



## The Sixties

A Journal of History, Politics and Culture

ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: <https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rsix20>

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To cite this article: Marcos P. Centeno-Martín (2021): 1968 and rural Japan as a site of struggle. Approaches to rural landscapes in the history of Japanese documentary film, The Sixties, DOI: [10.1080/17541328.2021.1996790](https://doi.org/10.1080/17541328.2021.1996790)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/17541328.2021.1996790>



Published online: 28 Nov 2021.



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# 1968 and rural Japan as a site of struggle. Approaches to rural landscapes in the history of Japanese documentary film

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## ABSTRACT

In the twentieth century, Japan produced an extraordinary documentary film heritage around the rural world which has not received sufficient attention. This article identifies three different approaches to the rural in Japanese film history: first, the wartime interest in place as providing an “authentic essence” of a national identity. Second, the postwar representation of the rural in public relations films (*PR eiga*), mainly interested in geography. And third, the release of Ogawa’s *Summer in Sanrizuka* in 1968 which brought a new dimension to a countryside transformed into both a battlefield and an icon of the political protest of the era.

## KEYWORDS

Kunio Yanagita; Hani Susumu; Tsuchimomto Noriaki; Ogawasa Shinsuke; Japanese documentary; rural Japan; folklore studies; student protests; militant cinema

## 1. Introduction: the rural landscape in the Japanese esthetic tradition

A Japanese interest in capturing a sensorial experience associated with the rural landscape can be traced back to Classical Japan. In the Heian period, Sei Shonagon y Murasaki Shikibu’s literature described the emotions emerging from the passage of seasons. In premodern Japanese arts, the rural was closely associated with “nature” and its connection to awe, the supernatural, the passage of time and notions of beauty. References to the rural landscape could be found in a variety of Japanese arts ranging from haiku poetry, *suibokuha*, oil painting and Noh theater. In all these artistic practices, the “natural landscape” (*sansui*) is something to be experienced through the senses.<sup>1</sup> It became a physical multisensory medium “in which cultural meanings and values are encoded.”<sup>2</sup> These traditional representations of the Japanese countryside provide a partial and subjective view of nature rather than a comprehensive one.

Cultural and artistic approaches to the rural changed with industrialization and the attendant emergence of an urban, mass society during the Meiji period. Modern representations separated human beings from nature,

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portraying them as separate entities from the landscape.<sup>3</sup> This splitting off of humans from nature was also a result of the Japanese encounter with anthropocentric European traditions of landscape portraiture that dated back to the Renaissances of fifteenth century.<sup>4</sup>

## 2. The earliest interest in documentary film: countryside and nationalism

The presence of the “rural” (*chihō*) in Japanese documentary film has received little attention, especially in contrast to other arts and means of expression. The theme of the rural predominates in Japanese nonfiction of the late 1930s. Film reviews of the time mention the emergence of a particular genre called “the peasant film” that revolved around rural villagers and farmers.<sup>5</sup> Examples of these films include *Snow Country* (Yukigun, 1939), *Earth* (Tsuchi, 1939), *Airplane Roar* (Bakuon, 1939), *Nightingale* (Uguisu, 1939), and *Horse* (Uma, 1941). The genre achieved popularity during this period for several reasons. First, the outbreak of war with China in 1937 provoked a heightened militaristic and nationalist discourses that celebrated rural Japan as a site of national identity. Decades of industrialization intensified the desire to reimagine rural Japan as a place where an authentic Japanese national identity could be reclaimed. Unlike the premodern period, the renewed interest in the rural was motivated by ideological reasons rather than by a genuine awe for nature.

Second, the proliferation of “peasant films” (*nōmin eiga*) must also be understood in the context of the growing predominance of both newsreels that followed the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937–1945) and documentary film – known at the time as *bunka eiga* (“culture films”). A “Film Law” (*Eiga Hō*) passed in 1939 established the compulsory exhibition of such films in cinemas.<sup>6</sup> Between January and June of 1941, 38 of the 135 authorized culture films were categorized as being about “agriculture and farming,”<sup>7</sup> representing 28% of the total production of documentary films at the time.

