JAPANESE FILM THEORY AND THE NATIONAL POLICY FILM DEBATE: 1937–1941

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In early 1942, Japanese film historian Hazumi Tsuneo looked back over the five year period since the outbreak of full-scale war with China in 1937 and marveled at how utterly the nation's cinema had changed: "Our whole way of looking at and of thinking about film has been radically altered."[1.] This alteration had been partly the result of a surge in technical sophistocations (if not exactly innovations). Montage editing techniques had moved beyond the phase of being experimental and controversial—as alien "Americanisms" or "Sovietisms"—and were giving films a noticeably modern look and feel. Resistence to the Talkies—once a bitterly divisive issue within the industry—had been wiped out and sound was now an integral part of the cinematic experience. Screen music and dialogue were now specific categories for appreciation; and a flourishing "scenario-as-literature movement" was supporting the regular publication several magazines. In a parallel development, film scripts were also the objects of intense scrutiny for the young censors working in the Home Ministry and the all-powerful Cabinet Information Bureau (Naikaku Jōhōkyoku).

The war had its own benefits for the Japanese film industry. As Hazumi notes, "Theaters showing news films have burgeoned throughout Tokyo in the wake of the China Incident. Their drawing power is spectacular and the daily crowds offer up unstinting applause at the sight of His Majesty's troops fighting in the far-off fields of north and central China. Where once there were two or three such theatres, there are now twenty-three in Tokyo alone."[2.] Everyone at least knew someone at the Front or on the way there, and so interest in the progress of the fighting, in the terrain and in the daily lives of the troops was both intense and personal. At least indirectly this situation led to one of the peculiarities of the era: the extremely high prestige of the film documentary. The demand for "authentic images" on the screen (and, as the huge popularity of Hino Ashihei's reportage novels was proving, in literature as well) was a key factor in molding the tastes of the public in the "Showa-Teens" (1935–45). This in turn had a direct influence on the construction and "look" of most drama films. The period up to the end

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of the Pacific War could be characterized as a golden era for the documentary, the semi-documentary and the pseudo-documentary.

Among the "radical alterations" Hazumi remarked upon in 1942 was the increased sophistocation of that breed of overtly propagandistic film called the Kokusaku or "National Policy" genre. In the early days of the Manchurian Incident directors like Yoshimura Misao ground out hysterical elegies to the "Three Human Bomb Patriots" (*Nikudan Sanyushi*). For all their patriotic fervor, they failed to capture the public imagination and were often box-office failures. "There is no way to compete with the living, breathing depictions afforded by news films'" was the assessment of pro-government critic Sawamura Tsutomu in his 1939 review of Tasaka Tomotaka's *Five Scouts* (*Go-nin no Sekkohei*, 1939). This film, representing the start of a "new wave," was a critical success and even won a Special Prize at Venice. The success was achieved by replicating the feel of the real battlefield. "In order to achieve some degree of independence (from the authority of the news documentary)," Sawamura pointed out, "Tasaka had to take possession of another kind of truth: the truth about human relationships." [3.] Close scrutiny of human relationships under battlefield conditions, presented in a documentary-like format, was the formula for a modest flowering of Kokusaku films between 1939 and the first year of the Pacific War. Although some filmmakers who contributed to this genre have since tried to explain away their wartime work as having been done "under duress," others recall the period with unabashed nostalgia. One of these is Yoshimura Kimisaburo, director of the excellent *Tank Commander Nishizumi* (*Nishizumi Sensha-chō Den*, 1940):

> The film world was of course caught in the clutches of a system of tight control. Still, compared to many other industries, we were treated with great consideration. The authorities naturally sought to manipulate us into making political propaganda, but they did recognize our function as producers of the only product capable of satisfying the entertainment-starved public. I believe that the social position of film people has never been higher than it was in the midst of the war. We young directors were all infected by *kokusaku*-fever, strutting about as if we were the benefactors of public enlightenment.[4.]

In the very late thirties and early forties, there was an intense effort among the nation's film critics and theorists of "national policy" to define a role for ultranationalist cinema in Japan and to plot out the aesthetic directions in which it should develop. No consensus was ever achieved and the hoped-for flowering was fast to wither, partly due to the internal contradictions of a cultural policy which sought to propagate itself through bureacratic regulation and partly due to the new austerities

brought on by the Pacific War. We can however discern the shadowy outlines of an emerging "consensus" on film aesthetics. Bearing in mind the phantomlike quality of my subject, I will attempt here a brief survey of this debate, trying to identify some of its salient features.

