

# 1 The Motion Pictures as a Problem

## THE ARRIVAL OF CINEMA

### *Moving Pictures, X-Rays, and Other Entertainments*

Japan is one case where it is hard to align the history of discourse on film with the arrival of the apparatus from the West. First, long before the cinema's arrival in Japan, books described in rather sensationalistic terms the marvels of Western knowledge, including such protocinematic devices as the zoetrope.<sup>1</sup> Then, entering the 1890s, Japanese newspapers, which were always interested in news of the latest trends in Western culture and science, began running articles announcing Thomas Edison's initial work. The film historian and collector Tsukada Yoshinobu painstakingly accumulated over his lifetime most of the newspaper and magazine articles printed in Japan about the motion pictures before and in the first year after the medium was imported into Japan, and he published them in his lifework, *Nihon eigashi no kenkyū* ("A Study of Japanese Film History"). Devoted to determining the exact facts and chronology relating to the first year of cinema in Japan (who imported what machine when and how), the book is also a treasure trove of examples of how the Japanese media first approached the motion pictures. According to Tsukada's research, the first article on Edison's new invention was published in the *Fukuoka nichichi shinbun* on April 12, 1890, more than a year before Edison even applied for a patent. Several other articles followed over the years, but since one that appeared in the English language *Japan Weekly Mail* (on July 18, 1891) was reprinted from the *London Times*, it is likely that most of them were translations of pieces that had run in foreign papers. As such, they exemplify the degree to which even the very first discussions of cinema in Japanese crisscrossed whatever boundaries existed between Japan and the West.

As one would expect, the focus of these articles is on the reproduction of movement, emphasizing the new apparatus's ability to represent even the most fleeting and precise transformations, preserving past events so that they could be shown again in the present just as they once were. Underlying these discussions was a conception of realism that praised the machine's ability to present a vision "that is no different than looking at the real thing."<sup>2</sup> The Japanese articles were seemingly not content with describing a new machine that humans could use in their quest to control the natural world. The headline of the first article in the *Fukuoka nichichi shinbun* on the Kinetograph (Edison's early attempt to combine motion pictures and the phonograph) is most telling: "Pictures Give a Speech" (Shashin, ensetsu o nasu). The article goes on to explain that "the pictures can seem as if they are truly moving and giving a speech."<sup>3</sup> Without mentioning that it is the people in the pictures who presumably move and speak, the article focuses attention on technology itself becoming an enunciative subject, spectacularizing the technology by underlining its marvelous qualities. It is this fascination with the apparatus that would dominate discussions of the Kinetoscope, the Cinématographe, and the Vitascope in the year after they were imported to Japan.<sup>4</sup> Yet in attempting to describe the marvels of these new inventions, writers would avail themselves of a variety of existing discourses to connect cinema to known phenomena, discussing it in relation to such discursive categories as *gentō*, *misemono*, Westernization, realism, and the wonders of science.

In approaching the technology itself, many availed themselves of *gentō* as a protocinematic reference point. The *Yomiuri shinbun* likened the process of projecting the image onto a white screen to that of the *gentō* (in many pieces, the term *gentō* itself was used to signify the process of projection),<sup>5</sup> and then went on to describe the motion pictures as "the most evolved version of *utsushi-e*,"<sup>6</sup> thereby creating a history in which the imported cinema was an outgrowth of the Japanese version of the magic lantern. A writer with the pen name Dōjin Shiin wrote in 1903 of a friend who still argued that *gentō*, in addition to being able to show the same "transformations" as the moving pictures, did not suffer from flicker and was certainly more rich in entertainment value than the new technology. While Dōjin himself agreed with his colleague on the emotional impact created by a skilled *gentō* performance, he went on to insist that "one cannot show the state of living moving beings without the moving pictures."<sup>7</sup> Although highly praised as an early means of moving image entertainment, the *gentō* in the end was used in most discussions as a difference against which cinema would be defined. The *Fusō shinbun* in Nagoya

declared the Vitascope to be “completely different in content from the existing *gentō* in that it looks as if it truly moves.”<sup>8</sup> Komada Kōyō, arguably the most prominent of the early motion picture showmen, reproduced a newspaper article in his early pamphlet explaining the Vitascope which declared that the device was “not something like the *gentō* which is made of slipshod imaginary pictures, but directly projects photographs. . . . Since these do not immediately differ from the real thing, . . . they do not move outside of natural laws.”<sup>9</sup> The motion pictures were thus valorized over *gentō* on the scale of realism, but only in a field of knowledge in which film was depicted as an extension of the magic lantern. Such is evident in one of the many names given to the cinema in its first few years in Japan: *jidō gentō*, or self-moving magic lantern.<sup>10</sup>

In further explaining the technology, much early discourse on cinema would avail itself of the interest or even faith in scientific knowledge and progress prominent in the Meiji quest to catch up with the West. The motion pictures were sold to Japanese audiences as a great scientific discovery, which Komada declared was “brought back to our country to develop the scientific thought of our colleagues.”<sup>11</sup> Komada then went on in his pamphlet to offer a hagiography of the “great inventor” of the Vitascope, Thomas Edison.<sup>12</sup> Another early publication on the new medium began by citing an 1830s French science fiction novel to show how the future dreamed of in the past was being outdone today with the invention of motion pictures.<sup>13</sup> Attaching the cinema to the centerpiece of Meiji enlightenment, scientific thought, was clearly a sales pitch by the motion pictures’ first promoters in Japan, but it was also a means of inserting the medium into a narrative of progress that contemporary Japanese society was eagerly trying to write.

In fact, much of the tone of early accounts of the cinema in Japan depicted the apparatus as both a symbol of Western society and a fount of knowledge useful for Japanese anxious to approach the West. The *Osaka asahi shinbun* reported that the promoters of the March 1897 screening of the Cinématographe at Kyoto’s Kyōgokuza, claiming that the invention was “sufficient for knowing at a glance the customs of Western Europe,” were planning to distribute free tickets to all those over the age of sixty in Kyoto so that they could “fully understand the situation in Western Europe.” Such elderly Japanese, their explanation went, “by still thinking that Americans and Europeans are beasts . . . are harming the education of the young.”<sup>14</sup> Thus advertised as a means of “showing the customs, manners, and famous places and cities in Europe and America,”<sup>15</sup> the motion pictures were often presented within a Western frame, with the lecturer

who explained the apparatus wearing in the early days a frock coat as he expounded on the wonders of Western science. For the showing at Kyoto's Shinkyōgoku Mototōkō Engekijō, the theater was reportedly decorated in Western trappings, and Western music was occasionally performed "so that the audience would not get bored."<sup>16</sup> Early film exhibition, then, was constructed as a means by which Japanese could vicariously enter a Western space and overcome the divisions in time and geography to achieve, if only in mind, Fukuzawa's call to "leave Asia and join Europe." The fruits of Western science promised an amazing (and amazingly easy) means of catching up with the Enlightenment, of consuming the West without having to leave local boundaries.

