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Rearticulating Japanese Cinematic Style



Exemplified by Contemporary Japanese Melodrama

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Cover Image: Tokyo Sonata (2008)

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Preface

Japanese cinema has always been valued by film theorists as an alternative filmic expression of the highest quality. Nevertheless, Japanese cinema is never described with the same respect as European and American filmic paradigms. Classical cinema, Russian montage, German expressionism, Italian neorealism and the French new wave are all regarded as distinctive filmic paradigms of their time. So why isn't Japanese cinema discussed with the same reverence as above mentioned paradigms?

Many attempts have been made to describe the style of Japanese cinema. And equally there has been much criticism of these attempts. The biggest problem lies in the opposing of Japanese cinema to European and American cinema based on cultural differences between Japan and those regions. By justifying Japanese cinema's difference on the basis of its cultural ties, Japanese culture is subordinated to European and American cultures. This thesis tries to approach the style of Japanese cinema at its most basic roots. A reappropriation of theoretical works is made in an attempt to single out the quintessential stylistic features of Japanese cinema. Cultural dichotomizing is avoided, while Japanese cinema as an expression of art is analyzed in its most basic form.

To narrow down the field of research, the Japanese melodrama has been chosen to exemplify the quintessential features of Japanese cinema. Few genres have been more consistently upheld within Japanese cinema than melodrama. Both contemporary family melodrama and historical period melodrama have long traditions within Japanese cinema. As such, theoretical discussions on the Japanese melodrama are related to contemporary cinema through film analyses. The theoretical content is first reappropriated, and secondly utilized as a tool in analyzing melodramas from the last few years.

In utilizing this historical view on contemporary Japanese melodrama, the style of Japanese cinema is outlined in its most basic form. The consistency in combining certain stylistic features is pointed out, from prewar cinema till recent productions. Hopefully, this thesis might provide the first step towards a serious description of Japanese cinema: a description in which the paradigmatic style of Japanese cinema might get the appropriate reverence it deserves.

Introduction - Research Question and Method Delineated

"In describing the history of earlier Japanese film I have often oscillated between the two ideas of the traditional and the modern. This is fitting because the Japanese themselves used to do so. We have thus searched for and found much living tradition within a contemporary context, many a tradition remaining in modern guise.

A similar search of contemporary Japanese film would find much less evident tradition. Such is the erosion experienced by any tradition. Notwithstanding, these various means do metamorphose and emerge in different form. That the Japanese cinematic accent is now much closer to that of the West is apparent. What is not so obvious, and this I have attempted to describe, is that it is still there."

Donald Richie, 2005

This is the concluding statement of Donald Richie's book *A Hundred Years of Japanese Film*. Where that book leaves the discussion of contemporary Japanese cinema, is where this thesis intends to pick it up. The point Richie seems to claim, is that Japanese cinema today is influenced from external sources at a far higher level than previously. Even so, it is emphasized that Japanese cinema still holds some distinctions that could be linked to Japanese tradition. The term *tradition* in the quote seems to suggest a Japanese traditional expression. The term *traditional Japanese expression* or *traditional Japanese aesthetics* is henceforth used to describe the aesthetics initially to be found in Japanese painting, prints, theatre, literature and design. (This will be further explained in chapter one.) It is this traditional Japanese expression, and its ties to Japanese cinema, that will be closely discussed in this thesis. The possible link between traditional Japanese aesthetics and cinematic stylistic features utilized in Japanese cinema will be debated.

Richie's term *cinematic accent* could also be interpreted in different ways. In this context it will be regarded as the style of Japanese cinema. Furthermore, Richie's statement is unclear when referring to the cinematic accent of Japan, as opposed to that of the *West*. The accent of the West can only be assumed to express American and European cinematic styles. In this connection the thesis will discuss whether Japanese cinema can be argued to maintain its influences from traditional Japanese aesthetics, even though influences from sources

outside Japan's borders have increased substantially after World War II. An explicit comparison between other national cinemasⁱ and Japanese cinema will not be directly discussed. External influences as a whole, however, will be discussed in relation to arguments concerning the influence of Japanese traditions in Japanese film productions. Influences from American, European and Russian styles will therefore be discussed indirectly.

This thesis will focus on discussing styleⁱⁱ within the confines of *mise-en-scene*: utilized filmic technique and form. A larger part of this approach will be to seek out how style in Japanese cinema can be discussed in itself, without the necessity of relating it to the context. The reason for choosing this approach is based on the presupposition that film is an art form in itself. Many theoretical works on Japanese cinema analyze it in relation to various socio-cultural, political or economic conditions of its time. In doing so the art of Japanese cinema is regarded as neglected by said theoretical works. In the context of this thesis the only matter of interest is what can actually be seen on the screen. Whatever the film might tell its audience about Japanese society and history is irrelevant. What matters is how the film is constructed, what specific tools are visible on the screen, and how these tools are applied. Such tools as camera angles, shot length, utilizing of effects, lighting, sound and acting is what will be discussed in this thesis. Hopefully this will produce a discussion around the artwork of Japanese cinema, as opposed to discussing symptomatic reading of the films. Japanese cinema will be discussed on a "meta-level".

Already in this last paragraph a central question of this thesis is visible. The segregating of style from historical and cultural contexts is an issue in relation to which most theoretical works on Japanese cinema fail to clarify their intentions. Although some sources acknowledge the complexity involved in discussing style separately, many fail to address the style in Japanese cinema as a possible paradigm with its own aesthetics. The style of Japanese cinema must necessarily be accounted for in relation to the styles of American and European cinemas, but it also needs to be assessed in the context of various trends and tendencies within Japanese cinema and other arts in general. A major pitfall is that if one fails to steer clear of historical and cultural context, one also fails to avoid opposing Japan with America and Europe on the cultural level, which in turn leads to orientalism. Relating style to contextual significance interpreted from the films leads to the treating of Japanese culture as fundamentally different from American or European culture. Therefore, the justifying of differences based on interpretations of style will be avoided. The metalanguage, or most basic building blocks of filmic expression, in Japanese cinema is what will be sought out.

The method applied will mainly be theoretical comparison, and secondarily analysis. Chapter one will consider two different time periods (prewar [before 1930], postwar [1950–2005]) drawn from discussion of various theoretical works on the topic. Chapter two will address contemporary Japanese melodrama (2005–2010) through film analysis. The focus on the genre of melodrama is chosen to narrow the field of research to a scope suitable to the confines of this thesis. In addition, analysis is chosen as the means of discussing contemporary melodrama, since the theoretical material on the subject is very limited. The reason for comparing discussions of prewar cinema with analyses of contemporary melodrama in a general treatment of the style of Japanese cinema, is that most theoretical works use prewar cinema as an example of the traits of Japanese cinema in general. Firstly, contrasting of various theoretical sources on prewar cinema will be carried out. Then a similar approach will be taken in discussing postwar cinema. In chapter two, a second type of comparison will be utilized, as this chapter will relate the theoretical texts and discussion to

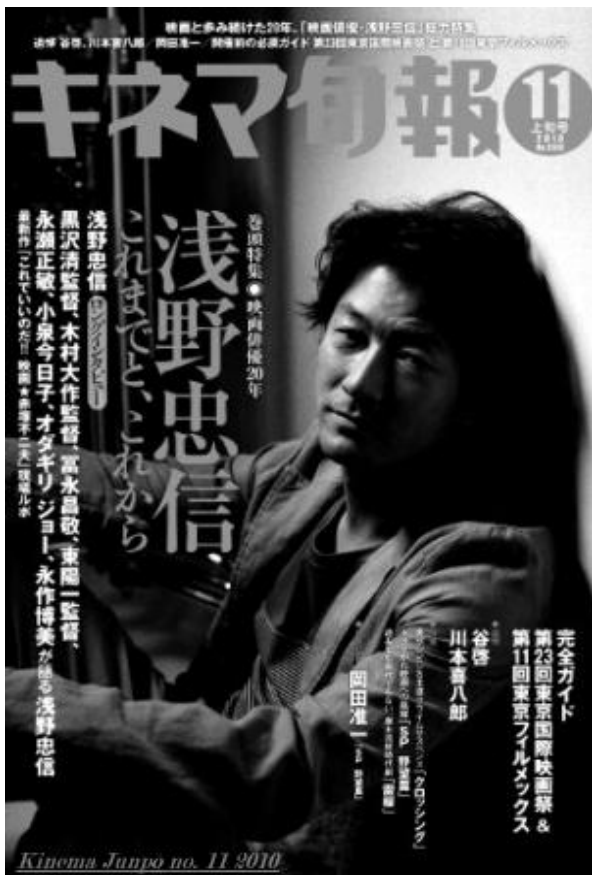


contemporary cinema through analysis of recent film productions. Using this method will reveal any possible influence of traditional Japanese aesthetics in the particular films being analyzed. At the same time, possible consistent tendencies in Japanese cinema will be outlined.

To discuss contemporary Japanese cinema as a whole would require more time and space than this thesis allows. Four film analyses are all that is possible within the scope of this thesis. Therefore it is clear that the films being analyzed cannot be regarded as representative of Japanese cinema, or even Japanese melodrama. At best, these films can hopefully indicate a stylistic pattern in

Japanese contemporary melodrama for further study. To narrow the field of research, the selection of the films for analysis is based on certain criteria. The films must be produced after 2000 (preferably within the last five years) in order to make the discussion as contemporaneously relevant as possible. Secondly, the films selected for analysis must all be within the generic confines of the melodrama.ⁱⁱⁱ This is done because a majority of the films

used as examples of the continued influence of traditional Japanese aesthetics in the reference works, also appear to be melodramas. For instance, the Ozu Yasujiro films discussed,



probably the most scrutinized films in relation to idiosyncrasies of Japanese cinema, are all melodramas. Thirdly, the films selected for analysis must have been placed among the top ten movies of the year by Japan's oldest, and arguably most influential, film magazine; Kinema Junpô. This is done to ensure that the films analyzed have been of critical interest in Japan. The point in this context is to see how theoretical work and analysis of previous Japanese cinema relates to the contemporary melodrama films chosen for analysis in this thesis. Even though the films selected cannot be regarded as representative for Japanese cinema as a whole, they would at least show if the relation between recent Japanese cinema

and traditional Japanese aesthetics exists within the confines of the melodrama, and by extension, if it exists at all. To what level such eventual influences are representative in Japanese cinema more generally would then be the next step in a more extensive research work than this thesis.

A big obstacle when discussing contemporary Japanese cinema is how to describe its characteristics. Consisting of many different genres and styles, it presents difficulties in describing any generic distinctions without resorting to generalizations. Even so, this thesis will refrain from outlining differences in characteristics within various genres of Japanese cinema. Japanese cinema is often organized on the basis of the emergence and disappearance of various Japanese subgenres. These subgenres will not be accounted for to any great extent. This is done because this thesis chooses to present its arguments based on a film-theoretical language that in Europe and America has already been established as the tools of the trade. It seems more purposeful to utilize established international film theoretic language than to fall back on an array of homemade descriptive categorizations to explain Japanese cinema. Such a study might be interesting, but too big a task to fit within the scope of this thesis. Different Japanese film genres will be referred to and explained to a limited extent when necessary. The

main focus, however, will be to outline certain characteristics within Japanese cinema that seem to in some way to be relatable to a set of traditional Japanese aesthetics. To discuss Japanese cinema in relation to such aesthetics, and whether this can be defended as an idiosyncratic Japanese cinematic paradigm, is the topic at hand.

Where this text differs from previous works in the same field, is that the topic will not be discussed through analysis of older cinematic productions. Prewar Japanese cinema is regarded to have been analyzed extensively enough in numerous theoretical contexts.^{iv} The analytical data from these films will therefore be derived from previous theoretical analyses and works. This thesis will focus its conclusion upon the production of the past ten years (2000–2010), with emphasis on the last five years. The idea is to compare analysis of recent drama productions to various theoretical works concerning Japanese cinema in general. This approach will hopefully produce a new approach to the further discussion of contemporary Japanese cinema and its style.

Chapter Outline – Thesis Structure Delineated

Many theorists have tried to describe the so-called *Japaneseness* portrayed in Japanese cinema. The term is usually used as a starting point as they try to set up theories about how to best describe what Japanese cinema is. The former half of chapter one is dedicated to the thoughts, ideas, assumptions and allegations made about prewar Japanese cinema and its connection to Japanese heritage, made by various theorists. Theories such as Darrel William Davis' *Monumental Style*, Donald Richie's *Representational/Presentational* dichotomy and Kathe Geist's *Western modernism, Japanese traditionalism*, will be compared to seek out their similarities or differences. Since this discussion has been widely debated, the most prominent works will be emphasized and set up against more recent ideas concerning characteristics of Japanese cinema. The ideas will be examined chronologically, after the period of time they discuss, starting with the Japanese cinema of the '20s, continuing until the late '30s. As mentioned before, prewar cinema is often used as an example to point out certain features within Japanese cinema as a whole. However, it is important to remember that even if these features are found in certain productions, they are never assumed to relate to all of Japanese cinema, but are rather used to point out how they are consistently characteristic of Japanese film productions.

Following the initial discussions of prewar cinema, arguments and ideas developed subsequently will be introduced. In addition, discussions on postwar cinema will be brought up for comparison. The period between 1939–1945 could comprise a separate chapter all together, but since wartime cinema relates differently to style because of its political ties, it will not be discussed in detail. Existing theory on wartime cinema does propose an explanation as to how propagandist sentiments and traditional Japanese aesthetics are related to wartime cinema. However, taking a stand towards this research will not be done here, because the navigating of uncertainty between these relations would require discussion beyond the spatial restrictions of this thesis. When necessary, wartime cinema will be discussed within the confines of the first chapter. The latter half of chapter one will account for developments in Japanese cinema following World War II. As indicated in Richie's opening quote, this period opened up for influences derived from outside Japan's own borders. This seems to assume that Japanese cinema was not influenced from outside sources in the prewar era, an assumption which also will be discussed further in this latter half of chapter one. Possibilities for coexistence between the opening arguments and postwar developments will be discussed.

The postwar section of chapter one will address some of the most recent theoretical work about how a traditional Japanese expression could be traced to cinematic productions. These sections will discuss the most recent theories on the latest film productions. Evolving stylistic tendencies from the postwar era towards the '80s and '90s will be accounted for. The main focus in the chapter's latter half will be to link the opening arguments to recent theory.

The second chapter will contain an introduction to contemporary Japanese melodrama, as well as in depth analyses of four recent film productions. The idea will be to see if there are any similarities between the in-depth analyses made in this thesis, but also to see how these analyses relate to theoretical work concerning both older and recent film productions. What hopefully could be achieved is to point out whether or not there are commonalities between older and recent productions. In addition, these analyses and examples may indicate whether traditional Japanese aesthetics have had any influence on recent Japanese films, and whether these influences could possibly have been sustained consistently from prewar cinema till recent film productions.

Following this, a concluding argument will be presented. What can be read out of the analyses? Does contemporary Japanese cinema, as far as the examples in this thesis go, share any characteristics with older productions? If so, could these characteristics be argued to hypothesize a Japanese cinematic paradigm? Ultimately, this thesis hopes to present an alternative manner of discussing Japanese cinema. Through reappropriation of theoretical work and comparison to contemporary cinema, hopefully the style of Japanese cinema can be discussed for what it is, not its cultural connections. Achieving this goal will be attempted by posing the following problem formulation:

Does contemporary Japanese melodrama reflect a lineage of traditional Japanese aesthetics?

This problem formulation could be divided into three central questions, each being addressed in its own section of this thesis.

Chapter one, former half (1.0.-1.5.): ***How can discussion on the style of Japanese cinema be isolated? How to avoid the contradictory confusion between discussions on style and symptomatic interpretation of Japanese cinema?***

Chapter one, latter half (1.6.-1.10.): ***How did style in Japanese cinema evolve in the postwar era and up to recent time, prior to production of the films which are analyzed in chapter two?***

Finally, in chapter two: *What do the selected film analyses indicate about the lineage of traditional Japanese aesthetics?*

A note on Japanese family names and Japanese film titles: Japanese authors, directors and actors are when firstly mentioned, presented by their family name, then their given name. Further referrals are done to the family name only, unless the full name is required for contextual clarification.

Films, when first time mentioned, will be presented thusly: *Japanese title/English language title*. Further referrals are done to the English language title.

Explanation of Terms for Discussion

Two recurring terms in this thesis must be explained beforehand. This is done so that the flow of discussion will not be unnecessarily disrupted later on. The premises of these terms will hereby be set, and unless other explanations are offered along the way these are the connotations established for these terms.

- 1) As already mentioned, regarding the opening quote, Richie sets up a somewhat generalized dichotomy between Japan and *the West*. This generalization of cinemas is a recurring theme in most of the reference sources in this thesis. In the works of Donald Richie, Darrel William Davis, Noël Burch, David Bordwell and Kathe Geist, to mention a few prominent sources of reference, *the West* or *Western cinema* is used as a concept against which to compare Japanese cinema. Unless otherwise stated, the meaning of the term *West* or *Western* in relation to cinema means American and European cinema. This is done because the films used for comparison and the examples being discussed in the source material, are without exception taken from either America or Europe.
- 2) The term *classical cinema* will be referred to throughout this thesis. This term is understood as the conventions tied to Hollywood cinema. *Classical cinema* is the development of a narrative form that had its emergence with David W. Griffith's films *Birth of a Nation* (1915) and *Intolerance* (1916). Following these films, *classical cinema* has been the dominant mode of cinematic production internationally. *Classical cinema* is the norm for production as well as the basis for audience expectations.¹ This style is presupposed to be the cinematic mainstream in this context. It is against this mainstream that Japanese cinema, as an alternative mode of production, will be compared. Such a comparative strategy has also been applied by most of the reference sources in this thesis. In this thesis, the conventions of *classical cinema* are understood as a style that is fluent, invisible, and promotes coherence, causality, clarity, consequence and continuity.²

¹ Stam, Robert, "Alternative Aesthetics. Introduction", in Stam, Robert and Miller, Toby (eds.). *Film and Theory: An Anthology* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), pp. 258–259; Davis, Darrel William, *Picturing Japaneseness. Monumental Style, National Identity, Japanese Film* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), p. 21.

² Stam, Robert, "Alternative Aesthetics. Introduction", in Stam, Robert and Miller, Toby (eds.). *Film and Theory: An Anthology*, pp. 258–259.

A Japanese Aesthetic Expression

It is not without reason that this thesis was started with a quote from Donald Richie. Receiving several honorary awards from Japan and the USA, Richie has become somewhat of an authority figure when it comes to Japanese cinema. Not only has he been writing about Japanese cinema for more than fifty years, but his number of published works in the area is also unmatched by any other authors. That being said, the following chapter will of course not use Richie's work without questioning his points. Compared with other sources on the same topics, there is room for debate and discussion in quite a few areas.

When it comes to Japanese cinema in general, Richie makes a strong argument that Japanese cinema possesses certain identifiable features. His argument states that Japanese cinema holds certain qualities which make it possible to distinguish it from other kinds of national cinematic styles. Even though Richie's quote has been used as a point of departure for this thesis, the discussion will start by comparing his arguments to those of Noël Burch. There are two reasons for choosing this path. Firstly, Burch's book, *To the Distant Observer, Form and Meaning in the Japanese Cinema*, has proven to be highly influential. More than half of the sources later to be discussed in this text, including Richie, refer to this book on various levels. Secondly, while all the other sources try to explain what the traditional Japanese aesthetics are and how they relate to Japanese cinema, Burch tries to explain why these influences occurred. His concern is to explain the political, economic and thematic background to be found in Japanese cinema in order to understand how to analyze Japanese films. Though this is, as previously mentioned, outside the scope of this text, Burch also addresses the style of Japanese cinema all through his book. Many arguments are similar to those presented later in this text when it comes to distinguishing Japanese cinema and its ties to traditional Japanese aesthetics. At the same time it presents a basic explanation of some early developments in Japanese cinema, which broadens the horizon for understanding further discussion on how influences in Japanese cinema take place and what they are. In this relation, it is important to underline that Burch's book has been widely criticized since its release. Certain points of his book are considered further in this thesis, but the book as a whole is primarily interesting as a stepping stone for most of the research available on Japanese cinema today. Although heavily criticized, Burch was among the first to present articulations in English on the style of Japanese cinema.

Opening Arguments on Prewar Japanese Cinema and its Following Critique

The early discussions of Noël Burch and Donald Richie

Burch starts out by stating that Japanese cinema is unlike that of any other nation, because of the country's singular history and unique combination of circumstances and forces at work.³ But before discussing the reason for this, a question with an embedded argument is presented.

How is it that several of the non-Western nations – China, of course, but even more prolifically, Egypt and India – have long produced motion pictures, only Japan has developed modes of filmic representation that are wholly and specifically her own, only Japan has produced a body of 'masterpieces'.⁴

The definition of a masterpiece is of course always up for discussion. Still, in a film-historical context, the films of China, India and Egypt appear to be rarely discussed to the same extent as Japanese cinema. This could at least suggest the importance of Japanese cinema as opposed to these three other nations and their cinemas. The question, however, is partly explained by looking at Japan's history and how the nation was never occupied before their defeat in 1945. Japan was never subjugated to semi-colonial status as was the case for more than a century with China. Neither was Japan enslaved like Egypt or India. Japan was one of very few non-Western countries to escape any colonial influences before World War II. According to Burch, "the fact that Japan was able to avoid colonial rule in the nineteenth century contributed directly to the originality of the Japanese film, since it made possible the technical and economic autonomy of her film industry".⁵ In relation to the style of Japanese cinema, this could arguably be seen as special, albeit coincidental, circumstances.

To understand the basic thought of Japanese aesthetics, Burch explains its originating differentiation by looking at the literary practices of the Heian period (794–1185). Japan is argued to possess a unique writing system that was both derived from Chinese non-phonetic writing while at the same time using its own phonetic alphabet. This gave Japan accessible understanding of the European phonetic linear mode of writing, while simultaneously resembling Chinese writing in its indifference to linear causality. Chinese grammar, for instance, is very free as far as sentence structure goes. This dual experience of linear and non-

³ Burch, Noël, *To the Distant Observer. Form and Meaning in the Japanese Cinema* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1979), p. 11.

⁴ Ibid. p. 26.

⁵ Ibid. p. 27.

linear writing modes may have paved the way for a radicalizing of Chinese thought in relation to Japanese aesthetic practice.⁶ Furthermore, it is important to underline that Japanese calligraphy of the Heian period had nothing in common with Western handwriting analysis. Purely the aesthetic quality of the writing, or as Burch puts it “the plastic rather than its personal or ‘psychological’ qualities”, were assessed to determine the writer’s personal virtues. The content was of secondary interest.⁷ Though there might not be a direct connection, it could be of interest to compare this emphasis on aesthetics before content. If transferable to Japanese cinema it might seem to justify a study purely based on style.

Following Burch’s train of thought, it is established that linearity and transparency of the signifier has dominated Western thought and art since the eighteenth century. The phrase *transparency of the signifier* refers to the clarity, causality and rationality dominating the production modes of literary, theatrical and cinematic productions. It is argued that no Japanese artistic practice, from the poetry of the Heian period, to the theatre and literature of the Tokugawa period (1603–1868), has ever subscribed to such a notion. As an essential characteristic of traditional Japanese art, this is also argued to have influenced the development of Japanese cinema.⁸ Burch argues that Japanese art traditionally is made under the assumption that the audience is familiar with the body of work with which the piece at hand familiarizes itself. If a literary text is written within a given category, the audience is expected to be familiar with any contextual signifiers belonging to this category. Furthermore, it is also expected that the audience possess a basic understanding of the social context within which the artwork places itself. This is argued to be a distinctive characteristic of both Heian literature as well as modern film practice.⁹ This notion is also supported by Richie when he discusses the link between prewar Japanese cinema and Japanese literature. As opposed to Western (i.e. American and European) plots that stress occurrence, causality, and responsibility, the Japanese traditional narrative is argued to emphasize sequential flow, connection and association. These latter features, particularly those of the Japanese narrative, are seen in relation to Ozu and how he emphasizes effect rather than cause, emotion rather than intellect in his films. This link between Japanese narrative and Ozu’s films are then argued to show how the celebration of evanescence and *mono no aware*, which initially is to be found in Japanese literature, is portrayed in purely cinematic terms.¹⁰ This further explains

⁶ Burch, Noël, *To the Distant Observer. Form and Meaning in the Japanese Cinema*, pp. 35–41.

⁷ *Ibid.* p. 44.

⁸ *Ibid.* p. 47.

⁹ *Ibid.* p. 49.

¹⁰ Richie, Donald, *A Hundred Years of Japanese Film* (Tokyo: Kodansha International Ltd, 2005), p. 123.

how Japanese cinema could be argued to be influenced by literature, theatre, and photography as well as paintings, prints, and Japanese design. The idea put forward by Richie is that Japanese cinema is a part of a complete Japanese aesthetic theory.

Aaron Gerow, on the other hand, argues that Burch's emphasis on intertextuality in Japanese cinema is based on a binary distinction between Japan and the West, being colored by implicit orientalism. Gerow argues that Burch fails to interrogate the actual contemporary discourses on tradition, modernity and intertextuality. Furthermore, Gerow states that Burch's inattention to various levels of contemporary debates on the issue of textual content in Japanese prewar cinema only adds to the notion of a Japanese cinema unified by Japaneseness. Burch's supposed failure to connect political and socioeconomic discussions with the cultural debate of that time is Gerow's main concern.¹¹ Though Gerow's critique appear to be valid, it is wrong to disregard Burch's arguments completely. Yoshimoto Mitsuhiro argues that Burch has been accused of an orientalist approach, since his description of Japanese cinema is based on the ideological assumption that classical cinema is dominant. Burch sets up a dichotomy where Japanese cinema is subordinated to that of classical cinema. However, Yoshimoto argues that it should be searched for an alternative system of representation, in which relating Japanese cinema to classical cinema is not necessarily a fatal flaw. He underlines, though, that such a search might easily be flawed by the writer's own conceptions of Japanese cinema. What Yoshimoto finds troubling in Burch's arguments is how Burch uses his set of alternative representations in coherence with the historical context in which they are set. When Burch sets up a list of alternative stylistic features, he substantiates his point by relating it to symptomatic contextual interpretation of cinema.¹² This is how Burch falls into a pitfall, rendering his arguments orientalist. In light of Yoshimoto's argument, Gerow and Burch are in fact arguing a bit beside (rather than against) each other. Gerow's hypothesis appears sensible, but still doesn't address the style of Japanese cinema in any way, which appears to be Burch's main concern.

