

Lone Wolves and Stray Dogs

The Japanese Crime Film
1931-1969

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Stray Dog
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Lone Wolves and Stray Dogs

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Ōsawa Jō, Curator, The National Film Center, Tokyo
Phil Kaffen, Assistant Professor, New York University
Aaron Gerow, Professor, Yale University |

Note: All Japanese names in this pamphlet are rendered in the traditional order of family name first.

Introduction

Aaron Gerow
Professor, Yale University

One can argue that Japanese film culture begins with the crime film. The tremendous success in 1911 of the French crime series *Zigomar*, about the eponymous master criminal eluding a series of detectives through brilliant disguises and tricks, not only put cinema on the cultural map in Japan, it also spurred Japanese imitations and stimulated the rise of the detective novel. But it also earned the ire of authorities who banned films of its ilk, as cinema itself became the object of approbation in Japan's first major film censorship incident. A pattern was set as the new medium cinema itself gained a reputation as being linked to crime, the urban, and the unknown, as if film was *Zigomar* himself: nowhere but everywhere, impossible to identify, unfathomable but distinctly modern.

Much of the Japanese cinema we know abroad could be seen as trying to free cinema from this bad reputation, proving that it could be morally, intellectually, and aesthetically good—a proper representative of Japan and its traditions. As a result, few examples of the long history of crime cinema traveled abroad. When we tried to put this series together with the National Film Center, Japan's national film archive actually had few subtitled prints of crime films. For a long time, they had been seen as too vulgar, too commercial, too Western—that is, not Japanese enough to represent Japanese cinema.

Yet as Phil Kaffen underlines in his essay about the face here, crime films—from *Zigomar* on—have always been about confounding identity, about duplicity, doubling, and the inability to grasp what is behind the surface. They are not “Japanese” because “Japaneseness” itself is under question. As Ōsawa Jō relates in his essay, they can be situated in liminal or “nothing” spaces, places that are themselves the products of unstable historical transformations and populated by characters whose identities—and sometimes masculinities—are under threat by that history. Some might complain they are “imitations” of American noir or gangster films, but their history in fact complicates such simple distinctions between America and Japan, between the original and the copy, given how these films can actually be about that history of unequal transnational flows.

One problem of identity is defining the crime film. The term “*hanzai eiga*” is often used in Japan, but clearly crime, or the less-than-legal use of violence, has been the fulcrum of a myriad of film narratives. We use the term rather loosely here, including the two main genres dealing with crime and criminals—the yakuza or gangster film and the detective film—as well as works that make crime a central means of exploring both the world and cinema. That's partially why crime films are so attractive: they deal with the underside of society, of modernity, of gender, and of the nation—and of cinema—in

ways quality cinema does not. It is thus no surprise that it was crime films that were often the first commercial movies to deal with class, poverty, social outcasts, resident Koreans, and mixed-race Japanese, albeit in ways that don't easily categorize as political cinema.

Thus while *Police Officer* clearly represents how many crime films are ostensibly about upholding the law (and the nation) and punishing evil, it also shows how they are about much more. Detective films can be attempts to know and corral the a-social, but often at the cost of knowing too much, especially about the similarities between detective and criminal (e.g., *Stray Dog*). Criminals and gangsters are attractive, both cinematically and narratively, and their potential as tropes for representing social tension could culminate in such examples as Tōei's chivalric “*ninkyō*” yakuza films of the 1960s, where it is the gangsters who are beneficent upholders of traditional values. The fact that this subgenre was celebrated by both the political left and right evinces again how crime films can themselves seem to have two faces.

Of course crime films were also criticized for being formulaic and mass-produced. But just as mystery novels are often about the problem of reading (of clues, of messages, etc.), so crime films are often about the difficulties of seeing and knowing. Their formula, in effect, often revolves around the instability of forms of cinematic knowledge. That's one reason that the field has attracted much of Japanese cinema's talent: crime film is just too intimately entwined with the problem of cinema in Japan to ignore. We will show films by great masters like Kurosawa Akira and Uchida Tomu (the subject of Yomota Inuhiko's essay), but even Ozu Yasujiro filmed gangster movies (such as *Dragnet Girl* [*Hijōsen no onna*, 1933]), as did the leaders of the Japanese New Wave (for instance, Shinoda Masahiro's *Pale Flower* [*Kawaita hana*, 1964]). The series will also feature work by genre auteurs such as Makino Masahiro, Okamoto Kihachi, Katō Tai, and Fukasaku Kinji, as well as opportunities to see tremendous performers like Mifune Toshirō, Mikuni Rentarō, Fuji Junko, Ichikawa Raizō, Kataoka Chiezō, Yamada Isuzu, and Hasegawa Kazuo.

By pure chance, we are showing three films with Takakura Ken (1931–2014), one of Japan's most famous actors, raised primarily in the yakuza film genre, whose death last November sparked mourning across the country. This series can then serve as a mini-memorial to him, one that introduces the breadth of the form of cinema that made him so attractive to millions of Japanese, but that also reveals all the darkness that is hidden when the media identified him as a national icon. Crime films, after all, complicated such identities from the start.

Uchida Tomu: Salvation for the Wicked

Yomota Inuhiko

Visiting Researcher, Kyoto University of Art and Design

Uchida Tomu (1897–1970) cut an imposing figure in the film world. Or, perhaps, it might be better to say he cut through the film world. His life more or less overlapped with John Ford's, and in the same way that Ford focused on westerns, Uchida was known for samurai films depicting a world in upheaval. The atmospheres he created were oppressive and the characters in his films were prisoners of their roiling emotions. They existed in the space between hope and despair, sin and regret, forever searching in vain for some kind of salvation.

In the 1920s, the tall and handsome young Uchida entered the film industry as an actor. Before long he began directing films, beginning with silent comedies. His style became progressively more serious, and he advocated the making of "historical films" (*rekishi eiga*) as superior to the merely entertaining slush of "period films" (*jidaigeki*). He spent a year living with poor hinterland farmers while making one of his masterpieces, *Earth* (*Tsuchi*, 1939). He then traveled to wartime Manchuria. After Japan was defeated and the state of Manchukuo collapsed, instead of immediately returning home Uchida and a small number of his friends remained in the new postwar China. Uchida welcomed Communist filmmakers to the spacious studio he had been using. He shared with them his filmmaking knowledge, making a significant contribution to postwar Chinese cinema during its inception.

Uchida returned to Japan in 1953 after living in China for eight years. He joined Tōei, where other filmmakers who had worked in Manchuria were producing films, and made new films one after the other, with both historical and contemporary settings. In the late 1950s he directed the three-part *Swords in the Moonlight* (*Daibōsatsu tōge*, 1957–59) and in the first half of the 1960s the five-part *Miyamoto Musashi* (1961–65). In one film he depicted the conflict between Japanese and Korean miners trapped in a cave-in; in another, he explored the psychological deterioration of a young Ainu man. Yet another film portrayed a company chairman who attempts to erase the memory of a murder he had once committed by successively committing new murders. The protagonists of Uchida's films are tormented by the memory of their past sins, doomed to wander in a world with no salvation.

Uchida was friends with Ozu Yasujiro and Mizoguchi Kenji, but the way the experience of the war is reflected in his films differs markedly from theirs. Ozu continued making films as if the war had never happened, maintaining his detached attitude. Mizoguchi, through trial and error, did his best to make films that would find favor with a society that had

turned its back on wartime ideology. Uchida made no attempts at direct depiction of the unspeakable things he had seen in the war, but compared to his prewar work his postwar films show a far more profound awareness of life and death. They also project a Buddhist sense of transience that could only be achieved by someone who had endured extreme circumstances amid the deaths of countless others. Uchida lived longer than both Mizoguchi and Ozu, continuing to make films into the 1970s. He completed a total of sixty-four films in his career. During the filming of his sixty-fifth, he collapsed, and passed away not long after. His final project was to be *Genral Nogi* (*Nogi taishō*). It would have told the story of the general who carried lifelong regret for having lost his regimental banner in a battle in his younger days, which eventually led him to use the occasion of the Meiji Emperor's death to commit suicide in the traditional way by cutting open his belly. The film, however, was never completed.

