

Godzilla: Culture through the Camera's Lens

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A thesis presented to the Honors College of Middle Tennessee State University in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for graduation from the University Honors College

Spring 2019

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Acknowledgments

I would like to thank and acknowledge my friends, family, girlfriend, and all those who have supported me during this process. I would like to extend a special thanks to my advisor, Professor Robert Kalwinsky, and my second reader, Professor Edward Bowen for their support and guidance through this process and to the MTSU Honors College for this opportunity.

Abstract

Godzilla serves as a modern work of mythology. It is a medium for the Japanese people to interpret and process the problems of the times, and a meter for analysts to judge the significance of these problems. When faced with anxieties over economic, political, and social issues, which the members of society cannot control, the Godzilla films are an outlet to express them. Since 1945, Godzilla has been a method for exposing and overcoming the problems facing society in a way people personally cannot.

Introduction

“I cannot believe that Godzilla is the only surviving member of his species. But, if we keep conducting nuclear tests, it’s possible that another Godzilla might appear...”

Professor Yamane, *Gojira* (1954)

Gojira, called Godzilla in English, is a long running and iconic series of Japanese *Kaiju* (giant monster) films.¹ In the United States, Godzilla is largely known for his campier exploits (e.g., performing flying jump kicks into monsters), and the wanton destruction of Tokyo. For the Japanese, he is a different monster entirely.

When these films are exported, alterations made to the content of the films to censor or localize them, as well as our own foreign perspective, means the original context is often lost in translation. The intended audience sees the film through a cultural lens that exists only in Japan and more precisely only in that era. The Japanese audience sees Godzilla in a moment when he is an expression of their own social anxiety, created to articulate things bigger than themselves.²

The process of storytelling is the process of mythologizing. In ancient times people told stories around campfires and wrote them down onto paper as imagined history, but what they were doing is no different than the stories of film. They were creating men and monsters to tackle the problems they could not. In making Godzilla, film makers were creating a metaphor for the struggles and problems of the time. This

¹ Although the monster's Japanese name is Gojira, I shall generally refer to him as Godzilla. This is done to distinguish the monster from his films, which are titled Gojira and Shin Gojira in two of my examples.

² Linda, R. Badley et al., *Traditions in World Cinema* (Bodmin: MPG Books Ltd., 2006), 220.

way, the audience can watch and engage as the heroes of the film contend with and defeat the monster, conquering the problems of the day in a way they cannot.

Anyone can find entertainment in the modern mythology of another country. To fully understanding the message behind the monster, we need to understand the socio-political and cultural context that created him in the time and place of his production. When we examine the content of these films within a Japanese context, a picture starts to form and the man in the lizard suit becomes more than just cheap entertainment. A closer look at the three case studies in this thesis, *Gojira*, *Godzilla vs. Hedorah*, and *Shin Gojira*, will offer insight into Japan at three turning points and how Godzilla intersects with those specific times.

In 1954, Godzilla was a spirit from the past, an angry god from traditional Japan. He lashed out at the modern Japan where he no longer belonged, because American bombs and American culture had turned his country into something he did not recognize. He represented not only the destruction of Japan during WWII, but the conflict between traditional and modern Japan that existed after the US occupation had ended. Japan grappled with its identity and a result was Godzilla, a monster that allowed Japan to reinvent its identity and deal with the crimes and tragedies of WWII and the pre-war culture that had facilitated them.

In 1972, the rapid economic growth of the 50s and 60s made Japan the richest country in Asia, but at a price. Large scale pollution was destroying not only the health of the environment but the Japanese people. In *Godzilla vs. Hedorah* this created a new angry god, Hedorah, a spirit of nature twisted by industrial pollution of the environment and counterculture's pollution of society. Godzilla fights his monster in a new role as the

stand-in for the Japanese people in their struggle against these two pollutions. Like Godzilla, they cannot win the battle alone, and it is only with government help, however slow or inefficient, that Hedorah is defeated..

In 2016s *Shin Gojira* Godzilla returns to being an angry god, but not in the same way as 1954. Now Japan is not the economically dynamic country of the late 20th Century. Surrounded by hostile and growing countries, facing stagnation inside the government, and dealing with overly-assertive allies, Godzilla becomes a way for Japan to criticize itself. The battle with the monster reveals the weakness of Japan's defense forces and its geriatric administration that is slow to act and too quick to depend on America, even when it is not in their best interests. Godzilla is only defeated when the Japanese people use their spirit and ingenuity to stand up to both their enemies and allies.

Over the years, Godzilla has been, and continues to be, a metric for the mood in Japan at any given time.³ What they think of their neighbors and allies, of their country's leadership, of its economic troubles and changing culture, all of it finds an outlet through the camera lens in Godzilla. A careful look at these movies can tell us a great deal about Japan during this timeframe.

³ Donald Richie. *A Hundred Years of Japanese Film*, (Tokyo: Kodansha International, 2001), 178.

Chapter 1: 1954s *Gojira*; Transition and Revisionism

In the fall of 1954, the film *Gojira*, directed by Honda Ishiro, premiered in Japanese cinemas.⁴ Honda was a young director who wanted to put the horrors of the Japanese wartime experience, and his own military service, into his film. This movie was a huge success. It became one of the forerunners of its own genre, *Daikiju*, and, of course, its own franchise. What made the film so poignant and successful in its day was not just its ability to frighten Japanese audiences. The powerful social commentary on a Japan in transition in the wake of its WWII devastation is what makes it a landmark of cinema. It deals with the experiences of the 1940s in the wake of American occupation and the construction of a victim identity to help Japan cope with and move on from the violence it experienced and committed during and before WWII.

Specter of the Past, War and Tradition

War

Gojira is a film full of symbolism in the form of a monster. One of the most powerful symbols it embodies is war, which is a monster beyond human control. *Gojira* prominently features a monster that destroys everything in its path. Beyond the visuals of destruction is a historical analogy to the creeping destruction of the Second World War. Others have proposed similar interpretations, though it is usually forgotten in the focus on Godzilla as the metaphorical atom bomb.⁵ This war-time analogy can be categorized into four stages: the submarine campaign, encroachment, bombing campaigns, and defeat.

⁴ Japanese names are traditionally written surname first, followed by the given name. In this thesis, I have followed this format except in regard to citations, in which I have followed Chicago Manual Style formatting rules and written the names differently when required.

⁵ Peter H. Brothers, "Japan's Nuclear Nightmare: How the Bomb Became a Beast Called "Godzilla"," *Cinéaste* 36, no. 3 (2011), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41691033>. 37.

During the Second World War, the Japanese military spread across Asia and the Pacific. From Manchuria, all the way to New Guinea, and across dozens of islands and outposts where millions of men or fleets of ships were fighting for the Japanese Empire. The Japanese mainland lacked the resources necessary to fulfill civilian and military needs. To keep the Imperial Navy sailing and the Imperial Army fighting, merchant marine ships constantly brought materials from Japanese controlled territory to Japan, and from there across the oceans to supply and feed the homeland and the military.⁶ This supply system would prove a dangerously weak link in the Japanese Empire, and at the start of WWII, the US Navy's submarine force exploited it.

