

ARTICLE



## The Bedridden Script Doctor: Itami Mansaku's Scenario Reviews

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### ABSTRACT

The director and scriptwriter Itami Mansaku was a major proponent of the revisionist movement in prewar Japanese period film. However, with only a handful of his screen works surviving, Itami's reputation arises mostly from his contemporaries' accounts and his own critical writings. Caught between the restrictions imposed by a debilitating illness and government censorship, during the war years Itami strived to stay in touch with the Japanese film world by continuing to work on scripts as well as write criticism from his sickbed. This article discusses Itami's creative and critical efforts, which were to have a considerable impact on subsequent Japanese filmmakers. Particular attention is paid to examining Itami's scenario reviews, serialised in the journal *Japanese Cinema* between 1941 and 1942, where he took an actively interventionist stance quite different from what is conventionally allowed for film criticism.

### Introduction

The last decade has seen a considerable proliferation of diverse Japanese film studies that rely on hitherto under-represented sources, which are often para-textual. However, scriptwriting, both as a phase in film production and a site of reception, has not yet been granted a proper place in this ever expanding field of scholarly inquiry.<sup>1</sup> This gap is all the more striking as the work of scriptwriters has commonly been well represented in the Japanese-language scholarship, attested by a wealth of primary and secondary materials in the form of various collections of printed scenarios, (auto)biographical and critical sources. At the same time, screenwriting studies has emerged as a discipline, and scholars such as Steven Maras and Steven Price have argued strongly in favour of treating film scripts as autonomous texts to which particular reading practices can be applied.<sup>2</sup> In a recent article I looked at the social status and spatial conditions of

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<sup>1</sup>Rare exceptions include Donald Richie's *Ozu* (1974) and Joanne Bernardi's *Writing in Light: The Silent Scenario and the Japanese Pure Film Movement* (2001). Richie dedicates a whole chapter to observing how scriptwriting formed an integral part of Ozu's working method while reproducing excerpts from Ozu's notebooks and stills from films, and contrasting these with both written and printed versions of the script. Bernardi, by uncovering a discourse in various early film journals from the 1910s, argues that the emergence of the scenario was part of a larger set of innovations first proposed by the critics involved in the so-called Pure Film Movement. However, a more characteristic stance towards scriptwriting is represented by studies such as Keiko I. McDonald's *From Book to Screen: Modern Japanese Literature in Film* (2000), from which considerations on the role of the script and the scriptwriter are almost completely eschewed. Fortunately, there are indications of an impending appreciation and interest in Japanese scriptwriting in the English-language world, such as the recent publication of Hashimoto Shinobu's *Compound Cinematics* (2015) and Shindō Kaneto's *Life Is Work* (2018).

<sup>2</sup>Maras, *Screenwriting*; Price, *The Screenplay, A History of the Screenplay*.

Japanese scriptwriting as well as the formation of a wide readership for scenarios prompted by diverse publishing strategies.<sup>3</sup> The present article proposes yet another avenue for considering scriptwriting as an integral part of studying Japanese cinema, by drawing attention to the creative and critical contributions of Itami Mansaku.

Itami Mansaku (born Ikeuchi Yoshitoyo, 1900–46) is well known as one of the ‘radical’ directors of the 1930s who sought to reform *jidaigeki* (period drama) by adding social commentary and modern sensibilities as well as introducing humour and satire to the genre’s vocabulary. However, Itami’s directing career was cut short by illness and very few prints of his films are available for viewing today. Fortunately, a considerable bulk of critical writings does remain, most of it produced when he was lying in a sickbed. This article places particular attention on Itami’s engagement with scriptwriting by analysing his reviews of scenarios published in the wartime journal *Japanese Cinema*. Paradoxically, Itami’s ailing health, while preventing him from being an active filmmaker, led him to make a singular and important contribution to cinema through different means.

### Itami’s Directing Career

Itami started his career in the film industry relatively late, at the age of 27, after several unsuccessful attempts to make a living as a book illustrator and at one time running an *oden* restaurant. He wrote his first scenarios while residing in Kyoto at the house of an old school friend from his native Matsuyama, Itō Daisuke (1898–1981), who had already established his reputation as a scriptwriter and film director.<sup>4</sup> Initially, Itami was employed to perform menial tasks at the tiny and short-lived Tanizaki Jūro Production studio located in Nara. He soon moved to a newly formed independent studio, Kataoka Chiezō Production (commonly abbreviated to Chie Puro), which was built for the star-period film actor Kataoka Chiezō (1903–83). Inagaki Hiroshi (1905–80) directed Itami’s first scripts, but after only four months of apprenticeship Itami commenced directing his own films, debuting with *Adauchi ruten* (Vicissitudes of Revenge, 1928).<sup>5</sup> Itami’s former disciple and assistant director, Saeki Kiyoshi (1914–2002), gives an account of Itami as a man of letters and an intellectual, which he considered rare among film directors.<sup>6</sup> Saeki suggests that such a prompt shift from one industrial role to another in the otherwise strictly hierarchical world of Japanese film was made possible by the family-like atmosphere of a small-scale studio.<sup>7</sup>

Itami’s most celebrated films include *Kokushi musō* (Peerless Patriot, 1932) and *Chūji uridasu* (Chūji Makes a Name for Himself, 1935). The former is a satirical

<sup>3</sup>Kitsnik, ‘Scenario Writers and Scenario Readers in the Golden Age of Japanese Cinema’.

<sup>4</sup>Itō Daisuke, one of the most acclaimed prewar Japanese directors, unlike Itami and Yamanaka, had the luck of extending his illustrious career beyond the war years. Initially employed as scriptwriter at the Shōchiku Studios at its very inception in 1920, he moved to the smaller Teikoku Kinema and directed his first feature in 1924. By the time he accommodated Itami, Itō had already begun his long association with the Nikkatsu’s Kyoto Studios. Around the same time, he wrote and directed *Chūji tabi nikki* (A Diary of Chūji’s Travels, 1927), which remains one of the highlights of the period-drama genre.

