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Still Grieving: mobility and absence in post-3/11 mourning films

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ABSTRACT

Post-3/11 mourning films have thus far gained little scholarly attention. This paper aims to correct that imbalance by analyzing a novel and three films that deal with loss and absence: Tendō Arata's *The Mourner* and its film adaptation by Tsutsumi Yukihiko, as well as Nakagawa Ryūtarō's films *Calling* and *Tokyo Sunrise*. While the type of loss in each film differs, all three films focus on mobility and absence in the process of mourning. This paper aims at expanding the scope of the study of so-called *shinsaigo eiga* (films dealing with the 3/11 tsunami and its aftermath) to include the role of mobility and absence in cinematic mourning as well as offering an analysis of a rare representation of male mourning in Japanese film in the wake of the recent spate of disasters that have afflicted Japan.

KEYWORDS

3/11 disaster; mourning film; male mourning; mobility; absence; Nakagawa Ryūtarō; Tendō Arata

Introduction

This paper aims to expand the scope of research into, and analysis of, *shinsaigo eiga*, the name given to films in Japan that deal with the Great East Japan Earthquake of 3/11 and its aftermath. The first step will be to examine the role of mobility and absence in the process of mourning in post-3/11 films about loss. The flexibility of the definition of *shinsaigo eiga* has allowed the inclusion of films such as *Your Name* (2016) and *Shin Godzilla* (2016) as reactions to or comments on the disaster in Tōhoku (Kimura 2013). However, as Japan saw a series of other terrible disasters and incidents in the eight years following March 2011 which also resulted in the deaths of many people, this paper will argue that the scope of *shinsaigo eiga* studies needs to be expanded even further in order to shed light on personal stories of mourning, in particular the mourning of the losses between same-sex intimates.

In *Sonogo no shinsaigo bungakuron*, Kimura Saeko writes:

What post-disaster literature means is that it not only includes works directly mentioning the disaster, but also it points to the whole situation surrounding post-disaster literature ... It is inevitable that memories of the disaster are evoked in any works read after the disaster. (2018, 26)

Kimura's analysis can be easily applied to the field of film studies in order to rethink the possibilities of *shinsaigo eiga*. As one such attempt, this article aims to renovate the

framework of *shinsaigo eiga* in post-3/11 Japanese culture by analyzing mourning films in which characters grieve and try to make sense of what they have lost. As Richard Armstrong reminds us in *Mourning Films: A Critical Study of Loss and Grieving in Cinema*, '[g]rief and cinema are about making sense of absence' (Armstrong 2012, 15). Thus I believe that the scope of *shinsaigo eiga* as a topic of research and analysis should be expanded to include motion and absence in the context of cinematic mourning.

The goal of this article is two-fold. One is to examine the role of physical and psychological mobility in the process of cinematic mourning. Confronting the absence of their beloved ones, bereft people often experience some forms of slowness and stillness. Some may argue that the sooner the bereft move on, the sooner they can recover. However, since such an argument overlooks the possibility of leaving behind others who are still mourning, we will look at how mourning films value the state of slowness and stillness. The other goal of this article is to explore the representation of male mourning in *shinsaigo eiga*, which deserves more critical attention in studies of mourning in contemporary cinema (Armstrong 2012, 195). In post-disaster Japan, it seems that male characters are denied their chance to express their intimate feelings for their male counterparts and, in some cases, mourn their deaths.

In discussing these topics, this article will closely examine three films: *The Mourner* by Tsutsumi Yukihiko (2015), as well as Nakagawa Ryūtarō's *Calling* and *Tokyo Sunrise* (2012 and 2015, respectively). Although the types of loss in each work may vary, physical or psychological mobility in these works play a significant role in portraying how the characters confront loss. Since they do not necessarily depict the mourning process that actual 3/11 survivors might have gone through, why then are they important to expanding the scope of *shinsaigo eiga*? To answer such a question, it is necessary to examine the view of critic Fujita Naoya towards our current condition of 'living in the same age' as the disaster (2017, 24), as he suggests that any films produced within such an age can evoke memories of the 3/11 disaster. Combined with Kimura's approach, Fujita's view helps emphasize that these mourning films, even without specifically alluding to the Great East Japan Earthquake, are able to offer filmic insight into the experiences of individual mourners whose emotional stillness and slowness affect their body movements and their process of mourning. In exploring such experiences, the last half of this article will analyze a specific, if rare, representations of male mourning in *shinsaigo eiga*.

