Imagined Realities: The Rise of New Wave Cinema in Post-War Japan

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Imagined Realities: The Rise of New Wave Cinema in Post-War Japan

Senior Project submitted to
The Division of Social Studies of Bard College
By: Asia Smudde Tom

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Introduction

After its defeat in WWII, Japan underwent a cultural transformation. The Allied powers took to replacing the militarized collective identity that had emerged as a result of the war with a modern democratized identity. As a result of this occupying influence, Japan experienced a period of censorship. The Allied forces, carried out by the Japanese bureaucracy, turned their focus on producing optimistic and controlled mass media to distract from the war’s atrocities. After the occupation period, those who felt this to be deceitful and who preferred content that reflected the public’s true feelings began to create a radical, Avante-garde, and politically provoking counterculture of film known as Numeru-bagu or the New Wave. Despite its radical approach, these filmmakers, up until the height of the New Wave in the mid-1960s, worked under a commercial and profit-driven studio system modeled after America’s and which implemented many film conventions such as narrative and visual continuity.

My first chapter will examine the early life and later films of director Yasujiro Ozu, whose career aligned with some of the largest sociological and political transformations within Japan and its film industry, including the pre-World War, WWII, and post-war eras. Ozu was often recognized as a conservative formalist because of his allusions to sentiments of the older generation, traditional aesthetics, and Gendai-geki (modern dramas) films. I argue that while he did exist and operate under this label, he simultaneously challenged established methods, narratives, and conventions used in the Japanese and Hollywood commercial film industry. Examples of this include his use of anti-cinematic techniques, especially in his later career between the years 1949-1953, in which he made his renowned Noriko trilogy.
This led to an even greater desire for the newest generation of filmmakers to challenge conventional methods in more visible ways, as expressed in the sub-genre called Taiyozoku or the Sun Tribe; the subject of my second chapter. The Sun Tribe films arose in the late 1950s and soon metastasized into the radical counterculture of the “New Wave Movement.” Although this sub-genre is not recognized formally as part of the “movement” and is often overlooked in discourse around this topic, I will argue in the latter half of this paper that it should be included as the beginning of the New Wave era in Japan. Within this movement surfaced certain themes that had never before been expressed in the media and which even alluded to subsequent political movements. The emergence of themes such as challenging traditional expectations of identity, success, and conservative notions of consumerism, launched what is known as Japan’s “generational war.”

The three directors - Yasujiro Ozu, Ko Nakahira, and Kon Ichikawa - were able to capture the confusion, frustration, and shifting identities of the modern subject. They utilized experimental methods of film technique while pushing the boundaries of the commercial and profit-driven studio system. Although their films were widely different in subject matter, each director consciously or subconsciously found a way to subvert conventional methods of cinema while simultaneously creating a personal style and propelling Japanese cinema into the New Wave movement. In organizing this study, I have mindfully approached my argument using the framework of conceptual analysis, formal and aesthetic film analysis, and historical-cultural analysis. Through this framework, I hope to provide a deeper awareness of the importance and difficulties of viewing cinema as a means of historical narrative. Narratives of post-war Japan are still - and will continue to be - constructed and reconstructed with the help of fictional forms of
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art and media. How can we essentially examine film to help us understand Japan’s history and how can we examine history to help us understand film as a mode of expression?

What is the New Wave?

In order to examine the rise of the New Wave movement, I will briefly describe what it is and why it is important to Japan. The Japanese New Wave era was most prominent between the late 1950s and early 1970s and was composed of a group of emerging filmmakers, most notably Seijun Suzuki (1923-2017), Shōhei Imamura (1926-2006), Kon Ichikawa (1915-2008), Hiroshi Teshigahara (1927-2001), and Nagisa Oshima (1932-2013). The term New Wave was not specific to Japan and is often largely associated with France (nouvelle vague) and Britain, which brought the term New Wave to a wider audience through directors such as Jean-Luc Goddard1, François Truffaut2, and Tony Richardson.3 The New Wave can be loosely understood as a creative movement defined by two main characteristics: the experimentation with non-traditional ways of filmmaking and the exploration of modern subjects and themes such as corruption and other sociological and political issues. The cinematic techniques employed by New Wave cinema challenged traditional methods of filmmaking. One notable example was going against classical Hollywood codes of realism and giving the visual and audible aspects of a film equal impact and dominance as the plot in the film viewing experience. However, this characteristic is where the similarities to international New Wave films come to a stop. The term, although loosely thrown

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1 Arguably the most influential French filmmaker of the post-war era and pioneer of the New Wave Movement in France, he is known for the films *Breathless* (1960), *Contempt* (1963), and *Vivre Sa Vie* (1962)
2 Another pioneer of the New Wave Movement. His most notable film *The 400 Blows* (1959) recounts inspiration from his own childhood.
around, is defined by a particular era within a specific country. Japan, in particular, is unique in its relationship with its own cinema and history.

One way to understand the New Wave is to situate it as an “avant-garde movement”. Renato Poggioli in the *Theory of Avant-Garde* states that the use of the word avant-garde in the context of a movement can be understood as “being in the vanguard of a new social movement and as utilizing artistic strategies of a new and challenging nature”. The development of this movement was also possible because the avant-garde could flourish during periods of political liberty, which Japan experienced after the end of the censorship movement during the occupation period. Some may argue that the term avant-garde implies non-acceptance by the mainstream audience. This did not apply to Japan’s New Wave cinema, however, I would still argue that this post-war movement constitutes the avant-garde whether or not the audience was aware of it. Although the New Wave movement in Japan did not necessarily define its objective, Desser alludes to the idea that the transformation of Japanese film techniques and subject matter may have been concerned with creating a film that was capable of revealing contradictions within Japanese society and isolating the culture’s increasingly materialist values and its imperialist alliances. While the definition of New Wave film is complex and varies from country to country, most Japanese New Wave films are politically subversive and its filmmakers actively utilized film as a tool to ignite social change. This is why it is difficult to label the Sun Tribe films as distinctly part of Japan’s New Wave movement because they did not have obvious political motives.

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5 Ibid, 5
6 Ibid, 4
However, because Japan’s New Wave was birthed from the commercialized industry rather than from independent studios and still had to withhold formal convention in many aspects, I believe the Sun Tribe films were the start of the New Wave movement in Japan, despite what characteristic New Wave films looked like later on. Although New Wave filmmakers in Japan would eventually choose to produce under independent studios, the controversial films that emerged from this period presented a rare opportunity for the film directors to innovate and push the boundaries of cinema while being shown to a mainstream audience.7

The Structure of the Film Industry

This section will lay out a brief history of Japan’s film industry, starting from the 1920s through the immediate postwar period when Ozu made his first trilogy film in 1949. Understanding the structure and commercialization of the film industry is integral to examining the struggles New Wave film directors faced in their attempts to revolutionize Japanese cinema. Until the 1970s, when the majority of New Wave films being produced were independent, Japan’s film industry could be best defined as an oligopoly, dominated by a few prominent film studios that hired filmmakers to turn out regularly scheduled films to the general public.8 These studios controlled the market through a system of “vertical integration and block booking,” which essentially regulated the three areas of the film industry - production, distribution, and exhibition.9 Film production was treated like a commodity and business whereby the film studios

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BQ&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result#v=onepage&q=daiei%20studio&f=false.
9 Ibid
were “modern culture factories” attempting to out-produce each other. This structure of commodification was the culmination of two primary periods in film industry history: the wartime government’s efforts to consolidate the industry and the post-war investment boom in studios and theaters to counter the popularity of television. The first major studios were established in the 1920s and included Toho, Shochiku, Nikkatsu, Daiei, and Tohei. From the late 1930s to the early 1950s the industry was largely controlled by the Japanese military authorities and the Allied Occupation Forces (1945-1952) which vetted script ideas in order to keep film aligned with Japan’s nationalist values. Government control over the industry continued to be strengthened by wartime efforts that allowed for the regulation of production and national policy censorship. Fujiki argues that the development of the film industry was linked to the “growing consciousness of modernity” within Japanese society. Studios consolidated their markets by specializing in specific genres and social topics, ones that reflected this modern consciousness and could be tied to specific directors or actors who were popular within the public sphere.

In addition to the studio oligopoly, Japanese studios, to a significant degree, shared a similar structural model with American studios, specifically Hollywood. This model adopted formal filmmaking conventions and narrative structure as well as the commodification of its directors and stars. These were central characteristics of the industry that filmmakers of the

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https://books.google.com/books?id=tOaHI25bn-kC&pg=PA70&lpg=PA70&dq=daiei+studio&source=bl&ots=USyxQvsPy&sig=WQMZh96v1x0kBxJE4Rnhvc-DYWg&hl=en&ei=xM2zSYuFGuLEjAfd3Y3P&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result#v=onepage&q=daiei%20studio&f=false.
pre-New-Wave and the New Wave would soon challenge. Starting with the arrival of Commodore Perry in 1853 and throughout the Meiji period (1868-1912), Japan went through a phase of internationalization, in which the West began influencing many aspects of Japanese life and culture. As early as the 1920s, the West began to infiltrate aspects of the growing film industry. Several Japanese studio heads visited Hollywood studios where they were able to observe first-hand how they were run. This led to the implementation of structural production changes, particularly in the Shochiku and Taishō Katsuei studios.¹⁴ One aspect of the western model that significantly shifted the structure of Japan's industry was its immense central star and director system, which notably increased the commercialization of films.¹⁵ Hideaki Fujiki notes that film stars essentially became commodities whose ranking was based on age, seniority, and popularity, similar to Hollywood standards.¹⁶ A quote by American cinematographer Victor Milner states, “a popular star is not merely a human being or a fine actor or actress… [but] also represents a tremendous financial investment”.¹⁷ Directors and producers were expected to uphold these system conventions, simultaneously driving the division of labor within the production of films and deepening the authority of the director and executive producer at the top. This hierarchy would pave the way for roughly the next 70 years of filmmaking in Japan. This commodification of stars and directors, which was influenced by the Hollywood system, increased the commercialization of the industry.

