

FALL 2005 JAPAN FILM SERIES

CINEMATIC STRANGERS

MARGINAL FIGURES IN JAPANESE FILM

*In conjunction with FILM 448a/JAPN 271a
Prints Courtesy of the Japan Foundation*

A woman gambler, an atomic terrorist, disillusioned youth, a Korean resident of Japan all people marginal to Japanese society featured in a series of celebrated films rarely shown outside Japan.

Film Notes by Aaron Gerow

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 29, 2005 7:00 PM
Whitney Humanities Center Auditorium, 53 Wall Street

Red Peony Gambler: Flower Cards Match

緋牡丹博徒 花札勝負 *Hibotan bakuto: Hanafuda shôbu*

Directed by **Katô Tai**

監督 加藤泰

Tôei, released 1 February 1969, 98min.

Producer: Shundô Kôji, Kusakabe Gorô
Screenplay: Suzuki Norifumi, Torii Motohiro
Original Story: Ishimoto Hisakichi
Photography: Furuya Shin
Editing: Miyamoto Shintarô
Art Direction: Tomita Jirô

Cast:

Oryû: Fuji Junko
Hanaoka: Takakura Ken
Kumasaka: Wakayama Tomisaburô
Sugiyama: Arashi Kanjûrô
Jiro: Ishiyama Ritsu
Police Officer: Fujiyama Kanbi
Otaka: Kiyokawa Nijiko

Japanese gangsters, called *yakuza*, have often fascinated Westerners. Their rigid hierarchy, rituals such as finger cutting, and elaborate tattoos have invaded a number of American films (e.g., *Black Rain*, *The Yakuza*), and served as one reason for the success abroad of such Japanese directors as Kitano Takeshi, Fukasaku Kinji, and Miike Takashi. They have their code, but are still badder than bad in a contemporary world already turned upside down. But they weren't always that way in Japanese cinema. In fact, the major boom in *yakuza* films, begun around 1964 at the Tôei studios, featured gangsters who were not only honorable and chivalrous (the films were called "ninkyô eiga" or literally "chivalrous films"), but lived in a better age. Most stories took place in the Meiji (1868-1912) or Taishô (1912-1925) eras, or at latest the period before WWII. This was a transitional period towards modernity, before Japan became a mass consumer society, and the *yakuza* in these works represented the communal values of tradition. Their enemies, usually other gangsters tied to crooked politicians or capitalists, represented a degradation of those values, if not a modern system of capital and centralized authority. If the chivalric gangsters wore kimono, bad ones often wore Western

suits. The good guys try to go about their business (sometimes running gambling dens, but also legitimate businesses as well), but suffer under the unscrupulous machinations of the rival gang. The hero, often played by male stars like Takakura Ken or Tsuruta Kôji, bears the insults (only the immature ones fly off the cuff) until he just can't take it anymore, resulting in the final, cathartic choreography of blood. Audiences in the 1960s were attracted to both the conservative and radical sides of this genre: the confirmation of tradition against a disruptive modernity plus the bloody slaughter of those in authority. The violence was highly aestheticized, if not ritualized, and Katô Tai was the best at manipulating this cinematic dance of death. Born in 1916, Katô was the nephew of the brilliant film director Yamanaka Sadao (we showed his *Tange Sazen* in fall 2004), and first entered the industry in 1937 through an introduction from his uncle. His first films were actually documentaries, some filmed for the Manchuria Film Association (Man'ei). After the war, he worked as an assistant director at Daiei for his idol Itô Daisuke and Kurosawa Akira (on *Rashomon*), but was fired for his leftist politics. Katô wandered between studios, directing his first fiction feature in 1951, before he eventually made his way to Tôei, which ruled the 1950s box office with its samurai movies. But while his colleagues worked quickly for a studio that at one time made nearly 100 films a year, Kato gained a reputation for precise visual planning. He would carefully storyboard his films and use low angle shots that sometimes demanded digging a hole for the camera. He was often a story of contrasts: if his planning produced a stylized aesthetics, he sometimes had his actors perform without make-up in wide-angle long takes. Such realism was aligned with his interest in contradictory character psychology, a fact that underlines how much Katô played with genre conventions. *Red Peony Gambler: Flower Cards Match* was the third episode in a series of films starring Fuji Junko as the female gambler Oryû (Katô directed three of the eight films made). In this story, she is on leave from the Kumasaka gang, and decides to help a Nagoya gang whose traditional supervision of local gambling is being threatened by a mob with political connections. The cast is star studded. Fuji was the top female star at a studio and in a genre that concentrated on male action, and played in ninety films before retiring at age 26 (only to return to acting later in life) to marry the famed Kabuki actor Onoe Kikunosuke (their daughter, Terajima Shinobu, is now one of Japan's best new actresses). Takakura Ken was the genre's top star and later branched out into other genres, even working in Hollywood in *Black Rain* (1989) and *Mr. Baseball* (1992). Fans may recognize the resemblance between Wakayama Tomisaburô (of the *Lone Wolf and Cub* (Kozure ôkami) series) and Katsu Shintarô of Daiei's *Zatôichi* series. They are in fact brothers. Finally, Arashi Kanjûrô was one of the great samurai movie stars, with a career dating back to the 1920s.

