

The Shochiku Corporation, Japan's 'National' Cinema, and the Rise of the New Wave [Excerpt]

A roster of well-established directors was recruited to work on Shochiku's slate, and despite their genuine attempts to satisfy their contracts with the studio, they would each soon become frustrated with the studio's stifling creative restrictions and the overtly cynical agenda they were made to work within. Those who didn't abandon their contracts outright in favour of independent film companies chose to act on this discontent by influencing filmmakers from other limbs of the industry and, by proxy, putting their stamp on the rising movement toward counter-culture films.

There was no manifesto underpinning these calls to action, yet most of these projects would contribute to a 'new left' within Japanese cinema, one born of global sociopolitical stirrings, and therefore escaping the ambits of the 'national'. These clusters of filmmakers would promptly found their own schools, hosting a kind of paradigmatic cinema that would be better defined by the search for political progress than anything prescribed by Shochiku or other studios.

The newly organised Art Theatre Guild often produced films which dealt with the trauma of a country beginning to heal after unprecedented death and destruction. The Guild's films would speak to existential pain, sorrow, and yearning following the obliteration of Hiroshima and Nagasaki at the hands of the US, Japan's brutalisation on the world stage, and their shifting relationship with foreigners, occupying forces, and with their own ruling classes. These films represented a refusal to accept the narratives of Japan's pre-war history as told in *hōga*, or "domestic cinema", and would become a monument to Japan's newfound creative self-determination.