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¹⁵ Ibid, 172
¹⁶ Ibid, 168
During the development of this burgeoning industry, a boy named Yasujiro was born on the outskirts of Tokyo. He would soon become one of, if not the most well-known filmmakers in the history of Japanese cinema. Through subtle experimental methods of filmmaking, he would challenge the very industry where he had made a name for himself while propelling Japanese cinema into its biggest cultural shift yet to exist.

By analyzing the experimental and narrative similarities and differences between Yasujiro Ozu and the Sun Tribe directors, Ko Nakahira and Kon Ichikawa, I will observe the ways in which they challenged the formal conventions of the studio industry, navigated the censorship and changing identities of the postwar subject, and how they each took part in birthing Japan’s New Wave movement.
Chapter 1 Censorship and Industry: Ozu’s Artifices of Cinema

Reductive analysis of the origins of the New Wave movement attributes the best-known New Wave directors as having actively rebelled against the style of the older generation of filmmakers including Yasujiro Ozu. The implications of this claim not only generalize the motivations of the New Wave directors but also distance Ozu from having personal and active influence over the evolution of Japanese cinema. Although he is credited for mastering the Japanese melodrama, he is not widely acknowledged for playing a major role in the emergence of the New Wave movement. In this chapter I argue that while Ozu was not considered a New Wave director, he played an integral part in advancing Japanese cinema towards this movement because he was able to separate himself from many conventions of the commercial industry - even at its height of control - through the development of what Yoshishige Yoshida calls “anti-cinema.” Anti-cinema is a term to describe the ways in which Ozu rejected the conventional and dominant structure of cinema, which relied heavily on the unimaginative imitation of reality. He demonstrated his awareness of the artificial qualities of conventional film techniques through ambiguous and even experimental methods of filmmaking. In the latter part of his career, Ozu released a trilogy: Late Spring in 1949, Early Summer in 1951, and Tokyo Story in 1953, which constituted three of his most profound insights into the changing nature of tradition and family within Japan in the 1950s. Through his use of anti-cinematic techniques such as structured non-narrative space, repetition and difference, and using the relationship between gazes and objects, Ozu exceeded convention while simultaneously creating his own historically identifiable aesthetic of filmmaking.
To better situate Ozu’s aesthetic, the subject of film must be identified through stylistic techniques. Ozu’s subjects dealt mainly with lower-middle-class family home life. He was labeled a social realist for his classical narrative style and inclusion of ordinary daily life. Through the anti-cinematic techniques mentioned above, Ozu’s films examined the cyclical and transitional nature of time as well as the gradual shifting and fracturing of the modern subject. Most notably in his later works, his simplistic yet contemplative style of filmmaking communicated a poetic fragility and ambiguity to the post-war modern Japanese experience. Film historians have placed Ozu’s films at the center of cultural discourse in relation to Japanese aesthetics, the tensions between the old and new generations, and a burgeoning cultural and political shift taking place among contemporary subjects. His film career spanned a prolific thirty-six years, beginning with the late silent era and concluding before the rise of the New Wave era, and covered turbulent periods of Japanese cinema and history—unprecedented by any other Japanese director.

Early Life: Shochiku & Ozu

In this section, I examine the early life of Ozu to contextualize his role as a filmmaker in the Japanese film industry and his impact on the emergence of the New Wave movement. Ozu was born on December 12, 1903, in Fukagawa, Tokyo. When he was ten, he moved to Matsukita in the Mie Prefecture where he spent most of his formative years. For most of his life, he lived with his mother while his father sold fertilizer and lived in Tokyo. In his early years, his dream of becoming a director developed from being an avid film fan and obsessing over Hollywood silent films, namely those starring comedic and stunt actors Charlie Chaplin, Harold Lloyd, and Rex Ingram. His earlier silent films, such as *Days of Youth (Wakaki Hi, 1929)* and *Walk Cheerfully*...
(Hogarakani ayume, 1930) were influenced by traditional Hollywood filmmaking techniques such as cinematography, lighting, acting styles, and morality tales. In 1923, through a referral by his uncle, he began his first film-related job working as an assistant cameraman at Shochiku film studio in Tokyo.

Ozu’s film career is loosely divided into two parts, the first part would cover the beginning of his career as a director at Shochiku in 1927 and the second part commencing around the end of WWII until his death in 1963. His directorial debut, Sword of Pertinence was a silent film made in 1927 and was unfortunately destroyed along with 18 of his other films. Thirty out of his 54 films were silent and he was considered one of the last great directors of the silent film era. The style of filmmaking in Ozu’s earlier films is distinctly different from the latter half of his career. His silent films often shared qualities of classical Hollywood cinema including acting styles, cinematography, lighting, and storylines that incorporated a more exaggerated and humorous approach. Yoshishige Yoshida claims that although Ozu’s earlier films outwardly resembled this style of Hollywood filmmaking, they also demonstrated his “subjugation to the modernist American cinematic style,” as exhibited in his ability to subtly criticize this method of filmmaking later on in his career and create a style unique to his own.18

At the time that Ozu began making films, the two primary genres of films being made and supported by the Japanese film industry were Jidai-geki and Gendai-geki. His debut film was his first and last Jidai-geki, or period film. The plot of Jidai-geki films was often set in the Edo period, borrowing from traditional stories, characters, and even acting styles of kabuki theater. For the rest of his career, Ozu specialized in the subject matter of Gendai-geki films, which were

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known as contemporary films set after 1868. His early pre-war films were mostly *Nansensu* ‘nonsense’ comedies with the presence of prop gags and comic asides.  

19 *Gendai-geki* films allowed for more sub-genres to emerge since it was tackling recognizable modern subjects such as *Shomin-geki* or common people’s drama. This would become integral to the changing nature of Japanese cinema in the coming years. In addition to this, this distinction of genres initiated a distinction of time within Japanese cinema in which *Gendai-geki* films added a sense of “newness” by distinguishing themselves from the narratives in the past.  

20 I believe that Ozu played with this distinction, communicating both the nostalgic remnants of the older generation and an awareness of the inevitable modernizing present. It is also important to note that Ozu’s source of contemporary topics was almost exclusively original content carefully crafted in collaboration with a number of selected screenwriters, unlike most other films that were adapted from novels. This allowed Ozu to gradually experiment with the relationship between formal technique and narrative storytelling.

As his career progressed, Ozu became strictly known as a Shochiku house director and was placed on a schedule to direct a certain number of films per year. In 1924, Shochiku’s newest director, Shiro Kido, began to promote a “staple product,” consisting of American-influenced melodramas, home dramas, and comedies. Kido, in his own words, wanted films to “look at the reality of human nature through the everyday activities of society”.  

21 The films guided by this ideal were sometimes socially critical but were based on the belief that human nature was essentially good therefore they rarely, if ever, critiqued the source of the environments in which

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they lived. Before even taking the directorial stage, these ideals would have lasting effects on Ozu, even while working as a young staff member at Shochiku. In addition to Hollywood-influenced genres, such as comedies and melodramas, narrative methods of storytelling, which demanded unitary meaning and sticking to narrative techniques of space and subjectivity, were also being produced at Japanese studios. However, as his career progressed, Ozu’s strict contract with Shochiku was loosened and did not entail a “whole scale replication of modern American production methods and ideologies”. He was able to personally assemble a team of collaborators with various specializations and have them work together in order to help create a product of his own imagination. Similar to Yoshida’s analysis of Ozu’s later films, Alastair Phillips argues that even from his early days as a filmmaker, Ozu was making films that could be identified as distinctively modern. He argues that his films are geared toward a “self-reflexive” narrative concerning the “fallibilities of the modern world and the means by which visual culture can transmit knowledge about the societies that inhabit it,” more specifically the changing direction of Japan's future. This argument helps position Ozu outside the dominant Americanized studio system known to dictate the international industry and allows the Japanese film industry to be observed within its own historical context and Japan’s national transformation into a modern state.

24 Ibid, 26
Pre-WWII and wartime Japan experienced feelings of psychological disparity that were difficult to portray outwardly in film because of strict government censorship of the film industry. What makes Ozu unique was his use of subtle experimental film methods to convey certain themes of the fracturing individual during this time despite these censorship laws. In the coming section, I will situate the state of Japan from what I deem the significant occurrences leading up to its involvement in WWII in order to historically contextualize Ozu's films leading up to the trilogy that I will formally analyze. When the Great Depression hit America and eventually spread to Japan in 1928, it would affect the future of the film industry and the nation for the next twenty years. The economic crash led to a high unemployment rate as Japan’s export sales collapsed. Public discontent attributed to political unrest and increased radicalization grew among ideals after the attempted coup d'états in 1932 and again in 1936. When Japan invaded China in 1937, Emperor Hirohito and the government assumed authoritarian control over the country. Ozu began focusing on more serious topics reflecting social and political conditions of Japan during the Showa period\(^\text{25}\), which is the period referring to the reign of Emperor Showa (1926-1989). Pre-1937 Ozu tackled the fear of unemployment that became a real threat during the depression, especially among white-collar employees.\(^\text{26}\) The modernism of the flourishing

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\(^{25}\) Showa modernism refers to the boom of cultural interaction with the West such as through art, cinema, clothes, and food. Modern pop culture began to flourish for the first time as consumerism reached a height and new methods of entertainment and lifestyle were introduced from the West.

