

The Aesthetic of Montage in the Films of Kamei Fumio

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This paper approaches the problem of cultural exchange in cinema by considering the work of a prominent Japanese documentary filmmaker Kamei Fumio (1908-1987). Prior to becoming a film director, Kamei spent two and a half years living in the Soviet Union (1929-1931) and later continued to play an important role as a cultural mediator between the two countries.¹ Kamei's exceptional talent, as well as his fascinating biography (i.e. early experience abroad, imprisonment, frequent confrontations with the ruling authorities) inspired a number of investigations into his life and work (Nornes 148-182; Satō 159-202). While it is widely acknowledged that Kamei's interest in editing was prompted by his visit to the USSR, it has never been entirely determined just how his study abroad experience influenced his future filmmaking.

In the 1920s, Soviet cinema was experiencing a golden age in regards to its avant-garde film movement, and it is logical to assume that Kamei's interest in editing developed under the influence of "Soviet montage". In Japan, Kamei's public image has been continuously crafted in association with the word *montage* (*montāju*)² – the word which does not simply mean "editing", but specifically points to the stylistic and ideological tendencies of 1920s Soviet cinema.³ Yet Kamei himself never admitted to deliberately adopting the editing principles promoted by the leading Soviet filmmakers (Sergei Eisenstein, Dziga Vertov, Vsevolod Pudovkin). Moreover, even though avant-garde Soviet filmmakers all agreed on the importance of editing, and the need to serve political objectives declared by the Communist Party, their definitions and practical implementations of "montage" were exceedingly diverse.

In the early 1920s, a pioneer of Soviet montage theory, Lev Kuleshov, conducted a series of experiments, which led him to believe that single shots could only acquire meaning when joined together. By juxtaposing a close-up shot of an actor, Ivan Mozzhukhin, with diverse visual materials (i.e. a bowl of soup, a baby, a young woman in a coffin) Kuleshov concluded that cinematic meaning could only be created through editing. This idea was later opposed by Sergei Eisenstein, who argued for the multiplicity of opposing meanings, which is already conceived through a single shot and could be discovered through editing. Eisenstein continued elaborating his theoretical views on montage long after the avant-garde film movement came under attack by the oppressive Stalinist regime. In his later theoretical works, Eisenstein reached a powerful realization that went beyond conventional understanding of montage as a physical process of cutting and splicing the film. He re-envisioned montage as a dynamic and all-embracing technique common to all of the arts. Its chief function was redefined as a gradual eliciting of the artwork's central theme and overarching meaning. This idea was fully developed by Eisenstein only in the late 1930s, long after Kamei had already left the Soviet Union. Yet as I would like to argue in the following pages, it is this late definition of montage that corresponds most accurately to the primary editing principle Kamei used in his wartime documentary films.

This paper aims to identify the points of contiguity between Kamei's films and his supposed Soviet "inspirers" by conducting a close textual analysis of Kamei's wartime documentaries: *Shanghai* (1938), *Peking* (1938), *Fighting Soldiers* (1939) and *Kobayashi Issa* (1941) – and comparing them to influential Soviet films to which Kamei was exposed in 1929-1931. Created within the first decade after Kamei's return from the USSR, these films come closest to revealing Kamei's adherence to (or deviation from) the aesthetics of Soviet avant-garde. As we shall find out, the films of Kamei Fumio addressed in this paper demonstrate a certain affinity with the stylistics of 1920s Soviet cinema. Yet even the most vivid examples presented in this paper are not enough to identify Kamei as an adherent of a specific cinematic style associated with any particular Soviet

filmmaker's definition of "montage" as coined during the 1920s. Kamei's use of editing techniques that are reminiscent of Soviet filmmakers is eclectic – he alternates different editing techniques according to his directorial needs, and more importantly, evacuates them of ideological connotations ingrained by Soviet filmmakers. Before considering the cinematic texts, let us briefly summarize Kamei's path to becoming a documentary filmmaker.

I . Kamei's Experience in the USSR

As is widely known, Kamei did not intend to study cinema when he set off for the Soviet Union. Before departing to the Soviet Union, he was a student at the Department of Fine Arts at Bunka Gakuin where he majored in sociology and painting. Kamei left school to study avant-garde Soviet art, but on his way to Moscow, he saw some Soviet films that touched him deeply, making him aware of cinema's power to agitate and inspire (Kamei, Kawarazaki, Hijikata 18). Upon arriving at VOKS' (All-Union Society for Cultural Ties with Abroad) headquarters in Moscow, Kamei expressed his desire to study cinema and was sent to Leningrad, where he could attend classes at Fotokinoteknikum, a state-run film school that mostly prepared cameramen and engineers. Kamei also had free access to the Leningrad branch of Sovkino film studio, where he became acquainted with leading filmmakers such as Grigorii Kozintsev, Sergei Yutkevich, and Fridrikh Ermler. It is important to note that the true leader and inspiration for these filmmakers was none other than Sergei Eisenstein, who was working in Moscow, but was highly influential among the filmmakers in Leningrad (Bagrov 10). As Soviet screenwriter Mikhail Bleiman recalled: "In Leningrad its own filmmaking 'school' was being formed. Although its head, Sergei Eisenstein was in Moscow, his students, – no, his proselytes, were working in Leningrad" (92). Kamei's palpable, but allegedly unintentional, contiguity with the stylistics of Sergei Eisenstein could be partially explained by this "geography" of Soviet cinema.

