

Yesterday's Loner: Parody and the Social Ambiguities of the
Yakuza

by

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Pre-Production: Why the Yakuza?

“To understand the heart of Japanese people, you must understand the yakuza and ninjyo¹...I have friends who are yakuza...and they are honorable, chivalrous people. They show the true spirit of the Japanese people.”

-A senior narcotics officer in the National Police Agency.

“We believe in the Japanese police. If they say the Inagawa gang is bad, then it is so. It is their duty to watch me. I respect them. Please convey my best regards to them.”

-Kakaji Inagawa, late boss of the Inagawa-kai, Japan’s 2nd most powerful criminal organization.

In light of Western society’s more ambivalent relationship with organized crime, the above quotations may seem counter intuitive. The West has, at times, valued and respected outlaws, viewed as defenders of downtrodden local communities. The late 12th century Robin Hood and his Merry Men, essentially a medieval organized crime family, extorting the rich for the sake of the poor (a category they surely identified with). Within the United States, the Robin Hood myth was expanded and applied to various gangs of gunman along the 19th century’s frontier. Not only were these criminals romanticized contemporaneously and contemporarily, but such bandits came to represent the tough, pioneering spirit of the country as a whole, a comparison that is still made (for better or for worse) by critics around the world. Japan’s collected traditional crime families, the yakuza, can perhaps be viewed as an amalgamation of these mythic zed figures that come to represent the interests of common citizens as well as national identity. However, unlike their Western counterparts, the yakuza and their romanticized identity are not distant legends; rather, they remain visibly active within Japanese society, perpetuating their image of selflessness across a vast cross section of the population demographic. Their active participation in society is perhaps shocking to Western sensibilities; yakuza members proudly display their gangs’ well- recognized names

¹ Literally, “chivalry.”

and logos on lapel pins and business cards, while the locations of their offices and headquarters are public knowledge. Moreover, the yakuza function in a capacity of civil conflict resolution, a sector where, even today, they receive more patronage than licensed attorneys.² Additionally, from their naissance, organized crime has enjoyed a privileged relationship with the state, serving the government in capacities ranging from local, civil servants, political terrorists, and campaign financiers; their influence permeates across all levels of Japanese government. These functions have brought the yakuza from social outcasts to something less definable. While recent loss of core moral guidelines and stronger disposition toward public violence has damaged the yakuza's social sanction persona, there remains, even among some of their harshest critics, a trace of esteem born of nostalgia. In light of this indefinite identity, what then is the social perception of the yakuza and how do we go about determining their place in society? Through active historical research, along with analysis of critical depictions in film, I hope to prove that despite the harm they cause society, the yakuza are not entirely a subversive force, and are, to some extent, a necessary and desiderate presence in the nation.

Central to understanding Japan's perception of the yakuza and heroism is the idea of *makoto* and its ability to inspire nostalgia for national figures. Ivan Morris notes that *makoto* is, "usually translated as 'sincerity,' but its connotations reach far deeper and wider...its common denominator has always been a purity of motive, which derives from man's absolute longing for an absolute meaning out of time, and from a realization that the social, political world is essentially a place of corruption whose materiality is incompatible with the

² West, Mark D. "Making Lawyers (and Gangsters) in Japan." *Vanderbilt Law Review* (2007). *Lexis Nexis*. Web. 16 Oct. 2009.

demands of pure spirit and truth.”³ Essentially, *makoto* heroes are not pragmatically or logically motivated; their strict devotion to traditional values and an unwavering moral code prevent them from making the simple compromises necessary to be successful. The most famous of *makoto* figures exist during times of progress and reform, yet are generally disposed to more conservative opinions. Popular Japanese *makoto* heroes include Yorozu,⁴ Nitta Yoshitsada,⁵ Saigo Takamori,⁶ or even the *kamikaze* pilots. These figures are respected as much for their uncompromising belief in maintaining traditional societal values and structures as they are for their failures and eventual deaths, predicated by their *makoto* spirit. Furthermore, *makoto* implies not only “pure spirit and truth” but a sense of nostalgia for an idealized past; a past that represents clearly defined values and codes lost in the hero’s own time.

The yakuza’s claim to *makoto* status is only possible through the appropriation of the feudal era moral concepts, *giri* and *ninjō*, referring to the acquired obligations existing within interpersonal relationships, extending to family members, bosses, and even to the nation.⁷ Stockwin argues that these obligations are impossible to repay, and thus demand extended self-sacrifice and asceticism associated with Japan’s feudal and prewar periods. *Giri*, loosely translated as “duty,” stands in stark contrast to *ninjō*, personal emotion or

³ Morris, Ivan. *The Nobility of Failure*. New York: New American Library, 1975. 22.

⁴ A man of humble birth who died for the cause of the traditional Shinto faith of the Mononobe against the new, foreign Buddhist religion of the victorious Soga clan. He is said to be the first to ceremonially take his life in battle.

⁵ A General during the Kemu Restoration, who successfully attacked the shogunate capital of Kamakura in 1333. He and the greater cause to which he was espoused to, were betrayed by the politically savvy Ashikaga Takaugi, and during the siege of Kuromaru, Yoshisada took his own life in the face of imminent defeat.

⁶ A Meiji period oligarch popularly believed to have turned reactionary when the Imperial government attempted to implement reforms greatly limiting samurai supremacy and power.

⁷ Stockwin, J. A. A. *Dictionary of the Modern Politics of Japan*. London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003. 104.

sympathy. While often depicted in popular literature as conflicting emotions, the joint association of the two highlights an idealized image of obligation as an emotionally charged, positive force.⁸ Originally key concepts in the samurai *bushido* code, *giri*, and *ninjō* were re-appropriated by yakuza after the termination of the feudal warrior class, many disaffected members of which would join the ranks of the yakuza at the end of the 19th century.

The term *giri/ninjō* is then taken from the samurai system of *bushido* and placed within the yakuza's code, *jingi*. *Jingi*, literally “honor” and “humanity,” in fact refers to the ritualized greetings between Japanese criminals in the prewar period. As the definitive yakuza sociologist Peter Hill writes, “*Jingi* takes three distinct forms: *aitsukei-mentsu*, *mawari-mentsu*, and *goro-mentsu*, which are used as a form of yakuza self-introduction in one-to-one, group, and threatening situations respectively. Trainees who failed to correctly recite *jingi* greetings in public could be beaten with impunity by yakuza from other groups.”⁹ Following Japan's defeat in WWII, all three forms of *jingi* fell out of fashion. By the 1970s, few remaining senior members possessed adequate competence in the ritual. In fact, Hill notes that in a more recent interview, a yakuza boss claimed traditional knowledge of *jingi* as a differentiating characteristic.¹⁰ Ironically, while the specifics of *jingi* became less common, the word came to represent the yakuza code as a whole, defined by *giri/ninjō* relationship. Through their appropriation of traditional moral concepts and signifiers, a history of political and public service, as well as active

⁸ Ibid., 105.

⁹ Hill, Peter B. E. *The Japanese Mafia: Yakuza, Law, and the State*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2006. 86.

¹⁰ Ibid., 86.

manipulation of media, the yakuza have constructed an association to preceding *makoto* icons, becoming perhaps the concept's only remaining representation.

Linda Hutcheon's *A Theory of Parody* has largely inspired the connections I will draw between yakuza history and film and their perpetuated anachronistic image. Hutcheon argues that parody has never been more prevalent than in the postmodern art world, stating, "Art forms have increasingly appeared to distrust external criticism to the extent that they have sought to incorporate critical commentary within their own structures in a kind of self-legitimizing short circuit of the normal critical dialogue."¹¹ In a contemporary context, parody "is one mode of coming to terms with the texts of that 'rich and intimidating legacy of the past...a model for the process of transfer and reorganization of the past...signal less an acknowledgment of the 'inadequacy of the definable forms' of their predecessors than their own desire to 'refunction' those forms in their own needs."¹² Hutcheon counters the widely held belief that parody necessarily functions as a tool of ridicule, arguing it can be utilized strictly for comparison between texts within a given medium or genre. She analyzes the term's etymology, noting that its Greek root *para*, while often translated solely as "counter," can also be read "beside," leading to a plurality of meaning.¹³ Yet, because comparison predicates difference, parody cannot be simple imitation. While imitation provides a connection to a cultural past, it serves as a continuation rather than a mark of transition. Parody requires the "addition of an ironic and critical dimension of distancing

¹¹ Hutcheon, Linda. *A Theory of Parody: the Teachings of Twentieth-century Art Forms*. New York: Methuen, 1985.

¹² *Ibid.*, 4.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 32.

for it to be an accurate reflection of the art of today.”¹⁴ Hutcheon often refers to temporal or cultural distancing as “trans-contextualization,” which acts as the signifier of comparison.

Hutcheon notes a distinction between parody and satire, claiming parody demands comparison to a specific discursive text or genre and thus “intramural” while satire is “extramural in its ameliorative aim.”¹⁵ However, this does not exclude parody from social criticism, as parody can employ satire in criticizing a third convention through imitation with ironic distance of an established form, “whose recasting in a modern work is frequently aimed at a satirical ridicule of contemporary customs or practices.”¹⁶

Yet perhaps the most relevant aspect of Hutcheon’s elaboration on parody is its dependence upon a comprehensible code. For parody to properly function, a level of familiarity with the parodied subject is required of the audience. If parody serves as a means of refunctioning the past, perhaps even as a means of understanding the past, one must have some competence with the past’s historical and artistic context. Hutcheon notes, “Parody, like irony, can...be said to require a certain institutionalized set of values – both aesthetic and social – in order to be understood, or even to exist.”¹⁷ The combination of the aesthetic and social contexts of a parodied work functions as “a hypothetical hermeneutical construct, inferred...by the reader from the text’s inscription.”¹⁸ These contexts must be understood by the audience to evoke the parody’s irony, and thus drawing the intended comparisons.

Hutcheon’s complex definition of parody can, however, be criticized for its generality. While her argument abolished the premise that only “bad” works can be parodied, and even suggests the use of parody as idealization, it privileges even the most minute of authorial

¹⁴ Ibid., 10.

¹⁵ Ibid., 43.

¹⁶ Ibid., 11.

¹⁷ Ibid., 95.

¹⁸ Ibid., 88.

decisions as examples of parody, as she states, “Its physical dimensions can be as vast as Joyce’s *Ulysses* or as small as the changing of one letter or word of a text...”¹⁹ The latter statement is particularly problematic when coupled with her suggestion that parody is “probably a genre, rather than a technique,”²⁰ where diminutive technical applications become metonyms for the complete text.

Nevertheless, parody, even in its most subtle functions, has enjoyed particular favoritism within Japan’s art tradition. Hutcheon herself discusses parody through allusion in Japanese court poetry, citing the *honkadori* technique as example. *Honkadori* refers to a 12th century *tanka* poem technique where one directly quotes an older *tanka*, using it as *honka* (the original work) integrated into the new *tanka*.²¹ This technique attempts to transfer the social, historical, and emotional contexts of the quoted *honka* into the newer *tanka*. Moreover, the juxtaposition of *honka* with the greater *tanka* emphasizes their recontextualized relationship. Thus parody is also utilized as complex homage, venerating the quoted work by its inclusion and simultaneously addressing their differences as a sign of the genre’s evolution.

Moreover, parody in Japanese art is not limited to written works; the performing arts have long utilized parody, at times as a self-defining characteristic. The earliest form of Japanese theatric tradition, Noh, became defined by mimicry and parody. The Noh narrative cannon is limited mostly to legends and prior literary classics. Some Noh narratives are based on single incident or poem in another text, employing the borrowed text’s literary devices, in

¹⁹ Ibid., 18.

²⁰ Ibid., 19.

²¹ This technique was not the first institutionalized form of allusion in Japanese court poetry, which had promoted allusion to revered classics since the time of the first imperial poetry compilation, the *Kokinshuu* in the early 10th century. Maynard, Senko K. *Linguistic Creativity in Japanese Discourse: Exploring the Multiplicity of Self, Perspective, and Voice*. Amsterdam: J. Benjamins Pub., 2007. 37.

an application of *bonkadori*.²² The Noh stage's physical form is another inter-textual mode of parody. The modern day Noh theater has a double roof structure, the roof of the stage falling underneath the roof of the theater structure itself. It seems that before the late 19th century, Noh was performed strictly outdoors;²³ the smaller roof places the traditional stage physically within a modern context, the contemporary structure, and thus acting as (an architectural) parody. The ubiquitous painted pines on the back walls of Noh stages function similarly, alluding to the outdoor nature of the earliest Noh performances, while exhibiting the rich aesthetic tastes of the Momoyama period.²⁴ Such set aesthetics became influential upon later, and is discussed in conjunction with depictions of yakuza. With Noh's developed emphasis on lineage and hereditary instructions, Noh actors "almost from the art's inception, have resisted the notion that Noh rests on natural talent...[and] correct performance...[and] demands adherence to 'traditions.'"²⁵ When genealogy determines one's status in troupe, it further determines the roles available to the actor; actors would usually play the same roles as their genealogical predecessors. Thus, in performing correctly through adhering to hereditary tradition, the Noh actor mimics not the character he plays, but the inherited performances of those that came before him. As Rath notes, "For the actor who tried to revive Noh in the postwar era by resuscitating Zeami's theories, wearing the mask was less a matter of historical appreciation than a sensory experience of embodying Zeami."²⁶ Rath's point is more generally stated by Raz: "Noh is mimesis: an actor playing an

²² Konparu, Kunio. *The Nob Theater: Principles and Perspectives*. New York: Weatherhill/Tankosha, 1983. 152.

²³ *Ibid.*, 111.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 114.

²⁵ Rath, Eric C. *The Ethos of Nob: Actors and Their Art*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2004. 1.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 241.

apparition in disguise on stage. This is the only theme of Noh.”²⁷ This, however is not an example of parody, rather, imitation lacking ironic distancing that would have arisen from historical appreciation of the object. While more akin to imitation, this approach toward acting would have parallels in the postwar *ninkyō eiga* (chivalry film).

My first chapter deals with the historical narrative of the yakuza and the transitions in their culture and social relevance. Yakuza film is undeniably rife with parody, and the directors I have analyzed often recontextualize genre representations of the yakuza (such as the aforementioned concept of the *makoto* hero) for the purpose of social criticism. With this in mind, the first chapter provides necessary historical and societal context, explaining the events and rituals that will be later depicted in the films. Let me quickly summarize the key ideas of the previous English works on the yakuza, since I will be drawing heavily from them in this chapter.

Kaplan and Dubro,²⁸ similarly to my thesis, attempt to present the yakuza as an ambiguous entity in Japan, tracing the history from the organizations’ origins to the turn of the century. Using anecdotes to create a continuous, personalized narrative, the authors make parallels between changes in Japanese and yakuza culture; they argue that the yakuza are an inseparable and entrenched presence within society. Yet, while perhaps striving for pluralistic representation, Dubro and Kaplan ultimately favor a subversive view of the yakuza, stressing their parasitic effect on society over the special place they hold in popular culture. Moreover, covering a vast gamut of figures and events, Kaplan and Dubro’s emphasis on personal stories neglects detailed analysis of cause and effect relationships

²⁷ Raz, Jacob. *Audience and Actors: a Study of Their Interaction in the Japanese Traditional Theatre*. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1983. 262.

²⁸ Kaplan, David E., and Alec Dubro. *Yakuza: Japan's Criminal Underworld*. Berkeley: University of California, 2003. Print.

found in other texts. Peter Hill's²⁹ own work is perhaps a response to this disregard. Hill questions whether the relationship between yakuza and state is unique relative to other countries, and to this end, refrains from long narrative of yakuza history in favor of detailing yakuza power structures and sources of income – their focus on the sale of protection which resembles that of the Italian mafia. Of particular importance to Hill are the causes and effects of the few anti-yakuza laws introduced in the last fifty years. Hill posits that harsher policies toward gangs have led to an increase in crime as new regulations and persecutions make yakuza membership less appealing; crime transitions from the controlled realm of the yakuza, which still possesses at least the façade of ritual and code, into the relative criminal anarchy more along the lines of other developed countries. According to Hill, the period of yakuza state mutualism is waning. The final major influence upon this initial chapter is Eiko Maruko Siniawer's recent publication and lecture given on the role of violence in Japan's democratic history.³⁰ A perfect supplement to both Kaplan and Hill, Siniawer attempts to answer the how and why of the connection between violent conservatives (the yakuza being prominent examples) and the state. Closely examining yakuza origins and roles in society, Siniawer delineates the transition of their role in local communities to an institutionalization of their position as violent strong arms in late 19th and early 20th century parliamentary politics. She further observes their service as agents of Japanese international policy in the development of its colonies, as well as their reaffirmed function as anti-liberal forces in the postwar period. She concludes that the yakuza's role in the institutionalization of state sponsored violence has made the realities of democracy in Japan problematic. However,

²⁹ Hill, Peter B. E. *The Japanese Mafia: Yakuza, Law and the State*. Oxford: Oxford Univ., 2003. Print.

³⁰ Siniawer, Eiko Maruko. *Ruffians, Yakuza, Nationalists: the Violent Politics of Modern Japan, 1860-1960*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2008. Print.

contrary to other texts concerning yakuza, Siniawer pays special attention to media articles in order to determine the yakuza's perception in history. Sadly, her text only extends to the 1960s, as such analysis would be particularly useful in contemporary study of the yakuza.

While these texts have developed a general understanding of the themes and transitions in yakuza history, they only briefly address the extent of the effects of nostalgia and constructed identity in the perception of organized crime. Attendance at Tokyo's famous *sanjo matsuri* religious event, where mostly naked yakuza display their tattoos and carry portable shrines and national symbols while standing on the shoulders of the common people, suggests that at least one day a year, society as a whole can remember with fondness the yakuza's connection to the community and the traditions of the nation. I have used the texts above to detail the events and transitions constructing the image of the yakuza, while, like the authors, situating the image within the reality of the yakuza's ultimate goal of profit, which is eventually sought by any means. Yet, these texts focus on the latter, leading to what seem like generally subversive portrayals. While the critical nature of these mostly negative portrayals is both valid and necessary (particularly as most of these issues have been ignored prior to the mid-70s), the texts above only briefly cover the public's perception of the yakuza, and its significance as anachronism. I argue that, despite the violence, corruption and economic problems for which the yakuza have been responsible, within most Japanese, remains this acknowledged respect for the nostalgia they represent. This led me to choose the films of Suzuki Seijun, Fukasaku Kinji, and Miike Takashi as points of analysis.

These directors share certain distinct similarities. All three began their careers within the studio system, directing numerous yakuza films with short budgets and shooting schedules. Within this constrictive structure, these figures managed to use unique and often shocking stylistics to parody the established genre norms. Furthermore, their use of parody extended

to contemporaneous social evaluation, often viewed as subversive in their perception of the yakuza. Yet, even among the criticism found in their work, these directors privilege the yakuza with a level of humanity and cool denied to them in the above historical texts.

In my second chapter, I examine Suzuki's *Kanto Wander* (*Kantô mushbuku*, 1963) and *Tokyo Drifter* (*Tôkyô nagaremono*, 1966), in order to analyze Suzuki's parody of the traditional yakuza *matabi* theme. I argue that Suzuki uses dark humor drawn from personal experience, eccentric style of jump cuts and color coordination, emphasizing ideas of philosophical and artistic absurdism and hyperbole (similar to beliefs of the French existentialists and the Theater of the Absurd), to parody prior genre conventions. Even while criticizing the industry, genre, and its yakuza subjects, Suzuki manages to leave the yakuza with a desirable sense of "hip" and "cool." In order to create a further context of comprehension within the genre, I begin by outlining the trends in yakuza film that came before Suzuki, the *matabi* film and its parodying *ninkyô eiga*. Essential to this study was McDonald's³¹ interpretation of trends in *giri/ ninjô*, which she believes have increasingly shifted to favor the latter. I discovered Ian Buruma's analysis of the yakuza as a hero in high school that introduced me to the concept of yakuza as nostalgia, which Marc Schilling³² provided both a small encyclopedia of yakuza film (relative to the thousands of films relating to the yakuza) and a summarization of Nikkatsu action films, providing necessary reference and access to interviews.

³¹ McDonald, Keiko I. "The Yakuza Film: An Introduction." *Reframing Japanese Cinema: Authorship, Genre, History*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1992. 165-92. Print.

³² Schilling, Mark. *The Yakuza Movie Book: a Guide to Japanese Gangster Films*. Berkeley, Calif.: Stone Bridge, 2003. Print.

Schilling, Mark. *No Borders, No Limits: Nikkatsu Action Cinema*. Godalming, England: FAB, 2007. Print.

My third chapter interprets Fukasaku Kinji's five part *Battles Without Honor and Humanity* (*Jingi naki tatakai*) series and the development the *jitsuroku eiga* (true story account) as parody and social criticism. The *jitsuroku eiga* parodies the *ninkyō eiga* in a manner opposite to Suzuki, focusing on realism through *cinéma vérité*s techniques and accurate historical contextualization and depiction. Sometimes, the graphic portrayal of such realities is often as absurd as some of Suzuki's stylisms. This chapter is informed by Richard Torrance's "The nature of violence in Fukasaku Kinji's *Jingi naki tatakai* (War without a code of honor)," from *Japan Forum*. Torrance notes Fukasaku's obvious intent for a documentary-like realism in his emphasis on real life yakuza stories and historical contexts of the key events presented in the series, as well as the departure from established norms in his use of graphic violence. Torrance concludes that the historicity and violence comments on American violence on an international scale, both before and after the war. On these points, I follow Torrance's lead. The constant reference to the atomic bomb, the Korean and the Vietnam wars lend themselves to inhumane representations of American violence. However, Torrance limits himself to this comparison, failing to note the similarities between the boss/family structures of the gangs and Japan's own conflicted war past. Moreover, Torrance ignores Fukasaku's own opinions concerning the significance of violence in man-to-man combat. Drawing from several interviews, I argue that the raw depiction of violence among low-ranking yakuza characters serves to humanize these figures and draws attention to the personal emotion involved in such struggles. Violence is simultaneously criticized and revered as a harmful force that is entirely human, acting as nostalgia, not for the prewar era, but for the occupation period, which many found difficult to move beyond.

My final chapter deals with the films of Miike Takashi, particularly *Shinjuku Triad Society* (*Shinjuku kuroshakai: Chaina mafia sensō*, 1995), *Rainy Dog* (*Gokudō kuroshakai*, 1997) and *Full*

Metal Yakuza (*Full Metal gokudō*, 1997). Miike's work has often been analyzed for its "shocking" imagery. Tony Williams,³³ like other contemporary critics, focuses on the twisted portrayals of vice and violence as Miike's take on postmodern culture. This essay refutes Miike's own intentions, as he claims such devices are not definitive, but rather mere stylistics used to better portray the story. Mika Ko³⁴ presents a better defined reading of Miike addressing the prevalence of the foreign Other in relation to Miike's extreme images of body mutilation. Ko argues that breaking physical bodies functions as a metaphor for the breakup of Japan's national identity and *kokutai* logic, the 19th century belief in the homogeneity of the Japanese race; according to Ko, Miike views the breakup of the national body as destructive, a contamination in Japanese culture, while in no way lamenting the loss. I would rather view Miike's use of multiculturalism as constructing a new, pluralistic Japan through the developing concept of *tabunka kyōsei* (multicultural co-living) and redefining of *gaikokujin* (foreign person).³⁵ Tom Mes,³⁶ an astute commentator and perhaps Miike's biggest fan, presents a more fitting analysis of Miike. The text extensively analyzes Miike's career from start in V-Cinema ('90's low budget films intended for strictly video release) until 2002, including his acting rolls. Rather than focus on shock and outrage, Mes begins his book by defining five themes prevalent in Miike's work. The themes of particular interest to my own research are "rootlessness," "outcasts," and the "family unit." Mes also notes the extent of juxtaposition in Miike's work, and believes Miike often favors multicultural characters, even when faced with discrimination. Those capable of embracing their identities are successful

³³ "Takashi Miike's Cinema of Outrage." *CineACTION* 64 (2002): 54-62. Print.

³⁴ Ko, Mika. "The Break-up of the Nation Body: Cosmetic Multiculturalism and the Films of Miike Takashi." *Theorising National Cinema*. London: BFI, 2006. 129-37. Print.

³⁵ Tai, Eika. "Multiethnic Japan and Nihonjin." *Japan's Minorities: the Illusion of Homogeneity*. London: Routledge, 2009. 139-61. Print.

³⁶ Mes, Tom. *Agitator: the Cinema of Takashi Miike*. Guildford: FAB, 2003. Print.

even as foreigners. However, Mes does not analyze Miike's work specifically in terms of the yakuza. I argue that Miike's use of stylistic juxtaposition incorporates both Suzuki-like comic hyperbole and Fukasaku's graphic realism. Further juxtaposition in pacing and camera shots and takes and the pervasiveness of multicultural characters creates a pluralistic image of established homogenous depictions. Moreover, in presenting the yakuza as multicultural and pluralistic, Miike enables the yakuza to remain national symbols in a country experiencing unprecedented blue collar immigration.³⁷

³⁷ Note that within my film analysis sections, corresponding stills will be located in the appendix.

Illicit Protection: the Dynamic Relationships between the State, Organized Crime, and the Public

Though originally outcasts, the yakuza would develop a privileged relationship with both the public and state, creating an aggrandized public image and perception. In order to understand the yakuza's connection to the nation, as proper comprehension of parody in yakuza film, we must examine the mythology and history of the yakuza beginning with the Edo period.

Organized Prototypes

Yakuza history began in this period of greater urbanization and economic development. The population of cities such as Edo, Osaka, and Kobe multiplied as the isolationist policies of the Tokugawa government led to greater development of domestic trade and the rise of the merchant class. For the first time in Japanese history, the lower classes were afforded leisure time and disposable income. Meanwhile, greater taxation by the *bakufu* as well as multiple famines imposed hardship and destitution on both samurai and peasant, alike. It is within these settings that the yakuza are born. The *yakuza* could be divided into two types, the *bakuto* (gamblers) and the *tekiya* (itinerant peddlers).³⁸

The *tekiya* were nomadic tradesmen, traveling the countryside and establishing stalls at markets. Often equated with gypsies in Europe or carnies in the United States, *tekiya* were infamous for selling shoddy goods or deceiving unsuspecting customers. Unlike *bakuto*, *tekiya* were heavily involved in legal economic activity. As their activities in the marketplace developed, *tekiya* began to gain the role of labor organizers.³⁹ Within markets, *tekiya* gangs were often the *de facto* policing force though, more often than not, this translated to extortion

³⁸ Hill, 37.

³⁹ Ibid., 36.

in exchange for protection. Between the years of 1754 and 1750, shogunal authorities grant certain *tekiya* bosses authority over market organization, even giving some the honors of a “surname and two swords,” a right reserved for the ruling samurai class.⁴⁰ This marks the first instance in long history of legitimization of organized crime by government powers.

Yet, this legitimization stands in sharp contrast to a major demographic within the *tekiya*, the *burakumin*. This latter group held the lowest position in Japanese society, those forced to work with dead flesh and corpses. While many *burakumin* came to join the *tekiya* as one of the only means to escape a static existence in a despised vocation, some criminals were forced to take on the shame of that class. Criminals who were not executed by *bakufu* authorities were often relegated to the status of *eta* (heavily polluted), the derogatory term applied to *burakumin*. Crime then becomes a polluting agent in itself, connecting a subversive physical characteristic to the *tekiya* as would, in later incidences, be applied to the yakuza as a whole.

The *bakuto* in contrast are the more criminal yet popularized yakuza prototypes. As gambling was strictly prohibited by the *bakufu*, the *bakuto* held one of the lowest positions in Japanese society.⁴¹ Gambling houses began to develop in abandoned temples and shrines on the outskirts or most impoverished parts of town, a further signifier of gambling’s subversive nature. The games played were either dice games or *hanafuda* (card games). The most popular card game of the time was *oichi-kabu*, a game similar to blackjack.⁴² While Western blackjack’s target number is 21, *oichi-kabu*’s is 19. The dealer may draw an 8 and a 9 at first, creating 17, a strong hand. Yet, if gambler decided to draw one more, a 3, his sum is

⁴⁰ Ibid., 11.

⁴¹ Unlike *tekiya*, who could claim to possess legal jobs, *bakuto* were labeled as *mushuku*, or “unregistered,”⁴¹ referring to those who lacked official residence or space in Tokugawa society (Siniawer 21).

⁴² Ibid., 36.

20, a “bust hand.” This is the origin of the word *yakuza*, *Ya* (8) *Ku* (9) *Za* (3), a throwaway hand, just as *bakuto* were throwaway members of Edo society.⁴³ Alternatively, some say that the gamblers themselves adopted the name, believing that with such a poor hand, only the lucky survived. The conflicting interpretation of the *yakuza*’s name is testament to its pluralistic identity.

Another important origin of *yakuza* culture comes from the role *bakuto* played within the community as benefactors and military servants. Despite the reality of gambling as extortion, as well as the violence to which it often leads, gambling can be ostensibly perceived as a beneficial industry as it provides a service in demand. The popularity of gambling during the Edo period attracted players of varied economic and social strata, developing the dens into community spaces. Perhaps to shroud the former aspect of their profession, many *bakuto* bosses turned to philanthropy. One 19th century *bakuto* boss, Seiriki, was noted to distribute often large sums of money to the poor in his village.⁴⁴ Seiriki also organized a local militia for which he provided weaponry. Such precautions were necessary against groups of lone samurai, many of which were known as *kabuki-mono* (crazy ones), or *batamoto-yakko* (servants of the shogun). While their main purpose was banditry, such figures were noted for wearing outlandish clothing and hairstyles, speaking in *mélange* of overly formal tones and vulgar slang, and brandishing hyperbolized, lengthy swords.⁴⁵ The opposing village civil defensemen became known as *machi-yakko* (servants of the town).⁴⁶ The semantic difference between the two groups’ titles suggests a stronger connection to the

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Siniawer, 22.

⁴⁵ Such figures became known in popular Japanese culture as *otokodate*, the chivalrous commoners. Kaplan & Dubro, 4.

⁴⁶ Hill, 38.

local community than to the nation, a condition that would arguably change through the next century.⁴⁷

Kunisada Chûji, a powerful 19th century *bakuto* boss, is perhaps the prototype for such a simultaneously beneficial and parasitic force on Tokugawa society, and a later paragon of yakuza chivalry in film. As a teenager, he became *mushuku*, ostracized from his family and village after murdering a rival in a fencing match.⁴⁸ After serving in several bakuto groups, he founded his own in Tamegai village. Chûji himself was tasked with certain community services, such as cleaning the village's well, for which. In return, Chûji not only revived permission to operate his gambling dens within town but was warned of the approach of government authority figures.⁴⁹ In juxtaposition, Chûji engaged in bloody conflicts against several rival groups, killing a number of men, including representatives of the state while expanding his territory well beyond the village. As boss of a gang described by modern historian Abe Akira as a "violent group of rogues," Chûji's crimes were considered so heinous that the authorities gathered 600 locals to pursue him and, when finally caught, he was publicly crucified before a crowd of 1,000 spectators.⁵⁰ Despite his privileged relationship with the village, the size of the pursuing mob and execution audience suggest a critical perception of Chûji by some townsfolk. Yet, popular culture has ignored the latter aspects of Chûji in favor of a romantic ideal. Figures like Chûji would be instrumental to

⁴⁷ 20th century yakuza trace their origins to the *machi-yakko*, though the postwar yakuza's use of heavy slang, garish suits, and violence as threat against everyday citizens suggest they share much more in common with the *batamoto-yakko*.

⁴⁸ Siniawer, 22.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 21.

viewing the bakuto as *kyōkaku*, “men of chivalry”⁵¹ and developing yakuza into representations of more traditional *makoto* heroes.

Towards the end of the Edo period, an important structure associated with contemporary yakuza was developed: the *oyabun-kobun* relationship. Each gang had its leader, the *oyabun* (father figure), while his subjects were *kobun* (child figure). The *oyabun* was the undisputed head of the group, providing both orders and advice, almost like a teacher. He was expected to protect his students, using the strength of the whole to protect the individual. Only one thing was expected of the *kobun*, complete and total loyalty to the group and by extension, the *oyabun*. While the origins of this relationship are dubious, Siniawer notes the work of Kanda Yutsuki, who finds a similarity between the *oyabun-kobun* relationship and the structures of contemporaneous sumo guilds. The prevalence of sumo wrestlers among early yakuza suggests that perhaps this hierarchy was borrowed from the latter. Regardless of its derivation, such a relationship created a fictitious family, or *ikka*, structure among yakuza groups.⁵² However, due to many yakuza’s *mushuku* designation, *ikka* and yakuza society became the only source of family and acceptance within Japan. *Jingi*, as discussed in the introduction, functioned as a means of introduction and, like the *oyabun-kobun* system, was possibly borrowed from a separate contemporaneous group. Originally employed by traveling artisans, and later traveling laborers for food and work, *jingi* became common among traveling yakuza in need of food and shelter. *Jingi* thus functioned as a yakuza signifying device, allowing the traveler privileges that through *mushuku* status, legal society denied him. Even without a home, a yakuza should have a family.

⁵¹ Ibid., 24.

⁵² Ibid., 20.

Many other rules and rituals that the yakuza practice today date back to this early historical context. One popular punishment for disobedience in early *yakuza* groups was expulsion. Not only would a disobedient criminal lose ties to his former gang, it was generally accepted that he would be blacklisted from serving even rival gangs, becoming an outcast even among outcasts. This practice continues even to this day among yakuza. If a crime was deemed more serious, the sentence was often death. If somewhat more tolerable, *yubitsume* may be called for. This of course is the famous yakuza practice of severing the top joint of the one's little finger. While in the 19th century, this practice was not limited to only yakuza, their implementation of this ritual had special significance. A four-fingered yakuza could not wield a sword as steadily, thus making the disloyal member more dependent on the group.⁵³

Another popular practice began in this era, the yakuza tattoo. Originally this practice came from prison tattoos. Criminals were given tattoos as a permanent sign of their crimes, forever ostracizing them from society. Yet, tattooing became a popular practice throughout Edo Japan. Religious, historical, and nature motifs became popular designs for tattoos. The full-body tattoo came to be the most popular among *tekiya* and *bakuto*, both of whom often worked with much of their bodies exposed.⁵⁴ For the yakuza, due to the painful nature associated with traditional ink and blade tattoos, such practices signify the yakuza's toughness and commitment. Furthermore, once tattooed, the yakuza was of course permanently marked for life, incapable of escaping his connection with the lifestyle to which he pledged.

⁵³ According to Japanese authorities, this practice has actually increased since the Tokugawa era. In 1993, government researchers found that 45% of yakuza members have severed finger joints, 15% have at least two joints removed (Kaplan & Dubro 14).

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 15.

Yakuza became literary imaginaries for the first time in the late Edo period. These criminals gained notoriety and popularity, as characters in what would be known as *matabi-mono*, or “wandering gambler” stories. Here, *yakuza* are portrayed as tough yet compassionate, chivalrous to the point of fault, their sense of moral obligation ultimately leads to heroic, yet undeserved, death.⁵⁵ Originally, key concepts in the samurai *bushido* code, *giri* and *ninjô*, were reappropriated by *yakuza*, a brilliant ploy that enhanced their position in society, a tribute to the success of the chivalry associated with the samurai.

By end of the Edo period, the *yakuza* would transition from the separate organized crime prototype of *tekiya* and *bakuto*, forming unified families that would eventually absorb many disaffected samurai, not to mention the last vestiges of the bygone warrior class’s moral code. By incorporating the latter as a signifier of past tradition, the *yakuza* would ensure their own popularization and connection to national identity while commencing a tradition of rituals and hierarchical structures that are still practiced to some extent today. While initially remaining tied to local communities, the coming era would engender well tended relationships between *yakuza* and the political powers that be, assuming a role similar to samurai retainers for the rising political parties of the Meiji and Taishô eras.

Pre-War Period: From Progressives to Institutionalized Reactionaries

Beginning from the Meiji period, the *yakuza* would move from local rural communities to the burgeoning cities of modern Japan, become more relevant and necessary as politicians attempted to exert more control over the countries new “democracy.” It is important to note that *yakuza* themselves were important cogs in the success of the Meiji revolution; many

⁵⁵ This will be discussed in further detail in the next chapter.

yakuza bands helped fight shogunate forces on the local level.⁵⁶ Yet, by 1884, the Meiji government reversed course (typical of government-yakuza relations for the remainder of their history) and implanted the Ordinance for the Treatment of Gambling Crimes, which led to the arrest of many gamblers. This was less related to a national anti-crime policy than to political considerations. As the Japanese tested the waters of democracy, many wondered who would have a voice in the new government. This led to the development of the Freedom and People's Rights Movement, where disaffected rural populations, which had bore the brunt of the developing Japanese economy's growing pains would attempt to assert their political powers through force on the local level.⁵⁷ As yakuza held privileged positions in local communities and were particularly experienced in the use of violence, they were natural organizers of local agrarian protests. These peasant uprisings, such as the Chichibu incident,⁵⁸ while locally popular, were perceived as liabilities by the state, which created a smear campaign that went beyond anti-gambling legislation. A series of highly critical, anti-yakuza newspaper articles were printed, attempting to group the entire movement as a collection of unruly, self-serving gangsters.⁵⁹ Yet, as Siniawer notes, this by no means was a nationally held belief, as yakuza still enjoyed a privileged perception among grassroots organizers.

