Queer Japanese Cinema: A Rich and Diverse Cultural History's

Challenge to Hegemonic Ideologies of Gender and Sexuality

by

Joshua M. Ferguson

B.A. Hons, University of Western Ontario, 2009.

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF

THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS

in

The Faculty of Graduate Studies

(Film Studies)

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

(Vancouver)

August 2010

ABSTRACT

There is a rich and diverse corpus of queer Japanese cinema that relates to Japan's pre-modern cultural specificities around and apropos of male-male sexuality and non-normative genders. A significant amount of academic work has explored and articulated Japan's queer past; however, Japan's queer cinema has largely been ignored and/or overlooked. The first chapter provides my anthropological foundation for male-male sexuality in the samurai class and queer gendered embodiments through the *bishōnen* and *onnagata*. In the second chapter, I explore the West's (particularly, America's) ideological influence on Japan in terms of gender and sexuality. This Western influence managed to obliterate Japan's queer cultural history. This chapter will investigate the reason behind Japan's assimilation of Western ideologies in relation to gender and sexuality. In the third chapter, I construct a theoretical model that examines how the cinematic apparatus works to maintain normative ideologies on gender and sexuality. I term this model the Gendered Sexuality Ideological Cinematic Apparatus (GSICA) and employ Foucault, Althusser and Butler as critical philosophers that offer tools in the construction of the GSICA. The GSICA is a key theory because it works to elucidate the meaning behind Japan's cinematic representation of male-male sexuality and non-normative gender. I examine four generic categories in Japanese cinema: samurai *jidaigeki*, samurai *shin jidaigeki*, *yakuza gendaigeki* and *shin yakuza gendaigeki*. I argue that these films, in representing specific time periods, work to either repudiate cultural history and/or represent it explicitly in relation to the time period which the film depicts. These representations allude to an intense queer representational and cultural struggle in Japanese cinema. It is time for the recognition of queer Japanese cinemas. These films illustrate the resilient sense of Japanese culture(s) via a (re)connection with ideologies of

gender and sexuality that existed prior to Japan's modernization and assimilation of Western

ideological frameworks.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

DEDICATION

To those who do not have a voice. To those who are beaten, scarred and killed for being different. To those who seek support and find none. This work is dedicated to those who are marginalized and demonised on a global scale for their difference.

INTRODUCTION: QUEER JAPANESE CINEMA

I believe that it is relevant to begin my thesis with a brief anecdote about the power of ideology, difference and queerness. During my early adolescence I articulated my queerness and essentially "came out" to family, friends and the public. I knew little of the negative consequence of my actions at that time in opening myself, and my difference, to those around me. Fortunately, my family and friends demonstrated tolerance and acceptance towards my queerness. However, society in general was not as kind. After experiencing waves of challenges, some of them dangerous, during my adolescence and early adulthood, I came to realize that diversity is reprimanded in our society because a majority of people maintain superficial and fictitious static identity categories in order to "homogenize" themselves in a collective sense that benefits society in numerous ways. The ideology of gender and sexuality is deeply entrenched, on an increasingly global scale, to marginalize and demonize those who embody difference. There is hope, however, in the area of academia wherein one can connect theory with practice in an effort to elucidate the reason behind the hegemony of normative gender and sexuality. In my study of Japanese culture, I began to acknowledge the vital cultural history that existed prior to modernization. This history articulates normativity in relation to queer sexuality and gender. Homophobia and transphobia both exist in our society because of the intense ideologies that perpetuate normative gender and sexuality. Using a post-colonialist methodology, one can (re)connect with cultural history to make sense of society's demonization of difference. Therefore, the academic path becomes one of healing, recovery and empowerment, and provides one with the tools to challenge intense hatred of difference. There are numerous individuals who are suffering and dying for their difference, and as scholars, we must remember that theory can often have tangible effects of widespread change. My thesis exists to elucidate the reasons

behind a perpetuation of normative gender and sexuality in cinema. Consequently, I hope that I can contribute a fragment of knowledge in the battle against the hatred of difference.

Cinema is a cultural artefact that transmits specific cultural discourses entrenched within a nation's history. Films represent culture in a plethora of ways: they ignore and/or repudiate culture and history, represent it in fragments or implicitly, and lay bare the cultural specificities of the nation from which they originate. Japan's cinematic canon is unique inasmuch as it possesses its own systems of genre and representational styles, which are reflexive of its culture and history. However, Japan's culture(s) significantly changed over the last two centuries, especially during the later part of the Meiji Restoration and Japan's movement towards modernity. [1] World War II also significantly influenced Japanese culture in the sense that the West/East binary fragmented and, therefore, the relationship between the West and East is more complicated as it is no longer predicated on simple contrasts. How have Japanese cultures been impacted by modernization, Western imposition (American) and Japan's own repudiation of a feudal state and acquiescence to a democratic one? Certainly there has been important scholarly work that charts this change in Japan's history; however, I plan to explore a cultural history specific to Japan, which has an extensive history of queer gender and sexuality. [2]

There is a significant and problematic gap in the academic focus on Japanese cinema. The queerness that exists on both connotative and denotative levels has long been ignored or disavowed by Japanese cinema's scholarly works. My thesis works to lay bare the important cultural and historical specificities of Japan in relation to queer sexuality and gender. Cinema often requires an anthropological perspective that magnifies cultural practices entrenched within

---

[1] I will refer to culture as plural because even in one country like Japan there are a plethora of different cultures.
[2] "Queer" will be used as a category of "difference" not to homogenize the diverse genders and sexualities in Japan's history (and arguably present) but to also signify a fluid difference, a category in the process of formation to borrow from queer theory.

the cultural apparatus. Therefore, this study will act as a beginning in the investigation of Japanese cinema that focuses on the abundance of queer representations of sexuality and gender – one that will enable a space for further academic queries that have an exploratory mandate to include queerness.

My thesis will explore the scholarly work that exposes and provides evidence for queer genders and sexualities in Japan's past. Queer genders and sexualities were accepted and part of normal and respectable behaviour in pre-modern Japan; however, now they are, in similar global ways, denigrated to marginality. What happened in Japan that caused queer subjects to go from being the norm to the marginalized/the minority and how is this represented in Japan's cinema?

To frame my argument, I will focus on two genres within Japanese cinema that represent queer genders and sexualities: *yakuza* and samurai films. These films are arguably sub-genres associated with Japanese period genres, particularly *gendaigeki* and *jidaigeki* and *shin-jidaigeki* and *shin-gendaigeki* respectively. The samurai ethos, which contained normative male-male sexuality and queer genders, is represented within the samurai films (*jidaigeki*). However, the representations of queerness in the *jidaigeki* films are usually only found on connotative levels. I also make a distinction between older samurai films, *jidaigeki*, films released from 1930-1980s, and contemporary ones, *shin-jidaigeki*, (1990s and onward). The more contemporary samurai films represent male-male sexuality more explicitly whereas the older, classic samurai films, particularly those of Kurosawa, repudiate the cultural specificity of queer sexuality or represent it in obscure, metaphorical ways.

I will also explore the partial disavowal of queerness in Kurosawa's cinema, which will suggest the impossibility of completely ignoring cultural and historical discourses of gender and sexuality. The focus on Kurosawa's cinema illustrates a common repudiation of specific pre-

modern cultural discourses that are evidenced by anthropological and historical work. Instead, Kurosawa's cinema is based on the removal and/or denial of male-male sexuality. And, the repudiation of pre-modern cultural history of male-male sexuality and queer genders is furthered by scholarly work that provides a comprehensive cinematic history of Japanese cinema, which I will discuss further below. In the samurai films of Kurosawa, Japanese cinema has attempted to repudiate its own cultural history in relation to queer genders and sexualities. This lack of cinematic acknowledgement is analogous to the lack of scholarly attention to the queerness that exists, or is repudiated, from all three stages of samurai and *yakuza* films. For example, Donald Richie's A Hundred Years of Japanese Film completely ignores Japanese films with queer content and fails to acknowledge that the cinematic canon of samurai *jidaigeki* does not adequately represent its own cultural history. Richie's failed attempt at providing a complete history of Japanese cinema through his omission of queer sexuality parallels the cinematic apparatus' intention to marginalize and submit queer representations to a place of obscurity – to render them invisible both to the viewer and reader. Therefore, my thesis is an academic exploration that attempts to render visible the queerness in Japan's cinema(s). I will explore the reasons behind the disappearance of queer genders and sexualities in some Japanese films while simultaneously highlighting lucid and explicit cinematic representations of queerness.

In Chapter One, I will discuss the significant historical and cultural foundation for male-male sexuality in Japan. Japan's queer history articulates normativity instead of marginality in relation to queerness. Thus, I will structure the thesis in interdisciplinary fashion. I will employ Gregory M. Pflugfelder, Mark J. McLelland, Tsuneo Watanabe, Eiko Ikegami, Isolde Standish and Ayako Kano among others for the historical and cultural portion of my thesis. In Chapter Two, I will illustrate, through my filmic analysis, a resistance and recapitulation of queer

identities in Japanese cinema – a struggle of dominant ideologies vis-a-vis a theoretical concept of the 'Gendered Sexuality Ideological Cinematic Apparatus' that partially borrows from Teresa De Lauretis' Technologies of Gender. This apparatus will make sense of the earlier representations in the samurai *jidaigeki* and *yakuza gendaigeki* to suggest ideological influence as a method of containing queer genders and sexualities in Japanese cinema. Subsequently, in Chapter Three, I will devote discursive space to posit a critical theoretical investigation of culture and history in relation to gender and sexuality. In this section, I will employ Michel Foucault, Judith Butler, and Louis Althusser. This Chapter situates my theoretical framework of the Gendered Sexuality Ideological Cinematic Apparatus. My recent trip to Japan for a month allowed for a space of cultural exploration that will challenge a reductive orientalist perspective. My journey through Japan has also enabled more confidence in my perspective on Japanese culture(s). These experiences in Japan have taught me to challenge the problematic assumption that Japan has a homogenous culture. This important lesson of Japan's cultural heterogeneity guides me through my analysis and criticism in an effort to avoid reductive and essentialist discussions of cultural history in relation to Japan's cinema. I will also discuss the trap of a West/Rest argument and how my work is post-colonialist in its attempt to break down binaries of identity categories to explore queerness, which will complicate the relationship between Japan and the West instead of viewing the relationship as static and antithetical.

In Chapter Four, I argue that there are three stages -- one stage has two phases -- of *yakuza* and samurai films that signify a struggle with the representation of Japan's queer cultural history. I will explore the first stage, the samurai *jidaigeki*, particularly *Seven Samurai* (Akira Kurosawa 1954), *Yojimbo* (Akira Kurosawa 1961) and *Binanjo (Castle of Handsome Men)* (Sasaki Yasushi 1959). Also, the contemporary films – samurai *shin-jidaigeki* -- I will explore as

part of this stage are: *Gohatto* (Oshima Nagisa 1999), *Zatoichi* (Takeshi Kitano 2003) and *Yaji &*
Kita: The Midnight Pilgrims (Kankuro Kudo 2005). The second stage articulates a cultural
adaptation of the samurai ethos into the *yakuza* culture; therefore, these *yakuza gendaigeki* films
represent both Japan's past and its modernity as a samurai/yakuza hybrid. I will explore these
films as hybrid texts whereby Japanese cinema comments on a transition in its own culture:
Brutal Tales of Chivalry (Kiyoshi Saeki 1965), *Brutal Tales of Chivalry 3* (Kiyoshi Saeki, 1966),
and *Brutal Tales of Chivalry 4* (Masahiro Makino 1967). The final stage of representation is the
yakuza (*shin-gendaigeki*) films such as *Shinjuku Triad Society* (Takashi Miike 1995), *Blues*
Harp (1998), *Gozu* (Takashi Miike 2004), *Gonin* (Takeshi Kitano 1995), *Boiling Point* (Takeshi
Kitano 1990), *Violent Cop* (Takeshi Kitano) and *Sonatine* (Takeshi Kitano 1993). The samurai
jidaigeki and contemporary samurai *shin-jidaigeki*, the *yakuza gendaigeki* and the *yakuza shin-*
gendaigeki, enable a filmic analysis of the representation of queer genders and sexualities within
Japanese cinema as it aligns with historically sensitive cultural shifts. I choose these specific
films for the periodic genres because they represent queerness in interesting ways that relate to
Japan's cultural history. These categories will open a space for the inclusion of queer Japanese
cinema because it is founded in the history and culture of Japan; therefore, these films indicate
important cultural relevance in an anthropological sense that must be acknowledged in the future
study of Japanese cinema. The time to submit to a comprehensive critical analysis of queer
Japanese cinema is at hand. This thesis is an inauguration to render visible Japan's rich and
diverse queer cinematic texts that will stimulate academic roots of cinematic queerness.

CHAPTER 1. JAPAN'S CULTURE(S) OF QUEER

1.1 Japan's History of Normative Male-Male Sexuality and Androgynous Genders

There are rich areas of anthropological, historical and feminist studies that explore male-male sexuality and gender in pre-modern Japan. For this specific study, I will focus on what Gary P. Leupp calls "the construction of homosexuality in Tokugawa Japan" in the title of his text, Male Colors. The Tokugawa period (1600-1868) – also known as the Edo period – defines the time period when successive Tokugawa shoguns ruled Japan.[3] Japan's Tokugawa period was structured by a feudal class-based system and each class, particularly the samurai class, had its own code of ethics. Leupp states that "the sexual relationships among males in the martial or samurai class unquestionably came to be modeled in part on the traditions of monks and courtiers" (47). Male-male sex in the Tokugawa period amongst certain classes and professions was considered a normative sexual practice that sometimes coincided with all-male environments. Leupp goes on to state that "aware of monastic and samurai traditions, men of common status in the Tokugawa period would naturally have regarded homosexual desire as normal and male-male sex as a permissible and attractive activity" (57). The normative values associated with male-male sex have been formally documented in Japan's history as "the list of shoguns, hegemons and principal *daimyo* thought to have been sexually involved with boys reads like a Who's Who of military and political history" from 1147 to the 1800s (Leupp 53).[4] In Ocean Homosexualities, Stephen O. Murray corroborates Leupp's statement: "in addition to shoguns, many of the great *daimyos* and samurai kept male lovers to provide emotional support

---

[3] I will speak of the Tokugawa/Edo period as the Tokugawa period since the samurai are a focus in this thesis and the Tokugawas were the most powerful samurai family during this time period.

[4] *Daimyo* are feudal lords that controlled territories (*han*) within Tokugawa Japan.

as well as entertainment and sensual pleasure" (130).[5] *In The Changing Nature of Sexuality,*

Furukawa Makoto states that "Japan produced a globally unique homosexual culture" (98). For

the discussion of "homosexuality" in the Tokugawa period, "The *shudō* construct...specified the

erotic object in terms not of biological sex, which was implicitly understood as male, but of age,

which differs from homosexuality and also from the Chinese-derived *nanshoku*" (Pflugfelder

30). *Shudō*, therefore, is the appropriate term for the discussion of male-male sex in the samurai

class because it acknowledges the importance of two characteristics, age and the implicit but not

explicit male biological sex. *Shudō* connotes the "way of loving youths" (Pflugfelder 54). The

relationship between two males in the samurai class was hierarchical. Pflugfelder states that

"together, the *wakashu* and *nenja* formed the two asymmetrical halves of the *shudō* couple, each

role complementary and predicated upon the existence of the other" (40). The *shudō* construct is

therefore a relationship based on opposites, a binary of old and young, experienced and

inexperienced (Pflugfelder 40). The *nenja's* function was of role model and pedagogue with the

purpose of initiating the *wakashu* into the samurai way of life (Pflugfelder 55). The *shudō*

relationship was also beneficial for both members of the relationship, albeit the more explicit

rewards would seem to be for the *wakashu*; Pflugfelder states that it had a "mutually ennobling

effect" (71).[6] The *wakashu* became the object of erotic desire for the older, experienced men in

the samurai class.

   In The Taming of the Samurai: Honorific Individualism and the Making of Modern

Japan, Eiko Ikegami states that "intimate committed relationships between two individual

samurai were sometimes considered more important than the social obligations of hierarchical

---

[5] In fact, the third Tokugawa shogun, Iemitsu had a fondness for the young boys who played roles on the kabuki stage. See Paul Varley's Japanese Culture.
[6] However, the *wakashu* did not necessarily have to derive pleasure from sex with the *nenja*, so it is indeed arguable whether it was the *nenja* or *wakashu* who actually received greater rewards from this type of hierarchical relationship.

relationships. This sentiment was most acutely represented by the positive moral value attached

to male-male love relationships among the samurai during the period" (209). Regardless of the

hierarchical order to male-male love and sex in the samurai class, the ethos was widely

recognized as normative, which is a radical break in modern transnational ideologies around and

apropos of queer sexuality. Ikegami states that "even though not all samurai were involved in

homosexual affairs, the life of male-dominated samurai communities fostered cultural attitudes

that idealized relationships of trust between individual warriors and expressed them in the idioms

of sentiments of intense male love" (209). Male-male love was viewed as a principle tool in the

education and maintenance of the samurai class.[7] Ikegami goes on to state that "indeed, male-

male love was often an additional emotional force in the solidarity and functioning of samurai

armies from the medieval period. It was partly in this atmosphere of acceptance of homosexual

relationships that the daimyo customarily employed many pages in their capital" (219). The

ethos stretched from commoner samurai – foot soldiers – to the powerful and elite *daimyo*

(territory – *han* - lords).

Male-male sexual practices were even included in documents intended to instruct samurai

on how to act and live. Ikegami discusses the foundational text <u>Hagakure</u> as

> A compilation of narratives told by a retired samurai, Yamamoto Jin-uemon Tsunetomo
> (1659-1719), to a fellow samurai, Tashiro Matazaemon Tsuramoto, together with
> Yamamoto's thoughts about these tales. Hagakure, the most famous and aggressive
> evocation of *bushido*, was a manifesto of protest against the majority of the samurai, who
> accepted their destiny of domestication (279).

<u>Hagakure</u> became an instrumental tool and inspiration for those who agreed with bushido (the

way of the warrior). The text specifically included detailed instruction about male-male sexuality

in relation to the samurai ethos. Ikegami notes how the text became "a source of inspiration for

Mishima Yukio, one of the most renowned postwar fiction writers. Mishima's suicide – death by

---

[7] Therefore, queer love was not really queer during this time as it was normative.

seppuku after he broke into the office of the Ground Self-Defense Force of Japan in an attempt to

'reawaken' Japan's army officers to the importance of his nationalist movement – made

headlines throughout the world" (279). And, Hagakure's relevance was heralded by Mishima

Yukio in Yukio Mishima on Hagakure: The Samurai Ethic and Modern Japan. Mishima's text is

a "personal interpretation of the classic samurai ethics and behaviour, Hagakure. There are

examples in Mishima's text that recall directions existing in the original Hagakure text

emphasizing male-male sexuality. He states that

> When the other man is your senior, it is advisable to spend about five years getting to
> know each other, and when you finally understand the depth of the other's emotion, you
> should take the initiative and ask for a pledge. If it is to be a relationship in which each
> would give his life for the other, you must be perfectly aware of each other's innermost
> feelings (142).[8]

The hierarchical aspect of the *shudō* relationships remains in this text as age is an important

factor. He also states that "of course you must not straddle the two Ways – love for man and love

for women. Even while you are in love with a man, you must concentrate your energies on the

Way of the Warrior. Then homosexual love goes very well with the Way of the Warrior" (142).

His acceptance of male-male sexuality as an important part of *bushido* cements *shudō* as a

critical part in the samurai's way of life. Furthermore, in Ihara Saikaku's The Great Mirror of

Male Love, translator Paul Gordon Schalow states that "Mishima Yukio once boasted that his

novel Kamen no Kokuhaku (Confessions of a Mask) was the first important work to deal with

the topic of homosexuality in Japan since Ihara Saikaku's Nanshoku Okagami (The Great Mirror

of Male Love) (5). Mishima's acceptance of bushido in modern Japan included the aspect of

shudō; therefore, male-male sexuality is imbricated into the samurai class as a symbiotic

relationship. Ihara Saikaku is one of Japan's most famous literary giants who wrote about male-

---

[8] It is relevant to note here that Mishima's *seppuku* was carried out with the assistance of a male lover, who also committed *seppuku* following Mishima.

male sexual affairs. <u>Nanshoku Okagami</u> is a collection of forty short stories by Saikaku that depict "homosexual love relations between adult men and adolescent boys in seventeenth century Japan" (Schalow 1). Schalow states that "popular literature in pre-modern Japan did not depict male love as abnormal or perverse, but integrated it into the larger sphere of sexual love as a literary theme" (6) Thus, the prevalence of *shudō* in the Tokugawa period enabled authors to write love stories about samurai relationships.