Showa period in which Ozu first entered the film industry faded away. The disappearance of this period of thriving modern consumption and mass media in the 1920s left a large gap during the economically stagnant conditions of the 1930s and the plot lines and film structure of Ozu's films undoubtedly reflected the uncertainty of wartime Japan.

When the first wave of Japan’s industrialization fell from its peak, hoards of people seeking new opportunities to work in the city, created a stark contrast between rural and urban life, in which the latter dominated Japanese society by 1880. Among the subjects of the nation emerged a growing disparity between the newly founded consumerist culture and a fragile process of modernization. Ozu still made films about lower middle-class families, but this shift allowed him to capture more vulnerable and fragmented subjects with a stark awareness of the transition in which they existed. These films were the first in their time to observe the growing discontent within the fluctuating Japanese economy and the emphasized commodity culture, consumerist temptation, and the toll it takes on an individual and unitary sense of spiritual well-being.

Due to wartime nationalism and militarism, the film industry was completely controlled by the government in the late 30s and early 40s and experienced a period of decline in production and viewer attendance. The Film Law of 1939 was a part of the national mobilization policy whose purpose was “to ensure the steady production and exhibition of kokutai [translated to national body] ideology on Japanese screens; the product coming out of Japanese studios had to

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30 Ibid
help raise a specifically Japanese consciousness so that the war would be won”.\textsuperscript{31} Kokutai can be expressed as the national character, national essence, state structure, the national polity of Japan and later, under the Meiji constitution, would become the basis of sovereignty.\textsuperscript{32} All members of the film industry, including actors, technicians, directors, and distributors were screened not only for their professional skills but for their political commitment to the war.\textsuperscript{33} In 1942, ten feature film studios were combined into three (Shochiku, Toho, and Daiei), mainly due to a shortage of raw film stock. In addition to this, each company was limited to distributing two films per month. The ideology of kokutai demanded that the cultural production of films adhere to strict principles of national polity which emphasized a “spiritual unification of the nation” driven by the revival of Japanese practices and embracing the emperor state and its hierarchical structure of Japanese society.\textsuperscript{34} Under this film law, Japanese film styles became “highly conventionalized” in order to “hide the fractiousness of reality” especially because films that did not adhere to these standards were subject to censorship.\textsuperscript{35} Examining the parallel trajectory of the film industry to major historical changes that Japan underwent during the war allows for the contextualization of the immense changes that occurred in Japanese cinema. Ozu served in the military from the years 1937 to 1939 and in the same year of his return, he attempted to make The Flavor of Green Tea over Rice, a sophisticated urban comedy that had nothing to do with the wartime period. The film was censored and unable to be released until 1952 because it was considered “too calm and

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\textsuperscript{34} Ibid

\textsuperscript{35} Ibid
\end{flushleft}
ordinary” for the heightened state of emergency declared by Japan. Yoshida claims that Ozu’s focus on the family unsustained by the war in a time when all directors were “swallowed up by it” was in some sense an anti-war position. After his military service leading up to Japan’s defeat, Ozu would continue to illustrate the family genre while introducing complex dynamics caused by the growing individualist nature of the modernizing subject.

*The Second Phase of Ozu: An Analysis of Film Techniques*

By analyzing the technical approaches of Ozu’s films *Late Spring* and *Tokyo Story*, I identify the methods in which Ozu challenged pre-determined conventions of the film industry and propelled the state of Japanese film into the New Wave era. I will give an account of the immediate events after Japan’s defeat in WWII in order to assert the complete alteration in Japan’s national structure and subsequent shift in awareness of subjective identity and situate Ozu’s films during this postwar period. The end of WW2 in 1945 and the beginning of the occupation would place Japan in a new era of upheaval, confusion, and reconstruction. Immediately following their defeat in 1945, Japan agreed to the Potsdam Agreement between three of the Allied forces of World War II: Great Britain, the United States, and the Soviet Union, and surrender its rights of sovereignty to the Supreme Commander of Allied Powers (SCAP) and to American General Douglas MacArthur and his headquarters. These new figures of authority

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were tasked with revising the Japanese constitution and demilitarizing the nation. With Japan’s wartime economy in shambles, inflation at an all-time high, and unemployment surging, the nation was in a crisis.\(^{38}\) This period of occupation would last until 1952 and would mark the only time in Japan's history it was occupied by a foreign power.

The first objective of SCAP was to demilitarize Japan, demobilize its troops, try soldiers and civilians for war crimes, and ban military officers from taking political leadership roles. The next objective was to implement a democratic structure in Japan.\(^{39}\) This process had one of the largest and most widespread effects on the people and nation as a whole because it aimed and succeeded to infiltrate the political, moral, and spiritual sphere of Japanese civil society.

Censorship efforts by the Civil Censorship Detachment (CCD) were organized by the Counter Intelligence Section (CIS) of the American Pacific Army. Until it was disbanded in 1949, efforts by the CCD were aimed at infiltrating integral parts of cultural expression, suppressing the presence of American occupation, and even forbidding public recognition of censorship from all forms of public media.\(^{40}\) Despite the suppressive effects of the occupation initiatives, Japanese intellectual Masao Maruyama claimed that this period of democratization was an “epistemological and ontological transformation” that was necessary for the Japanese to “live and act as modern subjects”.\(^{41}\) According to Maruyama, the modern subject would be capable of objective thinking and internalizing the “dualistic conception of ‘subjective’ and ‘objective,’


\(^{39}\) Ibid


essentially experiencing an awareness of one’s subjectivity. He claims that once the formally constructed "spirit" of the nation was essentially disfigured after Japan’s defeat, they were able to overcome this period through the awareness of their subjective nature which is capable of objective thinking. Some leftist intellectuals, such as Honda Shūgoeven, believed that the occupation period allowed for imaginative freedom because the even stricter wartime political controls and censorship had been dismantled completely. Shūgo, a Showa era writer, “characterized the time as one in which ‘both emptiness (kyodatsu) and limitless expectations swarmed above the intellectual barren (shisōteki haikyo),’ a state in which Japan’s near-complete material destruction paradoxically opened up a freedom of the imagination and was closely associated with utopian hopes for reconstruction.” Although there are limitations to viewing dualistic conceptions of society, Maruyama points to the implications of the continuous efforts carried out by the post-war subject to adjust itself to the ever-changing set of social circumstances and demands during this time. I chose to analyze Ozu’s trilogy because I believe Ozu’s portrayal of the occupation period through the fracturing of the family allows for an intimate understanding of these effects on an individual and collective level.

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43 Ibid, 81  
44 Ibid, 83
Late Spring, 1949

As these new national polities of Americanized democratic ideals seeped into Japanese consciousness, Ozu would embark on a new phase of his career, one that delved deeply into the precarious nature of the human condition and the struggles and decisions the modernizing subject faced. This phase found Ozu experimenting the most with his prior mastery of Hollywood film conventions beginning with the release of *Late Spring* in 1949, his first film in his series titled after seasonal transitions, and which describes the overarching themes he would be exploring. *Late Spring* is a family drama that follows the character of Noriko, a single child who happily looks after her widowed father Professor Somiya until he urges her to marry. The central question of the film focuses on the portrayal of marriage and how it is cross-examined as a necessary expectation - not because it gratifies the self, but because it upholds society. Noriko experiences what may be posed as ‘the awareness of her subjectivity’ when she asks, why? This complex and emotional turmoil that ensues between the characters is established amongst the backdrop of Ozu’s minimalist compositions and non-expository static shots that allude to ambiguous meaning. The film opens with the immediate acknowledgment of the setting, a shot of the train station in Kamakura, Japan with its abundant trees and flowers dancing in the wind. It takes a full minute to fully view the main character Noriko. The following forty-five seconds are filled with inserted views of the surrounding outdoor environment before cutting to a low angled shot inside a traditional Japanese home peering over at a tea ceremony taking place. This detail of prolonged “intermediate spaces” or “non-narrative space” such as the roof of a temple or a hanging train signal is established throughout this film and many other Ozu films (Bordwell, 309). These shots are not necessarily close-ups of objects or characters or even wide landscapes.

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but act as a momentary gaze. This technique aligns with Yoshida’s theory of “anti cinema” within Ozu’s work which is fueled by his doubt and speculation of the qualities of cinema deeming them artificial. As noted earlier, conventions of the film were similarly attuned to Hollywood codes of realism, which prioritized the visual composition of shots to align with the narrative structure of the film. In contrast, this montage doesn’t exist for the purpose of moving the narrative; the effect of the ambiguous gaze allows the viewers to ponder its meaning before even being introduced to the story.

