

# Time and Memory in the Moving Image: Yubari on Film

Aya OGAWARA

## Introduction

In August 2010, a film workshop was held in Yubari, a ‘remote’ city located at a corner of Japan’s most northern region Hokkaido. The theme of the workshop, which I myself attended, was ‘Image and Memory’<sup>1</sup>. In order to examine problems concerning this theme, Yubari was chosen, because its appearance changed rapidly after its 2007 bankruptcy: we wished to record the city’s current appearance before it might undergo any further change. The workshop consisted of three stages: recording the current appearance of Yubari, editing the recorded film together with clips from old promotional films, and showing the edited work to the citizens of Yubari. Through this, we aimed to elicit their memories. Significantly, the film produced in our workshop unconsciously represented preconceived notions of what Yubari is and used to be, which I will discuss later.<sup>2</sup>

In this paper, I will investigate how the moving image can affect memories. I will firstly analyze the representation of Yubari in the commercially successful Japanese film *Shiawase no kiroi hankachi*, or *The Yellow Handkerchief*, directed by Yoji Yamada in 1977. I will then briefly consider how our workshop film shows similar characteristics to Yamada’s film, and discuss how an established narrative influences our memories. Finally, I will seek the possibility of the moving image as a creative memory, referring to Damian Sutton’s book *Photography, Cinema, Memory: The Crystal Image of Time*. Sutton distinguishes memories and images into two types, allowing us to consider how we can become free from clichéd images and move toward a new type of image that calls up a personal memory. While Sutton relates the new type of memory more to photographic images, I will try to relate his argument to cinema.

## 1. Yubari as represented in *The Yellow Handkerchief* and in the workshop film

### 1-1. Yubari, a city outside the Japan of the boom years

The story of *The Yellow Handkerchief* is as follows: Kinya, a young man disappointed in love, quits his job and drives from Tokyo to Hokkaido. There he meets a broken-hearted girl Akemi and a man who has just come out of prison, Yuichi. The three tour around Hokkaido and head for Yubari, the city where Yuichi's wife lives. Once he asked his wife to display a yellow handkerchief on the pole in the yard if she would still love him. Then they find dozens of yellow handkerchiefs waving in the sky, and Kinya and Akemi fall in love.

Here, each of the characters finds solace in Yubari—Yuichi in particular. He confesses that in his twenties he had been a roughneck in Kyushu, the southern part of Japan, but that he now made a firm resolution to live honestly and came to Yubari as a miner, and here found a true love. Although he again committed a crime, his wife continued to love him and now welcomes his return home. Yubari is thus represented as a place where anyone, even a troubled youth, is welcome and is able to regain his or her lost love and humanity.

This idealized image of Yubari is represented visually through the landscape of Hokkaido and its rich nature. The protagonists drive alongside the ocean, the fields, and the mountains. Yuichi and his wife's home is situated within this lush environment. In contrast to the bleak image of Tokyo at the beginning of the film, this landscape's effect is embracing.

Furthermore, Yubari represents the elderly generation and the working class. For example, Yuichi and his wife live in a small room in one of the miners' old apartments, and the hospital they visit has antiquated instruments. The town looks as though it exists outside the Japan of the boom years (1955-74). This image of Yubari is based on real historical facts. The city once prospered due to the coal mining, but slowly declined with the advent of electricity in the 1950's. Although the city was home to some 120,000 people at its peak, it was losing its population to less than its half in 1976, the time when the film was made. Yubari became an old town, having been left outside the rapid economic growth of Japan<sup>3</sup>. The film reflects the reality in its story and image.

### 1-2. Yubari as a cliché of "good old Japan"

The film's representation of a previous way of life in Yubari relates to several codes outside the film. To begin with, it is related to Yuichi's performer, Ken Takakura, a star of Japanese cinema. He has been popular since the beginning of the 1960's, particularly for his portrayal of yakuza characters. Typically, he played a man of few words, with a stern face, aimlessly wandering the streets, violent, but always following a code of honor and humanity. When the yakuza genre fell out of fashion in the 1970's, *The Yellow Handkerchief* made use of Takakura's past onscreen persona for Yuichi's character<sup>4</sup>. In addition, the conjugal love between Yuichi and

his wife follow the codified logic of the yakuza's honor system. She offers him loyalty, despite the time he spent in prison. Thus, the film's representation of Yubari reflects Takakura's established screen persona—that of a “good old Japanese” man who lives by a strict ethical code.