The opening scene of *Gojira* depicts this commercial dependence almost better than history. The crew of the fishing vessel Eikomaru is shown at leisure. There is a blinding bomb blast, heavily implied to be an American nuclear test. Moments later, fire erupts from the bubbling water and destroys the Eikomaru;⁷ the same fate befalls several ships searching for Eikomaru. The monster is only hinted at in these scenes and the cause of the destruction remains a mystery. Similar scenes played out across the Pacific during WWII. What starts as a peaceful day turns into a nightmare. The bubbling wake of a torpedo is seen, and the crew of a vessel has no chance to react before it strikes and sinks their ship. Any vessels that come to help meet the same fate. References like these to American submarine attacks would have been haunting to veterans of the Japanese Imperial Navy and merchant fleets who survived them.

⁶ Max Hastings, *Retribution: The Battle for Japan, 1944-45* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2007), 267-268.

⁷ *Gojira*, directed by Ishiro Honda (1954, Tokyo, Toho Co. Ltd., distributed by Vivendi Entertainment), https://www.amazon.com/dp/B003MUU9TM/ref=cm_sw_r_cp_ep_dp_Jd8lCb9CD2MPE.

This Eikomaru is usually paralleled with the 1954 Lucky Dragon incident, during which the fishing vessel *Lucky Dragon* decided to fish in and around the Marshall Islands and was caught in the Castle Bravo nuclear tests.⁸ The crewmen contracted radiation sickness, and several would later die. This caused a public outcry in Japan and a wave of anti-nuclear sentiment at the time that Tomoyuki Tanaka, the producer behind *Gojira*, was searching for a new film project and undoubtedly provided inspiration for this scene. Taking this in the context of Godzilla as an analogy for war, he parallels the American submarine war. Godzilla reveals himself through subtle attacks, while creeping closer to Japan and its territory in the same way WWII did for the Japanese people.

Godzilla is not seen in the opening acts of the film. Instead, we see only the consequences of his presence until his dramatic and terrifying appearance on screen. This is not dissimilar to how Japan experienced WWII. When the War in the Pacific started, its battlefields were far away from the Japanese home islands. This would not last. As the Allies began to win victories in Midway, Guadalcanal, and countless other engagements, the US Navy slowly decimated Japanese surface fleet. This gradually undermined Japan's ability to fight and to supply itself, bringing the economy to its knees.⁹

Godzilla, in his guise as the horrors of war, made his presence known to the people of Oda Island. First, the fish around the island disappear, and the locals' nets come up empty. Next, when Godzilla makes landfall, the radiation he leaves behind poisons the village well.¹⁰ Government controls on food had begun before the outbreak of war. The rationing only got tighter as the war dragged on. By 1945, it had become so tight that the

⁸ Steve Rifle, *Godzilla's Footprint* the Virginia Quarterly Review 81, no. 1, (2005), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26441723>. 47-48

⁹ Hastings, *Retribution*, 279-280.

¹⁰ Honda, *Gojira*

average person was getting several hundred calories less than the 2,000 needed a day to maintain weight.¹¹ For many, this was the first time the war affected them personally. Compared to experiencing it second hand through drafted family members, they would now experience the hardships a full-scale war could bring. The people of Odo island are the stand-ins for the Japanese people, never seeing the monster and only seeing the effect his presence has on their lives. When they finally see the monster that has made their lives miserable, it signals something much worse.

The conventional and nuclear warfare comparisons converge in the third stage: the bombing campaigns. This section and the following, defeat, cover the most emotional and powerful moments of the film and the Second World War. These are the sections that the men behind the film draw the most from personal experience to create. During his service in the military, Honda witnessed the air raids on Tokyo and after the war he returned to the ruins of Hiroshima.¹² Tsuburaya Eiji, the lead special effects artist behind the film, had lived through the Tokyo fire-bombings.¹³

Because of the limited effect of strategic bombing of military targets on Japan, unrestricted firebombing against major Japanese cities was authorized, starting with Tokyo in March 1945. With the Japanese Army Air Force largely destroyed, hundreds of American bombers dropped thousands of fire bombs on major Japanese cities. By the end of the war, firebombing had done more damage than both atomic bombs combined, leaving many cities in the same burned-out state as Hiroshima and Nagasaki. When

¹¹ Samuel Yamashita, *Daily Life in Wartime Japan, 1940-1945* (University Press of Kansas, 2015), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1c6v8sw.6>. 38-39; Appendix 2. *Estimated Calorie Needs per Day, by Age, Sex, and Physical Activity Level*, Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, accessed 1/2/19, <https://health.gov/dietaryguidelines/2015/guidelines/appendix-2/>.

¹² Brothers, *Japan's Nuclear Nightmare*, 36.

¹³ August Ragone, *Eiji Tsuburuya: Master of Monsters* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2007), 29.

Godzilla attacks Tokyo, a wall of fire follows him and the Japanese defense force struggles to fight the fires, but is helpless against Godzilla, just as they had been against firebombing. This metaphor is fitting for Godzilla. Even before he arrives, the film prepares the audience to draw comparisons with scenes of searchlights sweeping the sky and radio bulletins announcing evacuation. The monster moves slowly and starts to sweep across and burn the city and prominent landmarks, while hapless civilians flee.¹⁴

The destruction of landmarks provides more than shock and awe. It makes the experience of the film and its depiction of destruction more personal for the audience. Watching a fire breathing monster destroy prominent landmarks, including a prominent theater that this film was shown in, makes the horror all the more real for the audience. Many in the theaters in 1954 would have seen—if not experienced—the destruction of the city less than ten years ago. Invoking such a traumatic experience through the metaphor of the monster created a sense of personal horror similar to Americans viewing a recreation of the September 11th attacks today.

When watching the scenes of death and destruction in the movie, with its many references to radiation, nuclear testing, and the two atomic bombings, it is impossible to escape the nuclear parallel. Godzilla's attack on Tokyo also invokes the atomic attacks. On August 6th and 9th, 1945, the United States Army Air Force dropped an atomic bomb on Hiroshima and on Nagasaki respectively. In an instant, large sections of these cities were vaporized. Together, the bombs killed nearly 200,000 people.¹⁵ Unlike conventional bombings, the atomic bombs left deadly radiation that would disfigure and kill,

¹⁴ Honda, *Gojira*.