Furthermore, before moving on to directly discuss American and European cinema compared to Japanese cinema, Burch digresses to take up the difference between European and Japanese theatre. A dichotomy between *presentational* and *representational* theatrical styles is introduced. The Japanese *Kabuki* and *Bunraku* (Doll Theatre) is argued to be *presentational*, while *Western* theatrical practice is argued to be *representational*. The latter

¹¹ Gerow, Aaron, *Visions of Japanese Modernity* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 2010), pp. 4–5.

¹² Yoshimoto, Mitsuhiro, *Kurosawa, Film Studies and Japanese Cinema* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000), p. 20.

style is a prolongation of the Greek theatre of the third and fourth centuries, and is distinguished by its effort to convince its audience that the stage and actors are not props, but a scene of an actual happening. In such a case, the stage is filled with illusions, as technical means are utilized to convey a sense of spatial discontinuity between the auditorium in which the audience sits and the stage where the play is performed. The presentational style, on the other hand, does not make a spatial discontinuity between the stage and the audience. The actor is regarded as an actor by the audience, as his makeup, costume, speech and movements emphasize the difference between his role and himself. This difference is referred to as a *disjunction between signifiers*, and is argued to be present in *Bunraku*, *Nô Theatre* and to a somewhat lesser extent in *Kabuki*. Furthermore it is argued that this *disjunction between signifiers* made a profound and direct impact on the Japanese silent film, as well as an indirect impact on the Japanese sound film.¹³ As Burch puts it: “In this early period, however, there can be no doubt that the pertinent visual traits of *kabuki* appear constantly on the screen as a surrogate of that presentational character defined by Earle Ernst as common to all Japanese theatre.” The flatness derived from the *kabuki* and *bunraku* appears to pose a general rule of production in early Japanese cinema: a trend that lasted into the late 1920s, and further made an impression on some of the most famous Japanese films of the 1930s.

Gerow finds it hard to maintain that Japanese cinema was merely an approximation to theatre. He argues that, just as *codes* were applied to distinguish Western painting style (*yôga*) from Japanese painting style (*nihonga*), so there were cinematic codes under which Japanese cinema was categorized. Still, Gerow argues, the cinematic codes were never so strong that the audience was alienated by foreign cinema. Gerow states that “there may have been tendencies in film production, exhibition, and reception to divide some practices, but not necessarily strict rules governing these”.¹⁴

Furthermore, Burch argues that Japan could be perceived as a ‘storehouse’ (Burch’s quotation marks) for that which was universally considered primitive modes of filmic representation.¹⁵ This statement points to his further arguments on the external influences on Japanese cinema in the prewar period. The connotation connected to this argument is explained by describing the influence of Chinese architecture in Japan. With its emphasis on ornate detail and emphatic contours, Chinese architecture was imported to Japan and thrived alongside its Japanese counterpart. Japanese architecture is based on geometrical simplicity

¹³ Burch, Noël, *To the Distant Observer. Form and Meaning in the Japanese Cinema*, pp. 69–74.

¹⁴ Gerow, Aaron, *Visions of Japanese Modernity*, pp. 101–103.

¹⁵ Burch, Noël, *To the Distant Observer. Form and Meaning in the Japanese Cinema*, p. 85.

and minimalist design, and is in this sense antithetical to the imported style from China.¹⁶ The point is that these two styles continued to thrive side by side in Japan. Similarly, though evidence of external influences on different types of art is visible, the native Japanese counterparts never ceased to exist. The imported influences never supplanted indigenous Japanese counterparts, but coexisted and remained creative from their emergence up to recent time. Burch explains:

Buddhist statues, a major genre of artistic expression in the period from the sixth to the ninth century, continued to evolve in style during the following eras, even when the picture scroll opened new possibilities for the visual representation of the world in the Heian period. Brush works with india ink flourished during the Muromachi period (1336–1573), but one school of arts remained faithful to the techniques and style of the picture scroll. Under the Tokugawa regime, a new style of painting and decorative art established by Sôtatsu and Kôrin; the technique of the woodcut print was elaborated to perfection. Yet artists never ceased to carve Buddhist statues or engage with great passion in brush-work painting. Practically no style ever died. In other words, the history of Japanese art is not one of succession but one of superposition.¹⁷

Though this argument hardly defends any art as typically Japanese, its point is nevertheless argued to apply to Japanese cinema as well as Japanese art. Whenever Japan was open to influence from external sources, particularly the narrative of classical cinema, the attitude of accepting, rejecting and assimilating it is argued to co-exist during the 1920s and 1930s.¹⁸ This argument appears to defend the idea that influences from traditional Japanese aesthetics can coexist side by side with external influences in Japanese cinema. Still, it is not discussed how these influences could possibly interact. At this moment they seem to be outlined as two separate influences. The utilizing of both in one film production would necessarily create either clear differentiation between the influences internally in the production, or, some sort of hybrid through the combination of influences. Relating this to early Japanese cinema, Gerow appears to somewhat be in line with Burch when he states the following:

¹⁶ Burch, Noël, *To the Distant Observer. Form and Meaning in the Japanese Cinema*, p. 90.

¹⁷ *Ibid.* p. 33.

¹⁸ *Ibid.* p. 92.

On the stylistic level, if spectators were accustomed to shifting between various codes and film styles, the Japanese films they and the filmmakers constructed reveal a similar flexibility textually; audiences and the sphere of exhibition also reveal their flexibility in their reception of these films. What we see here is a more irregular style, one neither “cinematic” nor wholly “theatrical,” but one that actually complicates codified divisions between filmic and theatrical, between modern and the traditional, and between self-sufficient narration and storytelling dependant on the *benshi* (narrator performing next to the film while being screened).¹⁹

This last statement, written thirty years later than the previous quote by Burch, appears not so much to oppose it as to represent a refined approach to the notion of Japanese cinema being one of superposition. For lack of a better word, the term *superposition* will henceforth be adopted throughout this thesis. Its meaning however will not be attributed directly to Burch’s sentiments, but rather refer to the refined notions on the topic as quoted by Gerow above, which will later be discussed in relation to assimilation and bending of cinema by Richie and Darrel William Davis.

To continue the previous paragraph’s train of thought, Burch emphasizes that non-concordance of historical and artistic progress is a universal phenomenon. But it is also maintained that Japan must be viewed as an extreme instance. This argument is justified by stating that the struggle between classes in Japan has always been dichotomized by the objectively materialist artistic practices of the native culture on one hand, and by the idealist dominant practices of the capitalist West on the other. The way this is transferable as an idea to cinematic theory is by explaining how the narrative modes of production in classical cinema are characterized. The narrative function in classical cinema is to give linear organization to the signifiers, to make the procedures of editing, organization of angles, shot sizes and angles as univocal as possible. Such a linearization and re-recording of images in terms of pseudo-linguistic montage is argued to be rendered meaningless in Japan, as it was antithetical to Japanese art, literature and language. The narrative in Japanese art, as exemplified by *kabuki* and *bunraku*, is set apart from the rest of the theatrical substance as an isolated function among others. All functions in American and European theatre, as well as classical cinema, are aimed at conveying and expressing the narrative essence.²⁰ Treating the narrative of classical cinema as meaningless in Japan is strongly opposed by Gerow, who

¹⁹ Gerow, Aaron, *Visions of Japanese Modernity*, p. 104.

²⁰ Burch, Noël, *To the Distant Observer. Form and Meaning in the Japanese Cinema*, pp. 95–98.

argues that since foreign cinema dominated the Japanese market up till the mid 1920s, there is no evidence that the Japanese audience did not enjoy classical narratives. According to Gerow, Burch's argument is tainted by the essentialization of the Japanese audience.²¹

Also Mitsuyo Wada-Marciano criticizes Burch on his comparison of classical cinema to Japanese cinema. Wada-Marciano argues that to the Japanese audience, classical cinema appears as just one of several foreign genres. When discussing Japanese genres in particular, Wada-Marciano states the following:

As we consider genres of any national cinema, we must contextualize them within their particular formative circumstances, such as cross-textual practices of moviegoing. It follows that the Japanese genre of the youth sports film should not be taken simply as a transplanted form or an imitation of a Hollywood genre, but rather as a newly created genre under the influence of Hollywood, tailored to suit local needs.²²

Though initially criticizing Burch for his take on the position of the Japanese audience, this last quote by Wada-Marciano seems to align with Gerow's refined take on the superposition of Japanese cinema. Gerow's critique of Burch culminates with his pointing out the problematics of a binary polarization between Japanese and classical cinema. As Gerow argues, such a dichotomy could neglect complex cultural interactions, as well as turning difference into political opposition.²³

Since Burch's book was written almost thirty years before both Gerow's and Wada-Marciano's, it is important to acknowledge and take into account these more recent thoughts on Japanese cinema. Both Burch, to some extent, and his critic Gerow receive some agreement in this thesis. As Gerow argues, Burch does appear to have forgotten important questions when it comes to the relation between cinema and related cultural debates in the prewar era. Nevertheless, Gerow mostly criticizes Burch when it comes to contextual, thematic and culturally related connections. What Gerow fails to acknowledge in many instances is that Burch strictly addresses the style of Japanese cinema. Burch's arguments might be flawed due to his dichotomizing of cultures. But as far as stylistic characteristics go, he still points out some interesting features which have inspired further discussions on the matter. Both Gerow and Wada-Marciano criticize Burch for setting up a binary dichotomy

²¹ Gerow, Aaron, *Visions of Japanese Modernity*, p. 19.

²² Wada-Marciano, Mitsuyo, *Nippon Modern: Japanese Cinema of the 1920s and 1930s* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2008), pp. 66 and 89.

²³ Gerow, Aaron, *Visions of Japanese Modernity*, p. 228.

between classical cinema and Japanese cinema, neglecting to account for various other styles and trends. On the other hand, both of these critiques are based on Japanese cinema's connection to Japanese society, culture and historical context. They emphasize the socio-cultural historical context of Japanese cinema, which in this thesis is regarded as neglecting the individual film's potential as a work of art. In this thesis both Burch and his critics are regarded as failing, as neither acknowledges the two-sided nature of the discussion. At the same time, both Burch and his critics make valid points from their respective views of Japanese cinema. For this reason, those of Burch's arguments which are assessed as discussing style exclusively have been outlined to explain their foundational basis for the further theoretical content discussed in this thesis. As argued by Yoshimoto, it is not pointless to seek out alternative modes of representation in relation to classical cinema. What must be avoided is the dichotomizing of cultural contexts. Ironically enough, Burch's attempt to explain why the style of Japanese cinema occurred, based on historical evidence, is rendered mute by his critics. Still, his arguments have influenced many writers when one asks what these stylistic features are, and how they present themselves in Japanese cinema. The first step in that direction will be to investigate more closely the direct connection between various Japanese art forms and Japanese cinema.

The Traditional Arts of Japan

Exploring the parallels between Japanese cinema and traditional Japanese painting and theatre

The focus will now be directed first towards the parallels between Japanese film and the traditions of Japanese painting. Following this, light will be shed on parallels between cinema and theatre. This will also establish a context for discussing further arguments and theoretical works and comparing them to the already presented material. An outline of the tradition of various Japanese art forms and their possible relation to Japanese cinema will be discussed. A basic understanding of how these art forms could relate to cinema is an assumption made in most of the theoretical works discussed in this thesis. Therefore it is relevant to point out the basic ideas behind these art forms and outline their similarities to cinema.

Satô Tadao argues that certain traditional concepts of imagery and techniques in the visual arts have influenced Japanese film. He also draws some parallels between Japanese film and traditional Japanese music and theatre. First of all, Satô underlines how landscapes are frequently used in Japanese films to symbolize various emotions. As opposed to western cinema, he contends that this occurs more frequently and with greater effect in Japanese cinema. As an example, mountains are used to symbolize nobility and stability; snow is used to symbolize purity, purification of the heart and mind, and the will to survive. Rivers and their banks are portrayed as conducive to expressing and confronting one's emotions. Satô connects these symbolisms to Taoism and Buddhism. Therefore, he also claims that this predilection for natural subjects does not simply reflect affection for nature, but must be understood in relation to cultural context.²⁴ This argument's linkage to religion can arguably be accused of dichotomizing Japanese and American culture in a similar manner as Burch was criticized for in previous chapters. Bearing this in mind, any further connections between style and Japanese religion will be disregarded. Instead, notice is taken of Satô's claim that these symbols portrayed in films are allegedly derived from Japanese landscape painting, and that they express certain emotions.²⁵

Furthermore, Satô brings up the style of Japanese scroll paintings, called *emaki*. These scroll paintings tell stories, but not in a way comparable to contemporary comic strip style. Whereas comic strip stories are enclosed frame by frame, the *emaki* tells its story in one continuous illustration. The story is unveiled as the scroll is unrolled. As Satô explains it, the

²⁴Satô, Tadao., "Japanese Cinema and the Traditional Arts", ch. 8: in Desser, D. and Ehrlich, L. C. (eds.), *Cinematic Landscapes: Observations on the Visual Arts and Cinema of China and Japan* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1994), pp. 211–214.

²⁵ *Ibid.* p. 168.

scenes and action are sequential in one consistent *emaki*. The action moves from left to right, and is often seen from above. Human figures are vaguely depicted, and always viewed as part of a long shot. This seems to be comparable to both the long shot and the long take. Satô also underlines these similarities when he explains how Mizoguchi Kenji utilized the long shot as a counteraction against cinematic techniques such as the Russian montage. The film mentioned is *Genroku Chûshingura/The Loyal Forty-Seven Retainers of the Genroku Era* (1941-1942). This particular film clearly utilizes long shots, absence of close ups and bird's-eye views as stylistic tools, arguably in order to return to the simplicity of the *emaki*.²⁶ It is important to keep in mind that although certain features of the *emaki* are comparable to film, it also differs in many aspects. Close ups, montages, different points of view and division between scenes do not exist in *emaki*.²⁷ Also, it is important to remember that the works of Mizoguchi are not representational for the majority of Japanese film productions of their time. (This will be closely discussed and clarified under the paragraph entitled *Monumental Style*.) The view on nature and its connection to man, however, suggests a general sentiment in Japanese art that arguably could be connected to Japanese film.

To further elaborate about *emaki*, the abundance of seasonal references such as grasses and flowers contribute to the atmosphere. The focus on the seasons in *emaki* derives from the painting style called *yamato-e*. This painting style is rooted in Japanese style, as opposed to Chinese style. In addition, classical Japanese poetry was also included in this type of painting. Nature and the four seasons are a major focus of the Japanese poetic style called *waka*, and the *yamato-e* provides illustrations for this poetry.²⁸ Cherry blossoms are arguably the most commonly known and also most frequently used natural imagery in both Japanese painting and Japanese cinema. The short season of cherry blossoms suggests the notions of transience and evanescence, as well as the sorrow of parting.²⁹

Also the Japanese *ukiyo-e*, or woodblock print, shares features with Japanese film productions of the prewar era. These prints became very popular in Japan during the Edo period (1603–1868). The *ukiyo-e* artists did not have to adhere to orthodox styles and subjects. Instead new techniques were constantly invented to maintain the popularity of these woodblock prints. A technique that proved to be very popular was the placing of individuals in the foreground, while the background depicted scenery from nature. Satô suggests that the popularity of using deep focus shots in Japanese cinema could be related to the popularity of

²⁶ Satô, Tadao, "Japanese Cinema and the Traditional Arts", p. 170.

²⁷ Ibid. p. 170.

²⁸ Ibid. p. 171.

²⁹ Ibid. p. 172.

the similar effect portrayed in *ukiyo-e*.³⁰ The form of visual depth that the *ukiyo-e* presents is recognized by Burch as well when he describes it as a step towards representational style. It was through *ukiyo-e* that linear perspective was first popularized in Japanese art. These arguments on the deep focus shot appear to counter the flatness discussed earlier by Burch. But in relation to this Burch maintains that “the pictorial art of the eighteenth century continued to differ profoundly from Western illusionist painting in the acknowledgement of surface and the frame-line as its disruptive edge. It continued, as well, to ignore ‘centering’ and its underlying anthropocentrism.”³¹ This statement explains that the deep focus shot as a singular stylistic feature gained popularity, while at the same time confirming Burch’s own notion on how antagonistic features could continue to thrive within Japanese culture through assimilation.

Moving on from paintings and prints, Japanese theatre could also be related to Japanese cinema. The arguably most famous traditional theatrical styles of Japan are called *kabuki* and *nô*. Both bear a deep connection to the visual arts; not only because the costumes and props are traditional, but because the highly stylized poses of the actors find their basis in traditional aesthetics. The *ukiyo-e* popularly depicted these poses by the actors of *kabuki* and *nô*. Mizoguchi is mentioned as a director who has drawn influences from these theatrical forms. Especially in period films this becomes visible with typically exaggerated acting, noticeably artificial sets, and traditional make-up and costumes.³²

Richie elaborates further on the relation between Japanese film and *kabuki*, stating that the initial dominant influence on Japanese cinema was the drama of the theatre, in contrast to Europe and the USA, where film was seen as a new way of taking pictures.³³ In this way, European and American cinema can be viewed as descended from painting and photography, whereas Japanese cinema has descended from drama and theatre. Though this distinction appears vague and undefined, a point could still be valid in relation to Japanese cinema. It is, however, worth noting that other theatrical forms directly inspired by European and American practices appeared in the Meiji period (1868–1912). *Shimpa* arose as a new theatrical form after 1888, which rapidly proved competitive to *kabuki* and its popularity. Though this theatrical form was directly inspired by European theatre, Burch points out that it was mostly developed by non-professionals with no practical firsthand knowledge of Western theatre.

³⁰ Satô, Tadao, “Japanese Cinema and the Traditional Arts”, p. 182.

³¹ Burch, Noël, *To the Distant Observer. Form and Meaning in the Japanese Cinema*, pp. 71–72.

³² Satô, Tadao, “Japanese Cinema and the Traditional Arts”, p. 183.

³³ Richie, Donald, “The Influences of Traditional Aesthetics on the Japanese Film”, ch. 7: in Desser, D. and Ehrlich, L. C., *Cinematic Landscapes: Observations on the Visual Arts and Cinema of China and Japan* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1994), p. 155.

Nevertheless, it had its influence on the modes of representation of early Japanese cinema.³⁴ What Burch seems to say is that the European and American manner of presenting narrative were possibly being introduced in Japan through *shimpa*. What Richie directs his attention towards is another aspect of style within Japanese cinema:

The difference of the East lies in the nature of influence. Western painterly influences on Western film have been defined as several: First, the specific source for the emotive power of the film imagery, seen in “the distinctive rendering of light by the painters of the North European Renaissance”... ..In Asia, however, the rendering of light is not among major traditional aesthetic concerns.³⁵

This refers to the active use of light and shadows as a feature within cinema. What is pointed out is that Japanese cinema often uses lighting in a similar manner to how it is used in *kabuki*. The dominant trend is argued to be full and flat lighting. This presumably indicates a strong direct light, eliminating any utilization of shadows as an effect. As a result, the aesthetic expression appears two-dimensional. According to Richie, the two-dimensional aspect of Japanese cinema is well known. Scenes from Mizoguchi’s films are compared to images from scroll painting. Scenes from Ichikawa Kon’s films are compared to woodblock prints, and scenes from Kurosawa Akira’s films are compared to images on *byōbu* (standing screens).³⁶

Kathe Geist concurs with Richie’s arguments when she sets up her dichotomy between *Western modernism* and *Japanese traditionalism*. Though she also, as Richie, places her discussion within the framework of the generalizing term *the West*, she seems to come up with some valid arguments in her detailed study of Ozu’s work. Her focus is on the similarities between Ozu’s use of space and that of the Japanese traditional artists working in two-dimensional media.³⁷ Following this she explains how two distinct schools of painting have coexisted in Japan since the Meiji period: the European-style painting called *yōga*, and the Japanese style painting called *nihonga*. Both styles have maintained a strong presence

³⁴ Burch, Noël, *To the Distant Observer. Form and Meaning in the Japanese Cinema*, pp. 59–60.

³⁵ Richie, Donald, “The Influences of Traditional Aesthetics on the Japanese Film”, pp. 155–156.

³⁶ *Ibid.* p. 158.

³⁷ Geist, Kathe, “Playing with Space: Ozu and Two-Dimensional Design in Japan”, ch. 13: in Desser, D. and Ehrlich, L. C., *Cinematic Landscapes: Observations on the Visual Arts and Cinema of China and Japan* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1994), p. 283.

within Japanese society:³⁸ an explanation that correspond to Burch's notion on Japanese art history, namely that it is marked by superposition rather than succession.

Moving on to discuss the use of empty space, Richie compares Ozu's films to scrolls, by pointing out how the frame is filled at the bottom, but the upper half is left empty.³⁹ Geist explains that the empty shot is not completely empty, but empty of reference. No characters appear, while location and purpose of the shot is often unexplained. At the same time, Geist argues that the shots often invite the viewer to read meaning into them in a similar manner as Japanese paintings do. She maintains that Ozu might indeed be trying to challenge European and American film traditions knowingly, but there was no need for him to look for alternative models to classical illusionism in Matisse or Picasso, when Japan had such alternative models of its own. Centuries before Matisse and Picasso explored tension between a flat two-dimensional surface and illusionistic, three-dimensional space, Japanese painters had done so both intuitively and deliberately. Thus, Geist concludes that Ozu doubtless knew modern European painting just as he knew both European and American film. But insofar as his work was inspired by, or similar to, two-dimensional media other than film, Geist argues that those media appear to have been Japanese and traditional rather than European and modern.⁴⁰ This argument seems to support Richie's comparison of Japanese cinema to traditional Japanese painting styles.

Furthermore, an argued visual difference between Japanese cinema and European and American styles is the way in which the complete composition is framed and emptiness is handled. The European and American idea, according to this argument, believes that space is already so filled that to cut out a portion of it and place a frame around it, as it were, is enough to express the emotions in the narrative. In Japan, however, the idea is that space itself is so empty that the placing of the frame is first set up, and then elements with which to fill this frame are placed to express certain emotions. Riche argues that it is as if an empty area has been originally envisioned and then filled according to the laws of art rather than the laws of life. This he relates to the manner in which many Japanese films present a composed reality. How these films are similar to Japanese painting is in how a self-contained world is presented, one animated not by natural forces but by the human mind. This is argued to be an *anthropomorphic* view, from the Japanese culture. A culture that finds emptiness to hold no quality until a person has made his mark, and that nature is not natural until a person has

³⁸ Geist, Kathe, "Playing with Space: Ozu and Two-Dimensional Design in Japan", pp. 284-285.

³⁹ Richie, Donald, "The Influences of Traditional Aesthetics on the Japanese Film", p. 159.

⁴⁰ Geist, Kathe, "Playing with Space: Ozu and Two-Dimensional Design in Japan", pp. 287, 295 and 297.

intervened to make it so.⁴¹ This argument by Richie is supported by Arne Kalland when he discusses what he calls the *taming* of nature in order to essentialize its beauty: a phenomenon that presumably became popular due to Japan's rapid industrialization. The technique could be exemplified with Japanese gardens and bonsai trees, where the beauty of nature is sanctified, and the polluted environment is ignored. With Japanese gardens and bonsai trees a small expression of nature's beauty is portrayed. Thus the beauty can be appreciated while external polluting elements can be shut out. According to Kalland the magnitude of nature is framed in part to project an idealized image of nature through reductionism.⁴² An example of this would be the Japanese picture garden and how it is laid out in such a fashion that it is only visible from one vantage point, with three of its four sides being enclosed. Thus an illusion of pictorial flatness is created in a three-dimensional field.

Richie further states that is not so surprising how Japanese painting supposedly has directly affected Japanese film. Not only are the aesthetics of Japanese film based on the aesthetics of Japanese art, but the scenes themselves may directly imitate paintings or prints. The further argument is that even if the direct influence of traditional Japanese art upon Japanese film may be seen as minor, if the view is restricted to simple resemblance; it is vast if the view considers the implication of a complete theory of aesthetics.⁴³ Richie's idea is that the visual resemblance isn't always obvious, but that the ideology of how and why nature and humans are presented seems to be similar in Japanese painting, woodblock prints, Japanese theatre and Japanese film. This appears to concur with the arguments of Satô, Kalland and Geist on the stylistic level. But as the next chapter will reveal, Richie's notion of a complete theory of aesthetics seems to utilize a binary position between Japan and the "West": a notion that explains the style of Japanese cinema through a socio-cultural dichotomy, falling into similar pitfalls as Burch was so thoroughly criticized for.

⁴¹ Richie, Donald, "The Influences of Traditional Aesthetics on the Japanese Film", pp. 160–161.

⁴² Kalland, Arne, "*Natur og Nasjonalisme i Japan*", ch. 3 in Grønning, Terje (ed.), *Vinduer mot Japan* (Trondheim: Tapir Akademisk Forlag, 2005), p. 49.

⁴³ Richie, Donald, "The Influences of Traditional Aesthetics on the Japanese Film", pp. 161-162.

Approaching the Style of Japanese Cinema

Splitting early discussions on the style of Japanese cinema in half

In his book of 1971, *Japanese Cinema: Film Style and National Character*, Richie addresses the style of Japanese cinema explicitly. The book describes Japanese cinema in a rather general manner, not connecting the style to any specific period in time other than a rather rough division between works before and after 1946. This could however point to an argument about Japanese cinema in a larger context, stating that the cinematic style is altogether subordinated to some general manner of production ideology. If that were the case, the arguments would still have to prove to agree with several other discussions concerning the traditions of Japanese cinema.