The parliamentary fervor associated with the Freedom and People's Rights Movement did, however continue to energize the yakuza, and would eventually lead to the development of mutually-favorable relationships between organized crime and politicians. Many young

⁵⁶ One famous example is Jirocho of Shimizu, who for his services to the restoration received public pardon and official posts (Hill 40).

⁵⁷ Siniawer, 27.

⁵⁸ A peasant uprising in 1884 led by a duo of gamblers, Tashiro Eisuke and Katô, which ultimately failed.

⁵⁹ Siniawer, 37.

toughs, commonly referred to as *sōshi*, were denied democratic rights by Japan's strict suffrage laws; as a result, *sōshi* chose to use their predisposition for violence to influence the voting habits of others. It is important, however, to address the distinction between rightist ruffians and yakuza. One did not have to be a yakuza to be a *sōshi*, yet many were. While initially more politically minded, Siniawer notes that, eventually, *sōshi* became more “yakuza-like,” more attached to a paycheck than a cause.⁶⁰ Yet, given their natural talents, yakuza were often recruited for the job, and associations such as the Tokyo Sōshi Club placed advertisements in their newsletters specifically soliciting individuals with criminal pasts.⁶¹ In contemporary popular media, these *sōshi* were considered rough, vulgar, and pre-modern, a rather critical allegation in Meiji Japan. This anachronistic image, for better or for worse, would follow the yakuza to the present millennium.

Eventually, the major political parties of Japan directly incorporated *sōshi* into their party structure, the *sōshi* becoming the more violent pressure lobbies of established political parties called *ingaidan*. While Liberal Party was the first to establish a *sōshi* training ground at their party head quarters, other political parties soon followed suit, creating an institutionalized use of violence specialists, of which the yakuza were willing participants. *Ingaidan* assignments included harassing certain oppositional politicians or to disrupt unfavorable rallies and assemblies. The pay depended upon the difficulty of the assignment, barring the entrance of a minor Diet official certainly paid less than wounding a cabinet minister. Other responsibilities involved filibustering and threatening at local assembly meetings. While not entirely within the domain of the yakuza, the political violence performed by the *ingaidan* would become the bread and butter of postwar yakuza state service.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 51.

⁶¹ Ibid., 46.

One could credit Mitsuru Tōyama with changing not only the course of domestic politics, but perhaps even driving Japan into overseas imperialist ambitions, tying the yakuza to the conservative cause from the 19th century. Starting as a *tekiya* in Fukuoka, Tōyama spent three years in jail for joining a samurai uprising. Upon his release, he started a gang of toughs specializing in coal-mine strike breaking, similar to *ingaidan* work. Quickly amassing wealth from his gang of right wing ruffians, Tōyama gained a reputation among local residents and politicians for both his frequent use of violence and his generosity and was subsequently known as the Emperor of the Slums.⁶²

In 1881, Tōyama went national and founded the Genyōsha (Dark Ocean Society) whose membership included yakuza and disaffected ex-samurai (many of whom would eventually become yakuza themselves).⁶³ His aim was to create a sentiment of international expansion and domestic authoritarian rule. Genyōsha credos worshipped structured power, the importance of Shinto, repudiated the power and values of foreigners, and revered, romanticized, and deified the emperor. Domestically this translated into a paramilitary force bent on exerting influence over military and bureaucratic personnel. In Japan, the Genyōsha served as political bodyguards, strong arm political persuaders, and strike breakers, similarly to the roles of many *sōshi* and yakuza groups of the day. Yet, unlike other organizations, members would train in special schools established across Japan, learning ultra-nationalist doctrine, martial arts, foreign languages, and espionage techniques.⁶⁴

Established initially as a People's Rights organization, the Genyōsha's belief in democracy for the purpose developing a strong nation led to goals of international

⁶² Kaplan & Dubro, 22.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 22.

expansion.⁶⁵ To promote his foreign expansion agenda, Tōyama conducted a systematic campaign of political terror. The Genyōsha was behind several assassination attempts on liberally minded government officials: activists hurled a bomb into the carriage of Foreign Minister Shigenobu Okuma, stabbed liberal politician Taisuke Itagaki, and murdered Toshimichi Okubo, considered by many as the era's most brilliant statesman.⁶⁶ With these steps now taken, Tōyama had curbed the political atmosphere to his expansionist desires. The Foreign Minister secretly asked Tōyama to “start a fire” in Korea, orchestrating events to facilitate Japanese expansion. The members of the Genyōsha, trained in espionage and foreign languages, were the perfect recruits. Yakuza dens existed not only throughout Japan but also on the continent as well by this point. Their purposes were intelligence, counterintelligence, and paramilitary. Drawing topographical maps, they noted the locations and conditions of Korean army installations and often acted as translators for the Japanese military and bureaucrats. More shockingly, they were believed to be behind the assassination of Queen Min in 1895, an event partially responsible for the subsequent invasion of Korea.⁶⁷ This, coupled with intensified political pressure at home, led to the annexation of Korea in 1910.

The success and power of the Genyōsha would forever fix ultra-nationalism on the Japanese political scene. From the Genyōsha sprouted hundreds of right wing political societies, many of which would employ yakuza agents. Some, like Genyōsha, would be supported by wealthy patrons and organizations, while others raised money through a variety of illegal activities ranging from gambling to drug trafficking. Tōyama himself would deny

⁶⁵ This is not to say they gave up on popular rights, rather, they believed in spreading “liberalism” across Asia, by any means necessary (Siniawer 53)

⁶⁶ Ibid., 23.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 22.

allegations of yakuza ties to his organization despite the prevalence of yakuza in his organization's membership and his own criminal past. Instead, he would label himself *kyôkaku*, or "man of chivalry."⁶⁸ Yet, as such organizations developed, this became increasingly more difficult to deny. By the 20th century, rightist nationalist groups were virtually indistinguishable from yakuza groups as yakuza participation only increased. Moreover, most ultra-nationalist groups of the time borrowed their power structure and rituals from yakuza practices.⁶⁹

Tôyama example of a patriotic criminal participating in nationalism and national service would have lasting effects on the yakuza who, in only little over a decade, transformed the national perception of the yakuza from local dissidents to national representatives.⁷⁰ During the Taishô period, two *oyabun* would capitalize on the national recognition gained from state/imperialist service as well as the violent nature of parliamentary politics of the time and successfully run for Diet.⁷¹ The yakuza identity was changing and would reach the pinnacle of its ties to conservatism in the late '20s and '30s with the creation of the Dai Nihon Kokusuikai (Greater Japan National Essence Association) and the Dai Nihon Seigiden (Greater Japan Justice Organization). These groups claimed to exist for the purpose of protecting "traditional Japanese values" by challenging Western imported ideas, mostly through the persecution of liberals out of fear of the recent emergence of Bolshevism.⁷² Called *bôryokudô* (violent groups), the term would eventually be synonymous with the

⁶⁸ Siniawer, 183.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 24.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁷¹ Yoshida Isokichi and Hora Senosuke. Both claimed to be *kyôkaku* rather than former *oyabun*, yet they brought the violence of the yakuza directly to the House of Representatives, where they acted as party enforcers, a mini-*ingaidan* within the Diet itself (Siniawer 92). Hora, in particular, is said to have treated political office exactly as yakuza life, sporting the full-body tattoo and putting party service in the terms of the yakuza brother relationship.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 109.

yakuza. Most importantly, these groups legitimized their violence through the proclaimed representation of Yamato spirit, the very essence of conservative Japanese identity, creating a discourse that emphasized their connection to the samurai's warrior code through the adoption of warrior class morality in the previous century.⁷³ Yet, as Japan's armed conflicts multiplied and became more desperate in the nation's pursuit of total war, the criminal double lives led by such individuals was no longer tolerated. By the 1940s, the yakuza were given the opportunity to solely work for the government or face incarceration.⁷⁴

Occupation and Beyond: Black Market Culture and Unique Privilege

When Emperor Hirohito gave his famous surrender speech, he entreated the Japanese people to "bear the unbearable." While this may have been the case for most of the population, it was not the fate for the yakuza. Starvation was an everyday reality for much of Japan's citizenry. Meanwhile, due to the great purges by SCAP in both Japanese government and police institutions, there was little in place to curb crime.⁷⁵ In order to survive, it was essential for the Japanese to participate in yakuza-controlled black markets. Within two months of surrender, 17,000 black markets sprang up around the nation.⁷⁶ Yakuza bosses made vast sums of money trading US Military goods to Japanese citizens at exaggerated prices, becoming the New Yen Class. By 1947, there were over 181 *oyabun* in Tokyo alone.⁷⁷ Yakuza bosses used the rice as a bribery tool, bartering it for any variety of services from hungry countrymen, including selling their wives and daughters as prostitutes, exclusion from unions, or even forcing membership, the latter of which led to new, rough membership

⁷³ Siniawer, 112.

⁷⁴ Kaplan & Dubro, 27.

⁷⁵ Hill, 43.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Kaplan & Dubro, 40.

experienced in violence through military service but untrained in yakuza traditions and ritual that would be known as *gurentai*, or thugs.⁷⁸

Outside of managing the black market, the yakuza were actively involved in construction, a profitable business considering most Japanese cities were severely damaged from US air raids. Yakuza possessed traditional ties to construction from Edo period when *tekiya* were labor brokers for the shogunal government. In fact, construction companies were so similar to gangs that they were often indistinguishable. Both used the word *gumi*, or “group,” to describe their organizations. Furthermore, both had strong political ties to the far right.⁷⁹

The successes of the yakuza eventually gained the attention of SCAP, who in 1947, created *Oyabun-Kobun* subcommittee, the purpose of which was to examine criminal activity. The subcommittee presented a report to SCAP headquarters, concluding the organized crime underworld

...extends into politics, controls the price of everyday commodities, controls the flow of goods through regular channels, and performs local government functions in the issuance of licenses and collection of taxes. In addition [yakuza] terrorize a large portion of urban populations who are engaged in the restaurant business and other entertainment industries.⁸⁰

The report never made it to General McArthur’s desk; McArthur and SCAP were uninterested in yakuza criminal activity and more concerned with communism, a fear which the yakuza once again exploited.

⁷⁸ The black markets were the realm of the *tekiya*, and the undisputed king of *tekiya* in this period was Kinosuke Ozu, the paragon of *tekiya* power during Occupation, Ozu controlled thousands of *tekiya* in Tokyo, not to mention several *bakuto* gangs in Shinjuku ward. He established the Roten Dogyo Kunimai (Street Stall Tradesmen’s Cooperative Union), with which he controlled over 26,000 members. Ozu made his way onto the Tokyo Chamber of Commerce and guided its decisions for some time. In the tradition of such figures as Yoshida and Hora, Ozu ran for a Diet seat in Shinjuku, though was unsuccessful (Kaplan & Dubro 46).

⁷⁹ Ibid., 37.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 40.

In fact, SCAP had a very intimate relationship with the yakuza, one of its divisions, G-2 utilized the yakuza as a weapon against engendered liberalism under the supervision of Major General Willoughby.⁸¹ The yakuza became G-2's source of "dirty tricks," blackmailing, pressuring, strikebreaking, and assassinating any leftist members or movements that Willoughby saw as threatening to Occupation's reverse course. One such incident was the Kaji Affair where G-2 agents kidnapped a liberal, leftist writer, Wataru Kaji, in 1951 and handed him over to the CIA where he was held even after occupation had ended.⁸²

In relation to Japan's displaced colonial subjects, the Occupational authorities' use of the yakuza cemented not only the traditional role of yakuza as promoters of ultra-conservative, xenophobic actions but as strong arm government also employed violence specialists henchmen. Universal suffrage and a public less tolerant to public violence led to the dissipation of the *sōshi*, leaving only the yakuza to act as violence specialists.⁸³ During the war, 2.6 million Koreans and 50,000 Chinese and Taiwanese were used essentially for as slave labor in Japan. Of two million repatriated. Those that remained were called *sankokujin* (three country people).⁸⁴ While some *sankokujin*, due to SCAP's initial distrust of the recently defeated Japanese, were given administrative positions in the Occupational government, many formed gangs, instead, often turning quite violent against their former overlords. In one instance in Kobe, 300 *sankokujin* invade the local police station and took hostages. The mayor, in turn, called the local yakuza power (and later national power), the Yamaguchi-gumi, who made short work of the minority gangsters. In Tokyo, Taiwanese gangsters took

⁸¹ Hill, 46.

⁸² Kaplan & Dubro, 47.

⁸³ Fearing the revival of a totalitarian police state, SCAP crippled the NPA, leaving only the yakuza, criminals themselves, to moderate crime. The NPA would remain mostly powerless for the remainder of the 20th century, finally passing modern police legislation only in the 1990s (Kaplan & Dubro 35).

over the Shimbashi area. A group of 1,000 Japanese *tekiya* from the Matsuda-gumi fired upon the group with a salvaged air force machine gun and chased the few survivors away. This action was viewed as “patriotic.”⁸⁵ While militant *sankokujin* gangs were essentially eradicated during Occupation, but that is not to say they disappeared from organized crime. Koreans in particular were able to join Japanese gangs in time, though due to Japanese racism, most would have to play down their Korean identity.⁸⁶

The relationship between SCAP, yakuza, and conservatives, who ensured that the same forces active in Japan in the prewar period were back in power through the familiar refrain of the challenge against communist. By the start of the Korean War, SCAP released 10,000 war criminals, and in just a year and a half, a total of 200,000, many of whom were high-ranking Class A war criminals released from Sugamo Prison.⁸⁷ One such man was Yoshio Kodama who collaborated with SCAP officials in rooting out those sympathetic to leftist thought. During the war Kodama was in charge of a vast network of spies and informants in occupied China. In Shanghai, he established the Kodama Agency, essentially a black market within the military. One responsibility of this agency was commodity and raw resource trading, i.e. heroin-for-minerals transactions. By the end of the war, he made \$125,000,000 for the Japanese military, not to mention a sizable fortune he skimmed off the top for himself.⁸⁸ Despite his fortune, Kodama was still well paid by SCAP for his services. Using his personal money and capital gathered from contemporary yakuza bosses, Kodama funded Karoku Tsuji and the Liberal Party.⁸⁹ Not only was he the undisputed power behind the

⁸⁵ Hill, 45.

⁸⁶ One particularly successful Korean yakuza was Hisayuki Machii, a Korean born yakuza who would eventually become *oyabun* of one of Tokyo’s most powerful gangs, the Tosei-kai.

⁸⁷ Kaplan & Dubro, 49.

⁸⁸ Ibid, 52.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 53.

LDP (the union of the Liberal and Democratic Parties) and the election of several prime ministers, but was also the go-between for politicians and their yakuza financiers and strong arms. His money and political connections ensured a corrupt Japanese government for decades. Such men as Kodama were dubbed *kuromaku*, literally black curtain. *Kuromaku* figures would create a mutualistic relationship between the LDP and the yakuza, who would reclaim their privileged prewar relationship with the state, becoming institutionalized strong arms for the LDP in conservative nationalist organizations. All the while, yakuza would accumulate unprecedented profits from crooked political deals, which *kuromaku* figures would to some extent conceal.⁹⁰

***Kuromaku* and the New Political Order**

The *kuromaku* era refers to the postwar period before the late 1970s, where yakuza and conservative politicians became the willing bedfellows of yakuza in exchange for vast campaign contributions and violent part service. In this mutually beneficial relationship, all parties profit, the yakuza, the politicians, and the *kuromaku*, at the expense of democracy, freedom of assembly, and equal justice under the law. Law enforcement, unequipped to deal with the power of the yakuza in its own, weakened postwar state, was in fact complicit through its chief representative Tokutaro Kimura.

A compatriot and yakuza sponsoring cohort of Kodama's was Tokutaro Kimura, denizen of Sugamo Prison and appointed Justice Minister in 1952.⁹¹ In an attempts at "justice," he created a 200,000-man army to crush communism, called the Patriotic Anti-communist Drawn Sword Regiment. During its establishing meeting, Kimura's protégé,

⁹⁰ To some extent as politicians were meeting with yakuza in the open, though the public was not privy to the true purposes of such associations as they were often within the context of nationalist organizations.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 56.

Nobuo Tsuji, stated, “Justice Minister, there is nobody who would risk their lives but gamblers, racketeers, and hoodlums. There are none but those fellows who risk their lives for their bosses.” In this instance, the highest ranking law-enforcing official in Japan attempts to recruit known criminals, which at this point in Japanese history, is neither new nor surprising. Though this initiative failed Kimura was made head of the Japanese Self Defense Force and further assisted the yakuza cause by creating the National Street Peddlers Union, subsidizing the costs of the *tekiya* bosses.⁹² He had known ties to every major yakuza boss and in fact, created the *Nippon Kokusui-kai*, another public federation of yakuza groups. Yet, for a collection of supposed nationalist, the *kuromaku* clique was surprisingly close with the US government, even after the end of Occupation.⁹³ The hypocrisy of such figures would finally be called into question during the Ampô riots.

The Ampô Pact of 1959 (or, as it was known in the West, the Mutual Cooperation and Security Treaty) was a hotly contested legislative document that challenged over sixty years of yakuza-politician corruption and led to the deployment of the yakuza against liberal minded citizens. While reaffirming Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution, Article 6 of the treaty allowed “a status of forces agreement on the stationing of United States forces in Japan, with specifics on the provision of facilities and areas for their use and on the administration of Japanese citizens employed in the facilities.”⁹⁴ This clause was unacceptable for student and union protesters united under the cause of *ampô bantai* – most of the voting

⁹² Szymkowiak, Kenneth, and Steinhoff, Patricia G. "Wrapping up in Something Long: Intimidation and Violence by Right-wing Groups in Postwar Japan." *Terrorism and Political Violence* 7.1 (1995): 265.

⁹³ In fact, this was simply business as usual as the US, and the CIA in particular had been financing LDP election to secure a pro-American, anti-liberal regime. The connection between even the Kennedy administration and LDP (and thus, kuromaku and yakuza) was so established that it was treated simply as US foreign policy (Siniawer 153).

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 67.

public sympathized with the protesters. Alarmed by the unrest in the nation, Prime Minister Kishi (elected by way of Kodama's machinations) asked his yakuza-connected cronies to put down these labor and student demonstrations.⁹⁵ President Eisenhower was scheduled to meet Nobusuke in Tokyo to see the treaty through, but in the rehearsal ride from the airport, the car that held the decoy Eisenhower was bombarded by protesters, resulting in the cancellation of the visit.⁹⁶ Kodama was thus given free reign and arranged a meeting with Tokyo's three most powerful *oyabun*, Kakuji Inagawa of the Kinsei-kai (eventually the Inagawa-gumi), Yoshimitsu Sekigami of the Sumiyoshi-kai, and Toyko's Al Capone, Kinosuke Ozu. Together, they gathered over 48,000 men, 18,000 *bakuto*, 10,000 *tekiya*, 10,000 rightists and many more government authorities to challenge protesters. The concentration of tens of thousands of thugs against a liberal population, similar in fact to the yakuza's own past association with the People's Rights Movement, naturally led to violence, as the yakuza thugs bludgeoned many demonstrators. On June 15th, one demonstration outside the Diet drew particular attention; a young co-ed was killed by ruthless yakuza strikebreakers.⁹⁷ Over the next three days, over 300,000 more protesters took to the streets. Though the treaty eventually passed in a quiet Diet session, Kishi resigned on June 23rd.⁹⁸ Students would continue to protest American military presence in Japan throughout the 1960s and would come against conservative attack, mostly yakuza-based. While as noted, the riots failed to prevent the ratification of the treaty, it did exhibit the first national public

⁹⁵ Ibid., 69.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 69.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 70.

⁹⁸ It is important to note that Hisayuki Machii, though Korean born, has lent himself and his gang for the purposes of Japanese nationalist organizations throughout his lifetime (Szymkowiak & Steinhoff 70).

objection to the exploitation of the nation at the hands of organized crime and equally unsavory politicians.

Kodama's *kuromaku* ventures however, were undeterred even by the demonstrations of hundreds of thousands of people; instead, the challenge simply spurred him onward in the establishment of the yakuza as the LDP's paramilitary branch. He participated in the establishment of the Zen Nippon Aikokusha Dantai Kaigi (All Japan Council of Patriotic Organizations) a pan-societal rightist association comprising 412 groups and over 150,000 members.⁹⁹ This group provided both political theory and political muscle for the right wing. The organization espoused general rightist principles rather than specific ideas. It did, however, have specific uses. When presented with the situation of a strike at a Chiba steel company, the result of the organizations involvement was the strike's break and 680 individuals hospitalized. In fact, the Aikokusha Dantai Kaigi membership was so flushed with yakuza that it was more commonly named the yakuza Kaigi.

Yet, the direct ties between gangster and ultra-conservative would soon be tested as members who were more actively political began to split from the pack. A more violent group formed within the yakuza Kaigi, the Seishi-kai – a faction directly loyal to Kodama. This organization composed itself of the usual suspects: current conservative politicians, men with war crime culpability, and of course, prominent yakuza *oyabun*, such as Korean crime boss Hisayuki Machii. It is important to note that Hisayuki Machii, though Korean born, has lent himself and his gang for the purposes of Japanese nationalist organizations throughout his lifetime. The Seishi-kai quickly withdrew from the Aikokusha Dantai Kaigai and held a retreat to the mountains of Niigata prefecture, where they trained as a

⁶³ Kaplan & Dubro, 71.

paramilitary army, learning such skills as street fighting and bomb throwing.¹⁰⁰ Though their skills would never be tested in an all out war with the left, the organization would be assigned tasks such as intimidating reporters and writers keen on providing details of the machinations of the *kuromaku*. Meanwhile, in 1961, three yakuza syndicates withdrew from the yakuza Kaigai as well, forming the all yakuza right-wing coalition, the Nippon Jiyu Shugi Renmei, a less active conservative organization.

The fracturing of the unified right, represented by LDP politicians, *kuromaku* and yakuza exhibited the construct of conservative yakuza identity. While challenging the left was certainly within the interests of nearly all yakuza groups, many had little interests neither in nationalism nor conservatism for the ideology's sake. By acquiescing to the Ampô Treaty and creating an atmosphere of kuromaku corruption, the LDP and the yakuza were alienating true conservatives on the far right, who viewed the latter groups as merely conservatives of convenience, their true intent being profiteering.¹⁰¹

The Gurentai and the Wealthy Nihilists

Simultaneously, the yakuza persona itself was changing. Prior to the war, yakuza groups followed strict codes, often based on samurai ritual, but after the defeat of the Occupation many became what is known as *gurentai*. Many *gurentai* were repatriated former soldiers without occupation or family to return to. With the drop in social standards associated with defeat and occupation, *gurentai* became neo-*batamoto-yakko*, lone, crazed, and without purpose in life, many addicted to wartime amphetamines. Some *gurentai* were *sangokujin*.¹⁰² These yakuza were generally more violent than their predecessors. Guns began to replace swords,

¹⁰⁰ Kaplan & Dubro, 72.

¹⁰¹ Szymkowiak & Steinhoff, 265.

¹⁰² Hill, 45.

while day-to-day street robberies escalated.¹⁰³ While some older generation yakuza were appalled by the change, the new school gangsters were proud of their disrespectful nature. Jettisoning their traditional attire, *kimono* and *happi*-coats, yakuza began to dress like the American gangsters they deified in Hollywood movies, black suits, dark shirts, white ties, fedora hats. More often than not, however, they drew from mafia parodies such as *Guys and Dolls*, acquiring an overly theatrical swagger. They even began to drive expensive American luxury cars to the point that attended parking lots would not park them due to their popularity with yakuza bosses.¹⁰⁴ This Westernized image of the yakuza challenged the constructed role of the yakuza as national representatives and only remaining connection to the samurai and thus, the *makoto* hero, while either influenced by or mirroring the yakuza's own connection to the west through the *kuromaku*. Perhaps for this very reason, yakuza bosses would actively pursue connection to popular media, film in particular, and actively promote a romanticized *kyōkaku* or in what would be known as *ninkyō eiga*.¹⁰⁵

One factor that may explain the loss yakuza's loss of a traditional nostalgic essence can perhaps be attributed to the changes within yakuza business itself changed within the period. With stability regained after Occupation and the economic successes during the Korean War, the yakuza business diverged into new economic sectors, facilitated by their vast network of government connections. The yakuza's traditional means of income, gambling, was encumbered by stronger policing and partial state appropriation, which nationalized racing.¹⁰⁶ Public racing of all kinds was permitted, and horse and boat racing became the realms of

¹⁰³ Kaplan & Dubro, 72.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 73.

¹⁰⁵ Varese, Federico. *The Secret History of Japanese Cinema: The Yakuza Movies*. 2006. TS 22. University of Oxford, Oxford. University of Oxford Faculty of Law Research Paper Series. 16. I will further examine this topic in the next chapter.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 61.

such *kuromaku* as Ryoichi Sasakawa. Yet, *oyabun* bosses would often use their political connections to become board members and even chairmen of legal gambling institutions. Moreover, casino style games were still illegal, and thus, fell under the control of the *yakuza*, along with a new game of chance, pachinko, a form of gambling reminiscent of pinball. Though pervasive across Japan, most *yakuza* pachinko profits were filtered back to the government in legal gambling taxes.¹⁰⁷ While perhaps not the *yakuza*'s "golden goose," pachinko is still a vibrant part of popular culture today.¹⁰⁸ The trend in business was to move from consumer staples to the luxury trade, the most popular of which were illegal drugs.

The *yakuza* had a prewar, state-sponsored connection to the opium trade in the colonies where they worked under the Opium Monopoly Bureau, a government agency tasked with introducing large quantities of opium to keep colonial populations docile. Yet, after the war, their attention turned towards methamphetamines, *shabu* or *pon* in Japanese, the very drugs given by Japanese government to workers and soldiers during WWII to give them the energy and ferocity of "the spirit of the Japanese."¹⁰⁹ With the war at an end, stockpiles of the drugs were scattered throughout the Japanese Archipelago. The drugs' use in the war effort legitimized them, removing the possible stigma attached. Furthermore, in the desperation of Occupation, amphetamines were used to stave off hunger and fatigue.¹¹⁰ The statistical trends of methamphetamine use in this period often mirror the trends in violence, which may lead one to believe that drug use fueled the insanity and nihilism of many *gurentai* style gangs. The sale of amphetamines continued through the '60s, supplying countries even as far as England where the youth Mod culture would glorify amphetamines.

¹⁰⁷ Kaplan & Dubro, 60.

¹⁰⁸ Mervio, Mika. "Koreans in Japan and Shimane." *Crossing National Borders: Human Migration Issues in Northeast Asia*. Tokyo: United Nations UP, 2005. 145.

¹⁰⁹ Hill, 50.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 46.

The yakuza consolidated a greater control in the legal profit venues of construction and entertainment, eventually leading to the corporate image of the '70s. War-torn Japan needed rebuilding – after the Korean War, the economy had the strength to fund it. This led to an unprecedented period of infrastructure development from roads, railways and airports, to apartment blocks and government housing.¹¹¹ In particular, shipping labor and shipping construction were under near complete yakuza control. As for entertainment, pachinko parlors, dancing clubs, strip clubs, bars, and even fashion stores were yakuza enterprises (many of which still are today). Prostitution, which at one point was nationalized in Japan, finally became illegal in 1956.¹¹² This was only good news for yakuza bosses who now had sole control of the standard brothels. However, the 1956 Prostitution Prevention Law only prohibited vaginal intercourse, leading to the development of the Japanese entertainment diversion, *soapland*. *Soaplands* are establishments where soap-covered women wash and massage their clients, yet in reality, offer services of masturbation and fellatio.¹¹³ Other sex services of the time included *dateclubs*, or phone order escort services.

The entertainment industry was beginning to be dominated by the yakuza who organized and often rigged professional sports such as sumo and even baseball. Theatres and the newly burgeoning film industry, too, would come under yakuza sway, a trend that would only continue with time.¹¹⁴ Finally, yakuza bosses used their political ties and vast sums of money to snatch up much of any emerging legal markets. Slowly the yakuza “family” was undergoing a metamorphosis, becoming more of a “corporation.”¹¹⁵

¹¹¹ Ibid., 47.

¹¹² Kaplan & Dubro, 61.

¹¹³ Hill, 114.

¹¹⁴ Kaplan & Dubro, 62.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 55.

Much like trends in the corporate world they began to mirror, as gangs became more powerful, they began to absorb their smaller competition, until in 1963, only 7 major yakuza families remained.¹¹⁶ The combination of the aggregations of the gangs, along with the irreverent nature of its members led to an unprecedented period of yakuza gang wars. In fact, this period was known as The Gang War period, where old values met modern ferocity.

Yakuza Expansion and Gang Wars

As gangs grew and consolidated locally in the post-war period, they diversified both in their profit rackets and in their controlled territories. It is at this point that gang wars truly became national, as Kansai and Kantô area yakuza grew to monolithic sizes, they jockeyed for position in Japan's 47 prefectures. So powerful were these gangs and so violent their engagements that it did not take long to warrant government attention toward crime while weakening the *kuromaku* order.

Founded before the war as a small, traditional yakuza outfit, the Yamaguchi-gumi, still Japan's largest and most powerful yakuza group, began its rise to power in 1946, when a young Kazuo Taoka, nicknamed "The Bear," inherited the gang from its founding *oyabun*, who died of natural causes in 1946. With only 25 *kobun* at first, the Yamaguchi-gumi used tightly structured organization as well as unconventional violence to dominate the greater Osaka bay area. Taoka began by consolidating control over his hometown, Kobe, through an alliance with a local *bakuto* gang, the Honda-kai. But, Taoka's ambitions were unquenched and in a bloody gang war the Yamaguchi-gumi *oyabun* absorbed his former ally's gang. Using guerrilla tactics, Taoka gained control over two other gangs, including the powerful Osaka

¹¹⁶ The gangs themselves grew. Whereas before the war, a gang would have at most 50 *kobun*, later gangs held numbers closer to 3,000 *kobun*. In 1963, the Tokyo Metropolitan Police estimated a total of 184,000 individuals in over 5,200 families and sub-families, a personnel list lengthier than the entire NPA and JSDF staff's (Kaplan & Dubro 74).

Korean gang, the Meiyu-kai. He expanded his docks operations, taking interest in 14 different cargo transport companies, and even starting a successful show business talent agency, pushing Osaka area performers to national recognition. By 1965, Taoka was grossing \$17,000,000 a year and controlled 343 gangs; by the end of the decade, he had 10,000 *kobun*.¹¹⁷

Meanwhile, in the Kantô area, Kakuji Inagawa and his Kokusei-kai gang began expanding their territory in Tokyo Bay. While Inagawa's gang specialized in black markets in Yokohama, his onetime mentor, *oyabun* Masajiro Tsuruoka, called for his assistance in dealing with Chinese and Korean gangs in the nearby hot spring resort of Atami. Using a small force of ruthless *gurentai*, Inagawa displayed a legendary lack of restraint in driving away the non-Japanese within the area. Soon after expanding into card and casino gambling industries in these areas and Shimizu, Inagawa proceeded to make inroads into nearby Tokyo, as well as far away locales like the northern island of Hokaido.¹¹⁸

Another distinguishing characteristic of this new era of violence was its main device, the gun. With the gun's supplementation of the sword as the preferred yakuza weapon, collateral damage had never been greater. Even Hiroshima, a locale that reinvented itself as a "city of peace" in the postwar period, became the ground for several gang wars and proxy gang wars, as described in the memoirs of Kizo Mino, a prominent *oyabun* in the area, and in subsequent books and films on the subject, *Battles Without Honor or Humanity (Jingi naki tatakai)*. The *Mainichi Shinbun* also took a hand in documenting the situation, releasing a fourteen-part series that documents yakuza violence. The expose was truly a signifier of the severity of the situation. For the first time in the postwar era, the Japanese media critically responds to

¹¹⁷ Kaplan, 75.

¹¹⁸ Kaplan & Dubro, 76.

yakuza violence rather than yield to intimidation. In an era where life was getting easier for the majority of the Japanese population, such public acts of violence were becoming less socially acceptable and ultimately detrimental to their public perception.

Political authorities, already unhappy with the blatant violence of the yakuza, needed little goading to reign in the gangs. Yet they received such impetus in December 1963 when a leaflet was sent out to all national LDP legislators, warning Diet members to end petty infighting and create a united front against communism and leftist influences.¹¹⁹ While in itself, this document is not unique, the identities of the signatories were the seven most powerful *oyabun* in the Kantô area. These men had been united by none other than Yoshio Kodama. Although originally hoping to create a national, all-yakuza federation, Kodama instead formed the all Kantô yakuza federation, or Kantô-kai, due to the reluctance of Yamaguchi-gumi boss Taoka. This group comprised 13,000 gangsters from seven major Kantô area gangs, headed by Kakuji Inagawa. Paranoid over the liberalism witnessed within the population during the Ampô protests, some of these *oyabun* believed they were performing their patriotic duties. Inagawa is quoted, “We gamblers cannot walk in broad daylight. But if we unite and become a wall to stop communism we can be of service to the nation.”¹²⁰ The reference to daylight alludes to a chivalrous yakuza belief claiming that gangsters walk in the shade so the public can have the light. Regardless of his sentiments, such a claim was completely at odds with the unconcealed violence in the streets of Japan. This was not lost on legislatures who, for the first time, took measures against the powerful developing yakuza syndicates ending nearly twenty years of yakuza uninterrupted privilege from the state.

¹¹⁹ Szymkowick & Steinhoff, 271.

¹²⁰ Kaplan, David. *Yakuza: Japan's Criminal Underworld*, 76.

However, the First Summit Strategy, the 1963 police countermeasures against increasing yakuza violence, did little but strengthen the larger syndicates. Police cracked down on the traditional yakuza enterprises, such as gambling and extortion, which were the lifeblood of small to medium-sized organizations. Larger syndicates had already been diversifying their sources of income, coupling illegal activity with more legal ventures. Moreover, by this point, gang bosses had instituted a system of *jonokin*, where subordinates would pay superiors monthly annual income, insulating the syndicate elite from any actual illegal activity. Thus, larger groups strengthened their positions, absorbing the members and territories of groups incapable of weathering police harassment. The First Summit Strategy was also the catalyst behind a very popular yakuza strategy that remains today: classification of syndicates as right wing political parties. Under this designation, yakuza would not be taxed nor targeted under any anti-gang laws. Now, Yakuza could also give a pretext for the assembly of many bosses under investigation – previously, such gatherings would become difficult due to police surveillance. It also fostered stronger ties between yakuza and their political liaisons, the *kuromaku*. Finally, taking the guise of political parties presented gangs with another means of income, extorted political donations. Protection money would often be paid to syndicates as either rally funds or payment for advertisements in yakuza published political journals. Ironically, the state's first public move against the yakuza in more than two decades after the war only strengthened their relationship, forcing the yakuza to be further dependent upon the state. In a way, the state here acts as the *oyabun*, invoking the summit strategy as *yubitsume*, punishing the *kobun* while strengthening a *kobun's* loyalty to the gang.

With police countermeasures in check, yakuza violence persisted among the larger syndicates. In particular, the Yamaguchi-gumi saw the formation of the Kantô-kai as a direct challenge to their power and met it head-on. In 1964, Taoka sends men to Yokohama to

challenge the deterrent of the Kantô-kai, leading to open fighting in the streets of Yokohama known as the Grand Palace Incident.¹²¹ Quick to assuage the tension so the situation, Kodama organizes an alliance between Taoka and Korean Tokyo gang boss Hisayuki Machii. This gambit backfired, too, giving Taoka a partner with whom to accelerate his expansion into the Kantô region. Taoka then began a relationship with Seigen Tanaka, a powerful rival of Kodama's and the two devised a plot, creating a false charity through which they could enter the Kantô market and circumvent Kantô-kai.¹²² While planning a counter offensive, Inagawa was in fact arrested; this time the state would not risk another blood bath or poor publicity that might result. In fact, the state's decision to remove Inagawa from the conflict, in an attempt to diffuse it, brought about an event that ensured peace for almost twenty years. While in prison, Inagawa was treated with respect and honor by Yamaguchi-gumi members under direct orders from Taoka. So moved was Inagawa, he decided to form an alliance with the Yamaguchi-gumi on, leading to a veritable Pax-Yamaguchi-gumi throughout yakuza society. The Yamaguchi-Inagawa combine now had control or alliances in all but four of Japan's prefectures. While Kodama's initial attempt at mediation led to hostilities, it ultimately worked out in his favor. The yakuza and their favorite *kuromaku* Yoshio Kodama seemed to have the world for their oyster, but little did they know that the end of Kodama and the *kuromaku* era quickly approached.

