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The Industrial Ichikawa: Ichikawa Kon after 1976

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Kon Ichikawa

Edited by James Quandt

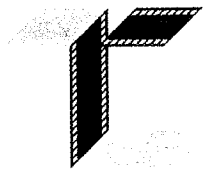
Cinematheque Ontario Monographs

Shohei Imamura, no. 1


Robert Bresson, no. 2

The Films of Joyce Wieland, no. 3

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The Industrial Ichikawa: Kon Ichikawa after 1976



Kon Ichikawa on the set of *Dora-Heita*

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AT THE AGE of eighty-six, Kon Ichikawa is still making feature films. Kaneto Shindo at eighty-eight may surpass him as the oldest Japanese director active today, but while Shindo steadily reels out medium-scale films at his independent production company, Kindai Eiga Kyokai (Kindai Motion Picture Association), Ichikawa in the year 2000 is still helming large-budget, studio extravaganzas like *Dora-Heita*. In his collection of interviews with Ichikawa, Yuki Mori groups their talks about the post-1976 films under the title “At the Frontline of Japanese Film,” which certainly refers not simply to Ichikawa’s continued artistic originality, but to his persistent presence behind the camera of some of the industry’s principal productions. This attests to his repeated commercial success: a number of his post-1976 works have finished in the top ten in the yearly box-office charts. Yet it also testifies to the fact that Ichikawa fits the industry well. While a director a year junior like Masaki Kobayashi could not make a film in the last eleven years of his life, and younger veterans like Yoshishige Yoshida can’t find work today, the ever-productive Ichikawa actually managed to release two features in 2000. Apparently he is more accommodating to the way studios work than these more obstinate filmmakers. My intent, however, is not to criticize him on this point, but rather to use this as a stepping stone to a larger argument: that the Ichikawa who conforms so well to the film companies can tell us a lot about the contemporary industry, and, vice versa, that the structure of the movie business in Japan can give us clues as to the source of Ichikawa’s recent success.

From early in his career, Ichikawa was rarely the rebel in what is a company business. Opposing the leftist leaders of the Toho strike, he took part in the formation

of Shintoho and got his first chance to direct there. Later on, he switched to Toho, Nikkatsu, and then Daiei at the request of friendly producers or in order to obtain better filming conditions, but never out of protest or a desire to go independent. Ichikawa did act as producer for a number of his own films, but his own company, “Kon Productions,” was created only in order to make *The Wanderers*, not necessarily to pursue his own cinematic vision. For much of his later years, he has maintained a comfortable relationship with Toho, the studio that raised him, directing many of their spotlighted, commemorative works. Ichikawa’s famous willingness to experiment or explore new horizons has then rarely been in conflict with commercial interests. In fact, the same eagerness brought him into early contact with television, directing dramas as early as 1959 and filming dozens of TV commercials. His *Kogarashi Monjiro*, a period TV drama from 1972–73, while undertaken in part to fund *The Wanderers*, actually became such a phenomenon it later sparked a sequel and bolstered the political career of its star, Atsuo Nakamura.

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Especially after 1976, Ichikawa’s name becomes frequently associated with films that symbolize important aspects of the movie industry. For instance, I would dare say that Ichikawa’s *The Inugami Family*—not the more critically successful *The Mak-ioka Sisters*—may be one of the most important works of the post-1970 era in Japanese film. This is not because of the film itself, although the star-studded cast and mystery narrative (based on a Seishi Yokomizo novel), combined with Ichikawa’s tense but humorous, stylized but cool direction, certainly make it an enjoyable movie to watch. *The Inugami Family* is a significant milestone because it helped change the way films were marketed, distributed, and exhibited in Japan. To begin with, it was the first film produced by the Kadokawa Haruki Office (a subsidiary of the Kadokawa Publishing Company), founded by the young maverick Haruki Kadokawa after he inherited the book business from his father. The film’s surprising success—1.56 billion yen in rentals, second best for the year—helped make Kadokawa a major player in the industry, as his company eventually made over sixty films until 1993, when Kadokawa’s arrest for cocaine possession prompted his downfall. When most of the major studios—Toho, Toei, and Shochiku—were severely cutting down on in-house production, Kadokawa’s productivity was a boost to the Japanese industry and his pursuit of sensational topics and Hollywood-style spectacle entertainment, as well as a commitment to supporting new talent (from the actress Hiroko Yakushimaru to directors like Shinji Somai, Yoshimitsu Morita, Kazuyuki Izutsu, and Yoichi Sai), helped infuse new life into a declin-

