

RUSSIAN LITERATURE IN JAPANESE FILM:
CROSS-CULTURAL ADAPTATIONS IN THE SILENT ERA

LITERATURA RUSA EN EL CINE JAPONÉS:
ADAPTACIONES INTERCULTURALES EN LA ERA DEL CINE MUDO

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Abstract

Since the beginning of the film industry in Japan, many short films and movies based on Western literary works were made, especially during the 1910s and 1920s. Several of those films were based on fashionable Russian literary works that had been staged in *Shingeki* (new drama) theaters. This study examines the adaptations of Russian literature produced from the early 1910s until the end of the silent-film era in the 1930s, focusing specifically on films based on Tolstoy's novel *Resurrection*, the drama *The Living Corpse*, and Gorky's play *The Lower Depths*. It is shown that the early adaptations, filmed in the 1910s, aimed to closely adhere to the original literary works by maintaining key plot events and recreating the cultural milieu through sets, costumes, and staging. However, starting from the 1920s, adaptations followed intercultural and intertextual processes, freely modifying the works to suit the Japanese cultural context. This shift in the approach to adapting Western literary works was influenced by the social, political, and cultural changes experienced by the country during those decades.

Resumen

Durante la era del cine mudo japonés se produjeron numerosas adaptaciones cinematográficas de obras literarias occidentales, especialmente de obras de autores rusos que tuvieron una amplia difusión en Japón. En este estudio se analizan, a partir de fotogramas y reseñas publicados en revistas y periódicos de la época, adaptaciones de literatura rusa producidas desde principios de los años 1910 hasta el final de la era del cine mudo en los años 1930, en concreto las películas basadas en la novela *Resurrección* y el drama *El cadáver viviente*, ambos de Tolstói, y la obra de teatro *Los bajos fondos*, de Gorki. Se muestra que las primeras adaptaciones, rodadas en los años 1910, buscaban ser fieles a las obras literarias originales, manteniendo los principales eventos de la trama y recreando el ambiente cultural de la obra literaria a través de los escenarios, el vestuario y la puesta en escena. Sin embargo, a partir de la década de 1920, las adaptaciones se realizaron siguiendo procesos interculturales e intertextuales en los que las obras se modificaban libremente para adaptarlas al contexto cultural japonés. Esta evolución en la forma de concebir las adaptaciones de obras literarias occidentales estuvo influida por los cambios sociales, políticos y culturales que experimentó el país en esas décadas.

Keywords: *Japanese film* || *Russian literature*
|| *Motion pictures and literature* ||
Intertextuality || *Silent films* || *Foreign movies*
|| *Film adaptation* || *Intermediality* ||
Cinematography

Palabras clave: *Cine japonés* || *Literatura rusa* ||
Cine y literatura || *Intertextualidad* || *Cine*
mudo || *Películas extranjeras* || *Adaptaciones*
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Cinematografía

Introduction

The process of adapting literature into film is referred to as an intertextual dialogic process, in which the filmmaker creates a new work by transforming elements of the literary source material (Stam, 2005). This can include the modification of cultural codes when adapting literature from different cultural spheres. Probably the most famous example of such adaptations, called intercultural or cross-cultural cinema, are Akira Kurosawa’s “samurai films” *Kumonosu-jō* (*Throne of Blood*, 1957) and *Ran* (1985), which were based on William Shakespeare’s (1564-1616) plays *Macbeth* (1606) and *King Lear* (1606), respectively.

Cross-cultural adaptation in Japanese film is a phenomenon that began in Japan decades before Kurosawa’s films gained worldwide recognition and were shown at international film festivals.¹ Since the beginning of the film industry in Japan, many short films and movies based on Western literary works were made, especially during the 1910s and 1920s.² Several of those films were based on fashionable Russian literary works that had been staged in *Shingeki* (new drama) theaters.³ This new form of theatre, developed in the late 19th century, adapted novels or plays to the stage written by prominent Russian authors such as Anton Chekhov (1860-1904), Maxim Gorky (1868-1936), and Leo Tolstoy (1828-1910). In addition to these authors, plays were adapted in *Shingeki* by prominent playwrights of other Western countries such as Norway’s Henrik Ibsen (1828-1906), Germany’s Hermann Sudermann (1857-1928),

¹ Kurosawa started to be known in the West after *Rashomon* (1950) won the Golden Lion at the 1951 Venice film festival. The film was released in the United States and most of Europe. The economic and critical success of that picture introduced Japanese cinema products to Western film markets for the first time, resulting in international recognition for other Japanese filmmakers. As a result of this success, Japanese films became popular in America and other Western countries during the 1950s.