Furthermore, this idealized vision of Yubari belonging to “good old Japan” follows the established style of its director Yamada. He famously directed a series of films, *Otoko wa tsuraiyo*, or *It's Tough Being a Man*. They were so popular that 48 films were made between 1969 and 1997, until the leading performer passed away. They follow the life and loves of a street merchant, Torajiro. He has much in common with Yuichi in *The Yellow Handkerchief*: both follow the yakuza's code—aimless wanderers and men of honor and humanity<sup>5</sup>. Moreover, they both have women who welcome their return: Yuichi's wife and Torajiro's sister, performed by the same actress Chieko Baisho.

The two films also share similarities in the way home is represented. In the Torajiro series, his home is in Shibamata, a traditional working class neighborhood in Tokyo, left behind Japan's rapid economic growth. Shibamata is shown as not wealthy, but full of humanity and love between family members, neighbors and couples<sup>6</sup>. It is represented as a utopia<sup>7</sup>—much like Yubari in *The Yellow Handkerchief*.

Yamada's 1977 film is thus informed by sentimental notions of an idyllic countryside, features an iconic star, and maintains the tropes of the director's preferred genre. As a result, Yubari is rendered as a cliché of “good old Japan”. It stands to reason, therefore, that the film could have been made in another location, possibly another coal mining town, with a similar result.

### 1-3. Cliché as time capsule

A cliché is a preconceived, fixed idea of a thing, which remains the same. Within a cliché, things stop changing. This can be seen in the way Yubari is represented in *The Yellow Handkerchief*. For example, in the closing scene, the three protagonists head for Yuichi's home to see if his wife would hang a yellow handkerchief on the pole, guessing Yubari and its inhabitants have changed. It is important for them that Yubari in the present corresponds with their notion of what it was in the past. To emphasize the unchanging scenery, the film offers a shot of Yuichi's house from the same angle as when it was shown in the earlier flashback scene.

In the flashbacks, it looks as if Yuichi picks up some past episodes from his memory and looks them back. Here, memory is like a time capsule in which the past remains as it was. As in the case with a cliché, things cease to change in his memory.

### 1-4. Yubari in the workshop film: cliché, established narrative, and memory

Like *The Yellow Handkerchief*, our workshop film could not evade clichéd views of Yubari. Before considering the film, let us see a background of the city. Yubari tried to establish itself as a tourist center in 1977. It did not succeed, however, and eventually went bankrupt in 2007. Its

population has now decreased to less than 10 percent of its peak. With closed schools, empty houses, and derelict commercial facilities, it may be fair to say that Yubari is a shadow of its former self.

Given this Yubari's historical situation, we tried to record evidence of what had happened to Yubari, and edited what we shot with clips from old promotional films. In doing so, we tied our representation of Yubari to the already established narrative—an antagonism between ruination in the present and prosperity in the past. We made the images of Yubari conform to the cliché, resulting in telling the city's well-known story. Therefore, our notions of time and memory were no different to *The Yellow Handkerchief*: the past remains the same as when it occurred, and we look it back from the present moment.

As our workshop film maintained a stereotypical attitude toward the idealized past and ruined present, the audience may have been unable to connect their own memories with Yubari on film. One's personal memory may become confused with those of filmmakers, particularly when the film tells an established story.

However, then, what kind of image can call up one's personal memory? Now let us investigate it by following Sutton.

## 2. Toward creative memory

### 2-1. Two types of memory: looking back versus a process of creation

Sutton explains memory:

... the important distinction to be made is between the backward-looking understanding of memory as made in the past and a more accurate appreciation of memory as a process in the present. This process takes recollection images as the material for a creative framing or 'fabulation'.<sup>8</sup>

Here, the two types of memory are defined as: 1) "the backward-looking understanding of memory as made in the past", and 2) an "appreciation of memory as a process in the present". Sutton posits that the two types are different in terms of time: the former delves into the past, and memories themselves remain the same as when they occurred, whilst the latter are made in the *present* moment.

'Memories made in the past' is in line with *The Yellow Handkerchief* and our workshop film. In these two films, memory is to look back on certain moments from the past. The past remains frozen in time and therefore memory is within an established narrative.

