ALIENATED DESIRES: MARXIST MATERIALITY IN EDOGAWA RANPO’S “THE HUMAN CHAIR” .................................................................................................................. 2
By Linda Zhou, Stanford University

INTENTIONALLY BLAND: EXAMINING JAPANESE PUBLIC DEPICTIONS OF THE CLASS BC WAR CRIMES TRIALS .................................................................................................................. 9
By Lim Jia Yi, National University of Singapore

QUEERING THE NEW WAVE: THE EMERGENCE OF QUEER JAPANESE CINEMA IN THE 1960S .................................................................................................................. 24
By Natalie Lie, National University of Singapore

UNDERSTANDING CHO SE-HUI’S THE DWARF: TO OBSERVE AND RELATE WHAT IS SEEN WITH FIDELITY .................................................................................................................. 36
By Stephanie Shim, Stanford University

AN INTERVIEW WITH PROFESSOR ARIEL FOX, PHD .................................................. 48

AN INTERVIEW WITH PROFESSOR DAFNA ZUR, PHD .................................................. 50
Alienated Desires: Marxist Materiality in Edogawa Ranpo’s “The Human Chair”

By Linda Zhou, Stanford University

Abstract

In the late 1920s and early 1930s, Japanese writer Edogawa Ranpo made an indelible imprint on Japanese popular culture by popularizing the erotic-grotesque-nonsense (ero-guro-nansensu) movement with his provocative body of writing. Ranpo’s erotic-grotesque-nonsense texts have been interpreted along the lines of gender, sexuality and ethnicity, but one critical axiom has been largely unaddressed: class. In this essay I will argue that Marxist thought is a crucial analytical framework for examining Ranpo’s iconic erotic-grotesque-nonsense short story ‘The Human Chair’. Through fleshing out its context and doing a close reading of its narrative intricacies, I will demonstrate how this seemingly frivolous and perverted story is in dialogue with Marxist theories of alienation and commodity fetishism.

Introduction: Edogawa Ranpo and the Erotic-Grotesque-Nonsense

Crowned as a seminal figure in Japanese detective fiction, Edogawa Ranpo has exhibited a narrative obsession with the psychopathological underbelly of society since the early days of his writing career. His pen name, interestingly, is phonetically based off the name of Edgar Allan Poe, the American father of detective fiction who he was highly influenced by. Ranpo’s fascination with social taboos propelled him as the leading writer in the erotic-grotesque-nonsense (ero guro nansensu) cultural movement that burgeoned in the late 1920s and early 1930s Japan. Erotic-grotesque-nonsense, with its “explorations of the deviant, the bizarre, and the ridiculous”, served as a vicarious form of media consumption for its modan audience. Modan, which signifies ‘modern’ in Japanese, has been interpreted by Miriam Silverberg as conceptually "[presuming] a post-traditional world not bound by national boundaries or timeless customs but informed by the open-endedness and dynamism of capitalism." Greg Pflugfelder expounds on the movement’s post-traditional spirit by describing its “celebration of the ‘erotic’ (ero)” as a “rejection of the Meiji dictum that sexuality was unsuited for public display”. He goes on to argue that “the valorization of the ‘nonsensical’ (nansensu) signaled a discontent with the constraining nature of received moral and epistemological

---

3 Reichert, "Deviance and Social Darwinism", 114.
certitudes.” In a world now sculpted by the tides of modernity and the market, erotic-grotesque nonsense emerges as a rupture in the old sociocultural fabric of Japan.

Written in 1925, The Human Chair is a short story that was situated in such a cultural milieu. It was also a period of heightened discontent over the growing Western influence (sometimes called seiyō kabure, the “Western infection”) on Japan. Mark Silver, in Purloined Letters: Cultural Borrowing and Japanese Crime Literature, has interpreted The Human Chair in the vein of Japan’s anxieties around Westernization, pinning the story’s depiction of a monstrous human-object hybrid onto Ranpo’s conflicted feelings on Japanese-Western cultural hybridity. The story was also published near the end of the Taisho period, a historical moment colored by expanding conglomerates that began to dominate the Japanese economy and further concentrate wealth in the upper classes, simultaneously leaving the urban populace to struggle in maintaining its previous way of life. The working classes grew more conscious of their dismal economic situation, and laborers started organizing into unions and "friendly societies".

“Love in a chair”: A Marxist interpretation

The Human Chair is a text that ceaselessly toys with our expectations. It flirts with the assumed boundary between subject and object, fact and fiction, the human and nonhuman. In the story, Yoshiko, a popular and well-off writer, receives an anonymous letter from a chair-maker who details his experience of hiding himself in a special chair and receiving sexual pleasure from the women who unknowingly sit on him. The narrative takes a disquieting turn when the chair-maker reveals that his special chair is the same chair that Yoshiko has been using all along. As Yoshiko succumbs to a state of panic, she receives a second anonymous letter claiming that the previous confessional letter was simply a made-up story, hence shrouding the ending in an unresolved ambiguity. More than just horrifying and absurd, The Human Chair as a text is destabilizing, undercutting the way we conceive of the material world around us.

Class discourse casts a heavy and persistent thematic shadow over The Human Chair. In his letter to Yoshiko, the chair-maker introduces himself as a "humble workman by trade" and laments that "the torture of [his] soul brought on by [his] ugliness" would have been remedied had he possessed wealth and power. His occupation as a chair-maker also positions his identity as possibly part of the Burakumin, a caste that has been historically maligned since the Edo period for being “tainted” with death due to

6 Silver, Japanese Crime Literature, 132.
8 Ibid., 72.
10 Ibid.
their work with dead animals.\(^{11}\) Self-deprecating descriptors are peppered throughout the text—calling himself a "worm" and "a loathsome creature,"\(^ {12}\) the chair-maker is cognizant of his lowly place in the existing social order. Without the means to alleviate his situation, he endlessly devotes himself to the craft of chair-making, work that ultimately manifests itself as alienated labor.

Alienation here refers to the estrangement the worker feels from his products of labor that he has no ownership over. As Karl Marx details in his *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, “[the] worker puts his life into the object; but now his life no longer belongs to him but to the object... Whatever the product of his labor is, he is not.”\(^ {13}\) The chair-maker similarly puts his life into the chairs he makes, describing "every fiber of the wood [he] used seemingly linked to [his] heart and soul”\(^ {14}\), drawing an intimate connection between the material of the chair and the essence of his being. Yet, whenever a chair is completed, he sits on it and "[imagines] the types of people who would eventually curl up in the chair, certainly people of nobility, living in palatial residences, with exquisite, priceless paintings hanging on the walls.”\(^ {15}\) The idealized details in his rich, imaginative descriptions are confined to a humble moment on the chair, betraying his deep-seated longing and melancholy. It is a striking scene that astutely captures the alienation of the worker: the chair-maker is resigned to fantasy, enjoying the fleeting feelings of comfort that he knows will never belong to him in reality. In contrast to the intimacy of the process of chair-making, Marx states that the final product "exists outside [the worker], independently, as something alien to him, and that it becomes a power on its own confronting him.”\(^ {16}\) If we probe the roots of the chair-maker’s bizarre idea to hide himself in his creation, we would return to this very sense of alienation: "the idea found its seed in my secret yearning to keep the chair for myself.”\(^ {17}\)

The members of bourgeois society who ultimately own and use the chair are unaware of the alienated labor that went into it. As Marx writes in 1844, "Political economy conceals the estrangement inherent in the nature of labor by not considering the direct relationship between the worker (labor) and production.”\(^ {18}\) With the rise of the modern capitalist economy, objects that were bought and used by consumers became further untethered from the process of their production. The ubiquitous, normalized neglect of human elements in material objects is underscored with the chair-maker’s remark that no one “suspected even for a fleeting moment that the soft ‘cushion’ on

---


\(^{12}\) Ranpo, “The Human Chair”, 21.


\(^{14}\) Ranpo, “The Human Chair”, 7.

\(^{15}\) Ibid., 6.


\(^{17}\) Ranpo, “The Human Chair”, 8.

which they were sitting was actually human flesh with blood circulating in its veins.”\(^\text{19}\)

His observation is also in resonance with Bruno Latour’s theory of the separation of subject and object under modernity — in his book *We Have Never Been Modern*, Latour argues that “modernity artificially made an ontological distinction between inanimate objects and human subjects.”\(^\text{20}\) The ontological nature of this separation suggests that Yoshiko’s shock at the chair-maker’s final confession can be parsed as a fundamentally ontological terror, as his haunting words force her to radically reconsider her relationship to everyday objects around her. The final letter she receives, with its jarring claim that the previous letter was mere fiction, induces more confusion that further destabilizes her sense of ontological security.

Yoshiko’s ignorance of all the alienated labor behind her material possessions is a natural consequence of a stratified society, where her wealthy upper-class sphere would never interact with the chair-maker’s humble working-class sphere, despite their invariable connection. The distance between their worlds is expressed through the epistolary form of the story: the letter as a medium mediates the relationship between the reader and the writer, demarcating a clear boundary between their social realities. It is through the letter that Yoshiko is able to engage with a working-class man from the comfort of her sheltered life — the letter being both the bridge and the separation between them. We see this constructed distance collapse with the unexpected shift of grammatical tense in the letter: the chair-maker’s story is initially recounted in past tense, projecting the impression of fiction, or as something divorced from the present. Towards the end, the text switches abruptly to present tense, in order to reveal that Yoshiko is the user and owner of the ‘human’ chair: “she happens to be none other than yourself, Madam!”\(^\text{21}\) The switch from past to present collapses the spatial and temporal boundary between Yoshiko’s life and the narrative world contained within the letter, impelling her to confront the materiality of the world starkly present around her. No longer can she project the chairmaker’s story onto a separate realm to be accessed at her convenience.

The harsh class stratification in *The Human Chair* is even harder to overlook when the only way a blue-collar worker can be in proximity to Yoshiko’s affluent world is to reconfigure his identity into a literal chair. It is worth noting that the ‘human’ chair was originally placed in a hotel lobby and its movement to Yoshiko’s residence was propagated by the forces of capitalism, namely the profit motive. As the chair-maker recalls, the reason behind the chair’s relocation “[originated] from this change in [the hotel’s] proprietorship”, where “a new policy was adopted, calling for a drastic retrenchment in expenditures, abolishment of luxurious fittings, and other steps to

\(^{19}\) Ibid., 12.


\(^{21}\) Ranpo, “The Human Chair”, 21.
increase profits through economy.” In the ruthless circulation of capital, a chair experiences more mobility than a person.

In a strange twist of irony, the chair-maker finds himself enjoying his life as a chair more than his life as a working-class man, which can be read as an allegory of the absurd commodity fetishism in society that is built off alienated labor. In Volume One of Capital, Marx discusses the "metaphysical subtleties" of a commodity, distinct from the utility and labor put into its creation. He develops the concept of "commodity fetishism," in which “the products of men’s hands... appear as independent beings endowed with life, and entering into relation both with one another and the human race.” The chair-maker accepts that in a society where commodities are fetishized, an object can be lavished with more love than a person. He confesses, “I was willing to find pure contentment in her love even for a material object, for I could find solace in the belief that her delicate feelings of love for even a mere chair were powerful enough to penetrate to the creature that dwelt inside... which was myself!” The mystification of the material as "independent beings endowed with life" is present in the ways the chair-maker analogizes Yoshiko’s relationship with his creation — he openly compares their dynamic to an intimate and vulnerable human relationship, such as “a baby falling into a mother’s embrace, or a girl surrendering herself into the arms of her lover.”

