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Sport in Japanese Cinema from the End of 19th Century to the End of the Pacific War. An Exploration

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ABSTRACT

The article discusses the interrelations between sport, cinema and socio-political transformation of Japan between 1868 and 1945. Cinema is identified as a mass medium able to serve as a socio-cultural document and a historical source. Article's starting point is a brief discussion of the Meiji era authorities' policy toward Western influences, cinema, and sport, both modern and traditional. This is followed by the discussion of early non-fiction films depicting sport, mainly sumo matches. Next section is devoted to the inclusion of sport motifs in feature film in the context of socio-cultural transformations of Japan. Main section of the article discusses three strategies of employing sport in Japanese cinema of the late 1920s and 1930s: 1) neutral observation in which modern sports are presented as one of the aspects of socio-cultural transformations of Japan, 2) introduction of more or less elaborate sport motifes into the narratives of films in which sport does not play a dominant role but which attempt to comment on the social reality, 3) utilisation of sport motifes as purely symbolical devices. Last section of the article briefly indicates on two options available for Japanese filmmakers during the Pacific War – inclusion of the themes they were interested in into films conforming with the national policy and subversive filmmaking.

KEYWORDS: Japanese cinema, sports in Japan, sports in cinema, *gendai-geki*, Ozu Yasujirō, Mizoguchi Kenji.

Cinema is a mass art *par excellence* – its essence lies in mechanical reproduction and broad accessibility, understood both as wide availability of cinematic products for potential audiences and their comprehensibility. As a vital, inclusive social phenomenon it cannot be confined in art galleries and limit its consumers to a narrow, elitist group of "connoisseurs". Cinema realizes its potential only if it maintains a close relationship with society – if it blends in with its tissue, flows in its veins, and sends impulses to its muscles. To achieve this, it has to reflect the world of the audiences, relate to their experiences and problems, even if it does that indirectly, by filtering them thought the filmmakers' imagination and sensitivity. Among all forms of human artistic activity cinema is probably the most sensitive to the slightest vibrations in its social environment and capable of providing instant responses to them. What is

more, it quite often tended to address issues that in more esteemed yet less egalitarian discourses – be it publicistic, academic or political – were articulated with noticeable delay.

Because of these properties cinematographic works can serve as valuable social documents, cultural artefacts that reflect certain phenomena, trends, moods, anxieties, and ideologies of their times, as well as convenient illustrations of knowledge acquired in a formal way. The history of every national cinema is in fact a history of the nation and the society in which this particular national cinema it is rooted. Complex relations between cinema and its socio-cultural, political, and economic environment are most visible when we turn our attention to the countries which at some point of their history went through sudden, rapid, and fundamental transformations. Such is the case of Japan, which in the mid-19th century abandoned its over 200 year-long restrictive isolationist policy and opened itself to Western influences, and in the span of the next 100 years went through phases of modernization, democratization and militarization.

Socio-political entanglement is by no means exclusive to cinema. It characterizes – to greater or lesser extent – all aspects of culture. In the case of mid-19th- to mid-20th-century Japan once can easily provide a substantial number of examples of such entanglement in the fields of theatre, literature, science, philosophy *etc.* (e.g. authorities' attempts to revaluate *kabuki* as a theatre of moral education; political roots of the *shinpa* theatre; influence of Western anthropology, evolutionist theories and social Darwinism on Japanese racial discourse and colonial policy; emergence, development, and suppression of proletarian literature). The vicissitudes of sports were also part – and can serve as an illustration – of diverse and not always convergent social, political, and cultural transformations of Japan from its "opening to the world" until its defeat in the Pacific War. During all of that period sport was not a neutral activity, as it was deeply embroiled in the ideological discourse(s) which favoured certain of its disciplines and attributed them with specific roles, and was one of the components of broader social processes which directly affected the life-styles, habits, aspirations and values of Japanese citizens.