The mourner

To mourn generally is to feel or express great sadness, especially because of someone's death. In Tendō Arata's Naoki Prize-winning novel *The Mourner* (Itamu hito, 2008), the protagonist Sakatsuki Shizuto has embarked on a seemingly endless journey for years in which he visits the sites of various people's passing. For Shizuto's mourning, three questions are important: 'Who loved them, whom did they love, and for what were they appreciated?' (Tendō 2008, 34). Based on these questions, Shizuto tries to memorize individual deaths as unique presences 'by internalizing the location into his heart' at the site of death (Tendō 2008, 40). Shizuto's mourning emphasizes an act of remembering the deceased based on the three aforementioned questions acquired during his long journey. In order to continue the journey, he insists that he will 'not to leave each individual deeply into his heart' (Tendō 2008, 225). Instead, he maintains that 'it is a privilege of a

family or someone left behind to mourn deeply over someone's death. I have realized through travelling how best it is for me to remember it as though a memory of an old friend' (Tendō 2008, 225). Shizuto, who used to work at a pharmaceutical company, experienced a mental breakdown due to the guilt he felt over forgetting the names of children who had died in hospitals, as well as forgetting the anniversary of his best friend's death. Shizuto was someone not only 'who had fallen down after experiencing so many deaths and sorrows' but also who 'just kept on mourning because he lacked energy to do anything else' (Tendō 2008, 443). Haunted by these deaths, he remained figuratively still; his journey as a mourner began from such a state of stillness.

Does *The Mourner*, the novel published three years before the 3/11 disaster, have any relevance to that awful event? *Shizuto's Diary* (Shizuto nikki itamu hito II, 2009; republished in 2012b), which functions as a prologue to *The Mourner*, includes a log in which Shizuto reflects on a solitary death (kodokushi) that occurred in temporary housing and sees it as an example of survivor's guilt (Tendō 2012b, 49). He ponders:

Of people who died alone, there were those who expressed their regret as to why they ended up surviving and that they would have rather died with people they loved on that day. Is it possible they kept on feeling the loneliness and hollowness of survivors in praying every day for people they have lost? (Tendō 2012b, 49)

Shizuto's Diary was the personal diary Tendō kept while working on *The Mourner* (Hon no hanashi Henshūbu 20 November 2009, para. 2). Although it was published in separate instalments in *All Yomiuri* from March to November 2009, its temporality remains unclear because Tendō sets it up as '20XX'. When it was republished as a pocket edition in 2012, not only did the setting make it possible for readers to connect the earthquake mentioned in the novel with the 3/11 disaster, but it is also natural if they relate Shizuto's mourning to the environment of post-3/11 Japan. If Shizuto/the mourner had actually existed, what relevance would Shizuto's method of mourning have in the wake of so many recent disasters?

To consider this possibility requires taking a close look at the role Tendō himself was expected to play after the earthquake, as the author who created Shizuto the mourner. On June 1, 2011, Tendō visited Iwate Prefecture to meet families of victims as part of a TV news program. Tendō also utilized Shizuto's technique of using newspaper and radio news as sources of information about places where people have died, and conducted interviews with victims' families (Tendō 2012a, 380). In the essay about this visit, Tendō expresses both the sense of confusion he had when facing actual damages in Iwate Prefecture eighty days after the earthquake and complicated feelings evoked through conversations with the victims' families.

Two things especially need to be taken into account. One is losing a sense of distance. Tendō says 'how shocked [he] was when realizing that [he] had lost an appropriate sense of distance after seeing the overwhelming vastness of the damage in person', after he had originally seen a large amount of edited video footage in Tokyo (Tendō 2012a, 393). The other is a danger of making invisible the presence of people 'voiceless and still' in confronting losses in post-3/11 society where victims are expected to behave positively and move on (Tendō 2012a, 406). This positivity is linked with a figurative movement forward. In the novel and the film adaptation of *The Mourner*, some victims find a certain positivity in Shizuto's version of mourning as he leaves immediately after the

deed is done, without looking back. That Shizuto moves forward is subject to criticism from characters in the novel and the film because it may upset victims' families who have not yet overcome their feelings of loss. The very motion of moving forward may function as a sign of forgetting the deceased and make those still in mourning feel guilty for not being able to move forward.