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 14, 2005

7:00 PM

Room 101 Linsly-Chittenden Hall, 63 High Street

The Man Who Stole the Sun

太陽を盗んだ男 *Taiyô o nusunda otoko*

Directed by Hasegawa Kazuhiko

監督 長谷川和彦

Kitty Film Corp., released 6 October 1979, 147min.

Producer: Ijichi Kei
Screenplay: Leonard Schrader, Hasegawa Kazuhiko
Original Story: Leonard Schrader
Photography: Suzuki Tatsuma
Editing: Suzuki Akira
Art Direction: Yokoo Yoshinaga

Cast:

Kido: Sawada Kenji
Det. Yamashita: Sugawara Bunta

Reiko: Ikegami Kimiko
Tanaka: Kitamura Kazuo
Nakayama: Kôyama Shigeru
Dr. Ichikawa: Satô Kei
Hijacker: Itô Yûnosuke

Hasegawa Kazuhiko made two films in the 1970s, *Young Murderer* (Seishun no satsujinsha, 1976) and *The Man Who Stole the Sun*, which have made him a legendary figure in Japanese cinema. Both were highly praised critically, becoming some of the representative works of that decade, and earned him a devout following. The problem is that Hasegawa has, to this date, only made these two films. It is probably testimony to the power of these works that even today fans eagerly await his next film, but one wonders whether his lack of productivity is not because these films are so strongly tied to the 1970s. Both feature young men, stuck in a place with no future, emasculated by their surroundings, who lash out in a criminal act, patricide in the first film, atomic terrorism in the second. These rebels still have the smell of 1960s cinema—Hasegawa first entered the industry working for Imamura Shôhei (*Vengeance Is Mine* (Fukushû wa ware ni ari))—but their concerns are less directly political: the middle school science teacher in *The Man Who Stole the Sun* who builds an atomic bomb, for instance, first demands just that TV networks broadcast baseball games without interruptions. Hasegawa is in some ways a transitional figure between the political independent cinema of the 1960s and the more inward-looking films of the 1980s. He was born in 1946 and attended Tokyo University before dropping out to work with Imamura. He later worked at Nikkatsu on some of the “Roman Porno” films of Fujita Toshiya and Kumashiro Tatsumi (we showed his *Twisted Path of Love* (Koibitotachi wa nureta) in the spring), gaining a reputation especially for his screenwriting skills. This he put to good effect in his own directorial films, but after 1979, he began devoting more time to other aspects of production, starting Directors Company, a cooperative venture that vainly tried to make directors the center of the film business, and producing such films Ishii Sôgô’s *Crazy Family* (Gyakufunsha kazoku, 1984). All of his own projects fell through, but if you check out his web site, www.goji.net, you can see he is still at it. *The Man Who Stole the Sun* stars Sawada Kenji, the lead singer for the “Group Sounds” band The Tigers who successfully made the transition to acting, and co-stars Sugawara Bunta of Fukasaku Kinji’s *Battles Without Honor and Humanity* (Jingi naki tatakai) series. The screenplay was co-written with Leonard Schrader, the brother of director Paul Schrader (*Cat People* and *Mishima*), who has been active in Japan, and the chief assistant director is Sômai Shinji, the director of our next film in the series, *Typhoon Club* (which was produced by Directors Company).