Daibōsatsu tōge and *Miyamoto Musashi* are both major works of modern popular literature. Both are lengthy novels with samurai as their main character, and both were adapted for the screen multiple times. Nakazato Kaizan (1885–1944) wrote *Daibōsatsu tōge* for serial publication over a period of twenty-seven years, and the story remains unfinished. It may well be the longest work of fiction in the world. Set against the turmoil at the end of the Edo period, it tells the story of a samurai who, driven by a nihilist impulse lurking in his psyche, goes on a killing spree murdering one victim after another. He eventually loses his eyesight, and his blade seems to become even more bloodthirsty. There are women who are infatuated with him, young samurai who swear revenge against him, and a servant who cares for his children while devotedly carving Buddhist icons. After a certain point in the story it is no longer clear if the main character is even still alive or if he has become a wrathful ghost, but the tale goes on. It comes to involve the struggle for the future of Japan between revolutionaries with ideas of a utopian monarchy and the Tokugawa government's ruthless secret police. The story features hundreds of characters and, taken in its entirety, is as complex and detailed as a Buddhist mandala. Nakazato once affirmed that he wrote this sprawling work as an exposition of Mahayana Buddhist thought. *Daibōsatsu tōge* was adapted for film four times, once before the war and three times after. Uchida's film version was the largest in scale, a trilogy in full Eastman color. The main character as portrayed by Kataoka Chiezō is a chilling man who has cast aside all human compassion and lives on the boundary between life and death. Each time he com-

mits a murder the sound of Buddhist chanting can be heard, and he is haunted by the memories of those he has killed.

Miyamoto Musashi is a novel written during the war by Yoshikawa Eiji (1892–1962). It tells the story of Musashi, a young man at the start of the seventeenth century who wanders Japan determined to master the art of the sword and eventually becomes the most skilled swordsman in the land. Where *Swords in the Moonlight* is the story of a nihilistic man living in the space between right and wrong, Miyamoto Musashi stands in sharp contrast as the tale of a young man completing rites of passage and overcoming adversity. It too has been repeatedly adapted for film, and here again Uchida's is the largest in scope, encompassing five films shot over five successive years. Uchida gave the lead role of Musashi to Nakamura Kinnosuke, who had also appeared in Uchida's *Swords in the Moonlight* as an inexperienced young samurai plotting revenge against the main character. By using Nakamura in both of these films, Uchida highlighted the relationship between the two stories: if *Swords in the Moonlight* can be thought of as a journey to the underworld motivated by the attraction of death (Thanatos), then *Miyamoto Musashi* is a story of rebirth founded on the desire for life (Eros). For Uchida, directing these two film sagas in succession was a symbolic expression of the death and rebirth he encountered in wartime Manchuria and postwar China and Japan.

A Fugitive from the Past was an especially significant film from the later years of Uchida's career. It follows *Swords in the Moonlight* as a story contrasting penitence and despair, heartlessness and purity, only this time set in postwar Japan. This may be one of the most profound films made in Japan in the years since the war. Though the main character played by Mikuni Rentarō is a brutal and inhumane killer, it is his deep longing for salvation that leads to his self-destruction. The novel by Mizukami Tsutomu (1919–2004) on which the film is based feels in some parts like a Dostoevsky novel, and in other parts like an ingenious detective story. But the overarching sensibility that ties the work together is Buddhist, particularly the views of life and death found in the Pure Land tradition. Pure Land Buddhism is based on the teachings of the monk Shinran (1173–1262), who preached one of the most difficult paradoxes in the history of Japanese thought: "If even righteous people can gain salvation, why should the wicked not be saved as well?" In Uchida's film adaptation of Mizukami's novel, he was able to express Shinran's challenging philosophy on screen. Why must the salvation of the wicked take precedence over that of the good? And how is that even possible? It could be said that all of Uchida's films are committed to searching for answers to these questions. Among the ethical inquiries of postwar Japanese film, *A Fugitive from the Past* stands at the pinnacle.

Translated by: Samuel Malissa



Police Officer

Land, Crime, and Masculinity

The Imagination of Crime Films in Postwar Japan

Ōsawa Jō

Curator, National Film Center, Tokyo

After the main title shot in *The Road to Hell*, we see a wide, barren plot of land in the suburbs. A car pulls to a stop and a man in a suit gets out. He seems to be connected with the construction project planned here. The setting abruptly moves to the city, and this plot of land in the suburbs hardly appears again. In a sharp contrast, the scenery takes on a film noir feel, teeming with people, cars, and buildings all painted with shadows cast from the neon signs and streetlights. But as the plot moves forward, we learn that the suburban plot of land from this early scene was the designated site for a public construction corporation, and the incident of corruption surrounding this public corporation was the starting point for the series of crimes occurring in the film.

This sort of anonymous land in the process of development, containing nothing but dirt and dust, is a landscape especially characteristic of the high economic growth period. After World War II, Japan promoted heavy construction as a national policy, leading corporations to buy so much land for industrial development that a “land price myth” was born, with people believing that the value of real estate would never stop rising. Against this background, Japanese films came to repeatedly incorporate scenes of such landscapes. In *A Certain Killer* as well, Shiozawa, played by Ichikawa Raizō, steps out of a taxi onto a barren plot of land by the harbor, with an industrial complex emitting smoke off in the distance. He finds a shabby apartment nearby to use as his hideout after stealing narcotics. Existing as a hotbed for wealth-generating crime, this land containing “nothing” is also a blank space in terms of power, where the powerful and the lawless roam freely. These sites were also easy to use as filming locations, and so they became the setting for many scenes of crime and action.

In the 1962 film *The Proud Challenge* (*Hokori takaki chōsen*), Fukasaku Kinji also chose to use reclaimed land in the chase scene during the final stretch of the film, thus incorporating shots of this sort of landscape of development particular to the high economic growth period. He had an original take on this, however, showing the streets of slums where the exploited and forgotten lived, indicating that the crime arising from the clash between the powerful and the lawless also entangled the poor.

The three brothers who are the protagonists of *Wolf, Pig, and Man* are born in a slum “fit for swine” in an area of reclaimed land. Ichirō (Mikuni Rentarō) and Jirō (Takakura Ken) have escaped the slum, leaving their family behind. Ichirō has found success within a yakuza organization, while Jirō hatches violent plans to make money. The story begins when

Saburō (Kitaōji Kin’ya) holds a funeral for his mother. He no longer has ties to the slum but neither does he have anywhere else to go, and together with his friends he sinks into a frenzy of dissolution. In the end, the slum where the three brothers clash is also a land containing “nothing” but in a different way from the land developed for industrial and residential purposes – although, in actuality, everything shunned by society exists there, including trash, animal corpses, abandoned buildings, disease, and poor people.

The film seems to suggest that, even after leaving this land of “nothing,” there is no hope for anyone. In one of the opening scenes, Jirō looks far into the distance from a hotel window, and a woman asks him what he is looking at. Jirō responds, “I want to go across the sea.” But he has no idea what lies beyond the sea, only imagining for some reason that there exists a form of freedom currently unavailable to him. And ultimately, Ichirō, the only one who has managed to survive, attempts to leave the streets of the slum behind him. Having seen Jirō and Saburō killed by the yakuza organization to which Ichirō belongs, the poor people of the slum throw rat corpses and rocks at him, expressing their anger wordlessly. Ichirō simply crosses the bridge and gradually disappears into the distance as the film ends. There is no indication of where his destination lies, but at the very least, it is unlikely to be a place full of hope.

Sixteen years before *Wolf, Pig, and Man*, Kurosawa Akira used the aesthetic setting of the swamp as a metaphor to show this sort of link between filthy slums and crime in the part-yakuza, part-crime film *Drunken Angel* (*Yoidore tenshi*, 1948). Methane gas ceaselessly wafts from the swamp in the middle of the shantytown where the film is set. As if trapped within this pitch-black swamp, the yakuza Matsunaga, played by Mifune Toshirō, cannot escape from the yakuza lifestyle no matter how much he struggles. Of course, the swamp of *Drunken Angel*, shot during the Occupation period, is different from filming in the “nothing” spaces of reclaimed land. In the later *The Bad Sleep Well* (*Warui yatsu hodo yoku nemuru*, 1960), Kurosawa tried his hand at a crime drama dealing with incidents of corruption at a land development corporation, but in terms of visual motifs, he never showed any interest in lands containing “nothing.”

