



PROJECT MUSE®

Translating Prewar Culture into Film: The Double Vision of
Suzuki Seijun's Zigeunerweisen

Rachel DiNitto

The Journal of Japanese Studies, Volume 30, Number 1, Winter 2004,
pp. 35-36 (Article)

Published by Society for Japanese Studies

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/jjs.2004.0009>



➔ *For additional information about this article*

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/55098>

RACHEL DINITTO

Translating Prewar Culture into Film: The Double Vision of Suzuki Seijun's *Zigeunerweisen*

Abstract: Stylistically breaking from his 1960s Nikkatsu films, cult director Suzuki Seijun entered Japan's pre-World War II era with *Zigeunerweisen* (1980). Suzuki forgoes conventional narrative to set up a world of random associations and misleading mismatches and recreates the unevenness and double life of the culturally shifting prewar era. From his position in late postwar Japan, he questions the nature of representation and the discourse of authenticity surrounding history and culture in the 1920s and 1930s. His deliberateness in this comments on the process of representation, the function of nostalgia, and the definition of modernity itself, as Suzuki translates prewar culture into film.

The recent Suzuki Seijun retrospective, "Style to Kill," attests to the continued popularity in Japan of this 1960s B-film director. Held in the spring of 2001, the retrospective focused on 40 films made during Suzuki's tenure as a genre hack at Nikkatsu. The title of the retrospective itself is a reference to *Koroshi no rakuin* (Branded to kill, 1967),¹ the stylized gangster film that famously "ended" Suzuki's career; he was fired the following year by Nikkatsu for "turning out pictures nobody could understand."² Upon losing his job, Suzuki became a counterculture hero, as 1960s radicals picketed Nikkatsu's offices and a generation of student activists elevated him to cult-figure status—a status he has never lost. With the 2001 retrospective came

I would like to thank the anonymous referees for their helpful suggestions, and all those who read, listened to, and commented on this article in earlier drafts. Special thanks go to Kuroko Kazuo for helping me acquire important source materials in the early stages of this project. This research was funded by a postdoctoral fellowship at Harvard University's Reischauer Institute.

1. Tony Rayns also plays off this title in Tony Rayns and Simon Field, eds., *Branded to Thrill: The Delirious Cinema of Suzuki Seijun* (London: Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1994).

2. David Chute, "Branded to Thrill," in *ibid.*, p. 17.

new reprints of the Nikkatsu films, a renewed interest in his work, and *Seijun sutairu* (Seijun style), a small book with cast interviews, stills, and film summaries.³

In recent years, Suzuki's fame in the United States has been bolstered by the release of a handful of his films on video with English subtitles. The campy appeal of *yakuza* or gangster films like *Koroshi no rakuin* and *Tokyo nagaremono* (Tokyo drifter, 1966), has gained Suzuki something of a following in the States as well. Yet film critic Tony Rayns argues that Suzuki remains "one of the many 'black holes' in the West's perception of world cinema."⁴ This sentiment is echoed in English-language film reviews from the late 1990s, reinforcing the sense that despite a number of retrospectives in Europe, North America, and other Western countries, Suzuki remained the purview of the Japanese cinephile.⁵ There is ample material about Suzuki on cult fan sites on the World Wide Web, such as "45. Caliber Samurai: A Seijun Suzuki Tribute Site" (<http://sweetbottom.tripod.com/index.htm>), and directors such as Jim Jarmusch have paid tribute to Suzuki, but English-language scholarship has yet to fully catch up.

This article ventures beyond Nikkatsu and Suzuki's hiatus in television for more than 10 years, further into the black hole to the art films (*geijutsu eiga*) he began making in the 1980s. Many retrospectives focused on Suzuki's Nikkatsu productions, and hence his 1980s and 1990s films have received even less attention in the West. In these later films, we find Suzuki forgoing his contemporary mass culture appeal to look beyond his own past to Japan's prewar years.⁶ Since these films postdate his Nikkatsu era, they are not included in *Seijun sutairu*. But they were rereleased at the time of the 2001 retrospective and are advertised on the *obi* (paper band on the outside of the book) as "Seijun bigaku no chōten 'Rōman sanbusaku'" (The height

3. Isoda Tsutomu, ed., *Seijun sutairu* (Tokyo: Waizu Shuppan, 2001).

4. Tony Rayns, "The Kyoka Factor: The Delights of Suzuki Seijun," in Rayns and Field, eds., *Branded to Thrill*, p. 5.

5. The following sources make reference to the limited access to Suzuki's films in the United States, specifically the difficulty of seeing subtitled versions of his films: Andy Klein, "Give It the Gas: Nuart Series Highlights the Legacy that Was Seijun Suzuki's Thrill Ride," *New Times Los Angeles*, March 13, 1997, movies section; "Return of the Japanese Outlaw Masters," advertisement for film festival held May 6–16, 1999, available from www.americancinematheque.com/japanoutlaw21999.htm; Scott Bowles, "An Intro to the Deliriously Lurid Cinema of Seijun Suzuki: Welcome to Wicked, Wonderful World of Japanese Autuer Seijun Suzuki," *iF Magazine*, August 27, 1999, available from www.ifmagazine.com/common/ArticlePrint.asp?ArticleID=333. Retrospectives on Suzuki were held in Paris, Rotterdam, São Paulo, Melbourne, Vancouver, Berkeley, and Los Angeles.

6. Suzuki has made other films set in the prewar period, namely *Kenka erejii* (Fighting elegy, 1966) and *Akutarō* (The bastard, 1963), but he did not recreate the detailed level of material culture seen in his 1980 *Zigeunerweisen*. Satō Tadao, "Tsigoineruwaizen," *Shinario*, June 1980, pp. 154–55.

of Seijun artistry: “The romantic trilogy”): *Zigeunerweisen* (Gypsy melody, 1980), *Kagerōza* (Heat-haze theater, 1981), and *Yumeji* (1991).⁷ They were also marketed in Japan as a DVD set with the English title “Deep Seijun.”

Zigeunerweisen is ostensibly about prewar intellectuals, but the lack of a coherent story line gives way to a loose collection of random images, sounds, associations, and events that translate prewar Japanese culture into film. The relentless doubling and dizzying array of cinematic techniques have been read as Suzuki’s grotesque misuse of his own filming style. Although the director might deny any deeper meaning to *Zigeunerweisen*, the deliberateness of this tricky narrative comments on the process of representation and on the definition of modernity itself. The film replicates the double nature of prewar cultural history and questions the notion of cultural originality that was so hotly debated in the 1920s and 1930s. Through this independent production, Suzuki retains some of the camp value of his earlier films and his renegade status as he challenges standard views of Taisho history.

Zigeunerweisen and the Late Postwar Film Industry

Zigeunerweisen heralded Suzuki’s return to the cinema.⁸ It was dubbed the “must-see” film of 1980, even though nobody knew quite what to make of it. It went on to win best picture, director, supporting actress, and art direction at the Japanese Academy Awards and a Jury Prize at the Berlin Film Festival in 1981.⁹ This is even more impressive when one considers that *Zigeunerweisen* was made outside the studio system as an independent production and filmed entirely on location in Japan with a small budget. However, the film opened on April 10 as a media event. Further skirting the studio system, it played in an inflatable mobile dome in the parking lot of Tokyo Tower.¹⁰ In the words of the literary journal *Bungei shunjū*, it was an act of “guerrilla screening.”¹¹ Suzuki’s experiment had all the novelty elements for a small-market success: the return of a cult director, a nonmainstream film, and a venue reminiscent of the underground theater. *Zigeunerweisen* drew 56,000 viewers over its 22-week showing, a suc-

7. *Kagerōza* is based on a story by Izumi Kyōka (1873–1939), and *Yumeji* (1991) is about the poet-painter Takehisa Yumeji (1884–1934).

8. Technically speaking, Suzuki’s first post-Nikkatsu film was *Hishū monogatari* (Tale of sorrow, 1977) but this did not attract the attention that the award-winning *Zigeunerweisen* did.

9. For film awards and “best ten” lists for 1980, see *Kinema junpō*, special issue (1981), p. 225; Satō Tadao and Yamane Sadao, eds., *Nihon eiga 1981: ‘80 nen kōkai Nihon eiga zenshū* (Tokyo: Haga Shoten, 1981), pp. 228–30.

10. The dome was the brainchild of theater impresario Arato Genjirō (and his company Cinema Plasett) and the Japanese Art Theatre, or ATG, which started producing successful, low-cost, experimental films in the late 1960s.

11. *Bungei shunjū*, June 1980, p. 423.

cess considering that an audience of 10,000 is large for an independent production.¹²

Zigeunerweisen initiated a new filming style for Suzuki and a new audience. At 144 minutes, it far exceeds the 90-minute-or-less boilerplate productions of Nikkatsu. This length gave Suzuki the opportunity to indulge himself and experiment outside the genre restrictions of his earlier years. The length, subject matter, and style drew the attention of a more elite and literary crowd, and may or may not have pleased his 1960s fans.¹³ Despite this critical success, *Zigeunerweisen* was not released on video, making it inaccessible to viewers who were not in Japan at the time of the original release. It only became available in conjunction with the 2001 retrospective, both in a newly restored print, which showed in Japanese theaters, and on DVD in September 2001.