² In 1897 the first motion-picture camera was imported to Japan and, as in many other countries, the first cameramen began filming scenes of the streets. In 1899, Komada Kōyō (1877-1835) formed the *Nihon sossen katsudō shashin kai* (Association of Japanese Motion Pictures), starting the film industry of Japan. The first shorts made by Komada’s company showed Geisha dances and excerpts of well-known kabuki plays such as *Momijigari* (Maple Viewing, 1899), shot by Shibata Tsunekichi (1850-1929) to record the performances of Ichikawa Danjurō IX (1838-1903) and Onoe Kikugorō (1844-1903), the most famous kabuki actors of that time. This film is the oldest extant Japanese film, designated an Important Cultural Property by the Japanese government’s Agency for Cultural Affairs.

³ Several Russian works performed in *Shingeki* theaters were subsequently adapted to film: the novel *Resurrection* by Tolstoy; the play *The Living Corpse*, by Tolstoy; Gorky’s play *The Lower Depths*; and the play *The Cherry Orchard*, by Chekhov.

and the United States' Eugene O'Neill (1888-1953). Japanese writers such as Osanai Kaoru (1881-1928) also contributed to the *Shingeki* movement.⁴

Influenced by the cultural, social, ideological, and political context of the moment, Japanese filmmakers' ways of approaching film adaptations of Western literature changed from one decade to another. The first adaptations shot during the 1910s were aimed at an educated audience familiar with *Shingeki* theater and Western literary culture (Satō, 2008: 20). These renditions aimed to adhere closely to the original literary works, retaining the main events of the plot and recreating the cultural milieu of the source text through the settings, costumes, and the *mise-en-scène* (Pinar, 2021).

During the 1920s, westernization and modernism characterized the cultural life of the big cities in Japan, and cinema quickly became the main entertainment of the urban masses (Wada-Marciano, 2008: 2). Japanese film directors of this decade interested in Western literature continued adapting works that had previously been staged in *Shingeki* theatres and began to make free adaptations of plays, novels, or short stories that had never yet been performed. Filmmakers discarded the theatrical practices found in former adaptations. Studios, directors, and scriptwriters were no longer concerned about theatrical conventions or about imitating the cultural framework of the adapted work. On the contrary—the adaptations were made following intercultural and intertextual processes in which the Western literary works were freely modified and adjusted to the Japanese cultural context, making them more comprehensible and appealing to the average member of the largely urban audience.

In this paper, I examine Japanese films produced from the 1910s until the end of the silent era in the 1930s based on the most well-known and popular Russian literary works in Japan during this period: Leo Tolstoy's novel *Resurrection* (1899), his play *The Living Corpse* (1911), and Gorky's play *The Lower Depths* (1902). In what follows, I discuss the process by which the filmmakers adapted these literary works, describing how the historical-social context influenced the director's adaptation process.

⁴ In 1909, Osanai Kaoru founded the theater company *Jiyū Gekijō* (Free Theater). His first production, Ibsen's play *John Gabriel Borkman* (1896), which premiered on November 27, 1909, is considered by scholars the origin of *Shingeki*. The following decade saw the foundation of several small theater companies dedicated to staging new drama, both foreign and Japanese.

Russian Literature Adaptations in Early Japanese Film: From *Shingeki* Theaters to the Screen

Following the restoration of imperial power in 1867, Japan ended more than two hundred years of cultural isolation. In addition to opening its doors to the West for trade, Japan was eager to learn languages, social sciences, literature, and other scientific disciplines from the West. The growing curiosity and interest in Western culture are manifested in the large number of translations of literary and philosophical works that were made during the Meiji Era (1868-1912). Throughout the 1870s, a wide range of complete or partial translations of Western books was published, often serially in newspapers and magazines (Beasley, 2013: 89). At first, English and American literature was the most translated, although subsequently French and Russian literature become fashionable.

