



Edge Hill University

**HOW HAS JAPANESE A-BOMB CINEMA PROGRESSED SINCE THE INITIAL
NUCLEAR BOMBINGS OF HIROSHIMA AND NAGASAKI?**

By

Nathan O'Grady



Contents

Introduction	pg.3
Methodology	pg.5
Chapter One: Children of Hiroshima and I Live in Fear	pg.6
Chapter Two: Gojira and Frankenstein Conquers the World, and <i>Kaiju</i> Films	pg.12
Chapter Three: Barefoot Gen and Akira	pg.18
Conclusion	pg.24
Bibliography	pg.26
Webology	pg.28
Filmography	pg.29

Introduction

The Second World War was unprecedented. Lasting between 1 September 1939 – 2 September 1945, the War ended after the surrender of Japan once the United States of America dropped two nuclear bombs over the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Post Second World War Japanese cinema has produced horrifying images, whether it be recreations of the bombings or films showcasing the damages, filmmakers were quick to want to capture images of the tragedy to make sure that the effects were forever known. Japanese cinema has dealt with the topic of and repercussions of the A-bomb since 1945. Some films, such as *The Effects of the Atomic Bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki* (Sueo Ito 1946), were kept classified during the US occupation of Japan, because of the terrifying nature of the bombing's aftermath. Once the occupation ended in 1952, independent studios and political organisations financed films that portrayed the disastrous effects of the nuclear bombings, because as Deamer writes, "the financing of atom bomb films was not something the Japanese mainstream cinema industry would encourage" (2014:8). Some film makers tied to major studios opted for a metaphorical representation of nuclear weapons and radiation, instead of explicitly showing it. Nevertheless, A-bomb themes have permeated Japanese cinema, and this thesis investigates the topic's reach. It argues that Japanese A-bomb cinema is a diverse topic that has created a wide variety of film that deals with nuclear themes spanning across decades, which is supported by case study analysis of specific films, ranging from different genres and mediums.

This dissertation is split into three chapters. The first chapter focuses upon the works of Akira Kurosawa and Kaneto Shindo, examining their body of work regarding the A-bomb, and how both directors deal with nuclear themes, creating a diverse representation in relation to the nuclear bombings. Chapter two focuses upon the work of Ishiro Honda, and how the monster movies he created are reflective of the culture in which they were made. Monster theory is applied to gain a greater understanding of how the monsters were conceived, and how they fit into the A-bomb genre. Chapter three analyses two animated films to show how despite being from a different medium than the other films, they still provide an analysis of A-

bomb themes, fitting them into the A-bomb genre and showing how diverse it can be. These three separate chapters demonstrate the topic's reach, and how it has created varied films.

This thesis explores how the effects of the nuclear bombings have influenced Japanese cinema, and how A-Bomb cinema has progressed. It focuses upon post-war themes such as nuclear trauma, *hibakusha* [person affected by bomb], guilt, and victimisation, to analyse how they are constructed within chosen films. Japanese society and culture, both pre and post Second World War, is referenced in order to gain a greater understanding of such themes, and how the nuclear influence is portrayed on screen. The films are analysed in relation to their nuclear content, and their influence across Japanese cinema is discussed. This thesis shows how the films produced have created a plethora of film work on the bomb, and that through the examination of Hiroshima, Nagasaki, and the A-bomb, Japanese cinema has created hugely different works that deals with nuclear thematics.

Methodology

To demonstrate how A-bomb cinema is diverse and has a wide reach across Japanese film, academic research in the form of books and journals is referenced to support this thesis. The analysis is qualitative and utilizes multiple sources spanning across different decades, each featuring their own theses which allows for an expansive breadth of knowledge on the topic of A-bomb cinema.

Alongside the textual analysis of the primary films found in each chapter are the secondary sources of academic writing, supporting the readings and observations made in each section. The secondary sources are useful for uncovering how the A-bomb topic was presented after the Second World War, and how it progressed alongside the popularisation of genres such as *kaiju* film and *anime*. The information gathered from this literature allows for a contextual analysis focusing upon the three distinct genres of realist cinema, *kaiju*, and *anime*, to understand their conception and to show how each set of films are varied work centred on the bomb, through their incorporation of various different themes.

The methodologies of qualitative textual analysis, critical research, and application of the historical and cultural context surrounding Japan post Second World War, are important for supporting the readings and observations found in each chapter. These methods of research allows for greater conclusions to be drawn, such as Japanese national victimisation being coded feminine, a reading which contextualises A-bomb cinema to the culture in which it was made. A plethora of readings are used to support the textual analysis of the primary texts, which have been chosen to showcase the diversity of A-bomb cinema, and how far the topic has reached.

Chapter One – Children of Hiroshima and I Live in Fear

Chapter one focuses upon early Japanese A-bomb cinema that was produced after the American occupation of Japan ended in 1952. The realist Japanese A-bomb films *Children of Hiroshima* (Kaneto Shindo 1952), and *I Live in Fear* (Akira Kurosawa 1955) are analysed to demonstrate how the topic of A-bomb cinema is diverse, even in its early beginnings. It provides a brief synopsis of Japan post Second World War, before delving into the historical context and A-bomb content of both films. They are examined to argue that despite the realist tone of both films, they differ enough to show the diversity within A-bomb cinema. Other films are referenced in support of this argument as they provide further understanding into the differences and similarities portrayed on screen. The chapter also covers the representation of men and women in these films, and how their portrayal lead to a different response into how the films were perceived.