My aim in this article it to present synthetic, introductory overview of the interrelations between cinema, sport, and the broad socio-political transformations in Japan until the end of the Pacific War. This overview is by no means exhaustive – due to its exploratory purpose certain films were omitted, while some others were mentioned only briefly, and, of course, there is a possibility that at this point I am not aware of certain facts and films. Nonetheless, I hope to provide the reader with basic factual

information on the subject, intuitions concerning functions of employing sport motives in selected cinematographic works, and proposition – in the form of exemplification – of the analytical framework for further research. I argue that the discussion of the relations between sport and early Japanese cinema should not be limited to providing a quasi-encyclopaedic descriptive list of films with sport motifs. We should rather focus on issues such as how cinematographic manifestations of sport related to everyday experiences of contemporary audiences, how they were influenced by internal transformations of the Japanese film industry, how they reflected broader social, cultural, political, and ideological processes that swept through Japan, and how certain filmmakers employed sport motifs to provide additional meanings to their works. Such an approach allows me to narrow down the corpus of films discussed in the article. These were selected primarily on the basis of their diversity in employing sport motives. The second criterion was their accessibility – I focus, with a few exceptions – on the films that not only survived, but are also commercially available.

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Historical Context of the Development of the Cinema and Sport in Japan

The discussion of the relationship between sport and early Japanese cinema requires prior consideration of historical context in which modern sport and cinema emerged and developed on Japanese soil.

As I mentioned elsewhere (Głownia 2012: 19) one of the most crucial problems faced by the Japanese authorities at the beginning of Meiji era (1868-1912) was the issue of relationship between desirable transformations in the spheres of politics, economy, and technology and socio-cultural change. The question was whether becoming a modern state and obtaining a strong position in the international arena required the ubiquitous acceptance of Western customs. Eventually the authorities rejected the idea of an unconditional following the Western model advocated by the most radical progressivists and sympathizers of Civilization and Enlightenment (*bunmei kaika*) movement. Instead, they chose an approach of acceptance of modernization and rejection of overly Westernization best characterized by the slogan of *wakon-yōsai* (“Japanese spirit and Western technology”). One of the consequences of adopting this ideology was an attempt to create a new Japanese citizen – one that would be able to assimilate Western knowledge, efficiently operate Western

technology, and actively contribute to the processes of modernization, yet who would remain faithful to the "Japanese spirit", tradition, morals and established social hierarchies and structures of power. At the same time Japanese intellectuals gradually developed concepts of race (*jinshu*), unique qualities of Japanese people (*minzoku*), and national essence (*kokutai*) (Weiner 1997), which were all employed in the formulation of national policy and ideology, and later found their full embodiment in the nationalistic and militaristic tendencies of the 1930s and 1940s. From Japan's "opening to the world" to the attack on Pearl Harbour, a peculiar kind of "game" was played on Japanese soil – that between "indigenous" and "foreign" elements. Generally, the former – if they were not identified as an indication of backwardness or obstacle for the rise of Japan as a modern nation – were positively valorised, while the latter were accepted only after they were subjected to the procedures of adaptation and nativization. It was a game that both cinema and sport had to participate in.

When cinema was introduced to Japan its social functions transcended merely providing entertainment. Not only did the technological aspect of cinematographic apparatus serve as an illustration of the might of Western scientific thought, but the movies themselves were an important source of knowledge about the distant, unknown world. This attitude toward the possibilities of new medium is best summarized by words of Inabata Katsutarō, the first importer of French cinematograph, who wrote: "I believed that this would be the most appropriate device for introducing contemporary Western culture to our country" (Toki, Mizuguchi 1996). In the 1910s the educational aspect of the new medium was further developed by the introduction of the idea of "popular education" (*tsūzoku kyōiku*) and the identification of cinema as one of the means of moral education (for discussion of the subject in relation to such issues as movie attendance by children and youth, youth delinquency, and film censorship see: Makino 2001, Salomon 2002, Głownia 2012). Subsequent film regulations of 1917, 1925 and 1939 gradually extended the authorities' control over cinema and presented them with a new opportunities of employing it in achieving their political goals.

Sport – both modern and traditional – was also utilized in the processes of moulding the new Japan. Western modern sport was brought to Japan at the beginning of the Meiji era by foreign advisors (known as *oyatoi gaikokujin*, "hired foreigners") and soon its various disciplines were introduced into Japanese schools as extra-curricular activities (for discussion of the development of Japanese school sport see: Kusaka 2006). The government encouraged adoption of modern sport disciplines in order to enhance the

moral education of the citizens, increase their military efficacy, promote modern lifestyles, and offset the presumed physical inferiority of the Japanese (Atkins 2007: 469). On the other hand, processes of modernization contested the practical value of *bujutsu*, traditional martial arts such as *kenjutsu* (swordsmanship), *kyūjutsu* (archery) and *jūjutsu* (unarmed combat), which led to drastic decrease in their popularity. Their revival in the form of *budō* (as they were called from 1919) was based on redefinition of their philosophical assumptions and concentration on moral education connected with training. In 1926 the term *budō* was introduced to the school physical education curriculum to differentiate traditional martial arts from team sports, and in 1931 *budō* disciplines were adopted in schools as a compulsory subject (Hamaguchi 2006: 6 and 19).