What is truly interesting in Kurosawa’s Occupation-era films is the path-breaking way in which he depicts the link between the trauma of wartime experiences and violent crime. The year after *Drunken Angel*, Kurosawa shot the film *Stray Dog* based on a true story and influenced by Georges Simenon’s crime novels. In this film, the gun thief Yusa (Kimura

Isao) is a former member of a kamikaze (*tokkōtai*) unit who has survived the war but can't make good, similar to Matsunaga from *Drunken Angel*. This corresponds with the stereotype in Japan at the time of demobilized soldiers leading criminal lives. But the detective Murakami (Mifune Toshirō), who has his gun stolen by Yusa in *Stray Dog*, is also a demobilized soldier. The plot involving the loss of a gun and its recovery clearly depicts the psychoanalytical theme of the crisis of masculinity, occurring with the loss of the phallus due to defeat in war.

In fact, for a long while after this film, Japanese films have continued to present variations on the theme of the connection between demobilized soldiers, particularly surviving members of kamikaze units, and violent crime. Among the films of this series, Shiozawa in *A Certain Killer* is also a surviving member of a kamikaze unit, with a connection implied between his depiction as an emotionless killer and his psychological trauma due to the war. Without a doubt, the land containing “nothing” in *A Certain Killer* is precisely a projection of this psychological lack within Shiozawa. In contrast with this portrayal, the slums containing “nothing” in *Wolf, Pig, and Man* are where violence emanates from a younger generation with nowhere to go, their point of departure being the poverty of the postwar period. However, in *Battles Without Honor and Humanity: Deadly Fight in Hiroshima* (*Jingi naki tatakai Hiroshima shitō-hen*, 1973), a collaboration with scriptwriter Kasahara Kazuo, Fukasaku casts the protagonist Yamanaka (Kitaōji Kin'ya) as a survivor of a kamikaze unit, while making him fall in love with the widow Seiko (Kaji Meiko), whose husband was also a member of a kamikaze unit but died in the war.

With these depictions in mind, we can begin to discern a pattern of representation in postwar Japanese crime films, drawing together the ideas of masculinity having lost its equilibrium, violence and criminal acts, and land containing “nothing.”

When such crime films from the high economic growth period are compared with Uchida Tomu's *A Fugitive from the Past*, the unusual nature of the representation of femininity and land within the film stands out even more. Inukai, played by Mikuni Rentarō, acts as the accomplice to a robbery and flees with a large amount of money. Ten years later, Inukai has cast aside his past and assumed the name “Tarumi” while making a living as the company president of a food product factory. At that point, the former prostitute Yae (Hidari Sachiko), who happened to spend half a day together with him ten years ago, sees a newspaper article about Tarumi and comes from Tokyo to visit him. Tarumi denies everything that Yae says, but the moment when she recognizes the deformity of his right thumb, Yae embraces Tarumi with fervent glee and declares him to be Inukai. Tarumi, or Inukai, tries to pull away from Yae, but then, after they briefly embrace, he strangles her to death.

In this way, the film shows that, by eliminating women and affection, the male protagonist is able to maintain his quiet life. But afterwards, Inukai is



Stray Dog ©Tōhō

greatly shaken when he is visited by the former detective Yumisaka (Ban Junzaburō) and receives his own thumbnail that Yae had long ago cut off and had continued to treasure and carry with her. Inukai then entreats Yumisaka to take him to Hakodate and Ōminato, the scene of his original crime. What makes *A Fugitive from the Past* unique is this interest in the physical memory with this woman and the specificity of the place where it happened. This calls for the detectives following the mystery of the crime, as well as the film's viewers, to imagine the poverty experienced by Inukai, who crossed from Hokkaidō to Honshū, having been born in the poor village of Tangō—considered by Takenaka Rō to be an outcaste *burakumin* area. Yumisaka declares before the police of Maizuru that those who have not experienced extreme poverty cannot understand Inukai. In a similar vein in this film, making the criminal admit to his crime is synonymous with comprehending his poverty. These conditions will at the same time offer a form of salvation separate from the judgment of the law for the out-of-control masculinity of Inukai—who will surely self-destruct if left to his own devices—as suggested by the violently sobbing form of the criminal after having committed murder.

Translated by: Grace Ting

Duplicity, the Face of Crime, and the Forensics of Cinema

Phil Kaffen

Assistant Professor, New York University

"I don't like bosses, either yakuza bosses, or XXXXX"
—Amachi Shigeru, *The 893 Gang*

The first request of detective Yumisaka (Ban Junzaburō) when he arrives at the scene of the shipwreck in *A Fugitive from the Past* is "Show me their faces." His investigation of the crime scene begins with a discrepancy between two faces. Out of this gap, a larger enigma emerges which he will pursue obsessively for the remainder of the film, and of his life. This mysterious gap demands a forensics of faces: a partial definition of cinema itself, as well as what we do with it.

If the face is a perennial problem for film analysis, the stakes loom larger for crime cinema in which there are inevitably two faces, at least, and acts of violence involved. It is the duplicity—the doubling and therefore potential falseness—of the face that calls for forensics as the mode of analysis proper to crime cinema. The face is the source of the gaze (so often considered in terms of violence). Witness and testimony are there embodied, and as such, faces are complicit in questions of evidence, of truth and deception. At the same time, faces exist in their bare exposure and vulnerability, objects of the gaze, of judgment (the line-up) and of violence.

In *The Man Who Disappeared Yesterday*, the clerk's order to the townspeople gathered to "lift your faces" (*omote age*) allows the revelation of truth to appear on their faces. Yet, this gap that allows for revelation remains rooted in the duplicity of Hasegawa Kazuo's face, a zone of indistinction as both suspect and detective, agent of violence and law. Nor is this duplicity limited to Hasegawa (notwithstanding his roles in both versions of *An Actor's Revenge* [*Yukinojō henge*]). It is a common element in crime cinema, allowing it to engage arguably the thorniest dilemma of modern politics. We need only consider Satō Kei in *The Evil Spirits of Japan* (*Nihon no akuryō*, dir. Kuroki Kazuo, 1970), or Kataoka Chiezō in *Akanishi Kakita* (dir. Itami Mansaku, 1936).

There is something uneasy about this duplicity of identity any face bears. Something about the face withdraws into itself. It never reveals all; it may reveal nothing, or falseness. In *The Last Gunfight*, Mifune Toshirō refers to one of the henchmen as a "toy doll," by his face, in other words, as a fake. Violence directed to the face (even when used for comic effect in the film), registers quite differently from being directed anywhere else on the person. It is often rooted in trying to overcome this inherent duplicity. Katō Tai's *I, the Executioner* (*Minagoroshi no reika*, 1968), the film he made prior to *The Red Peony*, begins with

an extreme close-up of a woman's face and then directs a shocking act of violence against it in the name of truth. Is there any more extreme image of this than a dagger plunged into the face of an infant (even as a sign) concealing contraband in *A Certain Killer*?



Yet, violence directed at the face will never fully erase this duplicity. Crime unfolds in the space between doubling and falseness, in the world between the two (even identical) faces, where truth and violence, law and force, operate in uneasy tension. Gilberto Perez writes: "No doubt, a face, to take hold of the screen, must find a world that suits it. No doubt, a world must find a face that suits it." Forensics does not simply seek the facts of a criminal act, but in order to establish and clarify the effects of violence on the scene, it must imagine the world in which the crime is rooted. This might begin with the face, but it cannot stay there. The forensics of cinema must investigate the mysterious, fraught relationship between the face and the world.

According to Akiyama Shun, most writing on crime ends up as mere words that never touch on the obscured, essentially human core any crime (but especially murder) expresses. Though he never mentions cinema, it was precisely in yakuza film, which was at its height when he was writing, that the face comes to stand for the impossibility of language to capture the true essence of man, his out-of-placeness with the world. Face and world withdraw from one another, separated by an unbridgeable chasm. The protagonists invariably cast themselves into this abyss. But the divide is not limited to the narratives of the films, or their implosion in the spectacle of the final cathartic raid.

When Mishima Yukio praised the beautiful violence of Tsuruta Kōji's face (in *Big Time Gambling Boss* [*Bakuchiuchi sōchō tobaku*, 1968]), in contrast to the ugly, pacifist faces of university professors on the news, he engendered a volatile debate. Mishima was praising what Shiota Akihiko has called "face as battleground," in which a whirlwind of emotions unfolds on the face in complex, beguiling ways. Unlike Shiota's example (Lilian Gish's famously forced smile in *Broken Blossoms* [dir. D.W. Griffith, 1919]), in Tsuruta's case, this battlefield is carved not only through the congeries of emotion displayed, but also by the palimpsest of his own history—a "returned" *tokkōtai* pilot who maintained strong emotional ties to the military and close connections with yakuza, as well as a his scandalous career in the entertainment industry. As an actor in over two hundred films, he would play a wide variety of roles from businessmen



The Road to Hell ©Nikkatsu

to killers, but it was undoubtedly in his many performances in war and yakuza films that the layers of history shaded his face most intensely. These layers became inextricable from one another. When the critic Sudō Hisashi argued that the left must reclaim the face of Tsuruta, he suggested that the lines of the battlefield could be re-drawn.