Concerning Japanese cinema before 1945, Richie opens by distinguishing it from European and American cinema. The opening statement says: “if the American film is strongest in action and the European film is strongest in character, then the Japanese film is richest in mood or atmosphere, in presenting characters in their natural surroundings.”⁴⁴ The evident and rather crude generalizations about European and American cinema will not be debated in this context. What this statement seems to suggest as idiosyncratic about Japanese cinema is the topic of interest. It appears to argue that the relationship between individuals and their natural surroundings is a predominant continuing theme within Japanese cinema. The ideological relationship between nature and man is closely connected to Japanese traditions. It is of course important in many, if not all cultures; but Japan arguably has a distinctive way of expressing it, which relates to Japanese existential ideology. It is argued that this ideology is opposed to the scientific reduction of nature to natural laws, which explore how nature can be mathematically calculated and mechanically manipulated. The Japanese view on nature is said to be holistic and related to Buddhism, focusing upon the dialogue between man and nature, rather than man’s control over nature. The human relationship to nature is socially connected, where man is regarded as a child of nature and therefore forever in its debt.⁴⁵ In Japan this is connected to the commonly known aesthetic expression known as *mono no aware*: a nostalgic, yet melancholic emotion associated with autumn, conceptualizing pathos and the fragility of nature.⁴⁶ This argument is problematic as

⁴⁴ Richie, Donald, *Japanese Cinema, Film Style and National Character* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1971), p. xix.

⁴⁵ Kalland, Arne, “Natur og Nasjonalisme i Japan”, pp. 45–46.

⁴⁶ Iversen, Gunnar, “Globale Fabler og Nasjonale Fortellinger”, ch. 9 in Grønning, Terje (ed.), *Vinduer mot Japan* (Trondheim: Tapir Akademisk Forlag, 2005), p. 144.

it reduces Japanese cinema to an explanation based on an existential ideology to which American and European ideologies are supposedly antagonists. Though Richie might try to set up a complete theory of aesthetics, he appears to neglect contradictions between Japanese cinema and its culture. According to Gerow, when criticizing Burch, such contradictions have to be accounted for, before contrasts with classical cinema can be deduced.⁴⁷ Mika Ko in her critique of Burch also concurs with this. According to Ko, the linking of Ozu's films to *mono no aware* is problematic, as the idea was presented by scholars in an attempt to claim Japanese superiority over China. As stated by Ko, Burch linked Japanese cinema and culture to what he perceived to be the real Japan, and thus contributed to the Japanese discourse of unique Japaneseness. In line with Gerow's arguments, Ko tries to distance her discussion from the binary opposition between classical cinema and Japanese cinema. Instead, she seeks to find out how Japanese cinema constructed its own 'otherness' (Ko's quotation marks.) in response to the changes in Japanese society.⁴⁸ Though Richie's argument is perhaps rendered mute by this critique, it is explained in this context to complete his further train of thought.

As Richie elaborates his arguments, he points out stylistic features of Japanese cinema that are not contrasted to classical cinema on a socio-cultural level. The interest in how man is seen, as opposed to focusing upon the being itself, often subordinates the object to its surroundings. The idea is to not only capture man and his environment but to also capture the atmosphere and mood of the setting. A lack of mood or atmosphere can only partially portray reality, as they are all closely connected.⁴⁹ The result of this emphasis on atmosphere is reflected in numerous ways through style. This could be exemplified by the long shot and the long take. The notion of the long take has already been accounted for by Satô. The idea behind the long take is what might make Japanese movies seem to progress more slowly than their European and American counterparts: namely that there is a need for lingering on details and environment in order to express emotions realistically. As with traditional Japanese art, drama and music, the aim is not comprehension. Comprehension does not necessarily mean understanding; understanding in this view can only be achieved through the combination of comprehension and feeling. The feel of art, music, drama or film is sought after, and in Japan it is commonly believed that feelings can only operate fully after a certain time of exposure.⁵⁰ Long takes have of course been used widely in film productions all over the world (Roy

⁴⁷ Gerow, Aaron, *Visions of Japanese Modernity*, p. 13.

⁴⁸ Ko, Mika, *Japanese Cinema and Otherness. Nationalism, Multiculturalism and the Problem of Japaneseness* (London: Routledge, 2010), p. 4.

⁴⁹ Richie, Donald, *Japanese Cinema, Film Style and National Character*, pp. xxiv–xxv.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.* pp. 15-16.

Anderson [Sweden], Carl Dreyer [Denmark], Theodoros Angelopoulos [Greece], Andrei Tarkovsky [Russia], and Bela Tarr [Hungary]). Still, the extent of utilizing the long take in Japanese cinema in general appears to be higher than in any other cinema.

Keiko McDonald links the earliest utilization of the long take in Japanese cinema to the fixed viewer position of the theatre audience. Most early footage showed what an audience saw, which were entire scenes shot in long shots. According to McDonald “The fixed approach to camera work remained a defining characteristic of Japanese cinema even after the long shot and long take were joined by other more specifically cinematic devices.”⁵¹ In addition, Gerow explains how Japanese theoreticians recognized that cinema’s mechanical nature posed a problem for artistic creation. Film, as photograph, detached itself from reality only through montage. As such, the Japanese theorist Sugiyama Heiichi states that the frames and rhythm of the long take sufficiently detach cinema from reproducing reality slavishly.⁵² The statement seemingly supports the artistic nature of Japanese cinema.

Following Richie’s line of thought, as his first remarks deal with Japanese cinema up to 1945 in general, the films of the ’30s are now discussed more in detail. Richie argues that “the development of Japanese cinema accomplished in only ten years what others had taken thirty to create: The formation of a national cinematic style.” The imprecise description of the *others* is assumed to point to the cinematic style of the USA. The argument also appears



confusing since it does not account for the establishment of Russian (montage) and German (expressionism) film styles that had indeed established themselves already in the 1920s. Furthermore, Richie argues that the development of this national cinematic style is marked by the

emergence of the Japanese genre *shomingeki*. This genre occurred for the first time in the mid-1920s, but rose to fame in the early ’30s in the work of Ozu, exemplified by *Tôkyô no Kôrasu/Tokyo Chorus* (1931), *Otona no Miru Ehon – Umarete wa Mita Keredo/I Was Born,*

⁵¹ McDonald, Keiko. L., *Reading a Japanese Film* (Honolulu; University of Hawai’i Press, 2006), p. 2.

⁵² Gerow, Aaron, *Visions of Japanese Modernity*, p. 77.

but... (1932) and *Haha o Kowazu ya/A Mother Should Be Loved* (1934). The *shomingeki* is characterized by its focus on realism and themes about lower middle class life.⁵³ As later to be discussed, this Japanese melodramatic genre gave Ozu his renowned, albeit questionable reputation as the most Japanese of all Japanese movie directors.

These statements and arguments by Richie, though of course open to debate, point out some interesting ideas about Japanese cinema in the years before 1945. It is worth mentioning that even if this is Richie's only book explicitly discussing the style of Japanese cinema, it is not his only book mentioning the same topic. What might come out as slightly premature initial thoughts about the style of Japanese cinema were later to be addressed in a more refined manner. (This will be closer discussed soon.) The characteristics outlined by Richie are interesting for the purpose of later comparison, in particular the long take.

Before moving on to theoretical works that specifically discuss Japanese cinema, the arguments of Richie will be contrasted with some thoughts on Japanese cinema by David Bordwell. As Richie was introduced as an authority figure when it comes to Japanese cinema, Bordwell is arguably one of the most prominent authority figures when it comes to cinema and film theory in general. In his book *Film History: An Introduction* he states that "Japanese cinema of the interwar era is clearly as important as that of the United States or Europe." Bordwell's sentiment seems to support the study of Japanese cinema as an equal to American and European cinema, rather than regarding Japanese cinema as subordinate in any way. Bordwell also refers to Noël Burch and how his focus on style brought out the non-Hollywood aspects of films, which in turn is traced to long-standing Japanese traditions in literature and visual arts.⁵⁴ This seems to agree with the idea that Burch still has valid points when it comes to the specific mechanics of style. At the same time Japanese cinema is set aside as something other than merely being influenced by classical cinema. This is only argued to apply within the confines of style, and therefore seems to support the study of style within Japanese cinema, which is the approach taken in this thesis.

⁵³ Richie, Donald, *Japanese Cinema, Film Style and National Character*, pp. 20 and 37.

⁵⁴ Bordwell, David and Thompson, Kristin, *Film History, An Introduction*, (New York: McGraw-Hill Inc., 1994), pp. 290–291.

Monumental Style

Japanese cinematic style's possibility as nationalistic catalyst realized

Monumental Style is a term introduced and discussed by Darrel William Davis. In the opening acknowledgments of his book *Picturing Japaneseness: Monumental Style, National Identity, Japanese Film*, David Bordwell is credited for inventing the term that was initially brought up as a supposed topic for discussion. So far Davis seems to be its sole defender. It is, however, used by Richie to back up some of his arguments in his latest book on Japanese cinema, *A Hundred Years of Japanese Film*.⁵⁵ (The book is later to be discussed in detail.) This suggests a certain credit given to the term *monumental style*. Since Davis' book concerning this style is also very extensive, it seems fitting to outline his arguments and compare his points to the other theoretical work discussed in this thesis.

First and foremost, it is important to emphasize that in defending the term *monumental style*, Davis is only referring to a handful of films^v (all of which fall under the label of *jidaigeiki/period film*) that share a certain set of characteristics he deems to be explicitly picturing Japaneseness. These films are also argued to be innovative when it comes to film style.⁵⁶ The films' years of release span from 1938 to 1990, though the majority were made between 1938 and 1953. Even if these films are few in number, it nevertheless seems pertinent in this context to discuss any argued stylistic innovations within Japanese cinema. An argued style of Japanese descent could possibly be closely related to the style of Japanese cinema in general. Whether these films are few in number or not seems irrelevant. Surely other established national cinematic styles and paradigms were but a handful in their initial period. This can be argued about German expressionism, Russian montage, Italian neorealism and the French new wave. So there seems no reason to not discuss monumental style as a possible innovative style within cinema in general, as argued by Davis.⁵⁷

Davis starts out by underlining that defining Japaneseness became an institutionalized activity in Japan in the late 1930s. To find out what were the hereditary and indigenous Japanese characteristics, writers, artists, journalists, company men, student activists and other various organizations were established to delineate the outlines of an authentic Japanese essence. Following that, these pictures of Japaneseness were offered as models to be emulated. Mass media, film, radio and newspapers in particular, were encouraged to generate

⁵⁵ Richie, Donald, *A Hundred Years of Japanese Film*, pp. 101–102, 116 and 196.

⁵⁶ Davis, Darrel William, *Picturing Japaneseness: Monumental Style, National Identity, Japanese Film* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), pp. 4 and 291–292.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.* p. 4.

representations of Japanese culture and behavior. These models were then subjected to approval by the authorities.⁵⁸ Davis asserts that the stylistic figures projected by monumental style express an imaginary Japaneseness. Nevertheless, he argues that this does not explain how the monumental style works in and on film.⁵⁹ Davis formulates his take on the discussion like this:

There was a lot of “ordinary” propaganda put out this time, hortatory newsreels and culture films typical of wartime. But there were also films that expressed more subtle and durable renditions of Japaneseness. They are sophisticated appropriations of feudal Japanese narratives and aesthetics, integrating these traditions into the textures of their style.

These films I have grouped together and designated the *monumental style* because they invest a form of spirituality in traditional Japanese heritage and embody a monument to a certain Japanese aura.⁶⁰

Firstly this seems to suggest different nuances within nationalistically directed films. Although these nuances could be discussed, they will be left out in this context, since they do not seem to be directly connected to use of style, but rather to political and nationalistic opinions, which is not the issue in this thesis. In relation to this, Davis contends that texts can transform contextual horizons, as long as it is kept in mind that propaganda provided the occasion for the innovation of the monumental style.⁶¹ How these films are deemed to be sophisticated will be further explained through Davis’ text. The interesting point is that Davis also argues that these films have derived style from traditional Japanese heredities and aesthetics. The phrases “spirituality in traditional Japanese heritage” and “Japanese aura” appear somewhat imprecise. But on the other hand, they do seem to suggest a connection between Japanese cinema and the previously mentioned Japaneseness. This will soon be elaborated in detail. The point for now is that Davis’ opening statement seems to agree with the arguments of Richie, Satô and Geist.

In defending the term *monumental style*, Davis meticulously outlines around twenty or so key points. Only the characteristics most clearly related to style will be discussed, due to the scope of this thesis. (A full list of characteristics outlined by Davis is set up in the

⁵⁸ Davis, Darrel William, *Picturing Japaneseness: Monumental Style, National Identity, Japanese Film*, p. 2.

⁵⁹ Ibid. p. 8.

⁶⁰ Ibid. p. 2.

⁶¹ Ibid. p. 8.

endnotes.^{vi}) First, the monumental style is deemed interesting because of its “bending” (Davis’ own quotation marks) of the classical cinema to accommodate the various trends in classical Japanese design and behavior.⁶² The *bending* seems to suggest that although Japanese cinema initially derived influences from classical cinema, the Japanese style has transformed these influences and aligned them with their own aesthetic ideologies. The argued goal of this transformation is to aim at returning the lost advantage of Japanese art. According to Davis, “the films enact canonization of history, an emphasis on indigenous art forms and design, and a corresponding technical repertoire of long takes and long shots, very slow camera movement, and a highly ceremonial manner of blocking, acting and design.”⁶³ The *ceremonial manner* may be an argument solely related to the discussion of *monumental style*. But the “emphasis on indigenous art forms and designs”, as well as the use of “long takes ... long shots ... [and] slow camera movement”, seem to be characteristics similar to those previously argued by Richie, the main point of Davis being that monumental style is a style that finds ways to incorporate traditional Japanese aesthetics into films, not just as setting, but as basic building blocks of the film’s stylistic pattern.⁶⁴

Davis further explains that “*the monumental style* is distinguished by the dominance of the Japanese indigenous tradition. It is appropriated for no other purpose than its own intrinsic values.”⁶⁵ This does not seem to relate much to the arguments presented earlier in this chapter, but rather to be a characteristic confined within the framework of the monumental style. When Richie, Satô and Geist discuss the application of Japanese traditional aesthetics in film, the aesthetics appear to be used as a tool to express certain emotions.

The techniques typical of the style, like the long shot and long take, slow moving camera, and spectacular locations and costumes, argued by Davis, cannot serve as exclusive stylistic markers of monumental style. It is how these features are used for a particular purpose that distinguishes monumental style from other Japanese films and styles.⁶⁶ This explains how Davis’ description of the monumental style holds many similarities to the previously discussed theoretical works in this thesis. The purpose behind the adoption of the style distinguishes monumental style from the discussed examples presented by Richie, Satô and Geist. In this connection it is worth mentioning that monumental style in itself is not the topic of discussion in this context. What is interesting about Davis’ work is that he identifies

⁶² Davis, Darrel William, *Picturing Japaneseness: Monumental Style, National Identity, Japanese Film*. p. 6.

⁶³ Ibid. p. 6.

⁶⁴ Ibid. p. 9.

⁶⁵ Ibid. p. 43.

⁶⁶ Ibid. p. 45.

many of the same features, and also gives them the same importance, as the ones put forward by Richie, Satô and Geist. Thus Davis' arguments can be a part of a larger discussion concerning the characteristics of Japanese cinema in general.

To distinguish monumental style from propaganda, Davis argues that it is a product of the nationalist fervor manifested in the film industry in the late 1930s. Its technical features, however, are not a simple reflection of nationalist propaganda. The complexity of the monumental style suggests hesitation and occasional ambivalence about its national scaffolding. The mediation between its sponsoring ideology and its formal textures are just as important as its patent nationalism.⁶⁷ This further clarifies different nuances within cinema with nationalistic purpose; the point being to set monumental style apart from purely propagandist films. Davis expands this statement by claiming that it is unacceptable to simply relegate films to the immediate cause of national policy censorship, as he maintains that the films he discusses contain so many other aspects and additional features.⁶⁸ Among these features are the concentration on the aesthetics of period detail, design and the valorization of familial and clan structures.⁶⁹ The latter seems again to be confined within the framework of monumental style, as it is not explicitly brought up by the other writers referred to in this context. This also seems to be connected to the purpose of style utilization. Monumental style appears to be more a nuance of nationalistic productions, while the discussed characteristics of Japanese cinema in general tend to be more linked with the expressing of emotions through style. As for the stylistics of the monumental style, the long take and long shot, the slow camera movements and the ascetic repose of blocking and design, they are argued by Davis to canonize the tradition of Japanese heredities.⁷⁰ This reflection by Davis on style seems very similar to the arguments of Richie, Satô and Geist. The lingering on details and the spiritualizing of nature in particular seems to be points of agreement between these theoretical works.

An additional point made by Davis while analyzing the film *The Loyal Forty-Seven Retainers of the Genroku Era*, a film which he argues falls within the category of monumental style, is that the spatial arrangements are explored in greater depth than character psychology. As Davis puts it, the viewer's perception is both constrained and opened up, and the aesthetics are supposedly portrayed by a *less is more* attitude.⁷¹ This at first glance seems

⁶⁷ Davis, Darrel William, *Picturing Japaneseness. Monumental Style, National Identity, Japanese Film*, p. 69.

⁶⁸ Ibid. p. 71.

⁶⁹ Ibid. p. 87.

⁷⁰ Ibid. p. 93.

⁷¹ Ibid. p. 159.

commensurable with the previous arguments concerning the aesthetics of prewar Japanese cinema, as noted by Satô and Richie. The lingering on details and the idea that space holds meaning in itself, does seem to suggest a style where a *less is more* attitude certainly does not work against the stylistic characteristics.

Davis also compares Japanese prewar cinema to Japanese paintings, exemplified by *The Loyal Forty-Seven Retainers of the Genroku Era* and the way its shots are reminiscent of the high parallel perspective found in the classical screen paintings called *Yamato-e*. As in these screen paintings, the angle of view is from far up (filmed by crane) and it is supposedly impartial and detached.⁷² Other shots of the same movie are argued to portray an angular corner illusion to organize the space within the frame. This is said to be typically portrayed in woodcuts of the Edo period.⁷³ This illusion is portrayed by showing two parallel lines that don't seem to be closing in on each other but stay equally parallel. Imagine standing on a train track. The further away you focus your view on the tracks, the closer the two lines of the track seem to get. The illusion is depicted by denying this depth of perspective from visibility. The tracks seem just as distant from each other no matter how far away the view is focused. Though these two comparisons between monumental style and Japanese painting and woodcuts don't discuss the issues in the same detail as Satô, it does seem to suggest that Japanese prewar cinema was influenced by these art forms on more than one level.

A final point derived from Davis' book is that he detects a shift in the themes of the film productions prior to the development of the monumental style. First he argues that a shift from primarily comic mode to primarily melodramatic mode within Japanese storytelling fiction took place in the early 1930s. Then he goes on to explain how a similar shift can be argued to have taken place within Japanese *jidaigeki* (period film) productions. He calls the *jidaigeki* produced up through 1933 *the earlier comic mode*, while the *jidaigeki* produced from 1933 through 1941 is called *the later melodramatic mode*. As Davis puts it, "this shift clarifies the narrative and style of monumental films according to their *jidaigeki* predecessors." The argument further is that instead of deriving influence from American cinema, the shift from comedy to melodrama is a symptom of a more general redirection of cultural policy, away from "Americanism". Davis then underlines that these are tendencies, but that the melodramatic mode was complimentary to the monumental style.⁷⁴ This seems to suggest that

⁷² Davis, Darrel William, *Picturing Japaneseness. Monumental Style, National Identity, Japanese Film*, p. 162.

⁷³ *Ibid.* p. 172.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.* p. 74.

the features of monumental style are more fitting within melodramatic, as opposed to comic themes. It is underlined, however, that these observations are tendencies.



The Loyal Forty-Seven Retainers of the Genroku Era 1941-1942

Closing the Prewar Discussion

Extracting key points for further discussion and analysis

Since this chapter drew its opening arguments from Richie's 1971 book on Japanese cinema, it seems fitting to close the prewar discussion by comparing it to his latest book on the same subject, *A Hundred Years of Japanese Film*, from 2005. It is still important to remember that even though all the previous arguments have used prewar films as examples, most of them are discussing Japanese cinema in general. The prewar film productions are used as examples to underline features of Japanese cinema in general. The exception is Davis and his monumental style, which is clearly linked to the period between 1930 till 1953. But even Davis, as will be discussed later, argues that the monumental style is visible in productions as late as in 1990. The point made by Richie, however, is that beside the directly visible influences drawn from traditional Japanese art, Japanese cinema can be argued to be influenced by a complete Japanese theory of aesthetics. In other words, the mode of representation utilized in Japanese cinema is argued to be part of a longer aesthetic lineage permeating various Japanese art forms.

The first clear development detected in Richie's arguments of 2005, is that he brings up the terms *presentational* and *representational ethos*.⁷⁵ This has already been discussed by Burch, and as Richie himself notes, it is not an original concept, but one that he stresses to a greater extent than previously done. In relation to cinema, the *representational* represents reality and assumes that "reality" (Richie's own quotation marks) itself is being shown; whereas *presentational* is that which presents images through various stylizations, with no assumption that reality is being displayed. The latter is attributed to Japanese cinema, and the former is attributed to the cinema of Europe and America.⁷⁶ Richie further elaborates on presentational ethos by referring to Japanese culture in general and how nature was portrayed. Wilderness was only natural after it had been shaped and presented in palpable form, flowers were considered living only after having been cut and arranged for viewing. Thus, life itself was only dramatically lifelike after having been explained and commented upon. As Richie puts it, art and entertainment alike were *presentational*.⁷⁷ Moreover, the influences of American and European film styles are said to be treated with a "perhaps peculiar Japanese pattern of behavior: First an indiscriminative acceptance of a new idea, then a period of

⁷⁵ Richie, Donald, *A Hundred Years of Japanese Film*, p. 12.

⁷⁶ Ibid. p. 11.

⁷⁷ Ibid. p. 26.

reaction against it, and finally a complete assimilation, whereby the idea is transformed and tailored to Japanese tastes.”⁷⁸

The commenting on nature seems to be in line with Richie’s arguments of 1971. The manner of articulating it as presentational, however, is new. It appears as a more refined way of explaining the arguments, setting them up in a dichotomized relation to European and American film styles. As for the peculiarity of Japanese behavior, it will not be debated in this context. Richie does underline that this is indeed a generalization, but a generalization that he holds to be true in many instances.⁷⁹ At this juncture, Richie’s argument appears to fall into similar pitfalls as his arguments of 1971. He does point out some stylistic features that are indeed interesting in the context of Japanese cinema, but his explanation appears to attribute these features to culturally biased preconceptions, an explanation with which this thesis does not concur.

In this relation it is interesting to consider Davis’ argument concerning assimilation of influences. As far as style goes, Richie’s argument does appear to parallel Davis’ argument, concerning how monumental style was characterized by its ability to bend the influences from American cinema to accommodate the various trends of classical Japanese design and behavior. These arguments seem to agree in assuming that assimilation is a distinctive characteristic of Japanese cinema. On the other hand, it does appear problematic to assert that such assimilation is particularly Japanese as it is possibly done all over the world. That assimilation is *typical* for Japanese cinema, however, seems to be a reasonable conclusion to draw from these arguments.

Furthermore, Richie discusses narrative technique, explaining how an old Japanese narrative technique is to assume that character can be defined by similarities or contrast to the physical surroundings. This assumption is argued to be present in many scroll paintings, as well as in Japanese film.⁸⁰ Once more, the argument seems to relate to those previously made, but articulated in a more refined manner. The depiction of man as subordinated to nature, as a characteristic within Japanese cinema, seems clear. Along with this, the Japanese relation to the far and close past is rearticulated. This is exemplified with the use of flashback as a cinematic tool. In Japanese film, as in Japanese poetry, the flashback is not employed to elucidate the present by reference to the past, but rather to suggest a parallel between the two. The flashback is used to give time and space an aesthetic value. Referring to David Bordwell,

⁷⁸ Richie, Donald, *A Hundred Years of Japanese Film*, p. 32.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.* pp. 11–12.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.* p. 40.

Richie explains how transitions in time are used as decoration in Japanese films, as opposed to European and American films where they suggests the passing of time.⁸¹ This argument apparently dichotomizes classical cinema and Japanese cinema on the stylistic level, without necessarily opposing different cultures.

Concerning Japanese cinema before 1923, Riche explains that it was in fact influenced by American cinema, but that the influence was on the Japanese companies' own initiative. The Japanese companies assimilated the ways of the California studios, to the extent that they themselves wanted. As Richie puts it, "it is probably safe to say that Japan has never assimilated anything that it did not want to."⁸² This comment suggests that the influence taken from America seems to be selected by Japanese cinema in an eclectic manner, rather than that Japanese cinema has been influenced by American cinema on a level outside the control of Japanese film companies. Further arguments concerning influences derived from outside Japan's borders will be further elaborated in the following postwar discussions.

A final interesting detail in Richie's arguments of 2005 is that he refers in several instances to Ozu's techniques as minimalist: pointing out the stripped sets, limited gestures, ideas being expressed indirectly, short suggestive conversations and how scenes rarely were dissolved or faded out, but ended with cuts.⁸³ Though it might be a bit presumptuous to draw a parallel between this argument by Richie, and Davis' *less is more* attitudes mentioned earlier, they do seem to coincide on some level. Both these arguments seem to suggest utilizing of techniques in a subtle manner that could be applied to emphasize the ideology of traditional Japanese aesthetics. Whether these *less is more attitudes* or *minimalist techniques* could be argued to be an important distinction within Japanese cinema is hard to say at this point, but they do seem to fit in with a lot of the arguments discussed in this context so far.

Before moving on to discussing postwar developments in Japanese cinema, the points of relevance and key stylistic features discussed in this first chapter will be listed.

- Superposition, as concurred upon by Burch, Gerow, Geist, Davis and Richie
- Natural depictions expressing certain emotions, as argued by Satô and Richie
- The deep focus shot, as argued by Satô and Burch
- Flat Lighting and two-dimensionality, as argued by Satô, Richie, Geist, and Kalland

⁸¹ Richie, Donald, *A Hundred Years of Japanese Film*, pp. 40–41.

⁸² *Ibid.* p. 42.

⁸³ *Ibid.* pp. 58 and 73.

- The long take, as pointed out to be a quintessential Japanese stylistic feature by Richie, McDonald, Gerow and Davis
- The lingering on detail/shots empty of reference, as discussed by Richie, Geist and Davis
- Regarding Gerow's critique, any stylistic features explained through a dichotomizing of Japanese and American socio-cultural or political oppositions will be disregarded.
- Regarding Yoshimoto's argument, stylistic features will still be compared to classical cinema and an alternative mode of representation will be sought.