In addition to sexuality, it is important to provide a brief discussion of the culture(s) of sex and gender in the Tokugawa period. "With the restoration of peace to the country after the Battle of Sekigahara in 1600, the object of sexual desire gradually shifted from the young soldier in training to the more effeminate boy" (Leupp 52). The beautiful boy is the *bishōnen*, who embodies an ambiguous gender. *Bishōnen* in pre-modern Japan became the "trophies" of older men and were sought after and fought over in the samurai class. Leupp states that "Ranking warriors might retain beautiful youths for sexual purposes, dressing them not as females but in conspicuously elegant, non-martial attire" (57). Sex was always based on a hierarchal relationship; a clear distinction between the older inserter and the young insertee; however, "it allowed a certain blurring of gender categories" (Leupp 171). The *bishōnen* were consistently treated as objects of the gaze in the Tokugawa period. Pflugfelder notes that "By fixing our gaze on the *bishōnen,* we are in effect assuming the characteristic stance of Edo-period popular discourse on male-male sexuality" (225). Androgynous men became synonymous with beauty, which was expected to stimulate erotic desire in men whether it was embodied in a woman or a male youth (Pflugfelder 227). However, the young male was aesthetically different from both women and men (Pflugfelder 228). *Bishōnen* thus occupied a polymorphous gender that produced carnal desire, which the masculine samurai thirsted for. The characteristics of *bishōnen*

can be considered conventional elements for youthful beauty: "snowy white skin, lustrous black hair, flowery red cheeks" (Pflugfelder 228). However, chromosomal sex-based identity is not in doubt, albeit the gender of the *bishōnen* is ambiguous.[9] Furukawa Makoto states that "In terms of gender, neither party's male identity is in doubt" (100). Interestingly, gender is never questioned because *bishōnen* are a different kind of beauty, not just a strictly feminine or masculine beauty, one that does not trespass on heterosexual or even homosexual grounds because a *bishōnen* embodiment exists outside of the male/masculine and female/feminine binaries (100). The polymorphous gender of a *bishōnen* is relevant for some of the film analysis because gender and sexuality are often linked. However, it is important to iterate that a conflation of gender and sexuality in relation to the films explored in this thesis would be problematic. In other words, queer gender does not define or signify a person's sexuality nor does queer sexuality signify queer gender. Gender and sexuality operate as separate aspects of Japanese culture inasmuch as male-male sexuality is not predicated on a *bishōnen* gender and vice versa.

1.2 Western Cultural Imposition: External and Internal Influences - The Erosion of Diversity and Ideological Containment of Queer Gender and Sex in Meiji Japan

At the end of the Tokugawa period, Japan began to end its national seclusionist policy in acquiescence to the national Western countries who were arguing for an increase in foreign trade. O'Murray states that "the Meiji restoration (1868) abolished the traditional feudal system and opened Japan to aspects of Western culture, including some of its sexual covertness" (363). In the year of 1868, Emperor Meiji was instated as the leader of Japan and the Tokugawa shogunate abolished. This is not to say that this year specifically heralded a sudden adoption of Western culture and values, but that this year marked the beginning of a slow but significant

---

[9] On the surface this seems contradictory because sex is conflated with gender. However, the *bishōnen* is considered to be a gendered subjectivity separate from biological sex that is based solely on different forms of beauty not related to solely masculine or feminine embodiments.

trend towards an acceptance of Western culture. With this acceptance of Western culture came an eventual shift in ideologies concerning gender and sexuality. In Acting Like a Woman in Modern Japan, Ayako Kano states that "in the years between 1629 and 1868, Japan was to a large extent politically isolated from the rest of the world, maintaining limited commercial relations with a few nations" (5). However, "when a new political regime seized power in the Meiji Restoration of 1868, a period of state-building and nation-building commenced, the gates were opened to Western influence" (Kano 6). In Modern Japan: A Social and Political History, Elise K. Tipton concurs that "Meiji leaders both outside and inside the government encouraged the adoption of Western social customs and cultural styles to reach the goal of 'civilization and enlightenment,' with no doubt that 'civilization' meant Western civilization" (47). Leupp states that "attitudes toward male-male sex have thus altered dramatically during the past 125 years. The changes are due in large part to the nature of Japan's incorporation into the world system since 1859" (202). Tsuneo Watanabe remarks that "the rapid decline of *shudō* started with westernization, from the beginning of the Meiji Restoration (1868) onward. In Japan, the process of modernization was at the same time a rejection and forgetting of this cultural tradition" (11). Japanese societal and cultural practices of gender and sexuality were contained within the broader sphere of legitimization as a nation in the eyes of the West. In other words, Western societal and cultural influence played a role in the decline of the *shudō* tradition and diverse genders as Japan repudiated the feudal system's specific cultural codes and instead adopted a Western view on gender and sexuality (Leupp 203). These Western influences on Japan materialized in different and damaging forms that had a direct impact on how Japan, prior to its modernization, accepted a diverse range of genders and sexualities among its people. Kano states that "a binary opposition of gender may not have been functioning in pre-Meiji Japan" and

debates began in the 1890s to 1910s to adopt the modern vocabulary of binary opposition: male/masculine and female/feminine (16-17). This adoption of a binary view, which is ontologically based in the West's obsession with stagnant identity categories in relation to the Enlightenment period, affected the diverse gendered bodies, and the diversity of sexual practices, that existed in pre-modern Japan.

In Japan: The Burden of Success, Jean Marie Bouissou discusses how Japanese culture was forever influenced by the West after its ideological imposition (80). Kano corroborates this influence:

> The formation of modern categories of gender and performance should be seen as a contentious process that took place in the decades following 1868, decades shaped by the effort to build a nation-state that would not only resist being colonized by the West but would itself become a colonizer of other nations (27).

Therefore, it was important for Japan to compete on a global platform by constructing and positioning a coherent nation-state that would articulate itself to the rest of the world in an effort to become industrialized and economically powerful. Kano states that "this went hand in hand with the institution of the normalization of heterosexuality, a norm that both assumed and constituted the binary division between men and women...consolidated by pathologizing homosexuality as perverse and unnatural" (27). This pathologization of homosexuality was supported by "European writings on sexology and the influx of Christian religious influence" (Kano 28). Gender was thus influenced by Western medical and religious perspectives because the Meiji period emphasized the difference between men and women (Kano 28). However, even the religious trend towards Neo-Confucianism that began in the Tokugawa period and borrows from the Chinese religion played its part in undermining male-male sexuality. Ikegami states that "male-male love [is] considered unnatural from the viewpoint of Neo-Confucian orthodoxy"

(306). Thus, these Western and Eastern cultural influences were producing a wide-spread assertion of ideologies into Japan's culture that ultimately forever changed its pre-modern beliefs on male-male sexuality and queer genders. Specific regulations followed from the Japanese government whereby it managed, through laws and regulations, to divide the genders into two; this division mimicked the West's conflation and coherence of gender and sex. The importance of appearance in the judgement of other cultures was significant for Japan's construction of its own modernized national image (Tipton 47). The trend towards a sex-based binary appearance is apparent in the films that I will focus on as the transition to and acceptance of modernity, in the form of mostly Western influence, even exists on the external bodies of the characters within the films.

The basis for the differentiation between men and women during the Meiji period was emphasized through the body (Kano 28). The corporeality of men and women was now the signifier for not only sex, but also gender. Kano states that "the government encouraged Western dress and short haircuts for all men for the sake of progress and civilization" and outlawed short hair for women in 1872 (29). Therefore, long hair, which was once abundant in the samurai class among men, became an indicator of femininity and femaleness. The discourse of sex/gender demarcation was perpetuated by other regulations in the law of 1872 that "made it illegal for men to dress like women and vice versa, thus drawing a stricter line between the genders" (Kano 29). Tipton points to these changes in dress signalled by the Empress and Emperor at the time. The Empress "took the lead for women by giving up customs of blackening her teeth and shaving her eyebrows and by adopting Victorian dress" (Tipton 47) and the "Emperor's example of a short Western haircut and pressure from local officials, such as authorizing police to cut any long hair they encountered, led to a rapid take-up of Western haircuts" (Tipton 49). The changes in

15

kimono to Western style physical dress affected the dress code of the samurai. The focus on the sexed body as an articulation of gender paralleled with and appeased Western ideologies of sex and gender. Japan's cultural specificities of diverse genders were eroded by this imposition from the West. David Desser explains that "we may understand the Meiji Restoration as a deliberate attempt to redefine Japan along Western lines" (20).

Modern Japan has been influenced by Western ideologies of gender and sexuality; however, there are still examples found within its culture that recall cultural value systems that existed in pre-modern Japan. In "Lilies of the Margin: Beautiful Boys and Queer Female Identities in Japan", James Welker states that "while transgressive on multiple levels, the gender-bending and ambiguous sexuality represented in 'boys love' manga and related magazines are part of a larger tradition of performing gender in Japan that stretches back at least to Edo era (1603-1868)" (48). Welker discusses a current "gay boom" in Japan (*gei būmu*), which is an increase of representations "in the mass media of predominantly male homosexuality" (48). Romit Dasgupta reaffirms the "gay boom of the early 1990s" as an effort of mainstream media to represent Japan's sexual minorities (159). Therefore, in the world of Japan's media, the sexual minorities that once existed in the realm of normativity in Japan's past are being represented in various ways. What is the media's interest in male homosexuality fuelled by? I think this fascination in male homosexuality recalls a time before Western ideological influence that welcomed a diverse range of sexual practices and gendered embodiments. The Japanese struggle to simultaneously invite and disavow queerness is the complex negotiation that exists within the samurai and *yakuza* films.

In Male Homosexuality in Modern Japan: Cultural Myths and Social Realities, Mark J. McLelland, in his writing about contemporary Japan, states that "in certain contexts, homosexual

sex is spoken of as 'disgusting'...and yet graphic representations of love between beautiful boys (*bishōnen*) are often represented as more romantic and pure than relationships between men and women" (3). This notion of purity and romance recalls the Hagakure's stance on male-male sexuality as a practice that complements the Way of the Warrior as something pure and does not distract the samurai from his responsibilities. McLelland also states that "it is therefore problematic in a male-dominated society like Japan to represent men as sexual in relation to other men without radically re-examining what it means to be gendered male" (7). Gender in modern Japan is quite often linked with sexuality, thus when I examine the films it will be important to understand the representation of gender as influencing sexuality. I would argue, however, that in pre-modern Japan sex/gender and sexuality were not always conflated as the acceptance and normativity of male-male sexuality allowed a wide array of sexual practices and gendered embodiments to exist. McLelland states that "the prominence of cross-dressed individuals featured in the media means that cross-dressing is the main paradigm Japanese people have for understanding non-normative sexualities" (8). Furthermore, he states that "the idea that same-sex attraction necessarily involves some kind of transgenderism or desire to be like or even become the opposite of one's biological sex is constantly reinforced by Japanese media which discuss homosexuality and transgenderism in the same context" (9). This conflation confuses sexuality as it obscures it underneath performances of gender in an attempt to explain the sexuality of the person. In other words, the conflation of gender and sexuality in Japan simplifies and contains sexuality within gender as it is the gender identity that defines a person's sexuality. McLelland states that "much of the material (printed) written [dealing with homosexuality] before the nineties has a highly ideological slant and tries to account for, justify or explain away the practice of homosexual desire in earlier periods of Japanese history" (13).

There is a dialectical tension, then, with homosexuality in contemporary Japan. On the one hand, it is represented in mainstream media, but this representation conflates gender and sexuality as an amalgamation of binary difference. On the other hand, the conflation of gender and sexuality, and the attempt to "explain away" the practice of homosexual desire in pre-modern Japan works to re-write history and view it as myth instead of truth. McLelland states that the "Tokugawa period (1600-1867) Japan has probably the best recorded tradition of male same-sex love in world history" (20). How is it possible for Japan to re-write its own history through an intense societal disavowal of a diversity of sexuality and gender that existed in pre-modern Japan? The tradition of normative male-male sexuality did not survive the Meiji Restoration. In fact, sodomy was made a criminal act "in article 266 of the Meiji legal code in 1873" (McLelland 26). To understand the widespread shift in cultural values in relation to queer gender and sexuality, I will theorize a form of a cinematic cultural apparatus that seeks to coincide with Japan's societal movement away from its own cultural history in the adoption of Western values.

CHAPTER 2. GENDERED SEXUALITY IDEOLOGICAL CINEMATIC APPARATUS (GSICA): A (RE) WORKING OF POSTSTRUCTURALIST THEORISTS

Louis Althusser's theorization of the Ideological State Apparatus (ISA) was a derivative from Marxist thought in regards to the State Apparatus (11). Most importantly, Althusser articulates that his theory is a 'descriptive' one that provides "the beginning and gives us the essential point, i.e. the decisive principle of every later development of the theory" (13). I am, therefore, continuing the approach that Althusser termed 'descriptive' to develop his theory into a cinematic-based methodology to analyze the hegemonic order of the representation of gender and sexuality in cinema. Further, the ISA are components of the private domain and Althusser makes explicit the fact that cultural venues themselves are private (18). The private thus regulates internally whereby the ISA fractures any sense of privacy and/or agency of an individual and ideologically assimilates them into the apparatus. Repression is an important aspect of the ISA and although Althusser theorized the 'Repressive State Apparatus' (RSA) in addition to the ISA, the RSA functions by violence whereas the ISA functions by ideology (19). However, Althusser states that "the ISA function secondarily by repression, even if ultimately, but only ultimately, this is very attenuated and concealed, even symbolic" (19). Although Althusser has noted that the ISA does not necessarily repress, the ISA represses secondarily through its first approach of ideological assimilation. Furthermore, since he states there is no such thing as a purely ideological apparatus – one that seeks only to assimilate through ideology – the ISA can thus be reconstructed to include discourses such as repression. Repression is entrenched within an ISA and this 'double-functioning' of the apparatus highlights the poststructuralist possibility for it to evolve.

The 'descriptive' nature of the ISA produces new possibilities which theoretically coincide with the discourse of cinema and its own apparatus. Althusser states that in the pre-capitalist historical period "it is absolutely clear that there was one dominant ISA, the Church" (25). He continues to suggest a new ISA to replace the religious ISA in a dominant role (26). Therefore, I think that the 'Gendered Sexuality Ideological Cinematic Apparatus' is a form of ISA that effectively works to reproduce the relations of gender and sexuality cinematic-based production within a dominant cultural medium. Althusser argues that "all ISAs, whatever they are, contribute to the same result: the reproduction of the relations of production i.e. capitalist relations of exploitation" (28). Certainly the relations of capitalist exploitation can be tied to the production of cinema; however, cinema has its own ideology that perpetuates and secures normative gender and sexuality on behalf of the capitalist-state. A discussion of the productive powers of ideology is thus instrumental to the furthering of the Gendered Sexuality Ideological Cinematic Apparatus (GSICA).[10]

Of crucial significance, Althusser posits the powerful relationship between ideology and the formulation of subjectivity. Althusser states that "the category of the subject is constitutive of all ideology, but at the same time and immediately I add that the category of the subject is only constitutive of all ideology insofar as all ideology has the function (which defines it) of 'constituting' concrete individuals as subjects" (45). The constitutive powers of ideology manifest in the cinematic apparatus whereby the apparatus instructs through a process of interpellation that mandates how gender 'should' look, how gender and sexuality 'should' be performed and what they both 'should not' transgress. Effectively, the GSICA interpellates the audience into a static understanding of what is a normative gender and sexuality. The important element of ideology rests in its ability to interpellate individuals by what Althusser calls

_____

[10] I should mention here again that this theory partly borrows from Teresa de Lauretis' Technologies of Gender.

"hailing" (47). Specifically, Althusser states that "all ideology hails or interpellates concrete individuals as concrete subjects" (47). The theory of interpellation is thus best stated as:

> I shall then suggest that ideology 'acts' or 'functions' in such a way that it 'recruits' subjects among the individuals (it recruits them all), or 'transforms' the individuals into subjects (it transforms them all) by that very precise operation which I have called interpellation or hailing, and which can be imagined along the lines of the most commonplace everyday police (or other hailing): 'Hey, you there! (48).

Therefore, ideology both recruits those who have not been conditioned into the ideologies of normative gender and sexuality and it also transforms those who may have transgressed the binary construction of both. Althusser's example of hailing is a form of constant monitoring, or a 'regulating' surveillance that ensures individuals control themselves. If individuals transgress the cultural logic of gender binaries then they are hailed back into normative ideologies of gender which perpetuate the existing relations of power. And, if individuals transgress normative sexual practices, they are also hailed back into heteronormativity. The transgression in Japan is a conflation of gender and sexuality whereby a transgression of either gender or sexuality initiates a hailing process that seeks to contain a subject to both a normative gender and sexuality. Furthermore, Althusser states that "the existence of ideology and the hailing or interpellation of individuals as subjects are one and the same thing" (49). By extrapolation, interpellation exists within cinema and functions in similar ways to ideologically assimilate and repress non-normative gender and sexuality. The GSICA works vis-a-vis the interpellation of individuals through the representation of normative gender and sexuality. This representation of normative gender and sexuality illustrates Foucault's poststructuralist theories of language in relation to

identification through confession, specifically his delineation of 'power as productive' and the history of sexuality in <u>History of Sexuality: Volume One</u>.

The relationship between language and identification is a significant component to the GSICA because ideological interpellation works in two specific ways. First, the performative aspect of gender in cinema, theorized by Judith Butler, works to inform individuals how to perform/appropriate their gender in certain ways. Second, language is an important basis that constitutes our subject sexuality, especially in relation to Foucault's notions of identification, which I term 'identity obsession'. People in the 21st century are obsessed with their individual identities that are ironically analogous in categorical ways. Gender has been reduced to male or female akin to chromosomal sex; therefore, people are obsessed with aligning their identities with male or female whereby they perform the related and 'appropriate' gendered characteristics, such as masculine or feminine. Foucault provides a thorough investigation into the beginning of 'identity obsession' by exploring the power of confession to construct our subjectivities.

Foucault states that a discursive explosion around sex "almost certainly constituted a whole restrictive economy, one that was incorporated into that politics of language and speech – spontaneous on the one hand, concerted on the other – which accompanied the social redistributions of the classical period" (18). Therefore, language and speech become the important components of self-identification which permeates social discourse. Where Foucault speaks of 'sex,' we can extrapolate that sex and gender have become discursively connected whereby one speaks of sex and gender almost simultaneously. Foucault explores how the Christian pastoral initiated the discursive formation of sex and how desire was transformed into discourse (21). He states that "the Christian pastoral prescribed as a fundamental duty the task of passing everything having to do with sex through the endless mill of speech" (21). Speech and

sex thus become linked and gender is imbricated into this discourse. Foucault's use of sex is a conflation of biological sex and gender roles and is never clearly distinguished from sexual acts. In addition, sex and gender have been conflated as one discourse, instead of two. Consequently, "Western man has been drawn for three centuries to the task of telling everything concerning of his sex; that since the classical age there has been a constant optimization and an increasing valorization of the discourse on sex" (Foucault 23). Foucault's specific point of "Western man" as the location where the discourse of sex has proliferated is quite important to understand how Japan was influenced by the West. However, the proliferation of the discourse of sex instigated the incitement to talk about sex; by way of Cartesian thinking Foucault states that "there emerged a political, economic and technical incitement to talk about sex – and in the form of analysis, stocktaking, classification and specification of quantitative and causal studies" (24). The structural discourse of sex/gender and sexuality originated from a period of discursive formation that centered on ways of classifying and analyzing things – identities -- into binaries. The evolutionary growth of people from individuals into a population brought new ways of monitoring sex/gender and sexuality. Foucault states that "one of the great innovations in the techniques of power in the 18th century was the emergence of population as an economic and political problem – governments perceived that they were not dealing simply with subjects, or even with a 'people' but with a 'population' with its specific phenomena and peculiar variables" (25). Thus the methodology of dealing with masses of people was deployed specifically through speech in an effort to make mandatory the utterance and alignment of individuals within the broader social sphere. In addition, this methodological deployment was imbricated through diverse forms of media, including notably cinema, whereby the masses could be controlled through forms of entertainment – the GSICA.

