

Socializing the audience: Going to the cinema in post-war Japan

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Abstract:

What makes a 'good' audience? In posing questions about audience behaviour, we must first think about expectations of who makes up 'the audience' in a particular place or time. Often a bad or mis-behaving audience is simply not the audience we had expected. Furthermore, we cannot assume 'the audience' to be uniform, or to follow as we might expect from marketing strategies. In order to understand how audience behaviours might diverge from the expectations of filmmakers, theatre owners, advertising strategists, and censorship bodies or those who seek to influence behaviours and attitudes through cinema, we must approach the audience as a diverse group of individuals with varied and competing desires, needs, and obligations.

In Occupation-era Japan (1945-1952), the offices of the Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers explicitly positioned the cinema as a means to change audience behaviours. Cinema content was developed under strict censorship, with the goal of reforming the Japanese way of life. The legal protection and implementation of gender equality was conceived as a means to 'democratize' post-war Japan, and so filmmakers were advised to include gender-equal characters and narratives in post-war productions, creating film content which presented women as emancipated members of society. Yet Japan even today struggles to achieve gender parity. So why did viewers not take the models of the cinema home as expected? This article presents ethnographic and archival materials suggesting a significant difference in how male and female viewers accessed and related to the cinema, arguing that socializing the audience requires establishing how that audience is constituted.

Keywords: Japan; propaganda; censorship; gender; ethnography; memory

What makes a 'good' audience, and how can we decide whether an audience is behaving or responding appropriately? In posing questions of audience behaviour, we must think about

expectations of who makes up 'the audience' in a particular place or time, and why we might expect these people to behave or respond in a particular manner. Often a bad or misbehaving audience is simply not the audience we had expected, or an audience reacting to circumstances outside our consideration. And of course, audiences cannot be assumed to be uniform, or to follow from creative intent or marketing strategy. In order to understand how audience behaviours might diverge from the expectations of filmmakers, theatre owners, advertising strategists, and censorship bodies or those who seek to influence behaviours and attitudes through cinema, we must approach the audience as a diverse group of individuals with varied and competing desires, needs, and obligations.

This article explores audience members' recollections, and historical accounts of cinema audience behaviours in Occupation-era Japan (1945-1952) based on an ethnographic study undertaken in Kansai that utilised participant observation, questionnaire surveys, informal interviews and filmed interviews. During the Allied Occupation, Japanese film content and the structure of the filmmaking industry was channelled in ways intended to democratize Japanese society. The documented political objectives of the Occupation era consequently make a fruitful case study to explore questions of audience behaviour, in relation to the impact of cinema on everyday life. Did audiences respond to the democratic prompts encoded in Occupation era cinema as the Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers (SCAP) hoped?

Juxtaposing material gathered from interviews, participant observation, and a questionnaire study, with archival material indicating the goals of the Occupation, we can see how an apparent lack of consideration as to how audiences accessed the cinema severely undermined attempts to use cinema content to influence social change. By exploring how a particular group of viewers remember interacting with the cinema under Occupation, this article demonstrates how unexpected audience behaviours impeded certain social changes that the Allied forces sought to effect through film development and exhibition. Of course, the ethnographic material presented here relies on audience members' contemporary recollections of their early experiences of cinema, and as such cannot be taken as direct historical fact. Nonetheless, given the lack of audience studies for this period of Japanese cinema, and the reliance of extant studies on newspaper and journal accounts of audience behaviour, it seems relevant to ask what audience memories can add to knowledge about this period of censorship and mass cinema attendance.

Addressing the audience in Occupied Japan

Cinema audience behaviour was a topic of much public discussion in early post-war Japan. The offices of SCAP, headed by General Douglas MacArthur, explicitly positioned the cinema as a means to change audience behaviours and ideologies in everyday life. Cinema content was developed under strict information dissemination and censorship guidelines, with the goal of fundamentally reforming the Japanese way of life. Beginning the Occupation of Japan on 2 September 1945, SCAP quickly circulated the Memorandum Concerning Elimination of Japanese Government Control of the Motion Picture Industry on 16 October

1945 (Hirano 1992: 39), indicating that the Japanese film industry was to play an important role in the Occupation from an early stage. The cinema was imagined as a means to 'educate' and 'reorient' Japanese viewers away from pre-war and wartime attitudes perceived as feudal or vulnerable to fascist interpretation (Kitamura 2010: 42). Information section personnel instructed Japanese filmmakers in the kind of content understood by the Occupiers to be desirable, assessing synopses and screenplays, before final film prints were censored or suppressed. Trade and fan magazines were similarly restricted in their reporting on the film industry and its stars.