Yet if reference to existing discourses on Western science and civilization, or use of Western music, was a central means of understanding the cinematic apparatus, one could hardly say the tactic made film more "familiar." Although Western music had by the 1890s made headway in Japan in the form of military music and school songs, as a popular form of entertainment, more traditional forms of Japanese music were far more recognizable to early film audiences. If Western music prevented Kyoto audiences from being bored, it was less because it was comfortably entertaining than because it was an exciting curiosity, one which did not so much explain the motion pictures as mark them by association as a marvelous new spectacle from abroad. Western trappings and the vicarious trip to Europe were more often an attraction, in Tom Gunning's sense of the term—a spectacle to be enjoyed more for its shock value and curiousness<sup>17</sup>—than a means of knowing either the medium or the West.

Labeling the cinema a new scientific discovery did not necessarily contain it within a field of knowledge in which its wonders were attributable to human mastery of natural laws. It is interesting to note that, while the article in English in the *Japan Weekly Mail* from April 1891 took pains to explain in detail the process by which film was moved and then stopped before the shutter in the Kinetograph—one of the central technical means by which the illusion of motion is produced—practically none of the Japanese articles reprinted in Tsukada's book made any endeavor to explain the process of intermittent motion.<sup>18</sup> In the early explanations of film technology in Japan, the catchphrases were *electricity* and *speed*. Given that much was made in advertisements of the power source used by the new invention, it was not surprising to see the *Yomiuri shinbun* "mistaking" (and thus mystifying) the cinematic signifier by explaining that "people and things shot in these photographs move through the use of electric power."<sup>19</sup> Many other papers resorted to reciting colossal numbers,

emphasizing how many thousands of pictures were taken each minute and how precisely a second of time was divided, as if the speed and numbers involved were sufficient to explain how people in the film moved. If the *Mainichi shinbun* could call the Kinetoscope “one great step for science” in one sentence, there was little keeping it from adding in the next that the invention “borrowed power from the miraculous mysteries of creation and destruction.”<sup>20</sup> The laws of science themselves, in some ways, were merely some of the inexplicable powers to which the cinema owed its fascinating talents, a field of mystery and wonder that, by association, paradoxically made the cinema understandable in its marvelousness, fitting easily into the discourse of the fairground entertainments, or *misemono*.

This fascination with the technology of cinema ultimately revolved around the apparatus’s capacity to reproduce reality. The primary focus of newspaper reports would continue to be on the realism of the motion pictures, as they declared that viewing the new spectacle was “no different from seeing the true thing,”<sup>21</sup> that it gave “the feeling of touching the real thing.”<sup>22</sup> In praising cinema’s talent for presenting the real as it truly is, the first book written on the motion pictures, published soon after the first screenings, went so far as to claim, like Dziga Vertov would decades later, that the new invention was “in practice more clear than looking at the true conditions.”<sup>23</sup> Contemporary newspaper articles lauded the machine’s ability to capture everything under the sun. Many papers echoed the *Yomiuri shinbun*’s claim that it could “copy down the situation of people’s movements without letting anything escape, large or small,” and proceeded to offer examples from the films being screened in Japan.<sup>24</sup> In the early discourse on cinema, there was a distinct interest, mixed with a wishful desire, in the motion pictures as a means of revealing all the hidden aspects of reality. The *Osaka asahi shinbun* speculated that, if Edison succeeded in his efforts to add color to this “self-moving means of photography,” then “there will not be a single thing under heaven not exposed in front of our eyes.”<sup>25</sup> Another paper, already lamenting that the current film technology could only show us limited aspects of things, was hoping that the addition of the newly discovered x-ray photography would allow the apparatus to see everything move.<sup>26</sup>

On a more general level, Akira Mizuta Lippit has written about the connections between cinema, x-ray technology, and visibility in later Japanese cinema,<sup>27</sup> but it is interesting to note that this connection was actually realized—in an odd fashion—in early motion picture exhibition in Japan. In August 1897, Arai Kazuichi, one of the first importers and promoters of Edison’s Vitascope in Japan, hit upon x-rays as a means of reviving flagging

interest in the “new invention” that had been shown in Japan for nearly a year, and inserted demonstrations of x-ray technology into the bill with film screenings. The film historian Komatsu Hiroshi, in pointing out how such a mode of exhibition was not uncommon in America and Europe as well, has argued that cinema in general in its early days was received by audiences as “an apparatus that shows what cannot be seen even though it is close at hand.”<sup>28</sup> Komatsu has presented this desire to see the unseen, or view the visible anew, as an unconscious “way of seeing”—and as the sole influence of Western ideologies on Japanese audiences and film—that was produced by the importation of cinema.<sup>29</sup> The dynamics of power in vision, especially when coupled with a quest for realism, are important issues in early Japanese cinema, but beyond doubting Komatsu’s claim about the limited influence of foreign cinema on Japan, I think it is important in this discussion to qualify his contention about cinema and sight in Japan. First, as we have seen with discourse emphasizing the tactile and physical proximity generated by the movies (“the feeling of touching the real thing”)—and as we will later see with complaints about the “obscurity” of the film experience in such movie districts as Asakusa—the cinema from the start was also a medium of the body, not just of sight. The benshi, who was present from the first showings, also made it strongly verbal. Second, Komatsu presupposes that a Japanese spectator watching a Lumière film is largely assuming the ideological position inscribed in the work’s regime of sight, a presumption that potentially idealizes the spectator and erases the processes of (mis)reading linked to cultural or historical differences in modes of reception. It is possible to argue, for instance, following the art historian Kinoshita Naoyuki, who has discussed the issue of the gaze with regard to the Lumière Company’s activities in Japan, that the Western exoticism and ethnographic viewpoint embodied in many of the Lumière *actualités* were not sufficiently understood by contemporary Japanese spectators.<sup>30</sup>

In the same way, one can take issue with Komatsu’s attempt to connect the desire to see the unseen with the importation of cinema. While it is essential to locate the motion pictures within the issue of vision in the late 1800s, it is equally important to note that cinema was not alone in cultivating this desire. Kinoshita, in his provocative analysis of the role of the *misemono* in modern Japanese art history, *Bijutsu to iu misemono* (The *Misemono* Called Art), repeatedly stresses that a discourse of realism intersected with the *misemono* from the early 1800s, even before the arrival of Commodore Matthew Perry and forms of Western art. As Kinoshita sees it, these ways of speaking not only help define the *misemono* but also elucidate how Western art was introduced into Japan. Kinoshita focuses some attention

on *ikiningyō*, the papier-mâché “living dolls” that, when arranged to recreate scenes from history or literature or introduce views of foreign lands, were a popular variety of *misemono* in entertainment districts like Edo’s (or Tokyo’s) Asakusa in the mid-1800s. When writing of these superbly crafted dolls, especially those molded by the most celebrated master of the art, Matsumoto Kisaburō, contemporary observers noted that viewing them “was like facing living people.”<sup>31</sup> Arguing that the *misemono* satisfied desires for realism ignored by other art forms, Kinoshita traces the quest for realism in *misemono* back centuries earlier, but stresses that *ikiningyō* marked a significant shift. Previous *misemono* modes of representation, such as *kago saikō* (baskets woven in the form of people and animals), were enjoyable to the degree that there was a gap between the materials used and the image represented; never forgetting they were viewing baskets, people marveled at how skillfully the materials were made to resemble real people. But everything was done to *ikiningyō* to eliminate the difference between the materials used and real persons, to make viewers forget they were looking at papier-mâché dolls.<sup>32</sup> It is unlikely, of course, that anyone really failed to remember that these were made of paper, and so amid a general shift from stressing the physicality of the object to hiding that, the tension between knowledge of the object and the wonders of technique/technology became a core aspect of the pleasure of *misemono*. Early cinema in Japan would carry on this enjoyable tension.