The film's limited distribution may account for the lack of a full critical treatment in either Japan or the United States. The case for Suzuki's neglect, however, is not unique; certainly other Japanese directors, such as Fukasaku Kinji, have been similarly overlooked. But Suzuki's own anti-intellectualism and history as a B-filmmaker may be partly to blame. The scholarship on Suzuki does not begin to approach the depth of research on Ozu or Kurosawa.¹⁴ Yet Suzuki never sought the position of these classic film directors; he reveled in his outlaw status, preferring to reside in the filmic margins. Film critic Stephen Teo describes Suzuki as "a stylist of Japano-trash," and Suzuki's work was included in the Rotterdam retrospective "Japanese Kings of the Bs."¹⁵ He has often claimed that his films have no meaning other than entertainment, and when asked about *Zigeunerweisen*, he said he had really wanted to make an action movie but couldn't get the budget.¹⁶

Although Suzuki's *Zigeunerweisen* was the domestic "must see" movie,

12. Satō and Yamane, eds., *Nihon eiga 1981*, p. 213. The success of *Zigeunerweisen* secured Suzuki double the budget for his next feature, *Kagerōza*.

13. Kusamori Shinichi and Wada Makoto, "Kantoku no shiken made uketa eiga seinen jidai no omoide," *Kinema junpō*, March 1981, pp. 119–27. Kusamori and Wada liked *Kenka erejii* and *Tōkyō nagaremono* better.

14. For more on Suzuki's films, see Ueno Kōshi, ed., *Suzuki Seijun zen'eiga* (Tokyo: Rippu Shobō, 1986).

15. Stephen Teo, "Seijun Suzuki: Authority in Minority," written in conjunction with the 49th Melbourne International Film Festival, available from www.sensesofcinema.com/contents/00/8/miff/suzuki.html.

16. An example of Suzuki's anti-intellectualism or reluctance to critically discuss his films can be found in an interview with *Midnight Eye*. Suzuki was asked about the visuals in his films and the connection with pop art. He said that as for the "choice of colors and such, there isn't much significance to them." Tom Mes, "Seijun Suzuki," *Midnight Eye*, October 11, 2001, available from www.midnighteye.com/interviews/seijun_suzuki.shtml (accessed August 21, 2003).

internationally speaking, Kurosawa's *Kagemusha* (The shadow warrior) was the Japanese film event of 1980. Kurosawa secured financial support from Francis Ford Coppola and George Lucas, and stars turned out from overseas for the world premiere in Japan. *Kagemusha* went on to win the Grand Prix at the Cannes Film Festival. However, domestically, *Zigeunerweisen* and *Kagemusha* ran neck and neck in the film polls and awards for 1980, placing first and second, respectively, in the leading film magazine *Kinema Junpō*'s "Best Ten" list.¹⁷

A comparison of Suzuki and Kurosawa would be a study in contrasts, both in terms of their response to the languishing Japanese studio system of the late 1970s and early 1980s, and in their appeal to domestic versus international film markets.¹⁸ Both directors looked to the past to make their films, but with very different results. Kurosawa's turn to an inward-looking, medieval age of civil warfare further boosted his international acclaim. By the early 1980s, Kurosawa was a "brand name with commercial value," and his *jidai-geki* (period films) were influential in creating images of a traditional Japan for Western consumption.¹⁹ However, Suzuki was not well known in the West, and his film about the liberal, cosmopolitan era that preceded Japan's modern war is not so readily categorized. *Zigeunerweisen* raises questions about Japan's identity by showcasing an age that in its vibrancy and internationalism defies stereotypical notions of a modern and militaristic Japan.

Zigeunerweisen could be considered a period piece in its detailed reproduction of the material culture of prewar Japan. The title is a reference to the 1904 violin composition by Pablo de Sarasate, a popular song in the decades preceding World War II. Suzuki showcases the "modern life" (*modan raifu*) that emerged in this important yet controversial period in Japanese history. The three films *Zigeunerweisen*, *Kagerōza*, and *Yumeji* are all roughly set in the 1920s and 1930s, and have been referred to as Suzuki's "Taisho Trilogy."²⁰ Indeed, Taisho, a term usually restricted to the period 1912–26, functions as a keyword for the film and for the prewar period as a whole. *Zigeunerweisen* presents Japan's hybrid prewar culture, or the aesthetic of "Taishō chic," as dubbed by the Honolulu Academy of Arts in its

17. A noteworthy mention is the placement of the two films in the magazine *Eiga geijutsu*. *Zigeunerweisen* was first on its "Best Ten" list and *Kagemusha* first on its "Worst Ten" list. See Satō and Yamane, eds., *Nihon eiga 1981*, p. 228.

18. For a brief discussion on the state of the Japanese film industry and the conditions under which Kurosawa produced *Kagemusha*, see Mitsuhiro Yoshimoto, *Kurosawa: Film Studies and Japanese Cinema* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), pp. 352–53; Stephen Prince, *The Warrior's Camera: The Cinema of Akira Kurosawa* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), pp. 4–6.

19. Yoshimoto, *Kurosawa*, p. 354.

20. Rayns, "The Kyōka Factor," p. 6.

recent exhibit.²¹ Shishido Jō, an actor in Suzuki's movies, describes the director as a "Taisho romantic,"²² and the association with Taisho and the prewar period in general goes beyond the films themselves. Suzuki was born in 1923, the year of the Great Kanto Earthquake, the defining event of the Taisho era.

But how is Taisho represented? How does the film intersect with the discourse on Taisho culture? And what did it mean for a 1960s cult director to make a film about the prewar years in the late postwar climate of 1980? Suzuki would argue that there is no deeper meaning in *Zigeunerweisen* or in any of other his films. But he does admit to a certain nostalgia for Taisho, and in many ways he creates his own version of it in the film. He not only recreates Taisho in terms of the material culture of the 1920s and 1930s, but also in the "unevenness" and contradictions of the historical moment as it played out in urban intellectual life.²³ However, it is important to note that this is not the Taisho of history books, but Suzuki's Taisho—a decadent, nihilistic, illusory world.

His conceptualization of Taisho may say more about the 1980s (or even the 1960s) than it does about the 1920s. Characteristics he attributes to the 1920s are surprisingly fitting to the climate of the late 1970s and early 1980s. One Japanese film review described 1980 as a *fin de siècle*,²⁴ a term popular among Taisho-period writers such as Akutagawa Ryūnosuke. This sense of an ending in late postwar, late Showa Japan is reminiscent of reactions to the physical and mental ruptures of the 1923 earthquake. The sense of illusion is ever present in Kurosawa's *Kagemusha*; this story of a thief who doubles for a great warlord is all about creating the illusion of the real.²⁵ And the decadence of the prewar period can also be seen in the late postwar film industry, which produced such over-the-top films as *Apocalypse Now* (1979). Coppola's overbudget Vietnam production was released in Japan in 1980 and was advertised alongside Suzuki's lengthy and lush *Zigeuner-*

21. The full name of the exhibition is "Taishō Chic: Japanese Modernity, Nostalgia and Deco." Edward Gomez, "When Japan Tried on the Modernist Mantle," *New York Times*, January 27, 2002, Arts & Leisure section, p. 37.

22. Shishido Jō, "Seijun-san wa Taishō roman no senchimentaristu," in Isoda, ed., *Seijun sutairu*, p. 4.

23. "Uneven" is a term Harry Harootunian uses to describe this period. Harootunian, *Overcome by Modernity: History, Culture, and Community in Interwar Japan* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

24. Shinario Sakka Kyōkai, '80 *nenkan daihyō shinarioshū* (Tokyo: Daviddosha, 1981), p. 351.

25. Mitsuhiro Yoshimoto argues that the film does not set up a simple dichotomy between illusion and reality, rather, Kurosawa "highlights the ambivalent interaction of reality and image by refusing to reduce the relationship of Shingen [the warlord] and the thief to that of original and copy." Yoshimoto, *Kurosawa*, p. 350. The complexity of the doubling in *Kagemusha* is further reason to compare it with *Zigeunerweisen*.

weisen. Suzuki also attributes an anarchy to Taisho that is perhaps more characteristic of the 1960s, but that era of student demonstrations and leftist activism may have been too recent to historicize.²⁶

The 1980s are further relevant because these years witnessed a resurgence of interest in prewar culture, and it is here that the two temporalities come together. Working at a nostalgic remove, *Zigeunerweisen* recreates many aspects of the prewar period. It conveys a sense of “pastness,” a “1920s-ness,” through images and aesthetics of fashion. But this is not, in Fredric Jameson’s terms, a so-called “nostalgia film” or “la mode rétro.”²⁷ Its aim is not historical realism. Rather, the film questions the nature of representation and the discourse on authenticity surrounding history and culture in the 1920s and 1930s. *Zigeunerweisen* takes it as a given that history is slippery and ultimately beyond our grasp; the characters in the film are haunted by a past (history) that is always morphing and moving away from them. They are always reliving certain events and reseeing certain images in an endless process of replication. Similarly, the nostalgia in *Zigeunerweisen* is not a “warm-hearted” feeling for a lost past, but neither it is an empty, postmodern, glossy image.²⁸ Nostalgia is a disruption of the present, an elusive double, a form of memory as unreliable as the history it seeks to represent. The past is not necessarily missing for Suzuki, but if it can be apprehended, it is only through this slippery double structure. It is in this setting that Suzuki constructs his wildly associative, surrealistic recreation of the prewar.