In the first years of the Occupation, SCAP personnel were proactive in encouraging the production of films that reflected the Allied Occupation's democratic agenda. The Motion Picture division of the Civil Information and Education Section (hereafter CIE) checked synopses, screenplays, and filming plans, while the Civil Censorship Detachment (hereafter CCD) examined prints. Finished products were often sent back to the studios for cuts or reworking. SCAP even attempted to formulate a hypothetical 'typical' post-war media audience member known as 'Moe-san' (Mayo 1984: 303). Moe-san was a composite of information gathered by Allied intelligence and researchers during and immediately after the war. Based on their understanding of wartime schooling and social indoctrination, Occupation personnel attempted to predict Moe-san's reaction to the media of the post-war period, with the intention of influencing the ideal audiences' 'democratization' through this same media. Moe-san was 'a typical citizen, of whom 43% were tenant farmers' (Mayo 1984: 303). 'He' had completed around eight years of primary school and had basic literary skills. 'He' had been successfully sold militarism, and could therefore be successfully introduced to democratic principles through the same media. 'He' also appears to have been assumed to be male (Mayo 1984: 303).

Re-imagining Japan onscreen

In this period before television, which arrived in Japan as a commercial product in 1953, and did not reach saturation until 1958, SCAP were not wrong to identify the cinema as one of the most convenient means of communicating the Occupation agenda to large numbers of the Japanese public. There was significant popular demand for film products, as audiences in newly defeated Japan embraced the cinema as a means of escape from the harsh realities of the poverty and uncertainty of the early occupation years. The popularity of film grew rapidly from 1945, culminating in a peak admissions rate of more than one billion viewers in 1958 (Motion Picture Producers Association of Japan, 2017). Many interlocutors recall the era as one 'without many entertainments' (Koyama 2016), and the cinema is remembered as the major attraction for young children in particular, in comparison to radio broadcasts and reading materials. In this sense, the cinema provided a young and impressionable audience for SCAP's message of change.

The question is whether the social changes SCAP attempted could be produced through film exhibition. First on the list of SCAP reforms was demilitarization, quickly followed by democratization. By October 1945, MacArthur had also suggested equal rights

for women as one of the five priority reforms to be enforced by the occupation. To gain the support and understanding of women 'who might otherwise resist out of conservatism', equal educational opportunities for both sexes were considered essential (Mayo 1984: 282). Universal suffrage, female admission to national universities, and the elimination of the pre-war adultery law were quickly ratified, and the Land Reform Law of October 1946 allowed women to inherit family property. By May 1947, gender equality had been included as Article 24 of the post-war Constitution, while Article 14 outlawed discrimination. The legal protection of gender equality was conceived as a means to 'democratize' post-war Japan, and so filmmakers were advised to include gender-equal characters and narratives in post-war productions, creating film content designed to sell the new post-war social order.

While the inclusion of provisions for gender equality in the 1947 Constitution of Japan is often discussed as the Occupation's legacy, Christine de Matos argues that 'gender reform was not a priority of the architects of the Occupation, but was rather an afterthought in the wider reform program, or perhaps subsumed beneath the more amorphous labels of democratization and human rights' (2007: 89). Historians speculate that Japanese activists and lawmakers would likely have achieved universal suffrage without the intervention of SCAP, in light of the destabilization of gender roles occasioned by wartime conscription and reliance on female labour. Nonetheless, Occupation personnel took an active role in translating Article 24 of the new Constitution for CIE and CCD personnel, and for the film industry. Cinephile David Conde, head of the Motion Picture and Theatrical branch of the CIE until July 1946, encouraged studios to present a positive image of women on film, and banned the production of films which 'deal with or approve the subjugation or degradation of women' (Freiberg 1992: 101). Conde instructed filmmakers to avoid confining women to domestic familial roles 'considering their newly upgraded social status' (Hirano 1992: 149). Studios and scriptwriters were encouraged to produce narratives and imagery that depicted emancipated Japanese women as aspirational. Instances of female subservience were deleted from film scripts (Kitamura 2010: 60) as SCAP personnel and filmmakers struggled to create a new image of post-war Japanese women that adhered closely to American gender ideals, and yet remained intelligible to Japanese audiences. SCAP influence over film content continued until June 1949, when the Motion Picture Code of Ethics Committee (*Eiga Rinri Kitei Kanri linkai*), a self-regulating organization modeled on the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America (later the MPAA) took over. By then, certain elements of studio infrastructure mandated by SCAP had become standard, such as the hiring of large numbers of female actors to meet SCAP's demand for female leading roles.

Female-focused film content was posited as a means to encourage gender equal ideologies in the audience. In the field of broadcast radio, this audience was explicitly imagined as female. Recently enfranchised Japanese women were 'encouraged to broadcast their concerns and thoughts' as the CIE 'believed radio could play a vital role in teaching and preparing women to exploit their new positions in Japanese society' (Luther and Boyd 1997: 46). While cinema audiences were similarly positioned as students of democracy, women's

involvement in film production was somewhat different. Women participated in film production as actresses, screenwriters, and script girls, and as the authors of novels adapted for the cinema. Yet directors and producers were overwhelmingly male. Female cinema audiences were also positioned slightly differently to their radio counterparts in relation to accessing the cinema. While listening to the radio necessitated the simple turn of a dial, and could be performed at home, on one's own or in company, attending the cinema required travel to the theatre, queuing for tickets, and as the ethnographic material to follow demonstrates, negotiating companionship and a shared interest in a particular film, as well as time and money.