*Ikinigyo* were intricately tied to this discourse of realism, the name of the craft itself often being termed *shōutsushi ikiningyō*, with a term meaning “accurate reflection” added at the front. It is interesting to note, as Kinoshita does, that the word *shōutsushi* was central to early artistic debates on realism that would eventually give birth to the modern meaning of the term *shashin*, or photography (the ideographic characters *sha* [also read “utsushi”] and *shin* literally meaning “reflecting the truth”).<sup>33</sup> As an early mode of “photography,” then, *ikiningyō* can be taken as another form of protocinema in Japan along with the *gentō*, satisfying desires to see the unseen (the foreign) or the fantastic (pictures move, dolls “live”). More important for this discussion, the forms for describing *ikiningyō* and later kinds of *misemono* strongly resemble those subsequently used for cinema. The Western looking glass (*Seiyō megane*), an early Meiji apparatus with numerous lenses through which spectators could see skillfully produced views of the West (usually with a well-lit, three-dimensional effect), was described as “the truly mysterious art of traveling through foreign lands without going to the West”; looking through it was “just like living in the various European countries.”<sup>34</sup> The discourse of seeing the unseen was less



a property of the cinema, as Komatsu contends, than an established way of speaking about visual entertainments in the field of the *misemono*. The term *misemono* literally does mean, after all, “showing something.”

The discourses of realism, the West, and the power of sight outlined above are less a unique discursive pattern—a reflection or discovery of the essence of the new medium—than a continuation of a mode of speaking common to the *misemono*. As was the case with other *misemono*, the first film showings in Japan were often described as performances, complete with music and a lecture, in which the presentation of the apparatus was more important than what was represented (thus carrying on *misemono*’s pleasurable tension over the knowledge of technique).<sup>35</sup> Even tying early film exhibition to the West or to x-ray technology was less a matter of reinforcing a unique ideology of sight inherent to the cinema and more a manifestation of the logic of the *misemono*, rendering both equally spectacular attractions. Discursively aligned with the power of the gods, science itself, as well as many things Western, was tied into this logic, such that cinema and x-rays were to a certain degree simply interchangeable blocks within the *misemono* structure. The demands of spectacle, performance, and visual and sometimes bodily fascination common to all *misemono* thereby overrode the necessity to explain why and how the cinematic apparatus worked. Imbricated with existing discourses on the *gentō*, science, Westernization, and realism, cinema may have occupied a particular space shaped by the intersections of these discourses, but such a space was not unique and therefore could not define the motion pictures as significantly different from other forms of *misemono* entertainment. As long as x-rays could be added to the bill, even the discourse of exhibition was not enough to set cinema apart. In their first years in Japan, the motion pictures were talked about mostly as just the latest attraction, one in a series of similar forms of entertainment that, exchangeable in the space of exhibition, could be discussed using the same terms and concepts.<sup>36</sup>

### *A Medium Not Yet Arrived*

Although, in the years following the importation of the motion pictures, *katsudō shashin* (or, literally, “moving photographs”) would become the name of the new medium, discourse on cinema would, for some time, continue to center on the field of the *misemono*, never fully distinguishing cinema from other forms of entertainment. It was only after the cinema was defined as a specific problem that demanded particular discursive solutions that film would begin to be discussed as a unique and separate medium. That, however, would take some time.



Dōjin Shiin's book, *Katsudō shashinjutsu jizai* (All about Moving Picture Craft), is a good example of the continued prevalence of *misemono* discourse on cinema. Printed in 1903, it came out the year the first permanent movie theater in Japan, the Denkikan, was established in Tokyo's Asakusa. Cloaked as a technical introduction, the work is basically a fantastic rendition of the wonders of cinema. Dōjin begins by claiming that the cinema was invented by the "anatomist" Lumière in order to show his students the workings of the human heart that could not be sufficiently explained in words or regular pictures. He echoes the first descriptions of cinema offered in Japan, praising it for being able to "continually copy down a state of infinite change without leaving anything out" and for picturing "not the slightest difference from the real thing."<sup>37</sup> Dōjin further pursues the potential of film to capture the motions inside the human body and devotes pages to speculating on whether film can be made to capture the motions of the mind. Citing a report that an Englishman had acquired such a machine from the king of Siam, he even ponders the ethical dilemma of being able to read other people's thoughts. While still focusing attention on the body, Dōjin takes the desire to see the unseen, stressed by Komatsu, to the extreme, but in a way that again draws on the founding traditions of the *misemono*, where the presentation of deformed creatures, mostly taking place on the grounds of temples and shrines, was used as a means of educating people about the punishments they would receive if they committed sins and accumulated bad karma.<sup>38</sup> That Dōjin's moral lesson, woven in a fantastic and excessive language, was unproblematically combined with both technical explanations of film and photography and a resolute belief in human progress is itself a sign of how inextricably the discourses of science and the motion pictures were still connected with the *misemono* imaginary even in 1903.<sup>39</sup>

The Russo-Japanese War in 1904–1905 provided a boost to the motion pictures, as films treating the war proved box office hits, composing 80 percent of the films shown. Fervently patriotic audiences were eager to see visual evidence that Japan was the first Asian country to defeat a European power. But this did not necessarily single the cinema out: as Ueda Manabu has shown, such visual evidence could in some cases, such as Komada Kōyō's *shinematekku* attraction, be a mixture of moving dioramas and motion pictures, in which the latter was actually the less important feature.<sup>40</sup> The discourse of realism did come to the fore again as exhibitors boasted of showing actual scenes from the latest battles and film producers sent cameramen to the front to acquire images that could sell. Yet as Komatsu Hiroshi argues, this version of realism was in no way based on

a firm cinematic division between fiction and nonfiction. Fake documentaries, featuring miniature ships and cigar smoke, were just as likely to be classified as “war subjects” as works actually filmed at the front.<sup>41</sup> According to Komatsu, audiences themselves did not seem to mind: “Authenticity on the level of film reception was not that important; all these works were part of a homogenous filmic representation. When spectators got angry that the war images unfolding before their eyes were false, their anger was in no way based on a conceptual opposition of nonfiction to fiction, but was simply directed against the fact the representation was inaccurate.”<sup>42</sup>

Whether the representation was seen as real had little to do with a Bazinian perception of the ontological relation of the image to reality; it was merely based on a comparison of known facts with what was presented on the screen. In this logic, panoramas and *ikininyō*, as long as they were accurate, were equally as real as—and thus interchangeable with—the cinema. According to Komatsu, the modes of film categorization that made fake and real documentaries equal under the rubric “war subjects” were borrowed from nineteenth-century magic lantern catalogs.<sup>43</sup> Abé Mark Nornes takes issue with Komatsu’s general claim about a “homogeneous cinema,” as well as with his tendency to narrate early film history from the position of fiction film. He notes some early actualities, such as *Kankoku Kōtaishi Denka, Itō Daishi Kankoku o miya nyūkyō no kōkei* (Scene of His Imperial Highness the Prince of Korea and Ito Hirobumi Entering the Imperial Palace, 1907), that could not have performed their intended functions (such as proving to Koreans that their prince, rumored to be dead, was still alive) had cinema not been recognized as providing truthful evidence.<sup>44</sup> Such films link up with the initial claims about the realism of the new medium, and they point to one way it would be distinguished in the coming years, but it would take time before such distinctions were made across the discursive field.