Random Associations and Deliberate Disunity

Attempting to summarize the dense and perplexing plot of *Zigeunerweisen* is, if not impossible, perhaps ill-intentioned. In place of a detailed plot summary, my analysis is anchored in an examination of key images, texts, and cinematic tropes Suzuki uses to structure his movie. The film moves from images of modern steam trains and Victrolas to traditional itinerant performers; includes deliberately cheesy martial-arts-style interludes and a giant, surrealistic, red crab; and in between showcases murder, sexual betrayal, suicide, and ghosts. The majority of reviews remark on the confusing nature of the movie, some favorably, some critically. Critic Izumiya Shigeru celebrates the incoherence as liberating, because it allows him to

26. Suzuki describes Taisho as an era that produced a strong anarchist/terrorist current. Rayns, “The Kyoka Factor,” pp. 7–8.

27. Fredric Jameson discusses postmodern nostalgia and images of “pastness” in film in *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), pp. 19–20.

28. Dai Jinhua talks about “warm-hearted nostalgia” as fashion in 1990s Chinese film, television, and material culture in “Imagined Nostalgia,” in Arif Dirlik and Xudong Zhang, eds., *Postmodernism and China* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), p. 211.

forgo story and focus solely on image.²⁹ Others such as the modern writer Kanai Mieko go so far as to argue that there is no point in trying to follow a narrative or apply one to the film because it operates on the level of the abstract.³⁰

In fact, one of best means for deciphering the film lies outside of it. Although there is no mention in the credits, *Zigeunerweisen* was roughly based on short stories by the modern writer Uchida Hyakken (1889–1971), and hence readers of Hyakken may be able to find coherence in Suzuki with the aid of this extratextual background. However, it is important to remember that Hyakken was not credited in the film (despite the fact that Suzuki and his script writer, Tanaka Yōzō, lifted whole segments of dialogue from his stories), nor can we assume that Suzuki expected his viewers to be familiar with these stories, or that he saw them as a necessary pre-text to understanding his movie. I mention some of the connections with Hyakken later, but here provide a brief overview of the major characters and events in the film and then describe some of the random, associative aspects to give a feeling for the movie as a whole. These random associations take the place of a cohesive narrative and drive the film.

The two main characters are Aochi Toyojirō and Nakasago Tadashi, former colleagues from the Military Academy (Rikugun Shikan Gakkō) where Aochi still teaches German. Nakasago, played by Harada Yoshio (dubbed the Lee Marvin of Japanese cinema), is an idiosyncratic, rough-edged, outcast intellectual of questionable moral fiber. He is accused of murdering a woman at the beginning of the film, and it is implied later that he has killed others while traveling around the Japanese countryside after quitting his job at the Military Academy. His philandering and unpredictable wandering drive the main story line, and perhaps he is the gypsy of the title. His friend Aochi is played by veteran director Fujita Toshiya. Aochi is a well-heeled member of the cultural elite who divides his time between traveling in pursuit of Nakasago and staying in Tokyo to look after the life his friend left behind. Aochi is torn between his sense of duty and need to abide by society's rules, and a longing for Nakasago's freedom.

Both men are married, but these bonds do not keep them from becoming involved with each other's wives in a game of sexual betrayal. Nakasago's first wife Sono is the daughter of a well-to-do, traditional family. She, however, dies from Spanish influenza (*Supein kaze*) a year after giving birth to a daughter, Toyoko. The child is named after Aochi's given name, and there is an implication that he is the real father. In a classic replacement scheme, Nakasago brings in Oine, a former geisha he and Aochi

29. Izumiya Shigeru, "Tsigoineruwaizen," *Kinema jumpō*, late June 1980, p. 138.

30. Kanai Mieko, "Eiga jihyō," *Bungei*, June 1980, p. 183.



Still 1. *Goze*. Reproduced with permission of Little More Co., Ltd., Tokyo.

had met a couple of years prior, to serve as wet nurse and lover.³¹ Not only does Oine fill the role of wife and mother, but she is a dead ringer for Sono. Both roles are played by the actress Ōtani Naoko, and the resemblance is used to effect many times. Aochi's wife, Shūko (Ōkusu Michiyo), with her bobbed hair and stylish Western clothing, is a liberated woman of the era. She has an affair with Nakasago and hides his copy of the Sarasate record the film is named for. Shūko's sister, Taeko, who is dying in a sanatorium, has a special affection for her brother-in-law, Aochi, and a scene of her topless in the hospital bed implies that it may have been mutual.

The sexual horseplay continues with a group of three itinerant blind musicians (*goze*). Utterly grotesque and used mainly for comic relief, the three travel around the film singing badly dubbed songs about Manchuria and sex (Still 1). The woman in the group crosses the line between performer and prostitute by exposing herself, opening and closing her legs, while singing for customers. She is married to the older of the two men but is having an affair with the younger one. At one point in the film, Aochi adds incest to the mix when he wonders if the woman and the younger man are siblings, but this turns out not to be true. Besides providing twisted humor, the most important role the *goze* play is to foreshadow the convoluted sexual relationship among the four main characters.

31. This character is known as Koine while she is a geisha and Oine after she has quit the profession.

The mirroring of relationships between the *goze* and the Aochi group is one instance of the associative techniques Suzuki uses to power his film. He also repeats certain visual images throughout the film. Two important ones are human bones and cherry blossom petals, images linked by the pink color of the blossoms. These two thread through the entire film, tying it together from opening to closing scene. In the opening sequence, credits are superimposed over different colored screens and shots of falling cherry blossom petals. The pink color of the cherry blossoms is used to describe the hue of Koine's brother's bones after he committed suicide. Koine explains that he killed himself by overdosing but never spit up any blood. According to the village elders, that blood soaked into his bones, tinting them a pale red. Nakasago is intrigued by her story, and this incident begins his fascination with human bones, especially Koine's, and by extension with death. He is constantly feeling her arms and legs muttering the word "red," as though he can look right through her skin. But his fascination with bones is not limited to Koine. In a strange dream sequence set in a tunnel, Nakasago proposes an exchange to Aochi; he makes his friend promise that the first one to die will give his bones to the one remaining alive. Nakasago grabs Aochi, confessing his attraction to bones and his repulsion with the sea of female flesh he is drowning in. The camera pans down to reveal the corpses of pregnant women under Nakasago's feet, presumably victims of his violent impulses.

Nakasago dies first. His death occurs after a long sequence in which he walks through mountainous landscapes following three young *goze*, child versions of the older trio. The scene switches to long takes (both close and distant) of cherry trees in full bloom. The camera closes in on an object under the trees—the back of Nakasago's head. The next shot, a close-up of his face, reveals that he is buried up to his neck but still alive, as his eyes slowly open. His beard has been shaved and he holds what appears to be a straight razor in his teeth.

From this scene the camera cuts back to the cherry trees and then to Aochi's office at the Military Academy where he receives a call from an alarmed Shūko who informs him that Nakasago is dead. The shock of the news is relayed through the dizzying sways of the camera panning left and right, back and forth between Aochi and Shūko as cherry blossoms flood in through their respective windows. Even though in reality they are at different locations in the city, the camera moves back and forth between their locations without the use of a split screen, collapsing the physical space between them. The cherries that come in through their windows are reminiscent of those in the opening credit sequence and, of course, those in the previous scenes of Nakasago's death.

The associations continue as Aochi goes to meet a doctor at a bar to ask if it is possible to remove all the skin from a corpse, leaving just a skeleton. Aochi visits Oine after Nakasago is dead, but he does not have the courage

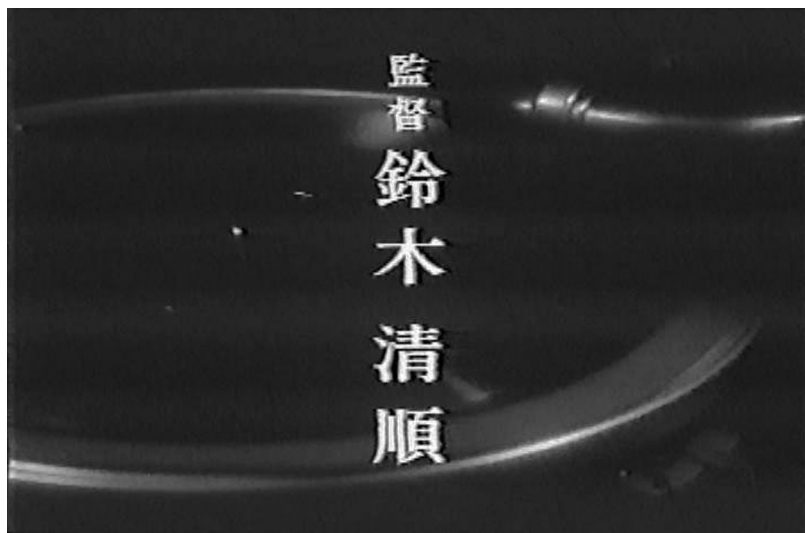
to look at his friend's remains. Oine assures him the bones were white, in a tacit reference to her brother's pink bones and to Aochi's suspicion that Nakasago also committed suicide. In a flashback scene of Nakasago and Shūko's affair, the two hide behind his outstretched cape which resembles a bat, one of the many references to Nakasago's vampiric side. In the final sequence of the film, Aochi has a strange encounter with Oine and flees the house only to be intercepted by Toyoko who, acting as a medium, demands that Aochi honor the pact he made with her dead father. Although Aochi is still alive, Toyoko demands *his* bones. The movie ends with a shot of Toyoko by the ocean standing near a small boat used to ferry coffins and a line of votive lanterns.