So could the cinema follow SCAP's expectations of radio in preparing women to exploit their upgraded position in Japanese society? To achieve this, women and female children had to have easy access to the cinema theatre. There is some indication that individual producers and distributors attempted to ensure that women participated in cinema culture. The Central Motion Picture Exchange (hereafter CMPE), which managed the distribution of US films, imported the 'women's film' genre and targeted features such as *Little Women* (Mervyn LeRoy, 1949) explicitly at a female audience. Promotional events included 'four-sisters' contests, and inviting girls with four siblings to attend for free (Kitamura 2010: 102). Yet this effort was nonetheless framed by a distinct focus on heterosexual romance and the ideal of marriage and family as a woman's peak ambition. In this case, the commercial drive to welcome women to the cinema did not have explicitly emancipatory goals.

The existence of genres such as the '*josei eiga*' or '*onna no eiga*', understood as 'women's films', as well as the '*hahamono*' mother films and the '*tsumamono*' wife films suggests a commercial attempt to attract female audiences.¹ We might also interpret the drive to clean up dirty or smelly cinema theatres described in more detail below as an attempt to make the cinema more accessible to all. Despite these efforts, female viewers at cinema theatres remained in the minority. Colleen Laird notes that nation-wide surveys indicate that female audience attendance peaked in 1956 with a turnout of 37.4 percent (Laird 2012: 124), suggesting that throughout the Occupation the female audience had been significantly smaller. During the Occupation and into its aftermath, women made up less than half of the commercial film theatre audience, although they outnumbered men within the Japanese population. In 1945, the population was 47.1% male and 52.9% female, with 4 million more women than men, and by 1950 women outnumbered men by 1 million, or 51% to 49%, a demographic trend which continues today (Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications).

Women appear to have been attending the cinema in significantly lesser numbers than men, particularly when we consider their over-representation in the Occupation era population as a whole. Material traces of SCAP cinema policy do not appear overly concerned with the gender demographic of the audience, and perhaps men were the intended audience of much film propaganda. Policy documents such as the 'Political Information-Education Program' prepared by the CIE in June 1948 called for all media

branches to coordinate in an effort to make Japanese audiences aware of the rights and responsibilities of democratic citizens (Tsuchiya 2002: 196). The document advised liaising directly with Japanese film producers to persuade them to include material and themes related to the political education of the Japanese populace. In November, this document was developed into a 158-page book titled *Information Programs*, designed as reference material for all CIE officers (National Archives II at College Park, Maryland, RG 331, GHQ/SCAP, CIE, Box 5305, file 12 and 15). Yuka Tsuchiya notes an emphasis on gender in this material, as Occupation personnel strove to align Japanese gender ideologies with American gender norms and expectations (2002: 202).

Film producers were praised for creating stories and images showing independent women pursuing their own happiness. For example, Shochiku studio's *Victory of Women* (*Josei no shōri*, Mizoguchi Kenji, 1946) is credited as 'an outstanding treatment of the theme of equality of women' (SCAP 1946: 7.18) and 'the first feature produced which dramatically embodies the concept of women's equality with men' (SCAP 1946: 7.269). Conde (1945) reported his own involvement in the production of films that championed gender equality, such as a meeting with 'Mr. Tsukimuri of Shōchiku' about a story idea titled 'Equal Rights for Men and Women' which he approved for scenario development. CIE personnel in charge of 'instituting gender democracy' imagined such politically-informed film content as complementing the political education conducted through community organizations, adult clubs, and adult education programs (Koikari 2002: 35). That male cinema audiences consumed this carefully curated content in greater numbers than women does not appear to have been a topic of discussion.

A number of Occupation personnel and US citizens visiting Japan reported that films, particularly imported Hollywood features, made a significant impression on Japanese audiences. Lucy Herndon Crockett, an American resident in Japan, remembers a Japanese woman sharing her impression that in American imported films, 'men's behavior to women is especially refined' and that 'these things are now influencing our social life, and also our private feelings' (1949: 205). Indeed, Crockett also recalls a Kyoto University student telling her that 'he and his friends learn from the American pictures how to light a cigarette for a girl, hold her coat, open a door for her' (1949: 204), indicating that the content of American cinema did influence the gender ideals of certain viewers. Yamada Ryōnosuke of Ichikawa City, writing to General MacArthur during the Occupation, also stated his belief that 'viewing American movies is most effective for reeducating Japanese youth' (quoted in Sodei 2001: 210). Addressing the audience at the release of a CIE education film, Donald Nugent, who took over from Conde from July 1946, declared, 'I am happy to say that the motion picture branch of our section has played an important part in the rebuilding of Japan' (Tsuchiya 2002: 209). The Occupiers certainly appear to have believed that SCAP's goal of changing Japanese ideologies using cinema was to some degree successful. Yet archival and anecdotal materials would suggest that SCAP's message on gender relations met success largely among young men, rather than the young women envisioned as claiming their new rights inspired by radio and cinema.