¹²¹ Kaplan, David. *Yakuza: Japan's Criminal Underworld*, 80.

¹²² They formed the League for Stamping Out Drug Trafficking; Taoka claiming that drug use had hurt the lives of many of his men during occupation and beyond. Taoka and Machii, joined by such morally minded groups as the administration of Rikkyo University and the Kansai Housewives Association, took to the streets, creating a national campaign of drug prevention. In October 1963, Taoka sent hundreds of Yamaguchi-gumi members to Tokyo in order to collect signatures for a petition against drugs, secretly establishing foot holds in the *Kantô* area. Inagawa gang members, as well as the rest of Japan, viewed these actions suspiciously yet were unable to impede the progress of the Yamaguchi-gumi (Kaplan & Dubro 80).

The End of the *Kuromaku*

By this point, much of Japan's political world was shrouded in dark, political corruption called *kuroi kiri*, or black mist.¹²³ The machinations of leading politicians, prominent gangsters, and the glue that bound them, the *kuromaku*, permeated across the economic and political landscape of Japan. It would take the involvement of a corrupt US aero-space corporation, the US government, and the international media to provoke accountability among Japan's elite. This would come in what would be known as the Lockheed scandal of 1976.

The Lockheed Corporation sought to sell its F-104 Starfighter to Japan in 1957, later their TriStar passenger planes and P-3C Orion antisubmarine planes and under their public relations expert, Taro Fukuda, established a relationship with Yoshio Kodama, a former cellmate. Lockheed's representative in Japan, Kenneth Hull, enlisted Kodama's assistance with lobbying politicians. Using such key figures in his yakuza-politician relationship such as leading Diet member Bamboku Ohno, LDP Vice President Ichiro Kono, and the Prime Minister Nobosuke Kishi, Kodama successfully lobbied the Japanese defense agency, while blackmailing a CEO, orchestrating the takeover of Japan's second largest airline, All Nippon Air. For his troubles, Kodama received tens of millions of dollars.¹²⁴

At a summit meeting between President Richard Nixon and then Prime Minister Kakuei Tanaka, Tanaka promised Nixon to buy \$320,000,000 worth of civil aircraft to take pressure of the US's trade deficit. Within days of this meeting, Kodama was signing checks for as

¹²³ Ibid., 81.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 86.

much as \$3,000,000, much of which was allocated for various political bribes.¹²⁵ Some speculated that the CIA was directly involved in these deals, encouraging Lockheed to pay off Japanese politicians to strengthen the sympathetic LDP party. This has never been confirmed.¹²⁶

The details of the scandal came out by chance, as Kodama's good friend and major shareholder in ANA, Osano, used his Lockheed money to pay back a Las Vegas gambling debt. The large sums owed in Vegas drew the attention of the US government investigation agencies and eventually led to a Senate hearing where Lockheed CEO revealed all, leading to unprecedented media frenzy in Japan. This information, coming only months after Nixon's own resignation, became the Watergate of Japan and marks the moment when the politicians, *yakuza*, and *kuromaku* were to be finally put on trail.

The public, unable to tolerate the blatant corruption any longer, was out for *kuromaku* blood. Japanese investigators raided Kodama's house, seizing countless documents, while probing his tax records. Shortly after, Kodama suffered a stroke and was bedridden from then on. This did not stop protestors, both from the right and the left, who began regularly demonstrating outside of his Kodama's home. Many ultra-right groups sent letters demanding Kodama's suicide; meanwhile, rumors of a Yamaguchi-gumi assassination were commonplace. The most telling form of Kodama's public disapproval came from Mitsuyasu Maeno, a twenty-nine year old actor and former zealot supporter of Kodama. On March 23, 1976, clad in a *kamikaze* outfit, Maeno rented a plane, and, after circling Kodama's neighborhood three times, torpedoed his plane into Kodama's home, missing Kodama, who

¹²⁵ Ibid., 89.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 90.

lay in bed on the other side of the house.¹²⁷ Maeno's assassination attempt revealed the sentiments that had existed within the far right since the early '60s. By trying to kill Kodama in a rather *makoto* way, Maeno parodied the *kamikaze* in order to reconnect to earlier forms of nationalism and sacrifice, while punishing the man arguably responsible for betraying the ideals of Japanese conservatism and national identity.

The aftermath of the Lockheed scandal in Japan was mixed. All but one of the implicated politicians won their incumbent seats in government that year, though all were convicted of their accused crimes. Due to lengthy appeals, however, most would not serve jail time for over a decade¹²⁸ – Kodama would remain hospitalized until his death on January 17, 1984. His funeral was attended by a wide variety of former associates: yakuza, rightists, businessmen, and entertainers. Noticeably absent were his former politician friends, many of whom obviously saw the *kuromaku* as a political liability.

Corporate Prostitutes: Sex Tourism and the Consolidation of Corporate Culture

Though end of the *kuromaku* era was at hand, the black mist itself would never completely dissipate. The major syndicates would continue to expand throughout the '70s. By the end of the decade, membership of the seven largest gangs increased by 20% and membership of the Big Three increased by 40%. While the Second Summit Strategy was immediately successful, most *oyabun* received short sentences, leaving prison before 1974.¹²⁹ This provided a capable leadership infrastructure for the larger syndicates in their expansion and absorption of many remaining gangs hurt by police interference in the summit strategies. By the end of the decade, the number of independent gangs in Japan would drop by 30%.

¹²⁷ Kaplan, 94.

¹²⁸ Prime Minister Tanaka's case taking over twenty years to reach the Supreme Court of Japan. In fact, Tanaka would remain the most powerful man in Japanese politics throughout the 80s (Kaplan & Dubro 95).

¹²⁹ Hill, 49.

Subsequently, new territorial expansion and increased police pressure by the formation of yet another Summit Strategy (1975) forced the yakuza to, once again, adapt their business practices for a new era, testing the waters abroad, mirroring again a trend in Japanese corporate culture. Due to Hisayuki Machii's involvement in what would be known as the Kim Incident of 1973, yakuza began to make inroads into South Korea.¹³⁰ Korea became a safe haven for fugitive yakuza, as Manchuria had once been prior to the war. It became only natural to sell drugs and women in such an environment. Women, in particular, were a specialized trade in yakuza sponsored sex trips to the peninsula. Commercial jets arrived in Korea every day filled with hundreds of well-to-do Japanese men, booked on three-day sex and alcohol junkets. By the late 70's, over 650,000 Japanese citizens visited Korea, annually. In one survey by the Korean Ministry of Tourism, 80% of these individuals listed *kisaeng* parties as the most impressive aspect of Korean tourism.¹³¹ Like geisha, *kisaeng* once referred to professional entertainers of Korea; now its meaning is closer to that of a government registered prostitute. *Kisaeng* would operate out of brothels in every city and neighborhood of Korea. Two of the most massive *kisaeng* houses flanked either side of the Japanese embassy. *Kisaeng* were generally women from impoverished rural areas of Korea who were sold as minors on the black market for as little as \$200. These women would forever be seen as stigmatized figures in Korean society. Many pimps forced these women into drug addictions and violence against *kisaeng* was common.

As the Korean sex tourism industry spread, Japanese branched off into different locations, such as Thailand, Taiwan, and the Philippines. In 1979, the Immigration Bureau of Japan noted 94% of tourists to Korea, 91% of tourists to Taiwan, 84% tourists to the

¹³⁰ Kaplan & Dubro, 232.

¹³¹ Ibid., 234.

Philippines, and 79% of tourists to Thailand were male.¹³² The yakuza themselves did not create this industry; they did, however, become active organizers and eventual managers of the sex travel industry. They would organize and accompany the tours, create contacts with local pimps, and act as underworld tour guides for the Japanese, providing them with any illicit diversion necessary. As time went on, yakuza began establishing brothels, most designed primarily for Japanese clients.

The emphasis placed on corporate culture both within the yakuza and their new corporate patrons revealed the profitability in shareholder meeting and with it, the birth of the *sokaiya*. Though this translates to “board meeting specialists,” they in fact are synonymous with corporate blackmailers and rabble rousers.¹³³ Until a provision made in 1982, these extortionists would buy one share of stock in a company and use it as justification to speak at board meetings. At which point, *sokaiya* would threaten to reveal sensitive information concerning the corporation’s financial status, misappropriation of funds, or embarrassing personal information concerning management. Poor business disclosure and transparency, lack of government oversight, and lack of accountability in corporate bureaucracies make the Japanese corporate world a particularly suited arena for such extortion. Another explanation for the efficacy of the *sokaiya* in Japan is a Japanese disposition to private conflict resolution. Most decisions in Japanese companies are made behind closed doors; shareholder meetings are viewed as a formality, expected not to last beyond a few minutes.¹³⁴ When *sokaiya* threaten the harmony and the trust shareholders have in the company bureaucracy, it becomes more expedient to pay such individuals off. Sometimes, *sokaiya* would be used by corporations in an attempt to fight fire with fire, using

¹³² Ibid., 235.

¹³³ In fact, very similar to the actions performed by the *ingaidan*.

¹³⁴ Hill, 126.

sokaiya to quell criticism of company policy and management. This creates a distinction between *yoto-sokaiya* (insider or protector *sokaiya*) and *yato-sokaiya* (outsider or aggressor *sokaiya*).

Though not necessarily synonymous, the *yakuza* and *sokaiya* often work together: the role of *yakuza* often functions to protect and mediate on behalf of the *sokaiya*. Conversely, throughout the '70s, many *yakuza* would send members to traditional *sokaiya* groups as apprentices. The rapid economic growth of the '60s led to more publicly traded companies in Japan, giving both common *yakuza* and non-affiliating *sokaiya* new targets every year. By 1973, police estimated a total of 1,763 active *sokaiya*; within ten years, this number would jump to 6,783, a 285% increase.¹³⁵ The *sokaiya* represent the completion of the *yakuza*'s transition. Originally outcasts, *yakuza* would develop into "men of influence" in rural and local communities by providing a much demanded service, then later, becoming "men of influence" in the political sense through championing the cause of nationalism—meanwhile, always enjoying a privileged place in the *kuromaku*-politician-*yakuza* relationship. Finally, with the end of the *kuromaku* era, the *yakuza*'s political ties could no longer be so overt; instead, upon entering the 1980s, the *yakuza* adapted to Japan's bubble economy, as active participants. Yet, the *sokaiya* present a deviation from the *yakuza* as service representatives; while the *ingaidan* would harass politicians in a similar manner, they were paid by their own political parties as a "service fee," rather than attempting to extort money directly from the victim. Such trends would prove very profitable, yet very damaging to *yakuza* public image.

Though not as public as they were in the Kodama era, state sponsorship of organized crime would continue to some extent until the present day. The public role *yakuza* themselves play in society contributes to their social acceptance. *Yakuza* offices and member

¹³⁵ Ibid., 125.

directories are public property, their flamboyant dress and gang pins are immediate signifiers of their identity. Their political ties themselves are hardly breakable. In rural areas, yakuza are often the local LDP campaign chiefs; in metropolitan areas they act as bodyguards, campaign workers, and fundraisers, using their special brand of coercion to make acceptable campaign quotas. Yet, it can be startling to hear claims of Japan's low crime rate when a former Prime Minister and Education Minister guarantee bail for a senior Yamaguchi-gumi captain.¹³⁶

However, regardless of how pervasive yakuza political ties remained during the 1980s, the direct ties between yakuza and politicians were visibly fading. Still, a new source of legitimization would present itself to the already commercializing yakuza, the corporate world. The yakuza and the Japanese economy were about to enter their most prosperous period, what would later be known as the Bubble era. In 1985, in order to curb Japanese protectionist trade policies, the G-7 nations agreed to increase the value of the yen to other leading currencies, thereby doubling its value to the dollar. Almost overnight, Japanese companies gained unprecedented buying power. This currency valuation was contemporary with generous interest rate cuts by Japan's central bank, marrying buying power with near limitless credit. Borrowed money stoked the flames of the economy, inflating real estate and market prices to inflated prices. As Japan's longest known gamblers, the yakuza thrived in the speculative markets of this bubble. The burgeoning real estate industry created new opportunities for yakuza both as traders of violence and in more legitimate forms of entrepreneurial activities. The profiteering ethos of the period soon set corporate interests above national and civic concerns; threats and violence against common citizens became a common norm in crimes that came to generally be known as *minbo*, the predatory extortion

¹³⁶ Ibid., 99.

of common people. Meanwhile, the growing generational gap within organized crime was taking visible effect and leading to extreme intra-gang and inter-gang warfare during the era.

The actions taken both by the state and the international community spurred valuation in the Japanese real estate industry, and organized crime found it necessary to the growing ambitions of corporate developers. The connection between yakuza and construction groups has been emphasized throughout this trend, yet it took the bubbling economy to see it reach its heights. In this period of land development, yakuza once again acted as labor brokers, subcontractors, and fixers. It is believed that by 1990, yakuza ran over 900 construction firms across Japan.¹³⁷ Outside of legitimate profit in the industry, yakuza frequently skimmed contracts and accepted kickbacks. In some cities, yakuza received 1% to 5% of the total value of construction contracts in which they were involved, while in Kyoto, local gangs were said to enforce a .8% portion of all construction projects in the city.¹³⁸ The Kansai region was particularly notorious for its yakuza construction ties, even such large scale projects as the Kansai International Airport construction falling within yakuza control, reaping tens of millions of dollars in profits.

The almost limitless credit of real estate developers soon placed yakuza in corporate service against the interests of everyday citizens in a new violent occupation dubbed *jiageya*, literally “one who raises land prices” or more accurately, “land shark”. While some *jiageya* bought land in and around a development site in order to consolidate land area, many simply used strong arm tactics to threaten local residents into selling-out to builders. As Japanese law makes it near impossible to evict tenants, even when a lease contract is proven to be violated, *jiageya* became necessary components of real estate development; once again the

¹³⁷ Kaplan, 180.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 180.

private solution presented by organized crime is more attractive than official venues quagmire in bureaucracy. Initially, yakuza may offer residents pay offs for their land; if this proves unsuccessful, more extreme actions are taken. Some yakuza take steps to make property ownership unbearable, creating a local gang presence or harassing citizens with loud noises and offensive smells. Others directly use violence and abductions to force locals off their land. While *jiageya* incidents first came to public attention in 1985, within five years they would become common occurrences with over 1,600 cases in Osaka alone.¹³⁹ With such services valued at 3% of total property value, *jiageya* became the Bubble era's single greatest source of yakuza income in both the Kansai and Kantô regions.¹⁴⁰

Profits and business experience gained from construction and *jiageya* ventures led to direct yakuza participation in the stock and real estate markets. Many yakuza families directly served corporate interests as greenmailers, the threat of corporate raiding by yakuza groups encouraging shareholders to buy yakuza controlled shares at a premium price. Other yakuza took to "ramping," a practice where credit-rich speculators would invest heavily in a low valued stock, launching its price to a value crest at which point speculators would sell off the entirety of their shares and profit from the stock's collapse. Yakuza were not hesitant in their participation in real estate, investing in a variety of properties and development projects, the most prevalent of which were golf courses. Yakuza also saw golf courses as valuable for their land value, their membership fees, and the prestige attached to golfing in Japan. Golf course ownership acted as a legitimizing agent for the yakuza. By 1992, the tiny island nation of Japan was home to 1,850 golf courses, with 300 under construction, and another 1,000

¹³⁹ Ibid., 178.

¹⁴⁰ Hill, 121.

scheduled for construction. One NPA official noted, “We suspect most golf developments are yakuza-tied in some way.”¹⁴¹

Though organized crime families concentrated on these profit venues, the Bubble era truly transformed the yakuza into full-scale entrepreneurs, opening criminal owned businesses of all kinds. Even such essential sectors as health and education were not safe from yakuza investment – gangs built and bought many private hospitals and schools. One FBI agent notes, “In many ways it’s easier for yakuza to operate hospitals. Nobody expects them to be in that kind of business.”¹⁴² To launder illegal money into legal investment, yakuza established *keigyon shatei*, “business brothers” or front companies. The scale of yakuza investments are exhibited by the proliferation of *keigyon shatei*. At the peak of the bubble, Tokyo police estimated 740 offices run by yakuza in the capital alone.¹⁴³ Some gangs were so removed from their legal sub-companies that many Bubble era clerks and employees did not know of the illicit nature of their employers. Yet *keigyon shatei*, too, had their directly criminal motivations. Entrepreneurship acted as a justification for gang expansion. The Yamaguchi-gumi used *keigyon shatei* to further break open the *Kantô* area market. The gang offered incentives to its more pioneering employees; \$10,000 to start business in the capital with \$1,500-\$2,000 in monthly payments. By 1990, the Yamaguchi-gumi boasted more than forty offices in Tokyo, building a power base of some 500 *kobun*.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴¹ Kaplan, 182.

¹⁴² Kattoulas, Velisarios. “The Yakuza Recession.” *Far Easter Economic Review*. Hong Kong. Jan 17, 2002. Vol. 165, Iss. 2; 15.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 185.

¹⁴⁴ This led to yet another full-scale inter-gang war between the Yamaguchi-gumi and such gangs as the Sumiyoshi-kai, which formed an eight gang alliance against the *Kantô* based intruders. In 1990, violence erupted in the suburb of Hachioji, where drive by shooting and gun battles took the lives of dozens and made streets so perilous, that authorities began offering maps to children showing “safe detours” to take to school (Kattoulas 184).

The Bubble era truly brought together the most varied group of participants in yakuza enterprises. Traditional yakuza, rightist extortionists, *sokaiya*, *jiageya*, computer hackers, stock speculators, and loan sharks all became permanent fixtures in such luxury locations as first-rate hotel lobbies and bars. Much to the anxiety of powerless local proprietors, criminals would discuss real estate, monetary economic policy, and extortion techniques in what became known as “lobby diplomacy.” The violence exhibited by yakuza toward everyday citizens of the Bubble era was legitimized by their acceptance in Japan’s corporate world. Their own conceptions of their social status had undergone drastic changes. Raisuke Miyawaki, former chief of the NPA’s organized crime unit noted, “The gangs no longer felt inferior. Once they saw the crooked activity of supposedly legitimate businessmen and bankers during the Bubble era, the yakuza began to discard their traditional sense of guilt.” Thus during the Bubble era, the yakuza primarily used corporate world success signifiers, rather than the grand state service projects of the *kuromaku* era, to project a non-subversive image.¹⁴⁵ Miyawaki’s “sense of guilt” would not be the only traditions discarded as the generational shift in yakuza members itself came to change the morals and ideologies of the crime syndicates.

By the end of the Bubble era, a new demographic of yakuza had accomplished unprecedented economic success. One 1988 conservative police figure estimates yakuza annual income at approximately \$10 billion, though more objective estimates put it between

¹⁴⁵ One should note that the Bubble era did not eliminate the conservative trappings of the Yakuza. Though particularly blatant instances of Yakuza state service dissipated, Yakuza remained the bodyguards, political organizers and fundraisers of many LDP politicians. Moreover, Yakuza still use rightist rhetoric and symbols as a means of legitimization and extortion to this day. Rather, the 80s brought the corporate legitimizing signifiers to equal importance to politically rooted symbols.

\$45 and \$70 billion.¹⁴⁶ The economic power and generational demographic change resulted in a transformation of yakuza self perception and a more exploitative approach to relations with the general public. Yet the economic successes of the period were ultimately built on loans, which when militantly reinvested in the economy, created a false market value – bubble market set to burst. In the coming recession, yakuza would resort to greater public violence while the fall of communism in the USSR would minimize the importance of their role as the enemies of dangerous leftist thought, casting them in a parasitic light that alienated the yakuza from society in a moderate, yet unprecedented, way.

Yakuza Recession and the Lost Decade

In the post-Bubble era, increased public violence as well as compounding yakuza debt turned some public and governmental opinion against the yakuza. When the Nikkei underwent a correction in 1990, stock prices plummeted, and the index lost nearly half of its value in nine months.¹⁴⁷ Real estate prices soon followed, and the great corporate yakuza syndicates were left holding comparably worthless stock and property. This would have mixed effects on yakuza; the syndicates will prove themselves experts in adaptation. Regardless, the sum of bad yakuza debt circulating within the Japanese economy would have lasting consequences, leading to what is commonly called the Yakuza Recession.

During the peak of the Bubble, Yakuza organization borrowed heavily from banks, receiving billions of dollars in loans on little or no collateral. Susumu Ishii, the Bubble era *oyabun* of the Inagawa-kai, personally received \$2.3 billion in loans, which, by 1991, had evaporated among falling stock and land prices in what became known as the Sagawa

¹⁴⁶ Kaplan, 193.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 193.

Scandal.^{148,149} The Inagawa-kai was not unique in its accrual of risky debt. While the exact sum of debt accumulated during the collapse of the bubble is still unproven, the Finance Ministry released a report in 1999 claiming the total to be in the vicinity of \$720 billion dollars, while in 2001 American investment bank Goldman Sachs reported a figure closer to \$2.1 trillion.¹⁵⁰ Former head of the NPA's organized crime division, Raisuke Miyawaki, claims, "up to 50% of bad debts held by Japanese banks could be impossible to recover as they involve organized crime and corrupt politicians."¹⁵¹ Even if one were to take the somewhat more conservative bank analysts' estimate of yakuza debt, 40%, out of the Ministry of Finance's total debt sum, it would dwarf the combined GDPs of Singapore and Switzerland.¹⁵²

The Yakuza Recession and the subsequent violence of the early '90s were both caused, in part, by the vehement opposition of yakuza syndicates to repay their outstanding debts. In this situation, the yakuza, once again, displayed their ability to adapt to changing economic situations with the creation of yet another "specialist," the *songiriya*, or "loss-cutting specialist."¹⁵³ These individuals negotiated property debt resolution through harassment and intimidation. One favorite tactic of the *songiriya* involved using the threat of force to scare away other buyers, thus insuring the lowest prices for seized property. In this way, much of

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 194.

¹⁴⁹ It is important to note that the Sagawa scandal involved some of Japan's most prominent LDP politicians, including LDP kingmaker and Vice President Kanemaru Shin and Prime Minister Takeshita Noboru. During the course of the Sagawa Scandal, Kanemaru invited Ishii to celebratory dinner, during which both offered the other the place of honor at the table (Hill, 180). Though direct yakuza state service may have been less visibly prominent, service to direct politicians and preferred treatment at the hands of politicians never completely lost its fashion.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 202.

¹⁵¹ Kattoulas, 13.

¹⁵² Ibid., 202.

¹⁵³ Hill, 195.

the debt-ridden Yakuza property remained in their hands. Another popular new form of extortion was *kyoubai bongai*, or “auction obstruction,” which was the bankruptcy auctions could be prevented, allowing the yakuza, or the debtor party they represent, to hold on to their repossessions.

In terms of cash debt resolution, yakuza organizations simply resorted to open violence. During the early ‘90s, the yakuza unleashed a crime wave against banks and bank representatives. Sumitomo Bank, one of Japan’s biggest lenders, held \$10 billion dollars of “bad” debt. In a three-month period in 1993, twenty-two violent incidents ranging from shootings to fire bombings befell employees of the corporation. None of the crimes were solved.¹⁵⁴ The next year, the member of the bank’s board of directors and head of operations in Nagoya was executed while answering the door.¹⁵⁵ Some executives, like Fuji Film’s general affairs chief Juntarô Suzuki, sought to break ties with yakuza, and in 1991 formally ended *sokaiya* payments. After living through three years of constant harassment, Suzuki was knifed to death outside his home by two yakuza, one Yamaguchi-gumi member.¹⁵⁶ Government officials were not spared from the violence associated bad debt.

In fact, in some cases, yakuza violence had no particular designated victims, rather, was a nihilistic response to the economic pressures of the recession. In 1994, a group of Kitakyushu yakuza went on 13 separate shooting sprees in one month, firing upon various businesses for no apparent reason. Kaplan notes that, at times, it seemed as if the gangs had

¹⁵⁴ Hill, 188.

¹⁵⁵ The death of Hatanaka Kazufumi is more suspect than it first appears. Yamada Hitoshi, head of Japan’s Bar Association’s anti-gang committee claims that Sumitomo had pitted yakuza gangs against each other in order to collect bad debt, leading to the deaths of two prominent *oyabun*. Kazufumi was particularly aggressive in his debt collecting policy, becoming the target of crime syndicates who feared they may be next (Hill 189).

¹⁵⁶ Kaplan, 200.

declared war upon Japanese society itself.¹⁵⁷ Whether this is true or not, these actions are a far cry from the code of chivalry at the center of yakuza culture. Economics and crime became so conflated that the code had lost all its meaning.

Half Measures and Counter Measures: the Police's Association and Response to Yakuza Violence

The increasing reliance by yakuza on civilian harassment through *minbo* crimes, the horrifying effects of greater yakuza involvement in the economy, and escalation of public violence demonstrated by organized crime brought their acceptance within society to an all-time low. Simultaneously, years of economic prosperity and the fall of the Soviet Union diminished the urgency of combating labor unrest and liberalism, possibly discrediting the yakuza's most valued service to the state. In the face of this, police reaction seemed necessary. Yet, outside of the two Summit Strategies, there was little precedent of police intervention in yakuza affairs; the police had been complicit in the rise of the yakuza, for by taking little action against organized crime, the police had legitimized its existence for over a century.

One obstacle to police response was and remains the corruption within Japanese policing organizations. In 1982, a woman brought an assault complaint against her boyfriend, a former sergeant in the Osaka Police Department. As the investigation continued, a connection between the suspect and a local gambling group developed. The suspect had been using contacts within Osaka's police department to tip-off gamblers of impending raids. More illicit connections quickly became apparent. When the case was brought before the court in November of 1982, a senior policeman and the manager of a pachinko parlor were found guilty. The next day, a veteran police sergeant with no direct ties

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

to the case committed suicide, leaving a note proclaiming his innocence; this led to even more arrests the following week. On November 12, 1982, Tadashi Sugihara, former chief of the Osaka police and current president of the National Police Academy, hung himself without reason. Those closest to him mentioned only that he had been making several late night telephone calls to Osaka the night before.¹⁵⁸ The Osaka Police Scandal sparked several other investigations across Japan that uncovered direct connections between police agents and yakuza. The vice chief of Kobe's police was found guilty of accepting thousands of dollars at a time for information on raids against yakuza, passing the profits down to his subordinates for his silence, and introducing members of rival departments to his yakuza contacts.¹⁵⁹ It should be noted that corruption within police organizations is still very much prevalent. Senior police officials frequently dine and play golf with known yakuza brass. Some even recommend yakuza organizations over the police for conflict resolution. In 1999, the prefectural police of Kanagawa were directly connected to extortion, drugs, and sexual harassment.¹⁶⁰ Police raids are useless gestures staged for the sake of publicity: anthropologist Walter Ames noted that the raids are usually ritual in nature; most criminals are released in a matter of days based on a lack of evidence and receive only minor penalties. Furthermore, most yakuza are tipped-off in advance, leaving them time to hide evidence and senior members. Almost mockingly, yakuza leave a few guns at the scene to justify the raid.¹⁶¹ In one 1995 case, three police officers are reported to have bought guns for local yakuza in order to confiscate later.¹⁶²

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 145. It also should be noted that Sugihara was being groomed for the position of Justice Minister before his suicide.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 147.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 147.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 149.

¹⁶² Ibid., 149.

Another obstacle to the honest policing of yakuza is the sympathy for yakuza conservatism and tradition among many police officers. The police recruitment process itself investigates candidates for leftist ties. Many police officials admire the yakuza code of chivalry through *giri/ninjō* in addition to yakuza power dynamics under *the oyabun/koibun* system. One senior NPA narcotics control officer likens the yakuza to the very spirit of being Japanese: “To understand the heart of the Japanese people, you must understand the yakuza and *ninkyō* (chivalry). Not all yakuza are bad...I have friends who are yakuza – poor yakuza, and they are honorable, chivalrous people. They show the true spirit of the Japanese people.”¹⁶³ A notable freelance journalist, Yu Terasawa, also once mentioned to me that there is little difference between yakuza and police recruit demographics; both seek young, conservative minded men who enjoy the violence associated with their jobs.¹⁶⁴

Yet, perhaps the greatest factor keeping police from prosecuting yakuza immediately after the collapse of the economic bubble was the lack of investigatory and persecuting power within the judicial system. One reporter once joked with a senior NPA official, stating, “Japan has a nineteenth-century police force trying to fight twenty-first century crime.” The official responded, “No, we have a 1940’s police force trying to fight 1990’s crime.”¹⁶⁵ No matter in which temporal domain you wish to place them, the NPA was ill-equipped to combat organized crime seriously. Until the collapse of the bubble, no laws

¹⁶³ Ibid., 150.

¹⁶⁴ Yu Terasawa is one of few Japanese freelance journalists currently fighting corruption. His investigatory journalism has led to the arrest of many corrupt police officials. His articles became fodder for Gen Takahashi *Confessions of a Dog*, a cinematic open criticism of police corruption, which had been censored from the Japanese market by authorities for years. I had the pleasure of meeting both individuals at a screening of the film at New York’s Japan Society this last summer, where I was employed partially as a hospitality service representative for visiting filmmakers and guests. Terasawa is currently engaged in a lawsuit against the Japanese courts themselves.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 20.

concerning money laundering or racketeering existed; police lacked the authority to conduct electronic surveillance or staged deliveries and had no national criminal database, and prosecutors could neither authorize undercover operations nor offer immunity to witnesses. US and UN pressure finally saw the enactment of a law targeting money laundering in 1991, yet even this measure lacked force. Penalties from this law were fairly weak and the law only concerning itself with drug money. Moreover, the law itself was rarely enforced, with only \$7 million seized over a six-year period.¹⁶⁶

While the police, as representatives of the state, seemed unwilling or unable to take any definite, citizens had had enough and began approaching yakuza confrontations in a self-reliant matter. Lawsuits and demonstrations against yakuza became common in the post-Bubble era. Between 1981 and 1991, requests for police intervention against yakuza doubled, with nearly 21,000 requests in 1991.¹⁶⁷ Residents began to join together to shut down many yakuza offices. Some citizens used spotlights and cameras to privately track yakuza activity.

Within this context, was finally born the *bôtaihô*, “violent group countermeasures law. Passed in May 1991, the *bôtaihô* began a government attack on the ambiguous nature of much of yakuza crime and even on the ambiguous nature of yakuza as a whole which required, for the first time in Japan’s history, a formal definition of the yakuza. To combat the vague nature of yakuza crime, the law itself was fairly vague. The law enabled the

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 207. Controlling organized crime is, in itself, a difficult task. Law enforcement is forced to work within the framework of the law, while criminals have no such scruples, a struggle where one side is forced to embrace humanistic values against autocratic enemies. Moreover, the NPA cannot seriously persecute organized crime while it remains in bed with politicians. Intimidation by organized crime limits its reporting, as well as the equally illicit activities of many of the yakuza’s victims. Much of the time, organized crime relies on its “brand,” using its harsh reputation more often than actual violence and direct threats. Increased police measures against organized crime lead to adaptation; gangs act as viruses to police vaccines, mutating to fit contemporary countermeasures.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 209.

formation of Public Safety Commissions who were tasked with designated groups as *bōryokudan*, or violent organizations.¹⁶⁸ Specifically, it defined these as “a group of which there is a high risk that its members (including members of its component groups) will collectively or routinely promote illegal violent behavior,” while such behavior was defined as “illegal acts which meets the criteria of the Public Safety Commission.”¹⁶⁹ In practice, a *bōryokudan* must meet three conditions (i) members of the organization make use of the organizations reputation or influence to gain financial advantage; (ii) a certain proportion of members must have criminal records; and that (iii) these organizations have hierarchical structures.¹⁷⁰ These designations essentially gave the NPA power to prosecute *minbo* where the offender uses his gang’s notoriety in lieu of direct threats and violence. Also, the law specifically addresses several kinds of extortions, illegalizing such acts as land sharking and loan sharking.¹⁷¹ The fact that groups are responsible for the actions of sub-groups is essential when the most violent offenders are conglomerations or confederations of gangs, rather than self-managing entities. Finally, the focus on organizations with hierarchical natures is a direct attack on the *oyabun-kobun* system by specifically differentiating yakuza from other criminals. At last, Japan had defined the yakuza and the definition was not flattering.

The yakuza problem has always existed in Japan, yet prior to the post Bubble era, the yakuza had always served a higher purpose, whether real or constructed. During the Edo period, the yakuza served as a source of diversion in the form of the *bakuto* as well as local

¹⁶⁸ Ironically the same name given to the violent nationalist groups that contributed to the spread of fascism and the glorification of yakuza culture in the prewar period. Reusing the word in a legal, negative context acts as parody and clearly demonstrates the dynamic nature of yakuza-state-public relations.

¹⁶⁹ Hill., 158.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 159.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 160.

labor and market organizers. Within their local communities, yakuza held positions of influence, but neither above the law nor public opinion, as the pursuit and capture of Chūji proves.

From the naissance of Japan's modern era, the yakuza used their propensity for violence both as a tool of the state by forming local militia on behalf of Imperial forces during the Boshin War and becoming leaders in several agrarian uprisings in the 1880s, later punished for demanding democratic rights through the anti-gambling law imposed upon them and attacked verbally in the contemporary media. Nevertheless, as parliamentary politics developed, the yakuza found their niche: using violence or the mere threat of violence as political voice. This would develop into the *ingaidan* common in prewar party politics that led to the Genyōsha. Serving the state both domestically in strike breaks and as *sōshi*, the yakuza would travel to the colonies, serving the nation similarly by employing violence and criminal practices (such as drug peddling) for the benefit of the nation and at the expense of its colonial subjects. As more and more yakuza formed violent nationalist groups, the moral codes that they adopted from the samurai at the end of the Edo period, came to justify their right to violence and their claim to represent Japanese culture.

Rather than shake the status quo during occupation, the US, as represented by SCAP, treated the yakuza and their conservative politician masters in a favorable light, attempting to combat communism, allowing them to reclaim their positions of privilege, and stifle democracy once more. But, in the postwar era, both the yakuza and the corrupt politicians they interact with benefited from the presence of key intermediary figures called *kuromaku*, the most famous of which was Yoshio Kodama. By working together, all three links in the *kuroi kiri* chain were able to form the Liberal Democratic Party, which has nearly monopolized political power since the end of occupation. For nearly twenty years, this

corrupt clique was able to mutually profit from each other at the expense of democracy and the nation's liberal interests. However, even conservative elements eventually saw through the black curtain and the hypocrisy of the yakuza and politicians corruption became evident. While the yakuza grew greedier and more violent fighting bloody expansionist wars that negatively affected the citizens they claim to protect and serve, the public finally exposed the system in Japan's own Watergate, the Lockheed scandal, only the *kuromaku* king, Kodama, took the fall, thus ending the period where yakuza could openly socialize with politicians without anyone taking notice.

Still receiving privileged treatment from politicians in less blatant manners, the yakuza turned from the political world to the newly emerging corporate world, exporting their unique brand of crime first to Korea and then around the world. The structure of the yakuza changed here, too, transitioning from a family, to a syndicate, to the existence of full-fledged corporations during the Bubble era, when the yakuza accumulated and eventually lost a large portion of the nation's finances that sent Japan into a deflationary spiral has yet to recover from. While yakuza practices were becoming more predatory and less service-orientated, the post-Bubble era seems to have driven them down a path of greed and desperation, committing unmitigated acts of violence and robbery that seem to deny the existence of any code whatsoever. In response, the state has finally addressed the yakuza problem for the first time since defining them, at least on paper, as violent groups, without any cultural or national trappings and ostensibly as purely subversive.

Though, even in the face of the greed and violence the yakuza have demonstrated the failure of the Popular Rights Movement, can one claim they are subversive? Let us briefly examine the quotations that opened this chapter, the statement by the NPA agent and late Inagawa. While, perhaps, the police representative has ulterior motives, as often is the case in

yakuza film and in the history of police-yakuza relations, if we take those words at face-value, there exists something within the yakuza that no amount of evidence, lack of morality, or code can easily shake. With a group like the yakuza, which has enjoyed legitimization through various means, particularly in its relative independence from state control, and patronage in the field of conflict resolution, vilification, and extraction, it becomes unclear to say the least. Even in the films of such notably critical yakuza directors as Suzuki, Fukasaku, and Miike, the yakuza are granted redeeming qualities, perhaps even more sincere than the constructed, romanticized depictions in *ninkyō eiga*.

