6. Third World, First World: Ishihara Yūjirō as a Cold War Star

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Abstract
This chapter examines Ishihara Yūjirō, a “national” or kokuminteki celebrity, as a Cold War star. Following his debut in 1956, the Kobe-born actor achieved instant fame by portraying a range of manly and masculine characters for Nikkatsu Studio and Ishihara Promotion, Inc. The so-called "Yūjirō films" began by presenting Japan as a developing Third World nation in the mid to late 1950s but over time boasted their rise in status by engaging the United States and Western Europe. By the early 1970s, Ishihara's Japan was a full-fledged member of the First World. The image and persona of the iconic star did not merely address "domestic" concerns but exemplified a desire for "uplift" within the tense geopolitics of the Cold War.

Keywords: Japan, international, transnational, US-Japan relations, Nikkatsu, Ishihara Promotion

Ishihara Yūjirō was a Japanese icon. Following his debut on the big screens in 1956, the Kobe-born actor not only became a leading star in the movie business but also achieved widespread fame as a singer, television actor, and content producer of his own independent talent company. Without a doubt, he was one of the most popular celebrities in post-World War II Japan. In this chapter, I examine how this “national” or kokuminteki star engaged Cold War geopolitics. Through a selective study of his big-screen narratives from the mid-1950s to the early 1970s, I specifically explore how Ishihara served to present changing representations of Japan from being a developing Third World nation alongside much of the non-Western world to becoming an industrialized First World country that emulated...
the United States and Western Europe. By demonstrating Ishihara’s active interplay with international geopolitics (both as a person and as a representation), I wish to show the ways in which his cinematic narratives helped form a Japan that was “uplifted” from Third World to First World.

This chapter will highlight a cultural figure who has surprisingly eluded full scholarly analysis. In treating Ishihara as a “Cold War star,” it aims to illustrate the internationality and transnationality of Japanese cinema, and also seeks to recast the narrative of contemporary Japan. Even though much of East and Southeast Asia became quickly embroiled in political, economic, military, and cultural strife after World War II, the Japanese public and Japanese scholars have primarily looked at the past eight decades through the lens of the “postwar” (sengo), which emplaces their home country in a world “after” and even “beyond” military conflict. By viewing Ishihara through a Cold War lens, this chapter joins a small but growing number of studies that situates “postwar” Japan in relation to the dangerous global conflict. Through an analysis of how Ishihara’s narratives operated between the Third and First Worlds, I will show how the Cold War was not simply imposed on Japan by the outside world but was also shaped by Japan’s own agendas and initiatives.

* Following Japanese convention, the names of Japanese individuals in this chapter will be presented surname first.

1 This chapter relies on Odd Arne Westad’s definition of the “Third World” as “former colonial or semicolonial countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America that were subject to European (or rather pan-European, including American and Russian) economic or political domination.” See Westad, The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 3.


3 The discrepancy between “postwar” and “Cold War” is stated, for example, in Carol Gluck, “The ‘End’ of the Postwar: Japan at the Turn of the Millennium,” Public Culture 10, no. 1: 1–23.

Japan and/as/above the Third World

Although often heralded as a “national” star, Ishihara Yūjirō was a hybrid subject. Born in 1934 in the international port city of Kobe and raised in two other cities by the ocean—Otaru and Hayama—he came of age in a liminal and fluid space in which he observed ships, foreigners, and the global flow of goods from a young age. His father, a shipping company executive, not only taught his son how to swim but also told him “stories about deals and negotiations with foreigners” and the “atmospheres of the harbors overseas.” In the years after World War II, Ishihara became an avid listener of English-language radio broadcasts, aired for US occupationaires. In time, he became an unusually tall young man with a tan obtained at the beach. People at the time commonly regarded him as Nihonjin banare, or a person whose looks seemed to transcend a “normal” Japanese person.