In his depiction of the scarred face of yakuza-turned-actor Andō Noboru in *A Man's Face Shows His Personal History* (*Otoko no kao wa rirekisho*, 1966), Katō Tai conveyed the tremendous weight born “by a man’s face.” Tōei’s criminal world, where Katō shot most of his films, is built on such faces—not only the faces of stars, but also the faces of the minor but ubiquitous actors—Amatsu Bin, Koike Asao, Uchida Asao, Shioji Akira, Machida Kyōsuke—whose singular faces are their characters. But Katō also knew that a woman’s face bore equal if not greater weight, as he demonstrated in *The Red Peony*, his first contribution to the *Red Peony Gambler* series. The famous opening scene keeps the face of Oryū (Fuji Junko) obscured in profile in the background. Her voice flows out seemingly without end while the camera explores the faces of the criminal world she (also a criminal) enters, including most prominently the imposing, aged face of the *jidaigeki* film star Arashi Kanjūrō. The scene also suggests the importance Katō gives to locating the limits of the face as subject and object of the gaze. The narrative of the film revolves around restoring vision to a blind girl, Okimi. After her operation, Okimi recognizes Oryū, who she is “seeing” for the first time, only when she feels her face. Fuji Junko’s face is captured in extreme close-up in this scene, blocking out the rest of the world. This emphasis on the limits of seeing posed by the face constitutes a principle—at once ethical and unsettling—of Katō’s films. Rarely is

everything within the frame in focus and visible in any given scene.



Film forensics must therefore contend with what is obscured by the face as well, turning away from it. *A Certain Killer*, a film composed of a competition between the three very different faces of Ichikawa Raizō (who first appears with an eye-patch), Narita Mikio, and Nogawa Yumiko, presents numerous examples. When Ichikawa stands in front of the large movie poster for the documentary *Turmoil in Vietnam*, his face is turned away from the camera (us) and toward the war. Viewers nonetheless share his view not through point-of-view editing, but through Mori Kazuo’s insertion of documentary images and sounds of war. When the photographic image of his intended target lap-dissolves into his own photograph of himself and his friends as *tokkōtai*, we must ask about the ambiguous connection between faces—as well as between crime and war. When he accepts the (fake) job proposed by Narita and Nogawa, we see only the back of his head, emphasized by the close-up shot scale. Additionally, much of the film takes place within the lugubrious room that allows them to look out without being seen, a panopticism endemic to cinema, according to film scholar Nakamura Hideyuki. If the criminals go outside, they risk exposing themselves. Thus, the building acts to conceal the faces of crime, while its own eye-like windows peer over a field of graves. If the face must find a world to suit it, we may find a link here with the land of the dead. The barren postwar landscape Ōsawa Jō has so keenly analyzed in this pamphlet intersects with this realm channeled by the *itako* medium’s face in *A Fugitive from the Past*. This face opens onto the intricate dimensions of Buddhism helpfully illuminated by Yomota Inuhiko’s observations on these pages, alongside the unmistakable shadow of the cross hovering in Mikuni Rentarō’s cell.



The epigraph that begins this essay comes from the film *The 893 Gang* (*893 Gurentai*), a story of dim-witted *chinpira* in Kyoto, the only contemporary crime film shot there during the postwar. They boast of their disdain for yakuza, who, by adhering to social hierarchies supposedly undone by American occupation, are resolutely “anti-democratic.” The line is uttered by Amachi Shigeru, who rejects an offer by his old friend (Takamatsu Hideo), now a criminal boss, to come back to the world of yakuza. The second half of the line is inaudible though we see his lips move. It is extremely important then to watch his face precisely for what escapes from it. The line that was erased (by Eirin, the self-censoring organ of the film industry that is a product of the United States occupation) is, “I don’t like bosses, either *oyabun* or the emperor.” While rumors abound of uncensored prints, the DVD and current prints that I have seen expose this silence, a trace of the U.S./Japan security system. According to the director, Nakajima Sadao, there was no problem with saying, “I don’t like the emperor,” but it is unacceptable to put yakuza and emperor together. A conspicuous silence over unsolved crimes remains, inscribed on a man’s face.

Chutaro of Banba



Mabuta no haha: Banba no Chūtārō

瞼の母 番場の忠太郎 (1931)

Production: Chiezō Productions, 85 min., silent (B&W)

Director: Inagaki Hiroshi

Script: Inagaki Hiroshi

Cast: Kataoka Chiezō (*Banba no Chūtārō*), Tokiwa Misako (*Mizukuma Ohama*), Yamada Isuzu (*Otose*), Asaka Shinpachirō (*Kanamachi no Hanji*), Yasukawa Etsuko (*Omura*)

PLOT:

Chutaro of Banba, also sometimes called “In Search of Mother” or “Mother Under the Eyelids,” is based on a semi-biographical play by Hasegawa Shin, a novelist and playwright who was instrumental in the development of the type of films known as *matatabi mono*, or wandering films. *Chutaro of Banba*, too, is such film. Its narrative takes place in the late Edo Period (1603–1868), and revolves around Chūtārō, who like Hasegawa, was abandoned by his mother when he was a child. Similarly, both the fictional character and the author long to reunite with their parent, whose remembrance is perpetuated in their minds. (The word *mabuta* in the original title, means eyelids, and refers to the notion of the mind’s eye.) However, utterly different from Hasegawa the writer, Chūtārō becomes a yakuza gang leader who wanders around the country. Chūtārō is torn between the morals of his outlaw profession, and his emotional devotion to the idea of one day quitting for the sake of the mother who left him years ago. When he is informed about the possibility that she is living in Edo (now Tokyo), he splits with his gang to look for her in the sprawling metropolis, where modernity clashes with such traditional values as loyalty, and perhaps even with the bond between mother and her child.

BACKGROUND:

Director Inagaki Hiroshi (1905–1980) is a rather special case in the history of Japanese cinema. Like several other directors, including for example, Imai Tadashi and Katō Tai (1916–1985), Inagaki is widely acknowledged as one of the most important filmmakers of all time in his native country, while

remaining much less appreciated worldwide today. This being said, however, at one time Inagaki was actually among the most celebrated Japanese directors abroad, after winning the Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film in 1954 with the first film of his *Samurai* trilogy, and the Golden Lion award at the Venice Film Festival in 1958, with *The Rickshaw Man* (*Muhōmatsu no isshō*), both starring internationally acclaimed actor Mifune Toshirō. *Chutaro of Banba* is one of his earliest films, directed less than three years after his debut in 1928. Although it is merely a single film in his oeuvre of more than a hundred films, it is still recognized as one of his best works. It is also a remarkable example of his silent filmmaking, and of an early stage in the evolution of the genre of *jidiageki* or period drama, of which Inagaki was among the most important pioneers.

An equally significant figure in the production of *Chutaro of Banba* is Kataoka Chiezō, the head of Chiezō Productions, who also plays the leading role in the film. Kataoka was one of the most popular film stars of the prewar era, and throughout his career he starred in literally hundreds of films. Moreover, during the nearly ten years his company operated, Kataoka helped create several highly regarded works by renowned directors such as, Itō Daisuke, Itami Mansaku, and Yamanaka Sadao. After the war, Kataoka was at one point among the highest paid actors in Japan, and took an executive position at Tōei, the most profitable film studio in the 1950s and early 1960s, during which it produced another version of *Chutaro of Banba* by Katō Tai in 1963.

