FROM NOSTALGIA TO CRUELTY: CHANGING STORIES OF LOVE, VIOLENCE,
AND MASCULINITY IN POSTWAR JAPANESE SAMURAI FILMS

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Serious students of Japanese film often study as auteurs Japanese directors such as Mizoguchi Kenji, Oshima Nagisa, and Ozu Yasujiro, yet Kurosawa Akira remains the most central to auteur studies of Japanese film largely based on the critical acclaim his samurai films, primarily produced between 1950 and 1970, garnered. Indeed, critics often focus on Kurosawa and see his samurai films as the most iconic of Japanese cinema and Japanese culture. Most Americans' present-day knowledge of Japanese films, and perhaps even of Japanese history and culture, begins and ends with Kurosawa Akira, and stems from his films about samurai in particular. Although monster films, like *Godzilla*, and horror films, like *Ringu*, enjoy broad familiarity in American culture as well as distinct cult followings, the image of the samurai is so strongly the central icon signaling Japanese cinema—and through such a cinematic prism, Japan itself—that typically English-language surveys of Japanese film feature images of samurai on their covers. Yet despite the centrality of Kurosawa and despite the prevalence of the samurai image in

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studies of Japanese film and in the minds of film viewers the world over, few scholars have analyzed the genre of samurai films as a whole. This neglect of the films most widely viewed in Japan and most iconic of Japanese culture abroad has resulted in a failure to appreciate or properly consider how central to the American idea of Japanese film samurai films have been. Samurai films not only educated Americans about how to think of Japan, but also provided an opportunity for postwar Japanese to collectively process the effects of Japan's postwar subjugation and rapid but often inequitable economic development. A close examination of samurai films indicates two predominant forms between 1953 and 1970. Far from being a static genre that embraced choreographed fight scenes and larger-than-life heroes, postwar samurai films reflected the changing values of their time: samurai films of the mid-1950s called for a return to prewar values while 1960s films used cynicism and violence to critique the failures of society. 1950s samurai films tended to center around a celebration of the traditional Japanese village, represented as the only truly authentic Japanese way of life and a return to prewar constructions of masculinity and gender relations. A decade later, Japanese film-makers used the same samurai motif to opposing ends, tending to repudiate nostalgia for a lost, primarily rural Japan. Their films critiqued present-day Japan for being overly hierarchical and identified the rural Japanese village and the virtues associated with it as sources of current illegitimate inequalities and class-based injustices.

Studying these films provides insight into the values of the producers and consumers of those films. I will analyze the values espoused by nostalgic films popular after the war and the repudiation of those values in films of the following decade. Values
espoused by nostalgic films popular in the decade or so after the end of the Second World War form a sharp contrast to the repudiation of those values in films of the following decade and highlight the principal tensions—both generational and demographic—that would accompany Japan’s re-emergence as an independent nation and industrial powerhouse by the 1970s.
CHAPTER II

THE EMERGENCE OF POSTWAR CINEMA GENRES AND AUDIENCES

Although the abject poverty in Japan during and immediately following the American occupation might suggest that few people could afford to go to theaters, the postwar era was actually the height of Japanese film production. During the 1950s, Japan led the world in the total number of films produced. It was the peak of Japanese film production and of samurai films in particular. The average Japanese went to the movies ten times per year; the average Tokyoite, twenty or as often as twice per month. Most films were shown as double bills and consisted of a period film, jidaigeki, paired with a contemporary drama, gendaigeki. By the early 1950s, there were 2,641 theaters in Japan, matching the postwar total, and by 1959 that number increased to 7,401. In 1958 1,127 million tickets were sold and in 1960, film production peaked with 547 films made in Japan. However, television, studio strikes, and poor management soon caused the major studios to rethink their strategy, focusing on less expensive contemporary

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3 Galbraith, 186.


5 The average American went to the movie theater 10 times per year and the average Englishman 18 times during the same period, Anderson, 412.

6 Anderson, 412-415.
In the 1950s it became increasingly difficult to make the spectacular period films so popular during the 1950s. Kurosawa was one of the only directors to do so after 1970, since he could obtain foreign funding after his early successes, such as *Rashomon* (1951), and as a consequence of his status as an auteur in American film circles. Even if the big, spectacular, period films of the 1950s were no longer within financial reach of most Japanese studios, films—particularly with samurai themes—did not decline in popularity. In the 1960s, Japanese audiences and appetites for samurai films grew and studios strove to meet increased demand.

Men were the principle audiences for Japanese films at this time. This is all the more true for films that featured spectacular sword fighting—the so-called “samurai” films with which this paper is principally concerned. This is not exclusively or reductively due to the masculine associations with fighting and war. Standish has argued that as television became more popular in the early 1960s, it became associated with the domestic and the female, while the cinema itself—as well as the genres particular to it—became associated with men and conflicts central to the construction of Japanese masculinity. Film genres emerged as part of major studios' efforts to tailor their films for male audiences. Thus, rather than attempting to attract men to the theaters with films that catered to them, studios concentrated production in certain genres because the cinema audience was presumed male. Nikkatsu filmed *romanporuno* (soft-core' pornography), Toei produced films about honorable gangsters, and Daiei specialized in eroticized, exoticized.

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superheroic samurai.⁹ Studios believed films featuring samurai and sword fighting suited the tastes and expectations of their principally male audiences.

Films made in Japan in the decades following World War II did not merely strive to capture the attention and shape the fantasy life of Japanese men with their deployment of scenes of fighting and violence. Critics and historians agree that the most popular and acclaimed films made in this period spoke to specifically masculine concerns with the diminution of national honor and prestige that losing the war and the crisis that the experience of occupation created for Japanese men. A nostalgic look at the pre-war and pre-industrial Japanese past characterized much Japanese film making in the 1950s, while a period of pronounced cynicism in film-making about this same imagined past followed in the 1960s. However, less has been said about what made a film nostalgic or cynical and how this shift reflected and encouraged a change in values. I argue that nostalgic films resurrected prewar values, reiterating the centrality of the village in constructing Japanese identity, privileging chaste love over romance, and constructing male homosocial relations around a father-son ideal. In contrast, cynical films mocked these values and used depictions of *bushido* to critique Japanese society. Furthermore, the formal elements of these films supported the nostalgic or cynical values contained within. Samurai films during the 1950s promoted a return to the values embraced by prewar *jidaigeki;* but as a new generation of filmmakers emerged in the 1960s, samurai films began to critique the failings of postwar Japan. These two decades saw the peak of Japanese film production as well as the greatest number of samurai films. The shift from

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⁹ Standish, *A New History of Japanese Cinema,* 269-271. In addition, Kurosawa's comments in a 1986 interview also suggest that the primary audience for samurai films was men. He registered his surprise that his recent film, *Ran,* had become popular among women, unlike his previous works; Bert Cardullo, editor, *Akira Kurosawa: Interviews* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2008), 140.
nostalgia to cynicism in samurai films reflects changing values in postwar Japanese society, as revealed through a close reading of these films. The plotlines, recurrent and high-profile characters, and visual iconography within the films made between 1953 and 1970 serve as guideposts for this transformation.
CHAPTER III

HISTORIOGRAPHIC AND METHODOLOGICAL CONCERNS

Despite the surge in post-war Japanese film production, and its economic importance, serious lacunae remain in Japanese film scholarship. Mitsuhiro Yoshimoto and Isolde Standish - point out the drawbacks of scholarship produced by Japanese scholars who know a great deal about Japan but little about film per se, as well as that produced by film scholars or aficionados who bring great insight to the analysis of cinematic texts but have tended to be unfamiliar with the specifics of Japanese culture and history. Both deficiencies render a deep understanding or useful analysis of Japanese film culture rare in the scholarship.10 According to Yoshimoto, the former group, best represented by Donald Richie and J.T. Anderson, began publishing humanistic celebrations of Japanese film during the 1960s. Their works portrayed Japan as a land of exoticism and alien culture, embedding an unproblematised sense of "nation character" and "the Japanese mind" in Japanese film studies that would prove difficult to dislodge.11 These critics used Japanese terms without scrutiny, thus creating a discourse of difference between Western and Japanese film.12 The over-emphasis of "nation character" and "the


11 Yoshimoto, 8-10.

12 Yoshimoto, 18.
Japanese mind" made the focus of their analysis the difference between Japanese and Western films, rather than the values and meanings conveyed by the films themselves.

Film theorists, most of whom knew a great deal about film but very little about Japan or Japanese culture, turned their attention to Japanese films in the late 1970s; however, their work also primarily served to reiterate the idea of a fundamental difference between Japanese and Western film. One of these theorists, Noel Burch, argued in the late 1970s that the aesthetics of traditional Japanese arts was replicated in early Japanese film, but in the past decade both Yoshimoto and Standish countered that his view of Japan was inherently Orientalist, a notion first elaborated by Edward Said in reference to the politicized meanings generated in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries by European writers about a mythical "East", that inevitably situates states and peoples located "East" of Europe as its fundamental antithesis. Since Said, many humanist critics of the construction of a Western self based around this polarity have extended his analysis to films and other popular media of the twentieth century. Like the first group of humanist critics, Burch's analysis again reduced to a comparison between Tokyo and Hollywood, creating a Japanese Other against which to measure Western film. In the work of scholars such as Burch the dichotomy of East/West continued to express itself in static and reductive comparisons between Tokyo and Hollywood, repetitively reformulating a Japanese Other against which to measure Western film rather than viewing Japanese film on its own terms embedded in its own changing historical context.¹³

¹³ One of the ongoing challenges of Western scholarship in Japan has been the issue of Orientalism. Scholars have struggled to study Japan without their scholarship reducing to a representation of Japan as backwards, feudal, exotic, and groupist - overlooking differences among the Japanese people as well as changes over time. Moreover, there was a constant exchange of ideas between Hollywood and the Japanese film industry throughout the 1950s and 1960s.
Standish and Yoshimoto have both looked for ways to theorize Japanese film without falling into an Orientalist paradigm. Standish has noted that one obvious solution to this dilemma is to examine the work of Japanese film critics; however, film scholarship is virtually nonexistent within Japan, outside of a recounting of events with minimal analysis.\textsuperscript{14} Standish and Yoshimoto's scholarship has suggested that the solution to this epistemological problem is to examine Japanese films within their historical context, with respect to both current events and Japanese film trends. For example, Yoshimoto grounded his analysis of Kurosawa's *Seven Samurai (Shichinin no samurai, 1954)* with a discussion of the *jidaigeki* genre in Japan and Kurosawa's relationship to it.\textsuperscript{15} Similarly, Standish used cultural context and genre conventions to argue that *ninkyo* (gangster films) were a response to social alienation and the breakdown of male homosocial relations.\textsuperscript{16} By emphasizing the place of Japanese films within a historical context alongside similar films, Standish and Yoshimoto were able to analyze Japanese films without falling into problematic discourses of difference.