Third, the conflict with China provoked an interest in the rural not only because it fueled nationalist discourses but also because the war triggered a sudden population crisis in rural areas. The Japanese military enlisted youth from small villages, accelerating the impression that traditional rural ways of life were fast approaching extinction.<sup>8</sup> This explains why documentary films evolved alongside folklore studies (*minzokugaku*), an emerging new discipline that was being simultaneously pioneered in Japan by Yanagita Kunio. In fact, cinematic approaches to rural Japan often counted on close collaborations with folklorists. The aforementioned *Snow Country* (*Yukigun*), for example, was completed by Ishimoto Tōkichi after three

years of filming in the regions of Yamagata, Tohoku, Hokkaido, and Hokuriku. The film is considered the first masterpiece of the genre and was produced by Geijutsu eigasha, a studio that also published the journal *Folklore Research (Minzokugaku Kenkyū)*.<sup>9</sup>

In the early decades, nonfiction formats had mainly provided a window to exotic places. For example, Lumière brother's catalogs and subsequent *travelogues* across the world showed the boundaries of the new Japanese empire.<sup>10</sup> By the late-1930s, nonfiction formats were being used to show the developments of the war in China. But Fumio Kamei noted that *Snowed Country* marked an inward turn toward a new kind of exoticism found within rural Japan.<sup>11</sup> As opposed to the wartime depictions of imperial conquest or military victory abroad, the films on rural Japan focus on the "rediscovery" of everyday life. Despite their apparent apolitical nature, they were ideologically shaped. The rural environment was used to project a biased idea of "nation" that fit into a nationalist mythology, neglecting Japanese diversity, poverty and the agrarian conflicts of the time.<sup>12</sup>

Among the most notorious examples of collaboration between documentary film and folklore studies was *Living by the Earth (Tsuchi ni ikiru)*, Miki Shigeru, 1941).<sup>13</sup> The cameraman Miki had been impressed by the ethnographic works of the peasant Yoshida Saburō and decided to make a film about the life of people around Akita prefecture, in Tohoku region, where Yoshida's works had been located. Miki asked the "father" of Japanese ethnography Yanagita to supervise the shooting and instead, Yanagita introduced him to Nara Kannosuke, a renowned ethnologist from southern Akita with whom he ended up filming.<sup>14</sup> The story suggests that documentaries on rural Japan must also be understood in relation to "ethnographic photography" (*minzoku shashin*). During the shooting of *Living by the Earth*, Miki took two thousand photographs of traditional village customs which were eventually published in a photo album entitled *People of the Snow Country (Yukiguni no minzoku)*, Miki and Yanagita, 1944). The album includes essays by Yanagita that emphasize the discovery of the value of the quotidian and the everyday.

Miki also provided a different approach to documentary than that provided by the leading documentary filmmaker of the era, Kamei Fumio. Not only did Miki film in Japan instead of the remote China, but in contrast to Kamei who attempted to tweak reality according to his goals, Miki sought to capture a reality that went beyond his own intentions. In fact, Miki rejected the use of scripts and even refused the notion of "directing" as such.<sup>15</sup> According to Fuji, this sensual reverence toward "reality" is what drew Miki toward the ethnographic films of rural areas.<sup>16</sup>

### 3. New postwar approaches to the rural in Hani Susumu's documentary school

This approach to filmmaking continued to some extent in the postwar period. For example, filmmaker Hani Susumu advocated for a less imposing role than that developed by Kamei (Hani 1956). Throughout dozens of writings, he also proposed a new cinema based on working without professional actors.<sup>17</sup> He also rejected the traditional usage of scripts<sup>18</sup> and denounced the idea that cinema should be subjugated to the written word.<sup>19</sup> Thus, Hani joined Iwasaki Akira's criticism of Paul Rotha's dramatizations and re-enactments and established a filmmaking style focused on observation and familiarization with filmed objects.<sup>20</sup>

Within this theoretical framework, Hani developed a "documentary method" that he implemented throughout the films he made for Iwanami Eiga.<sup>21</sup> The way his ideas materialized can be seen not only in his films that feature children and animals<sup>22</sup> but also in his documentary *Gunman-ken 2* (1962). This thirty-minute documentary is the forty-ninth episode of the series *Nihon Hakken [Discovering Japan]*, which was broadcast every Sunday morning between June 1961 and May 1962 on NET Television. Apart from Hani, other young directors and future leading figures of the Japanese documentary scene collaborated in the series, including Tsuchimoto Noriaki, Kuroki Kazuo, Segawa Junichi and Matsumoto Kimio. Those who collaborated in the project recalled that they were not constrained by prior planning and had the freedom to interact with the environment as they saw fit.<sup>23</sup> Thus, Iwanami's approach provided a space for developing the new cinema advocated by Hani, one that was freed from scripts and that sought to capture stories directly from reality.

Like the wartime ethnographic films on rural Japan, the *Nihon Hakken* series was produced in close relationship to photography. But in this case, the unifying thread was no longer ethnography but geography. The series was the adaptation for the small screen of the graphic reports entitled "Nihon no chiri" [Geography of Japan] which had been published between 1954 and 1958. These reports were authored by renowned photographer Natori Yōnosuke, who both photographed and edited the volumes. Hani noted that he and Natori had antagonistic perspectives. Thus, a comparative analysis between Natori's graphic report "Gunma-ken" and Hani's film *Gunma-ken 2* illuminates two very different visual approaches to portrayals of rural Japan.