The relationship Ozu has with traditionalism can be located within *Late Spring* especially because of the presence of “traditional” spaces in Japanese culture, however, I argue that these spaces are intersected with the utilization of experimental film techniques. I am aware of the general implications that labeling a space or ideology as “traditional” or “modern” can assume, however in making my argument I have found no other adequate/interchangeable word that better describes characteristics of prewar and post-war imagery in cinema, which is why I use the terms with quotations. David Bordwell goes as far as to claim that “no other Ozu film is saturated with the iconography of a certain ‘Japaneseness.’” However, he argues to those who attempt to solely label Ozu as a preserver of “tradition,” that this notable concentration can be used to communicate the possibility that Japanese “tradition” can be reconciled with the new liberalism of the Occupation era, subsequently redefining the concept altogether. “‘Traditional’ iconography can be located through spaces such as the opening scene’s tea ceremony, the zen garden (Figure 3), temples (Figure 4), kabuki theater, and the traditional home, but also through beliefs related to conservative ideals of the family, marriage, and gender. These beliefs are

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constantly being redefined throughout the film as progressive values and imagery are introduced amongst the “traditional” spaces. Some instances of western influence being introduced to Japan can be found in the focus on western imagery in signage such as an ad for Coca-Cola (Figure 1) or a cafe sign spelled in English letters (Figure 2). Because the censorship efforts of the Occupation period suppressed the American presence in media, Ozu utilized artificial qualities of film through contrasting images of “traditional” spaces and English signs to assert the presence of western influence through non-narrative space without being explicit.

![Figure 1](image1.png) ![Figure 2](image2.png)
Figure 1
Figure 2

![Figure 3](image3.png) ![Figure 4](image4.png)
Figure 3
Figure 4

*Late Spring, 1949*

The use of non-narrative space is used again in the scene where Shige, the family's keeper, is silently repairing a clothing article and Mr. Hattori (the only person Noriko had a mutual interest in) enters their home to drop an item -which we later find out is a marriage photograph of him
and his new wife - off. During this whole interaction, the camera stays fixed on the empty space in which Shige was sewing just moments before (Figure 5). The shot first faces Shige who stands up to greet Mr. Hattori then quickly moves to the back of her, showing her exiting the once filled space. The camera could have easily been relocated to show the interaction more clearly, but the camera stays reserved, watching from a discreet angle, almost hidden. The figures are completely blurred with the low-placed camera focused on the sprawled out cloth and sewing objects as if this display could either be a completely foreign or familiar display in the home. This same technique of camera angle is repeated throughout, showing characters coming through the front doors from an entirely different room with the screen walls obstructing over half of the view (Figure 6). This does absolutely nothing to move the plot along, yet Ozu takes great care in playing with the dimensions and details of the space. Ozu interrupts “traditional” spaces of the home with experimental angles that simultaneously communicates the active dynamic between the two and brings to attention that there is no such thing as a singular monolithic Japanese “traditional” aesthetic.48

Figure 5: *Late Spring*, 1949

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Changing values within the family, as depicted by the unstable relationship between a new generation and older generation family members, are also communicated in this film. An instance of conventional ideals intersecting progressive ones can be observed through the father-daughter relationship of Professor Somiya and Noriko. Noriko’s father is the complete opposite of the archetypal overbearing patriarchal figure. He is kind and patient and does everything in his power to care for Noriko. Noriko exhibits progressive ideals and behavior through her active disapproval of her father’s wishes for her to get married, however, these sentiments are met with an overarching societal expectation that Noriko must marry. In contrast to these expectations, there are progressive ideals laced within the fibers of this plot. For instance, her father, Professor Somiya, encourages Noriko to marry for love and happiness, which contrasts with the conventional emphasis on marriage for procreation (Bordwell, 307).\(^{49}\)

The character of Professor Somiya encapsulates the coexistence of conventional and progressive ideals during this period, placing into question the validity of such pre-existing values. While

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Ozu never explicitly communicates which is right or wrong, the mere representation of this paradox illuminates the imagined possibility of the existence of the two ideals. Not only is the inevitability of Noriko’s marriage communicated, but so too is the passing of time and the eventual parting of ways. In the final scene, Noriko’s father returns home alone in the evening, takes off his coat, and hangs it for the first time before sitting down. He begins to slowly peel an apple with an expression of deep thought before lowering his head (Figure 7 and 8). The final shortcuts to an image of waves, which evoke emotions and are reminiscent of Somiya’s past (Figure 9). While the father’s feelings of deep longing are represented with the images of a peeled apple and waves, these simple details are sufficient to evoke exactly what he is feeling; loss, remembrance, and acceptance.
Interlude: Early Summer, 1951

Ozu’s second film in the trilogy, Bakushu or Early Summer, was released only two years after Late Spring in 1951. Among Ozu’s trilogy, these two are the most related in terms of their storyline, however, their intentional differences in conclusion and character development are what makes Yoshida call Early Summer “anti-Late Spring.” The film re-articulates the story of a family drama surrounding the marriage of a daughter, Noriko, however, this time, the anti-cinematic device of repetition and difference from the film's predecessor is heavily emphasized throughout. Ozu subverts the film audience’s expectations by posing Early Summer as a “remake” of the earlier film and then “severely betraying them” thus simultaneously allowing Ozu to question and rearticulate his own work.⁵⁰ Notably, the film's narrative and stylistic qualities resemble classical Hollywood film devices more than the other two films in the trilogy. He does this with the use of three main acts, the interlaying of characters together in the plot, and sequences that link the scenes together, all of which exhibit ‘classical’ unity.⁵¹

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relies on chronology because there is no uncertainty in terms of the past, present, and future. However, oftentimes climactic events, such as the wedding or the departure of Noriko and her parents, are not included, while smaller events displaying ordinary daily life are included. This is a strategy that David Desser calls “ellipses,” or a pause in the story. Through this method, Ozu subverts classical conventions of prioritizing “climactic” moments of the narrative.

Tokyo Story, 1953

The third film in Ozu’s Noriko trilogy, Tokyo Story, is arguably Ozu’s most beloved and heartbreaking film. It concerns the subconscious and conscious breakage of family ties and the shifting ideologies of Japanese subjectivity after the occupational period. Released in 1953, the film takes place in an evolving post-war Japan, specifically Tokyo, where a pair of elderly parents visit their adult children and are met with hostility when they begin to impede their children’s work life. The film starts off lightly, just as many of Ozu’s films do. Upon the arrival of the parents, their children meet them at the train station and bring them to the home of the couple’s son, who is a doctor. The meeting at the station is not shown on the screen and is instead communicated through various still shots of Tokyo similar to those used at the beginning of Late Spring. This technique of indirectly indicating something that is implied in the dialogue is another technique of Ozu’s that will be addressed later. Because the parents’ impending trip was discussed in the prior scene, the shots clearly represent Tokyo, however, they are not necessarily recognizable as Tokyo as a whole. Fragments of Tokyo are first depicted by a shot of smoking factory chimney pipes. These are followed by two shots of the train station, a sign identifying the

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53 Ibid, 18
name of a doctor, and finally a low-angle shot of hanging clothes and children walking on a hill in the distance. In this short montage, Ozu communicates a multitude of ideas: they allude to the passing of time, imply that events are happening, and even test the viewer’s memory by allowing details about each shot to unfold throughout the film. This form of loosely stringing together images is demonstrative of Ozu’s deconstruction of narrative telling. A tendency of the Hollywood-based commercialized film industry is hand-holding the audience through each chronological sequence to ensure easy comprehension and plot continuity. In comparison, Ozu suggests that he is okay with evoking confusion in the viewer and allowing them to build the “fabula” or total system of story events and create their own meaning.\(^{54}\) This method is another “artifice of cinema” due to Ozu’s demonstration of his awareness of the limitations of cinema. This artifice is also demonstrated by another common method of Ozu’s, known as repetition and difference, which locates patterns in subtly different ways. In the scene where the parents visit the widow of their dead son, the three of them discuss a photograph that she has displayed in her apartment. The photo shows the characteristics of a man, however, his distinct features are unrecognizable to the audience. Here, the viewer is limited to seeing what the director wants them to see, even though it’s obvious that the couple yearns to see their son clearly. Ozu plays with and even causes discomfort to the audience when reminding them of this artificial quality of cinema. This lack of spectatorship is what Yoshima refers to as “invisible gazes.”\(^{55}\)

Yoshida describes Tokyo’s portrayal in this film as “apocalyptically mysterious.”\(^{56}\) While Yoshida never fully explains why Tokyo Story or the city holds apocalyptic qualities, the consistent mention of the biblical revelation of great knowledge could support multiple meanings.

