

Bridging the Past, Present, and Future: Nostalgia and Intertextuality in *It's a Summer Film*

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At the most basic levels, a Japanese film can be dissected to find influential elements and/or ideas that can provide an insight into aspects of Japanese culture. One such film, that received a rather average review from film critic Mark Schilling for the *Japan Times*, is *It's a Summer Film* (*Samā Firumu ni Noite*) (2020) directed by Sōshi Matsumoto. Schilling gives the film three out of five stars, noting the film has its awkward moments, arguing how it was endearing for those who appreciate passionate debates about classic samurai cinema.¹ There is something to be found in analyzing even films that might be average or B-grade quality, and *It's a Summer Film* is not necessarily a groundbreaking or grandiose film, providing a rather average, yet distinct, view of contemporary Japan that considers filmmaking and youth identity. In fact, as a part of youth film genre in Japan, Matsumoto's film is not a blockbuster, nor one aspiring for artistic excellence recognized at film festivals and from awards.² These films are integral to popular culture in Japan and directors are able to consistently secure funding to create them. In the Reiwa period, combining the *jidaigeki* genre and *seishun eiga* is creating new dialogues for new (and younger audiences) by blending traditional themes with modern issues, resonating with contemporary audiences and reflecting twenty-first century shifts.

As Japanese popular culture has been disseminated throughout the globe, it has begun demonstrating a wave of nostalgic storytelling, especially within youth-oriented media. *It's a Summer Film* follows Barefoot, a high school student who has a passion for *jidaigeki* films, commonly associated with and translated as "samurai films" despite being "period films." Her

passion for the genre is evident before she embarks on her own attempt, with a few ragtag friends of course, to create her own film that is an homage to the genre. While readable as a lighthearted youth drama, the film weaves nostalgia and intertextuality together to investigate the relationship between tradition and contemporary identity. Drawing on nostalgia and postmodern film studies, this article argues that *It's a Summer Film* attempts to both revive and reinterpret Japan's cinematic past, offering a reflection on the role of nostalgia and intertextuality in constructing both national and youth identities in the current Reiwa era (2019-present).

It's a Summer Film uses nostalgia and intertextuality not merely as indulgences, but as essential tools for modern Japanese youth to negotiate their identities and reimagine their cultural heritage. Intertextuality remains a key element in literature and film, evolving from ironic references in postmodernism to nostalgic and sincere connections in contemporary writing.³ This shift is reflected in *It's a Summer Film*, as characters work to create a *jidaigeki* film paying reverence to past genres while navigating personal relationships to others. The protagonist, named only Barefoot, is obsessed with *jidaigeki* films, and rejects the Film Club's clichéd rom-com and works to create her own samurai film like those of the golden age of Japanese cinema. Although blending science fiction into the film's elements, *It's a Summer Film* is primarily a *seishun eiga*, reflecting the experiences and aspirations of young people. There are numerous factors that contribute to the popularity of high school films in Japan, including nostalgia and the appeal of star actors who have gained fans through media such as J-pop.⁴ In fact, *It's a Summer Film*'s lead actress, Marika Itō, is herself a member of the J-pop group Nogizaka46. Nostalgic feelings are further amplified by seasonal imagery and the emotions tied to recurring cultural and institutional events throughout the year, and *It's a Summer Film* uses the elements of summer, such as a cultural festival, to capture such feelings (Pugsley 101). By combining elements of

different genres with intertextual references to Japanese cinema, *It's a Summer Film* addresses themes of identity and cultural continuity. Highlighting intertextual storytelling to preserve and reinterpret cultural memory, *It's a Summer Film* illustrates how modern Japanese youth negotiate identity by reimagining artistic traditions, offering a commentary on film's role in shaping and preserving memory in contemporary Japan.

Cinema's strong roots and influences are formed from nostalgic ties for directors, writers, actors, and audiences. As with most cinema, when new Japanese films are made, people might note the influences, homage, parody, and other relatable elements from these nostalgic works. Japan's film industry has successfully resisted Hollywood's dominance, with Japanese films making up 55% of the 2017 market share, up from 48% a decade earlier. High cinema attendance in Japan is supported by the country's cultural and linguistic unity, creating a cohesive audience.⁵ In Japan, the once popular *jidaigeki*, sometimes featuring samurai but namely stories set before the Meiji period (1868-1912). While *jidaigeki* have declined in popularity in Japan, *seishun eiga* have maintained popularity. Not including animated films, over 100 feature-length films feature a high school setting.⁶ This prevalence underscores the cultural significance of high school settings in Japanese cinema, reflecting societal interests and *seishun eiga*'s appeal. While the *seishun eiga* genre continues to succeed in contemporary Japanese cinema, the *jidaigeki* genre has experienced a decline, yet it remains nostalgically revered by audiences both in Japan and abroad.

