







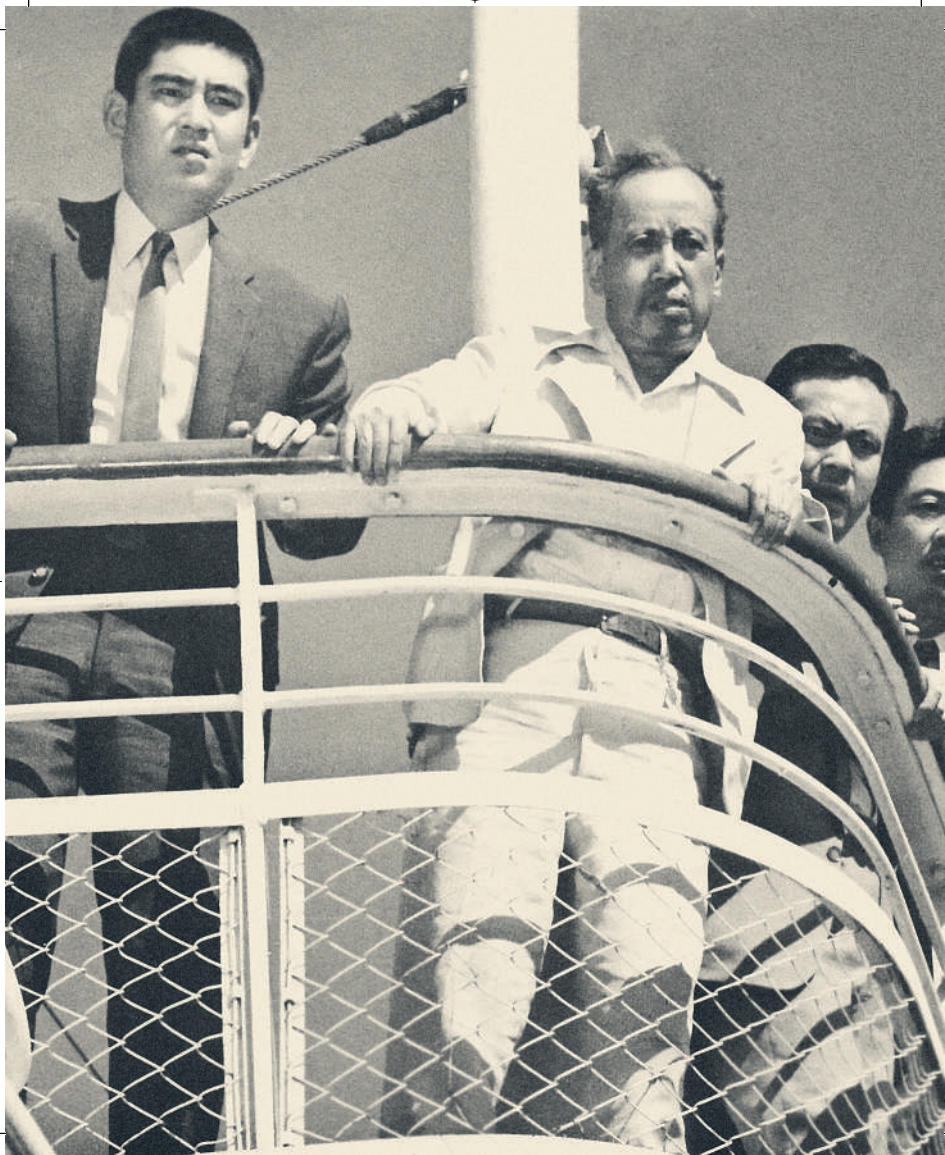
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# A FUGITIVE FROM THE PAST

飢餓海峡 KIGA KAIKYŌ

a.k.a. Straits of Hunger, The Hunger Straits

Original Release Date: 15 January 1965

## CAST

**Rentarō Mikuni** Takichi Inukai / Kyōichirō Tarumi

**Sachiko Hidari** Yae Sugito

**Junzaburō Ban** Detective Yumisaka

**Ken Takakura** Detective Ajimura

**Kōji Mitsui** Motojima

**Yoshi Katō** Chōzaemon, Yae's Father

**Susumu Fujita** Police Chief Ogimura

## CREW

Directed by **Tomu Uchida**

Screenplay by **Naoyuki Suzuki**

From the novel by **Tsutomu Minakami**

Produced by **Kimiharu Tsujino,**

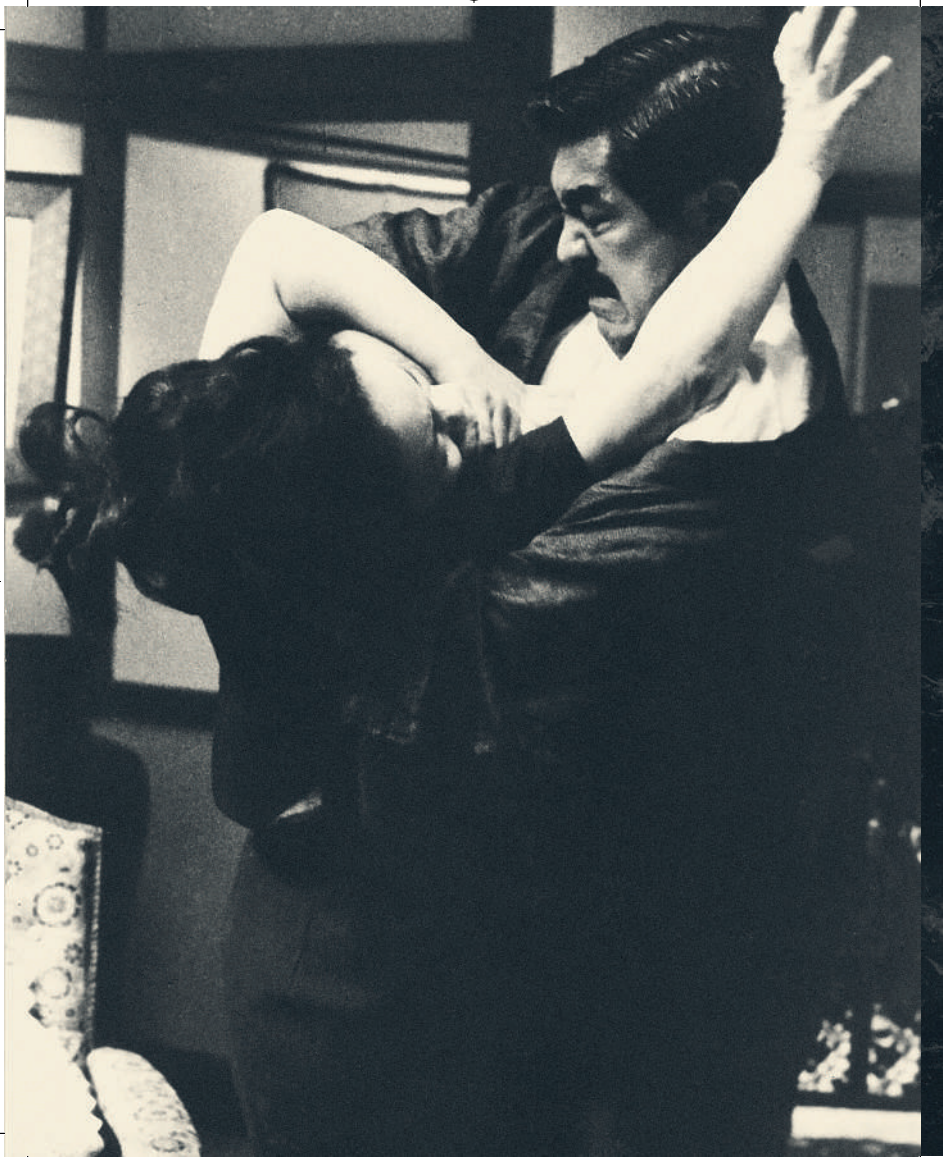
**Hisashi Yabe** and **Seiichi Yoshino**

Edited by **Yoshiki Nagasawa**

Director of Photography

**Hanjirō Nakazawa**

Music by **Isao Tomita**





# A TALE OF GUILT AND DREAD: TOMU UCHIDA'S A FUGITIVE FROM THE PAST

by David Baldwin

*"Tsugaru Strait, one of the many straits separating the islands of Japan: it holds in its depths both love and hate, and the swollen hearts of people tortured by misery."*

—From the opening narration of the film.

In early 1964, Tomu Uchida was one of the most famous, successful, and respected film directors in Japan. His studio, Toei, had just released the fourth part of the five-part series about the famous swordsman Musashi Miyamoto, which like the previous installments had been a big hit. He was the undisputed *kyosho* (master filmmaker) among Toei's team of directors, just as Akira Kurosawa was the *kyosho* at Toho and Ozu had been Shochiku's *kyosho*. Trailers for his pictures prominently displayed his likeness and/or name ("the great Tomu Uchida"), on a par with or even more prominently than those films' stars.