Preparations for and the promulgation of the comprehensive Film Law of 1939 gave special focus to this debate. To a large degree the law was patterned after the Nazi *Spitzenorganisation der Filmwirtschaft* (the Japanese version even contained an anomalous warning against "Jewish influences" within the nation's cinema). In general, however, the law was carefuly designed to appeal to a wide range of opinion within the film world. "So far our national policies for movies have not been carried out positively," Home Minister Kido Koichi stated as he presented the bill to the 74th Diet. "What has been lacking has been a policy positively to use and support movies." [5.] Kido seemed to be announcing an abrupt reversal of a long tradition of official suspicion and hostility toward the celluloid medium. As recently as August 1937—soon after the outbreak of the China Incident—the Home Ministry had slapped film markers with a formidable list of bureaucratic Don'ts : 1.) Don't subject the military to ridicule. 2.) Don't exaggerate the cruelties of war with overly realistic depictions. 3.) Do nothing to break the spirit of families with fighting men at the Front. 4.) Do nothing to stimulate pleasure-seeking or 'degenerate hedonism'. Then, later in 1937, the government began issuing sumptuary laws as part of a program to bring some of the austerity of the battlefield to the home-front, and cinema was again one of the targets. Because extended periods of entertainment were "unsuitable for the times, " the playing time for all feature films was severely reduced.

Although a bare listing of the main features of the 1939 Film Law might sound like the closing of a coffinlid over creative cinema in Japan, this was not necessarily the general perception at the time. In fact, the law was worked out with the close cooperation of leaders in the industry (including Shochiku's Kido Shiro, who was far from being a doctrinaire ultranationalist). What the industry representatives seemed to be looking for—and which a large number of them felt they had achieved with the Law—was the kind of "freedom" afforded by clearly defined guidelines. As managers of businesses they were anxious to reduce the risk factor of their investments. In the past, goverment censors could and did ban films which were already in prodution. Or, as in a few celebrated "nightmare" cases, they might even decree that a feature be permanently shelved after its completion.

Therefore, fearing the arbitrary and the capricious, while seeing their best

defense in making the government an active ally in the production of their films, many of the industry leaders welcomed the first article of the Film Law: mandatory inspection of film scripts prior to their production. Not only did it allow the authorities to participate "positively" in the inception of a film— which put them in a fostering or nurturing position— the filmmarker was given a certain amount of assurance that his work would not be bureaucratically ambushed further down the line. Negative evidence that this was an important factor is supplied by the case of Kamei Fumio. In the early forties, the authorities came to the conclusion that Kamei's work had a secret pacifist message (they were correct in their surmisal) and they withdrew Kamei's "right" to pre-production inspection of his scripts.

Other features of the Film Law included "registration" of all directors, actors and film technicans. As we can clearly see in the case of the unfortunate Kamei, this also served the purposes of totalitaran control. Kamei, for instance, was punished by having his registration as director revoked and was thereby effectively idled until the end of the Pacific War. The organization which actually carried out this certification was Dai Nihon Eiga Kyokai (The Greater Japan Film Association, established in 1933), which for a while was headed by Shochiku's Kido Shiro. Kido describes the charms of this organization to the captains of the film industry: "Through the Kyokai we could debate with government and military officials on an equal footing. Furthermore, when it came to handling those film artists who had an exaggerated notion of their own importance and who caused inconvenience throughout the industry by running here and there (i. e. breaking their contracts with their parent companies) we did on occasion avail ourselves of the Film Law."[6.)]

The single feature of the Film Law which appealed to ultranationalist and closet-liberal alike was Article 15, which provided for mandatory showings of newsfilms and "Culture Films" (*bunka eiga*) as part of each feature film program. In fact, it was this new category of "Culture Film" which fired the imaginations of both the filmmakers and the theorists of cultural policy. These various "educational" films, scientific documentaries and travelog treatments of regional culture made up a pottering backwater of film production, usually for film showings in school auditoriums or Buddhist temples. Now, with dramatic vigor, Culture Film production surged foward as a major industry with a vast audience. Kido Shiro claims that Article 15 was actually his own brainchild : "It is the one thing from that era which even today I am really proud of having accomplished. I got the idea when I was visiting Germany and I saw how they stimulated the development of their own culture films by eliminating admissions taxes for theatres that showed

them. [7.] For Kido, therefore, the Film Law was a modest cornucopia of benefits for himself and his kind. "It never once occurred to me," he rather implausibly contends, "that the Law would be used as a means of drawing cinema into the web of the new totalitarian regime."