ing business. Haruki Kadokawa’s own position as an interloper symbolized this new blood, but it also marked his challenge to existing commercial customs. The spirit expressed in his famous quote, “I love Japanese film; I hate the Japanese film world,” found itself manifested in such actions as the lawsuit against veteran *Inugami* producer Kiichi Ichikawa and others for falsifying receipts on that film, an apparently not-uncommon practice in an industry infamous for its unmodern business practices. His desire to do it his own way actually produced *The Inugami Family*, after discussions went sour with Shochiku over producing *The 8-Tomb Village*—also based on a Yokomizo mystery and eventually made by Yoshitaro Nomura in 1977—because the studio wouldn’t let him participate in production and release it according to his schedule.¹

Kadokawa’s influence, begun with *The Inugami Family*, also had more specific structural dimensions. First, *The Inugami Family* became the primary impetus behind the industry-wide shift away from program picture double-features towards single-feature *taisaku* (literally “big picture” blockbuster) releases. Although the Japanese film world had been suffering a decline from the early 1960s, a vertically integrated system of production/distribution/exhibition designed to feed theatre chains founded on block-booking contracts made it necessary for studios to produce large numbers of films to keep up the supply to theatres, especially in a releasing system that still changed product regularly. This over-production, begun in the mid-1950s with the revival of the double-feature, worsened, if not accelerated the industry’s decline by straining studio resources and mass-producing cheap product that could not compete with Hollywood films which were not equally restricted and, after the easing of import restrictions in the early 1960s, which were more readily available in Japan. When major studios could not produce the necessary films for their chains, they either went bankrupt, as Daiei did in 1971, underwent restructuring, as Nikkatsu did the same year, or began to use independent production companies as essentially sub-contractors. Still, rentals for foreign films topped those for Japanese works for the first time in 1975, but *taisaku* movies like *Inugami* helped reverse that trend for several years in the late 1970s. That and subsequent Kadokawa features like *Proof of the Man* (*Ningen no shomei*, 1977), *Proof of Savagery* (*Yasei no shomei*, 1978), and *Day of Resurrection* (*Fukkatsu no hi*, 1980) caught the public’s eye with their extravagant budgets, foreign locations, and phenomenal marketing, and *taisaku* soon took centre stage in the Japanese releasing line up.

It is important to note here that most of Ichikawa’s films after *The Inugami Family* fall under the rubric of *taisaku*, because of their budgets, casts, or labelling as commemorative works. He made four more films based on Yokomizo novels at Toho (the Kadokawa Office continued to get prominent credit for “planning” [*kikaku*]), all starring Koji Ishizaka as the detective Kosuke Kindaichi, and all

featuring star-studded casts. *The Phoenix* was a much expected epic co-production with Osamu Tezuka, Japan's most famous *manga* artist, and *Ancient City* was the "retirement" film of Momoe Yamaguchi, the most popular "idol" singer of the 1970s, whose films with Miura Tomokazu (whom she was retiring to marry) were consistently successful. *The Makioka Sisters* was Toho's "50th Anniversary Film" and *Princess from the Moon* its 55th. *Tsuru* was specially made as the 100th film of Sayuri Yoshinaga, one of Japan's most beloved actresses since the 1960s, and even *47 Ronin* was Toho's "Centennial of Cinema" film. Perhaps only *Lonely Heart*, which was released in a double bill with *The Bell of Amore* (*Amore no kane*, Kuni-hiko Watanabe), and *Shinsengumi* can be considered Ichikawa's "smaller" films of the period.