¹⁵ "The Atomic Bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki: Chapter 10 - Total Casualties," Yale Law School, Lillian Goldman Law Library, accessed 1/15/19, http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/mp10.asp.

sometimes horrifically, many who had survived the initial blast. The horror of these attacks is both dramatically and subtly presented in the film. In a scene shortly after the attack the leveled city, resembling any of the bombed-out cities of post-war Japan, is shown briefly. It is followed by images of the dead and dying, and other victims of the attack. Haunting choir music is played as these scenes play creating a stirring moment. There is a sense of unearthliness created in this scene. It is clear that what has happened is beyond normal conceptions of destruction. Fire bombs, as horrific as they were, could be understood within the conventional framework of warfare, as they took massive commitments of men, munitions, and time to accomplish. The atomic bomb was something strange and new and in many ways a monster out of science fiction.¹⁶

Atomic weapons far more destructive than those dropped on Japan are now considered the worst-case scenario in warfare. We know what they are, what they can do, and how they will be delivered. In 1945, the atomic bomb created a level of devastation that was previously only imagined in science fiction. The Japanese people were not prepared for such horrifying results from just one bomb.¹⁷ Few in Japan actually realized that Hiroshima had been destroyed by an atomic bomb and many refused to believe that the Americans had fielded something so powerful.¹⁸ For the people of Japan who had to experience this first hand, it was no less than the wrath of heaven than if a prehistoric god had come to deliver judgment on mankind.

The atomic connection is reinforced in a mundane scene. A hospital is crowded with the wounded and dying, and a doctor stands over a boy with a Geiger counter,

¹⁶ John Toland, *The Rising Sun: The Decline and Fall of the Japanese Empire, 1936-1945* (New York: The Modern Library, 2003), 794-795.

¹⁷ Toland, "... and Nagasaki" in *The Rising Sun*, 793-809.

¹⁸ Hastings, *Retribution*, 480.

measuring for radiation. This, and the scenes mentioned before, are what transforms the monster from the mundane (firebombing) to the unearthly (atomic warfare). It is the moment when the idea that Godzilla is a threat to all mankind is presented. He has become something beyond our normal conceptions of warfare and destruction. Godzilla is nuclear warfare, something that one cannot fight against and cannot rebuild from.

At the climax of the film, like the end of the Second World War, we see a Japan that is facing defeat. After the Atomic bombings, Japan was exhausted. Not only did it lack the strength left to fight, but it was facing the prospect of more atomic bombings and an invasion of Japan by the US. The only option for survival was as unpalatable as the alternative.

The military was an unrivaled political power in Japan. It was populated with ultra-nationalists and an honor-obsessed general who, like the samurai of the past, would die before admitting defeat.¹⁹ No peace could be found without their consent. But, even in the face of atomic bombings, they were reluctant to give in. It took a plea from the emperor himself to gain their approval for a surrender. After Japan capitulated, many military officers committed *Seppuku* (ritual suicide) to redeem their honor for their failure to prevent defeat. The returning veterans of the war often became social outsiders. The military and the militarists had started the war and insisted on fighting even after defeat was inevitable.²⁰ Their actions destroyed the country and the empire. These men, who were willing to see their country destroyed to preserve their honor, are represented in the film by the character Dr. Serizawa.

¹⁹ Toland, *The Rising Sun*, 818-819.

²⁰ Marius Jansen, *The Making of Modern Japan* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2000), 674.

Serizawa is a reclusive scientist and WWII veteran. All conventional weapons have failed to stop Godzilla, and soon all of Japan, and perhaps the world, may be destroyed. Serizawa, however, is burdened by his own pride. Only his discovery, a compound called Oxygen Destroyer, which dissolves living creatures down to their bones, can stop the monster. But, he is reluctant to use it for that purpose. He is convinced that there is a peaceful use for Oxygen Destroyer, and he is determined not to unveil it to the world until he can find it. He does not want to create something worse than the atom bomb, and he is willing to watch his country burn to the ground rather than use his work to save it and be remembered as the creator of a weapon of mass destruction. He is convinced to use it, finally, but only at great personal shame.²¹

Like the military, Serizawa is unwilling to sacrifice his personal honor for anything, even to save his own country. Nevertheless, he knows he has no choice. Similarly, many in the Japanese military knew they could not defeat the Americans but wanted to save face by surrendering on its own terms.²² Serizawa does not have time to wait and use Oxygen Destroyer at a time and place of his choosing any more than Japan could surrender on its own terms. Faced with the annihilation of his country by a creature even more dangerous than his weapon, he does relent. But, the concession is too much for his own pride, and to save face, he commits suicide like many in the Japanese military.

Tradition

Gojira is multilayered. Although it is analogous to Japan's wartime trauma, it is also symbolic of the tensions of transitioning Japan. Throughout the film, we see the

²¹ Honda, *Gojira*.

²² Hastings, *Retribution*, 444-445.

tensions in the New Japan between traditional culture and the American influence and from a martial empire to a pacifist democracy. We find this tension in the relationship between Emiko, Ogata, and the other characters, and between Godzilla and the Japanese people.

We are first introduced to Godzilla by name by an old man on Oda Island. He speaks of him like a boogiemán before being berated by a young woman who says they are both “relics” of the past.²³ As Japan became increasingly modern and Western under the influence of the US during the Occupation, it later struggled over what to do with the traditions and culture of past, in the modern Japan.

After the Second World War, most of Japan was disillusioned with the government and ideologies that had destroyed their country. Now, under the control of the US and under the command of US General Douglas MacArthur, a virtual sovereign during the Occupation, the country started to rebuild, with the Americans in the lead.²⁴ They conducted large scale economic, social, and political reforms. They broke up the wartime *Zaibatsu* (business conglomerates) that had run the economy to make way for smaller business. The political system was democratized and women’s suffrage was implemented. Anyone and anything the Americans saw as contributing to ultra-nationalism, which included official sponsorship of Shinto, the emperor’s divinity, thousands of public servants and military officers, was removed from government.²⁵ The Americans also wrote a new, pacifist constitution for Japan.

²³ Honda, *Gojira*.

²⁴ Peter Duss, *The Rise of Modern Japan* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1976), 239-241.

²⁵ Duss, *The Rise of Modern Japan*, 242-243.

Apart from legal reforms, the Americans themselves made a lasting impression on the Japanese. When the Occupation began, the Americans brought food, not just necessities but luxuries like chocolate and bubblegum. They brought their movies, cars, money, and their way of life. It would all be an important influence on Japan over the decade long Occupation.²⁶

The Occupation ended in 1952, less than two years before the release of *Gojira*. During the years that followed, Japan was in an era of transition, and in the film this is characterized by the couple Emiko and Ogata and their relationship to the other characters.²⁷

Emiko and Ogata are a young couple in love, but their relationship is not a traditional one. Technically, it is an affair, as Emiko is engaged to Dr. Serizawa, a friend and protégé of her father. However, she is in love with Ogata, and their struggle over how to break the news of this to both Serizawa and Emiko's father, Dr. Yamane, is one of the subplots of the film. The couple, which would not seem out of place in an American film, is a product of the Occupation. The relationship between men and women was influenced by the Americans. Exposure to American film, banned during the war, and simply interacting with them (especially in urban areas) made an impact.²⁸ Americans associate much more casually with each other, and men and women worked and lived together as relative equals. Something as simple as a man and a woman walking abreast could be considered strange in Japan before the Occupation. Arranged marriages were common,

²⁶Shunsuke Tsurumi. *A Cultural History of Postwar Japan, 1945-1980* (New York: KPI, 1987), 11-12.