Despite its decline in Japan, *jidaigeki* are most often viewed with rose-tinted lenses by Americans and some Japanese nationalists, especially as globalization happens. Samurai swing their swords honorably across the screen, portraying loyalty and bravery—the embodiments of *bushido*. The samurai is certainly a romanticized figure, but the figure was once used to provide

critiques of society rather than romanticizing an imagined past. Many films made in the postwar period were critical of the Japanese government or society, including films directed by Akira Kurosawa and Masaki Kobayashi. Kurosawa's films, such as *The Hidden Fortress* (*Kakushi Toride no San Akunin*) (1958) and *Yojimbo* (*Yōjinbō*) (1961) do not depict heroic samurai;⁷ in the case of *Yojimbo*, its plot addresses postwar concerns about duty and loyalty to a society that may be flawed.⁸ Films such as Kobayashi's *Hara-Kiri* (*Seppuku*) (1962) depict the ronin's life of poverty and isolation which lead him to question the morality of a system that discards loyal citizens without hesitation, thus resulting in his opposition of the ruling class and work to dismantle the very system that once shaped his beliefs.⁹ Their films featured numerous critiques and examinations of who and what the samurai were, as well as responding to World War II and the Japanese government.

When early Japanese films were being made, kabuki-based films became *jidaigeki* or *jidaimono*, which typically defined all period films.¹⁰ These films were so popular that roughly six thousand were made from 1908 to 1945, many of which are still shown on television today.¹¹ David Desser discusses three subgenres that arise immediately in the postwar period, the Nostalgic Drama, the Anti-Feudal Drama, and the Zen Fighters. Of note is his discussion of the Nostalgic Samurai Drama, which is nostalgic because it reasserts a supposedly unique Japanese past that was once restricted, evoking feelings through tragic characters like the ronin who are bound by duty and tradition in a changing society. Through specific settings, characters, and formalistic approaches, these films create a sense of longing for a past that emphasizes clear morality and the nobility of failure.¹² These are the sorts of films that depict a restorative nostalgia, one that eventually gives way to other subgenres within the *jidaigeki* genre.

As Japan moved into the 2000s, *jidaigeki* became somewhat reimagined or blended with other genres in the age of globalization and the influences of the Hollywood film. While there were examples of the Japanese Western prior to the 2000s, there was a “nostalgia boom” in the early 2000s during the Heisei period (1989-2019), as Japanese films used the Western genre to play with a lost past, “Invented and reinvented by a wide array of filmmakers, [and] the popular genre blossomed by tapping into viewers’ nostalgic craving for a ‘disappearing Japan.’”¹³ The relationship between Westerns and *jidaigeki* is not new, but cyclical. Kurosawa was influenced by the Westerns of John Ford. Spaghetti Westerns took influence from Kurosawa. In the 2000s the Western becomes a genre to explore the hybridization of Japan in an age of globalization. One such film, *Sukiyaki Western Django (Sukiyaki Uesutan Jango)* (2007) features a cameo by Quentin Tarantino. The setting of Yuta is a pun of Utah, and the film blends the Western genre with Japanese literature, history, and *jidaigeki*.¹⁴ The Japanese Western, with its stylized violence and nostalgic themes, reflects both the creative ingenuity of Japanese filmmakers and the influence of Hollywood, navigating an imagined Japan and broader global geopolitics.¹⁵ But *It's a Summer Film* is not interested in Westerns, Hollywood films, and focusing only on nationalist Japanese genres and film. Matsumoto’s use of nostalgia, however, appears as a response to the “accelerated rhythms of life and historical upheavals.”¹⁶ His lead actress is a J-pop idol whom Japanese audiences would recognize, he explores the aspects of school life without romanticizing them as in *seishun eiga* films, and, ultimately, his film is for a Japanese audience, not necessarily a global one.

In the current Reiwa period, Japan has embraced aspects of globalization, while still having concerns over other aspects, such as the influx of non-Japanese migrants due to labor shortages and the introduction of non-Japanese culture through consumerism. The declining

birthrates and a rapidly aging population are looming concerns often reflected in science fiction. Japan has begun considering globalization through its own lens rather than that of the West, moving away from Euro-American centric visions of the modern world. Japan is looking back at the 1980s and slowly considering issues of that period as not politically correct, yet also considering the ideas of political correctness running amok, as evidenced in the naming of *Futehodo*, a shortened version of the Japanese drama, *Extremely Inappropriate!* (*Futekisetsu ni mo Hodo ga Aru!*), as Japan's buzzword of 2024.¹⁷ Reiwa era Japan began with the abdication of the emperor in 2019, the beginning of COVID (2020), which impacted the production of *It's a Summer Film*, and is generally a time of reflection as Japan is still transitioning from the period of "Achieving Peace" (平成, *Heisei*) to this new period of "Beautiful Harmony" (令和, *Reiwa*). Thus, *It's a Summer Film* is reflecting on many things all at once. As Japan grapples with questions of heritage and progress, Barefoot and her friends turn the dialogue inward, offering a glimpse of how younger generations might interpret past and present through film.