There are a number of other associations in the film involving food, sex, and strange voices. In this last category is the Sarasate record from which the film draws its title. The gramophone, the gypsy melody, and the haunting voice of Sarasate tie together a number of scenes. But Suzuki also uses them to deliberately mislead the viewer, drawing them into a guessing game over what was seen and heard.

The film begins with an auditory representation of Taisho in the form of the title song, "Zigeunerweisen," which plays in the background. The credits are first superimposed over white and blue screens, and then over an image of falling cherry blossom petals, intercut with close-ups of a spinning record on an old-style player. The raspy gramophone noise on the soundtrack leads the viewer to think the music is coming from the spinning disc.³² The camera cuts back and forth between images of the disc and the falling petals as the credits continue to roll. When the camera returns for a third time to a shot of the record, the director's name appears on the screen. This time, however, the record is no longer spinning, but the music continues to play on the soundtrack (Still 2). A hand enters the frame from the front right and starts the gramophone, placing the needle on the record, indicating that the music should have stopped and restarted, but there is no such break in the soundtrack. Suzuki is deliberately playing with the conventions of film music, shifting back and forth between the diegetic and the nondiegetic, and back again. And given the timely placement of his directorial credit, he all but claims he is responsible for this disconnect between visual and auditory.

As the music plays on, we hear the voice-over of Aochi and Nakasago, who are attempting to decipher garbled words they hear on the record, words thought to have been spoken by Sarasate himself. The hand reaches in a second time to lift the needle, and this time the music stops. The silence

32. Suzuki Kōichi reminisces about listening to this legendary record as a grammar school student. He describes the scratchy gramophone noise as the very sound of the late Taisho and early Showa period. Suzuki Kōichi, "Miwataseba hana mo arashi mo. . .," *Tsukuru*, July 1980, p. 234.



Still 2. Still gramophone with director's name superimposed. Reproduced with permission of Little More Co., Ltd., Tokyo.

designates that we are back in the diegetic mode, and, in fact, the credits have long since ended with Suzuki's name. This opening sequence highlights the gap between the auditory and the visual or, otherwise stated, the gap between what we see and what we think we see, and, later, what we are told will happen and what really does happen. This disunity is a basic feature of *Zigeunerweisen*, which is experienced by both the characters in the film and the viewing audience.

When the needle is again placed on the record, the music starts and the two men continue their conversation about the strange voice, commenting that they cannot understand what is being said. Again, Suzuki introduces a sound that cannot be pinned down or deciphered. The dialogue from this scene is used again later in the film in one of the many instances of doubling in *Zigeunerweisen*. In addition to the obvious *doppelgänger* effect of Sono/Koine, Suzuki reuses or doubles images, scenes, dialogue, and sounds. These replications, be they false or true, tie the film together and comment on the nature of history, nostalgia, and prewar culture.

Prewar Modernity: Unevenness and Doubling

The prewar atmosphere is reflected in the settings, costumes, and props used to recreate the material culture of the era. The film is full of little pieces of the prewar period: the gramophone, the music, bowler hats and bobbed hair, and even black-and-white photographs of early cinema stars. This de-

tail prompted critic Satō Tadao to remark that the film overflows with a sense of the antique.³³ If pressed to date the events in *Zigeunerweisen*, we could use the Spanish influenza reference to tie it to the worldwide epidemic of 1918, but other aspects of the film, such as mention of Manchuria and the blatant *eroguronansensu* or erotic, grotesque nonsense, are linked to an early 1930s Japan. Aochi dresses in suits and a bowler hat and lives in a Western-style culture house (*bunka jūtaku*) by the sea.³⁴ He is the representation of Taisho-era *kyōyōshugi* (culture and learning). Shūko displays characteristics of the “new woman” (*atarashii onna*) of the teens: liberated, intelligent, and free-spirited. She is also a representation of the erotic, modern girl, or *moga*, of the late 1920s—flip, coquettish, hip, culturally attuned to the international, and above all sexually promiscuous.³⁵ The Military Academy where Aochi teaches creates another strong link to the prewar, because this training school for officers in the Imperial Japanese Army produced the military elite of the era.

This materiality and the social constituencies it enabled were the mark of the new modernity of the period. As Harry Harootunian argues in his recent study, *Overcome by Modernity: History, Culture, and Community in Interwar Japan*, this new, modern life, or at least the conception of it, was distinguished by “its materiality and its embeddedness in a culture of objects and their circulation.” This materiality “constituted the sign of a historicity of the present, its historical moment, the temporality of modernity.”³⁶ The question of what was modern was complex, and although many of these “objects” were Western, modern was not necessarily Western.³⁷

In fact, it was the mixing of the modern and the traditional, Western and Japanese, that defined Taisho Japan’s modernity. For all his Western ways, Aochi moves easily between modern and traditional spaces, clothing, and customs. Nakasago on the surface, however, appears to represent old Japan;

33. Satō Tadao, “Tsigoineruwaizen,” *Shinario*, June 1980, pp. 154–55.

34. This house in Kamakura was once occupied by modern author Arishima Ikuma, the younger brother of the famous writer Arishima Takeo. For more information on the filming and locations, see “Chōdaitokushū=Waidō kōsei, *Tsigoineruwaizen* Suzuki Seijun: sono bigaku tetsuri no shinkotchō kanpeki naru shintenkai,” *Eiga geijutsu*, April–June 1980. For more on culture houses, see Jordan Sand, “The Cultured Life as Contested Space: Dwelling and Discourse in the 1920s,” in Elise K. Tipton and John Clark, eds., *Being Modern in Japan: Culture and Society from the 1910s to the 1930s* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2000), pp. 99–118.

35. Miriam Silverberg, “The Modern Girl as Militant,” in Gail Lee Bernstein, ed., *Recreating Japanese Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), pp. 240–44; Miriam Silverberg, “The Café Waitress Serving Modern Japan,” in Stephen Vlastos, ed., *Invented Traditions of Modern Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

36. Harootunian, *Overcome by Modernity*, p. 97.

37. For a detailed description of the changes that took place in daily life ranging from the economic to the cultural, see Harootunian, “The Fantasy of Modern Life,” in *ibid*.

he dresses in Japanese clothing and lives in a traditional house in a wooded setting (shot in Kamakura). His first wife, Sono, is the daughter of a wealthy traditional family and his mistress/second wife, Oine, a former geisha. But a closer look reveals Nakasago's modern side. He is a scholar of German and owns the rare Sarasate album. Inside Nakasago's house is a Western-style study, reflective of the "eclectic" or mixed style of architecture that incorporated the new cultured living into houses in older, more conservative neighborhoods.³⁸ His desire to be free and his disregard for traditional social strictures of family and job are also more modern sensibilities, reminiscent of the naturalist writers. The *goze*, however, represent an older Japan, one predating the Taisho period and disappearing in the urban centers by the 1920s. The *goze* are a reminder of something losing out to modernity, and perhaps they carry some of the nostalgia of Kawabata's dancing girl.³⁹

Harootunian details this coexistence of multiple temporalities or "modernities" as integral to the modernization process. He draws attention to the uneven development of capitalism and the production of multiple modern spaces and temporalities in the everyday experience. "Thinkers and writers responded to Japan's modernity by describing it as a *doubling* that imprinted a difference between the new demands of capitalism and the market and the force of received forms of history and cultural patterns."⁴⁰ It is this sense of "doubling" that Suzuki recreates in *Zigeunerweisen*. He presents this emerging, conflicted modernity in the material aspects of the film, but he also represents the doubling in the form of *doppelgänger*s and slippages of perception. The experience of the "jarring coexistence of several pasts and the present" is reproduced in the viewer as the film continually folds back on itself.⁴¹

The doubleness of life is perceived mainly by Aochi, the narrator through whom our perceptions are filtered. Aochi is a reader of texts who often misreads; he is a narrator who also often misspeaks. Aochi narrates the film, chronicling the major events in Nakasago's life—marriage, birth, death, travels—but his narration does not always bring order to the film. In fact, it adds to the confusion.⁴² There is a slippage between Aochi's narration and what happens in the film. Although he is narrator, he is not always privileged to more information than the viewer. In many ways, Aochi is always seeing double, or at least multiple possibilities or representations for

38. Sand, "The Cultured Life," pp. 110–12.

39. Satō argues that the *goze* are an overused image from the underground theater that is out of sync with the world represented by the Sarasate recording. However, we can see a role for them in the context of multiple modernities and the clash of old and new. Satō, "Tsigoineruwaizen," p. 155.