Commodity fetishism hence plays a catalytic role in the actualization of the chair-maker’s physical and emotional desires, which in turn positions sexual fetishism as a response to the alienating conditions of modernity and capitalism. Sexual fetishism, particularly the variety that is common in the erotic-grotesque-nonsense, is the imaginative mapping of sexual desire onto the bizarre and disparate. As the chair-maker transposes his desires from his body onto an object, through the prism of commodity fetishism, his act acquires a strange form of logic. The transformative potential of living as a chair is alluded to when the chair-maker describes it as a "grave" where "to everyone else in the world [he] no longer existed". It is his metaphorical death that finally allows him to experience life, an existence where the world is governed by the "sense of touch rather than of sight", where "facial merits or demerits were of secondary importance", where he would no longer be burdened by his physical appearance and class background. Sexual fetishism thus becomes an imaginative vehicle to explore possibilities beyond the chair-maker’s social constraints. In pursuit of human desires, he reimagines himself as a fetishistic object.

---

22 Ranpo, “The Human Chair”, 16.
24 Ibid., 321.
26 Ibid., 21.
28 Ibid. 13.
Conclusion: The object/commodity of our desires

Edogawa Ranpo’s *The Human Chair*, in its mutant synthesis of flesh and material, strongly embodies Marxist concepts of alienation and commodity fetishism in both its narrative and form. Integrating Marxist thought into the erotic-grotesque-nonsense genre discourse accomplishes two things: first, by destabilizing the subject-object relation, the story interrogates our unintentional but myopic disregard for the alienated human labor ever present in the material world around us; second, the concept of sexual fetishism takes on a new form of significance that is in dialogue with our socioeconomic conditions under modern capitalism. It lends an intriguing angle to the interplay of imagination and desire, and the unorthodox but transgressive ways in which they are rendered vicariously.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Professor James Reichert for introducing this fascinating short story to me and for enriching my knowledge with details of its context and background, and most importantly, for his unwavering support since the very beginning of this essay’s inception. He was the one who suggested that I should submit this essay for publication and I could not be more grateful.
Bibliography


By Lim Jia Yi, National University of Singapore

Abstract
Of the post-World War II (WWII) trials of Japanese war criminals, the class B and C war crimes trials (BC trials) rarely appear in Japanese historical memory, as compared to the class A Tokyo Tribunal. Even when they do, BC war criminals are almost always depicted in a singularly sympathetic and positive light: victims of a faceless Japanese war machinery, forced to commit crimes by superiors who avoided post-war prosecution by way of social status and political power. This paper argues that even though public depictions of the BC trials promote support and sympathy for the men, these depictions are first and foremost a self-serving image that seeks to separate both the BC war criminals as well as Japanese grassroots society from the war crimes committed by Japanese troops during WWII.

Introduction: I Want to be a Shellfish
Any mention of the class B and C war crimes trials in Japan immediately calls to mind the enduring popular drama (and its multiple film version) “I Want to be a Shellfish,” in which the protagonist speaks of his desire to be reborn as a shellfish where he could live peacefully and worry-free under the waves. In this dramatic work, the protagonist is one of many Japanese soldiers tried post-WWII as class BC war criminals, a separate category from the more commonly known class A war criminals tried at the Tokyo Trials. This drama is particularly interesting because of the dual meaning its titular phrase carries. On the surface and throughout the dramatic storyline, the phrase highlights tribulations faced by BC war criminals and encourages sympathy. At the same time, the description of shellfish can also be ironically applied to the broader Japanese society, in reference to their ignorance of issues raised by the BC trials regarding Japanese war responsibility.

In order to properly examine Japanese depictions of war crimes trials, we must first start with the history of these post-WWII trials of the Japanese. The framework for these trials had been first established at the June 1945 “Conference on Military Trials in London,” distinguishing between “three categories of offense – crimes against peace, war crimes, and crimes against humanity.” 29 To easily denote the different categories, the letter ‘A’ was assigned to crimes against peace, ‘B’ to war crimes, and ‘C’ to crimes against humanity. Tokyo Trial defendants were charged only with crimes against peace, 30 which is why the convicted men are also referred to as class A war criminals. Of

---

30 Ibid.
the class B and class C war criminals, no trial formally distinguished between the two classes, so the trials are generally referred to as the class BC war crimes trials.

The class BC trials were jointly convened by eight countries: the United States of America, the Soviet Union, Britain, Australia, the Netherlands, France, the Philippines, and China. With a total of 5700 defendants tried in 2244 cases, the trials were spread across the Asia-Pacific region. In Japan, a single BC court was set up in Yokohama, where the Americans tried 996 men in a total of 319 cases. As far as possible, crimes were prosecuted where they had been committed, but Singapore was a key exception. Singapore acted as headquarters for British prosecution, with the Southeast Asia Command controlling British war crimes courts across the region. The sheer amount of prisoner-of-war (POW) mistreatment cases along the Siam-Burma Death Railway meant that British Burma courts were ill-equipped to handle the onslaught, and the bulk of these POW camp cases were prosecuted in Singapore instead. Moreover, given its centrality, other convening governments also set up offices and investigative teams in Singapore in order to better share information, and Australia also tried some cases in Singapore courtrooms. Singapore was important not just to the prosecuting countries but also to Japan, as Japanese lawyers and defendants participating in regional trials or being repatriated back to Japan often travelled via Singapore.

While historical studies from the perspectives of both the prosecuting countries and Japan often focus on the class A Tokyo Trials, little has been produced on the class BC trials, much less a Japanese perspective of the BC war crimes trials. In order to construct a comprehensive perspective of the BC trials in Japanese societal memory, this paper will trace the development of public and personal narratives regarding these trials. For the most part, public and personal Japanese views of the BC war crimes trials are similarly sympathetic, but it is the slight divergence between these two viewpoints that will prove most interesting in highlighting an intentional superficiality and bland lack of emotional depth to this compassion. The divergence also points to a public image of the BC trials that, once fully developed into sympathy, was rigid to the point of refusing to include dissenting views (even if such views may have come from actual trial participants).

Movement of Love: Public Depictions of the Class BC Trials

Examination of reactions to and depictions of the class BC trials in the Japanese public sphere can be divided into three major time periods: an early stage of indifference and even active shunning of returned war criminals; a middle stage where supporters

---

32 Hayashi Hirofumi, BCkyū Senpan Saiban (Tokyo: Iwanamishoten, 2005), p. 83
34 Ibid.
coalesced into activist groups and began organizing events; and a late stage outpouring of public support for the convicted BC war criminals. When studying the history of public support for the BC war criminals, given that citizen groups and government personnel often overlapped and worked closely together, there is no useful distinction between the Japanese people and government. Instead, this section will examine the various media depictions of the BC trials and the different attempts of various actors to influence such depictions in the public sphere.

The early stage of indifference towards the BC war crimes trials took place as trials were still ongoing. Since the BC trials were conducted at the same time as the Tokyo Tribunal, public attention focused instead on the class A trials. However, as the Tokyo Trial dragged on, the inundation of technical information and legal concepts began to fatigue both journalists and the Japanese public: a month into the trial, the courtroom’s press section was occupied only by “a few sleepy-looking journalists staying there for appearance’s sake,’ and by the time proceedings finally concluded the media had “stopped not only reporting on the Tokyo Trial but even mentioning it.”35 In this early stage, it was only as BC war criminals began to be repatriated home that reports increased, focusing on their repatriation and family reunions.

However, the ambivalence towards information on the BC trials did not extend to returning war criminals themselves. Convicted war criminals who had served their sentences and returned to Japan were discriminated against, as were their families. In this early stage, as historian Sandra Wilson explains, families of war criminals “were refused employment...and did not fare well in marriage negotiations,” and some even had trouble burying their executed family members.36 This is confirmed by BC war criminal Shinohara, who had served his sentence at Sugamo Prison in Tokyo. Speaking to a friend immediately after the war, he said, “My children’s road to success in life had been closed... I am worried about my children’s future.”37 Gozawa Sadaichi, convicted in the very first Singapore BC war crimes trial, also noted that during his imprisonment, his children were unable to even enroll in technical schools.38

Supporters of the BC war criminals became more vocal during the middle stage of public support, a period that can be roughly allocated to the late 1940s and early 50s, marked by the coalescence of war criminal support groups into more coordinated organizations. During this period, trials were still ongoing but convicted war criminals were also beginning to return to Japan, whether having served their sentences in overseas prisons or repatriated back to serve the remainder of their sentence at Sugamo.

38 Statement from Gozawa Sadaichi, BCkyū (igirisu saiban kankei) shingapōru saiban daiichiōji jiken, p. 19
Prison in Tokyo. Convicted war criminals were originally imprisoned at the location of their trials, but this soon became expensive for those countries, as they sought independence (in the case of colonies like Singapore and Malaya) or simply preferred to focus on post-war economic recovery and development. While this middle period is comparatively much shorter than the first and last stages of public views on the BC trials, it needs to be examined alone so that more attention can be paid to the slow buildup of support that occurred in this period. This is especially so considering that the actors involved here were mostly parties already connected to the war crimes trials and its participants, while the general public only entered the fray in the late stage.

In this middle period, three major advocates for the BC war criminals emerged: support groups, government actors, as well as friends and families of the war criminals (including also the war criminals themselves). During the immediate post-war chaos, there were multiple support groups for the large number of Japanese military personnel and civilians still trapped overseas. These groups merged in May 1947 to form a national organization named the “Association of the Families of the Missing to Promote the Repatriation of Compatriots Overseas.” At this point, GHQ propaganda regarding the war criminals “highlighted the atrocious nature of the crimes that led to their trials,” so this national organization did not focus efforts on war criminals and their families. In late 1947, however, a campaign that “dealt specifically with convicted war criminals” emerged, seeking to highlight their humanity and emphasize that the BC war criminals had been acting on superior orders. In any case, such support activities remained in the background of Japanese post-war society.

It took a major shock to galvanize public support for BC war criminals: the 1950 decision to open the Manus trials. These trials marked the last BC trials conducted by the Australian government as well as by the WWII Allies.

The Manus trials came at a very late stage in the BC war crimes trials process: as the Australian government submitted their list of suspects to the Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers (SCAP) for transfer from Sugamo to Manus Island, the SCAP was developing “a parole system at Sugamo Prison” to speed up release of incarcerated war criminals. The Manus trials were comparatively smaller than other Australian trials, but they had a major impact on Japanese society. This was because the SCAP announcement of the Manus trials on 28 January 1950 came at a time when those war criminals sentenced to short prison terms, as well as demobilized soldiers not prosecuted in trials or found not guilty, had returned home. These men had already settled back into

39 Wilson et. al., *Japanese War Criminals*, p. 130
40 Ibid., p. 132
41 Ibid., p. 130
42 Ibid., p. 131
44 Aszkielowicz, *Australian Pursuit*, p. 89
their communities and rebuilt their lives, and the prospect of new trials strengthened “the sense of injustice and dislocation from post-war peace”. Given their closeness to the subject, the Manus trials would have been a huge shock and threat to their new lives, whether or not these former soldiers were actually being called to stand trial. The Australian embassy in Tokyo was flooded with a deluge of “petitions and pleas for leniency,” in the aftermath of the SCAP announcement, with petitions often making their case based on the good character of the man in question. Nonaka Hanako, writing on behalf of her husband Nonaka Masaichi, pleaded that he was a “gentle and timid” man forced to fight in the war, who had returned to a miserable life that they had only just begun to improve.

These petitions built on the framework provided by the advocacy groups formed earlier in the late 1940s, with those associations collating letters before delivering them in bulk to politicians and embassies. The Manus trials marked the beginnings of an active petition campaign not just against Australia, but all trial governments who still held prisoners in Sugamo. Individuals, “prefectural bodies, women’s associations, and other groups” flooded embassies with petitions to the point that “Western diplomats complained that they could not cope with the workload.”

The decision to open the Manus trials, therefore, marks the shift from middle to late stage of public depictions of the BC war crimes trials, formally entering the period of sympathetic portrayals and full support. It is also in this late period that government involvement becomes clearest and most obvious (although not necessarily to the public). The late period of public support for BC war criminals extends from the 1950s to present day. Due to the government’s heavy involvement in public support campaigns, examination of this period needs to begin with the behind-the-scenes work government actors were doing regarding the BC war crimes trials. Within this time period, public perspective shifted from active support and campaigning on behalf of the war criminals, to a more banalized yet still positive portrayal of the men.