Rarely did Ichikawa work with new or unknown actors, and thus his films were sold in part through their casts, which featured both veteran and contemporary stars such as Mieko Takamine, Keiko Kishi, Tomisaburo Wakayama, Reiko Ohara, Tatsuya Nakadai, Junko Sakurada, Yoshiko Sakuma, Ruriko Asaoka, Kiuchi Nakai, Bunta Sugawara, Kirin Kiki, and Ken Takakura. The use of literary personalities like Chiyo Uno, Seishi Yokomizo, Yasunari Kawabata, and Yukio Mishima for the original stories helped these works as well, but it is worth noting that the name "Kon Ichikawa," usually preceded with titles like "great master" (*kyōshō*) and "master craftsman" (*meishō*), was also featured prominently in advertisements. Ichikawa's television work helped maintain his name recognition even among younger audiences, but tactics like the stunning use of large, bold-faced Mincho fonts during a film's beginning credits (found in many of his works from *The Inugami Family* to *Dora-Heita*) and the consistent casting of familiar faces like Ishizaka have helped give his works a recognizable "Ichikawa brand" quality. This known quality was in part what producers of *taisaku* were buying when they hired Ichikawa. One of the problems with the *taisaku* policy was that it greatly favoured established, name-value veterans over new directorial talent, and this was one condition that helped keep Ichikawa busy after the 1970s.²

Ichikawa thus helped define the *taisaku* direction of the post-1970s industry, and that policy had profound effects on the film business. Big-budget films could not be expected to break even unless their run was extended, especially in the large urban theatres, given that many of the rural houses had disappeared during the 1960s and 1970s. That naturally upset the distribution system of first-, second-, third-, fourth-run (and so on) theatres, where films regularly moved down the line over a period of months. So on the one hand, *taisaku* further pushed out smaller rural theatres, which had a harder time obtaining films,³ and on the other, it created a broader release system, with pictures opening all at once at over a hundred theatres for extended runs. By around 1980, the release line-up for the majors became centred on such single-feature *taisaku* and the limited number of series like *Tora-*

san that had proved to be consistent money-makers; what to do for the periods between such pictures remained a continual problem for distributors, especially since they were obligated to fill in such spots for their chain theatres.

The more pressing issue, however, was how to equal the *taisaku* Kadokawa was putting out. They had proven to be an effective measure against the Hollywood onslaught, but larger budgets also meant greater risk and the potential for drastic losses, especially after the public became more used to this new strategy and ceased to turn up for just any extravaganza. Already financially pressed, the majors needed some way to ease the load and spread the risk, and this prompted the increased reliance on independent producers and non-film industry capital. Kadokawa was the primary example of a well-financed independent producer from outside the movie industry making films and having them released through the majors' theatre chains, but entering the 1980s, one saw companies from a variety of areas, from construction to advertising, from toys to broadcasting, increasingly entering the film world. Ichikawa's *Rokumeikan*, for instance, was the third—and last—film produced by Marugen Buildings, a real-estate developer. With other companies taking up the burden, the established motion picture companies Toho, Toei, and Shochiku further decreased in-house production down to a handful of films each per year, and relied on co-productions or external productions for the bulk of their yearly line-ups. All three—especially Toho—essentially became distribution/exhibition companies instead of film producers. This not only put the nail in the coffin in the program picture system and the era of the studio, it revived a tendency from before the 1950s in which the interests of exhibitors dominated over those of producers. Kadokawa may have represented a new kind of maverick producer divorced of such exhibition interests, but his inability in the mid-1980s to start his own alternative distribution/exhibition system showed how the practical monopolization of exhibition by the three majors still held sway over the industry.