Kamei's travel to the Soviet Union is poorly documented, and there are still a lot of blanks to be filled. However, from VOKS' archival documents we know that during his stay in Leningrad, Kamei was already actively participating in the city's cultural life, taking his first steps toward becoming a cultural mediator. During the exhibition of silent Japanese cinema organized by VOKS in the summer of 1929, Kamei helped two young Soviet filmmakers to reedit Ushihara Kiyohiko's romantic comedy *Modern Training of a Samurai* (1928) in a way that would be more accessible to Soviet audiences. VOKS' officials report that this reedited film made a much better impression on audiences compared to other Japanese films released in Leningrad that had no additional editing (GARF f. 5283, op. 11, d. 63, 47). Just as for Sergei Eisenstein and other prominent Soviet directors of the time, Kamei's filmmaking career began in reediting foreign films for Soviet consumption. ⁴ This experience opened Kamei's eyes to the powerful and diverse capacities of editing, which later became the chief artistic tool of his own filmmaking.

The years of Kamei's visit to Leningrad was a transitional period in the history of the Soviet Union and its cinema. In the turbulent era of the First Five-Year Plan, cinema was required to become a powerful tool of documenting the nation's radical transformations. Nonfiction cinema, often referred to as *kul'turfil'ma* (culture films) was repeatedly proclaimed to be the most important kind of Soviet cinema. This general engagement with documentary undoubtedly influenced Kamei's interest in this specific genre and later made him a highly suitable candidate for working in the wartime Japanese film industry. Very much like the early 1930s Soviet Union, late 1930s Japan was preoccupied with creating a new "imagined community." As Japan's military and political involvement in China progressed, the government's need to document life in its newly acquired territories also increased. The years following the China Incident were marked by the rise of documentary cinema. The infamous Film Law passed in 1939 mandated the forced screenings of nonfiction films, generally referred to as *bunka eiga* (culture films). Ten years earlier, in 1929, just a few months after Kamei's arrival in Leningrad, a similar

resolution was issued in the Soviet Union. The Communist Party urged the film studios to produce more culture films and demanded that theater owners accompany their screenings of fiction films with culture films and newsreels (Sobranie zakonov SSSR 1475-1476). Thus, Kamei twice experienced a national drive for the advancement of documentary – first as a student and as an observer, and then a second time as a leading participant.

After returning to Japan, Kamei was officially hired by PCL (Photography Chemical Laboratory) and assigned to the Second Production Department (the Cultural Film Department). This was a perfect fit both for the PCL (later merged into Tōhō), which wished to advance the production of documentary cinema, and for Kamei, who wished to fully indulge his passion for editing. A number of Kamei's colleagues, including the head of the department, Matsuzaki Keiji, were former Prokino (Japan's Proletarian Film League) members and shared Kamei's interest in Marxist ideology, Soviet cinema, and documentary. PCL was one of the first Japanese film studios to start producing *henshū eiga*, or "edited films", which started appearing circa 1933 and differentiated themselves from standard news films by putting an emphasis on editing, thus anticipating and expediting the emergence of full-fledged "documentary cinema" (*kiroku eiga*) in 1930s Japan. Since Japanese filmmakers' interest towards *henshū eiga* was primarily determined by their fascination with theoretical writings on Soviet montage (Nornes 50-51), Kamei's experience of actually living in Leningrad and interacting with Soviet filmmakers instantly gained him a reputation as a qualified specialist. In the following section we will provide examples that demonstrate Kamei's broad knowledge of Soviet cinema, as well as his ability to expand on the lessons it provided.

II. Identifying Proximity with Soviet Cinema

1. Elemental Juxtapositions

One of the most basic uses of editing often employed in 1920s Soviet cinema is a juxtaposition that stresses strong inequalities between different groups of people. In Vladimir Erofeev's documentary film *To the Happy Harbor* (1930), which Kamei claims to have been greatly inspired by during his travel to the USSR (Kamei, Kawarazaki, Hijikata 21-22), the powerful, healthy-looking bodies of German workers are juxtaposed with the careless, well-fed German bourgeoisie dancing in a restaurant (17:30-18:20). When these sort of simple comparisons revealing social inequalities started appearing in late 1920s Japanese cinema, they were quickly labeled as adhering to the principles of "Soviet montage" (Yamamoto 89). In Kamei's wartime documentaries, we also see the use of similar techniques, yet they tend to function not as a means of disclosing class differences (as they did in 1920s Soviet cinema), but to stress ethnic inequalities, and by doing so, contribute to the national ideology prevalent in wartime Japan. In Kamei's *Kobayashi Issa*, for instance, images of Caucasian children riding bicycles and having lunch with their parents at a hotel in Karuizawa are juxtaposed with the image of a Japanese woman and her child mowing the lawn for tourists to play golf (9:50-10:20).