By the end of the first decade of the twentieth century, Japanese intellectuals began recording their observations about the new medium in writing, but it would be several years before they asserted such distinctions. A special collection of such essays, penned by illustrious figures such as the novelists Shimazaki Tōson and Nagai Kafū and the theater director Osanai Kaoru (whose interest in film would later lead him to serve as an advisor to Shōchiku in its early years), appeared in the journal *Shumi* (Taste) in August 1909, one of the first such collections to appear at a time when film magazines did not yet exist. I discuss essays by Osanai and Ogawa Mimei in chapter 3; for now, it is important to note that many of the other articles, while focused on the motion pictures as a specific topic, still did not offer a unique definition of the medium. Kafū, like the aficionado of

traditional *shitamachi* (downtown Tokyo) culture that he was, merely used the motion pictures as an excuse to grumble about the lack of purity in literature and art in a modernizing age, commenting how, since “the modern is a terrible age,” it was “more truly an honor to fail and be buried by the modern.”<sup>45</sup> With Kafū helping to establish a pattern of inventing tradition by lamenting the arrival of the modern, cinema served as only one of many unspecified signs of the new that facilitated the creation of the boundaries of old Japan.

Other authors, while more favorable to the motion pictures, mostly treated them as merely a new object of interest. Shimazaki, in a short piece, remarked that viewing films reminded him of the ever-present difference between East and West.<sup>46</sup> Yoshie Kogan, a scholar of French literature, was still using the language the first newspaper articles about film in Japan had used, commenting on how the device allowed one to preserve the past and witness everyday life in the West. The cinema’s interest, to him, remained on the level of the reproduction of simple motion.<sup>47</sup> Finally, the account by the poet and literary critic Kubota Utsubo was largely a skeptical record of his first trip to see the motion pictures earlier that year. Expecting the movies to be of interest only to children, he had been surprised not only because the audience had been mostly adults, but also because the pictures had been worthy of being shown to adults. Given that he saw cinema’s role as limited only to the introduction of rare sights, however, he ultimately restricts the motion pictures to the discourse of the *misemono* by claiming they “were the most interesting of the *misemono* of that kind.”<sup>48</sup>

In the first years of twentieth century, there was another major field of discourse that made little attempt to define a difference between cinema and other *misemono* entertainments: the law. Starting with Yoshiyama Kyokkō, one of the first film critics in Japan, many have cited the Copyright Law as the first law to recognize the existence of film: one section declares that reproducing or exhibiting the copyrighted work of another person as a motion picture was to be considered a copyright violation.<sup>49</sup> Such statutes, however, did little to define cinema as a unique object under the law. In fact, Japanese law was very late compared to other nations in clarifying cinema’s status as intellectual property. As is well known, early American films, without any clear statutory guidelines, were initially copyrighted as series of photographs until court decisions in 1903 allowed films to be submitted as single entities; even then, it took until 1912 for the law to be amended to treat the motion pictures as a distinct medium. Richard Abel has described how French law was initially reluctant to accord cinema status as a unique form of intellectual property, refusing it any protection on

the grounds that it was the product of a machine. Later, in conjunction with revisions of the Berne Convention in Berlin in 1908, which recognized some of the international property rights of films, French law gave cinema only limited protection as an extension of authorial rights or as a work related to a literary text.<sup>50</sup>

While Japan, as a signatory to the Berne Convention, technically consented to the provisions in the treaty protecting film, it did nothing to clarify this protection in Japanese law other than establish cinema as a threat to literary copyright. As late as 1929, Yanai Yoshio, legal scholar and former head of film censorship at the Home Ministry, had to devote a major section of his monumental *Katsudō shashin no hogo to torishimari* (Protection and Regulation of the Moving Pictures) to arguing copyright law. He proposed that, while Japanese copyright law did not specifically state that film was subject to protection, the motion pictures were included under the rubric of “other products in the realm of literature, academics, and art,” found in Article 1 of the law, and that Japan, by ratifying revisions of the Berne treaty, was obligated to treat domestic films as protected even if this was not specified in its own law.<sup>51</sup> Despite this tacit protection, the film industry would continue asking for some years for more specific provisions in the law. It seems typical of the ironies of early discourse on cinema in Japan that the medium was singled out, first, only as a threat to an established art like literature, and offered positive legal protection solely as part of an undistinguished, unnamed mass of “other arts.”

As a larger potential threat, films were subject to censorship from the very beginning. There is the oft-related anecdote about Edison's film *The Kiss*, in which the police attempted to stop the famous filmed kiss between May Irvin and John C. Rice from being shown in Osaka in 1897, complaining that it harmed public morals. The story goes that the quick-witted benshi Ueda Hoteiken apparently convinced the overly prudish police that a kiss was similar to a handshake in America and prevented the film from being banned.<sup>52</sup> According to Yoshiyama, the first film to actually be refused permission for exhibition in Japan was one produced by the French company Pathé Frères, *Le Inquisition* (1905), which was cited for excessive cruelty in 1906.<sup>53</sup> Such cases of police intervention, however, did not take place on the basis of any law that specifically named the motion pictures. Cinema was treated as a *misemono* as much in law as in popular discourse and, thus, initially regulated by the laws that covered those entertainments.<sup>54</sup> In Tokyo during the very first years, this meant either the Regulations for Viewing Establishments—the 1891 statute that covered sports or sideshow entertainments performed in front of public audiences, such as sumō, acrobatics,

and panoramas—or, for films shown in regular theaters, possibly also the Theater Regulations from 1890 (overhauled as the Theater Exhibition Regulations of 1900, the first attempt to systematize theater censorship). Such statutes required that exhibitors acquire police permission before presenting entertainments and stipulated that applications deemed to be potentially injurious of public peace and morals would not be approved.

Neither of these regulations, nor the corresponding ones in other localities, specifically cited the motion pictures or contained statutes that called for particular systems of control for film. Cinema certainly existed to the degree that authorities recognized it as an entertainment capable of harming public peace, manners, and morals, but in both the procedures to which it was submitted and the way it was articulated in law, film did not exist independently from other *misemono*. Subject to laws written before the apparatus even appeared on Japanese shores, the motion pictures were merely inserted into a series of long-standing censorship procedures and traditions and treated no differently from Edo-era entertainments. According to legal discourse, as well as to many other discourses dealing with film, it was as if cinema either had not yet appeared in Japan or, since it was treated like any other *misemono*, had always already been in Japan and was only assuming a shape not yet its own.