The discrepancy emerged from their different ways of dealing with ambiguity. Natori sought to depict an objective and factual reality by imposing control over the image, narrowing down its meaning and using it within limits that were malleable for the author. This style rejected a multiplicity of interpretations.<sup>24</sup> Natori's photos are mostly wide-angle shots of the

landscape accompanied by data on a prefecture's culture, economy and society. Thus he avoids the subjective dimensions of any given image. In fact, his photos rarely use close-ups of the people who live in those landscapes. While Natori refuses to engage with the subjectivity of images, for Hani, this is fruitful terrain to explore. Both visually and conceptually, his footage is much closer to the people of the landscape. Hani mainly resorts to close-ups which he uses to depict the concerns and aspirations of the individuals on camera. In some ways, Hani's films return to the emotional attachment to the filmed objects that Miki developed during the war. An example can be found in his portrayal of the Tonegawa River. While Natori uses wide-shots taken from distances and his texts provides factual data on its length and the prefectures it crosses, Hani embarks on a boat that crosses the river and he films close-ups of the passengers. Unlike Natori, Hani's interest is not in the river or the geography as such but the local people who coexist with it. Another example can be found in the description of the production sectors of Gunma. Natori uses wide shots of rice fields, so the viewer can never see the actual faces of the farmer. In contrast, Hani focuses on specific subjects. The film features a small family farm where an elderly woman explains that they raised cows and that the vegetable garden and cows provide half of the farm's incomes.

Hani thus embraces the subjectivity that Natori rejects. He believed that documentary makers should interrogate the inner universes existing in the characters they found in the profilmic world. Filmmaker's participation in the shooting was unavoidable and thus any intermediation with reality would be subjective.<sup>25</sup> However, rather than highlighting the filmmaker's presence, Hani's method is based on a discreet attitude aimed at exploring the internal reality of the individuals before the camera.<sup>26</sup> This approach to subjectivity emerged out of postwar debates within avant-garde cultural circles.<sup>27</sup> These debates revolved around new approaches to reality motivated by a response to wartime propaganda and extended into the realm of cinema by Hani and Matsumoto Toshio in the Kiroku Geijutsu no Kai (Documentary Arts Society) from 1957. Both authors represented a new generation of filmmakers who rejected the realism of the old left and were critical of the Japanese Communist Party.<sup>28</sup> For Hani, cinema's role was not incompatible with its ability to bear witness to reality. He believed that in order to depict a reality existing beyond the surface, documentary filmmakers needed to avoid inserting their own prejudices into their art.<sup>29</sup>

#### 4. Documenting the struggle against the state

These debates among the avant-garde about how to best represent reality contained a political dimension. Critic Kiyoteru Hanada claimed that while the term *avangyarudo* had spread widely during the postwar period, authors

should return to the political implication that the original term in Japanese for avant-garde, *zen'ei* had had before the war.<sup>30</sup> Teshigahara Hiroshi had incorporated a strong political dimension into his depiction of rural Japan through a series of “painting reportages” (*ruporutāju kaiga*), which portrayed farming conditions and the life of Masaru Kobayashi, a member of the revolutionary Maoist group Shokanha, on a *ebanashi* (narration-paintings) included in the series *Nihon no Shōgen* (1955).<sup>31</sup> However, this political commitment does not appear in Hani’s film representation of rural Japan. We must keep in mind that while the left dominated documentary circles in postwar Japan, there were structural constraints that prevented filmmakers from openly projecting political messages. In fact, throughout the postwar period, the documentary film industry was closely linked to public institutions like the Ministry of Education as well as to strategic industries responsible for economic growth. For example, Hani’s *Gunma-Ken 2* was part of the *Nihon hakken* series which was being sponsored by the company Fuji Seitetsu (Fuji Iron-Steel Co.). These institutional connections hindered an overtly political approach.

This approach did not start until the development of independent documentary film in the second half of the sixties. 1968 marks the heyday of student protests that appeared to reach their peak in Europe in the French May and Prague Spring. Italian universities were occupied by the *Sessantotto* movement, and similar student movements spread across the United Kingdom and West Germany. Even in Franco’s Spain, Universidad Complutense de Madrid, was closed for more than a month due to student demonstrations. By 1968, different movements were merging in Japan: the movement against the Vietnam War, movements for the rights of racial minorities and women, a call for an end to nuclear weapons proliferation, and the fight for workers’ rights. These movements combined with protests against university fees and the ratification of the “Anpo”, the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty. A sense of global movement flourished, fueled by the circulation of media images of protest across the world.<sup>32</sup> The death of the student leader Kamba Michiko at the hands of the riot police in Tokyo and the eruption of violent activities led by the Red Army in Japan paralleled the death of the student Benno Ohnesorg in West Berlin and the activities of the Baader–Meinhof Group in West Germany.