For Nikkatsu Studio, which was struggling to secure on-screen stars in the months after resuming its filmmaking in 1954, Ishihara’s “exotic” masculinity was an attraction. When the studio’s executives negotiated with his older brother Shintarō, a budding novelist who would later become known for his right-wing politics as governor of Tokyo, to make the film version of his award-winning novel Season of the Sun (Taiyō no kisetsu, film released in 1956), they hired the younger brother to play a supporting role. In this controversial film that depicted spoiled, delinquent youths engaging in reckless acts, Ishihara left a strong impression and was enlisted to star in a follow-up film, Crazed Fruit (Kurutta kajitsu, 1956). These, together with a few other narratives, generated instant notoriety and came to be known as Sun Tribe or Taiyōzoku films, which portrayed defiant youths under the heavy influence of American/Western culture, as they hung out in sun-kissed beaches—sometimes dating foreign women—and chiaroscuro-lit nightclubs where Westerners were regularly present. In both Season of the Sun and Crazed Fruit, Okada Masumi, a half-Danish actor, makes an appearance as a fellow rebel and helps construct an “exotic” feel within the youth community. From his debut, Ishihara is presented as part of a liminal, transnational setting.

These Taiyōzoku narratives helped revive Nikkatsu’s fortunes as a top Japanese studio. Ishihara became the centerpiece of the company’s production.

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6 Ishihara Yūjirō, Kuden waga jinsei no ji (Tokyo: Shufu to seikatsusha, 2003), 37.
and marketing, as its stock directors including Inoue Umetsugu, Kurihara Koreyoshi, Masuda Toshio, and Ushihara Yōichi took turns to churn out so-called “Yujiro films” (Yūjirō eiga) almost every month. Many of these narratives became part of Nikkatsu’s mukokuseki eiga or nationality-less films, which jumbled together a kaleidoscope of transnational representations. What is striking about the mukokuseki meta-genre is not just the influence of the US and Western Europe—a topic to which I shall return shortly hereafter—but also the prominence of the developing world. Ishihara’s emergence in the entertainment industry coincided with the decolonization of non-Western territories, the drive towards non-alignment, and the quest for global human rights. Interestingly, some of his early narratives present Japan within the rubric of the Third World, which Ishihara referred to as kōshikoku or a “backward country.”

Lunar Eclipse (Gesshoku, 1956) serves as a case in point. In this noir tale, Ishihara, the boxer, vies for the affection of a nightclub singer (Tsukioka Yumeji), who is also pursued by a rich Filipino, performed once again by the “exotic” Okada. The entanglement provokes the Japanese boxer to beat up the booze-drinking Filipino, but the former later dies after a fatal match on the ring, and the latter ends up shooting her in the end. I am Waiting (Ore wa matteru ze, 1957) exemplifies a desire to move across non-Western regions as Ishihara, a former boxer who runs a dingy eatery, expresses his eagerness to head for Brazil, where he believes his older brother lives, though he is ultimately stuck in Kobe’s seamy spaces. In Sea Bastards (Umi no yarō domo, 1957), Ishihara the foreman shepherds a group of dockworkers to collect scrap metal from embarked vessels. The ship they board is of Greek origin and carries black and Middle Eastern workers. In the hands of director Shindō Kaneto, who would actively pursue independent filmmaking throughout his long-lasting career, Ishihara’s men initially clash with the foreign workers but soon cultivate a lasting friendship with them. The non-Japanese crew expresses a spirit of revolutionary independence, which is depicted with grainy newsreel footage. Ishihara and his workers begin to identify with this budding Third World movement.

Yet if these films do present Japan as a “backward” Third World country, Ishihara’s characters strive to situate Japan above it. This is specifically done by playing up Ishihara’s manliness and sex appeal over Asian and

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10 See, for example, Mark Schilling, No Borders No Limits: Nikkatsu Action Cinema (Godalming: FAB Press, 2007); Watanabe, Nikkatsu akushon no karei na sekai.
11 Ishihara, Kōden waga jinsei no ji, 102.
non-Western women. In *Storm over Arabia* (*Arabu no arashi*, 1961), Ishihara’s character decides to travel to Egypt, following his dead grandfather’s advice to explore the world. Along the way, he helps a nationalist movement that is feminized through the appearance of the Egyptian actress Shadia, whom Ishihara once described off-screen as an “exotic beauty.” In the film, Ishihara, upon arriving in Egypt for the first time, opines that Cairo is a “more modern city than expected” before assisting the Egyptian woman’s efforts to recover a microfilm concealed in a necklace. Here, Ishihara sympathizes with a subaltern movement that would eventually win its independence. Here we see the adaptation of a gendered Orientalist construction, which has often operated within a binary structure sustained by a masculinized West and feminized East.

