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Research Guide to Japanese Film Studies (Introduction)

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Research Guide to Japanese Film Studies

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We want to add you, the reader, to this list! Is there a source, new or old, that you feel should have made the cut? Have you stumbled across an archive that we should know about? Did you find mistakes? Please tell us. We hope to issue updated editions of this book, and any and all suggestions are welcome. Even better, use our book and write something new that we can write up the next time around!

INTRODUCTION

by Aaron Gerow

Research on Japanese cinema has always been an uphill climb.

The first studies in Japan were written before 1920 and were faced with social prejudices that, fueled by the hysteria over the popularity of crime films like *Zigomar*, viewed the movies as vulgar entertainment or, worse, the source of cultural or moral degradation. With the playing field so defined, film study either played along, attempting to confirm these opinions, or valiantly tried to defend the cinema (although sometimes by only confirming dominant values). In either case, studies of cinema were accorded at best secondary importance, often reduced by official culture to the same level in the cultural hierarchy as film itself. With the exception of Nihon and Waseda universities, which sported early film study programs, academia largely ignored the discipline and even today offers few opportunities for scholars. This has affected the quality of much research. Most film books in Japan are still published without footnotes and extensive bibliographies or filmographies, and, caught in the intellectual culture industry of publish, publish, publish, some of the more popular film scholars spend little time checking their facts or information.

Even if Japanese cinema rose in status during and after WWII as a means of promoting national images at home and abroad, film production and research garnered little support. As was clear with the system of designating important cultural properties, Japanese culture was often defined as what came before Westernized modernity, which left Japanese cinema the ironic problem of being insufficiently Japanese to be worthy of support or research. Such attitudes have unfortunately shaped the research environment for film, and this guide is in many ways both a historical description of these difficult conditions and a map for navigating them.

For instance, the major periodical index, the Diet Library's *Zasshi kiji sakuin*, first largely ignored film magazines. When it did begin including them, it only picked a few and indexed them in ways that were hard to use (not indexing film reviews, for instance). Only recently has the index expanded its coverage of film magazines and begun to fill in the decades long gaps. Film archives were also founded late in Japan and were mostly focused on preserving film, not facilitating research. Scholars used to the openness of foreign film collections will quickly notice the cold, bureaucratic, and often "user-unfriendly" attitudes of Japanese archives and libraries. Most

institutions have improved in recent years due to bureaucratic reforms and the revival of the Japanese film industry, but the official emphasis on film as a business, not as a culture or an academic discipline, has placed archives in a weak position with regard to film companies. Even if a film or a still is clearly in the public domain, many archives will balk at letting you have images without permission if the company is still in existence, for fear of rubbing those companies in the wrong way.

The obstacles are not any lower when studying Japanese film abroad. Even if film study, if not also cinema in general, has been better recognized in countries like the United States, it long carried a hubris that, if not privileging Western cinema as the center of film practice, at least pretended the "distant observer" of non-Western cinemas like Japan had complete access to the cinematicity of the works, and thus did not need to engage with the complex local intertextuality of non-Western films. Film archives did collect Japanese movies, sometimes sooner and better than Japanese libraries, but they did not pursue the same kind of thorough collection of associated materials (books, magazines, ephemera, etc.) and creation of filmographies, bibliographies and indexes that they did for Western film. The cataloging of Japanese films at the Library of Congress in the United States—one of the most significant collections outside of Japan—was so poor in terms of transliterations and filmographic accuracy that it was often hard to figure what film a catalog record was referring to. Major indexes like the *FIAF International Index to Film Periodicals* do not include a single Japanese language periodical. At one level this is the responsibility of the FIAF members in Japan (and a Japanese government that underfunds those archives), but it also reflects an attitude on the part of the discipline in the West that pays insufficient attention to inequalities in film studies resources on an international scale. In the end, Western film studies often defines cinema as what it can study in its languages and relegates much of the hard research on non-Western cinema—except what it can appropriate—to the realm of area studies.