Early Non-Fictional Sport Films

In Japan recording of sports activities on film have a history as long as cinema itself. The first film depicting Japanese sportsmen was created by François-Constant Girel, who was sent to Japan by the Lumière brothers in order to help Inabata Katsutarō establish his film enterprise. Apart from serving as a serviceman and instructor for Inabata's projection teams, Girel made, for his French employers, a series of short "filmic postcards" depicting sceneries, customs, and daily life in Japan, which were later distributed in a Europe eager to see new views of exotic lands and its people. One of these films was about one-minute long *Japanese sword fencing* (*Escrime au sabre japonais*, 1897), shot in Kyoto during a *kenjutsu* training warm-up. When the first Japanese cameramen engaged in the filmmaking, the subjects they pursued – urban landscapes, geisha dances, theatrical performances – differed little from these chosen by their Western counterparts. Abé Mark Nornes observes that the films from the Lumière brothers catalogue tended to fit certain moulds, such as the family scene, the performer, the beautiful woman *etc.*, and the earliest films shot in Japan – by both foreign and local cameramen – constituted local variations of such formulas in which different culture filled the same general slot in the catalogue (Nornes 2003: 3). Soon Japanese film culture developed its own "general slot" in the form of films depicting sumo matches, which were shot *inter alia* by Tsuchiya Tsuneji and Konishi Ryō (Komatsu 1992: 237, McDonald 1994: 40).

Early Japanese film screening were often enriched by the application of extra-filmic elements. For example: when *Two People at Dōjō Temple* (*Ninin Dōjōji*, 1899, Shibata Tsunekichi) was exhibited at one of the *kabuki* theatres in August 1900, an impressive scenography – consisting of an

artificial valley and pond filled with fishes – was constructed in front of the screen, and while the film was projected an electric fan generated a cool breeze directed at the audience (Komatsu 1997: 177). Sumo films were often screened in accordance with this mode of presentation as exhibitors decorated their facilities, *benshi* – film narrators who accompanied projections – presented contestants and commented on the fight, while the members of the audience cheered for their favourites. Contemporary account on one of such screening from "Kyōto Shinbun" from February 1902 describes it as follows:

> "We see the figure of Umegaya the wrestler blown up to the size of the stage. The whole theatre is decked out like a real sumo tournament with colourful banners everywhere, and the *benshi* uses a megaphone to call out the announcements as if he were in a real stadium." (High 1984: 34)

Films depicting sumo matches were so popular that in 1910 a facility called Sumō-katsudō-kan – which sole purpose was to screen sumo films – was constructed in a Luna Park (*Runa pāku*), located in Asakusa, Tokyo's entertainment district. Popularity of sumo films may be attributed to sumo's revival after the period of crisis and – from the broader perspective – renewal of the interest in traditional martial arts under the influence of Japanese military successes in the First Sino-Japanese War (1894-5) and the Russo-Japanese War (1904-5) (Starecki 2006). Additionally there was also a more trivial reason: sumo tournaments were held twice a year, while films were screened all year round, on daily basis.

In contrast to sumo, neither traditional *kenjutsu* nor its modern incarnations were popular subjects of non-fiction films. Nonetheless, there was at least one attempt at recording swordsmanship on film and making its screening more appealing to the audience. At the premiere of *The Art of Shintō-style Sword Drama* (*Shintō-ryū kenbujutsu sugekimi*, 1908) – a film depicting the sword dance performed by Hibino Raifu, the founder of the Shintō-ryū school of swordsmanship – while the film was projected Hibino himself stood in front of the screen and recited Chinese poems (Komatsu 1992: 246). That, however, does not mean that Japanese cinema-goers were reluctant to see sword fight. On the contrary – fictional films with that kind of content were highly popular. It seems that the audiences were simply more interested in fanciful duels in *kyūha* films (literally: "old school", period films derived initially from *kabuki* and later from *kōdan*), than in realistic depictions of swordsmanship techniques in non-fiction films.

