Abstract

This research examines effeminate characters in Japanese cinema from 1945 to 1969, in order to explore their historical transformations and ideological implications in relation to the socio-political dynamics of post-war society. Data on effeminate characters, identified by their gender performance, are collected from the years 2017 to 2023, from over 1250 Japanese films produced in the specified period. To analyze the identified data, this research utilizes both contextualization and textual analysis. Analyzing both the texts and contexts can reveal how historical conditions and cinematic portrayals of effeminacy shape the negotiation how expression of gendered identity in post-war Japan.

This thesis is divided into five chapters, each exploring a different aspect of effeminacy during the post-war years: male prostitutes, the modern boy, the sisterboy, the gay boy, and the yakuza. While the chapters are organized chronologically to some extent, these categories are not necessarily specific types of effeminate characters but rather perspectives that allow for approaching effeminacy in post-war Japan. Each chapter begins with an examination of the historical and social contexts that shaped the representability of effeminate characters, followed by a textual analysis of representative cinematic works.

The analyses reveal that effeminate characters were influenced by a variety of social and industrial circumstances. Oftentimes, these socio-political contexts were tied to Japan's social formation after the defeat: cultures of defeat which emerged out of the aftermath of the war led to the visibility of male prostitutes, and the modern boy emerged as a reaction to the implementation of gender equality by the Occupation forces. The formation of consumer society also had an impact on effeminate representations, as the sisterboy and the gay boy emerged during the booms in 1957 and 1958, respectively. The changes also came from the film industry, especially the organization and reformation of the *Eirin*, affecting how

effeminacy could be depicted in Japanese cinema. The popularity of the yakuza film is a unique case in which a specific genre impacted the representation of effeminate characters. Overall, the condition of effeminate representability in post-war Japanese cinema was constructed by diverse social and industrial circumstances.

On an ideological level, effeminate characters served as a platform for negotiating Japan's gendered subjectivity. It is difficult to make a decisive argument on their ultimate effects since they appear in various films for different purposes. In some cases, their trivial screen presence functioned to redraw a line between the normative and the non-normative by, for example, being laughed off. In other instances, effeminate characters had the ability to challenge or disrupt the normative notions of masculinity and femininity, albeit temporarily, by playing with the binary of the two genders. In any case, effeminate characters epitomize the discourse of feminization after the defeat, a misogynistic imagination of Japan's subjugated state, which simultaneously opens up a space for the revelation of their function.

Furthermore, the analysis suggests that effeminacy is an integral part of the cinematic pleasure-making system. On the one hand, effeminate characters should not be celebrated without reservation as their screen presence relies on effeminate stereotypes, which oftentimes signal non-normative sexualities in a ridiculing manner. On the other hand, since popular films are ultimately commodities for mass audiences, the inclusion of effeminate characters is purposed to captivate viewers. Their recurring appearances in Japanese cinema to entertain the audience imply their enduring popularity despite (or because of) their ambiguous sexualities. Effeminacy was embraced more than it was repulsed, while perpetuating a cultural imaginary that stigmatizes sexual minorities.

The above findings contribute to academic discourses on Japanese cinema in various ways. First, they fill a gap in literature where the misrepresentation of sexual minorities in Japanese cinema is underexamined. This research reveals that a cinematic imagination of

sexual minorities was shaped by various social and industrial factors. Also, the findings suggest that damaging representations can be widely accepted and popular for the consumption of viewers in a heteronormative society. Overall, the findings indicate that effeminacy is more nuanced than a simple stereotype or misrepresentation.

Second, this research offers an alternative way to look at the cinematic formation of Japan's gendered subjectivity after the defeat. Previous studies have employed a binary framework that conceptualizes Japan's subject formation as castrated men overshadowed by liberated women after the war. Effeminacy is a new approach that engages with the complexities of national reconstruction by playing with the gender binary. The analyses of effeminate characters demonstrate that, albeit temporarily, films provide viewers with the opportunity to enjoy the disruption of gender norms and embrace a feminized state. This indicates an effeminate aspect of Japan's gendered identity that complicates the representation of men using women's liberated bodies to restore male subjects.