Theoretical discussions as to how the newly vitalized Culture Film could be made an effective tool of national policy began immediately after the Law was promulgated. The debate reached its high point in 1941. In his book, *The Essence of Japanese Cinema* (*Nihon Eiga no Honshitsu*, 1943), Imamura Taihei points out just how groping the development of the culture film continued to be, even two years after the Law: "Although the law prescribes compulsory showings of culture films, it is still unclear what they really are. The idea is, apparently, that they be of a nature diametrically opposed to standard dramatic films. Up to now, that which stands in such a relationship to drama films has been the documentary. Are we to assume that the documentary and the culture film are one and the same thing?" In the case of Imamura, this is far from an innocent question. As we shall see, he was already committed to a vision of the future of cinema which proclaimed the primacy of documentary realism as both a technique and a criterion. Looking back over Imamura's writings in the war years, it becomes apparent that he represented an attitude which often covertly resisted the politico-social system. In fact, by disguising his idiom, he continued to analyze film and culture from a patently dialectical materialist standpoint under the very noses of the authorities. Because the social implications of his analytical position remained shrouded in ambiguity, the authorities never considered him really "subversive" and so he was allowed to publish prominently well into the Pacific War years. One of his most consistent targets was the "*seishinshugi*" or "sprit-ism" which lurked at the heart of much of the militarist demagogery of the war years. "Spirit-ism" propounded an artificial opposition between "spirit" (usually the Japanese Spirit: *Nihon no seishin*; *yamato damashii*) and physical reality. In his discussion of the Culture Film, we see Imamura consistly trying to innoculate the genre against *seishinshugi* by emphasizing its nature as a *scientific* genre.

Needless to say, when the war began to turn against Japan, all branches of the media became infused with spirit-ism of a near hysterical type (in the end calling for "the Honorable Death of the Hundred Million"). But even in the far more confident days preceding Pearl Harbor, the Culture Film was clearly targeted as a vehicle for the propagation of an aestheticized form of seishinshugi. As the pro-government writer Sawamura Tsutomu put it in those sunnier times:

> In culture films, the political and philosophical posture of the filmmaker is of paramont importance. He must dedicate his whole being to the awakening possibilites of our new State. If he does that, works of great strength and beauty are sure to arise from within him and come forth.[8.)]

As if to respond to just such a pronouncement, Imamura Taihei warned against the notion that a "wonderful art can arise from a faulty, non-scientific basis." As one of the last proponents of the objective scientific spirit in Japan, Imamura fought back. To him, the proper function of the Culture Film was to imbue the common people with a scientific outlook:

> Especially with the outbreak of the China Incident and with its concomitant development of the means of rapid communication of news, we can foresee the reformation of society in accordance to the needs of modern war; I refer here to the inevitable scientific rationalization of society to which the exigencies of war have brought us. All this calls for the spreading of scientific awareness among the population.[9.)]

As a once-and-future Marxist, it was natural for Imamura to see science as the social panacea and art as the vehicle of public enlightenment. His own rather ecstatic vision for the future of Culture Film (documentaries) insisted upon the indentity between science and art. To him, the art of the future would cast off all "fictions" and proceed directly toward "documentary truth." In 1940, he wrote:

> In the coming cinema, dramatic films will be displaced by documentaries which, in turn, will have differentiated themselves into a variety of genres. Even when several people make documentaries on the same subject, each work will bear the imprint of the personality and proclivities of its maker... In this way the factual documentary will become a medium of artistic expression.[10.)]

All through this period, Imamura's purist views of the documentary caused him to proclaim that the expressions on the faces of "real" people were far more powerful (even on film) than those of professional actors and that montages of images from the real world were far more "eloquent" than anything artificially created on the studio lot. Imamura's frontal assault on fictionality in cinema was probably another manifestation of his hostility toward the romanticism implicit in *seishinshugi*. As a matter of fact, however, the only thoroughgoing textbook on the techniques of documentary filmmaking available at the time was a translation of Paul Rotha's *Documemtary Film*. And, unfortunately for Imamura, Rotha himself recommended the "creative dramatization of reality,"

including the use of professional actors and staged actions where necessary. The Rotha doctrine opened the way for such officially-approved Culture Film "documentaries" as *Hospital Ship* (*Byōin-sen*, 1940), ninety percent of which was scripted drama with professional actors.

Imamura's attempt to apply his anti-fictional purism to the documentary genre was met by the ferocious objections of Iwasaki Akira, a critic with impeccably leftist credentials (he was, in fact, eventually arrested and imprisoned by the authorities). Iwasaki was more acute in his perception of how both the documentary and the "news" genres were fast becoming effective collaborators in the war effort. As most of the right-leaning critics of the day were also quick to notice, the drama film was far less enthusiastic in its war support than were most war documentaries. Iwasaki therefore could share none of Imamura's illusions about a purist documentary movement "immunized" against patriotic hysteria. Furthermore, Iwasaki—who had actually made a number of documentaries in the late twenties during his days as a leader of the Proletarian Kinema (*Purokino*) Movement—knew that "purist" documentaries were virtually impossible. In any case, he saw the purposes of drama film and documentary film as completely separate. The documentary film was essentially a medium of reportage and analysis. Furthermore, cinema which expels the fabricated, the fictional, has very little possibility of aspiring to the artisic, because:

> The joy in human art is not simply the joy of apprehending, but is also the joy of creation, of fabrication.[11.)]