Foucault also explains that the state's "future and fortune were tied not only to the number and uprightness of its citizens, to their marriage rules and family organization, but to the manner in which each individual made use of his sex" (26). Therefore, the discourse of normative gender and sexuality in relation to marriage rules and family organization is relevant to the "uprightness of citizens" that Foucault postulates. The family household (*ie*) in Japan is an important societal organizational tool for success; therefore, if male-male sexuality and non-normative gender disrupts the principle of marriage and family organization, then it, in turn, disrupts society. Furthermore, "it was essential that the state knew what was happening with its citizen's sex, and the use they made of it, but also that each individual be capable of controlling the use he made of it" (Foucault 26). Members of the population were interpellated into a process of self-formation contained in a binary of sex/gender and sexuality through acts of speech and language. Foucault posits an important question in his poststructuralist text that clearly indicates the reason behind this incitement to discourse. "All this garrulous attention which has us in a stew over sexuality is it not motivated by one basic concern: to ensure population, to reproduce labour capacity, to perpetuate the form of social relations: in short, to constitute a sexuality that is economically useful and politically conservative?" (Foucault 38). The control of gender and sexuality originates from a conservative political ideology to maintain the order of things, such as male and female gender, in an effort to propagate a patriarchal-based productive system. In other words, the categories of sex/gender and sexuality are maintained in order to ensure social progression into a rational and empirical world. Consequently, such social progression depends on stagnation through identity obsession rather than through fluidity and doubt about identity. For example, Foucault states that "for a long time hermaphrodites were criminals, or crime's offspring, since their anatomical disposition, their very being, confounded the law that

distinguished the sexes and prescribed their union" (38). Therefore, any difference to the social

order of sex/gender and sexuality becomes conceived as dangerous to the binary categories, and

thus to society as a whole.

Butler states that "the domains of political and linguistic 'representation' set out in

advance the criterion by which subjects themselves are formed, with the result that representation

is extended only to what can be acknowledged as a subject" (1). Cinematic representation is

predicated on normative subjects that can be acknowledged through the cultural logic of

sex/gender and sexuality. Consequently, polymorphous identities that transgress these 'formed'

categories are excluded from representation. Thus cinematic representation of gender and

sexuality only works to include those individuals that are interpellated through the ideology –

who have constructed themselves 'truthfully' – and maintain normativity. The inclusion of

certain types of representation is apparent in both the samurai and *yakuza* films as they attempt to

render cultural history invisible through the act of (re)presenting the subjects in a state of

containment through the cinematic apparatus. The GSICA maintains structural binaries that rely

on equal poles of opposition, such as male/female and masculine/feminine and

heteronormativity. Binaries structure things into a rational order that precludes difference. The

discernable nature of binaries, therefore, works to exclude anything that would unsettle the

balanced "nature" of one or the other. Regulations of gender are instigated by ideology and

interpellation through modes of mass consumption, particularly cinema.

In Gender Trouble Butler states that "intelligible genders are those which in some sense

institute and maintain relations of coherence and continuity among sex, gender, sexual practice

and desire" (17). The rational order of gender stagnant 'identity obsession' maintains a

continuity that is culturally valorized and accepted. I will expand Butler's theory of 'intelligible

genders' to also include an 'intelligible sexuality' that seeks to represent only heteronormativity

instead of queerness. Since gender is a cultural construct, though, how does it continue to be

represented through the lens of rationality, specifically via binaries?[11] How does gender remain

culturally transfixed to sex and sexuality in Japan even though it can proliferate from it into

polymorphous identities?[12] Butler states that "inasmuch as 'identity' is assured through the

stabilizing concepts of sex, gender and sexuality, the very notion of 'the person' is called into

question by the cultural emergence of those 'incoherent' or 'discontinuous gendered norms of

cultural intelligibility by which persons are defined" (17). Thus transgendered bodies are

ironically used by the hegemonic discourse of normative gender to provide examples of

'incoherence' to the public so that they are aware of what not to 'be' like. McLelland draws on

Ito to state that "the reason why gay issues are sensationalized by the Japanese media is because

to 'feature homosexuals whose daily lives are really no different from heterosexuals does not

make interesting programming'" (37). The sensationalizing of an 'un-intelligible' gender and

sexuality provides an example for the public to distance themselves from 'un-intelligibility' and

in its place adopt an 'intelligible' gender and sexuality accepted by, and that benefits, society.

The 'intelligible' gender and sexuality are always represented in cinema whereas the

unintelligible are most often denied representation unless they are used as a 'warning' to others

in terms of how to perform and/or situate their gender and sexuality. Certain kinds of 'identities,'

as Butler states, cannot 'exist': "this is, those in which gender does not follow from sex and those

in which the practices of desire do not 'follow' from either sex or gender" (17). The GSICA

works to assimilate people into the cultural logic of sex/gender and sexuality. My analysis of the

---

[11] Mark McLelland also calls gender and sexuality "social fictions", which make sense because we have somehow acquiesced in treating them as "truth" instead of merely fabrication.

[12] From my trip to Japan, I experienced and observed a multiplicity of gendered embodiments. Especially in Tokyo, people are interested in playing with and performing genders in relation to characters that is termed "cosplay."

three genres of Japanese cinema will illustrate the GSICA's machinations to disavow authentic cultural history of Japan within its own cinema. Nevertheless, there are examples in my analysis whereby certain films shatter the hegemony of the GSICA and re-connect with Japan's cultural history in relation to gender and sexuality. These films are post-colonialist inasmuch as they attempt to break-through cultural colonialism in relation to gender and sexuality on the level of cinematic representation. I will illustrate how they hold promise for the future of Japanese cinema in a (re)connection with cultural history.

CHAPTER 3. TOWARDS QUEER JAPANESE CINEMATIC GENRES: CULTURAL HISTORY AND CINEMA

3.1 Samurai *Jidaigeki* and Samurai *Shin-jidaigeki* Cinema

Japan's relationship with Western culture(s) is complicated, but Japan has definitely been influenced by the West in various ways. The *jidaigeki* films that represent Japan's past are embedded with Western influence that seeks to exclude types of sexual and gendered subjectivities that existed within the time period they are supposed to represent in the first place. Isolde Standish's theory of the myth in relation to history is useful for this discussion. In Myth and Masculinity in the Japanese Cinema, Standish draws on Hayden White to suggest that "all histories are in some sense (non-objective) interpretations" (1). How can Japanese filmmakers represent authentic cultural history if they have been influenced from the West since the Meiji restoration? What happens to history when it relates to a country's own culture(s) if the culture(s) have been dominated by a hegemonic discourse that seeks to colonize?[13] And, how is memory connected to history and myth? Standish notes the important relationship between history, myth and memory and her study is focused on "how masculine subjectivity interacts with the past in the light of the present" (2).[14] I will employ Standish's focus to question how male-male sexuality is depicted and/or ignored by films that are supposed to represent the past while operating for and in the present. How does a film seek to represent the past, in an authentic manner, if it exists in the present and is ideologically influenced by the present's discourses? To start, Standish states that "for a person to fully comprehend the intended meaning of a film, he/she must be conversant with the cultural codes, conventions and practices employed" (4). Therefore, one would have to read Leupp, Pflugfelder and/or Watanabe and Iwata to understand

---

[13] Another question that arises here is whether the West completely colonized Japan in a cultural sense or was it Japan that self-colonized?

[14] Her focus is on the tragic hero narrative structure in Japanese films. See her text for more detail.

that prior to the Meiji Restoration, male-male sexuality amongst the samurai class was a normative practice and one that complemented the training of the samurai from boy to warrior. But, even if one reads these scholars and invests time in understanding how and why Japan's cultural views on male-male sexuality shifted so strongly, to find any normative practice of male-male sexuality in the *jidaigeki* films is a daunting task. Standish states that "this is not to say that the diegetic process is determined by a single dominant ideology, but rather that the contextual environment (ie. the socio-historical period) in which films are produced and received also plays a significant role in determining the extent of ideological contestation in any given film" (5). The ideological contestation and cultural struggle within the samurai *jidaigeki* films is evident because there is a conscious erasing of male-male sexual practices that existed for samurai. And, any instances of same-sex sexuality for the samurai are left to the realm of implication and metaphors that are hidden beneath the surface of the diegesis for the careful reader to discover. I will also discuss below how Akira Kurosawa, considered one of the Japan's greatest filmmakers, devoted almost his entire career to representing samurai life in cinema; and, the majority of these films fail to represent the male-male sexual life of the samurai.[15]

Standish states that "Japanese film scholarship has tended to centre on the historical and in so doing has stayed within pre-established discursive traditions that privilege the factual over and above the analytical" (11). I would argue with this point because one must take into consideration the cultural history when analyzing films that represent a specific period of time that no longer exists. Thus, samurai *jidaigeki* and *shin-jidaigeki* cinema requires that the scholar centres herself on the historical in making sense of, and deconstructing, these films. This does not mean that the factual is privileged "over and above the analytical" if the analysis plays a role

---

[15] I should make a note here to state that I don't intend to simply discuss auteurs of Japanese cinema, but that there are some auteurs who have played enormous roles in the creation of Japanese genres, particularly samurai *jidaigeki* and *yakuza gendaigeki*.

in the investigation of the filmic genres. And, there are scholars that focus on the analytical more than the historical, which can also become problematic. For example, Donald Richie, in his comprehensive text, <u>A Hundred Years of Japanese Film</u>, does the opposite of what Standish asserts. In Richie's analysis of the history of Japanese cinema, he fails to recognize the cultural history of Japan in relation to some of the filmic movements and genres that he discusses. It is in this omission, then, of a discussion of history in relation to the history of Japanese cinema that renders a strict analytical based perspective problematic. Richie specifically omits any discussion of queer Japanese cinema. He fails to mention the fact that samurai *jidaigeki* and *shin-jidaigeki* films do not represent the culture of samurai accurately. Nor does Richie try to illustrate examples of Japanese cinema that represent queer genders and/or sexualities. How does a comprehensive history of Japanese cinema fail to include important cultural and historical specificities? One must presume that Richie has been writing and studying Japanese history and culture in application to its cinema; therefore, how is he not aware of the expansive scholarly work on male-male sexuality and polymorphous genders in pre-modern Japan? Is this a further attempt on the part of the West to assert cultural influence in relation to Japan? Richie's narrow perspective, omitting any discussion of queer Japanese cinema in his text, reaffirms the demand for a comprehensive historical-based, culturally sensitive analysis that makes an effort to include cultural and historical specificities of Japan that are represented in its cinema and that have long been marginalized and ignored (in this case, ignored). Therefore, to focus specifically on samurai *jidaigeki* and *shin-jidaigeki* films by employing the specific history and culture in relation to them will prove to critically comment on a cinematic marginalization of male-male sexuality in Japanese samurai *jidaigeki* cinema that is successful because of the GSCIA and its mandate to assert a heteronormative ideology.

Standish discusses Althusser and ideology in relation to Japanese cinema. She states that

ideology alludes to our actual relation with the world through beliefs, often both unconscious and reflexive, masking, existing (power) relations and the 'reality of lived' experience as natural and commensical (11)....ideology can be understood as a representational structure in which the individual conceives or imagines his or her 'world view' and his or her place within that 'reality' (12).

The worldview that the *jidaigeki* and *shin-jidaigeki* films imagine are definitely removed from

the history that they seek to represent. It is in this removal that ideology asserts itself in a strong

hegemonic sense. And, Standish's notion of myth has relevance here because, drawing on

Claude Levi-Strauss, she states that "myths ensure the permanency of the group" (13). The

'group' here is a heteronormative one with an 'intelligible' gender and sexuality that

marginalizes those who do not cohere to this rigid static system. Within cinema, then, the myth

that has been created for samurai *jidaigeki* and *shin-jidaigeki* films is one of heteronormativity.

The myth of heteronormativity in the samurai class is evident in these films because they are

representing a specific time period in which male-male sexuality should be represented as

normative.

3.2 A Cultural Transition: The Beginnings of *Yakuza-Gendaigeki*

The second phase of Japanese cinema that comments on the society's shift towards

modernity is one of hybridity. This genre of early *yakuza-gendaigeki* films represents the

samurai's life in relation to modernity and the evolution of a samurai ethos into a *yakuza*-based

one. I believe these films illustrate the movement of some samurai to a *yakuza* lifestyle that seeks

to maintain an ethos predicated on bushido because these films represent both Japan's past and

movement into modernity.[16] Therefore, these films should represent male-male sexuality in a different way. The early, transitional, *yakuza gendaigeki* films will lead into the *yakuza shin-gendaigeki* films. The *yakuza gendaigeki* films explicitly represent homoeroticism and male-male sexuality, even the *bishōnen*, which were all normative within the samurai class of the Tokugawa period. Thus, the cultural specificities in relation to gender and sexuality explicitly exist in the *yakuza gendaigeki* films because the principles of the samurai have managed to survive throughout the intense cultural influence from the Meiji restoration to World War II and post-war Japan. The practices of the samurai have essentially been adopted by some of the *yakuza*, and it is through this adoption of an ethos that the most explicit representation of queerness exists in these *yakuza gendaigeki* films.

In Yakuza-Japan's Criminal Underworld, David E. Kaplan and Alec Dubro discuss the history and emergence of *yakuza*. They discuss the origins of *yakuza* as the "*kabuki-mono* – 'crazy ones' – eccentric samurai warriors known as the *hatamoto-yakko* or loosely, the servants of the shogun" (4). "The *kabuki-mono* – nearly all of them samurai of good standing – found themselves caught within a rigid medieval society" (Kaplan and Dubro 5). These samurai became *rōnin*, which were masterless samurai. Kaplan and Dubro state that "in the relative peace of Tokugawa society, these new groups of outlaw samurai began to take on a life of their own" (5).[17] However, the *yakuza* view themselves as "honourable outlaws" (Kaplan and Dubro 5) and began to appear as "early as mid 1700" (Kaplan and Dubro 8). The shift from a samurai to an

---

[16] I do not intend to homogenize all samurai as *yakuza* in the movement towards modernity, which would suggest that all samurai became *yakuza*. However, I want to make clear here that the samurai and *yakuza* are similar in various ways and that these similarities appear in the *yakuza* cinemas.

[17] It's interesting to note here that Kaplan and Dubro make a cinematic connection in this point as "the gangs of roving bandits from this era would later be brought to life in the Japanese movie, *Seven Samurai*." And, I will be analyzing this film later in the thesis.

honourable outlaw – *yakuza* – is illustrated in the early *yakuza-gendaigeki* films. Kaplan and

Dubro state that

> Like the Italian-mafia, the *yakuza* began organizing in families with a godfather at the top and new members adopted into the clan as older brothers, younger brothers and children. The *yakuza*, however, added to that structure the unique Japanese relationship known as *oyabun-kobun*, or literally 'father-role-child-role'. The *oyabun* provides advice, protection and help and in return receives the unswerving loyalty and service of his *kobun* whenever needed (8).

The *oyabun-kobun* relationship is similar to the *nenja-wakashu* relationship of the samurai in the

sense that the hierarchical aspect of the relationship is a principle tool of organization.

Furthermore, the filmic analysis of *yakuza gendaigeki* films will suggest that the *kobun* often

performs his service to the *oyabun* through sexuality. Thus, there is a sexualized component to

the *oyabun-kobun* relationship that is somewhat equivalent to the structure of samurai

relationships. Kaplan and Dubro state that "it is almost exclusively within the *yakuza* that the

oyabun-kobun system remains unchanged from its past, existing in a world where *kobun* will kill

others or even kill themselves for the sake of the *oyabun*" (10). And, although Kaplan and Dubro

note that the "*yakuza* are finally shedding their medieval past" – perhaps their ties to the samurai

class – they state that "bits and pieces of *oyabun-kobun* persist in postwar Japan" (325).

3.3 A Summary of Japan's Queer Cinematic Genres

Before I begin my critical investigation of the three genres of Japanese film that illustrate

struggles with its own cultural history, I will summarize below the three period genres in an

effort to elucidate their focus and the important connections they share with each other.

1) *Jidaigeki*: This genre must be broken into two stages to take into account older samurai films

and more contemporary ones because they are different on the level of representation in relation

to gender and sexuality.

a) *Samurai jidaigeki*: These films are produced between the 1930s-1980s and represent male-male sexuality in implicit ways. The auteur Kurosawa will be studied for this section.

b) *Samurai shin-jidageki*: The films that are produced after 1980 are remarkably different in their representation of queer gender and sexuality from the older jidaigeki films. These films represent explicit queer subjects instead of the implied instances of queer subjects in the samurai *jidaigeki* films.

2) *Yakuza gendaigeki* films: These films, from the early 1960s, comment on the cultural adaptation of the samurai ethos into the *yakuza*. They represent both Japan's past and its modernity. They are a samurai/*yakuza* hybrid genre.

3) *Yakuza shin-gendaigeki*: The films in this genre represent specific samurai values that have been maintained throughout Japan's movement into modernity and post-war. I will focus on the hierarchical relationship between the *oyabun-kobun* that is similar to the relationships of the samurai. This genre will argue for a queer Japanese cinema that seeks to negotiate, and illustrate, its own past through the present.

CHAPTER 4. AN ANALYSIS OF JAPAN'S SAMURAI AND YAKUZA FILMS

4.1 Samurai *Jidaigeki*: A Historical Genre that Forgets Its Own History

Akira Kurosawa's samurai classics have helped shape the *jidaigeki* genre. His films attempt to depict the samurai class and they usually focus on individual characters. It is important, however, to provide a theoretical auteur-based perspective on Kurosawa before I analyze his films' representations of male-male sexuality because it would be problematic to assume that Kurosawa made all of the decisions in his films as the sole author of the cinematic works. *Seven Samurai* and *Yojimbo* are cultural artefacts of a time that no longer exists in Japan, yet these films also evidently omit specificities of Japanese cultural history with regards to the normative practices of male-male sexuality in the samurai class. Therefore, to understand these problematic omissions in a comprehensive manner, one should pay attention to the forces at work that caused them in the first place. To understand Kurosawa's role as auteur is to also understand how and/or why he decided to disavow male-male sexual practices from the realm of representation in his films.

In the study of cinema, there is often a grievous assumption that the director is the author of his/her films. However, this assumption must be questioned in an effort to elucidate other forces at work in the construction of a filmic text, particularly that of ideology. I would argue that there are times when the director can be viewed as auteur, but that these cases are rare given the nature of collaboration in a film's construction. If a director is an auteur, then there must be a comprehensive criterion that he/she must have met to be considered one. Peter Wollen states that "the auteur theory does not limit itself to acclaiming the director as the main author of a film. It implies an operation of decipherment; it reveals authors where none had been seen before" (566). The search for an author of a filmic text can be a reductive and simplistic process that seeks to

view a film as a less complicated polysemic text. Instead of analyzing competing, conflicting and complex discourses at work in the construction of a film, to view a film from an auteur perspective, is to simplify an otherwise more complicated and multifaceted reading. Nevertheless, I will employ auteur theory in the analysis of Kurosawa's samurai *jidaigeki* in application with other theories, particularly the GSICA which will suggest that Kurosawa may indeed be one of the 'makers of meaning' in his films, but that there are also hegemonic discourses at work. Wollen discusses auteur theory as having two main schools: "those who insisted on revealing a core of meanings, of thematic motifs, and those who stressed style and mise en scene" (566). For this discussion, the first school is of more relevance because Kurosawa chooses a consistent theme for his films. The samurai class is consistently – but not always -- represented in Kurosawa's cinema and he remains consistent in his representation of samurai throughout his corpus of cinematic work. Thus, Kurosawa is an auteur because he represents the samurai class in a consistent manner; however, he is not the sole author of the semantic meanings and ideologies of sexuality that are represented in his films. With that said, is Kurosawa the cause of the omissions of male-male sexuality in his samurai films? Or, does this disavowal of samurai-based sexuality signal ideologies around and apropos of gender and sexuality that act as a hegemonic force of queer containment in cinema vis-a-vis the GSICA?