Despite the prominent place of samurai films in the Western idea of Japanese cinema, very little has been written on the genre. Beginning with the 1965 publication of Donald Richie's *The Films of Akira Kurosawa*, numerous works celebrating Kurosawa as auteur have been produced. Naturally, their focus is primarily Kurosawa's technique, influences, actors, and technicians rather than the overall context of film in Japan at the


\textsuperscript{15} Yoshimoto, 205-246.

A few authors have written books on samurai films but these seem intended more for popular consumption than for academia. Alain Silver dedicated his book, *The Samurai Film*, to "anyone who seeks to understand the inbred, cultural foundations of the Samurai film," and so it should not be surprising that his explanations of samurai and Japanese culture contained numerous misrepresentations and inaccuracies. Patrick Galloway's *Stray Dogs and Lone Wolves: The Samurai Film Handbook* was written for American fans of samurai films and emphasized plot summaries and short biographies of famous actors and directors. Stuart Galbraith included a chapter on samurai film in his survey, *Japanese Cinema*. As with the rest of the book, it listed what Galbraith considers the most important films, actors, and directors of the genre. A handful of academics have included chapters on period films as part of larger surveys. Darrell William Davis studied pre-war period films in his book, *Picturing Japaneseness*, centering his analysis on the idea of how national cinema constructed identity in Japan. He did include a final chapter on postwar period films, but as with the rest of his book his analysis contained serious flaws. It is unclear how he selected his films and how films fit into the political and economic contexts of the time. Moreover, he frequently read Japaneseness into


20 Galbraith, 120-139.

"exotic" objects such as bushido and Zen, and used these terms without further analysis. Finally, Standish did include a necessarily limited analysis of the genre in her survey of Japanese film, but was more concerned with the transition from cruel samurai films to yakuza films. My goal is to examine the values and central tensions constructed within samurai films in postwar Japan, since these are a reflection of the values and tensions of postwar Japanese society as a whole. There has not been a critical examination of the values in postwar samurai films.

The very idea of "the samurai film" as a genre is unique to American ways of viewing film as categorized by themes and recurrent characters or plotlines—in this case, the appearance of the samurai as a key figure or the presence of swordplay. Japanese critics find the issue of temporal setting far more significant to analysis of films, dividing post-war Japanese films into just two principal categories: gendaigeki (contemporary drama) and jidaigeki (period drama) regardless of subject. Only films in the distant past are jidaigeki, so a film made in the 1970s but set in the 1950s would be considered gendaigeki. Setting the film in the past determines the genre assignment of a film more than the presence or absence of samurai. Many American-designated “samurai films” are not actually about samurai; yakuza (gangsters) and ronin (unemployed samurai) are popular characters ubiquitously sprinkled throughout many Japanese films without attracting much attention from Japanese audiences as such. Nevertheless, and for the purposes of assessing the significance of samurai characters and the plots that principally

24 Yoshimoto, 210-214.
feature them, I will use the term "samurai film" to distinguish those *jidaigeki* that emphatically center around spectacular sword fights from other *jidaigeki* which do not.²⁵

Ideally, a study on the values of *jidaigeki* should identify and possibly center upon those films that were most widely viewed by Japanese theatergoers. Unfortunately, box office data for specific films is difficult to obtain. Distributors did not publish box office gross before 1999, and even now only data on the top successes are available.²⁶ The following films have been selected by critics as the best of the genre or enjoyed popularity that can be demonstrated by the production of sequels or the continued favoring of the director and stars within the studio system. Many of the films were cited by *Kinema Junpo*, a film industry magazine, as among the best produced during the year of their release. Many also received acclaim from critics abroad, even winning Academy Awards. For instance, of the early films, Kinugasa Teinosuke's *Gate of Hell* (*Jigokumon*, 1953) and Inagaki Hiroshi's *Samurai* trilogy (*Miyamoto musashi*, 1954-1956) both received Academy Awards for best-foreign language film—these films went on to become classics in the eyes of Japanese audiences as well. Kurosawa's *Seven Samurai* (*Shichinin no samurai*, 1954)—a film highly rated and wildly popular in the United States—was ranked as the third-best film of 1954 by *Kinema Junpo* magazine.²⁷ This same standard-bearer ranked Kurosawa's *The Hidden Fortress* (*Kakushi toride no san*...
akunin, 1958) second-best for 1958. Of the later films, Kurosawa's Yojimbo (1961) was ranked second best film of 1961 and Sanjuro (Tsubaki sanjuro, 1962) was ranked fifth best film of 1962. Kobayashi Masaki's Harakiri (Seppuku, 1962) was ranked third best film of 1962. The Zatoichi franchise was clearly commercially successful, with twenty-six entries in the series between 1962 and 1989. While none of Gosha Hideo's jidaigeki were ranked by Kinema Junpo or had sequels, he directed seven samurai films between 1964 and 1969, and one, Goyokin (Goyokin, 1969) was the first Japanese movie filmed in Panavision. Okamoto Kitahachi, director of The Sword of Doom (Daibosatsu toge, 1966), received multiple lifetime achievement awards from Japanese film critics, as well as a Japanese Academy Award. All of these films are prominently cited in the secondary literature on samurai film, including Galloway, Silver, and Galbraith. Although it is not possible to obtain box office figures on jidaigeki, these films are representative of the genre.

In the following two sections, I follow the methods of Standish and Yoshimoto in analyzing postwar samurai films. The films fall roughly into two groups. From 1953-1960, filmmakers embraced values prevalent in prewar films and created a nostalgic atmosphere in their films, and from 1961-1970 filmmakers instead used the

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28 Sengo kinema junpo besuto ten zenshi, 74.

29 Sengo kinema junpo besuto ten zenshi, 96, 103.

30 Galbraith, 187.


32 It should be noted that the selection of films by secondary authors may be skewed by the availability of films outside of Japan; generally, it is easier to obtain copies of films from the 1960s than the 1950s particularly if the film can claim a cult following; Galbraith, 121-139; Alain Silver, The Samurai Film; Patrick Galloway, Stray Dogs and Lone Wolves
trappings of samurai films to critique economic inequality and government corruption, as well as the values of the nostalgic films, through a cynical, violent past.
CHAPTER IV

NOSTALGIC FILMS: THE RETURN TO PREWAR VALUES, 1953-1960

Samurai films made in the early years after the occupation were generally nostalgic for pre-World War II values. This is not to say that they advocated a return to militarism, which was seen as a national failure, but rather to positive ideas of manhood and heroism. Nostalgic filmmakers used bright colors, stirring orchestral music, and performance of traditional arts such as koto music and noh theater to project a positive view of the past. The films promoted the village as the center of Japanese identity, prewar constructions of masculinity, and prewar idealized relations between men and women, often in opposition to the values that American occupation censors had attempted to impose on the film industry. Like conservative historians, who elided the successes of the Meiji reforms and the postwar recovery, these films allowed viewers to connect with the triumphs of the Japanese past while overlooking the failures of militarism and war.33 Some of these films drew on classic stories that had been popular before the war, like Inagaki's Miyamoto Musashi trilogy.34 The end of occupation film censorship saw a resurgence of positive prewar values from directors who had been popular before the war.


34 Musashi is of course a historical figure famous for writing the Book of Five Rings, but Inagaki's film was more directly based on an extremely popular novel by Yoshikawa Eiji serialized in the Asahi Shimbun between 1935 and 1939; Edwin O. Reischauer, "Foreward," in Musashi, by Eiji Yoshikawa, translated by Edwin O. Reischauer (United States: Kodansha America Ltd, 1995), ix.
The nostalgia of samurai films was likely influenced by the neoconservative response to the radical changes brought about by occupation and the new constitution. The 1946 constitution and the laws enacted immediately thereafter radically changed Japanese society: the new Labor Union law gave workers the right to strike, sweeping land reforms redistributed land ownership in rural Japan, the education system and the Ministry of Education were democratized, and husbands and wives became legal equals.35 There was also a sense of optimism and intellectual freedom among the educated, and an impulse towards political radicalism. At times during 1946, Japan seemed almost ready for a socialist revolution - labor unions expanded and workers seized enterprises and engaged in production control to demonstrate their power against employers. However, SCAP (Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers) officials soon became concerned with the mass rallies against Japanese government officials. May Day rallies that year brought hundreds of thousands of Japanese to the streets.36 In this context, many Japanese saw a real possibility of socialist revolution. The government responded by banning strikes, which MacArthur supported, and adopting some of the less radical "socialist" steps, such as including union leaders in economic planning meetings.37 By 1950, in response to rising Cold War tensions and the Korean War, SCAP began to reverse course. The Japan Communist Party's central committee was purged and its newspaper was suspended, and the National Police Reserve was established as a first step towards rearmament. The Diet


followed suit, and throughout 1952-1954 reversed a number of early reforms, regulating strikes, softening antimonopoly laws, centralizing control over schools, and establishing the Self-Defense Forces.\textsuperscript{38} These policies were supported by a rising neoconservative movement that wished to maintain the achievements of the immediate postwar without revolutionary excesses. Neoconservatives supported the welfare state, individual freedom, and the reform of conservative policies while defending against communism and the postwar left.\textsuperscript{39} The early days of the occupation were marked by political radicalism and the potential for socialist revolution, but by 1950 these sentiments had given way to conservativism in the face of social change and communist threat. This was reflected in the conservative nature of the nostalgic \textit{jidaigeki}. 

During the occupation, American authorities censored the majority of period films for promoting what they considered "feudalistic" values. Any film that promoted \textit{oyabun-kobun} (boss-follower) relationships, and in the censors' eyes, blind obedience, was banned as "feudal." In addition, censors prohibited any depiction of swords, even in imported films such as \textit{The Mark of Zorro} (1940). Kyoko Hirano suggested that this is because American propaganda films had used the sword as a symbol of undemocratic samurai oppression against lower classes and Japanese aggression.\textsuperscript{40} Censors also opposed the use of any stories believed to promote feudal loyalty and revenge, which made it impossible to film many subjects that had been previously popular in Japanese

\textsuperscript{38} Fukui, 158-159.  
\textsuperscript{39} Koschmann, 243.  
Instead they promoted films that praised democracy, the new constitution, women's liberation, and baseball. Open sexual expression had been forbidden by Japanese wartime authorities as a symbol of American decadence. Similarly citing sexual expression as a key battleground in the fight to influence public values through cinema, SCAP censors believed that the lack of public affection was indicative of Japanese tendencies towards keeping emotion hidden and "sneakiness." Nevertheless, the Japanese public still embraced new "democratization" films, despite high ticket costs, rapid inflation, and abject poverty. During the occupation SCAP censors strongly encouraged studios and directors to produce values that they believed were American and would have a positive influence on the Japanese people, particularly regarding key ideological areas such as the acceptance of the constitution and American occupiers. At the same time, SCAP officials discouraged images and themes that they perceived as threatening, particularly swords and period dramas. After the occupation ended in 1952, directors were able to return to images and themes that they found appealing, perhaps even more appealing because of their newfound freedom from censorship.