Iwasaki saw the future of Culture Film documentaries as lying beyond mere recordings of reality. He saw them as potentially a new genre: one of theoretical films which probed "the major issues of society, such as the housing problem or improving the cultural life of the rural village."

Although, in his own way, Imamura Taihei continued to struggle against the hysteria and fanaticism of the war years, he seems to have become progressively hobbled by his own ideological position. On occasion, it could lead him into strange political-postures, as we can see in this review of Leni Riefenstahl's pro-Nazi *Fest der Volker* (Japanese premiere, 6/19/40):

> "The growth of the artistic (and scientific) possibilities of the documentary film becomes possible as soon as a society decides it is beneficial and worthy of its unstinting financial support. This is precisely the achievement of Germany where nationalization has been

> carried out to the ultimate degree. It demonstrates the inseparable connection between progress in documentary film and its becoming an instrument of national policy. The documentary film which has been nationalized, which has been freed from the profit-seeking of the commercial world and which has been given the resources of sufficient funds and time, will demonstrate its superiority over all the dramatic films of today; we find proof of this in the special kind of excitement created by *Fest der Volker*.[12.)]

About this disturbing development in Imamura's thinking, modern citic Sato Tadao points out:

> During that period when Imamura could still express his Communist beliefs in a straightforward manner, he emphasized the quality of film as the product of a collective within society and that it would reach its highest flowering in the form of the documentary genre produced by a society based on socialism. When, however, he saw that his dream of a documentary film genre possessing the qualities of the social collective was actually being realized under the National Socialism of Hitler, he was thrilled. In this sense, Imamura had something in common with those former Communists who had undergone a political change of heart (*tenko*) in the militarist era and who had embraced the doctrine of 'productive efficiency.'[13)]

Hasegawa Nyozekan, who has managed to keep his reputation intact into the postwar years as a covert supporter of democracy during the wartime era, did in fact develop a cultural standpoint which seems very close to *seishinshugi*. In his *Theory of Japanese Film* (Nihon Eigaron, 1941) his aspirations for the Culture Film are closely interwoven with a position which stresses Japanese uniqueness and the special aesthetic consiousness of the race. The unique feature of Japanese film, he contends, lies with the emotional properties of the Japanese people themselves. These emotions come from "two thousand years of continuous history in the realm of feeling." This history has resulted in an artistic sense which fuses aestheticism (*shimbisei*) with ethical elements. *Shimbisei* informs the Japanese person that there is a beauty in each shape, as in dance. This shape, or *kata*, is fundamentally different the Western "symbol" (although it often functions in a similar manner). By maintaining its shape and fundamental mysteriousness, *kata* serves as a medium through which the *kokoro* (inner life) of the daily world reverberrates to the mind of the individual. That which is seen as "stylized" in Kabuki by the foreigner is really the *kata* of each character. Each shape, or *kata*, has a spiritual corollary showing the social position of the individual. This, in turn, is based upon the historical unity and continuity of the Japanese people. It is shared by all Japanese people, no matter what their class. And, because the traditional arts are intuitively accessible to all

members of the race, there is no distinction between "high class" and "low class" art. Similarly, entertainment and "enlightenment" cannot and should not be divided one from the other (as they tend to be in the West). This line of thinking, leads Hasegawa to his specific prescriptions for a uniquely Japanese Culture Film. As an instrument of intellectual training, it must maintain a fusion of 1.) intellectual content (communicated at an everyday level which avoids "textbookishness") and 2.) a high level of artistic treatment. Two conditions are necessary to achieve this fusion: intelligence and intuition. In fact, it is in the correct balancing of these two elements that Hasegawa seems to see the correct nurturing of the Japanese people of the future. Intelligence—by which he means the analytic faculty—informs and is informed by that "intuition" which resides at the heart of all traditional Japanese arts.

In short, Hasegawa proposed a role for the Culture Film as something more than simply a tool of intellectual training in Japan. It is, equally, part of the nation's *spiritual* training program. We see this in his insistence that scientific knowledge has a certain modality, part of which is ethical and part aesthetic. Hasegawa's brand of *seishinshugi* has certain properties in common with the Greek notion of *paideia*. Science is morality because one's life is made orderly by a belief in it. At the same time, that which is truly "scientific" has achieved its most aesthetically beautiful form.