2. The "Kuleshov Effect"

In Kamei's *Fighting Soldiers* we encounter a sequence reminiscent of both Lev Kuleshov's experiment with actor Ivan Mozzhukhin's close-up, and Eisenstein's use of "intellectual montage" in *October*, where the primitiveness of religion is conveyed through the juxtaposition of statues of different gods worshipped around the world (31:10-32:03). In Kamei's *Fighting Soldiers* we see a close-up of an elderly Chinese peasant juxtaposed with the images of 1) a burning house, 2) a person kneeling and praying in front of a local sanctuary, 3) children left without their home, 4) a person sitting alone in a wide open space with his head down, 5) clouded skies, 6) Chinese people having to desert their village, 7) dried-cracked earth, and 8) a roadway statue of a local deity whose hands are brought up to its face, as if covering its eyes so as not to see what is happening all around (1:20-3:58). Together these images of the

environment gradually reveal anger and bitterness concealed in the old man's neutral facial expression. It is noteworthy that Kamei himself described the old man's face as being "astounded," acknowledging that his emotions were already evident before the editing took place (Kamei, "Kiroku eiga to shinjitsu to" 42). According to Kamei, other images juxtaposed with the old man's face are necessary to explain *why* he looks so astounded. Using editing to explain the reasons behind the characters' emotions, Kamei differentiates himself from Kuleshov who insisted on the neutrality of shots that only reveal the characters' emotions when juxtaposed with other images.

3. "Counter-Use" of Documentary Film Footage

Another editing principle Kamei could have inherited from 1920s Soviet cinema is the "counter-use" of images produced by the enemy. This editing approach can be found in Esfir Shub's *Fall of the Romanov Dynasty* (1927), in which prerevolutionary film footage is rearranged in a way that demonstrates the oppressive nature of the imperial regime overthrown by the Bolsheviks. 5 In *Shanghai* (1938), Kamei also uses footage from a Chinese propaganda film, which is described by voiceover as being produced and distributed by the National Revolutionary Army of the Republic of China. This footage depicting a public speech made by Chiang Kai-shek and the binding of "traitors" who are accused of sympathizing with Japan (7:48-8:45) is meant to reveal the deceitful nature of the communists' propaganda as well as the brutality of Chinese troops who cruelly execute their own people. In Kamei's *Shanghai*, however, Chinese footage does not only serve as a means of degrading the enemy, it actually reveals similarities between Chinese and Japanese propaganda. Kamei's *Shanghai* begins with an inter-title announcing that the film was produced with the "generous support" of the Japanese army, and later we hear the voiceover explain the analogous origins of Chinese footage. It is underscored that even though the films' political messages may differ, their basic functions are the same. Kamei does not aim toward absolute veracity in his documentary film, suggesting

that if the Chinese resistance could use cinema to make one-sided arguments, so could the Japanese government – as demonstrated through the very film the audience is watching.

4. Reinterpretation of Well-Established Editing Patterns

In his films, Kamei elaborates not only on the editing principles, but entire series of images (editing sequences) created by Soviet filmmakers. His *Shanghai*, for instance, reinterprets an image of a clock, which was often used by Soviet filmmakers to celebrate the birth of a new historical era. In Sergei Eisenstein's *October* the capture of the Winter Palace is commemorated on several clock dials showing the time in different cities of the world (New York, Paris, London). This sequence is followed by a shot of a boy asleep on the tsar's throne – an image symbolizing the dawn of the new world order (1:40:30-1:40:48). In Mikhail Kaufman and Il'ia Kopalin's *Moscow (Moskva, 1927)*, which depicts the Soviet capital ten years after the October Revolution, the difficulty of visualizing major historical transformations is addressed. "It looks like the same old Moscow," – the inter-titles announce, and we see the centuries-old Kremlin, the Cathedral of Christ the Savior, and other historical sights (47:35-49:5). It looks like nothing has really changed, but this impression is misleading. The close-up of a clock dial is followed by a shot of a baby, signifying the birth of a new socialist state (49:33-49:50).