#### ZIGOMAR AND THE PROBLEM OF CINEMA

Cinema would make its appearance in Japan—almost with a vengeance—partly through the incident surrounding the French serial *Zigomar*, directed by Victorin Jasset for the Société Française des Films Eclair, which was imported to Japan by Fukuhōdō, a relatively new film company, and opened at their Asakusa theater, the Kinryūkan, on November 11, 1911. The fast-paced detective film, featuring repeated clashes between the debonair criminal mastermind and master of disguise Zigomar and a series of detectives (including one named Nick Carter), proved immensely popular with Japanese fans. The phenomenal success it enjoyed, and the authorities' reaction to it, had a major impact on Japanese film culture and created a series of shock waves that would alter the ways in which cinema was discussed and defined. While I do not intend to argue that the *Zigomar* incident was the sole cause of these changes in the way film was defined (there were pointed criticisms of cinema before the series' appearance), it is in many ways a condensation of these transformations.

The Japanese film industry had been enjoying its own small boom starting in about 1909, before the *Zigomar* sensation. With the industry earning



Figure 2. The debonair criminal mastermind and master of disguise, Zigomar.  
(Courtesy of the Kawakita Memorial Film Institute)

vital capital from the success of Russo-Japanese War films—another indication of the important role war has played in the formation of Japanese cinema—the number of permanent motion picture theaters increased, and several companies were formed to regularize production within Japan. Yoshizawa Shōten constructed the first film studio in Tokyo's Meguro district in January 1908, as well as a theme park in Asakusa named after Coney Island's Luna Park; Makino Shōzō began producing immensely popular *kyūgeki* (old style) films starring Onoe Matsunosuke for Yokota Shōkai in 1909; and M. Pathé's Umeya Shōkichi sent cameramen off to the South Pole to record the exploits of a Japanese expedition in one of the industry's first feature documentaries. With Fukuhōdō entering the picture in 1909 with a string of well-built theaters, the number of Tokyo movie houses rose to a total of forty-four by 1912.<sup>55</sup> Film had finally come into its own as a domestic industry, and the papers were replete with comments on how vigorous business was.<sup>56</sup> In July of the same year, the four existing film companies, partly in a belated effort to emulate the monopoly trust formed by the Motion Picture Patents Company in the United States,



but also to consolidate the business as a legitimate industry, merged to form the Nihon Katsudō Shashin Kabushiki Kaisha (Japan Moving Picture Company), or Nikkatsu for short. After the Meiji emperor died at the end of July, the Japanese film industry set out on a new path as Japan entered the Taishō era (1912–1926).

At this time, any detective stories featuring chase scenes and criminal masterminds seemed to be a hit with Japanese movie audiences. The first *Zigomar* was followed by a sequel, and other foreign productions were brought in to cash in on the craze. Even Japanese producers began filming their own *Zigomar* imitations, with such works as *Nihon Jigoma* (Japanese *Zigomar*; Yoshizawa, 1912), *Shin Jigoma daitantei* (New Great Detective *Zigomar*; M. Pathé, 1912), and *Jigoma kaishinroku* (The Record of *Zigomar*'s Reformation; Yoshizawa, 1912) doing much to introduce European techniques such as faster editing into Japanese cinema. The *Tokyo asahi shinbun* reported that four of the major movie theaters in Asakusa were showing *Zigomar* imitations on the night of October 4, 1912.<sup>57</sup> The craze even spread to the publishing industry, which began printing novelizations of these films (or stories based on them), a successful trend that had a definite effect on the development of the Japanese mystery novel.<sup>58</sup> *Zigomar* had become a nationwide sensation and came to represent the success of the motion pictures, if not the existence of cinema itself.<sup>59</sup> Newspapers reported that the name had become part of Japanese slang ("He's a *Zigomar*!" referred to a dapper, though somewhat suspicious, man), and that children in empty lots all over were enjoying themselves by creating their own versions of the detective Nick Carter chasing the elusive evildoer.

The popularity of *Zigomar*, arguably the first example of a truly mass, modern entertainment fad in Japanese history—if not also, as Nagamine Shigetoshi has argued, of a complex multimedia phenomenon<sup>60</sup>—was not always greeted with favor in public discourse. Education officials began worrying aloud about the potential harmful effects movies were having on children, prompting a Tokyo school board committee to issue a report in July 1911 warning of the dangers of the medium and its places of exhibition and recommending that the lower schools in the area bar filmgoing by their pupils.<sup>61</sup> As if to verify those worries, rumors spread of minors committing crimes based on what they had learned watching films like *Zigomar*. There arose what Hase Masato has called a kind of "cinemaphobia."<sup>62</sup> Without mentioning the French production, the powerful *Tokyo asahi shinbun* newspaper first ran a ten-part series of articles in February 1912 warning of the dangers of motion pictures to children, and then, on October 4, 1912, began an eight-part series of reports on the *Zigomar*



phenomena that characterized these films as “inspiring crime” and roundly criticized the Tokyo Metropolitan Police for not banning the movies before their release. Almost as if directly reacting to these criticisms (the *Asahi* actually took credit in print), the police announced on the 9th that they were banning *Zigomar* and other similar films from Tokyo screens (films that had already started their runs, however, were allowed to be shown until the 20th; new films of a similar vein would not be given permission to screen after the 10th). Other localities soon followed Tokyo’s lead; in this way, Japan’s first experience with film as a mass cultural phenomenon was deemed injurious to public morals and effectively stamped out.<sup>63</sup> In this action, and in the discussions surrounding the *Zigomar* craze, one can sense a shift in the way cinema was defined in discourse in Japan.

The *Tokyo asahi* took considerable effort to introduce the *Zigomar* phenomenon to its readership, starting the first article in its series with the inquiring title “Just What Is *Zigomar*?” The subsequent articles attempted to answer this question, explaining that this was “the last phenomenon of the Meiji era”<sup>64</sup> and offering a detailed summary of the plots of the first two French *Zigomar* productions. But this was an *Asahi* that in February had railed, “There are a hundred evils [to the motion pictures] and not one benefit.”<sup>65</sup> The series did not stop at objectively describing the craze: in a mixture of reportage and editorializing common to Japanese journalism at the time, it unequivocally stated, “Once you see *Zigomar*, you cannot call it a detective film, but rather a film promoting crime or a film glorifying criminals.”<sup>66</sup> Declaring that “the fact that [the *Zigomar* films] have a bad influence on or corrupt audiences is a fact that none can deny,”<sup>67</sup> the *Asahi* proceeded to claim the existence of two or three cases of such corruption. No specifics were given, and the assertion itself seems suspicious when looked at from our point in time. There were virtually no accounts detailing such “corruption” (e.g., examples of crimes being committed because of something the perpetrator had witnessed in a *Zigomar* film), except, ironically, ones *after* the banning of the film.<sup>68</sup> One may wonder if the claimed ill effect was more a result of the media coverage and police reaction than of the film itself (where cinema was not evil until named so officially), and this problem again prompts us to focus on the role that discourse played in defining cinema in Japan in the early 1910s.