Postwar Developments (1)

Internal changes in Japanese cinema

As suggested in chapter one, the idea of superposition's strong foothold within Japanese cinema is asserted strongly so far in this thesis (as refined through the arguments of Gerow, Richie and Davis). That postwar Japanese cinema was influenced by traditional Japanese aesthetics as well as by classical cinema, and certain European cinematic tendencies at the same time, is a stand taken here now. Though all these influences, as is the case with superposed influences, are maintained in the postwar era, the prominence of traditional aesthetics would soon be challenged by external influences. Simultaneously internal counteractions to the cinematic trends of the postwar era emerged in Japan. In the years following World War II, Japanese cinema was a scene of considerable change and development. On one hand, cinema was liberated from the censorship and legislature put down by the Japanese government in the prewar era. On the other hand, a new set of legislative guidelines were thrust on cinema by the allied forces' SCAP.⁸⁴ American film makers and propaganda researchers recognized the proficiency and subtle persuasiveness of Japanese wartime cinema as more effective than anything produced in America. Japanese cinema was therefore applied by the Allied forces as a tool for their cause. Thus it happened that Japanese cinema went from promoting Japanese homogeneity and nationalism prior to, and during World War II, to promoting democracy in the name of the Allied forces in the years following the war.⁸⁵

Another change in the Japanese movie market after 1945 was that the ban of American cinema productions was lifted. American films became available as well as the option of making films that were inspired by other sources than those particularly Japanese. Still, with the Allied forces taking control over Japanese cinema immediately after the occupation, substantial changes in the Japanese movie market would first be detectable in the late '50s. This period, however, was marked by the rise of many genres and directions that today are synonymous with what Japanese cinema is famous for. This is not to say that the promoting of Japaneseness disappeared, but rather that the expressions of prewar cinema were continued side by side with the surfacing of many new directions in the Japanese movie market.

⁸⁴ Bordwell, David and Thompson, Kristin, *Film History: An Introduction*, p. 462.

⁸⁵ Hirano, Kyoko, *Mr. Smith Goes to Tokyo: Japanese Cinema under the American Occupation, 1945–1942*, (Washington, DC: The Smithsonian Institution, 1992), p. 3.

Due to strong regulations in this period, most films had to submit to certain prohibitions. Still there existed films that were not used explicitly to express wartime sentiments. Richie clearly expresses that the traditional Japanese influences on the style of Japanese cinema survived the wartime.

The Japanese ability to see the present in the past was by this time so strongly a part of Japanese motion picture style that even the most jingoistic of wartime period films were elevated by it. All of these qualities managed to exist throughout the war and, in the years following, as though after a period of incubation, flowered...

A noteworthy point in this connection is that some of Ozu and Mizoguchi's most prominent works were produced during the wartime.⁸⁶ *The Loyal Forty-Seven Retainers of the Genroku Era*, for instance, perhaps Mizoguchi's most discussed film in this context, was produced in the midst of World War II. The film is listed as a monumental style film by Davis, and its long takes are some of the longest produced by Mizoguchi. This could point to the fact that traditional Japanese influences were encouraged by the Japanese government during World War II due to their nationalistic potential. Davis also points out how the style of these wartime films tries to break the so called "evolutionary tendency" of cinema in Japan, namely that it took after classical cinema.⁸⁷ This seems to explain to some degree how traditional Japanese influences could be maintained after the war. Even if influences from classical cinema, as well as other forms of cinema, exploded into the Japanese film market after World War II, they appear to take root in the Japanese film market as an countervailing tendency to the traditional Japanese ones.

In Ozu and Mizoguchi's films of the wartime era, a mild social protest against Japanese nationalism can be detected. On the other hand, the maintenance of traditional values in narrative form and mode of representation conformed to the national incentives of propagandist inclination in this period.⁸⁸ This argument suggests ambivalence when it comes to accessing to what end, and in what connection traditional Japanese aesthetics and values were utilized in Japanese wartime cinema. On the one hand, it fit perfectly within the rising nationalism, but in the other hand, it was an ongoing development of a prewar traditional aesthetics. To deduce where one ends and the other starts appears almost impossible. It is

⁸⁶ Burch, Noël, *To the Distant Observer: Form and Meaning in the Japanese Cinema*, p. 143.

⁸⁷ Davis, Darrel William, *Picturing Japaneseness: Monumental Style, National Identity, Japanese Film*, p. 76.

⁸⁸ Burch, Noël, *To the Distant Observer: Form and Meaning in the Japanese Cinema*, pp. 143–144.

interesting to notice how the film industry at this time is often portrayed as overtly propagandist. What is not always clear is that many films made by the large production companies were made by directors who were not under military influence, without propagandist drive, but have been displayed as such because they had to undergo military censorship.⁸⁹ This might undermine a still ongoing trend within Japanese productions during wartime, even with the financial setbacks. The point is that productions could still have propagandist values for the government, depending upon how these films were interpreted. Some films could blur the line between intended propaganda and productions directed without military interference. It is also important to acknowledge the fact that many filmmakers directing films about contemporary life often found themselves in strong disagreement with national policy. The Japanese auteurs now found themselves being told how to make movies by people with no background in film, which in turn resulted in some direct opposition to national policy.⁹⁰ In this context, the acknowledgment of identical visual appearances, and possibility for differentiations in incentives for making these, will have to suffice. The possibility must be borne in mind that Japanese cinema's ties to a traditional Japanese aesthetics continued to develop after the war because nationalism sustained it during the war. That does not mean that Japanese cinema was forced to utilize traditional Japanese aesthetics, but that it adapted to the legislature of the nationalist wartime regime because the opportunity for it was welcomed by the government.

⁸⁹ Desser, David, *From the Opium War to the Pacific War: Japanese Propaganda Films of World War II* (New Barnet, Herts: John Libbey and Company, 1995), p. 35.

⁹⁰ Anderson, Joseph L. and Richie, Donald, *The Japanese Film* (New York: Grove Press, 1960), p. 140.

Postwar Developments (2)

American and European influences

Richie argues that the combining of genres is a characteristic of Japanese cinema in general, which differentiates it from American, European and Russian cinema. This is traced back to the 1920s, and it is further argued that the works of Naruse Mikio, Toyoda Shirô, Ozu and Kurosawa are examples of this. In Japan, genres and emotions that in America, Europe and Russia have been considered to be antithetical have been combined.⁹¹ Furthermore, Richie makes it clear that contemporary issues and concerns are as much a part of Japanese cinema as Japanese traditions are. As he puts it; “if concern for the traditional might suggest a similarity among those directors who interest themselves in it, there is, at the same time the greatest divergence and dissimilarity among those directors who interest themselves in the less traditional.”⁹² Though this statement might be a bit vague taken out of context, it suggests that the influences derived from traditional Japanese aesthetics exist side by side with American and European influences. Richie elaborates this by maintaining that the postwar films of Ozu and Naruse exemplify how both traditional and modern influences were blended without losing their “Japanese accent”.⁹³ Richie argues that Ozu’s traditional side does not oppose the director’s modernist side.⁹⁴ This suggests that these tendencies somehow interacted within the framework of certain film productions. It is worth noticing though, that Ozu is said to start out as a traditionalist, then move towards modernist tendencies in the middle of his career, and finally return to reflect Japanese traditions in his later works.⁹⁵ For instance, Ozu’s postwar films are argued to be much more ambiguous when it comes to depicting of empty spaces. The shots empty of reference can more easily be rationally explained as pertaining to plot and narrative.⁹⁶

It is further argued by Richie that the structural exposure of Ozu’s films could both be associated with traditional Japanese ethos, and with American and European cinema.⁹⁷ This is also maintained by Scott Nygren, as he describes how Ozu’s films are regarded as traditionalist in the Japanese context, but at the same time treasured as modernist by American film theorists. Ozu’s form of traditional Japanese aesthetics is argued to

⁹¹ Richie, Donald, *Japanese Cinema, Film Style and National Character*, p. 39.

⁹² Richie, Donald, *A Hundred Years of Japanese Film*, p. 129.

⁹³ *Ibid.* p. 119.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.* p. 124.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.* p. 112.

⁹⁶ Burch, Noël, *To the Distant Observer: Form and Meaning in the Japanese Cinema*, p. 293.

⁹⁷ Richie, Donald, *A Hundred Years of Japanese Film*, p. 56.

decentralize and de-dramatize the Hollywood conventions of emphasizing characters and action.⁹⁸ This suggests that although Ozu's style represents a traditional Japanese mode of representation, it is still modernist in the way it challenges the conventions of Hollywood cinema. In other words, even though the filmic tools are derived from traditional Japanese aesthetics, the theme of the film expresses socio-political concerns of its time.

A similar sentiment is expressed by Davis when relating his monumental style to modernism. As Davis puts it, monumental style possesses dialectical modernism: "How the construction of Japaneseness is accomplished out of that most Western of materials, cinema. The form and meaning of Japaneseness will vary according to the themes, styles, and historical contexts in which it is cinematically constructed." Davis' hypothesis is that "in its quest for ways to represent a pure Japanese spirit, the monumental style inadvertently reveals the growing cosmopolitanization of Japanese popular culture." In addition to this, Davis argues that Japanese cinema was not adapted to American and European cinematic tendencies exclusively after World War II, but that such an assimilation already occurred in the mid 1930s.⁹⁹ This sentiment is also supported by Burch, as he underlines that Japanese directors were indeed aware of the early innovations of classical cinema, and also knew how to utilize them. Furthermore, Burch explains how such filmic tools as the reverse field and concertina, the medium close-up and cut on movement had become standardized tools of expressing continuity, contingency and linearity in American and European cinema. In Japan, on the other hand, examples suggest that these same tools were used as dramatic signifiers to displace the gestures of emotion.¹⁰⁰ Both arguments further support the notion of superposition within Japanese cinema.

Whereas Burch's argument suggests that Japanese cinema has different motives for utilizing tools of classical cinema, Davis' hypothesis and prior argument expresses why the key aspect *style* is important to explore. The form will vary according to themes, styles and historical context. This statement seems to suggest that *cinematic style*, when expressing Japaneseness through cinema, adapts to the various developments of themes, genres, and historical contexts. Style is still able to express certain elements that are arguably connected to Japaneseness, or in other words, traditional Japanese aesthetics. Davis' argument also seems to support Richie's suggestion that traditional and modernist tendencies in relation to style coexisted in Japanese cinema already in the prewar era.

⁹⁸ Nygren, Scott, *Time Frames: Japanese Cinema and the Unfolding of History*, p. 34.

⁹⁹ Davis, Darrel William, *Picturing Japaneseness: Monumental Style, National Identity, Japanese Film*, p. 46.

¹⁰⁰ Burch, Noël, *To the Distant Observer. Form and Meaning in the Japanese Cinema*, pp. 81–82.

The Japanese New Wave and Other Emerging Tendencies

The evolvement of stylistic tendencies in the '50s, '60s and '70s

Dedicating only one chapter to three decades surely seems neglectful compared to the detailed treatment of the prewar era so far in this thesis. Still, the amount of space granted to explaining new tendencies in the '50s – '70s is arguably proportionate with the attention it has been granted in the body of theory existing on Japanese cinema. This is not to say that new developments are of less importance, they just haven't been as thoroughly discussed as the traditional Japanese stylistics. Many films produced in this period are of course mentioned elsewhere in this thesis. Directors such as Ozu, Kurosawa and Kobayashi Masaki made some of their most famous works reflecting traditional Japanese aesthetics in this period. Ozu in particular is of interest due to his predilection for family melodramas. Still, the period also saw the rise of many American and European influences in Japanese cinema. These are influences that inventively oppose the esthetics of prewar Japanese cinema. Even though these new developments in Japanese cinema rarely come in the form of melodramas, which is the main genre of interest here, it is nevertheless important to outline stylistic tendencies which are in opposition to the style this thesis attempts to define. The recognition of new developments is of importance for the film analyses concluding this thesis. In the analyses, both traditional Japanese aesthetics and recent cinematic influences will be accounted for in order to pursue any connection they might share with contemporary Japanese melodrama films.

The postwar film examples discussed so far were mostly bound by the conventions of the Japanese studio system. As noted by McDonald, in the late 1940s the audience in postwar Japan was looking for entertainment, not indoctrination. The studios rushed to supply the demand by supporting musicals, comedies, and melodramas. Around this time Japanese cinema was discovered by the outside world as well, as Kurosawa's *Rashômon* was the Grand Prix winner at the 1951 Cannes Film Festival. Following this event, the rich heritage of Japanese cinema won recognition worldwide. Both Mizoguchi and Kurosawa won several awards at Cannes and Venice in the first half of the '50s.¹⁰¹ The early '50s also saw the first major influence by Italian neorealism in Japanese cinema.¹⁰² Though the realism of Japanese drama might appear in concordance with neorealism at first glance, these styles actually contrast with each other. André Bazin described the ideology of neorealism as an attempt to

¹⁰¹ McDonald, Keiko L., *Reading a Japanese Film*, pp. 7–8.

¹⁰² Anderson, Joseph L. and Richie, Donald, *The Japanese Film*, p. 190.

portray reality rather than the plastic of the image. By plastic, he referred to the style of sets, makeup, lighting, framing and composition of shots, and performance of actors.¹⁰³ The ideology of neorealism was typified by its *on location* filming, utilization of nonprofessional actors and depicting of menial situations lacking in dramatic valence.¹⁰⁴ In addition the sound and dialogue should ideally consist of purely diegetic on location recordings, and the narrative and style should be incorporated into each other in a manner that enhances the reality of the film, rather than adding to dramatic composition.¹⁰⁵ As such, neorealism has the appearance of a counteraction to the classical cinema paradigm, in particular the melodrama genre. In Bazin's own words: "Unfortunately the demon of melodrama that Italian film makers seem incapable of exorcising takes over every so often, thus imposing a dramatic necessity on strictly foreseeable events."¹⁰⁶ The stylistic ideology of neorealism strongly opposes the highly constructed, perfectionized cinematic style linked to traditional Japanese aesthetics. A prominent example of neorealist influence in Japanese cinema though, would be *And Yet We Live/Dokkoi Ikite Iru* (1951) by director Imai Tadashi. As noted by Anderson/Richie, *And Yet We Live's* style was patterned after the neorealist classic *Bicycle Thieves* (1948).¹⁰⁷

In relation to neorealism, it is also interesting to note that Bazin considered the long take to be a superior mode of expressing reality, as opposed to the traditional cutting in classical cinema. Bazin argues that when the action of a scene is not broken up into several cuts, and the juxtaposition of sequences that distort the temporal actuality of a scene is avoided, the audience is presented with an undiluted depiction of realism that is not to be misinterpreted.¹⁰⁸ Though Bazin's argument is centered around the content conveyed through utilization of the long take, its ties expressing reality don't appear compatible with the stylized utilization of the tool in Japanese cinema. In fact, many Japanese films discussed in this thesis, particularly melodramas, appear very realistic as far as content goes. On closer scrutiny, however, all these films are united by strict control over style through angling, lighting, sound, staging, and actor performance, all of which strongly contrast with the ideology of neorealism.

¹⁰³ Bazin, André, "The Evolution of the Language of Cinema", in Lehman, P. *Defining Cinema* (London: Athlone Press, 1997), p. 60.

¹⁰⁴ Bazin, André, *What Is Cinema?* Vol. 2 (Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 2005), p. 50.

¹⁰⁵ Bazin, André, "An Aesthetic Of Reality", in *The European Cinema Reader*, ed. Fowler, Catherine (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), pp. 57–58.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.* p. 58.

¹⁰⁷ Anderson, Joseph L. and Richie, Donald, *The Japanese Film*, p. 190.

¹⁰⁸ Bazin, André, "The Evolution of the Language of Cinema", pp. 67–70.

In the '50s there also arose some early articulations opposing the ideology of traditional Japanese cinema. The critic Imamura Taihei in particular criticized Ozu's style in relation to classical cinema. Imamura points out how Ozu's shots empty of character reference hinder the narrative flow and plot development. Furthermore, Imamura argued that society was indirectly observed when depicted in natural scenes, while people served as mere accessories. Imamura's early opposition to Ozu was based on the societal connections read from these movies, rather than rejecting the style in itself.¹⁰⁹ Nevertheless, Imamura's early critique would inevitably have had implications for style if his ideas had been transferred to production modes. In the decade to come, Imamura's sentiments would be embraced, both on paper and in cinematic productions.

In the late 1950s and early 1960s there arose a new generation of directors who opposed what they perceived to be a formulaic studio system. These developments could arguably be seen as a diminishing trend for traditional Japanese aesthetics, as outside influences and a multitude of new genres emerged. These developments surfaced due to some Japanese studios giving their directors and screenwriters more control over their own work. This created conditions that eventually resulted in the emergence of the Japanese *new wave* in the 1960s.¹¹⁰ This new wave received its name because it was reminiscent of the French new wave.¹¹¹ The Shochiku studio was the first to launch the new wave by promoting the young assistant director Ôshima Nagisa to director in 1959. His first films were a success, and soon other studios followed in Shochiku's footsteps.¹¹² Ôshima brought the discussion further by composing a manifesto in which he rejected the production modes and stylistic tendencies of traditional Japanese cinema. Burch argues that Ôshima's sentiments were due to the introduction of artistic principles forged in the West during the late classical, romantic and modernist periods. These were principles tied to the introduction of Western-style oil painting, music and literature in postwar Japanese society.¹¹³

It is important, however, to underline that the comparison of Ôshima's ideas to the French new wave was based on his predilection for confronting political issues. As for the relation of its ideology to stylistic content, the French new wave explicitly attempted to break

¹⁰⁹ Burch, Noël, *To the Distant Observer: Form and Meaning in the Japanese Cinema*, pp. 279–280.

¹¹⁰ Desser, David, *Eros Plus Massacre: An Introduction to the Japanese New Wave Cinema* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988), p. 9.

¹¹¹ McDonald, Keiko L., *Reading a Japanese Film*, p. 10.

¹¹² Bordwell, David and Thompson, Kristin, *Film History: An Introduction*. p. 549.

¹¹³ Burch, Noël, *To the Distant Observer: Form and Meaning in the Japanese Cinema*, pp. 326–327.

with the conventions of classical cinema.¹¹⁴ Ôshima's films are described as eclectic. As argued by Richie, Ôshima utilized stylistic methods when it best served the political purpose of his films. The stylistic conventions of the French new wave are therefore not directly transferable to Ôshima's style. As such, the importance of Ôshima's style is questioned in this context. The French new wave composed a new set of particular stylistic conventions, whereas Ôshima's style appears to merely adapt and merge previously established stylistic modes of representation. In this relation, David Desser argues that the Japanese *new wave* did not succeed the French new wave, as they both arose simultaneously. Though the stylistic features might be similar, the Japanese new wave is argued to be more immediately influenced by the Polish radical cinema of the late 1950s. In addition, the Japanese new wave contrasted with the French new wave in the fact that the former was strictly produced within the confines of the Japanese studio system. The latter was made purely by independent directors, or was aided by governmental subsidies.¹¹⁵ It is important to underline, however, that Desser mainly directs his attention towards the content of the new wave films. As for style in particular, he does not convincingly elaborate its ties to either classical cinema, the French new wave or Polish radical cinema. Desser also points out that the body of theoretical discussion concerning the Japanese new wave is very limited.¹¹⁶ For this reason, its style will not be discussed to any great extent in this thesis. The tendencies in this period will merely be acknowledged.

Other directors to be mentioned in connection with the Japanese new wave would be Shinoda Masahiro, Yoshida Yoshishige and Imamura Shôhei. Imamura, a former assistant of Ozu, rejected the Japanese aesthetics of his former employer. Imamura opposed Ozu's celebration of the official version of Japanese society, as depicted through traditional Japanese aesthetics.¹¹⁷ According to Imamura there are two Japans: The *official* version was epitomized by *nô*, *tea ceremony*, *Mizoguchi*, *Ozu*, *Kurosawa* and virtues of fidelity and devotion; the *real* Japan as depicted in Imamura's films was filled with infidelity, noncompliance, selfishness, lust and amorality.¹¹⁸ Describing his own style, Imamura states: "There are no shots in my films which do not contain human action. There are no empty landscapes or unmotivated cuts...".¹¹⁹ Imamura's films in the '60s are typically action-filled, rid of long shots and

¹¹⁴ Wollen, Peter, "Godard and Counter Cinema", in *The European Cinema Reader*, ed. Fowler, Catherine (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), p. 74.

¹¹⁵ Desser, David, *Eros Plus Massacre: An Introduction to the Japanese New Wave Cinema*, pp. 4–6.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.* p. 1.

¹¹⁷ Richie, Donald, *A Hundred Years of Japanese Film*, p. 186.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.* p. 184.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.* p. 190.

lingering camera views. (Here, *action* is not to be confused with its classical cinematic connotations.) The narrative is pushed forward with little breathing space between the causal relations portrayed.¹²⁰ As such, Imamura's style is in strong contrast to traditional Japanese aesthetics. However, as the case was with Ôshima, Imamura's foundation is a rejection of social critique in Japanese traditional cinema. Imamura's films appear to conform to classical cinematic conventions more than corresponding to the French new wave. As far as style goes in the context of Japanese cinema, it appears doubtful that Imamura added much to the table. Still, the tendencies of both Ôshima and Imamura confirm the increased American and European influence on Japanese cinema in the '60s. These are influences which must be accounted for in the film analysis to be conducted later in this thesis.

Desser argues that to properly assess the implications of the Japanese new wave, its strong societal criticizing content must be accounted for. As far as style goes, however, he does not counter the notion of the new wave being a counteraction against the filmic language of the previous generations of Japanese filmmakers.¹²¹ Social criticism was a central feature of the new wave, but this is not to say that social criticism was not expressed with more conventional methods of stylization at the same time. Shinoda's films are argued by Bordwell to "have a fastidiousness of visual design that echoes 1930s Japanese classicism."¹²² This at least poses the argument that some of the tendencies discussed in chapter one were also at some level incorporated into some of the new wave productions. It also seems in place to underline that although the Japanese new wave arose as a means to reach out to a new audience, it would not be correct to set up a commercial/non-commercial dichotomy between the new wave films and the postwar films of Ozu or Mizoguchi. The films of Ozu and Mizoguchi were also mainstream productions when the first appeared. Only in later years have they become popular among art film audiences in Europe and America.¹²³

Preceding the Japanese new wave, there also emerged several other genres in Japan that were inspired by American and European cinema. The *monster* movie was one of these genres, epitomized by Godzilla. Inspired by American successes of the rereleased *King Kong* (1933) in 1952 and *The Beast from 20,000 Fathoms* in 1953, the first Godzilla film *Gojira*, was released in 1954.¹²⁴ Another popular genre in the 1960s that was also inspired by

¹²⁰ Richie, Donald, *A Hundred Years of Japanese Film*, pp. 190–191.

¹²¹ Desser, David, *Eros Plus Massacre: An Introduction to the Japanese New Wave Cinema*, p. 2.

¹²² Bordwell, David and Thompson, Kristin, *Film History: An Introduction*, p. 552.

¹²³ Thompson, Kristin. "The Strange Cases of David Lynch", ch. 4 in *Storytelling in Film and Television* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), p. 114.

¹²⁴ McDonald, Keiko L., *Reading a Japanese Film*, p. 9.

American cinema was the *gangster/yakuza* film.¹²⁵ Within this genre the directors are in some contexts nicknamed the ‘outlaw masters of Japanese cinema’. The outlaw masters didn’t necessarily have to be directors of *yakuza* films, but were rather directors who in some way, controversially, defied the studio conventions.¹²⁶ Arguably this was in most cases done through the excessive use of violence, sex and language in *yakuza* films. Prominent outlaw master directors of that time would be Fukasaku Kinji and Suzuki Seijun.¹²⁷ Although the *yakuza* film is argued to be influenced by American action films, it is also noteworthy that Fukasaku claims to have always tried to incorporate influences from kabuki into his *yakuza* films.¹²⁸ Similarly to Bordwell’s argument on Shinoda’s films, this suggests that even if the influences from America and Europe were becoming stronger in Japan after the war, there were also examples of films blending external influences with influences derived from traditional Japanese aesthetics. To what extent these influences overshadowed each other would presumably be involved with each individual film’s construction. The point is that influences from Japan’s own culture were being maintained alongside new external influences. This argument coincides with the previous notion that Japanese cinema is characterized by superposition rather than succession.

Even if influences from America and Europe were increasing in the 1950s and 1960s, substantial amounts of period dramas (*Jidaigeki*) were still being released. In particular, the sword fighting violent period drama (*Chanbara*) rose to popularity as the Japanese audience were interested in genres that had been banned during the occupation.¹²⁹ While the *jidaigeki* previously have been argued to be inspired by traditional Japanese aesthetics, the *chanbara* portrays samurai films quite differently. The *chanbara* breaks with Japanese traditional aesthetics, as its emphasis on fast-paced, action-packed suspense is apparently derived from American films.¹³⁰

Wada-Marciano argues that the two broad genres *jidaigeki*, and its opposing *gendaijeki* (contemporary drama), have been maintained in Japanese cinema since the 1920s. According to Wada-Marciano these two “mega-genres” contain the whole range of Japanese subgenres. “Both have historically depended to a greater or lesser degree upon the close identification with stars, directors, and studio ‘flavors’ rather than the characteristic semantic and syntactic

¹²⁵ Richie, Donald, *Japanese Cinema, Film Style and National Character*, p. xxi.

¹²⁶ Desjardins, Chris, *Outlaw Masters of Japanese Cinema* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2005), p. 1.

¹²⁷ Ibid. p. 2.

¹²⁸ Ibid. p. 27.

¹²⁹ McDonald, Keiko L., *Reading a Japanese Film*, p. 8.

¹³⁰ Ibid. p. 4.

patterns so central to Hollywood genres". The argument is that these two genres are represented by a subtle negotiation with Hollywood genres already in early prewar Japanese cinema. Wada-Marciano utilizes this argument to underline how Japanese cinema contributed to establish an absolute point of historical disjunction with a before and after 1868 genre-system represented by these two genres. The *jidaigeki* period films being set before 1868, and the contemporary *gendaigeki* was set after. According to her, this was a politically welcome strategy as it supported the Japanese national formation.¹³¹ Nevertheless, it is interesting to note that these genres still exist, although they interact with the emergence of new genres. It appears compatible with the notion of superposition, as well as explaining how traditional aesthetics could possibly have been maintained until recent time.