In the midst of these upheavals, a new kind of militant cinema proliferated worldwide. Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino released their film manifesto *The Hour of the Furnaces* (*La Hora de los Hornos*, 1968). This represented a new kind of leftist political avant-garde that proposed that film be enlisted “as a weapon” against capitalism and imperialism. The same year, Jean-Luc Godard and Jean-Pierre Gorin formed the Dziga Vertov group, a militant film collective that emerged out of the events in Paris in May of 1968. On the Japanese scene, Tsuchimoto Noriaki and Ogawa Shinsuke



lead a new form of militant cinema linked to the student movement that arose against structures of power and authority. The movement emerged out of student film clubs at universities and documented the building of barricades and the struggle with riot police which occurred at 127 schools in 1968 and 153 in 1969 (representing 34% and 41% of Japanese universities).<sup>33</sup>

Both Tsuchimoto and Ogawa had trained as documentary filmmakers under Hani's influence at Iwanami Eiga. Tsuchimoto had been inspired by Hani's *Children Who Draw* to join Iwanami in 1956, the same year that film had been released.<sup>34</sup> He acknowledged that unlike the big studios, Iwanami was an inspiring small production company because it favored developing a fresh style and because of the theoretical leaning of its members.<sup>35</sup> Tsuchimoto was quickly promoted and directed seven episodes for *Secrets of the Year* (*Nenrin no himitsu*, Fuji TV, 1959–1960) and six episodes for *Discovering Japan* (*Nihon hakken*, NET TV, 1961–1962), a series in which Ogawa also collaborated, serving as assistant director. In this period, Tsuchimoto also worked as an assistant director for Hani's full-length film *Bad Boys* (*Furyō shōnen*, 1960–61), which was shot in a reformatory with former inmates and blurred the boundary between reality and fiction.<sup>36</sup>

In 1961, Tsuchimoto, Ogawa and other Iwanami filmmakers such as Kazuo Kiroki, Yōichi Higashi and Masaki Tamura formed the group Ao no Kai (Blue Group). These authors engaged in monthly in-house screenings and discussions of cinema. Simultaneously, *PR eiga* (PR film) was emerging as a prominent site for the production of nonfiction. Left-wing filmmakers like those who worked at Iwanami believed in the ability of cinema to educate and mobilize the masses. For them, making *PR eiga* (PR films) for the promotion of the industries was extremely contradictory and ended up being a frustrating experience, as these were the very capitalist structures that they aimed to criticize. As a result, in 1964, Ogawa, Tsuchimoto and Hani left the company to initiate careers as independent filmmakers.

At that point, Tsuchimoto and Ogawa turned their attention toward the intense student protests of the time.<sup>37</sup> They brought their cameras behind the barricades as university campuses became battlefields and sites of confrontation between the students and the riot police. In this environment, Tsuchimoto and Ogawa radicalized Hani's documentary method, based on improvisation, rejection of scripts, observation, technical estheticism and above all familiarization with the environment and an intimate approach to the filmed objects.<sup>38</sup>

#### **4.1. A new filmmaking stage: Ogawa's merging with the student protest**

Ogawa joined the group Jieiso at Takasaki City University of Economics where he made *Sea of Youth* (*A Sea of Youth* (*Seinen no umi*, 1966) and *Forest of Pressure – A Record of the Struggle at Takasaki City University of*



*Economics* a.k.a. *Forest of Oppression* (Assatsu no mori – Takasaki Keizai Daigaku toso no kiroku, 1967). The later followed a group of students who were barricading themselves. *Sea of Youth* focused on a protest against an increase in university fees led by students enrolled in distance education. These students mostly came from working class backgrounds and had to work to support their studies. *Forest of Pressure* establishes a distinction among working-class students who are leading the struggle and those from privileged backgrounds. The film features protests against admissions of non-qualified candidates who are children of the economic and political elites. At some point, a student dormitory is evacuated, but Ogawa remains behind the barricades with the most radical students who create a commune. From inside, Ogawa engages actively in political discussions and violent confrontation with the authorities, elevating documentary filmmaking to a new level in which the distinction between the filming subject (filmmaker) and the filmed object (the protagonists) become blurred.