The Occupation effort to fundamentally change Japanese attitudes to gender equality can reasonably be said to have suffered some serious setbacks in the context of women's representation in politics and the public workplace (see the World Economic Forum's yearly Gender Gap Report for more details). Feminist historians argue that this is in part due to the influence of American gender ideologies of the Occupation era, today considered regressive (Kobayashi 2004, 52). Scholars have also suggested that SCAP's interest in gender equality could have been interpreted by citizens as part of a punishing set of reforms directed at the male Japanese citizens held responsible for Japan's aggressive war (Koikari 2011). Given the documented efforts made to transmit gender equal ideals through cinema outlined above, I am concerned specifically here with structural factors that may have rendered the transmission of gender reform ideals to female film audiences less than successful. The memories presented in ethnographic interviews with viewers who attended the cinema during the Occupation suggest that a number of factors prevented the female audiences who were hailed by radio programming from devoting their attention to cinema content in a similar manner. The next section presents an account of the cinema spaces of post-war Japan alongside viewers' memories of how they accessed those spaces, and behaved within them, to raise key issues regarding women's access to the cinema and its narratives.

Methods

The ethnographic material presented below is drawn from a larger study that blends interviews with film viewers with material from a long-form questionnaire project involving 80 respondents, a number of letters and emails on memories of cinema-going, and participant observation at several cinemas and film groups specializing in retrospective screenings of postwar films. Participants in the larger study attended the cinema with varying degrees of regularity between 1945 and 1975: for the purposes of exploring audiences' relationship to cinema under the Occupation, only memories related to the period 1945-1952 have been cited here. The larger number of participants grew up in the Kansai region of Western Japan and their viewership experiences are specific to the area, however a small number also mentioned visits to cinemas in Tokyo and in the Kyushu area. All data has been anonymized using pseudonyms.

By analysing these viewers' memories, this study problematizes the Allied forces' understanding of the cinema as a tool to produce predictable changes in viewer attitudes. In applying discourse analysis to viewer-produced letters, questionnaires, and interviews, this study follows key works in the field of audience and reception studies including Janice Radway's *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature* (1984), Ien Ang's *Watching Dallas: Soap Opera and the Melodramatic Imagination* (1985), Jackie Stacey's *Star Gazing: Hollywood Cinema and Female Spectatorship* (1994), and Annette Kuhn's *Dreaming of Fred and Ginger: Cinema and Cultural Memory* (2002).

I began research for this study with two years of participant observation at the retrospective screening programs held at the Kyoto Bunka Hakubutsukan (Kyoto Culture

Museum), known locally as the Bunpaku. This large museum is situated on Sanjō Street, just off Karasuma Street in central Kyoto. On the third floor, a film theatre with a capacity of 180 seats hosts two daily screenings at 1:30pm and 6:30pm. Themed programs run for around one month, focusing on Japanese studio films made between 1910 and 1980. Each film is repeated four times in a single week, twice per day on two days, three days apart. Tickets are comparatively cheap at 500 yen for non-members and 400 yen for members, or 4000 yen for a yearly pass (a commercial cinema ticket would be closer to 2000 yen for one screening).

After two years of participant observation, I conducted a questionnaire survey at the Bunpaku film theatre, gathering 80 responses. I then generated interview questions from the recurring themes emerging from the questionnaire responses, and filmed interviews with volunteers from the group of questionnaire respondents. I have conducted informal interviews with a further 20 participants on a recurring basis, both in groups and individually.

Since 2014, I have also been practicing participant observation at a number of retrospective film screening programs in cinema and public spaces across Kansai. I attend monthly meetings of film circles and discussion groups managed and attended by Kansai residents between the ages of 70 and 95. I also attend a number of meetings and events that are not specifically film-related, including an English conversation group and a monthly lecture and dinner party for Kyoto University alumni. This triangulated ethnographic method is designed to achieve a balanced survey that includes participants of both sexes and casual viewers as well as committed film fans. Nonetheless, a clear gendered division between the narrative styles of female and male interlocutors has emerged. Attempting to understand this discrepancy, I began to investigate why female interlocutors were far less inclined to present themselves as expert witnesses than male interlocutors. As a result, I uncovered a significant difference between how male and female audience members recall engaging with the cinema as both a space and mode of entertainment during the Occupation and its aftermath.