All of the directors of nostalgic films had been active before and during the war. Occupation authorities removed almost no actors, directors, or producers. Kurosawa had begun his career as a director during the war, and his early films reflected values promoted by wartime censors. *Sanshiro Sugata* (1943) celebrated the athleticism of

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41 Hirano, 38.
42 Hirano, 146-176.
43 Hirano, 178.
44 Hirano, 147.
Japanese martial arts and *The Most Beautiful* (*Ichiban utsukushiku*, 1944) praised the lives of Japanese women working in munitions factories during the war. Kinugasa began his career as a director in 1922 with *A Page of Madness* (*Kurutta ippeji*), and made many films until his death in 1982. Japanese critics have consistently ranked Inagaki's wartime classic, *The Life of Muho Matsu* (*Muho matsu no issho*, 1943), as one of the ten best war films of all time and one of the top twenty Japanese films ever. Although American censorship interrupted the production of period films, directors who had been popular before and during the war immediately resumed producing samurai films that promoted prewar values after the occupation ended.

Early postwar samurai films embraced the construction of the village as the center of Japanese culture and identity, a practice that had roots in the prewar period. During the 1930s, folklorist Yanagita Kunio and agrarianist Miyashita Itara saw the village as embodying normative values and communalism against their newly urbanized society. This idea helped to construct an imagined community in Japan. Yanagita also believed that there existed a "true" Japan within the "present" Japan in remote mountain villages - in other words, by shifting from time to space he wanted to show that there had always existed a "true" and unified Japanese people. These prewar constructions of the village

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as the site of normative values, communalism, and the true Japanese identity all reappeared in nostalgic samurai films.

Both Kurosawa and Inagaki featured the traditional village as a place to reconnect with one's Japanese identity and learn socially normative values, and therefore a place that needed to be protected. The clearest example is Kurosawa's *Seven Samurai*, in which the seven heroes had to protect the traditional village from bandits who seek to destroy it. Kurosawa showed the heroes gaining a certain understanding through the time spent in the village that allowed them to rise above their status as poor unemployed samurai. For example, Kikuchiyo, a peasant's son masquerading as one of the seven, was accepted by the other samurai as their equal through his experience of returning to and defending the village. Katsushiro, the youngest of the seven, also matured in the village, falling in love and fighting a real battle for the first time. Kurosawa took up this theme again in *The Hidden Fortress*. The film followed General Rokurota and Princess Yuki's journey as they tried to escape from enemy territory with enough gold to rebuild their army, aided by two greedy peasants. During their journey, they hid by pretending to be part of a group of peasants going to a fire festival, in which they then participated. In order to maintain their disguise, the greedy peasants had to throw their cart of gold, hidden in firewood, into the bonfire. Although they were not yet cured of their greed, the incident in the village marked the point at which they began to realize that their misfortunes were caused by their own greed. Later, when Rokurota and Yuki were later captured, she told him that he should not feel sorry for failing her because the journey was interesting, especially participating in the fire festival. Kurosawa used the exchange to show that Yuki had also
learned how to be a leader from the experience, and that the village as a key site of growth. Similarly, in the third film of Inagaki's *Samurai* trilogy, Miyamoto Musashi postponed his duel with his archrival, Sasaki Kojiro, for one year so that he could live in a village and farm the land there. Inagaki showed Mushashi leading his companions in productively reclaiming land and growing crops, instead of being wandering swordsman doing odd jobs and winning duels for money. As with *The Hidden Fortress*, the village became an essential site of growth for Musashi that could not be bypassed even for a critical duel. Thus Inagaki's film suggests that he saw becoming a good Japanese citizen, through the positive influence of the village, as more important than becoming the best swordsman. And as in the *Seven Samurai*, Musashi saved the village from a bandit attack through his own heroism and his leadership of the villagers. Like Kurosawa, Inagaki used the site of the village to show how the Japanese people could withstand outside threats by coming together under through the traditional village. For both Kurosawa and Inagaki, the village was necessary in order for their heroes to form their heroic identity and fully become part of society, and therefore needed to be protected.

Postwar samurai films also returned to prewar romantic ideals, despite (and perhaps in response to) occupation censors' attempts to use romance as an antidote to "feudalism" and its evils. Before the war, the *jidaigeki* genre embraced a heroic masculinity that was incompatible with romance. In many films, the female love interest had to die in order for the hero to fulfill his heroic duty.\(^49\) Romantic love became a threat to male honor and heroism, so the female love interest had to sacrifice herself for the good of the hero. Prewar films also showed women sublimating their love for soldiers

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into love for a patriotic job, such as spying or nursing.\textsuperscript{50} After the war, occupation censors saw romance as an antidote for undesirable feudal values because prewar, "feudal" films did not romantic themes. In particular, they were convinced that the lack of kissing in films was a prime example of Japanese "sneakiness" and strongly pressured directors to include kissing scenes in romantic films. Critics had mixed reactions. Some thought that kissing scenes did not accurately portray how Japanese people acted, while others found kissing scenes superficial and sensational.\textsuperscript{51} But more importantly, occupation censors were effectively attempting to restructure sexuality and femininity. However, nostalgic samurai films advocated for a return to the old economy of unconsummated love, which shows that the occupation censors were not fully successful. Nostalgic films promoted the prewar ideal of unconsummated romantic love.

Romance was most strongly portrayed as a threat to male honor in Kinugasa's \textit{Gate of Hell}. Kinugasa's film told the story of Moritoh, initially the perfect twelfth-century warrior who fell from honor because of his obsessive love for the lady Kesa. Moritoh had been commendably loyal to his rightful lord, Kiyomori, in combat, even turning in his own brother as a traitor. During the initial fight scene, he rescued and fell in love with the empress's lady-in-waiting, Kesa, and when Kiyomori offered him a reward, Moritoh requested Kesa. However, she was already married to another lord, Wataru, and so Kiyomori told Moritoh that his wish was impossible. If Moritoh had given up then, he could have remained a hero. But he would not abandon his passion, resulting in Kesa's death and his dishonor. Moritoh began as the perfect warrior, but had

\textsuperscript{50} Standish, \textit{A New History of Japanese Cinema}, 148.

\textsuperscript{51} Hirano, 156-159.
become a failure because he did not resist his romantic passion towards Kesa.\textsuperscript{52} Through Moritoh's failure, Kinugasa showed the dangers of romantic passion to male heroicism. Had Moritoh been able to resist his passion for Kesa, he could have remained Kiyomori's best warrior.

In contrast, Ingaki's paragon of male heroism, Miyamoto Musashi, remained immune to romantic ardor in the \textit{Samurai} trilogy. In the first film, there were many instances where Musashi's ability to resist romantic love served him well, and his best friend Matahatchi's inability to put aside his passions emasculated him. Musashi and Matahatchi temporarily lived with Akemi and her mother, Okoh. Both Akemi and Okoh tried to seduce Musashi and failed while Matahatchi became Okoh's lover. As a result, Musashi was able to travel and hone his sword skills, while Matahatchi was jobless and subject to Okoh's whims. In the second film, Inagaki showed Musashi fighting a budding romance between him and his childhood friend, Otsu. After waiting for Musashi for years, Otsu decided to search Japan for him. When the two met, he told her that he preferred his sword to her company, although he loved her too. This again reflected the importance of renouncing women in Musashi's quest to become the ideal warrior. In the final sequence, Musashi and Otsu were in the woods together, and he began to kiss her. Although she had been lovingly following him, she nevertheless pushed him away and he loudly decided to give up women forever. As the ideal woman, Otsu had to force Musashi to abandon his love for her, despite her own feelings, so that he would choose

\textsuperscript{52} Davis has interpreted \textit{Gate of Hell} as a cautionary tale on the origins of \textit{bushido}, the system of samurai honor, and the psychic aftershocks of war. It should be noted that there is no mention of \textit{bushido} per se within the film, nor does Moritoh's war experience seem to be nearly as great a threat as his obsession for Kesa, 224.
masculine honor over romantic love. Musashi succeeded in becoming the ideal samurai because he was able to avoid the romantic love that undid Moritoh in *Gate of Hell*.

Father-son relationships also continued to structure society in nostalgic films. According to Standish, prewar films portrayed "an idealized masculinity in the depiction of the father, and . . . the implicit 'rite of passage' to manhood and citizenship of the son through the example of the father." Becoming a man in prewar film required - and was perhaps impossible without - the guidance of a father figure, not necessarily biological. This trope was again used in nostalgic films; for some heroes, becoming a man required accepting the role as father figure.

In the *Seven Samurai*, Kurosawa showed the leader of the seven, Kanbei, taking on the role of father figure to younger members of the seven. His example led the younger samurai to also accept the role as village defenders - the next samurai to join was Katsuhiro, who quickly came to appreciate Kanbei as a father figure and his respect for the farmers inspired Katsuhiro to give the farmers money for rice after they had run out. It similarly fell to Kanbei to "tame" the youngest of the seven, the irrepressible peasant Kikuchiyo. Kikuchiyo's wild, impulsive strength was a potential liability in the defense of the village, but gradually the older samurai, particularly Kanbei, convinced him to follow their leadership. Finally, when a baby was orphaned in the fighting, Kikuchiyo rescued him and thus continued the chain of father-son relationships within the film. For Kanbei, accepting the role of father was part of his heroism, because without his guidance, Kikuchiyo and Katsuhiro could not enter society as heroic men. Part of Kikuchiyo's growth was accepting responsibility for the infant he rescued. Kurosawa's

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film treated the father-son relationship as essential to the development of heroes - a man must learn to follow the good example of his father figure first, then he must in turn become a father figure to younger men.

In Inagaki's *Samurai* trilogy, father-son relationships were even more critical. This theme was in part a continuation of his acclaimed wartime film, *The Life of Muho Matsu*, about a rickshaw man who acted as a father to an orphan boy. In the first film, Inagaki depicted Musashi as physically strong, but wild. When Musashi was about to be punished by the local lord, an older priest, Takuan, asked for Musashi's life so that he could reform him. Because of Takuan's influence, Musashi was able to reenter society and begin his quest across Japan to become the strongest swordsman. He was not integrated into village society because he lacked a father, but with Takuan's fatherly guidance he was able to become a valued member of society. As Musashi became a man in the third film, he also assumed the role of father figure to a young orphan, Jotaro, as well as a local thug, Kuma. Just as Musashi had needed to embrace village life to become a true warrior, he also needed to accept his role as father figure in turn before he could face his archrival in their final battle. Nostalgic films showed that young men needed older mentors, and then became mentors themselves after they had achieved manhood, just as prewar films had done.