The translation of Russian literature began in Japan during the Meiji era of the 1880s, resulting from the growing interest in Western European culture. Russian literature is considered as one of the main sources of influence in the evolution of modern Japanese literature (Numano, 2013: 149). The first Russian literary work translated was Alexander Pushkin's (1799-1837) novel *Kapitanskaya dochka* (*The Captain's Daughter*, 1836). The story was translated from an English version and published in Japan in 1883 with the title *A Diary of the Butterfly Meditating over a Flower's Souls: Astonishing News from Russia* (Ronen, 2003: 177). Soon after the publication of Pushkin's novel, works by other prominent Russian writers such as Leo Tolstoy, Ivan Turgenev (1818-1883), Fyodor Dostoevsky (1821-1881), Nikolai Gogol (1809-1852), and Maxim Gorky were also translated into Japanese, most of them from English versions.

Tolstoy became the most influential writer in Japan's literary circles (Fukuyasu, 2015: 58). The scope of his popularity in Japan can be seen in that between 1916 and 1919 a journal dedicated entirely to studies of Tolstoy's works was published and, by 1925, around 250 different translations of Tolstoy's short stories, plays, and novels had been published (Mochizuko, 1995: 19). The first Tolstoy novel to appear in Japan was *Voyna i mir* (*War and Peace*, 1869) in an abridged version of the story translated directly from Russian. This version was published in 1886. A complete and accurate translation of the novel was published in four volumes several decades later, in 1914. Another Tolstoy work, *Voskreseniye* (*Resurrection*, 1899), was translated directly from Russian into Japanese in

1905. The translation of this novel was serialized in the newspaper *Nippon* and subsequently published in two volumes in 1908 and in 1910 (Fukuyasu, 2015: 60).

The first successful Japanese film adaptation of a Russian literary work was Kiyomatsu Hosoyama's (1888-1941) 1914 short movie *Kachūsha* (Katyusha), based on a dramatization of Tolstoy's novel *Resurrection*. The novel *Resurrection* is a story of redemption, specifically one experienced by the protagonist Prince Nekhludoff, who feels guilty for the unfortunate situation suffered by Katerina Máslova, better known as Katyusha, who worked as a servant in the house of Nekhludoff's aunt. During a visit to his aunt, when he was a young soldier on his way to the warfront to fight the Turkish army, Nekhludoff seduces and then abandons Katyusha. As a result, she has no option but to become a prostitute. Years later, the young woman was falsely accused and unjustly imprisoned for a crime she did not commit. The Prince feels responsible for her unfortunate fate, as well as for her imprisonment, since she has been accused due to a bureaucratic error of the people's jury, of which Nekhludoff himself was a member. For this reason, the Prince feels obliged to free her from prison. He is even willing to marry her and accompany her to her exile in Siberia.

In Japan, Tolstoy's story was adapted to the theater and performed on stage in 1914 by a *Shingeki* group called *Geijutsuza* (The arts theatre), founded in 1913 by the writer and critic Hōgetsu Shimamura (1871-1918) and the actress Sumako Matsui (1886-1919). It rapidly became a popular success of a *Shingeki* play (Kano, 2001: 211). The scope of its extraordinary achievement can be seen in the fact that the *Geijutsuza* troupe performed the play 444 times—not only in Tokyo, but in cities all over the country and abroad—in places such as Taiwan, Korea, Manchuria, and Vladivostok (Yamamoto, 1994: 29).

Hosoyama's film, of 39 minutes, produced by Nikkatsu, premiered on October 31, 1914.⁵ The film showed the influence of *Shingeki* theater traits, especially in the acting technique inspired by Konstantin Stanislavski (1863-1938).⁶ However, though the director tried to create a realistic atmosphere by keeping the original names of the characters and by using Russian costumes and settings (see Figure 1),

⁵ Nikkatsu Company (abbreviation of the Nippon Katsudoshashin Company) was founded in 1912. By 1914, it was producing an average of 14 films a month, and thus was the leader of film production in Japan. Also, in the 1910s, it dominated the film industry in the importation and screening of foreign films.

⁶ The Stanislavski method was introduced in Japan in 1913 by the *Shingeki* theater director Osanai Kaoru, who had previously traveled to Russia and met Stanislavski in person.