After the Second World War, Japan found itself under American occupation. Very little evidence of the effects of the atomic bombs were made public, due to a strict seven year censorship, in which “the government prohibited photographs, drawings, or stories to be published or circulated” (Masumoto 148:2020) in relation to the damage caused by the A-bombs. *The Effects of the Atomic Bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki* (Ito Sueo 1946) was the first Japanese film to explore the nuclear event (Deamer 2014:8). The documentary film was confiscated by the government and not made public for many decades. American officials made a valiant effort to “censor and officially deny the hazards of radiation and any long-term manifestation” (Shapiro 2001:252), so for any filmmaker to portray the aftermath of the bombing more realistically, they would have wait until the termination of the occupation (Deamer 2014:52). When the occupation dissolved after the Treaty of San Francisco in 1952, Japanese directors began to create realist films as a way to fully portray the damages done to Hiroshima and Nagasaki, as well as the long-standing effects of nuclear radiation found in *hibakusha*.

Director Kaneto Shindo, while not being a *hibakusha*, was born in Hiroshima and contributed towards several films that address the nuclear destruction. Before his career as a director, Shindo was drafted to the army in 1943 (Miller 2015:231). After the war, his first contribution towards Japanese nuclear cinema was co-writing credits for *The Bells of Nagasaki* (Oba Hideo 1950), an adaptation of *hibakusha* Takashi Nagai's novel. Shindo had to endure major story revisions imposed by American censors, resulting in Nagasaki only being used as a backdrop for a tragic romance (Lowenstein 2004:146). It was not until 1952 when Shindo was commissioned by the Japan Teachers Union that he could produce a film without fear of censorship, that being *Children of Hiroshima*. The film stars Shindo's future wife, Nobuko Otowa as Takako Ishikawa, a teacher working on an island off the coast of Hiroshima. She returns to the mainland during her summer holiday, returning to her hometown of Hiroshima and visiting the graves of her family who were killed in the Atomic bombing. The film then follows her travels around Hiroshima, reconnecting with former colleagues, pupils, and a former servant of her family.

The character of Ishikawa is an important figure for nuclear representation. Theorist Yoneyama writes, "postwar Japanese womanhood became fully implicated in sustaining the myth of national innocence and victimology" (1999:38). Throughout the film, Ishikawa never reflects on Japanese society, and how things went so badly that the country ended up being attacked by nuclear weapons. Instead, her character fits in with the female icon of Hiroshima representation, the "A-bomb maiden". The A-bomb maiden can be defined as "a tragic young heroine suffering from atomic-related illness" (Lowenstein 2004:149), but typically embodies qualities associated with an idealised feminine youth and beauty, and traditional Japanese cultural values (Todeschini 1996:224). Due to this, the A-bomb maiden has been criticised due to it feeling like a displacement of Japanese responsibility for the war, as well as presenting an idealised version of a victim. Shindo's later film, *Onibaba* (1964), (which also stars Otowa) criticises the A-bomb maiden representation and acts as a self-reflection onto the culture in which it was made. However, within *Children of Hiroshima*, the heroine *hibakusha* schoolteacher, as Lowenstein writes, "enables a historical narrative of

forgetting, where victimisation replaces responsibility for aggression" (2004:150), which is the case for the Ishikawa.

Within *Children of Hiroshima*, everything is slowed down, "it is not action that dominates, but affect" (Deamer 2014:38). The film has a deep connection with *mono no aware*, which indicates a feeling of empathy towards things, and the awareness of impermanence. The film depicts how the Japanese people display a "it can't be helped philosophy" (Deamer 2014:53), and how Japanese passivity has made a terrible event endurable. This passivity could also be described as *higaisha ishiki* [victim mentality], which is "exemplified in stories recounting the experiences of children" (Standish 2005:23). Another film, which also deals with a schoolteacher and her pupils is *Twenty-Four Eyes* (Keisuke Kinoshita 1954). While not directly dealing with the themes of nuclear trauma and *hibakusha*, the film still has similar elements to *Children of Hiroshima*, with its preconception with *mono no aware* and *higaisha ishiki*, and female main character. Lowenstein writes that "traditional gender roles are deployed to provide a source of stability in the face of trauma, [and] to displace Japanese national responsibility for the trauma itself" (2004:150). The women in both films represent *mono no aware* and the *higaisha ishiki*. As they are schoolteachers, they are motherly figures for their class. The display of child innocence and trauma, replaces any responsibility for the war and furthers Japanese victimhood.

Children of Hiroshima was entered into the 1953 Cannes Film Festival, and reportedly was a "box office success" in Japan (Hirano 1996:104). Despite this, the Japan Teachers Union was not impressed. Reportedly, the Union was not satisfied with how Shindo had turned the story into "a tearjerker and had destroyed its political orientation" (Richie 1996:23), and then funded another film, *Hiroshima* (Hideo Sekigawa 1953). Within *Children of Hiroshima*, the nuclear bombing is given a quick montage sequence, featuring breastfeeding babies and quick shots of naked women and the nuclear destruction. The focus is on the central character Ishikawa and the film is like an outsider's view on the bomb. Whereas *Hiroshima* retells the events of 6 August 1945 in a brutal cinematic form and presents a "totalizing historicist understanding of the atomic bomb" (Deamer 2014:268). It has a bigger emphasis

on both the American and Japanese military, and critiques Emperor Hirohito and his military aggression, and the Japanese people's complicity with the state. Despite the differing political nature of both films, they both represent the *mono no aware* and *higaisha ishiki* that is commonly associated with *hibakusha* cinema and demonstrates the topic's reach.

