

07. Embracing “Democracy”: How Ishizaka Yōjirō Movies Brought “Democracy” to Post-War Japan

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This paper considers through an analysis of Ishizaka Yōjirō movies the piratical process by which “democracy” was accepted via post-war Japanese popular culture.

This year (2015) marks seventy years since the end of World War II. Also, ever since the 1999 National Flag and Anthem Act, political forces in Japan trying to remake the post-war establishment prescribed in the constitution have grown more and more active. Regardless of whether one is for or against revising the Japanese constitution, examining post-war democracy has become an urgent task.

However, if such an examination only considers as manifestations of democracy political acts in a narrow sense—those based on specific aims and rooted in daily life while being directed towards a sphere outside of it—then it will be inadequate. Democracy is engraved in our familiar, everyday lives. People can adopt democracy in very personal, informal, and mundane forms. It spreads as, for example, ideas about ways to be human and lifestyles. In other words, it can be adopted in a piratical fashion.

Of course, this kind of adoption is somewhat ambiguous and hard to cognize, and, furthermore, each case differs. For these reasons, an analysis of it involves difficulties. Thus, this paper will examine the process by which democracy was embraced, rather than pushed upon Japan by an “other” as a political ideal. By analyzing expressions of democracy in best-selling and very influential popular culture movies based on Ishizaka Yōjirō’s works, it will show how democracy was changed into something easily imitable (adaptable) in everyday life in the form of ideas about what it means to be human and lifestyles.

I have chosen to focus on these films (including *Aoi sanmyaku* or “Blue Mountains”) for multiple reasons. First, they skillfully depict “democracy” through everyday themes such as romance and family, and many of them were bestsellers. Thus, Ishizaka’s works exerted a strong influence on post-war Japan’s very personal and everyday forms of democracy. Second, twenty of Ishizaka’s works were made into films over a long period stretching from 1937 to 1988. Therefore, it is possible to trace changes in their expressions over time. Third, Ishizaka Yōjirō films have a common pattern, despite being based on multiple works and having been created over such a long time span. Therefore, an analysis of these films enables one to understand how changes in the times influenced expressions of democracy.