Within Sutton's second type of memory, the 'creative process in the present', the past is not the same as before. The past is working within the present moment to bring about change. It

does not remain dormant, but itself collaborates with the present to create a new narrative.

## 2-2. Established narrative and chronological time

But what is narrative? According to Sutton, narrative is “the set of events implied by story telling through the use of an established yet often arbitrary grammar”<sup>9</sup>. *The Yellow Handkerchief* uses the cinematic grammar of the flashback, which adheres to the conventions of classical narrative. In the classical cinema, according to Sutton, each image is considered as a still (photogram) and juxtaposed on a filmstrip, in order to tell an established story through a narrative based on chronological time.

The same can be said of our workshop film: the past images of prosperity are contrasted with the present images of ruination. Here, the past and the present are represented based on a chronological understanding of time. These images appear on the filmstrip, to tell an established story.

## 2-3. Creative narrative and Deleuze’s ‘crystal of time’

Contrasting with this understanding of time as chronological, Sutton, following Gilles Deleuze, refers to the ‘crystal of time’: the present belongs to perception, while at the same time it becomes the past, preserved as pure recollection. Perception draws the recollection images into the present. The present and the past coexist, and become indiscernible. Thus the present and its past ‘crystallize’. This is ‘crystal of time’, which is internal to our consciousness.

“Narrative”, Sutton says, “recounts the past as if it were a different time from the present – an *other* time – whereas this is just a virtual image that occurs (coexists) with the actual present”<sup>10</sup>. Within the ‘crystal of time’, narrative is not pre-established, but is created in relation to the present perception. The French Nouvelle Vague films can be viewed as examples of films in which the narrative rejects the classical editing techniques in favor of harsh juxtapositions, such as Godard’s ‘jump-cuts’. Here, the audience may struggle to understand the stories, confronted by the images themselves. Even clichéd images stand out from the main narrative. A new narrative can be created from the images.

## 2-4. Photography and the ‘crystal of time’

Sutton argues that chronological narratives dominate cinema because film itself is linear and thus each frame must follow another<sup>11</sup>. Sutton then considers the concept of the ‘crystal image’ in relation to photography. He gives two reasons. First, photographic time is non-chronological. It is illogical, as Roland Barthes pointed out: an object seen in a photograph exists in the present moment, whereas in reality the object existed in the past, was photographed, and now exists only in the photograph. The present and the past are split and connected illogically<sup>12</sup>.

The second reason is that photography is limited to a single frame. Sutton writes:

The photography's poverty in representing time is demonstrated through its apparent need to be attached to other frames in the filmstrip, when in fact its abundant richness is from time plunging into the photographic frame.<sup>13</sup>

Since a photograph exists within only one frame, in photography it is difficult to represent chronological time – only the moving image possesses duration. Thus, the inability of a photograph to represent time means that the audience can perceive the image for as long as he or she wants, without a frame replacing another. The audience creates a new meaning. Sutton talks of time's "richness". In the "richness" of photographic time, an already established interpretation, such as seeing a family album, can dissolve, and a new meaning can be created. Sutton thus says, "We exist in the free-rewriting time of the photograph"<sup>14</sup>.

### Conclusion: toward a creative memory in the moving image

While Sutton is persuasive, I still consider that cinema will have the image that is not tamed into a narrative. There is a moment in cinema when an image is outstanding itself, away from a film's story. The audience will be attracted by the image itself, perceives it well, and then creates a new narrative inside the image.

One image from our workshop film illustrates this point. It shows a lush landscape, which will disappear beneath the waters of a dam in the near future. The film does not make this explicit, however. There are no subtitles, nor is there any voice over. The image appears suddenly. This seeming random act can work to focus the audience's attention on the landscape and provoke questions. It encourages them to create their own narrative thread. Any preconceived notion of Yubari being the site of an economic collapse disappears in this moment. The audience perceives the contents of the frame in relation to their own past experience. Here, a new narrative is created on the image, and memory becomes creative.

#### Notes

- 1 A workshop directed by Professor Hisamitsu Mizushima in the Department of Media Studies in Tokai University.
- 2 However, the citizens reacted kindly and warmly. For example, one of them, a lady over 80 years old, told us about the school shown in the film.
- 3 About Yubari's downturn and attempt to reform, see Koyata Washida, *Yubari mondai (The Problems in Yubari)*, Shodensha, 2007.
- 4 About Takakura's portrayal in *The Yellow Handkerchief*, see Tadao Sato, *Eiga wo kangaeru (Thought on Cinema)*, Shufunotomoshisha, 1991, pp. 11-12.
- 5 About *Otoko wa tsuraiyo* as a yakuza film, see Risaku Kiridoshi, *Yamada Yoji no <sekai> –genbukei wo otte (The <World> of Yoji Yamada –The Vision)*, Chikumashobo, 2004, pp. 115-121.