Branded as Ill: 1960s Ninkyō Eiga and the Parodic Films of Suzuki Seijun

Fade in to a modern pan-Asian decorated 1970s office. Jiro Kato (Kyosuke Machida) enters from the right, nonchalantly strolling in until reaching the center of the frame. Following a comfortable stop, Machida uses one hand to unbutton his slender brown suit jacket while extending the other in a casual bow. “Please receive my introduction.” An off screen speaker remarks, “First receive ours.” Machida replies, “Impossible, your position is higher.”¹⁷² The undiegetic speaker remains unfazed, “We will receive your words.” The director cuts to a profile medium shot of Machida; in the background hangs a framed Japanese flag hanging above a mantle displaying eastern antiques. “Thank you for the consideration. I am Kato Jiro. I was born in Osaka and belong to no clan.” The camera pans to the left, revealing three men, two behind a desk, one mirroring Machida’s extended hand and bow. Machida continues, “I am a free agent. I specialize in work of an international nature.”¹⁷³ The parallel man responds, “We are impressed by your politeness. I am Akira Masaru a humble soldier of the Tono Clan. We extend our best regards.” Both men relax their bows as Machida hands an introductory letter to the other speaker.

The film quoted above, starring such prominent (particularly within the yakuza genre) Japanese actors as Ken Takakura and Kyosuke Machida, was not produced by Toei or Nikkatsu studios. In fact, the presented scene is not from a Japanese film at all, rather, it

¹⁷² As the reader has been given the proper historical context in the previous, I would sooner translate the statement, *sore de ha jingi ni narimasen*, as “If this were the case, it wouldn’t be *jingi*.”

¹⁷³ This section too could use better translation. Machida’s words, “*sassokuno obikae arigatōgozaimasu. Oittsan gomenkōmurimasu. Watakushi umareba kansaidesu. Tōji jukyō ha kanda ni arimasu. Tosei ni tsukimashite ha Oyanashi no ippiki okamidesu. Seimei ha katō jirō to mōshimasu*,” are perhaps better translated as “Thank you for receiving my words. I’m sorry for my rudeness. I was born in the Kansai region. At the time my house was in Kanda. I’ve spent my criminal’s life as a lone wolf. My name is Katō Jirō. Thank you for your consideration.”

opens the late Sidney Polak's American production, *The Yakuza* (1974). Written by Leonard and Paul Schrader, the original script was based upon thorough research in both yakuza customs and films, later mostly scrapped by Polak, who had the script reedited by Hollywood "script doctor" Robert Towne.¹⁷⁴ Yet, amid revisions, which rendered the film, according to Toei producer and father of postwar yakuza film, Koji Shundô, a highly romanticized "boring melodrama," remained certain scenes of surprising accuracy. Unbeknownst to nearly all of its US audience, the above scene in *The Yakuza* is a rare depiction of the famous yakuza custom, *jingi*, formal greetings from the feudal era used as yakuza identity signifiers, which by the 1970s had almost fallen out of use.

Unfamiliar with yakuza history or earlier film conventions, the target US audience may not be able to appreciate the scene's parody of 1960s *ninkyô eiga*, a subgenre that truly popularized the yakuza on the screen and institutionalized the criminal society's representation of heroic national spirit. Toei Studio's *ninkyô eiga* was juxtaposed by the contemporaneous *mukokuseki akushon*, literally "borderless action," promoted by rival studio, Nikkatsu. Unlike *ninkyô eiga*, which were usually set in prewar urban contexts, borderless action films existed in fictionalized spaces reminiscent of modern urban life. Liberated from temporal restrictions, such directors as Suzuki Seijun were able to recontextualize the yakuza film, merging traditional *ninkyô eiga* themes with jazz, sex, and surrealism, while parodying the performative nature of the genre for the purpose of social criticism. Ostensibly subversive in his representation of the yakuza, Suzuki merely strips them of their constructed identity as champions of tradition, imbuing them instead with a modern "cool" aesthetic more appealing to the younger generation. Yet, just as historical context is necessary to analyze

¹⁷⁴ Schilling, Mark. *The Yakuza Movie Book: A Guide to Japanese Gangster Films*. New York: Stone Bridge, 2003. 307.

yakuza film, so too is a basic comprehension of the history and iconography of the genre itself. I will begin by giving a brief introduction to yakuza film and *ninkyō eiga*, before examining Suzuki's films, *Kanto Wanderer* (*Kantō mushuku*, 1963) and *Tokyo Drifter* (*Tōkyō nagaremono*, 1966) in respect to his parody of *ninkyō eiga*. One could easily notice their obvious similarity, the films' titles both broach on the yakuza theme of travel, a traditional subject in the yakuza world as well as the early yakuza related films of the 1930s.¹⁷⁵ Suzuki uses signature hyperstylistics and comic commentary to present two different methods of genre parody and studio criticism. In *Kanto Wanderer*, Suzuki presents parodies of *ninkyō eiga* by placing itself deep in the genre's conventions, making key deviations while stressing its performative nature through the traditional theater of kabuki. *Tokyo Drifter*, in contrast, is a drifting travel film set in a modern jazz context despite its absurd adherence to *ninkyō eiga*

***Makoto* Prototypes**

Until the thematic changes of the 1970's, yakuza films existed as vehicles of identity construction, employing feudal-era moral values to humanize and often glorify the criminal protagonists and to further perpetuate the self-created mythical history of the yakuza, which Suzuki would eventually parody. As a rule, films of this era focus more on socially and historically relevant iconography rather than originality; the films themselves are temporally bound to the morals of their respective decades as well as to those preceding, with narratives, themes, and even actors identical to their contemporaries.¹⁷⁶ These films construct yakuza protagonists in the *makoto* hero prototype, which as discussed in the introduction characterizes anachronistic fidelity to a moral code. With moral values taking precedent over realistic social commentary, characters and ideas are simultaneously

¹⁷⁵ Siniawer, 191.

¹⁷⁶ One could argue this is part of a greater traditional theatrical trend, one that extends to earlier forms of Japanese theater.

presented and judged as *good* or *bad*. Though the execution of the narrative and themes does change within the various genre subsets, the persistently formulaic nature of the films serves to mirror the strict ritualism of yakuza society, and, in turn, legitimize the yakuza as representatives of the prewar “Japanese spirit” addressed earlier. In the 1960s, however, directors would challenge these static forms of parody of earlier *gaman* (forbearance) films and break from convention by harnessing stylistically unorthodox techniques to entertain a new generation of filmgoers.

Most yakuza films prior to the 1970s can be characterized as *gaman eiga*, or literally, “films of forbearance,” thematically revolving around the traditional Japanese concepts of *giri*, *ninjō*, and *jingi*, explained earlier. *Giri* and *ninjō* had existed in other genres of Japanese film as a staple in both traditional samurai and *chanbara*, or sword fighting movies. Yet, while early yakuza films can be considered *chanbara*, they also interpret *giri/ninjō* through the context of *jingi* rather than samurai forms of moral codes. Indeed, it is through *jingi* that the *giri/ninjō* relationship has particular relevance to the yakuza protagonist and ultimately distinguishes yakuza film as its own genre. As this represents a distinct convention in yakuza film, it would become a main source of parody in later representations.

The static image in these films is based on a specific historical figure, the hero that initially codified yakuza morality and became the basis of future *makoto* parody—Kunisada Chûji. As discussed in the previous chapter, Chûji was a *bakuto oyabun* of mixed reputation from the Edo period. Yet, on screen, he is always depicted as a chivalrous young man so disgusted with corrupt authority that he chooses to live outside of it, becoming a yakuza.¹⁷⁷ In most of these narratives, Chûji leaves his life as a law-abiding citizen to join a yakuza family and bring down a corrupt local magistrate who is feared and hated by the people. This

¹⁷⁷ Schilling, Mark. *The Yakuza Movie Book A Guide to Japanese Gangster Films*. 21.

of course diverges from the historical account which credits murder and designation as *mushoku* for Chûji's transition into the yakuza world.¹⁷⁸ In such films, historical accuracy is marginalized in favor of constructing a morally steadfast cinematic hero. The most notable Chûji film was Itô Daisuke's *Chûji's Travel Diary (Chûji tabi niki, 1927)*, a trilogy chronicling the rise and fall of Chûji. While all three films differ in plot, the relationship between *giri* and *ninjô* serves to portray Chûji as ostracized from all parts of society, whether law-abiding or criminal; no matter the situation, *giri* to one's gang is presented as the dominant psychological force.¹⁷⁹ Eventually, Chûji falls sick and is captured, doomed to execution. It is worthwhile to note that the constructed narrative does not simply favor Chûji's civic contribution over his criminal activities, but completely ignores history, emphasizing a "lone wolf" quality over the more historic, positive image of "man of influence."¹⁸⁰ His initiation into the yakuza world is inspired by a personal moral code – a repudiation of disingenuous mainstream culture – while his inability to escape from yakuza society is determined by *giri* through *jingi*. His devotion to these codes of morality precludes him from true acceptance in either world: a man with strict morals is to be admired, yet has no place in the present. While this theme begins with Chûji, it extends through the 1960s, emerging as perhaps the most influential theme in yakuza film and a powerful signifier of the ambiguous place the yakuza inhabit in Japanese society.

As Chûji traveled into the world of sound in the 1930s, the focus of most yakuza-themed films transitioned to itinerant travelers, appearing in *matabi* films, literally "traveling

¹⁷⁸ Siniawer, 21.

¹⁷⁹ Nolletti, Arthur. *Reframing Japanese Cinema Authorship, Genre, History*. New York: Indiana UP, 1992. 168.

¹⁸⁰ Siniawer, 22.

everywhere.”¹⁸¹ The travel theme is especially important as it is the also my main topic of analysis when discussing Suzuki. In such traveler tales, Chûji (as well as other yakuza folk heroes) lead a poor yet exciting life, traveling hat-in-hand in search of new adventure. These sorts of films were even more in line with popular *chanbara* narratives, in which lone swordsmen traveled aimlessly in defense of the downtrodden.¹⁸² In one film, Inagaki’s *Yatoro’s Traveling Hat* (*Yataro gasa*, 1932), the protagonist sheds his prominent social position of personal retainer to the shogun to live the life of *matabi*, helping the common man along the way. Crisis stems from the hero’s inability to break the *giri* towards local gangs he joins amidst his journey. As the hero is in constant motion and conflict, he has no home or place outside the hearts of his saved victims and, of course, viewing audience.

Just as the yakuza themselves lost government support during the war, so too did yakuza film, as such heroes were deemed unacceptable in wartime society. The culmination of censorship following the end of occupation abolished restrictions upon the production of *jidai-geki* and depictions of feudal era heroes, becoming more popular than ever.¹⁸³ Yet, the folk heroes of cinema of the 1950s embodied the optimism kindled by economic and political development. Instead of the outcasts of prior decades, the yakuza of 1950s films were charismatic, noble figures who led by example and whose authority was rarely challenged. The paragon of the 1950s yakuza folk hero was none other than Jirocho of Shimizu, the Edo and Meiji period *oyabun* who was the prototype yakuza government collaborator. His image became popularized with the release of Makino Masahiro’s nine part

¹⁸¹ Noletti, 170.

¹⁸² Ian Buruma presents a particularly apt parallel, *The Bored Bannerman of the Shogun*, where the hero throws a stone in the air and sets off in the direction it lands. Buruma, Ian. *A Japanese Mirror: Heroes and Villains in Japanese Culture*. London: Phoenix, 2001. Print.

¹⁸³ Feudal era period pieces were banned by SCAP.

series, *The Adventures of Jirocho* (1952-1954, Toei Studios).¹⁸⁴ In this series, and in a variety of spin-offs and parallel productions, Jirocho is represented as a successful *oyabun*, with loyal *kobun* all actively living according to *jingi* through *giri* and *ninjô*. *Giri/ninjô* conflicts do not arise within the group, but rather, all conflict stems from villainous outside gangs, irreverent about the *jingi* Jirocho hold so dear. Yet, justice is no longer solely the protagonist's realm. Jirocho does not defend *giri* alone against an army of sword-wielding enemies; instead, conflict exists in the dichotomies between gang versus gang and good versus bad, resulting in victory for Jirocho and his *kobun* and a return to the status quo. The morals presented in the Jirocho stories are tools for the development of the powerful, modern nation-state: martial masculinity (presenting the value in reactionary militarism), paternalism (dictating strict obedience toward one's boss, father, or government), and fraternalism (the attractive presentation of military life).¹⁸⁵

The change in the approach to *giri/ninjô* as well as to the folk hero protagonist is generally attributed to the greater prosperity and optimism of the 1950s.¹⁸⁶ However, within this context, critics rarely give significance to the relationship between yakuza and the state. While the figure of Chûji actively defies government authority, Jirocho is an active supporter, serving the Meiji government and receiving his legitimized authority for his services during the civil war. During the 1950s, the beginnings of the *kuromaku* era, yakuza-state relations were themselves at an all-time high. One must not forget the example of Kimura Tokutaro, the justice minister who in the same year as the Jirocho series, attempted to form a 200,000-man yakuza army in the service of capitalism and the state. Featuring outlaws in support of the government was both in the interests of the LDP, ever-concerned with the threat of

¹⁸⁴ Schilling, 22.

¹⁸⁵ Thornton, S. A. *Japanese Period Film A Critical Analysis*. Jefferson: McFarland, 2007. 95.

¹⁸⁶ McDonald, 173.

communism, and of the growing number of yakuza families in the post-war period that continued to seek validation through support of state authority. This might be further researched in light of the fact that by the early 1950s the yakuza had begun to corner the entertainment industry of Japan. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Kazuo Taoka had created an Osaka-based talent agency in the 1950s and begun his involvement in the film industry, while Koji Shundô,¹⁸⁷ a regular gambler at the Goshima-gumi establishment and personal friend of its *oyabun* Fukujiro Ono, began producing at Toei Studios, and would eventually be responsible for the popularity of yakuza films in the next decade.¹⁸⁸

Another neglected explanation for the divergent trend in narrative in the '50's Jirocho films is the US's own influence. American representations of heroism greatly differ from the *makoto* tradition, in the words of yakuza director Fukasaku Kinji, "The American style of heroism has its own approach to action: The hero saves the people he loves while defeating the bad guys. In the traditional Japanese action films, the only choice of the hero is whether to die or go to prison. That leads to a very limited type of film..."¹⁸⁹ The protagonists of the Jirocho films live on after killing the "bad" rival gang, coincidentally similar to the American model. Further research could create a connection between Hollywood and Toei in the 50s.

Chivalry is Dead...At the End of the Film

The yakuza film's recontextualization in the 1960s would finally distinguish it as a separate genre onto itself, in the parodic *ninkyō eiga*. Due to their period settings, large-scale sword battles, and general lack of a *giri/ninjō* conflict, the 1950's Jirocho films are more closely associated with *chanbara* and samurai movies than the yakuza or *ninkyō* films that would follow. The Jirocho stories were contemporaneous with the golden age of the sword-

¹⁸⁷ While many yakuza claim Shundô was a yakuza, he would always deny it.

¹⁸⁸ Schilling, 26.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 50.

fighting genre, but by the end of the decade, a new golden age would emerge in the form of yakuza *ninkyō* (chivalry).¹⁹⁰ In an effort to keep films more interesting and accessible, Toei studios began producing yakuza films set in the 20th century, mostly in the Taishō (1912-1926) and Shōwa (1926-1989) periods. The new heroes of the 1960s *yakuza eiga* abandoned the countryside gambling houses of previous decades and much like their contemporaneous audiences, moved to the cities of Japan in times of growing economic prosperity and foreign influence. The characters of the 1960s took their cues from those popular in the time period that they portrayed. Thus, the heroes of films set in the '20s or '30s (but made in the '60s) closely resembled older yakuza figures like Chūji – characters as morally bound as they were anachronistic. This synthesis of contemporary issues with long-established plotlines and a more traditional concept of heroism marked a crucial step in the development of yakuza film, beginning its long tradition of parody. Yet, as I will discuss later, this form of parody differs from Suzuki's as it lacks comic overtones. *Ninkyō eiga* parody of prewar ideals marked the distance between yakuza representations in a venerating way, acting as an outlet for nostalgia.

One could make the argument that *ninkyō eiga* parodied the forms of yakuza society itself. Like yakuza society, *ninkyō eiga* had strict practices and rituals, demanding certain stars in specific roles, which were reproduced in various contexts to make hit after hit. While Hutcheon shies away from labeling the comparison between art and life parody, it is not content that is recontextualized, but form. According to Schrader, "*Yakuza-eiga* is probably the most restricted genre yet devised...the characters, conflicts, resolutions and themes are preset by genre convention."¹⁹¹ The significance placed on form over content in *ninkyō eiga*

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., 23.

¹⁹¹ Schrader, Paul. "Yakuza-eiga: a Primer." *Film Comment* 70 (1974): 1.

then perhaps parodies the ostensible prevalence of ritual and set conventions within the yakuza world. This is of course contrary to historical evidence which suggests a trend toward disregard for many rituals, and is yet another sign of film adaptations fashioning the general perception of the yakuza, in this case, the emphasis on a codified existence.

Instead, the 1960s continued to build the idea of yakuza morality. These films came to be epitomized by a specific emphasis upon the philosophy of *makoto*, demanding the hero's steadfast fidelity and his inevitable death. The yakuza, particularly the *ninkyō eiga* image of the yakuza, is perhaps the best modern example of the *makoto* hero. It is no coincidence that the movies of the 1960s were set in earlier, transitory times (just as the pre-war yakuza-themed films took place during the end of the feudal era). As I have mentioned, the yakuza have attempted to associate themselves with traditional culture and values for over a century. The use of the feudal *giri/ninjō* relationship borrowed from the samurai class of the past era, the use of tattoos exhibiting traditional Japanese historical and cultural motifs, and support of traditional institutions and power structures, have often cast a rather anachronistic light on the yakuza.

Yet, unlike the popular *makoto* figures before them, the actual yakuza of the postwar era did not leave their mark upon history with examples of tragic failure. Rather, they continued manipulating political connections and weak legislation to wield power as never before. Only the yakuza's close relationship with the film industry through producers and actors¹⁹² kept the content of *ninkyō eiga* along *makoto* lines. Real yakuza *ninkyō eiga* actors were particularly common, the most famous of which was Noburo Andô. A former yakuza, *oyabun*, and, at one point, the target of a nationwide manhunt, Noburo was convinced to join Toei as an

¹⁹² Many actors were former yakuza. One of the genre's most famous actors and inspirations is former yakuza, *oyabun*, and fugitive Noburo Ando.

actor by Shundô. As Noburo himself notes about Shundô, “He was a yakuza. They were all yakuza at that company...in Japanese, the only difference between a “yakuza” and “yakusha” (actor) is one...character.”¹⁹³ Moreover, yakuza oyabun would often sit in on screenings and demand to pre-approve the film’s content, in the spirit of “accuracy,” of course.¹⁹⁴ The prevalent involvement of the yakuza in the production world suggests an active role in the romanticized portrayal of criminal protagonists.

However, to portray yakuza figures as truly heroic to the public, the *ninkyô eiga* protagonist, in the tradition of his basis of parody, Chûji, despite fidelity to *jingi*, is doomed for failure or death. The protagonist’s values are depicted as being incompatible with the realities of the changing trends in gang life, that is, the loss of *jingi*. To maintain their interpretation of *jingi* (either through *giri* or *ninjô*), these heroes are willing to die for their morals. The rendering of a yakuza protagonist’s death must confront the fact that despite his chivalry, the *ninkyô eiga* hero is nonetheless a criminal at large, and his position in society remains problematic. His death, often a sacrificial act, conveniently removes him from Japanese society while atoning for the crimes he has committed throughout his life. Thus, perhaps there exists a dichotomy between the importance that society generally attributes to remembering the past and its willingness to forgive the past of the protagonist, who is deified for the traditions he lives by and the foregone era he represents.

An important aspect of *ninkyô eiga* parody is the genre’s star system. Reminiscent of Noh acting parody, Toei and other studios’ penchant for typecasting featured the same actors and

¹⁹³ Schilling, 121.

¹⁹⁴ Varese, Federico. *The Secret History of Japanese Cinema: The Yakuza Movies*. 2006. TS 22. University of Oxford, Oxford. University of Oxford Faculty of Law Research Paper Series. 16.

actresses playing identical roles in nearly every movie. Junko Fujiko,¹⁹⁵ for instance, had a monopoly on the confident, dignified, yet feminine love interests, while Takaura Ken played the noble, yet hot headed young Turk. Still, of all *ninkyō eiga* actors, Tsuruta Koji emerged as the quintessential *makoto* hero. In his own private life Tsuruta was somewhat of a *ninkyō* hero himself. During the war, Tsuruta served the Japanese navy as a kamikaze pilot,¹⁹⁶ though he was never given orders to fly.¹⁹⁷ In one interview Tsuruta stated words that could have been uttered by the *makoto* hero that he plays: “Be considerate, do your duty, keep your promises and respect your seniors. Know right from wrong and never cheat anyone.”¹⁹⁸ In his parallel singing career, Tsuruta further emphasized his personal embodiment of *makoto* with the his catch phrase lyrics, “You may think I’m an old fashioned guy.”¹⁹⁹ Such public display of *makoto* led Yukio Mishima, an ultra-nationalist author, yakuza film actor and fan to note, “He makes the beauty of *gaman* (forbearance) shine brightly.”²⁰⁰ Indeed, Tsuruta personified the Emperor’s call to “bear the unbearable” in the immediate postwar era. Male audiences admired his aloof melancholic facial expressions – a silent dignity behind the veil of a tough exterior that evoked fortitude in the face of great suffering.

Tsuruta starred in Toei’s early ‘60s *ninkyō* film, *Bakuto* (1964), an excellent example of the formulaic, anachronistic scenarios ubiquitous among the genre. Though set in the Meiji period, the recontextualized *Bakuto* addresses issues of modernization like those of the Shōwa and Taishō era films. Tsuruta plays Saburō Tachibana, a chivalrous yakuza in an age of development and conceded morality. When a local *oyabun* wishes to enter politics, he

¹⁹⁵ Daughter of Shundō Koji

¹⁹⁶ Kamikaze pilots are themselves excellent examples of *makoto* heroes. Tsuruta would later play ex-kamikaze pilots in the 1980s.

¹⁹⁷ Schilling, 147.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 148.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., 147.

²⁰⁰ Buruma, 177.

sacrifices the homes of several destitute yet noble common-folk in a business arrangement that favors an Osaka rail company. The *oyabun*, clad in three-piece suit and bowler hat stands in stark contrast to Tsuruta's own *oyabun*, an aging, kimono-wearing sage whose *jingi* and traditional gang cannot compete with the economically motivated upstarts. Though outraged by the erosion of values in the yakuza world, Tsuruta's character is kept in check by his *oyabun*. But when his *oyabun* dies, Tsuruta, fueled by a sense of moral obligation and outrage, resolves to destroy the rival gang. Yet, unlike the films of the '50s, the hero enters battle alone rather than risk the lives of his brothers. Armed with only a sword and hugely outnumbered, Tsuruta is shot repeatedly, his large body-tattoo still visible through blood and bullet holes, but he nevertheless manages to dispatch all of his enemies before crawling off in the final scene to a solitary death.²⁰¹ While this juxtaposes the Jirocho stories, which follow a more heroic plan more reminiscent of American examples, Tsuruta dies alone, a venerated outcast like the many *makoto* figures before him.

With his traditional garb, arms, and values, Tsuruta's character cannot assimilate to the progress of the world around him. Like a ghost trapped in purgatory for crimes committed in a previous life, he must purge himself of his sins by punishing the wicked, before fading from our world in great ceremony. Yet, as mentioned earlier, this is inevitable. As Tsuruta's figures have no place in modern society, they may as well already be dead. The climactic battle's purpose is not to remove the protagonist from society (which he morally already is), but to posthumously allow him to atone and legitimize the yakuza underworld through his heroism.

²⁰¹ Such scenes are referred to as *nagurikomi* (one against all fight) (Schilling 104).

Koji Tsuruta's loner moral code becomes construed as an expression of Japanese nationalism in his later films. In *Drifters on the Mainland*,²⁰² a western gang battles over possession of a Japanese-built reservoir in Hong Kong. The narrator informs us that Tsuruta's mission is to literally "show the Japanese spirit."²⁰³ Also, when Tsuruta's character objects to his fiancé selling her body to benefit the gang, she urges him to do his "duty as a Japanese..." As Ian Buruma posits, the film suggests an equivocation with gang service and national service.²⁰⁴ Eventually, the Japanese gang joins forces with the Chinese gang, as Tsuruta shakes the Chinese boss's hand and proclaims, "The East is one!"²⁰⁵ thereby invoking the wartime rhetoric of the Co-Prosperity Sphere—the concept that all Asian countries must unite with Japan as its leader. Not only is Tsuruta thus a personification of Japanese tradition through anachronism and heroic death, he is also directly connected to Japan's imperialist rhetoric and historical past.

Thus far, I have been emphasizing the conservative aspect of 1960's yakuza films. But before moving onto my analysis of Seijun's films, I also want to emphasize that as much as *ninkyō eiga* came to represent traditional values and nationalist themes, yakuza films of the time were appreciated as much by leftist student protesters as by conservatives like Yukio Mishima, and this complicates simply reading the films as "conservative." Take actor Ken Takakura, for example. He often starred alongside Koji Tsuruta, represented the younger, often stoic yet headstrong yakuza hero, and here is Buruma's description of him: "Ken-san is the adolescent hero, pure, naïve and angry. Women and gambling are not for him. He is

²⁰² Transliteration and release date not found (Buruma 186).

²⁰³ Ibid.

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

imbued with the Puritanism of a revolutionary.”²⁰⁶ Such a figure was particularly effective among the liberal students of Japan’s elite universities, who, according to Tsukasa Shiba and Sakae Aoyama, “were isolated in an era of high economic growth and tight social structures” and “felt a strong attraction to the standard [*ninkyō eiga*] motifs of male comrades banding together to fight the power structure.”²⁰⁷ Yet, such individuals grew weary of the repetition of the Toei *ninkyō eiga*, and would become attracted to Nikkatsu Studio’s brand of borderless action cinema. These figures make interpreting yakuza figures as conservative or liberal problematic, and it is this gray zone of the yakuza—as lone male figures who stand for a kind of liberal, independent hero who follows conservative, traditional codes—that becomes the focal point of Suzuki Seijun’s films. Let us now turn to his films to continue to explore the ambiguous stance of the yakuza in 1960’s film history.

The Jazz Bringer

Suzuki Seijun would parody the *ninkyō eiga* from sufficient genre distancing facilitated by Nikkatsu Studios. As mentioned before, the ‘50s and ‘60s saw Nikkatsu release a series of movies dubbed *mukokuseki akushon*, or “borderless action.” Whether pretty boy toughs like Akira Kobayashi or comical rogues like Jo Shishido, Nikkatsu heroes were a pop culture variant on the yakuza, and the studio’s *mukokuseki akushon* film can be credited with bringing the yakuza film into the postwar setting. According to Mark Schilling, these films inhabited “internationalized spaces...neither foreign nor Japanese but a mix of the two...where the Tokyo streets, Yokohama docks and Hokkaido plains took on an exciting, exotic aura, as though they were stand-ins for Manhattan, Marseilles or the American West.”²⁰⁸ The recontextualization of yakuza plots in fictionalized international spaces was perhaps the most

²⁰⁶ Ibid., 188.

²⁰⁷ Schilling, 24.

²⁰⁸ Schilling, Mark, *No Borders, No Limits Nikkatsu Action Cinema*. 5.

extreme form of yakuza film parody yet, and would have direct influence upon later directors such as Miike Takashi. The genre's very name, a mixture of Japanese and bastardized English, evokes the cross-cultural exchanges exhibited within the films. The contact zones created by borderless action reflect the cosmopolitan nature of a society with greater access to foreign culture and ideas; bebop jazz, fish tailed Cadillacs and yakuza patronized go-go clubs were perhaps better representations of the visible cultural changes present in '60's Japanese cities than the tucked away *izakaya* and *ryōkan* of the Toei *ninkyō eiga*. By constructing ironic distance, such films functioned simultaneously as parody and social commentary, a trend shared by Fukasaku and Miike. Yet, even compared to his *mukokuseki akushō* colleagues, director Seijun Suzuki's films are truly borderless, often bursting the framework of the archetypal yakuza film. Suzuki's absurdist humor almost necessitates his stylistically hyperbolized sets, costumes, narrative dislocations, and temporal chaos. The menagerie of Suzuki techniques stands in sharp contrast to the assembled iconography of the *ninkyō eiga*, parodying the genre while satirizing the industry that promotes it.

Suzuki's experience and work reveal a fascination with the absurd, both as simply synonymous with "ridiculous" as well as a definition closer to that of the French existentialists.²⁰⁹ Yet, rather than "rely on a formal, classical structure,"²¹⁰ Suzuki would take a stylistic approach more similar to the Theatre of the Absurd, which sought to "express its sense of the senselessness of the human condition and the inadequacy of the rational

²⁰⁹ In *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*, Camus essentially defines the absurd as an alienation stemming from a disconnection between the world and rationality, between purpose and meaning. Esslin, Martin. *The Theatre of the Absurd*. New York: Vintage, 2004. 23.

²¹⁰ Hughes, Alex, and Keith Reader. *Encyclopedia of Contemporary French Culture*. London: Routledge, 1998. 194.

approach by the open abandonment of rational devices or discursive thought.”²¹¹ Similar to such masters of drama as Brecht and Becket, Suzuki compliments absurd content with a form that parodies *ninkyō eiga* while emphasizing the absurd nature of the genre, both through hyperbolized genre conventions as well often theatrical nonsensical representations of reality. Yet while espousing their stylistics, Suzuki differs from such predecessors in drawing from personal experience. During the war, Suzuki was drafted by the Japanese Navy in 1943 and served in the Philippines, twice shipwrecked and promoted to the rank of 2nd Lieutenant.²¹² He attributes his dark sense of humor to those times, claiming,

When you go to war, you get that feeling. It’s inexcusable to say so, but it is humorous...Life was not only cheap when [me] and [my] friends were sent to die for the emperor, but also totally absurd. Nothing made sense and the sight of death seemed almost comical at times. When they sunk your ship, you had to be saved by other ships. I shall never forget the sight of those men climbing the ropes, swaying from side to side, hitting their heads all over the place. By the time they got on board they were black and blue...Some of them died, of course, and they had to be buried at sea. Two sailors would take their corpses to either side and the trumpets would go tatata and they’d throw the corpse overboard: tatata, another corpse, tatata, another one...(laughs).²¹³

Absurd in content and form, Suzuki’s notion of parody differs from the Theatre of the Absurd as it is often specifically marked as being anti-imperial, both historicized and subversive. This is reminiscent of such Suzuki heroes as Hanada, the protagonist of *Branded to Kill* (*Koroshi no Rakuin*, 1967), who after spending days approaching insanity, kills all his assailants on a dock while drunk, laughing and dancing all the while.²¹⁴ The docking of an aircraft carrier draws a comparison between Hanada’s absurd task, its nihilistic execution, and Japan’s own war past. The vast sacrifices demanded by the emperor during the war,

²¹¹ Esslin, 24.

²¹² Field, Simon, and Tony Rayns. *Branded to Thrill: The Delirious Cinema of Suzuki Seijun*. London: Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1994. 46.

²¹³ Buruma, 195.

²¹⁴ The military function of the dock is proven by the approaching US aircraft carrier.

mirroring the sacrifices demanded by *oyabun* or *kobun*, seem ultimately pointless to Suzuki. Like many of the characters in Suzuki's movies, when presented with a gruesome task in a situation devoid of discernable meaning, one can only laugh to remain sane.

Returning from the war, like the *gurentai* he would often depict, Suzuki became an assistant director at Shochiku Studios before becoming a contract director at Nikkatsu in 1956, directing mostly soft-core pornography. During the 1960s, Nikkatsu would produce two films a week, leaving contract directors little time and budget to execute projects. As Suzuki recounts, "From the time I got the script until I began shooting I had about one or two weeks...it would have been better if I had long preparation time like Kurosawa...No name directors like me had zero time, so I had no choice but to stay up all night and never go home...the actors had to get everything right the first time. I couldn't do retakes."²¹⁵ Pressed for time, Suzuki's style thus had to develop out of spontaneity. His approach to working with actors was "don't tell actors to do this and that. I only say something when they go off track. But in general I leave them alone."²¹⁶ As for the luxury of storyboards, Suzuki claims, "I've never done it. Preplanned or precalculated movies are not interesting. I either come up with the scene the day before or on the set. Inspiration makes the picture."

Given the time constraints imposed by the studio, Suzuki's unconventional stylistic techniques are all the more amazing. One source Suzuki drew heavily from was kabuki theater, providing clues into how he views his yakuza films as "traditionally" Japan: "I couldn't very well turn [my films] into Shakespeare. They were Japanese films after all, so I ended up using kabuki...it's all Japanese culture, that goes without saying. The Japanese spirit and various other things are all found [in kabuki and yakuza films]. They're sort of a

²¹⁵ Along with never sleeping, Suzuki supposedly never bathed or changed his clothes either during a shoot. Schilling, *The Yakuza Movie Book*. 98, 105.

²¹⁶ *Ibid*, 98.

rag-and-bone shop of Japanese culture.” To Suzuki, the highly stylized drama, set, and costumes of the kabuki theater lent itself to yakuza film, a genre already prone to such excess, and certainly fit into his own hyperbolized absurd sense of humor. In terms of his own sets and costumes, Suzuki found these components particularly important and worked actively with set designers and stylists: “Costume fitting is the beginning of character development...a hero has to look stylish. If he looks like a bum, he’s not a hero anymore...If you make the set extraordinary, [actors] go, ‘Whoah, this is wonderful!’ Then they transform from everyday life to the character’s life.” The art direction in Suzuki’s films is extremely significant in the construction of a conflicted depiction of the yakuza. Even when highly critical of the yakuza, Suzuki often injects his yakuza protagonists and unconventional sets with an unmistakable, yet indefinable sense of cool drawn from hip 60’s bebop culture. Part of Suzuki’s parodic genius lies in this; even when depicting heroes in a more villainous light, as in the case of *Branded To Kill*’s Hanada or *Youth of the Beast’s* (*Yaju no seishun, 1963*) protagonist, Jo, the viewer is left hoping to parody the character himself. Yet, at times Suzuki’s sets and costumes are sometimes so absurd, that is, devoid of rational explanation that the audience is led to suspend belief, deconstructing the world of the narrative. Deconstruction in fact is a critical component to Suzuki’s style, as he himself states: “I think what remains in our mind is not ‘construction’ but ‘deconstruction’. Making things is not what counts, the power that destroys them is. What is now standing is not really there. It is just something reflected in our eyes. When it is demolished, the consciousness of it begins to take form.”²¹⁷ Suzuki’s approach to the yakuza genre itself can be viewed in this way, either exaggerating iconic elements in the genre to the point of absurdity, or simply

²¹⁷ Satô, Tadao. *Currents in Japanese Cinema: Essays*. Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1982. 224.

removing them entirely. In the latter case, their absence marks the ironic distance and functions as parody.

Suzuki tires to incorporate his unique deconstructionist approach and stylistic elements to *Kanto Wanderer*, which, in its setting, resembles something closer to *ninkyō eiga*, becoming the agent of Suzuki's genre criticism. The film's plot revolves around *giri/ninjō* issues and inter-gang conflict in the midst of developing government-yakuza relations in the postwar period. Its protagonist, Katsuta (Akira Kobayashi), is the traditional yakuza hero—calm, patient, and naturally good looking, with soft features offset by his tattooed body and long facial scar. It is perhaps here though that similarities to Toei films end. While, billed as a “wanderer,” the story is set entirely within the city of Tokyo; the allusion to earlier traveling story films is only that—an allusion; absence again functions as parody. Yet, despite remaining within the same setting, Katsuta is portrayed as homeless, the literal definition of *mushūku*.²¹⁸

The film's commencing scene presents several examples of parody and absurdity. Three schoolgirls discuss Katsuta, a young gambling dealer for the Izu clan. They run into another young yakuza, Diamond Fuyu, of the rival Yoshida clan, who are challenging the Izu clan for a government sponsored construction project. While Fuyu is getting a tattoo, two of the girls are suddenly uncomfortable and hurry off, but one girl, Hanako, observes the ritual and is enthralled by the yakuza world. Fuyu falls for Hanako and takes her to an Izu illegal gambling den where Tetsu, a dealer, also finds her attractive. The police raid the den and Hanako is arrested but let off with a warning, while the Izu clan, already in financial distress, loses their only gambling den. Later, Tetsu waits for Hanako to leave the police station and convinces her to help him participate in a scam in which, with the promise of sex, she is to

²¹⁸ Siniawer, 21.

lure a man to a hotel room where Tetsu will extort his money. But when plans go awry, Hanako is left stranded and sold into sexual slavery.

After Tetsu punches Diamond Fuyu in the street, Katsuta visits Fuyu's home to apologize, where he runs into Fuyu's sister, Tatsuko, a grifter he had encountered four years earlier when he had exposed her and her partner in a scam. Katsuta becomes aware of Hanako's disappearance and yet learns nothing from Tetsu. The two conduct an unsuccessful search for Hanako and end up at a *ryōkan*, a Japanese inn. He again meets Tatsuko, this time running a scam with her husband, Hachi Okaru, a known card shark, who cheats by using shiny surfaces to steal glances at opponents' cards. In a private game, Okaru challenges Katsuta and prevails by using this technique.