A similar gender dynamic could be seen in *Rainbow over Kinmon* (*Kinmon tō ni kakeru hashi*, 1962). Co-produced by Nikkatsu and Taiwan’s Central Picture Cooperation, the film is set in the backdrop of the Korean War and the Second Taiwan Straits Crisis. Ishihara, who regards the Korean War as a “blood-smelling war” (*chinamagusai sensō*), is a principled doctor who quits his job at a hospital after it tries to cover up a misdiagnosis that led to the death of a patient. While attending to injured soldiers from Korea, he meets a Taiwanese woman named Li Chun (Hua Xin), whose husband had died in the war. Later, Ishihara becomes a ship doctor who sails the seas for three years before disembarking at Kinmon (Jinmen), an island which the Chinese Communist Party had been shelling for some time. There, he accidentally reunites with Li Chun, and they fall in love even though Ishihara had been pursued by a Japanese lover.

The decision Ishihara makes in choosing Li Chun as his romantic partner helps present Taiwan as a feminine space in need of protection by a manly authority. Unfortunately, Taiwanese men are incapable of serving that role, as they themselves depend on Ishihara for self-preservation. One could see this when the Japanese hero uses his own body to shield Li Chun’s younger brother from an explosion, or when he helps treat the injured local villagers. Ishihara even assists Li Chun’s father, who severely hurt his leg during World War II thanks to the Japanese. Ishihara extends his leadership to the villagers under the justification that he himself was a victim of the war, having lost his parents in China and in the air raids initiated by the United States. As a “postwar subject” who is not directly culpable for Japan’s imperial aggression, Ishihara expresses his country’s desired course of leadership

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against communist China. In the end, when an explosion kills Li Chun, Ishihara caresses her, uttering *yamero yamero*—stop stop! He sympathizes with Taiwan against communist China, not with guns and weapons, but with words and moral leadership.

**Engaging the First World**

The Yūjiro films that presented Japan as the Third World and above the Third World emerged alongside a cluster of others that engaged the West. This connection centered around the United States. Although Japan and the United States had already cultivated close cultural ties in the prewar era, their intimacy deepened considerably during the Occupation Era (1945–1952), which increasingly turned anticommunist thanks to the “reverse course.” This shift in Occupation policy prioritized economic reconstruction over earlier attempts to democratize Japan, ushered in a “Red Purge” of communists and their sympathizers, and led to the founding of the National Police Reserve (which would become the Self-Defense Forces in 1954). US-Japan relations strengthened under the Cold War rubric. By the time Ishihara first appeared on the screens, the Occupation had ended but US commodities and norms and values were pouring into the market to the extent that “[t]he middle-class ‘American way of life,’” according to Marylin Ivy, “became the Utopian goal and the dream of many Japanese.” This trend would continue as the nation sustained “high-speed economic growth”—one marked by 10 percent annual growth between the mid-1950s and the early 1970s.

Nikkatsu reinforced Japan’s intimacy with the United States in part by way of music. Even though Ishihara would become famous for his countless *kayōkyoku* songs or “popular ballads,” some of his early films would utilize the star’s vocal cords in light-hearted musicals that invoked Hollywood’s popular hits (both in Japan and the US), such as *An American in Paris* (1951) and *Singin’ in the Rain* (1952). One example of this was *Three Tomboys: The Dancing Sun* (*Otenba sannin musume: Odoru taiyō*, 1957), a tale of three sisters who, in daydreaming about romance and marriage (one hopes to find a “boyfriend who looks like James Dean”), comically search for a husband.