Almost all of Ichikawa's films after *The Inugami Family* were distributed by Toho, but few were really in-house productions. *Ancient City* was produced by Momoe Yamaguchi's talent agency Hori Productions, and *Lonely Heart* was made with For Life (a record company). *Harp of Burma* was co-produced with Fuji Television, Hakuhodo (an ad agency), and Kinema Tokyo; *Princess from the Moon* with Fuji; *47 Ronin* with Nihon Television and Suntory (a liquor company); and Ichikawa's 1996 version of *The 8-Tomb Village* was produced with Fuji and Kadokawa (now under the control of Haruki's brother). *Noh Mask Murders*, Ichikawa's second Kadokawa film, this time released by Toei, is a perfect example of this proliferation of investors: its "production committee" featured the participation of Nihon TV, Yomiuri TV, Kinki Railroads, Kinki Department Stores, Nara Kotsu (a transport company), Dentsu (an ad agency), IMAGICA (a film developer), Sagawa Kyubin (a delivery company), Bandai (the toy producer), Nihon Satellite,

Pioneer 1DC, Chukyo TV, Miyagi TV, Kumamoto Kenmin TV, Hokutojuku, not to mention Kadokawa.

There were several reasons non-film companies would invest in what was supposed to be a declining industry. One was company prestige, another was tax benefits (money invested in film enjoyed faster depreciation rates, a loop-hole that provided a good haven for companies loaded with excess profits during the bubble economy). But the primary reason was to tie one's own products with the film. This was Haruki Kadokawa's main impetus for entering the film business. Before he became president of Kadokawa Publishing, he deftly used a tie-up with the release of Arthur Hiller's *Love Story* (1970) to sell the Japanese translation of the Erich Segal novel and an album of Francis Lai's music. His success in that experiment prompted his desire to make a film based on a Yokomizo novel (most of which were published by Kadokawa), but Shochiku would not release *The 8-Tomb Village* at the time he wanted to drum up a large-scale "Yokomizo Fair" in bookstores, so he went his own way with *The Inugami Family*. The combination of selling the film, the books, and the music, while not unprecedented, was more aggressive than ever before and extremely successful. Product placements and tie-ins had existed from before the war, and there were prior cases of non-film companies investing in the major movies. But while earlier cinema had tended to tie into the success of a novel or record after they were hits, Kadokawa used all forms of media to sell everything simultaneously. It was this "mixed-media" blitz that stunned the industry with its novelty.

Ichikawa's "Kindaichi" films thus found themselves advertised not only in bookstores and publications and on book covers, but even on lipstick (the advertising catch-phrase for *Queen Bee* was "A Mystery in Lipstick," an expression that, while certainly based in the plot, was not unrelated to the fact Kanebo Cosmetics had a tie-in with the production). The later films co-produced with television networks like Fuji enjoyed great media exposure, which especially helped with a film like *Harp of Burma*. Ichikawa's remake of his 1956 film was strongly pushed by Fuji TV, the most successful of the networks investing in the movies, particularly after it had in 1983 created the biggest box-office hit in Japanese film history up to that point, *Antarctica* (*Nankyoku monogatari*, Koreyoshi Kurahara). With Fuji's help, *Harp of Burma* for a time rose to number five on the all-time box-office list with rentals of 2.95 billion yen. Such media strategies did seem to have an effect: for instance, *The Inugami Family*, *The Devil's Bouncing Ball Song*, and *The Makioka Sisters* with the help of their ad campaigns all proved wrong the pessimistic box-office predictions in the press.⁴

Tie-ins and co-productions, however, did not completely eliminate the risk involved in high-budget *taisaku*, especially when a figure like Kadokawa was spending as much as 5 billion yen on *Heaven and Earth* (*Ten to chi to*, 1990, directed by Kadokawa himself). A more guaranteed return was necessary and this is where *maeuri*, or advance tickets entered the picture.⁵ Discount advance tickets had had a long history and certainly were a beneficial option for many moviegoers facing an industry that continually compensated for the loss in revenue from declining attendance by raising ticket prices. But producers and distributors soon caught onto the idea that pushing advance ticket sales could be a means of ensuring earnings. In an early example, Kashima Construction helped finance *Skyscraper Dawn* (*Chokoso no akebono*, Hideo Sekigawa) in 1969, and pushed *maeuri* tickets on business partners and anyone else visiting company offices to recoup its investment. Kadokawa made an art out of selling advanced tickets. For *The Inugami Family*, Kadokawa was contractually obligated to the distributor Toho to sell 50,000 *maeuri* tickets, but boasted he had actually sold 60,000.⁶ This figure escalated to nearly 4,800,000 tickets for *Heaven and Earth*.⁷ What made Kadokawa infamous was reports that these sales were not simply based on effective media marketing and the box-office value of the film, but also on practices that touched on fair trade laws. Not only were business partners practically obligated to buy loads of tickets, but as one Kadokawa Publishing employee told a journalist, workers were simply given books of tickets and the cost deducted from their pay—all without their consent.⁸ Into the 1980s, whether as legally questionable or not, *maeuri* driven movies became the focal point of the entire industry, with Ichikawa's *Harp of Burma* and *Princess from the Moon* being two prominent examples.