As for the '70s, the new wave tendencies of the '60s were maintained throughout the decade. Directors clearly influenced by the new wave even continued to emerge in the '80s, but the popularity of the phenomenon died out towards the end of the '70s. As pointed out by Desser, the implicit meaning of the term "new wave" inevitably brings about its own demise.¹³² Due to the rise of TV's popularity, and the fact that non-Japanese films far surpassed the cinema showings of Japanese films, Japanese cinema productivity in general took a dive towards the end of the decade.¹³³ Desser argues that since the downfall of the new wave, no subsequent cinematic movement arose in Japan during the following decade (the '80s).¹³⁴ That was written in 1988, and even though the subsequence of the cinematic tendencies in the following chapter might of course be discussed, the decades to come did see a new spring for Japanese cinema.

¹³¹ Wada-Marciano, Mitsuyo, *Nippon Modern: Japanese Cinema of the 1920s and 1930s*, pp. 44, 45 and 53.

¹³² Desser, David, *Eros Plus Massacre: An Introduction to the Japanese New Wave Cinema*, p. 10.

¹³³ Richie, Donald, *A Hundred Years of Japanese Film*, p. 212.

¹³⁴ Desser, David, *Eros Plus Massacre: An Introduction to the Japanese New Wave Cinema*, p. 12.

The Japanese New New Wave (the 1980s – Recent Time)

Style culminating to its present state

In the early '80s the Japanese film studios experienced an economic downturn. This made many studios cut back on production and divert their focus to distribution. A void was created in the market, which was filled by independent filmmakers backed by outside enterprises. These new directors approached cinema from the viewpoint of film aficionados.¹³⁵ According to Nygren, these new directors made films that rejected the stylistic innovations of the initial new wave of the '60s, returning to a style of character centrality and classical continuity to be found in the “humanist” films of the '50s. Nygren argues that the stylistic features of this new *new wave* are characterized by a renewed influence from classical cinema. Not only are the new filmmakers argued to apply classical cinematic narratives to mark a departure from their immediate past, but several new wave (the old one beginning in the '60s) directors are listed and argued to produce films in the '80s with consistent stylistic patterns of classical cinema, differing from their work a decade or two earlier. Nagisa Ôshima, Shôhei Imamura and Yoshishige Yoshida, all prominent names of the new wave tendencies in the '60s and '70s, are argued to have produced films in the '80s in line with classical cinema conventions. The films mentioned as examples are *Senjô no Merry Christmas/Merry Christmas Mr. Lawrence* (1983, Ôshima); *Fukushû suru wa Ware ni Ari/Vengeance is Mine* (1979, Imamura) and *Ningen no Yakusoku/The Promise* (1986, Yoshida). According to Nygren, the classical cinema style of representation was employed to emphasize antifeudalistic individualism in film. These tendencies were in strong contrast to the traditional Japanese aesthetics being portrayed by Ozu, Mizoguchi or Naruse.¹³⁶ Also Itami Jûzô and his movie *Tampopo* (1987) are mentioned as an example of the new *new wave* of the '80s.¹³⁷ However, when examining this film's style closely, it appears to share as much with the initial new wave as it does with classical cinema. The multiple diegesis, narrative intransitivity and self-reflective nature of this particular film, appears to have as much in common with the Japanese new wave as its obvious parody on the American western genre is influenced from classical cinema. If anything, this film shares characteristics with the tendencies known in America as postclassical cinema. What is not clarified by either Nygren or McDonald is that the new *new wave* has a multitude of influences embedded in it, not leaving any of the Japanese stylistics from earlier decades behind. Richie doesn't mention this either, but instead points out how

¹³⁵ McDonald, Keiko L., *Reading a Japanese Film*, pp. 11–12.

¹³⁶ Nygren, Scott, *Time Frames: Japanese Cinema and the Unfolding of History*, pp. 199–201.

¹³⁷ McDonald, Keiko L., *Reading a Japanese Film*, p. 12.

Ôshima's film *Gohatto* (1999) and Yoshida's film *Wuthering Heights* (1988) both have been compared to Mizoguchi's films in the way they portray traditional Japanese aesthetics. According to Richie, these films indicate a return to a self-conscious Japaneseness after a period of foreign-inspired experimentation.¹³⁸

These tendencies in the '80s culminated with the rise of directors who distanced themselves from traditional Japanese aesthetics, as well as directors embracing the very same aesthetics. Miike Takashi is arguably one of the most prominent contemporary Japanese directors, who with his fast paced, extremely violent and taboo-breaking films has given postmodern Japanese cinema a face. His films are filled with close ups and fast cutting, typical of classical cinema action. At the same time he incorporates elements from *chanbara* bloodiness¹³⁹ in his films, mixing influences in an arguably indefinable melting pot. Miike's films are argued to transgress the boundaries of genre, to refuse accepted narrative norms and disregard the norms of film style.¹⁴⁰

On the apparently opposite side of the scale, the later works of Kitano Takeshi and Kore-eda Hirokazu are mentioned as examples. The later films of Kitano, such as *Hana-Bi/Fireworks* (1998), *Dolls* (2002) and *Zatoichi* (2003) are argued by Ko to re-read 'the emptiness of Japan', which in Kitano's earlier films was an aestheticisation of Japan. The later films are a nostalgic view of Japan which both praises and grieves for this kind of 'nothingness' (Ko's own quotation marks). The examples mentioned are the cherry blossoms in *Hana-Bi*, the elegiac Japanese landscapes presented in *Dolls*, and the community harmony manifest in the ending sequence of *Zatoichi*.¹⁴¹ Though Ko clearly discusses thematic content and the aestheticisation of the Japanese cultural phenomenon, the cherry blossoms could at least arguably be tied to the expressing of different emotions. In any case, when examining these films more closely, they do express nostalgia on the stylistic level as well. Especially *Hana-Bi* and *Dolls* have an abundance of long takes, slow camera movements and scenes apparently empty of reference. As these thematics and stylistics naturally are closely related, it is not so surprising that both appear in films that arguably take a nostalgic viewpoint on Japanese cinema. It is also interesting to notice that *Hana-Bi*, in addition to being nostalgic towards its traditional Japanese aesthetic influences, also is filled with contemporary *yakuza*

¹³⁸ Richie, Donald, *A Hundred Years of Japanese Film*, p. 208.

¹³⁹ Ibid. p. 224.

¹⁴⁰ Ko, Mika, *Japanese Cinema and Otherness: Nationalism, Multiculturalism and the Problem of Japaneseness*, p. 38.

¹⁴¹ Ibid. p. 91.

elements and strong graphical violence. Apparently this particular movie fits the superposition ideas about Japanese cinema quite well.

When comparing Miike's ultraviolent *yakuza* films with Kitano's *Hana-Bi*, Ko further argues that there is no similar project of aestheticising of Japan to be found in Miike's films. Instead it is argued that Miike's films, when depicting traditional Japanese phenomena, assume the characteristics of pastiche. When analyzing Miike's *yakuza* epos *Dead or Alive* (1999), it is interpreted as a deconstruction of the traditional notion of Japaneseness.¹⁴² Though this might be true, when assessing the stylistic features of *Dead or Alive*, the scenes which are not action-filled are still done slow-paced with prominent utilization of static camera and relative long shots. Though the shots are not nearly as long as in the works of Ozu or Mizoguchi, the average shot length (ASL) in Miike's films is nevertheless considerably longer than what is considered normative for classical cinema. (According to David Bordwell, the average shot length in classical cinema is 3-6 seconds in recent years.¹⁴³) It is important to underline that though Miike's films appear to be the pinnacle of postmodernism in Japanese cinema, even his films contain stylistics that could be linked to traditional Japanese aesthetics on the stylistic level. Still, there is a considerable difference in how the traditional Japanese aesthetics are approached in *Hana-Bi* and *Dead or Alive*. *Hana-Bi* mixes in these traditional influences consciously, expressing nostalgia and self-reflectivity over Japan's national cinematic heritage. *Dead or Alive*, on the other hand, appears to consciously distance itself from Japanese tradition and succeed on the thematic level. On the stylistic level, features that are arguably of a quintessential Japanese nature still shine through. This seems to indicate that the Japanese stylistic set of tools utilized to direct movies is fundamentally different from the normative style of classical cinema. These two films, one distancing itself from Japanese tradition and borrowing heavily from classical cinema stylistics, thematic and narrative, the other respectfully treating Japanese tradition in homage, both utilize stylistics of traditional Japanese aesthetics. Both films also arguably confirm the superposition notion as well as fit in with the notion of Japanese cinema as postmodern.

Yet another tendency within recent Japanese cinema, which possibly prolongs the stylistic tendencies linked to traditional Japanese aesthetics, is a wave of contemporary drama films. These are films that do not explicitly take influence from classical cinema thematics, narrative or style, but arguably continue the natural evolution of tendencies initiated by Ozu,

¹⁴² Ko, Mika, *Japanese Cinema and Otherness. Nationalism, Multiculturalism and the Problem of Japaneseness*, pp. 49 and 59.

¹⁴³ Bordwell, David, *The Way Hollywood Tells It* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 2006), p. 122.

Mizoguchi, and Naruse, then brought further by Kurosawa and Kobayashi. These are the kind of films that will be analyzed in this thesis. To mention a few examples: *Tasogare Seibei/Twilight Samurai* (2002, Yamada Yôji) and *Maboroshi no Hikari/Maborosi* (1995, Kore-eda Hirokazu) displayed these tendencies about a decade ago. More recent examples of these same tendencies refined are *Tennen Kokekkô/A Gentle Breeze in the Village* (2007, Yamashita Nobuhiro); *Kûchû Teien/Hanging Garden* (2005, Toyoda Toshiaki); *Sad Vacation* (2007, Aoyama Shinji) and *Hyakuman-en to Nigamushi Onna/One Million Yen Girl* (2008, Tanada Yuki).

Arguably the most prominent director in relation to these tendencies is Kore-eda. His slow-paced dramas are compared to the works of Ozu by many critics and theorists. Richie compares the two



when it comes to thematics, stating that Kore-eda has learned much from Ozu with his decomposition of the Japanese family as a major theme in many of his films.¹⁴⁴

Peter Skovfoged Laursen also compares Kore-eda to Ozu, but he draws parallels on the stylistic level. In particular, he discusses the utilization of shots empty of character reference. He points out that there are some differences between Ozu and Kore-eda's empty shots. Kore-eda's shots are said to be shorter and not so distinctively contrasting with the shots containing character reference. In addition, since Kore-eda's empty shots arguably are more connected to the thematics of the films, they are also claimed to hold a higher level of associative content to the film's thematics than do the empty shots of Ozu.¹⁴⁵

Conversely, McDonald opposes the comparing of Kore-eda to both Ozu and Mizoguchi. She argues that the resemblance between Kore-eda and these two directors is superficial at best. Kore-eda is granted the similarity when it comes to utilization of steady cam and long

¹⁴⁴ Richie, Donald, *A Hundred Years of Japanese Film*, p. 246.

¹⁴⁵ Laursen, Peter Skovfoged, "Mellemrum og fantasmagorisk lys: Karakterforladte rum hos Yasujiro Ozu og Hirokazu Kore-eda", in Copenhagen: *Kosmorama*, 2006., pp. 109, 110 and 117.

takes, but according to McDonald, that is where the similarity ends.¹⁴⁶ As noted by Laursen, McDonald points to Kore-eda's associative content within his shots. According to McDonald, Kore-eda invites the viewer to puzzle out the significance of his visual images and diegetic sounds. As such, Ozu is argued to make the viewer feel intuitively, whereas Kore-eda makes the viewer contemplate.¹⁴⁷

As for the comparison between long takes by Kore-eda and long takes by Mizoguchi, the former is argued to utilize long-distance framing in a manner unfamiliar to Mizoguchi. The long takes of Mizoguchi rather utilize medium shots in order to capture the body language of the characters more clearly. Mizoguchi's shots "focus on virtuoso performances by actors equipped to convey a full range of subtle emotions." According to McDonald, Kore-eda's young performers cannot be expected to meet similar high standards. The two directors are said to work to a different standard. Kore-eda's forte is said to lie in his cinematic mode of representation.¹⁴⁸

Two points can be derived from these thoughts on Kore-eda. Firstly, there appears to be a consensus when it comes to the similarity between Ozu, Mizoguchi and Kore-eda and certain of their stylistics. The differences pointed out seem to concern the reason for applying these stylistics, rather than the stylistics themselves. This will be further discussed in the analysis of Kore-eda's *Still Walking* from 2008. Secondly, the discussions on Kore-eda do not indicate in any manner that his films express nostalgia, pastiche or homage to the works of Ozu and Mizoguchi. In the instances where Kore-eda's differences from Ozu and Mizoguchi are mentioned, these differences are apparently described as an alternative manner of utilizing similar modes of representation. This might suggest that rather than copying the style of Ozu and Mizoguchi, Kore-eda has merely developed their mode of representation, adapting it to contemporary filmmaking.

¹⁴⁶ McDonald, Keiko L., *Reading a Japanese Film*, pp. 199 and 214.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.* p. 217.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.* pp. 213–216.

The Current Articulation of Japanese Cinematic Style

How the pitfalls compromising postwar Japanese cinema theory still permeate the current discussion

With the last two chapters in mind, it would appear plausible that the style of Japanese cinema would have developed in correspondence with the developments of Japanese cinema in the postwar era. This final chapter leaning on theoretical context will, however, prove that the main features of the style of Japanese cinema today have not changed much since the postwar era. The various stylistic developments discussed in the previous chapters are of course articulated, but as far as the defining of Japanese cinematic style goes, arguments still link Japanese cinema with traditional Japanese aesthetics.

To explain the style of Ozu further, as well as why it could be regarded as quintessentially Japanese, its connection to *mono no aware* is still persisted on (pp. 29–30). The sentiments of *mono no aware* are argued to be portrayed by the empty shots of Ozu. These shots are argued to express a resigned sadness, a calm yet uncertain feeling that implies the never ending changes and the evanescence of all things.¹⁴⁹ Although this example refers exclusively to Ozu's films, it is almost identical to the arguments of prewar cinema, and could at least indicate that some of the sentiments are continued after the war. As discussed in chapter one, *mono no aware* is problematic, as it is easily tied to a cultural binary preconception about Japan and America or Europe. However, in Richie's arguments of 2001, it is apparently pointed out how *mono no aware* expresses emotions, while at the same time being a part of the nationalist sentiments of Japaneseness. This is also confirmed by Richie when he explains that Ozu might be the most typical of all Japanese directors, and his works thus suitable to exemplify the Japanese sentiments and expressions.

In relation to Ozu in particular, Richie's argument is strongly opposed by Hasumi Shigehiko. Calling Ozu the most Japanese of directors is by Hasumi considered a grave mistake. According to Hasumi, Ozu ignores the typical seasonal changes in nature by predominantly filming under blue skies and sunny weather. For this reason, Ozu is argued to not be comparable with the notion of *mono no aware*, or any other seasonal glorifications argued to parallel traditional Japanese aesthetics with Japanese cinema.¹⁵⁰ In the particular case of natural depictions expressing emotions, Mizoguchi and Kurosawa is argued to utilize traditional Japanese aesthetics far more than Ozu.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁹ McDonald, Keiko L., *Reading a Japanese Film*, p. 69.

¹⁵⁰ Hasumi, Shigehiko, "Sunny Skies" in *Ozu's Tokyo Story*, ed. Desser, David (Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 120-121.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.* p. 127.

Richie does in fact argue that the relation to *mono no aware* aesthetics is not in any way exclusively related to Ozu. It rather seems that Richie thinks these particular aesthetics somehow relate to most Japanese film productions. When the limitations of the traditional Japanese view are discussed, Richie states: “And the majority of Japanese film directors treating these values – and almost every Japanese director has, they are such a part of Japanese life –...”¹⁵² A statement that seems to suggest that even if Japanese directors explicitly wish to explicitly not to reflect these values, they nevertheless have to decide how they want to relate to them. Because they are so strongly embedded in the Japanese culture, a choice has to be made as to how a film should relate (or not relate) to the traditional Japanese aesthetics of *mono no aware*. What Richie also seems to suggest is that similar sentiments concerning the passing of life and appreciation of nature could be said to be portrayed in many different films of different nationalities. But expressing these sentiments to such a degree through the use of style in film is argued to be somewhat exclusive to Japan. Here Richie appears to fall into some of the same pitfalls as Burch did in the late '70s. His failure to distinguish between socio-cultural implications and discussions of style makes his arguments problematic. When it comes to *mono no aware* expressing emotions and affecting the style of Japanese cinema, Richie might be right, but to assess *mono no aware* as an inescapable force in Japanese society, appears to dichotomize Japan from other cultures on a socio-cultural level.

As for the direct stylistic implications of *mono no aware*, it is connected to what is referred to as the *elegiac serenity* of Japanese traditions. How the hanging of a scroll and a few flowers express the sentiments of *mono no aware*, is compared to how Japanese postwar films express the same sentiments using only the simplest of means. The slow camera movements and the lingering on details are characteristics that express the sentiment of *mono no aware*. In this relation, Hasumi does not oppose Richie as blatantly, but underlines that what is of typical Japanese nature in the case of Ozu's films are the situations, customs and characters, not the manner in which the film is directed.¹⁵³ Furthermore, Richie links his argument to the Japanese notion about the apprehension of mood. One must understand mood in order to feel it.¹⁵⁴ These arguments are the same as those presented with respect to prewar cinema, and they also complement the arguments on *framing* of nature, made by Kalland. But in addition to that, Richie also mentions how Japanese films express their sentiment by the

¹⁵² Richie, Donald, *Japanese Cinema, Film Style and National Character*, p. 71.

¹⁵³ Shigehiko, Hasumi. "Sunny Skies". p. 128.

¹⁵⁴ Richie, Donald, *Japanese Cinema, Film Style and National Character*, p. 111.

simplest of means: an argument that also here seems to coincide with Davis' reflection on the *less is more* attitudes that these traditional Japanese aesthetics seems to convey.

The link between Japanese cinema and Japanese literature is also discussed in relation to prewar cinema. As opposed to Western plots (i.e. American and European) that stress occurrence, causality, and responsibility, the Japanese traditional narrative is argued to emphasize sequential flow, connection and association. These latter features, particularly those of the Japanese narrative, are seen in Ozu's work and how his films emphasize effect rather than cause, emotion rather than intellect. This link between Japanese narrative and Ozu's films is then argued to show how the celebration of evanescence and *mono no aware*, which is initially to be found in Japanese literature, is portrayed in purely cinematic terms.¹⁵⁵ This further explains how Japanese cinema could be argued to be influenced by literature, as well as by paintings, prints, and Japanese design.

The arguments presented so far in this second chapter might, however, to some degree underestimate the presence of traditional Japanese aesthetics that still could be argued to stylistically influence the films of the postwar era in Japan. As described by Cynthia Contreras in her article on Kobayashi Masaki, "the Japanese visual legacy is decidedly different from the framing traditions and individualistic one-point perspective derived from European Renaissance." Contreras appears to point out some defensible arguments concerning Japanese cinema that could put the already discussed arguments of Satô and Richie in a more elaborate perspective. The *framing traditions and individualistic one-point perspectives* are not explained any further, though they do perhaps coincide with the framing mentioned earlier by Richie and Kalland. The point emphasized by Contreras, however, is that the presentation of stories in Japanese paintings and theatre did differ from the painting styles and theatre presentations of European descent. The paintings on scrolls are claimed to give emptiness a meaning of its own. Japanese paintings didn't have to fill up the canvas, as was often done in European traditional painting.¹⁵⁶

Richie concurs with Contreras when it comes to the meaning of emptiness and how this differs from European traditional painting. He argues as follows: "In the West we feel that emptiness has no independent function... Eastern aesthetics, however, suggests that the 'empty' carries its own weight."¹⁵⁷ Still, for the emptiness to have a function or meaning, it

¹⁵⁵ Richie, Donald *A Hundred Years of Japanese Film*, p. 123.

¹⁵⁶ Contreras, Cynthia, "Kobayashi's Widescreen Aesthetic", in Desser, D. and Ehrlich, L. C. (eds.) *Cinematic Landscapes: Observations on the Visual Arts and Cinema of China and Japan* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1994), pp. 243–244.

¹⁵⁷ Richie, Donald, "The Influences of Traditional Aesthetics on the Japanese Film", p. 158.

has to be defined. Emptiness is not regarded as being present before the first mark is put down on paper. This is argued to be an important aesthetic precept that extends throughout much of Japanese culture. Though venturing into socio-cultural dichotomizing territory once more, Richie's argument does appear to elaborate on the expressing of emotions as well. A visualized example coinciding with Kalland's previous argument is the Japanese garden. In the case of Japanese gardens, nature is not regarded as being present before rocks, bamboo and other elements are placed. Only then can the space occupied by the garden be contrasted to other elements.¹⁵⁸

The view on emptiness could also be connected to the long shot and how these are often presented without human presence at all. This empty/full dichotomy can be detected in the empty spaces of Mizoguchi's compositions, in the empty sides of Naruse's scenes, and in the empty shots of Ozu.¹⁵⁹ As argued by Contreras, Kobayashi also drew influence from artistic and dramatic precedents in Japanese traditional culture.¹⁶⁰ This is exemplified by how Kobayashi utilized the bird's-eye perspective, which was argued to be derived from traditional Japanese paintings. The low angle *tatami* mat point of view has also been used, which was said to be linked to the reflective view of *haiku* writers when they savor the beauty of nature and the passing of time.¹⁶¹ Furthermore, Kobayashi's film *Seppuku/Harakiri* (1962) is argued to particularly show influences from Japanese theatre. It is asserted that the film is



ritualistic in style, like the *nô* play, and shows examples of slow moving long shots.¹⁶² If nothing else, these reflections indicate that certain postwar Japanese films appear to be directly influenced by traditional Japanese aesthetics when it comes to style. In this

¹⁵⁸ Richie, Donald, "The Influences of Traditional Aesthetics on the Japanese Film", pp. 158–159.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid. p. 159.

¹⁶⁰ Contreras, Cynthia, "Kobayashi's Widescreen Aesthetic", p. 242.

¹⁶¹ Ibid. pp. 247–248.

¹⁶² Ibid. pp. 249 and 258.

connection, it is worth noticing Wada-Marciano's argument, that even if the extent of the actual takes in many cases were not as refined as those of Ozu, the various filmmakers' utilization of such filmic devices is evidence of a vernacular genre system. The repetitious utilization of stylistic techniques and images arguably formed patterns of filmmaking and spectatorship.¹⁶³

Davis also recognizes detectable features in Japanese postwar cinema that fall under his term *monumental style*. It is, however, acknowledged that monumental style is not depicted in its purest form anymore. The tentative term *schizophrenic monumentalism* is used by Davis to explain how monumental style could function side by side with features considered non-monumental. As he describes it "technique conforms to canonical features of the monumental style, but the presence of anomalies and variations gives the style a knowing, deliberate, and self-conscious aspect."¹⁶⁴ This appears to suggest that the influences of Japanese traditions which compose the monumental style could coexist as a self-conscious individual feature, interacting with elements influenced from other sources. Davis then maintains his argument that even if monumental style is not portrayed in more than a handful of films, this does not compromise monumental style as a stylistic category. Concerning postwar cinema, it is explained that monumental style was diffused through films that balance monumental elements with more conventional elements.¹⁶⁵ As before, this seems to suggest coexistence between the influences of Japanese traditions and influences from other sources. This argument also seems to coincide somewhat with Davis's own discussed *bending* of influences, as well as Richie's argument concerning Japanese cinema's ability to assimilate almost anything to adjust it to the taste of the Japanese audience. If the features argued to be a part of a Japanese aesthetic expression now coexist, intertwined with externally influenced features, the idea that they compose an altogether new distinction within Japanese cinema doesn't seem to be improbable, but rather conforms to the notion of superposition.

Moreover, Davis explains how Kurosawa's film *Kagemusha/The Shadow Warrior* (1980) is a modern updating of the monumental style. As it is explained, in *Kagemusha*, the monumental style is applied to question the status of authorized classical icons of Japanese history. Sequences composed of long takes, slow camera movement, formal arrangements and declamations are all built on a lie, as Davis describes it: "While the monumental films of the late 1930's use style as an expression of bushido loyalty and historical authenticity,

¹⁶³ Wada-Marciano, Mitsuyo, *Nippon Modern: Japanese Cinema of the 1920s and 1930s*, p. 17.

¹⁶⁴ Davis, Darrel William, *Picturing Japaneseness: Monumental Style, National Identity, Japanese Film*, p. 205.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.* pp. 219–220.

Kagemusha uses style to expose these ideological props as a sham.”¹⁶⁶ Nevertheless, the stylistic features are the same as in the postwar films of monumental style. The reasoning behind applying these stylistic features is what makes them modernized. Accounting for the socio-cultural connotations of style, this argument seems to once more point out the self-awareness displayed through the use of monumental style in this particular film. That features comparable to traditional Japanese aesthetics, which are visible in the prewar cinema, seems also to be clearly indicated, though these features seem to be used for a particular purpose in the case of *Kagemusha*.

The film *Rikyu* (1990) is also argued to portray a modernized form of monumental style. Also in the case of *Rikyu* the style is said to be monumental, but the theme is said to hold political undertones that defy the original purpose of monumental style. Davis’ ending argument on the matter states: “Yet in its straightforward canonization of the master’s moral rectitude, *Rikyu* uses the monumental style no less instrumentally than the monumental masterpieces of the 1930’s.”¹⁶⁷ This appears to point out that the utilization of traditional Japanese aesthetics could be applied for a nontraditional purpose. The style in itself, however, could still be traditional, even if on an unconscious level from the producers’ side. Since style is the topic of discussion in this thesis, the above-mentioned examples seem to indicate that the style of certain Japanese film productions could still be argued to be influenced by traditional Japanese aesthetics.

¹⁶⁶ Davis, Darrel William, *Picturing Japaneseness: Monumental Style, National Identity, Japanese Film*, pp. 228 and 231–232.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.* p. 247.