Police Officer



Keisatsukan 警察官 (1933)

Production: Shinkō Kinema, 121 min. at 18fps (silent, B&W)

Director: Uchida Tomu

Screenplay: Yamauchi Eizō

Cast: Kosugi Isamu (*Itami*), Nakano Eiji (*Tomiooka Tetsuo*), Matsumoto Taisuke (*Miyabe*), Mori Shizuko (*Tazuko*), Katsura Tamako (*Emiko*)

PLOT:

During a traffic check, the police officer Itami runs into his old classmate Tetsuo. This sparks Tetsuo to visit the station and talk about old times. Itami had to leave school for family reasons, but due to the kind supervision of Officer Miyabe, he was able to put his life in order and became a policeman. He still lives with Miyabe and his daughter Tazuko. Tetsuo, however, is the son of a rich industrialist who seems to spend his days in dissipation. A few days later, Miyabe is shot in a bank robbery in which one of the two culprits escapes. In the hospital, he informs the others that he injured one of the two robbers with his sabre. The blood and fingerprints left on the scene are thus the main clues to the other's identity. After visiting Miyabe in the hospital, Itami runs into Tetsuo, and the two reminisce about their good old days at school. Tetsuo's limp, however, causes suspicion in the officer. Continuing his investigation, Itami one day finds himself being followed. Evading the pursuer, he turns the tables and follows that man to a billiard hall, where he again encounters Tetsuo by chance. He continues after the pursuer, only to lose him. It is then that he runs into Shin, who used to live next to the Miyabes with his sister Emiko. He takes him to their new place above a game parlor, where Itami spots Tetsuo's golf bag. After the arrested robber commits suicide in prison, and Miyabe dies in the hospital, Itami returns to the game hall and manages to get the fingerprint of the man who followed him. When it doesn't match the suspect's, he returns to stake out the joint, and sees Tetsuo leaving Emiko's place. He follows him and strikes up a conversation, managing to get Tetsuo's fingerprint on a

lighter. Itami returns to his room and confirms that Tetsuo's fingerprint matches that of the suspect. The police then surround Tetsuo's hideout, and a gun battle ensues. All of the crooks are arrested except for Tetsuo, who tries to flee and jump off a bridge. Itami stops him, however, and puts the cuffs on him.

BACKGROUND:

Police Officer is, on the one hand, a harbinger of "national policy" films. Produced with major support from police authorities, it had unprecedented access to police stations for filming locations, and was made with the aim of depicting a police force that sacrificed its own personal feelings to resolutely protect the citizenry. The basis for the film was a stage play depicting the Ōmori Gang Incident, in which a bank was robbed supposedly on the direction of Communist Party leaders. Official support for the film can then be seen as part of a larger policy directive, supporting increasingly fascistic control of domestic society through modern procedures, such as fingerprinting, which emblemized a new culture of cold, rationalized surveillance. On the other hand, the film could be seen as part of Uchida Tomu's long exploration of guilt and internal conflict in a realistic socio-historical milieu. Making his first film for Shinkō Kinema, he combined his concern for social realism with an often experimental and modernist touch in depicting emotional turmoil and narrative conflict. The film uses the geography of modern Tokyo to create conflicts in space and light that interrogate not only the character conflict but also a changing Japan.

The Man Who Disappeared Yesterday



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Kinō kieta otoko 昨日消えた男 (1941)

Production: Tōhō, 89 min. (B&W)

Director: Makino Masahiro

Screenplay: Oguni Hideo

Cast: Hasegawa Kazuo (*Bunkichi*), Yamada Isuzu (*Kotomi*), Tokugawa Musei (*Shinozaki Genzaemon*), Takamine Hideko (*Okyō*), Egawa Ureo (*Rokunojō*)

PLOT:

In a run-down tenement in Edo's Ryōgoku district, the much-disliked landlord Kanbei is found murdered one night. Suspicion first falls on Bunkichi, who always verbalized his resentment against Kanbei, and on the rōnin Shinozaki Genzaemon, who owed the landlord money. The police officials Rokunoshin and Hachigorō begin questioning all the colorful inhabitants of the tenement. Since Kanbei was killed with a sword, they first focus on Genzaemon and another rōnin, Yokoyama Kyūma. Kyūma, in love with Genzaemon's daughter Okyō, decides to falsely confess to the crime because he thinks her father did it. But with no evidence to back the confession up, Kyūma is released. Hachigorō suspects Bunkichi, but cannot manage to pin anything on that slick character. Bunkichi, however, is warned about Hachigorō by the locksmith Daisaburō, only to then find out that Daisaburō himself has been murdered. The now complex investigation is turned over to a higher authority: the magistrate Tōyama Zaemonnojō. When the residents of the tenement are all brought in for questioning by the magistrate, however, they are in for a big surprise: Tōyama looks surprisingly like Bunkichi! Under the magistrate's careful questioning, a larger conspiracy behind Kanbei's murder begins to emerge.

BACKGROUND:

Period film mysteries are not a rarity (we even showed one here at Yale in 2012—from the *Dandy Sashichi Detective Story* series—in our last series with the National Film Center). The novelist Okamoto Kidō helped establish the genre with his Inspector Hanshichi series in the 1910s, and many "torimonochō" ("detective notes") series soon followed in literature and cinema. Some featured low-level inspectors, but many were

centered on illustrious samurai magistrates, some of whom were portrayed as practically Robin-Hood-like protectors of the poor, who lived in disguise among the commoners until they revealed themselves at the last minute and punished evil officials. *The Man Who Disappeared Yesterday* is in that tradition, being based on a real-life magistrate, Tōyama Kagemoto (1793–1855), who spurred legends of the tattooed detective "Tōyama no Kin-san" hiding among and aiding the poor, stories that have become the basis for multiple films and television series. *The Man Who Disappeared Yesterday* deviates from that line, however, by also being loosely based on the film adaptations of Dashiell Hammett's *The Thin Man*. The repartee between Hasegawa and Yamada or amongst the great cast of performers thus becomes nearly as important as the mystery. Makino Masahiro (1908–1993) was the son of Makino Shōzō, the "father of Japanese cinema." Masahiro was a celebrated genre-film auteur who shot over 200 films in his career, and by this time had become a master not only of speed and rhythm, but also of fast shooting, with this movie being shot in only ten days. It was his first film for Tōhō, but he masterfully managed a cast featuring Hasegawa Kazuo (*An Actor's Revenge* [*Yukinojō henge*]), Yamada Isuzu (*Throne of Blood* [*Kumonosu-jō*, 1957]), the former benshi Tokugawa Musei, and a young Takamine Hideko (recently voted the best actress of all time by Japanese critics). The script was quickly penned by Oguni Hideo, later a frequent collaborator with Kurosawa Akira on *Seven Samurai* (*Shichinin no samurai*, 1954) and other films. *The Man Who Disappeared Yesterday* was released on January 9 to aim for the lucrative New Year's season and became a big hit, spurring the production of several other Hasegawa films under Makino's megaphone.

Stray Dog



Nora Inu 野良犬 (1949)

Production: Shin Tōhō; 122 min.

(B&W)

Director: Kurosawa Akira

Script: Kurosawa Akira and
Kikushima Ryūzō

Cast: Mifune Toshiro (*Murakami*),
Shimura Takashi (*Satō*), Awaji Keiko
(*Harumi*), Kimura Isao (*Yusa*)

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PLOT:

The story centers on a police detective, Murakami, whose pistol is stolen from him while he rides a trolley through Tokyo, a city still struggling to recover from the devastation of World War II. Murakami is overcome with guilt at the loss of his weapon, particularly when reports roll in that it is being used in a series of holdups, one ending fatally. Murakami devotes himself to tracking down the man who has his gun, going undercover to penetrate the seedy postwar black market and hunting down every possible lead. When Murakami finally encounters the criminal, he discovers that they share more in common than he might have imagined.

BACKGROUND:

Stray Dog, which Kurosawa Akira (1910–1998) wrote in collaboration with Kikushima Ryūzō, was Kikushima's screenwriting debut, though he would later work on scripts for many other films, including Kurosawa's *Throne of Blood*, Naruse Mikio's *When a Woman Ascends the Stairs* (*Onna ga kaidan o noboru toki*, 1960), and *Tora! Tora! Tora!* (1970), among others. Kurosawa, who wanted to "make a film in the manner of [French mystery writer Georges Simenon]", once considered his film a failure, but has later come to appreciate its strengths.¹

Released in 1949, *Stray Dog* was not Kurosawa's first postwar film, but is arguably his strongest investigation of violence and responsibility. Mifune Toshiro's Detective Murakami can be read as an allegory for the Japanese people, who were struggling with the question of culpability for the events of World War II when the film was made. According to the official postwar narrative, the Japanese people were not responsible for acts of aggression committed by the nation during the war, but were rather duped into complicity by a villainous leadership acting counter to the wishes

and best interests of the citizenry. In the same way, it could be said that Murakami, whose gun is stolen by a man who uses it to commit robberies (and eventually murder), is a mere victim, and that any crimes committed with his revolver have nothing to do with him.