The wave of public support produced by the Manus trials announcement was further boosted by the 8 September 1951 signing of the San Francisco Treaty and the 28 April 1952 return of sovereignty to Japan. The end of the American occupation meant an end to press controls preventing expressions of “open sympathy for war criminals,” allowing space for the individual and grassroots petitions sent in support of Manus defendants to mushroom into the nationwide petition campaign ai no undō (Movement...
of Love). It was launched May 1952 with participation from organizations spanning Japanese public society, such as “prefectural and city authorities, the Red Cross, various religious groups and the Association of the Families of the Missing.” 51 The main campaign spanned only two months, ending in July 1952, but apparently collected more than 10 million and 120 thousand signatures during that time. 52 The movement itself was most active between 1951 and 1953, 53 but continued until 1958, 54 collecting signatures and organizing events via prefectural branches across Japan. 55 As historian Nakadate Yūki describes, it was common in those years to see signature-collection tables set up in the streets, with baby-carrying housewives, students, and policemen on duty, among others, crowded around the table to sign the petitions. 56 Such public campaigns drew heavily on government support, but also galvanized public pressure on the post-Occupation government to take action regarding those BC war criminals still languishing in prison.

Given the popularity of the war criminal cause with the general public, Japanese politicians of that time sought to portray themselves as sympathetic towards and supportive of the cause. They flocked to Sugamo especially during campaign periods for national elections: the prison found itself surrounded by luxury cars as politicians from all over Japan “competed to make speeches of consolation and encouragement to the prisoners.” 57 The fact that politicians took up this cause so enthusiastically confirms the sympathetic perspective in which the Japanese public saw BC war criminals, since the almost performative manner in which those politicians expressed support for the cause could be seen as pandering to their constituents. As Wilson puts it, “politicians expected clear electoral advantage from their support of Class B and C war criminals,” with one politician even going as far as to promise to free all imprisoned war criminals if elected. 58 In this manner, the war criminal issue became a significant bargaining chip in election campaigns, to the extent that a political party “formed an association to support war criminals” which prevented non-party members from joining, so as to force supporters to join their party. 59

Popular media of the time magnified such sympathetic public views, romanticizing BC war criminals as victims of a cruel but faceless Japanese war machinery. These viewpoints manifested in hit songs as well as popular literature and movies, of

51 Wilson, “War, Soldier and Nation”, p. 202
53 Ibid., p. 35
54 Ibid.
55 Ibid., p. 43
56 Ibid., p. 46
57 Wilson, “The shifting politics of guilt”, p. 99
58 Wilson, “War, Soldier and Nation”, p. 203
59 Ibid.
which standout examples include the song *aa montenrupa no yoru wa fukete* (Ah, the Muntinlupa Night Wears on). Muntinlupa is a city in Metro Manila, Philippines, and one of the final overseas prisons that held Japanese war criminals at this late stage: other places like Singapore and Hong Kong had repatriated the men back to serve in Sugamo. Performed by Watanabe Hamako, the haunting song laments the imprisoned men's sad fates, trapped in a faraway prison and left to long for their mothers and homeland, having to somehow find the strength to live on until they are able to return to Japan. Its lyrics focus on the seemingly insurmountable distance between their prison windows and the Japanese homeland. The composer and lyricists were both on death row in Muntinlupa, and the song was first performed in 1952 to the Muntinlupa prisoners. Released shortly after Japan regained sovereignty, the song was explosively popular and cemented the pitiful image of BC war criminals that endures until today.

The 1958 television drama *watashi wa kai ni naritai* (I Want to be a Shellfish) is perhaps the major work that established how BC war criminals were portrayed in later media. Its enduring popularity resulted in multiple remakes, with film versions released in 1959, 1994, and 2008, as well as regular small screen reruns of the drama. It is based on BC war criminal Katō Tetsutarō’s 1953 essay *kurueru senpanshikeishū* (A Mad War Criminal on a Death Row), a semi-fictional narrative of “a war criminal recently released from Sugamo Prison.” However, beyond the ending declaration ‘I want to be a shellfish’, the essay and its visual adaptations have little in common. In both the textual and visual narratives, the phrase ‘I want to be a shellfish,’ comes in the protagonist’s final letter to his wife. In that letter, he states that he does not want to reborn as a human, nor does he want to be an animal that will be bullied by humans (such as horses and cows); instead, he wants to be a shellfish that lives at the bottom of the sea, free from worries about war and life’s sorrows. Screen versions of the story follow protagonist Shimizu Toyomatsu from his peaceful and happy village life to his unwilling conscription into the Japanese armed forces, culminating in his trial and conviction for a war crime his superior had forced him to commit. This is a common depiction of the BC war criminals, portraying them as regular men snatched from their pre-war lives to serve under cruel officers who “treated ordinary soldiers with contempt,” and forced in the post-war trials “to take responsibility for their superiors’ wartime actions.” The initial television drama and its multiple versions enjoyed great success, and almost single-

---

60 Daita Gintarō, *aa montenrupa no yoru wa fukete* <http://j-lyric.net/artist/a000adb/l018df6.html>
63 Wilson, “War, Soldier and Nation”, p. 198
64 Kirsch, “Recreating Memory”, p. 88
65 Ibid., pp. 88-89
66 Wilson, “War, Soldier and Nation”, p. 199
handedly “created an enduring myth of the wrongful pursuit of justice concerning BC class war crimes trials.”

In the vein of “I Want to be a Shellfish,” other movies and dramas were based off the proliferation of publications on the BC war criminal experience. For example, extending the theme of mother-son relationships that made the Muntinlupa song so melancholic, the film sugamo no haha (Mothers of Sugamo) focused on “war criminals transferred from other countries to Sugamo.” Additionally, the 1956 movie kabe atsuki heyå (The Room with Thick Walls) was based on a 1953 collection of essays written under pseudonyms by class BC war criminals held in Sugamo Prison, titled “The Room with Thick Walls: Life Records of Sugamo Class BC War Criminals.” The main theme of both movie and book was that “the real criminals escaped, while most of those in prison were innocent.” Popular magazines propagated this view, declaring that BC war criminals “were there because they were conscripted, and many had just been following orders,” arguing that “the plight of the convicted criminals was one that could have befallen any ordinary soldier” and by extension, any ordinary person.

The convicted war criminals themselves participated wholeheartedly in support campaigns and produced a large amount of literature on the subject. Those who had not been convicted or had been released (whether pardoned or simply having finished serving their sentences) worked the campaign on the outside, while within Sugamo Prison an active campaign also emerged. Control of Sugamo changed hands back to the Japanese after the San Francisco Treaty took effect, but release of war criminals slowed instead of accelerating. This slowdown resulted in an increasingly hopeless mood among the imprisoned men, as they questioned why a Japanese government would keep them incarcerated instead of supporting and releasing them. In order to keep their spirits up and also to raise their public profile, various publications arose within Sugamo Prison. Other than “The Room with Thick Walls,” 1953 also saw the publication of “Seven Years On: Letters from Imprisoned Student War Criminals,” a similar collection of essays written by imprisoned men under pseudonyms. Also, in order to encourage the ongoing petition campaign, BC war criminals in Sugamo published the “Sugamo Woodblock Print Collection.” The woodblock prints illustrated vignettes of their lives behind bars, seeking to incite sympathy for the war criminals’ situation.

---

68 Wilson, “War, Soldier and Nation”, p. 202
69 Ibid.
70 Ibid.
72 Ibid., p. 10
73 Ibid., p. 11
74 Ibid., p. 13
Other former servicemen and BC war criminals also published magazines and essay collections. Wakasa Tsuruyoshi, an official at the Ministry of Health and Welfare, contributed an essay titled “Personal Opinions Regarding the Class BC War Criminals” to a navy seamen magazine in 1952. In it, he wrote sympathetically of the BC war criminals, highlighting their wartime suffering and continued suffering post-war, and emphasizing that those men have been sacrificial victims of the war. This is a common refrain in writings of that time, with “criticism and distrust of higher-ranking officers” being a common theme in published material regarding the war that were produced during this time. For example, the writer who inspired “I want to be a shellfish,” Katō Tetsutarō, often wrote (under pseudonyms) of his resentment that “lesser figures” like himself were the ones being punished for “the crimes of national political leaders.”

In Wakasa’s essay, he declares that while there have been countless retellings of tragic stories regarding the war criminals, it is imperative for us to remember that the wounds of war are still continuing endlessly. To illustrate this, he writes of his visit to navy seamen imprisoned in Sugamo. The imprisoned seamen told him how they had looked forward to returning to Japan, only to be sent straight to Sugamo upon arrival, and now even though control of the prison had been transferred into Japanese hands, they were still not released. Wakasa also notes that during American control around thirty men would be released every month, yet now with the Japanese in power not even a single man had been released. The sympathetic view of the BC war criminals is clear here, and his essay also emphasized a need for the Japanese people to pressure their government to do more for the imprisoned war criminals.

Such popular depictions of the BC war criminals continue even into present day. The latest remake of “I want to be a shellfish” was released in 2008, and creative productions continue to be written and consumed. Historian Barak Kushner raises the example of the play Musical: The Southern Cross, which tells of “the love between a Japanese student” who is drafted into the war effort and “his Indonesian girlfriend who returns home to be a nationalist.” Kushner dismisses the production’s storyline as clichéd, but emphasizes that the play is “one of many that tends to gloss over Japanese crimes while highlighting” the positive Japanese role in “assisting Southeast Asian nationalism and subsequent independence,” depicting the BC war crimes as being “more imagined than real.”

While the topic of class BC war criminals is lesser known now in public memory, works that do mention the trials and war criminals often build solely off the positive

---

75 Wakasa Tsuruyoshi, “BCkyō senpan jukeisha ni taisuru shiken”, Kaiin= The seamen: zennihon kaiin kumiai kikanshi 4,10,38 (October 1952), p. 16
76 Wilson, “War, Soldier and Nation”, p. 199
77 Wilson, “War, Soldier and Nation”, p. 198
78 Wakasa, “BCkyō senpan”, p. 16
79 Kushner, Men to Devils, p. 25
80 Kushner, Men to Devils, p. 25
image constructed in the 1950s. In any case, media that formed the basis of that 1950s image continues to be propagated today, with the foremost example being reruns of “I want to be a shellfish.” It is telling that in most of the public depictions of the trials, from the genesis of the trials up till present day, the BC war criminals are almost always positively portrayed by depicting them as victims of the war effort and simply following superior orders.

**Conclusion: Bland for a Reason**

Sympathetic depictions of the class BC war criminals as victims of victors’ justice and superior orders, while one-sided, are not completely baseless and have their own merit. However, this overwhelmingly positive portrayal within Japanese public discourse is concerning. There have of course been dissenting opinions, especially by Japanese BC trial participants, but none of these opinions appear to have made much impact on the one-dimensional public image of sympathy. A key example of this was written by Abe Tarō, who had participated in the BC war crimes trials as a lawyer: acknowledging that the class BC war crimes trials did appear to have been show trials, he argued nevertheless that the trial governments had done their best to ensure everything was done fairly, and if it was the Japanese that had won the war, it would just have been the Dark Trials.81 By referring to dark trials, Abe was positing that any Japanese trial would have lacked transparency and fairness, if there would even have been trials in the first place.

There are two possible reasons for this silence. Firstly, the climate of public opinion made it difficult for trial participants with different views to speak up. With the Manus trials as a turning point, the pre-Manus indifference and even passive resentment of the class BC war criminals meant that it was in their best interests to remain out of public sight. The convening of the Manus trials, signing of the San Francisco Peace Treaty, as well as the 1950s explosion of public support for the BC war criminals, triggered a deluge of newspapers and radio shows falling over themselves trying to interview BC war criminals and their families. However, these media outlets were only interested in human interest stories that the general public ate up. In contrast, there was no similar avenue for men who held complicated differing viewpoints to express themselves. Whether they saw the trials as fair and necessary or unfair but necessary, BC war criminals and their lawyers who held any view other than blanket sympathy, were not able to contribute significantly to the development of the post-war image of class BC war crimes trials and war criminals.