²⁷ Colette Balmain. *Introduction to Japanese Horror Film* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3366/j.ctt1g09x15.9>. 36.

²⁸ Shunsuke, *A Cultural History of Postwar Japan*, 11.

and loyalty to the family, under Confucian and Shinto values, was expected to come first.²⁹

Serizawa is presented to us in a not-so-subtle illustration of how foreign his relationship is with Ogata and Emiko. Japan has the concept of *uchi* (inside) and *soto* (outside). It is the contrast between what is familiar and friendly and what is strange and unfamiliar.³⁰ Ogata and Emiko are presented to us as *uchi* from the outset of the film, they are a relatable couple, and easily identified as the hero and heroine. Emiko's fiancé by arrangement, Serizawa, is presented as *soto*, a part of, but apart from society. When we are introduced to him, Serizawa is a stoic figure in black, distinguished from the cheering crowd in light-colored clothes around him. He is, significantly, set apart from Emiko and Ogata; while they are on a departing ship, he is standing on the dock. The next time we see him, he is referred to as "the creature from the earth" in parallel to Godzilla, the creature from the sea.³¹ He is similar to Godzilla, a strange creature from the past.

Serizawa is a victim of the Second World War, who is physically and emotionally scarred by his experiences. He exists in the New Japan of 1954 but is not part of it due to the war-time trauma he represents. Like Godzilla, he is *soto* and in this role he represents the lasting memory of the war and it is suffering. He interferes with Ogata and Emiko's relationship by holding Emiko back from marrying Ogata, symbolically preventing Japan from moving on from the past. They respect his ingenuity and his courage as these are the parts of Imperial Japan that the country wanted to remember and admire. But his physical

²⁹ Takahiko Tomoeda, "The Essence of Shinto." *Pacific Affairs* 3, no. 4 (1930): 343-4, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2750558>. 344.

³⁰ Hector Garcia, *A Geek in Japan* (Rutland: Tuttle Publishing, 2010), 45.

³¹ Honda, *Gojira*.

and emotional scars keep him from being *uchi* and part of society. He continues to be *soto* until the end of the film when he commits suicide to make sure Oxygen Destroyer is never used again and wishing Emiko and Ogata happiness with his final words.

At the end of the war, there were many who could not accept an unconditional surrender and took responsibility for this loss of face. To preserve their honor and the nation's, they committed suicide. At the end of the film, Serizawa is one of these old guard committing suicide to restore Japan's honor and allow it to move forward.

Godzilla is the monster of the film and the natural villain for the Western audience. He is a far more sympathetic figure than that when viewed from the Japanese perspective, partially due to religious considerations.

Shinto is Japan's oldest religion and is as influential on its culture as Christianity is in the United State. However, it is much more penetrating into their daily life, and key to this is the concept of Kami.

Kami is often translated as "god," but this is not god in a Judo-Christian sense. A more accurate translation is "the divine." It refers to the power at work in the world and all things.³² There are guardian spirits in literally all things with power to affect the world around us.³³ Kami are not inherently good or evil and they are not omniscient, omnipotent, or omnipresent. But, they do have supernatural powers.

In the film we are introduced to a kami, Godzilla. When he is first mentioned by the old fisherman he is referred to as a kami, and in the very next scene we learn that he is regarded as such by the people of Odo Island, who made human sacrifices to him in the

³² Floyd Ross, *Shinto, the Way of Japan* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1965), 32-33.

³³ Sokyo Ono, William Woodard, *Shinto: The Kami Way* (Rutland: Charles E. Tuttle Co., Inc., 1972), 9.

past. The old fisherman laments that very little of the old ways are remembered.³⁴ Like Serizawa, Godzilla is set up to be *soto*, outside the normal of the New Japan, despite the fact that Godzilla is also a kami. This conflict develops out of the Occupation. Shinto was attacked by the Americans as a source of ultra-nationalism, upsetting the kami of old Japan and stirring the resentment of tradition, while at the same time creating a break between the old Japan and the new. Godzilla emerges as the guardian kami of tradition and ancient culture turned into a monster by the atomic bomb (America) and set loose into an unfamiliar landscape (the New Japan). Like Serizawa for Emiko and Ogata, he is distant and a threat to the new Japan because he is a part of the ancient cultures and traditions that helped propel it into war. Endangering the lives of Emiko and Ogata and everyone else, only with his death is safety and happiness ensured. But the film ends with the warning that there are more creatures like Godzilla, in reference to the growing conflict of the Cold War, and the resurgence of certain old guard elements in Japanese Society.³⁵

Construction of a Victim Identity

The death of Serizawa and Godzilla do not remove either from New Japan. Both were *soto* and *uchi* because they are integral parts of Japan's history and culture. They needed to be incorporated into the New Japan somehow. But, as they existed, painful and irreconcilable reminders of the past, this was difficult. So, to make them more palatable, the post-war culture had to reinterpret them into something the Japanese could accept: as the victims of WWII rather than the victimizers.

³⁴ Honda, *Gojira*.

³⁵ Saburo Ienaga, "The Glorification of War in Japanese Education," *International Security* 18, no. 3 (1993), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2539207>. 116-117.

The Second World War was a devastating loss for Japan. Not only was their military and industrial might destroyed, but when the country was occupied for the first time, its military spirit was broken.³⁶ The ideals of martial valor, honor, and sacrifice were invalidated by the sudden defeat and occupation of the country. Japan managed to rebuild, with American help, and in less than a decade would become the most prosperous country in the region as it entered an economic boom. For Japanese culture, stepping out of the traditional society and into the New Japan so abruptly was a traumatic experience. It needed to work through this trauma somehow and decide its status, now that it was not a military superpower.

Having only been recently freed from American censors, *Gojira* is an early example of historical revisionism. It presents the Japanese people as the victims of catastrophe thrust upon them by the Americans. While martial valor is not featured prominently, we do see several characters that embody tradition and self-sacrifice.

Throughout the Occupation, the Japanese education system and media were carefully controlled to ensure it only delivered an anti-war message.³⁷ Once the Occupation ended, conservative elements that had been kept out of politics by the Americans began to resurface. Several conservatives reached prominence and tried to amend the pacifist article 9 of the constitution, which renounced the right to make war or maintain war-making capacity, and reinstate the military.³⁸ In the mid-1950s, while these attempts at constitutional revision were happening, reforms in the education system and

³⁶ Ryfle, *Godzilla's Footprint*, 50.

³⁷ Ienaga, *The Glorification of War*, 123; Joseph Anderson and Donald Richie, *The Japanese Film: Art and Industry* (Tokyo, Rutland, Vt.: C.E. Tuttle Co., 1959), 160-162.

³⁸ Isao Sato. "Comment: Revisionism during the Forty Years of the Constitution of Japan." *Law and Contemporary Problems* 53, no. 1 (1990), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1191829>. 98.

the rising confidence of previous underground nationalist elements began to bring different opinions into the debate over Japan's past.