Unfortunately, area studies has also undervalued cinema studies. Japan scholars abroad have long ignored modern popular culture, either echoing Japanese official definitions of culture, or pursuing orientalist visions of culture that freeze Japan in a timeless past. Such major indexes as Naomi Fukuda's *Bibliography of Reference Works for Japanese Studies* privileged literature, history and the high arts at the expense of the vast amount written on film, especially in Japanese, and university libraries refused to collect such film-related materials as magazines. Top institutions like Yale and Michigan had perhaps a shelf's worth of film books in Japanese up until a few years ago, while also possessing twice that many volumes on obscure novelists that most people have forgotten. The situation has vastly improved at some of the major libraries, but only if they have the money and commitment. There remain colossal gaps to fill, ones both geographic and material.

It is important to know of such obstacles and the history behind them in part because the age of digital information sometimes gives us the illusion that such barriers are gone and accurate data is only a few keystrokes away. Perhaps this will become the case in the future, but it is definitely not true now when it comes to Japanese cinema. Although online databases like the Internet Movie Database (IMDB, 151) have provided convenient links to reviews and other useful material, basic data on the film or individual is often incomplete and not always accurate. While sites like the IMDB or Wikipedia ideally become accurate through cross-checking, as others correct someone's mistakes, the global flows of information management are unequal and data on non-Western cinema on such sites is notoriously sparse and inadequately vetted.

Even Japanese databases can suffer from these problems. User-managed sites are warped by fashion, such that certain recent popular movies have inordinately long entries while historically central, yet not currently trendy works are given scant attention. Those created by institutions are often restricted by lack of money or effort. Thus the online *Kinema junpō* database does not include prewar films, and its name readings are not always reliable. It is quite symbolic of conditions that the most comprehensive Japanese-language internet tool for cinema, the Japanese Movie Database (152), was compiled largely by one person, and thus, while a godsend to many, has mistakes and depends on the whims of that individual (the database, in fact, has become largely dormant as that person has abandoned updating it). This is not a critique leveled solely at online or digital resources; one can see similar problems with many print materials, in English or in Japanese. Japanese cinema studies has enjoyed neither the support nor the recognition that could have helped fund the production of a range of rigorous printed reference books and study facilities necessary to pursue the field.

For better or for worse, these obstacles are so fundamental that they influence the definition of the discipline of Japanese film studies itself. As mentioned above, it was articulations of cinema in Japan and abroad that shaped these obstacles, just as it was the unique problems that cinema seemingly posed to authorities in Japan or Japan scholars in America that prompted reactions that often exacerbated, not solved, these hurdles. What we do as scholars or students of Japanese cinema is to an extent determined by the unique overlapping of these influences. Thus, while it is ideal to question disciplinary boundaries that artificially impose ideologies of knowledge—Japanese film studies has suffered much from this and is thus one discipline, as Mitsuhiro Yoshimoto has argued in his book on Kurosawa Akira, that can uniquely challenge the academy—Japanese film has developed in particular conditions that require particular forms of research. That makes it difficult for anyone to just suddenly start researching the subject.

In some cases, this can mean having to learn Japanese. It is encouraging to see the publication of a number of English-language reference works, such

as Alexander Jacoby's dictionary of directors (93), which provide reliable information that can benefit researchers who know little Japanese. Too many previous works, like the Weisser dictionaries, contained enough mistakes to render them difficult to use for serious research. Yet there are simply not enough reference works available in English to perform any extensive research. Even with the general paucity of authoritative materials, there is far more available in Japanese. That said, those who have not completely mastered the language can greatly benefit from resources that provide, for instance, name readings, filmographies or even stills.