Cinema, sport and socio-political transformations of Japan

Despite the tremendous popularity of non-fiction sumo films in the early 20th century, sport was absent from Japanese fictional films until well into the 1920s. One may argue that inclusion of sport elements into fictional films was not compatible with idiosyncrasies and production policy of the nascent Japanese movie industry oriented toward production of generic period dramas and *shinpa* melodramas. Only after a new breed of Japanese filmmakers turned their attention to everyday life, experiences, aspirations, and problems of the audiences did sport gradually become more visible in films and started to play a more important in their narratives. One of the main factors of this change of approach toward filmmaking was the influence of Kido Shirō, head of Shōchiku's Kamata studios, who – after he was appointed to this position in 1924 – insisted on making films "directly connected to the actual lives of contemporary people" (Miyao 2013: 55) or, as he phrased it, "[about] people just like you and me" (Richie 2005:47). Shōchiku was a cradle of *shomin-geki* ("common people drama"), a broad genre that focused on a daily lives of average citizens, usually members of the lower-middle class, and frequently employed a slice-of-life technique. Because of this approach *shomin-geki* films, as well as films belonging to its derivative (sub)genres – quite often depicted sport activities or featured sport-related elements (equipment, facilities, photos *etc*.). Shortly after Kido was appointed as head of Kamata studios Ushihara Kiyohiko laid the foundations for the development of so-called *supotsu-mono* (sport films) in which he later specialized (Anderson, Richie 1982: 51, Wada-Marciano 2003: 63).

It is important to emphasize the sport was seldom – if ever – the key component of Japanese films of the period discussed in this article, at least not in the way of Western sport films which tend to focus on sporting competitions, rivalry between two contestants or teams, and their training. Depending on the filmmaker's preferences sport could serve – among other things – as an additional attraction to the film, as a way to establish the social environment in which a film's action took place or to enrich the characterization of a protagonist, and as a means for providing the film with additional meaning. However, regardless of its particular function(s) in a narrative, as well as whether it was positioned in the foreground, in the background or only had "cameo role", sport was above all a clear indicator of the cultural transformation of Japan.

After they turned their attention to the lives of their contemporaries, Japanese filmmakers were relatively quickly to realize – and testify – that

the postulate of separation of modernization from Westernization might have worked in theory, but was hard – if at all possible – to achieve in the real world. Films produced in the late 1920s and 1930s depicted an urban Japan that was largely Occidentalized: people dressed in Western fashion, streets and cafes full of *modan gāru* (modern, independent, and supposedly sexually liberated women), imported consumer good piling up in shop windows, jazz music coming from apartments and clubs, crowded cinema theatres, and modern sport disciplines. Some filmmakers greeted these changes benevolently, while others approached them with a greater degree of reflection, and pointed out their possible negative aspects, such as deepening of generational differences, dissolution of family structures, and lack of compatibility between traditional and modern values. In doing so they frequently employed the expressive rhetorical-stylistic figure of juxtaposing two contrastive models of femininity: overtly westernized and "traditional". Of course, the latter – hence the quotation marks – was a modern intellectual construct, an "invented tradition", based on the qualities attributed to "traditional woman" by the dominant discourse of that period. Thus "traditional" women depicted on screens were in fact quite modern, at least in comparison to the women of the Edo and early Meiji periods.

Even though the authorities had a fairly clear vision of which Western elements should be eliminated from Japan, and acted against them legally, especially after Japan embarked on the path of war – for example: in 1939 cosmetics were banned as unnecessary luxury, in 1940 university teachers were forbidden to use the Bible in classroom as it was perceived as harmful to the moral education of the Japanese, in 1941 movie theatres were forbidden to screen American and British movies, and in 1942 broadcasting of "enemy music" was prohibited – their attitude toward sport was somewhat schizophrenic. On the one hand, modern western sport disciplines were considered somewhat undesirable, as discordant with the Japanese tradition, on the other hand, through, there was a strong tendency to "Japanize" them, by including them into the discourse of a "national essence" and filling them with the "spirit of *budō*". It was concluded that they may serve Japan if the competitive aspect and individualism were eliminated and replaced with collectivism and a self-cultivation ethos. At the same time traditional *budō* was promoted as the best way of fostering the spirit of self-abandonment and devotion to the nation-state (Inoue 1998: 89-90). The 1928 Summer Olympics in Amsterdam proved that the Western sport disciplines have a huge potential in the development of imagined "Japaneseness". Japanese representation had its first big success

in the international sport arena by winning five medals, including two gold, and setting a new world record in the 200-meter breaststroke. At the end of the Olympic Games Japan occupied 15th position in the medal classification, being better than countries such as Austria, Norway, Poland, New Zealand and Spain. "Tōkyō Asahi Shimbun", one of the leading Japanese newspapers, wrote:

> "People were yelling <<Banzai!>> from the spectator stands when the two runners stood together for photographers. The other countries' reporters rushed toward us and asked to shake our hands. These Japanese runners embodied the Japanese spirit, demonstrating that Japanese resilience and power can win over the world, even though their bodies are small." (Wada-Marciano 2008: 62)

Strategies of Employing Sport Motives in Japanese Cinema of the Late 1920s and Early to Mid-1930s

In my opinion it is possible to distinguish at least three strategies of employing sport motives in Japanese cinema of the late 1920s and 1930s: 1) neutral observation in which modern sports are presented as one of the aspects of socio-cultural transformations of Japan, 2) introduction of more or less elaborate sport motives into the narratives of films in which sport does not play a dominant role but which attempt to comment on social reality, 3) utilisation of sport motives as purely symbolical devices. Of course this is not a classification but a typology, as there are films which employ strategies that could be identified as intermediate forms of those mentioned above.

The first strategy is best exemplified by two early works of Ozu Yasujirō – *Days of Youth* (*Gakusei romansu: Wakaki hi*, 1929) and *I Flunked, But…* (*Rakudai wa shita keredo*, 1930), both student comedies inspired by the films of Ernst Lubitsch and Harold Lloyd. Refraining from valorising socio-cultural changes that took place in Japan, Ozu simply shows how important a part of the lives of contemporary youth Western popular culture and leisure activities were. Among its indicators are foreign movie magazines read by the characters, and the walls covered with photos of Western movie stars and film posters – in *Days of Youth* it is a poster for the *7th Heaven* (1927, Frank Borzage), while in *I Flunked, But…* one for the *Charming Sinners* (1929, Robert Milton). Another element of everyday experiences of Japanese youth depicted in these films is modern sport.

Day of Youth and *I Flunked, But…* differ drastically in terms of importance of sport elements – while in the latter they are relegated to the background, in the former they are showcased. In the opening panning shot of Tokyo University the viewer is able to see a sports stadium in which the match is played. In the later part of the film the protagonist gazes at the shop window where various sports equipment is displayed, which clearly demonstrates the popularity of Western sport disciplines in contemporary Japanese society. A large part of the movie takes place on the slopes of Akakura, where the protagonists enjoy skiing, which was popular activity among the young intelligentsia. Besides signalizing certain social trends, the employment of skiing in the film's narrative was also functional, as it allowed Ozu to experiment with certain film techniques (dynamic editing, panoramic shots, point of view shots) and to construct a series of slapstick gags, based on the pranks between the two main characters that resulted from their rivalry – not in sport but in love. As the humour in *I Flunked, But…* has a different basis, sport is not featured extensively and its rare appearances are brief, yet they still indicate that sport was an integral part of student's lives.

Both films demonstrate that interest in sport of Japanese youth was not limited to engaging in it at an amateur level as a leisure activity. Various elements of these films suggest that the characters are sports fans, engaged in supporting both their school teams and professional athletes. The images of sportsmen in photos and on posters and shot where one of the students is reading a sport magazine suggest the rise of new heroes of mass imagination. It is also worth noting that the discipline presented in *I Flunked, But…* is baseball. This is quite important as baseball was at that time – and still is – tremendously popular in Japan, and as such was frequently depicted in films. Baseball established its popularity in the late 19th century. One of the factors that certainly contributed to this was its egalitarian character. Another one – which flattered Japanese national pride – was the series of victories of Tokyo's First Higher School's (*Daiichi Kōtō Gakkō*, a.k.a *Ichikō*) baseball team over the Yokohama Athletic Club that accepted only white members (Klein 1997: 79-80).