Figure 1

Still from Hosoyama's Kachūsha



Note: Left: the *oyama* Tachibana Teijirō (1893-1918) playing the role of Katyusha. Right: Sekine Tappatsu (1888-1928) playing Prince Nekhludoff. Notice the actors wear Russian-style clothes and hairstyles. Nekhludoff's wearing a uniform suggests that the film included the scene in which during a visit to his aunt's, on his way to the war against the Turkish, he “seduces” Katyusha. © Public domain.

it was still staged using traditional Kabuki conventions such as *oyama* impersonators (male actors playing female roles).⁷ It is not known what scenes of the novel were included in the film. However, it is possible to discern, since the only extant still of the movie shows the protagonist Nekhludoff wearing a Russian military uniform, that the film included the key scene in which, during a visit to his aunt's house on his way to the war against the Turks, he takes advantage of Katyusha.

Due to the popularity of the film, in 1915 Kiyomatsu Hosoyama filmed two more shorts, also based on parts of the *Shingeki* adaptation of Tolstoy's work *Nochi no*

⁷ *Oyama* actors, also known as *onnagata*, performed the female roles in Kabuki starting in 1629, when the Shogunate issued a decree prohibiting all women on the stage. The reason was that the authorities considered women acting as having a negative effect on public morals.

Kachūsha (Katyusha afterwards), which ran 40 minutes, and *Kachūsha zoku zoku hen* (Katyusha, part three), which was 55 minutes long. These sequels were released in January and October respectively. Also in 1915, Hosoyama made the film *Shikan no musume* (The officer's daughter), a 30-minute short based on Alexander Pushkin's *The Captain's Daughter*. There is no extant review or still of these films, so it is not possible to make categorical statements about the degree of realism produced or compare them with the literary work. However, considering the still of *Kachūsha* and the influence of *Shingeki* theater on the film industry at the time, it may be inferred that the director also tried in these adaptations to reproduce the plot of the stories and the cultural context of the works by recreating a Russian-like *mise-en-scène*.

The success of Hosoyama's adaptation of Tolstoy's *Resurrection* stimulated the Nikkatsu Company to produce more adaptations of Russian literature during the 1910s. New adaptations, inspired by Western screen-acting techniques, were directed by Tanaka Eizō (1886-1968). He is considered an important figure in Japanese film history for his innovative technique and his contribution to the modernization of cinema, although he also followed traditional Japanese theatrical conventions—such as the use of female impersonators (Jacoby, 2008: 301). Tanaka directed three films based on Russian works that had been staged in *Shingeki* theater. *Sakura no sono* (*The Cherry Orchard*), an adaptation of Anton Chekhov's 1904 play, was released in April 1918. Just one month later, in May 1918, an adaptation of Tolstoy's play *Ikeru shikabane* (*The Living Corpse*) premiered in Japan. *The Living Corpse* was published in Russia in 1911, and a translation from Russian to Japanese was first published in Japan in 1913. Subsequently, in 1919, Tanaka filmed a new version of Tolstoy's *Resurrection* titled in Japanese as *Fukkatsu (Kachūsha)* (Resurrection [Katyusha]). The film was released in Japanese theatres in February 1919.

The Living Corpse, first published in Russia in 1911, is believed to be based on a real-life story that was widely known to both Tolstoy and Moscow society (Wachtel, 1992: 262). The play revolves around the relationship of three characters: Fedya Protasov, a kindhearted but squandering aristocrat; Liza, his wife; and Victor Karenin, who is a friend of both. Since Fedya is obsessed with the belief that Liza has always loved Victor, instead of committing suicide he disappears from his life, feigning death, to leave them alone. Fedya's plan is successful. Everybody believes his death and Liza marries Victor. Unfortunately for all, Fedya's identity is discovered

after he explains his story while drunk in a tavern. Artemyev, a rascal costumer, listens to the conversation and proposes to Fedya that together they blackmail Liza and Karenin. Fedya refuses, so Artemyev denounces him to the police in revenge. Victor and Liza are brought to trial, both accused of bigamy and as accomplices to fraud. Fedya, aware that the judge will annul Liza's second marriage and will probably condemn them both to deportation to Siberia and realizing that the only way to save Liza and Victor's relationship is by committing a true suicide, shoots himself in the court.