<sup>5</sup>Inagaki recalls that over the years he had to step up several times to direct in place of Itami, who had fallen ill (Inagaki, *Nihon eiga no wakaki hi*, 263–64). The two continued their working relationship until the former’s untimely death, the critically acclaimed *Muhōmatsu no isshō* (The Rickshaw Man, 1943) and *Te o tsunagu kora* (Children Hand in Hand, 1948) being their final collaborations.

<sup>6</sup>Saeki, ‘Itami-san no enshutsu’, 156.

<sup>7</sup>Saeki, ‘Itami-san no enshutsu’, 159.

story about a simple peasant who assumes the name of a famous samurai and succeeds in beating the real name bearer in their final duel. The latter, Itami's first sound film (which was made after he left Chie Puro for Shinkō Kinema after a disagreement with Kataoka), presents Itami's nonsensical take on the legendary Edo-era outlaw Kunisada Chūji. The third notable film from this period, and a rare one in that its print has survived almost entirely intact, is *Akanishi Kakita* (Capricious Young Man, 1936), which starred Kataoka after the two had reconciled.<sup>8</sup> Based on a short story by Shiga Naoya (1883–1971), it depicts the life of an easy-going middle-aged samurai (actually a spy) who cares less about his duties than he does about playing a game of *shōgi* (Japanese chess) against an imaginary opponent in his lonely room, all the while indulging himself in sweets that make him suffer from perpetual stomach pains. Itami's use of biting humour to tackle serious social issues and making fun of the samurai code of honour has drawn comparisons to filmmakers such as Charlie Chaplin and René Clair.<sup>9</sup> Peter B. High has also argued that it was the influence of *shōshimin eiga* (lower-middle-class film), predominant at the time among Tokyo filmmakers, that revolutionised Kyoto-based period drama, with 'Yamanaka and Itami motivat[ing] their characters with the same needs, ambitions, and anxieties experienced by twentieth-century man'.<sup>10</sup>

After leaving Shinkō Kinema and entering another small film company, J.O. Studios, Itami was soon recruited to co-direct the first Japanese–German co-production, *Atarashiki tsuchi/Die Tochter des Samurai* (The New Earth/The Daughter of the Samurai, 1937, with Arnold Fanck).<sup>11</sup> Physically and mentally exhausted by this ill-advised collaboration, Itami's previously frail health was further compromised by an onset of tuberculosis in 1938 that effectively prohibited him from directing. His last efforts were largely considered failures in comparison with his widely celebrated earlier work. However, his final feature as director, *Kyojinden* (The Giant, 1938), could be characterised as an altogether solid and imaginative adaptation of Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables*. Among its other virtues, it featured the young Hara Setsuko (1920–2015), the star of *The New Earth*, as Chiyo (Cosette).

Among film scholars, there seems to be a certain ambivalence about considering Itami's merits as a director, especially in comparison with his contemporary Yamanaka Sadao (1909–38). For instance, Noël Burch maintains that although Itami revolutionised period drama on the content level, this success was not translated into cinematic terms as it was in Yamanaka's work.<sup>12</sup> On the other hand, in an attempt to advocate Itami's work, the critic Kitagawa Fuyuhiko devised the terms *inbun eiga* (verse film) and *sanbun eiga* (prose film) to juxtapose the styles of Yamanaka and Itami respectively.<sup>13</sup> These arguments have some grounding as Itami often preferred to sacrifice visual lyricism for plot twists and witty dialogue.

<sup>8</sup>All three films mentioned appeared high in *Kinema Junpō's* (The Movie Times) annual film critics' polls, ranking 6th, 4th and 5th respectively.

<sup>9</sup>Shindō, *Nihon shinarioshi*, 121. Itami discusses Clair's influence on his own work in the essay 'Rune Kureeru shiken', *Itami Mansaku zenshū*, vol. 2, 367–72.

<sup>10</sup>High, *The Imperial Screen*, 157.

<sup>11</sup>For detailed analyses of the circumstances of the film's production and reception, see Hansen, *The New Earth* and Haukamp, *Fräulein Hara Setsuko*.

<sup>12</sup>Burch, *To the Distant Observer*, 192.

<sup>13</sup>Kitagawa, *Junsui eigaki*, 23–26.

The sudden and tragic end to Itami's directing career combined with the loss of the celluloid prints of most of his films make it difficult to adequately assess the extent of his contributions to Japanese cinema.<sup>14</sup> We do, however, have anecdotal evidence in terms of Itami's influence on other filmmakers such as Ichikawa Kon (1915–2008), who worked for a time as his assistant, and Itami's own son, the actor and director Itami Jūzō (1933–97), described as a master of 'hectic social satire'.<sup>15</sup> Most importantly, although terminally ill, Itami continued to write scenarios as well as film criticism from his sickbed. In this capacity, Itami represents a remarkable case of a filmmaker who was articulate about the practical as well as the theoretical side of scriptwriting, an achievement rivalled in Japan only by Shindō Kaneto (1912–2012).<sup>16</sup> In the sections that follow, I will first examine how Itami's approach to scriptwriting has been characterised by Japanese film critics and then discuss his critical engagement with scenarios written by his contemporaries.