Diamond approaches Katsuta at a bar and demands to know what happened to Hanako, to which Katsuta feigns ignorance. Tensions rise between the Izu and Yoshida clan and Sato Izu begins to suspect Katsuta of disloyalty. Katsuta kills two rowdy gamblers and then is sent to kill boss Yoshida and his henchmen, but instead lets Yoshida live, making him promise to protect boss Izu. Instead, Yoshida manipulates Fuyu into killing Izu, who has just taken Hanako as his mistress. Katsuta and Fuyu end the movie in prison.

The film begins with credits, black calligraphy on wood—a traditional image one would associate with *ninkyō eiga* credits. Yet, the credits cut to dialogue in close-up shots of three young ladies, chatting away among the bustle of postwar Tokyo. The shift from traditional credits to loud streets and young ladies presents an initially familiar cinematic experience before instantly challenging the viewer's conception of subsequent action. The shift dislocates the viewer from the *ninkyō eiga* world to a more modern, youth-dominated context, immediately signaling Suzuki's intent to parody. Hanako asks Tokiko what her father does,

to which their third friend replies, “He’s a modern day knight, like this!” holding up a piece of paper. This cuts to a close-up shot of the three reaching for the paper in the air while an electric streetcar rushes by in the background. Suzuki then cuts to a low-angled shot of a megaphone on top of a building projecting a kabuki chant (a technique he repeats later in the film where a train station announcement is chants its instructions in the same style, taking a traditional art device and recontextualizing it in a modern, everyday setting). Once again, the viewer becomes suddenly defamiliarized as the film transitions from the noise of the modern streets to the shouts of traditional Japanese theater. The camera tilts down to reveal that the deserted building is Nikkatsu theatre. The camera stops tilting at ground level where the several discarded fliers lay, similar to the one held by the young ladies, promoting current yakuza films. Self-referential, the lack of an audience and deserted fliers are Suzuki’s own humorous criticism of the genre and his own studio. The next shot now cuts to a quiet, canal side alley filled with old, traditional houses. From this point the film essentially remains in this sort of setting. Since *ninkyō eiga* has no place in the modern era, Suzuki now literally separates the setting of the film from developed Tokyo. The performative style permeates into the buildings themselves, which, despite their traditional style, appear constructed and somewhat temporary, like a theater set. This simultaneously functions as parody and satire, using the visual iconography of theater while calling into question the reality of both the film and the entire genre.²¹⁹

Kanto Wanderer pokes fun at particular yakuza ritual as well. In one scene, Tetsu, an experienced yakuza dealer, loses the dice during a game, a point of critical departure from the genre norms. Another critical moment comes when Hanako watches Fuyu get his tattoo.

²¹⁹ From this movie onward, Suzuki would work with set designer Takeo Kimura, a man noted for providing Suzuki the lurid, hyperstylized sets his films would become associated with.

The tattoo artist classifies yakuza as “gallant men, like Fuyu here.” Fuyu attempts to remain unbothered during the process, whistling a tune. Yet as the blade touches his skin, he winces in pain. At one moment, he yelps and jumps to the floor, shouting, “Watch it, old man!” The tattoo artist replies, “No guts. A young guy like you – what a disgrace.” Unlike the characters played by Koji Tsuruta, Fuyu lacks *gaman*, and thus the particular form of masculinity necessary to be a *ninkyō eiga* hero, yet another example of *ninkyō eiga* parody.

The film approaches its conclusion with another instance of traditional and even modern theatrical stylization, the sword duel scene. The scene opens with an objective, wide angled long shot and take of Katsuta dealing a game of dice; all the characters appear equally small in the background, while the shot coupled with the wide, tatami floor evokes a theater stage rather than a set. Such a shot too is reminiscent of kabuki.²²⁰ As Suzuki himself notes, “In kabuki they show everything at once. The interest is in seeing where and how the exit.” True to his word, Suzuki draws attention to just that. Katsuta is forced to challenge two rowdy men armed with swords who enter from the right. As the rest of the gamblers escape, the two troublemakers draw their swords and Katsuta, shirtless and displaying his tattoos, retreats to “stage left.” A non-diegetic narrator notes in kabuki chant the inevitable choice between imprisonment and death awaiting Katsuta at the culmination of such a duel. His unspoken decision made, Katsuta retreats further, literally bursting through the *shōji* screens to the left of the set.²²¹ In the wide-angled long shot and take, the entire “stage” is still visible, as Katsuta quickly emerges from the right of the frame, spot-lit as both sides of the

²²⁰ The length of the take too contributes to the theatrical aesthetic produced, as editing, and cuts in particular, distinguish film from theater. By choosing to abstain from cuts in this segment, Suzuki briefly minimizes his own cinematic presence, and temporarily allows the audience to respond solely to the action. See Figure 1.

²²¹ See Figure 2.

set open to audience view.²²² While he approaches his assailants, the spotlight follows Katsuta, the star of this stage dramatic scene. Katsuta lunges forth, dispatching the two ruffians quickly. As the second attacker collapses, he knocks over the entire back paneling of the set, revealing a blood red background.²²³ At this point, Suzuki has removed the left, right, and now back walls of the set, and in the Brechtian sense, the fourth wall itself; when the rear wall falls, it reveals the space for the set that it is, removing the imaginary wall separating the audience from the theatrical nature of the set. While initially the long shot and take mute Suzuki's presence, the stylistic techniques employed call attention to the director himself. The audience can no longer suspend its disbelief at the divergence between presentation and expectation, alienated by the absurd.

The colors red and white have particular significance to the film's content, especially in relation to death and failure for the hero. As a placard in the Izu family's residence reads, "The way of the yakuza is red or white." According to the film, red is the color of prewar prison clothing, while white the color of funerary wear. The statement thus presents the yakuza hero as a doomed figure. When the screen walls collapse and reveal the red background, Katsuta's fate is revealed to us: prison. Yet, while the red background dominates the *mise-en-scène*, it is exposed as merely a curtain which drops to reveal Katsuta walking along a spot lit black path with black background, the only other color present the white of falling snow surrounding Katsuta.²²⁴ As Katsuta walks to the rival gang's offices, we are led to believe he will be "dressed in white." However, as we know, Katsuta does not die, rather, he is incarcerated for an act that proves to be pointless, and his boss is shot by Diamond Fuyu just after he goes to prison. Katsuta himself claims, "No matter what

²²² See Figure 3.

²²³ See Figure 4.

²²⁴ See Figure 5.

happened to boss Izu, I carried out our code.” However, the characters that lived by the code both end up in prison, including Diamond Fuyu.

Diamond Fuyu represents a deliberate contrast between traditional and modern yakuza. His very name, a combination of his given Japanese name and an English word (and one that evokes glamour at that), signifies his dual identity and his inherent parody. For the majority of the film, Fuyu wears a brown suit, making him the only principle character not dressed in Japanese style clothes. Fuyu dons a kimono only once, yet the scene is far from traditional; he dances with a hostess to a be-bop tune.

While Fuyu is essentially unsuccessful in any of his endeavors, Suzuki’s art direction grants Fuyu at least an aesthetically desirable quality. His brown suit and yellow shirt combination make him seem older and more mature than his face initially reveals, despite all the evidence presented toward his immaturity. When he dances to the be-bop in kimono, Fuyu’s casual ease is juxtaposed with his often awkward behavior throughout the rest of the film. Moreover, while presented as an ineffectual strong arm who gets beaten up by the buffoon like Tetsu, the audience’s perception of Fuyu changes when he holds his short dagger, a traditional weapon with a special shine and sleekness. While armed with the knife, Fuyu assumes a dangerous cool. Luckily, Suzuki does not privilege us with a demonstration of Fuyu’s knife wielding ability. This, of course, would have ruined the carefully constructed image of Fuyu.

Furthermore, Fuyu’s dedication to his gang, Hanako, and *jingi* make him an admirable character. In fact, a distinction is drawn between him and Okaru-Hachi. Though Fuyu earns his money illegally, his living is not dishonest like Hachi’s. He himself notes this while drunk, shouting “At least I’m a yakuza, not a crook.” This statement privileges the yakuza criminal tradition over independent ones, granting the yakuza greater cultural significance as is the

case in *ninkyō eiga*. Fuyu is thus presented as both a hip representative of youth culture as well as an inexperienced loser in the yakuza world. By the film's end, only Okaru remains a free man. The last scene of the film begins with an overhead shot of Katsuta sitting alone in his jail cell, spot lit and dressed in his kimono. The camera cranes down only to tilt up, focusing in a medium shot of Katsuta. Though he claimed his sacrifice was not in vain, he remains troubled, staring out into the distance. Horns blare, creating a sense of anxiety mirrored on the character's face.²²⁵ As Katsuta did not eliminate the Yoshida gang and boss, he is denied the hero's death. Suzuki thus attempts to complicate the place of the lone hero in the changing yakuza (and yakuza film) world. Outside of the context of the *ninkyō eiga* (the prewar period), *makoto* heroes find no redemption in sacrifice; figures such as Fuyu and Katsuta remain outcast criminals.

The character of Hanako is a particularly fitting example of Suzuki's use of parody as criticism. Hanako is constantly laughing; though this comes off as cute for most of the film, it is in fact a cheerful form of judgment. When she begins working for Tetsu, she even states, "I'm afraid I might giggle at the wrong moment." In this scene, Hanako and Tetsu are presented with their backs to the camera, looking out of a train window. Hanako here parodies the melodrama of *ninkyō eiga*, by acting uncharacteristically giddy, while simultaneously criticizing the genre, incapable of holding back her laughter while being forced into prostitution. Suzuki's choice to present Hanako with her back turned looking out a window mirrors the audience's own contemporaneous action of staring at a screen. Her words then may evoke the audience's own disbelief at the film's absurdity, or perhaps mirroring Suzuki's feelings, who uses humor to deal with tragedy, even in instances that

²²⁵ See Figure 6.

society may deem inappropriate.²²⁶ For most of the film, Hanako is perceived as victimized, forced into a life of prostitution against her will. Initially, however, she seems almost excited at the prospect. Moreover, she seems to turn the tables on her would-be savior Fuyu. While Boss Izu and Fuyu first pity her, perhaps they are more deserving of pity. Hanako ends the movie happy and confident, while Fuyu is manipulated into killing Izu and will spend the next ten years in prison. Hanako even eliminates the honor in Fuyu's prison sentence, stating in a rather mocking tone, "Fool! How old will you be then...a murderer and ex-con in his prime? Everything will have changed in 10 years, including your world." Hanako's final words signify her as the voice of reason, furthering her role of critic developed in the train scene. She mocks Fuyu's devotion to *giri* and *jingi* are pointless; the world he attempts to protect is deficient of relevance outside of the context of the *ninkyō eiga*. While functioning as an anachronism, Fuyu too lacks the redemption gained by the traditional *makoto* hero.

Kanto Wanderer is set in a thoroughly *ninkyō eiga* context which Suzuki parodies through absurd theatricisms as well as subversive content. In *Tokyo Drifter* however, Suzuki offers a different take on parody, sticking to a strict dialogue heavy with traditional drifting and obligation conflicts. Parody is drawn from the film's modern, jazz, and lounge setting, along with the absurd, evoked by Suzuki's relentless use of cinematic techniques such as jump cutting, superimposition, and embellishment of *ninkyō eiga* themes.

The film begins with Tetsu (Tetsuya Watari), recently out of the yakuza world, beaten up at Tokyo's docks by his old enemies, the Otsuka gang, who attempt to test his intentions. True to his word, Tetsu demonstrates forbearance and is left battered before eventually getting up and returning to his former boss's house. We learn that his boss, Kurata has taken

²²⁶ While this may seem initially subjective, Hanako is one of many examples of a Suzuki stylism I would call "the laughing girl," a female that seems to laugh uncontrollably at seemingly serious moments in the film. I will return to this figure in *Tokyo Drifter*.

a loan out on a building, hoping to enter the legitimate business world. Meanwhile Otsuka attempts to foil the plan, simultaneously trying to kill Tetsu while threatening the banker, Mr. Yoshi, into signing Kurata's debt, and thus, hands the building over to Otsuka. While almost successful, Tetsu manages to escape, saving Kurata's life in a gun fight that left two dead, including the girlfriend of his arch nemesis and doppelganger, Viper Tetsu. Deciding that remaining in Tokyo would be too dangerous, Tetsu takes a train north without telling his own girlfriend Chiharu. When arriving in the northern country, Tetsu is unwillingly drawn into a struggle between the South group, ally of Kurata and the North group, ally of Otsuka. Viper Tetsu follows him to the north and makes several attempts at his life. In one such case, Tetsu is saved by Shooting Star, a former *kobun* of Otsuka now an unaffiliated lone drifter. While appreciative of Shooting Star's help, Tetsu despises his lack of *giri* and leaves without a word for the southern island of Kyushu. There, Tetsu visits the Wild West Bar, owned by a former *kobun* of Kurata's, where he is drawn in to yet another fight, this time engendered by a conflict between Western sailors and drunk Japanese, leading to an absurd bar brawl similar to an old Western melodrama. Meanwhile, Kurata and Otsuka have struck a deal in exchange for Tetsu's life and Chiharu's virtue. Kurata orders the bar owner to kill Tetsu, yet Tetsu escapes, arriving in the surreal bar Chiharu sings in. In a one-against-all gunfight, Tetsu kills Otsuka before abandoning Chiharu to continue a life of drifting.

Tokyo Drifter is parodic of *ninkyō eiga* in its initial black and white division between good and evil, evident in Suzuki's use of color as well as Tetsu's relationship with his doppelganger, Viper Tetsu. The film's first shot is literally in black and white. In a long take and shot, Tetsu slowly makes his way toward the camera along a set of train tracks, bordered on either side by trains (trains in yakuza films are iconographic of *matabi* and signal his drifting throughout the film). As Tetsu approaches the front of the freight train to the right,

Suzuki pans with him, revealing Viper Tetsu standing on the opposite side. Suzuki frames the medium-long shot to capture the dark train in the middle, with Tetsu in his blue coat, appearing white in the two color contrast shot while his double's brown suit appears black.²²⁷ From the beginning of the film, the two are represented as white and black, good and evil, further delineated when Viper takes advantage of Tetsu's loyalty to his boss and beats him without mercy. As the film progresses, the two face off in several battles—at one point Tetsu leading the South-gumi while the Viper leads the North-gumi. Tetsu wounds the Viper, mutilating his hand, while the Viper returns the favor, shooting Tetsu in the arm. Yet, as the two trade-off punch for punch, the audience begins to realize that they are not so different. Both abandon their old colors and begin to wear grey suits, no longer characterized as simply “good” or “bad.” When cornered by Shooting Star and Tetsu at the Old West Saloon, he shoots himself in the head rather than giving up; while Viper Tetsu may serve a “bad” cause, he serves it loyally and to the death.²²⁸ This action seems to have redeemed the Viper; as they sit together in silence, drinking whisky and mourning Viper Tetsu, Shooting Star mutters, “Poor guy. He was duty bound to Otsuka.” Through the juxtaposition of Tetsu and the Viper, Suzuki thus creates a grey image of the yakuza, representing simultaneous constructive and subversive roles in Japanese Society.

Even in the film's score and sound, Suzuki creates absurd parody within the frame of his contractual obligations. Throughout the film, Tetsu is associated with a 60's ballad. This song details Tetsu's loyalty, willingness to drift, and lack of desire for female companionship. One line reads, “If I die, I'll die like a man. I'll let love pass me by just to remain loyal. I'm a drifter, the man from Tokyo.” Consequently, the movie was produced around the song, a

²²⁷ See Figure 7.

²²⁸ One should also note Kurata is ultimately proven no better than Otsuka, which further emphasizes the similarities between Tetsu and Viper Tetsu.

popular hit at the time. Tetsuya Watari was brought on for his first feature film solely to associate a pretty face with the song. Suzuki, meanwhile, was instructed to “put it in as much as possible. When you have to use a song like that, the story ceases to matter.”²²⁹ Thus, from the film’s onset, Suzuki made no attempts to refrain from parody and hyperbole, as he received orders to do just that, playing the song over and over. Sometimes a narrator sings it, sometimes it is Tetsu, himself, sometimes whistles it, while Chiharu also gives a performance. After one of Tetsu’s escapes from the Viper, the music is queued. Suzuki gives no visual indication that Tetsu is the source of the song, shooting him close lipped in several takes as the song plays. In spite of this, one random enemy yakuza exclaims, “Damn! How dare he sing like that!” The audience is never certain whether the music is diegetic or not, leading to a nonsensical disconnect between function and meaning that characterizes the absurd.

Without a need for legitimate continuity and an entertaining narrative structure, Suzuki was able to shoot the film using his most experimental stylistics to date, employing symbolic color superimpositions and alienating narrative disrupting jump cuts. A delineating example is found in Tetsu and Viper Tetsu’s one-on-one duel in the snow. Tetsu escapes from the chaos of the South/North group war. Suzuki shoots Tetsu wearing a beige mackintosh over his blue suit, approaching the camera in the snow. The *mise-en-scène* is dominated by a bleak muted color composition (white, beige, grey, and light blue), which blends together until Suzuki pans to the left, revealing contrasting bright red lantern in the foreground. As Tetsu passes the lantern to the right, Suzuki shifts perspectives to the reverse shot, capturing the back of a figure in a beige coat as he approaches the lantern now situated on the right of the

²²⁹ Schilling, 101.

frame.²³⁰ As he stops and takes a drink, the audience realizes this is not Tetsu but in fact the Viper, his coat being a similar color. The lantern then helped facilitate a match cut; by placing them consecutively in front of the lantern, Suzuki suggests that the Viper is pursuing Tetsu. This also functions to construct the two as surprisingly similar doppelgangers, which I will later discuss.

The director then cuts to a long shot of Tetsu walking towards the camera on the road, with the barely distinguishable figure of the Viper a few dozen yards behind him. Suzuki cuts to the reverse long shot of Tetsu turning around to face and stare down the Viper before slowly backing away, while the camera pans to the right, where the Viper attaches the silencer to his pistol. As a dramatic signifier of the duel to come, Suzuki utilizes a confrontational drum score. Suzuki builds suspense through quick cuts between Tetsu and the Viper, the former successfully evading his pursuer until they meet face-to-face on snowy train tracks. Here, Suzuki sandwiches long shot-reverse shots from behind the characters with profile medium shots capturing both independently.²³¹ As the train approaches behind them, Suzuki cuts to a high elevation long shot in which a barely distinguishable Tetsu dives directly into the Viper's barrage of bullets, landing on the tracks just ahead of the train and releasing a few shots of his own. Rather than cutting to a close-up of the action, however, Suzuki employs a nonlinear, high-elevation jump cut of Tetsu limping through the snow.²³² In classic form, Suzuki disrupts the linear flow of the narrative by inserting jump cuts at the section's most climactic moment, cutting to a temporally distant scene. Moreover, such jump cuts often lead to confusion in narrative. By skipping over what is often the most anticipated

²³⁰ See Figures 8 & 9.

²³¹ See Figures 10, 11, and 12.

²³² See Figures 13 and 14.

type of scene in *ninkyō eiga*, Suzuki leaves the audience dissatisfied by denying them the gratification of the duel's forestalled conclusion.²³³

Similar to techniques used in *Kanto Wanderer*, throughout this sequence, Suzuki superimposes a sharp shadow across certain parts of the frame, dividing the frame into dark and light sides.²³⁴ In one particularly striking shot, Suzuki captures a bridge in a head-on long shot, as Tetsu walks from the right side of the bridge into the darkened left of the frame, the edge of the shadow imposition diagonally cutting the frame into relative halves.²³⁵ Such shots are not limited to Tetsu, but are equally pervasive in representations of the Viper, even in shots of both characters together. These superimpositions suggest a similar duality of dark and light in both characters, while reminding the viewer of the director's power; the images presented are not reality but performance.²³⁶

Suzuki's further emphasizes this duality in the color coded costumes of the cast. Tetsu begins the film in a light blue suit, perhaps Suzuki's most interesting costume, granting Tetsu a level of cool perhaps only surpassed by Shishido Jo. As Marc Schilling notes, "what people

²³³ The outcome is not revealed for over forty seconds, as Tetsu limps to his small apartment, washing up as the Viper bursts into the room, his fingers bleeding badly. Tetsu spares the Viper.

²³⁴ Suzuki would once again parallel black and white in his next film, *Branded to Kill*. One particularly significant use of color comes from various shots of the urban landscape around Hanada's apartment are captured in negative colors. According to Miyao, this can be interpreted as Suzuki's commentary on the visibility of criminality, transitioning from the streets to an unseen, yet still existent underworld among new construction projects symbolizing Japan's economic success. The theme of darkness underneath society's veneer continues in the work of Fukasaku and Miike. Miyao, Daisuke. "Dark Visions of Japanese Noir: Suzuki Seijun's 'Branded to Kill'" *Japanese Cinema: Texts and Contexts*. London: Routledge, 2007. 197.

²³⁵ See Figure 15.

²³⁶ Suzuki employs a similar technique to superimposition in one shot of Tetsu. While capturing Tetsu in a head-on medium shot, the background scenery and the approaching train are clearly projected on a screen behind him, evident in the background's dulled colors, discontinuous with earlier shots of the train and background.

remember about the film is the style. Tetsuya Watari wearing a powder blue suit...²³⁷ changing to a grey suit that matches the Viper's during their final encounter, and dons a white suit in his final battle. Otsuaka, on the other hand, is usually depicted wearing a bright red riding jacket with dark black sunglasses. Suzuki particularly favors close-ups on Otsuka's face, his eyes almost always covered by sunglasses and his lips upturned in an evil smile. He does not change out of this costume until the last scene where he and all his henchmen and associates are wearing black to contrast Tetsu's white suit before he kills them all. The manner in which Tetsu accomplishes this is beyond absurd. He throws his gun across the room and then runs twenty feet before catching it again and shooting everyone. Suzuki parodies the ease in which heroes seem to approach such *nagurikomi* (*one against all*) scenes, in this case, performing a circus trick in the process. Perhaps the most over the top parody of the film though is the bar fight at the Old West Bar. After a drunken Japanese man gropes one of the Western cabaret dancers, a massive fight breaks out reminiscent of a saloon brawl in Westerns. Suzuki further develops the racial tensions as the cabaret dancer is about to punch Tetsu, only to exclaim, "I like you better than French, British, and American men!" Meanwhile, a group of Japanese women are facetiously giving marching orders to a group of drunken American sailors, yelling in broken English, "You are chicken," before breaking bottles over their heads. The chaos finally ends when Shooting Star, Tetsu, and the bar owner throw out twenty or so drunk Japanese and Americans by their shirt collars, in a parody of the culmination of one such typical Western. Suzuki thus not only parodies the Western form in this instance, but additionally creates a connection between the Western and *ninkyō eiga*, parody in itself.

²³⁷ Schilling, 102.

A simple examination of plot reveals the hyperbole in *Tokyo Drifter*. Suzuki takes every moral quality evident in *ninkyō eiga makoto* heroes and exaggerates them in Tetsu. Let us first discuss his unwavering loyalty, perhaps his most defining characteristic. Even in the face of a rough beating, Tetsu remains true to his boss's wishes. Suzuki represents Tetsu's absurd devotion by comparing him to a dog. The initial scenes, unlike the remainder of the film, are presented in black and white. Tetsu's signature light blue suit, for all intensive purposes, is thus white at the beginning of the film. After he is beaten and left, Suzuki cuts to a shot of a white dog, lying in a similar prone position. When Tetsu gets up and heads back to his boss's, Suzuki again cuts to the dog, which performs a parallel reaction. These match cuts serve the purpose of parodying *ninkyō eiga* loyalty through extreme exaggeration. Tetsu's fidelity is actually an attempt to literally fulfill his *giri*, trying to repay an imagined obligation to his former boss, who technically abandons Tetsu and the rest of the gang to go straight. Yet, Tetsu's fanatic belief in *giri*, which later keep him from adequately thanking Shooting Star for saving his life, forces him to follow Kurata like his metaphoric animal representation into the straight world. Ironically, it seems Tetsu is not cut out for a normal life; his only skills seem to be his ability to kill and drift.

Tetsu's *giri* toward his former boss is so exaggerated, that, at times he appears to exhibit a desire for what Jim Reichert notes as *nanshōku*, or "male-male love."²³⁸ Reichert associates *nanshōku* with "a pattern of unequal, often exploitative, power relations...pairing an adult partner with a pre-adult partner, usually in his teens."²³⁹ The parallels between Tetsu and Kurata's interactions and the relationship described by Reichert perhaps acts as criticism of the exploitative relationship between *oyabun* and *kobun*. Suzuki inserts certain key visual and

²³⁸ Reichert, Jim. *In the Company of Men: Representations of Male-male Sexuality in Meiji Literature*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford UP, 2006. 2.

²³⁹ Ibid.

spoken indications toward such a comparison. When Tetsu returns from the docks, he lingers outside of the Kurata house in the narrow alley, suddenly looking up. Suzuki then implements a jump cut to a low angled, medium shot of a strange tree. The tree, tall and thin, is stripped of most of its bark; its and leafless branches extend like thin hairs from the trunk.²⁴⁰ The juxtaposition of Tokyo Tower next to the tree furthers a possible interpretation of the tree as phallic, while its absurd and nonsensical proximity to the narrow alley outside of the Kurata house indicate the potential source of his affections, his boss. Tetsu, always overly eager to please his boss, reacts almost coyly to his boss's affections. At one point, his boss brings in a bowl of fruit (perhaps symbolic in itself) muttering, "I'm lost without a woman around." Tetsu does not respond directly to this statement, instead replying, "Seeing you fuss over me makes me kind of sad and happy at the same time." His boss continues, "You should marry Chiharu soon and open a club," to which Tetsu responds, "I'm through with women." Before he leaves to drift, Tetsu smiles at Kurata in a medium shot. The smile quickly turns to a grimace however, and as Tetsu's eyes start to water, he leaves. This scene suggests a homosocial relationship between Tetsu and Kurata similar to the vassal-retainer *nanshoku* relationships of the feudal era.

One could examine the transition of Tetsu's relationship with Kurata as the natural progression of the *nanshoku* relationship. Reichert notes, "It was assumed that the [*nanshoku*] relationship was temporary, since it could not continue after the junior partner became an adult..."²⁴¹ If the *nanshoku* relationship is supposed to be temporary, then perhaps Kurata's betrayal of Tetsu functions as a response to maturation. The point of divergence is Tetsu's

²⁴⁰ This tree is reminiscent of a similar image presented by Kaneto Shindô two years earlier in his highly eroticized film, *Onibaba* (1964). While not compelled to rap his arms around the tree, like the older woman in *Onibaba*, symbolizing her unsatisfied desire for a phallus, Tetsu's mind does seem to return to it a few times through the film.

²⁴¹ Ibid.

matabi. Travels and journeys are often depicted in film as “enlightening...an accurate metaphor for the journey of life...”²⁴² The journey, or its embarkment, marks the transition from youth to adulthood, necessitating the end of the privileged relationship between Kurata and Tetsu.

In contrast to the tender moment shared with his boss before he leaves, Tetsu does not even tell Chiharu of his *matabi*. When Chiharu somehow tracks Tetsu down in the north, he escapes off the train without so much as a word as she helplessly rides away. Suzuki also presents the viewers other possible visual clues of Tetsu’s possible *nanshoku* relationship with Kurata. When approaching the final showdown, Tetsu walks through a hallway with a series of high vertical beams that extend to the top of the ceiling and taper at the top, making a row of phallic like shapes.²⁴³ Meanwhile, Chiharu stands in the piano bar, always next to a conic shaped pier-mâché ring statue, which changes colors depending on Chiharu’s emotions. After killing Otsuka, the two embrace. All of the sudden, he looks down at her and states, “A drifter does not need women.” Suzuki cuts to a close-up of tears flowing down her face, until he cuts to Tetsu shaking his head. Before leaving, deliberately walking wide of the conic statue, he mentions “I can’t walk with a woman at my side,” before walking through the phallic hall again.

Even if one completely disregarded these points, Tetsu’s actions and relationship with his boss seem to lack the masculinity necessary in a traditional *ninkyō eiga* protagonist. Ironically, the *nanshoku* relationship represented hard masculinity in the Edo period.²⁴⁴ Such depictions are actually relatively similar to codified representations of masculinity in yakuza

²⁴² Iles, Timothy. *The Crisis of Identity in Contemporary Japanese Film: Personal, Cultural, National*. Leiden: Brill, 2008.135.

²⁴³ See Figure 16.

²⁴⁴ Reichert, 4.

films, where the protagonist ignores his relationship with his love interests, privileging his relationship with the group. Such notions of masculinity are directly influenced by Ihara Saikaku's "woman haters."²⁴⁵ Tetsu's rejection of Chiharu's affection is ostensibly within the established norm of both feudal and *ninkyō eiga* conventions, representative of the choice of *giri* and honor over women. Yet, despite possessing similar origin, the *ninkyō eiga* depiction of masculinity is more muted than its Edo period counterpart; the rejection of the woman is inevitable, yet by no means an afterthought. Part of the yakuza protagonist's masculinity stems from the internal conflict from such a decision; the hero has to "be a man", exhibiting forbearance and restraint in the face of personal desires. Yet, to Tetsu, it perhaps comes too easy. In a way, the audience feels as if "the lady doth protest too much," seemingly lacking any feelings for Chiharu that could cause conflict within him. The recontextualization of the "woman hater" within the later *yakuza eiga* context strips masculine signifiers of their ultimate meaning. Tetsu's relationship with Chiharu and Kurata then functions as parody, either establishing homosexual overtones contrary to conventional representations of yakuza protagonists, or over-representing established forms masculinity and a devotion to the group, rendering such gestures by their hyperbolized reproductions meaningless.

Suzuki's travel films are excellent examples of his comical parody of traditional *ninkyō eiga* and experimental stylistic techniques. Yet, just the next year, Suzuki would release *Branded to Kill*, leading to the termination of his contract and his blacklisting from the Japanese film industry for the next decade. Meanwhile, his absurd style would be challenged by director Fukasaku Kinji and his desire to create hyper-realistic yakuza films, while years later Miike

²⁴⁵ From his famous prose and fiction piece, *The Great Mirror of Male Love (Nanshōku okagami, 1687)*, which romanticizes "woman haters," samurai who reject all intimate relations with women in favor of male-male relationships, defined by samurai codes of morality and honor. Shirane, Haruo. *Early Modern Japanese Literature: an Anthology, 1600-1900*. New York: Columbia UP, 2002. 121.

Takashi would be influenced by both, merging their styles to create fictionalized spaces and depiction in such a graphic nature it becomes almost absurd itself. Yet even when critical, Suzuki is only being tongue-and-cheek; like Fukasaku and Miike, he allows protagonists a complex identity and creates an image of the yakuza that is simultaneously subversive as well as positive.

Combat Without a Code but With Humanity

“The American style of heroism has its own approach to action: The hero saves the people he loves while defeating the bad guys. In the traditional Japanese action films, the only choice of the hero is whether to die or go to prison. That leads to a very limited type of film...”

-Kinji Fukasaku

While the criminal cinemascapes of the 1960s were largely dominated by the *ninkyō eiga* and its contemporary *mukokuseki akushon*, by the end of the decade audiences began to tire of the formulaic plots and duty-bound two-dimensional protagonists.²⁴⁶ While yakuza-themed films had never accurately depicted the citizen-yakuza-state relationship, the stylistic excesses of the *ninkyō eiga* provided little commentary on the violent excesses of postwar yakuza expansion. As discussed in the previous chapter, Suzuki Seijun criticized these scenarios in films like *Kanto Wanderer* and *Tokyo Drifter* using many techniques including hyperbole and dark humor. Suzuki further contributed to the shifting tendencies in yakuza film through the introduction of nihilistic protagonists with somewhat ambiguous morals. Yet, after Nikkatsu terminated his contract, Suzuki was deemed too great a liability by other studios and was ostracized from the Japanese film industry for over a decade. In his absence, the face of yakuza film would change dramatically. Coming to similar conclusions over the efficacy of *ninkyō eiga*, in 1967, Toei production chief Okada Shigeru began replacing lesser-grossing *ninkyō eiga* in the lower half of double bills with *kosoboku rosen*, or “pink violence” films, depicting women as yakuza protagonists. But as Mark Schilling notes, “such series as *Sukeban Burusu* (Girl Boss Blues, 1971-77) were less interested in righting the gender balance...than on simply selling sex, often with rape, torture, and bondage in attendance.”²⁴⁷

²⁴⁶ McDonald, 184.

²⁴⁷ Schilling, 33.

Even unmitigated eroticism could not save the fortunes of the *ninkyō eiga*; most scholars mark the end of the genre's popularity at 1972, when leading Toei heroine Junka Fuji announced her marriage and subsequent retirement from film.²⁴⁸ The passing of time did its part; such strong and handsome stars as Ken Takakura and Koji Tsuruta were beginning to age and fade. Yet in classic form, Toei once again went back to the yakuza drawing board and, in a rather bold move, put the weight (and fate) of the studio in the hands of the radical young director, Kinji Fukasaku.

In what would later be dubbed *jitsuroku eiga* (true story film), Fukasaku would utilize extensive historical research, personal experience and raw *cinéma vérité*-style cinematography in an attempt to truthfully depict yakuza violence, greed, and its accompanying humanity, while exploring contemporaneous international political issues and criticizing the prewar totalitarian nation state. Contrary to the *ninkyō eiga* set in the romanticized prewar period, or even *mukokuseki akusbon* films which lack context, Fukasaku recontextualizes the yakuza film in the realities of postwar life. *His Battles Without Honor and Humanity (Jingi naki tatakai)* series could thus be argued to parody the idealization and hyperbole of cinematic representation in previous genre films, while self-consciously utilizing absurd hyperbole in often graphic depictions of violence.

Making Movie History

Battles Without Honor and Humanity is a five-part series depicting the violence that accompanied yakuza expansion in the postwar era. In *Battles Without Honor and Humanity*, Fukasaku broke from the yakuza tradition, tossing aside narrow moral quandaries for broad political and social commentary through extended historical and narrative development. While contracted at Toei, Fukasaku released several drama, detective, and yakuza films, yet

²⁴⁸ Schilling, 32.

shied away from *ninkyō eiga*. He admits, “I was into something else--I’d been raised in Mito in a tough environment and happened to end up in a film studio, so my films tended to be rough around the edges.”²⁴⁹ Fukasaku cited his childhood as a major influence on *Battles*. “People from Mito are a bit cranky. A lot of yakuza come from there and people get into a lot of fights. Guys who can’t fight aren’t considered to be men.”²⁵⁰ As a teenager and twenty-something during occupation, Fukasaku’s life shared much in common with those of his characters. In one anecdote, having taught himself to use a sword, he would sleep with it under his pillow. His will to accurately portray the tragedy of his youth came from the films of Akira Kurosawa: “He was the first one to go out into the burnt-out ruins with a camera...That’s our job – to record the reality around us.”²⁵¹

Fukasaku’s filmmaking goal was thus perfectly suited for *Battles*. The narrative itself is based upon the prison memoirs of Kōzō Mino, a major participant in the Hiroshima yakuza wars. According to the memoirs, in the immediate postwar period the *oyabun* of a small local gang, Yamamura Tatsuo, ordered Mino to kill the dominant prefectural boss, Tsuchioka Hiroshi, Yamamura’s chief rival. But, Mino’s attempt failed, leading to his arrest and incarceration. While imprisoned, Mino learned that Yamamura had not only succeeded in the assassination of Hiroshi but had earned a fortune by assisting American occupational arms shipping during the Korean War. As the gang grew wealthy, they gained many new members and territories, putting them at odds with more established gangs in the area. The growth and wealth led to internal discord within the gang, while larger gangs with national presences—the Yamaguchi-gumi and the Honda-kai in particular—attempted to capitalize on the lack of order to assert their own spheres of influence upon the prefecture. Expelled

²⁴⁹ Ibid., 49.

²⁵⁰ Ibid., 48.

²⁵¹ Ibid., 54.

from Yamamura's gang for his failure, Mino established a small gang of his own in Kure City. Yamamura then murdered one of Mino's men, and Mino joined with the Yamaguchi-gumi, who sent him hundreds of men, preparing for what would become the Hiroshima yakuza wars of 1963 and 1964. But, before the conflict began, Mino was arrested on charges of "complicity in an assault," intended by authorities to diffuse the situation.²⁵² Though the war continued well into the decade, Mino spent the next seven years in Abarashi Prison, where he wrote the memoir.