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 28, 2005 7:00 PM
Room 101 Linsly-Chittenden Hall, 63 High Street

Typhoon Club

台風クラブ *Taifû kurabu*

Directed by Sômai Shinji

監督 相米慎二

Directors Company, released 31 August 1985, 114min.

Producer: Miyasaka Susumu
Screenplay: Katô Yûji
Photography: Itô Akihiro
Editing: Tomita Isao
Art Direction: Ikeya Noriyoshi

Cast:

Mikami: Mikami Yûichi

Shimizu: Benibayashi Shigeru
Yamada: Matsunaga Toshiyuki
Takami: Kudô Yûki (Youki Kudoh)
Umemiya: Miura Tomokazu
Kobayashi: Omo Toshinori

Sômai Shinji is arguably the best postwar Japanese director you haven't heard of. The reasons for this are multifold. First, he debuted as a director in 1980, the beginning of the decade that was probably the nadir of Japanese cinema in terms of both domestic box office and foreign attention. Apart from Morita Yoshimitsu (*The Family Game* (Kazoku gēmu)) and Itami Jûzô (*Tampopo*), few of the newer directors were shown outside the country. Second, Sômai worked in genres that often failed to earn the attention of critics and film festivals. After working as an assistant director at Nikkatsu during its "Roman Porno" days, he began directing "idol pictures," his first two films, *The Terrible Couple* (Tonda kappuru, 1980) and *Sailor Suits and Machine Guns* (Sêrâ-fuku to kikanjû, 1981), in fact being vehicles for the cute singer Yakushimaru Hiroko. He would later go on to film more adult pictures, including one pink film, but children and adolescents always remained a central part of his world since one of his central subjects was the complicated, liminal state between childhood and adulthood. What made him a celebrated and extremely influential director at home was his film style, especially his use of long takes. If many filmmakers in the next generation, from Kurosawa Kiyoshi (*Cure*) to Hashiguchi Ryôsuke (*Like Grains of Sand* (Nagisa no Shindobaddo)), favor the long take, they inherited it less from Japan's original master of the long take, Mizoguchi Kenji, than from Sômai. And the filmmakers acknowledge that debt, either in words or in film: the last shot from Kurosawa's *bright future* (Akarui mirai), for instance, is clearly an homage to the end of Sômai's *Moving* (Ohikkoshi, 1993). His long takes fascinate because of their tensions and contradictions: they give freedom to character movement but shape it within elaborate performances, depict spatial continuity but also offer sudden changes that hint of temporal discontinuity, evoke the bursting forth of adolescent vitality and sexuality while intimating that the cessation of movement means nothing but death. *Typhoon Club* particularly ties these long takes to adolescent energy and confusion, as a group of middle-school students, faced with complicated interpersonal relationships and the realization that adulthood doesn't get much better, get stuck at school just as a typhoon is arriving. The typhoon scene, a bravura orchestration of rain and adolescent energy, in which the kids strip down and sing Warabe's "If Tomorrow" (Moshimo ashita ga) in the downpour, is one of the most celebrated moments in 1980s Japanese film. Unlike his earlier idol films, most of the performers here are unknowns except for Miura Tomokazu, himself a former idol star who proved his acting skills with this film, and Kudô Yûki, who is now one of the few Japanese actresses working in Hollywood (she has a prominent role in *Memoirs of a Geisha*).