In a similar vein to *October* and *Moscow*, Kamei's *Shanghai*, filmed after the city's surrender to the Japanese army, opens with a series of shots symbolizing a break in the flow of time. We see the Shanghai Customs House's clock tower – one of the most recognizable images of the city. The clock strikes twelve, and we see an establishing shot of Shanghai. Then, surprisingly, the audience sees the same clock tower again. It strikes noon, and the audience yet again sees an establishing shot of the city (1:00-2:25). It is difficult for first-time viewers to comprehend the difference between the two establishing shots and understand what this unusual juxtaposition implies. The recurrent appearance of the clock tower as well as the ringing of its bell, however, does capture the significance

and the monumentality of the historical moment Kamei wishes to address. If we look at the two establishing shots closely, we will see that in the earlier shot, the city is covered by smoke. We can also hear the distant noise of an explosion as well as car sirens. In the latter shot, the sky is clear, but almost none of the houses in the city have roofs. A drastic change is wrought on Shanghai's cityscape within mere seconds, and yet it is almost impossible for the viewer to recognize it. In a way that is reminiscent of Kaufman and Kopalín's films, Kamei expresses the impossibility of the camera to embrace the true scale of the historical transformation that is unfolding. Kamei's *Shanghai* also depicts small children who represent the future citizens of the new empire (1:11:30-1:11:38). These shots, however, appear towards the end of the film and their connection to the opening images of the clock tower is not as evident. Moreover, unlike the scenes from *Moscow* and *October*, which convey a direct and unambiguous meaning, the opening scene in *Shanghai* could be interpreted in two different ways. An attentive viewer, who notices the deconstructed roofs in one of the establishing shots, will understand the filmmaker's reference to Japan's rough interaction with the natural flow of Chinese time. A less experienced audience member will regard the same opening scene just as simply a monumental symbol of the birth of the new order in Asia.

5. Direct "Citations"

Sometimes Kamei's references to earlier Soviet films are more direct. Thus, the portrayal of the Forbidden City, where Chinese emperors and their households used to live, in Kamei's *Peking*, echoes the scenes depicting the seizure of the Winter Palace in *October*. A symbolic rape, portrayed in a scene where a sailor bursts into the tsarina's boudoir (1:34:55-1:36:14) corresponds to the depiction in *Peking* of Empress Dowager Cixi's bedroom. In Kamei's film, we do not see any intruders touching the empress' former belongings. However, the camera's gaze penetrating such an extremely private space as the bedroom as well as the ripped paper in the sliding doors (*shōji*) of the palace are strong enough

evidence of violation (1:32-2:30). Likewise, in *Kobayashi Issa*, which documents people's life in the rural Nagano prefecture, Kamei refers to Alexander Dovzhenko's *Earth (Zemlia, 1930)*, which reveals the process of collectivization in a Ukrainian village. Dovzhenko's film stresses the peasants' naiveté, for instance, they urinate in order to fix a tractor's radiator which ran out of water (29:41-30:01). Likewise, in *Kobayashi Issa*, Kamei, deliberately stages a scene showing a peasant urinating in the middle of the field (Kamei, "Kamei Fumio Ōi ni kataru" 37), emphasizing the peasant's closeness to nature (19:30-19:41).

Kobayashi Issa's ironic and condescending treatment of Buddhism is evident from the rhythmical editing and the mocking use of inappropriate music. This technique is an echo of famous antireligious images as first seen in Soviet cinema: e.g. the repellant priest in Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin* (1925), the pompous but meaningless Buddhist ceremony in Pudovkin's *Storm over Asia* (1928), and the grotesque depiction of a Russian Orthodox rainmaking ritual in Eisenstein's *Old and New* (1929). In Kamei's *Kobayashi Issa*, the juxtaposition of countless pilgrims ascending the stairs to Zenkōji, and the close-up shot of the offertory box bombarded by the coins thrown in by the pilgrims, equates living people with commercial income of the temple (6:52-7:05). The symbolic link between people and coins is demonstrated through the sameness of their "perpendicular" movement. The vertical movement of people ascending the stairs (a set of horizontal lines) is continued by the vertical movement of coins falling down between the horizontal partitions of the offertory box. This sort of editing echo the frame composition in *Battleship Potemkin's* famous Odessa steps sequence, in which the strong diagonal lines of the steps are crossed perpendicularly by the movement of people running down the steps (49:20-50:48). Kamei's scene is also reminiscent of Vladimir Sheiderov's depiction of Nikkō in *Big Tokyo (Bol'shoi Tokio, 1933)*, screened in Japan after Kamei's return from the Soviet Union. Shneiderov refers to the people climbing up the stairs and throwing donations as "the victims" and emphasizes the commercial benefit they bring by juxtaposing their images with the

laughing snouts of the statues of mythical creatures called *komainu* who are traditionally situated in front of temple entrances (32:46-33:54).