There is one other important aspect in which Hasegawa's wartime views come close to the ultranationalist position. He hails the Film Law as being "the first effort to form and control our nation's cinematic art." He then attacks modern liberal society as the reason for the continued low quality of cinematic art. In an oblique reference to Gresham's Law, he says that "because of the absolute freedom allowed in the world, the bad films have filled up the market place, driving out the good ones." Active intervention by the authorities is therefore to be welcomed. When he draws a parallel to Kabuki, Hasegawa's real point becomes quite clear. Kabuki grew spontaneously out of town culture in the feudal era. If the Bakufu had not intervened in its development—regulating this aspect and proscribing that—it would never have achieved the marvelous flowering it did. Art seems to flourish only when it is put under the limitations and constraints of the era in which it finds itself. These include political restrictions, as well as those of class and historical necessity. Thus, in this case, Hasegawa comes close to identifying the political forces which operate to repress culture as the very elements which bring it to flower. This is the same paradox residing at the heart of all totalitarian cultural theories.

Perhaps, in a different historical context, Hasegawa's opinions would appear less

ideologically charged. But within the 1941 contex, he seems to be a virtual fellow-traveler of such ultranationalists as Ōtsuka Kyōichi. In an article in *Eiga Hyōron* magazine in early 1939, "Japanese Film At the Crossroads", Otsuka says:

> At this very moment Japan stands at one of the great turning points in its history and, in carrying out its mission of rebuilding Asia, she must thrust aside all opposition. We Japanese have the blood of our ancestors throbbing in our veins. It is unthinkable that we should ever allow our splendid Japaneseness to fall into ruin. On the contrary, this love for things Japanese is destined to well up within (the creative artists among us), taking on marvelous new forms. Seen from this vantage point, the way forward for Japanese cinema is the bringing to real life of that unique beauty which is native to Japan. It is this which we must carry with us as we march out (*shinshutsu suru*) in to the world.

Hasegawa's *Eigaron* blueprints his vision for a brand new genre of drama film: the "*Rekishi Eiga*" (historical film). During the war years, this innocuously-named genre actually came to replace the venerable *jidaigeki* (samurai) genre. The new genre was one of lavishly-funded period piece spectaculars. Hasegawa holds that: "the Japanese feeling about history is distinctly different from that of the Westerner." In talking about his own nation's history, the Westerner must take on a certain objectivity, talking about foreign incursions and the commingling of cultural bloodlines. The Japanese, however, have a more personal relation to their nation's history, akin to family memories of one's personal lineage. This is due to the continuity of personality running through all of Japanese history. Japanese cinema, no matter how "modern" its medium, must never lose the message inscribed in the Japanese kokoro. This kokoro (heart, spirit) includes the ethos dwelling within the national language. "The *rekishi eiga*," Hasegawa says, "must dedicate itself to the preservation of the Japanese past by building it into a new artform. The *rekishi eiga* will then serve the function of training the people in that Culture of Feeling which is our special heritage."

The same Spring 1938 issue of *Eiga Hyōron* magazine containing the article by Otsuka quoted above, also features the film script for *The Abe Clan* (*Abe Ichizoku*, script by Kumagai Hisatora and Adachi Nobuo; directed by Kumagai, 1938). While even Kumagai admitted that the film was not a complete aesthetic success, its appearance at this time is historically significant: it is one of the earliest examples of the *rekishi eiga* genre. *Abe Ichizoku* is of course based upon the Mori Ogai story. The film version however greatly "sharpens" and "improves" upon the original, particularly in its glorification of the *seppuku* (ritual suicide) theme. In fact, this particular *rekishi eiga* is probably more deeply imbued with *seishinshugi* than many of those that followed. As

opposed to the even-handedness of the original, there is no doubt that the film's sympathies lie exclusively with the *budan-ha* (militarist) group in their hopeless struggle with the legalist *bunji-ha* faction, (the film's stereotypical villains). The cry of frustrated indigation sent up by the film's bushido purists clearly echoes the similar cry of the young militarist fanatics of the thirties.

When it was premiered, the film attracted the outrage of many critics: "Where is the original Ogai in this piece? We can only find here the sinister side of director Kumagai himself." These critics apparently completely missed the point. Pro-government, ultrationalist film critic Sawamura Tsutomu roared to the defense of the work:

> What breadth! What density this work has! If I may be allowed the expression, what violence of vision! Kumagai has thrown a bomb into the sluggish Japanese film world, blowing open a hole for fresh breezes to enter. He dazzles us with the fury of his iron determination to cut through the Gordian Knot which has strangled our nation's cinema. This work tosses and turns with the tempestuousness of Kumagai's passionate convictions about life. Writhings of this sort are of course far from the coolness of the Mori Ogai original. Yet it is clear that the present era demands from us just this sort of tumult. That this is so lacking from our presentday cinema is one of its chief flaws.[14.)]