Yet Uchida was anything but complacent. His friends and contemporaries Kenji Mizoguchi and Yasujiro Ozu were dead. The once huge and fiercely loyal Japanese film audience had started to stay home and watch television. Box-office receipts for domestic productions had therefore plummeted drastically since their high-water mark in the late 1950s. Uchida became obsessed with the idea that to survive, the film industry needed to start telling *modern* stories in a new way, and he badly wanted to help bring about this change, but the period films he'd been making recently were obviously not going to do the trick. So the 66 year-old filmmaker began the most unusual project

of his career: *A Fugitive from the Past*, a.k.a. *Straits of Hunger* (Kiga kaikyō, 1965), based upon a serialized novel by popular writer Tsutomu Minakami. It was a film he embarked upon with a sense of mission, as the only way he knew to save Japanese cinema.

## OUTCASTS

Shortly after the end of the war, in 1947, during a devastating typhoon, the protagonist, Takichi Inukai (Rentarō Mikuni), who is desperately trying, for economic reasons, to escape the northernmost Japanese island of Hokkaido and get to the main island, Honshu, becomes involved in the robbery and murder of a pawnbroker and his wife. Inukai's two ex-convict companions had perpetrated these crimes—though he himself, as the opening scenes wordlessly make clear, didn't plan them or carry them out, nor did he even know about their plan in advance. After he kills the convicts (in self-defense, or so he later claims), the destitute Inukai, certain that the police will never believe him to be innocent, decides to keep the loot and burn the evidence. As one online blogger has noted, in this moment of decision Inukai “gets to choose a life in prison or a life of guilt.”<sup>1</sup>

He rejects the former choice, but hopes, perhaps unconsciously, to finesse his conscience through an extraordinary gesture: for a friendly but very strange prostitute, Yae Sugito (Sachiko Hidari), with whom he spends the night, he leaves behind a colossal tip with part of the stolen money, more than enough, in fact, for her to settle her debts and start a new life. As if Fate anoints him for this act of kindness, Inukai, who takes on the identity of “Kyōichirō Tarumi,” turns businessman and soon acquires great wealth. But the consequences of Inukai's crime—his karma—can never be escaped. For just as Yae is increasingly consumed by the idea of tracking down and thanking her benefactor, a police inspector, Yumisaka (Junzaburō Ban), becomes obsessed with bringing Inukai to justice.

The importance of the concept of karma to Uchida's work has been noted by Japanese film scholar Inuhiko Yomota:

<sup>1</sup> “Lovers Corner #3 - Straits of Hunger,” *Nihon Cine Art* (blog) by “Chaos Rampant,” at <http://eigageijutsu.blogspot.com/2011/03/lovers-corner-3-straits-of-hunger.html>.



“Although he worked vigorously to make *jidaigeki* with a somber sensibility, such as *Bloody Spear at Mount Fuji* (*Chiyari Fuji*, 1955), the three-part series, *Sword in the Moonlight* (*Daibosatsu tōge*, 1957–1959) and the five-part series, *Miyamoto Musashi* (1961–1965), he also shot the film *A Fugitive from the Past* (*Kiga Kaikyō*, 1964 [sic]), starring Mikuni Rentarō and set in contemporary times. Running through each of these works is the director’s sharp awareness of human karma and discrimination, and he was there able to grasp an extremely real sense of evil.”<sup>2</sup>

The “discrimination” to which Yomota refers has everything to do with the “real sense of evil” he detects in Uchida’s films. Though the word is never uttered in the movie, there’s much evidence to suggest that both Inukai and Yae belong to the lowest and most shunned class of ethnic Japanese: the *burakumin*. The rough equivalent of India’s “untouchables” (*dalit*) caste, these people—workers in despised occupations such as butchers, tanners, undertakers, and prostitutes, and all their descendants—were outcasts during the feudal era, openly discriminated against and segregated within wretched *mura* (villages). Beginning in the Meiji era, prejudice against the *burakumin* was legally forbidden, but this merely served to make their oppression more covert, even to the present day.

In one of the most insightful articles written about the film, left-leaning critic and filmmaker Ryota Nakanishi has stated that *A Fugitive from the Past* “is all about Japanese class discrimination against *burakumin*,”<sup>3</sup> and thus the movie transcends the good cop/bad criminal dualism of the traditional crime thriller. Inukai’s neurotic behavior—concealing his killing of the ex-convicts and keeping the stolen money (which *he* didn’t steal) rather than turning it over to the police—seems only to make sense if we grasp that he would *automatically* fear the police because of who he is. Furthermore, Yae originates from a *mura* in Shimokita in Aomori prefecture, and belongs to a profession, prostitution, strongly associated with this outcast group. And when she applies, under the system of

<sup>2</sup> Yomota, Inuhiko (transl. Philip Kaffen). *What is Japanese Cinema? A History* (Columbia University Press, 2004), p. 123.

<sup>3</sup> Nakanishi, Ryota, “Film Review: *A Fugitive from the Past* (Japan, 1965) - Historical Meaning of ‘Hunger Strait,’” <https://www.ryotananakanishi.com> (published in the website’s blog section, dated 7/11/20).

sanctioned brothels, for a job at a Tokyo whorehouse, and the owners, despite the fact that she's unable to provide them with a ration card, decide to hire her anyway, Yae cries with relief. Her joy, writes Nakanishi, is due to the fact that the despised *burakumin* class faced discrimination in employment at all levels... even for jobs as legal prostitutes.

### THE FOG OF GUILT

What was it about this outcast antihero Inukai that so fascinated Uchida? The director would seem to have had absolutely nothing in common with this character. He was, after all, born into a respectable middle-class (though later impoverished) family, and had achieved considerable distinction in his profession. Yet for those with knowledge of the filmmaker's life, there are many autobiographical resonances in the film. Like "Kyōichirō Tarumi," Uchida had dark secrets that he took pains to conceal from the world.

In the final months of World War II, Uchida suddenly decided to leave Japan and go to Hsinking (today known as Changchun) in Manchuria, China, to visit one of several major film studios scattered throughout the Japanese Empire: the Manchurian Film Association, or Man'ei for short. As he had probably hoped would happen, he was then hired to make films by the head of that studio, the notorious fascist Masahiko Amakasu, who in 1923 had served jail time for the murder of leftist writer Sakae Ōsugi, his anarchist lover, and Ōsugi's six-year-old nephew, because the radical activist had sought, among other goals, to abolish the imperial system.<sup>4</sup>

However, the end of the war intervened before Uchida could start a film, and Amakasu committed suicide. Chinese Communist revolutionaries, who were engaged in a civil war with the Nationalist (KMT) forces for control of the country, took over the city and the studio. Given the opportunity by the revolutionaries to escape the city by train with other Japanese and return to his native land (and his wife and sons), Uchida refused, opting to stay behind to witness the historic revolution firsthand.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> The so-called Amakasu Incident is featured in the 1969 Kijū Yoshida film *Eros + Massacre* (*Erosu purasu gyakusatsu*).

<sup>5</sup> This anecdote is related by the filmmaker's son, Yūsaku Uchida, in a video interview included as a supplement on the 2018 Arrow Academy Blu-ray release of *Bloody Spear at Mount Fuji*.



What knowledge we have about Uchida's activities in China are drawn not from his own less-than-candid writings, but from those of Fumiko Kishi, who was employed as a film editor in Manchuria when Uchida arrived, and who became his colleague and friend.<sup>6</sup> According to Kishi's memoir, the Japanese expatriates in Manchuria elected Uchida and another prominent director, Sotoji Kimura,<sup>7</sup> as their leaders, and both Uchida and Kimura advised them to accompany the Red Army on its trek north. Because Uchida in particular was so highly respected, the group gladly obeyed.

There followed a long ordeal for the Japanese, as they received little financial or other support from the struggling Communist rebels. As Kishi writes in her memoir, "It became impossible for us all to get along living in mud huts with no food in the extreme cold... The thought that we might all really die here terrified us."<sup>8</sup> Some in fact *did* die, and in winter their bodies had to be cremated, as the ground was too cold and hard to bury them. When it turned out that not all members of the group were needed to help rebuild the Chinese film industry, the rest were commanded to dig coal for the revolution, a type of work for which most of them were ill-suited. Uchida, as a distinguished director, was officially exempt from this requirement. But though he was a middle-aged man who hadn't performed manual labor since his youth, he sacrificed his health to join his colleagues in the mine and work by their side.<sup>9</sup>

Uchida then received a job offer to teach editing techniques to Chinese filmmakers in the northern city of Hegang. The director was conflicted about this proposal, because he would have preferred, out of loyalty, to stay with his countrymen and take his chances. But by now he was also supporting the children of a Japanese woman who'd

<sup>6</sup> Kishi had earlier worked as an apprentice editor, while still a young teenager, on two classic works by Mizoguchi: *Osaka Elegy* (*Naniwa ereji*) and *Sisters of the Gion* (*Gion no shimai*), both released in 1936.

<sup>7</sup> Kimura is perhaps best known for making the first adaptation of Saisei Murō's story, *Older Brother, Younger Sister* (*Ani imōto*, 1936), remade under the same title by both Mikio Naruse (1953) and Tadashi Imai (1976).