Even the few men who did publicly express dissenting opinions did not succeed in engendering discourse: by choosing instead to reject “the war as a whole or war in general,” they diffused “responsibility to the entire world or to humanity,” conveniently

---

81 Statement from Abe Taro, *Niigata, Nagano chihō shucchō chōsa hōkokusho No. 49*, p. 37: Hei-11-hōmu-4A-21-6572, National Archives of Japan
glossing over in particular Japanese responsibility and their own personal responsibility in the situation. As historian James Orr argues, often those who “discussed war responsibility acted as if it were the exclusive” responsibility of the wartime Japanese government, and in any case the prevailing “atmosphere of denial” in Japanese society forced many to take the safe option of “denouncing the nation’s war acts while maintaining a discreet silence on personal involvement.” In this way, the few dissenting viewpoints that made their way into public domain did not inspire much discussion, if at all. The notion that class BC war crimes were secondary to class A crimes did not help: the interpretation that the BC trials “warranted lesser condemnation” than the class A trial persisted in the popular Japanese mind long after the trials and support campaigns had concluded. As such, Japanese society has not had a chance to properly consolidate its views on Japanese WWII actions, and there is also little incentive to open this particular can of worms.

There has been little opportunity for real public dialogue and soul-searching on the issue of what the BC war crimes trials meant. The Tokyo Trials have been widely covered and discussed, but the class A war crimes trials hold very little real significance. The class A trials represent a trial of the prominent wartime leaders that led Japan to war, and an international punishment of Japan for its WWII conduct. However, ordinary rank and file soldiers and generals fought the war and committed a bulk of the war crimes, and it is in the class BC courtrooms that the Japanese nation was truly put on trial. It is in the BC trials that the problem of Japanese WWII responsibility really lies, a complicated issue that requires sifting through of layers of blame and morality: for the soldier, the possibility that their comrades’ deaths may not have been for a greater good after all; for the general public, the possibility that their family members or friends could have been capable of such crimes against humanity. BC courts across Asia saw the pushing of blame back and forth between subordinate and superior, and while in the war crimes courts superior orders did not absolve foot soldiers of responsibility, it was the opposite in the court of public opinion.

Building on the above, a second reason for the silence of dissenting viewpoints regarding sympathy towards the BC war criminal, is that it is in the Japanese society’s interests to focus only on sympathetic depictions of the class BC trials. This is important, because the portrayal of class BC war crimes trials as unfair show trials and therefore the BC war criminals as innocent victims, produces a conveniently bland and one-dimensional image. The BC trials mark the tip of a jagged iceberg of issues regarding Japanese wartime participation, and unpacking it requires time and energy that Japanese society then did not have, and present-day Japan does not want to give. In the 1950s, at

---

82 Wilson, “War, Soldier and Nation”, p. 201
84 Ibid., p. 23
85 Wilson et. al., Japanese War Criminals, p. 6
a time when the Japanese public were still only beginning to learn about WWII beyond
the heavily sanitized version disseminated via wartime propaganda, the information
base that would facilitate deeper examination of war responsibility did not yet exist. The
late 1950s also saw the development of a WWII generation gap, since “children born after
the war were in the fourth and fifth grade, and even university students had only hazy
memories of the war.”\textsuperscript{86} Even if the public had been willing to unpack remaining issues
regarding Japanese WWII conduct, the informational entry barrier was simply too high.
This barrier was reinforced in the early 1960s, when television network sponsors
protested “the boom of controversial dramas” that sought to confront war responsibility
and wartime actions, resulting in the production of increasingly sanitized and
increasingly insipid media.\textsuperscript{87} Extending this phenomenon to present day, the image of
war criminal as victim has cemented itself in public memory, albeit a public memory that
does not concern itself much with the BC war trials.

This image is a singular portrayal that ignores problems the BC trials raise
regarding command responsibility and wartime Japanese government policies, not to
mention the widespread suffering caused by Japanese military actions across East and
Southeast Asian POW camps and civilian neighborhoods. It is telling that while there is
plenty of criticism and dialogue surrounding WWII itself, with different groups arguing
for and against pacifism while also examining every detail of the Tokyo Tribunal, there
has been little to nothing about the class BC war crimes trials. The result is the bland,
superficially positive public image detailed here.

A June 1947 article by a former soldier, quoted by Orr, states: “We didn’t know
the rights or wrongs of the war. Doing just as our leaders ordered we went to war…We
must realize that even though we were under compulsion…there was something Tōjō-
like in every one of our hearts and we haven’t gotten rid of it yet.”\textsuperscript{88} This soldier was
uncannily perceptive in identifying the very problem with issues of Japanese war
responsibility: there is no point in trying to establishing a single culprit or group of
culprits for the Japanese war effort. It was a collective war effort that drew support from
almost every corner of Japanese society, yet simply leaving it at an application of
collective responsibility would be to ignore the heart of the matter as well. There are
differing levels of personal responsibility within this collective responsibility, and the
problem is that these differing levels and differing viewpoints have not been allowed the
space to speak and be examined. There was no public demand for or acceptance of
alternative viewpoints to this widely disseminated national narrative, and the few BC
trial participants who sought to publicize their dissenting notions failed to spark
discourse.

\textsuperscript{86} Wilson, “War, Soldier and Nation”, p. 207
\textsuperscript{87} Kirsch, “Recreating Memory”, p. 86
\textsuperscript{88} Orr, \textit{Victim as Hero}, p. 22
In conclusion, the one-dimensional public images disseminated widely throughout Japanese post-WWII society, speaks to the inadequacy so far of the Japanese approach to wartime participation and responsibility. The image pushed by public depictions is so blandly positive that it allows little room for dissenting views or even merely clarification. It is engineered for optimal consumption and erase any need to delve further into the issue. While arguments continue to break out regarding other aspects of Japanese WWII participation, the history of the class BC war crimes trials remains alarmingly silent. It is almost as if Japanese public society was tired of confronting their potential culpability in Japan’s WWII actions, and this banal imagery was the easiest way to pre-empt controversy. Given that BC war criminals were mostly low-ranking soldiers drawn largely from the ordinary Japanese population, imparting war crimes responsibility on the BC war criminals (instead of pushing it further up the power hierarchy as is done currently), would call the Japanese public’s own responsibility into scrutiny.

Of course, overturning the present image of the BC trials and war criminals would be counterfactual, since it is an image based on facts (albeit selective reading of facts). However, discourse between those who saw the BC war criminals as sympathetic victims of show trials and those who saw the BC trials as fair and necessary, is long overdue. Such dialogues and conversations would most certainly provide a more nuanced and complete public perception of the class BC war crimes trials and its participants, and from then encourage further study into issues of Japanese war responsibility and post-war memory of WWII.
Bibliography


Daita Gintarō 代田銀太郎. *Aa montenrupa no yoru wa fukete ああモンテンルパの夜は更けて [Ah, the Muntinlupa night wears on]*. <http://j-lyric.net/art


Abstract
The New Wave movement of the 1960s was a key turning point in Japanese cinema, opening a space for the mainstream portrayal of queer sexuality on the silver screen. These early queer, or proto-queer, films such as Manji (dir. Masumura Yasuzō, 1964) and With Beauty and Sadness (Utsukushisa to Kanashimi to, dir. Shinoda Masahiro, 1965), however, remained limited in their explorations of queer sexuality, using female homosexual eroticism to draw audiences back to cinemas. Matsumoto Toshio’s neo-documentary Funeral Parade of Roses (Bara no Sōretsu, 1969) then stands a watershed for queer New Wave cinema with genuine exploration of the queer lives and identities of gei bois from Shibuya’s underground.

Introduction
Japan’s post-war democratisation set a new precedence for post-war Japanese society, liberating the populace from restrictions surrounding sexual expression that had been strictly regulated during the war. This was a time of sexual freedom, and nowhere was this shift more evident than in Japanese cinema which experienced a post-war renaissance following its release from wartime state-regulation and censorship. It was the 60s, however, that proved to be a crucial turning point, as the breakdown of the rigidly controlled studio system and rising socio-political activism created new media paradigms for Japanese cinema. Particularly significant was the New Wave movement that emerged against this backdrop, that not only challenged traditional cinematic conventions, but established a space for nascent queer cinema, as evidenced in the films Manji (dir. Masumura Yasuzo, 1964), With Beauty and Sadness (Utsukushisa to Kanashimi to, dir. Shinoda Masahiro, 1965), and Funeral Parade of Roses (Bara no Sōretsu, dir. Matsumoto Toshio, 1969). Borrowing Mark McLelland’s definition, “queer” here refers to “a range of non-heterosexual and gender variant identities, practices, and communities that have come into being in Japan in the post-war period”, with queer cinema referring to the exploration of these in film.89 The earliest queer, or proto-queer, films, like Manji and Beauty, while candidly exhibiting non-normative sexualities, were limited in their explorations of queerness, due to the heteronormative, commercial framework they were produced within. It was only with the independent, avant-garde film, Funeral, that an emphatically queer cinema was established in its serious explorations of gei culture, setting the foundation for the later emergence of a distinctly queer Japanese cinema.

89 Mark J. McLelland, Queer Japan from the Pacific War to the Internet Age (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005), 2.
The 60s New Wave and the Emergence of Queer Cinema

The socio-historical developments of the 1960s were pivotal to the emergence of queer cinema, that emerged from the post-war climate of open sexual discourse and the establishment of a new film production nexus that enabled the production and circulation of queer films. The emancipation of cinema from strict wartime censorship and regulation, such as the 1939 Film Laws, created new opportunities to explore themes beyond those previously determined by the wartime administration. This was particularly in the expanded capacity for the depiction of non-normative sexualities, which had been limited to heteronormative, pro-natal portrayals of sexuality in the period leading up to and during the war. Film production regulations further loosened as the tightly controlled studio system began to break down in the face of the cinematic downturn following the rise of television. Beginning with the bankruptcy of the Shin Tōhō Company, a major film production house, in 1961, the monopolistic and stratified commercial studio system that dominated Japanese cinema collapsed, leading companies to offer directors more leeway to pursue personal projects. This developed into the Nūberu Bāgu (Nouvelle Vague or New Wave) movement which was initially led by several young directors from Shōchiku studios, who attempted to attract young audiences back to cinema through more creative productions. The New Wave movement, heavily influenced by the climate of socio-political activism, used film to challenge established Japanese cinematic styles and themes and to rebel against the conservative socio-political structures of Japanese society and the rigid studio system. This translated into the exploration of transgressive themes in film, such as sex and violence, including explicit portrayals of queer sexuality that stood to challenge the dominance of heterosexual politics in mainstream cinema. It was within this newly expanded cinematic space that queer cinema flourished. Many early portrayals of queer sexuality, however, came in the form of sexual exploitation films as major studios turned to the production of pinku eiga (soft-core pornographic films) to sustain themselves. Lesbianism, especially, was commonly exploited as the subject of post-war pornography and the.

---

90 McLelland, Queer Japan, 65.
93 Nowell-Smith, Oxford History of World Cinema, 717.
95 Ibid., 257.
96 Standish, Politics, Porn and Protest, 92.
“perverse” press. While the proto-queer films *Manji* and *With Beauty and Sorrow* do not neatly fall into the category of *pinku eiga*, they were similarly produced with the intention of appealing to a heterosexual male audience and were not liberated from this element of misogynistic representation. Serious treatment of queer themes would only come with more radical elements of the New Wave, like in *Funeral*, that were interested in exploring queer identities and culture, as opposed to queer (sexual) acts alone. Together, these films formed the basis for later queer cinema, which evolved into a distinct and separate subculture of film dealing specifically with queer identities and cultures.