In the discussion of Akira Kurosawa, I will employ David Desser's The Samurai Films of Akira Kurosawa as an example of a foundational text on Kurosawa that makes important points about Kurosawa's cinematic career while simultaneously ignoring cultural discourses of gender and sexuality in the samurai class, particularly in *Seven Samurai* and *Yojimbo*. Consequently, in similar fashion to Richie, Desser also ignores the cultural history of the samurai in his analysis of the films. First, however, Desser's discussion of Kurosawa's career is useful to provide a context

from which to view Kurosawa and the films he directed. Desser states that "*Seven Samurai*, *Yojimbo* and *Sanjuro* found Americans firmly on their side. These films made Kurosawa unarguably Japan's best known director in the West. And it is still quite true that 'if any living director can rightfully claim to represent the cinema of Japan throughout the world, that director can only be Akira Kurosawa'" (2). If Kurosawa is the most Western of Japanese directors in terms of samurai *jidaigeki*, then his films would also represent Western cultural influence. Desser goes on to state that "as the Japanese soon discovered, again as it were, technology implies ideology. Within the new form of film, a whole new way of perceiving the world, of reconstructing it along social, cultural, and political lines, came into their country and forced them into dynamic confrontation with the West" (3). Thus, Kurosawa's films point to the confrontation with the West that caused a space of representational marginalization for male-male sexuality in the samurai films. The Western-influenced ideologies infiltrated the technology of the Japanese cinematic apparatus whereby it deployed productive methods of containing what modernity considers non-normative genders and sexualities.

Kurosawa greatly contributed to Japanese cinema and Western cinemas, particularly the Western and Gangster genres for American cinema. Desser states that "we should realize that *Seven Samurai* virtually created the serious contemporary Samurai film, paving the way for Masaki Kobayashi and Hideo Gosha. I might also point out that it was *Yojimbo* that inspired the visual delights and violent excesses of the popular 'Zato Ichi' series and the emerging yakuza form in the early sixties" (6). Although, Kurosawa is the most accessible director to study samurai film from a Western film studies perspective, he is without question an influential Japanese filmmaker. And, for this reason, his work developed important frameworks for future Japanese filmmakers to employ. His films initiate the emergence of contemporary samurai films

– *shin-jidaigeki* – and even the yakuza *gendaigeki*. Desser states that "as we have seen in certain studies of the Western and Gangster film it is often the popular formulas which best reveal cultural tensions" (7). The 'popular' director for the West can also 'best reveal cultural tensions.' Desser states that *Seven Samurai* is a pre-Tokugawa era film whereas *Yojimbo* is a late Tokugawa film.[18] Desser also notes the "modernist figures and techniques" in the two films, which he says are "related to both the traditional formulas and Western influences" (77). However, I think Desser is trapped by his own modernist, Western perspective that fails to recognize the important aspect of *shudō* in the samurai class.

Seven Samurai is an epic samurai *jidaigeki* that represents the feudal life of Japanese people and focuses on the class system, particularly the samurai and farmer classes. For Desser, Kurosawa has an "interest in historical accuracy" (79). There are examples of Kurosawa's acknowledgement of Japanese history in *Seven Samurai*, as Desser points to the firearms and I would add the focus on class struggle; but, where are the representations of *shudō*? The film constructs a heteronormative space for the samurai, one that forgets Japan's own cultural history in relation to sexuality. This is not to say that the samurai should exist in a homonormative space, but one that includes a variety of sexualities, especially *shudō*. In *Seven Samurai*, a relationship between Katsushiro (Isao Kimura), who is a samurai apprentice, and Kambei (Takashi Shimura), an elder samurai, develops. Desser discusses the relationship as a teacher-based one and he states that "Katsushiro is attracted to the farmer's cause by his admiration for Kambei" (84). His discussion of the relationship also focuses on the heterosexual relationship that develops between Katsushiro and Shino (Keiko Tsushima) – a young farmer girl in the village. Directly after Desser's statement about Katsushiro's motivation to help the farmers, he

---

[18] It is irrelevant for this study whether the films represent the Tokugawa period or not because if they purport to genuinely and accurately represent samurai, then they should represent their authentic sexual practices.

includes information about Katsushiro's attraction to a girl. Why is it necessary for Desser to

provide this information directly after analyzing the relationship between Katsushiro and

Kambei? The film definitely manages homoerotic moments by swiftly re-focusing them to the

heteronormative space; but, does Desser perpetuate this by failing to take into account the

implications that stem from Katsushiro and Kambei's relationship? If one recalls the *nenja-*

wakashu hierarchical structure of *shudō*, the pedagogical component of male-male sexuality is an

important aspect of the samurai ethos. The film does not coincide on an explicit representational

level with this cultural history, but it does frame it on a connotative level that must be read

carefully amidst the heteronormative space of the film. Desser also states that "Manzo, one of the

farmers, grabs his daughter Shino and insists that she cut her hair. He wants her to look like a

boy. 'Samurai are coming. They are dangerous'" (86). However, in pre-Tokugawa era Japan,

short hair was not a definitive marker for male sex as the widespread fashion of short hair was

initiated after the Meiji restoration. Thus, the film is signifies a wide-range of ideological

influences concerning gender and sexuality. Hypothetically, even if Shino did cut her hair, that

would not prevent samurai from making sexual advances because all samurai were not

heterosexual. In other words, samurai could be interested in Shino whether or not she had long

hair.

The most problematic point Desser makes about the film in his analysis articulates a

compulsory heterosexuality for the characters in the film that is both adopted by Desser and the

film itself in an effort to marginalize and disavow male-male sexuality. In relation to a sequence

in the film when Katsushiro is walking through the woods and notices Shino, Desser states that

Katsushiro

> does not initially realize that she is a girl. When she tries to run away from him, he
> wrestles her to the ground and makes the crucial discovery about her gender. These two

youths, both similarly untrained in the ways of their respective social classes, the girl not yet married and a mother, the boy not yet a true warrior, are brought together by their natural inclinations (88).

First, why is the discovery Katsushiro makes about Shino "crucial"? Second, Desser implies that heterosexuality is a "natural inclination". Again, similarly to how the filmic text of *Seven Samurai* is denying male-male sexuality and maintaining heteronormativity, a noted scholar on Kurosawa is doing the same. This problematic attention to heteronormativity in relation to the samurai that Desser adopts continues further into his analysis of the film. He states that in one scene, "the samurai's attention is drawn to one woman in particular, an extremely pretty woman who has just begun to stir. The women's sensuality stirs the men and they look at each other in surprise" (89). There are competing ideologies at work here in the analysis of the film. On one level, the film disavows queerness – what was normative in the samurai class.[19] And, on another level, Desser reads the film on an explicit level that complements a heteronormative based Western perspective that seeks to make sense of Japanese culture through Western ideologies on sexuality and gender. Desser's statements about hair as a marker of sex and "natural" in relation to heterosexuality perpetuate a view/mythology that all samurai are without question heterosexual. Desser, similarly to *Seven Samurai*, views the film with a compulsory heterosexuality that contains queerness from within. However, with the cultural context of *shudō*, a critically aware analysis renders implicit readings that correlate with an authentic samurai-based sexuality(ies).

If one focuses on the character of Kikuchiyo (Toshiro Mifune), there are examples of male-male sexuality that exist within *Seven Samurai*'s hegemonic heteronormative space. Kikuchiyo has long hair (pony-tailed) and follows the samurai dress code of a kimono. In

---

[19] I want to note here that normative does not mean universal or constant as samurai were also interested in women. They often had sexual relationships with both women and *wakashu*.

addition, his sword is much bigger than the rest of the samurai, which metaphorically suggests his hyper-masculinity and hyperbolic phallus. His hyper-masculine gender is apparent, but the male-male sexual practices that were normative within the samurai class are considerably, but not altogether, absent.

There are two scenes that illustrate a slight implication of homoeroticism within the filmic text. The first example is when Kikuchiyo enters the barn where the samurai wait for him, but he is clearly drunk and, thus, uninhibited. At one point in the scene, he rests against a fence in the barn and his shirt opens to reveal his chest. The following shot illustrates how the men are gazing at him. This homoerotic gaze is brief, but should not be ignored because it implies a fragment of *shudō* on the level of connotation. The second example centers on Kikuchiyo entering the frame near a waterfall. The other samurai watch him from above as he undresses and readies himself to catch fish. The men gaze at him while he undresses to his *fundoshi* (loincloth) and the scene takes time to portray his partially naked body running through the water. These scenes suggest a slight reference to male-male sexuality, albeit any explicit representation of male-male sexuality is almost completely removed from *Seven Samurai* and only suggested. And, the film uses comedy in relation to the moments of homoeroticism on the level of connotation to take attention away from these fragments of authenticity that disrupt the heteronormative space. Furthermore, there is one scene where Kikuchiyo pressures one of the farmers to sleep in the same spot in a barn with him and says "It's like old times." This statement could be in reference to his past life as a farmer; however, it can also be read as a moment of the cultural practices, particularly *shudō*, breaking through in one example of Japan's samurai *jidaigeki*.

Yojimbo is a samurai *jidaigeki* text without any implicit and/or explicit references to *shudō*. The film's narrative events occur in the year 1860, before the Meiji restoration. There is no sign of male-male sexuality in the film. Instead, there is a hyper-masculinity and heteronormativity that exists in the diegesis. Desser states that the film "gives rise to two significant exploitation forms that dominate Japan's output in the 60s and 70s, the Sword film and the *yakuza* film" (98). Thus, this film has inspired other generic forms of Japanese cinema, yet it is without any references to the *shudō* aspect of the samurai ethos. *Yojimbo* serves as a specific example of the GSICA's hegemonic ideology. If references to male-male sexuality do not exist in the filmic text, then the historical aspect of the samurai-*jidaigeki* genre can create a myth of heteronormativity in the samurai class that never existed in the first place. Kurosawa's role as an influential filmmaker for Japanese cinema is fraught with problems in relation to the disavowal of specificities of cultural history in the samurai class. A modern filmmaker portraying a time in Japan's history is influenced by the ideologies of modernity. Therefore, Kurosawa was inevitably working with and against ideologies of sexuality and gender that have influenced and infiltrated Japanese culture in an effort to insert heterosexuality and binary genders as the norm.

Before I discuss the *shin-jidaigeki* samurai films, it is beneficial to explore a samurai *jidaigeki* that is not part of Kurosawa's *oeuvre*. *Binanjo* (*Castle of Handsome Men* 1959)[20] is a Tokugawa era samurai film that focuses on a samurai who became *rōnin* after the Battle of Sekigahara in 1600.[21] The main character, Mido Shumenosuke (Nakamura Kinnosuke), has long hair that falls on his shoulders and he does not exhibit the hyper-masculine characteristics that

---

[20] The English version of the title is stated as "Castle of Handsome Men" on the film's jacket; however, IMDB's version is "The Forbidden Castle".

[21] The Battle of Sekigahara of 1600 was an important event in Japan's history that enabled the Tokugawa shogunate to secure a central seat of power in Japan that lasted for 267 years. Many samurai became *ronin* (masterless) after this battle because there were numerous deaths, and among these deaths were lords who retained samurai.

Kurosawa's samurai embody.[22] Mido is desired by women in the film who compete for his affections. There is also a young boy, Sotaro (actor unknown), who could be considered a *wakashu* because he follows Mido in the film and takes pleasure in his battles. Sotaro is a pseudo-apprentice to Mido, which could be an implied reference to the *nenja-wakashu* relationship of *shudō*. There is not enough evidence, however, to move beyond speculation because the film manages Mido's sexuality in a careful way. Mido does not end up with any of the women who are attracted to him in the film. Instead the final shot illustrates him leaving Chigusa (actor unknown), who seems to be an ex-romantic partner, and focuses on him leaving with Sotaro (the boy and not the heterosexual love interest). Consequently, Mido's ambiguous sexuality and gender is an example of the authentic cultural discourse of *shudō* and *bishōnen* that is struggling with the GSCIA to appear on the level of representation in the film. This film provides evidence for an alternative to Western cinema, Hollywood in particular, because it challenges the assumption and mandate that the male hero's journey ends in the (re)unification of the heterosexual couple. *Binanjo* is a film that is battling hegemonic discourse of gender and sexuality – it is a glimmer of hope that signals a breaking-free from the ideologies of 'intelligible' gender and sexuality that is embedded in the cinematic apparatus. The shin-*jidaigeki* samurai films will interact on an explicit level with the cultural history of the samurai that these samurai *jidaigeki* films are clearly tenuous of.

4.2 *Shin-jidaigeki* Samurai Cinema: A (Re)-Awakening of Authentic Japanese Queer Culture(s)

The *shin-jidaigeki* samurai films can be categorized into a contemporary genre that breaks free from the GSICA's containment of *shudō* and *bishōnen* in an effort to (re)connect

---

[22] It is relevant to note here that the main character of *Binanjo* looks very similar to *Gohatto*'s *bishōnen*. However, there is not enough filmic evidence on the level of analysis that suggests the main samurai in *Binanjo* is *bishōnen*. It is simply worthwhile to point out considering that I will have a lengthy discussion of *Gohatto* in the next section.

with Japan's cultural history – to (re)present it as though this history is truth instead of myth. The myths that exist in the samurai-*jidaigeki* films perpetuate a heteronormative space that repudiates male-male sexuality and pretends that samurai were exclusively heterosexual. In this section, I will explore how the contemporary – *shin-jidaigeki* – samurai films are able to represent male-male sexuality and androgynous genders that existed in pre-modern Japan because of a distance from cultural influence. In other words, the samurai-jidaigeki films were produced and released at a time of extreme cultural imposition vis-a-vis the West (America) just prior to and post World War II. In the 1950s and 1960s, the ideological interference around and apropos of gender and sexuality was strong enough to subdue Japan's own culture(s). However, it is in the last twenty to thirty years that Japan's cinema has been able to (re)negotiate and (re)connect with cultural specificities that existed in pre-modern Japan. I will begin this discussion with the most explicit samurai film to date in the entire corpus of Japanese cinema that deals with *shudō* and *bishōnen* – Oshima Nagisa's *Gohatto*.

Oshima Nagisa is one of Japan's most revolutionary and avant-garde filmmakers and his film, *Gohatto*, is no exception. I will speak of Oshima as an auteur because his films' content is almost always revolutionary and progressive. His work seeks to push the boundaries of subjects and their representation in Japanese cinema. In a Sight and Sound review of *Gohatto* entitled "Love, honour and obey," Philip Strick states that the "tension between respect for the past and concern for the future while coping with the fallible present is an Oshima theme" (38). Gohatto is set at the end of the Tokugawa period in 1865, which is a liminal period in Japan's history where Oshima could represent what had been 'unrepresentable' – the explicit annunciation of male-male sexuality and androgynous gender in the samurai class. In "Nagisa Oshima's Vast Historical Project and the Theme of Homoeroticism in *Taboo* (*Gohatto*)," Yoshihiro Yasuhara

states that "since the production of his controversial film *In the Realm of the Senses* (*Ai no Korida*, 1976) , the director Nagisa Oshima (1932-) has created all of his works beyond the limit of the Japanese film industry" (350). Yasuhara explores Oshima's filmic perspective for a rethinking of modern Japan and its culture (350). Oshima is working outside of a traditional form of representation that has long denied the specific cultural history of *shudō* in its cinema. By deciding to represent male-male sexuality in the samurai class, indeed with a film that focuses entirely on sexual and love-based relationships amongst samurai, he is breaking free from the limits imposed upon him by the Japanese film industry and the hegemonic ideologies at work in containing non-intelligible genders and sexualities.[23] I will explore Yasuhara's analysis of *Gohatto* in comparison with Andrew Grossman's criticism of the film in his article, "*Gohatto*— Or the End of Oshima Nagisa." Both articles miss the crucial point that *Gohatto* is a revolutionary film that has no equal in its engagement with the samurai ethos in pre-modern Japan. No other film has explicitly represented the male-male sexuality in the samurai class. Consequently, Oshima has broken free from a cultural struggle in cinema that permeated the samurai-*jidaigeki* studied thus far.

Yasuhara states that "on the surface, *Taboo*'s historical setting '*jidaigeki*' and its adoption of traditional images...leads some critics to regard *Taboo* as Oshima's untenable recourse to conservatism after four decades of radical filmmaking" (350). It is also interesting to point out that Yasuhara comments on the lack of scholarly attention towards *Gohatto* and calls Grossman's article – one of the only other essays on the film – "negative" in his notes (350). However, the film is both radical and conservative in its ability to represent a traditional culture of *shudō*, which is a fundamental break from the samurai-*jidaigeki* films. There is a lack of

---

[23] It should be noted that *Gohatto* isn't Nagisa's first film that deals with queer subjects as *Merry Christmas, Mr.Lawrence* (1982) explores the theme of homoeroticism in the military across racial, cultural and enemy/friend lives.

scholarly attention towards this film that is deserving of more. Richie discusses Oshima's work

in A Hundred Years of Japanese Film, but avoids his later films that complicate Japan's cinema.

Richie states that *In the Realm of the Senses* (1976) is Oshima's "most openly transgressive film"

because it broke public decency laws (201). However, I would argue against this because

Gohatto breaks the tradition of representing male-male sexuality implicitly in samurai films.

Richie states when describing the film that "by 1999, heterosexual love on screen, through

repeated exposure, had already lost its transgressive power. Oshima therefore turned to another

expression of desire" (Yasuhara 202). But what exactly has Oshima 'turned to,' why does Richie

avoid a clear discussion of the film's focus on queer relationships? The film is based on Shiba

Ryōtarō's novellas With a Lock of Hair Over His Forehead and The Revolt of the Mountain

(Grossman 2). Oshima's adaptation of the novellas focuses on one theme in particular as he

states that "in my opinion, one cannot understand the world of the samurai without showing the

fundamental homosexual aspect" (355). Yasuhara views the theme of homoeroticism as part of

Oshima's "vast historical project" that showcases the contradiction of Japanese identity in

relation to patriarchy (354). The homoeroticism – or really male-male sexuality – should be

allowed to exist in the filmic text for its own sake instead of it existing to comment on other

discourses, particularly patriarchy. Yasuhara believes that Grossman's analysis of the film is

"negative," which is a fair assessment considering that Grossman undercuts Oshima's

revolutionary film that exposes *shudō* rather than conceals it and is instead preoccupied with the

lack of sexual imagery in relation to male-male sexuality. Grossman states that the

cinematography becomes a "displacement' of the sex that, for one reason or another, [he] refuses

to explicitly show" (2). The 'showing' of sex is Grossman's central criticism. He decides to

focus on the fact that the film does not cohere to the explicit sexual imagery of *In the Realm of*

the Senses. But why does the film need to do both – represent *shudō* and show explicit sexual

imagery? He does not acknowledge that the subject matter of *shudō* has never been

represented in this manner before in Japanese samurai film. Grossman goes on to state that

> So while *Gohatto* purports to be fearlessly uncloseted about its homosexuality, its
> aesthetic tactics of substituting spurting blood for semen, or displacing sexual tensions to
> the safe spaces of the Kendo duels...are also masks that ironically mystify and fetishisize
> the content of the film's homosexuality, masks that beg us to look for subjects and
> symbolic meanings where none may exist (3).

The most crucial point here is that one does not have to look for implied meanings in this film, as

opposed to how one would have to carefully read samurai-*jidaigeki* texts in order to clarify the

concealed and contained references to male-male sexuality. The film is not begging us to look

for the subject of *shudō* because it already exists on an explicit level of representation.

Furthermore, the narrative revolves around the sexual relationships between the characters in the

film. I believe that Grossman is simply asking for too much in a film that is already revolutionary

just for representing what has long been 'unrepresentable.'

The most obvious form of the imposition of the West through the GSICA is the film's

title. *Gohatto* has been translated incorrectly for international audiences into "Taboo" because

Gohatto's more direct translation is "Against the Law" which suggests the ethos of the samurai

through the *shudō* code as a direct assault on modernity (Grossman 1).[24] In other words, the

cultural struggle of male-male sexuality in modern Japan is signified in the title. The incorrect

translation of the title from <u>Gohatto</u> to <u>Taboo</u> is a metaphor for the assimilation of Western

ideology of gender and sexuality into the filmic title whereas the title itself signals to audiences

that the narrative content is taboo. The correct translation of the title of the film "Against the

Law" recalls the law that made sodomy a criminal act "in article 266 of the Meiji legal code in

---

[24] A reminder here that GSICA stands for: Gendered Sexuality Ideological Cinematic Apparatus.