As Ramaswami Harindrath has noted, 'access to cultural resources' such as cinema is 'fundamental to conceptions of deliberative democracy' (2006). In SCAP's efforts to use the cinema as a mode of building such a democracy, fashioned after the American democratic capitalist model, how did the question of access to the cinema figure? My ethnographic material suggests that women and men had quite different access to the cinema in this era. Could this be a factor in the limited impact SCAP-compliant cinema appears to have made on gender ideologies in Japan? Harindrath argues that 'the audience-citizen's historicity, their specific socio-historical and cultural context, is crucial to their engagement with mediated forms of knowledge' (2006). In considering the efficacy of SCAP's efforts to re-shape Japanese knowledges of gender roles and freedoms using cinema content, we must interrogate the positionality of the Occupation era 'audience-citizen.'

Going to the cinema in Occupied Japan

Cinema theatres in early post-war Japan were organized into three tiers; first tier cinemas were the most expensive and showed the most recent films. The second and third tier cinemas showed less recent films, often in shabbier settings and using second-hand or recycled prints and older equipment. These theatres were cheaper and popular with children and young families. In the Kansai region, first-run and 'roadshow' theatres were few: Nagoya had the Yaegaki, Kyoto the Yasaka Kaikan, Kobe the ABC, and Osaka the Sennichimae (Terasawa 2010: 164). In the early years after the war, a number of cinemas were destroyed or badly damaged by bombing and fire. Yet the city of Kyoto alone had as many as 60 theatres by the period 1947-1956 (Katō 1996), so the choice was not limited in the second half of the Occupation, except by the time and money available to the viewer. As the accounts of cinema-going in this section demonstrate, these factors correlate with age, gender, and social class, as well as geographical location. The choices on offer ranged from the modern and well-designed film theatres advertising heating or cooling technologies (depending on the season) to the more basic theatres located in less stylish parts of town or in the suburbs. Takeda san recalls, 'As I had no money, I went to the second and third tier cinemas, the ones in the run-down areas (*basue*), and those in the suburbs' (2016). While the up-to-date theatres described by Katō Mikiro in Kyoto city centre (1996) may have boasted cutting edge facilities, from new films to up-to-date projectors and air conditioning, my interlocutors indicate that these theatres were reserved for special treats or one-off film events. Family trips to the film theatre involving children as young as four were generally limited to the second- and third-tier theatres, while the only questionnaire respondent whose first cinema encounter occurred in an up-market city centre cinema was also the oldest, aged nineteen on her first visit. Access to and behaviour in the cinema was circumscribed by this three-tier system.

The attempt to improve and modernize the film theatres was charted by local Kansai newspapers, which individual theatres used to communicate with their audiences about improvements and new rules. For example, in 1947 the Asahi Kaikan in Kyoto announced in a local newspaper that from May of the same year the 'stuffing system' (*tsumekomi shiki*) that had seen popular screenings filled to standing capacity would be replaced by a 'capacity limit, one showing' system (Katō 1996). Due to audience dissatisfaction, this was replaced in the next year with a substitution system whereby a patron leaving before the end of the screening gave the empty seat to an arriving patron, who could remain in the theatre for the next screening of the same film. My interlocutors report that such systems created a '*mannin*' or packed atmosphere, which was not necessarily disagreeable, but could appear threatening or dangerous to certain viewers, particularly those who felt disadvantaged or outnumbered in relation to their age or gender.

Until 1948, the Yasaka Grand was the only first-run theatre in Kyoto, and had a degree of flexibility in audience arrangements as it was in high demand. The Yasaka Grand introduced the first seat reservation system in Kyoto in 1947, which allowed viewers to sit together with their companions. In the cheaper second- and third- run cinemas, viewers

were packed in with little regard to who had arrived together. This may be one reason why many women reported feeling unsafe in dark film theatres in their younger years. First tier cinemas disciplined the audience by requiring reservations and using seat allocation, yet at the same time they also protected certain audience members by the same means. The second and third tier cinemas were certainly more free in terms of how the audience could come and go, or arrange themselves, but this very freedom could pose a threat to viewers positioned as vulnerable by age, gender, class, and physical ability.

The time and expense of travel from the suburbs to the cities was not great, but could dissuade younger viewers from heading for the city centre theatres for anything other than a special occasion. Of those living within the city centre, all but the wealthiest would be further dissuaded from the more elegant theatres by the difference in entrance fees. In the early post-war years, superior cinemas in Kyoto charged 25 or 30 yen, in comparison to the 20 yen tickets available at the second tier cinemas. Several interviewees remembered visiting the cheaper Cineplex-style buildings where a number of small third-tier venues were crowded together inside a single structure. Particularly for boys, these theatres presented an opportunity to get creative about viewership, as many male interviewees recall entering the cinema without paying by claiming to have an urgent message for a friend inside the theatre (Kishida 2016).

Gender, age, class, and geographical location therefore informed how the cinema audience was constituted. While young male children appear to have been freer in their viewership habits than female children and young women, married women and women with children also seem to have been relatively unhindered in their access to cinemas during the Occupation. A number of women who worked mainly in the home related their experiences of dropping into cheaper cinemas on their daily errand routes. The cost of a cheap cinema theatre ticket was low enough that housewives could afford to drop in and out regularly, using the cinema almost like the later television set, in that there was no perceived need or desire to watch a screening programme through to the end. This mode of viewing appears to situate the cinema as an easily accessible space for the young or middle-aged housewife to attend as it suited her daily schedule.