<sup>8</sup> Kishi, Fumiko and Ishii, Taeko, *Man'ei and I* (*Manei to watashi*) (Tokyo: Bungeishunju, 2015), p. 196. All translations from the Japanese are by Hayley Scanlon.

<sup>9</sup> Uchida's experience as a coal miner is reflected in an excellent, little-known film he made in 1957 for Toei about trapped miners, *The Eleventh Hour* (*Dotanba*), adapted from a 1956 television movie of the same name.

recently died of tuberculosis. To save himself *and* the children, Uchida decided to take the teaching job, abandoning, with considerable feelings of shame and remorse, the rest of the group. He hired Kishi as his assistant, and the two functioned well as a team and enjoyed the work. But the married Kishi took time off for maternity leave, and the sickly Uchida, who couldn't handle the workload alone, collapsed. He remained hospitalized until the Chinese authorities finally repatriated him in September 1953.

According to Kishi, "The memories of our time [in China] weighed heavily on everyone; all of us who survived were burdened by guilt."<sup>10</sup> Uchida's survivor's guilt was compounded by the fact that others who made it back to Japan were blacklisted by the film industry for their involvement with the Chinese Communists, while he, their leader, had been permitted to resume his career.

This legacy of guilt—connected implicitly in the film to Japan's larger *collective* guilt for its role in the World War—pervades *A Fugitive from the Past* like a fog, giving the movie its tone of relentless tension and fear. A comparison of the film with one that Uchida had made decades before—the 1933 silent detective thriller, *Police Officer (Keisatsukan)*—reveals how much his Chinese experience had changed him. Tetsuo, the villain of the earlier film (ironically, a Communist), is perceived completely from the outside, with almost no access to his inner life, but in the later film, Inukai is perceived largely from the *inside*, within his own tortured consciousness. Uchida in 1964 understood all too well why a man like Inukai would want to run from his past.

### A NEW NEW WAVE FILMMAKER

To get a sense of what Uchida achieved with *A Fugitive from the Past*, imagine if, in the 1960s, Louis Armstrong had decided to abandon traditional jazz and make music emulating such avant-garde masters as Ornette Coleman and Pharaoh Sanders, and had done so brilliantly, surpassing those much younger musicians. For much as free jazz had challenged American popular music, the Japanese New Wave, beginning in the

<sup>10</sup> Kishi and Ishii, p. 220.



late 1950s, had transformed Japanese Cinema. The young directors of this movement brought a cynicism and emotional detachment to their examination of the Japanese nation and character, calling into question the Romantic humanism of both Uchida's and Kurosawa's generations of filmmakers.

Director Shōhei Imamura was particularly groundbreaking, especially in his unsentimental depiction of Japanese women. For *The Insect Woman* (*Nippon konchūki*, 1963), he cast in the lead role the young Sachiko Hidari, who serves in that film as a kind of anti-Setsuko Hara. Whereas Hara, the star of Ozu's *Tokyo Story* (*Tōkyō monogatari*, 1953) and many other classics, was genteel, subtle, and sophisticated—a lady in every sense of the word—Hidari was brazenly direct and openly erotic, even primal. So just as Hara was, in her attitude and demeanor, the archetypical modern woman according to the standards of *pre-war* Japan, Hidari was the archetypical *post-war* woman. It was this above all that fascinated directors like Imamura... and Uchida.

So Uchida had found both an actress and a style for the new, modern movie he dreamed of making. But he then went even further. According to Nakanishi, Uchida, with the aid of cinematographer Hanjirō Nakazawa, developed a technique they dubbed the “Toei W106 method” to give the film a unique look and feel. As is well known, the entire film was shot in 16mm (often with a handheld camera) and blown up to 35mm for theatrical release. But in addition, Nakanishi writes, three distinctive post-production effects were used: a) the *blow-up and trim* method, whereby the original image is sometimes expanded to as much as twenty-five to thirty times its original size, b) the *relief* method, which juxtaposes negative and positive versions of the same image, and c) the *Sabatier* effect (sometimes called the “pseudo-solarization” effect), in which the light and dark values of the image are reversed, without greatly overexposing the negative. It's because of these unusual special effects that this work, technically a crime thriller, often feels more like a horror movie. They serve to render Tarumi's subjective experience in visual terms, particularly when the “ghost” of Inukai takes over his soul at crucial moments—most hauntingly, in his final confrontation with Yae.

Ultimately, *A Fugitive from the Past* differs from most Japanese New Wave films in its almost unbearable sense of tragedy. For Uchida could bring to this material an intimate experience of the horrors of war and revolution that his brash younger colleagues lacked, which he then transposed into the familiar conventions of the crime movie genre. As scholar Alexander Jacoby has written about this movie, “With its themes of guilt and obsession and its intimations of political allegory, it bettered Imamura as a study of the dark underbelly of post-war society.”<sup>11</sup>

### A WOUNDED MASTERWORK

Uchida’s quixotic dream of reviving the film industry by creating a single movie, even one of the most powerful ever made in Japan, that would serve as a model for the way forward was clearly doomed from the start. Nonetheless, he was shocked when Toei’s executives rejected the completed work. The studio, after all, had pioneered the double feature in Japan: how could they possibly fit Uchida’s epic film—the cut the director had submitted was 192-minutes long—on the top half of a double bill? So when the head of the studio gave it to another filmmaker to re-edit without Uchida’s consent, the latter threatened to take his name off the picture, and the fierce quarrel spilled over from Toei’s offices into the media. Then at last, a compromise was reached. A 183-minute “restored” version, it was decided, would be shown, by itself, in four theaters that Toei directly controlled, while an even briefer cut—167 minutes, almost a full half-hour shorter than the original<sup>12</sup>—would be screened elsewhere. This last version was paired on the same bill with a romantic teen musical called *Let’s Sing to This Cloud* (*Ano kumo ni utaō*, 1965), featuring future martial arts superstar Sonny Chiba as a high school English teacher.

Reviewers at the time seemed less than overwhelmed. The film placed fifth in the venerable cinema magazine *Kinema Junpo*’s annual critics’ poll: a respectable but

<sup>11</sup> Jacoby, Alexander. *A Critical Handbook of Japanese Film Directors* (Berkeley: Stone Bridge Press, 2008), p. 324.

<sup>12</sup> A fourth variant of the film, the so-called “French” version, available on at least one home video source, is 175-minutes long.



unremarkable showing. However, three decades later, in a 1995 *Kinema Junpo* poll to determine the best Japanese films of the past hundred years, the critics ranked it in sixth place, and in a similar poll taken just four years later, it was voted the third greatest Japanese production of the 20th Century... placed just ahead of *Tokyo Story*.

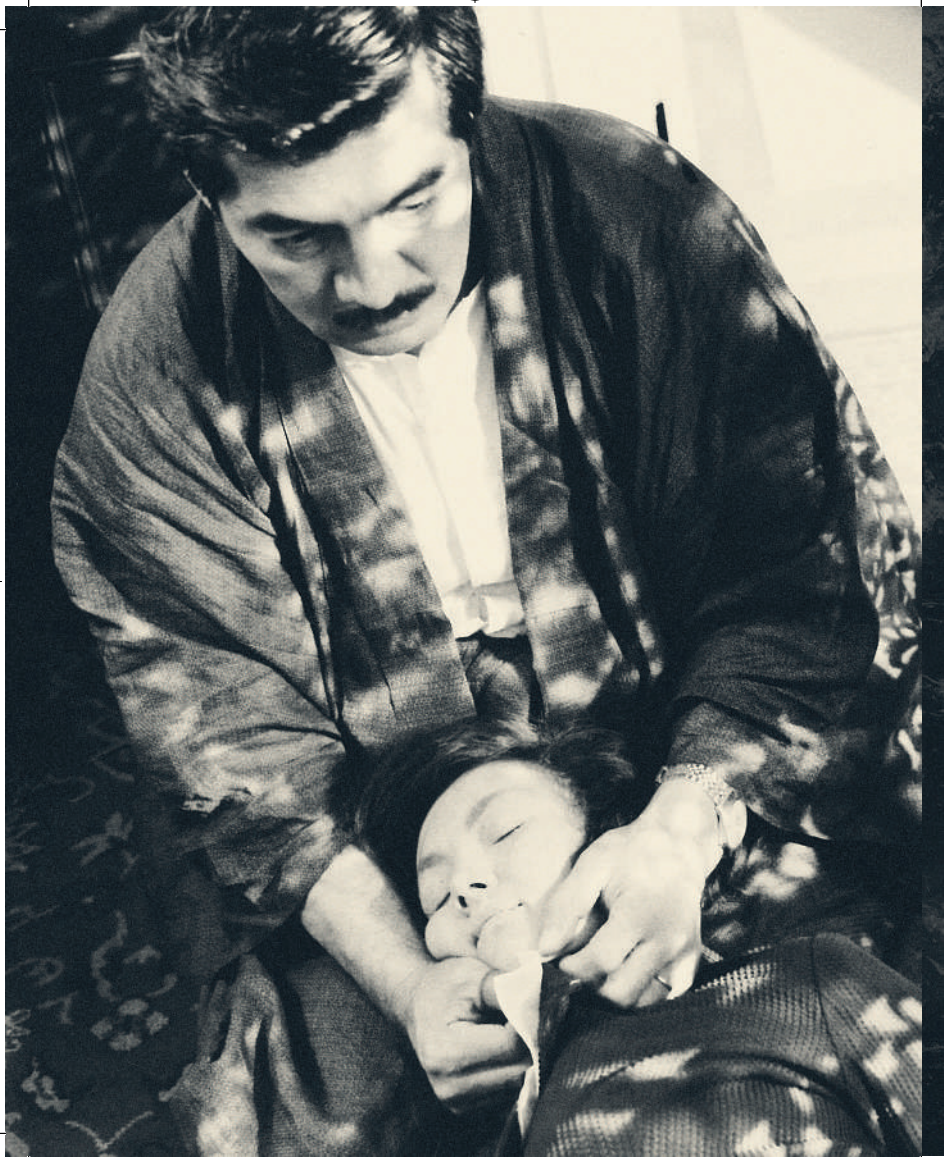
The year in which the picture was released, 1965, might well be regarded as the final year of Japanese Cinema's glorious Golden Age. In the decades to come, many fine and some great movies would be released, but the vigorous dialogue among cinematic giants that had characterized that unique period would vanish forever. So there's a sense of *finality* to this great work, of something vital coming to rest. Thus, it's fitting that, after the narrative's shocking conclusion, the beautiful, haunting final shot depicts the "hunger straits" of the film's Japanese title, now utterly calm, while the camera pans up towards a crystal-clear horizon, as seagulls sail by and massed choral voices—provided by Isao Tomita's extraordinary score—chant an eerie benediction, all passion spent.