So far, this paper has listed a number of vivid examples that illustrate Kamei's implicit affinity with avant-garde Soviet cinema, yet has also demonstrated the eclectic, incidental nature of this relationship. None of the cinematic techniques mentioned above can be identified as dominant in or fundamental to Kamei's documentaries. There seems, however, to be an underlying editing principle, which he devised, that is common to all of his wartime films. This principle could be described as an editing style based on the repetition of certain graphic patterns and objects that gradually reveal the film's underlying motif. Although this editing approach was never articulated by Kamei himself, nor was it addressed by the avant-garde Soviet filmmakers in their theoretical works written in the 1920s, it is clearly manifested in the silent films of Sergei Eisenstein, as well as in his theoretical essays written in the late 1930s. Some of the cinematic principles already evident in his earlier films were theorized by Sergei Eisenstein only a decade later. The following section examines the use of recurrent objects and graphic patterns in Kamei's documentary films and points to their affinity to the editing practices encouraged in the late theoretical work of Sergei Eisenstein

III. Repetition and Unity in Kamei's Wartime Cinema

As noted by David Bordwell, one of the biggest innovations brought into silent cinema by Sergei Eisenstein was the use of recurrent objects and graphic patterns employed for the purpose of unifying the film (48). Known for its negation of traditional narrative, Eisenstein's "plotless" cinema necessarily relied on this principle as an alternative method of organizing cinematic content. In his first feature film, *Strike* (1925), Eisenstein effectively uses recurring images of animals and water in order to achieve the unifying effect. In *Battleship Potemkin*, an important thematic cluster of recurring images of eyes, worms and hanging objects aids the film's dramatic progression. In *Old and New*, Eisenstein uses the

geometric figure of a circle in order to stylistically bind together his whole film (Bordwell 49-54). As we shall see, Kamei skillfully developed this cinematic technique in his wartime documentaries.

1. *Shanghai*

In *Shanghai*, the repeated depiction of dogs, children, and feeding is shown as a metaphor for Japan's relationship with China and serves an important role in creating the subversive feel of the film. In accordance with the wartime conventions of Japanese documentary cinema in *Shanghai*, Japanese officers talk about their military missions, but the soldiers are never shown actually fighting. Instead, the audience is repeatedly subjected to the images of Japanese soldiers interacting with dogs and children. Although this sort of depiction creates a friendly image of Japanese soldiers, it also in a way emasculates them. Several times, we are shown touching scenes depicting Japanese soldiers playing with little dogs. The four-footed friends, however, are not always obedient and sometimes the owner has to keep them on a leash (19:35-47). The film's last shot shows a little dog sitting next to a Japanese soldier's boots: a defenseless puppy – China – is at Japan's feet. However, in the last few seconds, before the film ends, the dog suddenly turns its head away from the soldier and the camera, as if demonstrating its unwillingness to participate in this performance (1:16:39-1:16:45).

The anger and hostility of the occupied also reveals itself in the famous montage sequence depicting a military parade. The shots of a military procession are juxtaposed with the sad and worrisome faces of Chinese citizens "greeting" the Japanese troops (47:56-49:46). Interestingly, this scene is preceded by a similar juxtaposition of a shot depicting those who *move* and a tracking shot depicting those who *watch* the procession. A shot of a moving trolley with Japanese soldiers is followed by a shot depicting several stray dogs who are supposedly watching this trolley pass by (30:53-31:15). This montage sequence acts like a little parody of an upcoming parade scene. It helps to draw a parallel between Chinese people and animals, priming the audience for the finale

with the little dog and the soldiers' boots. Although, by comparing Chinese people to animals, Kamei definitely dehumanizes them and thus actively contributes to the Japanese wartime propaganda, he also uses the very same images to show the occupied people's resistance.

2. Peking

In his succeeding film, *Peking*, Kamei continues to experiment with recurrent objects, motifs, actions, and even specific movements. The city's past and future are symbolized by the close-ups of two women: Empress Dowager (her portrait) and a young Chinese girl who appears towards the end of the film. The empress is characterized as a spoiled and sensual woman, fascinated by the West. Her bedroom is filled with Western possessions that are incongruous with the room's Chinese interior. We see a gorgeous chandelier and a European music box decorated with two rotating dolls (1:10-1:25). "The empress adored different sorts of toys. It is said that Britain received a concession to develop Chinese coal mines in exchange for this music box," – the voiceover declares. The Chinese girl that appears at the end of the film is presented as the empress' alter ego. When the camera films her, she casts her eyes down, shyly suggesting youth and innocence. She also uses music to entertain herself, but the musical instruments she uses are not Western, and they are not exactly inanimate objects. The girl plays with traditional Chinese pigeon whistles, which are fixed between the pigeons' tail feathers and produce tunes when the birds fly. She refers to pigeons as her "tender friends," which differentiates her from the empress who "liked toys."

In *Peking*, the empress' corruptibility and musicality, introduced early in the film, are repeatedly emphasized as the two main features that characterize the Chinese nation as a whole. In the film, Chinese monks play musical instruments and street vendors call and sing to draw attention to their products. Additionally, music acts as an important symbol of power dynamics. The film seems to suggest that those who are granted music must then become subjugated. The empress received a music box in exchange for the coal mines. In order to "appease" the conquered, Chinese

emperors provided Mongolian and Tibetan monks preaching Lamaism with their own shrines, where they could perform musical rituals. Later in the film, we see the Chinese orchestra performing a new national anthem given to the Chinese people by the Japanese government.