Contemporary Melodrama Analysis

When planning this thesis, certain parameters had to be set up to narrow the field of research. After careful consideration, the confines of the Japanese melodrama seemed to restrict the research field to a size which could feasibly be discussed within the relatively short framework. The theoretical material discussed so far in this thesis has to some extent approached Japanese cinema's style from a general point of view. However, many of the prominent examples discussed arguably fall under the generic category of melodrama. Although the definition of melodrama might differ somewhat in the context of Japanese cinema (see endnote iii) than in the context of classical cinema, it is arguably a prominent tendency to be found within Japanese cinema. All the films cited in the theoretical sources in this thesis, to exemplify the existence of traditional Japanese aesthetics within Japanese cinema, are drama films. All the examples derived from Ozu's films fall under the category of melodrama, as do many of Mizoguchi's, Kobayashi's, Naruse's and Ichikawa's films as well; the point being that as a genre, the Japanese melodrama appears to be a justifiable example when discussing the stylistic features of Japanese cinema in general. The main concern in this context is to examine how different filmic tools form the "language" utilized in the construction of the Japanese melodrama.

Davis argues that the films within his defined *monumental style* resist the classical cinematic influences permeating Japanese melodramatic period films (*jidaigeki*) in the 1930s. The melodrama period films of this decade are, according to Davis, the successors to the previously dominant comic period films. Still, the newer melodrama tendencies are argued to be predominantly influenced by classical cinema, whereas the monumental styled films resist the classical cinema stylistic paradigm in an attempt to revere Japanese cultural heritage.¹⁶⁸ Though this argument might point to Japanese melodrama as influenced by classical cinema to a greater extent than argued so far in this thesis, Davis' argument does not appear to address itself to the same films as those said to be influenced by traditional Japanese aesthetics. As examples on melodramatic period films influenced by classical cinema, Davis refers only to the propagandist film *Miyamoto Musashi* (1940) made by director Inagaki Hiroshi.¹⁶⁹ Films from the wartime era have been avoided in this context, precisely because their influences in relation to other cinematic paradigms do not appear to be applied for

¹⁶⁸ Davis, Darrel William, *Picturing Japaneseness: Monumental Style, National Identity, Japanese Film*, p. 76.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.* p. 76.

cinema's own sake. Political incentives are instead assumed to color the stylistic choices. Davis' argument does, however, underline the relation between the style of monumental films and the style of Japanese melodramatic period dramas. The monumental period film mentioned by Davis is the already discussed *The Loyal Forty-Seven Retainers of the Genroku Era*: a film which on many accounts has been convincingly argued to parallel Japanese traditional aesthetics.

In relation to the upcoming analyses, Ozu's melodrama films of the 1930s are more interesting in comparison than *The Loyal Forty-Seven Retainers of the Genroku Era*. *Tokyo Chorus* (1931), *I Was Born, but...* (1932) and *A Mother Should Be Loved* (1934) are all typical family melodramas which seem to share parallels with the films chosen for analysis. Also, Mizoguchi's *Gion no Kyôdai/Sisters of the Gion* (1936) is interesting in this connection. To link these prewar melodramatic tendencies with the postwar era, it is furthermore interesting to remember the melodrama films of Ozu, Naruse, Kobayashi and Kurosawa.

That which unifies all the films categorized as melodramas in this thesis is their common utilization of certain filmic features. The melodramatic films discussed in the source material, as well as the films selected for analysis, all fall under the categorization of the melodrama as explained by John Mercer and Martin Shingler (endnote iii). These films are all set in the Japanese middle class family. The conflicts in the films are prominently caused by generational differences. The films emphasize personal issues as opposed to sociopolitical or economic issues. The psychological conflict is typically relatable to the audience in a high degree. Though Mercer and Shingler's description of the melodrama is based on classical cinema, the features listed do appear applicable to Japanese melodrama.

It is also worth mentioning that melodramatic TV series became very popular in Japan in the 1950s:

The "middle class film" was not only a formative genre in the classical cinema of the 1920's and 1930's, but is also the foundation for the melodramatic tradition of *hômudorama*, a term that became synonymous with the television family melodramas in the postwar period.¹⁷⁰

In 1950s Japan, the term *merodorama* typically signified widow-lover thematics portrayed in TV-series. These *merodoramas* developed a pattern of suspended narrative, possibly caused

¹⁷⁰ Wada-Marciano, Mitsuyo, *Nippon Modern: Japanese Cinema of the 1920s and 1930s*, p. 12.

by its cliffhanger episodic nature. The narratives often deployed an elliptical temporal structure rather than the linear narrative typical of classical cinema melodrama. This particular type of melodrama existed side by side with the Japanese cinematic family drama, which by classical cinema standards, and also in this context, would be considered melodrama. The discussion of genre differences between Japanese and classical cinema necessarily becomes an issue as when Japanese melodrama contrasts with the hegemonic presence of classical cinema melodrama in Japan at that time. On a thematic level, as pointed out by Wada-Marciano, this could portray an anxiety towards modernity in Japanese society. On the stylistic level, however, Japanese cinema necessarily will have to be discussed in relation to classical and European cinema, but at the same time it needs to be articulated as a possible coherent cinematic paradigm with practices of its own.¹⁷¹

Before embarking on the contemporary melodrama analysis, key points from the two previous chapters will be listed. The points set up in this final listing will be those that appear to have the most convincing consensus among the theoretical works which have been discussed. This list will actively be used as a tool in the following film analyses. Whether or not these stylistic features listed appears to be a “language” for the making of these films will be discussed. Following the analyses, a conclusion will discuss whether these tools appear to be a “language” which is tied to a Japanese mode of representation, if this mode of representation is fundamentally different from classical cinema on the stylistic level, and finally, if contemporary Japanese melodrama appears to reflect a lineage between stylistics being developed from the prewar era until today.

- Superposition
- Flat lighting and two dimensionality
- Long shot/Slow camera movements
- Shots empty of character reference/Lingering on details
- Nonlinear narrative
- Natural depictions expressing certain emotions
- Deep focus shot

¹⁷¹ Wada-Marciano, Mitsuyo, *Nippon Modern: Japanese Cinema of the 1920s and 1930s*, pp. 3 and 54.

The Case of Kûchû Teien/Hanging Garden

Placed as number nine of the top ten movies of 2005 by Kinema Junpô,¹⁷² *Hanging Garden* is the oldest film to be analyzed in this thesis. The film is set in the home of a typical Japanese family living in an apartment complex in the suburbs. The father is a salary man, the mother works part time at a soba restaurant and the two children are still in school. The premise of the film is immediately established, as a monologue (by the mother of the household) on a black background proclaims that in this family they don't keep secrets from each other. Their everyday life is based on trust, openness and no secrecy within or outside the family. Then the film starts with a dialogue around the family breakfast table. The daughter, rather nonchalant, asks her mother where she was conceived, whereupon the mother in reminiscing dialogue with the father names a nearby love hotel. This unusual topic of discussion sets the tone for the remainder of the movie. The opening scene plays out in a traditional setting, where a nontraditional topic of discussion adds contemporary issues and taboo-breaking to the blend.

From the very first shot introduced in the movie, it is also abundantly clear that this film is of a distinctive and unique character when it comes to camera movement. Not only is the film's camerawork unique in the context of Japanese cinema, but in the context of cinema in general. The very first shot is a close-up of a lampshade hanging over the Kyobashi family's breakfast-/dinner-table. The lampshade's pattern is a depiction of the hanging gardens of Babylon. The camera moves slowly around the lampshade in a 360 degree turn, and then slowly pulls away to reveal a round table with a single flower placed on it. Following this, the camera pulls even further back to a half total shot of Eriko, the mother of the household, as she prepares breakfast for her family. It is at this moment the dialogue concerning the daughter's conception is initiated. During this first shot the whole family is introduced. First Eriko, then Mana the daughter, and finally Takashi the father and Ko the son. This first scene is a long take lasting 3 minutes and 28 seconds, constantly under the influence of a slow moving camera.

What is particularly unique about the film's camerawork is that the camera follows a theme of cyclical movements throughout the movie. There are several scenes where the camera does 360 degree turns around a location as in the opening scene. But the camera also does cyclical movements around the horizontal axis several times in the movie. One example is early on in the film when the father and two children are riding the bus towards work and

¹⁷² シネマ 1987, <http://homepage3.nifty.com/cinema1987/kinejun/kinejun2005.html> (visited 01.02.2011).

school. At this time the camera films on top of the bus in a rolling movement from side to side of the bus. It is as if the camera was placed in a rocking cradle on top of the bus roof. Other times the camera moves 360 degrees around the horizontal axis in a barrel roll move. When the film title is revealed on screen, the Kyobashi family's apartment complex appears in a long shot. The camera then does a barrel roll so that the apartment complex is upside down on the screen and then is rolled back to its original position. All of these cyclical camera moves are done with slow camera.

Another noticeable trait of the camerawork in *Hanging Garden* is that more often than not the camera is moving along with the actors. On many occasions where cuts would appear natural, the camera is purposefully made to follow the actors from one location to the next. This could be from the family kitchen to the hallway of the apartment, from the father sitting in his lover's yellow car to his son standing on a nearby corner, or from the hallway of the love hotel to the spinning bed in the love hotel room. In this way the cyclical theme of the movie's camerawork is maintained. The theme of circles is not only evident in camera movements, but also in various set designs throughout the movie. Wallpaper, pillowcases, sheets and clothing are all at different times in circular patterns. The focus on a birthday cake from above, the noticeable circular doodle on the calendar, or the repeated shots of a nearby Ferris wheel all adhere to the cyclical thematic so evident in *Hanging Garden*.

An interesting relationship in *Hanging Garden* is how its highly stylized and clearly original camerawork somehow seems to maintain clear links to the traditional Japanese aesthetics. The film is in its entirety compiled of 208 different shots. The average shot length (ASL) is 32.7 seconds. As previously mentioned, David Bordwell argued that the ASL in American films of the Hollywood style to be 3-6 seconds in recent years.¹⁷³ If compared to the Japanese cinema used as a stepping stone for the argument of a Japanese mode of representation, *Hanging Garden* has a longer ASL than any of Ozu's films.¹⁷⁴ Compared to Mizoguchi's *Zangiku Monogatari/Story of the Last Chrysanthemums* (1939), argued by Davis to be a monumental style film, the ASL in *Hanging Garden* is shorter. *Story of the Last Chrysanthemums* has an ASL of 57 seconds.¹⁷⁵ This shows us that the ASL clearly differentiates *Hanging Garden* from recent American cinema, but also that it could be arguably long in relation to Japanese cinema. The ASL of *Hanging Garden* combined with

¹⁷³ Bordwell, David, *The Way Hollywood Tells It* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2006), p. 122.

¹⁷⁴ Bordwell, David, *Ozu and the Poetics of Cinema*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988), p. 377.

¹⁷⁵ Kirihaara, Donald, *Patterns of Time: Mizoguchi and the 1930s*, (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992), p. 69.

the composition of the shots does show tendencies that confirm the arguments of Richie, Satô and Geist when it comes to use of the long take. There are several compositional factors of the shots which contribute to this.

Firstly, even though there are more moving camera shots than static camera shots in the film, the camera is always moved in a slow manner. Only one sequence in the film consists of fast cutting and camera moves. This is a scene of 6 different shots in less than 15 seconds, when Ko's grandmother attacks his female tutor at the love hotel location. Secondly, the slow tempo of the camera movement is enhanced by the constant avoidance of the *shot-reverse shot* technique in dialogue scenes. There is only one instance where *shot-reverse shot* is applied during conversation, which is when Takashi's sex friend is introduced and they have a rather awkward moment at a nicer restaurant. Also the music, or lack thereof, adds to the tempo and feel of the film. There are only two different nondiegetic themes that occasionally are utilized to underline plot developments and the tragicomedy of it all. This is the opening harp theme, and a melancholic piano theme introduced early on, in the seventh shot of the movie. In addition there is a diegetic J-pop/rock theme playing in Takashi's sex friend's car, which is heard a couple of times when the sex friend is present.

The slow camera movements, the avoidance of *shot-reverse shot* and the sparse score all contribute to a composition of the shots which seems to compliment the long ASL of the movie. Even if this extended use of the long take is not directly influenced by Japanese paintings and theater, the tendencies in *Hanging Garden* seem to have more in common with the long shots portrayed in the films of Mizoguchi, than with any external sources outside of Japan. As argued by Satô when comparing Mizoguchi's *The Loyal Forty-Seven Retainers of the Genroku Era* to the *emaki*, many of the scenes in *Hanging Garden* bring the *emaki* style of storytelling to mind. Similar to how stories unfold on one elongated piece of paper from one side to the other, the progression of many scenes in *Hanging Garden* unfolds through slow sideward camera movements rather than cutting from scene to scene. If not directly inspired by *emaki*, it seems justifiable to presume that there is a connection between the extended use of the long shot by Mizoguchi and Kobayashi that has influenced the long ASL to be found in *Hanging Garden*.

As the story progresses, there are soon indications that something isn't quite right in this family which is seemingly so free of inhibitions. We learn that Eriko's mother has been placed in some kind of facility. On her first visit at this facility, Eriko's unusual cold behavior towards her apparently eccentric mother, suggests underlying conflicts of a deeper manner. Also in the following sequence, at Eriko's workplace, her behavior raises questions as she

accuses her colleague of having chlamydia and using the soba water to mend her nether regions.

In the following sequences both Mana and Takashi end up at the same love hotel where Mana was conceived. Mana goes with a friend from school, Takashi with his sex friend. This coincidental occurrence, though they avoid the embarrassment of meeting each other, seems to add to the cyclic theme of the movie. Whether it is a question of destiny or not, Mana is back at her place of conception, contemplating what would happen if she got pregnant this very moment.

The film slowly reveals a dysfunctional family covered by the shell of a perfect family. The next, albeit fantastical coincidence, is that Ko takes on a tutor who happens to be another lover of Takashi. Meanwhile Eriko has gone to her mother's apartment to clean it out when a flashback to her childhood is triggered. Here we learn that she, through a peep-hole, heard she was an unwanted child. Her mother didn't care for her, and has been neglecting her all her life. Then Eriko as a child burst into the room trying to stab her mother, but is held back by some male visitors. Following this flashback, Eriko spins into a monologue explaining how the whole family was made as a carefully planned scheme of hers. She got pregnant on purpose to lure Takashi into an early marriage. Then she manipulated her whole family into her image of the perfect family she never had herself.

Following this revelatory moment in the film, after some scenes where also Ko, his tutor and grandmother end up at the same love hotel where Mana was conceived, yet another sequence takes place around the Kyobashi dinner table. This sequence is particularly interesting since it is composed of four meticulously organized long takes back to back. First there are two shots, each at about 2 minutes, where Ko's tutor (Takashi's lover) gets drunk. Then she states that the family is like a school play where everyone knows the facts, but no one speaks the truth. In the following 6 minute 52 second long take, the tutor gets too drunk, Takashi helps her to the bathroom, and the grandmother unwittingly answers his cell to reveal a call from his sex friend in front of the whole family. In the frustration of this unraveling family moment, Eriko wishes death upon her mother while desperately trying to hold the family together, but instead she ends up frustrating the kids who end up leaving the dinner altogether. As this dinner was a birthday party honoring the grandmother, the next 4 minute 53 second long take is of Eriko and her mother alone in the darkness with the birthday cake. The grandmother recalls how Eriko refused to share her ice cream with her one summer day by the Ferris wheel in Eriko's childhood years. Eriko replies by calling grandmother a failure as a mother, and proclaims that she herself does what a mother should.

Following this shattering of Eriko's world, the next day she is depicted as unstable and developing nervous tics. In one of the final scenes she enters her rooftop garden of plants hanging in pots. The rain is pouring, and suddenly it's raining blood as Eriko repeatedly screams out in frustration over her shattered dreams. The film does not end in total tragedy, however, as the family to Eriko's surprise remembers her birthday and plans a surprise birthday party for her. Following the credits, the final shot of the movie is the same as the first shot, the family's dinner table with a single flower in a vase. Ending the film with the same shot as it started literally completes the circle that is the cyclic theme of the film.

The cyclical theme of *Hanging Garden* might suggest the inevitable course of one's destiny. Eriko tries so hard to escape her past, but in the end she seems to have already taken on some of her mother's eccentric features. As nature – or in this case plants in a garden – is used partly as a metaphor in the film, the cycle of nature also seems to be an applicable notion for the theme of the film. Gratitude for one's existence and the acknowledgment of nature and life's fragility doesn't seem to be the focus in *Hanging Garden*, however. The cycle of life is rather brought down to a personal level, as we see how familial tendencies are passed on through generations. It doesn't seem right to attribute the emotions expressed in *Hanging Garden* to the previously argued expressing of emotions as part of a Japanese mode of representation. In *Hanging Garden* the cyclical theme might be expressing the unchanging course of nature's cycles, but at the same time its theme seems more occupied with questions of parents rearing children, destiny and the artificial façade put on by a seemingly normal Japanese family. If anything, the cyclical theme confirms the notion of superposition as it utilizes the cycle of life in a new manner where contemporary nuclear family issues are questioned.

To further back up the previous paragraph, it is useful to discuss the film's title. The Hanging Gardens of Babylon was a monument allegedly built by King Nebuchadnezzar II as a present for his homesick wife.¹⁷⁶ The fact that the hanging gardens are known as one of the Seven Wonders of the World is besides the point in this context. What is of relevance is that Nebuchadnezzar created an artificial paradise for his loved one to make her feel less homesick. In a similar manner Eriko has created her artificial paradise to make her forget her childhood home. It might actually be a point, that Eriko's creation is just as fantastic as the actual hanging gardens, since the creating of the perfect family might be just as impossible. The film certainly raises questions about the artifice of Japanese family life in general. It is explained

¹⁷⁶ The Hanging Gardens of Babylon, <http://www.angelfire.com/ny/anghockey/hanginggardens.html> (visited 01.02.2011).

that Eriko's family and her relationship to her husband is created without the influence of actual emotions, thus they live in an empty shell of a relationship. It is also worth noting that, according to several online critiques and reviewers,¹⁷⁷ a real hanging garden, as the one on Eriko's rooftop garden with plants in hanging pots, supposedly symbolizes the rootlessness of Japanese society. Plants living in pots like this can never really embed their roots in the ground.

As pointed out in the introduction of this thesis, style is the primary concern, while a method of segregating style from symptomatic or contextual interpretation is sought. In the case of *Hanging Garden* this has proved especially difficult since the stylistic features clearly add to the narrative in itself: in particular, the cyclical theme and how the camera work is utilized to express it. Therefore it seemed necessary to explain the film's thematics in order to understand the purpose of the stylistic choices. That is not to say that segregating the style in *Hanging Garden* from contextual content is impossible. Once the relationship between style and context has been established, style can then be usefully discussed on its own.

Questioning the artifice of the Japanese family in general seems to be but one cornerstone of many contemporary issues which are brought into the narrative of *Hanging Garden*. The innovative and original camerawork certainly adds another contemporary feel to the film. On the other hand there are clearly underlying tendencies comparable to Japanese cinema of the '30s, especially in the film's consistent utilization of slow camera movement and very long ASL. It appears valid to conclude that old techniques have been fused with new ideas, creating a film with a brand new style of its own. The theme and narrative are clearly contemporary, but the mode of representation or style of the movie is clearly a blend of old techniques and an attempt to innovate with the camera as a narrative tool in its own right. Thus it also seems that *Hanging Garden*, on the stylistic level, is built up by superpositioned stylistic features, both maintaining stylistic features similar to early Japanese cinema, but also remaining open and unafraid to develop or assimilate the style in new directions.

Concerning shots empty of character reference, there don't seem to be any of these in *Hanging Garden*. In fact, the complete opposite seems to be more accurate. Each and every shot appears to be filled to the brim with symbolism or direct connection to the film's theme and story. The narrative is linear throughout the movie with the exception of Eriko's flashbacks and some dream sequences, both which are clearly indicated to be of such a nature. The flashbacks are in black and white and the dream sequence is signaled by the distorting of

¹⁷⁷ Snowblood Apple, <http://www.snowbloodapple.com/kuchuteien.htm> (visited 01.02.2011):

the film frame before spinning into dream. There is also one flashback in color, but evidently a flashback as it is introduced through an old picture of Eriko and her mother by the Ferris wheel, sharing a happy childhood moment. Initially this might appear as a moment of hope depicted amongst the display of overtly dysfunctional family incidents. But if paid attention to, Eriko is showed sharing her ice cream with her mother, thus exposing the mother to nevertheless be a lying, conniving woman.

To align this stylistic analysis with the key reference points set up previously, *Hanging Garden* confirms some key points, remains neutral on others, but doesn't seem to contradict any points either. There is an abundance of superposition, long shots and slow or static camera movements throughout the movie. The narrative is nonlinear at times, but not enough to make a confident argument that nonlinear narrative is a key feature of the film. As for *deep focus shot* and *flat lighting* of scenes, neither of these stylistic features seems particularly prevalent in *Hanging Garden*. The theme could be interpreted to express emotions, such as nature's inevitable course, the circle of life or the cycle of a single year, symbolizing life and nature's fragility. Such an interpretation seems secondary in the context of *Hanging Garden* though, as the cyclical theme seems more connected to destiny, fate and generational heritage. So far, superposition and ASL seem to be the only features strongly confirming typical tendencies associated with a Japanese mode of representation. Nevertheless, the style of *Hanging Garden* appears deliberate down to every detail, resulting in a highly original and innovative formative language. Therefore it is also interesting to notice how this deliberate utilization of style, all through the movie, brings to mind and parallels the storytelling technique of the *emaki*.

The strong visual character and self reflective sense in which *Hanging Garden* utilizes its style brings the stylistic tendencies of the French new wave to mind. The way in which the filmic tools are made visible and underline the medium's existence throughout the film parallels the ideas of the new wave. Still, the manner in which theme and style are closely integrated in *Hanging Garden* rather suggests that the stylistic choices are made for other purposes than to proclaim film as a medium. The result of the stylistic utilization is a highly symbolic film where dysfunction in the Japanese nuclear family and character study are the centres of attention. Also in relation to melodrama as genre, *Hanging Garden* appears unusual. The themes of generational differences set in middle class families are maintained. But as far as style goes, there does not appear much ground to compare *Hanging Garden* with either classical cinema or Japanese melodramas.

The Case of Gururi No Koto/All around Us

In 2008, *All around Us* placed second on Kinema Junpô's annual top ten movies of the year announcement.¹⁷⁸ Only beaten by Oscar-winning *Okuribito/Departures*, *All around Us* is an exploration of human nature and the human psyche. The film is set in an urban environment where a relatively young couple is struggling with everyday difficulties. The timeline of the narrative starts in the winter of 1993 and ends in July 2001. The protagonists, Kanao and Shoko, are from the start of the movie established as contrasting personalities. He is introduced as an outgoing shoe repair worker who strikes up, albeit mostly unsuccessful, conversations with random fellow citizens he encounter in his daily routines. She, on the other hand, is quickly introduced as a quiet, shut-in individual with a definite need of structure and control in her everyday life. In the opening scenes it is also revealed that they are expecting a child together.

The film is divided into eight chapters which are clearly marked as such, since each chapter starts with a shot of the couple's calendar on the wall. The narrative unfolds along the following timeline: Winter 1993, July 1993, February 1994, July 1995, October 1997, July 1998, May 2000 and July 2001. The film is thus 100 per cent linear. There are no jumps in time nor flashbacks, neither any dream sequences or fantasy imaginings. This unfolding of a linear narrative adds to the realism of the film. For each calendar shot it is noticeable that there are some red crosses on some, while others have none. These are early on explained as Shoko's schedule for her and Kanao's sex life. She wants order in every aspect of her life, while Kanao tries to insert a sense of spontaneity into the relationship as best he can. Still, as different as these two individuals might appear, they somehow make their relationship work.

With the baby on the way, Kanao one day accepts a job offer from a friend, since it pays better than his current job. The new job is as a sketch artist for a television news team. Kanao now has to appear at the most prominent national courtroom cases to make his sketches of the various defendants. These cases are all actual horrid incidents that have been up for courtroom cases in Japan during the timeline of the movie. Kanao sits through various famous and not so famous cases, the more famous incidents being the Otaku Murderer who killed four school girls and ate parts of them, and the Tokyo Subway gas attack which ended up killing thirteen people.

¹⁷⁸ シネマ 1987, <http://homepage3.nifty.com/cinema1987/kinejun/kinejun2008.html> (visited 28.02.2011).

As Kanao pursues his new career, the film cuts to February 1994. First a calendar shot, then a shot of a memorial shrine honoring the couple's lost infant girl. From this point on, Shoko dives into depression. Kanao seems to cope with the loss of the child, but struggles to maintain the sanity of his wife Shoko. As Shoko sinks further into depression each day, Kanao, in addition to witnessing murderers and rapists each and every week, does appear after a while, to be struggling with his own emotional state as well. In the chapter unfolding from October of 1997, Shoko seems to be losing her balance more as each day passes. This culminates with a breakdown in the couple's apartment after Kanao kills a spider. Shoko sees spiders as a good omen if left alive. The entire sequence is filmed in a long take where Shoko spins into hysteria. Kanao then talks her down, and after Shoko has aired her deepest depressing thoughts the couple shares a hearty laugh and a loving hug. At this point Shoko has experienced a cathartic moment.

In a secondary storyline Shoko's family is also introduced throughout the movie. Her brother and his wife frequent Shoko and Kanao's daily life, as does Shoko's mother. These characters are oblivious to Shoko's struggles with depression. Instead they seem more interested in their inheritance, as it is also revealed that Shoko's father, who left her mother many years ago for a younger woman, is dying of cancer. Shoko's brother, in particular, is depicted as an opportunistic and greedy individual. During family discussions, stature and wealth seems to be his primary concern; his family's wellbeing comes second. Also the mother initially appears to share Shoko's brother's values. But when Shoko and Kanao stand up on behalf of the mother during an inheritance issue discussion, the mother confides in Shoko. As it turns out, the mother was the one cheating on Shoko's father, not the other way around. Shoko is shocked, but at the same time she becomes closer to her mother than ever before.