The film adaptation of the play *Ikeru shikabane* had a profound impact on Japanese society at the time and became very popular. The scope of its success can be seen in the attention it received from the magazine *Katsudō no sekai* (June 1918)—which included a 15-page review of the movie by an unknown reviewer—and in the number of copies of the film that existed at the time. Five copies of the film were distributed to theaters, when the norm at the time was to make one or two prints (Gerow, 2001: 6). Probably its popularity was partly due to the innovative cinematic techniques Tanaka used in the movie. He filmed a larger number of shots, introduced some dialogic titles, and attempted to use a more realistic style by reproducing Russian settings, making the cast acting less stilted and shooting outdoors.

Tanaka aimed to adhere to the plot and to create, similar to Hosoyama, a distinctive Russian *mise-en-scène* (see Figure 2). This attempt is praised in a critique written by an unknown reviewer that was published in the newspaper *Yomiuri Shinbun*. The critic stresses the closeness of the movie to the original play, mentioning that it retains the message, and emphasizing the sense of realism given by the costumes and the use of Russian-style objects and furniture (“*Ikeru shikabane*”, 1918b). Furthermore, the reviewer remarks on the effort of the actors in imitating Western foreign behaviors; however, the reviewer criticizes the actors for being, despite their efforts, “too Japanese” in their acting: facial expressions are not expressive enough, their movements are slow, the male impersonators awkward, and the use of Japanese-style make-up too distracting. For this critic, these vestiges of the Kabuki and *Shinpa* acting styles minimize the overall realism of the film:⁸

⁸ The *Shinpa* (new school) theater emerged in the 1880s as a replacement for kabuki, whose themes and style did not allow for the representation of the concerns of modern Japan. With the arrival of cinema, many *Shinpa* theater works were adapted to the screen, giving rise to the *Shinpa Daihigeki* (*Shinpa* melodrama) genre. Both *Shinpa* theater works and films shared some characteristics of kabuki theater, such as mannerisms in acting.

The costumes and instruments were not chosen at random but with a lot of consideration. Furthermore, actors were also trying to behave like foreigners as much as they could. [...] Throughout the film, messages and concepts were represented well, and the way it was filmed was skillful, too. [...] However, lack of facial expression and sluggish behavior as typical deficits among Japanese people, and awkwardness of men playing the roles of women sometimes gave unsatisfying impressions. In addition, those putting Japanese style make-up on themselves and those wearing a wig overtly were very distracting. (“Ikeru shikabane”, 1918b: 6)

The detailed description of the film published in *Katsudō no sekai* (June 1918) includes the dialogic titles of the movie and the lyrics of three songs that do not appear in Tolstoy’s play. These songs were played in the theatrical version staged by the *Geijutsuza* troupe in 1914, but also in the most important movie theaters in Tokyo. The summary of the plot indicates that it was divided into five parts, each one corresponding to the five acts of the play. The action of the film was still set in Russia, and the names of the roles were the same as in the literary work, though names were phonetically adapted to facilitate Japanese pronunciation. The movie reproduced the main events and maintained almost all the characters of the play’s plot, although act six, in which Fedya, Liza, and Kalenin testify in the court, was omitted. Thus, the denouement described in the final act differs from the one depicted in the movie: Artemyev figures out where Liza and Karenin live and goes to their home to tell them the truth about Fedya’s false death and threatens them to give him money. Nevertheless, before Artemyev finishes saying all this, Fedya appears and shoots him dead without saying a word. Next Fedya points the pistol to his own temple and shoots himself, falling to the ground.

In *Fukkatsu* (*Kachūsha*), Tanaka’s adaptation of Tolstoy’s *Resurrection*, the director also recreated a Russian *mise-en-scène*. The review of the film published in the magazine *Katsudō gaho* (April 1919) shows that the account of the origin of Katyusha’s decline is the same as appears in Tolstoy’s novel (“Fukkatsu (*Kachūsha*)”, 1919a). The plot’s explanation focuses only on a description of one scene narrated in chapter 17 in the first part of the novel, in which Nekhludoff seduces Katyusha. Besides the description of how Nekhludoff finally manages to enter Katyusha’s room, the article highlights the fact that Nekhludoff, as in the novel, does not regret having

Figure 2

Stills from Ikeru shikabane published in the magazine Katsudō no sekai



Note: Top: indoor scene in which the *mise-en-scène* recreates a Russian-style room. Bottom: outdoor scene with Fedya, played by Kaichi Yamamoto (1877-1939), and Liza (right), played by the *oyama* Teinosuke Kinugasa (1896-1982) playing. Note that the actors wear Western-style clothes and that the scene is shot outdoors, which was one of the innovative cinematic techniques used by Tanaka. Kinugasa would become a film director when actresses started to play female roles. His more successful work as a director was the experimental film *Kurutta ippēji* (A Page of Madness, 1926). Source: “Ikeru shikabane” (1918a: 30).