However, as mentioned previously, Shizuto himself was immobilized too. In looking back on the process of creating Shizuto, Tendō says: 'The mourner, who had fallen down and remained in the state of stillness, gradually got up, reconsidered what was inside him and events surround him, fearfully stepped outside and shortly after left for an unexpected journey of mourning' (2012a, 443). The impetus of this journey is the movement from the state of stillness to motion, and the journey itself is a continuity of movements. The film adaptation of *The Mourner* has done away with the majority of Shizuto's journey from the novel. But the director Tsutsumi meticulously shows the movement related to Shizuto's mourning in the film's opening sequence in which the camera frames Shizuto in long shots travelling to the locations of various deaths. This opening sequence also contains Shizuto's voiceover repeating the aforementioned questions. As he finishes mourning, he declares that 'I will remember that you actually lived' and promises to remember them as if internalizing their souls inside him.

At the core of Shizuto's mourning lies an act of remembering each death not just as a number but as an individual life that actually existed. Individual deaths can become distant and depersonalized when large numbers of people die in calamities or accidents. The Great East Japan Earthquake, for instance, took the lives of approximately 15,000 people. Yet, if Shizuto had actually existed, readers/audiences would probably anticipate that he would visit and mourn over each death. That *The Mourner* was republished after the 3/11 disaster and later adapted into a feature film suggests that it was indeed connected to the cultural zeitgeist.

The mobility represented by Shizuto's travelling to each site of a death becomes the key to understanding narratives of loss. Shizuto, who was once immobilized himself, never demands that victims' families move on; instead, he himself becomes the agency of recovery by moving forward. Someone mourning over losses that have nothing to do with them is actually rare in the body of mourning films, but it is increasingly relevant in the wake of the many recent disasters that have afflicted Japan. This analysis will next turn to the films of Nakagawa Ryūtarō whose works consistently deal with the theme of personal loss.

Portraying an absence of life: *Calling*

Nakagawa Ryūtarō emerged on the scene in the 2010s. Born in 1990, Nakagawa was an avid reader of Dazai Osamu and Mishima Yukio and aspired to be a poet in his teen years, leading him to self-publish a collection of poems, *Yuki ni itaru miyako*, at the age of seventeen (Nakagawa 2017b, 127). After entering Keio University, he began studying filmmaking. When his film *Calling* won the Indie Soul Award for Best Cinematography at the Boston International Film Festival, Nakagawa and his peers founded a filmmaking group Tokyo New Cinema (TNC). By March 2019, Nakagawa had directed six feature-length films, some of which have garnered international recognition.

No characters in Nakagawa films are actually portrayed as victims or survivors of the 3/11 disaster. However, in an interview conducted upon the release of *Summer Blooms*, he said,

The first news I remember was of the Tokyo subway sarin attack by a cult group *Aum shinkyō* and the Great Hanshin Earthquake. Then, right after entering university, the Great East Japan Earthquake happened' (Hyōgo 2018, 137). This interview shows how the earthquake has rooted in his memory. According to the research conducted for this paper, Nakagawa had never talked about disasters before this point. In terms of the narrative, the film *Little History of Rain Drops* (Amatsubu no chiisana rekishi, 2012) briefly mentions a quake-resistant house, and it is only in the film *Calling* that the 3/11 disaster seems to have a significant impact on its narrative's temporality. Even so, the reason why we cannot overlook Nakagawa's films is that themes of absence, grief, loss, and death persist throughout all his films, making them worth examining in the context of post-3/11 mourning films.