The *Tokyo asahi shinbun* was quick to offer various objects of blame for the *Zigomar* phenomenon. Part of the problem, it said, lay with the film and its producers. In a world of cutthroat competition, companies spared no cost in topping both their competition and previous successes. As a result, works like *Zigomar* were “born of the ferocious competition based

in commercialism," exposing the fact that the profit motive was not always consistent with the quest to foster a positive influence on society.<sup>69</sup> Thus, the *Asahi* was introducing a theme that would shape many discussions on film up until World War II: that the problem of cinema lay in part in its nature as an industrial art based on capitalistic practices that did not always support the Neo-Confucian national and social goals central to national ideology from the Meiji on.

At the center of the *Asahi* analysis was a detailed consideration of the uniqueness of cinema as a medium, which began with the fact that films like *Zigomar* were fictional products. Reflecting a Neo-Confucian mistrust of fabrication, the *Asahi* began its series by openly wondering why a fictional creation could have so much power over people. Answering its own question, and thereby underlining its own worries about cinema, the newspaper declared, "Even if one can say that every villain is the product of a serials author's imagination, one cannot neglect the fact that once he appears in a work of the moving pictures, the sense that he is the real thing is more prominent than one's feeling in watching theater. Accordingly, the degree to which film itself exerts a lasting influence on audiences is a problem that cannot be neglected."<sup>70</sup> The fact that cinema could make the fictional seem real was both part of its appeal and a major problem, because "simply and ingeniously flavoring the work with fantasy and fact is itself sufficient to strengthen and spread the film's lasting influence."<sup>71</sup> In emphasizing cinema's unique capacity to turn the imaginary into reality, the *Asahi* was constructing a narrative in which audience influence depended on a difference represented by the cinema. Film was finally beginning to peek out from the shadows of the *misemono*, but ironically, in the *Tokyo asahi's* view, only to the extent that it was a social problem.

At the time, it was felt that not only the realism of the films themselves but also the entire space surrounding cinema distinguished it as a dangerous medium and created a plethora of strong stimuli that left a lasting mark on spectators. In the eighth part of the *Zigomar* series, the *Asahi* offered a vivid account of the sensory experience of going to the movies in 1912 in the movie theater district of Tokyo's Asakusa:

Beyond the electric lights that dazzle the eyes and the noise from the bands that tend to stray off-key—both of which lead the minds of passersby astray—the first set of stimuli offered by the moving picture district are the placards painted in strong colors of red, blue, yellow, and purple which incite curious hearts. Men and women who set foot in this area quickly become the prisoners of the moving pictures even before they watch a film, already losing their mental balance.



Figure 3. Asakusa's moving picture district in 1910, showing the garish banners and ornate facades of the Taishōkan and the Sekaikan. (Courtesy of the National Diet Library, [www.ndl.go.jp](http://www.ndl.go.jp))

Audiences stimulated and led on in this way first taste an unpleasant feeling as they enter the darkness from the light. Their state of mind, having lost its balance, eventually falls into an uneasy mood. Here the air inside the theater, inadequately ventilated, assaults people with a kind of unclean humidity and attacks the sense of smell with tobacco smoke, the fragrance of face powder, and the odor of sweat.

In an insecure and unpleasant theater, what is projected into the eyes of people having lost mental tranquility is *Zigomar*. . . . The conditions for extending an evil influence and for causing corruption have all been prepared in these elements.<sup>72</sup>

There were of course other entertainments in Asakusa that contributed to this cacophony, but here cinema was being blamed for an entire environment; it was starting to figure in discourse as the core of a new, but threatening, modern life. Not only the films themselves but also cinema as a modern spatial experience assaulting the senses seemed to contribute to the motion pictures' influence. As the paper had previously stressed, the movie hall represented a dangerous, crass, and almost obscene form of physicality, harming not only the spirits of spectators but also their very bodies (as such, cinema eventually became the object of legal and

educational, as well as medical, forms of correction).<sup>73</sup> Carrying on but rendering negative such earlier discourses, cinema was demonized not just for its visuality but also for its physicality. Another example of such medical discourse was the recurring emphasis on film as a form of “stimulation” (*shigeki*), according to which the cinema’s influence seemed to bypass the filtering effects of reason and judgment to affect people’s character bodily and directly. Unique not only as a technology, film was identified as a central facet of a new but disorientating culture in which both the boundaries between mind and body and the divisions between social groups were undermined and confused, creating a kind of “heterotopia” in Foucault’s sense of the term.<sup>74</sup> Such boundary transgressions were a source of fear to the *Asahi* and cited as the basis of the kind of demolition of normal modes of thought that distinguished the moviegoing experience.

In the *Tokyo asahi*’s vision, conditions of reception were not completely to blame for undermining spectators’ processes of reason: moving picture audiences were somehow different from the start. Why, after all, would any normal human being tolerate time and time again the inherently “insecure and unpleasant,” the physically damaging conditions of the theater as movie fans did? Implied in the paper’s account was a cinema audience almost abnormal in character, made up of fans who possessed addictive personalities that forced them to become “prisoners” of the unpleasant as a perverse necessity. As a whole, the paper characterized movie audiences in less than complementary terms, stating that those “sucked into this *Zigomar*” were “like ants swarming around a piece of sweet sugar.”<sup>75</sup> With the *Asahi* claiming that “sensible-minded people would undoubtedly frown upon this fashion for crime films within the moving picture theaters,”<sup>76</sup> the paper was distancing itself from regular filmgoers, placing them on a lower rung in a hierarchy of right-mindedness and siding itself (and its readers) with the “sensible,” who refrained from the moblike behavior of the movie masses. Reflecting a fear of the modern crowd common in later Japanese intellectual descriptions of mass culture, the discourse established an “us” versus “them” division that defined the medium in class-based terms and placed cinema spectatorship outside the boundaries of right-minded behavior. It was cinema’s influence on this other set of people that was of central concern.

A description of the composition of the film audience served in part to justify this hierarchy. According to the *Tokyo asahi*, “the grand majority of the audience is young boys and girls of lower or middle school age,”<sup>77</sup> and such future leaders of society were seemingly vulnerable to the motion pictures’ authority.

With these scenes and props, the film first leads the audience into a field of realistic impression and there shows, putting into motion, various evil deeds. Even adult audiences with good sense and judgment are so impressed they call it "an interesting novelty that works well." The film naturally offers even more intense excitement in the minds of the young who like both adventure and strong individuals, and who idealize the winner in any situation.

For instance, even if the conclusion results in the death of the villain, just how much does the moral point of view indicated by the death of the villain transmit an authoritative impression in the minds of the young living in today's society? Most of them will only see the success of the elusive on-screen hero, and think in the end how they would like to become a figure on screen themselves, to act and appear as if on film.<sup>78</sup>

On the one hand, it was believed that children (and other lesser spectators, like women) did not possess the discernment necessary to both properly read the film's ending and ward off the pernicious stimulations of cinema, especially since the motion pictures offered them modes of identification that were previously unheard of. Given that it is debatable whether the audience was dominated by children as the *Asahi* believed,<sup>79</sup> the problem concerning the film audience was less one of age than of modes of understanding and knowledge.