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for their widowed mother. As the boy next door, Ishihara, together with two other single buddies, performs a number that gripes about older, gray-haired men who seem to have their way with younger women. In *Birth of Jazz Sister* (*Jazz musume tanjō*, 1957), Ishihara is a member of a musical troupe, sharing the stage with popular singer Eri Chiemi. He appears in a show with a guitar on a set resembling a Western saloon, dances in a pier with a Mexican sombrero, and flirts with Eri wearing a tuxedo in front of an opulent fountain.

In integrating songs and music into plot and narrative, Nikkatsu endeavored to encode Ishihara with “jazz” or *jazu*, which in the early postwar years encompassed a “considerably broad [range of] musical styles” including boogie-woogie, be-bop, and swing. In *The Wonderful Guy* (*Subarashiki dansei*, 1958), a backstage musical that dramatizes the pursuit of marriage partners, Ishihara is a stage director who performs a mellow saxophone number at his sister’s wedding. In the more well-known *Man Who Causes a Storm* (*Arashi o yobu otoko*, 1957), the main instrument is the drums. A rugged man who often gets drawn into fist fights, Ishihara joins a band at a colorfully illuminated nightclub. Unlike the “soft” musicals released earlier, Ishihara, before breaking out into an impromptu song dubbed “I am a Drummer,” showcases his signature masculinity by aggressively pounding the instrument. He instantly gains the reputation as a “tough guy drummer,” beats a reigning rival in a drum competition, and reaches top stardom (before being roughed up by a band of villains). In *Love in Ginza* (*Ginza no koi no monogatari*, 1962), the Kobe-born star is a poor artist who shares a room with a jazz pianist (Jerry Fujio) who would play the film’s main theme. The plot is sandwiched by scenes in which the artist-protagonist spots a man on a balcony practicing the trumpet. One might read the scene as a metaphor of Japan’s “Americanization,” as the US musical genre appears to disseminate across the Japanese citiescape.

In the meantime, Nikkatsu also drew from Hollywood’s melodramatic formulas. One can see this in the company’s so-called “mood action” films, which offered a “blend of melodrama and action” that presents the hero and heroine as “mature adults” whose experiences and memories of the past would often shape the core line of action. A film that inspired the cultural transfer was *Casablanca* (1942), which the Japanese studio adapted to the

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17 Mike Molasky, *Sengo Nikō no jazu bunka: eiga bungaku angora* (Tokyo: Seidosha, 2005), 33. Molasky also argues that jazz was seen as “general popular music that entered from the United States.” See p. 51.

point of parody. For example, *Escape into Terror* (*Taiyō e no dasshutsu*, 1963) introduces Ishihara as a nightclub owner who alludes to Humphrey Bogart’s looks by donning a white suit with a bottle of Johnny Walker on the side. In *A World for Two* (*Futari no sekai*, 1966), the male protagonist returns to an elegant nightclub after spending five years overseas and rekindles his friendship with an African American pianist—just like Dooley Wilson’s “Sam.” The influence of the Warner Bros. film is even more blatant in *A Warm Misty Night* (*Yogiri yo konya mo arigatō*, 1967), in which Ishihara runs a nightclub in Yokohama while secretly helping those who wish to flee the country. The hard-boiled hero sips whiskey alone when his former fiancé (Asaoka Ruriko), who mysteriously abandoned him on the day of their wedding, appears in sight. Although now married to a revolutionary leader (Nitani Hideaki), she is still in love with Ishihara. However, the mood action hero, like Bogie at the Moroccan airfield, chooses to assist her escape with her husband. In a moment that invokes Bogart’s famous line about reclaiming their happy times in Paris (“we got it back last night”), Ishihara quips: “we recovered the 1,500 days and nights.”