Barefoot is a teen girl who is obsessed with *jidaigeki* films rather than stereotypical romantic girls' comics or love in general. She is a bit uncouth, loud, and hangs out in an old RV as her secret base. Her two friends, Kickboard a girl in the astronomy club and Blue Hawaii a girl in the Kendo club, only ever called by their nicknames, hang out with her and watch *jidaigeki* in an old RV. A member of the Film Club, Barefoot feels frustrated about the club's choice for their cultural festival film (a romantic comedy) and complains to her two friends who note that it was a shame her film (a *jidaigeki*) was not picked. Barefoot claims she is fine and that she could not find her lead actor anyway. Later she runs into a seemingly random young man named Rintaro who she believes is perfect for her film, and who is later revealed to be a time traveler. Once she is able to convince him to be her lead, the film moves forward as she

assembles her crew (Daddy Boy, Rintaro, Oguri, Masayama, and Komada) and tries to overcome the pressure she feels to get the movie just right. Over the course of the film Barefoot's love for *jidaigeki*, which is typically a male dominated genre and audience, rubs off on her newly formed crew who dedicate themselves to helping her make a worthy film. Throughout the film, Rintaro, who is a time traveler from the future, reveals that *jidaigeki* films, or films over a minute long, no longer exist in the future. The whole reason he is there is to see the first film of his favorite *jidaigeki* director, Barefoot.

Barefoot's journey in creating her *jidaigeki* film, driven by her passion for a genre steeped in historical and cultural nostalgia, parallels the themes explored by Svetlana Boym in her book *The Future of Nostalgia*. Boym examines the role of nostalgia throughout Europe, only briefly and occasionally touching on Asia. Her examination of nostalgia provides a thorough baseline for understanding how Matsumoto's use of nostalgia subverts typical uses in both *seishun eiga* and *jidaigeki* films. She discusses two kinds of nostalgia—the restorative and reflective. Restorative nostalgia aligns with the kinds of films being made in the early 2000s, when Japan was in its second decade of an economic recession, and certainly those being made in the prewar and postwar periods of Japan. Restorative nostalgia is one that tries to reconstruct the “lost home,” a nostalgia that “does not think of itself as nostalgia, but rather as truth and tradition.”¹⁸ Where restorative nostalgia protects the absolute truth, “reflective nostalgia calls it into question.”¹⁹ Reflective nostalgia is focused on the “ambivalence of human longing and belonging and does not shy away from the contradictions of modernity.”²⁰ In *jidaigeki* films, like *The 47 Ronin (Genroku Chūshingura)* (1941) or *Samurai I: Musashi Miyamoto (Miyamoto Musashi)* (1954), loyalty and sacrifice are celebrated, honor and discipline are reflected, and the samurai code is generally idealized.

One might assume that *It's a Summer Film* is portraying a young woman with a restorative nostalgia for a simpler time with “traditional” Japanese values in film. Restorative nostalgia “proposes to rebuild the lost home and patch up the memory gaps,” as well as evoking “a national past and future.”²¹ It could be argued that Barefoot and friends are trying to bring the past to life, that they are attempting to recreate an idealized version of the past in their film, but that does a disservice to the intertextual references throughout the film. At a time when Japan is supposedly growing into a conservative right-wing nation, it might be argued that the samurai, a nationalist figure and symbol during WWII, would reflect these ideas of the invented traditions of WWII Japan. However, the nostalgia that the film embodies appears to be more of a reflective nostalgia. The reflective nostalgia of the film “is more about individual and cultural memory,” especially in Barefoot’s case as she has a longing to create an homage to *jidaigeki* and the implied loss of her grandmother who introduced her to those films.²²

Through Barefoot, the audience sees that Japanese culture is personally linked to the individual; others see her passion for films and become linked in their connection to her. The film never creates an image of a homogenous culture, rather through its reflective nostalgia it refutes the restorative nostalgic idea of a homogenous Japanese culture. Barefoot and her crew do not sacrifice their individuality, cultural or personal, for any social group. Barefoot cherishes the fragmented memories she has of her grandmother, and at times there is an irony and humor to her longing for the films she watched with her grandmother as she tries to explain the films to her crew-turned-friends.²³ These memories become more complicated and reflective once Rintaro’s identity as a time traveler is revealed. Like Barefoot, he finds a longing in the *jidaigeki* films because they are no longer relevant or viewed in the future, except by a few such as himself. He becomes a link to the future that Barefoot must bridge with the past and present.

Barefoot's personal journey is intertwined with the broader context of *jidaigeki* films, which often critique Japanese society and challenge traditional values, just as she does by rejecting the Film Club's romantic comedy and not rejoining the club itself. It is important to note that neither the films that Barefoot loves nor all *jidaigeki* films were made with this restorative nostalgia. Posters adorn the wall of her camper featuring *13 Assassins* (*Jūsan-nin no shikaku*) (1963) and the American documentary *Mifune: The Last Samurai* (2015). There are also numerous books, some belonging to her friend Kickboard, a teen girl who is interested in science and astronomy, and a book entitled *Making a Samurai Film*. A sweeping shot of the room highlights both DVD and VHS copies of films, including *Throne of Blood* (*Kumonosu-jō*) (1957), *The Twilight Samurai* (*Tasogare Seibei*) (2002), and *When the Last Sword Is Drawn* (*Mibu Gishi Den*) (2002).