### Itami's Scriptwriting Style

Iijima Tadashi (1902–96), a prominent film critic and historian, has discussed foreign script formats available in translation in Japan since the 1920s, while delineating their influence on Japanese writers such as Yoda Yoshikata (1909–91), who was best known for his long collaboration with Mizoguchi Kenji (1898–1956), as well as Itami. Iijima claims that Itami, much like a number of other scriptwriters working during the late silent era, had initially modelled his scenarios after the example set by the French scriptwriter and director Louis Delluc (1890–1924).<sup>17</sup> Partly owing to Iijima's own efforts, Delluc was one of the most celebrated foreign film directors in prewar Japan.<sup>18</sup> Iijima contrasts Delluc's scriptwriting style with that of Carl Mayer (1894–1944) and D.W. Griffith (1875–1948) and suggests that Delluc's originality lies in omitting unnecessary technical details and assuming that any reader with previous film-

<sup>14</sup>Itami's scripts have a much better survival rate than his films: as of 2018, only six prints of substantial length are available, while scenarios have been repeatedly made available for the general readership. A volume of *Nihon shinario bungaku zenshū* (Complete Works of Japanese Scenario Literature, 1956) dedicated to Itami comprises the scenarios of *Hanabi* (Fireworks), *Chūji uridasu* (Chūji Makes a Name for Himself), *Akanishi Kakita* (Capricious Young Man), *Muhōmatsu no isshō* (The Rickshaw Man) and *Te o tsunagu kora* (Children Hand in Hand). *Itami Mansaku zenshū* (The Collected Works of Itami Mansaku, 1961, reprinted 1973) adds to these *Tenka taiheki* (Peace on Earth), *Kokushi musō* (Peerless Patriot, commonly credited to Ise no Shigetaka), *Adauchi ruten* (Vicissitudes of Revenge) and *Fushaku shinmyō* (Self-Sacrificing Dedication). *Akanishi Kakita* appears in the two scenario anthologies published as special editions of *Kinema Junpō*, *Nihon eiga daihyō shinario zenshū* (Complete Representative Scenarios of Japanese Film, 1958) and *Nihon eiga shinario koten zenshū* (Complete Classic Scenarios of Japanese Film, 1966), while *Muhōmatsu no isshō* is included in *Nihon shinario taikai* (Series of Japanese Scenarios, 1973) and most recently in *Nihon meisaku shinariosen jōkan* (Selection of Japanese Scenario Masterpieces, 2016).

<sup>15</sup>Jacoby, *A Critical Handbook*, 90.

<sup>16</sup>Shindō was a prolific scriptwriter and acclaimed director, who also penned a number of influential scriptwriting manuals as well as a history of Japanese cinema considered from the viewpoint of scriptwriting, *Nihon shinarioshi* (History of Japanese Scenario, 1989).

<sup>17</sup>Iijima, *Eiga no naka no bungaku*, 166.

<sup>18</sup>Delluc, a notable French impressionist director along with the better-known Abel Gance (1889–1981) and Jean Epstein (1897–1953), earned his place in film history as a critic and founder of early film societies (*ciné-clubs*). His collection of film scripts, *Drames de cinéma* (Film Dramas, 1923), has been identified by Iijima as the very first example of *yomu shinario* (scenario for reading) in a single-book format. Iijima attributes two more 'firsts' to Delluc: film criticism as presented in *Cinéma & Cie* (Cinema and Company, 1919) and the first book-length study on Charlie Chaplin (1921) (Iijima, *Eiga no naka no bungaku*, 167).

viewing experience would be able to fill in the gaps, something that also characterises Itami's approach to scriptwriting.<sup>19</sup>

It should be noted that Iijima does not consider Itami's scripts as blueprints for film production but as literary artefacts quite removed from their initial industrial function. At this juncture, Iijima points out that Itami's entire writing style is evocative of imagery and rhythm, and the inclusion of certain technical details such as camera movements only adds to a uniquely cinematic yet literary impression, as opposed to the fixed and dull expressions often used for annotating stage plays.<sup>20</sup> By suggesting that a more technically detailed script tends to repress its literary qualities, Iijima seems to be arriving at a paradox that the more precise a scenario is, the less literary (and, by extension, legible) it will be. This echoes Itami's own views about scriptwriting:

I am one of those who believe that in the form of the scenario, there is a unique appeal [*omoshiromi*] that cannot be found in any other type of literature. ... While being primitive in form, its implied meaning [*ganchiku*] and suggestive power [*shisaryoku*] surpass any literary craftsmanship.<sup>21</sup>

Itami's imperative to remain at the same time spare and yet refined brings to mind the screenwriting scholar Steven Maras's notion about film script as a text that '[w]orks as a blueprint not because it is technically precise, but because it is poetic. Poetic writing draws on a different idea of precision that can be described "crystalline"'.<sup>22</sup>

Another film critic, Kitagawa Fuyuhiko (1900–90), contextualised Itami's writing from a somewhat different angle when examining his script *Akanishi Kakita* (1936) in comparison to its literary source.<sup>23</sup> Kitagawa considers this an exemplary case of how to lay bare differences between what he calls *bungakuteki hyōgen* (literary expression) and *shinarioteki hyōgen* (scenaric expression). In particular, Kitagawa exposes how the original novelist's descriptive passages have been effectively rendered into scenes of lengthy dialogue in order to convey the character of the protagonist Akanishi by means more suited to the audiovisual medium. For instance, Kitagawa writes that the exposition of the protagonist is attained in an opening scene with a conversation between a pair of characters of secondary importance rather than the more conventional option of voiceover narration.<sup>24</sup>

Kitagawa also draws attention to how the ending has been altered in the film. The source story concludes by simply stating that the whereabouts of Akanishi and his love interest remain unknown. In his adaptation, Itami replaces this with a sweet and comical conclusion, where after a sequence of deadpan dialogue the

<sup>19</sup>Iijima, *Eiga no naka no bungaku*, 172–77. Iijima criticises Mayer for his failure to fulfil the continuity format: although camera movements are registered in the script, the links between individual shots are left undetermined. Griffith, in turn, seems to have too oppressive an amount of technical information for Iijima's taste (e.g. how many feet of celluloid each scene requires).

<sup>20</sup>Iijima, *Eiga no naka no bungaku*, 174.

<sup>21</sup>Itami, 'Shinario zakkan', 21–22.

<sup>22</sup>Maras, *Screenwriting*, 124.