The third documentary produced by Jieiso was *Report from Haneda* (Gennin hokusho – Haneda toso no kiroku, 1967). In this film, Ogawa leaves the university campus in order to capture the clash between students and the police at Haneda airport when prime minister Satō Eisaku returned from a trip to the United States. The Satō administration (1964–72) granted support to the U.S. military intervention in Vietnam and was assisting in the creation of an anti-communist block of developmentalist regimes in Asia. In the process, the administration was cooperating with authoritarian leaders such as Park Chung-hee in South Korea, Chiang Kai-shek in Taiwan, General Marcos in the Philippines, General Suharto in Indonesia and the military dictator Thanom Kittikachorn in Thailand which had ended any hope of retaining a nonalignment policy in the Cold War.<sup>39</sup>

#### **4.2. Student barricades in 1968 Japan**

This extraordinary period of upheaval in Japan intensified in 1968 due to several factors: the aforementioned support of the U.S. intervention in Vietnam, opposition to the ratification of the US-Japan Security Treaty of 1970, anxiety surrounding a potential nuclear war between China and the Soviet Union, wider discontent toward politics in general, and the perceived betrayal of the postwar promise of Japanese democratization. By the late 1960s, these struggles expanded to a wider society that included a populace that appeared apolitical.<sup>40</sup> Student barricades proliferated across hundreds of universities. Sixty-seven campuses ended up seized by the police or closed. Universities in Tokyo, Waseda, Nihon and Ochanomizu, to name a few, witnessed savage combat between students, riot police, and rightist groups.

In this context, Tuschimoto applied Hani's filmmaking method based on the idea of a close gaze to reality before the camera. In *Prehistory of the Partisan Party* (Paruchizan zenshi, 1969), he filmed the struggle at Kyoto University, documenting his own life behind the barricades with a group of radical students who called themselves "partisans." This was not new for Tsuchimoto. He had long been committed to the student movement and had even been arrested during his years as students at Waseda University. *Prehistory of the Partisan Party* films the struggle from inside, including the making of Molotov cocktails. According to Abe Nornes, this film was part of a militant cinema movement whose goal was the mobilizing of the masses.<sup>41</sup> However, the film retains a certain distance vis-à-vis its subject. It has been noted that Tsuchimoto did not fully embrace this collective's advocacy of violence (presumably some collective members later joined the terrorist group Red Army).<sup>42</sup>

### 5. Rural Japan in 1968: a new site for struggle

Interestingly, Ogawa abandoned the university barricades to film the battles against the state in the rural area of Sanrizuka in 1968. With a newly formed team named Ogawa Productions, he traveled to this village in the Chiba prefecture to capture the peasants' uprising against a plan to build a new international airport (later known as Narita Airport). *The Battle Front for the Liberation of Japan – Summer in Sanrizuka* (Nihon kaiho sensen – Sanrizuka no natsu, 1968) is the first in a series of seven documentaries made by Ogawa Productions about the conflict. Located sixty kilometers outside of Tokyo, Sanrizuka is a region of valleys and hills whose lands are covered by rice paddies and fields for the cultivation of a variety of vegetables. While its volcanic soil was not particularly fertile, farmers had been granted land to increase the food supply to Tokyo during the Meiji period (1868–1912). Initially, it was hard to foresee any strong opposition, as owners were promised 50% inflated prices for their land. However, farmers opposed the Satō's administration economic restructuring plan, which favored industrialization and forced young farmers to abandon their villages. The activists and students who arrived in Sanrizuka were motivated by their opposition to the Anpo Security Treaty with the U.S, which would allow American military aircrafts extensive use of the new airport for the Vietnam War. An organization called Hantai Domei, originally led by the Japanese Communist Party (JCP), was established at the end of 1967 to oppose the airport proposal. The group's leadership was taken over by New Left students, who regarded its initial nonviolent approach as ineffective. As a result, clashes with the riot police became common in early 1968. Ogawa's production team arrived in February, when the protests were at their peak, and in April, they started shooting the struggle, transforming the rural landscape into a symbol of confrontation with the state.

Portrayals of rural Japan had already achieved a political dimension in documentaries depicting the protests against the enlargement of the American military base in Sunagawa (for example, in Kamei Fumio's *The People of Sunagawa – A Record of the Anti-Base Struggle* (*Sunagawa no hitobhito. Kichi hantai toso no kiroku*, 1955). During the second half of the 1950s, the rural landscape became a highly emotionally charged battlefield. But the struggle at Sanrizuka was unprecedented in both its intensity and duration. In Sanrizuka, Ogawa took Hani's immersive filmmaking method one step further. While Hani had spent seven months with the children of *Children who Draw* in order to enter their inner universe,<sup>43</sup> Ogawa lived with the peasants of Sanrizuka for nine years in a commune his crew members created at a borrowed farmhouse. Discussions on the intimate relationship between the filmmaking subject (*shutai*) and their objects (*taisho*) were extremely influential in documentary practices in the late 1960s. But as Nornes noted, no filmmaker had ever developed such a close relationship to their filmed objects as Ogawa.<sup>44</sup>

In Ogawa's series, there is no clear distinction between subject and object. Ogawa and his team are not mere observers of the scene. They lived with the farmers and participated actively in their discussions and in their confrontations with the police. The filmmakers merge with the filmed objects to an extent that they are not separate entities from the profilmic world. While shooting *Summer in Sanrizuka*, the cameraman Tamura Masaki threw himself into the mass of protesters, the assistant director Matsumoto Takeaki and cameraman Otsu Koshiro were beaten by the police, and his assistant Otsuka Noboru was arrested. The voice-over echoes the filmmakers' involvement in the events, pointing out that on the eleventh of July, a cameraman was arrested but they kept shooting with another camera. A handheld shot appears to capture that moment. Such handheld shots were taken at the barricades themselves or within the melee and at one point, a camera was even hit with water from a watercannon, although the cameraman kept filming with wet lens. An intertitle states that in April, the riot police tormented farmers, arrested 15 people, and injured 42, of which 7 were hospitalized.