**Homosexual Desires and Heterosexual Fantasy in *Manji* (1964) and *With Beauty and Sorrow* (1965)**

Masumura Yasuzō’s *Manji* and Shinoda Masahiro’s *Beauty* were breakthrough queer films of the Japanese New Wave with their bold portrayals of homosexuality in mainstream film. Based on the novels *Quicksand* (1928-1930) by Tanizaki Jun’ichirō and *Beauty and Sadness* (1964) by Kawabata Yasunari, both films revolve around a pair of lesbian lovers, Sonoko and Mitsuko in *Manji*, and Otoko and Keiko in *Beauty*, navigating their complicated love triangles in a web of heartbreak, revenge, and deceit. Though often cited as lesbian films, the female protagonists in both films are not depicted as exclusively homosexual, pursuing heterosexual liaisons as well. In *Manji*, Mitsuko also pursues a relationship with Sonoko’s husband, while in *Beauty*, Keiko has sexual relations with Otoko’s ex-lover, Oki, and his son. While both these proto-queer films attempt to explore queer identities, their representations are limited by their focus on enticing heterosexual audiences through erotic and transgressive sexualities, as opposed to sincerely exploring female homosexuality. They did, however, establish a paradigm in Japanese cinema with their candid depictions of non-normative sexuality on the big screen.

---

97 McLelland, *Queer Japan*, 122. In the post-war period, *rezu* would emerge as one of the terms to describe lesbian Japanese pornography, prompting actual lesbians from using the term precisely due to such connotation, instead referring to themselves as *rezubian/bian* or *daiku*. The “perverse” press refers to sex-related publications that emerged in the 1950s that focused on queer/perverse desires (*hentai seiyoku*).
Manji and Beauty are ostensibly the earliest “queer” films to depict lesbian desires beyond their pornographic depictions in pinku eiga, bringing them to the mainstream. Particularly significant is the portrayal of lesbian desire, in both these films, as part of an active assertion of female sexual agency that supersedes the “pure love” paradigms traditionally depicted in S-Kankei stories.98 The films not only portray lesbian desires that are explicitly sexual, even perverse, but depict same-sex desiring protagonists who actively pursue and assert their sexuality. This premise is established at the start of Manji when Sonoko passionately tears off the sheet covering Mitsuko’s naked body when she poses as a nude model for her. The camera pans down Mitsuko’s nude figure in accordance with Sonoko’s own gaze reflecting Sonoko’s overwhelming lust and desire for her. In what can be considered a subversion of the male gaze, the objectifying gaze is not only used to express the desire and lust of the female subject but is also replaced with the desiring homosexual gaze of Sonoko. Particularly significant is the active, even aggressive, assertion of female sexuality from both Mitsuko and Sonoko, who unabashedly pursue their relationship with each other against the wills of their male lovers. In a moment of confrontation with Kotaro, Sonoko expresses her displeasure in being married to him and declares her love for Mitsuko. She even physically confronts and corners him when he insults her and Mitsuko and curtly rejects his apologies. She gets bolder as time passes and blatantly expresses her affection for Mitsuko in Kotaro’s presence, even vowing to “get rid of him.” Mitsuko similarly forces Eijiro to accept her

---

98 McLelland, Queer Japan, 20-21. S-Kankei or “S” relationships refers to same-sex relationships between girls that occurred in the girls’ schools that were established in the Taisho period. According to McLelland, “same-sex love between women was considered to be more psychological, emotional and spiritual, whereas men’s desires were considered more carnal.”
relationship with Sonoko, threatening to leave him otherwise. Keiko, in *Beauty*, is just as feisty and lustful as Mitsuko, sharing the same uninhibited desires, even forcing herself onto Otoko in the night. With these films, portrayals of homosexuality were no longer merely subtly implied or alluded to, but openly depicted and used as a substantial part of the narrative. Their portrayal of mature and sexual lesbian relationships also complicates earlier mainstream depictions of lesbianism, significantly departing from the tropes of the transitory, schoolgirl romances of *S-Kankei*. Most importantly, these proto-queer films offered homosexual subjectivities that never before had a place in Japanese cinema.

![Image](image-url)

*Figure 2: The female protagonists in Manji and Beauty have multiple nude scenes in the film*

These efforts at presenting queer narratives and subjectivities are, however, subverted by the heteronormative framework of the mainstream studio system that oversaw the films production. Daiei studios that produced *Manji* and Shōchiku studios that produced *Beauty* were two of the five major production companies of the 60s. This not only explains the more conventional film techniques employed in both films but also the manner in which queerness is portrayed, which was primarily orchestrated to appeal to commercial audiences. Shōchiku, for example, was originally a conservative studio that focused on the production of melodramas for a predominantly female audience. Shinoda initially proposed a film with a homosexual lead but was turned down, leading him to direct his acclaimed *yakuza* film, *Pale Flower* (1964), instead. *Beauty*, however, directed barely a year later, was a film with lesbian protagonists. This development should be understood in relation to larger developments surrounding film production as major studios moved toward the production of sexually explicit pink films to counter...
their financial difficulties. These accounted for 40% of domestic film production by 1965.\textsuperscript{99} In line with this, Shōchiku forayed into the production of more “risqué” films to attract audiences.\textsuperscript{100} Beauty, released just a year after the Shōchiku soft-core double bill by Takechi Tetsuji, can be seen as part of this movement of the commercialisation of sex and violence to generate revenue for financially strapped production studios. This established a space for early Japanese queer cinema, though neither Beauty nor Manji were necessarily developed to be deliberately queer but were, instead, meant to appeal to the “prurient interests” of audiences.\textsuperscript{101}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{image.png}
\caption{Extreme close-ups of the naked female body are examples of the male gaze in Manji}
\end{figure}

These heteronormative frameworks permeated the diegetic portrayals of queerness in the films, offering female homosexuality for male consumption rather than being truly interested in exploring lesbian identities. Both films provide little depth to the lustful depictions of same-sex relationships, which function more as provocative and erotic spectacles. Portrayals of homosexual desires and relationships never escape the heterosexual male gaze either, whether in the diegetic or real world, with Mitsuko and Keiko remaining objects of desire to the male antagonists in the films whilst being presented as sex symbols to audiences as well. It is significant that Wakao Ayako, who plays Mitsuko in Manji, was one of Daiei’s “New Face” actresses, known for her “erotic and dangerous” star image, often being depicted in films as the desirable “erotic object

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{99} Standish, Politics, Porn and Protest, 92.
\item \textsuperscript{100} Ibid., 93.
\item \textsuperscript{101} Ibid., 93.
\end{itemize}
Where attempts are made to recapture the male gaze, as in Manji, the homosexual desiring gaze is still ultimately supplanted by the heterosexual gaze of the predominantly male audience. Attempts at presenting lesbian subjectivities through a homosexual gaze are also few and far between, and in both films, the prolonged heterosexual sex scenes and disproportionate amounts of female nudity seem poised to pander to a male audience. These misogynistic portrayals can be attributed to the novels both the films are based on, Quicksand and Beauty and Sadness, both of which were written by authors known for their erotic and perverse portrayals of female sexuality, likened to the “erotic fantasies of elderly men.” Within these novels, the telling of perverse tales far outweighed desires to explore queer sexuality. The phenomenon of these proto-queer films is perhaps best summarised in Standish’s critique that “the re-assertion of carnal desire as the essence of subjectivity was often complicated by the libidinal economy of the filmmakers concerned and was perforce a masculine-defined and ultimately misogynistic subjectivity.” Though a space had opened for portrayals of queer sexuality, these were ultimately subsumed by the heteronormative and patriarchal structures that continued to dominate. Contained within this discourse, the female body, and particularly lesbian sexuality, remained eroticised for male pleasure.

**Documenting Gei Subculture in Funeral Parade of Roses (1969)**

It would be the more radical elements of the Japanese New Wave that provided a space for the genuine exploration of queerness, as exemplified in the avant-garde, neo-documentary film Funeral Parade of Roses. In a homosexual re-enactment of the Oedipal narrative, Funeral, set in the underground gei bar in Shinjuku, tells the story of Eddie (Ikehata Shinnosuke; stage name, Peter), a gei bōi, who competes with his rival Leda (Ogasawara Osamu; stage name, Usagi), for the affections of bar owner Gonda, little knowing that Gonda is actually his father. Matsumoto’s Funeral does not merely use Tokyo’s gei scene as a plot device, but as an avenue to explore Tokyo’s gei subculture and the individuals that comprise it.

Funeral’s distinctiveness can be attributed to the unique circumstances underlying its production, specifically the ideologies of director Matsumoto Toshio and the studio behind its distribution, the Art Theatre Guild (ATG). Funeral marks a watershed in the development of queer cinema, as perhaps the first Japanese film that

---


105 McLelland, *Queer Japan*, 78-80. The term gei bōi in Japan generally referred to effeminate gay men, particularly those who worked in the entertainment and nightlife industry. As McLelland notes, “Gei bōi therefore came to be understood, at least in part, as an occupational category.
intentionally sought to explore queer identities and cultures. A director, artist, and film theorist, Matsumoto, inspired by the French New Wave, was one of the pioneers of the avant-garde documentary, producing experimental films and video art since the 1950s.\footnote{Mika Ko, “‘Neo-Documentarism’ in Funeral Parade of Roses: The New Realism of Matsumoto Toshio,” \textit{Screen} 52, no. 3 (2011), 377.} His oeuvre includes a manifesto on “neo-documentarism”, that discusses the integration of documentary and avant-garde styles in film to elucidate the dialectic between individual subjectivity and reality.\footnote{Ibid., 378.} Unlike Masumura and Shinoda, Matsumoto was far more radical in both his politics and filmmaking as a member of the independent and leftist “political avant-garde.”\footnote{Yuriko Furuhata, \textit{Cinema of Actuality: Japanese Avant-Garde Filmmaking in the Season of Image Politics} (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013), 2.} This movement, which included the likes of Ōshima Nagisa and Wakamatsu Kōji, sought to radicalise Japanese cinema and establish its position in the new media environment.\footnote{Ibid., 3.} Beyond the aesthetic and artistic qualities of the neo-documentary style, it was the radical potential of the form that fuelled Matsumoto’s use of it to interrogate the political and social developments of the time.\footnote{Ko, “Neo-Documentarism,” 379.} Unlike \textit{Manji} and \textit{Beauty}, \textit{Funeral} was also produced by the independent studio ATG which specialised in the production of avant-garde films and the distribution of foreign art-house films. The ATG played a big role in supporting independent New Wave filmmakers and their projects, particularly those that were rejected by larger studios.\footnote{Standish, \textit{New History}, 268.} These factors account for \textit{Funeral}’s more experimental and subversive depictions of queer subject matter, which prioritised the form and content of the film over commercial appeal.
The neo-documentary film *Funeral* is equal parts political allegory as it is social commentary, standing to challenge the (hetero)sexual and gendered norms of society through its avant-garde form and queer subject matter. As one of the first Japanese films to depict homosexuality, the film “de-naturalise[s]’ heterosexuality” and exposes the performativity of gender through the exploration of *gei* culture.\(^\text{112}\) *Funeral* comes at the heels of an earlier short film by Matsumoto, *For the Damaged Right Eye* (1968), that also features gay culture.\(^\text{113}\) Matsumoto chose the subject matter for its transgressive nature, in particular, its opposition to societal norms and expectations.\(^\text{114}\) Set in a real-life gay bar in Shinjuku, the Bar Genet, and with a cast that includes actual *gei bōis*, including Peter and Usagi, the film challenges heteronormativity beyond fictional depictions by portraying the actual lives and subjectivities of these queer individuals. The blurring of lines between fiction and reality within the film’s diegetic space allows for the interrogation of Shinjuku’s *gei* subculture as seen in the snippets of actual interviews with *gei bōis* that inter-splice the narrative. These interviews provide insightful probes into queer sexual identities, ambitions, and experiences that resist heteronormative standards but also establish a basis for audiences to better understand *gei* culture. These scenes further complicate traditional understandings of sexuality and the gender binary by exposing the fluidity of sexual expression and gender performativity. The act of cross-dressing, in particular, often highlighted in the film, exposes the artifice of gendered roles, which are shown to be neither as determined nor as dichotomised as is often understood.