In his film, Kamei utilizes concentric movements and the images of cyclical objects in order to show Peking quite literally caught up in a maelstrom of war. The cyclical movement introduced in the scene depicting the rotating dolls on the empress' music box constitutes an important theme that is reiterated throughout the whole film. For example, we see street performers using two dolls in frilly skirts to entertain the Chinese people. Under the performer's magic, the dolls twirl around in circles (31:02-31:26), which calls to mind the rotating dolls decorating the empress' music box. This repetition of the same movement emphasizes the link between the former Chinese rulers and the common people of the present: both like to be entertained with simple toys.

The metaphorical depiction of swirling movement reaches its apogee towards the end of the film. We see Japanese war-planes (41:20-41:30), the petals of white ivy carried by the wind (42:15-42:25), and a flock of pigeons (42:42-42:49) – all moving in a swirl. These images clearly romanticize war and propagate Japan's military involvement in China as a prerequisite for a peaceful Asia. At the same time, they also depict Peking as a city situated in the eye of a storm. The political weather is calm there, but instability could be easily introduced. There are virtually no evident signs of war, and the city seems to continue its day-to-date existence. The troubled atmosphere swirling around the city, however, is suggested in occasional glances and sharp comments made by the Chinese people, which gesture toward the Japanese filmmakers' "otherness" as well as the inappropriateness of their presence and actions (Nornes 152-156).

3. *Fighting Soldiers*

The production of *Fighting Soldiers* (1939) was a critical moment in Kamei's filmmaking career not only because the film was

denied a public screening and contributed to the formation of his heroic image as the only Japanese filmmaker who opposed the war, but because this was the first film Kamei oversaw the shooting of as a film director. Being able to actually control the filming process clearly fascinated Kamei but also resulted in a number of heated confrontations with his cinematographer Miki Shigeru. The abundant use of long shots and long takes in *Fighting Soldiers* is not exactly characteristic of Kamei's filmmaking in general, but could be partially explained, in this case, by the fledgling director's unwillingness to let go of his attachment to certain scenes he diligently staged. The most memorable and frequently discussed scene in Kamei's *Fighting Soldiers* is a long take depicting an army officer giving out orders to his subordinates. For more than ten minutes, the camera holds still while watching soldiers come and go, reporting new information from the front lines (24:00-34:28). This scene is a reenactment and the soldiers are merely repeating what they supposedly did during a previous fight. The soldiers' amateurish acting reveals that the whole scene was carefully staged and rehearsed, implicating the film's inability to show the audience the real truth of war.

In *Fighting Soldiers* Kamei yet again employs the use of recurrent graphic patterns that stylistically and semantically bind the film. This time, the motif is of a measured, linear movement introduced already in the film's opening sequence. The title "Fighting Soldiers" is superimposed over a tracking shot, sliding in parallel to the horizon of a seemingly boundlessly expansive Chinese landscape (0:12-0:26). Throughout the film, the camera almost never moves into the depth of a shot (i.e. into the heart of China), emphasizing its inability to penetrate and dominate the land over which the great battle is being fought. Kamei repeatedly uses tracking shots and long takes depicting the columns of moving people, horses, and vehicles, as if comparing the war to a continuous linear movement — slow, exhausting, seemingly endless and worse of all purposeless.

4. Kobayashi Issa

In his next film, *Kobayashi Issa* (1941) Kamei recovers his initial taste for a more self-conscious, dynamic editing. Made under the auspices of the Nagano Prefectural Department of Tourism, *Kobayashi Issa* does not only promote Nagano but also tells the tragic story of the lonely and unappreciated poet, Issa. By using parallel lines as the film's main geometrical motif, Kamei alludes to the parallel lives led by Issa and his fellow villagers, who are not willing to accept him as a member of their community. The first shot to appear after the opening credits is an inter-title of Issa's haiku, superimposed on what seems to be a reproduction of a lined piece of paper (0:40). Later, spectators are continuously reminded of this graphic pattern in the recurrent images of tilled soil and the well-defined geometrical structure of Japanese architecture.

In order to emphasize Issa's alienation, Kamei devotes much effort to indicate homogeneity and strong unity within the group of people that repudiate him. Further developing the motif suggested in Dovzhenko's *Earth*, Kamei endows his peasant characters with vertical body movements directed downwards, towards the earth. We see them sowing (the seeds fall down [8:02-8:22]), plowing (the hoe is lowered [8:24-8:45]), make donations at the Zenkōji temple (coins fall down into an offertory box [6:50-6:58]), comb their hair while standing outside of the house (the comb slides down the hair [11:30-11:45]) and urinate while standing outdoors (liquid falls on the earth [19:30-19:41]). These actions identify peasants' movements as simplistic and monotonous, and their interests as essentially down-to-earth. Issa's artistic aspirations are incompatible with peasant life, which is further emphasized in a scene that compares the poet with his descendent, an ordinary rice farmer Kobayashi Yatarō.