<sup>23</sup>Kitagawa, 'Bungakuteki hyōgen', 98. The version of the scenario Kitagawa used has some discrepancies with the one that was published two years later in the volume dedicated to Itami in the series *Nihon shinario bungaku zenshū* (Complete Works of Japanese Scenario Literature). One marked difference between these versions is how in the latter, all scenes are numbered, whereas in the former, the beginning of a new scene is indicated by little round marks and intertitles with uppercase Ts, making it appear very much like a silent-film script rather than the master-scene script format that has dominated Japanese scriptwriting since the advent of sound cinema.

<sup>24</sup>Kitagawa, 'Bungakuteki hyōgen', 99–100.

lovers are sitting still while Mendelssohn's *Wedding March* plays over the scene.<sup>25</sup> The use of sound in this early talkie deserves attention in its own right, especially in terms of how the abrupt bursts of tense classical music are inserted in order to augment several dramatic scenes towards the end of the film. Interestingly, Itami's use of Chopin's *Prelude Op. 28, No. 15* (also known as 'Raindrop') in the opening scene of *Akanishi Kakita* has been cited by both the director Kurosawa Akira (1910–98) and the actor Shimura Takashi (1905–82) as a major influence in adding tonality to the seminal *Shichinin no samurai* (Seven Samurai, 1954).<sup>26</sup> As we saw before, Itami has been accused of placing more emphasis on the verbal than the visual with his allegedly 'prosaic' style, but a strong aural aspect is something that should not be omitted from a discussion of his work.<sup>27</sup> At any rate, Itami appears to have been on his way to fully appropriate the benefits of the new sound medium when his directing career was cut short.<sup>28</sup>

### Itami's Legacy

While today only a precious few of Itami's films are extant, the majority of his writings remain intact and accessible. It is largely by virtue of these written materials that Itami has been posthumously rediscovered and his reputation has enjoyed a revival, particularly since the 1971 publication of a selection of essays, edited by his son-in-law, the Nobel Prize-winning novelist Ōe Kenzaburō (born 1935). In a way, Itami's wartime writings on cinema suggest a link between his earlier social criticism on the screen and his last texts, which unflinchingly tackled the controversial issues of collective war guilt and individual responsibility. This trend is most saliently displayed in Itami's celebrated essay 'Sensō sekininsha no mondai' (The Problem of Those Responsible for the War, 1946), published shortly before his death and analysed in detail by Keiko Hirano.<sup>29</sup> It is probably on strength of such texts that Mitsuhiro Yoshimoto has called Itami 'a conscience of the prewar cinema'<sup>30</sup> and High has pointed out that it was in the writings of Itami as well as fellow film critics Iwasaki Akira (1903–81) and Imamura Taihei (1911–86) that 'the spirit of genuine critical inquiry remained alive' through the war years.<sup>31</sup>

Hashimoto Shinobu (1918–2018), perhaps the single most important Japanese scriptwriter,<sup>32</sup> first encountered Itami's work while recuperating in a military hospital.

<sup>25</sup>Kitagawa, 'Bungakuteki hyōgen', 105–06.

<sup>26</sup>Yoshimoto, *Kurosawa*, 237.

<sup>27</sup>Along similar lines, Irie Toshirō has pointed out the use of a sound bridge between the shots in Itami's version of *The New Earth* as an exemplary example of the more sophisticated use of sound in contrast to the Fanck versions of the same film (Irie, 'Curator's choice', 12–13). I am grateful to Iris Haukamp for providing this reference.

<sup>28</sup>Once again, the loss of most of his film prints becomes a major impediment: although a number of scripts survive and have indeed been reprinted on several occasions, they commonly lack any notes on sound design.

<sup>29</sup>Hirano 'Japanese Filmmakers and Responsibility', 212–32.

<sup>30</sup>Yoshimoto, *Kurosawa*, 236. It would seem more suitable to complement this statement by replacing 'prewar' with 'wartime'.

<sup>31</sup>High, *The Imperial Screen*, 166.

<sup>32</sup>Hashimoto was best known as a member of Kurosawa Akira's writing team, credited for films such as *Rashōmon* (1950), *Ikiru* (1952), *Shichinin no samurai* (Seven Samurai, 1954), *Ikimono no kiroku* (Record of a Living Being, 1955), *Kumonosujō* (Throne of Blood, 1957), *Kakushi toride no san akunin* (The Hidden Fortress, 1958), *Warui yatsu hodo yoku nemuru* (The Bad Sleep Well, 1960) and *Dodesukaden* (1970). He wrote scripts filmed by other notable directors such as Imai Tadashi, Kobayashi Masaki, Naruse Mikio and Yamamoto Satsuo, and directed three features himself, including *Watashi wa kai ni naritai* (I Want to Be a Shellfish, 1959), a unique take on the issue of responsibility for war crimes.

Hashimoto enlisted for service in 1938 but was discharged after contracting tuberculosis. He then spent four years in the Okayama Disabled Veterans' Rehabilitation Facility. In his memoirs, available in English translation as *Compound Cinematics* (2015), Hashimoto recalls that, expecting to die soon, he had brought nothing to read and must have appeared visibly bored to his fellow patients. In the hospital, a patient lent him an issue of the journal *Nippon eiga* (Japanese Cinema), which contained the full text of a scenario. Hashimoto, amazed by how simple this type of writing appeared, made a resolution to write a script of his own and send it to the greatest Japanese scriptwriter alive, who according to his roommate was a man called Itami Mansaku.<sup>33</sup>

Hashimoto discovered that scriptwriting was not quite as simple as he had envisaged, and it took three years to complete his first script, which he finally sent to Itami in 1942. Against all his expectations, he soon received a reply in which the elder writer had 'pinpointed weaknesses in [his] work and even offered specific guidance for what and how to revise'.<sup>34</sup> The correspondence between Hashimoto and Itami continued through the war years until the latter's death in September 1946. Invigorated by this accidentally discovered enthusiasm for scriptwriting, Hashimoto subsequently made a full recovery and at the age of 100 was one of the last surviving players from what is commonly called the Golden Age of Japanese cinema.<sup>35</sup> Hashimoto considered Itami as his mentor, and this exchange of ideas certainly played a crucial role in Hashimoto's subsequent, celebrated career that started with *Rashōmon* (1950, co-written and directed by Kurosawa Akira).<sup>36</sup>