As the movie cuts to July 1998, Shoko is partaking in a tea ceremony at what appears to be a therapeutic centre driven by female monks. At this point Shoko is marked by stillness, and is clearly recovering from her depression. Her face is no longer struck with sadness. She smiles and calmly takes on small projects at her rehabilitation facility. Her mentor urges her to again take up painting from her high school days to further help her recovery. Thus Shoko finds her way back to herself by painting various flowers and vegetables she is growing on her apartment veranda. As a noticeable analogy of the "*ying yang*" relationship Shoko and Kanao share, Shoko nurses herself back to life by painting the simple experienced moments of beauty in her existence. Kanao on the other hand, makes his living by sketching the most horrible imaginings possible in human existence. All of which, both beauty and horror,

surround their life every day. This fact seems to be the main theme of the movie, which also explains the title. In the final shots of the movie, the couple lie together on the floor at Shoko's rehabilitation facility, looking at all of Shoko's paintings, as these have been put up on the ceiling of the room. Shoko and Kanao flirt and laugh together. They appear to finally have found their way back to the state their relationship was in when they started their journey together. As in the first chapters of the film, the final chapters also start with shots of a calendar where red crosses appear on a weekly basis.

With the rough delineation of the narrative in place, the stylistic features of *All around Us* will now be discussed. In comparison with *Hanging Garden* the stylistic language is utilized in a completely different manner. In *Hanging Garden* the stylistic language of the film was very deliberate and visible. In relation to narrative and theme, the style was clearly utilized as a conscious expression of the unfolding story. For the audience, this breaks the illusion of realism and clearly proclaims that what is being presented is a construct of imagination. *All around Us*, on the other hand, has a seamless, invisible and apparently unconscious stylistic language. The realism is never broken. The stylistic tools are utilized as a means of telling a story, but the style itself is never made visible. Though done very proficiently, the style in *All around Us* never takes prominence over content in the film. Whereas style was as important as story and theme in *Hanging Garden*, the style never overshadows the narrative and thematic of *All around Us*. Instead style is used to drive the narrative in a subtle, natural and realistic manner. Firstly, the pace is significantly higher in *All around Us* than in *Hanging Garden*. *Shot-reverse shot* is utilized in most conversations. The general cutting pace is relatively high throughout the film, and camera movement is adapted to the situations, static as well as fast and slow-moving. There are no shots empty of character reference or lingering on details. In addition there is not one single long shot in the whole movie. Everything is kept personal and close to the characters and their emotional undertakings. This does not, however, eliminate *All around Us* and its style from fitting within certain frames arguably connected to a Japanese cinematic paradigm.

Since the film appears seamless, it seems probable that the style application is more unconscious than was the case with *Hanging Garden*. In the case of *All around Us* the style is strictly applied to bring forth the narrative without using style for style's sake. This makes the utilization of style more interesting. If style comparable to traditional Japanese aesthetics were to be found in this film it would suggest an unconscious utilization of said style.

The ASL in *All around Us* is 9.7 seconds. This is considerably shorter than the ASL of *Hanging Garden* or of the famous long ASLs of Mizoguchi. Still the ASL in *All around Us* is

longer than the average ASL of Hollywood cinema, as argued by David Bordwell. It is also longer than the ASL in most of Ozu's films. Compared to Ozu's more famous melodramas, *I Was Born, but...*, *Tokyo Chorus* of the 1930s, and *Tôkyô Monogatari/Tokyo Story* from 1953, the ASL of *All around Us* is longer than all three. It therefore seems fair to assess that also *All around Us* adheres to the notion that long ASLs and long takes are essential features of a Japanese cinematic paradigm. Through the films of Mizoguchi, Kobayashi and Naruse this paradigm has been linked with traditional Japanese aesthetics.

At certain points throughout the movie, three long takes are applied as they naturally fit with the flow of the film. (Excluding these three long takes from the ASL count gives *All around Us* a total ASL of 8.4 seconds.) The first such long take of notice is the first time we see Shoko and Kanao together in their apartment. Their opposing personalities are established through a discussion about their sex life. She wants routine, he wants spontaneity. The scene is done in one take lasting 7 minutes and 5 seconds. A similar scene in a similar setting is when Shoko has a raging breakdown in their apartment and finally let her inner thoughts spill out in front of Kanao. The take lasts for 4 minutes and 48 seconds. Finally there is a long take towards the end of the film, set in the mother's apartment. The scene is with Shoko, Kanao and Shoko's mother. At this point Shoko's mother confesses for the first time her infidelity and at the same time begs Kanao to take good care of Shoko. The take lasts for 5 minutes and 59 seconds. These three long takes are all applied to establish the characters and their emotional developments. What is interesting is that the long takes do not appear to be applied for the sake of doing long takes; instead they are utilized as a natural piece of the narrative progression. Thus the style seems to somewhat confirm the long take as a particular feature of a Japanese cinematic paradigm. Scenes that without doubt are unnaturally long in relation to the classical cinema paradigm are unconsciously applied as a stylistic feature in *All around Us*.

With respect to to the ASL, it is also interesting to notice that there is a turning point midway through *All around Us*. During the first half of the film, the relatively fast pace seems suited to Kanao and his adapting to the busy life of a news reporting team. His encounters in courtrooms, in the city and at the news office are colored by fast pace, hurried work routines and stress. In his new line of work the deadline must always be met, and with a background from shoe repair, he has a lot to adapt to. The high pace of the film also adds to the feeling of depression and anxiety that Shoko is going through. About midway through the film, Shoko is revealed to have got help to work through her issues. At this point the tempo of the film is significantly altered. The ASL of the first half of the movie is 8.4 seconds, whereas the latter half has an ASL of 11.3 seconds. As Shoko starts to recover, she also slows down, takes in

her natural surroundings and tries to come to peace with the unfortunate events which have taken place in her life. At the same time as the lives of Shoko and Kanao are starting to get back on track, the pace of the film is slowed down.

The change of pace between the first and second half of *All around Us* is interesting. If the actual scenes are not counted, this alternation in pace is very subtle. Whether this is a deliberate move or not, it seems to underline the importance of slowing down the pace in everyday life. As Shoko learns to cope with life being out of her control, she also learns to appreciate the little things in life. She studies flowers and tomatoes. She spends time nurturing her life and relationship. The invisible style certainly enhances these notions in what appears to be unconscious selection of style. In this sense, *All around Us* certainly is a strong contender when it comes to expressing emotions through natural depictions. The emotions might not be expressed in the same way as was done in the films of Ozu or Mizoguchi, but the incentive and outcome appear similar. The communication of these emotions is arguably a contemporary adaptation of their expression in earlier Japanese cinema. Therefore *All around Us* does also seem to confirm the notion of superposition as part of a Japanese cinematic paradigm.

If comparing *All around Us* to contemporary Japanese cinema, it falls under the same category of family melodrama as the other films analyzed in this thesis. The setting is in a middle class family, generation gaps are prominent in the thematics, and the plot is related to personal issues rather than sociopolitical ones. The style of *All around Us*, although it has certain features relatable to traditional Japanese aesthetics, does appear comparable to classical cinema melodrama at the same time. The relatively fast cutting, utilization of *Shot-reverse shot* and seamless formative language does bring classical cinema to mind. On the other hand, the ASL and communication of emotional development through natural depictions signal ties to traditional Japanese aesthetics. These relations, being both to classical cinema melodrama and traditional Japanese aesthetics, once more appear to confirm the notion of superposition as a paradigmatic feature of the Japanese cinema melodrama.

The strict realism, complete absence of effects shot, and strong emphasis on discussion between family members is shared only between *All around Us* and *Still Walking*. The connection between neorealism and these two films will be discussed further in the analysis of *Still Walking*. In relation to Japanese cinema, however, both these films seem to share similarities with Ozu's films of the 30s and 50s on a stylistic level, in particular *Tokyo Story*. *Hanging Garden* on the other hand, has a more visible style; the realism is broken from time to time and there is no refraining from special effects shots. As such, *Hanging Garden*

appears to be part of a larger body of family melodramas produced in the last decade or so. Other titles worth mentioning in this respect would be *Midnight Sun/Taiyô no Uta* (2006), *Sad Vacation* (2007) and *One Million Yen Girl/Hyakuman-en to Nigamushi Onna* (2008). These films all seem to be inspired by the Japanese family melodramas of the 30s and 50s. But where *All around Us* and *Still Walking* obey the realism and style of the 30s and 50s directly, *Hanging Garden*, and to a lesser extent, *Tokyo Sonata*, appear to have adapted their style to a more contemporary expression. This will be further explored in the two following analyses.

Remembering the checklist of key points listed before embarking on these film analyses, *All around Us* advocates three stylistic features which in particular belong to a Japanese cinematic paradigm: the long shot, superposition, and the utilization of natural depictions to express emotions.



The Case of Tokyo Sonata

In order to cut to the case of style, this analysis of *Tokyo Sonata* will give a minimal overview of the narrative. Following the overview, style and its implications will be discussed. The delineation of *Tokyo Sonata's* narrative reveals several parallels to *Hanging Garden*. In the case of *Tokyo Sonata*, however, the style doesn't continuously symbolize the narrative in the same manner as was done in *Hanging Garden*. Thus a broad elaboration of the storyline appears unnecessary.

The opening shots set the tone of the movie, as a salary-man is let go from his job due to cutbacks. On his way home, he stops by a soup kitchen where several other white collar workers are in line for a free meal. Alongside derelicts and mentally challenged individuals, salary-men in suits and ties in line for a free meal are apparently an everyday occurrence at the soup kitchen. As the salary-man returns home he is clearly reluctant to enter his home. As a result he climbs around the house, onto their terrace and enters the family home through the terrace door. Immediately he is met by his wife, leading to a somewhat humorous moment of awkwardness.

The following scenes introduce the Sasaki nuclear family of four. This would be Ryûhei the father, Megumi the mother, and their two sons Kenji and Takashi. As the film progresses, the keeping of secrets within the family, as was the case with *Hanging Garden*, proves to be a central theme. Ryûhei's predicament is given prominence in the first half of the movie, as he chooses not to disclose to his family the misfortune of losing his job. Instead he dresses for work every day, eats at the soup kitchen and maintains his daily routine. Throughout the movie he searches for employment, but the tough situation in Tokyo at the time leaves him having to accept a position as a caretaker at a local suburban mall. In his frustration over his situation, Ryûhei exerts his dominance in the family home with vigilance.

During this time it is slowly introduced into the narrative that Megumi is suffering some personal issues, as her everyday life as a traditional housewife proves to be monotonous and unexciting. Ryûhei and Megumi never reveal their personal crises and problems to each other. Simultaneously, the two sons also prove to be engaging in after school activities behind their parents' backs. The youngest, Kenji, has previously asked Ryûhei and Megumi if he could start taking piano lessons. Denied this by Ryûhei, Kenji secretly uses his lunch-money to take lessons on his own. The older brother Takashi, on the other hand, suddenly and out of the blue asks to join the American Army, as such a program has recently been made available in Japan. This also is refused by Ryûhei, but Takashi still leaves despite his father's wishes.

As such, issues as family hierarchies, workplace hierarchies, honor and the dysfunctional state of Japanese nuclear families are addressed in *Tokyo Sonata* on the thematic level. In the latter half of the film a letter from Takashi clearly underlines the main theme of the film, however. Takashi writes that he is supposed to return home due to the fact that employment of foreign soldiers in the American Army was unnecessary, but has decided to stay in America for a while. According to Takashi he wishes to explore another culture in search of his own happiness. This appears to be the case for the rest of the family as well. Kenji excels at the piano, finally finding some sense of purpose and belonging in his life. Megumi is accosted by a burglar in the family home and is forced to spend a night on the run together with this burglar. On the very same night, Ryûhei is lying knocked unconscious in a gutter by a hit and run accident. As Megumi wakes up in a shed, abandoned by her abductor, and Ryûhei wakes up in the gutter, they both appear to have cathartic experiences. Following these incidents, life appears to fall back into its normal routine for the Sasaki family. The secrets are revealed, and Megumi and Ryûhei seem content with their daily routines and employment. The final scene of the movie portrays Kenji as he astonishes the entire audience when auditioning for a prestigious Tokyo music academy.

Although a central theme of *Tokyo Sonata* is the secrecy and sense of honor within the family, the style of the film is different from that of *Hanging Garden*. The sense of realism is much more prevalent in *Tokyo Sonata*. Whereas the style of *Hanging Garden* is highly self-reflective and clearly underlines its narrative to be that of a filmic representation, *Tokyo Sonata* has a stronger sense of reality. The narrative is never broken by signaling the audience with clearly filmic expositions intruding under the film's thematic. Within the landscape of representational modes, *Tokyo Sonata* appears to be a blend of the style found in *Hanging Garden* and the style found in *All around Us*. Similar to *Hanging Garden*, the narrative is often brought forward by a camera moving from one point to the next without cutting. As such, the storytelling of the *emaki* is brought to mind (pages 25–26). The realism is strictly maintained, however, similarly to *All around Us*.

The narrative shows a tendency of being a blend between that presented in *Hanging Garden* and *All around Us*. *Tokyo Sonata* is nonlinear at times, particularly in the latter half of the movie. The nonlinear story is however clearly marked as such. This takes place during Megumi's incident with the burglar. First there is a scene where Ryûhei finds an envelope full of cash when cleaning the mall toilets. As he walks fast through the mall he runs into Megumi, rendering him shocked and totally embarrassed, resulting in his fleeing the scene. Then the movie jumps back in time and follows Megumi's storyline leading up to the very same

encounter with Ryûhei in the mall. In addition, Megumi also launches a shorter nonlinear narrative trajectory through a dream sequence. This time there is no signaling of the nonlinear escapade. Without warning, the homecoming of Takashi is introduced. He sits down in the family home hallway exclaiming that he has killed too many people. In the following scene, Megumi awakes in an outcry. In synch with the audience she becomes aware that the previous incident was nothing more than a dream.

Another feature similar to *All around Us* is the diverse application of static and moving camera shots. Still there is a predominance of static shots in *Tokyo Sonata*, and the camera always moves in a slow tempo. Adding to the realism, the cutting is done meticulously seamlessly, making the scene transitions flow naturally and uninterruptedly. The predominance of static shots and continuous utilization of slow moving camera adds to the relatively slow pace of the movie. The pacing is also underlined by the absence of a musical score. There is a main melancholic theme introduced a couple of times, and also a somewhat humorous quirky theme that follows the comic relief of the clumsy burglar. Still, the film is predominantly without nondiegetic sound. This results in the emphasizing of the slow pace in the film, but also appears to direct attention to the character development in particular.

Also concerning the ASL, *Tokyo Sonata* falls in between the two previously analyzed films. The ASL of *Tokyo Sonata* is 21.3 seconds. Once more the ASL is considerably longer than what is assessed to be the standard within classical cinema.¹⁷⁹ The shot length is, in synch with the cutting work, made seamless and clearly adjusted to enhance the realism of the film. There are few overtly long takes similar to those in *Hanging Garden*. Instead there is a steady flow of slow-moving, slow-paced scenes throughout the movie. The longest take takes place in the family home when the parents discover that Kenji has been taking piano lessons behind their backs. In a desperate attempt to maintain his dominance, Ryûhei resorts to physical violence, resulting in the parents having to bring Kenji to the emergency room at the nearest hospital. The scene in the family home is presented through a 2 minutes, 38 seconds long shot.

Furthermore, *shot-reverse shot* technique is refrained from during most dialogues, as was also the case with *Hanging Garden*. What is solely done in *Tokyo Sonata*, however, is the utilization of *shot-reverse shot* in several non-dialogue scenes. This is done to direct attention to the character's facial expressions and body language. An example would be the scene where Takashi first brings home his army application papers to show Megumi. When

¹⁷⁹ Bordwell, David, *The Way Hollywood Tells It* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2006), p. 122.

explaining his intentions, the camera focuses on Takashi as the dialogue proceeds. At the end of the dialogue, *shot-reverse shot* is applied as the mother and son exchange looks. The son seems exited while Megumi is stunned by this sudden turn of events.

As with the other analyzed films in this thesis, *Tokyo Sonata* also fits the generic typicality of the melodrama. The setting is around a Japanese middle-class nuclear family, and the plot points are centered on the personal issues of the main characters. Generational differences might not be as prevalent in *Tokyo Sonata* as in *Still Walking* or *All around Us*, but Takashi's choosing to join the American forces still leaves Ryûhei and Megumi speechless in confusion, as they find such a choice totally incomprehensible. This incident does prove generational differences to be an issue in *Tokyo Sonata* as well. The seamless style in *Tokyo Sonata* might bring the style of classical cinema to mind. But the long ASL, lack of nondiegetic music and nonlinear narrative clearly indicate an alternative cinematic paradigm. Compared to Ozu and his family melodrama *Tokyo Story* (1953), the similarities might point to a lineage in form of a Japanese cinematic paradigm. The ASL in *Tokyo Story* is only half of that in *Tokyo Sonata* (10.2 seconds), but still the two films are more similar on the stylistic level than is the case with classical cinema and *Tokyo Sonata*. An interesting detail in this connection is that Ozu is known for his shots empty of character reference (p. 66). Similarly, there is a shot completely lacking character reference in *Tokyo Sonata*. The shot comes midway in the movie, when unexpectedly a Tokyo overpass with heavy traffic and suburban cityscape is suddenly seen glancing past by the camera. Later in the film, city landscapes are also depicted, but this time the scenes are established by the fact that Megumi is driving around for the first time since she acquired her driver's license. The shot of the Tokyo overpass is not established in relation to the story in any way.

The argument can be made that *Tokyo Sonata* exemplifies how the seamlessness of classical cinema is superpositioned on a Japanese cinematic paradigm. But to extrapolate that the stylistic features of the movie are directly inspired by classical cinema appears somewhat speculative. The sense of realism that *Tokyo Sonata* exudes seems much more comparable to the paradigmatic style of Italian neorealism. The lack of nondiegetic music, the static camera predominance and portrayal of realistic character development seems somewhat suited to the ideals of neorealism. The fact that there are several nondiegetic musical elements introduced, and the emergence of ironic undertones from time to time of course counters the strict stylistic set of rules tied to neorealism. But the realism is nevertheless always strictly maintained in *Tokyo Sonata*. As example of superposition, *Tokyo Sonata* can be argued to maintain the lineage of Ozu's style. Certain elements from both neorealism and classical cinema might be

slightly embedded in the style of *Tokyo Sonata*, an argument that also have been uttered about *Tokyo Story*.

If compared to the list of key features argued to reflect the lineage of a Japanese cinematic paradigm (p. 69), *Tokyo Sonata* applies on several accounts. The ASL and slow camera movements are undeniably a constant throughout the movie. The narrative is nonlinear at times, shots empty of character reference are utilized, and superposition is arguably present. As for flat lighting and deep focus shot, none of these appear to have a prevalent position in the stylistic language utilized in *Tokyo Sonata*. Neither is there any evidence whatsoever of utilization of natural depictions to convey emotions. The film overall comes off as a relatively slow-paced family melodrama. The slow pace, accompanied by the lack of nondiegetic music and the unhurried camera work, results in an in depth character study. The manner in which *shot-reverse shot* is utilized also supports the notion that the characters of the narrative are the centre of attention. The focus on the unsaid, the depiction of exchanged looks and body language is all underlined by the style of the film. Ultimately the characters and their development is what *Tokyo Sonata* is utilizing its filmic technique and stylistic language to explore.



The Case of Aruitemo Aruitemo/Still Walking

The prior three analyses have been conducted following the same pattern of delineating narrative and discussing style. This fourth and final analysis will be conducted in a slightly different manner. Narrative explanation will be given less space, while the findings of the three previous analyses will be relied on and compared. In addition, this analysis will be made in the perspective of Keiko L. McDonald's book *Reading a Japanese film*, in particular her chapter on Kore-Eda's film *Maboroshi no Hikari*, entitled: "*The Danger and Allure of Phantom Light: Hirokazu Koreeda's Maboroshi no Hikari*" (1995). In this chapter McDonald criticizes the critics who compare Kore-eda to Ozu and Mizoguchi. McDonald argues that Kore-eda's mode of representation differs radically from the two great masters of Japanese cinema.¹⁸⁰ Since McDonald's arguments are done in light of *Maboroshi no Hikari* in particular, this analysis will relate McDonald's arguments to *Still Walking*, asking whether or not they seem valid and relevant to the films analyzed in this thesis.

Concerning the narrative of *Still Walking*, it is hard not to notice the obvious parallels to Ozu's *Tokyo Story*. In both narratives the setting is the gathering of Japanese middle class families. In both narratives the family has gone through the hardship of losing a son/sibling. In *Tokyo Story* the elderly parents visit their busy children living in Tokyo. In *Still Walking*, the elderly couple's family home is the setting in which the children come on an annual visit to honor the memory of their lost brother. In contrast to *Tokyo Story*, the elderly couple in *Still Walking* is struggling hard every day with the loss of their son. The father in the household is left bitter and cold as he lost his only heir to the family business. He worked as a local doctor, and his practice will now perish with him. In *Tokyo Story* the generation gap was a prominent theme as the children hardly had time to tend to their visiting parents. In *Still Walking*, the generation gap is still an issue, as the elderly parents clearly have a hard time coming to terms with their children's choices in life. At the same time, *Still Walking* visualizes the family hierarchy and gender roles of the older generation. It could easily be argued that *Still Walking* pays homage to Ozu's *Tokyo Story* as far as the narrative goes.

Furthermore, relating *Still Walking* to the prior analyses, its style will be discussed in relation to the argued key points of any possible Japanese cinematic paradigm. *Still Walking* is shot completely in static camera, with the exception of four shots. The first two occurrences of moving camera are two successive shots of the family's children playing in the street. Then

¹⁸⁰ McDonald, Keiko. L., *Reading a Japanese Film* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2006),. p. 199.

there is a moving camera shot at the graveyard when the elderly mother and her son's family visit Junbei's grave. Finally, the last shot of the movie has camera movement. It depicts the son's family descending the hill from the family graveyard where they have paid their respects to the grandparents, who are now both dead. The camera slowly moves from the family towards the horizon with the Japanese suburban landscape and ocean-line in frame before it ends the movie. This consistent use of static camera gives a strengthened impression of slow pace throughout the movie. Given the emphasis on dialogue in the film however, the pace never seems too slow. When trying to take in all the connotations and underlying messages in the dialogue, the pace appears suitable as most uttered speech demands attention and deduction.

There are several shots throughout the movie where details are lingered on both outside and inside the household. Although many of these might appear empty of character reference, this is in most instances not the case. For instance, one shot lingering on the family home's backyard iron gate apparently seems without pertinence to the narrative. When closer examining the shot, a scooter's handlebars are out of focus in the foreground, thus signaling that the sushi-delivery guy has arrived. There is however one shot inside the family house, lingering on a tiny vase with a single flower in water, that appears to be without character reference. More such shots can arguably be detected, though most, albeit cleverly hidden, have reference pertaining to the narrative.

As for the utilization of nondiegetic music, there is one ongoing melancholic theme which is introduced around five times throughout the movie. These are however very short instances, and the majority of the movie is shot without any score or soundtrack whatsoever. On one occasion, diegetic music is introduced as the elderly grandmother puts on a record. This instance is worth noticing for one reason. The song, if one listens to the lyrics, is called *Aruitemo Aruitemo*.

Similarly to *All around Us*, the narrative in *Still Walking* is 100 percent linear. There are no flashbacks, dreams or alternate storylines going on. As previously mentioned, the timeline of the movie is about one and a half days in the lives of the family, with the last scene being three years in the future. Another interesting similarity shared between *All around Us* and *Still Walking* is the utilization of insects to enhance the story. In *All around Us* a spider is cherished by the female protagonist as she associates the importance of its life with that of her lost child. The same thing happens in *Still Walking* when the grandmother is convinced that a butterfly is the reincarnation of her deceased son. Both these instances appear to indicate that

natural depictions are utilized to express emotions to some extent in contemporary Japanese melodramas, linking the genre with traditional Japanese aesthetics.

When it comes to the ASL, it proves to be the most consistent indicator of a paradigmatic lineage in Japanese cinema. The ASL in *Still Walking* is 17.9 seconds. As in all the analyzed films in this thesis, this ASL is also considerably longer than that which has been assessed by David Bordwell to be the average ASL of classical cinema. In addition, the ASL is once again longer than all of Ozu's films, but shorter than Mizoguchi's perfecting of the long take utilization. The long ASL of *Still Walking* adds synchronicity between style and the pace of the narrative. There are no overtly long takes which stand out in the movie. The longest take is a 2 minutes 56 seconds shot during the family lunch where every family character is present. Though there are no 5–7 minutes long takes as was the case with *Hanging Garden* and *All around Us*, the shot length and pace in *Still Walking* are consistent and give the impression of an even slower paced narrative. There are an abundance of shots between 1–2 minutes length which gives the movie a consistent slow-paced tempo. As was the case with *Tokyo Sonata* and *All around Us*, the pace of the films appears to direct attention to character development. Focus on unsaid dialogue, exchange of looks and body language appear to be a common denominator between all four films analyzed in this thesis.

Regarding the utilization of flat light and deep focus, these are both applied sporadically in *Still Walking*. None of these two stylistic features are particularly visible, and they appear rather to be coincidental, rather than being applied for the sake of narrative, style or historical reasons. Since these features are marginal they will be left out for the remainder of this thesis, if only to be remembered as key points of theory which have not been particularly visible in the limited selection of films analyzed.

As for melodrama as genre, the stylistic language of *Still Walking* clearly parallels *Tokyo Story* rather than sharing similarities with classical cinema melodrama. As far as both films go, they show evidence of some similarity to classical cinema in the linear narrative and causality-driven plot. The long ASL, slow and static camera, natural depictions of emotions and general slow pacing, however, seem to indicate a Japanese cinematic paradigm being predominantly utilized in the film's stylistic language.

Moving on to McDonald's analysis of Kore-eda's *Maboroshi no Hikari*, a comparison of Kore-eda's style to that of Ozu and Mizoguchi will now be discussed. McDonald argues that Kore-eda's mode of representation at best resembles that of Mizoguchi and Ozu on a superficial level. To back up this argument, McDonald compares a long shot from

Mizoguchi's *Chikamatsu Monogatari/The Crucified Lovers* (1954) with a long shot from Kore-eda's *Maboroshi no Hikari*. In McDonald's own words:

Like Mizoguchi in *The Crucified Lovers*, Koreeda directs a steady camera at his virtuoso long take. But there the similarity ends. This young director sets his sights on characters much farther away; they are in fact reduced to distant silhouettes. Mizoguchi would not have done that. He was too much a connoisseur of eloquent body language, especially in women.