taken advantage of her feelings, and that he has no intention of going any further in their relationship, which leads to Katyusha’s undoing. The summary and critique of Tanaka’s film does not allow one to make categorical assertions about what scenes were included, or which ones were omitted. However, the film’s extant stills show that Tanaka shot scenes that are crucial to the development of the novel’s plot, such as the imprisonment of Katyusha and her relationship with other prisoners, Nekhludoff visiting her in the jail, and their march to Siberia (see Figure 3). Moreover, the film’s

credits show that the main characters were retained, with their names modified or adjusted to fit Japanese pronunciation. The fact that these characters appeared in the film show that it is likely the movie included crucial scenes of the novel that allow the plot to evolve. However, this adaptation omitted a considerable number of secondary characters depicted in the novel that criticize and condemn various aspects of Russian society, including the upper classes, the criminal justice system, the peasants' misery, and the Orthodox Church.

Figure 3

Stills published in Katsudō no sekai (March 1919)



Note: Bottom: Nekhludoff visits Katyusha in prison and gives her money. Top: Still from the scene in which Nekhludoff and Katyusha, along with other prisoners, march to Siberia. *Source:* “Fukkatsu (Kachusha)” (1919b: 32)

Setting the stories in the Japanese cultural context: Russian literature adaptations of the 1920s and 1930s

The first film based on a Western literary work, made following a non-theatrical film style and adapting the story to the Japanese cultural context, was *Rojō no reikon* (*Souls on the Road*, 1921). The film was directed by Murata Minoru (1894-1937) in cooperation with *Shingeki* theater director and writer Osanai Kaoru. *Rojō no reikon*, produced by Shochiku Kinema, is considered “the picture which for many marks the true beginning of the Japanese cinema” (Richie, 2012: 12). It was filmed entirely on location, presenting a new and innovative aesthetic and an atmosphere that reflected the mood of the characters. Murata’s film was one of the first movies to use actresses instead of female impersonators, to show poor people as main characters, and to employ the technique of flashbacks to sustain the action. The movie was inspired by D. W. Griffith’s (1875-1947) *Intolerance* (1916), a film that depicted several parallel stories unified under a single theme. Similar to Griffith’s style, Murata developed in his film two parallel stories, attempting social criticism and the Japanese aesthetic of *mono-no-aware*, a characteristic mournful reflection on the sadness of life (Klinowski & Garbicz, 2012: 525).

One of the stories was based on the translation by Mori Ōgai (1862-1922) of Wilhelm’s Schmidtbonn (1876-1952) play *Mutter Landstrasse* (*Children on the Street*, 1901). The other story was based on Gorky’s play *Na dne* (*The Lower Depths*, 1902). *The Lower Depths* became very popular in Russia, with 14 editions published by 1903 due to its success. In Japan, the play had been successfully presented on the stage by Osanai Kaoru in 1913, a performance in which he applied Stanislavski’s acting method for the first time in Japan (Nakayama, 2017: 197). The play portrays the arrival of a pilgrim named Luka at a lodging house where the down-and-out and marginalized reside—a thief, a gambler, an ex-aristocrat, an alcoholic ex-actor, and a prostitute, among other dehumanized characters. For different reasons, all of them have met misfortune and are trapped in poverty, unable to get out. In Murata’s film, however, none of the main events nor the characters portrayed in the original play appears. Actually, the plot of the story of the two ex-convicts narrated in *Rojō no reikon* is based on a short account that is explained in the third act by Luka, to a young girl called Natasha to exemplify his philosophy of life and his ideas about the need for mankind to be merciful. Luka recalls that he worked as a warden and caught two