40. Harootunian, *Overcome by Modernity*, p. xvii.

41. Ibid.

42. Ueno Kōshi, "Suzuki Seijun no undō," *Yuriika*, June 1980, p. 172.

various events. Perhaps this is due to the doubleness of life itself, to the co-existence of multiple realities upon which he looks.

Suzuki's doubling and disorientation draw on techniques from prewar literature and film. *Zigeunerweisen* is at times reminiscent of the surrealist cinema and its emphasis on dreams, antinarrative, and the bizarre. Japanese examples would include the Shinkankakuha's modernist experiment *Kurutta ippeji* (A page of madness, 1926), which like the influential *Das Kabinett des Doktor Caligari* (The cabinet of Dr. Caligari, 1920) uses an insane asylum as a setting. European films with cinematic doubling tricks like *Student von Prague* (Student of Prague, 1913 and 1926) were popular among Japanese authors, such as Akutagawa Ryūnosuke and Satō Haruo, who wrote *doppelgänger*s into their fiction.⁴³ The double in Japanese literature often symbolized the fractured, unstable state of the narrator's mind, a side effect of living in the uneven, modern world Harootunian describes.

In *Zigeunerweisen*, a strict *doppelgänger* replacement occurs primarily with Sono and Oine, which Suzuki achieves by using the same actress for both roles. Aochi is confused when he pays his final visit to Oine to return the Sarasate record. She changes appearance, oscillating back and forth between the two women. This is so effective that Aochi starts to doubt himself, thinking Sono has come back from the dead. Oine laments that Nakasago is gone; all she has left are his books and other effects, and of course Toyoko. She is adamant that she won't give Toyoko back to Nakasago, talking as if he were still alive. Oine puts the Sarasate record on the player and leaves the room. The camera tracks back across the room to a shot of the gramophone; however, this time the record is spinning but no sound is coming out. Aochi moves over to examine it and Oine's voice from offscreen explains that the player is not working properly.

Oine then reappears in a different outfit and hairstyle. She serves Aochi some beer she's been keeping since Nakasago died. She jokes that maybe Nakasago will join them, and suddenly "Zigeunerweisen" starts playing on the gramophone. Aochi looks spooked, his emotion emphasized by a close-up of two beer bottles and *three* glasses. When Sarasate's voice starts in, the camera cuts back to a shot of Oine in her original dress. Suddenly the voice on the record is clearer. Sarasate, or perhaps Nakasago, seems to be saying that Toyoko is his, and Oine cringes in fear, seemingly afraid that her late husband/lover will return from the dead to take the child from her. She runs through the house looking for Toyoko, who is at school.

Oine backs offscreen and then reappears in different clothing, begging Aochi not to leave. She repeats dialogue from an earlier sequence in which Sono walked Aochi through Nakasago's house, which was transformed by

43. See for example Satō's "Shimon" (The fingerprint, 1918), and Akutagawa's "Futatsu no tegami" (The two letters, 1917) and "Haguruma" (Cogwheels, 1927).

darkness and strange red lighting. Aochi stumbled through the house as “Zigeunerweisen” played distantly in the background. The scene ended when Aochi confessed to Sono that he was once bewitched by a fox, to which she replied that perhaps he has again fallen into the fox’s den from which there is no way out. Oine repeats this last line and Aochi turns and begins strangling her, demanding to know who she is. Her outer jacket falls off and it is clear that she is Oine. Aochi removes his hands and she flees in fear, repeating over and over that Toyoko is at school. The repetition of dialogue and costume change blur the line between the two women. Is this a simple case of *déjà vu*? Has Sono also come back from the dead to reclaim her daughter or have the two women’s identities merged?

Aochi is at a similar loss when Oine and Nakasago offer differing stories on the fate of the three blind performers. Nakasago claims he saw the two men beat each other to death on the beach while the woman floated away in a barrel. (This is a strangely comic scene in which the men literally beat each other into the sand. Fake blood spurts from their heads, as they disappear into holes on the beach.) Oine, however, says they compromised with a three-way marriage. Aochi is unable confirm either story, nor is the viewer.

This case with the *goze* represents a second type of doubling or replication that occurs either within the storytelling of the film or on the level of the filmmaking. Scenes and images are replayed, multiplied, and repeated with slight differences in editing, color, and sound. One of the most dramatic uses of these cinematic techniques revolves around a sexual interlude between Nakasago and Shūko. Aochi finds out about this from his sister-in-law, Taeko, who is dying in a sanatorium.

Aochi visits Taeko, and to his surprise, she tells him that Shūko came to visit with Nakasago. As Taeko begins relating the story, the camera tracks in on the window to the hallway through which pass Nakasago and Shūko. There is no editing break to indicate that Aochi is no longer in the room or that it is a separate time frame. Nakasago and Shūko lean over Taeko, who appears to be unconscious, and then Nakasago gets something in his eye. Shūko walks him over to the window and, in a series of close-ups, licks his eyeball to remove the dirt (Still 3). The camera cuts away from this strangely erotic scene, to one of Aochi looking through a hospital window. Aochi leaves the sanatorium, and then the camera cuts to a shot of Nakasago banging on Aochi’s door. He forces his way in and chases Shūko around the house. In an attempt to escape, she locks herself in the bathroom and bedroom, but he is seemingly everywhere at once. The action switches outside the house, then to Aochi leaving the hospital, and then back to Nakasago carrying Shūko on his back into the house. She has been stripped down to her 1920s-style bloomers, and in the final scene of this interlude, Nakasago runs his hand over Shūko’s naked torso. The two disappear behind Nakasago’s Japanese-style overcoat (*tonbi*), which is strangely propped up in front of them like a giant bat. When the overcoat drops to the floor, Shūko



Still 3. Shuko licking Nakasago's eyeball. Reproduced with permission of Little More Co., Ltd., Tokyo.

is left standing alone, as though Nakasago was never there. Aochi, who has come directly from the hospital, runs into Nakasago who appears to have been waiting for him outside a restaurant. As they eat, Nakasago says that he just came from Aochi's where Shūko told him Aochi wasn't home. Aochi doesn't believe him and implies that something happened between the two of them.

This sequence plays with the flow of time in the film; a seeming flash-back is made to appear simultaneous with the action. If indeed Nakasago came to the hospital with Shūko, it must have occurred on a separate day, since in the scenes preceding this Aochi is at home with Shūko, who is sick. Aochi specifically tells Taeko that Shūko was too sick to visit. However, the filming of these scenes runs the timeline together. It appears that Nakasago was at Aochi's house while Aochi was visiting Taeko. If this is so, when did Shūko and Nakasago visit the hospital? Taeko could not have possibly witnessed the sexual interlude at Aochi's house. In fact, it appears that Aochi has dreamed up the entire sex sequence, since nobody other than Shūko and Nakasago would have been there to see it. This is not merely a case of a film presenting material from an omniscient point of view unavailable to any witnesses. There is something more subversive going on. Suzuki is making both the viewers and the characters in the film question whether the events they see are real or imaginary.

The scenes of Shūko and Nakasago appear to be creations of Aochi's mind, since Taeko is not providing him with the visuals. But both he and the viewer "see" these events a second time. He visits Taeko after Nakasago's

death and she mistakes him for Nakasago. She tells Aochi that she saw Nakasago again. She also tells him she had a dream in which Nakasago embraced Shūko. Aochi is not sure what she means by “dream,” but in referring back to the original incident, she explains that he must have had the same dream or shared in her dream somehow. The room darkens when she says the word “dream,” and Aochi begins to wonder if the affair really happened. But the visuals remain. The images of Nakasago and Shūko’s interlude are replayed on the screen in a black-and-white, silent, edited form, which is inconsistent with the original order of the events. History once again becomes shuffled and suspect.

Aochi is unable to distinguish dream from reality. If he originally dreamed the affair between his colleague and wife, then how much of the rest of the film is also part of Aochi’s dream? The way the scenes are shot reinforces the dreamlike quality, lending credibility to this theory. Is it possible that Nakasago is also visiting Taeko, and that she is acting as a medium to warn Aochi of his declining mental state? Perhaps he only imagined the oscillation between Oine and Sono in the final sequence. If it was only a dream, then Aochi’s reliability as a narrator is suspect. Since much of the film hinges on his interpretation of the events, it is impossible to know what really happened. Aochi’s sanity is further questioned in a long sequence involving the Sarasate record and another unidentified voice.

After the opening sequence, the action moves a year ahead as Aochi’s voice-over informs us of Nakasago’s marriage. The men enjoy dinner together, then the scene shifts to Nakasago’s Western-style study. They discuss the strange voice on the Sarasate record, repeating the dialogue from the voice-over in the opening of the film in yet another instance of doubling. However, this time the shot of the spinning record is replaced with a still disc. The needle rests on the record as though they had just finished listening to it (Still 4). Nakasago explains the voice is Sarasate’s own, and the record is a collector’s item. No matter how many times he listens to it, he can’t figure out what Sarasate is saying. Aochi can’t either and he laments that if only the voice were a little clearer it might be possible to decipher it. His comments foreshadow the voice Oine hears at the end of the film.