*David Baldwin is a blogger, playwright, screenwriter, and activist based in New York City. He is the creator of a blog about the life and work of the great director Tomu Uchida: "IUTAS, the Uchida Tomu Appreciation Society," located at uchidatomu.com. He has also recently co-authored a screenplay, Buster & Fatty, about the friendship of Buster Keaton and Roscoe "Fatty" Arbuckle, and the latter's infamous trials for manslaughter. The author wishes to thank Hayley Scanlon for her assistance with translation.*











# TOMU UCHIDA'S SALVATION FROM EVIL

by Inuhiko Yomota

Translated from Japanese by Alana Stone

Tomu Uchida was a renowned director of film adaptations of novels by the likes of such popular authors as Kaizan Nakazato and Eiji Yoshikawa, whose national acclaim spanned the pre- and post-war periods. In *A Fugitive from the Past*, Uchida took on the challenge of adapting the work of Tsutomu Minakami (1919–2004), one of post-war Japan's representative popular novelists, transforming his masterpiece into a brilliantly successful film.

Minakami was born into a poor family in a valley of Wakasa Bay in Fukui prefecture. As a young boy he was taken into the custody of a temple, where he produced a novel after being subjected to various hardships. His protagonists, whose life circumstances vary considerably, range from prostitutes to criminals to young monks; while ever-present in the background looms the strong influence of the Shin Buddhist conception of humanity and salvation.

The lengthy novel *A Fugitive from the Past* was published in 1963. It is 1700 pages long. It falls under the genre of the social detective novel. However, its composition is somewhat unusual in that the protagonist's crime is clearly depicted in the first half of the work, while the detectives revisit and investigate it in the second half. In fact, the author, who had published the first half in the *Asahi Weekly* in serialized form over the span of a year, was initially unable to complete the work. By publishing the latter half, he was finally able to publish the novel in book form.

Shigeru Okada, the Chairman of Toei Studio in Tokyo, was the first to become engrossed

with *A Fugitive from the Past*. Okada proposed that Uchida, who had finished filming four out of the five *Miyamoto Musashi* films (1961–1965) and had expressed interest in refreshing his repertoire by exploring more contemporary subject matter, should now shoot a detective story. Okada was then transferred to the Kyoto studio to become chairman there, so the project was to be overseen by the new (Tokyo) chairman, Kimiharu Tsujino. Since the pre-war days, Tsujino had maintained a reputation in Kyoto for having the air of an activist. It was immediately decided that Naoyuki Suzuki should be in charge of the script while Uchida's second son, Yūsaku Uchida, would oversee the production process. Production began in May 1964 and was publicly announced at the end of July. Shooting from summer to autumn, plans were made to premiere the film at the National Arts Festival in November.<sup>1</sup> Uchida expressed his desire to shoot this great work in 16mm, which he would subsequently blow up to 35mm. This treatment would lend a rough quality to the film's grain, bringing out a coarse on-screen texture.

It was thought that the subtle shadows on the character's faces might be blown away and that there was an inherent risk that what was out of focus might not be clearly visible, potentially causing the background details to appear ambiguous. However, Uchida was convinced that this type of rough screen quality would present an analogue to the devastation of post-war Japanese society. He called this technique the "W106 Method," or the "Wide 106 Method." However, Uchida jokingly nicknamed it the "Wide Tom Method," convincing Toei's president Hiroshi Okawa that using it would save him money. In 1964, a cool breeze was beginning to blow over the once considered omnipotent film industry, with companies finding it increasingly difficult to secure the abundant production costs they once had done.

What prompted Uchida to make this adaptation, then? What first springs to mind is the fact that the novel, set between 1947 and 1957, presents the Japan of that decade. To Uchida, who was repatriated to Japan in 1953, when he was obliged to undergo medical treatment for a time, this period symbolized his years of absence. It contemporaneously

<sup>1</sup> The Agency for Cultural Affairs (ACA) National Arts Festival was held every autumn since 1946 to showcase to the Japanese public outstanding works of art from Japan and overseas.



represents Japan during a period of subsiding turmoil, when food and housing conditions were improving and defeated cities, once reduced to rubble, were rapidly regaining their vitality. Ten years after proclaiming his return to directing with *Bloody Spear at Mount Fuji* (*Chiyari Fuji*, 1955), Uchida would showcase his confidence as a director by depicting contemporary Japan. By daring to scrutinize the period of his absence, he was, in a sense, able to extract psychological compensation via that portrayal.

By using a crane, Uchida managed to capture a scene set up as an open set spanning 200 meters of the Ikebukuro black market where the heroine Yae works, assembling characters including veterans, “*pan-pan* girls,”<sup>2</sup> and GI’s; sprinkling the crowd with representative members of the post-war entertainment industry. By dressing up, Yae avoids being caught out as a *pan-pan* girl; crosses the overpass and hides in the open space before finally arriving at the bar where she works. With the help of the crane, Uchida was able to fit this entire scene into a single long shot.

As Yae leans briefly against a billboard, a leaflet reading, “*Promote the withdrawal of our compatriots in China!!*” appears casually pasted between various political posters and advertisements, pointing to the story of Uchida’s own absence from this place. Uchida intentionally introduces a perspective from outside Japan to represent the period of his own absence under the occupation by the Allied Forces. The film adopts the perspective of those Japanese who have repatriated, taking the existence of Japan for granted while rejecting the perspective of those who have remained in the country, viewing them as ignorant of the fluidity of the outside world. It goes without saying that Uchida shared this point of view; here the protagonist of *A Fugitive from the Past* similarly experiences this narrative of fluidity and repatriation.

It is at Maizuru, the very port where Uchida’s ferry docked when he repatriated to Japan from China, that the protagonist arrives after deciding to put an end to the turbulent state of his existence in Hokkaido, Japan’s periphery. Curiously, even in 1953, this was

<sup>2</sup> *Pan-pan* girl was a derogatory term used for the prostitutes who generally served the occupying forces in the post-war period.

not an uncommon occurrence. Depicting Japanese society, or rather the Japanese landscape, from the viewpoint of those who had returned from the *gaichi* (Japanese periphery), is what Uchida was reflecting upon when he adapted *A Fugitive from the Past*.

Tsutomu Minakami's original novel tells the following story: Kyōichirō Tarumi, the protagonist, was born in the village of Okutamba. The child of an impoverished farmer, he was raised single-handedly by his mother. After finishing elementary school, he went to Osaka to serve as an apprentice, eventually becoming a pioneer farmhand in Kutchan, Hokkaido, while regularly sending money back home to support his mother. At the end of the war, he becomes the agricultural leader of a pioneer town but is sentenced to three months in jail for petty theft.

Obligated to leave this village and thus forced to move around Hokkaido, he encounters two ex-convicts recently released on parole from Abashiri prison. Kyōichirō is saddened to discover that they had been thrown back into society in the very clothes they were wearing at the time of their arrest, without receiving any financial support for their rehabilitation. In September 1947, the two ex-convicts break into a pawnshop in Iwanai, committing a burglary-murder before committing arson in the town and fleeing. Kyōichirō becomes caught up in this escape. That same night, the Seikan Ferry, which had departed the port of Hakodate, capsizes due to a typhoon, causing the most significant national tragedy of the post-war period to date. In the confusion surrounding the incident, Kyōichirō muddles in with the shipwreck's victims, eventually getting his hands on a small boat on the beach, which he rows into the dark strait with the ex-convicts. The two of them attempt to murder Kyōichirō in a dispute about the stolen money, but end up falling out of the small boat. Their corpses become mixed up with those of the innumerable victims washed up on the shore. Yumisaka, a detective with the First Division Hakodate Police Investigations Unit, harbors doubts about this string of events, but the incident eventually collapses into a labyrinthine spiral.