vagabonds, Stepan and Yakoff, trying to enter the villa he was guarding. He forced them, as a punishment, to flog each other, at which point they tell him they were just looking for something to eat because they were starving. Luka feels pity and gives them food and shelter for three months. The story depicted in Murata's film is very similar to Luka's tale: two wanderers, Tsurikichi and Kanezo, are caught by a guard while trying to enter a house, but instead of being handed over to the authorities, they received help and mercy. Nevertheless, there are some remarkable differences. Luka's encounter with the thieves is set near Tomsk, in an estate situated in a lonely forest where he and the wanderers spend the winter together. In the movie, the action is set in a wealthy family's villa in a rural Japanese town. In contrast to the play, the watchman is not alone in the house. The owner's family is there, busy preparing for a Christmas celebration.⁹ It is Yoko, the owner's daughter who, after seeing discreetly how the guard made Tsurikichi and Kanezo whip each other, intercedes, and invites them to spend Christmas Eve with her family and servants. The wanderers leave the house the next morning—not three months later, like Stepan and Yakoff—after having received new clothes and provisions for their trip.

The most significant difference between Luka's narration and the play is the status of the wanderers. Luka explains that Stepan and Yakoff were armed fugitives who had recently escaped from a Siberian prison camp. In the picture, the vagabonds are free men, ex-convicts who have recently been released from jail. The change in the characters' condition—from armed fugitives to liberated men—apparently unimportant, was necessary to conform with the film policies. According to the censorship regulations established in 1912 after the so-called Zigomar incident and the regulations for the control of motion pictures issued by the Tokyo Metropolitan Police in 1917, the film could have been banned if it had presented the wanderers as runaways instead of ex-convicts.¹⁰ These norms stated that no screening permission should be given to

⁹ Although Christianity was a minority religion in Japan, in the last decades of the 19th century Christmas became very popular in Japan especially in the big cities and among the urban middle classes. By 1900, it was common to decorate shops and some commercial streets, to see images of Santa Claus, and send Christmas cards. By the 1920s, Christmas celebrations spread to the lower classes and rural regions.

¹⁰ *Zigomar, le roi des voleurs* (Zigomar, King of Thieves, 1911) was a French film directed by Victorin-Hippolyte Jasset, based on the novel by Léon Sazie. The movie, which depicts the adventures of a criminal mastermind, was released in Japan the same year with the title *Jigoma*, attracting crowds of spectators. This impressive commercial success motivated Japanese studios to produce Zigomar imitations such as *Nihon Jigoma* (Japanese Zigoma, 1912) or *Shin Jigoma daitantei* (New great detective Zigomar, 1912). Many bureaucrats and educators considered that these films

films that, among other restrictions, present elements that tend to support lawbreakers or make criminal activity appear attractive (Makino, 2001: 65). Thus, depicting in a film two fugitives who have broken the law and who receive compassion and shelter from well positioned and reputed citizens could be interpreted as an apology for delinquency and amount to an attack on social stability.

In this way, the movie does not contain the political message of Gorky’s original drama, which denounces social inequality and injustice, and illustrates the need for social change. Although the film claims solidarity among humankind and introduces the idea that it is necessary to be merciful and compassionate towards one’s fellow humans, it does not question the social and economic order, or the usefulness of the prison system, as Luka does. Nevertheless, the picture—as it appears in the play in Luka’s account—underscores the fact that a lack of mercy can lead to deplorable social consequences. Luka mentions this idea, asserting that if he had not been compassionate, he could have been killed by the wanderers and, subsequently, they could be sentenced to prison again. In the film, this thought is highlighted at the end, when Yoko sees the wanderers resuming their journey. Intertitles and images of them killing the guard, as well as a flash-forward to them in prison, represents what Yoko imagines about what could happen if she had not felt sorry for the ex-convicts. The film ends emphasizing the message of the need for mankind to be merciful by adding intertitles with a quotation from the play: “Someone has to be kind, girl—someone must pity people! Christ pitied everybody—and he said to us: ‘Go and do likewise!’ However, we refuse to do so.” It is difficult to assert if the audience could understand the reference to Christ, but it is likely they could grasp the message of generosity and goodwill in a moment in which an individualistic ethos grew among the urban middle class, a fact that became a fixation in Japanese intellectual discourse of the Taishō era.

In 1935, the last silent film based on a Russian literary work was released.¹¹ This was *Fukkatsu* (Resurrection), directed by Misao Yoshimura (1905-1945), a new adaptation of Tolstoy’s novel *Resurrection*. In Yoshimura’s version, in contrast to Hosoyama’s

were inspiring the audience to commit crimes imitating what they had seen in the cinema. To avoid such negative influences that they thought could threaten the social order, many called on the authorities to restrict or ban the screening of this type of film.