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\(^{55}\) Ibid, 94

\(^{56}\) Ibid, 89
of the term. For instance, the relationship of gazes between character and landscape and viewer and object is one of Ozu’s unique cinematic techniques. The opening sequence could be described as apocalyptically mysterious because it prioritizes the human relationship with its material objects, which, in this instance, is illustrated with the misplacement of an air pillow. Yoshida notes that the repeated presence of objects throughout the film communicates that “humans are never alone as long as the numerous things in the world are gazing at them.” Additionally, Ozu’s representation of landscape imagery is replaced with fragmented images of Tokyo, such as clothes hung out to dry and chimneys in a landfill. External space is much more elusive than internal space, which is often depicted with deep space composition. One instance of apocalyptic elusiveness is when the couple is dislocated from their children's homes and are left wandering the city aimlessly. The scene shows the couple staring at the landscape of Tokyo and speaking of the massiveness of the city; however, the viewer only sees the figures’ backs. Tokyo exists only through the gaze of these characters, who are facing unknown fates. Yoshida argues that Tokyo stares at the couple, not the other way around. As mentioned above, Ozu does not always show what is discussed but allows the audience to imagine what is omitted, leaving the scene overwhelmed with possible meaning. This is what can be extracted from the nature of apocalypse: the ability to make gazes seem dreamlike or hidden and compelling the viewer to derive their own meaning. Tokyo, therefore, becomes an abstract and invisible space, one that represents disorder and disorientation. The gaze becomes operative in a spectator’s view, eluding presumed notions of time and space. Yoshida relates this feeling to the chaos of human existence, claiming that “the experience of wandering the invisible city of Tokyo reminds us of our

57 Deep space composition is a film term that references the placement of actors, props, and set pieces at great depth. Subjects in the foreground and the background are both kept in focus through deep focus shots of the space.
experience living a human life”. While gazing at the landscape, the couple theorizes that if they got lost they would be unable to find each other. Looking toward an “uncertain future and the irreversible past” renders the present invisible, but also inevitable, just like the city in this film.

In this film, and throughout the trilogy, Ozu repeats the theme of fracturing family ties, which alludes to the changing nature of generational ideology due to the effects of the war. The first interaction in Tokyo between Fumiko and her son is a strong example of the kind of sentiment repeated throughout the film. When Fumiko’s son returns home from school, he excitedly asks whether his grandparents have arrived yet. His smile quickly disappears when he learns that his personal desk has been relocated to provide more room for them. In an instant, he grows hostile, selfish, and consumed with concern for himself and his exams, to which his mother responds, “Keep quiet. You never study anyway.” A later scene shows Noriko’s son practicing English diligently at his western-style desk and chair. One cannot conclude whether he did usually study at his desk or if its unexpected absence prompted him to. This scene foreshadows the family’s sentiments once their parents’ presence begins to impede upon their independent lives. At the beginning of the film, the children were welcoming; with personable gifts in hand and their homes open. However, they soon rejected their parents and treated them like burdens, which resulted in the scene of the displaced mother and father aimlessly walking around Tokyo. Ozu was fascinated by the expression of family bonds through rituals such as funerals or partings. This subconscious tie would be overlooked by their children until the Mother would fall ill and pass away suddenly, soon after her return to Onomichi. Similar to the


grandchild who begins to study once his desk is taken away, the children authentically mourn for their mother in the hours after her passing and express regret for not appreciating her presence when she was alive.

This same feeling is captured when Keizo goes to see his mother, but is late, and arrives at the exact moment of her death. The children, including the step-daughter Noriko, are seated around their mother’s body in a symmetric pattern. The frame includes the obstruction of blurred objects in the forefront such as cups on a table and luggage. When the setting of a shot can be so carefully controlled, why would Ozu choose to interrupt the space with these stagnant materials? This again evokes the consistent allusion to the viewer of the relationship between gazes and objects. Koichi tells Keizo to look at their mother, to see “how peaceful she is,” and once again the expression and face of the mother is not shown. Further, when Keizo lifts the cloth over her face, each of the surrounding family members bow their heads (Figure 10). Ozu’s choice of hiding the mother’s expression could be additionally identified as an invisible gaze by Yoshida as it isn’t between the living, and what is being gazed at is hidden from the viewer. This disparate dynamic between the viewer, the children, and the reposed mother creates a series of invisible and indirect gazes simultaneously distorting the expectation of what the film “owes” to the viewer. Ozu again highlights the artificial quality of film attempting to imitate reality. Unlike most classical Hollywood films, there are no villains in Ozu’s films; the suffering of the characters all seems to be an inevitable and natural part of life. Their selfish actions appear harsh on the surface, but are validated by the stark commitment demanded by the modernizing world. The emotions shared after the mother’s death are real, but once a few days pass, the realization that they have to pack their things and continue on with their lives comes into stark relief. This is perfectly encapsulated in the bar scene when the father Shoshiki laments, “We can’t expect too
much from our children… times have changed, we have to face it.” Tokyo Story effectively
captures the dichotomy between the occupation period’s implementation of a “democratized”
system that focused on a shift from “transcendental values to focus on the primacy and integrity
of the individual”. This shift is expressed through the older generation which still holds on to
sentiments of pre-war Japan and which is both empathized with and ‘obsoleted’ by the viewer,
and through the self-serving children, which represent the modern paradigm of individualist
attitudes. This shift from the transcendental narrative of submitting to life’s cyclical truths to this
modernized autonomous self hints at the emergence of “bourgeois individualism” and the
post-war existentialist movement that can be located in the Sun Tribe films I will be analyzing in
the next chapter.

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60 Desser, David. 1988. Eros plus Massacre : An Introduction to the Japanese New Wave Cinema. Pg. 21,
Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
Late Spring, Early Summer, and Tokyo Story only scratch the surface of Ozu’s vast filmography and each one delicately peers into the heart and soul of his world. Despite the fact that his early films resembled classical Hollywood cinema, Ozu was able to master these techniques and playfully and earnestly challenge them. Despite living through the pre-war depression, wartime authoritarianism, and post-war nationalism, Ozu never changed his film’s subject matter; he continuously sought to fully capture family life within the home over changing times. Throughout his career, Japan’s burgeoning commercial film industry, largely modeled after Hollywood, had a major effect on what kind of films could be made and methods of storytelling could be followed. This imposed strict expectations on Ozu to uphold classical filmmaking
conventions. Although Ozu was labeled as a conservative formalist among film critics, he distinguished himself from these confining labels by using “cinematic artifice.” This included the presence of non-narrative space, which defied evident unitary meaning, patterns of repetition, which found differences in subtle ways, and an overwhelming presence of gazes and expressions that put into question the relationship the viewer had with film and its multiplicity of meanings. As a result of these cinematic devices, Ozu formed ambiguous relationships and meaning between spaces, people, and objects that culminated in a unique aesthetic of his own. Ozu’s films have touched its viewers emotionally while subtly embodying “interrelated feelings of love, loneliness, loss, and sadness derived from an intuitive passing of time, its passing and inevitability” 61

Chapter 2 The Sun Tribe Explosion: Rendering Youth Culture in 1950’s

In the wake of Ozu’s pure and poetic cinematic trilogy, the soon-to-be-known New Wave movement was brewing within Japanese filmmaking, which would soon be known as the New Wave. In the mid-1950s, the film studio Nikkatsu released a series of incendiary youth films that categorized a new genre called taiyozoku, translated to Sun Tribe, which sent a moral panic amongst the older generation. These films expressed a previously unexposed sentiment among the growing post-war youth culture focusing on nihilism, sex, and disturbed self-identity. The Sun Tribe subjects were notably identified as the children of wealthy pre-war aristocratic parents who funded their vapid and controversial lifestyle alluding to the ideology of bourgeois individualism. These depictions were received by the older generation as vulgar and distasteful, however, their overwhelming popularity proved to capture the desires of the postwar youth generation. The Japanese New Wave era in Japan is usually identified as having emerged following the Anpo demonstrations of the 1960s, films that embodied characteristics of the New Wave were being made on a smaller scale in the mid-1950s. Although the definition and parameters of the New Wave movement are difficult to define and are still being debated, I argue that the Sun Tribe genre represented the beginning of the New Wave movement. Sun Tribe films articulated the struggles of the modern subject while challenging pre-established techniques of filmmaking such as experimenting with editing, textures and composition, audio, and camera movement. Crazed Fruit (Kurutta kajitsu, Ko Nakahira, 1956) and Punishment Room (Shokei no heya, Kon Ichikawa, 1956) are two taiyozoku films released under Nikkatsu and Daiei Studios.

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that utilized unconventional stylistic techniques while exploring themes resonant in post-war youth culture specifically conflicts between generations and conventional social and moral values. Although the radical qualities of Sun Tribe genre were quickly extinguished through the strengthening of Japanese censorship, these films permanently altered the Japanese film style and propelled the history of cinema into the New Wave movement.

**Post Occupation: Nikkatsu Studio Rebrands**

Censorship from media censorship of wartime and the occupation period heavily wounded the state of the film industry. As a result, studios turned toward popularized subject matter to satisfy their well-paying young audience, this would unintentionally birth the commercialized genre: Sun Tribe. To situate the importance of this genre, I will contextualize the state of Japan after the occupational period and the film industry. After the precarious period of crisis and restructuring of the occupational era, the post-war era was declared “over” in 1956 in a famous government white paper after consecutive years of steady economic growth had brought back a sense of security to the nation.\(^{63}\) Japan was now living with an altered demographic regarding habits of lifestyle with a postwar “baby boom,” the widespread availability of automobiles, and the arrival of television in 1953. This widespread enthusiasm for household tasks created an atmosphere that greatly concerned the ‘home’, family, and offspring, while foreshadowing the rise of mass culture.\(^{64}\) Although Japan was able to regain economic stability from the Korean War and herald immense psychological and material changes, problems

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persisted. There was a large disparity between the “economic growth based on supplying goods for other consumer societies and the actual lifestyles of most Japanese”.