In addition, masculinity was often portrayed as a natural quality in nostalgic films. Directors used cuts between masculine heroes and scenes of nature to create a connection for the viewer between the two; in addition, some heroes had to travel into nature in order to fully realize their heroic potential. Connecting nature and masculinity served to hide
the constructed and changing nature of on-screen depictions of masculinity by arguing that it was natural and therefore inherent and unassailable. However, natural masculinity was not enough for the nostalgic hero. Through the help of older mentors, and time spent in a traditional village (not a city), the natural masculinity of the hero was tamed so that he could be a productive member of society. Masculinity was natural, but only fully realized through the help of older mentors and time spent in the traditional village.

Kurosawa used scenes of nature to establish Kikuchiyo's masculinity in the *Seven Samurai*. At first, the other samurai did not accept Kikuchiyo as one of them. As they walked to the village along the main road, Kikuchiyo followed through the woods. Then, they watched him catching fish bare-handed in a stream and cooking it on a fire. These scenes established Kikuchiyo as part of nature. But by the end of the film, through Kanbei's mentoring and the influence of the village, Kikuchiyo was accepted by the villagers and the samurai as a man. Kikuchiyo's natural masculinity was tamed by the influence of the village and older men.

Similarly, the heroes of Inagaki's *Samurai* trilogy embodied natural masculinity that was later civilized through the village and the help of older mentors. Throughout the first film, Inagaki tied Musashi to nature. After Musashi left Akemi and her mother's house, Inagaki included a long montage of shots of Musashi interspersed with mountains, waterfalls, and scenes of nature. This visually connected Musashi with the natural world. In the third film, Inagaki even showed Musashi's archrival, Sasaki Kojiro, traveling into the wilderness in order to improve his sword skills - it was not enough for him to practice in the city because he could not assert his masculinity as a swordsman without first
connecting to nature. However, because he was not as fully a part of nature as Musashi, Kojiro was defeated in their final battle. Throughout the final sequence, Inagaki portrayed Kojiro as tied to civilization and Musashi to nature. Kojiro arrived with an entourage of cultured lords while Musashi arrived on a humble fishing boat. Inagaki filmed Kojiro with his back to the lords, while Musashi's back was to the sea. Thus, in each cut, Kojiro was tied to civilization and Musashi was tied to the ocean and the setting sun. In effect, Musashi's natural masculinity, though tamed, defeated the civilized sword fighting of Kojiro. The *Samurai* trilogy portrayed masculinity as natural and powerful; once tamed by the influence of the traditional village and older mentors, this masculinity could overcome even the strongest rival.

The nostalgic themes of the village, unconsummated romance, father-son relationships, and natural masculinity were reinforced by the formal qualities of the films. Nostalgic films often employed bright colors, in stark contrast to later cynical films that were shot in black and white. Even by the end of the 1960s when all films were shot in color, cynical films employed a darker palette than nostalgic films. Similarly, the Japan of nostalgic films had a bright cleanness to it. Even if, according to the plot, the hero had been camping for days, his kimono would still be impeccably clean and coordinated. Nostalgic films usually had stirring orchestral scores, while cynical films began to use contemporary jazz and mambo in the soundtrack. Finally, the depiction of violence shifted from bloodless to realistic and graphic. Nostalgic films made Japan's past (and past values) appear pure and desirable.
The use of color supported the nostalgic aesthetic of early postwar films while later films reverted to black and white. The first sequence in *Gate of Hell* showed the Heike clan fleeing their palace in a flurry of bright, multi-colored kimono and banners. Bright colors were also used to differentiate sides in the conflict. The protagonist, Moritoh, always wore bright blues, while his love interest, Kesa, wore red. Kesa's husband wore red during the horse race where he competed against Moritoh, and golds later in the film. Despite the tragic events of the film, life as a medieval Japanese aristocrat appears beautiful throughout. Similarly, Inagaki's *Samurai* trilogy was shot in full color with a certain nostalgic brightness to them. The brilliant colors in both films give a cheerful, desirable look to the past, encouraging viewers to forget the recent, negative past of the war and occupation in favor of the positive values of nostalgic films.

Nostalgic films also had a clean aesthetic. Nostalgic films featured bright, coordinated kimono; peasants could appear artistically dirty, as befit their role, but heroes and samurai always appeared well-maintained. Musashi from the *Samurai* trilogy never became visibly disheveled during his travels, and he appeared perfectly composed after his final battle against Sasaki Kojiro. In a sense, heroes were immune to any chaos or misfortune that might befall them. Similarly, the wealthy nobles of *Gate of Hell* were impeccably clothed and their mansions impeccably furnished. As with the use of color, unrealistic cleanliness made the past and its values appear desirable. Nostalgic films avoided dirt, lest it undermine the idyllic past.

Music also changed between the nostalgic and cynical films. Nostalgic films used an orchestral soundtrack, occasionally with interludes of *koto* or other Japanese
instrumentation. Koto was especially prominent in *Gate of Hell*, as Kesa's *koto* skills emphasized her status as traditional romantic lead, standing against assault from Moritoh's defiance of traditional romantic ideals. The orchestral score often maintained the mise-en-scene of a period film, while heightening the sense of heroism surrounding the protagonist. As with the use of color and cleanliness, music helped to create a desirable, idealized past.

Similarly, the clean violence of nostalgic *jidaigeki* reinforced social order and conservative values. These older films did not show blood or the act of *seppuku*, ritual suicide by disembowelment. Typically, fight scenes in nostalgic films featured the hero bloodlessly striking his opponents with his blade. Realistically, a fatal sword wound would bleed but blood was never shown on kimono or on the sword blade. Perhaps the best example is the final installment of Inagaki's *Samurai* trilogy, where Sasaki Kojiro smiled peacefully in death after Musashi killed him in a duel. Nostalgic films also avoided the use of guns, even if they were accurate to the period. The exception is Kurosawa, although guns were always of secondary importance to swords and bows. The sword is an inherently nostalgic weapon, and its use reads as less real, and more symbolic, to modern audiences than a gun.

The form of nostalgic samurai films reinforced their return to prewar values. The films used bright, cheerful colors, pristine sets and costumes, stirring orchestral music and *koto*, and unrealistic violence to present a desirable view of the past. Within this realm, characters and stories reaffirmed prewar values such as the position of the village as the heart of Japanese identity, the perception of romance as a threat to male honor, the
privileging of father-son relationships, and the presentation of true masculinity as a natural virtue. Although occupation censors had tried to replace "feudal" values with pro-American ones, some directors chose to promote prewar values through period films.
CHAPTER V

CYNICAL FILMS: AGAINST SOCIAL INJUSTICE AND NOSTALGIC VALUES, 1961-1970

While nostalgic films attempted to reinforce prewar values, the cynical films that emerged during the 1960s used images of Japan's samurai past to critique contemporary social problems, particularly greed, materialism, and government corruption. These films were filmed in black and white to create a bleaker aesthetic, and showed dirty samurai and peasants in a hostile world. Often modern jazz or enka was used for soundtracks, and low-class shamisen music replaced the high-class koto music within the films. These films repudiated traditional values, mocking villagers, embracing romantic love, and promoting alternative ideas of masculinity. Bushido, often assumed to be the unchanging code of the samurai warrior, had been largely absent in nostalgic films but reappeared in the new cynical films as a substitute for contemporary problems. Throughout the 1960s, samurai films used the trappings of the past to encourage social change, rather than a return to nostalgic values.

Although the shift from nostalgic to cynical samurai films was somewhat gradual - many films from the late 1950s and early 1960s have both cynical and nostalgic qualities - key political events during 1959-1960 fostered a sentiment of
disenfranchisement and anger at corporate and government power. First, the 313-day strike and lockout at the Miike Mine ended in favor of the company. In 1945 Japanese industrial workers began to form powerful unions that throughout the 1950s had protected worker interests by promoting safety, equal treatment, fair wages, and secure careers. These unions controlled wages and promotions, basing them on seniority and therefore the assumed need of individual workers. However, as part of the movement to increase productivity, managers wanted to move to a merit-pay system and offer different salaries for different jobs. The Miike Mine union had been one of the most powerful of the early postwar unions, and so its defeat in 1960, and the subsequent layoffs of 2,000 union members, effectively signaled the end of the strong postwar unions. At the same time, anti-war students and intellectuals strongly protested the extension and revision of the 1960 US-Japan Security Treaty, which further integrated Japan into the US Cold War defense system. Historically, the 1947 "peace constitution" enjoyed strong public support and many resisted any re-militarization, despite US pressure. Leftist groups who strongly believed in pacifist principles led public protests, but opinion polls showed that fifty percent of respondents endorsed neutrality. Ultimately, Prime Minister Kishi Nobuske signed the treaty, but was forced to resign. Many activists and intellectuals felt disillusioned with the signing of the treaty, and saw it as a failure of postwar democracy because of their inability to affect the political outcome. 


56 J. Victor Koschmann, "Intellectuals and Politics" in *Postwar Japan as History*, 409-411.
strike and the treaty protests fostered a sense that business executives and political leaders did not respect the opinions of the Japanese people. This sentiment revealed itself in the cynicism and emphasis on corporate and government corruption in samurai films.

An emerging younger generation of filmmakers also began to dominate *jidaigeki* production. While nostalgic films were made by directors who had been active before and during the war, such as Inagaki and Kinugasa, most of the directors of cynical films were much younger. Gosha Hideo began his career directing television programs, and his first full-length film was released in 1964.  

Kobayashi Masaki joined Shochiku studios in 1941, spent time in the Japanese army and a POW camp, and then began directing after the war.  

And although Kurosawa had begun his career as a director during the war, he was one of the first directors of samurai film to incorporate the cynical turn in his films with *Yojimbo*. Even Inagaki, who had been one of the most popular directors of prewar and nostalgic samurai films, began making more cynical films with *Chushingura* (1962) and *Samurai Banners* (*Fuurin Kazan*, 1969). Nevertheless, most cynical films were produced by a later generation of film directors.

These directors were part of a larger trend towards filming acts of nihilistic rebellion, often in response to political turmoil. Standish has argued that this strong sense of political disenfranchisement informed the transgressive films of the *taiyozoku*, sun tribe, and Oshima Nagisa. *Taiyozoku* films often portrayed youth committing acts of nihilistic rebellion against their parents and emphasized the generational fissures within Japanese society. Similarly, Oshima showed his characters transgressing the political

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57 Silver, 109.

58 Galloway, 33.
order by refusing to internalize guilt projected on them by society. Cynical samurai films were part of a larger trend in Japanese cinema to show the disillusionment of Japan's youth on screen.

Influenced strongly by an environment of political turmoil and socially responsive film, cynical films depicted frustration with corporate and government greed and corruption. Often, historical figures such as daimyo and yakuza bosses stood in for contemporary leaders. While some directors such as Kobayashi showed their hero fight and be defeated by these social forces, other directors created superhuman figures like Zatoichi and Sanjuro who saved the people from corruption and greed. Unlike nostalgic films, which looked back to a gentler past and prewar values, cynical films showed a corrupt past that stood in place of contemporary social problems.