Murakami, however, insists upon assuming responsibility for the violence that he feels he has unleashed by failing to control his own firearm. Central to Murakami's struggle with the thief is the idea that he and the thief are so similar, and that circumstance alone may have made the difference between their positions. This sense of similarity peaks when Murakami and the thief are engaged in their final struggle, with little visual distinction between them, until they collapse, framed side-by-side in a shot that emphasizes their sameness. Murakami's ethics and the visual parallels between him and the man who commits crimes with his weapon undermine a reductive division between innocence and complicity. In the end, it is up to Murakami as an individual to determine the extent of his own responsibility and to put an end to the crimes enabled by his own carelessness.

Ultimately, it is Murakami's strength of character that allows him to apprehend the criminal. In his final confrontation with the thief, it is by accepting the return of the same violence that he believes his mistake to have begun that Murakami is at last able to complete the cycle and regain control of his weapon.

The investigation of the social causes of crime is a theme Kurosawa would revisit in later work, including *High and Low* (*Tengoku to jigoku*, 1963) (on which Kikushima also collaborated, and in which Mifune appeared), but the miscreant in *Stray Dog*, a wronged ex-soldier desperately seeking survival in a bombed-out city, is perhaps Kurosawa's most sympathetic criminal.

1. Terrence Rafferty, "Stray Dog: Kurosawa Comes of Age," <http://www.criterion.com/current/posts/323-stray-dog-kurosawa-comes-of-age>

The Road to Hell



Jigoku no magarikado

地獄の曲がり角 (1959)

Production: Nikkatsu, 92 min.

(B&W)

Director: Kurahara Koreyoshi

Screenplay: Baba Masaru,

Yamada Nobuo

Cast: Hayama Ryōji (*Maki*), Inagaki

Mihoko (*Akiko*), Minamida Yōko

(*Takako*), Nihon'yanagi Hiroshi

(*Matsunaga*), Kondō Hiroshi

(*Hachirō*)

©Nikkatsu

PLOT:

Maki, working a dead-end job at the Sakura Hotel, comes across a murder in one of the rooms and discovers a mysterious key near the body, with a note suggesting that it is one of three. In the next morning's paper, he learns that the murdered man was an assistant at a government ministry who had just gotten out of prison for his involvement in a bribery scandal. What's more, 150 million yen have gone missing! Thrilled with this unexpected opportunity to change his life, Maki becomes a new man, much to the chagrin of his girlfriend Akiko, who works at a flower shop at the hotel and dreams of living together with Maki. Meanwhile, a mysterious woman named Takako, who is staying at the hotel in the room next to the one in which the murder took place, seduces Maki with the aim of stealing the key away from him. By setting up a tape recorder in the hotel room to record secret liaisons, Maki is able to blackmail for money and soon finds himself contesting a yakuza organization. While he increasingly shows himself capable of becoming a man of considerable influence, Akiko from the flower shop dislikes this transformation of her lover. However, her disapproval is not enough to wake Maki up from the dream he is pursuing involving the mystery of the three keys and unimaginable sums of money. Released the autumn before Japan was engulfed by mass protests against the renewal of the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty (Anpo) in the spring of 1960, this stylish crime drama follows an ordinary schmuck into a well-spun web of government and corporate corruption. Once ensnared, can he ever escape? If so, at what cost?

BACKGROUND:

Although far less well-known outside Japan than his studio-mate Suzuki Seijun, Kurahara Koreyoshi

(1927–2002) was one of Nikkatsu's top directors in the 1960s, during which time filmmakers established a distinct studio style conventionally dubbed "Nikkatsu Action." After working as assistant director on the epochal 1956 film *Crazed Fruit* (*Kurutta kajitsu*), often described as the opening salvo of Japanese cinema's New Wave, Kurahara made his directorial debut the following year with the noir-ish *I Am Waiting* (*Ore wa matteiru ze*, 1957), starring Sun Tribe idol Ishihara Yūjirō. With the success of that film, Kurahara quickly became a leading figure in Nikkatsu's remarkable late-50s revival, directing five films released in 1959 alone, including *The Road to Hell*. But it was his 1960 frenetic, jazz-drunk yawp *The Warped Ones* (*Kyōnetsu no kisetsu*)—sometimes called Japan's *Breathless*—that marks Kurahara's true breakout as a daring and original director. It could be said that *The Road to Hell* has more in common with Kurahara's well-paced, moody crime drama *Intimidation* (*Aru kyōhaku*, 1960) than the perfectly offbeat New Wave recklessness of *The Warped Ones*, but one thematic element that seems to tie these films together is their blurring together of ordinary people and gangsters. While we revel in the stylish innovations of these films, we might also see in them a commentary on what people turn into as they try to get a leg up in the cutthroat era of high-speed economic growth—a concern that seems as relevant in 2015 as it was fifty-five years ago.

It should be noted that *The Road to Hell* was Kurahara's first collaboration with cinematographer Mamiya Yoshio and screenwriter Yamada Nobuo, both of whom went on to work with Kurahara on several films throughout the 1960s. Nikkatsu stars Hayama Ryōji and Minamida Yōko lead a cast that also includes Nikkatsu Action villain Kondō Hiroshi.

The Last Gunfight



Ankokugai no taiketsu

暗黒街の対決 (1960)

Production: Tōhō, 95 min. (Color)

Director: Okamoto Kihachi

Script: Nishiki Motosada,
Sekizawa Shin'ichi

Cast: Tsuruta Kōji (*Murayama Tetsuo*), Mifune Toshirō (*Fujioka Saburō*), Kita Akemi (*Mari*), Tsukasa Yōko (*Sally*), Yanagawa Keiko (*Yōko*)

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PLOT:

A detective in civilian clothes arrives in a rural town to investigate crimes involving two local yakuza families, Ōoka and Kozuka. These two organized crime groups violently compete over territory, and over prostitution, drugs and gambling markets in the area. It is soon revealed that the local mournful bartender used to be a yakuza member as well, but after his wife died, allegedly in an accident, he has taken an oath to quit in order to become a *katagi*, the yakuza term for a law abiding citizen. The relationship between him and the detective becomes warmer after the detective raises suspicions that the wife had actually been killed as a result of clashes between the yakuza gangs he is investigating. Despite some initial doubts, the bartender gradually grows to trust the steadfast detective, and eventually agrees to work with him. Yet, unlike the detective who is determined to bring the criminals to justice in the court of law, the bartender envisions a less lawful outcome for those responsible for the death of his beloved wife.

BACKGROUND:

Two of Japan's greatest actors co-star in *The Last Gunfight*: Mifune Toshirō (playing the detective), and Tsuruta Kōji (playing the bartender). The former is the internationally acclaimed performer who collaborated with Okamoto Kihachi (1924–2005) on some of the director's best-known works, including *Samurai Assassin* (*Samurai*, 1965) and *The Sword of Doom* (*Daibosatsu tōge*, 1966). The other actor, Tsuruta Kōji, is somewhat lesser known in the West, but arguably was even more popular than Mifune in his own country. Tsuruta appeared in only a few films produced by Tōhō before he joined the rival, Tōei, where he would become known for

his roles in the studio's brand of *ninkyō eiga*, or chivalrous yakuza films.

The work of director Okamoto Kihachi has been drawing more attention in recent years. For decades, Okamoto was considered simply one among the many contract studio directors working in postwar Japan. However, reissues of some of his films on DVDs, along with international screenings and retrospectives, reveal his cinematic mastery. Okamoto was hired by one of Japan's biggest studios, Tōhō, almost immediately after graduating from college. He first served as an assistant to renowned directors such as Makino Masahiro and Naruse Mikio, before becoming a director himself in 1958. Throughout a career that spanned more than four decades, he directed nearly forty films in various genres, including comedy, *jidaigeki*, and war, a subject he was partially interested in due to his own traumatic experiences as a teenage soldier in WWII.