11 Although the first Japanese talkie entitled *Madamu to nyōbō* (The Neighbor’s Wife and Mine) was directed in 1931 by Heinosuke Gosho (1902-1981), silent movies were still made until the end of the decade.

and Tanaka's adaptations, the novel was transferred to the Japanese cultural context, presenting remarkable differences to the novel. According to the summary published in the magazine *Kinema junpō* (February 1935), the film focused on the decline in the protagonist, named Otsuya, combining elements of the "fallen woman" melodrama and the "maternal melodrama," both common in Japanese cinema ("Fukkatsu", 1935).

The film's plot revolves around Otsuya, a beautiful young woman living in a farm owned by Kazuhiro, the aunt of Murase, a wealthy First Lieutenant. While he is on leave visiting his aunt, he has an affair with Otsuya, leaving her pregnant. When the family finds out about her pregnancy, she must run away, and she stays at the house of an old man called Yasaku. However, she must leave her new home, owing to spiteful gossip, and moves to Tokyo, where she gives birth. Due to her miserable living conditions, she is obliged to work as a prostitute with the aim of supporting her baby. Despite all Otsuya's sacrifices, the baby dies, leaving her dejected. Moreover, soon after, by some misfortune, she is accused of a murder. At this point, Kazuhiro reads in a newspaper of Otsuya's fall and the charge against her. Feeling guilty and advised by a friend, Kazuhiro comes to her aid and saves her from being unjustly condemned.

Tolstoy uses the character of Katyusha as an archetype of the fallen woman to elaborate a critique of Russian society and the judicial system, which Nekhludoff defines as conceived just to benefit the upper class and its interests. However, in this picture there is neither social nor political criticism. Yoshimura portrays Otsuya as a victim of hard times and as a self-sacrificing mother, who—in contrast to Katyusha—does not abandon her baby and is obliged to work as a prostitute to support him. Her poverty-stricken status and subsequent fall into prostitution is presented as a natural progression, not uncommon among single poor women from rural and urban areas at that time. Otsuya, as in the case of other underprivileged females in Japan, is pushed into prostitution. Indeed, from the 1930s until the end of the war, prostitution in Japan was boosted by the government, which also oversaw the sale of thousands of girls to brothels overseas; these were known as *karayuki san*, doomed to satisfy the sexual appetites of Japanese troops and expatriates (Robertson, 1999: 784-785). In contrast, Lieutenant Kazuhiro is presented as an archetypical army officer who rescues Otsuya from a miserable life and an unpromising future in prison when he learns of her misfortunes. Thus, none of the episodes narrated in the novel after Katyusha's sentence are depicted. These omitted episodes were used by Tolstoy to

denounce what he considered endemic injustice in Russian society: the elites and the system of private property ownership that condemned peasants to a life of misery. The portrayal of characters and omission of key narrative events in the film can be understood through its socio-political and ideological context.

From the very first years of the arrival of cinema in Japan (1896), censorship imposed regulations and norms on the Japanese film industry. From 1929 onward, when increasing Japanese militarism dominated Japanese people’s political and social life, the government controlled all film production. Therefore, according to Japanese government film policies it was not permitted to screen stories representing elements that could be perceived as subversive, such as portraying a dishonest officer, criticizing the legal system, depicting a trial conducted by incompetent judges, or sloppy government employees—or indeed unfair sentencing and cruel punishment—as appears in Tolstoy’s story. Displaying or insinuating the existence of political prisoners or negative judgments concerning private property could not be mentioned at a time in which totalitarian and extreme right-wing political ideologies were emerging in Japan and in the world.

Conclusion

Russian literature began to be adapted in Japanese filmmaking in the 1910s. The first adaptations were based on plays that had previously been staged in *Shingeki* theaters. Filmmakers aimed for realism and sought to recreate the cultural atmosphere of the original works through staging and acting styles. However, the adaptations of Russian works in the 1920s followed European and American filming and narrative techniques and underwent intertextual and cross-cultural processes. Directors transformed the works to fit the Japanese context, modifying the storylines and omitting or adding characters and events. As in the case of films such as Murata’s *Rojō no reikon* or Yoshimura’s *Fukkatsu*, the socio-political background and censorship influenced the intertextual transformation of the literary works from the Russian cultural context to the Japanese, determining the changes in setting and style and the levels of signification.

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