\(^{112}\) Ko, “Ne-Documentarism,” 384.


\(^{114}\) Ko, “Neo-Documentarism,” 389.
When Eddie and his gei friends confront “real” women, a challenge is made, not only between femininities but against the gendered norms of society as symbolically represented in the “real” women. Funeral’s earnest portrayal of gei subculture and resistance of traditional heteronormativity undoubtedly situates it within a distinctly queer cinema that informatively presents queer subjectivities without exploiting them for commercial purposes.

![Figure 4: An interview with actor and gei bōi Usagi (Leda) in Funeral](image)

**Conclusion**

The New Wave movement in Japan was both limited and revolutionary in establishing the foundations for Japanese queer cinema. The earliest proto-queer films, *Manji* and *Beauty*, while ground-breaking in their explicit depictions of homosexuality were also restricted in their portrayals, being subjected to the heteronormative and
commercial interests of mainstream cinema, big studios, and their original source materials. As Standish observes, “the libidinal economy of the filmmakers ensured that... masculine desire, channelled through heterosexual relations remained dominant”, and nowhere was this truer than in proto-queer films.\textsuperscript{115} \textit{Funeral}, however, as an independent production, was able to portray queer culture beyond those confines, interrogating queer counterculture in an insightful and serious manner. While these elements of queer culture gained visibility during the New Wave, their portrayals and use in film did not necessarily intend to promote queer culture or to appeal to queer audiences specifically. The New Wave, however, did, beyond forming queer cinema, also provide opportunities for queer actors to perform in film, as seen in \textit{Funeral}, which starred \textit{gei bōi} Peter, and Fukasaku Kinji’s 1968 film \textit{Black Lizard}, which starred gay actor Akihiro Maruyama as the female lead. While \textit{Black Lizard} was not a queer film per se, the role brought wider attention to and brought representation for the queer community. The New Wave thus not only laid the foundations for queer cinema but created opportunities for the mainstream presence of queer individuals, whether in the diegesis or in the form of star personalities. It is undeniable that the New Wave established a new space for portrayals of queerness in Japanese mainstream cinema, setting the precedence for its later emergence as a distinct genre of Japanese film and generating greater visibility for the queer community as a whole.

\textsuperscript{115} Standish, \textit{New History}, 257.
Bibliography
Films

Bibliography
McLelland, Mark J. *Queer Japan from the Pacific War to the Internet Age.* Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005.
Understanding Cho Se-hui’s *The Dwarf*: To Observe and Relate What is Seen with Fidelity

By Stephanie Shim, Stanford University

Abstract

As a prominent South Korean writer who defined himself as “far from a great aesthete or a creative genius, but an observer who related what he saw with fidelity,”116 Cho Se-hui paints a nuanced and sophisticated portrait of the onerous life in the quotidian space under Park Chung Hee’s authoritarian regime. Park Chung Hee, who served as the president of the Republic of Korea from 1961 to 1979, is a highly controversial figure in Korean history because of the considerable ambivalence that marks his legacy.117 Albeit responsible for ushering rapid economic growth in South Korea, Park’s presidency also undermined the institution of democracy as he established an oppressive authoritarian rule and sought to make himself president for life.118 Through *The Dwarf*, Cho endeavors to explore the harrowing costs of compressed industrialization in precipitating the malaise of the nouveau riche and the pervasive uncertainty among the working class, who were in thrall to forces beyond their reach. Cho’s magnum opus revolves around the trajectory of the “dwarf” and his family who must grapple with the destructive costs of modernization in Korea. This paper will examine how *The Dwarf* collapses realism and modernism to create a hybrid narrative that draws on experimental writing to subvert the binary structure in literary style.119 In a larger scope, Cho challenges the binary framework concerning literature’s role in politics as a mouthpiece for change and in the arts to fulfill pure aestheticism. While recognizing the existence of irreconcilable gaps when ironing out these concepts, Cho strives to make sense of the incommensurable truths that pervaded the oppressive and onerous society under Park’s military dictatorship. In addition, the paper will analyze Cho’s rejection of time as engaged in a linear

118 Ibid.
119 Realism in literature served as “a counter-aesthetic to the decadent, ‘bourgeois’ modernism.” Its narrative sought to capture reality through descriptive language and was characterized by the “knowability of the world.” Modernism, on the other hand, was marked by the character’s profound introspection and aesthetic literary expressions to engage with “modernity.” Modernism also encompassed a strand of ambiguity or uncertainty, often through “a limited or fallible point of view” in its narrative structure.

relationship with progress, which undermined the state-sponsored rhetoric on its prioritization of accelerated prosperity in national capital. The paper will look at “A Little Ball Launched by a Dwarf” in particular to explore the aforementioned themes, since this story best reflects aspects that are critical to reinforcing the main idea of the paper.

Cho Se-hui was a white-collar employee at a small publishing company who did not show particular interest in joining the literary wave that criticized Park Chung Hee’s military dictatorship for its stifling political oppression and cultural censorship. Although the dissident writers’ movement was gaining momentum at the time, Cho did not partake in the cause, nor did he find any source of literary inspiration that compelled him to pick up his pen. It was not until he stumbled upon the eviction of an impoverished family from one of the ubiquitous shantytowns (p’anjach’on) in Seoul that his writer’s muse ignited. The scene turned his paralysis into rage (ulbun), as Cho bore witness to the family “having their last meal in their shack, enveloped in a cloud of dust as men with sledgehammers broke down their front door,” in compliance with Park’s agenda of modernization through forced redevelopment. This seismic experience urged Cho to pen a story that became “Knifeblade,” the first of twelve interconnected short stories that would make up his masterpiece The Dwarf. Cho’s magnum opus, which was “the first work of Korean fiction to reach the milestone of two hundred printings,” imprinted a paramount mark upon the trajectory of Korean literature. Through The Dwarf, Cho sketches a nuanced and sophisticated portrait of the onerous life under Park’s authoritarian regime by folding critical commentary into the narrative. He endeavors to explore the harrowing costs of compressed industrialization in precipitating the malaise of the nouveau riche and the pervasive uncertainty among the working class, who were in thrall to forces beyond their reach. The Dwarf thus foregrounds the story of the people who “could not set foot outside [their] area” no matter how much they “worked [themselves] to the bone.”

Although Cho delves into the underbelly of the Park regime, which was marked by competing priorities between accelerated economic development and popular demand for democratization, he also sets forth to shed some light on the perennial debate over literature’s role. Korean writers had been struggling to establish a definitive understanding of literature’s function and purview in both the artistic and political spheres. While some writers defined the purpose of literature as a form of expression solely committed to pure aestheticism, others have countered this argument, claiming that literature must be politicized to serve as a call for action and change. This

120 Youngju Ryu, Writers of the Winter Republic: Literature and Resistance in Park Chung Hee’s Korea (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2016), 100.
121 Ibid.
122 Ibid., 99.
contentious question persisted throughout Korea’s literary history and became even more relevant against the backdrop of the “Winter Republic” when the relationship between progress and resistance grew more convoluted. As evident with the dissident writers’ movement, more people were leveraging literature as a mouthpiece for political resistance and reform—a literary agenda that also prompted the conception of the metaphor “Winter Republic” in an unpublished poem recited before a crowd in Kwangju. A young high school teacher by the name of Yang Song-u coined this popular epithet in February 1975 in order to denounce the state of the country and urge his people to take action in resisting the gross abuse of authority. People living in the Winter Republic had to reconcile Korea’s rapid industrialization, championed by Park’s development-oriented state agenda, and severe political oppression rendered by his military dictatorship. With these two-fold forces in effect, the role of literature became salient and obscure along the axes of politics and arts. The active employment of literature for political causes further complicated the debate by creating a paradox in which literature’s involvement in the political realm diminished its value to contribute to pure aestheticism.

The question over literature’s function manifested in the binarization of narrative styles, establishing the foundation for a longstanding division that existed between realism and modernism. While realism attached more weight to literature’s purpose in effecting change, modernism grounded literature as a work of art. This literary friction emerged in the rivalry between quarterly publications, Ch’angbi and Munji. Writers of realism in Ch’angbi believed that the proper literary response to the Yushin regime was “active and militant resistance,” whereas those who aligned themselves with modernism in Munji added greater focus to literature’s self-sufficiency as a work of art that maintained its “autonomous realm of absolute aesthetics.” Cho aims to address this persistent debate over literature’s role and the tensions between realism and modernism in The Dwarf. The solution that he puts forth is to cease the attempt to reconcile literature’s purview between political matters and artistic realms. Cho suspends the binary framework that demarcates literature into a vehicle for reform and a mode of aesthetics while recognizing the incommensurable gaps that are existent in literature’s function. Rather than defining one literary purpose as more legitimate than the other, Cho dismantles the “either-or” model and underscores literature’s capacity to perform both roles.

Scholars of Korean literature have been struggling to categorize The Dwarf as either a work of realism or modernism, for the work did not fit any conventional literary label. Realism is a movement that emphasizes content over form, characterized by a descriptive writing style that intends to capture reality. It was considered a counter-

---


125 Ryu, Writers of the Winter Republic, 106.
aesthetic to the “bourgeois” narrative of modernism and is thus often utilized to address the topic of class antagonism. The hallmark of realism also include the representability or knowability of the world achieved through its language. Modernism prioritizes form over content and is marked by a weak narrative structure, and a break from textual organization. Its writing draws on prolific symbolism, introspection, and a considerable sense of uncertainty or ambiguity. *The Dwarf* does not harbor legible markers for either realism or modernism. By weaving in threads from both literary fabrics, however, Cho subverts the binary framework of these narrative styles, which dominated the discourse among Korean writers during the Winter Republic,¹²⁶ and in a larger scope, challenges the binary understanding of literature’s role between politics and arts.

This paper will examine how *The Dwarf* collapses realism and modernism to create a hybrid narrative that draws on experimental writing to subvert the binary structure in literary style. In addition, it will analyze Cho’s rejection of time as engaged in a linear relationship with progress, which undermined the state-sponsored rhetoric on progress and its prioritization of accelerated economic prosperity. The paper will look at “A Little Ball Launched by a Dwarf” in particular to explore the aforementioned themes, since this story best reflects aspects that are critical to reinforcing the main idea of the paper. “A Little Ball Launched by a Dwarf” effectively encapsulates important literary characteristics that represent both realism and modernism, while depicting the irreconcilable extremities of society that expose the injustice, inequality, and trauma of the time. In addition, this story was selected because it contains important details that provide insight into the dwarf, who is at the heart of Cho’s novel, and his family.

“A Little Ball Launched by a Dwarf” is the story of “the urban poor living in almost inhuman conditions of filth and deprivation, and frequently in the process of forced relocation by the authorities.”¹²⁷ Cho crafts a narrative that exposes the shadows of progress helmed by compressed industrialization and focuses on the toils of the working class. In addition to detailing their oppressive reality, Cho enables the voice of the working class to take center stage in his story, thereby broaching the subject of class antagonism—an element of realism. By bringing the narrative of the oppressed to the fore, Cho offers a stark juxtaposition with the narrative of the oppressors from the upper crust of society and thus heightens class conflicts, which were prominent in the Winter Republic. Other features of realism are conspicuous in the story, including Cho’s descriptive writing that shines light on the everyday lives of the working class. When Yong-su, the eldest son of the dwarf’s family, breaks the news of the condemnation notice to his mother, the following description unfolds: “Mother stopped eating. I looked down at her meal try. Steamed barley with rice, dark soybean paste, a couple of shriveled-up


peppers, potato chunks in soy sauce.”