While Itami provided Hashimoto with advice about scriptwriting by way of private correspondence, he also participated in a public forum on this topic. While forced to a less active role since the beginning of his illness, Itami had a regular column, called 'Shinario jihyō' (Scenario Reviews), in the leading wartime film journal, *Japanese Cinema*. In the 11 instalments between April 1941 and March 1942, Itami reviewed the latest scenarios published in that and other film journals and, much like in his letters to Hashimoto, pointed out their shortcomings and suggested revisions, while drawing attention to the work of yet unknown scriptwriters such as the young Kurosawa.<sup>37</sup> It should be noted that this practice was not entirely unprecedented. In fact, in the 1930s scenario reviews were published in several film journals, some of which were later reprinted in book format. For instance, Kitagawa Fuyuhiko included a chapter worth of scenario reviews in his

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<sup>33</sup>Hashimoto, *Compound Cinematics*, 14–15.

<sup>34</sup>Hashimoto, *Compound Cinematics*, 18.

<sup>35</sup>Sadly, Hashimoto passed away while this article was in the final stages of production in July 2018.

<sup>36</sup>Hashimoto's debut coincided with the period when scriptwriters were held in high regard by film critics and audiences alike. Although a number of notable writers such as Itami had appeared earlier, it was the immediate postwar condition that granted the profession new visibility, with the best of them being designated as *shinario sakka* (scenario author) (Kitsnik, 'Scenario Writers and Scenario Readers in the Golden Age of Japanese Cinema', 286–88). Such writers were noted for producing original scripts that often revealed a willingness to engage with serious social issues but also an aptitude for reworking more traditional material. Indeed, *Rashōmon*, Hashimoto's adaptation of Akutagawa Ryūnosuke's short stories set in the Middle Ages, garnered considerable acclaim and proved to be a turning point for both its director's career and the international reception of Japanese cinema.

<sup>37</sup>A year later, these reviews were reprinted in full as part of the collection *Seiga zakki* (Miscellaneous Notes while Lying Ill, 1943). A digitalised version of the book can be accessed on the website of the National Diet Library at <http://kindai.ndl.go.jp/info:ndljp/pid/1125768> (frames 115–82). The important place these texts hold in Itami's oeuvre is attested by them being reprinted in all subsequent collections of Itami's writings on cinema: *Itami Mansaku zenshū* (The Collected Works of Itami Mansaku, 1961, reprinted 1973) and *Itami Mansaku esseishū* (Collection of Essays by Itami Mansaku, 1971, bunko edition 2010).

*Gendai eigaron* (On Contemporary Film, 1941).<sup>38</sup> In addition, many of the scenarios examined by Itami were simultaneously reviewed in competing journals such as *Eiga hyōron* (Film Criticism), albeit in less detail. However, what makes the case of Itami unique is his methodical approach to discussing these texts.

In this series of reviews, Itami discusses 30 scenarios, but only 17 of these were made into films (see Table 1). Judging from Itami's often harsh criticism of these scripts, one is tempted to conclude that perhaps not all of them were intended to be produced. On the other hand, the relatively poor production ratio can certainly be ascribed to the circumstances surrounding the outbreak of the Pacific War in December 1941. Only a month later, in an attempt to streamline the film industry and focus it on the war effort, all existing film studios, save for Shōchiku and Tōhō, were merged into the new Dai Nippon Eiga Seisaku Kabushiki Kaisha (Great Japanese Film Production Co Ltd, abbreviated as Daiei).<sup>39</sup> This left a vast number of employees out of work and many projects unfinished. However, film scripts, such as those reviewed by Itami, continued to be published in film journals such as *Japanese Cinema* and *Film Criticism*, effectively saving them from obscurity.

These reviews were frequently published before the actual release of the film, which reflects the work-in-progress character of the scenarios and Itami's approach to them.<sup>40</sup> Indeed, Itami acts rather like a script doctor, pointing out shortcomings with his keen professional eye and offering solutions to overcome them. Itami's method was to single out illogicalities, inconsistencies or exaggerations in the script. At the same time, it appears as if each single review is also invested in exploring a much wider problem, often demonstrating Itami's penchant for satire and social criticism. Such discussion points included the choice of material, the structure of the script, the motivation of the characters, the use of sound and dialogue, the style and functions of description, cinematic treatment of time, mixing fact and fiction, and adapting literature to film. In effect, using script doctoring as a pretext, Itami was tackling a number of general issues of filmmaking.

## Itami's Critical Engagement

In his very first scenario review in *Japanese Cinema*, that of Yoda Yoshikata's *Geidō ichidai otoko* (The Life of an Actor, 1941, Mizoguchi Kenji), Itami presents his first rule of scriptwriting: 'I strongly believe that the basis of the scenario is simple objective description. ... A scenario must not arbitrarily express anything that film essentially cannot'.<sup>41</sup> Itami adds that, at the time when publishing scenarios had become increasingly common, it was more important than ever that attention be paid to distinguishing this mode of writing from those that relied more on verbal embellishments. This is '[b]ecause even if the

<sup>38</sup>Kitagawa's continuous engagement with scenarios is attested to by his film reviews in the postwar journal *Kinema junpō*, where he almost routinely relates to his expectations after having read the script before watching the film.

<sup>39</sup>Traces of this industrial consolidation can be examined in Table 1. For instance, the scenario *Ōhara Yūgaku*, by Ozaki Masafusa (1907–82), was published in a promotional pamphlet by Daito Eiga, but before it was produced, this small studio at Sugamo in Tokyo became part of Daiei and the film was cancelled.