Japan was trying to decide how it would remember its past when *Gojira* premiered. Its epic scenes of destruction show us a Japan helpless before the might of a merciless monster created by the American's atomic bomb. This monster is also a tragic figure, since he was harmless before and only because of the Americans was he turned into a threatening monster. The only thing that eventually puts an end to the nightmare is the sacrifice of a brave scientist who, in *bushido* fashion, defeats the creature at the cost of his own life. This sacrifice is what allows Japan to move on, rebuild, and become content again, allowing the ends to justify the means. Scenes like this allowed the Japanese audience to reinterpret their country's experience during the war and focus on the devastation they and their country suffered but rebuilt as a peaceful nation.³⁹ The message in *Godzilla* is clearly anti-war and anti-nuclear proliferation. Within the Japanese context these become more of a criticism of the Americans who were embroiled in the Cold War and an arms race with the USSR. Japan's own wartime past is glossed over and given a positive image of brave, if futile, resistance, reinforced by heroic music in key instances.

More intentional attempts at historical revision would deny Japan's wartime crimes against its neighbors. *Gojira* is something more natural. It is an outgrowth of Japan's need to reconcile its wartime past. It offers an outlet for the Japanese to process their experiences and find closure by focusing on what their country has suffered and recovered from, rather than the sins of the past.

³⁹ Susan Napier "Panic Sites: The Japanese Imagination of Disaster from *Godzilla* to *Akira*." *Journal of Japanese Studies* 19, no. 2 (1993), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/132643>. 331-332.

At the end of the film Serizawa commits suicide, ensuring that the weapon he made to defeat Godzilla, and its secrets, die with him. The monster suffers a horrible, and also sympathetic death. Serizawa's death is a symbolic gesture against the true enemy of mankind, not a monster from below the seas, but the specter of another (nuclear) world war; which threatens to destroy all nations more completely than Japan was after WWII.

Chapter 2: 1971s Godzilla Vs. Hedorah; Destroyer to Ambivalent Protector

Several more Godzilla films were made after *Gojira*. These all varied in tone and themes in a way reflective of how rapidly Japan was changing during the 50s and 60s.

Godzilla Vs. Hedorah was directed by Banno Yoshimitsu and a cast of young and relatively untested artists who remade Godzilla for their generation.

Godzilla Vs. Hedorah is considered one of the campier entries on this side of the Pacific. This is not entirely inaccurate, but it would be premature to dismiss it as just another B-movie. It is as clearly environmental as the original was anti-nuclear and in many ways it holds to the spirit of the original better than earlier entries like *All Monsters Attack* (Godzilla's Revenge) or *King Kong vs. Godzilla*.⁴⁰ With its social criticism and unique styling, it is a product of the period when Japan had recovered from WWII and was no longer struggling over the question of old versus new, or of reconciling its recent wartime experiences. However, Japan's postwar baby boomer generation was just beginning its own struggles over identity similar to their parents' identity issues in 1954. The postwar Japan was facing a new set of challenges that would once again have to reconcile with its identity while it dealt with security as well as quality of life.

Security: The Environment and the Counterculture

In the film, we see people constantly concerned with security. Some characters make the nihilistic decision to embrace hedonism, because there is no such thing as security anymore. Others attempt to reestablish security in the face of threats. The

⁴⁰ David Kalt, *A Critical History and Filmography of Toho's Godzilla Series* (Jefferson, NC, London: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2010), 118.

security concerns in this film take two forms: the need to address environmental concern from unregulated industry, and the issue of dealing with fringe elements of society.

Environment and Pollution

The film's title is localized as *Godzilla vs. the Smog Monster*, which is a more descriptive title. The monster, Hedorah, is a creature literally made from and feeds on pollution. Direct parallels are drawn between continued pollution and the growth of Hedorah in the same way parallels are drawn between Godzilla and nuclear testing in *Gojira*. Societal concerns for environmental issues, as well as concerns over the effects of the economic Miracle on the nation's health, and the new identity created after 1945 may have only traded one evil for another.

Pollution from industrialization—chemical dumping produced high-profile scandals in the 60s and 70s—was a problem in Japan even before WWII.⁴¹ Like many countries of the time, Japan was beginning to realize the impact of industry and urbanization on the environment. In the opening scenes of the film we see mount Fuji in the background, and in the foreground a factory bellowing smoke. The camera pans to a polluted ocean filled with dead animals and trash, while a song about pollution plays.⁴² The rock-and-roll song makes an odd contrast with the bleak and repulsive imagery it accompanies. This sequence lacks the subtlety of the Eikomaru opening to *Gojira* but performs the same function by linking the film to the issue of pollution (compared to atomic weapons) from the beginning.

⁴¹ Jean-Marie Bouissou, *Japan: The Burden of Success* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2002), 126-127.

⁴² Yoshimitsu Banno dir., *Godzilla vs. Hedorah*, 1971, Tokyo: Toho Co. Ltd. distributed by Kraken Releasing.

By 1971, Japan had made a complete recovery from the war and returned to its status as a world power, only now an economic rather than a military one. It did this by channeling all its resources into economic and industrial development. A mutual defense treaty with America meant Japan could leave security to the United States and spend almost nothing on defense.⁴³ It promoted industrial and economic growth with protectionist policies and plans like the Income Doubling Plan, which tried to double the income of the Japanese worker and raise living standards by 1970. It worked: the Japanese economy boomed throughout the 60s and would become its own best customer as salaries rose and spending increased. This Japanese economic Miracle would keep going until 1972.

It was not free growth and the Japanese paid for it in several ways. People fled the countryside and flooded into growing urban sprawls, such as Tokyo, where they would live in densely packed neighborhoods and often with poor living standards.⁴⁴ The industrial development that was creating the Miracle was carried out with little thought to the environmental impact of construction projects which disrupted and destroyed habitats for both humans and animals, or industrial dumping which was equally destructive. In the late 60s and early 70s Japan started to realize that the so-called Japanese Miracle was also a curse.

The cities were becoming overpopulated and crowded. They were choked with smog that hung over them like overcast clouds. This is referenced several times in the film, starting with the opening images of smoking factories with Mt. Fuji in the backdrop

⁴³ Gary D. Allinson, *Japan's Postwar History* 2nd ed (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), 94-95.

⁴⁴ Bouissou, *Burden of Success*, 127-128.

and reappearing in several other scenes of Tokyo covered by industrial smoke. The image of polluted waters is another recurring image of environmental pollution. Oily garbage-filled waters were a common sight in Tokyo during the 60's. The movie takes time to highlight when Ken, the child protagonist, recites a poem describing how all pollution is dumped into the sea, over a slide show of polluted ocean still frames.⁴⁵ In a heavily populated urban sprawl these things were not just unsightly, but deadly.