Although this superfluous information of food disrupts the narrative flow of the story, the provided details are pivotal in painting a thorough and vivid portrait of the lives of people from the lowest crust of society—even touching upon aspects that are as trivial as their diet. As Mother’s humble dishes showcase, many families, including the dwarf’s, barely got by and could not afford delectable foods. It was the unattainable dream for many children of the urban poor to stuff themselves full with coveted dishes, as manifested in the story with Myong-hui, a girl who is the next-door neighbor to the dwarf’s family and Yong-su’s childhood crush. In a scene that harnesses descriptive writing, Myong-hui reveals to Yong-su a laundry list of foods she wants to have: “citrus soda, grapes, instant noodles, pastries, apples, eggs, meat, rice without barley, laver.”

As the story elaborates, malnourishment was a ubiquitous condition among the working class. The realistic portrayal of the urban poor’s struggle is further complemented by the reproduction of official documents in the story, including the condemnation notice and the proof-of-demolition form. Written in technical and legal language, the documents are overlaid with a detached and methodical tone in forewarning the dwarf’s family of their eviction and verifying the demolition of their house. By incorporating authentic documents that are issued by the government and highlighting their impersonal language, the story criticizes the Park regime and its disregard for the working class by foregrounding the undercurrent of ruthless dehumanization in such sources. Moreover, Cho hinges upon these records to build a cyclical narrative structure through which both the beginning and end of the story, as well as the fate of the dwarf and his family, are shaped by documents. The condemnation notice helps unfold the story and presents an integral conflict that drives the plot forward as the dwarf’s family are forced to leave their house for “new housing development.” The proof-of-demolition form is integrated towards the end of the story and serves as a means of closure. The form signifies the reclamation of the family house after reconstruction, which is achieved by Yong-hui who leaves her family, follows the real estate speculator, and performs sexual favors in order to steal this important document. Cho focuses on the bitter reality entailed by the documents, which are mere pieces of paper but have the power to dictate the fate of the dwarf’s family. In fact, the two pieces of paper that herald the beginning and conclusion of the story mark the deprivation of individual will in a society subjected to the hyper-acceleration of industrialization and the resultant gaps of inequality that are amplified in urban areas. Individual will is naught but peripheral, for such documents as the condemnation notice and the proof-of-demolition form demand absolute compliance. The state-issued papers are what define the loss and reclamation of the family house and in a larger scope, erodes the history and memory associated with

---

129 Cho, “A Little Ball Launched by a Dwarf,” in *The Dwarf*, 57.
130 Ibid., 48.
the place. Cho integrates elements of realism into “A Little Ball Launched by a Dwarf” to effectively encapsulate the overbearing conditions that fettered the working class and to criticize the authoritarian regime’s negligence of people on the bottom of society who were rendered hopeless and invisible.

Despite weaving in such prominent hallmarks of realism, Cho draws on distinct attributes of modernism to epitomize his experimental writing and create a hybrid narrative that subverts the literary juxtaposition between realism and modernism. The most conspicuous element of modernism in the story is the character of the dwarf himself. Cho’s novel centers on the dwarf, who serves as a common thread linking all the short stories together. He is ostensibly an actual man by the name of Kim Pul-i who is three feet three inches tall and weighs seventy pounds.”131 Whether the dwarf is a tangible man whose existence is grounded in reality or a character whom the audience must view through an allegorical lens for a metaphorical understanding is never made clear in the story. Nevertheless, by bringing this unconventional and marginalized subject to the heart of his narrative, Cho breaks away from a formulaic narrative structure, turns inward to focus on the individual, and recognizes the ambiguity surrounding the dwarf, thereby evoking a modernist reading of the story. Because the backbone of the novel is grounded on the dwarf’s experience, Cho secures ample interpretive space for his audience to mull over the character and extrapolate his existence to a larger allegorical meaning. The dwarf’s physical attributes can be interpreted as an intentional factor to manifest the socioeconomic oppression of the working class in a tangible output. Although the dwarf is presented as a single man in the novel, readers have enough room to flex their critical thinking and perceive the dwarf as a mosaic that encompasses different experiences of the oppressed while illuminating their collective suffering. This prevailing sense of ambiguity surrounding the character of the dwarf and the meaning he carries in the story is another strand of modernism. Moreover, the dwarf’s amorphous identity challenges the knowability of the material conveyed by the language of realism. Although Cho’s delivery is straightforward in writing, the content that he imparts to the readership ventures into the fantastical, thereby complicating the categorization of The Dwarf. The language that Cho employs fall under realism, yet the content that the language is describing does not achieve the knowability or representability of the world that it should.132

This aspect of modernism is undergirded by the peculiarities that Cho embeds in the plotline. In “A Little Ball Launched by a Dwarf,” the dwarf suddenly announces that he is going to quit the five modes of work that he had pursued over the course of his life, which included “selling bonds, sharpening knives, washing windows in high rises,

---

131 Cho, “A Little Ball Launched by a Dwarf,” in The Dwarf, 58.
installing water pumps, and repairing water lines,” and work for a circus instead.\textsuperscript{133} The dwarf brings home a hunchback and plans to work as his assistant as they “discuss the routine they would perform.”\textsuperscript{134} The series of developments that ensues in the plotline is eccentric and perplexing:

“At this point Mother protested. We raised objections as well. Father backed down listlessly. The hunchback sat looking at us with a blank expression. He left with tears rolling down his cheeks. From the rear he looked absolutely dismal. Father’s dream was shattered. Shouldering his heavy toolbag, Father went out in search of work.”\textsuperscript{135}

Cho’s writing is heavily fragmented and terse; with a handful of simple sentences, he introduces and abruptly concludes an incident that borders on fantasy. Yet another unorthodox and interesting character—the hunchback—takes the narrative stage to simulate the audience’s imaginative faculty. The hunchback is shrouded in mystery, for the readers do not know where he comes from or how he is acquainted with the dwarf, and there is little character development and background to engender any feasible speculations. Because Cho employs fragmented and nonchalant language to elucidate such a chimerical situation, he engenders doubt among the readers with respect to their comprehension of the story. This mismatch in language and content builds strong certainty for the reader since Cho rarely provides any conspicuous indicators to determine whether what is unfolding on page is real or imagined. Uncertainty and ambiguity thus become the dominant impression that results from this hybrid writing.

Another important component of modernism is the weak and indefinite narrative structure that bends time and space in \textit{The Dwarf}. In lieu of constructing a linear development, Cho puts together a disjointed framework that does not show any correlation between the time, space, and point of view operating in the narrative. The twelve stories that constitute the novel have different plotlines and are told from varying perspective. In fact, the reader is unable to discern the intricate connection looping all the stories together until the end of the novel. Moreover, the stories are not arranged in a consistent spatial pattern or by a chronological trajectory. Because Cho does not afford clarity to the time and space in each story, the burden of comprehension falls on the reader to piece together all the available clues and make sense of the story. “A Little Ball Launched by a Dwarf” is also told from three different points of view—by Yong-su, Yong-ho, and Yong-hui, the three children of the dwarf. Where each vignette is taking place, whether the family are still living in their house or have already been evicted, how

\textsuperscript{133} Cho, “A Little Ball Launched by a Dwarf,” in \textit{The Dwarf}, 58.
\textsuperscript{134} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{135} Ibid.
much time has passed between each account are some of the important questions that the readers have, although both the story is devoid of lucid answers.

In addition to this distinct narrative that mimics uncertainty, “A Little Ball Launched by a Dwarf” contains several other pillars of modernism including introspection and symbolism. The story features a number of important self-reflexive observations that contribute to character development and psychologize the oppression of the working class. In a poignant scene that depicts a politician’s visit to the shantytown where the dwarf’s family was living, the story captures Yong-su’s thoughts in reaction to the empty promises set forth by this figure of Authority:

“The entire neighborhood grew calm. Suddenly it was so still—what the heck was going on? I was ashamed of the way our neighborhood smelled. They had bowed and greeted Father. Father had to stand on tiptoe to shake hands with them. But that didn’t matter to us. In our eyes our dwarf of a father was a giant. … I hated them. They were liars. They had such fantastic plans. But plans were not what we needed. A lot of people had already made many plans. But nothing had changed.”

Yong-su’s introspective comments shed light upon his attitude towards the squalid neighborhood, his own father, and politicians. While he is humiliated by the state of the shantytown where he lives, he takes immense pride in his father whom he regards as a “giant” in spite of his diminutive stature. Although Yong-su is far from satisfied with his family’s dismal life as working class, he does not lament his father’s impotence but harbors strong affection for the dwarf instead. Yong-su’s reflection on the deceptive politicians, who come by the neighborhood every once in a while and forge unfulfilled promises, is characterized by the disillusionment with and hatred towards authority. These sentiments reflect the psychology of the working class and offer insights into their attitude against established institutions, namely the government—thereby enriching the narrative and amplifying their voices. “A Little Ball Launched by a Dwarf” also draws on symbolism as a component of modernism. The dwarf commits suicide in a factory smokestack, which serves as the emblem of the working class. The working class were bound to the mundane conditions of their factory work to advance the economic development of the state and they were not able to enjoy the concomitant profits. Because the factory constituted a prevalent institution of oppression, Cho is intentional with the dwarf ending his life in the smokestack—forever shackled to what served as an integral element of his identity as a member of the working class. In another instance, Yong-su complains to his mother that he wants to “have clothes with pockets like everyone else” (Cho 51). At first blush, this comment can be passed off as an insignificant detail, but the

---

absence of pockets in the clothes of Yong-su and his siblings points to their inability to accumulate anything. Because they do not have pockets stitched to their clothes, they are not capable of holding and accumulating any food and money, thus propelled into perpetual poverty. The lack of pockets also connotes the implausibility of socioeconomic mobility. The dwarf’s family are consequently tethered to the working class as permanent victims of injustice and inequality.

It is possible to understand Cho’s deliberate synthesis of elements from both realism and modernism as a concerted effort to evade the authoritarian regime’s stringent censorship on contemporary literature. By weaving in strands from both literary styles, Cho created a diversion in order to deflect the censor form his critique of the Park administration’s coercive agenda, which prioritized economic development at the expense of the working class. Cho offers negative commentary on the authoritarian regime’s disregard for the fallout of compressed industrialization and its obdurate marginalization of the working-class community. However, by highlighting the idiosyncratic features of his work to captivate the readership while embedding his critical attitude towards the state under the veil of the bizarre, Cho could effectively evade censorship. He was thus equipped to launch an oblique critique of the Winter Republic on the literary landscape. Moreover, Cho’s experimental writing helped dismantle the hegemony of the binary framework that differentiated realism from modernism. His inclusion of both in “A Little Ball Launched by a Dwarf” and The Dwarf at large is a testament to the destabilization of oppositions between the binary pair, which is demonstrated in the “The Möbius Strip” by the absence of duality in its structure. Cho foregrounds the logic of opposition between realism and modernism, but gainsays this narrative strategy in order to establish a hybrid that subverts the existent binary thinking. However, he also takes heed of the fact that people are not always granted the vantage point to perceive the Möbius Strip in full view. Those without the prerogative to discern the whole picture from the outside are impeded by their myopic perspectives and bound to a limited understanding of fundamental oppositions. It is thus important to recognize the existence of irreconcilable gaps rather than settling on a failed resolution to bridge them. While Cho collapses realism and modernism in The Dwarf to create a hybrid narrative, he does not aim to integrate the two strands to produce a complete amalgam. Given the irreconcilable gaps between realism and modernism on their form, content, tone, and function, Cho merely intertwines the two and embeds this opposition in his text. In a similar vein, Cho’s work accepts the incongruity pertaining to literature’s role in politics as a vehicle for resistance and in the arts as a mode of aesthetics. Debating whether one realm carries a more sublime literary purpose than the other is pointless and writers should instead appreciate literature’s potential to effectively carry out its functions in both spheres. Moreover, Cho aligned this understanding of fundamental gaps with the incommensurable truths that proliferated in the Winter Republic. Grasping the concept of irreconcilability was salient to make sense of a society that did not make
sense—a society in which people who valued integrity, honesty, and a strong work ethic suffered from poverty, while those who fed on deception, exploitation, and corruption enjoyed affluence.