Nakagawa's first feature, *Calling*, is a film about absence. It depicts endless efforts by a husband to make his wife, who seems mentally ill, happy.¹ *Calling* contains almost no dialogue, a choice probably made due to budget restrictions. In its place, the film is filled with voices of cicadas, the sound of cooking and cutting flowers, and the noises of city crowds. Yet, something else also fills the film's landscape: suicide, a dead animal on the road, a run-down blue flower, all of which suggest death. The film's very first shot vividly indicates the absence of life. With the loud buzz of cicadas in the background, hands filled with congeries of cicada skin are presented in the centre of the frame. The shot changes, and an inter-title 'August 2011' is inserted on a black background. The film's setting then moves to the couple's apartment. The editing of these shots sets up the temporality of the film in the summer of 2011, and also introduces the first of multiple instances of absence in the film.

One example is the absence of an actual living girl throughout the film. The wife carries a female doll as if as a replacement for her daughter, who might have died in the disaster. One decoration in the apartment helps visualize such an absence. The short curtain (noren) hung over the top of the study desk has two gaps, revealing pictures of a daughter and a mother. The distance created between the mother and the daughter places the daughter not too far, but far enough that the mother cannot reach her. There is also a scene where the husband apologizes to a store employee for his wife, who has shoplifted a bag of diapers, which she does not actually need. Her need for the diapers makes the absence of the child in the film unavoidably vivid. The 3/11 disaster resulted in the deaths of countless children. The 2011 documentary film *311*, by Mori Tatsuya, et al, includes a conversation with mothers attempting to find their children amidst the debris and oceans of muddy water. If we suppose that the couple in *Calling* have also lost their child in a disaster, we could interpret the congeries of cicada shells as dead bodies. As the loudness of the cicada's voices overwhelms the scene, the invisible source of such overwhelming sound overlaps over the image of empty shells, emphasizing the absence of life.

According to Armstrong, cinema 'cannot verbally acknowledge the import of what has been lost', and silence functions as 'an aesthetic resource expressive of the intensities of grief and contemplation' (2012, 193). By minimizing dialogue, *Calling* successfully captures the typical figure of a mourning woman through the characterization of the silent wife. Silence enables an expression of deep sorrow within her, and at the same time, it means that her 'sullen, unreadable' facial expression suggests her sorrow is at a 'cul-de-sac' (Armstrong 2012, 192). Also, the fact that she mostly stays at home is a trope

common in melodrama. In mourning films using melodramatic conventions, a home or domestic space is a 'private space [that] becomes the stage for private and personal problems and emotions' that unfold in order for the process of mourning to take place (Armstrong 2012, 176). While *Calling* ends with a scene at a home, the wife's sorrow remains unresolved.

The wife in *Calling* is a 'voiceless and still' person. In fact, she is often seen seated throughout the film, contrary to the husband, who moves around as he takes care of her. Through silence, Nakagawa shows the wife as trapped in a space which includes both the absence and presence of the child. Yet, his view is not pessimistic or critical of the 'voiceless and still' wife, as she is shown to be in the process of remembering the life as it existed in a way similar to Shizuto the mourner. In this way, *Calling* can be seen as one of the post-3/11 stories about loss. In the post-3/11 socio-historical context, it is impossible to separate any of the fictional narratives created around this period from the loss and mourning that resulted from the string of disasters that befell Japan at the time. Japanese viewers and readers will inevitably connect such narratives to the prevailing zeitgeist.

As an example, one needs only to look at the way Kore-eda Hirokazu has decided to engage with the reality of the Great East Japan Earthquake. He says: 'I'd like to spend more time to depict this earthquake in my own way. For now, I'd rather embrace it as a catastrophe than putting what it meant to me into words or images' (2017, 239). In fact, Kore-eda headed to Fukushima right after the earthquake, but he confesses that it was difficult for him to make a documentary there after seeing the damage (Kore-eda 2017, 237). Yet, Kore-eda, as the director of *DISTANCE* (2001) and *Nobody Knows* (2004) in which he dealt with social issues such as neglect and poverty, adds the following: He 'does not intend to make a fiction film incorporating the earthquake on purpose' but incorporates a way of thinking that 'it is not the cinema that changes but myself' by being influenced by the phenomenon endangering everyday lives (2017, 239). Such a way of thinking surfaces in Nakagawa films at the more personal level.