The social setting of Yūjirō films widely varies by film, but it often underscores the presence and influence of America in Japan. In *Crimson Wings* (*Kurenai no tsubasa*, 1958), Ishihara, an English-speaking pilot working for a small airline company, mans a Cessna that is hijacked by a mobster seeking to escape abroad. The disappearance of the plane prompts a search by Japanese authorities, who contact the US military’s “search and rescue coordination center.” In *The Sky is Mine* (*Ten to chi o kakeru otoko*, 1959), a Japanese-American flight instructor is dispatched to Ishihara’s flight school and preaches “scientific” methods to Japanese students. Ishihara’s birth father, in *That Guy and I* (*Aitsu to watashi*, 1961), runs a successful hotel business in the US and urges his son to join him. In *Fresh Leaves* (*Wakai hito*, 1962), Ishihara is a schoolteacher who works at a Catholic girls’ school run by an American principal who expresses sympathy and support towards the teachers and the students. Before running a nightclub, the main character of *A Warm Misty Night* is a captain of an international passenger ship owned by American President Lines. In *Rub Out the Killers* (*Satsujinsha o kese*, 1964), Ishihara is hired to live as a double of a young heir of a shipping company after its president and vice president were lost in an accident. Since the young heir is an archaeologist living in the United States, the Nikkatsu star makes a dramatic entrance by “returning” to Japan on a Pan American jet liner and waxes eloquent about his time in North America.

In addition to the United States, Ishihara is also a bridge figure with Western Europe. In *For This We Fight* (*Machikara machi e tsumujikaze*, 1958),
1961), Ishihara's character goes to (West) Germany to receive training in medicine, which he practices once he returns to Japan. France receives its dues by being presented as a center of “high culture.” In The Man Who Rode the Typhoon (Fūsoku 40 mētoru, 1958), Ishihara is a college student who would later become involved in his father’s construction business. The sister of his friend is a chanson singer who had returned from Paris. While her elegant lifestyle and training in France were aided by a villainous boyfriend who seeks to take over her father’s construction company, she is drawn to Ishihara’s pure charm and crosses her lover. Her affiliation with France does not end by symbolizing Western decadence or corruption; instead, she pushes the plot in support of Ishihara’s cause. In The Cleanup (Arashi no yūsha tachi, 1969), three young women who work under a self-indulgent fashion designer (Hama Mie) steal a load of cash from a band of gangster men and leave for France to study fashion design.

**Becoming the First World**

Some Yūjirō films exemplified another level of intimacy with the First World. At a time when Japanese studios were beginning to seek entry into the global marketplace, Nikkatsu decided to dispatch Ishihara to American and European sites for its tent-pole productions. In the meantime, Ishihara himself would seek filmmaking both in and with the West by founding his own production company, Ishihara Promotion, Inc. These “First World films” were shot in US and European locations, involved offshore cast and crew, and expressed an urge to “even up” with the West. In other words, Ishihara’s image and persona in these films conveyed a desire for “uplift” from Third World to First World.

The first film that directly engaged the West was Love and Death (Sekai o kakeru koi, 1959). Based on a famous novel by Mushanokōji Saneatsu, this Nikkatsu narrative showcases a tragic romance between a hero (Ishihara) and a heroine (Asaoka Ruriko) throughout the time he spends abroad. Whereas the original story established the main character as a novelist, the film defines the protagonist as a modern international-style architect whose entry was chosen for the competition at the Italian Biennale. The architect’s “internationalism” is accentuated by the fact that his mother is the wife of a diplomat and his uncle lives in Sweden.

The internationality of the film is enhanced by location shooting. As the “first Japanese film that truly relied on European locations,” Love and Death has Ishihara the architect visit a slew of Western European
countries—France, Italy, Sweden, Denmark, West Germany, and Norway. With a 16mm camera in hand, he tours the major landmarks, from a “new” shopping center in Stockholm and Frogner Park in Oslo to the Arc de Triomphe in Paris. The narrative takes the form of a “tourist film” (kankō eiga) that introduces the foreign landscape to both the on-screen protagonist and the viewing public. The novelty value of these scenic sites was so great that Nikkatsu, while shooting the film, accumulated footage for a spinoff documentary on the star’s actual trip. That film, *Yūjirō in Europe* (Yūjirō Ōshū kakearuki, 1959), “elaborates” on *Love and Death* by having Ishihara rave about an overpass in Stockholm for being orderly or a bike road in Copenhagen for being well-run without chaos. In his first-person narration, Ishihara even wishes that Japan would adopt Denmark’s “public morals” (kōshū dōtoku) as his home country prepares for the 1964 Olympics.