All of these factors may shape and define our discipline, but they do not prevent the strategic use of and negotiation with present conditions. We are faced with an uneven playing field, but one that is also not too strictly regulated; it in fact offers exciting opportunities to the degree it is not fully shaped. With all the obstacles that exist, Japanese film studies, more so than with research on major Western cinema, demands that the scholar build up a research foundation partially on his or her own, by bearing considerable responsibility to verify fundamental information, cooperate with fellow scholars, and mutually raise the level of research to a high standard. He or she cannot simply work alone and rely on a single source for information. Yet that also means the researcher can be like the *bricoleur*, using a variety of skills and knowledges transcending any one field to strategically combine, collaborate, and construct.

There is in fact no solitary authoritative source of knowledge in the discipline. The Kinema Junpōsha dictionaries, for instance, may be one of the best sources for director and actor name readings, biographies and filmographies, but there are mistakes (Suwa Nobuhiro's name, for instance, is rendered "Suwa Atsuhiko" in the 1997 edition of the director dictionary). The National Diet Library, usually the authoritative source for name readings, may get Suwa's name right, but it gets Ushihara Kiyohiko's wrong (rendering it "Kyohiko") and rarely provides name readings for filmmakers beyond the director and screenwriter. It is incumbent upon the researcher to consult multiple resources so as to verify basic information. Frankly, it is hard climbing up the hill of Japanese film studies, and unfortunately, there are too many researchers who do not take the time and the effort to do this. The result is that there are otherwise fine discussions of Japanese cinema that are marred by elementary errors. These only damage the field as unsuspecting readers then use that mistaken information as fact, and spread it.

The lack of resources, however, has also left space for creative production of resources and greater collaboration between scholars. One of the consequences of the difficulties of Japanese film studies has been the development of cooperative ventures to share the burden of study and the information obtained. While some scholarly spaces still operate in an old version of the esoteric teacher-disciple relation, where both knowledge and the means of obtaining it were passed on as if in secret, a project like Kinema

Club, which started out as a group of young Japanese film scholars who shared copies of tables of contents of old journals, has been innovative and quite public, even if it has been hampered by lack of funding. Those of us involved have always hoped it could serve as an original model not only for studying Japanese film, but also of pursuing research on cinema or Japan—of what an academic discipline could be like.

This guide is in many ways a continuation of the Kinema Club project. We in fact started this book separately, I focusing on bibliography and Markus trying to cast a wider web. We could have refused to cooperate in order to each obtain the sole credit thought necessary to get promoted in American academia; we could have even abandoned the project in order to monopolize the resources and knowledge that many in the Japanese research world keep secret so as to maintain their authority. Instead, the two of us chose to pool our different resources, and the resulting work has benefitted enormously from that decision.

Our aim is to create, not just a survival guide to help students and scholars navigate the obstacles of Japanese film study, but also a program for changing the conditions and in some ways the meaning of study. We hope to alter the definition of the field, not from the top down, declaring the canonical works that everyone must read, but from the bottom up, encouraging all of us who love Japanese movies to put that affection and enthusiasm into a careful and concerted approach to the medium that, precisely because it can crystallize a collective effort, can budge even the heaviest obstacles. Following Yoshimoto, we strongly believe that the study of Japanese cinema can help alter the definitions of culture, academia, and scholarly disciplines, in part because research on Japanese film has often been excluded from these institutions due to the threat it poses to their established ideologies. But this is not simply a theoretical problem. Research on Japanese cinema must ultimately be defined on the ground through practice, through our own disgruntled resistance to the conditions forced upon us. The more of us, the better, for it is only the critical weight of our cooperative effort that can change such poor conditions and help us all move up the sometimes exasperating hill of Japanese cinema study.