I Live in Fear (Akira Kurosawa 1955) stars Toshihiro Mifune as Kiichi Nakajima, an elderly Japanese man, convinced that a nuclear war is imminent and him and his whole family will die if they stay in Japan. His wife and three oldest children try to have him ruled incompetent before a three man arbitration panel that includes Dr. Harada (Takashi Shimura). Kurosawa was already established as a politically charged filmmaker, with *Rashomon* (1950) releasing a few years prior, a film that can be analysed as a metaphorical representation of the atom bomb, and the very nature of memory (Deamer 2014:172). Kurosawa engaged himself with A-bomb cinema frequently throughout his career, with films such as *Dreams* (1990) and *Rhapsody in August* (1991) concerning nuclear trauma. However, originally *I Live in Fear* was not supposed to be political at all and was "envisioned as a satire before becoming a tragedy" (Wild 2014:97). Unlike *Children of Hiroshima*, the film does not concern itself with *hibakusha*, or any depiction of the nuclear bomb. The film is set in Tokyo, and exams how a character is overwhelmed by nuclear anxiety and an overwhelming terror, which results in driving himself insane.

I Live in Fear thematically differs from the A-bomb films mentioned previously, as it deals with nuclear issues psychologically. As Prince writes, "[*I Live in Fear*] deals with nuclear phenomena on a second-order level of transformation [...] the pervasiveness of eerie weather patterns – oppressive heat, fiery lightning, torrential rain" (1990:168). The bomb is never shown, instead it permeates the air with its presence. Sounds of planes flying, rain, wind thunder, and lightning scare Nakajima, as he believes them to be atom bombs. Once he is institutionalised at the end of the film he begins to scream in despair, believing the Earth to be ravaged by nuclear war. Kurosawa's film approached the A-bomb no way any other film had attempted to, "treating it for the first time as a psychological force devastating human

life from within" (Tadao 1982:199), therefore *I Live in Fear* shows the diversity of A-bomb film, and the depth such a topic, making it stand out amongst its contemporaries.

Another way that differentiates *I Live in Fear* with other A-bomb films is its male protagonist. Nakajima has been described as "a hero who cannot act and who therefore suffers the tortures of the damned" (Prince 1990:164). He is actively trying to secure his family's safety, but they want no part of it. His family are cold, self-interested people and immobilise him so that he cannot carry out his plan. The film's mise-en-scene and imagery "formalizes deeper thematic and metaphorical dimensions of meaning" (Prince 1990:163). Compared with previous A-bomb films, there is no shots of the Hiroshima dome, destroyed locale or scenes featuring radioactively ill people. Instead, *I Live in Fear* features dense spaces and tightly constrained rooms, metaphorically representing Nakajima's plight. As the film progresses the imagery becomes tighter and more restrictive, until he becomes physically entrapped and powerless over his situation.

Lowenstein writes that another way of understanding the bomb is "Japanese national aggression (coded masculine), and Japanese national victimisation (coded feminine)" (2004:159). Nakajima's anxieties consume him to the point in which he performs an aggressive act of burning down his family's foundry, their only source of stable income. This leads to his entrapment at the end of the film, which can then be analysed as Japanese national aggression being punished. Interestingly, *I Live in Fear* was the biggest failure of Kurosawa's career up until that point, with Kurosawa stating, "I see that we made the film too soon" (Richie 1996:114). Compared with *Children of Hiroshima*, which was a box office success, clearly the Japanese people did not want to acknowledge their national aggression or the prospect of nuclear extinction that Nakajima concerns himself with. Perhaps it is due to Nakajima not being an A-bomb maiden or a *hibakusha*, and supporting this point is the character of Dr Harada, who also happens to be another elderly gentleman, and the only other person who sees reason in Nakajima's fears.

Kurosawa would make a *hibakusha* the central focus of *Rhapsody in August*. The film was negatively received amongst American critics, who criticised the film for "its portrayal of the Japanese as mere victims" (Yoshimoto 2000:366). This criticism can be linked with Lowenstein's approach of understanding the nuclear bomb, as the main character Kane (Sachiko Murase) is an elderly *hibakusha* whose husband was killed in the Nagasaki nuclear bombing. *Rhapsody in August* examines nuclear trauma on a generational scale by showcasing the effects of the bomb on a three generation family. *Rhapsody in August* is almost like a polar opposite film to *I Live in Fear*, as Kane's Grandchildren want to spend time with her, and learn more about her nuclear trauma, unlike Nakajima who is shunned and punished. Yoshimoto claims that *Rhapsody in August* is a film in which "the present is haunted by the past" (2000:369), but this can also be applied to *I Live in Fear* as well, as Nakajima's behaviour is a response to Japan's past trauma. This demonstrates how different stories within A-bomb cinema allows for a greater understanding of the nuclear topic, showcasing the longevity of trauma and the topic's reach.

To conclude the first chapter, A-bomb cinema has a breadth of films with similar thematics, but differing stories and representations. While *Children of Hiroshima* focuses upon the A-bomb maiden, and the devastating effects that the bomb had on Hiroshima, *I Live in Fear* shows how damaging the psychological effects of nuclear power have had on people, with new anxieties such as fear of nuclear fallout beginning to plague people's minds. The supporting films such as *Hiroshima*, and *Rhapsody in August* showcase how different realist A-bomb films can be, portraying a wide variety of issues associated with the A-bomb. In the case of *Rhapsody in August*, it shows how A-bomb films are still being made, dealing with new problems caused by the bomb nearly fifty years later.