1873" (McLelland 26). This law made the sexual practices of the samurai illegal in 1873, eight years after the narrative events in the film. Oshima is, thus, calling attention to the fact that *shudō* itself, though normative, became a taboo in modern Japan.

Sōzaburō Kano (Ryuhei Matsuda), exemplary of the *bishōnen* in the samurai class through his embodiment of an androgynous gender, volunteers for the Shinsengumi militia, "a historical troop whose legendary duty it was to quell the rebellions that threatened the Tokugawa Shogunate" (Grossman 2).[25] Sōzaburō is a perfect example of a *bishōnen* because of his explicitly ambiguous gender and his ability to hypnotize men around him. The filmic text renders Sōzaburō's embodiment as *bishōnen* and *wakashu* as something that usurps the power of the samurai order. Although the samurai order is disrupted by Sōzaburō's androgyny and sexual appeal, the male-male sexuality is not a problem in the film. Sōzaburō's sexual appeal begins to disintegrate the hierarchical structure of the samurai class – his aggressive, rather than passive characteristic as a *wakashu* disrupts the very order of the *nenja-wakashu* hierarchical system. Therefore, the system of male-male sexuality is able to exist if it complements the hierarchical – and patriarchal – structure of the class. His mysterious control over the other samurai starts at the beginning when Captain Toshizo Hijikata (Takeshi Kitano) thinks that Commander Kondo (Yoichi Sai) may be entranced by Sōzaburō's beauty, but it could not be possible because "he doesn't have that leaning."[26] This statement could be read as an example of Western influence, but it should be remembered that not all samurai practiced *shudō* even though it was normative. At this moment, however, Hijikata notices Sōzaburō is different from the rest of the *wakashu* in

---

[25] I want to make clear here that when I say gender; I do not mean that one cannot determine whether Sōzaburō is a male or female. What I do mean is that he exhibits an array of masculine and feminine characteristics that renders him androgynous and, thus, having an ambiguous gender.

[26] Takeshi 'Beat' Kitano is an extremely important director and actor for this thesis in the yakuza-*gendaigeki* section and also this section. Is it mere coincidence that he plays the role of the samurai who is confused about his sexuality in this revolutionary samurai film when he either acts in or directs other films with explicit queer content?

their militia. Yashuhara states that "Oshima attempts to find in the reality of the Shinsen militia an unknown dynamics, which in *Taboo* centers on the historically obscure character Sōzaburō Kanō" (353). The reason Sōzaburō seems obscure is because Oshima has represented what was considered normative *bishōnen* gender.

Hyozo (Tadanobu Asano) and Sōzaburō begin training with the Shinsengumi simultaneously and Hyozo seems hypnotized by Sōzaburō's beauty. At night, Hyozo cannot refrain from reaching out and touching Sōzaburō, and then asks "Have you ever made love?" Hyozo has literally known Sōzaburō for a few hours, but Sōzaburō pulsates with strong carnal attractiveness which consequently establishes an erotic hold on him. The *bishōnen* has an ability to instigate an internal erotic carnal impulse within another samurai.[27] Grossman states that "to suggest, for example, that Kano's boyish androgyny disrupts samurai orders of masculine power is to ignore the *wakashu-nenja* relationship that had been an institutionalized part of samurai history" (3). Throughout the film, Hijikata attempts to figure out why this boy's beauty has such a hold on the samurai. Yasuhara states that "Sōzaburō's confrontation with Lt. Hijikata" begins with his rationalistic eyes attempting to figure out the boy's ambiguity (354). However, *bishōnen* cannot be easily defined or "figured out" and one of the main components of the narrative revolves around Hijikata's attempts to rationalize Sōzaburō's powers of enchantment in order to make sense of his own sexuality. Hijikata is the character that symbolizes Western cultural control in the narrative. He remains confused throughout the film about his own feelings towards Sōzaburō. Hijikita even states in one scene that the militia emanates a certain energy, which is potentially dangerous, and then says "young men are drawn into it." This statement parallels his thoughts about Sōzaburō and his sexual appeal because Sōzaburō "unsettles" men in the militia.

---

[27] The *bishōnen*'s ontological basis began in the *wakashu* of the samurai class. However, it simply means "beautiful boy" and in modern Japan, figures of the *bishōnen* are abundant in the media, especially in *yaoi* and *shonen ai* manga.

In one scene, Commander Isami Kondo (Yoichi Sai) orders Hijikata to associate Sōzaburō with women in the hopes that he will stop enchanting the militia's men. Hijikata tasks Yamazaki (Masa Tommies) to assist in assimilating Sōzaburō into heterosexual practices. It is explained that Yamazaki is supposedly against "leaning" the way of *shudō*, but he slowly becomes entranced by Sōzaburō's presence as he spends time with him. From a close-up shot of Yamazaki's face, it is clear that he is fighting his growing desire for Sōzaburō. Yamazaki then shakes his face and says "No, don't." He has to fight off his growing sexual interest in Sōzaburō, which suggests that *shudō* is something that one cannot control or avoid. There is also a brief sequence where Yamazaki is pleasuring himself after spending time with Sōzaburō.

The film's final scene illustrates Hijikata's struggle with his sexuality, which metaphorically suggests a Western influence unknown to samurai in pre-modern Japan when *shudō* was normative. The militia request that Sōzaburō murder his lover, Hyozo, who has transgressed the laws of the clan. Sōzaburō kills him without hesitancy, which suggests his devotion to the militia. After Sōzaburō kills Hyozo, Lt. Soji, (Shinji Takeda) who watched the battle with Hijikata, realizes that he must now kill Sōzaburō and a shot change illustrates Hijikata standing next to a beautiful flowering pink tree within the mise-en-scene. There is an off-screen sound of a slash and Sōzaburō yelling in pain, which implies the slaying of Sōzaburō as Hijikata's voice narrates, "Sōzaburō was too beautiful. He was possessed by evil." Hijikata then forcefully chops down the tree, which metaphorically suggests the end of Sōzaburō because the samurai militia could not cope with a change to the *nenja-wakashu* dynamic – Sozaburo was too aggressive as a *wakashu* and *bishōnen*. Strick states that in "felling the sapling Hijikata has severed himself from his own inadmissible interest in the taboo of Kano" (39). The cutting down of the tree by a Captain of the Shinsengumi three years before the Meiji Restoration also

suggests the end of this period of Japan's cultural practices in regards to male-male sexuality and androgynous genders. Regardless of the reference to the emergence of Japan's modernity and subsequent influence this had on sexuality and gender, *Gohatto* remains a revolutionary filmic text that deals explicitly with a cultural history that has long been forgotten in a Japanese cinema mainly fascinated in telling samurai-based history from a mythological perspective that ignores male-male sexuality.

Another contemporary samurai film that continues the trend of representing queer genders and sexualities in correlation with Japanese cultural history is *Yaji and Kita: The Midnight Pilgrims*. The DVD's back-cover states that the narrative is set in the "ancient Edo period, Yaji (played by pop star Tomoya Nagase) and Kita (played by kabuki star Shichinosuke Nakamura) are two flamboyant, down and out samurai." The couple are affectionate and loving towards one another in the first half of the film. However, in the second half of the narrative Kita falls in love with a woman named Oyuki (Yumi Shimizu), which complicates his relationship with Yaji. This heterosexual twist to the narrative suggests the struggle between Japanese modernity and history with regards to male-male sexuality. In Adam Campbell's review of the film, he states that "rather than the modern era imposing on the past, the film portrays the past as being aware of the present" (2). The film points to the struggle of Japan's modern-day tolerance of male-male sexuality with the Kita and Oyuki love story. The brief heterosexual love story challenges the queer sexuality of the film in an attempt to strike a presentist conversation between the past and present. Mark Schilling also discusses the film in his review as a "period drama" that focuses on a "happy gay couple in old Edo" (2). Yet, the "happy gay couple" cannot exist in the diegesis without challenges as it is Kita's surprise love-based obsession with Oyuki that threatens the same-sex relationship.

Near the beginning of the film, Yaji and Kita and village people break out into a song and

dance sequence.[28] The song in this sequence is entitled "Born to be Gay." Yaji and Kita sing:

"Taking no women or kids. 'Cause we're born to be...GAY!" The crowd cheers behind them

after this line and they continue to dance in a set that depicts street life in ancient Edo. In a scene

that follows the song and dance sequence, Yaji and Kita walk through a forest holding hands and

two women walk past them. The women look back and one of them says "you boys are real

chummy." Yaji replies by saying "Not chummy. We're gay. We love men more than three

square meals. We're two homos madly in love." These lines could be considered humourous, but

they are also unapologetic about the two men's love for one another. The film manages to

represent queerness in an explicit manner and initiates a conversation that enables the characters

to speak their sexuality instead of simply portraying it through embraces and touching. However,

the film changes its tone when Kita becomes attracted to Oyuki, which threatens Yaji and Kita's

same-sex relationship. In one scene, Kita yells at Mt. Fuji -- in front of Yaji -- that he loves

Oyuki. Yaji yells at him and asks if he has forgotten that he is gay. Kita replies by saying that

Oyuki will solve his "gay problems." Up until now, the film did not present male-male sexuality

as a problem, but the film is striking a discursive engagement between the past and present in an

effort to illustrate how Japan has become intolerant of what was considered normative sexual

practices in pre-modern Japan. The film manages to (re)focus on the relationship between Yaji

and Kita near the end. They kiss at the film's denouement and Kita says that Yaji is his "only

reality." Kita's line is metaphorically suggesting that the sequence where he was in love with

Oyuki was fictional inasmuch as it was a challenge embedded with societal pressure in relation

to their queer relationship. The two samurai ride away on a big pink elephant that morphs into a

---

[28] Of interest, the film could be considered a "samurai musical", which coincides with <u>The Guardian</u>'s view of
Zatoichi as Peter Bradshaw and Derek Malcolm consider it "the first samurai musical." See the Friday 5 September
2003 issue for more.

motorcycle while swiftly vanishing down a road. The film is a conversation about the Edo/Tokugawa period's cultural history of normative male-male sexuality and the modern day struggle of unconstrained queerness in Japan. In similar ways to *Gohatto*, *Yaji and Kita* is a cinematic example of Japan's cultural struggle with male-male sexuality and its representation in samurai shin-*jidaigeki* films strikes more of a resemblance, or at least manages to represent explicitly, the cultural customs of the samurai pre-modernity.

Zatoichi is another *shin-jidaigeki* samurai film that recalls Japan's historical perspective on male-male sexuality; however, it focuses particularly on androgynous genders that existed in pre-modernity. Before an analysis of the film, it is important to provide a cultural and historical context in relation to the type of androgynous gender that is represented in the diegesis. The representation of gender in this case is not *bishōnen* but *onnagata*. The *onnagata* were male impersonators of female roles in *kabuki* theatre (Kano 16). Kano states that "it is of course problematic to define *onnagata* as 'men acting like women' since such a formulation assumes a binary opposition of gender that may not have been functioning in pre-Meiji Japan" (16). Thus transvestism in pre-modern Japan was not merely an attempt to cross-dress and assume traits of the opposite gender and sex, but was an act of performing gender and sex outside of the cultural logic of Western sex/gender binaries. Consequently, Kano states that "it is arguable that *onnagata* as well as the *wakashu* – young men who served as sexual partners to adult men – constituted a separate gender in Tokugawa Japan" (16). Thus, the *wakashu* and *onnagata* could have occupied a separate space of gendered embodiment for people in pre-modern Japan that the male/masculine and female/feminine binaries could not contain. Kano states that "the essentialist and expressive understanding of gender was a modern one, in contrast to the theatrical and performative understanding of gender exemplified in *kabuki*" (23). The characteristic of fluid

gendered embodiment of the *onnagata* in *kabuki* subverts a modern rationalization of

'intelligible' genders that separates and contains gender/sex as salient polarizations. Furthermore,

there is a definitive contrast of ideology in regards to gender from pre-modern to modern Japan

as Kano states that "before the Meiji period, what we now think of as biological sex and cultural

gender were aligned radically differently from today" (28). Gender/sex has become a crucial

identity category for people to make sense of themselves by. Kano goes on to say that "historians

have pointed out that in the Edo period preceding 1868, it was social class rather than gender that

most strongly defined a person's status in society" (Kano 29). The social class of an individual

rather than a person's gender/sex constituted people in pre-modern Japan through the feudal

systems of *shi-no-ko-sho* (samurai, farmer, artisan and merchant). The imposition of Western

ideologies around and apropos of gender played a crucial role in the erosion of polymorphous

genders that had existed in pre-modern Japan.

The history of *kabuki* theatre evolved from female performers to young boy female

impersonators and finally, adult female-impersonators. Varley states that "the originator of

kabuki was a woman named Okuni" who "led a troupe of female dancers in Kyoto in a kind of

outdoor musical entertainment that was labelled (by others) '*kabuki* dancing'" (187). Eventually,

> shogunate officials sternly disapproved of both the onstage and offstage behaviour of
> female performers such as these, and in 1629, after a period of indecision, they banned
> their participation in kabuki altogether. This had the immediate effect of giving impetus
> to the rise of another form of entertainment known as 'young men's kabuki'....but to the
> dismay of the authorities, the youths were as much of a social nuisance as the female
> kabuki performers since they aroused the homosexual passions that had been widespread
> in Japan from the medieval age on. Finally, in 1652, after a number of unseemly incidents
> including public brawls in the midst of performances over the affections of the actors on
> stage, the shogunate also banned young men's kabuki. Henceforth, only adult males (or
> youths who had shaved their forelocks to give the appearance that they were adults) were
> allowed to perform on the kabuki stage. (187)

Thus, what will be explored as *wakashu/onnagata* and adult *onnagata* sexuality in *Zatoichi* is culturally relevant for pre-modern Japan and these gendered embodiments existed on a separate plane from a binary based sex/gender. Takeshi Kitano is undoubtedly one of the most influential members of the Japanese film industry who has contributed to representations of queerness in Japan's cinema either as an actor or director or both. In *Zatoichi*, he does both in the roles of director and lead actor. Consequently, the film is self-reflexive about its subject matter, which includes the character of Osei (Daigoro Tachibana)/Young Osei (Taichi Saotome) who is an embodiment of a *wakashu/onnagata* and *onnagata*. In an interview with Takeshi conducted by Tony Rayns, Rayns tells Takeshi that he was surprised that he "took such a sympathetic view of the effeminate boy forced into prostitution" (23). Takeshi responds by saying "That wasn't a taboo in the Edo period. I guess it started from the time when young men began playing the female roles in kabuki after the authorities banned women from the stage" (23). Therefore, Takeshi's cultural awareness of the *onnagata* is represented in the film in the performance and treatment of Osei. But, why is Rayns surprised that Takeshi takes a 'sympathetic' view of Osei? Does Rayns assume that a representation of queer gender will be treated as unsympathetic in Takeshi's films? This question will be explored further in the section on yakuza-*gendaigeki* in relation to Takeshi's yakuza films and their representation of male-male sexuality and queer gender.

In "Between Comedy and Kitsch: Kitano's *Zatoichi* and Kurosawa's Traditions of 'Jidaigeki' Comedies," Rie Karatsu states that "*Zatoichi* is Kitano's biggest box-office success to date, with around two million Japanese theatre admissions" (1). The film garnered critical success and won the Silver Lion (Special Director's Award), among other awards, at the sixtieth Venice Film Festival" (Karatsu 1). The film is a revision of Kenji Misumi's *Zatoichi Monogatari*

and in this original series, "Ichi is not only a killer but he is a masseur who gives comfort and erotic pleasure to people" (Karatsu 7). The original series also had what Karatsu terms "subtle touches in homoeroticism" (7). However, Kitano's *Zatoichi* focuses more on a fascination with queer genders via the adoration and desire for young Osei as *wakashu/onnagata* and adult Osei as *onnagata*. Karatsu states that "*jidaigeki* is what Japanese young people come to regard as" old fashioned, preachy and artificial (3). Kitano criticizes Japanese young people's views towards pre-modern Japan: "Kitano's concern is exposed in one of his books, in which Kitano criticizes Japan's young people's unconditional worship of North American individualism as the best policy to emulate without considering its historical background" (3). And, it is Western individualism that has made identity politics excessive to the point where individuals, influenced by the productive power of ideology, are obsessed with containing their sex/gender and maintaining it as static. Osei's gender in the film is fluid and challenges the static gender/sex binaries that are a hegemonic ideology. Karatsu divides the characters into 'serious' and 'destructive' (comedic) (9). She states that Osei is a "destructive character who travels back and forth between serious and comic" (9). Yet, Osei is always a member of a serious narrative that is devoid of comedy. The comedy that Karatsu speaks of is an incongruity between Osei's gender and his body. In other words, Karatsu reads Osei's queer gender as 'un-intelligible' and humorous. Except, Takeshi did not mean for Osei's *onnagata* status to be comedic, but authentic to Japan's cultural history. Karatsu states that "their bewildered looks at his feminine attire provide the audience with another destructive comic interlude to the narrative" (9). Yet, Osei's feminine attire relates to an ancient Japanese culture of theatrical female-impersonation rather than its existing for comedic effect. Karatsu's analysis of Osei is a Western perspective, and even a contemporary/modern Japanese perspective, of Japanese cinema that is unaware of specific

cultural history. Karatsu states that "Kitano understands Japanese culture innately, deeply, and across the boundaries of social classes" (11). Ironically, then, it is Karatsu that remains unaware in her analysis of Osei's character in the film in a problematic attempt at making a connection between Osei's queer gender as comedic and 'destructive.'

In the scene where Osei's *wakashu/onnagata* status is confirmed, both he and his sister, Okinu (Yuko Daike/Young Okinu: Ayano Yoshida) roam the streets after being orphaned by a gang that has murdered their parents. Their motivation as adults is to find and seek vengeance against this gang. However, the young Osei and Okinu end up in a home doing work for room and board. The 'Master' (actor unknown) of the home takes an interest in Osei. Osei's transformation into a *wakashu/onnagata* is illustrated from Okinu's point-of-view as she watches Osei and the 'Master' from a crack in the door. The 'Master' tells Osei that he will be his from now on and touches Osei's chest. Osei and Okinu both manage to leave the home because of the 'Master's' aggressive desire for Osei, which leaves them homeless. Karatsu reads this scene as a 'molestation' of young Osei (13). But, the scene only illustrates Osei's chest being touched briefly and the following scene illustrates Osei's free will to become a prostitute in order to perpetuate his and his sister's survival. Why does Karatsu interpret Osei's motivation to prostitution as molestation? I think Karatsu implies that there is somehow a connection between the 'Master' dressing Osei up as an *onnagata* and the pseudo-molestation as the sole cause of his adulthood status of *onnagata*. In doing this, Karatsu makes a problematic statement about the impossibility of female-impersonators. She implies that *onnagata* cannot exist without first being molested or "made" into *onnagata* by an authority figure, which recalls homophobic causal notions of homosexuality as an effect of childhood molestation. Furthermore, Karatsu's statement undermines Osei's own decision to embody the status of *onnagata* to guarantee his and

his sister's survival. Osei is forced into prostitution because of the unfortunate circumstance he and his sister are in.[29] But, this also recalls the historical aspect of the *wakashu/onnagata* on stage as admired and desired by men. Unfortunately, this is not the only statement in Karatsu's article that is problematic. She states that "Laughter is also enhanced by the confusion of gender in Tachibana's role for Osei" (14). However, Osei is not confused about his gender because at the end of the film he articulates his comfort level with being *onnagata* to Shinkichi (Gadarukanaru Taka). Shinkichi acts as Zatoichi's sidekick in the film and helps the siblings. He admires Osei and desires to become an *onnagata* after meeting him. Shinkichi tells Osei that he "could become a man again" and Osei replies by saying that "this way suits me just fine." This statement by Osei reaffirms that he is not confused by his gendered embodiment of the *onnagata* gender. Although, the cause of Karatsu's problematic statement about Osei's "confused gender" becomes obvious from a conversation between Osei and Shinkichi when Osei states that he is, indeed, a man.