From the voice on the record, Aochi segues into a story about another strange voice he and Shūko heard while eating lunch after a visit to Taeko. It happened during a conversation he had with Shūko about Taeko’s chances for recovery.

Aochi: What a pity to die at 19.

Shūko: I don’t know, she might recover.

Aochi: Why do you say that?

Shūko: What do you mean?

Voice: She’s a goner.⁴⁴

44. See the screenplay in *Eiga geijutsu*, April-June 1980, p. 43.



Still 4. Still gramophone in Nakasago's study. Reproduced with permission of Little More Co., Ltd., Tokyo.

Shūko screams and moves to the window. The camera cuts back to a shot of the still record, visually couching this new voice within the larger framework of the indecipherable mumblings on “Zigeunerweisen.” The last line of the above dialogue is marked in the screenplay as “voice” (*koe*), and Aochi is certain it was not his. Nakasago is convinced that either it came from Aochi’s mouth or, worse, Aochi is starting to hear things. At best, it is a sign of a nervous breakdown (*shinkei suiaku*), and at worst, insanity. Nakasago seems even more frightened by the story than Aochi. He mutters “ki o tsukenakucha” (better watch out) almost as a warning to himself. Nakasago is amply spooked by this story, but there is yet another layer of doubling that adds depth to his reaction. This last type of doubling moves beyond the confines of the film to create a layering effect with characters in literary texts and with historical literary figures.

Rewriting Hyakken

Many of the haunting scenes in *Zigeunerweisen* are taken from short stories by the modern writer Uchida Hyakken. Suzuki uses Hyakken in a variety of ways, drawing on his stories for dialogue, characters, settings, and the general mood of the film.⁴⁵ Into the basics of Hyakken’s “Sarasāte no

45. Suzuki uses some of the names of Hyakken’s original characters and makes up new ones for others. For simplicity, I usually use Suzuki’s names to refer to both sets.

ban" (The Sarasate disc, 1948), Suzuki and his script writer, Tanaka Yōzō, inject images, dialogue, and incidents from other Hyakken fiction. Many of Hyakken's stories, especially those in his maiden collection *Meido* (Realm of the dead, 1922), are fragmentary tales of strange encounters in shifting landscapes. His characters are linked only by vague memories that may have connected them in the past, but that are never fully revealed. These gaps are left open in Hyakken's texts, since the author refuses to provide the missing segments. This experimental style is reminiscent of other prewar writers and filmmakers working in a modernist vein. Suzuki may similarly leave his viewer guessing in *Zigeunerweisen*, but he does the opposite for the reader of Hyakken. By knitting together pieces of Hyakken's fragmentary texts, Suzuki makes links across Hyakken's stories and fills in the narrative gaps. In the process, Suzuki creates a new text, or a second version of the original, a part of the endless process of replication.

"Sarasate no ban" is a story about two friends and a 78-rpm record of Sarasate's famous "*Zigeunerweisen*." It may seem strange to speak about this story (and hence the film) in terms of Taisho and the prewar, since Hyakken wrote this story after 1945. But "Sarasate no ban" is reflective of his earlier style, especially the eerie atmosphere of his Taisho-period fiction, and the setting of the work is definitely prewar. The Sarasate disc that appears in both the film and the story is an actual record; Hyakken was given the 78 by the Sōseki family after his literary mentor Natsume Sōseki died in 1916. Both Hyakken's daughter and Sōseki's son have commented on the strange, muttering voice of Sarasate on the record.⁴⁶ However, it is important to note that we are at a remove from the era, and Hyakken, like Suzuki, is in a nostalgic mode.

In many of Hyakken's Taisho and early Showa works, meteorological conditions and seemingly insignificant sounds and actions set the stage for strange events. Suzuki uses elements of the following opening to "Sarasate no ban" to capture Aochi's unsettled state of mind and his increasing paranoia.

The wind battering the rain doors suddenly died down around nightfall, and the house grew quiet. The silence gave me a strange sinking sensation. I sat with my elbows resting on the desk, my mind a blank. My thoughts cleared and my mood improved, but I grew sleepy. Then I heard a small, hard noise from up on the roof. Must be stones rolling down the tiles, I thought. The rolling accelerated and the sound of them hitting the eaves sent a shiver down my spine. Whether they dropped into the garden or not I don't know, for in that instant my hair stood on end, and much as I tried to calm down I couldn't sit still. I got up and moved toward the living room. My wife, who

46. Itō Mino, "Chichi, Uchida Hyakken: dai yon kai," *Bungei hiroba*, July 1982, pp. 16–17; Uchida Hyakken, "Sōseki chikuonki," in Uchida Hyakken, *Uchida Hyakken zenshū*, Vol. 4 (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1972). For comments by Sōseki's son, Natsume Shinroku, see Sakai Hideyuki, *Hyakken: ai no ayumi, bungaku no ayumi* (Tokyo: Yūseidō, 1995), pp. 216–17.

also heard the noise, opened the sliding door with a startle, “What is it? You’re white as a ghost!”⁴⁷

This scene appears in its entirety toward the end of the film as Aochi sits in his study reading old German texts. Suzuki uses the image (or sound) of pebbles rolling down the roof a second time in *Zigeunerweisen* in yet another instance of doubling. Directly prior to this scene is the one mentioned earlier in which Aochi stumbles through Nakasago’s darkened house as “Zigeunerweisen” plays in the background. After the comment about the fox den, the eerie music ends and the camera cuts to a close-up of a bubbling pot of food, which is comprised mostly of *konnyaku*, the item used repeatedly in the film to represent the sexual tension between Aochi and Sono. Aochi hears the sound of the pebbles and demands that Sono tell him who is throwing rocks onto the roof, but she sits there calmly breaking off pieces of *konnyaku*, ignoring his pleas. The fisheye lens and Sono’s nonchalance amplify Aochi’s unease.

This interlude with Aochi and Sono is reminiscent of an unsettling encounter between the narrator and a strange woman from his past in Hyakken’s “Hanabi” (Fireworks, 1922). When Aochi stumbles through Nakasago’s house in *Zigeunerweisen*, he passes by objects described in “Hanabi,” such as the book with old, tattered pages that holds secrets the narrator would rather not know. At the end of Hyakken’s story the woman accuses the narrator of cheating on her, and the latent eroticism in “Hanabi” is intensified in the film, as Sono’s kimono falls back to expose her naked torso. The camera cuts to Aochi’s pensive face but does not visually pursue the unstated affair. Sex is also what solves the puzzle of the missing Sarasate disc in the segment described below.

One of the most memorable sequences in both story and film involves a series of visits Oine makes to Aochi’s house to retrieve her late husband/lover’s dictionaries and reference works. Aochi is puzzled by Oine’s visits, which always happen around dusk. Oine refuses to enter Aochi’s house and speaks to him with her back half-turned as she waits on the dimly lit porch. He is confused not only by her knowledge of these items, but also by her ability to pronounce the titles of these foreign reference works. One night she gives Aochi his answer by telling him that Toyoko is talking in her sleep and often mentions Aochi’s house. Aochi is baffled, but Oine explains that Toyoko is speaking with her dead father who is instructing her to retrieve his items from Aochi.

In their most recent conversation, Nakasago implied that Toyoko should consult Shūko, and Oine asks specifically for the record. In Hyakken’s story, Nakasago’s widow also asks to speak with the narrator’s wife but she never

47. Uchida, *Uchida Hyakken zenshū*, Vol. 6, p. 125.

explains why. Hyakken's narrator eventually remembers that he lent the record to another friend, but in *Zigeunerweisen*, it is Shūko who has been hiding Nakasago's copy of the record all along. When she finally produces it, Aochi slaps her across the face, which we can read as a reprimand for her infidelity.

Another Hyakken work Suzuki draws freely from is "Yamataka bōshi" (The bowler hat, 1929), a story about the unstable mental states of Aochi Toyojirō and his colleague Noguchi, two professors at the Military Academy. As Aochi's condition improves, Noguchi's worsens, and the story climaxes in Noguchi's suicide. Hyakken's story is often regarded as a fictional tribute to Akutagawa Ryūnosuke, the well-known Taisho writer who killed himself in 1927, and with whom Hyakken taught at the Yokosuka Naval Engineers Academy.⁴⁸ The scenes in *Zigeunerweisen* when Aochi and Shūko hear the strange voice at lunch and Aochi's subsequent discussion with Nakasago are taken almost verbatim from Hyakken's story. By having Nakasago speak the lines of Hyakken's Noguchi character (Akutagawa), Suzuki foreshadows Nakasago's death and brings in a romanticized yet tragic view of Taisho intellectuals as symbolized by Akutagawa. If we can read Nakasago as Akutagawa, then we can speculate that Suzuki is commenting on the high cost of Taisho intellectualism and leveling a critique at the period. The term Nakasago uses for "nervous exhaustion" or "nervous breakdown" (neurasthenia), *shinkei suijaku*, was a key word in the prewar period. Many Taisho intellectuals suffered from *shinkei suijaku*, whether it was the fear of insanity or actual insanity itself. Some, like Akutagawa, actually killed themselves, and, by using Akutagawa, Suzuki draws on one of the most potent images of the era.