Chapter Two – Gojira, Frankenstein Conquers the World, and Kaiju Films

Chapter two focuses upon the *kaiju* [monster] genre of Japanese film. The genre began with *Gojira* (Ishiro Honda 1954), which has been analysed as “a sober and thoughtful reflection on H-bomb tests, atomic age anxiety, and Japanese vulnerability” (Berra 2010:208), with the main character Godzilla embodying the atom bomb (Deamer 2014:69). The chapter focuses upon *Gojira*, and its context in relation to the atom bomb, America, and the nuclear thematics of the film. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen’s work on monster theory is used to analyse how *kaiju* monsters embody the culture from which they were made, as well as how their constant escape has led to a franchise, and new monsters with new readings. Another film, *Frankenstein Conquers the World* (Ishiro Honda 1965) is analysed to show how the franchise evolved alongside its growth in the West. This chapter argues that *kaiju* films have demonstrated a great variety of film within A-bomb cinema, which has allowed them to become a staple that cannot be dismissed when discussing the topic.

After the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the world entered the Cold War era. Japan itself began a period of history some call its “American Interlude” (Durkin 2021:2), which brought an influx of different cultures and criticism from the Japanese people. Japanese art began to become influenced by the West, and Japanese science fiction “drew heavily upon American influences that contemplated the implications of nuclear war” (Durkin 2021:2). Science and technological advancement was rapid during this period, with various nations growing their own nuclear power, creating nuclear fears and anxieties worldwide, but especially in Japan. Heightening nuclear fears was the incident of *Lucky Dragon No. 5*. On March 1, 1954, a Japanese tuna fishing boat (called *Lucky Dragon No. 5*) sailed dangerously close to an American hydrogen bomb test, resulting in the fish and crew being showered with radioactive fallout, with the crew falling ill with radiation sickness, and death in some extreme cases.

Gojira, is a Japanese *kaiju* science-fiction film that was conceived by producer Tomoyuki Tanaka after the *Lucky Dragon No. 5* incident. During the American occupation, Japanese

cinemas had already been exposed to American monster films, as *King Kong* (Merian C. Cooper and Ernest B. Schoedsack 1933) was re-released in 1952, and *The Beast from 20,000 Fathoms* (Eugene Lourie 1953) followed the year after. Both films were successful in cinema (Berra 2010:208), so Tanaka's idea of creating a *kaiju* film was timely and relevant. *Gojira* sees Japan's authorities dealing with the sudden appearance of Godzilla, an ancient sea creature whose attacks trigger fears of nuclear fallout in post-war Japan. J.P Telotte provides many definitions of the science fiction genre in his book *Science Fiction Film* (2001). A definition of the genre - "a form intent on defamiliarizing reality through various generic strategies in order to reflect on it more effectively" (2001:5), is applicable to *Gojira*, as the film primarily focuses upon the nuclear bomb, and the radioactive effects such a thing leaves.

One important theme of *Gojira* that separates it from other A-bomb films, is the primary theme of "restoration of balance and harmony" (Shapiro 2001:273). Godzilla may embody the bomb, but he is also defeated by nuclear technology in the form of a weapon called the "Oxygen Destroyer". In this way, *Gojira* represents the "circuitous logic of the arms race" (Deamer 2014:69), and how mankind has become too powerful, as the only thing that can defeat a destructive being is something scarily stronger. This message is not restricted to the people of Japan, as Noriega writes "the anxieties of Godzilla is just as much Japan's as America's" (1987:69). *Gojira* was the first foreign film to become widely released across mainstream cinemas in the United States (Ryfle 2007: xiii), in the form of *Godzilla, King of the Monsters!* (Terry O. Morse and Ishiro Honda 1954). The film is a highly edited version of *Gojira*, featuring an English dub, as well as a new American character, the reporter Steve Martin (Raymond Burr).

Godzilla, King of the Monsters! Deals with the uneasy topic many Americans felt post Second World War. Firstly, their "ambivalent relationship with Japan" (Shapiro 2001:112), but secondly, their relationship with nuclear weapons, and the responsibility of being the first country to develop and use one on another. Martin acts as a stand in and bridges the gap between cultures, although by doing so, he pushes aside who Shapiro claims is "the central character" (2001:276) of the original film – Emiko (Momoko Kochi). Despite fitting the criteria

of an A-bomb maiden, she is never presented as one. Instead, she serves as a mediator between three men: her father, her lover, and scientist Serizawa (Akihito Hirata). Shapiro considers Godzilla a projection of Emiko (2001:274), because she is the character who makes the decision regarding the reptilian's fate. As he is killed and the film ends, no resolution is offered and instead, dialogue acting as a direct address to the film viewers occurs, warning that if nuclear testing continues then the world will see another Godzilla appear.