The second of the aforementioned strategies of employing sport motifs into films was successfully adapted by Shimazu Yasujirō, one of the pioneers of *shomin-geki*. He utilised a sport motif as early as 1923 when he directed *Father* (*Otosan*, a.k.a. *Chichi*), a light-hearted comedy about a baseball champion and a country girl, which allowed him to contrast the mentalities of urban and rural Japan, and – as some film scholars argue – expose class

differences characteristic of that period (Richie 2005: 46). However, it is a film he made over a decade later that is of particular interest here.

Our Neighbour, miss Yae (*Tonari no Yae-chan*, 1934) focuses on a few days in the lives of two middle-class families living in the Tokyo suburbs. Although the film features a quite elaborate sport motif – as one of the film premises is Seiji's preparation for a baseball competition under the guidance of his older brother – it does not dominate the narrative. Due to the adoption of the slice-of-life technique four scenes depicting baseball-related activities – two of training, one of a match, and one of what appears to be purely recreational play – comfortably blend in with other scenes to present a holistic view on the daily life of "average" Japanese citizens (quotation mark due to the fact that they are representatives of certain social strata). The images appearing on the screen could be characterized as "the New Japan in a nutshell" – young protagonists wear western clothes, study foreign languages, visit commerce districts and cinemas (in one scene they watch one of the Betty Boop animation shorts), and do sports, and the *Red River Valley* song can be heard in the background.

What differentiates *Our Neighbour, miss Yae* from previously discussed films by Ozu – apart from the social environment in which the action takes place and general tone – is that Shimazu does not limit himself to chronicling the social transformations of Japan, but also comments on them. Yet even though he points out such issues as generational differences, especially in the approach toward gender roles and the institution of marriage, he remains an optimist – although the parents may find it hard to understand their daughter, they take it with a smile. In terms of the subject of this article the match scene which appears near the end of the film is of particular interest, as it shows that the authorities were unable to fully realise their ambitions concerning important sports – although they certainly developed the habit of self-cultivation they were still marked by a competitive spirit and, above all, they were perceived by youth not as a form of physical and spiritual development but as entertainment.

One may argue that the constatation of failure of national sport policy is also present in the *Children in the Wind* (*Kaze no naka no kodomo*, 1937, Shimizu Hiroshi), the first part of a dylogy of children's films based on the novels of Tsubota Jōji. In one of the scenes the young protagonists – Zenta and Senpai – play with their father, pretending that they are participating in a sumo match. Yet this "match" is nothing like the spiritual ceremony as the authorities would like to see it, but a chaotic scramble. Moreover, their father does not treat sumo as an element of a moral education, but as a way to create and maintain a close relationship with his children and to

entertain them. While discussing this film it is worth mentioning another scene in which the brothers play, pretending that they are taking part in the Olympic Games and acting the out the swimming competition with Zenta acting as a speaker, who first presents the contestants and later commentates on the race. Besides being humorous and providing audiences with a few laughs, this scene clearly illustrates the broad diffusion of interest in water sports after the Japanese success at the Amsterdam Summer Olympics.

Films belonging to the *supotsu-mono* genre did not limit themselves – as in a case of numerous Western sport films – to the depiction of training and competition, but often openly referred to social issues. This approach is best exemplified by *Why do the Youth Cry?* (*Wakamono yo naze naku ka*, 1930, Ushihara Kiyohiko), which focus on the events of lives of two friends coming from radically different social backgrounds. The first – Shigeru – is a young sport stars who leaves his rich family along with his "traditional" sister, as the cannot stand their overly westernized, hedonistic stepmother. The second is a left-wing journalist and political activist born into a working class family, who accuses Shigeru's father – who is a cabinet minister – of accepting a bribe. Although some critics accused the film of being conformists – as it features a happy ending in which Shigeru's family is reconciled and his father clears himself of bribery charge, which suggests that the internal contradictions and social problems of modern Japan can be resolved without carrying out systematic changes – it clearly illustrates the tendency of sport genre films to address socio-political issues (for extensive discussion of this film and its social-political context see Wada-Marciano 2008: 62-75).

As I mentioned before certain films employ sport motives in a way that situates them somewhere in between two of the three strategies I have distinguished. Such is the case of Ozu's exceptional *The Lady and the Beard* (*Shukujo to hige*, 1931). On the one hand, sport motif is utilised symbolically, yet, on the other, it constitutes an integral part of a narrative that helps to complement the character of the protagonist and to maintain the casual relationship between certain scenes. What differentiates this film from *Days of Youth* and *I Flunked, but…* is that this time Ozu went beyond the role of chronicler and commented on the changes that had occurred in Japan. *The Lady and the Beard* is a humorous discussion on Japanese modernity from the perspective of – as Krzysztof Loska aptly characterizes him – "a modern conservative" (Loska 2009: 193).