<sup>40</sup>For instance, one of the scenarios, *Jokyōshi no kiroku* (The Record of a Lady Teacher) by Kishi Matsuo, was made into a film with a different title, *Wakai sensei* (Young Teacher, 1942, Satō Takeshi). Another scenario, Asagami Toshio's *Kabacheppo* (Princess Trout), was re-reviewed by Itami eight months later upon the publication of its updated final version (*ketteikō*).

<sup>41</sup>Itami, *Itami Mansaku esseishū*, 174.



Table 1. Scenarios reviewed by Itami Mansaku in *Japanese Cinema*.

Title	Writer	Journal	Publishing date	Itami's review date	Film premiere date	Director	Studio
<i>Geidō ichidai otoko</i> (The Life of an Actor)	Yoda Yoshikata	<i>Nippon eiga</i>	1941.01.01	1941.04.09	1941.02.09	Mizoguchi Kenji	Tokusaku Production (Shōchiku)
<i>Mikaeri no tō</i> (The Inspection Tower)	Shimizu Hiroshi	<i>Eiga hyōron</i>	1941.01.01	1941.04.09	1941.01.30	Shimizu Hiroshi	Shōchiku (Ōfuna)
<i>Medetaki wa Kōrin byōbu</i> (Kōrin's Screen Is Auspicious)	Inoue Kaoru	<i>Nippon eiga</i>	1941.02.01	1941.04.09			
<i>Shidō monogatari</i> (A Story of Leadership)	Sawamura Tsutomu	<i>Eiga hyōron</i>	1941.02.01	1941.04.09	1941.10.04	Kumagai Hisatora	Tōhō Eiga (Tokyo)
<i>Akeyuku tsuchi</i> (Earth at Dawn)	Yahiro Fuji	<i>Jidai eiga</i> (No. 16)	?	1941.04.09	1941.03.09	Terakado Seikichi	Shinkō Kinema (Kyoto)
<i>Jokyōshi no kiroku</i> (The Record of a Lady Teacher)	Kishi Matsuo	<i>Eiga hyōron</i>	1941.04.01	1941.05.09	1942.03.20	Satō Takeshi	Tōhō Eiga (Tokyo) (film title: <i>Wakari sensei</i> (Young Teacher))
<i>Waga ai no ki</i> (The Story of Our Love)	Yagi Yasutarō	<i>Eiga hyōron</i>	1941.04.01	1941.05.09	1941.11.07	Toyoda Shirō	Tōkyō Hassei Eiga (Tōhō)
<i>Gunji taii</i> (Captain Gunji)	Yagi Ryūichirō	<i>Nippon eiga</i>	1941.05.01	1941.05.09			
<i>Yomigaeru tsuchi</i> (Earth Returning)	Itō Sadasuke	<i>Nippon eiga</i>	1941.04.01	1941.07.04			
<i>Kabacheppo</i> (Princess Trout)	Asagami Toshio	<i>Nippon eiga</i>	1941.07.01	1941.07.04			
<i>Watanabe Kazan</i>	Yahiro Fuji	<i>Jidai eiga</i> (No. 17)	?	1941.07.04			
<i>Hachijūhachi-nenme no taiyō</i> (The Sun of the 88th Year)	Sawamura Tsutomu	<i>Nippon eiga</i>	1941.08.01	1941.07.30	1941.11.15	Takizawa Eisuke	Tōhō Eiga (Tokyo)
<i>Rudoran no gashū</i> (Ledran's Drawings)	Inoue Kaoru	<i>Nippon eiga</i>	1941.08.01	1941.07.30			
<i>Ishibumi</i> (Monument)	Yanai Takao	<i>Eiga hyōron</i>	1941.05.01	1941.08.31	1941.07.29	Hara Kenkichi	Shōchiku (Shimogamo)
<i>Nobushi</i> (Masterless Soldier)	Mimura Shintarō	<i>Nippon eiga</i>	1941.09.01	1941.08.31			
<i>Genroku chūshingurū: zenpen</i> (The Loyal 47 Ronin of the Genroku: Part 1)	Hara Ken'ichirō/ Yoda Yoshikata	<i>Jidai eiga</i> (No. 18)	?	1941.09.04	1941.12.01	Mizoguchi Kenji	Kyōa Eiga/Shōchiku (Kyōto)
<i>Jirō monogatari</i> (The Tale of Jirō)	Tateoka Kennosuke	<i>Eiga hyōron</i>	1941.09.01	1941.09.04	1941.12.11	Shima Kōji	Nikkatsu (Tamagawa)
<i>Chichi ariki</i> (There Was a Father)	Ozu Yasujiro/Ikeda Tadao/Yanai Takao	<i>Eiga hyōron</i>	1941.10.01	1941.11.01	1942.04.01	Ozu Yasujiro	Shōchiku (Ōfuna)
<i>Shiroi hekiga</i> (The White Mural)	Yoshida Fumio	<i>Nippon eiga</i>	1941.11.01	1941.11.01	1942.02.04	Chiba Yasuki	Tōhō Eiga (Tokyo)

(Continued)



Table 1. (Continued).