Gojira moves away from a direct expression of the nuclear event and, as Deamer puts it, "[is] the first Japanese atom bomb movie to snare the imagination of a mass audience" (2014:32). Jeffrey Jerome Cohen's *Monster Theory* (1996) provides a greater understanding into the conception of Godzilla. Within the book, Cohen writes about seven theses' that can be used to understand cultures in which monsters are spawned from. A particular one, "The Monster's Body Is a Cultural Body" (1996:4) can provide detailed analysis of *Gojira*. Cohen describes how a monster's body incorporates fear and anxieties of the culture in which it was made, which is reinforced through a statement by Honda in which he said, "we wanted [Godzilla] to possess the terrifying characteristics of an atomic bomb" (Ryfle 2017:85). Godzilla's existence is ultimately tied to the A-bomb, and offers a reflection on nuclear weapons, Japanese vulnerability, and anxiety in the face of a new nuclear age.

An additional thesis of Cohen's "The Monster Always Escapes" (1996:5), is also applicable to *Gojira*. Despite appearing to die at the end, the film was followed by a sequel, *Godzilla Raids Again* (Motoyoshi Oda 1955), releasing less than a year later. As the franchise has progressed, it has become a series that involves monsters fighting each other, rather than the politics surrounding nuclear weaponry. Within *Mothra vs Godzilla* (Ishiro Honda 1964), a character states, "calls to ban nuclear weapons are a dime a dozen now back home" (0:42:01), however no protests are shown, as the film primarily focuses upon the spectacle of two monsters fighting. Despite Godzilla being trapped at the end of the film, he always returns and has become a staple within A-bomb cinema, receiving instalments as recently as *Godzilla vs Kong* (Adam Wingard 2021) as the threat of a nuclear bomb is always lingering.

The franchise attempted to branch out away from the staple Godzilla, with films such as *Rodan* (Ishiro Honda 1956), involving a pterodactyl-like monster tormenting a small mining village. However, *Rodan* never achieved the popularity of Godzilla, relegating the character to a supporting role in the mid-sixties (Armstrong 2009:171), perhaps due to not incorporating any nuclear themes, or nuclear powers for the central character to have, such as Godzilla's atomic breath. Curiously, similar to *Godzilla King of the Monsters*, the film differs in the American version, which opens up with nuclear bomb testing from the American military, showing the devastating effects on nature and structures. As Shapiro writes, "for American audiences, it [the re-editing] makes certain issues more obvious" (2001:112) which is symbolic of the development and testing of the hydrogen bombs the USA was performing during the mid-1950s, which led to the *Lucky Dragon No. 5* incident.

The *kaiju* films of the fifties and early sixties were produced within Japan, then exported and re-edited for a Western audience. This changed with a certain entry in the series – *Frankenstein Conquers the World* – as it is a co-production between Hollywood's United Productions of America, and Japanese production company Toho. The film begins during the Second World War, involving Nazi officers sending the living heart of Frankenstein's Monster to the Imperial Japanese Navy. Japanese scientists based in Hiroshima begin experimenting on the heart, until their lab is bombed with nuclear weapons from the United States. At this point in the franchise's history, "Honda was now directing for the American market as well as for Japan" (Ryfle 2017:222), but it still managed to keep its preoccupation with A-bomb cinema and nuclear themes.

Frankenstein Conquers the World is the first and only film of Honda's to contain a reenactment of the nuclear attack on Japan (Ryfle 2017:244). The blast is represented with a fiery blaze, and long shots of destroyed buildings. A title card is displayed of 6 August 1945, and then the film skips forward fifteen years with a shot of the Hiroshima dome. Frankenstein's Monster, in contrast to Mary Shelly's work, is a *hibakusha* and is reflective of the culture in which it was made, which is supported by Cohen's theses, "The Monster's Body Is a Cultural Body" (1996:4). Mick Broderick describes the film as having a "brose attitude" (1996:3)

towards its representation of the *hibakusha*. This brose attitude is put on display when a young female *hibakusha* thanks American Dr Bowen (Nick Adams) for treating her. Later, he reflects on the experience, claiming that Hiroshima has given us the opportunity to study the tissues of the human body (0:10:45). The brose attitude is reflective of the differing attitudes towards the nuclear bombings held by the Japanese and the Americans, and how one nations trauma is used for another's scientific advancement.

As with *Godzilla*, Cohen's thesis of "The Monster Always Escapes" (1996:5), can also be applied to Frankenstein's Monster. At the end of the film, his status is unknown, with some scientists theorising that he survived, while others assume him to be dead. The film was followed by a loose sequel, *The War of the Gargantuas* (Ishiro Honda 1966), which sees a reincarnated Frankenstein's Monster bathed in green, due to being born from leftover atomic cells found in the ocean, showing how the threat of nuclear power has not been contained. Another monster, a brown Frankenstein's Monster, appears and is revealed to be a former test subject of Stewart's. It helps its green brother escape and survive, until finally the pair engage in battle and become swallowed up by an underwater volcano. *The War of the Gargantuas* primarily focuses upon nature, with an abundance of scenes involving the ocean and mountainous landscapes. In the world of *kaiju* cinema, "nature itself [...] has been rendered monstrous and impure" (Tsutsumi 2006:33), and this is established at the beginning of the film, when a giant octopus and the green Frankenstein's Monster attacks a fishing boat.