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 17, 2005 7:00 PM
Whitney Humanities Center Auditorium, 53 Wall Street

All Under the Moon

月はどっちに出ている *Tsuki wa dotchi ni dete iru*

Directed by Sai Yôichi

監督 崔洋一

Cine Qua Non, released 6 November 1993, 95 min.

Producer: Lee Bong-Ou, Aoki Katsuhiko
Screenplay: Chong Wui-Sin, Sai Yôichi
Original Story: Yan Sogil
Photography: Fujisawa Jun'ichi
Editing: Okuhara Yoshiyuki
Art Direction: Imamura Tsutomu

Cast:

Tadao:	Kishitani Gorô
Connie:	Ruby Moreno
Eijun:	Ezawa Moeko
Konno:	Furuoya Masato
Tada:	Kunimura Jun
Senba:	Maro Akaji
Businessman:	Hagiwara Masato

Although Korean residents of Japan (*zainichi*) have been a significant presence in, if not a thorn in the back of, postwar Japan, Japanese cinema has largely shunned their existence. Iwai Shunji, for instance, could make his epic tale of foreigners living in Japan, *Swallowtail Butterfly* (1996), without offering a single trace of Korean residents. With rampant discrimination against Koreans, for a long time it was just too politically sensitive to broach the subject, so only committed filmmakers like Ôshima Nagisa or marginal genres like the yakuza film dealt with the *zainichi* phenomenon. That began to change in the 1990s when the rising presence of foreigners in Japan could no longer be ignored, contradicting all the myths about a homogeneous Japanese nation. More films would take up *zainichi* issues until a film like Yukisada Isao's *Go*, an entertainment film about a cool but troubled *zainichi* youth and his romance with a Japanese girl, could become one of the top films of 2001. Important in this turn was the rise to prominence of *zainichi* filmmakers in the film industry, particularly the director Sai Yôichi (also known as Choi Yang-Il), the screenwriter Chong Wui-Sin and the producer Lee Bong-Ou. Sai was born in Nagano Prefecture and worked as an assistant director for Murakawa Tôru and Ôshima (notably his *In the Realm of the Senses* (*Ai no koriida*)) before debuting as a director in 1983. While he began in commercial entertainment cinema, making four films for Kadokawa Haruki, the media baron who shook up the industry in the 1970s and 1980s with his advertising blitzes, his work has always shown a concern with marginal figures in Japan, especially Okinawans (*Via Okinawa* (*A sain-deizu*, 1989); *A Pig's Revenge* (*Buta no mukui*, 1999)). He first directly took on his own ethnicity when he collaborated with Chong Wui-Sin, an award winning *zainichi* playwright, on the story for *All Under the Moon*. Initially, a 33-minute version was made in the satellite channel WOWOW's "J-Movie Wars" series starring Ishibashi Ryô as Tadao (to some, this is actually an even better version). Then Lee Bong-Ou, president of the film company Cine Qua Non, helped realize the feature-length project, which ended up becoming the most critically acclaimed film of 1993. What distinguished the film was not just its subject, but the way it treated it. While the few previous films that depicted *zainichi* tended to be serious social realism, Sai and Chong, working from the story by Yan Sogil, presented a comedy which poked fun as much at the Koreans as at the Japanese who discriminate against them. The tone was fresh but nonetheless biting. This represented a new generation of *zainichi* less concerned with the politics of their elders and who were seeking out ways to negotiate a place for themselves in Japan. In the film, this takes the form of the taxi driver Tadao's romance with a Filipino hostess named Connie, even though her employer—who is Tadao's mother—frowns upon this relationship. After *All Under the Moon*, Sai has continued to mix art films with entertainment flicks, taking up the problem of the *zainichi* community again in the much darker *Blood and Bones* (*Chi to hone*, 2004). Sai has also occasionally appeared on screen as an actor, most famously in Ôshima's *Gohatto*.