Title	Writer	Journal	Publishing date	Itami's review date	Film premiere date	Director	Studio
<i>Ômura Masujirô</i>	Yahiro Fuji	<i>Nippon eiga</i>	1941.12.01	1941.11.30	1942.01.14	Mori Kazuo	Shinkô Kinema (Kyôto)
<i>Nankai no hanataba</i> (Bouquet of the South Seas)	Yagi Ryûichirô	<i>Nippon eiga</i>	1941.12.01	1941.11.30	1942.05.21	Abe Yutaka	Tôhô Eiga (Tokyo)
<i>Seikatsu no kawa</i> (The River of Life)	Uekusa Keinosuke	<i>Nippon eiga</i>	1941.12.01	1941.11.30			
<i>Genroku chûshingura: kôhen</i> (The Loyal 47 Ronin of the Genroku: Part 2)	Hara Ken'ichirô/ Yoda Yoshikata	<i>Eiga hyôron</i>	1941.11.01	1941.11.30	1942.02.11	Mizoguchi Kenji	Shôchiku (Kyôto)
<i>Ôhara Yûgaku</i>	Ozaki Masafusa	Daito Eiga senden panfuretto <i>Nippon eiga</i>	?	1941.11.30			
<i>Umesato-sensei gyôjôki</i> (The Life Story of Dr Umesato)	Mimura Shintarô	<i>Nippon eiga</i>	1942.01.01	1941.12.04	1942.06.25	Takizawa Eisuke	Tôhô Eiga (Tokyo)
<i>Darumaji no doitsujin</i> (A German at Darumaji)	Kurosawa Akira	<i>Eiga hyôron</i>	1941.12.01	1942.01.25			
<i>Hahakogusa</i> (Mother-and-Child Grass)	Koito Nobu	<i>Nippon eiga</i>	1942.02.01	1942.01.25	1942.06.04	Tasaka Tomotaka	Shôchiku (Uzumasa)
<i>Shizuka nari</i> (All Is Quiet)	Kurosawa Akira	<i>Nippon eiga</i>	1942.02.01	1942.03.07			
<i>Kabacheppo</i> (Princess Trout)	Asagami Toshio	<i>Nippon eiga</i>	1942.03.01	1942.03.07			
<i>Yama o mamoru hitobito</i> (People Guarding the Mountain)	Nobuchi Akira	<i>Eiga kyakuhon</i> (No. 21)	?	1942.03.07			

cinematic expression gets substituted with a literary one, it is only evil people like us who will notice it, while most people just casually skim it through and admire it for what it is'.<sup>42</sup> Here, Itami is clearly stating his own task and responsibility as a critic.

In a number of reviews Itami returns to this question of distinguishing between cinematic and literary modes of expression. For instance, in a review of Mimura Shintarō's (1897–1970) *Umesato-sensei gyōjōki* (The Life Story of Dr Umesato, 1942, Takizawa Eisuke), Itami notes that '[t]he difficulty, and at the same time the boundless appeal of the scenario lies in the [writer's] attempt of moulding a "film" that has a thoroughly concrete form, while using "literature" that is essentially of conceptual character'.<sup>43</sup> This concern naturally leads Itami to examine the issue of adapting literature to the screen, and he readily admits that alterations to the source text are inevitable and strongly advocates the writer's right or even obligation to make appropriate changes,<sup>44</sup> especially if one has to work with poor source material.<sup>45</sup> At the same time, Itami warns about extensive omissions, which should only be made in order to make the story more comprehensible for the viewer.<sup>46</sup>

When examining adapted scenarios, Itami seems particularly adamant about inconsistencies with genre conventions. In the review of *Shidō monogatari* (A Story of Leadership, 1941, Kumagai Hisatora) Itami first congratulates the scriptwriter, Sawamura Tsutomu (1915–77), on his choice of material, only to dismiss the attempt to merge the modes of *bungei eiga* (literary film) and melodrama within a single work. The use of too many augmentations by way of subplots as well as the omission of the dramatic final scene prompts Itami to conclude that an adapter should have the right attitude towards the original material.<sup>47</sup> Along similar lines, in his review of Kishi Matsuo's (1906–85) *Jokyōshi no kiroku* (The Record of a Lady Teacher),<sup>48</sup> based on a non-fiction book by Hirano Fumiko, Itami is puzzled by the scriptwriter's decision to enhance the plot with a number of fictional scenes. For Itami, this seems incongruous because the source text is based on real-life events.<sup>49</sup> It should be noted here that, somewhat paradoxically, Itami himself was striving to create something quite unclassifiable from a film-genre standpoint by directing films such as *Akanishi Kakita*.

Another recurring motif in Itami's reviews is a question about the motivation of the characters and how any discrepancies in their motivation can undermine the entire logic of the narrative. A good example of this is the review of *Chichi ariki* (There Was a Father, 1942, Ozu Yasujiro).<sup>50</sup> Itami notes that while the film is built upon the simple premise of a father and a son destined to live apart from one another, their failure to make more effort to change the situation is insufficiently explained, which in effect leads to an ambiguity in the characters' real intentions.<sup>51</sup> Itami also expresses his concerns about Ozu's idiosyncratic use of cinematic time: he says that

<sup>42</sup>Itami, *Itami Mansaku esseishū*, 174.

<sup>43</sup>Itami, *Itami Mansaku esseishū*, 255.

<sup>44</sup>Itami, *Itami Mansaku esseishū*, 182.

<sup>45</sup>Itami, *Itami Mansaku esseishū*, 253.

<sup>46</sup>Itami, *Itami Mansaku esseishū*, 256.

<sup>47</sup>Itami, *Itami Mansaku esseishū*, 178–79. In this review and a few others, Itami displays a particular dislike of the work of Sawamura, with whom he was clearly at odds ideologically. See High, *The Imperial Screen*, 223–46, on *A Story of Leadership* and other 'spiritist' films written by Sawamura.

<sup>48</sup>The film was released in 1942 as *Wakai sensei* (Young Teacher), directed by Satō Takeshi and starring Hara Setsuko.

<sup>49</sup>Itami, *Itami Mansaku esseishū*, 184.

<sup>50</sup>Written by Ikeda Tadao (1905–64), Yanai Takao (1902–81) and Ozu Yasujiro (1903–63).