Mino's work was in turn discovered by Kôchi Iiboshi, a reporter for the *Yomiuri Shinbun* and a former yakuza himself. Iiboshi adapted Mino's memoirs into a serialized documentary novel, leaving the facts and details of the text essentially intact but making minute changes, the most evident of which are the similarities in names: Kôzô Mino would be directly paralleled by the character Shôzô Hirono and Yamamura Tatsuo by Yamamori Yoshio.²⁵³ The book's serialization brought it to the attention of Toei,²⁵⁴ which hired Kazuo Kasahara to adapt the text; Kasahara's extensive experience in *ninkyô eiga* lead him to question Fukasaku's vision, believing morality to be the heart of yakuza film.²⁵⁵ The original script attempted, according to Kasahara, "to lay down a paper-thin foundation of emotional drama concerning *giri* versus *ninjô* and then using this, approach a documentary style by bringing out

²⁵² Torrance, Richard. "The nature of violence in Fukasaku Kinji's *Jingi naki tatakai* (War without a code of honor)", Japan Forum, 17:3, 394.

²⁵³ Ibid., 394.

²⁵⁴ In fact, Bunta Sugawara discovered the story himself while reading an issue of *Shukan Sankei* which featured Sugawara on the cover. Sugawara was riding the high-speed train from Tokyo to meet Toei producer, (and arguably the father of yakuza film) Koji Shundô, at the Kyoto production lot. Initially struck by the text's title and eventually captivated by the account, Sugawara disembarked and upon meeting his superior, convinced Shundô to produce the film, cast Sugawara as the star, and hire Fukasaku, whom Shundô had little respect for.

²⁵⁵ Schilling, 51.

the meaner aspects of the human condition.”²⁵⁶ Yet, after much criticism from the rest of the crew, Kasahara exceeded their expectations. Deciding to interview nearly every remaining associate of Mino’s, Kasahara became privy to anecdotes unavailable to Iiboshi. In some ways, however, Kasahara’s interviews only made his task more difficult, “...there was no focus for the action...these guys were losers and misfits and their stories were those of losers and misfits. There was no source for catharsis to please the audience that expected the thrill of action...”²⁵⁷ Despite his efforts in pursuing Fukasaku’s realist vision, Kasahara could not entirely overcome his *ninkyō eiga* background and what he perceived to be the importance of pathos, which he felt the project lacked. Thus, while in the memoirs Mino’s assassination attempt was unsuccessful, Kasahara’s Hirono succeeds, making Yamamori’s betrayal of him all the more unsavory and thereby drawing clearer distinctions between good and evil in the narrative.

Perhaps it was difficult for Kasahara to fully accept the series’ title, which invokes a yakuza film without a code.²⁵⁸ Yakuza society as represented in the films was, when compared to its predecessors, a dystopian nightmare. The loyalty, etiquette, and forbearance of some of Koji Tsuruta’s characters were utterly abandoned. Even the stylish élan of the *mukokuseki akushon* films was dispensed. Fukasaku’s characters were, like the director himself, “rough around the edges,” unrestrained in fashion, profanities, or violence. Taken

²⁵⁶ Torrance, 395.

²⁵⁷ Ibid., 394.

²⁵⁸ If consistency were the sole aim of this text, I would perhaps use McDonald’s translation of the original Japanese title, *Jingi Naki Tatakai*. McDonald translates the title as *Combat Without Code*, providing a translation that is arguably more contextual to the yakuza world. Fukasaku’s English translator, Linda Hoaglund, instead uses the literal meaning of *jingi*. This translation is problematic; it may be construed that the characters lack humanity, which is not Fukakusa’s wish. However, Hoaglund’s attempt does display the violence and desperation of the film. This is not the first time Hoaglund has taken liberties with Fukasaku’s work (she asked his permission to add the word “rage” to the beginning of the title for his film *If You Are Young* in order to get the emotions of the film across.

together, statements by two of Fukasaku's personal friends, Sadao Yamane and Linda Hoaglund,²⁵⁹ speak to the Fukasaku's ironic distancing from *ninkyō eiga* yakuza depictions. Yamane describes the portrayal of yakuza in *ninkyō eiga*, stating, "Ninkyō films depicted stoic men who suppressed all desire."²⁶⁰ Linda Hoaglund once said, "The reason I love Mr. Fukasaku's films is that no one is polite."²⁶¹

I Can't Be Your Hero, Baby

The code is blatantly absent from this yakuza film series, both in conception and practice, the juxtaposition of preceding films leading to several instances which parody *ninkyō eiga* ritualized depictions of actual yakuza ceremonies. In the first installment of the series, Hirono puts his gang in jeopardy when he gets into a fistfight with a well-connected yakuza. He resolves to perform *yubitsume*, cutting off the joint of his smallest finger – yet, a problem arises. As Hirono bluntly states, "I gave my word so I have to do it. But I don't know how." In fact, no one in the gang is competent in the code, except surprisingly Yamamori's wife, who had seen it once in Osaka. Though she guides him through the steps, he botches the ceremony, losing the joint as he cuts it. The entire gang undertakes a mostly comical search for the missing joint, which is eventually found in the chicken coop, pecked to a pulp. Hirono seems barely affected by the self-inflicted mutilation, quickly joining the search without so much as a wince. One of the gangsters examines the finger, observing, "Look how pathetic it is!" This criticism then doubles as parody: The immediate postwar generation yakuza, recently repatriated military grunts, joined the yakuza as a means of survival, but the black market's chaos and desperation left little time or purpose for

²⁵⁹ Yamane being Fukasaku's personal biographer and Hoaglund his English translator.

²⁶⁰ "Jitsuroku: Reinventing the Yakuza Genre." Interview by Sadao Yamane. *The Yakuza Papers: Battles Without Honor & Humanity*. 2004. DVD.

²⁶¹ "Translating Fukasaku, an Interview with Subtitler Linda Hoaglund." Interview by Linda Hoaglund. *The Yakuza Papers: Battles Without Honor & Humanity*. 2004. DVD.

education in tradition; a *ninkyō eiga* practice seems pathetic and futile when placed in the context of hard boiled occupation.

In a thematically similar event in the series' third installment, one of Hirono's own *kobun* embezzles money from the gang, earning him a savage beating from Hirono. Yet, feeling guilty still, the young gangster decides to make a physical sacrifice, one more suited to the violence of the postwar period. As Hirono walks in to his headquarters, he notices the guilty figure shaking, the end of his left arm hanging as bloody stump in a sling, while the hand itself lies on the table, wrapped as a present. One of his brothers states, "I told him to cut off a finger, but he said two or three fingers weren't enough...He cut off his own hand with a hatchet." The *kobun* in question gestures with his stump toward Hirono, smiling sheepishly as he shakes uncontrollably from the pain. The saturation of violence in this chaotic era clearly desensitized lowly yakuza, stripping the weight of sacrifice and *giri* from the traditional *yubitsume* ceremony, and leading to more graphic and self-consciously absurd displays of *jingi*.²⁶² This juxtaposes the ease and insignificance of Hirono's own *yubitsume*, yet, such sacrifice does not impress Hirono, who shouts, "Shitbrain! That was a fucking stupid thing to do! Now how are you going to fight!" While the *kobun*'s actions parody the ceremony's triviality in the face of harsh postwar realities, Hirono's response emphasizes the irrationality of such excess while parodying the very purpose of the ritual. Traditionally, *yubitsume*, as described in the second chapter, punished disloyalty by limiting the yakuza's ability to wield a sword, making them more dependent upon the group as a whole. Yet, this

²⁶² Miike would present a similar violent escalation in the *yubitsume* ritual in *Ichi be Killer* (*Koroshiya Ichi*, 2001) where the yakuza Kakihara cuts off the end of his tongue, claiming it a better representation of *yubitsume* sacrifice as he loves sweets. In reality, Kakihara loves nothing more than physical pain; the sacrifice of such a gesture further loses connection to its traditional significance.

did not prevent the use of violence outright, as yakuza were in fact violence specialists.²⁶³ While the violence of the postwar era perhaps demanded more extreme forms of sacrifice relative to their historical context and precedent, at the same time, the trend toward intensified gang expansion and conflict make such *jingi* motivated gestures even more impractical than *yubitsume*. However, Fukasaku's parody of the ceremony does not end there. The *kobun* responds to Hirono's seemingly rhetorical question, using his remaining quivering hand to grab the pistol from his pocket, muttering, "I have a weapon." The proliferation of surplus Imperial and US military arms in the postwar period minimized the importance of the sword and its associated traditions and rituals. Within the context of the series, violence is usually represented in close-quarter pistol fights, where hand-eye coordination and dexterity are overshadowed by instinctual emotional and physical reactions. Thus, the loss of a few fingers or even a hand loses all significance. *Yubitsume* only serves its desired function within the context of the sword, and by recontextualizing the practice, Fukasaku parodies the modern application of ceremony both in form and function, portraying such character building devices as purposeless, and mirroring Suzuki's own recontextualization of traditional rituals as evidence of the absurd.

One distinguishing result of this technique exhibits is Fukasaku's parodying of the *ninkyō* and *mukokuseki akushon eiga* star systems. Fukasaku believes his own greatest contribution to film was the abolition of the latter.²⁶⁴ He critiques "star" actors, stating, "They were so interested in looking good, they would never roll around on the floor and get pissed off."²⁶⁵ Fukasaku drew from a younger generation of actors, just on the cusp of stardom, "We cast younger people...who weren't well known-we got them from the *obeiya* [the large room

²⁶³ *Siniawer*, 5.

²⁶⁴ *McDonald*, 29.

²⁶⁵ *Schilling*, 52.

where beginning actors slept].”²⁶⁶ Yet, while casting one of his favorite actors and good friends Bunta Sugawara, Fukasaku favored utilizing supporting actors as much as possible, leading to an ensemble cast nicknamed, “the piranha corps.” Yamane discusses Fukasaku’s ensemble cast, arguing, “Even when portraying a hero, other characters are always involved. Even though there is a hero, he is also just one character among all others. Focusing on one character, as if spot-lit, doesn’t reflect what happens in real life at all.”²⁶⁷ In fact, Fukasaku so stressed the use of a young, varied cast that after the first two installments, he was forced to recast actors, whose characters had already been killed, in new often conflicting roles. Umemiya Tatsuo, for instance, plays both Hirono’s sworn brother Wakasugi as well as Akashi family representative Iwai. By representing both Wakasugi, a violent, yet honorable local yakuza hero, and Iwai, a kind, yet devious national powerbroker, using the same actor, Fukasaku would create a pluralistic image of the yakuza, similar to his predecessor Suzuki and later film director Miike. Fukasaku’s emphasis on the ensemble cast led him to diverge from popular cinematic custom, placing supporting characters in the foreground, while often obscuring principle actors. On set, he would shout, “You back there. Why are you hanging back. Step forward!”²⁶⁸ Fukasaku’s thus cast the established norms of character hierarchy into disorder (mirroring the hierarchal chaos of the yakuza families as well as the visual chaos of the black market streets), emphasizing the short-lived supporting characters over recurring figures.²⁶⁹

²⁶⁶ Ibid.

²⁶⁷ Jitsuroku: Reinventing the Yakuza Genre." Interview by Sadao Yamane. *The Yakuza Papers: Battles Without Honor & Humanity*. 2004. DVD

²⁶⁸ Ibid.

²⁶⁹ One should note that despite Fukasaku’s intentions, Sugawara did become a star through the *Battles* films. His depiction of Hirono was so well liked, he would often simply sign autographs as “*jingi*.”

Fukasaku's repudiation of the star system is mirrored in the films' content, simultaneously parodying and criticizing the code and the *makoto* hero. Incapable of satiating their thirst for greed and power, bosses exploit their men's loyalty, promising them vast rewards for often unreasonable request, all the while self devising serving plans through which their men are sacrificed. This is perhaps the most prevalent theme throughout the series. Each film features one young yakuza whose relatively traditional sense of yakuza morality is exploited by the older boss for his own ends, while the underling faces prison or death. Such figures are called *teppôdama*, or literally, "bullets," evocative of both their deadly nature and expendability. The first such character is Hirono, who receives meager compensation for his many acts of bravery and sacrifice. Moreover, Hirono learns that both he and his friend, Wakasugi, were sold out to their enemies and the authorities as a convenience for Yamamori. After returning from prison deeply jaded, Hirono decides to break ties with Yamamori and start his own gang, establishing himself as a boss. He feels he has learned a lesson, finally understanding the new rules of the yakuza world. Yet, it will take the entire series for Hirono to fully grasp the ubiquitous hypocrisy of the modern yakuza.

Fukasaku further redefines the character of the yakuza protagonist by transforming him into the very thing he himself hates most, a self-serving boss. In the second installment, Hirono is guilty of capriciously sacrificing his own men when he kills a man out of spite, then orders one of his own *kobun* to confess to the crime. The young bullet, naïve to the reality of the sacrifice he is about to make, readily agrees, while pathetically grateful to share a beer with his bosses. Everyone seems content until Fukasaku, using a *cinéma vérité*s stylistic (I will define this in detail later), freezes the frame, superimposing written text under the young man, the day's date, and his prison sentence: twelve years. While *kobun* taking the fall for an *oyabun* is not uncommon even in *ninkyô eiga*, this instance functions as parody when

supplemented with such text; the juxtaposition strips the act of its heroism, leaving a harsh reality that seems suggestive of the absurd.

Yet, Fukasaku does not leave such recognition up to chance, eventually beating the audience over the head with it. In the fourth installment, Hirono's friend Iwai visits, bringing him an expensive lunch box. The detective remarks, "Bosses like you get to feast on fancy food but all the grunts get is prison garbage. When you're a yakuza, only the boss gets the perks. Even in war, they don't lift a finger. The grunts do all the dirty work. Truth is, they're probably afraid to die." Hirono rages, "We live by a different code. Shut the fuck up if you don't understand!" The detective responds, "If you cared about your men, you'd be the first to die." He leaves Hirono speechless. While unyielding loyalty is expected from a *kobun*, the ease with which bosses sacrifice their men makes such devotion truly meaningless. For most of the final installment, Hirono, arrested for complicity in an assault at the end of the previous installment, remains incarcerated. Upon his release, he debates whether he should continue the yakuza life. The film ends with the funeral of yet another *kobun*, Akio. As Hirono exits the funeral, the narrator states, "Hirono could not even remember the face of the young boy that was killed. But on this day he finally decided to retire." As Hirono remains in prison for most of the film, Akio serves as a part-time protagonist; at one point, he takes his sworn brother's assignment, killing the ever elusive *oyabun* in open daylight.²⁷⁰ One would think such a valued *kobun* would be worth remembering. Akio's anonymity reflects Fukasaku's belief in the anonymity of the hero, while Hirono's realization of the futility of their way of life distinguishes *jitsuroken eiga* from *ninkyō eiga*, where the hero's final sacrifice becomes the redeeming factor for his life of crime. Rather than culminating in

²⁷⁰ Akio's sworn brother is charged with the task, yet becomes too frightened. As the two hide behind a wall waiting for Makihara to pass, Akio's yakuza brother pisses himself from fright, a scene parodied later in Miike's *Full Metal Yakuza* (*Full Metal gokudō*, 1997).

aesthetic zed catharsis, Fukasaku leaves the protagonist and audience frustrated with the lack of purpose in following the code.

A prime example of the parodic futility of the *makoto* hero is the character Yamanaka, a naïve young hitman who befriends Hirono in prison. Lacking family and means of survival, Yamanaka is alone in the world, until he is taken into the Hiroshima Muraoka family, where he becomes a *teppōdama*. Muraoka seems to like the young man, even offering him the love of his life, Muraoka's niece, Yasuko. Yasuko's ex-husband died as a kamikaze pilot; it would reflect poorly upon Muraoka's conservative yakuza identity to allow her to remarry, yet he gives his blessing, before ordering Muraoka on his most dangerous assassination yet. Surprisingly, Yamanaka succeeds but is arrested and sentenced to life in prison. While incarcerated, he discovers that Muraoka sent Yasuko back to her husband's family to marry his brother. Naturally livid, Yamanaka breaks out of prison to kill Muraoka. Muraoka receives news of Yamanaka's escape and quickly recalls Yasuko, fooling Yamanaka into unshakeable guilt and loyalty. Yamanaka embarks on a final suicide mission in an attempt to repay his boss's ostensible kindness. After eliminating Muraoka's remaining enemies, he makes his way back to the Muraoka family house, where Muraoka's lieutenant, Matsunaga, finally reveals the truth. Surrounded by the police and with no one to turn to, he realizes his sacrifices have been futile. He takes a handful of dust, blows it away, and then clogs his pistol with dirt before finally shooting himself in the mouth; the dust in the pistol causes a fatal explosion. At his funeral service, bosses like Muraoka and Yamamori collect money as presents, which they gamble away at the service, all the while making passing comments such as, "Muraoka really had a good man." As Hirono watches Muraoka celebrating happily at the funeral, he cannot bring himself to even light a cigarette. Fukasaku ends the film with a shot of Yamanaka's grave, narrating, "Yamanaka's name is still whispered as a legendry

Hiroshima yakuza. But no one visits his grave now.” The graveyard fades into the Hiroshima skyline, finally focusing on the atomic bomb dome. The narrator ends with, “Many more would be sacrificed in the escalation of the struggles among the yakuza of Hiroshima.” Fukasaku here challenges the traditional value associated with the *makoto* hero’s sacrifice. The first statement denies him physical representations extended to more traditional *makoto* heroes,²⁷¹ while the second takes away any unique quality his story may have, thus designating him as just one among many. This designation is similar to Fukasaku’s treatment of the character of Akio discussed above. Without the context of the code, which aestheticizes such climactic moments, Yamanaka’s sacrifice loses its significance, worth little more than a quick mention.

Real Rough Style: Constructing Violence Through *Cinema Vérités*

Battles stylistically constructs historical context and the harsh realities of the postwar yakuza world through the use of *cinéma vérité*²⁷² approach, using specific editing and camera techniques, to imply the extent of historical research undertaken. The film opens with the sound of an explosion, as the camera pans up on a still photo of a pillar of smoke converging at the top into a mushroom cloud. At this point, Fukasaku cues the music and credits, horns blare the haunting theme song of the film, and the title appears in a bold red

²⁷¹ Nitta Yoshisada, despite his subversive image at the time of his death, is buried at the Kokubunji (official state temple) in Shikoku, heavily associated with the Ikushina shrine in Gunma Prefecture, and is posthumously remembered in statues across the country. Saigô Takamori too is immortalized in statues, one particularly prominent one in Tokyo’s Ueno park. Saigô is enshrined at Yasakuni, dedicated to the spirits of soldiers who died fighting for the emperor, including the *kamikaze* pilots. While I am not arguing Yamanaka deserves such honors, his unmarked and unvisited burial site suggests the absence of posthumous veneration necessary in a *makoto* hero.

²⁷² *Cinéma vérité* is a method of filmmaking developed in the 1960s involving a small crew entering “the real world” with portable light and sound equipment, using minimal production to capture the most true to life images. Rothman, William. "Eternal Vérités: Cinema-Vérité and Classical Cinema." *The "I" of the Camera: Essays in Film Criticism, History, and Aesthetics*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 2004. 281.

blood spatter: an action film adaptation of Jackson Pollack's action painting.²⁷³ As the credits continue, Fukasaku utilizes montage, juxtaposing photos of the ruins of Hiroshima (the burnt out A-bomb dome, radiation patients examined by doctors amid the rubble) with photos of the black market (MPs attempting to control traffic, men gambling on dirt roads, crowds huddled around countless sales stands).²⁷⁴ These images place the film within the historical context of not only the black market but of the war that engendered it.

The effort Fukasaku devoted to this type of historical contextualization was rather unique to the genre. *Ninkyō eiga* were temporally static, the narratives spanning a few brief years in the Taisho or early Showa period. *Mukokuseki akushon* conversely lacked any setting or frame, thus garnering the adjective “borderless.” *Battles*, on the other hand, spans roughly twenty years, from Japan's surrender to the mid '70s. This grants the series a long period through which the narrative can provide historical commentary, documenting the transition of everyday life, from the struggles of the black market era to the order obtained later through economic and political stability, and so, much like Suzuki's *Branded to Kill* and Miike's later *Dark Society* trilogy, emphasizes the hidden, yet discernable, dark underbelly of the Japanese city.

In the second installment (*Battles Without Honor and Humanity 2: Deadly Fight In Hiroshima*), Fukasaku experiments more with his signature still photo opening. Here, he opens with still color photograph taken from the first installment and includes narration to provide background information as a plot reminder. These stills are interspersed with authentic black and white photos of yakuza and gangs as well as of the film's characters in shots not found in the movie. Here Fukasaku attempts to create a direct connection between his

²⁷³ See Figure 17.

²⁷⁴ See Figure 18.

researched and portrayed subjects, giving a “real” credibility to his own characters and film by associating them with an older era, thus granting them greater historical legitimacy. These stills cut to a shot of the A-bomb Dome, as the narrator remarks, “In 1950, as the Korean War broke out...” The camera zooms into the sky of the photo, and once again an explosion cuts to images of US military planes, smoke clouds, etc. The camera zooms in and out of these photos, shaking from left to right. Somehow, it seems, the photos are affected by the very subject matter they depict. Here, Fukasaku demonstrates the mimetic nature of art, in keeping with his general goal of presenting reality (i.e. history) as art (i.e. film). Fukasaku finally finishes this sequence of stills with a montage of newspaper headlines and photos. Headlines read: “Terror of flowing blood – silent victim,” “The weapon was a US military pistol,” “Three people dead, searching for traces of a...”²⁷⁵ The inclusion of the newspapers furthers the documentary feel of the film, lending credence to its veracity.

While the newspaper motif would be further explored in the following two installments, Fukasaku would shift the target of his appropriation from stills to film. The sequence once again opens with narrating background information over stills (including the death, casualty, and arrest totals from the last film), cutting in real life images of yakuza and police forming en masse, before cutting back to stills of the fictional yakuza conducting a board meeting. Next, however, Fukasaku chooses a still, long-distance photo of the yakuza offices (now restructured as a political party, Tensei). He then cuts to a magnified portion of the photo, the focus on a group of garishly dressed yakuza standing guard. The distance of the first photo and the focus on the individuals in the second zoomed-in still suggest voyeurism similar to that of a private investigator. The next cut features the empty interior of the Tensei office, displaying its name and crest in gold on dark wood. Finally, Fukasaku

²⁷⁵ See Figure 19.

transitions from color stills to a black and white film long shot of the twenty-year anniversary of the atomic bomb peace march; shown is a small army of yakuza paraders brandishing banners, praising peace and democracy, wearing head bands with their party name and the rising sun icon, over which our bloody titles are imposed.²⁷⁶ The credits roll, and after a few more close-ups on recognizable characters in the crowd, Fukasaku limits himself to longer shots and takes, capturing the parade from every angle as it slowly marches forward. These techniques suggest an objective representation similar to what we would expect from a news program.

Fukasaku's *cinéma vérité*s style extends throughout his film work, particularly in his depictions of violence. Let us examine the first black market segment in the series, as it exhibits a variety of important stylistic techniques. The first shot features the date and place – Kure City 1946 – imposed onto an objective establishing long shot of the black market, first in black and white, and then slowly fading in and out into color, almost as if the color were breathed into the movie. One could interpret this as the director breathing new life into purely historical footage, suggested by the formally marked date and time. Throughout the series Fukasaku will make the decision to inform the viewer of the date and time in this way, reaffirming the historical context. What follows is a cut to a medium shot of Hirono dressed in military garb, drinking unfiltered sake, until he hears a scream and turns to the camera. Fukasaku cuts to a medium shot of a woman screaming and running through an outdoor black market scene. The *mise-en-scène* is dominated by khaki and beige clothing and color, making the frame busy and confusing. A few beige shapes materialize in the crowd, now discernable as American G.I.s chasing after the woman, as the camera, clearly hand

²⁷⁶ This juxtaposition is a particularly absurd form of parody, the image of such characters as Otomo Katsutoshi scowling as they march in a peace parade is laughable. See Figure 20.

held, quickly follows the action. As she runs past Hirono, the camera quickly turns back in a blur before freezing on an out-of-focus medium shot of Hirono, off-centered to the left side of the frame; the caption underneath reads, “SHOUZOU HIRONO FUTURE UNDERBOSS OF YAMAMORI FAMILY.”²⁷⁷ While the camera is frozen, the diegetic shouts of the black marketers and soldiers continue. The still itself is hardly discernable and unfreezes in just a few seconds before tracking to the left to repeat the process for his friend, Yamagata.

The use of still photos to introduce gang members in the midst of chaotic composition is repeated throughout the scene and series. The confused frames and brief time given to observe the photographs leaves the viewer incapable of committing characters’ names, faces, and future ranks to memory. By freezing the frame in the midst of such fast paced action shots only to immediately resume the pace, Fukasaku halts the expected flow of time and narrative, which is further distorted by allowing diegetic sound to continue to play as the shot is frozen, leaving the viewer feeling displaced and confused among the chaos – perhaps no different than the initial reactions of most black market denizens at the start of occupation. The freezes, as mentioned, are often out of focus, generally catching the subject in a moment of action. This characterizes the subjects as men of action, yet in some ways robs them of identity, in the vein of Fukasaku’s attempt at creating an ensemble cast that parodies and challenges the star system and emphasis on the morality of a single hero present in *ninkyō eiga*. The characters’ faces are often obscured in such shots and we are not given their back stories; by introducing them in such a manner, Fukasaku tries to make them somewhat faceless, providing only their tough facade and context as identification. To the

²⁷⁷ See Figure 21.

audience, these men are back alley thugs, not “spot-lit heroes” as Yamane described the established representation of the yakuza protagonist.

Fukasaku further attempts to draw this parallel in his freeze frame technique of portraying the deaths and arrests of characters. In these cases, the event’s date and victims’ fate replace their rank. Some of the characters designated in this way have no more than two or three lines in the film before being killed off in one way or another. Their names could have been given in context, but in imbuing them with enough importance to freeze the flow of the film, Fukasaku reinforces how sudden and chaotic their deaths really are while further emphasizing the ensemble cast. Such characters enter Fukasaku’s story as an unsettling freeze amidst chaos and depart in the same way. For some, their only significance is their nearly inevitable, violent death that is used to juxtapose the pathos of violence with the objective, factual information of the text imposed onto the shots.

As the scene continues, Fukasaku utilizes guerrilla-style camera techniques to depict confrontation and violence in an attempt to permeate realism through his action, departing again from the choreographed action of preceding genre films. Once action resumes after the freezes, Hirono and Yamagata run past the camera off screen, chasing the soldiers and woman. The camera attempts to follow, quickly rotating in another blur of khaki, beige and indiscernible faces. This technique allows the audience to feel as if we too have lost the characters among the crowd, imparting to the audience the chaos and anarchy of the black market, and demonstrating that the characters are less significant than the events around them. Fukasaku then cuts to a busy medium shot, as the soldiers finally capture the woman. As they carry her to the left, the camera, still hand held, tracks with them in a long take, with the frame often obscured by vaguely defined figures and obstacles, before stopping at a barn into which the soldiers throw the screaming woman. As they restrain her and drop their

trousers, the camera swoops in and out, abruptly transitioning between medium, close-up, and extreme close-up shots of faces, arms, and other body parts. Here, the cameraman literally becomes an on-site news or documentary filmmaker, pushing the frame in and out in an attempt to draw as close to his subjects as possible without entering their conflict.

Fukasaku then cuts to a medium shot of Hirono, who enters the scene with a dirty sack of clothing with which he beats the soldier on top of the woman, over the head. The camera has trouble tracking Hirono, whose body is often off center and sometimes mostly out of the frame. Instead, it focuses on the sack itself. As Hirono brings it down upon the body of the American, the camera winds up and comes down in a quick, confusing tracking-shot, directly mimicking not the character but the action of violence itself and remains focused on the woman as she escapes to the right, before turning to the left and pushing in to follow the action. Long takes such as these with frenzied shifts in subject and focus which, unlike Suzuki's constant jump cuts, limit the role and visual guidance of the director and allow the audience to choose what it pays attention to, capture the larger event rather than any one character. This allows the audience to once again focus on the event itself rather than the characters' psychological response to the event. Once Hirono swings a log at the soldiers, the camera again follows the motions of his limbs rather than of his torso. Along with the clothing bag track, this marks a transition from the shot in which they carry the woman into the barn where the camera pushes in and out but does not participate. Here, the camera almost becomes a phantom accomplice in the fight, at the very least mimicking Hirono's own motions in a subjective manner. Though shots like the former are very common throughout the series, shots like the latter occur less frequently and are reserved only for when Fukasaku would like the viewer to sympathize with the character. That is, the camera's imitation of the character's own action grants the audience the character's psychological

response that long takes and pans minimize. By combining the long takes and pans with hand-held camera movement that mimics the character's actions, Fukasaku combines objective representation of the general event with a pseudo-subjective representation of the character's actions and emotions. Moreover, he accomplishes this without stressing his own presence in the film's execution, letting the action instead dictate the audience's emotional reactions. I will address this point further after describing Fukasaku's other depictions of violence.

The next scene is equally important: it exhibits the extent to which Fukasaku depicts violence, his unprecedented graphic representation parodying the relative cleanliness of violence in *ninkyō eiga*. Wakasugi catches two men attempting to steal gasoline and has both figures dragged into a hut – the sequence represented in cinematic techniques similar to the previous scene in which the girl is carried to the barn.²⁷⁸ Wakasugi then orders his men to cut off their right arms. The first thief's arm is held in the center of the frame. As a sword slices through it, blood bursts across the *mise-en-scène*. The second instance of amputation is similarly depicted, except that (while the arm is once again in the center of the frame) the victim is in the background. As the arm is cut off, the blood sprays at the camera, nearly missing the lens.²⁷⁹ The frame freezes as the man holding the arm as it is cut falls back, obscuring the frame. The only image clearly depicted is the victim's pained face in the background, his body obscured by his own arm stump in the foreground – an abrupt and startling end to the scene. Extreme violence, particularly the explicit blood spatter was not

²⁷⁸ Though not necessarily unique to the previous scene in execution, one should also note the next scene, where Wakasugi cuts off the right arms of two gasoline thieves. Fukasaku freeze frames at the action's climax.

²⁷⁹ This may or may not be intentional. In many other cases throughout the series, Fukasaku allows such liquid as water or sake to hit the lens, causing droplets to obscure the frame and contributing to the documentary/guerilla style of the film. See Figure 22.

very common in *gaman eiga*, *ninkyō eiga*, or *mukokuseki akushon*, which were considered violent by a token of their high body counts but which generally lacked their graphic representation.

The final important camera technique found in the initial black market scene is the low-angled canted shot. After Yamagata is wounded in a fight against a drunken yakuza, Hirono decides to help Yamagata's yakuza friends and offers to kill the culprit himself. As the yakuza charges at Hirono with sword drawn, Hirono positions himself with his feet wide apart, hesitating before finally releasing at the last moment.²⁸⁰ The camera tracks the yakuza from a high-angled medium-long shot from Hirono's perspective, capturing the full body of the yakuza as he falls and rolls dead. Fukasaku cues the horns and cuts to a reverse canted low-angled long shot. Fukasaku usually prefers long takes and pans such as those found in the scene where Hirono fights the G.I.s to shot-reverse-shot cuts when depicting violence.. This same shot, however, reappears throughout the series. The canted shot-reverse shot coupled with the non-diegetic horn sound signifies particularly climactic instances of violence.²⁸¹ By selecting the low-angled, long, canted shot, which tilts the camera into a diagonal orientation, we view the scene as if we, too, are lying on the ground with our heads tilted sideways like the corpse of the victim, thus creating visceral realism while denying the assailant the power usually gained from the reverse low angled shot; the diagonal tilt of the camera deemphasizes the stature generally afforded to the victimizer by a standard low-angled shot. In these situations, Fukasaku attempts to create greater sympathy with the dead victim than the killer, even when the killer is the protagonist. The length of the take and shot, coupled with the subjectivity presented in the point of view of the canted shot,

²⁸⁰ This, too, is an example of parody, a drunken, sword-bearing yakuza charging at a man who can barely shoot a gun. In juxtaposition to *ninkyō eiga*, the hesitant gun armed novice quickly dispatches the sword wielding man.

²⁸¹ See Figure 23.

victimizes the audience while reminding the viewer of the greater context of the event, where everyone is a victim.

Now that we have examined the forms of violence in *Battles*, let us examine its purpose: the construction of historicized reality and the humanization of lowly yakuza characters.

Concerning violence in the film's historical context, Fukasaku had this to say:

Why I depict violence in my films is because I think it's closely related to one aspect of our postwar experience. There's a term 'the in-ruins generation' or 'the black market generation'. People belonging to this generation share a common feeling. They have a kind of aversion to the rebuilt society of Japan...they refused to accept the reconstructed society and felt a strong longing for the chaotic black market era. And they held on to violent emotions themselves.²⁸²

Fukasaku's graphic depictions of violence and chaos in the historical context can thus be viewed as a means of portraying the emotions of both his characters and of his generation, juxtaposing and parodying *ninkyō eiga*'s emphasis on internal conflict stemming from anachronistic moral codes. We have already discussed Fukasaku's love of "bullet" characters, whose bitter emotions the viewer is permitted to experience firsthand through *cinéma vérité*s style. Director Kurosawa Kiyoshi stresses the importance of emotions in Fukasaku's portrayal of violence:

When a person uses violence against another, both sides feel emotions. People go through emotional experiences when they use violence. It's entirely different from cold-blooded killing by a hit man for business. Nor is it like killing a great number of people with a push of a button. When a person uses violence or kills another, the attacker and the attacked both experience emotions that are incredibly complex but also reveal a fundamental part of humanity.²⁸³

²⁸² "Boryoku: Fukasaku and the Art of Violence." Interview by Kinji Fukasaku. *The Yakuza Papers: Battles Without Honor & Humanity*. 2004. Yamane notes, "There were those who chose to change as postwar Japan changed and there were those that stood firm and felt nothing would be gained by changing. I believe Fukasaku couldn't take a stand on either side."

"Jitsuroku: Reinventing the Yakuza Genre." Interview by Sadao Yamane. *The Yakuza Papers: Battles Without Honor & Humanity*. Television.

²⁸³ "Boryoku: Fukasaku and the Art of Violence." Interview by Kinji Fukasaku.

Due to the emotion inherent that exists in man-to-man combat, Fukasaku's shooting style allows the viewer to understand the humanity of both the victim and the victor.²⁸⁴ Thus, despite frequent subversive representations of yakuza, Fukasaku still grants them redeeming, human qualities.²⁸⁵

Humanized interpersonal violence is subsequently juxtaposed by violence on the national and international level; violence committed by the US, rather than criminal violence, is portrayed as one of the true evils of the film, begetting the yakuza's street violence. Americanized negative social influence is present even in *ninkyō eiga*, which challenges the affect of Western culture upon Japan's own traditions and morals. Westernization then represents the destruction of the moral code. It would not be inappropriate then to assume that *Battles* challenges Japan's joint history with the US, parodying *ninkyō eiga*'s original theme by recontextualizing it at a historical point where Western influence is no longer merely challenging traditional morality but is completely supplanting it. The yakuza families of *Battles* are certainly more akin to the *ninkyō eiga*'s villainous, westernized gangs that lack regard for *jingi*. Fukasaku thus parodies *ninkyō eiga* by representing its criticized subject as the norm while still criticizing it himself.

Yet, a historical narrative set in Hiroshima demands reference to the bomb, to which I have alluded. The film begins, as we know, with the still photo of the atomic mushroom cloud. The narration states: "A new kind of violence came to replace the old in lawless Japan. It was everyone for himself amidst the chaos." When coupled with the photo, the viewer can assume that the "old violence" referenced is the bombing of Hiroshima, while the "new violence" refers to the gang wars. By following the first sentence with the second,

²⁸⁴ Yet as most of the violence in the series is depicted as meaningless, one wonders what exactly such "victor" win?

Fukasaku suggests that the new violence, characterized by “everyone for himself,” is rooted in the chaos caused by the old. This suggestion is then immediately proven in the film’s opening scene. The violence committed by the American soldiers force Hirono’s hand, leading to his own, new violence. Moreover, the policies of the United States continue to contribute violence in Hiroshima; the Yamamori-gumi’s initial success is derived from Korean War contracts, which leads them to greater expansion and greater violence. The difference in violence is also apparent, particularly in light of Kurosawa Kiyoshi’s observations. While yakuza violence remains on the streets, person-to-person American violence is characterized in the film by planes and bombs, an impersonal form of violence that kills multitudes at once, precluding the expression of base, human emotion. The yakuza, then, with whatever accompanying flaws they may embody, remain distinctly human when compared with the faceless inhumanity of the United States.

Fukasaku develops this idea of “new violence” tied to the postwar era in his second and fourth installments. The atomic bomb allusions are particularly prevalent throughout the second film in the metaphor of water. When on the run, the Otomo gang hides in the Motomachi district, which in those days was a destitute shanty town known as the “bomb slums.” This district, which hugs the Ota River, became a mass grave in the immediate aftermath of the bomb, where victims of the bomb rushed, begging for the river’s poisoned water before they died. The water imagery is dominant throughout the film. When the Otomo gang tortures a Muraoka yakuza, he begs for water in a similar manner, at which point the Otomos tie him to a boat and drag him through the river to his death. Later in the film, as Yamanaka returns to meet with Matsunaga, he enters the house panting, begging for water. Finally, as Yamanaka prepares for his suicide, he lays under a leaky faucet, drinking

one drop at a time.²⁸⁶ With the film starting and ending with an image of the atomic bomb dome, Yamanaka's violent end parodies the fate of the atomic bomb's victims.