When Hedorah makes his first true appearance in the film, he emerges to feed on the smoke from a factory in Tokyo. Godzilla soon arrives to challenge him. Over the course of a one-sided battle with Godzilla, the thick sludge that makes up Hedorah gets flung off him with deadly consequences. A group of salary men (Japanese office workers) are playing a game of mahjong when Hedorah sludge, flung off it by Godzilla, crashes through their window. Off-camera they let out ghastly screams. When we see them again, they have all drowned in the toxic sludge.⁴⁶

This scene serves two purposes. The first is to point out the horrific cost of unregulated industry, as throughout the film both the human and the environmental toll is shown vividly. The second is to place blame. The salary men, with the implication that they are employees of the factory, are victims of their own carelessness. Government policies designed to drive growth expanded the cities and industries that made the pollution and destroyed the environment. The primary polluters were the companies that owned the factories and produced toxic waste. Heavy industry and chemical production (which had grown throughout the 50s and 60s) produced more industrial waste than any

⁴⁵ Banno, *Godzilla vs. Hedorah*.

⁴⁶ Banno, *Godzilla vs. Hedorah*.

other kind of Japanese production. This waste had to be disposed of, and it was generally dumped in the ocean and waterways, sometimes even when the negative effects were known.

The Sumida River flows through Tokyo. In the 40s and 50s many people depended on it for fishing and it was a popular leisure spot. The Honshu Paper Co. and other companies set up plants along the river and it soon became filled with sewage and industrial waste, damaging the fishing industry. The fisherman protested but the government was unresponsive and there were clashes between local police and fisherman.⁴⁷ This is one of the less extreme cases compared to later disasters in Minamata Bay or Yokkaichi. These were all disturbing for the people experiencing the environmental degradation of Japan, especially when it began to affect not just their business but their health.

Health

The death of the salary men during the first battle between Godzilla and Hedorah can be symbolic in a third way. Pollution kills only a few to start, but spreads. Japan faced a series of scandals when pollution affected entire populations and killed dozens of people. Two of the most prominent in the years leading up to 1971 were the Minamata Disease scandal and the Yokkaichi Asthma scandal. Both of these have the dubious honor of being the first instances of a new disease.

In the opening scenes a fisherman brings a large black tadpole to a local scientist, Dr. Yano Toru. The tadpole is soon revealed as related to Hedorah. While Dr. Yano

⁵² Hirokazu Iwasaki. *Overcoming Pollution in Japan and Lessons Learned* (Japan: Water Environment Division, Environmental Management Bureau, Ministry of the Environment. Accessed 2019), 2.

examines it, the fisherman comments that he found it in a place where he used to catch a lot of prawn. Now, all that is ever caught in the bay, if anything, are mutated fish, and he gestures to a shelf of disfigured fish in glass jars in Dr. Yano's house. He found the tadpole in Suruga Bay, but he could just as easily have been talking about Minamata Bay.

Minamata Bay is a small fishing town in Kumamoto prefecture that sits on the Yatsushiro Sea. The Chisso Corporation had been dumping methylmercury, a byproduct of acetylene production, into the bay since 1908.⁴⁸ The chemical steadily built up inside the fish of the bay to toxic levels. The first case of what would be called Minamata Disease was documented in 1958, when a young girl became ill; soon others followed. The disease was a neurological disorder that affected the muscles, eyes, and hearing and could cause comas, paralysis, and death.⁴⁹ Teams were created to look into cases of this disease, but it was not until 1959 that they began to discover the cause was methylmercury dumped into the sea. Over the next several years the people of Minamata struggled for redress and compensation against the Chisso Corporation and the government, with the ordeal fading into the background in the early 60's. It reemerged into the public eye in 1965 when a second occurrence of Minamata disease sprung up along the Agano River basin in Niigata Prefecture. This resulted in another investigation, more claims for compensation, and the scandal continued to drag on until 1971. Almost 3,000 people were officially diagnosed with Minamata Disease during this disaster.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Bouissou, *Burden of Success*, 126.

⁴⁹ *Minamata Disease*, Boston University, accessed February 5th, 2019, <http://www.bu.edu/sustainability/minamata-disease/>.

⁵⁰ Noriyuki Hachiya, "The History and the Present of Minamata Disease—Entering the second half a century—" in *Japanese Medical Association Journal* 49, no. 3, (2006), 112-118. http://www.med.or.jp/english/pdf/2006_03/112_118.pdf. 117.

In *Godzilla vs. Hedorah*, death is featured more vividly than in any other Godzilla sequel up to that point. Links to the Minamata Scandal are established from the beginning with the scenes of the polluted ocean and the fisherman bringing in the tadpole. Hedorah, as would be expected of a sludge monster, is incredibly toxic. Exposure to his sludge maims and kills, and the first victims we see are Dr. Yano and his son Ken. While going out on a diving mission to do research into the strange tadpole, Dr. Yano is attacked by a smaller Hedorah while in the water. On shore, his son is also attacked, though not as badly injured. In a suspenseful moment, Ken calls out for his father, but there is no sign of him, leading the viewer to think he is dead. He is not. Instead, he is only maimed, his face partially deformed by contact with the creature, and he is bed-ridden for the rest of the film. Ken is also hurt, his hand injured from contact with the monster, though Ken's injuries are never made as visual or horrific as his father's or other victims' injuries.⁵¹ In a parallel to Minamata, one of the first victims is a child.

During 1970, Banno made monthly commutes from Osaka to the Toho studio in Tokyo. During each trip, he passed through Tokyo and smog shrouded Yokkaichi. It is no surprise that Yokkaichi and smog should have influenced his movie.⁵² The coastal city Yokkaichi, in Mie prefecture, was chosen as the site of three major petrochemical refineries between 1955 and 1966. Apart from the oil refineries, there were numerous other plants built in Yokkaichi, and it became one of the largest industrial centers in Japan.⁵³ As environmental pollution rose, the atmosphere began to produce noxious

⁵¹ Banno, *Godzilla vs. Hedorah*.

⁵² Shean Rhodes and Brooke McCorkle, *Japan's Green Monsters: Environmental Commentary in Kaiju Cinema* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2018), Kindle Edition, 114-115.

⁵³ Tetsuzo Kitagawa, "Cause Analysis of the Yokkaichi Asthma Episode in Japan" *Journal of the Air Pollution Control Association* 34, no. 7, (1984): 743-746, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00022470.1984.10465807>. 743.

odors, and residents began to complain. Starting in 1960, more than 600 patients contracted illnesses like chronic bronchitis, allergic asthma bronchitis, and pulmonary emphysema; many more were affected by Yokkaichi Asthma. The cause was sulfuric oxides (sulfuric acid) being pumped out by the factories and gathering in a cloud kilometers wide.⁵⁴ Outraged citizens began highly publicized litigations against the companies responsible, which was ongoing during the time of the film's release.