> Shinkichi: I'll have a bath.
>
> Osei: Me too.
>
> Shinkichi: No! Men first.
>
> Osei: I am a man!
>
> Shinkichi: ...

Both Karatsu and Shinkichi become perplexed about Osei's definitive status about his sex/gender. In this specific example, though, Shinkichi's confusion is with Osei's sex because he cannot separate Osei's gender from his sex. This confusion originates from a conflation of sex and gender than did not exist in pre-modern Japan. In other words, an *onnagata*'s chromosomal

---

[29] I want to make clear here that *onnagata* were not prostitutes, but in this example the *onnagata* happens to be a prostitute.

male sex was not in question because of his effeminate gender. There are also numerous occasions in the film where samurai articulate their attraction to Osei and these moments are able to exist free from judgement or confusion about his gender and sex. *Zatoichi* explicitly represents a pre-modern normative gendered embodiment of *wakashu/onnagata* and *onnagata* in a contemporary samurai *jidaigeki*. It will serve as an example alongside *Gohatto* and *Yaji and Kita* that draws a strong connection between Japan's past and its present in cinema. This acknowledgement rather than repudiation forecasts a promising cinematic future for the representation of Japan's cultural history in samurai shin-*jidaigeki* cinema. There is one other genre that is also refusing an avoidance of queer subjects in Japanese cinema and has roots in the samurai cinema and cultural ethos: *yakuza gendaigeki*.

4.3 The Movement of a Queer Samurai Sexuality to the *Yakuza*: *Yakuza Gendaigeki* Cinema as Proof of Cultural Resilience

The *yakuza gendaigeki* films have two different stages: the transitional/hybrid films of the 1960s-1980s and the *yakuza gendaigeki* films post-1980s, particularly of Takashi Miike and Takeshi Kitano. The transitional *yakuza gendaigeki* films comment on the *yakuza*'s assimilation of the samurai ethos. And, this assimilation includes male-male sexuality embedded within the hierarchical – often intergenerational – structured relationships of the samurai. However, the references to homoeroticism in the early *yakuza gendaigeki* are too few to undertake a more comprehensive discussion of the films. Consequently, I will explore these films from a critical perspective to provide the implications of male-male sexuality and how this parallels with the early *yakuza*'s adoption of samurai-based values.[30] This film analysis will lead into a larger discussion devoted to the contemporary *yakuza* films of Takashi Miike and Takeshi Kitano who

---

[30] When I say samurai values, I'm referring to the <u>Hagakure</u> and the cultural specificities of gender and sexuality explored earlier in this thesis.

represent male-male sexuality and queer genders that signal cultural similarities with pre-modern Japan.

I have already investigated several filmic examples wherein Japan's cinema is struggling with its own cultural history before Japan modernized and integrated into a Westernized ideological system around and apropos of 'intelligible' gender and sexuality. The films that deny and mythologize Japan's history by repudiating the male-male sexuality of the samurai class indicate a cultural struggle at the level of cinematic representation. This struggle is rationalized by the GSICA, an ideological-based hegemonic system that works, on a productive level, to disavow cinema of non-normative genders and sexualities. However, as I have demonstrated, some contemporary Japanese cinema is drawing strong connections with its past in an effort to represent queerness.[31] The early, transitional, *yakuza gendaigeki* films comment on the resilience of cultural attitudes about male-male sexuality. In three of the *Showa Zankyoden* series (remnants of Chivalry in the Showa Era), Ken Takakura plays the character of a *yakuza*/samurai hybrid that illustrates the motif of a struggle between *giri* (duty) and *ninjō* (desire). In the Yakuza Movie Book, Mark Schilling states that "Showa Zankyoden" "ran for nine installments from 1965 to 1972" and that Takakura's character "usually begins each film as the putative foe of a gangster named Kokichi Kazama (Ryo Ikebe), but by the end they are firm friends, going off to fight the rival gang together" (144). I will focus on the dynamic between Ryo Ikebe and Ken Takakura's characters in three of the "Showa Zankyoden" films: *Brutal Tales of Chivalry*, *Brutal Tales of Chivalry 3: The Lone Wolf* and *Brutal Tales of Chivalry 4: Blood Stained Tattoo*.[32] All of these films depict the transition on the level of appearance and behaviour from samurai to

---

[31] It is important to remember that although male-male sexuality and androgynous genders can be considered "queer" in modern Japan, these subjectivities were normative in pre-modern Japan. The question that exists here is that underneath all of the containment strategies of 'intelligible' ideologies of gender and sexuality – is queer really that queer for Japan?

[32] From this point forward, I will speak of the films as *BTC*, *BTC3* and *BTC4* to avoid writing out the long titles.

yakuza. Furthermore, the study of Takakura and Ikebe's relationships in the films signifies an implicit reading of male-male sexuality. In ways, then, similar to the Kurosawa samurai-*jidaigeki* films, these films also point to the struggle of homoerotic representation in Japanese cinema.

Schilling discusses that in the 1960s there was a "*yakuza* movie boom" (144). These films would be influential in the rise of serious *yakuza gendaigeki* of the 1980s and beyond. Therefore, the representation of the *yakuza* in these early filmic examples is important to explore. The early *yakuza* have assimilated the samurai ethos while simultaneously establishing their own aesthetic motifs and value systems. I have already explored how the *nenja-wakashu* hierarchical relationship of the samurai class is similar to the *oyabun-kobun* hierarchical structure of the yakuza relationships. Whereas the *nenja-wakashu* included a mandatory sexual component, the *oyabun-kobun* does not always necessitate male-male sexuality. On a reductive level, the *yakuza* have replaced the kimono of the samurai with business suits and Hawaiian/tropical collared shirts. Their family crests are replaced by tattoos and guns take the place of swords.[33] The *Showa Zankyoden* films point to these transitional changes as family crests are still abundant within the diegesis amongst the clans and families; however, tattoos become a more important aesthetic aspect of the individual to display in battle. In almost all of the final battle scenes in the three films, Takakura and Ikebe's characters rip their sleeves or shirts off to display their tattoos while engaging in battle. Also, business suits are a definitive change from *jidaigeki* to *gendaigeki* films, which are especially apparent in *BTC* in the Shinsei Group (the *yakuza* villains of the film).[34] The most significant change between samurai and *yakuza* is the employment of the gun

---

[33] I want to clarify here that the replacement of tattoos with crests and swords for guns is not always the case. I do not attempt to homogenize the *yakuza*'s style and weapon choice here, but I do want to point out that there are clear changes from the samurai to the *yakuza* in the form of clothing and weaponry.

[34] It is interesting to note here that business suits are undoubtedly the most significant Western influence in relation to fashion in Japan. From my travels there, I noticed, especially in larger Japanese cities, that business suits are more abundant than in North American cities.

instead of the sword. The three films depict the sword as the weapon of choice in the prolonged

battle scenes. But, the guns appear in moments of surprise as more efficient weapons. The

evolution of weaponry from guns to swords is obvious in the later *yakuza gendaigeki* where guns

become the preferred weapon for *yakuza* rather than the sword. In *BTC*, *BTC3* and *BTC4*, the

sword and gun both exist as weapons that signify the evolution from a samurai way of fighting to

a *yakuza*-based one. In the biographical information on Takakura in the DVD's features it states

that

> In the early 1960s, Toei Studios, the self-proclaimed 'Kingdom of Jidai Geki' found themselves in an early life crisis when confronted with a dwindling audience thanks to the advance in popularity of television. Toei mastermind and...gangster Koji Shundo...who ran Toei like a *yakuza* gang with himself as Boss decided to change the gameplan and replace the ailing samurai film with a new variation of Ninkyo Eiga (chivalry films) centered on *yakuza* circa the late Meiji through Taisho and early Showa era.

These films are thus representing a dialectical tension between past and present, feudal Japan and

modernity, in the movement from samurai to yakuza within and without the films.[35]

To reiterate, my film analysis will focus on the relationship between Takakura and

Ikebe's characters in the three films. Their relationship signifies a hybridized male-male

sexuality that exists on the level of connotation with dialogical metaphors and a leitmotif of eye

contact that speaks for the love that cannot exist between the two men in the diegeses. The male-

male sexuality in these early *yakuza gendaigeki* films cannot exist on an explicit level. Instead,

one can infer homoeroticism from the repetitive sensuality and sensitivity these characters share

for one another in all of the films. The three films have almost the exact same plot, which

Schilling discusses in his brief biography of Takakura. The relationship between Ikebe and

Takakura in the three films is almost identical. Takakura and Ikebe's characters begin the films

---

[35] Toei's emblematic title screen that depicts strong waves clashing against rocks is an excellent metaphor for the studio's representation, both with samurai and *yakuza* films, of the struggle between past and present – a cultural resilience that is symbolized with the rocks standing in solidarity against the "waves of change" from beyond.

as enemies, challenge each other and then develop a sense of respect and loyalty that culminates

in both of them fighting together against enemies in the last battle. Schilling states that

"Takakura's *yakuza* heroes were inevitably *tateyaku* (heroic leading men) characters, who stoutly

resisted romantic passion and usually bade farewell to their love interest in the last reel" (145). It

is clear that Takakura is more interested in his *giri* (duty) to his family/clan than his *ninjo*

(personal desire). But, his love interest is an important element of his loyalty that signifies a

homoeroticism embedded deeply in the filmic texts. All three films represent a love between

Takakura and Ikebe that cannot be represented explicitly – it is a part of the loyalty that they

share for one another that ends in metaphorical orgasms in the final battles whereby Ikebe's

character sacrifices himself for Takakura. In *BTC*, there are two scenes that depict this

burgeoning relationship. First, Takakura's character, Seiji, is shot in the arm and he rests in his

room. Kazama (Ikebe) enters his room and says "Let me take that bullet out for you," Seiji

allows him to remove the bullet. This scene is ripe with homoeroticism as a low angled shot

depicts Kazama staring down at Seiji in a gaze that lasts for almost the entire scene. They stare at

each other while Kazama carefully removes the bullet from Seiji's arm while Seiji's moans. The

eye contact between them is consistent throughout the scene and it ends in Seiji slightly smiling

at Kazama. The slight smile that Kazama/Ikebe shares with Seiji/Takakura is a motif in all of the

films. The second example is the final battle sequence where Seiji and Kazama meet in a dark

area of the village. Kazama wants to accompany Seiji in the battle against the Shinsei Group.

Kazama pleads with Seiji and eventually Seiji surrenders and allows him to join him. This team-

up is repeated in *BTC3* and *BTC4*. Kazama's loyalty to Seiji, and vice-versa, stands in for the

sexual desire that the two feel for each other.

I will confirm this love affair in *BTC3* with three specific examples from the film. Katsuragi (Ikebe) and Shigejiro (Takakura) meet on a beach and agree to fight one another because of their connections to competing clans. But, Katsuragi says that "you're too good a man to kill." People show up and interrupt their fight. Shigejiro says to Katsuragi, "we're being interrupted. Sorry but can we hold off this match?" Why does the battle require privacy? The battleground in this scene signifies the bedroom for the two men whereby they desire privacy to "clash swords." Phallic metaphors aside, the need for Katsuragi and Shigejiro's privacy is metaphorically suggesting a level of intimacy between them that cannot be shared with the diegetic characters in any explicit manner. They enter into a second battle later in the film and stare at each other in a way that evokes sensuality rather than aggression. Again, people intervene, men that are after Shigejiro this time and they shoot him in the arm. Katsuragi swiftly jumps to Shigejiro's protection and says "It looks like I've come to really like you. It isn't just my sister." Katsuragi's sister in the film, Mie (actor unknown), is attracted to Shigejiro. In this scene, Katsuragi is articulating a shared attraction with his sister towards Shigejiro. In the film's final battle sequence, the men meet up again. The shot depicting their meeting illustrates them framed by two boats (one on either side of the frame) that creates a voyeuristic perspective on Shigejiro and Katsuragi. The shot perspective of them between the two boats is analogous to a peep-hole view that signifies a type of secret meeting. Katsuragi says "I waited a long time for you." Shot-reverse-shots depict the two men staring at each other in discussing Katsuragi's desire to join Shigejiro in the final battle. When Shigejiro surrenders to Katsuragi, the same response occurred in *BTC*, he smiles at Shigejiro. Katsuragi sacrifices his life for Shigejiro in the battle and is held in Shigejiro's arms while he dies on the beach. Katsuragi says "we lost the

chance to have another match...In our next lives...let's come back as allies." He fades away and the film ends with a shot of Shigejiro and Mie.

I will explore how Ikebe's sister in these films consistently operates as the sexual link between the two men as a connection that enables the male-male sexuality to exist through the mediation of a fabricated heterosexual relationship that never really exists for its own sake. In other words, the heterosexual relationship between Takakura and Ikebe's sisters in the films only exists to link the two men together sexually. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's theory that there is a continuum between the homosocial and homosexual is relevant for this film. Sedgwick argues that the homosocial in various ways becomes the homosexual through a triangulation of desire that requires a woman as one point on the triangle.[36] The heterosexual relationship is an artifice that enables the male-male sexuality. In *BTC4*, Hide (Takakura) and Ju (Ikebe) have a reunion after being apart for three years. Fumi (Junko Fuji) is Ju's sister that apparently had a relationship with Hide before his departure. However, Hide would rather see Ju before Fumi. When Hide and Ju see each other for the first time in three years, they act like long-lost lovers. Ju grabs Hide's sleeve and pulls him off-screen. The next shot depicts them standing on a bridge while they smile and gaze into each other's eyes. Ju says "three years is a long time" and Hide replies, "I was hoping to have my first drink with you." In the final battle sequence, Ju sacrifices himself for Hide – a motif in all three films. Fumi is clearly the heteronormative mediator for Ju and Hide's relationship in *BTC4* as she exists in the scenes to settle anxieties in relation to the queer relationship. The significant point, here, is that the relationship exists in all three films and it evolves from the level of complete connotation in *BTC* to a more lucid representation of male-male sexuality in *BTC3* and *BTC4*. The love that cannot exist for Takakura and Ikebe is an example of the GSICA's deployment where it attempts to repudiate the male-male sexuality of

---

[36] See her <u>Between Men:English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire</u> for more.

the early *yakuza gendaigeki*. Fortunately, these films illustrate that there is a probable cultural struggle in the representation of male-male sexuality. The evolution from a samurai ethos to a *yakuza* one is also apparent in these films. In the study of Kitano and Miike's *oeuvre* and other *yakuza gendaigeki*, queer sexualities and genders proliferate in a contemporary Japanese cinema that is exhibiting a cultural resilience to external ideological influence from binary traditions of simplified sexualized and gendered beliefs and customs.

4.4 'Beat' Takeshi Kitano, Takashi Miike: A Continuation of Japan's Culture-based Queer Cinema

There was a "gay boom" in Japanese media in the 1990s. In "Obscenity and Homosexual Depiction in Japan," Udo Helms states that "there were not many gay-themed films in Japan prior to the 90s" (134). However, I have already explored several films that can be considered queer in ways that are implicit. Yet these films are examples of Japan's longstanding cinematic representation of male-male sexuality and non-normative gender on a connotative level. And, therefore, the 1990s saw a proliferation of gay films that explicitly dealt with queer subjects. This is not to denigrate the films that came before the 1990s, as Japanese cinema has always struggled with the representation of queerness. Helms notes that filmmakers such as Hashiguchi Ryosuke with *Hatachi no binetsu* (*Slight Fever of a Twenty Year Old* 1993), *Nagisa no Sindbad* (*Like Grains of Sand* 1995) and *Hush!* (2001) played a significant role in this 'gay boom.' I will focus on the yakuza-*gendaigeki* films during this time period – 1980s and 1990s – as examples of films with gay content. I will clarify that, although there was a "gay boom" in the 1990s, this movement does not suddenly signify a progressive, and positive, trend towards the representation of male-male sexuality in Japanese cinema. The yakuza-*gendaigeki* films serve as an additional

example of Japan's struggle with its cultural history in relation to gender and sexuality; and, how these ideologies are mediated and represented in its cinema.

To begin, I will focus on 'Beat' Takeshi Kitano/Takeshi Kitano and his films: *Violent Cop*, *Boiling Point* and *Sonatine*.[37] I will also explore *Gonin* – a film directed by Takashi Ishii -- as a film that continues the typical representation of male-male sexuality in Kitano's directed works. All of these films star Takeshi Kitano; therefore, it is important to provide contextual background to what I explored earlier in this thesis because Kitano is a complicated character in Japanese cinema with numerous contributions. In Beat Takeshi vs. Takeshi Kitano, Casio Abe discusses Kitano's influences and early career. He began his career on television as 'Beat' Kitano and was influenced by Nagisa Oshima who "helped to create Takeshi Kitano's cinematic sensibility" (17). Oshima's status as an avant-garde filmmaker, then, influenced Kitano's directorial beginnings. With that said, one can presume that Kitano's content will also challenge the status quo in various ways. Schilling states that Takeshi "redefined the *yakuza* film in the 1990s" (73). And, that "there is no one else quite like Kitano in the history of the *yakuza* movie genre – or for that matter, Japanese film" (Schilling 76). To focus on Kitano's persona is to invoke a complicated discussion about his multifaceted subjectivity. Abe states that "Takeshi might have forced himself into a 'director=star' framework" (32). I will explore below how this automatic dualistic role enables a complicated film analysis in relation to the gaze. For now, Kitano's dual persona, or even hybrid and fluid identity, creates fractures in his films that parallel with his own identity in flux. This fluidity is analogous to queer genders and sexualities free from the hegemonic underpinnings of the GSICA which attempts to contain diversity in static categories. Kitano's fluid identity works against this type of containment and his films

---

[37] Although Takeshi Kitano is often referred to as 'Beat' Takeshi, I will continue to use Takeshi Kitano to maintain consistency in what could become a rather convoluted discussion of multiple personalities.

demonstrate ambivalent representations of male-male sexuality. In <u>Kitano Takeshi</u>, Aaron Gerow states that Kitano's "creation of alternative personalities is part of his productive activities" and that his own biography articulates his "formation of multiple personalities" (16). Gerow also points out that he "spent much of his time in Shinjuku, which was the center of 1960s counterculture" (17). Of relevance, Shinjuku-Ni-chome is Tokyo's, and Japan's, largest gay district.[38] His social upbringing in this area of Tokyo influences his treatment of queer characters in his films. Furthermore, "he often says his worldview emerged from Adachi Ward, where yakuza and other socially ostracised figures lived next door" (17). Kitano's conditioning from living and spending time in areas of Tokyo that contain residents with an 'outsider' or 'other' status is evident in his films. Regardless of whether the representations of 'other' in his films are progressive or problematic, they exist and this existence confirms that Kitano has been influenced by his upbringing in these areas of Tokyo.

Gerow states that Kitano has a "positive concern for those living on the margins of Japanese civil society" (29). Kitano's films demonstrate the movement towards representing what Gerow states are the "ethnic and sexual others long suppressed in Japanese film" (53). And, minorities are not central to Kitano's films; they simply appear (Gerow 53). Consequently, Gerow rightly questions how Kitano represents such figures, which he believes are "in some cases...disturbing" (53). Standish states that "Kitano (Beat) Takeshi's star persona is predicated on a spontaneous masculinity which draws on iconic meanings of stoicism and 'reflexive masochism' institutionalized in the 1960s through the star persona of such heroes as Takakura Ken" (190). The stoic moments in Kitano's performances exist as moments of reflection for the excessive violence while simultaneously providing the viewer with a space to understand the

---

[38] See Sandra Buckley, ed., Encyclopedia of Contemporary Japanese Culture (New York: Routledge, 2002), 165, 409, 453-4.

connection between violence and sexuality in his films. In addition, Kitano as "director=star", or I would argue director=actor, manifests in a homoerotic gaze whereby Kitano is directing himself as both violent and sexually ambiguous characters. In other words, Standish's statement is acute because there is a 'reflexive masochism' to Kitano's roles because he directs himself both being violent and the victim of violence. In relation to this, sexuality is almost always linked with violence in the four films. Gerow states that "Kitano's treatment of homosexuality seems ambivalent, demonising it in *Violent Cop*, normalising it in *Zatoichi* and rendering it the butt of jokes in *Takeshis'*, but he is more willing to foreground the homosexuality of homosociality than Hollywood action cinema" (56). His representation of male-male sexuality in the films is ambivalent because it is consistently paired with violence and death. However, Kitano does include male-male sexuality more than Hollywood cinema, and thus it must be reaffirmed that Japanese cinema is constantly working against Western influences around and apropos of gender and sexuality. Japanese cinema is displaying a strong effort of resistance in the wake of extreme societal pressure in conformation with 'intelligible' genders and sexualities.