One of the first, and possibly the most influential, cynical films dealing with theme of greed and the dangers of the modern commercial economy was Kurosawa's Yojimbo. It was set in 1860, shortly after Commodore Perry had opened trade relations with Japan and not dissimilar from 1960 in terms of radical social change. A ronin named Sanjuro arrived in a city plagued by constant violence from two rival yakuza gangs. Disgusted by both sides, he tricked the two gangs into fighting until they completely annihilated each other. But the cinematography of the film suggested that Sanjuro liberated the town from a prison of modern commercialism. Kurosawa, and his cameraman Miyagawa Kazuo, used the grates and and lines of the buildings to suggest a town of cages that the townspeople could not leave out of fear of the yakuza. When Sanjuro sold his services as a bodyguard (yojimbo) to one of the yakuza gangs,

Kurosawa repeatedly cut to the prostitutes working in the gang's brothel. This visually equated Sanjuro selling his labor as a swordsman with the prostitute's sale of their bodies. In a later subplot, the same *yakuza* gang sold the wife of a man in their debt as a concubine, indicating a willingness to sell even unsaleable female bodies. After Sanjuro cleverly saved her and returned her to her husband and son - and in doing so, removed her from the commercial market - the gangs retaliated in turn by destroying a silk warehouse and a sake brewery. These early casualties in the gang war again indicate Kurosawa's belief in the problem of excessive devotion to commercial goods. Ultimately, the town, as a site of commercial activity, needed to be purified by an outsider through the violent deaths of the greedy businessmen, in this case the *yakuza* who comprised most of the town's residents. Wage labor, as a bodyguard or prostitute, and excessive devotion to luxury goods, were both part of the evil of the local *yakuza* corporations. Thus it was the very nature of the town's commercial economy that Sanjuro had to defeat, as much as the corrupt *yakuza* bosses.

In many interviews, Kurosawa expressed a deep frustration and dissatisfaction with corporate greed and materialism in numerous interviews. Although he often insisted that his films did not have an explicit message, he admitted in his later years that his opinions seeped into his films involuntarily. Kurosawa admitted having Marxist political leanings, like many other students during his youth.⁶⁰ He also saw the greed and avoidance of risk prevalent among studio executives as the main roadblock in making

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⁶⁰ Cardullo, 38, 57.
good films. Politically, and throughout his career as a director, Kurosawa was angered by the greed of studio executives and corporations.

Other directors also took on the issue of government and corporate greed as well. Gosha's *Kedamono no Ken (Sword of the Beast, 1965)* included a subplot about a loyal retainer and his wife who illegally mined shogunate gold for their lord, but were then murdered by his men to keep shogunate officials from finding out. The motif of the loyal samurai destroyed by a greedy lord appeared again in his 1969 film, *Goyokin*. The hero, Magobe, had to prevent his former lord from first using a fishing village to steal shogunate gold and then murdering the residents to keep the shogunate officials from discovering his crimes. Similarly, the Zatoichi and Nemuri Kyoshiro franchises both featured many stories where Kyoshiro and Zatoichi defeated greedy merchants and *yakuza* bosses, and thereby showed their heroes resisting corporate and government greed. Kurosawa's ambivalence towards wage labor in *Yojimbo* was echoed by the initial *Zatoichi* film, *The Tale of Zatoichi (Zatoichi Monogatari, 1962)* - just because a *yakuza* boss had hired Zatoichi did not mean that the boss owned his sword skills. After he agreed to work for boss Sukegoro, Zatoichi refused to perform sword tricks at his dinner party, saying that his sword skills were not for parlor tricks. Like Sanjuro, Zatoichi would work for a larger organization when it suited him but his skills could not be bought completely.

Kurosawa also attacked government corruption in his 1962 film, *Sanjuro*. Once again, Mifune Toshiro starred as the wandering ronin, Sanjuro. This time, he walked into a group of nine young samurai meeting at a temple. They were concerned that the

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61 Cardullo, 86-89.
chamberlain of their province, second most powerful after the daimyo, was not addressing local corruption, at least not as enthusiastically as the superintendent, the local shogunate official. However, the much less naive Sanjuro quickly realized that the superintendent was really the source of the problems, and helped the nine overcome the corrupt superintendent and rescue the chamberlain. As in Yojimbo, Sanjuro's position as an outsider allowed him to see the larger situation and purge the corruption from the town. But in this case, the evil was the result of corrupt officials rather than commercial activity.

Many other directors echoed Kurosawa's concern that a significant number of government officials were corrupt and did not care about common people. In Gosha's Kedamono no Ken, the protagonist became a ronin because he was forced out of his clan on false charges by a superior who disliked him. Goyokin depicted feudal lords as equally corrupt, willing to slaughter entire villages in order to steal shogunate gold. Both featured heroes who in some way triumphed over corruption; in the former, the hero quit working as a samurai altogether, choosing to live outside of authority and in the latter, the hero managed to kill the lord who had ordered the murders. Corruption was a recurring and essential theme in the Nemuri Kyoshiro and Zatoichi franchises. Legitimate authority figures were noticeably absent; the people in power were invariably yakuza bosses, corrupt daimyo and shogunate officials working with the yakuza bosses, or corrupt merchants - the subtext was that all authority figures in contemporary Japan were equally corrupt and affiliated with the yakuza. And most stories entailed Zatoichi or Kyoshiro helping the abused and powerless fight against the corrupt and powerful. Part
of the appeal of characters like Zatoichi, Kyoshiro, or Sanjuro was watching a superhuman samurai actually defeat the greed and corruption that many believed was plaguing Japanese society. In making Yojimbo, Kurosawa recalled that "I was so fed up with the world of the yakuza. So in order to attack their evil and irrationality, and thoroughly mess them up, I brought in the super-samurai played by Mifune." For Kurosawa, and other directors, the super-samurai enabled him to show the defeat of contemporary corruption and evil, as represented by yakuza and pre-Meiji officials. One of the most prevalent themes of the cynical films was showing superhuman samurai heroes who could take on government corruption and win.

On the other hand, it may have seemed simpler for directors to directly attack greed and corruption in contemporary dramas rather than in samurai films, but because the studio system often censored direct attacks on corporations and the government, directors needed to couch potentially controversial ideas in seemingly unrelated films. Historically, industry self-censorship was even more pervasive and more effective than censorship by either the Japanese pre-war regime or the American occupation. Industry executives often vetoed a potentially controversial script or film idea before official censors became involved, putting tremendous pressure on directors to at least appear to follow the official ideology. Kurosawa recalled that "in 1960, I made The Bad Sleep Well, a film critical of corruption and bigness in business which destroyed the lives of men working for corporate structures. When I submitted the original script, the producers disagreed with everything. I had to make cowardly compromises. I couldn't show what I

62 Cardullo, 63.

wanted to show -- that the real and final source of corruption was at the top." Producers did not want to make movies that might appear critical of their own large and powerful corporations. Instead, directors hid their criticisms in the trappings of *jidaigeki*, since studio executives had no objection to negative portrayals of *daimyo*, merchants, and *yakuza* bosses.

Although the samurai film genre had modeled conservative values after the occupation ended, directors upset by the social discontent of the late 1950s and early 1960s began to use the genre to attack contemporary social problems, particularly greed and corruption. Film studios had historically engaged in a high degree of self-censorship and continued to engage in self-censorship, making it difficult if not impossible for even internationally famous directors like Kurosawa to address present-day corporate and governmental failings. In response, the conservative samurai film genre was reappropriated; it was acceptable to show corrupt *daimyo* and greedy *yakuza* in a way that was not possible with modern politicians and businessmen. Cynical films were most concerned with attacking and sometimes defeating contemporary social problems, despite their setting in the past.

Cynical films also repudiated the values embraced by nostalgic films. Nostalgic films promoted the village as the center of Japanese identity, prewar constructions of masculinity, and prewar idealized relations between men and women. These values had been prevalent since before the war in *jidaigeki*, but the new cynical films turned against them.

64 Cardullo, 115.
As part of this turn against older films, the cynical samurai films either ignored the previous position of the village as a site of maturation or used it to critique society as a whole. Generally, the village was no longer worthy of mention except as a stop on the way to somewhere more interesting, such as Edo, or a chance site of conflict. However, Gosha Hideo's film *Three Outlaw Samurai* (*Sanbiki no Samurai*, 1964) completely repudiated this trope. After the titular heroes had fought the corrupt magistrate on behalf of the local peasants, the peasants sat down and refused to present a petition to the lord. Shiba, one of the samurai, furiously raged at them: "Hey, don't you want to get out of the mud? It's now or never. Won't you do anything? Are you afraid of your lives? Aren't you ashamed? You? And you? And you? Go ahead! Bring him the petition! Come on! Bring him the petition!" In this case, corruption could not be defeated because the peasants were too cowardly to risk giving the petition to the lord, even after Shiba and has friends had fought on their behalf. Earlier heroes like Musashi and the seven samurai had been able to rally the people together to fight against outside threats like bandits, but Gosha's three samurai faced a village too scared to fight against corrupt officials. Rather than serving as imperfect but no less important bearers of Japanese identity, peasants afraid to fight for themselves were of no use to wandering swordsmen.

Similarly, some cynical films depicted a breakdown in the structuring of male homosocial relations centered around the father-son relationship, showing sons act against their fathers advice and fathers disowning or neglecting their sons. In nostalgic films like the *Samurai* trilogy and *Seven Samurai*, older men taught younger men how to become heroic. In contrast, Okamoto's 1966 film *Sword of Doom* showed a young
swordsman, Ryūnosuke, who was a remorseless killer, murdering an old man for no reason in the opening sequence. Although it was not clear what circumstances, if any, led to Ryūnosuke's alienation, he had extremely dysfunctional relationships with both older and younger men in his life. In one scene, his father even asked Ryūnosuke's rival to kill his son: "with your own hands, kill Ryūnosuke as soon as possible. If only he had never been born!" Later in the film, Ryūnosuke killed his common law wife - after the murder, Okamoto immediately cut to a shot of their infant son wailing, emphasizing his complete failure as a biological father. Okamoto chose to emphasize the breakdown of father-son bonds in his film, rather than showing their positive influence as Inagaki and Kurosawa did in their nostalgic films. Like Gosha, Okamoto's films showed that nostalgic values rang false in the new cynical era - in this case, that he believed older and younger men did not uphold previous standards of mutual obligation and respect.