It was not uncommon for Sawamura to stake out isolated positions of such extremism in his film criticisms. Marching to an entirely different drummer than many of his colleagues, he commonly praised films they had condemned on solid aesthetic grounds. Similarly he would excoriate such widely-recognized masterworks as Ozu's *I Was Born But...* for their "limpness of spirit." As the most articulate expression of unfettered *seishinshugi* in Japan's wartime cinema, Sawamura's views deserve some attention here.

In his essay, "The Direction of Japanese Cinema", he gives us a clear overview of his position. Responding to the widespread charge that the quality of films had fallen off due to the controls clapped on the film industry in the Film Law era, Sawamura admitted that "some film artists appear to be still floudering in the waves of the new era, unable to grasp the necessary conviction." It is this lack of "conviction" which induces them to turn back to the sorry old formulas (such as slice-of-life *shoshimingeki* films). "So many of the entertainments of today, merely breed lethargic hedonism in our people." When people indulge in purely escapist fare, he says, "they are like people who stand on their rooves all night to catch a glimpse of some distant fire" ; they are merely observers of that which does not concern them:

> Film goers might find such fires in the distance of some interest, but is it the function of cinema merely to arouse interest in such purely worthless matters? If this were the case, cinema would have to be condemned as altogether unsuited to these times of grave crisis. I am on the contrary utterly convinced that cinema has a special leadership role to carry out within our culture.[15.)]

Sawamura then moves on to the goals of the cinema of the future:

> The goal is not simply to be 'fun' or even 'artistically excellent.' Cinema must be of direct service to the State and to the lives of its people. I am not saying that 'usefulness' is the only criterion to be applied, far from it. Cinema must engage the viewer's interest; and of course it must seek the highest possible aesthetic expression.

Sawamura is clearly uncomfortable with the idea of cinema as art, particularly when it is used as the vehicle for the expression of a personalistic artistic vision. Like all fascists, he rejects the tradition of individualism: "If we must admit that Art involves the artist in an exclusive loyalty to his own personally-held beliefs, then it is best that cinema not be 'Art' at all."

Sawamura's next point is a fascinating one: "Cinema must not become the preserve of any particular intellectual or social striation in society Only when it is able to appeal to the totality of our nation's people can we say that it has grasped its true essence." In a separate essay, "Concerning the People's Cinema," he draws a parallel to the situation of "people's literature" (*kokumin bungaku*), "*kokumin*" being one of the cultural buzz words of the wartime era:

> The call goes out fore a literature written for all the nation's people. When one looks back over our cultural history, one can not find a single era in which all classes were drawn into intimate communion with the same literary forms. In ancient times it was literature for the Court; in Edo times it was the literature of the townsmen. More recently it has been the literature of the Leftists or of the *bundan* elite. Creation of a literature and of a cinema accessible to all the people is central to our national slogan of ichi oku isshin ("one hundred million united into one heart").

Since cinema has such a central role as both a shaper of culture and as a trainer-up of the national spirit, it cannot possibly remain immune from centralized political direction: "For better or for worse, this is both the fate of cinema and a tribute to its vast persuasive powers." Still—and this is where Sawamura finds himself at odds with the obsessive meddlings of the censorship bureaus—"there is no necessity for cinema to be turned into a mere loudspeaker for the views of politicians." Within the order of the

State, there is a proper sphere for each: "Politics has its methodology proper to politics, and the cinema has one proper to itself as well." As a sincere supporter of the New Order, Sawamura is especially sensitive to disharmony in this area. Time and again he clearly states that the whole point of the new national cultural policy is to encourage a healthy blossoming of (ultranationalist) art. This sincere desire confronted the pro-facist Sawamura with an insolvable dilemma. Balancing the natural tropisms of the totalitarian state with the minimal "breathing-space" requirements of creative art proved to be an impossible task. The result was artistic impasse. This contradiction between Art and the State renders Sawamura's system patently illogical. But, as we shall see, Sawamura's romantic "mind-over-reality" philosophy tends to feed on "illogicality." Like Tertullian, he seems to proclaim: "it is absurd, therefore I believe!"

Sawamura's positive prescriptions for the New Cinema are firmly rooted in this sort of paradox:

> As the war becomes prolonged and the day-to-day lives of the people become aggravated by multiplying complexities, the reality of their lives will lead them into spiritual confusion. Human frailties will rise to the surface, gradually atomizing society. It is at this point that the power of film to unify and exalt the nation's one hundred million souls will be called upon. And what should we show our screens at this time? Things of general interest, rather than of specialized interest; the ordinary, rather than the bizarre; the beautiful rather than the ugly; images of bravery rather than those of grandeur; images of joy rather than of pathos; these are the principles of the film of the future.