Left behind in the world without him: *Tokyo Sunrise*

Nakagawa's fifth feature *Tokyo Sunrise* (Hashire, zetsubō ni oitsukare nai hayasa de, 2015) was made based on his own experience of losing his best friend from college and served as 'a requiem for his dead friend' as well as 'his own memoir' (GAGA 2018, 9). Through interactions with his best friend, Nakagawa learned of filmmakers such as Jean-Luc Godard and Robert Bresson, became immersed in various subcultures, and started making films (Nakagawa 2017a, 275). Before and after founding TNC, his best friend volunteered to help with his filmmaking. In an obituary for his death, Nakagawa reveals that the Japanese title of *Tokyo Sunrise* came from the words left to him by his best friend (2 July 2013, para. 5).

Described as 'road-movie-like' in *Kinema junpo's* review, *Tokyo Sunrise* depicts the protagonist Ren (Taiga) mourning the death of his best friend Kaoru (Kobayashi Ryūju) (Ishimura 2017, 134). The process includes Ren's road trip to the Hokuriku area in order to give Kaoru's first love a portrait that Kaoru left before committing a suicide a year before. Ren's life is filled with Kaoru's absence. His memories of Kaoru invoked through spatial images of a house, a public bath, and through the journey itself establish 'parallel temporalities',

intercutting the past and present through temporal and spatial movements (Armstrong 2012, 179). Through this journey, what the audience witnesses in Ren's tears is the devastating loneliness and sorrow he feels at the loss of the intense male-male intimacy between himself and Kaoru, and the depth and weight of Kaoru's absence in Ren's life.

The intensity of intimacy with the dead affects how one copes with the death. No correct one way exists regarding the duration and the timing of one's mourning. Although Nakagawa first attempted to tell a story of his best friend's death from multiple points of view, he concluded that it was impossible to understand them all. This impossibility is shown through the way Nakagawa shows Ren seeking his own way of confronting Kaoru's absence (Ishimura 2017, 134). Just as Shizuto did, Ren remains in the state of 'voiceless[ness] and still[ness]' in the face of the overwhelming waves of sorrow caused by Kaoru's death.

Tokyo Sunrise starts in the past tense. The opening sequence shows, first, a girl picking up a drawing someone left behind in the room of a traditional Japanese inn, and second, a man driving at night. The film shows us the man reach and spend time at a cliff by the open sea in the early morning. Without showing the man's face, the screen quickly cuts to black, shutting down the sound of waves. Immediately, the camera shows a farewell message 'Goodbye, Kaoru!' and tilts down to show the person for whom this message was meant. By inserting the face absent from the opening scene, it is clear that this is Kaoru. The scene is shot in the texture of a home video, which deftly establishes Kaoru's relationship with Ren and Risako (Kurokawa Mei), his ex-girlfriend. Because this is the last video footage of Kaoru, the home video feel emphasizes the fact that Kaoru is long gone. The film again sharply cuts to black to suggest the sudden disappearance of Kaoru from the protagonist's life.

After the blackout we hear Kaoru's father's brief speech about the anniversary of Kaoru's death, indicating that Kaoru no longer exists in this world. At this point, it is only seven minutes and thirty seconds into the film. Then the father and another friend emphasize the rapidness of time since the death; the father announces, 'It's been already a year, so let's drink a toast [mou ichinen sugitande, kanpai shimasu]', and the friend says to Ren, 'I can't believe it's been already a year [mou ichinen kaā].' As the father prepares for the toast, the camera turns to Ren. While other participants clearly pronounce 'kanpai' (cheers), Ren, raising the glass softly, only weakly pronounces 'pai'. What is crucial here is that Ren is too slow to catch up to the speed suggested by the adjective 'mou' (already). We can interpret that as Ren's inability to catch up to where the others are in the mourning process. In other words, in terms of mourning over the death of Kaoru, Ren's sense of temporality is not accordance with the temporality of others who seem to have no problem with the fastness of the time.

Such slow-paced mourning is evident in *Summer Blooms* as well. Just as internet commentator Lisbon22 precisely verbalizes, it is a sense that 'while other people who mourned together somehow managed to accept losses and start to move on as a role of the alive, for those who cannot accept the loss, one feels removed from the world and time stopped' (22 May 2018, para. 2). 'The world' here belongs to one of the two worlds that many mourning films suggest. That is, 'one in which life goes on as though the loss never took place', and the other is 'one in which the person who defined that world is gone' (Armstrong 2012, 28). Protagonists in mourning films are often trapped between these

two worlds, emphasising the presence of loss by indicating the space filled with memories of the dead through 'parallel temporalities'.