Let's take a look at *Princess from the Moon*, released on September 26, 1987, which sported one of the most aggressive sales strategies of the decade. The film was made by Toho and Fuji TV for 1.2 billion yen, but given publicity and other costs, the picture might have cost upwards of 2 billion yen. To recoup this, the sales campaign began by holding major previews inside and outside Japan starting on September 2 (including, eyeing the foreign market, New York, with prominent American politicians and financial and cultural figures in attendance). The film would also open the Second Tokyo International Film Festival, earning the attendant attention. Fuji TV would then begin its massive broadcasting campaign, just like the one that proved so successful in the case of *Antarctica* and *Harp of Burma*. At the same time, Kanebo, a sponsor of the film, would launch its "Princess Kaguya" line of cosmetics, advertised in television commercials aired from August 21 to mid-October and featured in magazines, newspapers, and subway ads. To sell advance tickets, Nihon Life Insurance, another co-sponsor, would

use its 80,000-person nationwide sales force to distribute tickets as “presents” to customers (probably in exchange for buying policies) and Fuji TV would push 50,000 special *maeuri* tickets that could be used for admission to *Princess* and two other Fuji-sponsored films: *Hawaiian Dream* (*Hawaiian dorimu*, Toru Kawashima) and the double feature of *Take Me Skiing* (*Watashi o suki ni tsuretette*, Yasuo Baba) and *Eternal ½* (*Eien no ½*, Kichitaro Negishi). In total, Toho had printed four million advance tickets in the hope that 1.5 million would be sold. With an active effort to bring school groups to the theatres, 700,000 tickets were already reported sold by early August.⁹ In the theatres, *Princess from the Moon* was not the hit *Harp of Burma* was. Total rentals were reported at 1.5 billion, second best for the year, but certainly less than the projected 2 billion yen in costs. However, given that *maeuri* campaigns also functioned as initial advertisement for video rentals, it is likely the film broke even in the end.

From a broad perspective, there were certainly many benefits to the *maeuri* system, beyond those to viewers who could see the films they wanted to see for less money. The sales campaigns themselves helped advertise the films and made Japanese cinema a more attractive event to choosy consumers. By guaranteeing returns, the system attracted more investment in a risky business and helped Japanese cinema produce the *taisaku* that could compete with Hollywood at home. Since the tickets ensured revenue not only for the distributor, but also for exhibitors, they helped maintain income and keep in business many of the theatres providing a showcase for Japanese films.¹⁰ The guarantees also helped distributors convince foreign-film-specialty theatres (which are run on a free booking system) to show Japanese films in a broad release. Many theatres, in fact, still demand a guaranteed *maeuri* sales figure before agreeing to show a film. Investors in the project could get their money back faster, and even companies pushed to buy advance tickets could at least deduct the costs as business expenses. In the end, one could argue that the tickets are one of the main reasons the block-booking system for Japanese movies has not disintegrated and that the majors are still making and distributing Japanese films. To many, however, the detriments of *maeuri* tickets outweigh the benefits. Essentially, if a film's return is largely guaranteed before it is even released, with many of the tickets not being sold on the basis of the entertainment potential of the product itself, then it basically makes no difference whether the movie is good or not. This leads to inertia on the level not only of production, but even of the theatres, who with a guaranteed audience, need not think of new ways to attract customers or to improve viewing conditions. One can thus argue that the *maeuri* system is one of the central reasons in the decline in the quality of both film content and exhibition services.¹¹ Producers and investors, becoming accustomed to “sure” projects, increasingly shy away from using new talent or novel stories, and rely on established directors like Ichikawa and known narratives like *Harp of Burma* and *Princess from the Moon* to attract potential investors—who tend not to