In an early scene revealing these books and posters, Barefoot, Blue Hawaii, and Kickboard are bonding over *Zatōichi* "part 2," released in the West as *The Tale of Zatōichi Continues* (*Zoku Zatōichi Monogatari*) (1962). Some of the films shown in Barefoot's room reflect her devotion to the genre, as well as her knowledge. Several of the films, such as *13 Assassins*, are critical of Japanese society, as well blind obedience and loyalty. As viewers are introduced to the character of Barefoot, she represents an audience within the narrative, as she is a fan—an expert—of *jidaigeki* films, engaging with their tropes and stylistic conventions. Her decision to make a samurai film is a direct act of intertextual creation, drawing on the elements of past films and her nostalgia linked to them to create something new. She references *Zatōichi*'s sword fighting style several times and her film features her samurai protagonists fighting against multiple opponents who attack one-by-one rather than all at once. The meta-narrative of making

a film within a film further emphasizes this layering of texts, as it offers a self-reflexive commentary on the creative process and the construction of meaning through film.

It's a Summer Film constructs this tone visually and narratively. For example, Barefoot's film, *Samurai Spring*, features sweeping shots of traditional sword fights and melodramatic close-ups reminiscent of *The Tale of Zatoichi* (*Zatoichi Monogatari*) (1962). Even Barefoot's ideas of the fight between her protagonist and his friend are reminiscent of that between Zatoichi and Hirate in *The Tale of Zatoichi*. When Barefoot swings a stick around like a sword or during her climatic scenes with Rintaro, she mimics Ichi's reverse grip style of fighting. *It's a Summer Film's* narrative places Barefoot in a mix of nostalgia with contemporary issues of creative identity and self-expression set within a modern high school context. Barefoot also talks about her relationship with her grandmother, whom she resembles. She says that her grandma took her to see her first film, *The Tale of Zatoichi*. Seeing this film is what sparks her love of the *jidaigeki*, and she tells her friends, "Movies connect the present with the past through the big screen. Through my films, I want to connect with the future."²⁴ This is a film that could be about restorative nostalgia, but it is not. Barefoot is a budding female director in a male-dominated field, rejecting romanticized notions of whom she should be, what her film should be, and asserting herself as an individual rather than a passive member of the group.

Barefoot and her friends are not merely imitating the past—they are engaging in a dialogue with it, reflecting the postmodern tendency to recycle and reinterpret cultural texts. This postmodern tendency, or even post-postmodern tendency, operated intertextually in the film. Post-postmodern intertextuality uses familiar references to evoke nostalgia and genuine emotional connections, shifting from the ironic use in postmodernism to creating shared experiences and sincere feelings.²⁵ Nostalgia in *It's a Summer Film* becomes a tool for exploring

how the younger generation, represented by Barefoot and her friends, connects with cultural traditions that seem increasingly distant in a world influenced by globalization and rapidly developing technology. Barefoot's emotional investment in her project speaks to a desire to preserve something meaningful from the past, one mired in her reflective nostalgia, but the film also subtly questions whether such efforts are sustainable or necessary in a world advancing so rapidly towards the future. While not nearly as critical of society as some postwar films, *It's a Summer Film* still critiques the role of media and youth consumption of media in contemporary Japan.

Using Boym's frameworks, nostalgia in cinematic storytelling serves to bridge the past with the present, while also presenting considerations for the future. In doing so it can offer audiences a chance to reconnect with familiar cultural touchstones, such as films, novels, or general popular culture. In *It's a Summer Film*, Barefoot's obsession with samurai films mirrors a larger cultural longing for a bygone era, specifically the golden age of Japanese cinema (1950s-1960s). During this time, films by directors like Akira Kurosawa, Masaki Kobayashi, and Kenji Misumi, among others, exemplified the period's samurai films that commonly provided examinations of a postwar Japan, critiques of the military and government, as well as globalizing influences. Yet, her cultural longing is not necessarily that of wanting to have a nationalist identity of a samurai, but a longing for a film that she views to have meaning and purpose compared to the Film Club's romantic comedy, *I Can't Help Loving You!* The club's film is not unlike the romantic films so commonly made in the *seishun eiga* genre. *It's a Summer Film* itself is of the *seishun eiga* genre, but it does not adhere to the standard formulas of this genre. *It's a Summer Film* does not reject the aspects of the *seishun eiga*; Barefoot's determination to create a

samurai film is not only an homage to past masters of *jidaigeki*, but a way of carving her own space within Japan's cinematic history and tradition, which is largely male-dominated.