There are two spaces that cause Ren to feel that Kaoru has fallen out of his world. One is the public bath. In this scene, the camera frames Ren with a wide lens. Ren occupies only a third of the bath, leaving the other space wide open. In the next shot he's framed in the middle of a long shot, making him look small and lost. On the other hand, the next bath scene narrated in the past temporality gives a tighter impression of male-male intimacy that is expressed by the physical proximity between them. The camera frames them in a medium shot. By forcing the viewer to compare the two spaces in the past and the present, the impact of Kaoru's absence from Ren's life is vividly made.

The other space is an apartment room they shared. In the past, they shared the apartment and Kaoru used the upper bed. As mentioned above, private spaces can make people more conscious of absence. Right before leaving for a road trip, Kaoru's ex-girl friend Risako visits the apartment. Crucially, in this scene she uses the same cup Kaoru used to use and she says to Ren, 'You haven't moved yet', suggesting that Ren is still incapable of letting go of the space filled with his memories of Kaoru. Moreover, Risako even dares to climb up to Kaoru's upper bed. Ren prefers the lower bed because he hates heights, but we later see him lying down on the upper bed after returning from the road trip, which suggests a transition in his mourning. Therefore, his refusal of the upper bed – the space once occupied by Kaoru – is important to note for its relationship to this scene.

Why does Ren remain immobile while other people are starting to move on as time goes by? In Japanese culture when discussing the process of mourning, same-sex relationships, especially male-male intimacy, are often overlooked. Studies on mourning films have primarily examined the relationships between parents and children and between heterosexual couples. These previous studies have therefore ignored the losses of same-sex intimacy. Ren's sense of loss towards Kaoru's absence may be similar to 'publicly ungrivable losses' that Judith Butler (2000) claims in *Antigone's Claims: Kinship Between Life and Death* ('Antigone's Claim', para. 52). Using Butler's claim, Lisbon22 in analyzing *Tokyo Sunrise* and *Summer Blooms* argues that 'those who are considered inappropriate in our society are subject to oppression and exclusion and therefore are not able to properly mourn the dead and give meanings to their loss' (22 May 2018, para.11).

An example of the kind of oppression that makes male mourning difficult is shown in a scene in which Kaoru and Ren have a date with two women at an izakaya-style restaurant. When one of the women asks them whether they are gay, Kaoru laughs it off while Ren does not say anything. Meanwhile, an unpleasant conversation between businessmen in the background seems to irritate Ren with its sexually vulgar tone, so Kaoru softly rubs his shoulder consolingly. However, Ren confronts them. After the women leave hurriedly witnessing Ren's anger, Kaoru accuses Ren of being too short-tempered, to which Ren replies: 'Aren't you mad?' The businessmen's conversation was not directed at them, so why is Ren irritated? Considering how unhappy Ren looked during the date with the two women, his irritation may be towards their suspicion of his and Kaoru's sexual orientation or his relationship to Kaoru. While Nakagawa portrayed tragic queer characters in his film *Plastic Love Story* (2013), whether or not Ren and Kaoru had a sexual relationship depends on the audience's reading of the situation. But, it is most likely that Ren's short-temper and irritation is a result of his attitude against a narrow

mindset that can only read male-male intimacy as indicative of a homosexual or bisexual relationship.

Such a narrow view may lead to male-male intimacy being seen as a 'publicly ungrievable loss(es)', and it may rob men of a chance to engage in the process of mourning. The past narrative beautifully depicts Ren and Kaoru's shared time on the top of the building in the early morning. This scene helps to emphasize the words that Kaoru left Ren about their imagined future together. However, Kaoru no longer exists in the future they hoped to see together. To Ren, such a future is a present that is 'one in which the person who defined that world is gone' (Armstrong 2012, 28), which makes it meaningless to move forward.

Exposing the emotions

Thirty minutes of this eighty-three-minute film take the form of a road movie. Conversations shot from a camera placed on the dashboard and tracking shots framing the Japan Sea and the passing woods are typical of the visual style of a road movie. In this way, by adapting a form of travelogue, physical movements are visualized in the narrative of loss. Unlike Shizuto who walks to the site of death in *The Mourner*, the characters in *Tokyo Sunrise* instead drive to the cliff in the Hokuriku area as a way to face Kaoru's death.