Several of my female interlocutors continue this practice today. For example, during my questionnaire survey at the Kyoto Bunpaku theatre, a lady in her nineties left a screening mid-way through the film, and sat down in the lobby for a chat while she completed a questionnaire. I asked whether she had disliked the film, a famous 1950s melodrama, or whether she had seen it before. On the contrary, she replied that she had liked the film very much, but was killing time between finishing an errand and meeting her husband for lunch. She had become accustomed to popping into the cinema theatre for a short break during the early years of her marriage, when she spent her afternoons shopping for groceries while her husband was at work. She would sit for around an hour in the cinema before meeting a friend or returning to her household duties. Like many interlocutors, she expressed gratitude for the local screening programme, but while others appreciated the calibre of films featured, the affordability of the tickets, or the innovative programme themes, she

was particularly pleased with the screening structure, which repeated the same film four times in one week. This allowed her to drop into the first part of a film without any intention of staying to the end, and if she enjoyed the story or found herself intrigued by the ending, she would return later in the week and watch the rest. I observed the same pattern during my years of participant observation at the Bunpaku theatre, noting that many patrons dropped in or out halfway through a film, and returned to the same film at a later screening. In this way the peripatetic viewing habits many female viewers formed in the early post-war era continue today in specialized theatres.

Once in the cinema however, this group recalls their viewing experience as frequently interrupted. A number of women reported the necessity of leaving the cinema before the end of the film in order to complete time-limited chores such as grocery shopping or meal preparation. Of those who brought children to the cinema with them, many recall being forced to leave the theatre, or becoming distracted from the film onscreen, by the behaviours and demands of their children or younger siblings. A significant number of younger viewers, both male and female, recall forcing an older female relative to leave the cinema theatre, or miss key moments of a film, by crying, shouting, or otherwise behaving in a manner that necessitated the intervention of a mother, sister, or aunt. Hashimoto san remembers his elder sister's response to such an incident.

As there were many siblings in my family, my elder sister often took me to the cinema. I remember one time, I must have been around eight years old (I've checked this with my older sister), and my sister took me to a film with Ishihama Akira playing a character who gets sent to war around high school age [*Boyhood/ Shōnenki*, Kinoshita Keisuke, 1951]. The soldiers have to get up so early and suffer physically. There was that song, I forget the name... (sings) *tan tan tan ta ta tan ta ta tan*. That music appeared when the soldiers marched out, and when I saw it I cried a lot. When we got back home, I remember that my sister told everyone, 'He caused me some amount of trouble!' (Hashimoto 2016)

In Hashimoto san's account, his sister joked that his emotional response caused trouble for her. A number of interviewees commented on the unsuitable nature of much film content for younger children, whether excessively sad, scary, or sexual (Takeda 2016). At this time, many cinemas had no restrictions on what kinds of film children could see, and a number of interlocutors recall being brought to see films they later understood to be directed at adult viewers. Access for children was limited according to the rules of cinema-going in a particular area, and parental interest in cinema. While Imai san remembers children being forbidden to enter certain cinemas alone in 1946 in Shiga prefecture (Imai 2016), Takeda san remembers his film fan mother bringing him to the cinema often to see adult as well as children's films (Takeda 2016).

Many interlocutors remember the cinema as a less than welcoming space. Several

female questionnaire respondents recalled the dirtier atmospheres of post-war film theatres, noting the change in cinema culture from the Occupation era to the present. One questionnaire respondent remembered, 'In those days the film theatres weren't so beautiful (*utsukushikunai*). Now they look like hotels!' Many interviewees and questionnaire respondents mentioned the unpleasant smell of the cheap seats near the toilets. Yamashita san recalled, 'The smell was terrible!' (*nioi ga kusai!*) (2016). For children and younger viewers, these were the most affordable seats, however the stench could give the movie-viewing experience a sense of sufferance and caused distractions and widespread grumbling. A public discussion on the issue of poor ventilation in cinemas was raised by a Department of Public Health survey and published in the *Kyoto Shinbun* newspaper in May 1952 (Katō 1996), suggesting that the problem was widely recognized. The CMPE did attempt to force cinemas that screened US films to adhere to a higher standard of hygiene, threatening to withdraw American films from non-compliant theatres (Kitamura 2010: 116). Yet again, there does not appear to have been significant interventions in theatres screening primarily Japanese films. Despite the care expended on crafting the content of post-war Japanese films to uphold democratic ideals, the Occupiers appear to have given little thought to the environment in which these films would be viewed, and how this environment might affect access or response to film content.