This was not Ogawa's first contact with rural Japan.<sup>45</sup> He had developed a close relationship with the rural world in *Children Living the Mountains* (*Yama ni ikiru kora*, 1958). He made this film with Eikan, the student film club at Kokugakuin University where he had enrolled in 1955. Ogawa served as the producer and traveled with other club members to a village in Gifu prefecture, where he developed interpersonal relationships, drinking tea and chatting at villagers' homes.<sup>46</sup> Ogawa's close gaze reproduced Hani's stance. However, his goals were different from Hani's. While Hani was primarily interested in the psychological dimension of his characters, Ogawa's were closer to Kamei's political commitments. In fact, Communist critic Yamada

Kazuo claimed that *Children Living the Mountains* was rejected by the Ministry of Education for its criticism of the lack of textbooks and teachers in rural areas.<sup>47</sup> Ogawa had also worked in the countryside after he joined Iwanami. During the filming of *Hokakido, My Love* (Waga ai Hokkaido, Kuroki Kazuo, 1960), he acted as Kuroki's assistant director. This was a PR film sponsored by the Hokkaido Power Company, and Ogawa and the crew traveled to the northern island of Japan, where they tried to capture on film both the beauty of its natural resources and its exploitation by the company. In the following years, Ogawa also wrote scripts about the rural world with Iwanami colleagues from the Blue Group. They were conceived as PR films, although none of them were ultimately made.

In the heavily politicized environment of 1968, Ogawa's portrayals of the rural were driven by the topical issues of the day. In fact, rather than making documentaries as such, Ogawa saw himself as making a newsreel on the battles at Sanrizuka.<sup>48</sup> Indeed, his works do not present a carefully reflected and planned approach to reality but are characterized by improvisation and an extraordinary immediacy to the depicted events. *Summer in Sanrizuka* does not follow a classical narrative structure. After an intertitle stating that the government decided to build an airport in Narita in 1967, the film abruptly opens with chaotic scenes of charges from the riot police, protesters shouting at the agents, and airport workers running away from the farmers. The viewer is exposed to great mayhem with no organized succession of events. In the following scene, there are close-up shots of a group of activists in a headquarters, analyzing events with maps and scrawls. The dialogue is not heard but replaced with non-synchronized discussions over walkie-talkies. Then, the title *Summer in Sanrizuka* and the film credits are presented and followed by a handheld shot of somebody walking a narrow pathway, pans of the watermelon fields, and farmers beating metal barrels to alert everyone about the arrival of new police agents and airport workers. The voice-over shifts from walkie-talkie conversations to announcements given over speakers. The following sequences include students and female farmers marching through the rice paddies.

In a long closeup, a narrator explains that the airport will be used by the American military for the Vietnam War, overlapping with images of the clash between the police and the masses, who are encouraged to take action. Several subsequent sequences are comprised of quick camera movements of students wearing their characteristic hats, towels covering their face and holding long wooden sticks and sickles. The film depicts protesters in the clamor of battle, sometimes discussing or planning the next clash. The film seems out of control from the outset and the viewer is continuously left alone before decontextualized images. It provides no specific details about where or when the clashes and discussions are taking place.

Collective discussions are normally shot through closeups of the participants. In the first half of the film, some demonstrators acknowledge that they are exhausted and even demoralized, and some farmers claim that they need to do go back to work on the farms. Nevertheless, as the film evolves, voices of those determined to continue the struggle assume center stage. In the second half of the film, participants agree that they need to keep fighting using their own weapons to showcase their cause. Discussions revolve around how to make the resistance more effective. Then, the film presents a tower and siren, along with barricades and iron cables which were built as part of the resistance strategy. Scenes include tracking shots from cars, random closeups, protesters and students throwing stones, and images of people waiting for the next clash alternating with other shots that feature people running.

All in all, the spectator is transferred from one spot to another in the midst of a jumble of shots and is exposed to different people. But it is impossible to identify clear leading characters. The only lead character is the rural landscape itself, which is transformed into a battlefield and is the only consistent protagonist in *Summer in Sanrizuka*. This idea is emphasized in the film's closing sequence which is comprised of aerial shots of the Sanrizuka landscape where the battles had taken place and is accompanied by Beethoven's Ninth Symphony.