When we see Hedorah for the second time, he has transformed from a frog-like aquatic creature to something that flies over Tokyo spraying toxic gas that corrodes anything metal and sickens or kills people if they inhale it. This scene starts with an interesting reference to a smaller pollution scare. A group of schoolgirls are exercising when Hedorah flies past. They immediately began to cough and fall over. This is a reference to a group of Tokyo schoolgirls who became suddenly sick due to the polluted air.⁵⁵ People are shown running from Hedorah, only to drop dead a moment later and graphically disintegrate into skeletons. Plants exposed to his gas wither and die and metal rusts away. Afterwards, they specifically mention that this was because Hedorah let out a cloud of sulfuric acid. These are very clear references not just to the Yokkachi Asthma issue but to the problem of air pollution in general. It had become not just an environmental and aesthetic problem but a serious health problem.

Minamata and Yokkachi are just two of the many infamous pollution scandals of the Japanese Miracle. Industrialized urbanization left many people crowded into the cities with each other and the factories that employed them. Even in the countryside, people

⁵⁴ Kitagawa, *Yokkaichi Asthma*, 743.

⁵⁵ Rhodes Murphey, "The Japanese Experience with Pollution and Controls." *Environmental Review: ER* 8, no. 3 (1984): 285-94, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3984327>. 288.

could not escape the expanding industry and pollution. Like Hedorah it crept across the land spraying toxic sludge and smoke. Even a great kami like Godzilla is not immune to it. Against Hedorah, a creature that embodies how deadly pollution is, even he struggles. It could even be interpreted that Hedorah is a vengeful nature spirit, wounded by man and twisted into a monster in the same way Godzilla was turned into one by radiation. This would not be an idea exclusive to *Godzilla vs. Hedorah*. It appears in Japanese media even today, such as the anime *Spirited Away*. In this film, a river spirit, his river having been turned into a sewage dump, is mistaken for a sludge monster when he appears at a bath house, trying to get clean and become recognizable again.⁵⁶ Hedorah is not looking to get a bath and clean up; he is only seeking to grow and destroy life. Just as in *Gojira*, this monster cannot be defeated by science alone; it will require the Japanese spirit.

Reconstructing Identity: Defeating the Monster

Hedorah is pollution; he grows and destroys as long as we continue to pollute. By the final battle, Hedorah is not only physically bigger than Godzilla, but apparently more powerful as well. It seems that Godzilla, the only thing standing between Japan and destruction, will be the next victim of Hedorah. This is an actual and a metaphorical battle of culture as well as environment. As Japan comes to grips with the dark side of the Miracle, it must deal with this reality and the rising counterculture of the 60s and 70s as the post-war generation begins to find its place in Japan.

⁵⁶ Chris G. Hall, "Totoros, Boar Gods, and River Spirits: Nature Spirits as Intermediaries in the Animation of Hayao Miyazaki." *Resilience: A Journal of the Environmental Humanities* 2, no. 3 (2015): 158-65, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5250/resilience.2.3.0158>. 163.

Godzilla vs. Counterculture

In the 60s and 70s, the counterculture movement was growing not just in US, but Japan, in ways that would be familiar to people in either country—student protests, rock music, generational divides, and drugs. *Godzilla vs. Hedorah* is a product of this time, taking some of its characterizations and cinematic style from the era in ways that are unique and controversial among scholars and fans of *Godzilla*. This controversy says much about the period. The first generation born during the Occupation was coming of age and coming into conflict with the generation that lived through it. This is a story we see best by following the couple, Yukio and Miki. They are a contrast for Emiko and Ogata from *Gojira*.

Yuiko and Miki are an almost stereotypical counterculture couple. We first see Miki in the opening of the film. She performs the pollution song that is the theme of the movie. We see Yuiko briefly but are introduced to him during the first battle between *Godzilla* and *Hedorah*. He is intoxicated in a club, watching Miki dancing in a revealing skin-tight suit on a table. The club is filled with vibrant, psychedelic music, lights, and sounds, and the patrons are dancing or, like Yuiko, drinking themselves into a stupor. The people in the club are oblivious to the danger outside as *Godzilla* and *Hedorah* battle but are suddenly awakened to it when *Hedorah*'s sludge enters the club.⁵⁷ The couple is generally oblivious to the danger of *Hedorah* and has several encounters with the monster throughout the film. Unlike Emiko and Ogata, representing the enterprising generation of 1954 that was driving to build Japan, Miki and Yuiko are counterculture, a generation that does not know what to do with itself.

⁵⁷ Banno, *Godzilla vs. Hedorah*.

Emiko and Ogata were often center stage in *Gojira*, representing the modern Japan. They were not only aware, but also proactive in addressing it. Emiko revealed Serizawa's secret, when she saw there was nothing else that could defeat Godzilla. Ogata risked his life to help plant the weapon near Godzilla and is the closest thing to a traditional action hero in *Gojira*. Miki and Yuiko are not this couple. Instead of proactive and aware, they are generally oblivious and defeatist. This is most spectacularly demonstrated when Yuiko decides to change a million-person march to protest pollution into a million-person bonfire party, as a nihilistic last hurrah before Hedorah destroys the world.

In the years before *Godzilla Vs. Hedorah*, student uprisings swept the country. They were disruptive, and at the height of activity forced the temporary closure of universities across the nation.⁵⁸ Protests in 1960 against the US-Japan Security Treaty brought down Prime Minister Kishi's government. Students were quiet for almost a decade when, in 1967, police clashed with activists who were trying to stop a visit by the Prime Minister to South Vietnam. This kicked off the Zenkyōtō Movement, a wave of student protests that lasted until harsh legislation in 1970 brought it to an end.

Although these protests were large and public, they were not a united front. Left-wing groups tried to organize these protests as anti-Vietnam war, anti-Security Treaty (due for renewal in 1970), anti-pollution, or pro-Marxist, but with limited success. These student movements, unlike the 1960 protests, were not focused on domestic or foreign policy issues. They were primarily concerned with administrative or political issues

⁵⁸ Eiji Oguma, trans. Nick Kapur et al. "Japan's 1968: A Collective Reaction to Rapid Economic Growth in an Age of Turmoil" *The Asia-Pacific Journal* 13, is. 12, no. 1 (2015), <https://apjif.org/-Oguma-Eiji/4300/article.pdf>. 1.

within their own universities. As a result, it was hard to pin down exactly what the students wanted. Gradually, growing pessimism caused the less radical students to drop off, while the most radical formed extreme political groups.⁵⁹

The sources of this rebellion were the pressures of the changing Japan on its youngest generations, having grown up in a developing Japan and coming of age in a fully reconstructed Japan. The country wrestled with the issues from pollution to the US security Alliance. The post-Occupation generation lacked the identity of nation builders that the previous generation had in the late 40s and the 50s. Even among the student activists there was a divide between the committed leftists who overlapped the post-war generations, and the consumerist culture of those born during the Miracle. They were split between the political activism of the leftist organizers and the consumerist culture of the Miracle.⁶⁰ Under the pressures of the highly competitive Japanese education system and a culture in transition, they explored their identity through manga, politics, and rock and roll in a vein similar to the Vietnam War generations in the United States.⁶¹

Miki and Yuiko fit into the culture of uncertain students looking for their identity in a new era and finding it through rebelling against the establishment. This is why we are first introduced to them in a psychedelic club, and why, at times, they appear incredibly irresponsible and aimless. They, like the rest of their generation in the Miracle-era Japan, struggle with the issues of the day, as they attempted to discover their identity apart from the one created by the post-Occupation Japan in 1954. They are indecisive because, in an age of consumerism, their search for a social identity turns into a search

⁵⁹ Oguma, *Japan's 1968*, 5-6.