Furthermore, McDonald attributes Kore-eda's placement of actors to the fact that he was using young inexperienced actors. Mizoguchi, on the other hand relied on the strong performance of veteran actors. As such, McDonald argues that Kore-eda's long take gets its power from the director's distant painterly depiction of the disturbed imagination. His forte is argued to lie in his stylistic language.¹⁸¹

McDonald's arguments indeed appear accurate when concerning the early films of Kore-eda. Both *Maboroshi no Hikari* and *Wandâfuru Raifu/After Life* (1998) are films clearly affected by monetary issues as far as production and actors go. The latter film, however, arguably was a breakthrough for Kore-eda. The film was a success that got several awards at film festivals in Japan, America and Europe. Following the turn of the millennium, Kore-eda returned with several high production films. Both production and casting were evidently moved into the big leagues of Japanese cinema. Both *Dare Mo Shiranai/Nobody Knows* (2004) and *Hana Yori Mo Naho/Hana; The Tale of a Reluctant Samurai* (2006) are low key, subtle films that definitely are driven by the high proficiency level of casted actors. Famous Japanese actors such as Asano Tadanobu, Kagawa Teruyuki and Harada Yoshio are all cast in Kore-eda's recent films, and exemplifies how he now has his pick of the litter as far as actors go.

In *Still Walking* the casting is arguably stronger than ever. The arguments comparing *Maboroshi no Hikari* to Mizoguchi's *The Crucified Lovers* don't appear applicable. The constant slow pace and high number of long takes relies completely on the performance of the cast. Kore-eda's long takes are never done from a distance, but instead constantly shoot the actors at close range. If anything, when it comes to the long takes and how they express the

¹⁸¹ McDonald, Keiko L., *Reading a Japanese Film*, pp. 214 and 216.

actor's emotions through dialogue and body language, *Still Walking* appears to parallel the purpose of the technique as utilized by Mizoguchi.

Following her comparison between Mizoguchi and Kore-eda, McDonald moves on to discuss similarities and differences between Ozu and Kore-eda. The final sequence of *Maboroshi no Hikari* is recognized as an apparent homage to Ozu's *Tokyo Story*. Both directors are characterized by their affinity for subtlety and simplistic storytelling. However, attributing Ozu's storytelling technique partly to strong cast performance, McDonald argues that Kore-eda's simplicity is fundamentally different from Ozu's simplicity. Ozu is, on the one hand, said to redeem banal daily routine to elicit complex responses in his audience. Kore-eda's simplicity is argued to lie within his utilization of visual images and diegetic sounds as signifiers, inviting the audience to puzzle out the significance of these images and sounds. According to McDonald; Ozu makes the audience feel intuitively, while Kore-eda makes the audience think.¹⁸²

Again, McDonald's arguments are only applicable to Kore-eda's earlier films. The painterly portrayal of images and signifying diegetic sounds are unrepresented in his films released the last ten years. *Still Walking* appears rather to utilize daily routines, idiosyncrasies and the banality of normal family life to gain response from its audience. As far as evoking audience reactions goes, *Still Walking* seems more like a direct prolongation of Ozu's sensibilities than any of the other films analyzed in this thesis. Given the theme of the film, it even seems more suitable to turn McDonald's think/feel dichotomy upside down. The thematics in both *Still Walking* and *Tokyo Story* certainly present food for thought; while Kore-eda's previous experimentation with sounds could perfectly well add to the unconscious feel of the film even if they are not particularly focused on.

Returning to the primary question of this thesis, *Still Walking* appears to be the most evident example arguing for an ongoing stylistic paradigm within Japanese cinema. The long takes and static camera use definitely parallel the utilization of the same techniques in prewar Japanese cinema. There are a few shots empty of character reference and a few instances where deep focus shots are applied. Both features are seamlessly utilized though, not appearing to be there for the sake of utilizing these stylistic features. The pace of the film is slow, as the character development is done carefully and in detail. In addition, there are signs of natural phenomenon being utilized as emotional signifiers. As argued about Ozu's film,

¹⁸² McDonald, Keiko L., *Reading a Japanese Film*, pp. 216–217.

Kore-eda also relies on his cast performance. The film in itself is as minimal and non-extravagant as *Tokyo Story*.

As mentioned in the analysis of *All around Us*, the film shares a strict sense of realism with *Still Walking*. The 100 percent linearity, the seamlessness in editing and lack of nondiegetic music are all features which parallel the style of Italian neorealism. Still, the fact that nondiegetic music is utilized in several places in both films is in clear contradiction to the ideals of neorealism. In the instances where nondiegetic music appears, a particular emotional response is triggered in the audience. Also, the undeniable high proficiency level of the actors clearly counters the ideals of neorealism. Therefore it seems more probable to assess that notions from both neorealism and classical cinema might be partly superimposed in the stylistic language of *Still Walking*. This argument also concurs with the previously argued notions of a Japanese cinematic paradigm.

As for the notion of superposition, *Still Walking* hardly merges new style in any way with the content of the film. It could be argued that the thematics superpose a contemporary issue on a film in traditional Japanese guise. Still this appears incorrect, when Ozu's *Tokyo Story* had the contemporary thematic of its time so clearly embedded in the narrative. Contemporary issues on the thematic level could thus arguably be viewed as a traditional feature of the Japanese melodrama. For this reason it is also hard to call *Still Walking* homage to Ozu. When nothing differs thematically or stylistically from a previous film tradition, the film in question would rather be a direct prolongation of a tradition where the idiosyncrasies of the genre are maintained dogmatically.



Conclusion

The theory-laden first chapter in this thesis presents argumentation that recognizes Japanese cinema as a filmic paradigm. This paradigm, or set of stylistic features, illustrates how commonalities can be traced from prewar Japanese cinema till contemporary cinema. Initially, investigating the relation between traditional Japanese aesthetics and the style of Japanese cinema were done. Starting with Burch, who was the first to discuss the style of Japanese cinema explicitly, the line of thought which was developed further by Richie, Geist, Davis, Gerow and Wada-Marciano, constructed the argument with which the following analyses were to be compared. Satô's reflections on the connection between traditional Japanese aesthetics also added valuable context to this argument. The most prominent point made in this thesis relating to these mentioned theorists is the deconstruction and reappropriation of their arguments. In concurrence with Yoshimoto, most of these arguments have been considered somewhat misleading, as none of them clearly underlines the difference between purely stylistic matters and symptomatic connections to said stylistics. In trying to conclude each theorist's points about style in particular, a set of stylistic features is listed as a proposed stylistic paradigm for Japanese cinema. In chapter one, there are several stylistic features that are argued for so consistently that they are evaluated to be closely connected to a Japanese cinematic paradigm. These features are: the long take, the lingering on details in shots empty of character reference, the natural depiction reflecting certain emotions, and finally, the notion of superposition and assimilation in Japanese cinema.

The prewar part of the thesis is perhaps a bit too prominent, but as mentioned before, this prominence does reflect the body of research in the field of style in Japanese cinema. There is an abundance of theoretical material on prewar Japanese cinema which clearly outweighs the extent to which postwar cinema has been discussed. Nevertheless, following the prewar discussions, its key points are compared with discussions on postwar cinema in the latter half of chapter one. The points being made on prewar cinema are in the postwar discussions confirmed and somewhat refined by Richie, Davis, Contreras, and to a smaller extent by Ko and McDonald. Although Gerow and Wada-Marciano did initially present some counterarguments to both Burch and Richie, when discussions on style have been deconstructed and style separated from its symptomatic, cultural context, no counter arguments appear convincing in relation to the proposed listing of stylistic features constructing a Japanese cinematic paradigm.

The second chapter, consisting solely of a short introduction and film analysis, serves as the connection between the theoretically based discussions in chapter one and contemporary Japanese melodrama. Several commonalities can be detected between the two. First and foremost, the ASL is noticeable as it spans from 9.66 seconds to 32.74 seconds. The four films together have an average ASL of 20.40 seconds. In comparison, the shot length of these four films is more than three times longer than Bordwell's argued average of classical cinema. As mentioned the average of classical cinema melodrama might be longer than classical cinema in general. Still, the difference in ASL is substantial enough to strongly indicate a difference between a Japanese cinematic paradigm and that of classical cinema. Furthermore, the ASL of the films analyzed goes hand in hand with the prominent utilization of static and slow camera movements. Only in the first half of *All around Us*, is the camera utilized in a cutting pace that could resemble classical cinema. Aside from this fast-paced part of this film, the camera movements portrayed in the analyzed films are consistently similar to each other, but also consistently different from classical cinema, or neorealism and the French new wave for that matter. Altogether, the long takes and camera utilization appear to consistently indicate a stylistic tendency that if further confirmed through research could possibly be a pivotal part of a Japanese cinematic paradigm.

Another consistency detected in the analyses is how natural depictions are utilized to express the emotional state of the characters. In *Hanging Garden*, the literal hanging garden of the family symbolized the rootlessness of the Japanese nuclear family. At the same time the literal garden referred to the myth of the hanging gardens of Babylon, and symbolized how the family was but an artificial shell of happiness. In *All around Us* the killing of a spider serves as a catalyst for Shoko's mental breakdown. In two scenes the wellbeing of the spider parallels Shoko's contented state of mind. When it is smashed by Kanao, Shoko loses it completely and goes ballistic in the couple's apartment. Similarly, in *Still Walking*, a butterfly serves as catalyst for an almost magical moment within the family, as the grandmother is convinced it is the soul of her deceased son who has returned. The attribution by the grandmother of this symbolic nature to the butterfly makes it serve as a catalyst for her own emotion, which is grief and relief of grief. In *Tokyo Sonata* there is no apparent utilization of natural depictions to express emotions. Nevertheless, the presence of such expressions in the three other films does seem to indicate that it is very much present in recent Japanese melodrama. These depictions also appear to be quintessential of a Japanese cinematic paradigm as there appears to be no evident equivalent in classical cinema. The research on

this field is of course limited, but as far as theoretical material goes, there appears to be no argument for similar depictions as prominent elsewhere than in Japanese cinema.

Viewing these natural depictions of emotions in relation to the utilization of long takes and slow camera movements, as discussed in the two previous paragraphs, they certainly seem to coincide with Richie's notions on the matter in his discussion of traditional Japanese aesthetics (p. 58). In *Hanging Garden*, *All around Us* and *Still Walking*, the tempo of the camera does indeed appear to extend the characters' emotional development when portrayed through natural depictions. Even in the relatively fast-paced *All around Us*, in the pivotal scene depicting the smashing of the spider/Shoko's breakdown, the tempo is slowed down considerably. The whole scene is filmed in one 4 minute 48 second-long take. As such, the slow camera interacting with natural depictions of emotions does appear to contribute to a greater understanding of the emotional state/mood being depicted, which in turn is linkable to traditional Japanese aesthetics, as argued by Richie. Also Davis' and Sato's thoughts on the matter are in unison with Richie's. Davis deems the long take and slow camera to be part of a canonization of Japanese traditional aesthetics (p. 34), and Sato argues that Japanese cinema is influenced by Japanese traditional aesthetics in a manner which parallels cinema with Japanese scroll paintings, poetry, woodblock prints and theater (pp. 21–23). The film analyses conducted in this thesis appear to also parallel these arguments by Richie, Davis and Sato when it comes to natural depiction of emotions.

Richie argues that these traditional aesthetics are depicted in Japanese cinema by the simplest of means; an argument which also corresponds to Davis' notion of *less is more* attitudes as being portrayed in the films he analyzes. Davis however differentiates the films he argues to be of *monumental style* from the body of Japanese cinema in general. He argues that character psychology is tuned down to the benefit of spatial arrangements. Still, the links he makes to traditional aesthetics, and the stylistic features he outlines parallel both Richie's arguments and the analyses conducted in this thesis. The difference in monumental style is rather the sentiments by which these stylistic features have been applied. The notion of *less is more* attitudes are scarcely discussed in the body of theoretical works pertaining to this thesis. Still, it seems to be an interesting idea, particularly since it seems to correspond perfectly with the understated formative language of the four films analyzed in this thesis. The connection between long take, slow camera, natural depictions of emotions, and sentiments of *less is more* attitude, could possibly form a hypothetical paradigm of Japanese cinema which incorporates contemporary movements. The connection between understatement in Japanese

cinema and Japanese minimalism as portrayed in architecture and design would also be interesting to incorporate in such a preliminary research project.

A final prominent similarity in the analyses is the consistency of superposition. It is important to underline here that even though the term *superposition* was introduced by Burch, it is rather Gerow's, Richie's and Davis's refinement of the term when discussing assimilation that is sought in the analyses. *Still Walking* seems the exception in this respect, as it does not portray any evident signs of superposition. The other films analyzed, however, are all argued to conform to the notions of superposition as discussed throughout this thesis. Kathe Geist draws parallels between Japanese cinema and Japanese art in this relation (p. 24). Her argument seems to tie traditional Japanese aesthetics together with Japanese cinema in a convincing manner. This is also strengthened by Davis and Richie as they both deem superposition to be a distinctive feature of Japanese cinema. Davis maintains that bending of the classical cinema norms is done in Japanese cinema to cater to the tastes of the Japanese audience (p. 32). Richie deems assimilation to be a pivotal stylistic feature in Japanese cinema (pp. 36–37). Though Richie's thoughts on the matter are possibly among his most blatant generalizations on Japanese culture, it nevertheless points to a unified theory on superposition in Japanese cinema. Richie, Davis and Geist appear to concur, as does also Gerow, who ties superposition directly to style in his argument (p. 18). These theorists have made their argument on the connection between traditional Japanese aesthetics and Japanese cinema. It does not appear improbable that these tendencies are the same as those detected in the film analyses of contemporary Japanese melodramas. The blend of old and new stylistic features, the mix of classical cinema signifiers and traditional Japanese aesthetics are prominent in these films and this does appear to be a possible feature in a hypothetical Japanese cinematic paradigm.

As for the discussions on linearity/nonlinearity, flat lighting and deep focus shot in chapter one, there do not appear to be any evident findings in the films analyzed that convincingly tie these stylistic features to the notion of a Japanese cinematic paradigm.

The main task of this thesis has been to investigate the possibility of a consistent lineage between Japanese cinema and traditional Japanese aesthetics. Through discussions on, and examples by, prominent Japanese melodramas, the stylistic commonalities in a possible cinematic paradigm have been outlined. Through discussions of traditional Japanese aesthetics, Japanese film history and finally analysis of contemporary Japanese melodrama, such a cinematic paradigm, at least in its initial form, has been outlined. Together with the discussions of chapter one, the film analyses conducted do conclude that the ASL, static and

slow camera utilization, the natural depictions of emotions and superposition appear to construct a Japanese cinematic paradigm that has been consistent since the prewar era. A central point underlined in deducing this conclusion, is the importance attributed to reappropriation of earlier discussions. The theoretical material discussed has been clearly divided between discussions of stylistic matters, and discussions rooted in the symptomatic understanding of Japanese cultural context. The presupposition has been that only when the discussions of style have been thoroughly separated from symptomatic interpreted relations, can the paradigm of style in Japanese cinema be properly investigated. This is what this thesis has tried to accomplish, at least at a preliminary level. But as already pointed out, the magnitude of this thesis (or lack thereof) allows the findings of the analyses to function as indications at best. Hopefully this text can serve as a stepping stone for further research on the style of Japanese cinema and the Japanese melodrama.

Afterword

There are several shortcomings in this project (deliberately cut and underlined as such throughout the thesis) which make it unable to function as anything more than an indication or point of departure for research. For a more conclusive argumentation on the Japanese cinematic paradigm, several pressing matters would have to be included. First, melodrama as genre is never explicitly singled out in discussions on prewar Japanese cinema's mode of representation. Melodramas just happen to be at the pinnacle of discussions on Japanese cinema as a whole. The reason for singling out this genre in this context is that it was able to contribute adequately to the discussion within the limited framework. Further discussion on the matter would not necessarily have to be bound by the genre restrictions of the melodrama. Still, it would be a possible point of departure for further research. If such a path were to be taken, the genre specifics would have to be elaborated in detail. The argued Japanese cinematic paradigm would have to be analyzed in relation to both Japanese melodrama and other genres to determine whether certain stylistic features might be particular to the melodrama alone. The Japanese melodrama would necessarily have to be compared to melodrama in general to seek out eventual similarities and differences within the confines of the genre. For instance, the Japanese melodrama should probably be set up against the classical cinema melodrama. The differences between these two melodramatic styles might not be as marked as the differences pointed out here between the Japanese melodrama and classical cinema in general. There are a few reasons for not doing a direct comparison between the classical cinema melodrama and the Japanese melodrama in this thesis. For one thing, as already mentioned, the melodrama is merely discussed incidentally in discussions on prewar cinema, not singling out the genre as particularly representative of the Japanese mode of representation. Going into genre specifics therefore didn't seem to fit the theoretical material utilized in this thesis. For another, there is virtually no literature which makes a comparison between Japanese and classical cinema melodrama. A direct comparison between these two melodramatic styles might reveal interesting links, but would probably demand the extent of a complete master thesis in its own right.

Second, to make a more conclusive study on the style of contemporary Japanese cinema, the notion of superposition and assimilation would have to be addressed more extensively. Once more the topic has been deliberately avoided due to spatial restrictions, but several sources have made links between Japanese cinema and postmodernism. The relation between

superposition and assimilation would first have to be addressed in detail. Following such a detailed elaboration, the connection to postmodern stylistic sensibilities would have to be addressed. Both superposition and assimilation have in this thesis been argued to be a pivotal feature in a hypothesized Japanese cinematic paradigm. At the same time, both superposition and assimilation appear to parallel postmodern tendencies of style at a high level. Whether or not superposition and assimilation could even be asserted to be features of a cinematic stylistic legacy at all would have to be discussed. It appears possible that both these features could be argued to be symptoms of postmodern stylistic sensibilities, just as easily as being essential features of a cinematic paradigm. The argument could be made that the discussion of superposition and assimilation in Japanese cinema predates discussions on the postmodern. Still, concerning contemporary Japanese cinema, the relation between the proposed cinematic paradigm and postmodern sensibilities would necessarily have to be addressed.

Finally, to make a more conclusive argument, a larger body of films would have to be analyzed. Although a larger selection of melodramas would be the way to go in this particular thesis, a broader selection of genres would appear more in line with the arguments being presented on prewar cinema. Following the justification of film selection in this thesis, a larger body of films rooted in Kinema Junpô's top ten movies of the year lists could, for instance, make a viable subject for analysis. This would, as in this thesis, be a study based on the critical acclaim being given Japanese cinema from Japanese media. As an example, analysis of the top ten movies of the last five years would give a much clearer indication on the present state of a proposed Japanese cinematic paradigm.

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ⁱ The term *national cinema* is used in this thesis as a descriptive phrase to underline that the cinema being discussed is tied to one explicit nation. In most instances where this phrase comes up, it either concerns American cinema or European cinema. National cinema is, however, only used to describe cinematic styles regarded as established within film theory as a paradigm. These could be American/Hollywood classical cinema, Russian montage, German expressionism, Italian neorealism or the French new wave. When the term is used in relation to Japanese cinema, it is done so to question whether or not Japanese cinema could be regarded as a paradigm of its own, and therefore could also be described as a national cinema.

National cinema is of course a term that could be applied to any nation's cinema. But in this thesis the term is only used for those cinemas that have either been acknowledged as paradigms, or in Japan's case, are examined to assess if they also deserve to be deemed a paradigm.

ⁱⁱ The definition of style given here will not be very detailed, but rather describes the contours of it, in order to set some parameters for this thesis. Robert Stam describes filmic style as resulting from the infinite choices involving camera movements, laboratory effects, décor, characteristic editing prefaces and the use of sound. He argues that dramatic realism and continuity is the dominant trend within cinema in general. (Stam, Robert. *Alternative Aesthetics*, pp. 258-259.) Kristin Thompson argues that the most fundamental function of style is to clarify narrative, (Thompson, Kristin. *Storytelling in the New Hollywood*, pp. 19.) whereas David Bordwell describes style as concisely, but as fully, as possible:

“In the narrowest sense, I take style to be a film's systematic and significant use of techniques of the medium. Those techniques fall into broad domains: mise en scene (staging, lighting, performance and setting), framing, focus, control of color values, and other aspects of cinematography; editing; and sound. Style is, minimally, the texture of the film's images and sounds, the result of choices made by the filmmaker(s) in particular historical circumstances.” (Bordwell, David. *On the History of Film Style*, pp. 4.)

The analysis made of films in this context concentrates on technique, style and form, rather than trying to explain stylistic utilization through historical and political references. The style will, however, be linked to certain Japanese ideologies and thematics, since these seem to be undeniably connected. In particular, the notion of *mono no aware*, will be closely discussed.

ⁱⁱⁱ The genre known as melodrama in American and European film theoretic terminology appears never to have acquired classified status as such in Japan. According to Burch are “the Japanese genre classifications based on class distinctions, historical period or narrative structure, rather than hierarchical distinctions of content and tone such as have come to be implicit in melodrama, slapstick, etc.” Nevertheless, there are Japanese genres and films that are very similar to the melodrama distinction of America and Europe. As already mentioned, this thesis relies on the film-theoretic terminology of America and Europe since Japanese cinema is discussed in relation to American and European cinema.

The basic formula for a melodrama can be traced back to the 1800s. Guilbert Pixérécourt (1773–1844) is credited as the creator of melodrama. He wrote down twelve criteria for a successful melodrama at that time, which were immediately adopted by cinema. A theoretical acclaim of the melodrama, however, did not appear until the 1970s, when film theorists produced a more coherent field of investigation. From this emerged the seemingly ultimate form of melodrama, *the Hollywood family melodrama*. Following the development of these studies, a basic model for the Hollywood family melodrama is listed by John Mercer and Martin Shingler in their book *Melodrama. Genre, Style, Sensibility* from 2004. (p. 9–13)

- First and foremost, the basic model chiefly concerns the conflicts and tensions of a middle class family. More often than not, the conflict is between generations. Emphasis tends to be on personal emotional traumas, as opposed to social or economic concerns.
- The model of the Hollywood family melodrama is characterized by its central protagonist, who tends to be privileged by a high degree of audience identification.

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- The emphasis is frequently on the direct portrayal of the psychological situation, which the audience is likely to share from their own experiences of family life.
 - At certain moments, a breaking down of ‘reality’ appears, which can be understood as the hysterical moment of the text. At this point, the mise-en-scene has a tendency to become explicitly symbolic or coded, with the accompaniment of heavily repetitive and intrusive music.
 - There is a tendency of wish fulfillment and to culminate the drama in a happy ending.

Furthermore, Robert Lang recognizes additional features in the family melodrama. The family, or bourgeois domestic melodrama, as Lang calls it, appeared with the rise of capitalism and designates the family as the central area of family life. The melodrama is an exploration of identity in which one self is set up against, and compared to “*the other*”. It is also underlined that the features listed above also could be detected in other forms of melodramas, such as the western or the gangster film. The difference from family melodrama and these other forms is that the familial narrative is often repressed to the benefit of an external dynamic of action. Whereas the family melodrama turns conflict inward, western or gangster melodramas resolve their conflicts by action. (Lang, Robert. *American Film Melodrama*, p. 5–11.)

Finally, it is argued by Mercer and Shingler that the narrative and aesthetic effects of melodrama can be detected across a multitude of genres, sub-genres and film cycles. Essential melodramatic traits utilized are pathos and its emotional impact on audiences. The relations to realism and recognition of conventional representations and limitations, as for instance the limitations of language, are also an important melodramatic trait. Thus it is argued that melodrama should be viewed as a mode of representation rather than a genre in itself, and a model of film melodrama is proposed. (Mercer and Shingler, *Melodrama. Genre, Style, Sensibility*, pp. 78–79 and 93–94.)

- Melodramas begin and end in a space of innocence. Lost innocence provokes nostalgia that in turn provokes pathos.
- Melodramas focus on victim-heroes and the eventual recognition of their virtue.
- Melodramas employ aesthetics of astonishment: at the point where virtue is at last recognized there as a prolongation of emotional effect that often sets up the need for action (the climactic action).
- Melodramas employ a dialectic of pathos and action, establishing a tension between being ‘too late’ and ‘just in the nick of time’; time is the ultimate object of loss, this loss provoking tears.
- Characters in melodrama embody primary psychic roles organized in Manichean conflicts of good and evil. Melodramatic characters are monopathic: that is, lacking more complex mixes of feelings and psychological depth.

^{iv} The theoretical contexts referred to are particularly those of Richie, Burch, Satô, Bordwell, Geist, Contreras, and Davis, as they appear in the list of source materials at the end of this thesis.

^v Monumental Style Films, as listed by Darrel William Davis

- Abe Ichzoku/The Abe Clan (1938) Director: Kumagai Hisatora
- Genroku Chusingura/The Loyal Forty-Seven Retainers of the Genroku Era (1941–1942) Director: Mizoguchi Kenji
- Iemitsu to Hikozaemon/Shogun Iemitsu and His Mentor Hikozaemon (1941) Director: Makino Masahiro
- Jigoku Mon/Gate to Hell (1953) Director: Kinugasa Teinosuke
- Kagemusha/The Shadow Warrior (1980) Director: Kurosawa Akira
- Kawanakajima Kassen/The Battle of Kawanakajima (1940) Director: Kinugasa Teinosuke
- Ran/Chaos (1985) Director: Kurosawa Akira
- Rikyu (1990) Director: Teshigahara Hiroshi
- Zangiku Monogatari (1939) Director: Mizoguchi Kenji

^{vi} Key Characteristics of Monumental Style, as identified by Darrel William Davis^{vi}

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- Indigenous Japanese Tradition is Appropriated for Its Own Sake (p. 43)
 - Displacement of Physical Action by Technique (p. 84)
 - Objectified Spectatorship (pp. 92–93)
 - Emphasis on The Dignified Death (pp. 92–93)
 - Lingering on the Aesthetics of Period Detail (pp. 92–93)
 - Focus on Duty and Obligations (pp. 92–93)
 - Canonization of Traditional Japanese Heritage (pp. 92–93)
 - The Long Shot/The Long Take (p. 93)
 - Graceful Camera Movement (p. 93)
 - Ascetic Repose of Blocking and Design (p. 93)
 - Utilizing of Nature as Historical Glorifier (p. 94)
 - Foreground an Imaginary Japanese Identity that Eschews the Corrupting Influences of the West (p. 113)
 - Concerned more with Exhortation than with Entertainment (p. 216)