The plot focuses on the adventures of a hard-headed traditionalist and martial arts practitioner, who finds it hard to adjust to modern Japan and

whose lush beard – which serves as a one of the symbols of his yearning for the good old times – makes it impossible for him to find a job. By applying the popular device of contrastive visions of femininity – a modest, "traditional" girl vs. modern, demonic, yet somehow appealing *femme fatale* – Ozu presents highly stereotyped alternatives for future Japan, depending on which path it would embarked on. However, unlike the radical conservatives he does not advocate an unconditional return to "tradition" as a remedy for problems posed by modernity. Firstly, he treats the *femme fatale* with a certain degree of sympathy and allows her to change her ways, which does not necessarily mean that she has to stop wearing Western fashion or visiting to cafes. Secondly, his depiction of a conservative protagonist is satirical. Ozu reveals his intentions as early as the opening scene, where, by presenting a *kendō* competition in a slapstick manner, he strips this marital art from the splendour and philosophical depth with which it was associated with in the nationalistic discourse. What is more, in one of later scenes he depicts another derivative of traditional Japanese swordsmanship – the sword dance – in an equally satirical manner. It is also worth noting that the protagonist is, in fact, quite modern, as in many respects his traditionalism and conservatism draws from attitudes of late-19th century Japan. His vision of ideal femininity is close to the idea of "good wife, wise mother" (*ryōsai kenbo*) and among his "role models" presented on various photographs are Abraham Lincoln, Karl Marx, and Lev Nikolayevich Tolstoy. This clearly shows that clear-cut binary opposition of "traditional" vs. "modern" is not sufficient to properly describe social attitudes and discursive practices of that period.

Ozu was by no means the only Japanese filmmaker of that period who associated the psychological traits of characters with the sports they practiced. A similar approach can be found in Shimizu's sequel to *Children in the Wind – Four Seasons of Children* (*Kodomo no shiki*, 1939). The association of the young brother's grandfather with *kyūjutsū*, though brief, as he is seen with a bow for about two minutes, is of great significance. It perfectly complements the image of a man of a bygone era, a proponent of a traditional family model based on rigid hierarchy, but also one of high moral standards, especially when compared to his Westernized associate who embodies brutal capitalism at its worst.

The strategy of employing sport motif as a purely symbolical device was brilliantly applied by Mizoguchi's Kenji's in *Tokyo March* (*Tōkyō kōshin-kyoku*, 1929). Mizoguchi used the melodramatic formula as a pretext to expose profound social-economic disproportions that characterized modern urban Japan. A combination of effective cuts, *benshi* narration, intertitles,

and a melancholic song sung by Satō Chikayo, creates a striking contrast between the entertainment and commerce districts, such as Ginza or Asakusa, and the industrial parts of the capital "covered in smoke and dust", whose inhabitants, instead of indulging in carefree consumption struggle to survive. This explicit thesis is complemented by an extremely intense tennis scene. At the beginning of this scene the camera follows a tennis match played by four friends, which seems like another neutral observation of the one of the popular leisure activities devoid of any ethical connotations. At one point the tennis ball lands outside the court on a lower level. At the players' request a young girl living there tries to throw the ball back over the fence – a symbolic social barrier between the urban underclass and the upper class. Despite her efforts she is unable to do so. Fascinated by the girl's beauty one of the friends takes her photo with a camera – yet another symbol of wealth and social status. This brief contact between two social worlds comes to an end and the friends return to their joyful activities.

Although both Ozu in *The Lady and the Beard* and Mizoguchi in *Tokyō March* added a certain "surplus of meaning" to sport-related scenes, there are important differences between their approaches. In the case of Ozu's film the sport theme was used to highlight certain psychological traits of the main character and to introduce a number of scenes related to his interest in martial arts, which, in turn, led to other scenes – hence the sport motif is functional for the narrative. Mizoguchi, on the other hand, utilised the sport motif solely as a platform for social commentary. The choice of a tennis match as a way to contrast modern Japanese haves and have-nots was arbitrary as the analogical though could have been expressed in many other ways, by depicting one of many other –non-sport-related – aspects of big city life.