In this atmosphere a concentrated youth culture was “identified, isolated, and coddled”. A source of tension and an alienated subjectivity represented the opposition to the optimism of the conservative ‘economism’ and “raised desires and expectations by a government intent on recovery” in the post-war period. This phenomenon of growing frustration was quite apparent through the expression of cinema and aesthetics beginning in the mid-'50s after the Allied Occupation era. Competition rose from other media forms due to the emergence and popularization of television. This urged the film industry to reflect on the changes of the period and the emergence of a consumer society. Sun Tribe films reflected the youth’s feelings toward the economic, social, and cultural state of Japan after the occupation period.

The majority of the Sun Tribe films were released under Nikkatsu, the oldest major film studio in Japan established in 1912. Due to financial difficulties and film stock shortages in wartime Japan, Nikkatsu studio was forced to merge with two weaker studios (along with Shinko Kinema and Daiko) under Daiei Film in 1942. For 13 years Nikkatsu ceased production completely. The Japanese government created Daei to consolidate and regain control over the film industry after the war. During most of the mergers under Daei studio, there were extreme post-war censorship laws, which led to the loss of Nikkatsu’s voice within the overpowered and

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strictly controlled industry. Through the imposed censorship operation, a fundamental contradiction was exposed in the occupational system as a whole. This system of secrecy aimed to fly under the radar through the process of “democratization” and thought control under the name of “free expression”.⁶⁸ Although it is doubtful whether censorship efforts had any specific ideological objective due to its fluctuating criteria, it is certain that during this period, true experiences and sentiments of the Japanese immediately following the end of the war were silenced on a public and widespread scale.

Shunya Yoshimi categorizes the consequences of the American occupation into two categories as “effects consciously pursued as a part of occupation policy and effects that arose unconsciously through the interaction of occupier and occupied.” The easing of censorship codes during the U.S occupation permitted films depicting sex and violence to be made.⁶⁹ In 1954 during the postwar expansion of the Japanese film industry, Nikkatsu officially began production in a newly constructed studio. With an aim to commercialize the newly emergent youth film, Nikkatsu attempted to regain an individual voice in the industry while maximizing profit. The year 1956 focused on adaptations of the popularized novels of Shintaro Ishihara. Their rebranding identified with the youth culture in Ishihara’s novels. Ishihara wrote his first Sun Tribe novel *Season of the Sun* in 1955 while attending university. This story was the first taiyozoku adaptation to hit the big screen and was directed by Takumi Furukawa. It depicts a high school boxing team and the relationship between one of the members Tatsuya and his

sexually independent and upper-class love interest Eiko. The social interactions of Tatsuya’s group of wealthy friends verge between chasing girls around, indulging in sexual competition, and leisure at the beach or on their boats. This film readily established the Sun Tribe subgenre in the film industry while opening Japanese film audiences to a new product of the spectacle.\textsuperscript{70} The term taiyozoku, coined by cultural critic Oya Soichi, referenced film trends in beach-oriented consumer lifestyles and the term “shayo-zoku,” the post-WWII generation of formerly wealthy, land-owning families.\textsuperscript{71} Ishihara did not create taiyozoku stories to push genre boundaries; he wanted to document the environment that he had grown up around. The subgenre phenomena’s origins can be traced back to Ishihara’s literary creations.\textsuperscript{72} Studio investment in these youth-centric films wasn’t aimed to change the direction of cinema in Japan. These literary adaptations were produced “quickly and cheaply” to profit off of the sudden boom of interest in the subject matter, becoming an exploitative pattern of the studio system. If this influential studio system never intended for this drastic shift in Japanese cinematic history, then how did it come to be?

\textsuperscript{70} A term developed by French Marxist theorist and philosopher Guy Debord who believed that images mediate the social relations among people and experience become commodified.
**Crazed Fruit, 1956**

Ko Nakahira’s Crazed Fruit sent a wave of shock amongst its viewers. It can be identified as the film that sparked the complete transformation of cinema in the post-war era. Notable New Wave Director Nagisa Oshima recognized it as a “portent of the future” is a quote that noted, “in the sound of the girl's skirt being ripped and the hum of the motorboat slashing through the older brother, sensitive people could hear the wails of a seagull heralding a new age in Japanese cinema.”

French New Wave director Francois Truffaut, who saw the film by accident with little historical context to apply to the film, saw Nakahira’s film as bold and fresh, asserting creative personality and disrupting expectations of the industrial studio system.

The emphasis on capturing the present in Nikkatsu youth films is similar to early Italian neorealism, which challenged a culture steeped in the need to explain the past through causality. While Ozu was labeled as a traditional filmmaker due to his nostalgic recounts of the pre-modernist era, Sun Tribe films are known for exposing pleasurable sentiments of the present while anticipating the dominant future of the new generation.

Ko Nakahira, the director of Crazed Fruit and later established auteur, was born in 1926 in Tokyo. He worked as an assistant director at Shochiku studios from 1948 to 1954 until he moved to Nikkatsu in hopes of becoming a director. As an assistant director he worked under Yuzo Kawashimi, Seijun Suzuki, Kanedo Shinto, and Akira Kurasawa. He was obsessed with

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learning editing techniques which undoubtedly applied to his notable ‘fresh perspective’. His second film Crazed Fruit was highly praised for its bold mise-en-scène, up-tempo storytelling, and sensational cutting. Nakahira’s filmmaking philosophy prioritized shooting its subjects through an emphasis on technique and style rather than the subject matter itself. This led to an uncertainty of his direct intentions within taiyozoku pictures. His depiction of youth culture was ambivalent, being neither outwardly positive, nor condescendingly negative. The film centers around two brothers, Natsu and Haru, whose names ambiguously reference the seasons: Summer and Spring. The two enjoy a laid back summer in an upper-middle-class coastal town. The nihilistic older brother Natsu and his “Sun Tribe” friends spend their days purposelessly rebelling against conventional expectations through sex and violence, while the younger and more naive Haru discovers a pure love with the beautiful and seemingly innocent Eri. Beyond this initial setup ensues a passionate and gripping brother rivalry propelled by jealousy, betrayal, and obsession. Crazed Fruit’s subject matter couldn’t be more widely different from those of Yasujiru Ozu’s films. While both filmmaking styles push formal, narrative, and thematic boundaries both Ozu and Nakahira simultaneously navigate the trauma and aftermath of Japan’s defeat in World War II. Unconventional film techniques are used through quick cuts and panning shots that give energy and movement while vibrant shots of still visual imagery instill unspoken meaning behind certain motifs, such as the sun and heat. The film stylized sexuality, and overt distaste for older generations through these above elements.

Unlike most title cards of the time that were projected against a stagnant backdrop, Crazed Fruit’s opens with a shared glimpse of the fate of the main protagonist Haru. Before the main title is even shown, a shadowed figure is shown speeding in a boat towards the audience.
The camera cuts to glistening water and exhaust being spurted behind a boat cruising with ease through Japanese waters, as if on a tropical coast. The raspy and wailing sound of a saxophone and slow tempo swing band interrupts the roar of the vessel while zooming in to a view of the figure’s face-scanning the horizon, with a mutinous rage in his eyes. Along with Toru Takemitsu’s soundtrack, Nakahira instantaneously sets the tone with a jazz theme echoing along the wafting sliding tones of a Hawaiian style steel guitar. The speeding boat coupled with the shadowed figure design a unique rhythm that become the film’s signature of independence.

Similar to the opening of Ozu’s *Late Spring*, *Crazed Fruit* also opens with a shot of Kamakura Station. Instead of using prolonged stills of the station details which we saw in Ozu’s intro, Nakahira sets a rapid pace as he shows two brothers jumping out of a car and running to catch the train. Natsu tells the younger Haru to forget the tickets and they skirt by the entryway inches away from a station attendant with concern for authority. They make the train by pushing through crowds of pedestrians. Their differing opinions quickly become clear by bantering about sailing, girls, friends, and appearance. Haru states that his short hair makes him look tougher and a “little rebellious,” to which Natsu responds “not with that scrawny body.” While the two are joking in this scene there is an undertone of competing ideals of masculinity and power, which grows instrumentally throughout the film when the female figure Eri is introduced into their lives. Some storytelling devices in the film reverberate those of conventional Hollywood productions. However, *Crazed Fruit* uses stylistic techniques that represent “less narrative elements such as the body, desire, rhythm and style”.  

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Nakahira's contrasting shots between movement and stillness is arguably the most distinguishable detail of camera work in the film. Similar to the theory of repetition and difference located in Ozu’s work, Nakahira’s tracking shots of the speeding motorboat, water skiing, and fast cars are juxtaposed to frequent cutaways of languid imagery like floating seaweed or reposing bodies “evoking the texture of experiences”.77 The sun tribe subjects depicted in the film represent a growing sentiment among the youth emphasizing uncertainty for the future and individual purpose within the bigger society. Natsu’s rant in Frank's house communicates the central logic of the sun tribe. He notes that the older generation is attempting to sell the idea that their generation is the future of the burgeoning industry, which to them is unexciting and outdated. As a result, they choose to “find their own way to live,” which for the time being is executed through aimless and lazy means. This directionless movement captures the inescapability and suffocation of the period that is frequently expressed through uncontrollable overt violence and erotic tension.