On the other hand, contemporary discourse was describing a potentially ineluctable historical difference that posed a distinct threat. An editorial in the *Yomiuri shinbun* cited the motion pictures (along with the phonograph) as one of the great modern inventions that had truly penetrated the everyday lives of normal people.<sup>80</sup> But to the *Tokyo asahi shinbun*, this modernity served as the background for a new breed of young Japanese who increasingly expressed desires that approved modes of moral discourse could not accommodate. The problem concerned not just a minority of children who were visibly cruel and mischievous by nature, but a majority born with such instincts.<sup>81</sup> The cinema, then, did not simply produce but "conform[ed] to these instincts and tastes," representing a new age that threatened to overturn established orders.<sup>82</sup> Film spectators were not simply undereducated but also fundamentally different in their way of perceiving the world and acting on their desires.

As a problem of knowledge, cinema was considered by many officials an educational issue from the 1910s on.<sup>83</sup> To them, film viewers both young and old required instruction, a mental preparedness that would protect them from the disorienting assault of the cinematic experience and enable them to produce approved meanings from specific film works. But what surfaced in the *Zigomar* incident, and what presented an obstacle not

encountered earlier, was the problem of alterity, this time as represented by the question of the image. The *Tokyo asahi* noted, "As expected, the style of explanation of the benshi charged with lecturing did not neglect the lesson that good is rewarded and evil punished, . . . but in the minds of audiences who were watching the changes appear before their eyes on screen, no sense arose of good being rewarded and evil being punished."<sup>84</sup> It was thus felt that spoken language was unable to direct the interpretive processes of cinema audiences; there was something in the image that exceeded or even worked against the word. An official from the Tokyo Metropolitan Police, in explaining their difficulties with the film, also noted the difference between the film summary submitted as part of the censorship procedure and the film itself: "At police headquarters, it was thought, looking at the original story of the French *Zigomar*, that there was nothing much to it. Among works of this kind, you would think they were only a kind of child's play when you inspect the moving picture license. That's why we approved it up until today, thinking it had no effect on public morals. However, looking at the actual film, there is a world of difference from the explanation in both the scenery and the characters."<sup>85</sup>

This was not simply a problem of the accuracy of the plot summary: there was increasing concern that the motion pictures were a medium fundamentally different from existing linguistic arts, one that posed unique problems. The *Tokyo asahi* defined this difference: "Compared to *jōruri* and *naniwa-bushi*,<sup>86</sup> which specialize in the aural, and compared to theater, which attacks using both the visual and the aural, the impression received from the moving pictures is stronger and the influence caused is greater."<sup>87</sup> Cinema was defined as visual, not because of its essence, but because of the problems it supposedly posed. With the image seemingly resistant to the restrictions of the word, there was no guarantee that the minds of audiences were producing even the desired meanings. It was the alterity of the image, coupled with spectator desires associated with it, that helped define the cinema and mass cultural modernity as a threat to a Meiji order that had just seen its leader pass away.

It is important to emphasize that the problem of the image was not one exclusive to *Zigomar*; in the end, cinema itself was the issue. *Zigomar* was thought to merely represent a dangerous trend in motion picture culture that necessitated banning not just this French production but also all others similar to it. *Zigomar* had become a problem in other nations as well (it was eventually banned in France, for instance), often because of its supposed elevation of criminality through the figure of an upper-class criminal. While class would become a central problem in later discussions of film censorship



in Japan, *Zigomar's* social portrayals were barely mentioned in the discourse surrounding the film. Many did voice concern that the film was teaching minors the methods of crime, but it is significant that, despite the recommendations of several newspapers,<sup>88</sup> police never pulled any of the *Zigomar*-influenced novels from the bookstore shelves. It was *Zigomar's* new and unique depiction of crime through the image that was the issue.

The *Asahi* in particular was already citing a driving force behind this evolution in the image: "When people get used to the moving pictures and will no longer be satisfied with most products, it will be necessary to provide something unprecedented and strongly stimulating so as to shock the visual senses."<sup>89</sup> This, the *Asahi shinbun* felt, was what *Zigomar* and its ilk were doing at an accelerating rate: offering a thrilling and singular mode of visual sensation, a new phenomenon that the paper would call "motion-picture-like" (*katsudō shashinteki*).<sup>90</sup> This emerging uniqueness of cinematic narration was itself cited as a problem. Earlier, the newspaper had complained in general about the "unnaturalness" and incomprehensibility of new film techniques such as ellipses and cutting within the scene, arguing that jumping from scene to scene or cutting out (what, in the classical narrative economy, are considered unimportant) actions confused and fatigued spectators, especially younger ones.<sup>91</sup> The transformation of time and space enabled by editing was itself seen as a threat. In *Zigomar*, this was coupled with the villain's ability to appear and disappear, to change costumes in an instant and mysteriously jump from one place to another while eluding his pursuers, but in a way that, the *Asahi* acknowledged, proved absolutely fascinating to new Japanese youth.

This fluidity of space and identity, analogous to the circulatory anonymity of the modern crowd, was, according to Tom Gunning, a central concern of not only early trick films but also nineteenth-century phenomena like photography (which both undermined established forms of identity through mechanical reproduction and instituted new ones by documenting the individual body) and detective fiction (which tried to assert the certainty of an individual's guilt against an ever-changing urban environment).<sup>92</sup> We can speculate that it was this transcendence of space and time and *Zigomar's* ability to disguise himself and change identities (aided by Jasset's skillful use of trick photography)—elements similar to the "motionless voyage" Noël Burch cites as central to the classical film experience—that both fascinated and disturbed contemporary observers. That is perhaps why so much of the discourse on these films worried about the audience's ability to recognize and identify who was the villain and who was the hero. If, as Gunning says, *Zigomar* "envisioned a new cinema



of narrative integration, moving towards the paradigm of classical filmmaking,"<sup>93</sup> the discourse on film in Japan marked it as the point at which the moving pictures broke with previous paradigms and stepped into the unknown—the simultaneously alluring and threatening modern realm of spatiotemporal dis- and reconnection—and thereby posed the problem of what cinema is. Here we can say that cinema became foreign after it was familiar. Here the incipient classical mode was being less vernacularized than made alien, and so the Pure Film Movement's task later on would be to reinvent the familiarity of classical forms, in part by rendering other modes of filmmaking alien to cinema if not also Japan.