Sawamura then moves on to an assault on "literalist realism":

> The era of realism-worship has passed. The new era looks forward to a rebirth of romanticism; it yearns for the birth of a new idealism. The new cinema will unfurl the flag of romanticism in the hearts of our people and bring their ideals to flower. Muck-raking among 'the things-as-they-are' of reality has lost its power as a breed of art. It is the new task of art to lead the people out of everyday reality toward the ideal shape of what they want to be.

Sawamura concludes his prescriptions with a paean to unadulterated spirit-ism: "Henceforth, we will move forward by discarding that realism which refuses to believe in anything but Reality-Itself. We will instead place our full faith in the human spirit and in idealism."

Announcing that "I want to write scripts about the beauty and strength of the struggling human spirit," Sawamura became a close collaborator with film director Kumagai Hisatora. Kumagai himself, like many of his contemporaries, had made the

spiritual voyage from muckraking liberalism to war propagandist. That which made him different from others was the degree to which he converted; he became a fanatic. The first result of the Sawamura-Kumagai collboration was *Naval Brigade At Shanghai* (*Shanhai Rikusenkai*, 1939), depicting the outbreak of fighting there in early 1937. A year earlier, Kamei Fumio had made his fine *Shanghai* (1938), a work which did much to raise general interest in the possibilities of documentary film. Kumagai's plan for *Naval Brigade* was "to strive for an over-all dramatic effect while subduing all overtly dramatic elements and looking at things from a news film standpoint." Whereas Kamei had achieved a startling amount of objectivity in his film—allowing inanimate objects to speak eloquently about pathos of war—the Sawamura-Kumagai production sought to use only the guise of objectivity in presenting an overtly propagandistic message. In fact, *Naval Brigade* represents an important step in the "taming" of pure documentary techniques for *kokusaku* purposes. Kumagai "resented the colonialism of the Anglo-American powers in Asia" and was determinded to defend the Japanese position of opposing them, "trying to inform the people though the film that the war was a matter of striking at the Anglo-America menace though its puppet, Chiang Kai Shek." The narration itself often sounds like a government broadcast: "Enduring every kind of insult and overtly anti-Japanese provocation, the Japanese forces stood fast in their desire to find a peaceful solution..."

Even more significant perhaps is the manner in which Sawamura succeeded in filling the film with his own particular brand of *seishinshugi*. At the funeral of the slain ("murdered") Lt. Oyama, the Company Commander promises to avenge the atrocity. As the script describes the scene: "eyes filled with deep determination, the men watched their commander and the commander, with the same expression or spiritual intensity, nodded back to them quietly." The use of such facial expressions — including the celebrated "smile of resignation" — was fast becoming a hallmark of the genre.

After a two year interval—in which Sawamura was drafted into the Army, sent to the Front and wounded—he returned to collaborate with Kumagai on their next film: *A Story of Leadership* (*Shidō Monogatari*, 1941), about an old railroad engineer and his Army recruit trainee. Before the end of the film, the old engineer's entire family becomes intimately involved in the project of training up this lad to be of service to the nation. Running through the entire work is a kind of religious faith in the Army, its soldiers and their divine mission.

In an interview soon after the film's completion, Kumagai articulated what he and Sawamura saw as their own mission: "That which Hitler is doing in the sphere of poli-

tics and war is art. We must emulate Hitler and become the crusading patriots of film."

Two years later, Sawamura scripted the film *Navy* (*Kaigun*, 1943, dir. Tasaka Tomotaka). The film was officially sponsored by the Navy Department and takes the seishinshugi theme of *kunren* (training) to realms of high abstraction. Indeed, the film awaits a full semiological examination of the manner in which its visual/conceptual elements are worked together. Viewed from the vantage point of today, the film is a facinating attempt to create a montage vocabulary for the expression of militarist hero-worship and for that sense of reverence toward the *Kokutai* expected of every wartime Japanese citizen. In the words of Iijima Tadashi, a critic reviewing the film at the time of its release, however, the film was "a completely regrettable failure." The problem seemed to lie in the very construction we find of academic interest today: "Throughout, the entire film lacks any intimate flow of scene to scene, any rhythmic consistency. The over-all effect is diffuse, scattered."[16.)]

Even at the height of their influence, Sawamura and his sprit-ism attracted a certain amount of opposition. Itami Mansaku, the renowed director-scenarioist-film theorist, was perhaps the most articulate. In 1943, already confined for life to his sick-bed, Itami managed both to effectively demolish the mechanism of sprit-ism and to couch his demolition operation in the idiom of concerned patriotism. The pretext for the assault was an analysis of Sawamura's script for *Sun of the Eighty Eighth Year* (*Hachijū-hachi Nen No Taiyō*, 1943):

> It appears to be in the nature of cinema to be severely limited as to the volume of 'message' or content it can carry. One reason is the limitation of time; another is that filmic expression can deal only in the non-abstract. It is nothing more than an organization of visible units, reproduced from visible reality. Cinema is therefore rather unsuited to the articulation of abstract concepts. And, when it tries to express the notion of hugeness (of things or of matters), it is confined to the range of that which is visible. Once this is surpassed, it immediately becomes an *abstraction*, a virtual cinematic impossibility. As things swell in conceptual volume, they approach Pure Abstaction.[17.)]