A notable instance of directionless movement can be observed in the striking final scene when Haru confronts Eri and his brother, whom he ultimately murders. He is shown speeding toward their sailboat at a high angle, filmed from a helicopter that Nakahira borrowed from a newspaper company (Figure 11).78 Haru circles them with malice in his eyes for almost four minutes, gripping the viewer to wonder what his next move will be. Quick interweaving closeups mixed between intense stares, cinematic rays of the morning sun, and the singular sound of the whirring motorboat are paired with varied long shots of the boat racing around them. This

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78 Ibid
combination is what stylistically and technically allows Nakahira to unconventionally communicate the gripping tension present between the subjects and create a visually exciting and unpredictable experience among the audience.

In the film’s most relaxing moment, Haru and Eri spend the day basking in the sun aside one another. The cutaways shift from floating seaweed lapping in the calm water to close-up shots of the body such as the clenching of Haru’s fists and Eri's lip-biting resulting in visual metaphors of sexual desire and ambivalent ideals. Similarly, in a scene where Haru and Eri sleep together in the cove by the ocean, the shot of them laying together on the sand with their clothes sprawled around them is intersected with a short sequence of closeups of the wafting evening waves. The sound of water crashing softly on the beach melts into an echoing trumpet theme reminiscent of Late Spring’s closing scene, which also cuts to rolling waves (Figure 11 and 12). Its air of ambivalence communicates themes of dislocation, emptiness, longing, and
self-degradation. Although Ozu’s representation of repetition and difference can be observed in the function of repeating themes or emotions in a subtle through the gazes of people and objects, Nakahira’s more overt use of communicating tension and precarity through fast-paced action shots alongside languid and subdued imagery perfectly echoes this device by capturing the complexities of Japan’s youth.

Figure 12: *Late Spring*, 1949

Figure 13: *Crazed Fruit*, 1956
Punishment Room, 1956

Punishment Room by Kon Ichikawa released in 1965 from Daiei studios was another taiyozoku film additionally adapted by novelist Shintaro Ishihara. The film captures an incendiary youth culture through the story of an increasingly violent and nihilistic university student named Katsumi, which in Japanese refers to triumph over oneself. Among the darkest and most violent of sun tribe films, Punishment Room’s protagonist acts on impulse of complete carnal desire through illegal extortion, deliberate repulsion for authority, and even premeditated rape. One particular insight into the behaviors of Katsumi is the portrayal of his miserable home life led by his misogynistic and chronically ill father whose ineffectual disposition in his work fuels an antagonism. Although Ichikawa held a reputation as a post-war humanist director, his depiction of youth culture during the New Wave era was very present in this film. Ichikawa was born in Ise City, Mie Prefecture on November 20, 1915. His father died right after his birth and when he was four his mother took him to live in Osaka, where his older sister was married. In his youth he enjoyed reading adventure novels, watching Japanese chambara (samurai films), and drawing pictures. During junior high, he encountered the animated film Silly Symphonies by Walt Disney, which inspired him to enter the animation department at J.O. Studio, who would later merge with a few other studios into Toho film Co. in 1937.79 He sought to move on to feature filmmaking, so when J.O. started making their own feature films and shut down the animation department, Ichikawa became an assistant director and graduated into the directorial position under Toho in 1948 with his debut release of A Flower Blooms (Hana hiraku, 1948). In his incredibly long-standing career, Ichikawa made over eighty films with his last one released in 2006.

Possibly the most outstanding quality of Ichikawa’s oeuvre is his widely variant and sometimes paradoxical stance in genre, theme, style, and tone. He never limited himself to working with one particular film studio, which was very rare for directors trying to make themselves known within the industry. Similar to Ozu, he paid incredible attention to detail and technical precision. For him “artifice did not preclude but abetted authenticity”. On the other hand, his early training as a painter and animator allowed for a prime artistic instinct to simultaneously seep through his films. Through this approach, Ichikawa was able to approach the adaptation from a perspective that was both critical and ambiguous, one that was filled with experimental formal techniques as well as a complex sociological narrative.

Ichikawa’s wife and frequent creative collaborator, Natto Wada, was Punishment Room’s scriptwriter. Her literary eye abetted her to contextualize the story in a sociological framework by accrediting the protagonist’s antagonism to generational difference. She added details and perspectives into the script that were not formulated by Ishihara such as the humanization of Katsumi’s father and the presence of the protagonist's mother in an attempt to understand the behaviors of the youth from a parents perspective whose expectation is to educate their child. While Ichikawa simultaneously drawing out the pervading nihilism and violent emptiness through salient mise-en-scene and distortion of visual and aural sensation, Michael Raine argues that Ichikawa defers from and even mocks the romanticized anger found in Ishihara’s novel. The film’s complex relationship with the novel’s content is highlighted through Ichikawa’s manipulation of film techniques and Wada’s humanistic approach to the modern family. Raine

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argues that the novel and its depiction of the youth would have been transient without Ichikawa’s cinematic adaptation that “marked a shift in the history of Japanese film style”.

The contrasting elements of the film such as lighting, visual motifs, diegetic and nondiegetic sound “leave the viewer adrift in an absurd and violent world” and represent the ambivalent sociological representation of youth culture in post-war Japan.

Ichikawa's visual composition of crowds is continuously repeated throughout the film and is used to emphasize the isolated indifference of the main protagonist. During the title screen montage, a large celebratory event is shown in the background held in an outdoor stadium. Confetti thrown into the air over-animated motion of the bodies makes the recognition of any particular individual in the crowd nearly impossible is juxtaposed with close-up shots of excited participants and spectators. The overlapping blare of singing, shouting, and a single toned siren blur together also distorts the ability to sort out singular tones from the crowd. The scene’s use of disjointed images depicting a large mass and close-ups of individuals within the crowd in an almost documentary style “strikes a strangely dissonant note”. The exact montage content from the title cards is repeated about 25 minutes in, however, this time the scene cuts to another crowded celebration in the evening after the baseball game held at ‘Shinjuku Sports Land.’ The contrasting subjects in this scene give greater insight into the conflicting attitudes of the generations with the close-up shots of elderly bystanders with expressions of disbelief and the outwardly unapologetic and disruptive actions of the inebriated teenagers. From the mass of movement, Katsumi can be located standing center frame with his weight pressed against a wall.

83 Ibid, 176
A disposition of forced apathy emanates from his body as he can barely make eye contact with a peer who drunkenly points out his lack of female company. Shortly after, begins the highly controversial pursuit of the rape of Akiko and her friend. The opening montage gives little narrative structure to the film other than its depiction of a new generation, however, as the film goes on the repetition of crowds in chaotic movement contrasted with the main protagonist’s overt stillness and separation from them alludes to a central theme within the film, the internal and subjective struggles present within this larger movement. Even during the dances organized by Katsumi and his friends, the camera pans over the crowd of dancing individuals who seem almost delusionally happy dancing to upbeat jazz music while the scheming and violence-obsessed protagonist is solely concerned with fulfilling his carnal and deceitful desires. This juxtaposition highlights a conflict between the internal and external aspects of subjectivity; i.e what Katsumi feels like as an adolescent vs what the youth is presented as.

Another way that Ichikawa communicates conflict and discomfort among the characters, especially the family, is through the use of lighting. The presence of lighting in visual culture requires a certain awareness of the materiality of cinema, a device that echoes Yoshida’s theory of the ‘artifices of cinema’. During the popularization of cinema culture, filmmakers realized that the manipulation of shadows and lightness could influence and enhance the sensory and visual experience.84 The lighting in Punishment Room “ignores familiar cinematic resources” through its apparent use of harsh and oftentimes flickering fluorescent light illuminating the suffocated dwellings of Japan’s striving middle class juxtaposed with the large brilliantly lit dance room

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halls. The scenes in the home are filled with awkward shots of physical imposition. Disappointment is articulated through the cramped and crowded room and tense dialogue. The lighting doesn’t just illuminate the figures speaking, but the stacked appliances, half-open closet, and mess of material objects notably a hat and newspaper sprawled aimlessly on the floor. When Katsumi’s father attempts to confront him about embarrassing him at his place of work, the overattentive presence of the mother at the beginning of the scene is met with hostility from both Katsumi and his father and they kick her out of the room. Instead of continuing to focus the camera on the two male figures, Ichikawa shows the door closing from the perspective of the mother shutting herself into complete darkness before switching on a softer overhead lamp which reveals her dispirited expression. Ichikawa uses fluorescent light and stark darkness in the home to highlight the resentment and alienation characterizing modern middle-class family life.