have film experience. The majors stop working on smaller projects, investing in new equipment, or engaging in talent development, and the distribution system begins to lean towards wide releases, leaving little room for the narrower releases necessary for smaller films.¹² There are certainly cases of *maeuri* films that attracted audiences in droves, and Kadokawa in particular can be credited with maintaining a commitment to spectacle entertainment, but viewers did not remain ignorant of the hollowness of many of the blockbuster films. Advance tickets were sold, but many were not used, and in some horrible cases like *Fukuzawa Yukichi* (1991, dir. Shinichiro Sawai), less than half of those tickets actually turned up at the cinema. Thus one had the bizarre spectacle of theatres showing a film listed at the top of the box-office charts actually being largely empty.¹³ The distributor need care about the unused tickets since the money is already in hand and theatres are only paid their share on the basis of the tickets used (though the remaining portion is usually divided among the theatres, supposedly in part to support weaker cinemas in the chain¹⁴). Since Japanese houses, unlike their American counterparts, gain most of their revenue from the box office, not from concession sales, it doesn't really matter if there is an audience between the aisles or not. Seemingly, what was most important to the major players in the industry was not providing a good product or service to customers, but rather preserving their theatre chains. This was because, unlike the 1950s, when studios exercised almost autocratic power over exhibitors, theatres are now in the dominant position in the industry.¹⁵ The Japanese industry is a film theatre industry, not a film industry,¹⁶ and *maeuri* films came to the fore because they are good for exhibitors.

Advance tickets, however, can be detrimental to the public image of Japanese cinema. Not only are “top box-office films” shown at barren theatres, but unused *maeuri* tickets end up at discount ticket shops (which buy up and resell all sorts of tickets) selling for less than half their original price. This creates a definite embarrassment for the movie and its makers. One can thus argue that not only the lethargy encouraged in production by the *maeuri* system, but the results at the theatres and on the streets exacerbate the still persistent opinion among Japanese audiences that Japanese films are bad, only further scaring potential spectators away from the cinemas.

I certainly do not want to argue that Ichikawa's work after 1976 has in particular contributed to this disillusionment towards Japanese film among audiences. The success of many of his works in the yearly awards presentations testifies to their level of quality (though it is also undeniable that many of the domestic honours favour veterans and films distributed by the majors). Yet the relative lack of both commercial and critical success for his *taisaku* films after *Princess from the Moon* arguably testifies both to the fatigue of the system and to audience weariness. Perhaps as the *maeuri taisaku* system, which seemed to fit Ichikawa so well and which effectively matched the boom economy of the 1980s, declines in the years

after “the bubble,” Ichikawa and the Japanese film industry are becoming less of a good match.

4

As one of most successful of directors after the 1970s, it is perhaps inevitable that Kon Ichikawa would have become associated with film projects that either furthered change or represented shifts in the way business was done in the movie world. Yet as I have argued, there were many structural factors which helped place Ichikawa at the centre of the Japanese film industry, primary of which is the tendency to favour saleable veteran directors when pushing *maeuri taisaku*. Ichikawa himself, being accommodating to projects offered by friendly producers, went along with these industrial trends. His personal tastes, for instance for detective fiction or animation, also helped him get work at a time when publishing houses were using film to sell mysteries and animation was topping the box-office charts (his role as supervisor for the hit *Galaxy Express 999* [*Ginga tetsudo 999*, 1979, dir. Rintaro] should not be forgotten). Further, his experience in television made him a good choice for networks increasingly entering film production (Fuji TV even brought him in to act as “cooperating director” on *The Adventures of Milo and Otis* [*Koneko monogatari*, 1986, dir. Masanori Hata], which went on to earn a phenomenal 5.4 billion yen in rentals). In some ways, Ichikawa was in the right place at the right time.