Yet while seemingly in awe of Europe’s major landmarks, Ishihara never concedes or submits to Japan’s First-World allies. Rather, he boasts of Japan’s approximation to Western Europe. In *Yūjirō in Europe*, Ishihara is shown strolling down the streets of Paris, as his own voice narration touts his height as being on the “taller side” even among the Parisians alongside him. When showing the Eiffel Tower, the narrator does not fail to note that the French steel structure has become the “second tallest” in the world thanks to the newly erected Tokyo Tower. In the final scene, which captures the Swiss Alps, the film cuts to shots of the Japan Alps as well as Ginza’s cityscape, as the narrator concludes: “Japan is also wonderful.”

Likewise, *Love and Death* stresses the “wonderful”-ness of Japan. In a speech delivered before his friends, Ishihara’s character proclaims that “Japan is at the center of the world” and that he would venture to Europe so that he could “come home.” The architect reiterates this belief in Paris by stating the following: “Even though people who live in Paris for a long time say that they do not want to return to Japan, I want to return.” Unlike the “Third World narratives” in which the masculinized Japanese protagonist wields hegemonic influence over feminized non-Western subjects, Ishihara in *Love and Death* maintains his fidelity to Asaoka and communicates with her through an exchange of letters read in voiceovers. Throughout the film, the romance plot is confined to Japan’s ethno-national sphere, and no boundaries are “violated” with the Western world. As if to respond to his loyalty, Asaoka increasingly “turns Japanese” as she takes koto lessons, wears a kimono, watches a noh play, and prepares to become a “good wife, wise mother” (ryōsai kenbo).

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19 Satō, Ishihara Yūjirō: Shōwa taigō den, 133.
The urge to even up with the West also surfaces in *Man at the Bullfight* (*Tōgyū ni kakeru otoko*, 1960). Partly shot in Spain and France, the narrative develops around a *menage a trois* between a newspaper man (Ishihara), a stage actor (Kitahara Mie), and her banker-fiancé (Nitani Hideaki). In addition to actively shaping this romance plot, Ishihara furthers a “work plot” in which he strives to introduce Spanish bullfighting to Japan. Ishihara attempts this by pleading his case to a Spanish promoter (Alfonso Rojas) who had lost faith in the Japanese after an initial arrangement to bring live bullfighting to Japan was abruptly cancelled. Determined and undeterred, Ishihara visits Spain and France to chase down the promoter until finally securing an agreement. In their last encounter at the bull ring, the boss tells Ishihara: “You and only you had made it possible.” In forging the deal, the Japanese subject manages to earn the respect of a European ally.

Other studio films, especially ones made after the mid-1960s, attempt to present Japan explicitly on the side of the First—not Third—World. In *Pearl Necklace* (*Seishun daitōryō*, 1966), a song-and-dance film that was made through a collaboration with the talent agency Johnny’s, Ishihara lands in Australia to shoot on location, playing the character that works for a trade promotion association. Speaking fluent English, the protagonist takes part in an honest business with Australians while aiming to uncover a corruption scheme masterminded by a Japanese pharmaceutical company. Ishihara discovers that the drug company was exploiting a pot of money that was hidden during World War II, and his main mission is to prevent the company from illegally selling unapproved, harmful medicine to an unnamed Southeast Asian country. Ishihara’s mission here is to present Japan’s reciprocity with a First World partner and wield paternalistic “protection” over war-torn Third World subjects, which he refers to as “boys” or *shōnen*.

For Ishihara, working at Nikkatsu was highly rewarding, but he also became increasingly frustrated being on the studio’s “conveyor belt.” In 1962, Ishihara announced the founding of his own independent company, Ishihara Promotion, Inc. While agreeing to remain under the studio’s contract, he vowed to “create attractive new films with our own hands and advance them on a global scale,” particularly by co-producing films with the United States. As a way to begin this new venture, Ishihara chose to produce a film that exemplified his desire to engage the United States: *Alone Across the Pacific* (*Taiheiyō hitori bocchi*, 1963).