<sup>51</sup>Itami, *Itami Mansaku esseishū*, 235.

when switching from one scene to another, the amount of time that has been left out between the scenes is always greater than expected by the spectator (reader). For instance, when one keeps thinking that two or three months have passed since the previous scene, s/he is soon to learn from the dialogue that it is actually four or five years.<sup>52</sup>

Itami states that while watching these films the viewer must adjust to this 'cinematic time', but when the time adjustment is small the viewer finds this pleasurable rather than annoying because it evokes a 'sensation akin to velocity'. In contrast, he points out that if the time displacement is only disclosed at the end of a long scene, it is too difficult for the viewer to adjust.<sup>53</sup>

Ostensibly, Itami might have been the first to identify and describe this Ozu-esque use of screen time and its cognitive effect on the viewer. By so doing, Itami astutely singles out a number of features, such as the apparent illogicality of the plot and elliptical style that leaves out major incidents, that later film critics have characterised as the strengths of Ozu's work. Itami's contemporary observations are surprisingly close to the more detailed analyses of how Ozu's decentering of the narrative and playful use of time and space in fact draw attention to the conventions of cinema itself.<sup>54</sup> Somewhat prophetically, at the end of his review, Itami writes that judging from his impression of reading the script, *Chichi ariki* could turn out to be a singularly Japanese film, one no foreign filmmaker could hope to imitate.<sup>55</sup> In effect, Itami is prefiguring the repeated claims of the alleged Japaneseness of the director's work elaborated by scholars such as Noël Burch, Donald Richie and Paul Schrader.<sup>56</sup>

Itami praises the 'Japaneseness' of *Chichi ariki*, a film that very much subscribed to the dominant ideology of the time by underlining the sense of social duty on the part of both the father and the son, but he seems to take a more critical stance towards propagandistic *kokusaku eiga* (national policy films) that were supposed to boost public morale during the war. When discussing Yahiro Fuji's (1904–86) *Ōmura Masujirō* (1941, directed by Mori Kazuo), a biopic of the man considered the 'Father of the Modern Japanese Army', Itami points out that just as a good subject does not by default make for a good film, good historical material does not automatically produce a good national film.<sup>57</sup> By insisting that films must above all work in cinematic terms, Itami seems to be going against the grain of the official policies by hinting at the severe problems facing such stale productions, which at the time were becoming increasingly common. Not without irony, in this review, published a week before the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, Itami appears to be providing instructions on how to make effective propaganda films.

As cinema was becoming an increasingly important part of Japan's war effort, between 1941 and 1945 the Jōhyōkyoku (Cabinet Board of Information) organised annual script competitions. A number of fledgling scriptwriters participated, and winners included such as yet unknown figures as Kurosawa and Shindo.<sup>58</sup> Towards the end of the series, Itami reviewed two scenarios by Kurosawa, *Darumaji no doitsujin*

<sup>52</sup>Itami, *Itami Mansaku esseishū*, 236.

<sup>53</sup>Itami, *Itami Mansaku esseishū*, 236.

<sup>54</sup>See Bordwell and Thompson, *Film Art*, 396–401 and Desser 'The Space of Ambivalence', 457–72.

<sup>55</sup>Itami, *Itami Mansaku esseishū*, 237–38.

<sup>56</sup>For a critical appraisal of these approaches, see Yoshimoto, *Kurosawa*, 9–23.

<sup>57</sup>Itami, *Itami Mansaku esseishū*, 242–43. Here, Itami uses the term *kokumin eiga* (national film) rather than *kokusaku eiga*.

<sup>58</sup>For more on the competition, see Salomon, *Views of the Dark Valley*, 203–04.

(A German at Darumaji, 1941) and *Shizuka nari* (All Is Quiet, 1942). Both scripts remain unproduced, and Itami's reviews are highly relevant, not least for the fact that these are probably the first critical writings on the work of the future director; Kurosawa's debut feature, *Sugata Sanshirō*, was released only in 1943.

*Darumaji no doitsujin* received much praise from Itami, especially for its imaginative use of *ji no bun* (descriptive passages). Itami goes as far as to say that although he had in the past proposed that descriptions in a scenario were equal in importance to the dialogue, it was only this script by Kurosawa that finally provided him with concrete examples to support his argument.<sup>59</sup> *Shizuka nari*, which placed second in the First Cabinet Board of Information Script Contest in 1942, fares somewhat less well, especially in comparison to the other script, being criticised by Itami for its overlong dialogue and several smaller issues.<sup>60</sup> Ōe Kenzaburō points out that for contemporary audiences familiar with Kurosawa's later directorial work, it is interesting to see that some of his future strengths are designated by Itami as shortcomings.<sup>61</sup>

Finally, it is also important to remember that the scenarios reviewed by Itami were often published before the release of their respective films and sometimes even before they were completed (some never were). For instance, the script of *Chichi ariki* was published in *Eiga hyōron* (*Film Criticism*) in October 1941, Itami reviewed it in the November issue of *Nippon eiga* (*Japanese Cinema*), and the film itself premiered in April 1942.<sup>62</sup> This practice of letting the general public have a glimpse of the scenario before the release of the film stands in striking contrast with Hollywood, which was famously very protective and secretive about its scripts. Conversely, published scenarios served a function akin to that of a trailer or a teaser that enticed consumers to go and watch the final product. They also marked a site for feedback where the quality of the script could be tested and attested before actual expenses for production were allocated, especially relevant in the context of wartime shortages.

## Conclusion

It is highly probable that Itami never saw the films of the scenarios he read and reviewed. Incapacitated by illness, writing and script doctoring proved to be the only means to sustain his relationship with cinema. Ironically, this puts us today in a somewhat analogous situation: deprived of these films (many of which are now lost or were never produced in the first place) but endowed with their scripts, as well as Itami's reviews. This article has demonstrated that Itami's place in the history of Japanese cinema and subsequent influence on later generations of filmmakers can begin to be re-evaluated through his critical writings. While I have suggested but one possibility of employing scenarios as a source for studying Japanese film, one can anticipate further applications. In particular, it would be worth examining how Itami's efforts relate to the wider fascination with scriptwriting as a way to approach cinema during the war years.

<sup>59</sup>Itami, *Itami Mansaku esseishū*, 259.

<sup>60</sup>Itami, *Itami Mansaku esseishū*, 268.

<sup>61</sup>Ōe, 'Kaisetsu', 386.

<sup>62</sup>An earlier version of the script of *Chichi ariki* was published as early as 1937 in a volume of *Shinario bungaku zenshū* (Complete Works of Scenario Literature).

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