Determined to start a new life with the large sum of money he has unexpectedly fallen upon, Kyōichirō meets a prostitute, Yae Sugito, on the light railway, with whom he later



sleeps at a brothel at Ominato. Yae is the daughter of a poor lumberjack and carries the burden of her family's debt, having worked in the sex trade since the age of sixteen. Kyōichirō adopts the pseudonym Takichi Inukai and gives Yae a large wad of banknotes. She takes this opportunity to repay the loan outstanding on her house, subsequently moving to Tokyo. Kyōichirō chooses to settle down in Maizuru, then at the height of post-war disorder. He begins his new life by single-handedly establishing a starch processing company and, within a decade, gains recognition as a citizen of respectable social standing. He makes a large donation to the Ministry of Justice to support the reintegration of prisoners into society, gaining the respect of the local community.

For her part, Yae survives as a prostitute in the turmoil of post-war Tokyo. She falls in love with a man involved in black market activities, but conceals the fact that her present subsistence hinges on the large sum of money she'd received from a mysterious person named Takichi Inukai. One day, she picks up a newspaper and discovers that Inukai is presently known as the great philanthropist Kyōichirō Tarumi. The Anti-Prostitution Law is about to come into force and the time is therefore ripe for her to consider her next move. Yae decides to visit Kyōichirō in Maizuru to express her gratitude for his act of a decade earlier.

Kyōichirō is perturbed by Yae's visit. He denies being Inukai and claims that he's not attempting to evade Yae's ingenuous questioning. Fearing the collapse of his life and of the business he's built up, he poisons her and the houseboy with potassium cyanide as if they'd planned a double suicide, disposing of the corpses in the midst of a rainstorm. The following morning the local police discover the bodies, but Kyōichirō feigns ignorance and disbelief, ordering his wife to testify on his behalf. He'd become acquainted with his employer's daughter back in the days when he'd been a farmhand in the pioneer village, eventually marrying her after she'd been orphaned.

The original novel thus tells the story of the encounter and unfortunate demise of Kyōichirō and Yae, a man and a woman from impoverished backgrounds. In reality, the incident involving the capsizing of the Seikan ferry (the Tōya Maru accident) and the

Great Fire of Iwanai both occurred in 1954. However the author shifted the time frame to 1947, when the post-war chaos was at its height. In 1957, when Yae was murdered, the Anti-Prostitution Law was enacted. In the intervening decade, Tarumi, who had started out with a single flourmill, was able to successfully grow his business into a massive food production enterprise. This reflects the state of the Japanese economy at the time which, while at first in ruins, eventually recovered, and in turn reflects society as a whole as it gradually recovered its affluence.

The narrator first mentions the case at the Hakodate police station behind Detective Yumisaka's back. He then shifts the focus to Yae, telling the tale of her life in Tokyo. Finally, when the action shifts to Maizuru, the focus turns to the Police Department's investigation of the feigned double suicide incident. Under the direction of Chief of Police Ogimura, the detectives meticulously research details about everything from Kyōichirō's birthplace to the bar in Tokyo where Yae once worked, to interviewing former prostitutes and gathering testimonies from people familiar with the lives of both





of them. Of particular note is the zealous activity of Assistant Police Officer Ajimura. It is he who requests the participation of Yumisaka, who had retired when the case entered a state of labyrinthine confusion a decade earlier but still harbors a passion for solving it.

Kyōichirō's true life story is only fully elucidated at the novel's conclusion. Appearing before the police, he at first stubbornly denies involvement in any past criminal acts until being forced to concede when Yumisaka confronts him with irrefutable evidence. Kyōichirō, who was incredulous as to the sincerity of Yae's intentions, now deeply regrets murdering her. He insists on taking his own boat to cross over from Maizuru to Hokkaido to assure himself of the state of the former pioneer town before willingly making a confession. The police approve his request, sending him off on the boat, handcuffed. When the Tsugaru Strait appears, Kyōichirō stuns the detectives by suddenly throwing himself overboard.

In the novel, the young Kyōichirō goes to a pioneer settlement and is later sent to a mine on the verge of abandonment where he devotes himself to hard labor. This reflects



Uchida's own forced labor in a remote part of the Soviet-Japanese border. This is purely speculative, but had Manchukuo not capitulated with Japan's defeat, Minakami may have chosen to set the work in a settlement in the Japanese Empire rather than in Hokkaido. What struck me most in the novel was the hero's demeanor as he first leaves his hometown, placing all his hope in settling in the periphery, but instead ending up expelled from and destroyed by it. This reading suggests the novel could be reconsidered from a post-colonial perspective, a theory corroborated by Uchida's own experience in Manchuria.

In the film version, Rentarō Mikuni plays Tarumi and Sachiko Hidari plays Yae Sugito. On Toei's side, Yoshiko Sakuma was initially expected to play Yae. Isamu Kosugi was initially considered for the role of Detective Yumisaka. Starting with Uchida's first feature film, *Three Days of Competition* (*Kyōsō mikkakan*, 1927), Kosugi had been cast in several of his films: *Unending Advance* (*Kagirinaki zenshin*, 1937), *Earth* (*Tsuchi*, 1939), the *History* trilogy (*Rekishi*, 1940), and as the leading role in *Torii Suneemon* (1942). Kosugi was a sure bet when attempting to cast a retired, not-so-short, former detective. However, due to a scheduling conflict, he was unable to accept the part. Therefore, thanks mainly to his Tohoku twang, Yamagata-born Junzaburō Ban practically fell into the role. "Banjun," who'd become a household name with his famous catchphrase "Ajapa!" was a very popular comedic actor. Appearing regularly in comedy series like *The Inn in Front of the Train Station* (*Kigeki: Ekimae ryokan*, 1958–1969), he'd never appeared in a social drama and was unknown as a serious dramatic actor. The casting proved successful. His brilliant portrayal of the role of the stubborn, aging former detective, won Best Supporting Actor in the annual Mainichi Film Awards.

So what is the tangible difference between the original work and its adaptation? What screenwriter Naoyuki Suzuki kept in mind while adapting the 1700-page novel into a screenplay was how to effectively assemble the two protagonists' narratives. In the original story, Yae is working at an *izakaya* in Ikebukuro when she receives a large sum of money from a male friend involved in the sale of black-market rice, thereby raising the suspicions of the police. Reacting to this, she dares to slip out of Ikebukuro into the



Kameido red light district at the end of the field, hiding the large sum of money she has received from Inukai. This episode is omitted in the film where it is simply explained that Yae leaves Ikebukuro because she dislikes being involved in local gangs' turf wars. In the second half of the novel, to determine his identity, the entire Maizuru police force investigates all aspects of Tarumi's life, researching everything from his birthplace to his place of residence in Hokkaido; his every sound and footstep is depicted in great detail. The meticulous process of tracing Yae's whereabouts in Tokyo is also described. But the film version omits this entire episode, instead offering a summary describing the detectives' return to the police station to report their main findings. The script is extremely concise in its treatment of the details of the investigation. On the other hand, what is dealt with at great length are Kyōichirō's two statements. In the novel, he easily succumbs to the detectives' detailed investigation and the plot swiftly moves towards resolution. In the film, he is summoned and interrogated by the investigators more than twice, and gives a lengthy statement. Initially displaying outright insolence, he eventually gives the police a statement wrought with dignity. However, from the moment he is confronted with physical evidence, he becomes depressed, apologetically prostrating himself. Mikuni, the lead actor, portrayed these conflicting emotions brilliantly.

The film's opening sequence captures the rough waves of the Tsugaru Strait. As the title expands on the screen, something akin to a pilgrim's hymn becomes audible, seemingly weaving together the spaces between the characters. It is a chorus from *jizo wazan* familiar to viewers from Uchida's *Sword in the Moonlight* (*Daibosatsu tōge*, 1957). The notion of "strait" reflects the idea of moving from one side of something to another. Geographically, this is about moving from Hakodate to the Shimokita Peninsula, going from Hokkaido to the *naichi* "inland" of Honshu, but it also implies a change of life story, from one narrative to another. Does crossing imply a shift from a life plagued by hunger to one not so? Or does the very act of crossing imply, like those who have gone down the road of hunger, a state brimming with cruelty and misery? The fact that the title word "hunger" overlaps with the hymn immediately suggests what will become a major motif throughout the film, the question of evil and salvation.