Yet as a way of concluding, one wonders whether there was not also something about his style and thematics which ensured his prominent place in the contemporary industry. This can involve the question of how well he corresponded to audience tastes or the mentality of the era, and one could argue his persistent irony and aversion to sentimental humanism matched a Japan increasingly disillusioned after the era of high economic growth and the failure of 1960s leftism. More importantly, his style also seemed to correspond to the industrial spirit of the time. Consider the statements of director Shunji Iwai, now famous for his films *Love Letter* (1995) and *Swallowtail Butterfly* (*Suwaroteiru*, 1996) popular with young Japanese. He recalls being captivated in middle school by the combination of an old style and a modern touch in *The Imigami Family*, and relates how Ichikawa afterward became his virtual textbook in film technique, especially editing.¹⁷ This is understandable, given how Iwai’s often narratively unmotivated use of editing flourishes recalls aspects of Ichikawa’s editing style in *Imigami* and other films. The exploration of style for the sake of style, almost at the cost of content—a stylistic dandyism, a cool stylishness—was a tendency in Ichikawa’s work from early on, but I would argue it becomes more of an industry norm from the 1980s, as evidenced by directors like Iwai, who see Ichikawa as a mentor more than they do Kurosawa or Oshima.

Nobuhiro Suwa (director of *M/Other*, 1999), in a discussion with Shinji Aoyama (director of *Helpless*, 1996 and *Eureka*, 2000), emphasizes how in the 1980s the central issue became not what to film but how to film it, as stylistic issues dominated at a time when most felt that all that could be shot had been shot.¹⁸ As a result, cinema turned in on itself and there were many works, from Juzo Itami’s *Tampopo* (1985) to Kaizo Hayashi’s *To Sleep So as to Dream* (*Yume miru yo ni nemuritai*, 1986), that were films about film—just as were Ichikawa’s *The Devil’s Bouncing Ball Song* and *Actress*. It is tempting to analogically connect this kind of film to the industry that was behind it, for a cinema for the sake of cinema—as if viewing itself in a hall of mirrors—seems almost homologous to an industrial system in which a film’s commercial value was a mere reflection of how many tickets its producers had forcibly sold. Just as many films ignored social or political issues for the pursuit of style, the movie market depended little on external factors like social fashions or audience pleasure, and was largely decided by how well corporate partners could manipulate the media and exert their influence to sell tickets. Whether in terms of its style or its box-office potential, a movie related to itself and nothing outside. One can certainly argue that Kon Ichikawa’s cinema after 1976 possessed values beyond that, but it is undeniable that in many ways it fit well an industry that had so dangerously turned in on itself.

Notes

1. For accounts of Kadokawa’s role in the industry, see Toshiyuki Matsushima, “Haruki Kadokawa no eiga shokku ryoho,” in *Eiga 40-nen zenkiroku*, Kinema Junpo Zokan 929 (Kinema Junposha, 1986): 172–73; Hiroshi Okada, et al., “Kadokawa tataka, soshite yurimodoshi,” *Eiga geijutsu* 370 (winter 1994): 5–26; Masaaki Nomura, “Eigakai o kasseikaseta ‘onikko’ no jijitsu,” *Kinema Junpo* 1117 (15 October 1993): 58–60; and Tatsuya Masuatai, “Kadokawa eiga ni ko wa attemo tsumi wa nai!” *Kinema Junpo* 1117 (15 October 1993): 61–63.
2. Ichikawa mentions that he had originally intended to leave *The House of Hanging* to a newer director, but Kadokawa objected. Kon Ichikawa and Yuki Mori, *Kon Ichikawa no eiga-tachi* (Tokyo: Waizu Shuppan, 1994), 409.
3. Bin Nagatsuka, “Nihon eigakai topikkusu ’77,” *Nihon eiga 1978*, eds. Tadao Sato and Sadao Yamane (Tokyo: Haga Shoten, 1978), 199–204.
4. For those predictions, see Kazuo Kuroi, “Kogyo kachi,” *Kinema Junpo* 693 (15 October 1976): 178–79; Kazuo Kuroi, “Kogyo kachi,” *Kinema Junpo* 705 (1 April 1977): 207; and Kenjiro Tachikawa, “Kogyo kachi,” *Kinema Junpo* 860 (15 May 1983): 170–71.
5. My account of the *maeuri* system relies in part on that given by Shin’ichi Sano, *Nihon eiga wa, ima* (Tokyo: TBS Buritanika, 1996), 219–62.