As the memories of my interlocutors suggest, engagement with the cinema could be a gender issue. Many women who worked at home felt the need to leave the cinema before the end of the film in order to continue household chores, or prepare dinner for family members returning from work. For the women who brought children to the cinema, the child's behaviour could become a distraction from the narrative on-screen (significantly, only one male interlocutor remembered bringing a child to the cinema). These factors combine to suggest that women may have been less attentive to cinema content than their male counterparts, and certainly recall experiencing greater restrictions in terms of when, where, and how they entered the cinema. As a result, many women today are uncomfortable presenting their memories of cinema-going as expert testimony.

Being female at the cinema

In this section, I want to consider some of the cinema-going and viewership behaviours recounted by female interlocutors which might suggest why SCAP's attempt to generate an awareness of gender equality through cinema content did not have real life effects commensurate with expectations, at least in regard to female audience members. In focusing on female interlocutors here, I do not wish to suggest that male viewers were ignorant of the gender-equality theme present in many popular film texts, or disinclined to participate in implementing gender equality in everyday life. Rather, I wish to explore some of the ways in which SCAP's already compromised message of gender equality may have been lost in transmission to an imagined audience of newly-emancipated women, expected to 'exploit their new positions in Japanese society' like their radio audience counterparts (Luther and Boyd 1997: 46). The burden of social change in the direction of gender equality

was often rhetorically assigned to female citizens, who were expected to demand and defend the new rights SCAP had legislated for them. Emancipated female characters and film stars were positioned as attractive role models for female audiences, and signs of change to come for male audiences. In considering why female audiences may not have taken up the invitation to re-model their lives and expectations after the women they saw on-screen, it is necessary to investigate how women came to, and engaged with, the cinema.

As indicated above, female audiences were lesser in number than male audiences across Japan, particularly considering that they made up a greater percentage of the population overall. In Kansai, male viewers recall having freer access to the cinema than female viewers in their childhood years. Accounts of sneaking into the cinema without paying given by male interlocutors also suggest that there may have been a significant number of male audience members not counted in official box office records and surveys. This pattern is borne out by nation-wide studies of fan activities, for example, the annual surveys conducted by the film magazine *Film Friend* (*Eiga no tomo*), which registered the gender of respondents as two-thirds male (Kitamura 2010: 165). Women did participate in writing to fan columns, and a number of the magazine's advertisements were for female-oriented products such as lipstick (Kitamura 2010: 165). Yet editorial staff suggested that the lesser participation of women indicated the continuation of 'traditional' social norms (1951: 37), including the muting of female voices in the public sphere.

Female viewers also went to the cinema alone at a much less frequent rate than their male counterparts. Shōchiku studio head Kidō Shiro celebrated this phenomenon, arguing that if studios focused on producing films aimed at female viewers, their box office figures would thrive as women always brought friends or dates. 'Women never go to the cinema alone. They will always bring either a friend or a lover' (quoted in Wada-Marciano 2008: 80). In fact, my female interlocutors recall being brought to the cinema by parents, older siblings, or dates, rather than instigating the trip themselves, suggesting that while female cinema-goers may have increased the overall number of viewers, they were not necessarily channelling those viewers towards their preferred film texts.

One might also question whether a romantic partner could distract attention from the film onscreen. None of my interlocutors willingly brought up the topic of romantic interactions during film screenings, and I was wary of addressing the issue. Annette Kuhn notes that in her study of 1930s cinema attendance in Britain, only one male interlocutor addressed the topic uninvited (2002: 138). It is certainly an awkward question to bring up during a filmed interview! On one hand, the establishment of the cinema as central to modern dating behaviours suggests that cinema culture did play a part in fostering the new ideal of the romantic couple as an equal partnership. In Kurosawa Akira's *One Wonderful Sunday* (*Subarashiki nichiyōbi*, 1947) a character even mentions the cinema as a 'cheap date' and an opportunity for young men and women to share some time together, away from the demands of work and family. While the cinema theatre space may have welcomed post-war couples however, it does not necessarily follow that these same couples were

influenced by the ideological content of film texts.

Analyzing archival material that discusses couples' behaviours in the cinema suggests that attending the cinema with a partner increases the likelihood of inattentive or distracted viewing. An ethnographic article on 'The state of couples in the movie theater' noted that couples in the cinema often responded actively when a scene with 'sex appeal' (*sei teki appiiru*) appeared on screen. Such scenes are described as including 'dialogue containing the words 'I love (*ai*) you,' 'I like (*suki*) you,' 'marriage,' 'body,' and 'pregnancy,'" or scenes including 'a kiss or some other physical resolution' (Fukuoka 1950: 165). Couples kissed or interacted with one another during these scenes, while other audience members called out commentary. In this way, attending the cinema with a partner appears to have presented some viewing distractions.