Discussing Sawamura's description of the training up of a young worker into model craftsman (a builder of ships in this case), Itami comments dryly that the author, "through the depiction, seems confident he has achieved the exaltation of the nation's 'ichioku-isshin' spirit. But, according to Itami, Sawamura is too ambitious—"too greedy." The story features a conflict over shipbuilding policy between Teppei, the hero, and the rationalisms his rival, a Tokyo U. graduate. The real problem in this conflict, according to Itami, is Teppei's own spirit-ism:

> One wonders whether the extremely simplistic quality of Teppei's nationalism and 'sense of urgent mission' does not represent an oversimplification in Sawamura's own seishinshugi...One gets the impression that the feverish emotionalism of such patriots reflects a stunting of their psychological growth...By having the ship built on time, the author obviously intends to place the laurel of victory on the brow of sprit-ism. Granted, when it comes to turning out one single military vessel on short order there may well be some practical use to the hysterical energy embodied in seishinshugi. But when it infects a building-program of twenty or thirty such vessels, it must surely become a major hazard... Looking at the weaknesses of this script, I am forced to conclude that are no shortcuts to art. Sawamura seems to believe that if his own (or any other author's) patriotic emotions and 'crisis spirit' have been thoroughly aroused, his expressive powers will flourish of themselves and a work of great persuasiveness will result spontaneously. If this supposition has the least bit of truth, all of us who have toiled long years toward the refinement of our expressive arts will have to retire from the field utterly.[18.)]

Before concluding this discussion of the kokusaku genre, I wish to list a few of the important issues space does not allow me cover here: 1.) The creation of a false consensus that Japanese cinema was in a "decline" on the eve of its capitulation to the government in the late thirties. 2.) The extremely important role of documentary film as a constituent element in the aesthetics of kokusaku film. 3.) The related issue of "what is realism" and of what constitutes "social reality"? 4.) A purging of the greatest red herring affecting of this era: "war responsibility" on the part of individual film markers, writers, etc., including Sawamura.

It is unfortunately very difficult to make a complete survey of the aesthetic debate which created the backdrop to the formative period of kokusaku films. The ravages of war, of thought police and (one would assume) of discrete "revisions" in the postwar period by some of the actual participants in the wartime debate, have depleted documentary resources. Many of the films are no longer available for viewing. Even now, the books I have been using crumble as I turn their yellowed pages. Everywhere I come across references to works which seem no longer to exist. Yet, I am convinced that a deeper understanding of this one debate will add much to making the entire period more accessible and more cogent. Political, economic and military histories tell only part of the story of this era. A study of the period's cinematic history can go far toward illuminating the psychology of Japan's war years.

FOOTNOTES

1.) Hazumi Tsuneo, Eiga Gojunen-shi (Tokyo, 1942) p. 411.
2.) Ibid.
3.) Sawamura Tsutomu, from a 2/1938 article collected into *Gendai Eigaron* (Tokyo, 1941), p. 194.
4.) Yoshimura Kimisaburo, *Kinema no Jidai* (Tokyo, 1985), p. 286.
5.) Mitchell, Richard H., *Censorship In Imperial Japan* (Princeton, 1984), p. 203.
6.) Kido Shiro, *Nihon Eigaron* (Tokyo, 1956), 9. 183.
7.) Ibid. p. 184.
8.) Sawamura, *op. cit.* p.137.
9.) Imamura Taihei, *Nihon Eiga no Honshitsu* (Tokyo, 1941), p. 263.
10.) Imamura Taihei, "Kiroku Eigaron", *Kinema Jumpo Magazine* (Tokyo, 1/1940).
11.) Iwasaki Akira, *Eiga to Genjitsu* (Tokyo, 1939), p. 73.
12.) Quoted in Sato Tadao, *Nihon Eiga Rironshi* (Tokyo, 1977), p. 201.
13.) Ibid.
14.) Sawamura, *op cit.* p. 204.
15.) Ibid. p. 361.
16.) Iijima Tadashi, in a 1943 article collected into *Senchū Eigashi* (Tokyo, 1984), p. 208.
17.) Itami Mansaku, 8/1943 *Nihon Eiga* magazine article collected into *Essei-shu* (Tokyo, 1971), p. 174.
18.) Ibid. p. 175.