Nakasago's character is deepened through further references to the Buraiha, a literary group of the 1930s and 1940s, whose members, such as Sakaguchi Ango and Dazai Osamu, were famous for their drinking, drugs, and, in the case of Dazai, suicide. Nakasago fits with the irreverent and dissolute lifestyle of the Buraiha authors, both in his private life and in his public rebellion against society and the intelligentsia. Unlike Aochi, he does not keep his job at the Military Academy. He forgoes the pleasures of the cultural elite for a life of wandering. Critics Satō Tadao and Hasumi Shigehiko have suggested that Nakasago is Suzuki's tribute to the Buraiha authors.⁴⁹ And maybe we can think of Nakasago less as a strictly Taisho figure than as a

48. Hyakken, however, resisted this interpretation, arguing, "It's a novel. Akutagawa's name's not even in there." See Uchida Michio, *Meido no shūhen* (Tokyo: Kanrin Shobō, 1997), p. 149.

49. Satō Tadao, *ATG eiga o yomu: 60 nendai ni hajimatta meisaku no ākaibu* (Tokyo: Film Art Sha, 1991), p. 343; Hasumi Shigehiko, "Yūrei wa kawaita oto o hibikaseru," *Eiga geijutsu*, April-June 1980, p. 33.

bleak, self-destructive outgrowth of Taisho intellectual culture that manifested itself in the succeeding decades.

It is important to note, however, that Suzuki does not directly allude to Akutagawa or the *Buraiha*. The references are made through intertextuality and interpretation. Hyakken is never mentioned in the film credits and neither is Akutagawa or the *Buraiha* mentioned by name in the film. Movie reviews did credit the story to Hyakken, and they mentioned that the sanatorium where Aochi's sister-in-law lay dying was the very place Dazai recuperated after a botched lovers' suicide. From Suzuki and Tanaka's script, we move back through the basic framework of Hyakken's "Sarasāte no ban," written in 1948, on to "Yamataka bōshi" from 1929, which is thought to recapture events from 1927 and earlier, such as Akutagawa's suicide. At the same time, we move forward from Akutagawa's death to a generation of writers who succeeded him. Time compresses and collapses as both the film and the literature work at a certain remove from events portrayed.

The coexistence of multiple temporalities in the film mimics the overlapping of multiple temporalities/modernities in the modern experience Harootyan speaks of. But in *Zigeunerweisen* there is yet another layer or temporality, namely the 1980s nostalgia for the prewar period. This nostalgia is tied directly into the double structure of the film. In the same way that the song "Zigeunerweisen" moves between the diegetic and the nondiegetic in the opening credit sequence, the nostalgia functions both within the film and in the extradiegetic context of the late postwar. At this point I shift the discussion from the content and inner workings of the film to the time in which it was produced and ask how *Zigeunerweisen* functioned in the late postwar context. What was the appeal in 1980 of a film set in the 1920s?

Repackaging the Prewar as Nostalgia

John Treat remarks in his introduction to *Contemporary Japan and Popular Culture* that Japan in the 1980s was characterized by the "production of a nostalgia for an earlier age that it was not."⁵⁰ Marilyn Ivy and Jennifer Robertson also address the links between prewar and postwar culture. Ivy discusses the mid-1980s marketing of the prewar as "vintage culture" complete with "nostalgia products" (*nosutarujii shōhin*), and Robertson analyzes the "landscape of nostalgia" created in late postwar Japan.⁵¹ A driving

50. John Treat, ed., *Contemporary Japan and Popular Culture* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1996), p. 10.

51. Marilyn Ivy, *Discourses of the Vanishing* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), p. 55; Jennifer Robertson, "Hegemonic Nostalgia, Tourism, and Nation-Making in Japan," in Umesao Tadao, Harumi Befu, and Ishimori Shuzo, eds., *Tourism*, Vol. 9 of *Japanese Civilization in the Modern World* (Osaka: National Museum of Ethnology, 1995), p. 99.

force in the creation of this nostalgia was Japan Railways' marketing campaigns, "Discover Japan" of the 1970s and "Exotic Japan" of the 1980s.⁵² These encouraged the discovery of an exotic, yet distantly familiar Japan, and provided a *furusato* or rural homeland for urbanites who had long lost any such place to return to. This "nostalgia for the experience of nostalgia" functioned in the mid-1980s marketing of the prewar as vintage culture.⁵³ Prewar culture was sold to a generation who knew nothing of life before the war, and for whom it truly was "nostalgia for the experience of nostalgia." Although *Zigeunerweisen* prefigures the height of this trend, the film could very easily have been marketed as a *nosutarujii shōhin*.

Nakasago wanders through the film, and although he is not traveling to "Rediscover Japan," viewers are encouraged to "rediscover Taisho." As mentioned earlier, Suzuki has chosen to emphasize certain aspects of the Taisho period in his film, namely the illusory, the surrealistic, the self-destructive, and the decadent. His decision to focus on the cultural, at the expense of the political or militaristic, should not be seen as a distortion of historical reality. First, his aim was not historical realism. Second, on some level it is possible to see Nakasago and Aochi, the quirky, morally questionable, mentally unstable professors of the Military Academy, as a critique of prewar militarism. The academy was so well respected that it is hard to imagine it employing a character such as Nakasago.

In the end it is the cultural *Zeitgeist* that Suzuki captures. The late 1920s and early 1930s were characterized by a decadence (*dekadan*), which was often connected with popular entertainment such as jazz clubs, dance halls, and movies. *Zigeunerweisen* showcases this *fin-de-siècle* moral turpitude and rotting beauty in connection to food and sex, often through the character Shūko. Shūko's identification as a modern girl (*moga*) is not incidental since the *moga* symbolized this new sexuality. Her coquettish behavior with Nakasago leads up to the eyeball licking, an erotic spin on the famous eye cutting in Salvador Dali and Luis Buñuel's Surrealistic film *Un Chien andalou* (Andalusian dog, 1928). When she has sex with Nakasago, her body is covered in an allergic rash. She is embarrassed, but he tells her that she's most attractive when her body is "on the verge of rotting." In a later scene, she eats an overripe peach, slurping and running her tongue back and forth across the skin. She tells Aochi it is at its most delicious when beginning to rot, when the sweet flavor mixes with the acrid poison taste inside. He stands in disbelief since Shūko has recently suffered an attack from fruit allergies, but she muses that perhaps her body has changed. The unstated incident re-

52. See Ivy, *Discourses*, and Robertson, "Hegemonic Nostalgia," for more on the Japan Railways campaigns.

53. Robertson, "Hegemonic Nostalgia," p. 92.

sponsible for this physical transformation is the affair with Nakasago. Aochi may be angry with his wife and friend, but he is not immune to the loose sexual mores. There is a strong implication that he has an affair with Sono, and an image of a gelatinous, jiggling heap of *konnyaku* is used over and over in repeated close-ups to represent the attraction between Aochi and his friend's wife.

The erotic, over-the-top scenes with food, sex, and eyeballs can be described as *eroguronansensu*, a catchword of the late 1920s and early 1930s for the abnormal and sexually charged.⁵⁴ This mood of *eroguro* is not limited to the story, but pervades the filmmaking as well. At 144 minutes, *Zigeunerweisen* is decadent compared with Suzuki's Nikkatsu productions. Suzuki does not seem concerned with economical use of film, as he replays scenes and images over and over. Tony Rayns describes *Zigeunerweisen* as Suzuki at his "most free and playful, working outside the disciplines of established genre."⁵⁵ However, other critics have been less generous, arguing that Suzuki overindulged himself in image to the detriment of narrative.⁵⁶ Kanai Mieko complains that if there is something grotesque about *Zigeunerweisen*, it's the way that Suzuki overuses his own cinematic trademarks.⁵⁷

The prewar culture of *Zigeunerweisen* functioned as a "new boundary of the exotic" for 1980s youth, who were drawn to the "emergent forms of Japanese modernity and its mass culture."⁵⁸ The film does focus on the emergent modernity, but is more about intellectual than mass culture.⁵⁹ This is somewhat ironic given that Suzuki was very much a part of mass film culture in the 1960s. Kanai Mieko referred to this when she commented in 1980 that Suzuki was virtually unknown to those who read literary journals, to the point that his name was even misspelled in an interview she gave.⁶⁰ But in *Zigeunerweisen*, Suzuki switched gears in both content and form by producing an art film (*geijutsu eiga*) about elite prewar lifestyles.

The question remains: by watching *Zigeunerweisen*, are we able to apprehend the experience of the prewar period or is this a false nostalgia? Are we like Aochi, unable to grasp what is in front of us? Does the viewer fail to apprehend the "real thing," because the prewar period is only an illusion?