To understand the way that the director plays with traditional film conventions within *It's a Summer Film*, a discussion of genre is imperative. As noted, *It's a Summer Film* blends several genres, but its foremost genre is that of the *seishun eiga*, which Sōshi Matsumoto always wanted to direct.²⁶ These films have a strong appeal for teen and young adult audiences while evoking familiar schoolyard nostalgia in older viewers.²⁷ These films evoke a sense of nostalgia for viewers, which itself can be a form of intertextuality.²⁸ However, *It's a Summer Film*, while using typical conventions including that of the romantic comedy, subverts many of the expectations of such a youth film. These films not only evoke nostalgia for audiences but also serve as a creative outlet for writers, producers, and filmmakers, drawing from their own nostalgic school experiences. *Seishun eiga* typically blend past memories of teen love and school dramas with present-day perspectives, creating a nostalgic yet complex portrayal of adolescence.²⁹ *It's a Summer Film* does this through its blending of genres and subverting the expectations of romance so often depicted in these films. The shift in genres with science fiction is found in how Rintaro is a male from the future coming to the past to see Barefoot's first film because she is his favorite director, whereas typically in films like *The Girl Who Leapt through Time (Toki o Kakeru Shōjo)*, the female lead is traveling in the past and meeting her male love interest.

This subversion is most notable in the film's final scene, where *seishun eiga* and *jidaigeki* genres are most notably blended. Deciding what she filmed was not good enough, Barefoot stops the film and says they will act out the final scene. "No matter how much you love your rival, you have to kill him. Face him in the end!" she says passionately.³⁰ As they fight using brooms,

Barefoot, using *Zatōichi*'s fighting style, confesses her feelings to Rintaro: "Killing is a confession of love. So I'm going to drive this sword right through your heart. What I mean is... In other words... Rintaro, I love you."³¹ This confession is a typical part of the *seishun eiga* genre, but here the dialogue is tinged with *jidaigeki*-esque elements, using action to convey emotion. The confession is subversive because they use this dialogue dressed in Barefoot's contemporary school uniform and Rintaro's futuristic gray outfit, rather than costume befitting the *jidaigeki*.

This blending of old and new not only pays homage to the past, but also creates a bridge between different eras of filmmaking, reflecting a respect for traditional cinematic forms while engaging with contemporary audiences. This blending also allows Barefoot an identity that separates her from her peers, celebrating her individualism and taking on the challenge of continuing Japan's tradition of cinema into the future. As they continue fighting, Barefoot says, "You saw it. You watched me. When I saw my first samurai movie it moved me. I started making movies to connect that emotion with the future. Now you saw this movie. You'll take it into the future. Right?"³² Here Barefoot connects the past, present, and future. The past is the genre used for their film, the present is Barefoot's filmmaking, and the future is Rintaro. The time travel genre elements subvert those of the *jidaigeki*, all blending and playing within the space of a *seishun eiga*. While they fight with their "swords" and during this confession, Rintaro recreates the *kabedon*, a stereotypical element where the male lead places his hand on the wall while the female lead has her back against it during the romantic confession. As he performs this stereotypical and clichéd move, he says, "I love this story."³³

Another blending and playing with *jidaigeki* genre elements, is when Barefoot is shown creating a model of a castle on a hill. The scene briefly happens in a montage as Barefoot's crew

looks surprised at the detailed model. What is notable about this brief moment is that the film is using traditional special effects to give Barefoot's film the necessary landscape and setting piece to make it a *jidaigeki*. Barefoot's film is shot on a smartphone with modern technology, but this one moment shows dedication to preserving practical special effects rather than relying on CGI. In addition to reflective nostalgia, *It's a Summer Film* shares ideas of remediative nostalgia. Kennedy-Karpat expands on the framework of Boym with "remediative nostalgia," which refers to the blending of traditional, medium-specific elements with new platforms and texts, meaning despite the potential for innovation, there is a deliberate choice to incorporate and preserve older, familiar elements within new media.³⁴ Despite the availability of new technologies and cultural shifts that could lead to entirely new forms of cinema, Barefoot's film deliberately incorporates and preserves the aesthetic and thematic codes of classic *jidaigeki*, such as practical effects and the climatic samurai duel. At one point, as she is chatting with Rintaro, Barefoot says, "But samurai films have to end in a showdown. Or it's not a samurai film."³⁵

The film's most obvious intertextual references are to samurai films. However, there are additional references to science fiction, blending these genres into a postmodern pastiche that speaks to the hybrid nature of contemporary media consumption. Additionally, the film employs these intertextual references to not just film, but popular literature as well. One such example of an intertextual reference not related to film is when Kickboard is reading the science fiction novel *The Girl Who Leapt Through Time*, an obvious foreshadowing of the film's events, but also a widely read novel. The novel was first serialized from 1965 to 1966 in *Gakkan*, a magazine for high school students, and eventually published as a novel in 1967. Regarding film media alone, *The Girl Who Leapt through Time* has been adapted between 1972 and 2016 as three different television drama series, four different film adaptations, an anime film, and a stage

play, not including the printed media adaptations. *It's a Summer Film* is clearly paying homage to this ubiquitous novel, except instead of the female protagonist time travelling, it is a boy who leaps through time.