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Alone Across the Pacific is a story about the real-life adventurer Horie Kenichi, who crossed the Pacific Ocean on a yacht named the Mermaid. Dreaming of sailing the seas, and even feeling jealous at “foreigners who cross the sea or ride around the world on a small yacht or raft,” Ishihara travelled to Hawaii and California to film the oceanic adventure. With its press sheet highlighting the “growth of the tough guy Yūjirō,” the film pits a “confining” Japan (which, in the main character’s words, was a “country in chains” or sakoku) against the “free” and “open” Pacific Ocean. In the film, the Japanese mainland is represented with long shots of the industrial cityscape oozing with smoke and close-ups of workers and automobiles restlessly moving on the streets. These images help generate a contrast with multiple long shots of a tiny Mermaid floating in a sea of vivid blue.

It merits to note that Alone Across the Pacific establishes another dichotomy, one that presents Japan against the United States. The contrast is shown by having Ishihara’s tiny yacht encounter a large American vessel (amassing some 10,000 tons according to the press sheet) on his way to the US mainland. Upon reaching San Francisco, Ishihara crosses the Golden Gate Bridge, whose grandeur is showcased with shots from the top of the bridge overseeing the streaming traffic, in addition to a sea-level shot that captures the red steel structure with a handheld camera. Before landing on shore, the protagonist encounters a white yacht much bigger than his own. The imbalance of power is displayed in the size of the ships, the number of crew members (one versus five) and the camera angle, which positions the family in a higher position than Ishihara. The viewer particularly notices the gaze of a young boy in a striped shirt, jaws dropped, as he stares at the Japanese yachtsman from a higher vertical position.

Following the release of Alone Across the Pacific, Ishihara’s company would produce films on diverse topics, including castle-seizing during the Sengoku period (Taking the Castle/Shiro tori, 1965) and the construction of a major dam after World War II (The Sands of Kurobe/Kurobe no taiyō, 1968). But Ishihara’s desire to engage the First World remained strong. He thus would appear in 20th Century Fox’s The Magnificent Men in Their Flying Machines; Or, How I Flew from London to Paris in 25 hours and n Minutes (1965), for example. In 1971, the company released The Walking Major (Aru heishi no kake). In this narrative, the lead actor is a photographer following a US Army Major (Dale Robertson) who decides to march 1,300 kilometers to raise money for a run-down orphanage.

22 Ishihara, Waga seishun monogatari, 165.
Ishihara the photographer is skeptical of the Major's “benevolent” intentions, as he recalls witnessing him (accidentally) killing a young Korean couple some years prior. A flashback shows Robertson's battalion firing at a stack of firewood in an unnamed village, not knowing that hiding behind the stack is an innocent family. Ishihara, who arrives at the scene shortly thereafter, witnesses the damage and smacks the Major with his fist.

What triggers Ishihara’s actions is not just the death of the two Koreans but the appearance of their little boy, who starts crying aloud when he sees his dead parents. It then becomes clear that Ishihara's rage is directed at the Major's orphanning of an Asian Other, in ways that fiercely condemns this “ugly American.” In contrast to the San Francisco scene in Alone Across the Pacific, in which Ishihara is stared at from above by a Caucasian child, the civilian massacre scene in The Walking Major implicitly presents Japan’s elevated cultural status as the taciturn Japanese hero who deploys a paternalistic gaze at an infantilized Third World subject.

Yet while appearing to stand up to US military violence, Ishihara also deepens Japan’s alliance with the United States. The narrative reinforces the bilateral relationship by redeeming Robertson's humanism and intentions. This begins with Ishihara's realization that the Caucasian-looking US Major was part Native American. The skeptical photographer also learns that Robertson decided to conduct the charity walk to honor a wish made by a young boy at the orphanage. Over time, Ishihara comes to accept Robertson's brand of paternalism as the latter tries to atone for the mistake he made in Korea and genuinely seeks to build a permanent home for Japanese orphans. After completing his walk, the Major is cheered by children, teachers, and local residents. Though Ishihara, the photographer, does walk away from the celebration, he never elects to expose Robertson's dark past in Korea in spite of threatening to do so early on. The “walking major's” moral restoration is completed in Vietnam, upon which Ishihara offers his congratulations for the rebuilding of the orphanage. When the Major is killed in an ambush, the aggressor now becomes a victim of war. The film ends as Ishihara, following the footsteps of the “walking major,” marches forward, as if to carry the burden and responsibilities that the US Major had left for him.