A disaster occurs on the Seikan Ferry and two men in dirty military uniforms flee from an Iwanai pawnshop. They are prisoners on parole from Abashiri prison. Smoke is visible in the background. At Iwanai train station another man of large stature, Inukai, clings to some rice balls with his dirty work gloves as the crowd surrounding him, now aware of the fire, enters a state of frenzy. As ordered by the other two, he heads to the ticket office. Perhaps because he is in a rush, he squeezes the rice balls with his left hand while attempting to buy a ticket with his right. The three jump onto the train that has now swung into motion. A general state of nervousness prevails, and the crowd remains silent. The pair take some cigarettes from a paper box, and proceed to smoke them, but the tall man doesn't join in. Should the journey be interrupted due to the incident in Hakodate, they plan to jump out onto the track and start running. There is a sudden cut at this point as the scene switches to depict the chaos at the port of Hakodate surrounding the attempted rescue operation. Aware of the emergency, throngs of people dash towards the beach and the road leading up to it is jam-packed with traffic. At the beach, Yumisaka, an assistant police officer with the Hakodate police, is delivering emergency orders to his subordinates. Terrifyingly rough waves rage in the night sea. The film thus presents an unexplained concatenation of emergency situations occurring in two different locations.

The following morning, tents have been pitched on a completely silent beach, while a succession of caskets is carried off. The previous night, Yumisaka had undertaken the work of identifying the corpses. He removes his hat, placing it in front of a casket, and decides to have the bodies buried rather than allow for their cremation, in order to solve the mystery of the two unidentified corpses. The two coffins are taken to a hilltop temple graveyard and are buried in Yumisaka's presence. If one listens carefully, Yumisaka can almost imperceptibly be heard chanting the Heart Sutra. The temple's High Priest comes over, jocularly remarking that the need for the shaven-headed one to chant a sutra will be obviated on this occasion. This vignette does not occur in the original novel, where Yumisaka simply gives a statement about the suspicious events at a meeting held at the Emergency Response Headquarters two days after the disaster. This unassuming shot reveals the duality of Yumisaka's character. He is someone who

seeks truth while simultaneously praying for the salvation of the unidentified. This duality captures the film's overarching message, thus demonstrating the importance of the aging detective's role in the story.

Moving a little ahead of the film's actual progression, Yumisaka steers the investigation headquarters' examination of the mystery of the two unidentified bodies. He visits the Hotoke-ga-ura rock formations at the Shimokita Peninsula and, after struggling to climb up a cliff, comes across the small burnt boat abandoned by Inukai, concluding that this is a site where evidence has been purposefully destroyed. He observes a pile of ash without a trace of a burnt boat, not even a single nail. In the original novel, the detective at this point bitterly elaborates on his sense of futility. In the film, he gently wraps a handful of ashes in a handkerchief, which he takes home. This shot can easily be overlooked, but these ashes will ultimately lead to the ashes of the dead. In addition to ash eventually becoming strong physical evidence in the pursuit of Inukai/Tarumi, it should also be noted that Yumisaka places great emphasis on memorial services. It is worth mentioning that at the end of the three-hour-plus long film, we will re-witness the chanting of the sutra by the same character. This is the conclusion Uchida wished to leave us with. Though these are only fleetingly mentioned in the original work, I would like to explore in detail the various visual elements that make such a strong impact in the film.

Inukai arrives at the Shimokita Peninsula and, while contemplating Mount Osore, comes across a blind shrine maiden and medium, or *Itako*. In the original novel, Inukai receives a rice ball from Yae whom he meets by chance on the light railway. Here, he will be told the story of how Yae, on the third anniversary of her mother's death, asked the shrine maiden to make contact with her mother. Yae believes that communication with the dead is tantamount to old wives' tales and laughs it off, but when Inukai hears what she has to say about Mount Osore, the clear evocation of the folkloric landscape has a strong impact on him. This is depicted in the scene in which Inukai is walking around



in the heat at *sai no kawara*, at the backside of Mount Osore, in a state of confusion.<sup>3</sup> Ritual stone piles lay scattered here and there and an otherworldly tension is palpable. At this point in the film, the technique of using 16mm instead of 35mm film to lend a rough quality to the image is perhaps at its most effective. As Inukai wanders about, lost in his frenzied state, the image suddenly switches to negative, possibly a metaphor for being caught in hell. He reaches a farm, grabbing a radish that he eats in a famished state. He believes that he is alone, but somebody shouts at him from a nearby farm. He hears moaning coming from the farmhouse, which prompts him to glance through the building's broken window only to see a hunched-over middle-aged shrine maiden, chanting a candle-lit incantation. People resembling her relatives sit around her, their faces spiritually heightened, clapping along enthusiastically. Eyes clouded over, she elaborates on hell and the meaning of *sai no kawara* in a trance-like state. As she rubs some prayer beads between her hands, a look of satisfaction gradually emerges on her face. This scene, which a terrified Inukai witnesses before fleeing, is reminiscent of Tatsumi Hijikata's *Ankoku Butoh*.<sup>4</sup>

Later on the train Yae first broaches conversation with Inukai, unaware of his experience with the *Itako* at Mount Osore. When she herself had asked the *Itako* to make contact with her mother, the following message had been communicated: "*There's no road leading us back, there's no way to return.*" This scene strongly evokes another in *Sword in the Moonlight* where the song "*Ai no yamabushi*" is sung by *tori-oi* female singers.<sup>5</sup> Inukai's bizarre moment at *sai no kawara* and his encounter with the moaning middle-aged woman in the farmhouse are here equated to going through hell. In contrast, his momentary basking in the train's warm light symbolizes his sense of momentary inner peace. At this joyful, blessed juncture on the train, Yae appears to show him unpaid mercy in this, the

<sup>3</sup> In Japanese mythology, *sai no kawara* is thought to be a riverbed in the netherworld where the souls of departed children do penance. This border between the worlds of the living and hell is administered by Jizō Bosatsu.

<sup>4</sup> *Ankoku Butoh* is an abstract and highly evocative dance form founded by Tatsumi Hijikata and Kazuo Ohno in 1959 and developed in the context of Japan's avant-garde arts scene during the 1960s.

<sup>5</sup> *Tori-oi* are traditional female street musicians who perform in large hats with shamisen.

film's most heightened expression of her purity. Though the two of them appear to be filled with earthly joy, in reality the dead are casting deep and somber shadows that will eventually drag them down. Why does Mount Osore suddenly appear in Inukai's eyes? This mysterious and sacred mountain is a reminder of the shadow of death he had left behind when he finally moved back to the mainland amidst deep emotional turmoil.

Inukai's sexual encounter with Yae, reduced in the novel to one sentence: "It was a diluted sexual encounter," is endowed with deep significance by Uchida. At the brothel in Ōminato, at the moment rain begins to lightly fall when Yae opens the *shoji*, Mount Osore appears, its dark shadow encroaching on him. A rumbling of thunder resounds and Inukai begins to feel very frightened. Yae observes his state of fear, which she finds amusing, pronouncing the shrine maiden's words she'd already told him on the train. Embroiled with the thunder, *jizo wazan*, the hymn that repeats throughout the film, is almost imperceptible. At this point a fearful Inukai and an exuberant Yae have wordless sex. Afterwards, Yae appears entirely satisfied, sprawling her limbs languorously across the tatami. On close observation, an *ofuda* (scroll) depicting a Mount Osore *jizo* (statue of the Buddha) can be seen hanging on the wall. This scene is of interest as it evokes Bataille's theory of heightened eroticism being triggered by the fear of death. A relaxing post-coital interlude is accompanied by the receding thunder. One of the vital aspects of *A Fugitive from the Past* is its setting against the backdrop of the folkloric imaginary.

Yae is, at this point, very comfortable with Inukai, placing all her trust in him. She offers to cut his fingernails. In the novel, Inukai, having fought with two men in the small boat, injures his hand badly, which Yae then tends to. However, Uchida dared to reduce the scope of this to Inukai's right thumb; the thumb that had been entirely crushed when he had accidentally caught his hand under a minecart, so his fingernail is grotesquely mangled and discolored black. Inukai hesitates to show Yae, but she loves the deformed nail and ends up keeping it. Inukai then suddenly hands Yae a bundle of bills wrapped in a dirty piece of newspaper before leaving the room. Yae is unsure how to take this, at first hiding the money under the futon, but when Inukai leaves she gently takes it out again to confirm that it really is a wad of bank notes. She panics, hiding it in the knee





crease of her clothes. At that moment she senses something prickling her fingers. It is Inukai's black nail. She decides to store it carefully together with the money.

This series of scenes surrounding Mount Osore, from Yae's impersonation of the monster with the futon to the handling of the nail to the handing over of the money forms an important arc that foreshadows several events that will subsequently occur, such as Yae's love for Inukai, the fetishism at its core, and the rebuilding of her life. From the start, the film is narrated from an overwhelmingly negative perspective of death and mysticism, but here we are finally presented with a positive moment between a man and a woman. In fact, until her demise, Yae will recall this moment as having been the most joyful of her life. She will remove the black fingernail from the place where she has carefully stored it and indulge in sweet romantic fantasies. Furthermore, this strange object plays a decisive role in the concluding part of the story, as it constitutes the strongest physical evidence establishing that Inukai is in fact Tarumi. Why did Uchida place such emphasis on a black fingernail—a body part like human waste, like a tooth or hair—to the extent that it is given equal weight as a large bundle of money?