Cho rejects the notion of time as aligned in a linear trajectory with progress, which was obdurately purported and underscored by the Park regime in order to render legitimacy to their state agenda rooted in rapid economic development. He pokes fun at the Yushin regime’s rhetoric of developmentalism, which insisted on the prioritization of prosperity in order to allow people with an exemplary work ethic to reap the benefits that would eventually trickle down with time. In fact, time was not the key to rectifying the deep-seated socioeconomic inequalities in contemporary society, because these disparities were historical, systematic, and sustainable. In “A Little Ball Launched by a Dwarf,” Yong-su reflects on the generational turmoil that reigns in a perpetual cycle when he comes across “a sales document involving slaves.”

“We didn’t hope for anything from Father. He had put in enough work over the years. And he had suffered enough. Father wasn’t the only one to have experienced trouble. His father, his grandfather, his grandfather’s father, that father’s grandfather, and so on down the line, from one generation to the next—they may have experienced more trouble than he.”

The document serves as a source of compounded dismay for Yong-su as he realizes the difficulty in breaking the chain of oppression that has persisted throughout his lineage. His ancestors had worn clothes without pockets just as he does, for they were unable to pocket or accumulate any of their assets as slaves who merely survived, devoid of any long-term visions to propel them out of the cycle of poverty. Yong-su perceives the dwarf as a “bad man,” a father who “can’t even be a bad guy” because “bad guys have lots of money and stuff.” What is even more dreadful is the foreboding that Yong-su will come to fill in the shoes of the dwarf and undertake similar struggles, since he will not be able to escape the throes of poverty and time does not entail improved conditions or progress in their status. There is an overarching pessimism that penetrates the onerous account by Yong-su, stemming from the hopeless realization that “the law’s on their side,” and so is time. Inequality persists in a continuum of history, family, and time; seldom does it encounter transformations and pave new paths. Cho rejects the Winter Republic’s paradigmatic idea of time as the panacea to deep-rooted socioeconomic inequalities that

137 Cho, “A Little Ball Launched by a Dwarf,” in The Dwarf, 52.
138 Ibid., 53.
139 Cho, “A Little Ball Launched by a Dwarf,” in The Dwarf, 52.
140 Ibid., 51.
could be resolved through a gradual process of wealth as accumulated from rapid economic developments, and that would cascade down the social ladder. He instead eliminates all vestiges of hope in perceiving progress as a path to prosperity and poses the suffering undertaken by the working class as devoid of any meaning, rather than an investment for a better posterity.

Cho flirts with the line between realism and modernism to deconstruct the standing opposition between these two literary movements. In a larger scope, he challenges the binary framework concerning literature’s role in politics as a mouthpiece for change and in the arts to fulfill pure aestheticism. While recognizing the existence of irreconcilable gaps when ironing out these concepts, Cho also endeavors to make sense of the incommensurable truths that pervaded the oppressive and onerous society under Park’s military dictatorship. In addition, he rejects the notion that connects time with progress in a linear relationship. Cho regarded himself as “far from a great aesthetician or a creative genius, but an observer who related what he saw with fidelity.”\textsuperscript{141} Perhaps he hoped to fill in the role of someone whom Yong-su and the working class had envisioned: a figure “who could understanding [their] sufferings and take it upon [himself].”\textsuperscript{142} Whoever he aspired to become, he was that and some more—a writer who understood the toils and pinpointed the needs of the people who wanted to “leave the dead land,” but had to jump the highest to land on the moon.\textsuperscript{143}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{141} Ryu, Writers of the Winter Republic, 102.
\textsuperscript{142} Cho, “A Little Ball Launched by a Dwarf,” in The Dwarf, 55.
\textsuperscript{143} Ibid., 63.
\end{flushright}
Bibliography


An Interview with Professor Ariel Fox, PhD

Ariel Fox is an assistant professor of Chinese literature in the department of East Asian Languages and Civilizations at the University of Chicago.

Can you introduce yourself and the research you are currently involved in?

I am an assistant professor in the Department of East Asian Languages and Civilizations and the Committee on Theater and Performance Studies. My research is broadly concerned with the intersection of economic and literary imaginaries in early modern China. I am currently working on a book about a group of playwrights who were active in the cultural and commercial center of Suzhou around the middle of the seventeenth century. This was a time of increasing awareness of one’s enmeshment in transregional economies, and these plays—both as texts and as performances—became sites for rethinking one’s place in these circuits of exchange.

In a departure from other contemporaneous dramas, these plays center stories of merchants and shopkeepers, broken contracts and property disputes, strings of cash and hoards of bullion. Whereas other elite texts of the time treat the turning of everyone and everything into objects of commerce as a source of grave, existential concern for the literatus subject, in these plays the universalizing of a certain kind of commercialized selfhood is reconceptualized as something productive—something narratively interesting, socially generative, and morally redemptive.

Where does theater fall in terms of conversation with other modes of understanding and dealing with these economic and social changes during this time period?

In the late Ming and early Qing, we see a deep fascination with theater, not just as an experience on the stage or in the study, but as a way to make sense of the self. The idea of role play, of fashioning a persona for yourself and inhabiting that persona in the world, was particularly compelling at a moment when the rise of massive merchant fortunes and a well-developed market for luxury goods made literati identity into a kind of consumer choice.

So theater occupied a prominent place in the late imperial imagination, and you see an attention to theatricality as a concept in non-theatrical genres like painting and poetry. At the same time, drama—itself a synthesis of music, movement, poetry, and prose forms—is always in conversation with other modes of expression. The Suzhou playwrights were particularly engaged with the vernacular short stories from the collections of contemporaneous authors/editors like Feng Menglong and Ling Mengchu that depict the unexpected interactions of shopkeepers, beggars, courtesans, students,
and officials that characterize urban life. These stories, and the new families and communities that they envision, frequently served as a source of inspiration for their plays.

What specifically about premodern Chinese theater of any form, chuanqi, zaju, whatever, specifically captures your attention and your imagination?

Chuanqi, which was the preeminent genre of drama during this period, are extremely long (they can run over fifty scenes and would take multiple days to perform in full) and narratively complex. I have always been really drawn in by their incredibly baroque and often bizarre plots, their maximalist approach to theatrical story-telling. In one scene an innocent student stands trial for murder, a few scenes later a fearsome bear has fallen in love with him, and by the end of the play he has defeated a band of pirates, attained high office, and gotten married—twice! Chuanqi is largely associated with the blossoming romance between a beautiful young woman and a talented young man, and this is certainly at the heart of many plays. But there are also a lot of dead bodies found in giant pumpkins.

Late imperial chuanqi is also fascinating in terms of its many lives both in print and in performance. A play could be experienced as a lavishly illustrated woodblock print to be perused by the literatus connoisseur at his leisure or as an aria performed by a courtesan on a pleasure boat or as a scene performed by itinerant entertainers at a temple festival or a household troupe in a private garden. There is no static object we can point to as the definitive play, as it is always being transformed for and by these shifting contexts.
An Interview with Professor Dafna Zur, PhD

Dafna Zur is an Associate Professor in the Department of East Asian Languages and Cultures at Stanford University. She teaches courses on Korean literature, cinema, and popular culture. Her book, Figuring Korean Futures: Children’s Literature in Modern Korea (Stanford University Press, 2017), traces the affective investments and coded aspirations made possible by children’s literature in colonial and postcolonial Korea. She is working on a new project on moral education in science and literary youth magazines in postwar North and South Korea. She has published articles on North Korean science fiction, the Korean War in North and South Korean children’s literature, childhood in cinema, and Korean popular culture. Her translations of Korean fiction have appeared in wordwithoutborders.org, The Columbia Anthology of Modern Korean Short Stories, and the Asia Literary Review.

It says on your website that you’re currently studying moral education in scientific and youth magazines: how does that education take shape?

Well, it’s actually still a project that is very much in its infancy, and so I’m not too confident in being able to say a lot about it. All I can say is that I got interested in this question of morality and education and literature when I started looking through science magazines for young readers that were published in North Korea in the 1950’s, and I was really intrigued by the scientific content as being more than just data and formulas: they all relied very heavily on narrative structure, whether it was prose (nonfiction and fiction), comics, or was some kind of rhetorical structure to convey scientific material. And so I started to think, as a literature person, what can I do with science, particularly in the Cold War period when science becomes so critical and so central to the big ideological conflicts during the Cold War. The reason that I found myself thinking about morality is that I realized that anything that is written for young people—either with educational purposes or for entertainment purposes—has a really strong moral undertone. And I think it’s because morality does have a really central role in the restructuring of post-war society, and it becomes really important in the absence of a lot of more traditional moral systems, which fall apart a little bit. My conjecture is that this new moral order comes in that rides this ideological wave and the moral language penetrates this written material. And so I think what’s kind of driving a lot of this interest is to really understand where morality and ideology weave in and out of material that is seemingly apolitical, like science and engineering, skills that are seen as technical skills that are really critical to the new generation. So I’m showing the moral stakes in this very very important body of knowledge, and we’ll see where it takes me.
I know this project is still in development, but can you say anything about how these roles were presented to children? Did they differ between North and South Korea, and how so?

It is a little bit early to say, but what I expect is that there will be quite a bit of similarity in that science and engineering becomes so important across the board, particularly on both sides of the Iron Curtain, as part of the arms race, as part of the Cold War logic, that there’s similar investments in science, as “our science” is the peaceful, good science, and “their science” is the belligerent, warmongering science. So I think both sides take that position, but I’m not in a position yet to say how they are different.

This research carries over somewhat from your first book about how children’s literature in the post-war era of Korea created this national identity embodied in the children, correct?

So my book came out of this sort of wonder at how colonial Korea managed, despite this national and language repression, to go on and have this really rich history of publishing for young people. And so my first book tried to understand what these publications were like, how to understand the different voices that come out in publications for young people, and what the different investments were by different constituents that were writing for children. So this new project on Cold War North and South Korea, does come out of the first project in that I’m really still interested in materials for young people. They end up usually not really being part of the main “bread and butter” materials; historians don’t really look at published materials because they’re not really considered archives. And people in literature don’t look at anything that’s written for young people because it’s considered its own thing: it doesn’t have the same cultural clout or capital. So nobody’s actually looked at these magazines, and I went to Moscow a year ago to collect a bunch of these magazines—there’s a very, very big collection in the Lenin Library in Moscow of North Korean magazines—so I went there, collected a lot of magazines, and I’m slowly trying to make my way through them. So to go back to your original question, it comes out of my interest in young people, and in material that’s written for young people, because that’s not something usually people look at, and I think that’s a really good place to investigate social values and ideas about the past, present and future.

Why do you think scholarship around children’s literature has been so neglected?

I think maybe the reason that children’s literature in particular has not really been considered very seriously is because it’s a body of work that is written by adults for young people who are in the process of becoming grownups. They themselves don’t have any purchasing power, and in the periods that I’m looking at they don’t have
political clout or power. They’re really just being talked at. And so perhaps for that reason, and because it’s considered very commercial, for scholars of literature it’s never sort of been an obvious place to go to find great inspiration. So that may be the reason, because it’s this minor population, both literally and figuratively. But I find that it’s a really fascinating place because an awareness of children and writing for children really means so much: it means that a society becomes aware of the purchasing power, aware of children playing a larger and larger role in society as consumers, and in terms of both capitalism and socialism children do become a much more important constituency. And I think there is this impulse on behalf of people who write for children, to try and communicate and shape them in a much more explicit way than, perhaps, in other fields. So to me it’s an endlessly fascinating body of work that I think you can look at from all kinds of different angles.

Of course! Thank you so much for your time.