First, Kamei shows a famous portrait of Issa sitting on a floor, holding a long paper scroll in his hands (25:33-25:47). This shot is followed with an image of Yatarō also sitting on the floor holding a long narrow object – a tobacco pipe (25:48-25:59). The visual similarity between the two distant relatives is quickly subverted by Yatarō proudly announcing that: "I am Issa-san's descendent. I may not be a poet, but I

make rice.” This line illustrates Yatarō’s pride in his occupation and shows what the peasants’ real priorities are – they are directed at material enrichment and not towards creative pursuits. Thus, the visual likeness between Issa and Yatarō is used in order to stress their radical differences. Through repetition and alteration of motifs, Kamei gradually moves his audience toward the realization of the film’s overarching message, identified by Sergei Eisenstein as the film’s “ultimate, common whole” (Vol.2 298). In fact, it is in Eisenstein’s writings that we find theoretical support for the primary editing principle adopted by Kamei.

IV. Montage as a Trans-National Artistic Principle

As mentioned earlier, Eisenstein’s theoretical ideas about montage evolved over time and underwent different stages. His first theoretical manifesto “The Montage of Attractions” (1923) was written based on Eisenstein’s experience in theater and called for the use of various “aggressive moments” – *attractions* – that would “subject the audience to emotional or psychological influence” (Vol.1 34). Moving into the world of cinema, he attempted to further develop ideas expressed by Lev Kuleshov. Based on the assumptions that cinematic meaning is generated only through the juxtaposition of camera shots, Eisenstein directed all of his energies to creating clear, mono-semantic shots reminiscent of letters and syllables and therefore perfectly designed for editing (Kleiman 16). This grandiose experiment aimed at realizing the concept of “intellectual cinema” was abandoned when Eisenstein encountered the impossibility of freeing the shot completely from the inherent multi-vocality of meanings. “The shot never becomes a letter but always remains an ambiguous hieroglyph,” he wrote in 1929 (Eisenstein, Vol.1 182). As it is widely acknowledged, it was Eisenstein’s familiarization with Japanese culture, including its writing system, traditional theater, and painting that prompted him to revise earlier assertions and propose the concept of “over-tonal montage” – a method of editing that takes into account “all of the stimulus

in the shot” – rhythm, content, type of movement, light, etc. (Eisenstein, Vol.1 191).

Through the 1930s – an extremely difficult and dramatic period for all Soviet artists initially associated with the avant-garde – Eisenstein continued to broaden his knowledge of art by studying literature, music, and painting from different parts of the world. By the late 1930s, he elaborated a new understanding of “montage” defined as an extremely important cinematic technique aimed to “evoke in the perceptions and emotions of the spectator the most exhaustive, total *image of the film’s theme*” (Eisenstein, Vol. 2 299). In fact, Eisenstein considered montage to be an essential aesthetic principle common to all of the arts. Drawing on examples from Leonardo Da Vinci, Emile Zola, Leo Tolstoy, Alexander Pushkin, James Joyce, and many other artists, Eisenstein urged filmmakers to use editing in a way that will create “a generalized *image* through which the author has experienced the theme of the film in question” (Vol.2 299). These objectives seem to be thoroughly realized in Kamei’s wartime documentaries. In *Shanghai*, the theme of unequal relations between the occupier and the occupied is expressed through the repetition and alteration of scenes involving little dogs and Japanese soldiers. In *Peking*, the city’s past and present are expressed through the repetition of various swirling movements symbolizing the city’s seemingly calm, but exceedingly dangerous, political situation. In *Fighting Soldiers*, the purposelessness of war is manifested through the motif of an endless, tiresome, measured, linear movement while in *Kobayashi Issa*, the repetition of vertical body movements and the graphical motif of parallel lines emphasizes the tragedy of a talented poet and his alienation from his own people.

The central topics of Kamei’s films as well as the “generalized images” that express them (swirling movement, parallel lines) are developed gradually and reach their utmost expressivity and meaningfulness toward the end of the films. In *Shanghai*, Kamei prepares us for the ambiguous meaning of the last scene of a soldiers’ boots and a little dog through a series of “supplemental” editing sequences. In

Kobayashi Issa, an image of the local people utterly disinterested in Issa's poetic legacy is revealed gradually and becomes fully realized only in the narrator's last words lamenting the fact that "no one seems to remember Issa." This type of consecutive approach was also highly championed by Sergei Eisenstein. He defines a true work of art as a "process of forming images in the mind of the spectator" and differentiates it from a "lifeless piece of work in which the spectator is presented with a depiction of the results of a certain past creative process" by stressing that the generalized image of the film must gradually arise and evolve as the film itself progresses.