Figure 14: Punishment Room, 1956

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86 Ibid, 197
Another film that similarly depicts the subjective struggles of Japan’s stratified middle class is Ozu’s *I Was Born, But...*. Although produced nearly twenty years apart, both main characters are dissatisfied and disillusioned with their father’s submission to figures of authority and use plays of power with their peers and family to regain control and rebel. Both protagonists seem to place their anger and resentment towards the victim of the exploitative nature of a capitalist system. However, Ozu’s film ultimately acknowledges the implacable social order in
finding acceptance within the inevitability, which was thematic of many of his films including the two discussed before. This acceptance is articulated in a light-hearted scene when the two brothers end their hunger strike through the symbolic sharing of rice balls with their father. In contrast to this, *Punishment Room*’s unequivocal rebellion against the older generation communicates a passionate desire and unwavering determination for a different life than what is presented to him. Katsumi’s complete lack of empathy and disregard for the older generation allows him to place himself in a mindset of active and prolonged action, claiming that he will actually “live”. Additionally, from the very beginning of the film, the interactions between Katsumi and his father exceed the conventional generational hierarchy. When his father’s body eventually fails and he becomes bedridden, the power dynamic is communicated through the unbalanced camera angles where the shot points from above at his father lying lifeless on the floor, his mother’s head faced away from him, while the camera shoots Katsumi from below with his eyes illuminated by a band of light emphasizing the mental and physical imbalance of respect between him and his parents (Figure 17 and 18). He couldn’t care less if his father dies as in his eyes the older generation is already dead.
The other aspect of Katsumi’s active rebellion is observed in his relationship with fellow student Akiko, whom he first encountered during a class debate about Weber’s social theory. This scene is another cinematic invention by Wada in an attempt to give a sociological motivation to the upcoming rape in the film. The students discuss the topic of “postwar shutaisei”

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(subjectivity) debate between economist Marxists and leftists influenced by existential philosophy”. Katsumi agrees with Akiko on the importance of seishin bunka (spiritual/mental culture) to avoid “misguided historical materialist thinking”, but retorts that the proof of existence does not lie in the spirit or consciousness of the human, but through the daily actions of trial and error which will then allow for the realization of the spirit. This declaration of Katsumi suggests he shares values of existentialist philosophy, which to predicate in the words of Jean-Paul Sartre; “maintains that in man- and man alone- existence precedes essence” meaning that man is defined by their action in the world and must create their own essence. Defining action places an immense universal responsibility upon the individual resulting in the inescapable condition of anguish and despair. However, through the endurance of these conditions arises a “lucid consciousness of the human condition” therefore, a freedom and choice over one's destitution. The mention of existentialist values in the film allows for an insightful understanding of Katsumi’s philosophical approach to life. However, because existentialism in the film is neither praised nor criticized, it is difficult to draw direct behavioral conclusions from this reference. When Katsumi tries to assert himself in the debate, he is cut off by his professor who is unbothered by the content. As he dismisses the class the students dissipate around him and the motif of the relationship with crowds and isolation is repeated as he is left, frozen in the shot. His inability to escape or even express his struggles of modern subjectivity to his peers and

89 Ibid, 90
90 Ibid
professor sends him further into unprovoked anger and violence towards the only person who seemed to share a similar view toward the predicament of contemporary youth. After drugging and slinging Akiko and her friend over their backs like sacks of potatoes, Katsumi’s friend lightly suggests they play a game of rock-paper-scissors to decide who gets who, which adds to the complete lack of seriousness among the assailants. When in the hotel room, Katsumi shakes Akiko’s barely conscious body violently while yelling “Why don’t you talk? Aren’t you the one who debated me at the conference?” The previous attempts to rationalize Katsumi’s arrogance or connect with a common subjectivity through the reference of their intellectual debate melt away in this sterile and brightly lit scene as Katsumi is taken over by animalistic instincts. The viewer expects the natural cut and the rest of the scene to be left to the imagination, (which in conventional films prior didn’t aim to show such explicit violence) however the scene drowns on with the extensive sound of his screams of anguish paired with an angled shot from the end of the bed showing her dangling hand and bouncing mattress. Ichikawa’s decision to impose the explicit physicality of rape onto the screen forces the audience to “look straight-on at the self, which is understood by examining the anxiety of modern times”. This act of violence further disrupts the film's portrayal of modern subjectivity through its suggestion of existentialist theory. Although Katsumi states philosophical views during the debate that noticeably align within the core values of existentialism, his carnal act of violence against Akiko goes against the true humanist aim of the philosophy. Sartre notes that violence, although in no way forgiven, can be understood as a “distorted practice for ‘overcoming’ the


alienated limits which frustrate meaningful action.” In this sense, the alienation and threat that is characterized by the “genuine realization of oppression”-created by ideological social formations- are then acted upon by a projected and objectified other who is on the receiving end, the objectified other being Akiko and her friend. The feelings of rebellion are identified and come from “legitimate origins,” however in an environment of scarcity such as a consumer and capitalist-driven society, the individual’s distorted reaction to threat is assumed in the perpetuation of violent domination.93 With the awareness of the inevitable oversimplification of Sarte and the complex state of the modern subject in post-war Japan, Ichikawa’s use of visible violence can be examined through the notion of distorted individual rebellion present in Japan’s youth culture. The film’s apropos to the sociological indifference of the students gives the film a more intellectual and even political contextual approach in comparison to its other taiyozoku counterparts, perhaps preempting the future anpo rebellion, which would include the uprising of Japan’s ordinary citizens and intellectuals including the mass involvement of university students. The characteristic New Wave films of the forthcoming 1960s were characterized by directors who “augmented their understanding of the cinematic arts as a means of political action or praxis”.94 In contrast, this film was not an outright vocation for political action; as the protagonist’s fate ultimately achieves nothing but his near-violent death. Therefore, Punishment Room demonstrates the possibility of this intellectual and political characterization while still


maintaining an ambiguous position on ideological and moral motivations. This method would continue to be developed further in cinema into the New Wave.

_Punishment Room_ and _Crazed Fruit_ are arguably two of the most influential _taiyozoku_ films of 1956. In the wake of the American Occupation period, after years of implementing a democratic structure in Japan through demilitarizing and censorship efforts, an angry and rebellious oriented youth culture was identified in mainstream literature and media. In an attempt to combat the popularization of television and increase commercial profit, the film industry exploited this interest in youth culture and quickly churned out cheap films, upgrading young and inexperienced studio assistants to the role of director. The youth identified with the films and were willing to spend money, therefore the studios promoted the subgenre subconsciously assisting the emergence of the New Wave. Perhaps this combination of events was a perfect storm scenario, however, it is undeniable that these innovative and controversial films permanently altered the state of Japanese cinema and its future. Ko Nakahira and Kon Ichikawa each added their own unique spin to the stories of Shintaro Ishihara with their individual use of experimental techniques such as fast-paced editing, unusual lighting, and the repetition of visual motifs to showcase the shifting nature of the postwar individual through their indifference to morals and consumerist aspirations of the older generation. The fact that this depiction of subject matter was possible within the mainstream studio industry ignited the politically targeted and experimental New Wave films of the 1960s.
Conclusion:

In this thesis, I have analyzed and examined the multiple and complex conditions that gave rise to the Japanese New Wave movement and the influence that the directors Ozu, Nakahira, and Ichikawa had on it. Prior to WWII, the Japanese film industry resembled the Hollywood system with its formal narrative and genre conventions. The government during wartime Japan had an interest in rekindling the “spirit” of national polity and films were under strict censorship laws to reflect these values. During the post-war Occupation period, films were also heavily censored, however, these films had to emphasize the democratization of the Japanese constitution, and ultimately of the people. I chose to examine Ozu and his films *Late Spring* and *Tokyo Story* not only because his career paralleled all three of these historic periods, but because, despite these vast changes in Japanese history and to the film industry, he remained steadfastly dedicated to making family dramas. The older Ozu got, the more emotionally complex his inter-familial relationships became and the more stripped down and intimate in form they appeared. Through mastering this dynamic approach, he was able to dramatize the formation of the modern cultural identity through the discord between the older and newer generations. Additionally, he subtly, yet effectively challenged the Japanese studio system and its commercially-driven and Hollywood conventions by using experimental techniques that exposed the artificial qualities of cinema and favored ambiguous meaning through the depiction of modernizing subjects. By borrowing from conventional aesthetics and styles and altering them, Ozu maintained an authorial voice that successfully resisted control over his ideas and views. I believe that Ozu’s powerful, yet quietly subversive approach, made him a key innovator of Japanese cinema and the New Wave movement.
Only three years after the release of *Tokyo Story* in 1956, Nikkatsu studio released the youth and sexually-oriented film *Season of the Sun*. The film was adapted from the novel of Shintaro Ishihara, and sparked a series of controversial films that were released under the label of the Sun Tribe. That same year, two filmmakers - Ko Nakahira and Kon Ichikawa - created two of the most formally, visually, and thematically innovative and provocative films yet to date, *Crazed Fruit* and *Punishment Room*. Although produced under the commercialized film industry whose primary goal was to make quick money from an emerging popular youth culture, Nakahira and Ichikawa used these narratives to push the boundaries of film and to reflect the sentiments that Japan’s youth had towards the growing consumer culture and outdated values of the older generation. Nakahira evokes growing tension and the displacement of the individual in a modernizing environment through the use of face-paced editing, contrasting shots of movement and stillness, and visual motifs. Ichikawa delves into the more violent internal struggles of the modern subject through the use of harsh lighting, repeated motifs of masses, and references to sociological debates. Because neither director’s judgments on the Sun Tribe ideals were very clear, the films urge the viewers to look straight at the complexities of the human even if it exposes internal and disturbing thoughts and desires. Though the release of these films led to a temporary rise in censorship, the films’ bold expression of formal innovation and their anticipation of mental and physical change in modern Japan would catapult the film industry into the New Wave. Despite the limitations imposed on them, Ozu, Nakahira, and Ichikawa, in their own ways, both utilized and innovated existing methods of film to construct their own narratives and communicate them to the mainstream public. Throughout this work, I highlighted the competing and conflicting narratives of post-war Japan as depicted in films leading up to, and emerging from, the New Wave movement. I ask the reader to more deeply engage and further
consider their role as film viewers in shaping these individually shaped narratives of imagined realities.
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