Despite being released twelve years after the *Lucky Dragon No. 5* incident, the memory of such an event still exists and has a primary influence on the themes, and locale of the film. The green Frankenstein's Monster is sensitive to light, possibly inspired by the *pika* [flash] of the atomic bomb, so he lives in the ocean, haunting the waters and terrorising local fishermen. Historically, Japan's "expressive forms of culture evoke the natural world" (Shapiro 2001:255), which has manifested within A-bomb cinema, especially *kaiju* films. Reinforcing this point is *Mothra* (Ishiro Honda 1961), taking place on an island located in Indonesia nearby a site for atomic tests. A typhoon hits a group of sailors, who wash up on the island, succumbing to

radiation sickness. Due to the effects of the A-bomb, nature has been “made monstrous by the nuclear science and cold war politics of American modernity” (Tsutsui 2006:33). The *kaiju* cinema of the fifties and sixties incorporates both the beauty and terror of nature, to create a serious but playful genre of film that deals with nuclear themes, becoming a staple of A-bomb cinema.

The birth of *Gojira* has meant that *kaiju* film and its various monsters will forever be tied to the A-bomb. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen's work provided useful means of analysing their existence, and how they embody the A-bomb, and are reflective of the culture in which they were made. *Kaiju* film, despite releases such as *Frankenstein Conquered the World* which transcended a Japanese audience and found new life in the West, always had strong themes regarding the A-bomb. With various entries and future sequels planned, *kaiju* films are important when analysing the topic of Japanese A-bomb cinema due to how prominent they have become within Japanese culture.

Chapter Three – Barefoot Gen and Akira

The following chapter analyses *anime* that deals with A-bomb thematics. It examines the historical war drama *Barefoot Gen* (Mori Masaki 1983), and the cyberpunk action film *Akira* (Katsuhiro Otomo 1988) in relation to their nuclear themes, to demonstrate the variety of A-bomb cinema. While the films may differ regarding genre, they are similar in their focus upon “determined situations and character behaviour” (Deamer 2014:75), which is showcased through the harrowing situations the films show. This chapter argues that these two *anime* films provide a range of nuclear themes, such as focusing upon war orphans and Japanese national identity, which provides a variety within A-bomb cinema, and will be supported by academic literature and journals. The chapter provides a brief synopsis on the state of animation post Second World War and assess *Barefoot Gen* in relation to it being described as a film “of people’s history” (Deamer 2014:77). *Akira* is then analysed in relation to the cyberpunk genre, and how it uses its genre to convey nuclear imagery and themes.

As censorship began to creep into occupied Japan post Second World War, 100 animators made the decision to establish an animation studio called *New Japan Animation Company* (Tze-Yue 2010:79). One film made under the company, *Sakura* (Masaoka Kenzo 1946) conveys images of spring in Japan, featuring a girl in *kimono* surrounded by nature, cherry blossoms and insects are shown throughout. The film has been read as “an indication of a new dawn and a symbolic portrayal of a utopian postwar era” (Tze-Tue 2010:80), with the expressive natural world representing a new era after the A-bomb. On the other hand, the occupation was also used to create propaganda animation, as *The Magic Pen* (Masao Kumakawa 1946) depicts an orphan boy and a Western looking magic doll, who gives him a pen to draw anything he wants. He draws skyscrapers, houses, trees, motorways, and apartments, representing the “material realization of an anticipated new “dawn”, at the expense of requiring help from a Western colonist. (Tze-Tue 2010:82). These two short films show that even in its infancy, *anime* has been used to convey post-war themes, setting the groundwork for other productions to follow. Many years later, *Barefoot Gen* was created, an *anime* directly dealing with the Hiroshima nuclear bombing.

Keiji Nakazawa is the *mangaka* [manga artist] who created *Barefoot Gen*. Born in Hiroshima, Nakazawa is a *hibakusha* who was inspired by the works of fellow *mangaka* Osamu Tezuka to create *manga*. Inspired by his “anger toward the war and the atomic bomb” (Nakazawa 2015:185), he resolved to create a series embedded with his own life experience of being one of the few people to survive an atomic bomb. He first produced *I Saw It* (1972), an autobiographical piece following his life, beginning at 1945 and ending in 1972. This was the basis for *Barefoot Gen*, which while based on fact, fictionalised some elements (such as the character of Gen, voiced by Issei Miyazaki) to create a longer story. Nakazawa writes, “I’m the model for Gen. *Barefoot Gen* is based on fact” (Nakazawa 2015: xxiv), which distinguishes the film from others within A-bomb cinema, as it concerns itself with a real lived experience of an individual.

While *Barefoot Gen* may fall under criticism that gets labelled on many A-bomb films – the negative connotation of representing Japanese victimisation – Napier writes that “*Barefoot Gen* acknowledges suffering but resists victimhood” (2005:229) and describes the film as a powerful anti-war film. For example, the character of Gen's Father (Takao Inoue) acts as a critique on Japanese nationalism. At the beginning of the film, and despite the war being in its dying embers, there is a military parade with the general population being supportive. Gen's Father believes that Japan has already lost the war, going against Japanese nationalism, and critiquing the government by later commenting “Our government is run by madmen. They're just stupid, crazy. All of them” (0:23:40). After the nuclear attack, there is a scene involving people crying that the Emperor has surrendered, as they feel ashamed. Gen's Mother (Yoshie Shimamura) cannot believe that anyone would want the war to continue, and questions why the government has surrendered now and not before the nuclear attacks. Napier writes that “the narrative momentum in these scenes is of resistance rather than acquiescence” (2005:223), thus *Barefoot Gen* challenges nationalism and victimisation by portraying the ideology which directly contributed to the dropping of the nuclear bombs.