Notwithstanding the dark and disturbing themes *The Last Gunfight* showcases along with the film's thrilling action scenes, the film is actually quite humorous, and it features even comedic musical sequences, as well as the jazzy music composed by Satō Masaru, who is famous for soundtracks such as Kurosawa Akira's *Yōjimbo* (1961). Moreover, the film's playful exploration of genre boundaries is also reminiscent of some of the director's later works that feature a mixture of genres such as, *Oh Bomb* (*Aa bakudan*, 1964), *Dixieland Daimyo* (*Jazu daimyō*, 1986), and *East Meets West* (1995).

Wolf, Pig, and Man



Ōkami to buta to ningen

狼と豚と人間 (1964)

Production: Tōei, 95 min. (B&W)

Director: Fukasaku Kinji

Script: Fukasaku Kinji, Satō Jun'ya

Cast: Takakura Ken (*Kuroki Jirō*),
Kitaōji Kin'ya (*Kuroki Saburō*),
Mikuni Rentarō (*Kuroki Ichirō*),
Ehara Shinjirō (*Mizuhara*),
Okazaki Jirō (*Takeshi*), Shima
Hiroko (*Mako*)

©Tōei

PLOT:

Jirō is the second brother of the Kuroki family. He has just been released from jail and is already scheming a new heist. For this mission he hopes to recruit his younger brother, who is referred to as Sabu by his friends. This is a difficult task, as Sabu resents his brother for his lack of concern toward their mother who has just died. Sabu is nevertheless lured to take part in his brother's plot when Jirō offers him what seems to be a large sum of money. However, this is not going to be a happy family operation. First, the target of the plan is a powerful yakuza gang, led by a ruthless boss, for whom the eldest Kuroki brother Ichirō is working. Second, Jirō offers his younger brother only a small share of the loot but not lesser exposure to the risks. While the robbery itself is successful, when Sabu finds out about what really has been stolen, he betrays his brother and runs away with the spoils. Jirō thus sparks a war between the three brothers. But before they can reconcile, they also need to face their partners in crime, particularly the yakuza gang leader, who fights to reclaim his fortune.

BACKGROUND:

Director Fukasaku Kinji (1930–2003) is probably best known in the West for his last film, the controversial dystopian thriller, *Battle Royale* (*Batoru row-aiaru*, 1999). In Japan, and for film fans all over the world, however, he is chiefly recognized as a master of yakuza films. Among the dozens of films he directed pertaining to this subgenre, most popular is undoubtedly the film series, *Battles Without Honor and Humanity* (*Jinginaiki tatakai*, 1973–1974), starring Sugawara Bunta, who passed away several months ago. The series is also a prime example of the unique film style labeled, *jitsuroku*, or “true-record.”

Among the most prominent features of this style are: shaky hand-held camera, shooting on location, and dialogue faithful to real-life speech. Yet, to these realistic elements, Fukasaku also adds freeze-frames, as well as narration—aspects that work against the seemingly documentary pretense of the films and enhance the artificiality of the cinematic experience.

Wolf, Pig, and Man is an earlier work of the director, released a decade before his famous film series. Nonetheless, many of the characteristics of the cinematic style he would perfect are visible in this film as well. For example, the film begins with a sequence of motion and still frames along with spoken narration. Moreover, most of scenes were filmed on location, occasionally capturing objects and individuals that were not part of the production. In addition, a preference is marked throughout the film for relatively long shots with extensive camera movement, as well as the use of zoom in and out over editing. These factors contribute to the film's authenticity in its portrayal of the Japanese underworld while at the same time also bolster its highly stylized outlook.

The star of the film is Takakura Ken, arguably the single most popular Japanese actor of all time, passed away November 14, 2014. He is the only actor in Japan who has won four Japanese Academy Awards for leading actor, and in 2013 he was awarded the Japanese Order of Culture by the Emperor. Takakura appeared in more than two hundred films, including many domestic box-office hits and critically acclaimed films. In addition, he also starred in many international films, such as Ridley Scott's *Black Rain* (1989) and Zhang Yimou's *Riding Alone for Thousands of Miles* (*Qian li zou dan qi*, 2005).

A Fugitive from the Past



Kiga kaikyō 飢餓海峡 (1965)

Production: Tōei, 183 min. (B&W)

Director: Uchida Tomu

Screenplay: Suzuki Naoyuki

Cast: Mikuni Rentarō (*Inukai Takichi*), Hidari Sachiko (*Sugito Yae*), Ban Junzaburō (*Yumisaka Kichitarō*), Takakura Ken (*Ajimura Tokio*), Katō Yoshi (*Sugito Chōzaemon*)

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PLOT:

On September 22, 1947, a typhoon is approaching the northern island of Hokkaido when a fire breaks out in a pawnshop in the town of Iwanai. Just before that, two men had fled the shop and joined another before heading off to Hakodate, a city that was in pandemonium trying to rescue survivors of the shipwrecked Aomori-Hakodate ferry. One of those helping is Detective Yumisaka from Iwanai. When he returns home, he finds out that the fire, apparently set to cover up a murder-robbery, has burned down much of the town. The warden of the Abashiri Prison visits and suggests that two recently released inmates, Numata and Kijima, might be involved. Investigating them, Yumisaki discovers they were staying at an inn with a man named Inukai Takichi. Checking out Hakodate, he finds out that one of the rescue boats is missing. Crossing the Tsugaru Strait, he finds a spot where the boat was probably burned and collects some of the ashes.

In the forest of the Shimokita Peninsula, Inukai is walking alone until he finds a poor house in which an old woman, in the custom of the area, is trying to summon the spirits of the dead. Scared, Inukai runs off and hops on a logging train and meets a woman named Yae who gives him food. Following her, he finds out she is a prostitute in Ōminato. He spends the night with her, but even after she cuts his nails, refuses her entreaties for him to stay. Instead he leaves her a bundle of cash and escapes. When Yumisaka asks Yae about Inukai's whereabouts, she lies, intending to use the money to pay off her debts and flee to Tokyo. Returning to Iwanai, Yumisaka receives the first photos of Numata and Kijima, and recognizes them as the two bodies that had seemingly been recovered

from the ferry but had been left unclaimed. He figures Inukai killed them. Thinking Yae knows something, he heads for Tokyo to find her, but Yae, sensing his presence, evades him by moving to another red-light district.

Ten years later, the red-light districts are being closed down as prostitution has been made illegal. Yae spots a newspaper article about a Maizuru company donating a large sum of money to help convicts rehabilitate. The head of the company, Tarumi Kyōichirō, looks exactly like Inukai. Yae then decides to visit Maizuru where events take a turn for the worse.

BACKGROUND:

A Fugitive from the Past—also called “Straits of Hunger”—is considered Uchida Tomu’s masterpiece, a monumental work that is often selected as one of the best Japanese films of all time by domestic critics (it was number three in a 1999 poll). Working from Mizukami Tsutomu’s novel, but taking it to new depths, *A Fugitive from the Past* is ostensibly a detective mystery, but at the same time also a recollection of the stark landscape of immediate postwar Japan and a practically Buddhist exploration of guilt and suffering, a kind of Japanese *Crime and Punishment*. The landscape and psychology become intertwined through Uchida’s daring cinematography, in which he shot on 16mm film and then blew it up to 35mm to create a gray, grainy world pressing on the backs of his characters, one that occasionally reverses in a bold use of negative film stock.

A Certain Killer



Aru koroshiya ある殺し屋 (1967)

Production: Daiei, 82 min. (Color)

Director: Mori Kazuo

Screenplay: Masumura Yasuzō,
Ishimatsu Yoshihiro

Cast: Ichikawa Raizō (*Shiozawa*),
Nogawa Yumiko (*Keiko*), Narita Mikio
(*Maeda*), Nagisa Mayumi (*Shigeko*),
Koike Asao (*Kimura*)

©Kadokawa

PLOT:

The narrative consists of a complicated structure involving a number of flashbacks. The film centers on a notorious killer named Shiozawa, who is feared by yakuza clans but disguises his identity by managing a small Japanese restaurant. One day, Shiozawa meets Keiko, who starts to hang around him once she finds out he has money. Keiko begins working at his restaurant while making vain attempts to seduce Shiozawa. Meanwhile, Shiozawa contracts with the Kimura-gumi yakuza clan to murder Ōwada, the boss of rival clan, for 20 million yen. When Shiozawa succeeds in killing Ōwada by his trained method using just one needle, one of the Kimura-gumi members, Maeda, asks Shiozawa to take him as an apprentice, only to be rejected. Maeda begins to have intimate relations with Keiko, and the couple soon plots to murder Shiozawa and take his money. Before murdering him, however, Maeda and Keiko try to get Shiozawa to steal 200 million yen worth of drugs. The heist goes according to plan, but Maeda's attempt to kill Shiozawa is unsuccessful, since Shiozawa, having anticipated Maeda's betrayal, unloaded Maeda's gun beforehand. Another unexpected event occurs when Maeda's boss Kimura intervenes. Shiozawa kills Kimura with his needle method, and quietly departs from the spot while leaving the remaining drugs to Maeda and Keiko.