There are two thematic motifs in relation to the representation of male-male sexuality in *Violent Cop*, *Boiling Point*, *Sonatine* and *Gonin*. First, Kitano's 'reflexive masochism', which manifests in a homoerotic gaze, complicates what are mostly disturbing and ambivalent representations of gay characters. Second, Kitano's representations of queerness in the *yakuza gendaigeki* films are problematic. Grossman states that "I continue to be unsure of what exactly Kitano's bi-curious interest in predatory homosexuality is, as it is usually played for gawking black comedy that borders on unintentional homophobia" (5). The queer characters in the four films are some combinations of murderers, rapists, psychotic, sadomasochistic and, in Kitano's case, masochistic. This typecasting of queerness with these characters perpetuates the Western

cinematic traditional mandate that there is always a consequence to being queer, whether it is a punishment or character flaw. Furthermore, the queer sexuality is connected to violence, which causes ambivalence about the representation of queerness because violence can also become a metaphor for a cathartic release of sexual repression. In this case, the violence is metaphorically suggesting Japan's catharsis from Western ideologies.

Violent Cop begins with two scenes that confirm a generational divide in Japan. The first scene depicts a group of adolescent boys beating up and aggravating a homeless man. One of the boys returns home, and Kitano's character, Azuma, follows him to his house and eventually enters the home and violently beats the boy in his own bedroom. Thus the film begins with a theme of 'violence as an answer to violence.' One must analyze the violence more deeply, then, to understand the causal existence of it and why it permeates the diegesis in ways that connect with male-male sexuality, albeit in this specific scene there is no connection between male-male sexuality and violence. The second scene illustrates young boys, this time, throwing metal cans from a bridge into an old man's boat. There is not a negative consequence for these boys, but these two scenes confirm that there is a generational divide and that the generations are in tension with one another. This is a metaphor for Japan's cultural traditions and how new generations can challenge older generations in order to change and manipulate cultural attitudes and beliefs. There is, then, a strong connection with intergenerational conflict and violence in this film, which relates to the problematic representation of same-sex sexuality. Arguably, there are two main queer characters in Violent Cop – Azuma and the assassin, Kiyohiro (Hakuryu). Azuma's bisexuality, or what could be homosexuality because his sexuality is never clarified, is implied throughout the film. His relationship with the rookie cop, Kikuchi (Makoto Ashikawa), resembles the oyabun-kobun structure because Kikuchi becomes Azuma's apprentice in the film

and they spend a lot of leisure time together. Azuma's queerness is rendered explicit when he

enters Kiyohiro's apartment later in the film and sees a young man in his bed. Azuma responds

by saying "Good taste." This line is delivered without humour; instead it is clear that Azuma is

actually applauding Kiyohiro's choice in men. Azuma is driven by violence, though, and is a

sadist in this film. Furthermore, Kitano is also masochistic in the sense that he directs himself in

the persona of Azuma through a tremendous amount of violence. Azuma is stabbed, sliced and

punched throughout the film. The violence mediates the sexuality as I will explore below with

the representation of queerness via the character of Kiyohiro.

Kiyohiro is unapologetic about his queer subjectivity, but his role as a relentless assassin

who enjoys murdering people complicates the representation of non-normative sexuality in

Violent Cop. Through rendering the homosexual character as a villain, Kitano has managed to

make his representation of queer subjects problematic. Kiyohiro derives pleasure from killing

people and this forces the *yakuza* boss, Nito (Ittoku Kishibe), to order him to leave the gang. This

results in Kiyohiro killing his underlings and facing Azuma in a final battle that ends in

Kiyohiro's death. Not only does the queer character embody the most murderous and sadistic

subjectivity in the film – other than Azuma – he must also die as a consequence of his

transgressions. Kiyohiro committed murders and other horrendous actions in the film, but the

punishment of death is linked to his status as the queerest character in this film. To continue the

problematic criticism of such characters, Abe states that

> Kiyohiro's fixation on the abdomen contrasts nicely with Azuma's fixation with the head
> (57). There is probably a suggestion here that a fixation on the abdomen is feminine
> while a fixation on the head is masculine. Thus, it seems appropriate that Kiyohiro wears
> a white turtleneck and is homosexual (58).

It is reductive, and indeed problematic, to think that the sole indication of Kiyohiro's

homosexuality for Abe is his "white turtleneck" and "fixation on the abdomen." Certainly, there

are examples of Kiyohiro stabbing his victims in the stomach, but Abe's link between his clothing choice of a turtleneck, and a white one at that, as an indication of his homosexuality is problematic at best. Abe maintains the thread of homo-negative interpretations of Japanese cinema. What is relevant about Abe's statement is that Azuma's hyper-masculinity is contrasted against Kiyohiro's homosexuality in a locker-room scene where Azuma practically tortures Kiyohiro by beating him up. Instead of depicting the violence with images, it is represented with the sounds of violence, for example clashing against the lockers and articulations of pain. After Kiyohiro has been beaten by Azuma, a low-angle shot from the perspective of Kiyohiro looks up at Azuma, who is placed in a position of superiority. The violence is, then, a substitute for Azuma's repressed sexuality as Kiyohiro becomes a queer conduit for Azuma's violence. *Violent Cop* takes different measures at punishing transgressive sexuality, yet the homoeroticism simultaneously exists in spaces free from judgement. Kitano's ambivalent position towards sexuality is further complicated in *Boiling Point*.

Kitano's character, Uehara, is also curiously bisexual in *Boiling Point*. In this film, there is an explicit example of his sexuality where he rapes one of his underlings, Tamagi (actor unknown).[39] This scene is a sexual catharsis for Uehara who clearly releases sexual tension that was repressed. Abe discusses this scene as an example of "dispersive violence" (79). "Dispersive violence" is an apt way of describing the violence that takes many forms in Kitano's films. There is a polymorphous quality to Kitano's violence and it is almost always a metaphor. In the scene prior to the rape, Uehara is in a karaoke bar and he pushes Fumiyo (Eri Fuse), who could be his mistress or girlfriend, and moves close to Kazuo (Dankan). Kazuo and Masaki (Yurei Yanagi) meet Uehara earlier in the film. They are both members of a Japanese baseball team who aggravate the *yakuza* and decide to travel to Okinawa to buy a gun to protect themselves. When

---

[39] The character of Tamagi is spelled as both Tamaki and Tamagi in articles.

in Okinawa, they are befriended by Uehara. Uehara develops an attraction towards Kazuo and says "You shaved your legs. Got a chick?" Uehara proceeds to place his head near Kazuo's crotch and says "You smell nice." Uehara places his arm around Kazuo and kisses and flirts with him. This scene displays a form of sensitivity and sensuality that did not exist in Azuma's character traits in *Violent Cop*. And, Uehara seems nervous as if it is his first time flirting and touching a man. This scene would be borderline romantic if it was not for Kazuo's fearfulness of Uehara. In the scene where Uehara rapes Tamagi, it begins with a close-up shot of Uehara hanging from pull-up bars and then the next shot depicts Uehara in his underwear and a tropical-print shirt. This shot begins the homoerotic gaze on Kitano's characters that continues into the other films. Kitano is gazing at himself in his underwear – he is effectively placing himself in the position as the object of the gaze. The rape scene is certainly problematic because it maintains the connection between queer characters and transgression. It also continues the trend of linking male-male sexuality with violence. If one reads the few shots before the rape scene, it is obvious that Uehara's connection with his sexuality is not merely through a sadistic violence. By linking rape with male-male sexuality, Kitano is commenting on the repression of sexuality in modern day Japan. Abe further complicates the representation of sexuality when he states that "Uehara is Tamaki and Tamaki is Uehara. This explains why, in the karaoke bar, they repeat each other's movements as if they were mirror images" (85). If Tamaki and Uehara are the same person, then Uehara rapes himself in the scene. And, if Uehara is raping himself in the scene, then Takeshi is further enforcing the homoeroticism attached to his characters in an effort to solidify the fact that male-male sexuality not only exists in modern day Japan, but the consequence of repression manifests in a polymorphous violence. Abe states that "of course, the impression of Uehara's tentacles stems in part from his bisexual preferences. Uehara is a 'spider' whose capacity to have

sex indiscriminately and whose instability to be quantified sexually ties different men and women together in a variety of webs" (86). The characters in *Violent Cop*, *Boiling Point*, *Sonatine* and *Gonin* seem to be caught in Kitano's webs and not just Uehara's. Regardless of whether sexuality is queer or not, it is always complicated and/or problematic because of its connection with violence.

Gonin's representation of queer sexuality, though it was directed by someone other than Kitano, is similar to Kitano's thematic motifs. Again, Kitano's character, Ichiro, is also bisexual or homosexual (again this is not clarified) and his sexuality is deeply embedded in violence that manifests itself in a rape scene. This rape scene involves more violence than before as the victim is passive but Ichiro beats him while he undresses him. The role of Ichiro is far too violent and detached to be considered at all progressive as the rape scene is disturbing. Why is there a pattern with Kitano's characters in these films? Why does he always take the place of a hyper-masculine violent individual who represses his sexuality and expresses it only through a polymorphous violence? Fortunately, Ichiro is not the only queer character in the film as two of the five men who rebel against the yakuza are lovers. Mitsuya (Masahiro Motoki) and Bandai (Koichi Sato) have a relationship that progresses from flirtation to romantic love. However, the only time where the two men express this love for each other is in a scene where Bandai is shot multiple times and lies bleeding on a bathroom floor with Mitsuya holding him and crying. The only kiss they share is in this scene and Mitsuya suddenly realizes the love he had for Bandai when Bandai dies. This is another example of the inextricable connection between male-male sexuality and violence because the love the two men share for each other can only be fully realized in the violent death of Bandai.[40] Only when Bandai dies can Mitsuya express the feelings that he was

---

[40] I should note here that it is typical of Japanese romantic climaxes in general (in film and fiction) to end tragically in a love only recognized or expressed when it is too late.

repressing throughout the entire film. And, this scene is barely romantic: they are sitting in a bath of blood only now expressing their love for one another. Nevertheless, the love is still explicitly represented, here, even if the representation is complicated by the violence that is always attached to it. To recall Gerow's thoughts about Japanese cinema and homosexuality, at least the representation of male-male sexuality exists even if it is complex and problematic at times in contrast to Hollywood action cinema that predicates itself on heteronormativity.

Sonatine has a more complicated relationship with male-male sexuality inasmuch as the film mediates sexuality through metaphors and dialogical implications. Abe states that "Sonatine's Murakawa...appears to have already passed beyond the state of exhaustion. He does not have sexual intercourse in this film, which seems to signify that he has already fallen into a state of sexual impotence" (131). It is obvious that Kitano's role, as Murakawa, is of one of 'stoic observer' in this film in terms of sexuality. The three films discussed in this section so far have focused on Kitano's characterized sexuality as transgressive and violent, never quite heteronormative. Thus, these films challenge traditional heteronormative spaces. Sonatine does this in a different way through the relationship of Uechi (Masanobu Katsumura) and Ken (Susumu Terajima). Uechi and Ken are members of a yakuza gang sent to Okinawa with Murakawa to settle a dispute between two factions. The second half of the film consists of reflective long-shots of the Okinawa beaches and seascapes that operate as backgrounds to the dialogue and action. The relationship between Uechi and Ken is not simply a homosocial one, but also homoerotic. The homosocial space of the yakuza can enable homosexuality. In one scene, Uechi passes an action figure to Ken with the figure's legs spread apart and Uechi says "fuck me darling," Ken responds by saying "fuck off," but then Uechi uses the toy to kiss Ken as a synecdoche for his own lips. He puts the figure up to Ken's cheek and makes a kissing sound

and they both laugh and smile at each other. Suddenly, it starts raining outside of the cottage they are sitting in and they decide to bathe themselves in the rain. Therefore, the sexual foreplay that exists with the action figure as a synecdoche for the touching that cannot be explicitly represented between the two men ends in a kiss and a scene that metaphorically suggests orgasms for both men. The next shot depicts Uechi and Ken soaping their bodies off. Uechi is in his underwear and Ken is in his pants without a shirt on. The soap is quite heavy and thick on their bodies. The rain stops and they whine and complain about the fact that it did not rain enough for the two of them to adequately wash themselves off. The complaint also implies that Uechi and Ken are disappointed by the fact that they cannot truly express their homosexual desires towards one another. And, this scene is sexually charged with metaphors of orgasm. Overall, the film is devoid of sexuality, albeit the implied relationship between Uechi and Ken and the sparse nudity of Miyuki (Aya Kokumai), who Murakawa befriends while on the island. All of these films embody a complex negotiation with representing male-male sexuality in *yakuza gendaigeki*. Kitano's multifaceted persona is further complicated by a homoerotic and masochistic gaze that he creates for his characters. The films are inextricably connecting violence with male-male sexuality to articulate the problems of repressed sexuality that operates as an allegory for Japan's own struggle with its cultural history in modernity.

Takashi Miike's films share a similar thematic preoccupation with Kitano's *yakuza-gendaigeki* in that they are inclined to represent male-male sexuality through violence. And, these representations lead to problems explored earlier with Kitano's work. If the representations of queerness exist, are they progressive for simply existing in Japanese cinema? Or are they problematic for their portrayal of queers as villains, psychotics, murderers, among others? That is, how can a representation of male-male sexuality in Japanese cinema be progressive if it is

always attached to violence and exceptionally violent and disturbing characters? I will

investigate this question further with Miike's *Shinjuku Triad Society*, *Gozu* and *Blues Harp*.[41]

Miike is an established filmmaker who has contributed immensely to the corpus of contemporary

Japanese cinema in a short period of time.[42] Compared to the rest of the filmmakers discussed in

this thesis, Miike undoubtedly has the largest amount of films that feature queer content,

particularly male-male sexuality and non-normative genders. In addition to *Shinjuku Triad*

Society, *Gozu* and *Blues Harp*, Miike's *Fudoh: The New Generation* (1996), *Lady Hunter*

(1991), *Ichi the Killer* (2001) and *The Bird People in China* (1998) all represent queer subjects.

Therefore, Miike can be considered a filmmaker who is preoccupied with featuring queer

subjects in his cinema. In <u>Agitator: The Cinema of Takashi Miike</u>, Tom Mes states that "Miike's

films run the gamut of deviation from the heterosexual norm. Homosexuals and gay sex feature

in numerous films" (25). Miike's fascination for the outcast/other is similar to Kitano's. Miike's

interest in marginal identities enables him to deconstruct the body from the inside out. I believe

Miike is interested in what drives our identities in the external sense from within. That is to say

that Miike is obsessed with exploring the reasons behind identity construction and he invests

time in representing identity as fractured and heterogeneous. Furthermore, he is clearly

fascinated with the deconstruction of the body through torture, violence and other forms of

bodily fracturing in his films. Mes states that "the most fundamental defining characteristic of

the characters in the films of Takashi Miike is their existence in a medium state: they float

between two elements, feeling rootless, part of neither one nor the other" (23). For example, Mes

provides an example from *Fudoh: The New Generation* in which one of the characters is a

---

[41] Unfortunately, I was unable to find a region 1 version of *Blues Harp* with English subtitles. So, for the analysis on *Blues Harp*, I will rely on criticisms and reviews of the film in an effort to elucidate its representation of male-male sexuality.
[42] In fact, IMDB lists Miike as the director of eighty-two films since 1991.

hermaphrodite and "is equipped with both male and female sex organs" while engaging in sex with both men and women (24). Mes states that "while their rootless nature blurs the characters' own sense of personal identity, their medium state also has its repercussions on the way they are viewed, judged and treated by the world around them" (25). The queer characters are not able to exist in the films without a negative consequence of their transgressions. Although these characters may be proffered a liminal state by Miike's interest in fluid identities, they must answer to a world that views them as 'un-intelligible.' Mes states that what "forms the surface of Takashi Miike's films" is "crime, violence, sex, vice, rape, narcotics and death" (32). Rather surprisingly, then (or not), while being one of Japan's fearless filmmakers in the representation of queer gender and sexuality, Miike remains preoccupied with maintaining these representations through the problematic lens of violence, murder and death. Nevertheless, the sexuality in Miike's films explores the intense negotiation of male-male sexuality in Japanese cinema. As a result of Western-based ideological interpellation vis-à-vis 'intelligible' gender and sexuality in Japan, any representation of non-normative gender and sexuality manifests in a cinematic tension that yields both progressive and problematic instances. Mes states that "the sex scenes in Takashi Miike's films do not exist to arouse the audience, but to define the characters and the lives they lead" (32). This is in direct contrast to Hollywood cinema whereby it routinely represents heteronormative sexuality as a device to both lure/arouse audiences and to protect them from non-normativity. The sex that exists in Miike's films is for the characters' own sake and not for the audience. Miike does not partake in any efforts to please or comfort the audience in his films; therefore, the diegetic spaces are not heteronormative but rather a space of heterotopias. In "Of Other Spaces", Foucault states that

> There are also, probably in every culture, in every civilization, real places- places that do exist and that are formed in the very founding of society-which are something like

78

counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and in-verted. Places of this kind are outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality. Because these places are absolutely different from all the sites that they reflect and speak about, I shall call them, by way of contrast to utopias, heterotopias. I believe that between utopias and these quite other sites, these heterotopias, there might be a sort of mixed, joint experience, which would be the mirror (24).

In Miike's films, heterotopias are abundant because the spaces invert the normative spaces of representation in cinema and thereby they proffer diversity a place of existence. Furthermore, heterotopias are often non-hegemonic spaces[43] that enable what is usually contained to free itself from the cage of un-representation – of forced invisibility. The un-representable in cinema is the queer, and in Miike's films he enables a diegetic space of heterotopias that Foucault terms a "mixed, joint experience" inasmuch as the queer is almost always represented as deviant in other ways, particularly the murderer, the psycho(tic), the sadist and/or masochist. In *Lady Hunter*, the queer is the gun crazy sadist and in *Ichi the Killer*, the male-male sexuality is predicated on a perverse duality of sadism and masochism. However, Miike's films still enable a queer enunciation. It would be reductive to assume that simply because violence is always connected to male-male sexuality that it is problematic and/or regressive. In my analysis of *Shinjuku Triad Society, Gozu* and *Blues Harp*, I will investigate how these representations are significations for the cultural struggle with diverse genders and sexualities in Japanese cinema.

Shinjuku Triad Society is Miike's first film made specifically for theatrical release and Mes states that it is a "turning point in his career and development as an artist" (63). There are a few queer characters in the film, but my analysis will focus on Shu (actor unknown) and Wang (Tomorowo Taguchi). Shu is Wang's prostitute lover who is a sadistic, phallus-obsessed young man. Mes describes Wang "who would go on to feature in a large number of Miike's films" as

---

[43] I am synthesizing Foucault's theories of heterotopias in an effort to focus on Miike. See Foucault's essay for more detailed theoretical information.

an "all-round sexual deviant: homosexual, exhibitionist and sadist. He is a man who tears out a woman's eyeballs with his fingers, but who at the same time is deeply in love with his boyfriend, the rent boy Shu" (64). Thus, Shu and Wang – gay lovers – are also both sadists. Nevertheless, their scenes together are imbued with a sense of romance as the bed they frequent is surrounded by candles and dim lights. There is a complexity, then, to the representation of queerness because it is packaged with extreme forms of deviance. But, the heterosexual characters in the film do not exist without flaws. In comparison with Kitano's representation of cops as violent in *Violent Cop*, the detective in charge of investigations into Chinese organized crime, Kiriya (Kippei Shiina), is both violent and a rapist. And, Kiriya, albeit he is one of the only surviving characters of the film at the end, is marginalized by the queerness that seems to insert itself more than heteronormativity. The first shot of the film is Shu naked in bed with his voice-over as he says "I know a love story that's both sickening and sweet. That's how love really is." The next scene is him approaching a bearded man in a nightclub with drugs. The man hands money to Shu in exchange for oral sex. Shu begins to perform fellatio on the man and the scene's sexuality is illustrated in an effort not to conceal but reveal male-male sexuality. They are soon interrupted by Kiriya – who raids the nightclub in search of the Chinese mafia – and Shu manages to escape by zipping-up the man's pant zipper into his penis, which illustrates Shu's sadistic tendencies. The next shot of Shu depicts him leaving the nightclub from a side-door and a police-officer approaches him. Shu swiftly slices the officer's wrist and neck and runs off laughing while blood gushes from the officer's wounds in the background. In another scene, Shu fellates a yakuza boss and the scene lasts for quite some time with explicit dialogue in relation to the oral sex. However, shortly thereafter Shu returns to his home with Wang and Wang discovers that Shu has cheated on him. Wang ends up killing Shu in the end while Kiriya shoots and kills Wang. The

film ends with its queer characters dead, but the "hero/protagonist" of the film embodied by Kiriya does not exactly hold a positive moral compass with his violent outbursts that include a rape. Therefore, although the queers are psychotic and sadistic, the heteronormative hero has similar tendencies. The diegetic space of *Shinjuku Triad Society* is one of heterotopias because it challenges heteronormativity in its repetitive gay sex scenes that seems to break free from hegemonic ideologies of sexuality.