My guess is that it has something to do with Uchida's personal experience of working in the unforgiving environment of the mines of "New China." The hauling of minecarts and material through subterranean tunnels was something he did on a daily basis. In Uchida's experience, accidents involving minecarts were probably not uncommon. In the novel, the object that Yae secretly stores in her purse to commemorate her encounter with Inukai is the razor with which he shaved in the brothel's bathroom. According to Suzuki, who was in charge of the script, Uchida realized as early as the first production meeting that this razor would not be evocative enough to serve as a memento. Razors were casually disposed of, as these were habitually provided in brothels. Uchida wondered whether this commonly available object lacked the impact necessary to evoke the couple's blissful memories.

In his book *The Golden Bough*, the 19th century folklorist James Frazer was the first to attempt a systematic analysis of the importance of Magical Thinking surrounding



body parts that have fallen from the human body. From the standpoint of contagious magic, possessing someone's fingernail is directly connected to manipulating that person's will. By giving Yae a nail, a unique body part belonging to Inukai, instead of an anonymous razor, what he had in mind was the type of magical thinking still flowing at the base of a supposedly modernized post-war society. Inukai's black, curved fingernail thus becomes a privileged fetishized object within the realm of Yae's sexual fantasies. To Yae, who has only met him once, the nail is doubly symbolic in that it signifies both Inukai's absence and his presence within this absence. It should not, however, be dismissed that a character other than Yae also falls under the spell of fetishism.

Our attention should now be drawn to Yumisaka, the detective who had wrapped the ashes of the burnt boat in a handkerchief, storing them away in a chest of drawers despite his family's ridicule. Yumisaka at once resembles Yae and finds himself in a very similar predicament to her. Both are trapped by belongings left behind by Takichi Inukai and, with those as their only clue, hope to be reunited with him.

I would like to point out that at the same time Uchida was making *Sword in the Moonlight* in 1957, Takeo Kuwabara published his *Daibosatsu tōge* theory, highly praising Kaizan Nakazato's source novel of the same name. Kuwabara explains that *Daibosatsu tōge* describes three layers of Japanese culture: the first being the layer of modern consciousness, below which lies a layer of feudal Confucianism. These two are underscored by a stagnant base layer, difficult to define and containing elements of shamanism that have been worshiped at shrines since ancient times.

The film version of *A Fugitive from the Past* provides an excellent example of what Kuwabara pointed out to be the "shamanistic thing" at the base layer of Japanese culture. Indeed, in the original novel, the "blind shrine maiden" is only cursorily mentioned. By building on the author's light referencing, Uchida manages to draw out the fact that Yae's sexual temptation is rooted in an irrational, shamanistic impulse, a horrifying phenomenon whose male analogue, here embodied by Inukai, is tantamount to death. Uchida successfully depicts the paradox that Inukai's left-behind nail and

ashes awaken fetishistic passions in both Yae and Yumisaka, ultimately acting as physical evidence that untangles the weighty hidden history.

If the scene depicting Yae and Takichi Inukai's initial meeting, culminating in their sexual encounter at the brothel, is the climactic moment of the first half of Uchida's film, then the decisive episode of the second half occurs when Yae visits the wealthy man known as Kyōichirō Tarumi, whom she innocently believes to be Inukai. Interestingly, Uchida directs these two scenes with extremely precise symmetry. An interesting homologous relationship is established through the depiction of iterations and inversions. In a tearoom in the Kameido red light district, Yae has gotten hold of a dreary article announcing the enactment of the Anti-Prostitution Law, while in the same newspaper she comes across an article describing the announcement by a philanthropist named Kyōichirō Tarumi that he will donate as much as 30 million yen to the Ministry of Justice for the welfare and rehabilitation of prisoners after their release.

At the Tarumi family home, a middle-aged woman instructs her to wait in the drawing room. This is apparently Tarumi's wife. She has a slight limp and a cold demeanor. After entering the room, Tarumi sits on the sofa, listening to Yae's story while, with his left hand, playing with the temples of his glasses; he persists in feigning ignorance of the name Inukai. At that moment, lightning flashes and rain begins to lightly fall. Tarumi stands up and attempts to close the window with his right hand, which he has kept hidden thus far. Yae then happens to catch a glimpse of Tarumi's right thumb, which she claims to remember. She runs over to him to confirm her suspicion. Struck by an overwhelming wave of emotion, she embraces Inukai like a madwoman. Fearing an escalation of the turmoil, Tarumi covers Yae's mouth with his left hand to muffle her cries, while grabbing her neck with his right. However, when he senses Yae's overwhelming delight, he involuntarily strangles her out of fear. At this point, the melody of *jizo wazan* descends like a spiral. We hear a dull sound as he breaks her neck. Having heard the commotion, Takenaka, the houseboy, comes rushing in. Tarumi places his hand on Takenaka's neck, strangling him without hesitation. The melody of *jizo wazan*, cut off before, now begins to flow.



In Minakami's original work, Tarumi takes Yae's life by serving her black tea laced with potassium cyanide and gives the same poison to Takenaka, staging it as if the two had planned a lover's double suicide to take place at the stormy beach. However, the film presents a more complex version of the murder, which is not simply committed out of fear of exposing his past wrongdoings. It can instead be interpreted as an extremely twisted act of love, resulting in an unfortunate act of manslaughter.

*Jizo wazan's* omnipresence imparts on the viewer the transcendental impression that *A Fugitive from the Past* is intended to be observed from afar. To a Shin Buddhist, the film immediately evokes the Amida Buddha, but Uchida's direction is not intended for missionary purposes. In any case, in order to render the melody that is repeatedly presented, but inaudible to the on-screen characters, meaningful, the presence of a character capable of mediating between the two becomes necessary. In this context, the presence of Yumisaka, the detective from the Hakodate Police Department, gains primacy.

Yumisaka is portrayed very differently in Minakami's original novel. He's the sole instructor and 7th Dan master of the Kendō training center established by the Sapporo police. When Assistant Detective Ajimura of the Maizuru police travels to Hakodate to ask for his help, he visits the *dojo* and finds a pale and hardy old man nearing sixty years. His face is wrinkled and his white hair stretches out behind him. The old man observes Ajimura with a steely gaze. Minakami's depiction of Yumisaka is that of a restrained, aging kendō practitioner, one who has maintained his pride in carrying on in the line of the samurai despite having retired from the police force.

Uchida initially portrays Yumisaka as a loser with no connection to the world of Kendō. He is depicted as an assistant police officer that, in his obsession with meaningless details, is incapable of finding the culprit, instead plunging the case of the murder of the Iwanai pawnbroker into a labyrinthine spiral. Suzuki's script depicts Yumisaka as someone unable to deal with the realities of his profession while at the same time confronting a difficult domestic situation, with two hungry children, and finding himself





in a position of acute isolation. This section does not, of course, appear in the original novel. Disparaged by his wife, Yumisaka is incapable of fighting back. The instant he leaves the house, his children gobble up the food he has left untouched in a pot. Yumisaka walks across the windswept fields of Hakodate at dusk. He walks out towards the shore, attempting to calm himself. As the waves crash against the shore, he tries in vain to conjure up the image of a person named Inukai. Thus ends the first part of *A Fugitive from the Past*. Up to this point, the perspective has been from the Hakodate (Hokkaido) side. Now there is a juncture where the point-of-view will switch to Yae's, who has been in Tokyo. Yumisaka will continue to make the occasional appearance as a detective chasing Yae, but will no longer be at the center of the action. He will reappear ten years later at the Maizuru Police Station, as an important tertiary witness in Yae's murder case.

When assistant police officer Ajimura (Ken Takakura), who maintains a good reputation as a university-educated intellectual detective, visits Yumisaka in Hakodate, the latter is a guard at the local youth detention center. Unable to cope with the constraints of police bureaucracy, he has finally settled on this job. He is balding and obviously not in great shape. Ajimura tells Yumisaka about Tarumi. Yumisaka's instinct tells him that this is the same person he once attempted to arrest. He immediately decides to go to Maizuru. His sons, a university and high school student, don't take kindly to his taking time off to travel at his own expense. Yumisaka turns his back on his sons' disapproval, removes a package that he has stored deep in the top part of a chest of drawers, and heads for the station accompanied by Ajimura. The elder son asks the younger to hand their father several 100-yen notes.

Viewers could easily dismiss this scene as inconsequential, drawing the conclusion that the content of the package in the chest of drawers is simply some money. However, the contents turn out to be the ashes of Inukai's burnt boat. The film version emphasizes the fact that Yumisaka, who has been subsisting at the edge of poverty, is obsessed with the idea of uncovering the truth behind the incident.