Furthermore, Yamada says that he esteems for Japanese social rules of 'giri ninjo (moral obligation and humanity)': see Yoji Yamada, Kai Kimura and others, *Nihonjin to ningen kankei (Japanese and Their*

*Relationships*), Ikkosha, 1979, pp. 10-18.

- 6 About Shibamata as 'home in Tokyo', see Eshun Hamaguchi and Satoru Kaneko, *Tora-san to nihonjin: Eiga Otoko wa tsuraiyo no shakai shinri (Torajiro and the Japanese: Social Psychology of It's Tough Being a Man)*, Chisenshokan, 2005, pp. 53-56.
- 7 About Shibamata as utopia, see Tadao Sato, *Tokyo to iu shuyaku: Eiga no naka no Edo Tokyo (Tokyo the Hero: Edo Tokyo in the Films)*, Kodansha, 1985, pp. 152-154.
- 8 Damian Sutton, Photography, *Cinema, Memory—The Crystal Image of Time*, University of Minnesota Press, 2009, p. 211.
- 9 Sutton, op. cit., p. 143.
- 10 Sutton, op. cit., p. 147.
- 11 Sutton, op. cit., p. 145.
- 12 Sutton, op. cit., pp. 59-60.
- 13 Sutton, op. cit., p. 234.
- 14 Sutton, op. cit., p. 157.



## 映画映像における時間と記憶：夕張の映像から

小河原あや

2010年夏の北海道夕張市にて、映像と記憶に関するワークショップが行われた。このワークショップは、財政破綻以来変わりつつあるこの街の現在の様子を記録し、それを過去の夕張市の映像と共に編集して、そうしてできた作品を住民に見てもらうことによって、映画映像をきっかけに住民の記憶を呼び起こすことを目的とした。しかし、夕張市の歴史的状況を念頭に入れたこのワークショップ映画は、繁栄した過去／荒廃しつつある現在という紋切り型、既成のナラティブに当てはめてこの街を表象する結果となり、個人的な記憶を呼び起こすのは難しかったと考えられる。

夕張についての紋切り型の表象、既成のナラティブは、映画『幸福の黄色いハンカチ』（山田洋次監督、1977年）に顕著である。この映画の中で夕張は、高度経済成長に取り残された「古き良き日本」の紋切り型で表象されている。またこの映画はフラッシュバックの技法を用いて登場人物の過去の回想を表すのだが、これは過去を、紋切り型と同様に、それが起った時の状態のまま変化しないもの、事物が或る時点の状態にとどまっているものとして理解し、記憶を、過去の振り返りとして表している。このような記憶理解は、過去の夕張を紋切り型、既成のナラティブに当てはめて表した我々のワークショップ映画に共通する。

ダミアン・サットン著 *Photography, Cinema, Memory* によれば、記憶の概念には二種類ある。一方は、過去に作られた記憶を現在の時点から振り返るといふものであり、これはクロノロジカルな時間概念に基づいている。他方は、時間を現在と過去の「結晶」とする考えに基づく「創造的記憶」、すなわち、過去が現在と協働して、この現在の瞬間に新たな記憶を創造するといふものである。

サットンによれば、映画においては、線的な上映時間枠の中で複数の映像が次々に現れるゆえにクロノロジカルな時間表象がされやすいのに対して、写真においては、事物が一つの枠内で示され、撮影された時点（過去）とそれを見る時点（現在）とが不合理に結ばれるゆえに、時間の「結晶」において記憶が創造的になる。しかし、映画においても創造的記憶は可能である。例えば、上述のワークショップ映画には、或る夕張の風景の映像が突如として説明無しに現れるときがある。このような映像は、映画の線的な時間上に成立するナラティブを拒み、映像そのものとして突出する。観客は、それを現在の瞬間に注視し、自ら新たなナラティブを創造せざるを得なくなるだろう。このとき、映画映像において創造的記憶が働くと考えられる。