Nagamine Shigetoshi has offered the interesting hypothesis that *Zigomar* and related films were banned only after the Japanese film versions and novels began appearing. Citing the *Asahi* as evidence, he argues that authorities became worried because the stories were becoming domesticated, or Japanized, taking place with Japanese actors in familiar Japanese settings, and thus better able to influence unsuspecting homegrown audiences.<sup>94</sup> That certainly was a fear, and in the following decades censors would come down harder on Japanese films for portraying certain actions such as kissing (which was banned in cinema until after World War II) than on foreign films for portraying the same actions (where an innocent kiss was allowed on occasion). Authorities could sometimes accept images of certain behaviors if these were comfortably framed as "foreign," but not if they crossed the border and entered Japanese everyday life. *Zigomar* was probably one such case, but I emphasize that the majority of discourse on the film focused less on such border crossings in content—and the fear that foreign behavior was becoming familiar—and more on the realization that the cinema, the means by which these actions were shown and which had until then appeared just to be another *misemono*, was itself alien. The parallel anxiety was less that Japanese would become foreign, and more that they were already new and different and that cinema both represented and exacerbated this fact.

It was against these anxieties surrounding new media and the idea of identity changing from both within and without, that many discourses on film tried to operate. Just as Gunning emphasizes the important role of regimes of knowledge in processing photographic information so as to refix and reestablish identity within a modern social context, so we can investigate how discourses after the *Zigomar* incident attempted to name and classify this particular visual experience. On the one hand, such discourses, represented by the efforts of educational authorities and newspapers to describe and categorize cinema and its individual texts, laid the

foundations for film study in Japan. On the other, in the hands of film reformers like those in the Jun'eigageki Undō (Pure Film Movement) in the 1910s, these discussions would work to merge the cinema with the culture of the new Japanese middle class and transform the status of Japanese film and its audiences.

The *Zigomar* incident in this way helped define a central problem with the motion pictures that authorities and social leaders would confront for some time: how to control an alluring but elusive visual (and sometimes physical) mode of signification—one that resisted the regulation of the written or spoken word—and its spectatorship. Recognition of this unique problem was reflected in the police's reaction to the incident. A few days after banning the film, the Tokyo police issued a set of internal procedural guidelines detailing what to guard against when evaluating applications for film exhibition:

1. Works constructed from a framework that suggests adultery.
2. Works liable to invite or support methods of crime.
3. Works bordering on cruelty.
4. Works constructed from a pattern that covers love relations or that descend into obscenity, especially ones capable of exciting base emotions.
5. Works contrary to morality, that induce mischief by children, or that cause corruption.<sup>95</sup>

The sections covering adultery, cruelty, obscenity, and morality differed little from the theater regulations in force at the time.<sup>96</sup> What had changed in confronting the problem of film was the perception that cinematic works could not only offend established sensibilities or directly harm public morals but also strongly induce objectionable behavior in spectators, especially in certain sectors of the audience. Theater regulations at the time never posited a narrative of behavioral influence, or specified audiences that should be the object of regulative concern. This was a problem thought specific to cinema, which was posited as influencing a newly defined object of correction and control: thought and behavior; I expand on this in chapter 5.

Cinema was a unique problem that demanded particular modes of correction. It was as cinema that *Zigomar* was banned, not as literature. The special attention—or fear—focused on cinema is evident in reports that authorities even tried to prevent producers from making films on the life of General Nogi Maresuke, the military leader who committed *junshi* (ritual suicide on the occasion of one's lord's death) on the night of the Meiji emperor's funeral, only one month before *Zigomar* was banned.<sup>97</sup> Despite the fact Nogi was already being praised by many as the epitome of

*bushidō*, the perfect example of citizenship for Japanese children, cinema and its form of spectatorship were apparently too dangerous to trust them to spread even this important message.

As a Tokyo police official said, there was “a necessity to more strictly watch [the moving pictures] than the theater.”<sup>98</sup> The procedure for censoring films started to change. The Tokyo Metropolitan Police attributed their mistake in approving *Zigomar* for exhibition in part to the fact that they had not seen the film beforehand;<sup>99</sup> given the *misemono* regulations that covered cinema at the time, an application required only a written summary of the film or of the benshi’s narration.<sup>100</sup> The police did send out officers to investigate the films while they were being screened in the theaters, but this procedure was no different from dispatching foot patrols to the sideshow tents.<sup>101</sup> The *Zigomar* incident made it clear that censoring the content of a film required more than a review of a written summary. The Tokyo police acknowledged that they now needed to base their decisions on preview screenings.<sup>102</sup> The definition of the filmic text itself began to change as censorship procedures started to place importance on the text as a visual object, not just as a written story, as well as on the text as viewed, not just as read. New censorship technologies were deemed necessary (and later proposed in, for instance, the groundbreaking 1917 Tokyo Moving Picture Regulations), ones that molded modern models of subjectivity centered on promoting the internal mental faculties capable of accommodating this visual “stimulation,” and ones that regulated the physical side of cinema and created a homology between the structure of the individual subject and the social hierarchy, where the mental (the upper class and the state) would rule over the body (the lower class, the people).

Thus, it is important to stress that reactions against cinema were not simply a manifestation of an existing Japan confronting or domesticating a new or foreign object. Certainly cinema became a mark of the modern, a modern to be feared and regulated, but it was seen as alien only after it was treated as familiar (as a *misemono*). The Japan that encountered it was also assuredly not a traditional entity, given and complete, but one that authorities recognized was already new, different, and changing. And what they proposed against cinema was not the reinforcement of old-time values (although that rhetoric would become more common two decades later, long after these cultural transformations had already begun), but rather a set of new techniques that, as I argue in chapter 5, were conducive to constructing a modern subject within a modern nation. Cinema helped prompt these changes, but only insofar as it became subject to a transformative struggle over its form and meaning. What was emerging here was not a

battle between old and new but one between different forces or conceptions of modernity. One site of this battle was the rising field of discourse on cinema, which itself was being shaped by the circumstances of film's "discovery" as a problem.

The history of discourse on the moving pictures in Japan as a specific object began only with the realization that discourse was inadequate to define or accommodate its object. Such a realization itself was not sufficient to generate a discourse on the motion pictures: it had to be linked to a description of the medium as a social problem in need of solution. Only with such a perception did the fact that existing discourses, such as those on the *misemono*, failed to treat the cinema as a differentiated sign become an issue. Discourse on cinema developed by first negating existing discourses, establishing the basis of a semiotics of difference within which the cinema would be defined. Such a semiotic negation was doubled in the social realm, because the motion pictures had to be, in a sense, rejected or posited as objectionable in order to gain a positive definition. Cinema did not become a problem because it was modern and visual; it became modern and visual through the process of being defined as a problem, one dialectically intertwined with many other facets of what was seen as modern. Cinema was defined by being a problem, just as the problem was defined by cinema and its modernity. The question remained, however, how to solve the problems posed by cinema. The very fact that the motion pictures posed a problem that sparked objections meant that film was being durably established in discourse in a way that other, ephemeral *misemono*, like the panorama and the Western looking glass, never did. Again an existing object cinema was not being "discovered"; rather, *cinema* was appearing in discourse as a term considered crucial in identifying central problems of modernity, discourse, visuality, the body, perception, class, and society. Cinema became distinguished in discourse precisely as a medium that exceeded current discourse (if not the word itself), one that utilized a new mode of signification that could not be accommodated in existing forms of speech and writing. It was this contradictory task of delineating in discourse what by definition could not be described—and thus of finding novel forms of discourse to shape and accommodate it—that became the central dynamic of 1910s discourse on cinema in Japan.