That there are so many adaptations of *The Girl Who Leapt Through Time* speaks to how far removed the adaptations are in the current Reiwa period. The novel's adaptations pick and choose the elements to highlight, and it is a novel that has been mediated through various media and popular culture. As paradoxical as it sounds, the origin of this work becomes lost in the multiple adaptations, while still being a widely read novel. When Barefoot notes what Kickboard is reading, she states, "I didn't know it was a novel" leading to Kickboard telling her, "It's the original work."³⁶ Then again, Barefoot tells Kickboard she is not interested in science fiction, to which Kickboard only replies that she "should get into it."³⁷ That Barefoot should get into science fiction sets up the film for its later twist, the time travel reveal, which becomes intertwined with romantic confessions in *seishun eiga*. Ironically enough, Barefoot does "get into it" as she is suddenly in a science fiction film.

The blending of genres in *It's a Summer Film*, from samurai film to science fiction to high school/youth drama, highlights the playful postmodern nature of its intertextuality. The film never takes itself too seriously. The film's genre hybridity allows it to examine themes of time travel, not only as a plot device but as a metaphor for the act of engaging with the past. The time travel element in the story reinforces the nostalgic tones of the film, as it embodies the desire to revisit and reimagine historical moments. However, unlike most films that treat nostalgia as a purely restorative force, *It's a Summer Film* complicates this by injecting modern sensibilities into its homage to a Japan of the past. Barefoot uses the present as an act of creation, shaping the future based on her reinterpretation of the past through film. This active engagement with time

highlights the film's message that the present, and the past, are not necessarily static entities, rather they are forces that can shape the future. Rintaro embodies this possibility of change, suggesting that the future is not predetermined but can be altered by taking what he has learned, his conscious decisions and actions in the present, with him to the future. Barefoot's desire to change the future by understanding and creating her own film set in the past underscores the film's portrayal of nostalgia. Rather than viewing the past as something to be restored, *It's a Summer Film* presents it as a source of inspiration and innovation, allowing the characters to envision new possibilities for the future that Rintaro returns to. Engaging with the past and envisioning the issues of the future through film, the crew demonstrates that the present is a powerful tool reflecting on the past and shaping the future. This active engagement with time encourages audiences to reflect on their own relationship with history and the possibilities ahead.

This complexity is further explored through Elizabeth Hirschman's concept of "out-of-text people and event intertextuality." This involves consumers linking fictional actions or characters to real-life people or events, which helps consumers connect the fictional world with the real world—thus anchoring their internal conceptual world to external reality.³⁸ Barefoot's passion for samurai films and her admiration for classic samurai heroes like Zatōichi link the fictional narrative to actual historical and cultural elements of *jidaigeki*. This connection allows viewers to anchor the film's story within the broader context of Japanese film history. Moreover, the film's depiction of the struggles and triumphs of making a movie can be related to the real-world experiences of filmmakers, especially those who are passionate about bringing older, or traditional, genres into modern contexts. This type of intertextuality allows the audience to relate the fiction of Barefoot and crew's experiences to the real-world challenges of filmmaking,

presenting a chance to bridge the gap between the film's internal world and the external reality of the audience's varied experiences and knowledge.

Contemporary Japan is in a position to reflect on the past, as seen with the drama *Extremely Inappropriate*'s similar use of time travel to consider the latter part of the Shōwa era, specifically 1986. In the Reiwa period, Japan has shown a willingness to look back and critique the past as a way to establish certain sensibilities. This is reflected in *It's a Summer Film* through the characters who, while enamored with samurai films, are at the same time aware of their own limitations and anachronisms. For instance, Barefoot's film stars a samurai character from the past who is played by someone from the future. Then there is the character of Daddy Boy who is a modern teen better suited to an imagined past of refined and educated samurai, a young man who is constantly teased about his age. The film creates a humorous yet insightful commentary on how historical narratives can clash with contemporary realities and how out of place some "traditional" sensibilities can be in the modern period. Even when Barefoot is included in Karin's film, it is superficially because she is knowledgeable about *jidaigeki*, only for her to play a bit part as a time-traveling woman in love with the male lead in Karin's film, creating a nod to how these narratives can clash. In fact, when her scene ends, one of Karin's crewmembers' quips, "A historical twist really adds to the worldview of the film."³⁹ *It's a Summer Film*'s blending of genres and playing with time travel becomes a metaphor for the film's larger narrative, which grapples with how young people today relate to the supposed cultural traditions that are seemingly more and more distant.

This tension between historical narratives and contemporary realities extends beyond film and into the structures that shape everyday life, such as the education system. Just as *It's a Summer Film* playfully critiques the clash between tradition and modernity, Japanese schools

continue to uphold long-standing expectations that emphasize social conformity and group harmony. The current expectations in Japanese schools have not changed so much in the last several decades, and the pressure to conform to societal pressures remains in place. Students are essentially taught in school how to be obedient citizens and workers, focused on maintaining harmony within their social groups. Due to these pressures and expectations, schools, like other formal institutions, play a crucial role in reflecting societal changes, and Japan has long been concerned about raising its children as loyal citizens, a worry that intensified after World War II during a period of reflection.⁴⁰ The Japanese school system puts an emphasis on students to join in-groups through club activities, and even as adults they are encouraged to create in-group bonds with coworkers. Peer and social pressure often encourage an individual to be a part of the collective and to not disrupt social bonds or to stand out.