This trend continues today; during participant observation at a number of retrospective film screenings and cinema events, I frequently observed elderly couples leaving early at the insistence of the male partner. Conversely, a number of elderly women who attend retrospective screenings regularly today express their enjoyment of a new freedom to choose their own viewing content, time, and place. In many cases this coincides with a change in gender roles at home, as their retired partners wish to use the domestic space for their own pursuits, and wives leave the home during the day to make space. Koyama san expressed this arrangement as a reversal of their previous roles, suggesting that now her husband remains at home, she has become the 'salaryman,' and going to the cinema everyday is like her job (2016). This freedom contrasts with her memories of the early post-war years, when women accompanied by partners or children experienced any number of distractions in their cinema viewing, while younger girls perceived significant barriers to attending the cinema alone in relation to personal safety and socially acceptable gendered behaviour.

Barriers to attending the cinema as a woman only increased during the 1950s and 1960s. For example, Koyama san experienced a lone trip to a cinema in Kobe in the 1960s as dampening her childhood enthusiasm for cinema. Growing up during the Occupation in Kōshien, she had enjoyed walking to her local cinema with her elder sisters, drawn by the film posters on the billboards along their route from home to school. Though 'in those days, girls couldn't go to the cinema alone' (*hitori de eigakan ni josei ga iku yō na jidai de wa nakatta*), she could enter the cinema for free as an elementary school student, and so her two elder sisters would take her with them frequently when they walked the short fifteen minutes under the train tracks from their home to the local cinema (Koyama 2016). She was often able to watch a favourite film two or three times in this way.

Yet, visiting Kobe, she found the local cinema intimidating, recalling that 'it took some courage' to go in (*yūki ga hitsuyō*) (Koyama 2016). The theatre was full of older men, and she felt uncomfortable being there as a woman alone. On moving to Kyoto after her marriage, she was delighted to be in the 'cinema city' (*Kyōto wa eiga no machi*) (Koyama 2016). Shimogyōku Street in the central district was then home to a number of second and third tier film theatres. Yet she recalls that her husband, born in Kyoto, advised her that

schoolchildren in the late 1940s and 1950s had been banned from visiting cinemas in the area due to its ‘many temptations’ (*yūwaku no ooi*). He recounted stories of teachers standing outside the theatres to dissuade students from sneaking in (Koyama 2016). Both male and female viewers articulated the cinema as a space that posed certain risks to women and younger children, circumscribing their access to these spaces. Women and young children therefore could not be counted on to freely attend the films carefully crafted for their development by Occupation personnel and censors.

Conclusion: An un-socialized audience?

As Japan continues to struggle with the question of gender equality today, facing ever-dropping rankings year on year in the World Economic Forum’s Gender Gap report and demands from citizens and politicians alike for action, it seems fair to suggest that attempts to popularize the ideal of gender equality using cinema content were not entirely successful. I have suggested here that this may have been in part due to a simple question of cinema-going behaviors. The disproportionate difficulties women and female children could face in entering cinemas in certain areas or at certain times, and the distractions posed by caring for others within the space of the cinema itself, may have undermined attempts to transmit inspiring images and narratives of female emancipation to male and female viewers alike. In this particular case, the audience does not appear to have explicitly resisted the message of SCAP-compliant film texts, but these elements affecting the gendered constitution and behaviors of the audience are certainly relevant to the on-going question of whether audiences’ thinking can be informed by onscreen ideologies. The Occupation era Japanese cinema audience was not necessarily badly behaved or inadequately socialized; rather, it was not quite the audience assumed by content creators and marketing strategies.

In this respect, the experiences and memories of viewers discussed here, as well as archival material that indicates SCAP’s expectations of the audience (such as Moe san, the imagined ideal viewer), demonstrates how ideas about ‘good’ audience behavior changes across countries, and across time. The American occupiers of post-war Japan may have conceptualized a ‘good’ audience as an audience responsive to Allied democratic capitalist propaganda. Yet in the historical context of the early post-war era, Japanese audiences had suffered badly from their investment in the wartime ideologies communicated by cinema and radio from the 1930s to the disastrous end of Japan’s war in August 1945. It is not surprising that this same audience would have treated cinema propaganda a little more lightly in the post-war era, some dropping in and out of the cinema without regard to screening times, and others bringing children. Add to this a number of keen female film fans who recall feeling restricted in their access to certain theatres in certain places, or at certain times, and we have a picture of an audience very different to the ‘good’ or typical audience assumed by Occupation planning. Yet members of this audience are still intimately engaged with the cinema today, attending retrospective screenings, organizing film clubs, and participating in cinema studies such as my own. Perhaps the ‘good’ post-war Japanese audience, as they understand audience behavior themselves, is an audience in critical and

on-going engagement with cinema, rather than an audience compliant with film propaganda.

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Note:

¹ The titles of these sub-genres literally translate to 'women films' (*josei eiga*), 'women's films' (*onna no eiga*), 'mother stories' (*hahamono*) and 'wife stories' (*tsumamono*). While these titles describe the films' content, and narrative conventions such as the death of the mother at the end of the classic *hahamono*, they have also been used to infer a female audience, as discussed by Colleen Laird (2012).