In "The Break-up of the National Body: Cosmetic Multiculturalism and the Films of Miike Takashi," Mika Ko states that "Miike's films can be read and interpreted in relation to the socio-historical context of contemporary Japan" (129). And, that "Miike's films attempt to subvert or deconstruct the idea of a unified body or the mythical national body of Japan" (134). Miike's films instead point to a cultural heterogeneity that exists in Japan. Japan is often viewed as homogeneous, but it is this mistake that leads "distant observers," in Noel Burch's words, to assume that the Japanese have a homogeneous culture and, therefore, monolithic notions of societal issues such as gender and sexuality. In fact, Miike's *Blues Harp* and *Gozu* comment on Japan's heterogeneous culture because they represent male-male sexuality in ways that point to the country's shifting and multiple ideologies towards gender and sexuality. Furthermore, they also articulate Western ideological imposition in the form of layers, often the body itself, that must be peeled away to understand authentic forms of culture that existed in pre-modern Japan before a myth was created about an 'intelligible' gender and (heteronormative) sexuality. In Outlaw Masters of Japanese Film, Chris Desjardins provides a summary of the film:

> Chuji (Hiroyuki Ikeuchi) the bastard son of a Japanese mother and a homeless black ex-GI, works as a bartender at a blues rock club in a small town near an American base. One night Chuji shelters a wounded *yakuza*, Kenji (Seiichi Tanabe) (191)....Little does he know that Kenji is homosexual and that, in addition to feeling obligated to Chuji, he has also fallen in love with him (192).

Desjardins states that the film "remains one of Miike's finest, a perfectly realized and emotionally affecting movie" (192). Kenji's queerness is closeted and he sleeps with a woman, but then cleans himself afterwards (Mes 142). This film is a representation of male-male sexuality and the struggle that queers face in modern day Japan. Mes states that "Kenji's situation is ironically mirrored in that of his own underling Kaneko (Bob Suzuki), who harbours a secret crush on him but similarly never makes his feelings known, precisely because Kenji shows no indication that he is gay" (142). Although, my own film analysis cannot corroborate these statements of the film, it is clear that the film represents the struggle for queers to conceal their identity in modern day Japan. In doing so, Miike has enabled a space for the discussion of queerness by arguing against a homogeneous heteronormative Japanese cultural identity.

Gozu's engagement with male-male sexuality is more complicated than Miike's previous films because the queerness exists in a hyperbolic metaphor beneath a figurative mass of flesh in the diegesis. In the essay on the film featured in the DVD, Mes discusses the subject at the heart of *Gozu*.

> If we strip it of its abundant absurdism, the film tells the simple tale of a man who wants his male companion to admit that he loves him and wants to sleep with him. It requires the illusion of heterosexuality, in the shapely form of actress Kimika Yoshino, to get him there, but once he has owned up to his true feelings this illusion quite literally splits apart to reveal its true face (*Gozu* Features).

Mes's analysis of the film's central meaning is accurate because the film ends in a catharsis of sexual repression that has no comparison. The *oyabun-kobun* relationship between Minami (Yuta Sone) and Ozaki (Sho Aikawa) is a love that is challenged by surreal events in the film's narrative. Minami is a younger member of a *yakuza* gang that is supposed to bring Ozaki to be "disposed" of in Nagoya because the *yakuza* boss thinks that he is insane as a result of recent outbursts. For example, in the first scene of the film Ozaki believes that a cute chihuahua is

actually a "*yakuza* attack dog" meant to murder passing *yakuza*. Consequently, he kills the dog in

plain sight of the members of the gang. However, Minami explains to Ozaki that he is ready to

sacrifice his life for him when they stop for a washroom break on their way to Nagoya. It is

questionable whether Minami would have actually protected Ozaki or left him to be murdered.

Nonetheless, this type of loyalty recalls the *oyabun-kobun* relationship of the yakuza that bears

similarities to the *wakashu-nenja* structure of the samurai. There is also an emphasis on

Minami's male body as it is exposed quite frequently and the dialogue seems to revolve around

Minami's recently circumcised penis. *Gozu* is also ripe with homoerotic references and implies

that Minami is struggling with his queer sexuality. Eventually, Minami loses Ozaki in Nagoya as

he disappears, which leads Minami to search for him. Minami discovers that Ozaki is trapped

within the body of a woman – "Female Ozaki" – which culminates in Minami's acceptance of

his homosexuality in the film's climax.[44] Miike's thematic preoccupation with the body as a

vessel for multiple identities is confirmed with the climax of *Gozu*. Desjardins states that the film

is "poking fun at homophobia," which it does: instead of enabling a homophobic space, it

exposes the effect(s) of repressed male-male sexuality. In a sex scene between Minami and the

female Ozaki, he approaches her with caution because he is fighting his homosexuality as he is

partially forced to have sex with a female body in order to be with Ozaki. His phallus becomes

stuck in the female Ozaki and he pulls her around the room trying to remove himself from her

vagina. He becomes frantic and then notices a hand from within female Ozaki's vulva gripping

his phallus. Finally, the hand releases Minami's penis, and a shot explicitly illustrates the hand

reaching for Minami with the female Ozaki's legs spread apart. Ozaki's head is birthed from the

---

[44] I should note here that this scene can also be read as misogynistic. I did not devote space to the representation of women in the periodic genres of films analyzed, but women are remarkably absent in some of these films and/or represented in problematic ways. A feminist perspective would deliver rich and interesting theories about the representation of women in samurai and *yakuza* films.

body as the flesh conceals what Minami had repressed in his love for Ozaki. The flesh births the queerness that the film struggles with until the denouement in a cathartic release free from the repression of male-male sexuality. Ultimately, Ozaki's entire body is birthed from the female body that simultaneously exposes the artifice of the body as an indicator of gender and sexuality. Miike's representation of queerness is articulated through the tearing away of the body to reveal what is repressed. It is through this breakdown of the body – the birth of male-male sexuality – that provides an explicit discussion of queerness unlike any other. *Gozu* represents heteronormativity as artifice through a heterotopia that tears away the ideologies of 'intelligible' sexuality in order to reveal Japan's ignored cultural history. Miike is, therefore, a revolutionary filmmaker in his assertion of queerness whether it is paired with violence or not – it is provided a space for reflection and consideration. It is in this realm of consideration that Miike is challenging hegemonic ideologies around and apropos of gender and sexuality that manipulate cinema in an effort to interpellate people into 'intelligible' identity categories based on binarisms. Miike, perhaps unbeknownst to himself, is providing Japanese cinema with examples of queer gender and sexuality in the *yakuza gendaigeki* genre that remember important cultural history that has been long forgotten in both the focus on and criticism of Japan's cinema.

CONCLUSION: An Introduction Rather Than a Conclusion to Queer Japanese Cinema

The evolution of queer Japanese cinema relates to the transition of cultural discourses from pre-modern to modern Japan. The historical existence – corroborated by historians and anthropologists – provides evidence for normative male-male sexuality in the Tokugawa period. In addition, queer genders in the form of the *bishōnen* and *onnagata* challenge the binaries of sex/gender that exist on an almost global basis in the modern world. Japan's culture in relation to sexuality and sex/gender has been ideologically influenced from external sources. In an effort to modernize and industrialize Japan in competition with the West, the nation's assimilation of Western ideologies was viewed as necessary. Directly following the Meiji period, the changes in sex/gender and sexuality were enforced through regulations and decrees that separated the genders into two halves – male and female – and criminalized normative male-male sexual practices just prior to the Meiji period. The productive power of ideology is complemented by the cinematic apparatus whereby it manages to interpellate viewers. The Gendered, Sexuality Ideological Cinematic Apparatus deploys its powers of interpellation of the audience in order to maintain a productive and hegemonic view of gender and sexuality that aligns with 'intelligible' identity categories in stasis. Japan's cinema is no exception to this, as all cinematic apparatus operates through ideological concealment and containment through the representation of normative subjectivities and marginalization of non-normativity. However, the difference with Japanese cinema is that it has the ability to (re)connect with its cultural history in an effort to repudiate the hegemony of the GSICA. Japan's rich and diverse queer cultural history demands representation in Japanese cinema. And, it is cinema that can begin to (de)construct these Western influences of sexuality and gender on a societal scale that would enable Japan's culture(s) to (re)connect with its history.

Japanese cinema has a long and complicated history with the representation of queer gender and sexuality. Furthermore, some of the prominent critics and scholars of Japanese cinema – Richie and others explored in this thesis – have managed to ignore and/or disavow the discussion and focus on queer subjects from what they deem as "comprehensive" and "thorough" historical overviews of the corpus of Japan's cinema. Consequently, this narrow view and ignorance of queer subjects parallels with some of Japan's cinema that attempts to forget and/or create a mythology of Japan that simply does not correlate with the anthropological and historical evidence, particularly that of the samurai class and its complex ethos concerning male-male sexuality. It is in Kurosawa's samurai *jidaigeki*, that these myths are created in an effort to conceal what was normative in the samurai class – male-male sexuality. However, as my film analysis has pointed out, even these films include implicit references to queerness that can no longer be ignored. The samurai *shin-jidaigeki* operate in the necessary space for a post-colonialist breakthrough whereby these films manage to represent male-male sexuality and non-normative genders in an explicit manner, particularly Oshima's revolutionary *Gohatto* that works as a cultural Japanese artefact on the samurai class. The transitional *yakuza gendaigeki* films illustrate the evolution of some samurai into *yakuza* and the cultural borrowing that coincides with this transition. The *wakashu-nenja* hierarchical relationship parallels with the *oyabun-kobun* structure of the *yakuza* in combination with other aesthetic changes and adaptations. The male-male sexuality is almost 'un-representable' in these films, yet it still manages to exist in connotative form. The *yakuza shin-gendaigeki* of Kitano and Miike is consciously working to (re)connect Japan's past with its present in an effort to expose Japan's own cultural repression and national mythologies of gender and sexuality. These films are constructing a concrete space for queer Japanese cinema that scholars, critics and the industry can no longer afford to ignore.

The cultural implications of these films are wide-ranging. They work to restore and (re)connect Japan with its own past while simultaneously serving as a challenge to hegemonic heteronormative ideologies and spaces to the rest of the world. Cinema has the incredible power to change. It works to change beliefs, values and even forms of intolerance. Therefore, Japanese cinema can act as a queer beacon for other national cinemas in their struggle against dominant ideologies that will ultimately result in queer cinematic foundations for spaces of tolerance and acceptance.

FILMOGRAPHY

Binanjo (Castle of Handsome Men). Dir. Yasushi Sasaki. Toei Video. 1959.

Boiling Point. Dir. Takeshi Kitano. Bandai Visual Company. 1990.

Brutal Tales of Chivalry. Dir. Kiyoshi Saeki. Toei. 1965.

Brutal Tales of Chivalry 3. Dir. Kiyoshi Saeki. Toei. 1966.

Brutal Tales of Chivalry 4. Dir. Masahiro Makino. Toei. 1967.

Gohatto. Dir. Oshima Nagisa. New Yorker Films. 1999.

Gonin. Dir. Takashi Ishii. EDKO Film. 1995.

Gozu. Dir. Takashi Miike. Pathfinder Home Entertainment. 2004.

Seven Samurai. Dir. Akira Kurosawa. Criterion. 1954.

Shinjuku Triad Society. Dir. Takashi Miike. Kadokawa Daiei Pictures, Inc. 1995.

Sonatine. Dir. Takeshi Kitano. Miramax Home Entertainment. 1993.

Violent Cop. Dir. Takeshi Kitano. Bandai Media Department. 1989.

Yaji & Kita: The Midnight Pilgrims. Dir. Kankuro Kudo. Tokyo Shock. 2005.

Zatocihi. Dir. Takeshi Kitano. Beuna Vista. 2003.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Abe, Casio. <u>Beat Takeshi vs. Takeshi Kitano</u>. New York, NY: Kaya Press, 1994.

Althusser, Louis. <u>On Ideology.</u> 1971. London: Verso, 2008.

Allen, Matthew & Rumi Sakamoto. "Introduction: Inside-out Japan? Popular Culture &

    Globalization in the Context of Japan." <u>Popular Culture, Globalization and Japan</u>. New

    York, NY: Routledge, 2006.

Bouissou, Jean-Marie. <u>The Burden of Success</u>. Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2002.

Burch, Noel. <u>To the Distant Observer: Form and Meaning in the Japanese Cinema</u>. Ed. Annette

    Michelson. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1979.

Butler, Judith. <u>Gender Trouble</u>. New York & London: Routledge, 1990.

---. <u>Undoing Gender</u>. New York: Routledge, 2004.

Bradshaw, Peter and Derek Malcolm. "Sex and the Samurai." <u>The Guardian Online</u>. (2003) Web.

    8 July 2010.

Campbell, Adam. "Yaji and Kita: The Midnight Pilgrims." <u>Midnight Eye</u> (2006). Web. 8 July

    2010.

Dasgupta, Romit. "The Film Bishonen and Queer(N)Asia through Japanese Popular Culture."

    Eds. Matthew Allen and Rumi Sakamoto. <u>Popular Culture, Globalization and Japan</u>. New

    York, NY: Routledge, 2006.

De Lauretis, Teresa. <u>Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film, and Fiction</u>. Houndmills,

    Basingstoke, Hampshire and London: The Macmillan Press Ltd. 1987.

Desjardins, Chris. <u>Outlaw Masters of Japanese Film</u>. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005.

Desser, David. The Samurai Films of Akira Kurosawa. 2nd ed. Ann Arbor, Michigan: UMI

Research Press. 1983.

Foucault, Michel. The History of Sexuality An Introduction: Volume 1. 1976. Vintage Books,

     1990.

--- & Jay Miskowiec. "Of Other Spaces." The Johns Hopkins University Press 16:1 (1986).

Furukawa Makoto. "The Changing Nature of Sexuality: The Three Codes Framing

     Homosexuality in Modern Japan." U.S.-Japan Women's Journal 7 (1994): 98-127.

Grossman, Andrew. "Gohatto-Or the End of Oshima Nagisa?" Bright Lights Film Journal 33

     (2001).

Helms, Udo. "Obscenity and Homosexual Depiction in Japan". Journal of Homosexuality, 39:3,

     127-147.

Ikegami, Eiko. The Taming of the Samurai: Honorific Individualism and the Making of Modern

     Japan. 2nd ed. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard UP. 1997.

Jagose, Annamarie. Queer Theory: An Introduction. New York: New York University Press,

     1996.

Kano, Ayako. Acting Like a Woman in Modern Japan :Theater, Gender, and Nationalism. 1st ed.

     New York ;; Houndmills England: Palgrave, 2001.

Kaplan, David E. & Alec Dubro. Yakuza: Japan's Criminal Underworld. Expanded ed. Berkeley

     & Los Angeles, University of California Press. 2003.

Karatsu, Rie. "Between Comedy and Kitsch: Kitano's Zatoichi and Kurosawa's Traditions of

     'Jidaigeki' Comedies". *Scope: An Online Journal of Film and TV Studies* 6 (2006) n. pag.

     Web. 8 July 2010.

Ko, Mika. "The Break-up of the National Body: Cosmetic Multiculturalism and the Films of

    Miike Takashi". <u>Theorising National Cinema</u>. Eds. Valentina Vitali and Paul Willemen.

    London: British Film Institute, 2006.

Leupp, Gary P. <u>Male Colors: The Construction of Homosexuality in Tokugawa Japan</u>.

    Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press 1995.

---. "Male Homosexuality in Early Modern Japan: The State of the Scholarship." <u>Queer

    Masculinities, 1550-1800: Siting Same-Sex Desire in the Early Modern World</u>. Eds.

    Katherine O'Donnell and Michael O'Rourke. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006.

Mes, Tom. <u>Agitator: The Cinema of Takashi Miike</u>. Surrey, England: FAB Press, 2003.

McLelland, Mark J. <u>Male Homosexuality in Modern Japan: Cultural Myths and Social Realities</u>.

    Richmond: Curzon, 2000.

Mishima, Yukio. <u>Yukio Mishima on Hagakure: The Samurai Ethic and Modern Japan</u>. Trans,

    Kathryn Sparling. New York: Basic Books, Inc. 1977.

Nolletti, Arthur, and David Desser. <u>Reframing Japanese Cinema :Authorship, Genre, History</u>.

    Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992.

Murray, Stephen O. <u>Ocean Homosexualities</u>. New York & London: Garland Publishing, Inc.,

    1992.

Pflugfelder, Gregory M. <u>Cartographies of Desire: Male-Male Sexuality in Japanese

    Discourse 1600-1950</u>. University of California Press., Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1999.

Rayns, Tony. "Luck of the Drawn Blade". <u>Sight & Sound</u>. 13:11 (2003).

Richie, Donald. <u>A Hundred Years of Japanese Film: A Concise History with a Selective Guide to

    DVDs and Videos</u>. 2nd ed. New York: Kondansha International. 2005.

Saikaku, Ihara. <u>The Great Mirror of Male Love</u>. Trans. Paul Gordon Schalow. Stanford,

California: Stanford UP, 1990.

Schalow, Paul. "Introduction". The Great Mirror of Male Love. Trans. Paul Gordon Schalow.

Stanford, California: Stanford UP, 1990.

Schilling, Mark. The Yakuza Movie Book: A Guide to Japanese Gangster Films. Berkeley,

California: Stone Bridge Press, 2003.

---. "A trip through cloud-Kudo-land." The Japan Times Online (2005). Web. 8 July 2010.

Sedgewick, Eve Kosofsky. Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire.

Columbia UP: 1985.

Standish, Isolde. A New History of Japanese Cinema: A Century of Narrative Film. New York,

NY: Continuum, 2005.

---. Myth & Masculinity in the Japanese Cinema. Richmond: Curzon, 2000.

Strick, Philip. "*Taboo*: Love, honour and obey". Sight & Sound. 11:8 (2001).

Watanabe, Tsuneo, and Jun'ichi Iwata. The Love of the Samurai :A Thousand Years of Japanese

Homosexuality. London: GMP Publishers; Boston: Distributed in North America by

Alyson Publications, 1989.

Welker, James. "Lilies of the Margin: Beautiful Boys and Queer Female Identities in Japan."

AsiaPacifiQueer: Rethinking Genders and Sexualities. Eds. Fran Martin et al. Chicago:

University of Illinois Press, 2008.

Wilchins, Riki. Queer Theory, Gender Theory: An Instant Primer. Los Angeles, CA: Alyson

Publications, 2004.

Wollen, Peter. "The Auteur Theory." Film Theory and Criticism. 1975. Eds. Leo Braudy and

Marshall Cohen. New York: Oxford, 2004. 865-580.

Yasuhara, Yoshihiro. "Nagisa Oshima's Vast Historical Project and the Theme of Homoeroticism

in <u>Taboo (Gohatto)</u>." <u>Literature/Film Quarterly</u> 35.1 (2007): 350-7.