In addition, the heroes of cynical films were not tied to ideas of male purity and experienced romantic love. Nevertheless, the new samurai heroes were not expected to be eternally pure like Miyamoto Musashi or Moritoh. Both Zatoichi and Nemuri Kyoshiro frequently had women fall wildly in love with them, even seeming to return those feelings, in the course of their films and both got the girl at least occasionally. In The Tale of Zatoichi Continues (Zoku Zatoichi monogatari, 1962), the second film in the Zatoichi franchise, Zatoichi befriended a local geisha, Setsu, and accepted her offer to spend the night at her house. She commented the next day that she liked the feeling of being married that she had with Zatoichi at her house. Similarly, in the first Nemurui Kyoshiro film, The Adventures of Nemuri Kyoshiro: The Chinese Jade (Nemuri Kyoshiro...
Sappocho, 1963), Kyoshiro was seduced by the double agent Chisa, and spent the rest of the film helping her to win back her rightful inheritance from her corrupt samurai father. Unlike in nostalgic films, the new heroes were not expected to be chaste, nor did romantic relationships with women prevent them from reaching their heroic potential.

Moreover, while masculinity remained a quality tied to nature, its relationship to civilization changed dramatically. In nostalgic films such as the Samurai trilogy, masculinity was depicted as a natural quality that was then tamed and honed by the traditional village and the guidance of older male mentors. Cynical films also visually connected their heroes with nature, but in this case the natural hero had to come from the wilderness outside civilization to reform a corrupt and commercialized town. Kurosawa's Yojimbo opened with the hero, Sanjuro, walking through the Japanese countryside into the town. This established the hero as outside of the corrupt town, and as part of the rural, natural countryside. Later, in an iconic shot, Kurosawa cut between Sanjuro and a stray dog, holding a severed hand. It is not clear where the hand had come from, but it indicating Sanjuro's wild and untamed nature. Unlike Miyamoto Musashi, his untamed wildness proved to be an asset, allowing him to then purge the village of the corrupt yakuza gangs. Similarly, the first shot of Gosha's Three Outlaw Samurai was Shiba walking through rice paddies, then cleaning the mud off of his shoes. This was intercut with a stray dog also walking down the road. As with Sanjuro, Shiba was visually tied to a stray dog. Also like Sanjuro, his stray dog nature later enabled him to help the villagers fight against the corrupt local magistrate. The heroes of cynical films were tied to nature just as the heroes of nostalgic films were; however, their wild masculinity enabled them
to purify corrupt society, unlike the nostalgic heroes who were tamed in order to become part of society.

Although primarily concerned with greed and corruption among rich corporations and government officials, cynical films also turned against the values of nostalgic films. The village was no longer the locus of Japanese identity, and villagers were not universally good, albeit simple, people. Father-son relationships, biological or spiritual, did not effectively structure homosocial relations in the films, and in some cases fathers and sons turned against each other. Heroes were allowed to win the heroine, and a relationship with the heroine did not diminish their heroic deeds. Masculinity was still seen as a natural quality; however, rather than being tamed by civilization, particularly the village, it purified corrupt civilization. Cynical films did not promote the same values that nostalgic films had promoted and in some cases, actively denigrated the values that nostalgic films had praised.

Many Western scholars have included bushido among the values that cynical films attacked, even though bushido was not a value under siege as much as a way of attacking other values. After the war, bushido as an ideology of modern Japanese militarism had been completely discredited by defeat; significantly, nostalgic films never included bushido among the ideologies that seemed worth remembering. It did not become thematically important until the rise of the cynical film, particularly Kobayashi’s Harakiri and Samurai Rebellion. Nevertheless, because of the powerful tendency of Western film critics to essentialize Japanese film through "exotic" terms such as bushido, it is worth
examining both Western film critics' approach as well as the historical realities in order to understand how it functioned in cynical samurai films as a way to critique contemporary social issues while appearing to target an ideology that was already defunct.

These critics have frequently misrepresented *bushido* in samurai films. Some film critics adopted wholesale popular conceptions of *bushido* which have been discredited by historians.\(^{65}\) Other critics invoked *bushido* as an aspect of a particular film genre, without explaining what historical moment of *bushido* they are citing.\(^{66}\) This tacitly assumes that *bushido* is monolithic and unchanging. In addition, it contributes to a tendency to read any difference in Japanese films as a product of the films' Japanese-ness. It is also not uncommon to see *bushido* as taken as the central theme in a film even if it is never explicitly mentioned or implicitly invoked.\(^{67}\) Finally, Standish argued that cruel *jidaigeki* pit a humanist perspective against the strict ideology of *bushido*.\(^{68}\) However, the ideology of *bushido* had been discredited by the war. All of these approaches suffer from reading *bushido* strictly as *bushido*, and not as an ideological stand-in for other perceived social problems in cynical films.

The popular Western idea of *bushido* has little basis in historical fact. Writing in response to historians who blame the evils of Japanese militarism on *bushido*, Karl Friday and Cameron Hurst argued that *bushido*, although having some earlier roots, is generally

\(^{65}\) Silver, 19-27; Galloway, 14-16.

\(^{66}\) Davis described "monumental films" as canonizing "the patriarchal formations of *bushido*, the way of the warrior" without further inquiry into what type of *bushido* these films embraced, 39.

\(^{67}\) Davis cited "old" *bushido* versus "new" *bushido* as the central conflict in *Gate of Hell*, rather than Moritoh's violation of heroic purity, 224.

a modern construction and with a set of virtues so generic that that virtually no one could argue against them.\(^\text{69}\) The term *bushido* itself was not used to denote a warrior code until the modern era, and was rarely used prior to the late nineteenth century, although there are a few books written sometime during the Tokugawa Era such as Yamamoto Tsunetomo's *Hagakure* and Daidoji Yuzan's *Budo shoshinshu* which do use it with some frequency.\(^\text{70}\) Hurst characterizes these earlier works as being largely out-of-touch with the broader Confucian philosophy adopted by most of the samurai elite and overly concerned with war and death, termed "evil customs from the sengoku era [sixteenth century]" by the Confucian philosopher Ogyu Sorai.\(^\text{71}\) Moreover, the emphasis that *bushido* tracts and Confucian philosophy placed on loyalty to one's lord was likely due to the contractual and temporal relationship between lord and master, governed by mutual self-interest. The frequent exhortations to remain loyal to one's lord suggest that frequently this was not the case.\(^\text{72}\) In addition, early modern proponents of *bushido* such as Yamamoto and Daidoji condemned the actions of the forty-seven ronin, whose attack on Lord Kira is often taken as the canonical example of peerless *bushido*. Even at its supposed height, *bushido* was a debated philosophy.\(^\text{73}\) Prior to the modern era, *bushido* existed marginally as a philosophy and even less so as an actual practice.


\(^{70}\) Friday, 340; Hurst, 511.

\(^{71}\) Hurst, 511.

\(^{72}\) Friday, 342; Hurst 511.

\(^{73}\) Friday, 344.
However, the Meiji government resurrected the idea of *bushido* as part of its program of constructing a unified and classless modern Japanese state. An 1871 rescript by the Ministry of War to the new conscript army urged "loyalty, decorum, faith, obedience, courage, frugality, and honor" and described these qualities as "the bushido of old." But applying *bushido* to a conscript army was precisely the opposite of the early modern authors intended to do: completely concerned with differentiating the samurai from the lower classes, they would have been shocked at the Meiji government's re-appropriation of *bushido.* The new Meiji *bushido* promoted patriotism to the state institution, not loyalty to one's feudal lord. Moreover, these virtues are so general that they might apply to any ethical system, including, as Hurst has noted, the Boy Scout Motto. The Meiji state, in the name of *bushido,* encouraged all of its people to become proper citizens of a modern nation.

In addition, some Meiji authors were less concerned about *bushido* as practiced in Japan than with demonstrating Japan's equality as a modern nation with the West and justifying Japan's colonial projects. Nitobe Inazo, whose seminal 1899 English-language book *Bushido: The Soul of Japan* is often used by Western scholars to explain *bushido,* did not seek to uncover the historical *bushido* as much as show that *bushido* is in every way equivalent to Western chivalry and, by extension, demonstrate that Japan had a feudal past. His book begins "Chivalry is a flower no less indigenous to the soil of Japan than its emblem, the cherry blossom . . . it is still a living object of power and beauty

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74 Friday, 340.
75 Friday, 343.
76 Hurst, 511.
among us . . . [although] the conditions of society which brought it forth and nourished it have long disappeared.” Nitobe found a parallel in the Western tradition to every aspect of bushido that he cited, attempting to prove to his Western audience that Japan shared the same traditions of chivalry and feudalism that the West had. Although some Japanese readers criticized Nitobe's often cavalier use of Japanese history and literature, others like Nakariya Kaiten and Takagi Takeshi were enthralled by his ideas and wrote their own essays comparing bushido and chivalry. Japanese intellectuals needed to produce a feudal past for Japan because of the widely accepted logic of modernity. Most Western intellectuals believed that nations progressed through a series of stages before becoming modern; without a feudal past Japan could not be modern in the present. Nitobe remained influential in Japan, participating fully in discourses that positioned Japan as the "Europe" of the East in interwar ideology. By 1929 he was involved in pan-Asian groups that shunned internationalism for regionalism, claiming that Japan had the right to control Asia. The ideology of bushido promoted Japan's equality with the West, as well as an equal right to colonize weaker nations.

After the war, many felt that pan-Asian colonialism and militarism had been discredited by defeat, and bushido as an ideology with them. Immediately after the war, Sakaguchi Ango's two widely influential works, "On Decadence" and "A Continuation to the Thesis on Decadence," saw bushido as part of the ideologies that postwar Japan had

78 Hurst, 511.
to overcome. In "On Decadence," Sakaguchi characterized bushido as an unnatural system devised by weak men. It, along with the ideology surrounding the emperor, was a failure that, he hoped, the Japanese people would learn from.\textsuperscript{80} His second essay listed bushido as part of the harmful "false clothing" that the Japanese people needed to shed in order to heal.\textsuperscript{81} As intellectuals began to analyze Japan's defeat, bushido was seen as a failed ideology.

To summarize, bushido as an institution dates to the late nineteenth century and has only tenuous ties to the actual behavior and beliefs of medieval samurai. During the Meiji period bushido was utilized to promote unity within the Japanese state as well as prove the modernity of the Japanese state vis-a-vis the post-feudal Western powers. After the war, militarism and kokutai ideology were largely discredited by defeat, and even the most conservative groups chose to emphasize the noble sacrifice of the dead rather than urge any return to militarism, much less bushido. At no point was there a unified or codified formulation of bushido. Therefore, it is inherently problematic to assume the existence of a constant, unified formulation of bushido. Moreover, reading postwar films as "anti-bushido" is equally problematic since there was no faction promoting bushido for the films to be against. Instead, as the following analysis will argue, bushido served as a substitute for other issues that directors wished to address.