In *It's a Summer Film* Barefoot and her crew are individuals who stand out with their distinct niche interests, but they have become friends. Barefoot does not fit comfortably within the Film Club, Kickboard appears to be by herself in the Astronomy Club, and Oguri appears to be a kind of delinquent with his dyed hair and bike full of a motley assortment of headlights. The film's plot moves forward when Kickboard suggests making the film outside of club hours and they do it on their own in opposition to Karin's film which is a typical rom-com. Karin and her crew are very clearly coded as the mainstream teens and the club hails Karin as a genius. By the end of *It's a Summer Film*, Barefoot and her crew come to an understanding with Karin's, but they do not assimilate into Karin's group. They still reject aspects of the institutions expected of them by stopping the film and acting out the last scene in front of a crowd. Rather than adhering to institutional rules and societal expectations, Barefoot and her friends continue to reject them, highlighting an independence from the rest of their peers.

This sense of individuality is closely tied to Barefoot's personal nostalgia. The use of nostalgia in the film is not just limited to the nostalgia evoked in the film's audience or the *seishun eiga* genre itself. Nostalgia is also a reaction, one which arises from external stimuli or personal memories, meaning that it is highly personal, and what evokes nostalgia in one person might not have the same effect on another.⁴¹ Barefoot's nostalgia for *jidaigeki* is personal to her, and her nostalgia is not shared by her classmates, as witnessed in a flashback when the only vote to make her samurai film was her own and the rest of the club voted for Karin's film. Yet, she is able to inspire her newly found friends through her passion and excitement.

This personal nostalgia, however, also reflects broader cultural anxieties. Nostalgia links the past with the present and future, both backward-looking and forward-looking, as past fantasies shaped by current needs affect the "realities of the future," meaning one must take responsibility for one's nostalgic tales.⁴² Barefoot's fantasies, as connected to her grandmother, are shaped by her current needs which reject those of her peers in the Film Club, and which influence her future as a filmmaker. Her responsibility for her nostalgic love of *jidaigeki* sees her take responsibility (after encouragement from her friends) to make her love of those tales into a creative reality, impacting her future and the futures of those around her.

The film's use of the *jidaigeki* film is not just a personal quest for Barefoot but also a commentary on Japan's evolving national identity—one that is built upon ideas of tradition and one that is engaged with the efforts of being a part of the modern globalized world. The nostalgia for Barefoot's favorite films, with honorable heroes who were loyal to their comrades and challenging the expectations of society and blind obedience, contrasts sharply with the more fragmented and formulaic or stereotypical identities of the film's antagonists, and sometimes its protagonists. Like *jidaigeki*, *seishun eiga* rely on certain stereotypes and tropes for success, yet

It's a Summer Film critically reflects on and deconstructs these conventions. These intertextual elements create space for resistance to conformity while still allowing individuals to find a sense of community.

One such character who contrasts with these elements of original *jidaigeki* films is Blue Hawaii, who is a member of the school's kendo team, and the closest thing to the warrior figures she likes alongside Barefoot and Kickboard. She talks about the nobility of Shintarō Katsu as Zatōichi, mentions Raizō Ichikawa in *Satan's Sword (Daibosatsu Tōge)* (1960), and is the one who offers to train the actors in swordsmanship for Barefoot's film. Yet, she is later revealed to be an even bigger fan of romantic comedies and shōjo manga, or girls' comics, known for their romantic storylines. She performs in Karin's film as the ghost of Kosuke's ex-girlfriend. Blue Hawaii has multiple sides to her, but they are rendered in stereotypes and fragments. Although this is not critical, Blue Hawaii presents a character who has depth and is not nearly as one dimensional as Karin or some of the other characters in the film. She is not just a jock or a stereotypical fan of girls' comics. Through Blue Hawaii's surprise interest in something that seems antithetical to what the audience knows of her, the film highlights the fact that it is acceptable to like mainstream things without being defined by them.

Blue Hawaii's character, with her layered interests that defy simple categorization and rejection of romanticized stereotypes standard to Japanese film genres, exemplifies the film's broader exploration of identity and tradition. Just as Blue Hawaii navigates multiple influences without being confined by them, *It's a Summer Film* resists the trap of romanticizing the past without question. Instead, it offers a nuanced view of how young people can engage with elements of their cultural heritage by both preserving and reimagining it for a new era that is not based upon conformity to the group. Rather, there is a shift in preserving and reimagining for the

individual. Barefoot's film is not a perfect replication of a classic samurai film; it is a product of its time, shaped by the limitations and influences of her generation. After all, how can Barefoot and her friends be nostalgic for a period they never lived in or for the historical contexts of the period the films were created? Compared to her friends, Barefoot is the only one with a link to the nostalgic and imagined past of Japanese cinema through her grandmother. In this sense, as the gap between older and younger generations within Japan widens, *It's a Summer Film* serves as a reflection on the role of nostalgia and intertextuality in cultural preservation and innovation in contemporary Japan.