These ideas are presented in Eisenstein's influential essay "Montage 1938" (Eisenstein, *Iskusstvo kino* 37-49). Within a year after the essay was published in the Soviet Union, its translation appeared in a Japanese magazine *Kinema Jumpō* (1 October 61-68, 21 October 29-30, 1 November 29-30).⁶ In 1940, it was also published as a separate book along with two other writings by Sergei Eisenstein translated a decade earlier (Eisenstein, *Eisenshutain eiga ron* 62-150). Thus, already by the fall of 1939, Kamei had access to Eisenstein's important essay. Yet by the time Eisenstein's essay became available in Japanese (and by the time it was first published in Russian), Kamei already produced *Shanghai, Peking*, and *Fighting Soldiers*, which all practically employ theoretical principles articulated by the Soviet filmmaker. Working in different countries without any known personal interactions, two filmmakers reached a remarkably analogous type and understanding of cinema.

The similarities evident between Kamei and Eisenstein can be explained by referring to Kamei's experience in the USSR and Eisenstein's strong fascination with Japanese culture. It is tempting to suggest that Kamei's films and Eisenstein's theory correlate so well because they share the same cultural background – a unique blend of ideas generated both by Soviet avant-garde cinema and centuries-old Japanese culture. Yet both of these concepts – "Soviet montage" and "traditional Japanese culture" – are highly evasive ideas, and should not be tossed around lightly. Instead of seeing Eisenstein's passion for Japanese culture

as the chief reason for the accessibility of his works and how easily adaptable it became by Japanese filmmakers, it is also possible to perceive it as an indication of a universality intrinsic to Eisenstein's cinematic theories and practices. The aesthetics of Kabuki theater, traditional Japanese woodblock prints, painting, and calligraphy was a substantial, but not the sole, source for Eisenstein's theoretical reflections. His late understanding of montage rests on a thorough investigation of art in all of its diverse forms, and the bowing of Kamei's works to this all-embracing definition of montage indicates their contiguity with a truly universal artistic tradition, which is much broader than the cinematic legacy of the Soviet avant-garde.

Cinematic techniques developed by Soviet filmmakers in the 1920s and generally identified as the distinctive features of "Soviet montage" were appropriated by Kamei for various objectives – sometimes they worked in support of official policy, and sometimes as a means of subverting it. This reveals the political flexibility of cinematic techniques employed by the avant-garde Soviet filmmakers and shows Kamei as a talented artist who mastered these techniques so thoroughly that he could use them according to his own intentions. To see Kamei's works as a regeneration of "Soviet montage," however, would clearly be an overstatement. A strong link between Kamei's name and the term "montage" (*montāju*) repeatedly emphasized by film critics and scholars was not established through a close, unbiased examination of Kamei's films, but was formed intuitively, based on general expectations forged out of Kamei's unconventional career path. Kamei's alleged affinity with everything "Soviet" including "Soviet montage" was rationalized not only by his long-term visit to the USSR, but even more so by his postwar reputation as a leftist filmmaker closely associated with the Japanese Communist Party. The leading role played by Kamei during the Tōhō strike (1946-1948), his participation in the independent film movement (*dokuritsu puro undō*), as well as his postwar predilection for the aesthetics of Socialist Realism contributed to his wartime documentaries being largely perceived as a manifestation of principles associated with "Soviet

montage”. This paper has shown, however, that these allegations are unsubstantiated. If we insist on the use of the term “montage,” we must also hold to the definition proposed by the late Sergei Eisenstein. Only when understood broadly, as an expressive technique meant to gradually reveal and emphasize the artwork’s main imagistic theme, then are we able to identify “montage” as the chief cinematic principle underlying Kamei’s films.

Notes

- 1 In the early 1950s, Kamei was on the editorial board of a monthly film magazine *Soveto Eiga* (*Soviet Cinema*, 1951-1954), he published a monograph on Soviet cinema (Kamei, Hijikata) and his feature film, *Woman Walking Alone on the Earth* (1953) became one of the first Japanese films widely released in postwar USSR (Fedorova 192-233). I discuss Kamei’s role as a cultural mediator between Japanese and Soviet/Russian cinema in more detail in my doctoral dissertation (Fedorova 98-151), part of which was adapted for this paper.
- 2 In a forward to a collection of essays written by Kamei the book’s editor and Kamei’s close acquaintance Tanikawa Yoshio refers to Kamei as “a master of montage” (*montāju no tatsujin*) (Tanikawa iii).
- 3 In his insightful work on the reception of montage theory in prewar Japan, Iwamoto Kenji suggests that in Japan the terms “montage” and “montage theory” are generally perceived to denote “film theory that arose in the 1920s Soviet Union and reflected the ideas of Vertov, Kuleshov, Pudovking, Eisenstein” (67).
- 4 As it is widely known, Eisenstein’s artistic career began in theater. Before directing his debut work *Strike* (1924) his only experience with professional filmmaking was when he assisted Esfir Shub in editing Fritz Lang’s *Dr. Mabuse the Gambler* (1922) for Soviet audiences (Bordwell 7).
- 5 Nornes (186) also points to the similarities between Shub’s editing techniques and Kamei’s postwar *A Japanese Tragedy* (1946).
- 6 In order for Eisenstein’s essay to be more “up-to-date,” its title was altered to “Montage 1939.”

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