BACKGROUND:

Mori Kazuo (1911–1989, a.k.a. Mori Issei), is best known as a director of Daiei's period films (*jidaigeki*) during the 1950s and 1960s, including *Samurai Vendetta* (*Hakuōki*, 1959) and *The Blind Menace* (*Shiranui kengyō*, 1960). After graduating from Kyoto Imperial University, Mori began his career as an assistant director to Itō Daisuke prior to his directorial debut with *Adauchi Hizakurige* (1936). After the war, most of Mori's films became part of Daiei's "program pictures," which suggests genre-oriented films made under constrained resources

and generic requirements imposed by studio system. Despite the restrictions under which Mori made films, his works have continued to garner positive popular and critical attention. With *A Certain Killer*, Mori goes beyond his already-established reputation as a *jidaigeki* specialist by constructing a somber, fatalistic mood for postwar Japan. The film is often categorized as "Japanese film noir," and it was released in the same year with another crucial noir film, Suzuki Seijun's *Branded to Kill* (*Koroshi no rakuin*, 1967). Adapted from a novel by Fujiwara Shinji (as was another film in this series, *The Road to Hell*), *A Certain Killer* involves at least two key figures that need special attention. One is Ichikawa Raizō (1931–1969), who plays the protagonist Shiozawa. Raizō debuted as a kabuki actor when he was a teenager, but he entered Daiei in 1954 and began his career as a film actor with *The Great White Tiger Platoon* (*Hana no byakkotai*, 1954). He quickly became a big star and—until his death in 1969 at the age of 37—he appeared mostly in *jidaigeki* including numerous works directed by Mori. *A Certain Killer* was one of only a handful of films set in contemporary Japan (*gendai geki*) in which Raizō appeared. The second key figure is Masumura Yasuzō (1924–1986), the film's co-scriptwriter together with Ishimatsu Yoshihiro. A graduate of the University of Tokyo, Masumura entered Daiei in 1947 as an assistant director. During the early 1950s, he studied filmmaking in Italy under Antonioni, Fellini, and Visconti. Soon after coming back to Japan, he debuted as director with *Kisses* (*Kuchizuke*, 1957). Masumura proposed the kind of cinema that would shock spectators by breaking from depicting the everyday life of an idealized middle-class as he saw in films by directors such as Ozu Yasujiro. As a representative of a new generation of filmmakers, Masumura provided *A Certain Killer* with additional narrative twists and suspense.

The Red Peony



Hibotan bakuto: hanafuda shōbu
緋牡丹博徒 花札勝負 (1969)

Production: Tōei, 98 min. (Color)

Director: Katō Tai

Script: Suzuki Noribumi. Torii Motohiro

Cast: Fuji Junko (*Oryū*), Arashi
Kanjūrō (*Sugiyama Teijirō*), Kiyokawa
Nijiko (*Otake*), Wakayama Tomisaburō
(*Kumasaka Torakichi*), Takakura
Ken (*Hanaoka Shōgo*), Koike Asao
(*Kanahara Tetsunosuke*)

©Tōei

PLOT:

Set in Nagoya in the late nineteenth century, the film revolves around Hibotan no Oryū, a young and beautiful “female gambler” who gets apprenticed to the Nishinomaru, a local yakuza under constant threat of the Kanahara, a rival yakuza in collusion with a powerful politician, Furuta. Jirō, a son of the Nishinomaru’s boss, is in love with Yaeko, a daughter of the Kanahara’s head. With the help of Hanaoka, the Kanahara’s lieutenant, Oryū helps the young couple run off together to Osaka, which instigates the all-out violent war between the two syndicates.

BACKGROUND:

The Red Peony is the third in a series of eight Tōei films (1968–1972) featuring Hibotan no Oryū, arguably the most famous “female yakuza” in the history of Japanese cinema. Oryū was the product of the film studios in Japan in search of the hit-making heroic characters on screen. The innovative combination of the feminine beauty and the masculine violence to create a morally ambiguous ‘gangster’ heroine was indeed part of the trend, preceded by Daiei Studio’s *Female Gambler* (*Onna tobakushi*) series (1966–1971) starring the glamorous Enami Kyōko. However, the *Red Peony Gambler* series, which showcased some of the most desired postwar stars, including Fuji Junko and Tsuruta Kōji as well as the recently deceased Takakura Ken and Sugawara Bunta, naturally stood out.

The noteworthiness of *The Red Peony* is in part a product of its talent. It is largely regarded as the best of the series directed by Katō Tai (1916–1985), a favorite of Okada Shigeru, the president of the studio. The nephew of the “genius” *jidaigeki* (period film) director Yamanaka Sadao (1909–1938), Katō was first making documentaries for the Manchukuo Film Association (Manshū Eiga Kyōkai) during wartime.

The popularity of his films, however, peaked in the 1960s when the industry was going through a drastic change with the emergence of the so-called “new wave,” whose makers were committed to challenging cinematic traditions and the culture at large. Katō has suffered relative neglect outside Japan partly because his career primarily revolved around *jidaigeki* and yakuza films, genre-oriented popular cinemas produced strictly within studio system. However, his stylistically rigorous filmmaking principles, including excessive use of low-angle and vibrant color schema (which vividly illustrates the splashes of blood), have been highly praised and often revisited as “auteur” by later-generation filmmakers, critics, and cinephiles.

Katō’s persistent use of low-angles in part derived from his own fascination with Fuji Junko’s virtuoso movement of “footing” (Katō described it as *ashisabaki*, the term typically used for Kabuki performance). Famously, for *The Red Peony*, Katō wanted almost ankle-level, extreme low angle shots so the film crew was forced to dig up a fully paved road. Such an idiosyncratic perfectionism reminiscent of Kurosawa Akira is, however, balanced with the new sensibility redolent of new wave filmmakers; Katō notes that the spontaneous energy of the gambling scene in the film, for instance, is indebted to *Pale Flower* (*Kawaita hana*, 1964), a masterful crime film directed by Shinoda Masahiro.

World Premiere of Chutaro of Banba

THE PRINT:

As mentioned in the “Introduction,” there are still relatively few classic yakuza or detective films that have been subtitled and made available for foreign audiences. We were thus thrilled when the National Film Center of the National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo, followed through on our suggestion and created the first English subtitled print of one of great examples of the *matatabi* or wandering gangster genre, *Chutaro of Banba*. The print, created just in time for our series, will be shown for the first time here at Yale. It is based on the best print of the film that exists in Japanese archives: a 16mm print in the collection of Matsuda Eigasha. Given that many of the masterpieces of prewar Japanese cinema are lost or in poor condition, we have to be thankful that this print, while showing its age, still evinces its cinematic power. The 16mm print has been blown up to 35mm.

THE MUSIC:

Our screening of *Chutaro of Banba* will be accompanied by live music performed by the trio, Limbergino.

Formed in 2014, **Limbergino** is an up-and-coming ensemble devoted to the creation of new music for silent films. The trio, all current or former students of the Yale School of Music, consists of keyboardist Dan Schlosberg, guitarist Jesse Limbacher, and violinist James Rubino. The music they create together can only be experienced live in concert, and is specifically created to give each film a unique accompaniment that changes with every performance. Last spring they performed a score for Lois Weber’s *The Blot* in collaboration with the Yale Film Studies Center for their Re-Building the Canon series.



Chutaro of Banba

We would like to acknowledge and credit the following film companies for their cooperation in allowing us to screen their films for our event:

“THE MAN WHO DISAPPEARED YESTERDAY,” “STRAY DOG,” “THE LAST GUNFIGHT,”
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“WOLF, PIG, AND MAN,” “A FUGITIVE FROM THE PAST,” “THE RED PEONY” ©Toei Co., Ltd.

“A CERTAIN KILLER” ©Kadokawa Shoten, Co., Ltd.

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National Film Center
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This series is dedicated to Takakura Ken (1931–2014)

Wolf, Pig, and Man ©Tōei