As Desser notes, 1968 marked the consolidation of a new criticism that demanded higher visibility of traditionally neglected members of society (workers, students, women) where documenting political discourses was not enough.<sup>49</sup> This higher visibility also required changes in production, circulation, and consumption structures. Ogawa Pro materialized this comprehensive understanding of militant cinema. It was not a conventional film studio, but rather an unusual organization that attracted at least a hundred people in 1968. Members were not paid any salary. Instead they were bonded by shared political ideals and lived communally, some of them for only few days but others for two decades.<sup>50</sup> This filmmaking style went beyond cinema. It was closely linked to their quest for new modes of living.

This extraordinary commitment to an immersive approach to film did not end with *Summer in Sanrizuka*. Hani's father, the renowned Marxist historian Hani Goro, was impressed with the film and gave Ogawa a donation to make the following one, *Sanrizuka – Front Line for the Liberation of Japan* (Nihon kaiho sensen: Sanrizuka 1970) which focuses on the farmers of Heta village. In the early 1970s, Ogawa kept filming the struggle and documenting chaotic sequence of events, intense emotions and debates, and clashes with the police. By 1973, mass demonstrations had vanished in Japan, to a great extent because of the Red Army (Sekigun) whose terrorist activities helped to discredit the student movement.<sup>51</sup> In this context, Ogawa abandoned the political charge of his films and focused

instead on the daily lives of the crew as farmers, which resulted in *Sanrizuka – Heta Village* (*Sanrizuka – Heta Buraku*, 1973). The following year, Ogawa's team moved to Magino village in Yamagata Prefecture where they lived for thirteen years, growing rice and continuing their documentaries about life in a farming village. Thus 1968 marked the heyday of the militant cinema linked to the New Left, which involved not only a closer relationship between politics and film but also between politics and life. While the early 1970s saw the twilight of these kind of films, we can still find significant representations of rural Japan as a site of struggle against power in the Tsuchimoto series of documentaries on the Minamata incident: *Minamata – The Victims and Their World* (1971) and *Minamata Disease: A Trilogy* (*Igaku to shite no Minamata-byō: Sanbusaku*, 1974–1975). Those films follow farmers' struggle for compensation for illnesses caused by a spill from a local factory that poisoned water with mercury.

## 6. Conclusion

It is well-known that the representations of the rural have a long tradition in Japanese cultural and artistic production. However, this article has focused on the role of the rural in the history of Japanese documentary film, a topic which has received far less attention from scholars. The films presented here do not offer continuity with the traditional representations of the rural found in premodern Japan, which were mainly driven by sensorial experiences of natural landscapes. These films shift their attention from the natural environments as such to the people living in them. This reveals modern modes of representation that are not necessarily linked to earlier philosophical and cultural traditions.

However, patterns of representing the rural have not remained unchanged in Japanese documentary production. Film representations have been subject to all kinds of synchronic interests. In the 1930s, the rural became a place to find the essence of “authentic Japan” prompted first by nationalistic discourses that intensified after the outbreak of the war in China; and second by folklore studies that emerged as a consequence of anxieties triggered by a perceived decline in traditions in the face of urbanization and the development of mass society.

In the postwar period, the rural became more closely associated with high economic growth. The countryside was represented on PR films and television series sponsored by public institutions or heavy industries that were engaged in the exploration of natural resources. Hence, the interest shifted from identity traits found in folklore to the physical traits and factual elements found in geography. The ground shifted again in 1968, when the rural contained a strong political dimension. In this period of great social turmoil, Ogawa showed how the village of Sanrizuka, no less than the



university barricades, became an icon of the struggle against the state. This marks the heyday of a new kind of representation of the rural as a site of conflict, symbolizing resistance against economic and political power structures. The same power structures that build airports in the countryside are the same that implement capitalist reforms: favoring industry to the detriment of farmers, increasing university fees and supporting the American intervention in Vietnam. This common enemy attracted students, activists and protesters who came from all over Japan to join the struggle in Sanrizuka which had much wider implications than just the surrendering of land for the airport.

In this particular environment, Ogawa epitomized the militant cinema of 1968 by using a filmmaking method based on improvisation and a familiarization with the filmed objects that had been developed by Hani at Iwanami. Tsuchimoto also added political commitment to this method. However, Ogawa went one step further by radicalizing this filmmaking style with an unprecedented engagement in the topics depicted before the camera. Ogawa's team members became active elements of the world presented on screen. This highly emotional and politicized rural environment provided circumstances that made the film's subjects and objects merge and became indissolubly linked. Ogawa and his crew not only showed a clear ideological commitment to their topic but also developed a more comprehensive commitment that expanded to all aspects of their lives, which were inseparable of the filmed elements. As a consequence, these cinematic experiences of the rural are essential to understanding the tendencies of documentary film in Japan, creating a cinema that aspired to collective engagement in reality and raised fascinating questions about the relationship between filmmakers in filmed world.