What do Ren and Risako wonder at the cliff, the place where Kaoru committed suicide? There, they both remain silent at first. Since Kaoru smoked a cigarette there once, Ren softly places a cigarette on the ground, as if in memory of his friend, and then Risako starts to cry. Ren waits until she stops sobbing and reveals: 'I was, I was actually jealous of you. He didn't spend time with me after he started going out with you'. Sobbing, she laughing replies, 'Stop joking'. Although Ren's words are taken as a joke, this is actually the first time Ren begins to reveal his emotions. This is how the journey becomes Ren's first step forward to face the loss.



Figure 1. The two try to reimagine their distance to Kaoru. Ren's body movement is restricted because Ren is trapped in the absence of Kaoru (Courtesy of *Tokyo Sunrise* Production Committee).

In the room of the traditional Japanese inn near the cliff, Ren and Risako ask each other why they have come to Hokuriku. This is shown in a three-minute proscenium shot (Figure 1). In this scene, Ren is seated on the left side of the frame, and Risako is sitting on the edge of window on the right. This scene begins with Risako positioned slightly higher than Ren, but after hearing Ren's remark, Risako is repositioned to almost the same eye level. So, how does the conversation unfold? Irritated by the influence that the dead Kaoru stills has over her, Risako tells Ren that she will go home the next morning. When he asks her why she came with him, she responds without looking at him: 'I don't know'. When Ren continues, 'Because you don't want to think that it was because you two broke up', she replies a little harshly: 'What do YOU want to do? You were so close with him'. And looking directly at him, she asks: 'What will you get by meeting his first love? What will be changed?' (she says this in reference to Ren's plan to seek out Kaoru's first love). To her question, he slowly replies as he exhales: 'I wish he hated. Hated me. It makes me sick thinking he died without anything to do with me'. His words pierce her, making her tear up and she repositions herself on the floor. Lastly, he says, 'I wonder who he really was', looking down. While the distance between the camera and the subjects is close enough that audiences can clearly see their facial expressions, it also captures bodies responding to complex emotions evoked during the process of rethinking their relationship with Kaoru. Only Ren's head moves, as his arms and legs are immobilized.² Will this immobilized body ever be freed?

After separating from Risako, Ren continues his trip to find Kaoru's first love. Compared to the journey to the cliff, the latter half of the trip includes more shots of landscape using tracking and panning shots. The image of sunset both in an extreme long shot and then a long shot are beautiful shots whose beauty are contrasted with the ineffable disappointment he experiences through his encounter with Kaoru's first love, Kanna. When he returns to the cliff, a gradation of darkness, close to grey, and the roar of the Japan Sea engulf him. In mourning films, grey often symbolizes a psychological state of someone on the verge of being swallowed by loss, and the wane of the ocean functions as a border between life and death, implying the possibility of the mourner's suicide (Armstrong 2012, 187; 99). Here, in order to escape from the hands of despair, Ren tries to call someone for help, but the audience does not know to whom he is calling. If we imagine that he is calling Kaoru, it never reaches him, and the machine-like message would only amplify his absence.

Of Ren's journey, the most impactful scene is when an old man from the traditional Japanese inn helps him and feeds him a warm meal. The camera first frames him in a medium shot from behind and shows his slow movements as he starts to eat. Once he puts food into his mouth, the camera now frames him from the front and continues without a cut for three minutes. As he gradually consumes food, Ren, who until this point had not shed a single tear, begins to shiver and cry, trembling (Figure 2). In directing this scene, Nakagawa gave Taiga a specific order:

My aim is that 'I want to depict an incapability to understand each other'. So, I told [Taiga] that Ren's emotions must be affected by the scene with Kanna at a bar to the meal scene in which he eats as he cries. From a day before the scene where he cries, Taiga did not talk to anybody and skipped meals. He gave a great performance on shooting. (Ishimura 2017, 134)

The meal helps release the tension in his body, and the tears and shivers help him finally move his emotions outside his body.³



Figure 2. In contrast to Ren sobbing quietly, the sound of running water in the background stirringly fills the space. This shot vividly captures the flood of emotion (Courtesy of *Tokyo Sunrise Production Committee*).