Although most films do not explicitly use bushido as a theme, it does become central in films about the forty-seven Ako ronin because their story is so strongly tied to


any formulation of it. In brief, in 1701 Asano, lord of Ako, attacked his supervisor, Lord Kira in the Shogun's palace because Kira had publicly slighted him. He wounded, but did not kill, Kira; however, the penalty for drawing a blade in the shogun's palace was death regardless of the reason. Asano committed *seppuku* and his property was confiscated. His vassals relinquished his castle and waited until 1702, when they launched a night attack on Kira's mansion and killed him. They surrendered and committed *seppuku*, claiming that they had to kill Kira as part of their duty to Asano. No formal record was ever made stating why Asano attacked Kira initially, leaving the story open to interpretation. Most scholars agree that the story derives its power because it can be read as praising absolute loyalty to one's lord by elites as well as endorsing rebellion against an unjust system by the ruled. But, since *bushido* and the story of the forty-seven are both ambiguous, writers and directors can interpret the story in a variety of ways.

Inagaki's 1962 version of *Chushingura* clearly placed blame for the tragedy with the corruption of Kira and the shogunate government by beginning the film with an extended sequence showing the shogunate's abuses. First, an innkeeper and his wife who often host noble visitors complained that while the common people might esteem nobles they certainly do not. Then, Inagaki showed the shogun's favorite dog being carried in an elaborate palanquin through the streets of Edo. Next, Kira and Yanagisawa, the shogun's favorite courtier, complained that Asano has not sent them enough presents, and the audience learned that Yanagisawa was the favorite because he offered his wife to the shogun. Kira agreed that life is about lust and greed. These scenes showed that the common people were constantly reminded of the abuses of the shogunate, since even the

shogun's dog was treated better than them, and that all of the high level officials were engaging in bribery and corruption.

Next, Asano was introduced as a moral contrast to Kira, and this opposition set the story in motion. He refused to participate in the gift economy (here shown more as a system of bribery), even if it hurt his position, and would rather listen to his wife play *koto* than deal with court politics. Though wealthy, he did not use his position to gain more money and women. Kira, as his superior, told Asano that he must give better gifts if he wants to be successful, which he refuses. Kira was furious, and through subsequent scenes abused and humiliated Asano until he made his fateful attack in the shogun's palace. Inagaki explicitly placed responsibility for the tragedy on government corruption.

But as in many formulations of the story, the primary agent of *bushido* is Asano's chamberlain Oishi and his forty-six companions. As with Asano, Oishi was a moral bureaucrat standing in vain opposition to a corrupt government. After the fief is confiscated, his first thought was to ensure that the local currency is honored lest farmers and local merchants be hurt. He also ensured that the money he borrowed to fund the attack on Kira was fully repaid, and although he spent time with geisha at tea houses, Inagaki made clear that this was just a ploy to deceive Kira and the shogun. In Inagaki's version, Oishi and his men could right injustice by attacking the shogun's government.

Their final raid cemented their heroic, self-sacrificing defeat of the corrupt and greedy bureaucracy, embodied by Kira. Inagaki devoted twenty-one minutes of his film to the vassals fight against Kira's hired bodyguards, and his last scene was the vassal's triumphant procession through Edo, using a voice over to remind the audience that they
all would commit seppuku shortly after. The voice-over technique created a distance between the viewer and the forty-six's death, emphasizing instead their heroism. Inagaki showed death as a small price to pay for the heroic defeat of bad government official.

Because of the association between Chushingura and bushido, one might expect the film to take bushido as its central theme. However, Inagaki's main point seemed to be that good officials like Asano and Oishi had to resist bad officials like Kira in order to create a just government. Moreover, Oishi and his companions had to die precisely because they were honest officials with respect for the law -- if they had not committed seppuku they would have shown the same disregard for the law as Kira and his fellow corrupt officials. Inagaki's version of the Chushingura story was not so much about bushido but about the same frustration with seemingly unresponsive government officials that drove other cynical films. Although Inagaki still showed his heroes holding the law in respect, much more so than other creators of cynical films, this should not be surprising given the many nostalgic films to his credit. Nevertheless, by the early 1960s formerly nostalgic filmmakers had begun to use samurai films to advocate for the ouster of corrupt officials, even if their films were among the less radical.

Another film often analyzed in terms of bushido is Kobayashi Masaki's Harakiri (Seppuku, 1962), although it too used bushido to critique contemporary issues -- in this case, a seeming lack of economic justice in Japanese society. The story, set in 1630, centered on the practice of a poor ronin going to a wealthy clan's mansion and asking to commit seppuku in hopes that the clan will pay him to do so elsewhere. Kobayashi emulated many of the monumental style shots common to prewar films, such as the first
scene of Tsugomu, the protagonist, at the gate of the Ii clan mansion. The clan counselor
tells Tsugomu about the last ronin, Motome, who was forced to kill himself with a
bamboo blade for trying the ploy. Kobayashi portrayed Motome's death in graphic detail,
powerfully filming the panic on his face and the pool of blood during the act. Then,
Tsugomu explained, also through a series of flashbacks, that Motome was his son-in-law.
Tsugomu and Motome were from wealthy samurai families who had lost everything
when the Tokugawa disbanded their clan. Although they had tried to survive teaching
and making umbrellas, Motome's wife and son had become sick and they could not afford
a doctor. Motome's wife and son died soon after Ii clan retainers brought his body back,
and Tsugomu, despairing because he had not yet sold his metal sword blades, vowed
revenge. He recounted how he had humiliated the counselors directly responsible for
Motome's death by cutting their topknots yet not killing them; the head counselor of the Ii
ordered them to commit seppuku for their failure. Then, he killed as many of the Ii
retainers as he could, slaying one on the clan insignia and throwing the empty clan armor,
shot behind the opening credits, at another. Despite Tsugomu's real and symbolic attack
on the Ii clan, effectively nothing changed. The counselor covered up the deaths of the
retainers, citing a duty to protect the clan, and the armor was restored at the end. The
final voice-over explained how the Ii ultimately used the incident to their advantage. But,
as with the forty-seven ronin, the ideology of bushido only seemed to be the motivation
for a tragedy actually caused by the unfair descent into poverty of Motome's family..

In effect, Kobayashi used bushido as a substitute to critique contemporary
economic injustice. The chain of events leading to Motome and Tsugomu's death began
with job loss following the dissolution of the clan through no fault of either man. Then, since they had no marketable skills, both were unable to make ends meet without Tsugomu selling his daughter as concubine. And as Motome used the threat of harakiri as a plea for help from the Ii clan, the counselors mocked him and were unwilling to offer him money, or even let him leave the Ii compound, without killing himself. Like Sanjuro in Yojimbo, Tsugomu tried to correct the situation through violence, attacking Ii clan members as well as their clan insignia and clan armor, but unlike Sanjuro, Tsugomu could not affect change even with his own violent death. Although Tsugomu appeared to be attacking the institution of bushido, he was actually attacking a contemporary economic system that did not care about those disenfranchised by the system.

Moreover, Kobayashi was well-known for using gendai geki humanist films to criticize other social problems, such as postwar guilt. One example was his three-part, nine hour film The Human Condition (Ningen no Joken, 1959-1961). The film centered around Kaji, who began as an overseer to a Chinese work group in Manchuria and was later tried for war crimes even though he had tried to act ethically. Although the film read as strongly pacifist because it showed war reducing everyone to victims and perpetrators, it also legitimized a view of individual powerlessness to act morally. Furthermore, Kobayashi said that "all of my pictures are concerned with resisting entrenched power. That's what Harakiri is about . . . I suppose I've always challenged authority." Because of his political persuasions, it makes more sense to interpret Harakiri as an attack on entrenched political and economic power in contemporary society than as anti-bushido,

83 Standish, Myth and Masculinity in the Japanese Cinema, 123-141.
84 Quoted in Galbraith, 134.
since *bushido* was of limited political relevance. Kobayashi's other work also presented a critique of modern problems.

Finally, other *jidai geki* used *bushido* to represent a search for a moral code that corrected the unfairness of the law. It should be noted that these films rarely explicitly referenced *bushido*. In this formulation, *bushido* appeared remarkably similar to Standish's analysis of morality in the *yakuza* films that dominated Japanese cinema from the mid-1960s through the 1990s. This code was called *jingi*, and Standish described it as a conservative system based on the Confucian derived ideas of *giri* and *ninjo*. However, *jingi*, since it is the *yakuza* code, fundamentally belonged to those outside of the law. 85

This formulation of *bushido* appeared in the *jidai geki* series that served as predecessors to the *yakuka* genre films, such as the *Zatoichi* and *Nemuri Kyoshiro* franchises. Neither set of films gives specific rules to *jingi* or *bushido*, but instead implies that certain actions like fighting to help friends or innocent outsiders is good and other actions like betraying superiors or comrades and bullying ordinary people is bad. Both feature honorable outlaws who fought corrupt *yakuza* bosses and shogunate officials, and envisioned true morality as coming from below. The *bushido* of some samurai films was re-imagined as the *jingi* found in the *yakuza* genre.

The role of *bushido* in samurai films was not static, but changed as the emphasis shifted from nostalgia to cynicism. Most nostalgic films did not see explicit references to *bushido* as a value worth ressurecting. Cruel *jidai geki* used *bushido* as a substitute for contemporary issues, such as corrupt officials, economic injustice, and the idea that morality could only be found at the bottom of the social hierarchy, not at the top.

Standish has argued that Japanese film critics and historians didn't like the cruel jidai geki because of "their challenge to the myths of bushido, rather than the more spurious reason that these films were made to appeal to foreign audiences." But perhaps the issue was not the challenge to bushido as much as the contemporary problems that bushido served to represent.

Directors also altered their cinematic techniques as cynical themes grew to dominate samurai films. Despite improvements in film technology, many directors chose to film in black and white, avoiding the cheerful colors of The Gate of Hell or the Samurai trilogy. Heroes, now more likely to be ronin or yakuza than samurai, appeared dirty and disheveled after traveling and fighting. Soundtracks often featured contemporary jazz and enka music; instead of subtly contributing to a nostalgic mise-en-scene, began to pull the story into the troubled present, rather than allowing the viewer to experience an idealized past. Finally, violence became startlingly realistic. This much less pleasant image of the past supported themes of social critique in the cruel samurai films.

Unlike the nostalgic films, samurai films made during the early 1960s were frequently shot in black and white. While it might seem more logical for black and white films to precede color films, the dark shadows and high contrast of black and white film better fit the darker themes of cynical films, just as bright colors suited the nostalgic themes of earlier films. Although the preference for black and white can be partially explained by cost for lower-budget series such as Zatoichi and artistic motivation in the

case of Kurosawa, the widespread use of black and white certainly contributed to a bleaker aesthetic in films like *Three Outlaw Samurai* (*Sanbiki no samurai*, 1964) and *The Sword of Doom* (*Daibosatsu toge*, 1966). But as color became dominant in the late 1960s film industry as a whole, cruel *jidaigeki* were filmed in color as well.