6. Kon Ichikawa, Yuji Ono, Haruki Kadokawa, and Yoshio Shirai, "Nihon eiga no genjo no naka de eiga *Inugamike no ichizoku* ga motsu imi wa?" *Kinema Junpo* 692 (1 October 1976): 73.
7. Masuotari, "Kadokawa eiga," 61.
8. Sano reports (232): "I met a middle-level employee at Kadokawa Shoten, the company that was the largest cause of the introduction of *maeuri* movies, and which was still continuing to produce such *maeuri* films as *Rex: A Dinosaur Story* (*Rex kyoryu monogatari*, 1993, directed by Haruki Kodokawa) at the time of the interview. When I touched on this subject, he suddenly lowered his voice. 'We are forced to buy tickets for company produced films all on the orders of those higher up. The amount is deducted from our salaries or bonuses. In my case, I had 200,000 yen deducted from my bonus.'"
 9. This summary of the *Princess of the Moon* sales strategy is taken from "Kogyo kachi," *Kinema Junpo* 968 (15 September 1987): 166–67.
10. Sano reports that the fear in the industry was that if the *maeuri* system was eliminated, nearly half of the nation's theatres would go bankrupt and the number committed to showing Japanese films would plummet. Sano, 237.
11. For a stinging critique of Japanese movie theatres as a service industry, see Yoshiaki Murakami and Norifumi Ogawa, *Nihon eiga sangyo saizensen* (Tokyo: Kadokawa Shoten, 1999).
12. This reproduces the current situation in which there are very few opportunities for medium-size releases. Either a film opens nationwide through the majors at nearly 200 theatres, or at one independent cinema in Tokyo, in hopes that a handful of houses in other cities will also pick it up. There are few options in between. Many films have suffered from this inflexibility in the distribution system.
13. This is possible because box-office results—as opposed to attendance results—are tabulated by the industry itself based on tickets sold, not on tickets used. Not only are these figures suspicious, but even today the industry refuses to release numbers on theatre ticket grosses (as in the United States), and only makes public distributor income on rentals.
14. See Kazuaki Maruyama, *Sekai ga chumokusuru Nihon eiga no hen'yo* (Tokyo: Soshisha, 1998), 227–28. Office Kitano producer Masayuki Mori charges that the revenue from these unused tickets, even if distributed to theatres, is often hidden from the independent producer by the distributor, effectively defrauding it of its share.
15. This change is reflected in distribution rental rates. While in 1959, distributors could extract an average of 55 per cent of the ticket gross from theatres in the form of rentals, that figure fell to 37.2 per cent in 1973 as distributors/producers became weaker and weaker in comparison to exhibitors. See Eiga Bunka Kyokai, *Saikin Nihon eigakai no shomondai* (Eiga Bunka Kyokai, 1975).
16. A comment often heard in the film press. See, for instance, Eiichi Takahashi, et al., "80-nen eigakai sokatsu to 81-nen no tenbo o kataru," *Kinema Junpo* 805 (15 February 1981): 187.
17. Shunji Iwai, "Kyohon Inugamike no ichizoku," *Bessatsu Taiyo: Kantoku Ichikawa Kon*, ed. Yoji Takahashi (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 2000), 110–11.
18. See Nobuhiro Suwa and Shinji Aoyama, "'Nani o' 'ika ni' o kyozetsusuru shizen gensho-eiga e," *Eiga Geijutsu* 389 (spring 2000): 82. An English translation by Michael Raine is available: "Cinema as a Natural Phenomenon: Rejecting the Distinction between the 'What' and the 'How,'" V'00 Viennale Vienna International Film Festival (Vienna: viennale Vienna International Film Festival, 2000): 246–254.