Sport in War-Time Cinema: Conformity and Contestation

With the gradual extension of state control over the Japanese movie industry – which culminated in the promulgation of the 1939 Film Law (*Eiga-hō*) and the articulation of the idea of so-called "national cinema" (*kokumin eiga*) and "national policy films" (*kokusaku eiga*) that expressed the "Japanese spirit" unspoiled by Western influences (*ibid.* 283-300) – Japanese authorities obtained the means to present on the screens their vision of the world. During the war, Japanese filmmakers, regardless of the subject of their films, were left with two options. They could adapt to the requirements imposed on them and at best – if they were not characterized by a total indifference – introduce into the films, consistent with national

policy, themes in which they were particularly interested (as in the case of Ozu's war-time films), or engage in a dangerous game with the authorities by infusing their works with subversive elements.

Kursawa Akira chose the first option. His *Judo saga* dylogy (*Sugata Sanshirō*, 1943; *Zoku Sugata Sanshirō*, 1945) – although its first part was strongly criticized by the Imperial Army's Media Section for its too Western style and content, and was released only after Ozu's intercession (Richie 1990: 39) – can be perceived as a panegyric to the values attributed to the martial arts, and – at least to some extent – as a symbolic lecture on Japan's foreign policy. Hiroshi Shimizu – though he later made his share of *kokusaku eiga* with *Sayon's Bell* (*Sayon no kane*, 1943) – took the opposite approach. His *A Star Athlete* (*Haganata senshu*, 1937), which premiered only three months after the outbreak of the Second Sino-Japanese War, focuses on a student's two-day march in the rural countryside which constitutes a part of their military exercise. On a surface level Shimizu's film contains all the elements that the authorities wished to see in such type of film, as it associates sport with military drill, depicts the joy of being conscripted and popular support for the institution of military, and the its moral could be summarized in words: "No matter how good you are individually, it is the group that comes first" (Burch 1979, 249). Despite all these elements – or maybe thanks to them – *A Star Athlete* is a charmingly subversive film. Although students sing militaristic songs – from which one can learn that even though the enemies outnumber them they are like sheep without a shepherd – they do it in an ironic way. Moreover, they seem to be more interested in girls and individual sport competition than in enhancing military skills. Last but not least – they argue which one of them more resembles Gary Cooper in his role in *Morocco* (1930, Josef von Sternberg).

A Star Athlete was made before the promulgation of the 1939 Film Law which introduced pre-production censorship in addition to pre-existing post-production censorship – from now on all scripts had to be approved by Home Ministry's censors before the shooting even began. Thus its creators were in much better position in terms of creative freedom than filmmakers working under the constrains of restrictive law. Until the end of the war sports and physical exercises were depicted – in both dramatic and documentary films – almost exclusively as a tool for physical and spiritual development and in the context of their benefits for military and industry. Yamamoto Kajirō's *The War at Sea from Hawaii to Malaya* (*Hawai Mare oki kaisen*, 1942) Watanabe Kunio's *Toward the Decisive Battle in the Sky* (Kessen no Ozora e, 1943) are the best examples of films that stress the

importance of physical education in military training. The former contains elaborate scenes of physical exercises, sumo training and rugby match. Watanabe's film goes one step further – one of its main plot point concerns sickly boy who overcomes his weakness under the influence of group of fit, strong, and dedicated cadets. *The Most Beautiful* (*Ichiban utsukushiku*, 1944), second Kurosawa's film, presents sport as a mean of building up strength, stamina, and morale of young members of the Women's Labor Volunteer Corps working at the lens factory in Hiratsuka by juxtaposing scenes of volleyball matches with girl's other activities, and – most notably – charts depicting constant raise in production. Yet, film's approach toward sports is not completely utilitarian as – apart from sequence of temporary crisis – girls are depicted as if they were genuinely enjoying the game.

Post Scriptum

From their introduction into Japan sport and cinema were entangled in the socio-political discourse(s) related to the processes of modernization, westernization, and militarization. Japan's defeat in the Pacific War and its subsequent occupation by Allied Forces led to yet another series of fundamental socio-political transformations. Post-war Japan did not release cinema or sports from their service to state and society – it just assigned them a new set of tasks. This, however, is a subject for a separate article.

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