Barefoot Gen beginning prior to the nuclear attack allows this resistance to be represented fully. Besides the aforementioned ideology of Gen's parents, we are shown "the pain of war as it's felt by those in the midst of it" (Johansen 2021:1). Food stamps are treasured, fish are scarce in the river, and people live in a day-to-day fear of being bombed, which is shown through the repeated air raid drills. This perspective of the everyday civilians allows a criticism of Japanese society, one in which status meant everything. Historically, Japan had a patriarchal *ie* family system, which placed the household as more important than oneself (Davies 2002:119). This model of family ensured a national polity of 'nation-as-family', in which women's rights were "sublimated to the smooth functioning of a system devoted to 'national good', [...] including imperialism" (Russell 2007:133). *Barefoot Gen* shows the unfair social system during the war, as upper-class members of society such as a priest has an abundance of food, members of the military are given food, yet civilians are given strict rationing.

Nakazawa was the subject of discrimination once people knew him to be a *hibakusha*, which he managed to incorporate within his work. He stated that "if you said you were *hibakusha* matter-of-factly, among friends, they made weird faces. I'd never seen such cold eyes" (Minear 2008:8). The discrimination against *hibakusha* is represented through the character of Seiji (Katsuji Mori), a man who Gen looks after for some money. Even though he is in his brother's care, they do not interact due to the injuries Seiji succumbed to during the bombing. He states to Gen and his adopted brother Ryuta (Masaki Koda), "you were the only ones that treated me as something more than a freak or a corpse" (1:09:27). In the sequel *Barefoot Gen 2* (Toshio Hirata 1986), another *hibakusha* Katsuko (Kimi Aoyama) is made fun of due to the burns she suffered because of the bomb, which is different from previous A-bomb films where victims are respected and A-bomb maidens are used to displace national responsibility.

Barefoot Gen also portrays other crucial issues such as "the terrible conditions of the war orphans" (Szasz 2013:113). Gen and his Mother decide to adopt Ryuta, a boy whose family was killed in the blast. Ryuta's adoption is one of the more positive aspects of the film, but *Barefoot Gen 2* focuses upon this issue more in depth. The character of Masa (Kei Nakamura)

is the leader of a gang of orphans, and involves them in activities such as smoking, bunking school, fighting police, and stealing. This focus on children presents a people's history that other A-bomb films have not. It "elides the horror of the *pika* and the suffering of the *hibakusha*" (Deamer 2014:109), and provides a broader perspective on the issues that followed Hiroshima after the bombing. Other *anime* films such as *Grave of the Fireflies* (Isao Takahata 1988) have also focused on war orphans, but *Barefoot Gen* solely concerns itself with the *hibakusha* and Hiroshima from the perspective of children, presenting a varied story in the scope of A-bomb cinema.

Katsuhiro Otomo's *Akira*, despite not showing Hiroshima or the A-bomb directly, is an adult cyberpunk action *anime* film which has been described as "a film set in the future offering a displaced view on the present in the context of the past" (Deamer 2014:115). It immediately concerns itself with *pika*, as the opening sequence shows a ball of light eclipsing the Tokyo of 1989 during World War Three. The film then jumps thirty-one years after, to a dystopian 2019 in the metropolis city Neo-Tokyo. The film follows Shotaro Kaneda (Mitsuo Iwata), the leader of a biker gang, and his childhood friend Tetsuo Shima (Nozomu Sasaki), who acquires telekinetic abilities after a motorbike accident. The film released at a time when "Japan had reached what has perhaps been its postwar peak" (Napier 2005:40), and acts as a self-reflection of the nation, one fearful for the future due to its traumatic past.

Tetsuo's body begins to mutate once his powers begin to get stronger, featuring elements of body horror, a genre which focuses upon "the metamorphosis and transformation of the body" (Cherry 2009:82). The changes Tetsuo undergoes shows his adolescence, but on a metaphorical level acts as a self-reflection on Japanese national identity in the midst of the country's peak. His monstrous transformation glorifies Japan's new image but also shows how the country fears this change, representing a reflection of its deep-seated ambivalence (Napier 2005:40). The film does not offer a conclusion to this uncertainty, instead it ends without closure after another *pika* explosion, showing how the threat of another A-bomb will always be lingering. Furthermore, Tetsuo's mutations embody many of the physical traits possessed by the *hibakusha*. His body develops keloid tumors and begins leaking blood as

he expands, which are “instant signifiers of the *hibakusha*” (Marczynski 2016, para 9), acting as a self-reflection on Japanese identity and their representation of those affected by the A-bomb.

Cyberpunk as a genre, focuses upon “alienated subcultures that adopt the high-tech tools of the establishment they are [...] alienated from” (Iglesia 2018:2). *Akira* features similar themes to *Barefoot Gen*, as the main cast of characters are orphans. It is unknown whether they are *hibakusha*, but similar to other A-bomb films, their lack of parental figures shows the horrors of the *pika*. In the aftermath of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings, “hundreds of Japanese orphans were relocated to China” (Marczynski 2016, para 5), so the main cast of characters within *Akira* represents the negligent treatment authority had towards war orphans. Furthering this, the city of Neo-Tokyo is plagued by high-crime rates and a militaristic government that experiments on children. The only way for the main characters to navigate this dystopian world is through their high-tech motorcycles, which they use to engage in trouble with other gangs and the military. The film portrays how an “existing civilization has undergone a traumatic transformation” (Gardner 2008:203) through the cyberpunk elements such as alienated subculture and high-tech tools, showing how *Akira* is diverse amongst A-bomb film, and demonstrates the topic's reach.