At the end of the road trip, he finds the picture Kaoru left at the same inn. It is a picture of a person with their arms spread over the vast ocean heading towards a big shining sun. The person drawn in the picture is a call back to earlier in the film when Kaoru was shown running around with his arms spread just like the person in the picture. After the journey, Ren returns to Tokyo and decides to move out of his apartment. Inside the empty room, he lies down on the upper bed and stares at the ceiling just as Kaoru might have. As Ren starts paragliding, this gaze is paralleled with his gaze towards the sky and the sun towards which Kaoru headed. Through paragliding, the film's opening and ending scenes form a sort of Moebius strip via an exchange of gaze between Ren and Kaoru via intercutting. The camera frames Kaoru standing with the ocean in the background, and he smiles a little looking off screen. The shot changes, and this time it shows Ren driving at night, just as Kaoru was driving at night in the opening sequence. As Ren rests in the car, we see him through the front glass; the camera eye moves inside the car and shows Ren's face, almost invisible due to backlight. The scene fades out, and we see Ren and Kaoru going down a steep hill on bicycles. The way Kaoru spreads his arms resembles an image of paragliding as well. The film is now back to the present and shows the bright, red sunrise whose rays are reflected on the calm waves. Looking at the sunrise, Ren looks back and stares directly at the camera. His gaze cast off screen seemingly connected to Kaoru's gaze also cast off screen. Not that Ren's gaze identifies with Kaoru's gaze, but this editing pattern, appearing as a shot-reverse-shot set up, means that Ren is not facing Kaoru's absence in order to forget him but to seek ways in which he can coexist with the absence.

Conclusion: mourning never ends

Our understanding of *shinasaigo eiga* should be expanded by including the study of the crucial formal elements of movement and stillness. Understanding that the movement or stillness of characters in these films is coded visually as representing where they are in the process of mourning helps deepen our understanding of the narrative and the characters themselves. These films each have a 'voiceless and still' person at the core of the narrative, and their very stillness shows the viewer where they are in the process of mourning.

Some may argue that the losses represented in these films have nothing to do with the 3/11 disaster and its aftermath. While such an argument may have credibility in a literal sense, the images of the tsunami and the explosion of the nuclear plant in Fukushima have been omnipresent in Japan since that time, meaning it is impossible for a Japanese viewer to not be reminded of these horrifying images of loss and destruction when viewing these films. They reflect the zeitgeist of post-3/11 Japan.

These films may serve a purpose in helping people come to terms with their own sense of loss, but unfortunately these depictions of loss in Japanese film are almost exclusively heteronormative in nature. This paper offered a close analysis of a rare depiction of mourning in a non-heteronormative relationship in *shinsaigo eiga*. In so doing it acknowledges that everyone needs the opportunity to mourn, regardless of gender, sexual orientation or the gender or sexual orientation of the person they have lost. The study of *shinsaigo eiga* must expand to include the study of representations of all who suffer loss and mourn because to do otherwise is to deny the humanity and suffering of those who are often neglected at the margins.

Notes

1. In *Calling*, there is a moment in which F. Scott Fitzgerald's *Tender Is the Night* appears. It is possible that a young wife in *Tender Is the Night*, who is mentally ill, is a source of inspiration for a silent wife in *Calling*.
2. At the shore near the cliff, Ren and Risako meet a group of children flying kites. While Risako can easily fly the kite, Ren fails to keep it in the air. The falling of the kite may be accidental, but one of the children tells Ren that he needs to relax. It suggests that Ren's body is still stiff at this point in the film.
3. Sendai Mediatheque established the centre for remembering 3.11, also known as recorder311, in 2011. One of its exhibitions, '3 gatsu 12 nichi hajimari no gohan [March 12th: Food of the Beginning]', displayed seventy-two pictures that captured survivors' memories of food from March 11 to May 24, 2011. Many of the comments written by survivors on Post-it notes indicate a direct connection between food and life such as: 'Taberu koto wa ikiru koto [to eat is to live]' (Center for Remembering 3.11 n.d.).

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