The tense but respectful dynamic between Japan and the United States constitutes a major theme in Safari 5000 (Eikō e no 5000 km, 1970). In this film, Ishihara is a race car driver competing against an American car company that is attempting to penetrate the Japanese automobile market. Ishihara takes on this rivalry by joining Nissan's race team and traveling internationally on Japan Air Lines. Ishihara's character is no longer dependent on US technology but seems to compete with the industrialized world on a level playing field.
Interestingly, the playing field is more than bilateral. The main site of action is the East African Safari Rally, which began in 1953 as the East African Coronation Rally to celebrate the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II. Ishihara enters this colonial space as the only non-Western driver and eventually beats his Western rivals, including the United States, thanks to his tenacity and grit. His stoic masculinity also rewards his romantic aspirations. In the film, the race plot dovetails with a romantic subplot that involves Ishihara, his lover (Asaoka Ruriko), and her former boyfriend (Alain Cuny)—a prominent fashion designer in France. Although bothered by Ishihara’s obsession with auto racing, Asaoka, drawn to his manliness, chooses to be with the Japanese hero. In the end, the plot resolves with Ishihara’s personal and professional victory against the West. If the film begins by portraying Japan as an underdog, it ends by having Japan reach the pinnacle of the First World.

Ishihara’s identification with the First World occurs in tandem with an attempt to complete Japan’s separation from its Third World counterparts. This process is shown in a telling scene in which Ishihara’s car breaks down on the dirt road. As soon as it arrives, the repair crew quickly jacks up the vehicle to replace a car part. In this scene, the camera juxtaposes shots of the engineers fixing the vehicle with extreme close-ups of African children curiously staring at the technological marvel. Here, Japan and Africa are presented in a dichotomy of sorts, from the industrialized former to the primitive latter, from the brightness of the car’s silver fender to the darkness of the children’s skin color, and of course, Japan as First World versus Africa as Third World. During the shooting in Kenya, Ishihara recalled that one of the biggest challenges concerned the handling of “indigenous locals of undeveloped lands” who would “stare at us from the bushes” with a “single piece of cloth wrapped around their bodies.” Just as Ishihara the actor/producer employs an othering gaze towards Kenyan onlookers, the film presents Third World subjects as an exotic Other against Japan, which now seems to have gained bona fide membership in the First World club.

Conclusion

By the time The Walking Major and Safari 5000 appeared on the screens, Japan was at the tail end of a period of “high growth.” Rapid economic and

industrial development had turned the country into one of the wealthiest nations in the world. Ironically, the fortunes of Ishihara Promotion Inc. was heading in the opposite direction. Owing to unkind box office results, the company went into debt and teetered towards bankruptcy. Ishihara strove to revive his company’s fortunes by producing police dramas for television. *Bark at the Sun!* (*Taiyo ni hoero!, 1972–1986*), *Big City* (*Daitokai, 1976–1979*), and *Western Police* (*Seibu keisatsu, 1979–1984*) became successful hits that revitalized the company’s fortunes. But his health was quietly deteriorating. In 1984, Ishihara was diagnosed with liver cancer; and in 1987 he died at the age of 52.28

Ishihara Yūjirō did not exist in a local or national void. He was a transnational and international persona—in this chapter, I argued that he was a Cold War star. As a lead actor for Nikkatsu Studio, he began by appearing in films that identified Japan as a Third World nation and even identified with subaltern communities. But his films would increasingly position his own country above non-aligned states. In the meantime, Ishihara would also engage the First World through Nikkatsu’s effort to internationalize filmmaking and by utilizing his own production company. His characters expressed aspiration, engaged in competition, and sought respect and admiration from Western countries. Ishihara’s films urged Japan’s transformation from the Third World to the First World. They reveal a “quest for status” in a rapidly changing world.

Bibliography


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