Nevertheless, in films like Gosha Hideo's *Goyokin* (1969), the color palette was much darker than nostalgic films like *The Gate of Hell* or the *Samurai* trilogy. As with his black and white films, Gosha employed high contrasts between white show and the dark kimono of the characters and symbolic black crows even in Panavision color. This also enabled him to emphasize the bright red of blood, naturally vibrant and striking against a palette of navy blues, blacks, and white. Even when cynical films were shot in color, they did not use color in the same ebullient way that nostalgic films had. Nostalgic films reveled in color, while cynical films first used black and white, and then muted color to convey darker messages.

In contrast to the orchestral music and high-class *koto* of nostalgic films, cynical films often employed modern jazz or lower class Japanese music. Kurosawa seems to have been the first to score a samurai film with modern jazz with *Yojimbo*, and other directors followed suit, such as Gosha in *Three Outlaw Samurai*. This device served to relate the events of the films with the present; an orchestral soundtrack often maintained the *mise-en-scene* of a period film, where decidedly anachronistic jazz constantly reaffirmed the films' relation to the present. Music also marked the shift in emphasis from high-class heroes like samurai and feudal lords to low class *ronin* and *yakuza*.

87 Kurosawa stated in a 1981 interview that "color film does not have the versatility and subtlety that black and white has. . . it simply can't do what I want it to"; in *Akira Kurosawa Interviews*, edited by Bert Cardullo, 89.
When period music was used in later films, it was generally types associated with the lower classes, like geisha songs and street musicians playing *samisen*. Nostalgic films used music to create nostalgia for traditional high culture and cement a presentation of an idealized Japanese past, while cynical films used music to connect their films with modern society and the lower classes.

Cruel films also avoided the clean aesthetic of nostalgic films. Characters like Miyamoto Musashi never became visibly disheveled during their travels; even after his climactic final battle against Sasaki Kojiro he appeared perfectly composed. In contrast, Shiba, the hero of *Three Outlaw Samurai*, first appeared walking along a dirt road and then tried to clean a thick layer mud from his sandals, and after the climactic sword fight, his kimono was soaked with sweat. Nostalgic films avoided dirt, lest it undermine the idyllic past, while cynical films used dirt to show the realistic effects of their heroes’ adventures.

The dirtiness of cynical films is of course closely related to the new, realistic and bloody violence shown in them. Nostalgic films avoided realistic or graphic violence; even *seppuku*, integral to the plot of the forty-seven *ronin*, was not shown on screen until the 1960s.\(^{88}\) The unrealistic violence of nostalgic films hid the cost of promoting conservative values. Because the violence was not real, and the hero was never truly injured, and noble warriors died honorably and heroically if at all, it seemed an acceptable price to preserve the status quo. On the other hand, realistic violence revealed the intangible violence caused by entrenched systems of corruption and greed. Guns were used, but usually only by the villains. Like the modernized soundtrack, the

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presence of guns connected the themes of the films to the present. The new, realistic portrayal of violence supported the anti-establishment themes of cynical samurai films.

Kurosawa's *Yojimbo* was one of the first films to show realistic violence, attacking contemporary greed and corruption. This fight was real in a way that fighting in nostalgic films had not been. In Inagaki's *Samurai* trilogy, Musashi was never really injured, and fights, usually against nameless bandits, secured the security of the heroes and the villagers they protected. But in *Yojimbo*, Sanjuro was shown after he had been severely by one of the rival *yakuza* gangs. He had a black eye, was covered in blood, and barely able to walk. After he crawled to freedom, Kurosawa showed Sanjuro hiding in a coffin, symbolically indicating his closeness to death. He clearly showed the high physical toll on Sanjuro because of his opposition to the greedy commercialism promoted by the *yakuza*. Kurosawa used Gonji, an old man who first explained the situation to Sanjuro and served as the conscience of the film, and the coffin maker to further show the high cost of excising the *yakuza* from the town. Initially, he had supported Sanjuro's plan because lots of dead men would result in lots of coffin sales, but by the end of the film so many men had died that no one was bothering with coffins, so even he began to despair. And when Sanjuro, defeated his nemesis, Unosuke, he died in a pool of his own blood, desperately trying to strike back at Sanjuro. This was in striking contrast to the similar final battle of rivals at the end of Inagaki's *Samurai* trilogy, when Sasaki Kojiro died bloodlessly, with a contented smile on his face. Kurosawa did not allow Unosuke a noble death, instead emphasizing the ultimate, and necessary, cost of liberating the village. Extreme violence was necessary precisely because greed had become so firmly
entrenched in the town. Realistic violence showed the cost of tolerating corruption, as well as the challenge of eliminating it.

Similarly, Okamoto used graphic violence *The Sword of Doom* to mock the tropes of nostalgic films. Every fight sequence began with a graphic depiction of the cost of violence, such as a bloody limb. Unlike the nostalgic hero who righted wrongs through his sword skills, the protagonist, Ryunosuke, went on violent and often unprovoked killing sprees. Through realistic violence, Ryunosuke sliced through the core values of nostalgic films. He injured villagers for no reason, instead of protecting him and he forced his rival's wife to be his mistress, instead of pure, non-physical love. He refused to engage in appropriate father-son relationships by accepting the mentoring of older men and mentoring younger men in return -- his father disowned him because of his excessive violence and he in turn abandoned his infant son. Realistic violence proved part of Okamoto's effort to demonstrate the impossibility of nostalgic values and nostalgic heroes in his decade.

The conventions of cynical films diverged sharply from those of nostalgic films, corresponding to the shift in values. While nostalgic films had depicted a bright, colorful, desirable past, cynical films used black and white film or dark colors to show the ugliness within contemporary society. Often soundtracks featured current musical styles such as jazz or *enka*, relating the themes of the film to the present. Heroes were not longer immune from the logical effects of the weather and travel. Most importantly, violence appeared real, showing the cost of batting the established power structures - quite unlike
the nostalgic heroes who rarely suffered when fighting for conservative ideals. Cynical films portrayed a more cruel past in order to show the failings of the present.

Unlike the nostalgic films of the 1950s, which used the past to promote prewar values, the cynical films of the 1960s presented a bleak world facing the same problems of greed and corruption that contemporary society did. Due to the self-censorship of the studio system, samurai films could attack the failings of the government and corporations in ways that contemporary dramas could not. Many cynical films featured outsiders, often ronin or yakuza, fighting and winning against social problems, although often at a high cost. Generally, these films did not portray nostalgic values; some even turned against them, mocking villagers, father-son relationships, and masculine purity. Bushido, largely absent from nostalgic films, reappeared as a stand-in for other social problems - since no one was invested in promoting bushido at the time, it was a ready target. Instead of looking backwards, samurai films addressed the problems of the present throughout the 1960s.
By the start of the 1970s, the samurai film had become an increasingly marginal genre of Japanese film. Except for the occasional Kurosawa film, most were low budget productions that did not receive critical acclaim. However, both the nostalgic values of 1950s samurai films and the cynical values of 1960s samurai films remained relevant, although in altered form, in other media. As cynical values began to dominate the big screen, nostalgic values reappeared in television serials. Similarly, the ninkyo yakuza, or honorable gangster, genre of film had replaced samurai films by the 1970s continued to explore the problems of greed and corruption within Japanese society. Although the samurai film genre became marginalized, the themes of the genre remained relevant in other forms.

Nostalgic period drama moved to the emerging medium of television when cynical films began to dominate theaters. One notable example is the annual NHK Taiga Drama. The NHK, or Nippon Hoso Kosai, is a government sponsored television station, much like PBS in the United States or the BBC in Great Britain. Since 1963, the NHK

has produced a year-long period drama of approximately 49 one-hour episodes, focusing on a heroic figure from the pre-modern past.\textsuperscript{90} Formally, the series are much more like the nostalgic films, with bright colors and sets, a lack of dirtiness, unrealistic violence, and sweeping orchestral music coupled with performances of traditional theater, such as Noh and Kabuki. Usually, the main character is someone who can be seen as contributing to the formation of modern Japan in positive way, such as Sakamoto Ryoma, a leader during the start of the Meiji period, or Yoshitsune, Takeda Shingen, and Uesugi Kenshin, all warriors who are revered for contributing to modern ideas of the samurai spirit. The main character's opposition is never portrayed as evil in anyway; usually he is either misguided or has an opposing view on how to work for the betterment of the country. In the Taiga Drama, nostalgic values, such as the importance of the rural village, father-son relationships, and pure, unconsummated love, periodically emerge against a tapestry of patriotism and nostalgia for an idealized samurai past. Nostalgic values remain relevant within television \textit{jidaigeki} serials.

Similarly, the anger at greed, corruption, and increasingly outmoded values found a new medium in \textit{yakuza} films. The \textit{yakuza} film genre, which began to emerge in the mid-1960s, was a natural continuation of cynical films since many popular series had been about \textit{yakuza}. Just as cynical films expressed discontent in the greed and corruption that plagued corporate and political hierarchies, \textit{yakuza} films mapped these relations on to the hierarchies of gangs. The overt, and increasingly graphic, violence of \textit{yakuza} films expressed the intangible violence that enforced the hierarchies of Japanese society.\textsuperscript{91} The

themes of cynical films continued through the dominant yakuza genre after the decline of the samurai film.

Nostalgic and cynical films presented two very different views of the samurai past. Nostalgic samurai films showed that many Japanese people wanted to return to prewar values after the US occupation ended. These films situated the traditional, rural village at the center of Japanese identity, depicted prewar conceptions of romance and male purity, and structured male homosocial lines through father-son relationships. Cynical films reacted to the widespread view that the Japanese government and powerful corporations were corrupt, greedy, and did not care about the average Japanese citizen. These views could not easily be expressed in a modern setting due to industry self-censorship, and so were hidden in stories of corrupt daimyo, pre-modern yakuza, and oppressive applications of bushido. Moreover, cynical films turned against the now-outdated values of nostalgic films, showing cowardly peasants, love affairs, and failed fathers. The form of the films also echoed these changes. Nostalgic films presented a bright, colorful, and inviting view of the past where the hero nobly triumphed over nameless bandits or worthy opponent. Cynical films were often shot in black and white or muted colors and the hero visibly suffered in his fight against greed and corruption. Between the 1950s and 1960s, films portrayed the past very differently Japan.

While Western scholarship has tented to portray samurai films as monolithic and stagnant, jidaigeki were as dynamic and varied as any other genre of Japanese film. Rather than presenting a static look at Japan's imagined past, samurai films reflected
popular sentiment. After occupation ended, many people wanted to return to what were seen as positive prewar values. Although militarism appeared to be dead, some prewar values still held a great deal of appeal. However, by the beginning of the 1960s, people became cynical and disillusioned about the Japanese government and the increasing power of large Japanese corporations. The studio system made it difficult to criticize these forces directly, but films set in the past allowed for covert critiques. And even after the height of their popularity, both cynical and nostalgic films continued to influence Japanese popular culture. Beyond the kimono and *katana*, samurai films embodied the values and politics of postwar Japan.
REFERENCES