The fluid movement of the high-tech motorcycle contrasts “the unmoving structure of power and authority, represented by the enormous, massed buildings” (Napier 2005:41). The bikes are an agent of change, with these orphans having the freedom to roam or leave the city, whereas *hibakusha* in other A-bomb films do not have the means to do so. Film scholar Jon Lewis has written about the motorcycle as “the phallic symbol of power and authority” (1993:144), which when applied to the cast of *Akira*, shows what little power they have in their authoritarian state. The lack of power is amplified by Tetsuo, who at the beginning of the film fails to start Kaneda's bike, with his own one being destroyed moments later. He then becomes hospitalised at the same location in which children are being experimented on, showing how *Akira* presents “a world in which the innocent were grotesquely sacrificed [...] to the military-industrial complex” (Napier 2007:104). This is an allegory for *hibakusha* and

victims of A-bomb testing such as those aboard *Lucky Dragon No 5*, as those people have fell victim to the machinations of the military industrial complex, similarly to how the children within *Akira* are victims of cruel secret government experiments.

Barefoot Gen and *Akira*, while being from different genres, are occupied with similar themes such as orphans and the bomb. They provide a great variety in their representations of nuclear themes, with *Barefoot Gen* focusing upon fact, and *Akira* focusing upon a dystopian future. They have left a legacy in A-bomb cinema, as *Barefoot Gen* is found in libraries of primary and middle schools in Japan (Minear 2008:9), and *Akira* found new life in the West, being frequently touted in "Top Ten Anime" lists (Napier 2005:43). The success of both films show how A-bomb cinema has progressed since the initial nuclear bombing. Their reception created a solidified legacy that deals with the *hibakusha* and *pika* in a way that takes advantage of both of their genres and the form of animation, demonstrating the reach of A-bomb cinema, and how diverse it is.

Conclusion

This dissertation's focus on Japanese A-bomb cinema and its themes across its three chapters has shown the diversity of the topic, and how far its reach has been since the bombings in 1945.

From the initial films of the 50s such as *Children of Hiroshima* and *I Live in Fear*, to 80s films like *Akira*, A-bomb themes have permeated Japanese cinema, showing how the topic of the A-bomb has a broad reach and that the cinema itself is a diverse topic. Films such as *In This Corner of the World* (Sunao Katabuchi 2016) further this point, showing how war films with A-bomb themes are still being released today, which is reinforced through a planned live action remake of *Akira* scheduled for 2023. All three chapters have taken a look at different forms of A-bomb cinema, from the realist works of Shindo and Kurosawa in chapter one, to the *kaiju* world created by Honda, to *anime* film dealing with nuclear thematics, each chapter has shown the diversity of A-bomb cinema and how each style of cinema has dealt with nuclear themes in their own way.

The first chapter showed how *Children of Hiroshima* and *I Live in Fear* contrasted with each other, as one focused upon the very real aftermath of Hiroshima, while the other focused upon the psychological turmoil that the existence of the nuclear bomb brings. *Children of Hiroshima* was analysed regarding the A-bomb maiden protagonist, its preoccupation with *mono no aware*, and *higaisha ishiki*, as well as the criticism of Japan's self-victimisation after the Second World War. *I Live in Fear* differs with its male protagonist, and the fact that Japanese reception to the film was rather negative, becoming Kurosawa's biggest blunder of his career up until that point. It touched upon Kurosawa's later film, *Rhapsody in August* and how he deployed a female *hibakusha*, which is more conventional within the A-bomb genre.

The second chapter discussed the breadth of *kaiju* cinema, particularly focusing upon *Gojira* and its nuclear themes. The film was analysed with its relationship to the science fiction genre, as well as useful theory from Jeffrey Jerome Cohen to help gauge a greater

understanding of the monsters within the film, and how they embody A-bomb films and reflect the culture in which they were made. The chapter then explored *kaiju* films made with a Western audience in mind, such as *Frankenstein Conquers the World* and *The War of the Gargantuas*, and how despite them being made for the West, they still managed to keep their nuclear themes, providing a variety within A-bomb cinema. Further films such as *Rodan* and *Mothra* were examined to show how *kaiju* cinema will forever be tied to the nuclear bomb, and how this genre of film has become prominent within Japanese culture due to the various sequels and future ones planned.

Chapter three deviated away from live action and put the focus onto *anime*, and how A-bomb themes have been portrayed in a different medium. Despite *Barefoot Gen* and *Akira* not being from similar genres, they both display the variety of A-bomb cinema, and how the power of animation allows for A-bomb imagery such as *pika* and the nuclear attack on Hiroshima to be displayed. Both films are similar as they focus on orphans and both criticise authority, with *Barefoot Gen* resisting nationalism and being described as a powerful anti-war film by Susan Napier. Both films show how nuclear cinema has progressed from its realist roots of the fifties, taking advantage of the animated format to concern themselves with *hibakusha* and *pika*, providing a variety within A-bomb cinema and demonstrating the topics reach.

This thesis has shown how Japanese A-bomb cinema has progressed since the initial nuclear bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and how the topic has created a thriving diversity dealing with a vast amount of nuclear themes such as nationalism, victimisation, and fear of another A-bomb. Academic literature ranging from books and journals provided a great amount of information surrounding Japanese cinema, which formed the basis for much of this work. However, further research into this area may provide a more expansive understanding of the diversity of A-bomb cinema, as it was difficult to find academic work surrounding the *kaiju* films, despite there being a large amount of films from this genre, particularly concerning the character of Godzilla.

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