54. For a reference to *eroguronansensu* and early Showa, see '80 *nenkan daihyō shinarioshū*, p. 352.

55. Rayns, "The Kyoka Factor," p. 8.

56. Kusamori and Wada, "Kantoku no shiken," p. 126.

57. Kanai, "Eiga jihyō," p. 184.

58. Ivy, *Discourses*, pp. 47, 55.

59. Satō, "Tsigoineruwaizen," pp. 154–55; Konaka Yōtarō, "Tsigoneruwaizen," *Ushio*, July 1980, p. 210.

60. Kanai, "Eiga jihyō," p. 182.

On one level, viewers do apprehend a prewar sense through this visual representation of “1920s-ness,” but on another level, Suzuki is moving away from representation and its emphasis on authenticity and originality. In the end, Suzuki’s nostalgia is cold comfort, for it proves too elusive to bring back the warm belonging of the past or to assuage the alienation of the present.⁶¹ In evaluating *Zigeunerweisen* as a representation of the prewar, it is useful to first examine the concept of representation and its connections with culture in the context of film.

Translating Culture

In *Primitive Passions: Visuality, Sexuality, Ethnography, and Contemporary Chinese Cinema*, Rey Chow discusses the problems inherent in the “rendering of ‘China’ into film.”⁶² She begins with the example of Zhang Yimou, who has been criticized by the Chinese for the shallowness of his films that betray the historical depth of traditional China. She admits that although this may be an understandable reaction to the asymmetrical legacy of Western imperialism, this nativist criticism prioritizes authenticity in a way that perpetuates an anthropological deadlock between the Westernizers on the one hand and the traditionalists on the other. In an effort to move away from this stalemate and from the emphasis on “an original that can be betrayed,” Chow discards the terms expression, articulation, and representation because they return to the idea of an original. She prefers the idea of “translation” via Walter Benjamin, because it allows her to escape the unidirectional movement between an original and its derivations, in this case, between China and its representation in film.⁶³

Chow asks: “Can we theorize translation between cultures without somehow valorizing some ‘original’?”⁶⁴ In order to accomplish this, she moves beyond a strictly linguistic discourse to allow for translation to happen between media, or already mediated sources. This allows her to discuss how “China” is rendered or translated into film. It is this use of the word “translation” that I apply in order to assess *Zigeunerweisen* as a “rendering of ‘Taisho’ into film.”

In using Chow’s ideas to analyze *Zigeunerweisen*, I change the parameters to look at translation *within* a culture, admittedly decontextualizing

61. Dai Jinhua discusses nostalgia in contemporary China as a response to the anxiety brought on by modernization. See “Imagined Nostalgia,” p. 207.

62. Rey Chow, *Primitive Passions: Visuality, Sexuality, Ethnography, and Contemporary Chinese Cinema* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), p. 183.

63. Chow uses Walter Benjamin’s essay “The Task of the Translator,” in Hannah Arendt, ed., *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken, 1969).

64. Chow, *Primitive Passions*, p. 192.

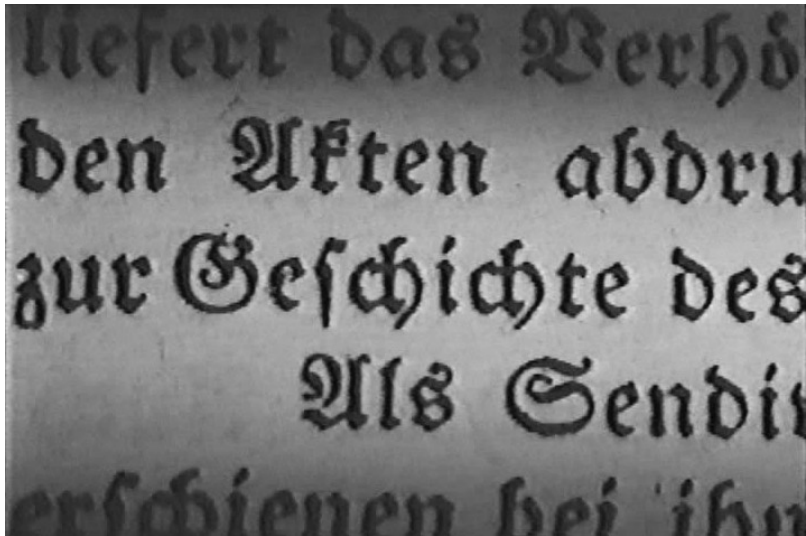
Chow's argument. Suzuki was not subject to the nativist criticisms aimed at Zhang's films, and *Zigeunerweisen* was not marketed to a foreign audience. It was limited even in its domestic circulation. Despite these differences, Chow's analysis is applicable because critiques of *Zigeunerweisen* reveal a sense that there is an original (a national past) that is being re-presented in cinematic form. Japanese reviewers commented on the nostalgic, antique quality of the film and the detailed, material recreation of the prewar period. Chow's argument can be reworked for this domestic context, because how a particular culture looks back at its own past can also fall prey to an emphasis on originality, even without the intervention of Western eyes. This internal debate reproduces the terms of Chow's external, cross-cultural one. Chow's argument is useful because it allows us change the terms and discuss the film in relation to both the prewar culture it showcases and the postwar culture in which it was produced. It enables the move between the mediated realms of culture and film.

Returning here to the question—are we able to apprehend the experience of the prewar, or is this a false nostalgia?—allows us to ask a second question. Does *Zigeunerweisen* deconstruct or reinforce the idea of an original? In this case, the original is the prewar era itself. Certainly for a large segment of the 1980s audience, the original lies far beyond the reach of memory and is purely a marketing construction. Suzuki may have been born in Taisho, but by the time the liberal, prewar era of his film was over, he was only 10 or 12 years old. It is not a time he lived through as an adult, nor is he trying to give this impression by setting himself up as an expert.

Ultimately, Suzuki is not concerned with the original. Like Chow, he is moving away from “an original that can be betrayed.” In fact, he is actively seeking to betray that original. He is questioning the very act of representation through the use of a false nostalgia. With its relentless doubling and slippage, the film raises the question of what in the 1920s was in fact original. It also raises the question of how original or authentic our nostalgia for it is. Suzuki shows us that nostalgia is in itself a form of doubling, “a co-existence of several pasts and the present,” and that by extension, history and memory are as elusive and unreliable as his *doppelgänger*s.

The very notion of originality becomes suspect given the multiple temporalities and the jarring mix of cultures. Chow argues that “contemporary Chinese films are cultural ‘translations.’”⁶⁵ But we must in the case of Taisho raise the very question of what in fact was “Taisho culture.” The question is crucial because in the prewar period the concept of culture was deeply tied into ideas of originality and authenticity. “Culture” (*bunka*) was a controversial term used to speak of the temporal, the spatial, the material,

65. Ibid., p. 202.



Still 5. Word *Geschichte* from Aochi's book. Reproduced with permission of Little More Co., Ltd., Tokyo.

the national, and the historical. Debates raged over whether this “culture” was the constantly shifting reality as lived, or an idealized immutable that only existed in the past or in some unforeseen future.⁶⁶

Philosopher Watsuji Tetsurō addressed this notion of culture as “doubling”; modern Japanese were leading a double life (*nijū seikatsu*) as a means to “account for change and succession within a framework of fixity.”⁶⁷ This idea of living in multiple temporalities/cultures is represented in *Zigeunerweisen* through Aochi, who in many respects leads a double life. He shifts between dream and reality, present and past as he relives and re-speaks actions and conversations. Sexually, he is married but has an affair with the wife of his best friend, Nakasago (who happens to be sleeping with Aochi's own wife). Culturally, he moves back and forth between the modern and the traditional, the Western and the Japanese. Intellectually, he represents the liberal thinking of the era, yet professionally he works for an institution that is training a conservative military readying for war and engaging in thought control. His encounters with the past and the otherworldly place him on constantly shifting ground, the very sense of flux that led to the prewar crisis of representation.

Can we read Suzuki's “translation”—the movement away from an orig-

66. See Harootunian, *Overcome by Modernity*, for an examination of culture via various thinkers of the prewar period.

67. *Ibid.*, p. 88.

inal—as a critique in itself? Reality in the film is only one of many possible realities, and, by extension, the Taisho of the film is only one of many possible Taishos. By making this multiplicity apparent (and deliberate), Suzuki strips the authenticity from any possible original. In the end, the film “translates” prewar culture because the original in *Zigeunerweisen* is like the voice on the record, ultimately indecipherable. The doubling in *Zigeunerweisen*, if it serves to “imprint difference,” is that between the actual prewar and the nostalgia for a prewar experience. It is the overlapping of history and a nostalgia for that very history. But neither is real. Both are illusion.

The idea of history comes to the fore in *Zigeunerweisen* in a scene shortly after Nakasago's death. The camera opens onto a gloomy shot of Aochi's study. He is seated at his desk reading and struggling to stay awake. The camera focuses in on the text, and German words appear on the screen. The camera mimics the eye, moving back and forth over the word *Geschichte*, “history” (Still 5). Aochi reaches for a paperweight and slams it onto the page, literally trying to stamp out “history.” But it continues to haunt him as he repeats actions from earlier scenes and time folds back on itself. He hears phantom sounds, such as the pebbles rolling down his roof, and is reminded of experiences from the past, scaring his wife Shūko. She remarks that he is as white as a sheet, echoing Sono's earlier comment that he looked as if he'd seen a ghost. Perhaps he has, or maybe it is just time doubling back on him. History is ever present, whether it be personal, national, fantastic, or real. But its haunting specter is beyond our reach, just as reality is beyond the reach of Aochi.

COLLEGE OF WILLIAM AND MARY