In the fourth installment, a "bullet" by the name of Nozaki is offered money to kill an *oyabun* who shows him compassion that is uncharacteristic of bosses in the film. Emotionally conflicted, Nozaki returns to his family's rundown apartment in the atomic bomb slums. His mother's face is scarred with keloids, similar to the Hiroshima Maidens. Nozaki's poverty is represented not only by his apartment but by its broken television. His family's complaint about the latter creates the impetus necessary to murder perhaps the only kind *oyabun* of the series. Shortly after, Nozaki is arrested. The emphasis on the decisions association with the poor quality of life his family leads in the atomic bomb slums suggests that the bomb is responsible for his fate.

Moreover, Fukasaku's political criticisms are not aimed solely at the US. The ruthlessness of the gangs is paralleled in the depiction of Japan's own politicians. Throughout the series, Japanese politicians are depicted as no nobler than yakuza without a code. The first gang wars of the film occur when a local politician hires the Yamamori family to kidnap a political rival the night before a major vote. The vote, itself, is as anarchic as the black market's streets; assemblymen climb over tables, crowding and shouting and pushing their way to the front. Later, the kidnapped politician would incite an internal war within the gang as vengeance. Yet, since politicians are not given the benefit of actual interpersonal violence, they are grouped then with the inhumane violence of the Americans. By addressing such political corruption, Fukasaku is addressing the aforementioned *kuromaku* influence over politics (which reached its pinnacle in the 1970s). In the second installment, the Muraoka family is in close contact with local political officials, who grant Muraoka both a

²⁸⁶ See Figure 24.

security contract at the government owned racetrack, as well as the profitable position of director. Later in the film, Muraoka, when threatened with criminal charges, alludes to earlier conflicts that he has undertaken on the government's behalf against *sankokujin*, stating directly to the chief of police, "Have you forgotten you asked for my help with the Koreans after we lost the war?" Yakuza make great state allies, but only when convenient for the state.

One political comparison that seems obvious yet noticeably absent in critical analysis of the series is between the gangs and the prewar imperialist state. Fukasaku developed a political consciousness during the war, as he states, "I realized that the military men and the politicians had all been liars...we were taught that boys should die for the sake of the country, even if they were only fifteen years old. Having those kinds of experiences, I suddenly felt that war was bad and that I'd had enough of the emperor." Imperial Japan was presented similarly to a family, as expressed by Weiner in "'Self' and 'Other' in Imperial Japan," "...the emperor was established as both head of state and semi-divine father to the national community."²⁸⁷ While comparisons between *oyabun* and the emperor were common enough, *ninkyō eiga* comparisons generally depicted the *oyabun* as wise and passive, well-intentioned yet incapable of reigning in the more hot headed members of the group. Fukasaku again parodies for the purpose of social criticism; his *oyabuns* function as subversive representations of the emperor, carelessly sacrificing their own people for the benefit of the elite few.

In *Battles Without Honor and Humanity*, Fukasaku presents a graphic parody of prior genre conventions, using *cinéma vérité* style to create a sense of historical context that allows the

²⁸⁷ Weiner, Michael. "'Self' and 'Other' in Imperial Japan." *Japan's Minorities: the Illusion of Homogeneity*. London: Routledge, 2009. 2.

audience to understand the violence of the time, simultaneously subverting and humanizing the image of the yakuza. The violence of the latter is juxtaposed with that of the United States and Japan's own post and prewar politicians, who, through parody, are criticized as the ones truly lacking humanity. Fukasaku would influence gang films by contemporaneous Western directors such as Scorsese and Freidkin, who also attempted to ground their films in the historical context of 1970's New York City, as well as in the violence of '90's yakuza director, Takashi Miike.

Ten Thousand Things²⁸⁸: Plurality in Takashi Miike's Representation of Yakuza

As Japan entered the 1980s, its economy slowly inflated and banks began to lend vast sums of money on credit held against overvalued real estate. Economic success discouraged an already dwindling youth population from filling their once designated Triple K jobs (jobs deemed too dirty demanding or dangerous to be desirable), catalyzing vast immigration from Korea, China, Taiwan, as well as South East Asia and the Middle East. In 1993, over 300,000 immigrants were living in Japan illegally; by 2000, the figure reached a half million.²⁸⁹ As the principle force in the construction industry, the yakuza benefited most from the decade's economic success, completing the transition from family groups to corporate entities. Along

²⁸⁸ A Buddhist expression referring to the dynamic interconnection and plural nature of all things. Downey, Jean M. "Japanese War Orphans: a Possible Bridge." *Perspective From Asia Kyoto Journal* 73 (2007).

²⁸⁹ Kaplan, 273

with cheap foreign labor in the legal world, mass immigration saturated the criminal market. In 1991, the NPA reported over 1,000 illegal immigrants among the ranks of the yakuza, putting to rest the myth of yakuza homogeneity. Still more troubling were non-affiliated foreign gangs, particularly the Chinese. Between 1992 and 1996, arrests of foreign gangs increased five fold and had captured the public's attention. A xenophobic reaction ensued; a series of posters adorned the city claiming foreign gangs were "threatening our culture, history and lifestyle." The media, meanwhile, temporarily pardoned the yakuza for their role in the collapse of the Bubble, instead labeling many Chinese immigrants as gangsters, responsible for pushing the age-old symbols of national identity, the yakuza out of their traditional entertainment district of Kabukichô.

Meanwhile, films of the era emphasized the dangerous possibilities of foreign immigrations, like Toshio Masuda's *Heavenly Sin* (1992), which featured a near future where a multi-cultural collection of disgruntled foreign laborers ravages Tokyo under the behest of a Chinese crime boss.²⁹⁰ The marginalization of foreign Others led to a reinvigoration of the yakuza's role as cultural representatives translated to film; in a brief movement that became known as neo-*ninkyô eiga*, films emulated the themes and morals of Toei's 1960s' movies with modern production value and context (parody as veneration). The norm in these films was the glorification of Japanese organized crime at the expense of Otherized foreign residents, a convention challenged by a minority of vocal directors, particularly Takashi Miike.

Perhaps Miike's most notable contribution to yakuza film is an emphasized discourse on foreign, sexual, and failed Otherized criminal figures as national representatives. Miike's own family lived abroad in Japan's colonies in China and Korea, his own father born in Seoul.

²⁹⁰ Kaplan & Dubro, 275.

Miike himself grew up in Osaka's Korean district. In a way, Miike's films are similar to Fukasaku's, attempting to parody accepted yakuza genre norms to address social issues pressing to the director. Yet, while Fukasaku's films are entrenched in extended historical context, Miike's films follow Suzuki's example, existing simultaneously as a depiction of the present as well as a hyperbolized imaginary construction. In lieu of making a general judgment on the yakuza, Miike utilizes stylistic and thematic juxtaposition to comment on the multifaceted, pluralistic and ultimately constructive state and perception of organized crime, as well as Japan's racial and social composition. Though often prone to Otherizing yakuza figures, Miike nevertheless promotes their identity as representative national bodies, imbuing them with a pluralistic character that can come to represent the entirety of Japan's non-homogeneous population, rather than a destructive force that serves to fragment and destroy traditional Japanese society and by extension, the yakuza.

Background Shots

Miike's career has generally been associated with the recently engendered OV film.²⁹¹ As in every reactionary period in yakuza history and film, subversive counter-representations began to develop particularly in the V-Cinema film world. Correctly attributing the proliferation of video as a factor for the 1980s lull in yakuza film, Toei developed a spin-off production studio, Toei Video. As these films required meager financial investment and distribution the instant proliferation of OV films fed off the initial economic success of the Bubble, while ensuring their continued production in Japan's "lost decade." The most common subject in V-Cinema was unsurprisingly gang-related films. In light of their relatively insignificant costs and distribution numbers, studios gave OV directors greater

²⁹¹ Standing for "original video", referring to films produced for strictly video consumption. Also often called V-Cinema.

freedom in content and style. In the tradition of such low budget experimenting filmmakers as Suzuki, many directors took this opportunity to present a lighter side to the yakuza, creating a dark humor through unrealistic hyperbole and tongue-in-cheek jokes. While beginning his directing career in television, Miike became the poster child for the 90s yakuza V-Cinema movement. Even after making several made-for-theater films, he has returned again and again to the OV genre, taking advantage of the casual relationship between producer and director. In V-Cinema, Miike would develop a style of comedy and distress through absurd depictions of eroticism, violence and interpersonal relationships.²⁹²

Contrary to popular critical perception, Miike employs his twisted comedy and graphic violence for the sake of thematic content, rather than simple shock value. He states, “I sense that people at foreign festivals expect something violent or radical from my films, some kind of extreme entertainment that’s different from everything else playing there. But it was not my aim to create those types of films, it was a result of choosing the best way to express the subject.”²⁹³ The subject itself is irrelevant, anything that interests Miike himself. One would be too hasty in assuming a more classic yakuza film outside Miike’s realm; *Agitator* (2002) and *Graveyard of Honor* (2002) are both homages to preceding traditions in yakuza film, the latter being a direct remake of a Fukasaku film by the same name. Miike himself admits, “I’m attracted to orthodox things, I like traditional yakuza film. I generally prefer the orthodox to the innovative. I like to find interesting things that nobody cares about because they come in an orthodox format. To make a traditional film in a traditional way...even

²⁹² One such film is *Osaka Tough Guys* (Naniwayûkyôden. 1995), which features two high school drop outs who inadvertently answer a job listing for what is revealed to be a yakuza group. Apathetic, rude and puerile, Miike’s early films create parody by placing 90s delinquents through the motions of yakuza initiation, the recontextualization acting as parody, challenging the seriousness of *jingi* with the apathy of generation X, while satirizing the youth’s lack of options in a narrowing job market.

²⁹³ Mes, 370.

when working this way you can broach subjects that are relevant today and make something new.”²⁹⁴ The respect Miike attributes to past forms prevents one from taking Miike’s parody as simple ridicule, but perhaps as a way of addressing his connection to the genre’s past. As Miike executed more and more films, the comic parody remained, albeit in a secondary role to thematic development, particularly in the depiction of the Other.

An adequate point of origin in examining juxtaposition and foreign others is the first two installments of his Dark Society Trilogy: *Shinjuku Triad Society* and *Rainy Dog*. In content and style, the films stand in mutual opposition, while possessing the popular Miike themes of family disintegration and cultural displacement. Mes states, “Unlike many of his early V-Cinema films, set and steeped in the reality of his own experiences growing up in Osaka, *Shinjuku Triad Society* (*Shinjuku Dark Society: Chinese Mafia War* in the vernacular) inhabits Tokyo’s red light district and yakuza township, Shinjuku’s Kabukichô . The film depicts the international conflicts within Kabukichô’s underworld, where Japanese, mainland Chinese, and Taiwanese gangs contend for profit and power. As Miike explains, “In Shinjuku, more than half of those who invested in the area are Chinese, not Japanese. It’s also the place where all the yakuza groups from all over Japan gather and Taiwanese and Koreans are becoming involved.”

The film begins with the deaths of several Chinese criminals, attributed to the Taiwanese Dragon Claw triad and its young, sexually deviant boss, Shu-Ming Wang. The investigation is led by Shinjuku’s senior organized crime detective, Tatsuhito Kiriya, a *zanryu koji*.--define²⁹⁵ Tatsuhito hopes to buy his sick father a home in warmer climate. After apprehending and

²⁹⁴ Mes, 370.

²⁹⁵ Literally “children left behind”, referring to orphans or descendants of orphans left after Japan abandoned its pre-war colonial possessions, often mixed Asian and Japanese blood. Downey, Jean M. "Japanese War Orphans: a Possible Bridge." *Perspective From Asia Kyoto Journal* 73 (2007).

interrogating several Dragon Claw members, Tatsuhito is surprised to find his younger brother and recently graduated law student, Yoshihito, who is among the suspects' legal representatives. Through a second interrogation of the initial suspect, Tatsuhito learns Wang escaped from Taiwan after killing his father, later establishing a children's hospital in his former hometown. Tatsuhito stakes out Wang's known location where Wang collects protection money from a Kabukichô brothel. In a business meeting gone bad colloq with a Japanese bawd, Wang rips out the Madame's eye, leading to conflict with the local Yamane-gumi. With Yoshihito behind the wheel of an escape vehicle, the gang literally flattens their yakuza enemies while chased in vain by Tatsuhito. Luckily, the detective catches a break in the case when he ordered to escort a criminal back to Taiwan. Rather than return immediately as instructed, Tatsuhito enlists the aid of a local policeman, who chaperones Tatsuhito to Wang's hospital in the south. Miike reveals, far from philanthropy, the hospital's purpose is profit, the center of an illegal anatomic trader; organs from impoverished Taiwanese children are sold to Japanese buyers. Upon his return, Tatsuhito is reprimanded for conducting an unauthorized investigation in Taiwan and temporarily suspended. Moreover, his former position as the yakuza's patsy is filled by his partner. Upon returning to Yamane-gumi headquarters, he is quickly beaten and sent to Wang; the Yamane-gumi being Wang's new organ distribution chain. This delicate criminal alliance crumbles when Yoshihito notices embezzlement on the part of the Yamane gang, leading to the execution of its senior members. Meanwhile, Tatsuhito is in fact marked for organ removal but escapes thanks to the infatuation of the female gangster Ritsuko (she's Japanese?). He tracks down his brother, beats him until unconscious then places him on a train home, forcibly returning him to the family unit. With no reservations, Tatsuhito employs a secret password to enter Wang's lair. Parallel to this Wang struggles with his own "family"

problems; his male lover Shu has traded sexual favors for a “priceless” knife with the late boss of the Yamane gang. After punishing Shu by removing an unspecified organ, Wang attempts to wash the blood off his hands, interrupted by Tatsuhiro’s entrance. Riddled with bullets, Wang dies, crawling toward Shu in his last breathes. After denying Wang’s murder to his superiors, Tatsuhiro receives a promotion. The film ends with voice over by Shu, alluding to Tatsuhiro’s later death at the hands of Dragon Claw members.

Stylistically, the film’s fast pace and often grim content dwarf even Fukasaku’s *Battles*. After an initial shot of Shu lying on a bed, the film opens with a hand held shot of a dark city street, the only distinguishing object in the *mise-en-scène* the ominous smoke escaping from out a manhole. The camera continues its indiscernible tracking while diegetic panicked crowd noise pervades. Light momentarily dominates the frame as a photo-flash reveals a close-up of a bloody, severed head. More flashes light up a crime scene in confusion. Miike cuts to a police cruiser navigating the busy Shinjuku streets with a dark filter over the camera lens dulling the shine and sharpness of the entertainment district’s bright lights. What follows is a series of jump cuts split between the streets of Shinjuku, a night club, and other seemingly unrelated shots: an establishing shot of strobe lit hip-hop club, a close-up of hands holding a severed pig’s head, a medium shot of a young, unhappy child, an extreme close-up of hands washing off blood in a sink, more police cars, a medium shot of a half naked homeless man crawling on the dark streets, a close-up of a woman lighting her cigarette with a candle, a close-up of a DJ’s hands scratching on a turntable, a din of mixed Japanese and Chinese shouts at the crime scene where the crime scene photographer snaps a series of three photos, depicted as three jump cuts progressing from long to medium to close-up, of an officer holding the severed head while in a stereotypical light hearted photo pose (peace sign with a big smile). As the settings of each cut changes, so too does the

diegetic sound, which given the close-up of the DJ scratching, suggests an almost hip-hop like mixing of sound and images.²⁹⁶ The images are arranged in intentional disorder, likened by Daniel and Wood as a “sensation akin to reading a long, disturbing sentence missing all of the grammar and most of the verbs.”²⁹⁷ One prime example, the temporal distance between the shots of the severed human head and the shot of the pig’s head, which if shown in sequence would have created a match cut, offering a more linear image progression. Some images, the little boy and the bloody hands in the sink have no significance until much later in the film, when coupled with similar shots come to represent images of Wang. This disjointed montage, reminiscent of some of Suzuki’s own jump cut techniques in *Branded to Kill*, serves to create a dark, confused, fast paced constructed world. Shinjuku’s dark society (the film’s very title) is presented in the use of the dark filter used to mute the bright lights of the city. Like Suzuki and Fukasaku, Miike attempts to emphasize the darkness hidden just beneath the streets patrolled in a country “lacking crime.”

This is further enumerated as the quick jump cuts lead to a montage of relatively longer takes. Detective Tatsuhito and his partner exit their car, dropping a crow bar before hastily picking it up and leaving the neon colored streets into a dark back alley. In dealing with Shinjuku and Kabukichô, Miike often juxtaposes the neon brightness of the main thoroughfare and the darkness of the back alleys. One need only take a few steps of the main paths to enter the underworld. Inside the wet, dingy stairwells of the club, the young Shu drops a vial of a white powder drug (possibly speed, cocaine, or heroine). An older man propositions the boy for the drugs as well as his body, receiving oral stimulation while

²⁹⁶ Rob Daniel and David Wood would make the DJ comparison to such signature fast paced montage in the later Miike films *Ichi: The Killer*, and *Dead or Alive*. Wood, David. "Pain Threshold: the Cinema of Takashi Miike." *Fear without Frontiers: Horror Cinema across the Globe*. By Rob Daniel. Godalming: FAB P., 2003. Pg. 287.

²⁹⁷ *Ibid*, 287.

smearing the white powder on his nose, mouth and lips. Miike cuts to an overhead shot of the club, light cutting in and out through the strobe. This technique itself is akin to a jump cut; as the police charge in, the giddy dancers transform into panicked escapees between strobe flashes, a further comparison between the district's entertainment and criminal purposes. As Tatsuhito enters the stairwell, interrupting Shu's task, Shu quickly jams the old John's penis into his own trouser zipper and escapes out from the bottom. The diegetic hip-hop is abruptly silenced as an officer capriciously slams the DJ into his own turntables. As Shu escapes, he comes across a young cop, whose wrist and neck he nonchalantly slashes, the officer standing prone as blood comically sprays in a combination of Fukasaku gore with Suzuki hyperbole. As Shu runs toward the bright main streets, Tatsuhito looks after the dying policeman, his wound coating the detective in blood. Miike cuts to a shot of the famous Shinjuku landmark, the Tokyo Metropolitan Government building. The building's shape and color are dulled, the windows hardly visible even when lit, while the sky, a dull dark blue, is juxtaposed with unrealistically large yellow and red moon. The entire image, highly stylized and extremely reminiscent of Suzuki, looks more like painting than film. Next, Miike brings the viewer to an interrogation room, inferred to be in the building. Tatsuhito interrogates a man and slaps him repeatedly for answering only in an obscure Taiwanese dialect. The next cut features Ritsuko, one of the girls at the club and suspected Dragon Claw member, stripped searched by a female officer. Miike cues comically loud and moist sound as the female officer examines the woman's vagina and anus for contraband. The comedy is emphasized when Tatsuhito slaps his partner's blatant erection, taking him (and the viewer) out of their erotic reverie. After getting dressed, Ritsuko is asked several questions concerning the Dragon Claw. She remains silent, until jumping atop the interrogation table, spreading her legs and demanding sex in

exchange for information. This demand is ostensibly facetious as she and Tatsuhiro's partner begin to laugh uproariously. Miike then frames Tatsuhiro in a high angle, low shot from below the table. Rather than laughing, Tatsuhiro's face appears cemented in a villainous smile, the moonlight from the window creating a contrast between light and dark on his body. As the other characters enjoy the joke, Tatsuhiro picks up a chair. Miike cuts to an overhead shot of Tatsuhiro swinging the chair onto Ritsuko's laughing face. The impact, coupled with the loud bang of a drum, is obscured by the bold titles that appear on the screen. The film has begun.

In attempting to avoid a completely borderless feel, like the Nikkatsu films of Suzuki, Miike and his editor, Yasushi Shimamura, claims to have attempted to capture the contemporaneous reality of the district in their scenes in Shinjuku. Miike states, "We pursued the reality of what we were doing, and didn't go into those places without careful research." Shimamura elaborates, "At the time, if you walked into Shinjuku, there were many underground worlds there. It was a closed society at the time and it was difficult to shoot there. Sometimes yakuza interfered in filming. Every single corner of the street was a different yakuza territory, yet, we managed to make a film that showed the real Shinjuku." One stylistic attempt at this came from Miike's use of hidden camera. As he himself notes, "You can't shoot a car chase in Shinjuku by script. Even if you could it would look phony. Do it on a mid-town pavement and film it with a hidden camera."²⁹⁸

²⁹⁸ Miike would use hidden camera throughout his career when shooting in Shinjuku. One particularly notable use came in the film *Graveyard of Honor*, where the protagonist is shot with hidden camera as he stumbles down a street, completely covered in blood. While completely out of place, most ignore the bloody figure, with only one bystander shocked at the ostensible tragedy. Mes, Tom. *Agitator. The Cinema of Takashi Miike*. Surrey: FAB, 2006. Pg. 288.

Yet, given the cuts and scenes described above, it becomes clear that Miike's depiction is a hyperrealistic construction define, a parody of Kabukichô which is a reproduction of what?. *Shinjuku Triad Society* lacks many of Fukasaku's *cinema vérité*s stylistics such as long takes and use of printed media to proliferate the historical context. Rather, Miike utilizes hyperbole in content and style along with on site locations to create a world separate from Kakubkicho, different in event and appearance, yet pathologically similar, "reminding the audience how visceral [yakuza film] can be"²⁹⁹. The sequenced cuts themselves are often so short, the viewer only retains a vague sensation of what is being shown; the jarring jump cut formation takes precedent over any single image. Miike also borrows from the absurdist cannon of Suzuki in his saturated color coding; the police station is shot in blue filter to capture its austerity; Taiwan's heat is suggested by a yellow filtered lens. Miike also inserts signature comically surreal, such as when a detective steps into a pile of feces. Rubbing it off his shoe, his anger becomes shock as he exclaims, "Is that human..." Moreover, while using hand-held camera shots and actual Shinjuku streets, Miike's stylized shot of the Tokyo Metropolitan Government building reminds us that any reality we may find in the streets and underworld exists beneath the stylized, hyperbolized building and moon above, perhaps the "dark society" too is an exaggerated construction.

The Tokyo Metropolitan Building also represents a different dichotomy, between the state and the underworld. is this important, and are you going to tie it together with the issue of minorities? With its dark double spires contrasted by the ominous, yellow moon, the structure looks more like Dracula's castle than city hall, a darker edifice than the streets it is supposed to govern and protect. Insert still This too is reflected in the actions of the state and through its most evident representatives, the police. In our initial introduction to

²⁹⁹ Daniel and Wood, 287.

Tatsuhito, we see him drop a crow bar from out of his car, only to quickly pick it up and bring it along to the crime scene. Not exactly a standard issue NPA weapon, the crow bar is sooner associated with delinquent street gangs, a visual signifier of the dark nature associated with police work in Shinjuku. The club bust itself only reinforces this opinion, as Tatsuhito's partner slams the DJ's head into his turntables for no apparent reason. The actions Tatsuhito performed within the Metropolitan building further stress the evil castle comparison.

Tatsuhito resorts to illegal force in every interrogation he undertakes, escalating the violence in each instance. In the first, he slaps around an uncooperative illegal alien, a mild abuse of power, albeit still illegal. Next, he interrogates Ritsuko. As mentioned above, Tatsuhito does not take part in the joke; when he picks up the chair with which he will break Ritsuko's nose, the light from the window casts a half shadow on his body, a metaphor for his semi-dark nature. Later interrogations are even more unsavory. Tatsuhito re-interrogates the original uncooperative individual, letting a pint-sized policeman throw him twice to the ground with Judo before the tiny cop sodomizes the victim in the police gymnasium. Ironically, this act was not pain-based torture but rather controlled pleasure; the subject only reveals his information when threatened with the secession of sodomy. This strange reception to rape torture is repeated later, when Tatsuhito himself anally rapes Ritsuko as a message to Wang, another darkly comic turn of events. In yet another ironic twist, the rape is what leads Ritsuko to fall in love with the detective and betray her gang.³⁰⁰ Such "dirty" methods are hardly surprising in light of Tatsuhito's collusion with the yakuza Yamane group. What is Miike trying to say by conflating the "legal" with the "illegal" forces of society? In fact, the very nature of Tatsuhito's job as Shinjuku's senior organized crime detective is defined by this relationship; he works to control invasive foreign gangs within the district on the behalf

³⁰⁰ She claims the rape caused her to climax for the first time without the aid of heroine.

of the landed, native syndicates. Rather than change the crimescape of the city, Tatsuhito profits by keeping the status quo.

The connection between state and yakuza is further enumerated upon Tatsuhito's return from Taiwan, and here is where the "minorities" enter the scene. The Yamane-gumi and Dragon Claw gang have forged an alliance, and Tatsuhito's meddling in Taiwan does not go unnoticed. Removed from the case and suspended, his superiors clearly react to pressure from their own yakuza patrons. One might wonder why he receives a promotion then after his boss alludes that Tatsuhito is the clear suspect in Wang's murder, yet by that point, Dragon Claw has broken the truce with the Yamane-gumi, making Dragon Claw, once again, a viable persecution target. His success within his profession is thus always tied with how useful he is to the yakuza, the converse of the Japanese.

Yet, unsavory inclinations aside, Tatsuhito shares another major characteristic with his nemesis Wang, his foreign heritage. As a *zanryu koji* living in Japan, Tatsuhito seeks but never fully receives acceptance by society. As Miike himself notes, "This man who doesn't belong, blows off steam in Shinjuku, looking for justice for himself." Whether one believes his racial ambiguity as the cause of Tatsuhito's predilection for violence, it certainly affects his interpersonal relationships. After ordering him to find and arrest Wang, his yakuza contact wonders, "You're not shielding him just cause both of you are mixed blood, right?" We see the complexity of his racial identity in the next scene, when he returns to his parent's home. On the wall is a framed newspaper article with the headline, "War orphan from China graduates from University and enters police." Miike focuses on a quotation from Tatsuhito, reading, "I am a Japanese." This suggests Tatsuhito solely identifies with his Japanese heritage, supplemented by his relationship with his Chinese mother who speaks minimal Japanese. While speaking fluent Mandarin, Tatsuhito rarely addresses his mother directly,

choosing to speak to his sick father and allowing him to translate. His parents are no different in their national identification. In the one family outing depicted in the film, the Kariyas go to the Imperial Palace, and both parents (half Japanese father and full Chinese mother) bow at the gate of the palace, showing deference to the sovereign and symbol of the traditional nation state. The only member of the family absent at this moment is Yoshihito, who disappears just before to meet Wang, favoring his Chinese roots to Japanese. This leads one to consider perhaps Tatsuhito works for the yakuza, the foot soldiers of nationalism, as a symbol of ethnic support as well as a source of illicit funds. His fervent persecution of Chinese gangsters can be a twisted form of patriotism. Yet, despite national self-declaration, Tatsuhito cannot forget his full heritage, evident in his trip to Taiwan.

Whatever the benefits of favoring Japanese identity may be at home, Tatsuhito is further alienated when he travels to Taiwan. Despite his fluency in Mandarin, Tatsuhito seems incapable of communicating with any of the locals, save a fellow police detective who had studied Japanese at University; even still, they limit their communications to Japanese. Moreover, his dress, a light pink suit, dark sunglasses, and a beige fedora, mark him more a *ninkyō eiga* yakuza than contemporaneous Taiwanese or Japanese adult. Here Miike once again signifies the connection between the state and organized crime, a connection furthered when the two arrive at Wang's hospital. In this scene, the Taiwanese guide mentions the hospital was built during the Japanese colonial period and was refurbished by Wang. In light of the building's purpose—harvesting organs from destitute Taiwanese children for wealthier Japanese families—it symbolizes the persistence of Japanese imperialism. His police counterpart also mentions off hand that his grandfather was killed by a Japanese soldier. At one point he suggests to him, “This is no place for a Japanese.” Tatsuhito himself has little connection to this Chinese place; the only sign of his Chinese roots surfaces

when he hears a folk song identical to one his mother once sang to him.³⁰¹ However, the guide knows Tatsuhiro's secret which he reveals to the viewer for the first time; Tatsuhiro was born in China, living there for sixteen years before taking his father's name of Kariya upon arriving in Japan. The impetus of the relocation was perhaps persecution. When bound and drugged in the back of Wang's car, he mentions how he and his brother were often kicked into pigpens for their Japanese blood, and blamed for any theft in the area. Wang's response to these confessions is perhaps more poignant: "I think we're in Japan now." Tatsuhiro's story could easily double for contemporaneous emigrant experiences in Japan, where the pigpen can stand for general segregation, as well as noting the 90s trends to associate Chinese foreign Others with criminals. Also, the film doesn't just compare contemporary time to colonial time. It seems to be saying that colonialism never ended.

Needs stronger sentence here-maybe something like how Wang becomes the epitome of "Taiwanese-ness" or even "Chinese-ness" if the film doesn't distinguish between the two. Wang's immigration experience proves him better suited for success in a foreign culture. At times, his nationality does in fact pose an obstacle, making him victim of the anti-foreign NPA and media, as well as racially insensitive remarks. When he price gauges the Japanese bawd, the Madame often resorts to racial insults, at one point simply shouting "Taiwanese rats!" Here, she justifies Wang's unethical (*jingi*-less) underworld business practices with his nationality, rather than his criminality, using his actions to stereotype his immigrant community. This is in fact rebuffed by Miike, as the Japanese Yamane-gumi are equally unprincipled, the lack of *jingi* then due not to any national identification, simply a modern necessity. The Yamane-gumi themselves racially stereotype Wang, assuming he cannot speak

³⁰¹ Later, Wang would sing the same song while washing blood off his hands, a further comparison drawn between the two.

Japanese when cornering him in the next scene. Yet, Wang responds to racial discrimination in a more proactive manner than his detective counterpart. In the case of the pimp, he immediately turns around and rips the Madame's eyeball from out her head, and eventually, kills off the Yamane group's most senior members, capably overcoming his classification as Other by hurt those that stand in his way. One may wonder then why Wang is ultimately killed by Tatsuhito. Though the detective may superficially get the last laugh, Shu's voice over in the film's last shot implies that, shortly after, Shu himself kills Tatsuhito. The group embracing their Other status, the Dragon Claw, continues to thrive.

One of Wang's gang's strengths lies in their multicultural demographic; though marked simply as foreign Other by the Japanese gang, his gang, while mostly Taiwanese, also includes mixed blood members like Yoshihito, as well as solely Japanese members, including Ritsuko and Karino, a former Yamane-gumi member and Wang's right hand man. Karino is particularly useful to Wang, as he not only provides muscle but is adept at maneuvering situations with Japanese locals. It is his knowledge and force of will that allow Wang to raise prices on Chinese prostitutes to the Japanese bawd. Thus, through Karino, the gang possesses essential knowledge of Japanese society and cultural practices, while its foreign leadership allows the gang to break any inconvenient social taboos that would perhaps affect a Japanese rival. For his role as Dragon Claw Lieutenant, his fellow Japanese countrymen strip Karino of his national identity. Despite his fluent Japanese and inferred past interactions with both the Madame and the Yamame-gumi, Karino is equally targeted in both instances of racial insensitivity, the statements directed to the group as a whole, rather than strictly to Wang.

Yet, within his own group, Karino is still an outsider. He lacks competence in Chinese, and struggles to understand Shu when he tries to explain the police raid. Even when Shu

consecutively repeats the name of Karino's girlfriend, Ritsuko, he looks confused, and mumbles, "I don't understand you. Bitch!" Furthermore, the Chinese prostitutes he manages for the Dragon Claw cannot, or care not, to pronounce his name correctly, calling him "Ka-i-no". He furiously shouts back, "Kar-i-no, I keep telling you!" In fact, Karino would repeat this statement as his last words, before dying by Tatsuhiro's gun. In fact, Tatsuhiro's dominance over Ritsuko leads to both Karino and Wang's death. In her intercourse with Karino, Ritsuko takes a much more active roll, initiating sexual activity by spilling yogurt on his pants as an excuse for oral stimulation, only to beg him to "do it" over and over; Miike quickly cuts to a copulation scene with Ritsuko on top, clearly exerting all the effort. Karino cannot satisfy Ritsuko's adventurous and insatiable sexual appetite, and she resorts to shooting up heroine before coitus for surplus stimulation. Ritsuko finds no sexual satisfaction outside of the drug until Tatsuhiro takes the dominant role, sodomizing her against her will. One should also note this (along with the orchestrated rape of the Chinese man by the Judo expert) presents Tatsuhiro as a sexual deviant, similar to Wang. Why? Just because he has anal sex? Is anal sex marked as being "deviant" in the film? As Ritsuko's satisfaction prompts her to reveal the gang's machinations, Karino's passivity leaves her unsatisfied.

Additionally, the Japanese Yamane-group, despite their "home turf advantage", is depicted as somewhat ineffectual. Throughout the film, Miike presents the yakuza as passive, only reacting to their Chinese rivals. In every confrontation, members of the Yamane-gumi prove themselves incapable of dealing with the Dragon Claw, run over by a car and later shot to death. Even in terms of masculinity, an evidently common point of comparison in Miike films, the yakuza are found wanting. Wang is depicted as a sexual deviant, a homosexual sadomasochist with a love of exposing himself to criminal rivals. After flashing

an assembly of older Chinese triads, the older Chinese respond, "What a total animal!" These factors initially depict Wang as a sexual Other. However, there is an overarching theme that is being drawn. Yet, later in the film, the Yamane group boss gives Shu a priceless knife in exchange for sexual favors. He specifies, "What kind of service does Wang get?" Thus, the comparison is drawn; Japanese yakuza share Wang's divergent sexual appetites. Before unzipping his pants, the boss hesitates, mumbling, "Don't laugh..." Miike establishes a medium shot from behind the yakuza of Shu on his knees. As he examines the penis, Shu's eyes dart to the camera, expressing initial surprise then disappointment before commencing. After no more than thirty seconds, the yakuza finishes, stating, "I'm quick aren't I? It always pleases my partners." Similarly to Karino, the Japanese boss is presented as sexually insufficient, impotent in comparison to characters with a claim to Chinese heritage.

Yet, perhaps the Yamane-gumi are not the only representatives of the yakuza within the film. Miike presents several visual yakuza signifiers within Tatsuhito's character. Our first indication, the crow bar, suits a yakuza more than a detective.-this is subjective-delete Even in a hand-to-hand confrontation, a detective would sooner use a nightstick, if alone a pistol. Weapons such as crowbars are generally associated with extortion. Torture and rape, while common in the NPA according to journalist Yu Teresawa, are more frequently perpetrated by yakuza in Miike's films. Moreover, Tatsuhito's fervent identification with Japan, as well as service to pure Japanese yakuza are typical no different than many similarly Otherized Koreans, who actively participated in post-war yakuza activity, both in the criminal sector as well as in conservative national groups. Finally, in his trip to Taiwan, he investigates the situation on behalf of yakuza authorities at home, much like the yakuza of such political terrorist organizations as the Black Dragon Society did before him. His dress in Taiwan, as

mentioned before, is a blatant homage to the bright suits worn by yakuza in 60s and early 70s yakuza film. In those years, yakuza tourists were common in Taiwan, where they organized sex tourism vacations for the political and corporate leaders of Japan.

Miike's pluralist view of the yakuza, and through it, the nation as a whole is expressed in Shinjuku itself. As he claims, "Most Japanese films are based around the Japanese mentality, its way of thinking, because their preoccupation is 'We're Japanese.' To raise a question to deal with minorities and make it is taboo. There is a *zainichi* yakuza. He insists he is a patriot not a yakuza. That's where his heart lies, he claims. This is reality, the real face of the nationalists. The real world of Japan isn't as simple as a picture you see on the TV news." While not the typical *ninkyō eiga* representation of yakuza, Miike's foreign Other figures juxtapose both the traditional yakuza identity as well as the pluralities that exist in the multicultural, wider demographic of Japanese residents, equally meaningful as national symbols.