Seishun eiga often follow a positive trajectory, which includes hope and moral epiphanies, an optimistic tone reflecting a sense of hope for Japan and its people, despite contemporary issues of an aging population and slow economic growth. Nostalgia offers safe, familiar feelings in these films, with the structured school environment framing each story.⁴³ Arguably, *It's a Summer Film's* nostalgia carries safe, familiar feelings, but there is also concern for the future and how nostalgia might play a role. "In the future, no one has time to hear other people's stories," Doc, a teenage friend of Rintaro's says.⁴⁴ In the future, films and movie theaters no longer exist. Films are only five seconds long and anything that is a minute is considered "super long."⁴⁵ The *jidaigeki* that Barefoot loves so much range from one hour and a half to nearly three hours in length. Barefoot has still managed to create a connection that should not be possible. In a world where *jidaigeki* and *seishun eiga* have disappeared, her films still resonate with Rintaro. He is a fan of her films in the future, and they both promise one another to not let films disappear entirely. *It's a Summer Film* ends abruptly just as Barefoot and Rintaro run towards one another to clash. The future and present are suddenly open to possibility, and it is up to Barefoot to live up to her potential and for Rintaro to keep his word in

the future. With this open ending, it is possible that Matsumoto is telling his audience that both the present and future is theirs to write.

Culture can be a dynamic space for individual creativity and connection, rather than just a force for uniformity. During times of upheaval, what people often miss most is the shared cultural experiences with friends and compatriots, which are based on mutual interests rather than national or religious ties.⁴⁶ *It's a Summer Film* highlights how Japan's film culture, and its cinematic history, can be a space for individual play and creativity. Matsumoto's film showcases how contemporary Japanese youth find meaning and connection through shared cultural experiences, rather than through traditional or nationalistic ties, or even the pressures of being a part of the main in-group. Barefoot, her friends, and their ragtag crew come together not because of a shared past or heritage, but through their (newly discovered) mutual passion for filmmaking and *jidaigeki*. Through this elective affinity they form bonds together while navigating their personal and creative challenges. Their friendship and collaboration highlight how culture provides a context for relationships to develop through shared interests and creative endeavors, rather than through nationalist ties of being Japanese and/or continuity of tradition alone. Culture, thus, guarantees space for individual play and creativity, offering contemporary youth in Japan a way to connect and express themselves beyond conventional societal structures.

It's a Summer Film uses nostalgia and intertextuality to explore the tensions between tradition and modernity in contemporary Japanese cinema. This cannot be clearer than in the clashes Barefoot has with Karin's film and the Film Club. Yet, by paying homage to classic samurai films while also reinterpreting their themes and aesthetics, *It's a Summer Film* offers a thoughtful reflection on how young filmmakers can engage with the past. Rooted in a post-postmodern sensibility, the film does not approach nostalgia with irony or satire, nor does it

advocate for a restoration of an imagined past. Rather than rejecting or blindly adopting tradition, the film allows the present to honor and negotiate the past's role in shaping an imagined future. In doing so, *It's a Summer Film* is not making an overly critical commentary on the present or issuing a call to action. Instead, its sincerity lies in its gentle exploration of possibility, offering a hopeful meditation on how Japan's cinematic heritage can continue to evolve for newer generations.

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³ Simon Radchenko, "Again and Always: Intertextuality outside of Postmodernism," *Interlitteraria* 27, no. 2 (2022): 288.

⁴ Pugsley, 101.

⁵ Pugsley, 2.

⁶ Pugsley, 1.

⁷ Donald Richie, *A Hundred Years of Japanese Film: A Concise History, with a Selective Guide to DVDs and Videos* (New York: Kodansha, 2012), 171-172.

⁸ David Desser, "Toward a Structural Analysis of the Postwar Samurai Film," *Quarterly Review of Film & Video* 8, no. 1 (1983): 26.

- ⁹ Desser, 30.
- ¹⁰ Richie, 23.
- ¹¹ Richie, 24.
- ¹² Desser, 26-29.
- ¹³ Hiroshi Kitamura, "Japanese Cinema and Hollywood: Frontiers of Nostalgia: The Japanese Western and the Postwar Era," in *The Japanese Cinema Book*, eds. Hideaki Fujiki and Alistair Phillips (New York: Bloomsbury, 2020), 527.
- ¹⁴ Kitamura, 527.
- ¹⁵ Kitamura, 527-528.
- ¹⁶ Boym, xiv.
- ¹⁷ Matthew Hernon, "Bemusement as Futehodo is Named Japan's Buzzword of 2024," *Tokyo Weekender*, December 2, 2024, <https://www.tokyoweekender.com/japan-life/news-and-opinion/futehodo-named-japans-buzzword-2024/>.
- ¹⁸ Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), xviii.
- ¹⁹ Boym, xviii.
- ²⁰ Boym, xviii.
- ²¹ Boym, 41, 49.
- ²² Boym, 41, 49.
- ²³ Boym, 49-50.
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- ³⁸ Hirschman, 58.
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- ⁴⁰ Pugsley, 5.
- ⁴¹ Kennedy-Karpat, 284.
- ⁴² Boym, xvi.
- ⁴³ Pugsley, 186.
- ⁴⁴ *It's a Summer Film*.
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