## Notes

1. Lira, "Naturaleza, sensibilidad y memoria corporal," 2020.
2. Mitchell, *Landscape and Power*.
3. Furuhata, "Returning to Actuality," 353.
4. Grosgrrove, *Transnatctions of the Institute of the British Geographers*, 46.
5. Kimura, "Korekara no nōmin eiga," 50; and Tsumura, *Eiga to kanshō*, 21–22.
6. Centeno-Martín, *Reediting the War in Asia*, 104; Hamasaki, "Nyūsu eiga kōkogaku," 34; and Satō, *Renzu kara miru Nihon gendai shi*, 183.
7. Aihara, "Seisaku kikaku no shōsatsu," 22–26.
8. Fuji, "Yanagita Kunio and the Culture Film."
9. Fuji, "Bunka suru eiga."
10. Centeno-Martín "Gazes outside the Representation"; and Satō, *Nihon kiroku eizōshi*, 26.
11. Kamei et al., "Nihon bunka eiga no shoki kara kyō wo kataru zadankai," 21.
12. Tsumura, *Eiga to kanshō*, 25; and Fuji, "Yanagita Kunio and the Culture Film."
13. Only 15minutes have survived until today.



14. Mura, “Yanagita sensei to kiroku eiga”; and Fuji, “Yanagita Kunio and the Culture Film.”
15. Tanaka et al. “Satsueisha no seishin ni tsuite,” 41.
16. See note 8 above.
17. Hani, *Engi shinai shuyakutachi*.
18. Hani, “Watashi no shinarioron.”
19. Hani, “Satsuei shinagara manabukoto,” 213.
20. Hani, “Zenei eiga no koto,” 9.
21. Centeno-Martín, “Method Directors,” 125–152; Centeno-Martín “Legacies of Hani Susumu’s Documentary School”; and Jesty, “Image Pragmatics.”
22. Centeno-Martín, “Imágenes del ‘espíritu de reconstrucción.’”
23. Matshomoto and Ishizaka, “Dokumentarii – no umi e. . .,” 61.
24. Natori, *Shashin no yomikata*, 55–65.
25. Hani, “Eizō de wa kangaerarenaika,” 49.
26. Hani, “Satsuei shinagara manabukoto,” 211.
27. See Toba, *1950 Nendai*, 19–47.
28. Matsumoto, *Eizō no hakken*, 64.
29. Hani, *Engi shinai shuyakutachi*, 49.
30. Hanada, “Nijūjinkaku,” 133.
31. Toba, *1950 nendai*, 55–63.
32. Marotti, “Japan 1968. . .”.
33. Kosugi, “1968–69 Nen Tokyo Daigaku denani ga okitaka.”
34. Gerow, “Tsuchimoto Noriaki.”
35. Hani, “Aru tokuina rīdā ni tsiute no kaisō,” 132.
36. Centeno-Martín, “The Limits of Fiction.”
37. Tsuchimoto’s Works have been discussed by himself, Tadao Satō and several colleagues from Iwanami such as Kazuo Kuroki and Toshie Tokieda in Tsuchimoto et al. *Dokumentari towa nani ka*. Ogawa’s series on Sanrikuza struggle has been studied by Suzuki, Otsu et al., *Ogawa. Purodakushon “Sanrizuka no natsu” o miru*.
38. Nornes spotted traits of Hani’s documentary method in Tsuchimoto and Ogawa’s films in Nornes, *The Documentaries of Noriaki Tsuchimoto*, 2–4.
39. Schaller, “Securing the Great Crescent.”
40. Ibid.
41. Nornes, *Forest of Pressure*, 74.
42. Desser, “El Zen y el arte documental.”
43. Hani, *Engi shinai shuyakutachi* (Protagonists Who Do Not Act), 52.
44. Nornes, *Forest of Pressure*, xiv.
45. Ironically, folklore studies seem to have some links to Ogawa even if ethnographic approaches had been completely abandoned in his documentary representation of the rural. His grandfather, Ogawa Suzuichi, who had been mayor of a village in this area seems to have acted as the aforementioned ethnographer Kunio Yanagita’s informant on local traditions. And Ogawa Shinsuke claimed to have attended Kunio’s lectures at Kokugauin university.
46. Nornes, *Forest of Pressure*, 29.
47. Ibid.
48. Ueno, “Hacia una teoría sobre el estilo cinematográfico de Shinsuke Ogawa,” 137.
49. See note 42 above.
50. Nornes, *Forest of Pressure*, xvii.
51. Igarashi, “Dead Bodies and Living Guns.”

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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