A GUIDE TO USING THIS GUIDE

This guide is the first of its kind in the field of Japanese film studies and is rare in both cinema, scholarship, and Japan studies. The very fact it exists communicates much about the uniqueness of studying Japanese film and the conditions for that research. We have endeavored to introduce institutions and resources that can help those interested in Japanese cinema explore its rich and varied world with greater depth and rigor. The first section introduces archives and libraries where you can watch films and/or consult paper or electronic resources on the cinematic heritage. The second provides

a list of distributors of film prints, helping not only those of us who wish to show films on the original celluloid, but also those who want get at works unavailable on video or DVD. The third section covers bookstores, both on the net and not, that can be troves for those treasure hunters hoping to find a film book or magazine for their own or library collection. The fourth and largest portion of the book is devoted to a bibliography, not of all the books on Japanese film, but of the key works that have provided reference information for a wide range of scholars and their questions. A fifth chapter lists important online sources, and a final section tries to answer some of the questions we are frequently asked about researching Japanese film.

This guide is not intended to be exhaustive. It contains the books, journals, libraries and archives that are rich enough to reward the effort to clear the obstacles sometimes involved in their use. We are not attempting to write the English version of Tsuji Kyōhei's bibliography (74). This aims to become a *genkan* to Japanese film studies, an entryway into navigating through one of the richest cinematic archives there is. Given the unusual position Japanese film studies is in, this guide is by necessity also unusual. Just as we have, in our two decades of seriously studying Japanese film, had to personally manage the myriad of difficulties involved in that research, so this guide tries to provide a personal angle to these problems precisely so that the user can adapt it to his or her needs on the ground, so to speak. We thus provide a number of tales of trials and tribulations that hopefully can be a lesson to the reader as well. This personal perspective again means that we have not covered everything like omniscient arbiters of the discipline. Some may wonder why we picked one book and not another or why their favorite archive is relegated to "The Rest," but the quest to provide a clearer picture of the field had to start from where we stood, and we hope, with the cooperation of other scholars and users of this guide, that the conception of the field will grow in detail in the future. What we have inserted is what we have found from experience to be important. The range of publications we include in the bibliography as reference books is by necessity broad. Given the relative lack of traditional reference books such as dictionaries and encyclopedias in Japanese cinema studies, scholars must rely on a wider range of materials. Technically, almost anything can be of use, but we focus on works that a wide-range of users can reference for a variety of research purposes to obtain basic authoritative information. We take responsibility for what we include or cut, and apologize to colleagues whose work did not make that cut. The emphasis throughout is on film studies. Television will have to wait for an updated edition, if there is interest.

With each section, we offer comments both on the section as a whole as well as on important individual entries. Within many sections, we have given priority to letting users know what is most likely to help them the most, and thus have broadly ranked entries into "The Best" and "The Rest." Within those, entries are in alphabetical order, unless strong similarities

(such as different editions of the same history) necessitated keeping them together, or a chronological order seemed to make better sense. Since some may still find that difficult to navigate, we have provided a basic index at the end of the book.

For archives, libraries, distributors and bookstores, we have endeavored to provide the most up-to-date contact information, including phone numbers and email addresses. We have listed the numbers you dial from inside that country (without country codes) and English websites when available (which is not very often with Japanese institutions). It is inevitable that some of this information will change over time, but we hope we have offered enough data for you to search out places even if they have moved or altered their names.

Throughout we have used modified Hepburn romanization and, with the bibliographic entries, tried to apply Library of Congress romanization rules for issues such as word division and rendering numbers. In many cases, we have consulted with the bibliographic records of major libraries like Yale and Michigan to ensure accuracy, conformity and consistency. The entries may not match those a professional bibliographer might create (for instance, we have converted all dating by imperial reign to the Western system), but these are all records that can be used to search in major library databases. We are both quite indebted to the help of librarians at our and other institutions, and we hope, as one expression of thanks, that this work can help librarians and bibliographers throughout the world single out the works that may be necessary to improve their research collections. While our bibliography is not the canon for Japanese film studies, it is a place to start exploring.

Just as we have obtained the help of many librarians, we have enjoyed the advice and suggestions of many of our colleagues and students who have commented on early versions of this work. We feel that we are all part of the effort to shape the field where we work and play. Just as this guide is, in terms of authorship, a collaborative project, we believe that the shape of the future will depend on our communal effort.