Miike continues to pursue demographic juxtaposition in the next installment in his Dark Society trilogy, *Rainy Dog* (*Yakuza Dark Society* in the vernacular), which presents a failed yakuza as a foreign Other abroad. The protagonist, Yuji, is an exiled Japanese yakuza living in Taipei, where it perpetually rains. He works part time in a slaughterhouse as a pig carcass transporter (the jump cut in Shinjuku Triad Society thus creating an immediate connection), while moonlighting as a contract assassin for a local Taiwanese gangster. The local boss saves Yuji's money for him, putting it toward a fake passport. Incapable of traveling in the rain, Yuji lives an isolated existence, interrupted by an ex-girlfriend, who leaves Yuji to take care of their love child, Chen. The child himself is dumb, incapable of speaking. Despite Yuji's lack of regard for the child throughout the film, the boy follows Yuji around like a dog. Meanwhile, Yuji is also pursued by a suited Japanese man, bent on killing Yuji. While

the reason for the vendetta is not clear English Yuji. Yuji is assigned a new target, Ku Chi Peng, yet decides to spend the evening in a dirty brothel instead. Yuji is presented with Lily, the proprietor's most sought commodity. Lily too feels isolated; she writes on her website of her will to travel the world, searching for someone to rescue her from Taipei. After spending another day and night waiting for the rain to stop with Lily, he resumes his assignment, gunning down Ku Chi Peng and two others in a dark alley, shooting the dead corpses' faces for good measure. He comes across their briefcase full of money, which he returns with to Lily, offering to take her with him in exchange for taking care of Chen. Meanwhile, Ku Chi Peng's brother, Ku Hung discovers Peng's death and orders his men to patrol the station. When Yuji and his companions drive past the station in a hijacked taxi, Hung and his men pepper the car with bullets. The taxi eventually drops them off at a deserted beach. The three spend a quiet night in a shack on the beach, before Yuji calls his boss for his money and passport. Despite the boss's kind words, he plans to betray Yuji, revealing his location to Hung. Yuji anticipates his boss's disloyalty and orders his constructed family unit to flee. Luckily, Chen digs up a motor scooter from under the sand and the three escape with the money before Hung's men reach the beach. They stop at the home of Lily's acquaintance, a gay artist who claims "girls and gays are happy [Peng] is dead", yet himself betrays the group for the \$500,000 reward posted by Hung on Lily's website. Forced to flee in the rain, Yuji orders them to split up and head for the station, a choice that leads to Lily's murder and Chen's capture. Hoping to use Chen as a hostage, Hung engages Yuji. In an unprecedented moment, Chen manages his first sound, a loud shout that distracts Hung and his henchman long enough for Yuji to shoot both. In an emotionally climactic moment, Yuji embraces Chen, finally recognizing him as his son, rather than a dog. This catharsis is interrupted as Yuji's body is littered with bullets; his Japanese nemesis has finally caught him. Elated, the

unnamed gunman jettisons his belongings and runs off into the distance. In another turn of events, Hung gets up; Yuji's bullet hit his dead brother's lighter, sentimental Kevlar. Ready to finish his own vendetta, Hung points the gun at Chen, before changing his mind. Instead, Hung advises him to grow up, then come back for revenge.³⁰²

Unlike the *zanyu koji* protagonist of the first installment, Yuji's Otherized status comes not from any racial ambiguity, but from his clearly defined Japanese identity in a foreign locale. He lives alone in an inconspicuous isolated apartment deep in the slums. Upon his return home from a night spent transporting pig carcasses, he queues up an old Japanese *kaiju* film-define³⁰³ on his computer while listening to an answering machine recording from one of his old gang members in Japan. The message states that while Yuji has been exiled, his boss has been killed. "That leaves you with no place to return to." His former brother breaks all remaining ties before mentioning that he would "take care of" Yuji's girlfriend". The vintage monster movie symbolizes Yuji's nostalgia for the home he can never come back to. The message itself is more complex than initially presented. Though it plays upon his return to his apartment, the telephone never rings; rather, the machine is activated by Yuji, who presses three buttons, before turning on the film and listening to the message. A few minutes after this call, we hear another message, this time from his Chinese boss, yet this call is predicated by the telephone's ring. The latter piece of information suggests the first message could not have been recorded at that moment, while the fact that it took three different commands to play the message suggests it's older, perhaps a saved message. It is perhaps too convenient that the message plays simultaneously with the nostalgic film. One could interpret the visual and aural clues to argue Yuji saved the message and plays it

³⁰² A scene influencing an almost identical one in Tarantino's *Kill Bill*.

³⁰³ Literally "strange beast", this refers to Japanese giant monster films such as the *Godzilla* series.

habitually to remind him of what he has lost, as he does with the monster films. However, if we disregard the temporality of the recording, the significance of its content is clear, as stated by Yuji, “A dismissed foot soldier of the underworld; that’s the lowest of the low. I won’t hear...from any of my brothers again.”? Yuji not only understands his own isolation, he views it morally, judging himself, from the films onset, as a loser, a failed yakuza. Also as a diasporic figure.

In the eyes of the locals, Yuji is always viewed as a foreign Other. His dress, all white coat, shirt and trousers, literally distinguish him from other characters. Still, Yuji’s Chinese boss falsely emphasizes Yuji’s acceptance in Taiwan, declaring, “Yuji, you’re my son. You’re really part of the family.” Yet, despite Yuji’s fluent Mandarin, he feels the need to spell it out for him, separating each syllable, “M-Y S-O-N”, as Karino does with his name in *Shinjuku*. The choice to use the word “really” in the initial statement also hints at an inherent skepticism, needing extra qualification. Later, even as he betrays Yuji to Hung, the Chinese boss stresses this false assimilation, making his infidelity all the more blatant. Another Chinese character, Lily’s pimp, also immediately designates Yuji as foreign other, addressing him in broken Japanese rather than in Mandarin. Yuji, for his part, does not bother to correct him, recognizing his foreignness. In fact, Miike rarely allows Yuji any dialogue at all, taking away his voice in the foreign land. The dumbness of his half Japanese son too stresses his Otherized status in Taiwan.

The symbol of Yuji’s identity as a yakuza, a Japanese and an Other is also conveyed by his yakuza tattoo. Miike reveals the tattoo when Lily removes his shirt from behind in a head-on, long take and shot. As his shirt comes off, lightning flashes, throwing a strobe like light onto the tattoo. Visibly shocked, Lily backs away to the edge of the bed. Yet, shock instantly turns to intrigue as she exclaims, “It’s beautiful.” Miike then cuts to a medium shot

from Lily's perspective, focusing on Yuji's back. Lightning flashes again and Miike cuts to a close-up of the tattoo itself, revealing it to be a traditional warrior print, before cutting to an extreme close-up of the warrior's face. Such grand unveiling is common in Miike's representation of yakuza tattoos. The yakuza tattoo itself is the representation of the group's physical connection to traditional Japan and its values. While in many earlier yakuza films, such as Suzuki's *Tattooed for Life*, the tattoo signifies the character's permanent status as criminal outcast, in this case, it is a permanent mark of Yuji's Otherness as a national symbol of Japan. The tragedy lies in his inability to return to the only place represented as home to him. It is important to note, however, that the tattoo is judged to be beautiful, and Miike's suturing of the lighting and his cuts imbue the tattoo with extreme masculinity and power. In this signature depiction of yakuza tattoos, Miike associates this national symbol with strength, a stylistic that will be further discussed.

Yuji's exile forces him to remain in Taipei, while his inability to overcome his national identity and assimilate mark the experience negative, a true prison. Yuji hints at this when staring at Chen outside as he remembers a story of a man in prison so long, he befriends a fly, only to go insane when the fly abandons him. This recollection not only explains Yuji's indifference to other characters as originating from his own national abandonment issues, while revealing his permanent suffering as a marginalized foreigner. His inability to gain a passport is a physical representation of his role as prisoner.³⁰⁴ His relationship with rain further illustrates his captive nature; he cannot travel while it rains. Throughout the film, the weather report is used as a foreshadowing technique. The initial weather report states, "Pressure from the East will spread showers across Taiwan." The pressure from the East

³⁰⁴ The inability to acquire a passport as a signifier for foreign Otherness is revisited in the third installment of the trilogy, *Ley Lines* (1999), *Japan's Dark Society* in the vernacular.

could refer to a number of things, Yuji's exile or perhaps his pursuer, yet undeniably associates the rain with Japan, directly to the East. Rain, particularly being caught in the rain, represents a lack of shelter, or a lack of home or family. As a foreign Other, Yuji has no metaphoric shelter or home in torrential Taipei. Eventually, Yuji's inability to successfully travel in the rain contributes to both his and Lily's death.

Lily's initial attraction originates from his Otherizing symbol, his tattoo, as she herself feels rootless and trapped.—is she another diasporic figure. She explains her own opinions on home and rain, stating, "It rains too much here. I hate the rain..." She mentions wanting to escape the rain, yet wonders if she will only find rain wherever she goes, "What if it turns out to be the same as here?" Lily is thus equally homeless and trapped. She acknowledges Yuji's equivalent status when she asks if he is free. When he replies he is, she types "a liar" in English on her computer. Other, thus, recognizes Other.

Another constant reminder of Yuji's drifting is his Japanese counterpart, the unnamed assailant. Miike introduces the character with a close-up of the man's face buried in a sleeping bag. He cuts to a reverse shot from the man's perspective looking up at the vastness of the sky. The man unzips the sleeping bag and in a high elevation, low angle, long shot, the setting is revealed to be a dirty rooftop in a slum. The man stretches, then unzips his pants and urinates on the building's roof, only to turn his stream off the edge of the building, literally pissing on the city. In a long take, Miike cuts to a close-up of the man holding his genitals, slowly panning up to his face. As he finishes, his face betrays his bodily relief as he mumbles to himself, "I love you Taipei." The expression of relief, however, slowly shifts to anger, and he shouts, "Taipei!" Miike then cuts to a high angled long shot from the bottom of the building, the pursuer only slightly visible, his body Lilliputian in comparison to the buildings around him. This foreign Other is insignificant within the context of the city. Like

Yuji's distinguishing all white costume, the pursuer's cheap black suit and dark tie are reminiscent of a Japanese salaryman. As he unzips his sleeping bag, we see that he has slept in the suit. Miike's insistence on continuous costuming is parodic of 60s era yakuza art directing, where the character's costume defined their identity. The figure's exit from the closed sleeping bag, coupled with his theatric stretching, are reminiscent of an insect leaving its cocoon. In his case, he emerges from the sleeping bag as a salaryman. Though neither his occupation nor his reason for wanting Yuji dead are explained, the two are connected, as he tells Yuji, "I'll get you eventually. It's my job." The motive and the end are then one and the same, he needs to kill Yuji solely that is his job. This can perhaps be interpreted as an allusion to the salaryman's drone like stereotype. Yuji's reply, "What a boring job" then fits within the context of yakuza film, where the boredom of salaryman life is often compared to the excitement of the yakuza's existence.³⁰⁵ Yet, despite his unflinching resolve to his task, the pursuer too lacks a home in Taiwan, as he states, "I just wanna get back to Japan." The choice of "get back to" over "go back" suggest he drifts rather than actively moves, as represented by the backpack and sleeping bag he always carries around. In Taipei, he has no home. Only after killing Yuji does the man abandon these items, the representations and tools of his homelessness no longer necessary.

Rainy Dog places greater focus upon characterization, creating emotionally conflicted characters whose identities are often complex enough to suggest plurality of representation. Chen's mother is one such example. When in Yuji's apartment, her tone and dialogue characterize her as selfish and uncaring. Yet, Miike offers the audience access to a private moment of redemption; as she rides away in a taxi, her heavy sobs (mirroring the rain

³⁰⁵ This theme would resurface in other Miike films such as *Ichi: The Killer*, as well as in such contemporaneous films as Shinya Tsukamoto's *Bullet Ballet*.

outside) suggest this to be a conflicted decision, an unexplained choice of lesser evil. Yuji, of course, is the principle example of internal conflict. While mostly mechanically emotionless in both the execution of his job and his general treatment of his son, Yuji's humanity does expose itself, as in the case of his final embrace and acceptance of Chen. Yuji's emotional dichotomy is physically represented by his sunglasses, which given the constant rain and gloom of the city, serve a more metaphoric rather than functional purpose. Yuji wears sunglasses in situations requiring pragmatic action, when on assignment for example. In situations where Yuji is emotionally vulnerable, the glasses come off. One should note that when revealing his tattoo (and by extension his yakuza and national identity), Yuji does not wear his glasses. The dichotomy of emotional representation is juxtaposed with the plurality of yakuza identity, the masculine tattooed figure in contrast to the exiled failure.

Rainy Dog stylistically juxtaposes to? *Shinjuku Triad Society*. It lacks the latter film's graphic violence or sexual deviancy, focusing on metaphor and characterization. *Rainy Dog* also opposes *Shinjuku's* fast cuts and pacing. Here, Miike favors long takes and long shots. The title, featuring Yuji in a thirty second long shot standing to the far left of the *mise-en-scene* in the pouring rain against the wall of his shanty apartment building depicts the extent of his isolation and outcast status. Miike's color and light choices also contribute to the viewers understanding of Yuji's predicament and despair. Contrasting the rich colors of Shinjuku—Miike opts for under exposure, painting the city in a perpetual rainy gray. The gray is sometimes replaced by a dull blue filter, highlighting the general glum emotions expressed by the characters. In the absence of rain, Miike uses high contrast to emphasize the city's darkness. Even as Yuji walks through the markets during the day, objects and individuals are too dark to discern, until he walks through a light patch, abruptly revealing the scene around him, similarly to the lightning revealing the tattoo. On occasion, Miike uses long shots

through doorways and windows, either placing the camera in the dark with the space through the door or window brightly lit, or positioning the camera in the light and focusing on darkness in the distance. These types of shots are similar to the shot of Tatsuhito in *Shinjuku Triad Society* where the moon's light through the window casts him in a light-shadow contrast. The juxtaposition again represents the coexisting light and dark found in the city and the character himself.

The sound of the film is also more restrained than in the previous film. Lacking a hip-hop and electronica soundtrack, most of the film's sound comes from diegetic rain splashes, which eventually become unnoticeable white noise, until Miike suddenly cuts to silent interior shots. These abrupt switches are marked by either an end to the rain, or an occasional blues guitar riff, which are later revealed as the serenade of a brothel employee. Sound is further restrained in the minimal use of dialogue. While Chen never speaks, Yuji barely does, resulting in silence for most of the film. Miike instead relies on the visual metaphors and techniques discussed to depict emotion and further

While generally more restrained in form and content than *Shinjuku Triad Society*, *Rainy Dog* utilizes specific techniques of hyperbole and exaggeration. Unlike *Shinjuku* where heterosexual intercourse, homosexual oral sex, and both hetero and homosexual anal sex are depicted, *Rainy Dog* has no explicit sexual scenes. While Lily and Yuji certainly conduct intercourse, Miike cuts between them undressing before a shot of them laying in bed afterwards. However, in *Shinjuku*, Miike chooses to cover genitalia in shadow, rather than deal with representing genitalia. In light of this, Miike's depiction of the pursuer urinating juxtaposes the restrained tone of the rest of the film. As the man pulls out his penis, Miike obscures the organ by imposing a light blue scribble reminiscent of lightning, which remains in constant, erratic motion to cover the character's penis. The lightning, bright and fast

paced, would perhaps be more fitting in the first installment, acting as juxtaposition in *Rainy Dog*. In his close-up shot of the organ, the lighting extends rather far from the body, suggesting a penis of exaggerated size and girth, a rather shocking interruption from other, more realistic aspects of the film.

It follows that since Yuji's trouble began in Japan and his national identity marks him as an Other, his death too, would be caused not by the Chinese Hung, but by another representative of Japan, the pursuer. By the film's conclusion, Yuji is presented as a failed hero, incapable of succeeding in Taipei, nor able to gain a passport and leave. He never finds a group that accepts him, and when he tries to construct one himself, he cannot maintain it; the family unit also crumbles as only Chen survives. Yet, by creating complex characters with conflicting emotions and desires, particularly in the case of Yuji, Miike attempts to suggest a plurality in yakuza identity, and as representatives of the Japanese nation, a diverse, diasporic population composition. With the suggestion of revenge to come, Chen, a *zanryu koji* himself, is established as a future Miike hero, perhaps eventually contributing to Kabukichô's racial melting pot.

While sharing more in common with Miike's early yakuza spoofs than the Dark Society Trilogy, *Full Metal Yakuza* (1997) is concerned with plurality of memory and identity, masculinity, and the relationship between the viewer and the yakuza hero. The narrative begins with Keisuke Hagane, a young yakuza recruit who admires yakuza veteran Tosa. While scrubbing the floors, Hagane peeps through an opening in a shoji screen and sees Tosa *sans* shirt, revealing Tosa's striking tattoo. Aware of Hagane's admiration of him, Tosa entrusts his wallet to Hagane, as he expects to head to prison after the conclusion of his nights work. While necking in an alley with his girlfriend, Yukari, Tosa single-handedly engages a group of rival yakuza, killing most and maiming the survivors, for which he

receives a seven year prison sentence. Meanwhile, Hagane has developed into a useless yakuza, a coward incapable of collecting extortion money. His only impetus is his devotion to Tosa. Upon Tosa's release from prison, Hagane escorts him to a villa, only to be betrayed by his own gang, who believe Tosa's dedication to *jingi* to be a liability to gang expansion. As the gunmen open fire upon the two yakuza, Tosa shields Hagane's body, absorbing the majority of bullet wounds. When Hagane wakes up, he finds himself rebuilt, part robot, part yakuza. He has been reconstructed by the insane, yet comical scientist, Genpaku Hiraga. Hiraga explains Hagane's multiple sourced construction; Hagane is an amalgamation of his and Tosa's limbs and organs. While most of his body is his, Hagane possesses Tosa's legs, arms, heart, tattoo, and penis. Moreover, Hagane's skin is now metal, also his only source of sustenance, making him vulnerable not to sword nor gun, but only rain and his own emotions. When Hagane feels emotional, he is instructed to recite a mantra three times, the mantra being a Russian lullaby. As he regains both his and Tosa's memory, Hagane vows to avenge Tosa's death. In a series of comically graphic fight scenes, Hagane eliminates the entire rival gang, along with most of his own former brothers. Convinced to give up by his former best friend Taka, Hagane wanders until he arrives at a beach, where he constructs a small shelter. As it turns out, the beach is the family graveyard of the Tosa family, where Yukari mourns Tosa's death. After months of cohabitation with Hagane, Yukari propositions Hagane in order to try to move past Tosa. Hagane reveals his secrets; he is part metal and part Tosa. Yukari claims she cannot love two men, and leaves, hoping to kill Tosa's treacherous former boss while he golfs. She fails, becoming the gang's prisoner and sexual toy. Amid torture, Yukari reveals Hagane's location, which leads his former boss decides kill him with an explosion. Though the bomb goes off, Hagane escapes in time, yet leaves behind of his wireless camera eyeballs at the scene of the explosion. The eye, still a

functioning camera, is brought to gang headquarters, where it broadcasts Yukari's rape by several men, including Hagane's former boss and former friend, Taka. Violently convulsing from rage, Hagane makes his way to headquarters where, armed with a sword, he proceeds to eliminate all foes in *ninkyō eiga* fashion. While bullets seem to have no effect on him for nearly all of the film, one manages to penetrate Hagane's skin, before he powers off.

Similar to *Rainy Dog's* protagonist Yuji, Hagane begins the film as a failed yakuza. While on a loan collecting assignment with his friend Taka, Hagane is chased by the debtor's knife wielding wife. Miike constructs the comedy of the situation by using a technique similar to his through-door shots in *Rainy Dog*, placing the camera behind a doorway, in a medium long shot of Hagane chased back and forth in Scooby-Doo fashion by the knife wielding old lady across the doorway, the only visible part of *mise-en-scene*. The old lady serves multiple, illustrating Hagane's incompatibility with the yakuza life, while venting the public's frustration with yakuza. Taka and Hagane's assignment is rather unsavory; instead of representing the Robin Hood yakuza myth, they are more in line with the contemporaneous reality, extorting money from an impoverished old couple. Consequently, this parodies extortion scenes in reference to other yakuza films, while acting as satire in expressing public opinion. Her charge against Hagane and his comic cowardly escape turn the yakuza from a source of concern (as was the case in the violent 90s) to a source of ridicule. Upon their return, the boss demotes Hagane back to toilet cleaning duty, shouting, "You can't even take candy from a kid...you're useless."

Hagane's failure as a yakuza is further enumerated through conflict with a *bazōku* gang. Surrounded by the youngsters in the park, he tries to intimidate them with his status, stating, "Do you know what I am?" Hagane attempts to scare the kids by asserting himself as yakuza, yet he looks so weak and cowardly, the punks quickly overpower and insult him.

This too acts as parody, marking the transition from a time when yakuza protagonists were capable of immediate self-identification. Hagane, accordingly, cannot even identify himself as yakuza. In a flashback, we discover the extent of his cowardice. While Hagane and Taka hide behind a wall to kill a rival boss, at the opportune moment, Hagane restrains Taka out of fear, preventing Taka from murdering the target while literally so scared he pisses himself. This scene too functions as parody, directly referring to an almost identical scene in the final installment of Fukasaku's *Battles*, where one *kobun* charged with the murder of a rival boss too pisses himself, yet his brother heroically takes his spear gun and kills the target. Miike juxtaposes Fukasaku's character, who takes on his brother's responsibility, with Hagane who's failure in his role foils his brother's heroism.

Hagane's masculinity is further called into question sexually. After he practically begging his girlfriend Naomi for sex, Miike's depicts Hagane's performance as rather pathetic. Miike opens the scene with an extreme close-up of Hagane's back, panning up to the very beginnings of a copy of Tosa's dragon tattoo. The tattoo's lack of progress represents Hagane's immaturity, cowardice, and failure; after seven years as a yakuza, one would have earned enough to pay for a body tattoo, his lack then stemming from failure in earning, fear, or both. During intercourse, Hagane seems more scared than excited, while Naomi looks thoroughly uninterested. Ultimately, Hagane fails again, growing tired before even finishing. Disgusted with her pathetic boyfriend, Naomi shouts, "Useless, limp dick as always." When Hagane tries to strike her to put her in her place, she beats him back, exclaiming "I'm not scared of you. You can't even get tattooed properly." This scene functions as a continuation of *Rainy Dog*, where masculinity, sex and tattoos are all connected. Additionally, this scene parodies *Battles*, where sex is nearly always depicted from above, the yakuza on top of the woman, displaying his masculinity in his tattoo and generally rough intercourse. At this

point, Hagane has been beaten by his girlfriend, a group of teenagers, and an old woman. Incapable of earning money or satisfying the proper yakuza norms, Hagane is representative of many post- Bubble yakuza, struggling to survive after the introduction of the *Boutaihou* laws. Hagane's inability to exert any agency marks him as a marginalized Other within his own group, similar to Yuji's own Other status built in part on failure.

While Hagane represents the insufficient yakuza, his mentor Tosa juxtaposes his identity, embodying the paragon of yakuza heroism and masculinity. Miike first introduces Tosa as Hagane peaks into his room through open *shoji* screens. In a medium shot from Hagane's perspective, the camera focuses on Tosa exposing his massive dragon tattoo while kneeling in front of a Shinto altar. Miike cuts to an extreme close-up of Tosa's right hand, holding a sword. The camera pans up the arm to the small of the back, now an extreme close-up of Tosa's tattoo. By beginning the shot with the sword, Miike attempts to represent the tattoo as an extension of yakuza martial masculinity. The Shinto altar in front of Tosa sutures the tattoo with the national religion, thus charging the icon with nationalist significance.

Tosa's traditional yakuza heroism is proven that very night. In a dark Tokyo alley, Tosa kisses and embraces his girlfriend Yukari. Miike begins with a close-up of both embracing. In between kisses, Tosa looks towards the camera, where Miike cuts to a point-of-view shot from Tosa's perspective. A dozen or so members of the enemy gang are casually strolling toward him. Miike cuts to an extreme close-up of the lover's hands grasping. The camera tracks Tosa's hand as he quickly reaches for his sword, before Yukari's hand stops it. Cutting to a close-up of their two faces staring at each other, Tosa whispers "I have to go"³⁰⁶ before unleashing a whirlwind of sword slashes, killing or maiming the lot of them. This scene is

³⁰⁶ Thus reads the subtitles, yet perhaps a better translation of the line, *ja ne*, would be more casual, perhaps closer to "Later."

itself a parody of a *ninkyō eiga* last stand sword fight. While mostly accurate to the traditional scene, Miike inserts certain modern elements that make the scene more absurd than pathological. First, while Yukari's reactions are typical of the yakuza heroes girl, who's love is sacrificed for the sake of the gang, her attire is far from traditional. While usually in these scenes, the girlfriend wears a *kimono* or *yukata*, Yukari wears a small red jacket over a tiny purple shirt, on top of a torn jean mini-skirt; rather than the symbol of female purity, she represents modern promiscuity, emphasizing the historical recontextualization. The fight itself is absurd, directed similarly to *ninkyō eiga* swordplay with its choreographed feel. Yet, the results of the violence are more similar to Fukasaku. Perhaps as an homage to *Battles*, an enemy's arm is cut off in a torrent of blood, repeated again as Tosa stabs the rival *oyabun* in the chest, Tosa's face mirroring Tatsuhito's when clutching Shu's police victims. 60s era sword fights lacked excessive blood, making them seem elegant and noble in comparison. While Tosa's sword forms were no different than those of Koji Tsuruta's characters, the graphic effects are shocking, forcing Yukari to exclaim, "You animal!" This combines *ninkyō* and *jitsuroku eiga* in parody, ironically distancing the familiar action with its expected result.

After undergoing the unifying surgery, Hagane absorbs several of Tosa's body parts, becoming a walking juxtaposition of yakuza identity. The body parts he gains affect his masculinity most. Tosa's arms and legs are his source of force in combat, his brave heart juxtaposes Hagane's own cowardice, representing the heart of yakuza and thus, Japanese spirit. His tattoo, as mentioned, is both a symbol of masculinity and national identity. Finally, perhaps Hagane's most important second hand organ is Tosa's penis. Hagane discovers his new appendage, looking down into his pants. The change is so shocking to him, he begins whimper in terror, mumbling, "Big...and circumcised." Genpaku himself explains his choice in genitalia replacement, "His dick. With the balls attached of course. Your's weren't

damaged, but the super roboman shouldn't let anyone down..." Hagane, who throughout the movie has, even sexually, let everyone down, is no longer insufficient. In fact, the juxtaposition is emphasized when he uses his super hearing to listen in on Naomi have sex with Taka, both of whom spend their intercourse poking fun at Hagane's former sized member. In fact, through comparison to *Rainy Dog*, one can argue that Hagane's power as a cyborg is directly related to Tosa's large penis. Whenever Hagane pushes his Full Metal power to the limit, it creates a blue lighting force. For example, when testing out his new legs on a bicycle, Hagane creates a whirlwind of blue lighting energy that propels him forward. When enraged in a fight, Hagane's fists create the same lightning. The same sort of scribbled blue lightning was used to censor the absurdly massive penis of *Rainy Dog's* pursuer. Knowledge of *Rainy Dog* then serves as a necessary decoder for Miike's encoded parody.

The Full Metal Yakuza does possess weakness, emotions and water. The latter is understandable as he is mostly made of metal and wiring, yet also is in coincidental shared attribute with *Rainy Dog's* Yuji, another representative of a failed yakuza Other. However, by giving emotions the power to short circuit the indestructible yakuza, Miike furthers his cause of representing the cyborg as the zenith of masculinity, forcing him to dull his emotions through tranquilizers brought on by mantra. According to Genpaku, a hero has no need for emotions like love and hate, which is why Genpaku ultimately disapproves of Hagane's will for revenge. Yet that will itself is a manifestation of the robot's plurality, in shared memory.

As the Full Metal yakuza, Hagane has access to both his and Tosa's memories, the simultaneous juxtaposition catalyzing his will for revenge. The two identities are so totally joined, at some points, Hagane is incapable of distinguishing memory identity. On occasion, he even acts out Tosa's old memories in the present, as when Miike cross cuts between black and white images of Tosa's initial sword fight and Hagane's final one. The cyborg even

shares Tosa's muscle memory. Hagane senses Yukari's presence on the beach as his penis suddenly becomes erect for no reason. This muscle memory reaction triggers a one of Tosa's flashbacks. The shared memories are a representation of shared national memory. If Tosa and Hagane, polar opposite representations of yakuza, can have common memory, the multicultural Japanese state too can create an all-inclusive identity with a complete account of nation history.

Perhaps the most important function of juxtaposition and national representation in the cyborg yakuza is what he represents as a hero. The final fight scene, featuring the now metallic yakuza fighting an army of enemies with a sword is perhaps the most striking form of parody presented. While a robot yakuza may seem rather absurd, it is perhaps less so than a mere human accomplishing the same in the given situation. Furthermore, while easily deflecting bullets throughout the entire film, catches a fatal blow at the end of the scene. Surprised at the turn of events himself, he exclaims, "How could I be shot", before "powering down", a parody of the essential death of the *makoto* hero. The ability to transition from regular life to absurd science fiction is a further commentary on heroism and the nation. Beyond representing a lack in expected yakuza qualities, Hagane represents the average Japanese citizen, who himself would be incapable of fulfilling the duties of the yakuza. Miike's juxtaposition of Tosa and Hagane allow the viewer to imagine themselves the yakuza hero in this situation. If Hagane represents the national average, then any Japanese individual of any cultural/social/gender identification can be represented by the Full Metal yakuza, allowing infinite parallel juxtapositions through his mediocre component identity.

Miike's yakuza films address taboo race issues, mirroring the juxtaposition in stylistic techniques he is so fond of. His image of a pluralistic yakuza reaffirms Japanese identity

rather than dismantle it. Rather than viewing yakuza as stereotypically xenophobic, he allows indigenous organized crime to represent the multicultural national population, as paralleled within their own gangs.

Concluding Ceremonies: The Yakuza, Yakuza Recession and the Zombie Bank

“Ultimately, the yakuza will become like the U.S. mafia. In the future ther’ll be one national mob. Like my organization, the bigger firms will take over. You can see the move toward a more corporate structure.”

-Inagawa Kakuji

Now we are left approaching the question, how do we make sense of the discussed film’s depiction of the yakuza? Suzuki, Fukasaku, and Miike all present figures as often tragic, yet lacking the necessary context to really be heroes. Suzuki’s depictions leave the audience unsatisfied in heroism. Katsuta and Fuyu both make extreme sacrifices for the sake of jingi through giri to their bosses, both receiving long sentences. Hanako strips Fuyu’s heroism from his sacrifice, essentially acting as the voice of reason and informing him both of the parodic nature of his action, that is, how temporally displaced such views are, even more so by the time he gets out of prison. Katsuta on the other hand comes to this realization himself as he sits in prison, his face displaying anxiety mirrored by the nondiagetic horns. Yet, the viewer is still left feeling both characters are decent people, only tragically displaced from relavent a relavent context. Fukasaku’s *teppôdama* characters function similarly. If placed within the context of the ninkyo eiga, their sacrifices would have meaning, yet in the face of the atomic bombs destruction, there is no meaning. It take Hirono five installments to realize this, before he finally decides to retire. Miike’s characters are literally displaced, diasporic figures who have trouble relating to any one culture. Tatsuhito³⁰⁷, a *zanryû koji* of mixed race and foreign birth finds it difficult to fit in within Japanese society. No matter how patriotic he is, people still find him slightly untrustworthy due to his Chinese heritage. Even though he prevailsover Wang, he is still killed by Shu a few days later, the voice over

³⁰⁷ Tatsuhito, though not a yakuza per se, has several yakuza like characteristic to the extent that have posited that Miike attemptsto present him as such to liken him to his indicated gangster doppelganger, Wang.

indicating it an afterthought a pathetic tragedy in itself. Yuji had no place in Japan, hence his exile, yet clearly lacks relevance to Taipei as well, where his silence rarely allows him to express himself. Unlike the native Hung who can talk Yuji's boss into betraying him, despite his fluent Mandarin, Yuji is always assumed to be as vocally dumb as his actual dumb son, Chen. Perhaps if Yuji were given a chance to vocally express himself, he would not have been killed the instant he finally connects with his son, an unheroic tragic fate.

In reference to the yakuza, Boss Inagawa's words could not be more relevant. The identity and perception of the yakuza has come a long way. Originally relevant solely on the local level, with the coming of the modern age and a the unfamiliar institution of democracy, the yakuza were able to exploit their well honed skills in the production of violence to serve both the state and their own interests in the prewar period. This was then repeated in the immediate postwar period, where, with the help of the *kuromaku*, particularly Kodama, the major syndicates grew wealthy and expanded to swallow gang after gang, the successful one's becoming corporations. During the Bubble period, the yakuza participated in the decade's many opportunities for speculative ventures, and banks lent freely. At the time, the banks did not know that by granted such loans, they were taking on too much leverage, not knowing real estate prices were going to plummet nor that their borrower's, the yakuza, had no intention of paying them back. While the yakuza have steadily developed an ongoing parody of corporate culture in their own for the last fifty or so years within their own structures, with the economic difficulties of the *post-Bubble* era as well as those currently imposed by the *bôtaihô* laws upon the yakuza, the yakuza certainly look like a corporation in trouble. Yet, true to their parodic relationship, in this time of worldwide economic recession, the yakuza are in step with trends in corporations. Due to the recession, a decade old buzz term has reappeared in economic discourse in several countries, the "zombie bank." While

currently a hot topic in Ireland, Australia and even recently in the United States (concerning the bailout of Citi Bank), the term originated in during the the post-Bubble economy. Rather than define the yakuza as simply violent³⁰⁸, I would argue the yakuza have been corporate for so long, they respond to economic and political pressures similarly to a corporation. Moreover, as the yakuza were equally complicit in the collapse of real estate, stocks, and many other investment assets, they have a personal connection to the phenomenon. The zombie bank, a observable fact in part caused by the yakuza themselves, is essentially a bank that has become insolvent and lacks enough capital to cover liabilities, yet receives just enough injected capital from the government or perhaps inspires just enough consumer confidence in the institution, or extending it credit to cover its immediate losses, or any other ultimately ineffectual response. Not only do I believe the yakuza mirror the zombie bank, but moreover the Japanese government, like every other economist, understands its economic problems are tied to insolvent banks that gave out fraudulent loans in a time of high speculation, i.e zombie banks and obligated lenders, i.e. the yakuza who have no intention of meeting that obligation, i.e. the yakuza. Moreover, the Japanese government has left its country in this recession by refusing to recognize the elephant in the room; the sums lost are so vast that the neither the banks nor the yakuza will ever be able to pay them back.³⁰⁹

The economic and legal troubles facing the yakuza are putting heavy strains on their functionality. As Hill notes, “Not only do they have to face the double punch of the burst

³⁰⁸ While the literal definition of *bōryokudan* literally signifies violent group, the provisions of the law state it slightly more openly, “any group of which there is a high risk its members will collectively or routinely promote illegal activity.” Hill, 158.

³⁰⁹ Cooley, Thomas F. "Zombie Firms And Zombie Banks." *Forbes Magazine*. 11 Feb. 09. Web. 12 Apr. 2010. <http://www.forbes.com/2009/02/10/recession-tarp-japan-opinions-columnists_0211_thomas_cooley.html>.

bubble and the *bôtaihô*...the prospects for the yakuza look bleak indeed.”³¹⁰ However, he follows up, “the continued existence of illegal markets where at least some of this wealth end up will ensure that the yakuza will never entirely disappear. However, a more hostile legal climate and a reduced scope for offering private fixing services in upper-world disputes will result in the yakuza being less conspicuous than they were in the 20th century...they will not be immediately recognizable as yakuza...” Hill suggests that the yakuza are living hand to mouth and any further trouble that comes their way could leave them simply a shell of what they were, much like zombie banks.

Moreover, despite the feeble condition of the syndicates these days, Japanese politicians continue to give extend support to the yakuz, as Hill states:

I returned to Osaka to interview Yamaguchi-gumi members. Whilst interviewing a mid-level boss in his gang office, the secretary of an LDP politician called and invited himself to discuss a land-deal that the real-estate side of my interviewee’s operation was helping with. When the secretary left, the interviewee told me that he had been friends with the politician for a long time. He still supports him financially but now gives him smaller sums that are less likely to attract attention.³¹¹

Similar to its approach to zombie banks, the Japanese government is keeping these syndicates in an undead state, neither letting them die out nor making them completely solvent, thus refusing to address the issue fully. Why then would they do this? As Hill has noticed, since the implementation of the *bôtaihô*, crime has in fact gone up.³¹² Hill believes these crimes were committed not by active members, but part-time members cut lose who are forced into independent, petty crime.³¹³ Japan’s “greatest fear” then is coming true, with

³¹⁰ Hill, 275.

³¹¹ Hill, Peter. *The Japanese Mafia, Take Two: Postscript to Paper Back Edition*. 2006. MS 2006-06. Department of Sociology Oxford, Oxford.

³¹² Hill, *The Japanese Mafia*. 272.

³¹³ Ibid.

the break up of yakuza groups, “unorganized” crime is hitting the streets for the first time since the occupation.

If we view the yakuza as a zombie bank, perhaps it can serve as an explanation for their appeal in the face of their violence, greed, and parasitic nature. The yakuza are the walking dead, both literally in that they “either wear red or white,” or because they represent nostalgic notions of tradition that we cannot let go. We cannot let it die for out of fear or nostalgia, nor will we actively see it thrive, knowing the cost of such irresponsibility (violence, economic crisis, etc). It seems film, a fictionalized spotlight on reality, is the perfect place for them.

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