At the Maizuru police station, Tarumi has already been summoned, however, he has only chosen to reveal facts about his current social status and his contribution to the Ministry of Justice, displaying an arrogant attitude to all personnel ranking lower than the chief of police. Refusing to engage with the police officers' questioning, he storms out of the interrogation room in a state of exasperation. Words cannot attest to the quality of Mikuni's performance. From his roles in *Stepbrothers* (*Ibo kyōdai*, Miyoji Ieki, 1957) to *Sweet Revenge* (*Kiri no hata*, Katsumi Nishikawa, 1977) in which he played a sexually predatorial lawyer, there is probably no actor in post-war Japanese cinema his equal when it came to portraying hypocritical villains. One of the detectives, who has taken great pains to find out where Tarumi lived as a child blurts the discriminatory comment: "If you're born in such a place, you're sure to grow up without a sense of guilt." He then goes on to add that beside his generous donation, Tarumi has also established a scholarship and enjoys the deep respect of the local residents.

As the detective's reports pile up, the mystery surrounding Tarumi deepens. Susumu Fujita, the chief of police in charge of the interrogation process, stands by. He too is baffled by the situation—in the absence of physical evidence, there's no way to arrest Tarumi. But there is another factor influencing the failed outcome of these interrogations. While the Maizuru police are constantly attempting to understand Tarumi's past from the standpoint of *naichi* (Honshu), Tarumi himself has been living under the logic of someone who has abandoned *naichi* at a young age and has since been living with the mind-set of *gaichi* (Hokkaido). He believes there is an absolute gap between these two places, the strait, and that it is impossible to understand what goes on in the *gaichi* without having the perspective of the *gaichi*. No one at the police station is aware of this gap, and they are therefore all incapable of proceeding with the investigation.

Incidentally, it should be noted that, in the pre-war period, the *gaichi* included Manchukuo, established by Japan in Northeast China. The link between Tarumi's youthful journey to Hokkaido as a pioneer and Uchida's first-hand experience of the small farming settlements in Manchuria is not emphasized in an obvious way. Tarumi started his business in the flour milling industry, rapidly developing his company into



a large enterprise in the town of Maizuru. This was a bustling place counting a large number of repatriated Japanese returning from Manchuria after the war. Needless to say, this was also the site of Tomu Uchida's arrival on Japanese soil as a returnee. In this sense, it is understandable that Tarumi, who had restarted his life as Inukai in the *gaichi*, should leave his first footprints in the *naichi* in this town of repatriates.

In the film, a detective reports the results of his investigation into Tarumi's wife Toshiko. When Toshiko was repatriated from the continent, she had given birth to a mixed-race stillborn child, and had no relatives in Japan. She was lost and alone. Taking pity on her, Tarumi decided to take Toshiko as a wife. In the novel, Toshiko is simply described as the only daughter of the pioneer farmer Tarumi worked for as a farmhand. Though Toshiko plays a very minor role in the film, appearing only in a few shots, she plays a vital role in confusing the operation by insisting on her husband's alibi. Without spelling it out, the film implies that Toshiko had a tragic past and the fact that she is lame should not be overlooked. The story of two repatriates, Tarumi and Toshiko, who survived tragedy to be united in Maizuru, emerges in a hazy way, and the viewer can only indirectly glean the relationship between husband and wife.

During their final confrontation in the detention center, Yumisaka removes the ashes from his breast pocket, thrusting them before his opponent. He tells Tarumi that Yae had always believed in him but that he hadn't believed in her. Hearing these words, Tarumi thrashes out at the ashes with his palm, knocking them to the ground before prostrating himself, weeping on the floor. Needless to say, these are the ashes of the small boat that Inukai burned at Hotoke-ga-ura, but also symbolize Yae's ashes. The nail and the ashes, in being presented to their owner in this way, force Tarumi accept that he has an alter ego, Inukai. This is how we finally reach the story's epilogue.

The conclusion of *A Fugitive from the Past* gives the inverse impression of the film's opening. The Seikan Ferry, which had left Hakodate by night before sinking, is now heading from Aomori towards Hakodate in the daytime. Mount Osore, gloomily oppressive in the thunder, towers unperturbed in the clear sky. Yumisaka, who had read

the sutra in front of the unidentified corpses, now recites the same scripture for all the dead, including Yae, so that they may reach Nirvana. *Jizo wazan* flows out from behind the endless, dark sea.

The production of *A Fugitive from the Past* was wracked by multiple setbacks. In the night scene depicting the height of chaos associated with the capsizing of the ferry at the port of Hakodate, more than 500 extras and a huge number of cars were kept on standby. However, as a typhoon failed to conveniently strike, shooting was postponed for days on end. During this prolonged impasse, the crew grew frustrated, and the director's impatience made him overwhelmingly irritated and depressed. The shooting schedule was extended and finally concluded at the end of October, two weeks behind schedule.

Meanwhile, an internal labor dispute broke out within Toei and producer Kimiharu Tsujino was released from his responsibilities. In his place stepped a young rationalist, Chiaki Imada, who exhibited no interest in “master directors” of the likes of Uchida. Delays in shooting led to the release date being moved back, as the production failed to meet the deadline for the National Arts Festival. The program for the following year had already been determined. As a result, after it was previewed on its own on December 27th, the film was released the following year on January 15th, 1965, as part of a double bill. The film's length was an issue. There is a fundamental difference between producers' attitudes towards single and double bills. With double bills, from a distribution standpoint, to maintain a reasonable cap on the number of screenings, a strict limit is imposed on the runtime of any single feature.

According to Kōji Ōta, an assistant director of Uchida's, the released work measured 13,000 feet and ran 2 hours, 24 minutes, and 27 seconds. However, what screened at the All Rush Film Festival, when it was first previewed, was a film of 17,282 feet, amounting to 3 hours, 12 minutes, and 1 second.<sup>6</sup> Imada, the new producer, requested that Uchida shorten this and when he obstinately refused, Imada ordered the assistant

<sup>6</sup> The figures are quoted from Kōji Ōta's *Yumei o haku: Ningen Uchida Tomu*, (Tokyo: Shakaishisōsha, 1985), p. 184.



director, Ōta, to do it. Ōta reluctantly cut 25 minutes, creating a version running 2 hours, 46 minutes, and 47 seconds. News of this contention broke out in the press, sparking protests by several filmmakers. Uchida commented that if the film was cut, he wanted his name removed from the credits. In the end, Uchida and Toei President Hiroshi Okawa came to an agreement, compromising by restoring half of the cut material.

The details surrounding these circumstances cannot be faithfully recounted, as the people involved are no longer alive. However, the episode anticipates the decline of Toei as a film studio. As a result, when first released on January 15th, 1965, a 183-minute “restored version” was screened at four Tokyo theaters, whereas in the rest of the country, Ōta’s shorter version was shown. The film proved a big hit and later, after receiving various film awards, Toei supported this restored version for its revival screenings. Uchida’s departure from Toei in December 1965, three months after the September release of the fifth and final part of the *Miyamoto Musashi* series, *Ganryūjima no kettō*, was prompted by the controversy surrounding the film’s length. He was 67 years old. Uchida, who no longer needed to stay in Kyoto, sold his Narutaki mansion and moved to Odawara. Renting a four-and-a-half tatami mat apartment on the moat-side of Odawara Castle on his own, Uchida put on the airs of a madman, his head brimming with thoughts of shooting a film about General Maresuke Nogi.

*Yomota Inuhiko was born in Osaka, Japan in 1953. He studied the history of religion at Tokyo University, researched comparative literature at the postgraduate school of the same university where he completed his PhD. He lectured as a professor of film history at Meiji Gakuin University and retired in 2012. He has taught at Columbia University, Tel Aviv University, Bologna University, and many other universities as a visiting professor and scholar. His publications in Japanese include Invitation to Film History, Luis Buñuel, Nagisa Ōshima and Japan, Japanese Cinema and Mythology of the Postwar Society, Japanese Cinema in the Asian Context, High School in 1968, Portraits of Dogs, and Pasolini. He has translated Edward Said, Pier Paolo Pasolini’s poetry, and published three poetry books, A Beggar of Life, My Purgatory, and Separating Fire. His English-language book, What is Japanese Cinema: A History was published by Columbia University Press in 2019.*











## ABOUT THE TRANSFER

*A Fugitive from the Past* is presented in its original 2.40:1 aspect ratio with mono sound. The High-Definition master was produced and supplied by Toei from the best available archival materials, with additional grading and picture restoration by Arrow Films at R3Store Studios.

R3Store Studios:

Dan Crussell, Jo Griffin, Nathan Leaman-Hill, Rich Watson

## PRODUCTION CREDITS

Disc and Booklet Produced by **Jasper Sharp**

Executive Producers **Kevin Lambert, Francesco Simeoni**

Technical Assistant **James Pearcey**

Technical Producer **James White**

QC **Joe Andreyev, Aidan Doyle**

Production Coordinator **Leila El-Khalifi Hall**

Production Assistant **Samuel Thiery**

Blu-ray Mastering **Visual Data Media Services**

Subtitling **The Engine House Media Services**

Cover Artwork and Illustrations **Tony Stella**

Design **Scott Saslow**

## SPECIAL THANKS

Alex Agran, Sarah Appleton, David Baldwin, Aaron Gerow, Irene González-López, Erik Homenick, Earl Jackson, Daisuke Miyao, Alana Stone, Shiori Takata, Inuhiko Yomota, Yukiko Wachi (Kawakita Memorial Film Institute), Alexander Zahlten