⁶⁰ Oguma, *Japan's 1968*, 16.

⁶¹ Oguma, *Japan's 1968*, 14-19.

for personal identity outside of social norms, which often alienated them from older generations. The best example of this is just before the final battle, with Miki, Yuiko, and more than 100 other young people holding a bonfire near Mt. Fuji. While they play rock music and dance around a fire, a group of old villagers looks on. This scene creates a brilliant parallel as the villagers look almost ghoulish and strange, and it is clear that these two groups come from very different worlds.⁶²

Yuiko and Miki serve as the stand-ins for the counterculture movement of Japan, bouncing between causes and ideas as it attempted to define itself in the world the previous generation had so quickly created. The film makes it clear that their way is not the answer through its portrayal of them as irresponsible and the final fates of Yuiko and Miki. When Hedorah makes his appearance some of the youths at the bonfire attempt to fight him off, throwing torches from the bonfire. Many, including Yuiko, are killed. Some, including Miki and the child protagonist Ken (his presence apparently a reinforcement of the irresponsibility of counterculture,) survive to be seen in the final shots of the film.

Miki and the survivors are part of the counterculture. They are the students protesting, occupying schools, and exploring themselves through music, excess, and ideological experimentation. The majority of them eventually melt into the population. They find jobs, have children, and reconcile themselves to the Miracle and post-Miracle Japan by assimilating into society. Environmental regulations are put in place, harsh laws crack down on students, and the strange world that they found themselves in became the norm. Some, however, would not assimilate. Yuiko and the others, they are the political radicals

⁶² Banno, *Godzilla vs. Hedorah*

who could not find a place in the Japan created by the Miracle. They found a home in groups like the Red Army faction, which were clearly fringe and had no place in collective society.⁶³ Their destruction is a criticism, pointing to the fact their way is not an answer.

Godzilla (The New Japan) vs. Hedorah

The final battle of this film is campy. Godzilla flies, using his atomic breath like a rocket engine. The Japanese Self Defense Force (JSDF) is farcically incompetent. The Japanese audience took these stunts no more seriously than the American audience did. But there is an identity crisis under the B-movie action. The significance of its symbolism is in the struggles of the Japanese society created after the war, as it tried to deal with the issues of the monster of the day. Instead of radiation it was pollution. The New Japan was a versatile adaptation of Japan's wartime and pre-war cultural legacy, striving for economic dominance and prosperity, instead of military success and conquest. Just as military power brought consequences, so did the economic success. It brought a new monster in 1971 that embodied pollution and counterculture, just as Godzilla had embodied war and militarism in 1954.

The monster Hedorah is the old Godzilla in a new skin. He even bears some vague similarities to Godzilla in his final form. He displays dangerous and destructive weapons (acidic sludge and gas, and a laser that serves as a stand in for Godzilla's atomic breath), a vaguely Godzilla-shaped body, and kills indiscriminately.⁶⁴ He is a dangerous threat, this time of pollution instead of warfare, and highlights a cultural identity crisis

⁶³ Oguma, *Japan's 1968*, 6.

⁶⁴ Banno, *Godzilla vs. Hedorah*.

with the counterculture characters. Similar to *Gojira* the conflict is old vs. new—this time the counterculture of the 60s and 70s against the postwar modernism of the 50s. The counterculture (Hedorah) is a social pollution that threatens the old social almost as much as environmental pollution threatened traditional ways of living.⁶⁵ Some factions of counterculture would end with deadly encounters between groups like the Red Army Faction (radical offshoots of the Zenkyōtō Movement) and the police.

Banno and the creators of *Godzilla vs. Hedorah* could not have seen the future, but they could see the mass arrests and rumblings created by leftists and militant groups that were outgrowths of the current age. They were the worst symptoms of a social problem that was the counterculture identity crisis. This is why Dr. Yano, one of the heroes of the film, realizes that Hedorah is nothing more than a monster, while Miki would wonder if he is actually a force for good since he eats pollution.⁶⁶ It is a clash of generations but also a clash of cultures. The two are clearly divided in their views and Hedorah is a controversial issue too big for a divided society to tackle.

By the end of the film, Hedorah is physically bigger and stronger than Godzilla. In the battle between them it becomes clear that Godzilla (Japan's new culture and society) cannot deal with the problem by himself. In this battle between two kami, Hedorah, the new and merciless monster, overpowers Godzilla, who was trying to defend Japan. The Japanese government was initially passive in addressing pollution and the counterculture. So, no matter how strongly the Japanese people objected, there was little they could do. Even the police found it difficult to deal with the Zenkyōtō Movement on

⁶⁵ Rhodes, *Japan's Green Monster*, 122.

⁶⁶ Banno, *Godzilla vs. Hedorah*.

their own, as they were hamstrung by legal limitations. They needed government legislation to expand their powers so they could properly deal with the movements and its offshoots.

Despite his efforts, Godzilla, likewise, could not defeat Hedorah on his own. While the government was slow and clumsy in its response, it would respond. The government finally heard the overwhelming voice of the angry public, attended to scientific evidence, and created an agency and legislation to deal with the problem. It was a slow bureaucratic process, but progress was made. In the film, the JSDF is finally mobilized and it is a machine they make (though powered by Godzilla) that gives Godzilla the edge he needs to defeat Hedorah.

Graphic death and destruction by the Hedorah was the centerpiece of *Gojira*, but later entries in the series shifted focus away from the human toll, with it being implied more often than shown.⁶⁷ *Godzilla vs. Hedorah* returns a focus to the human toll of the monster with the destruction created by Hedorah, but the absence of any destruction and almost any concern for Godzilla is noteworthy. None of the movie's fatalities are caused by Godzilla, all of them are caused by Hedorah, the cultural other, *soto*, compared to Godzilla the relative insider, *uchi*. Although in *Gojira* Godzilla was presented as an alien threat that embodies war, this is not the case in *Godzilla vs. Hedorah*. He has not lost all of his negative aspects; he is still an uncontrollable monster, the way Japan reconciled its past under the victim narrative after WWII placated the kami Godzilla. He became the spirit of postwar Japan. As this guardian, kami, he responds to the threat from Hedorah, the angry god of social and environmental pollution that threatens it. But it is only when

⁶⁷ Kalat, *Filmography of Toho's Godzilla*, 118.

the Japanese government assists him, even if clumsily, that Godzilla was able to overcome Hedorah. The Japanese people were only able to overcome social and cultural pollution when the government intervened to assist, creating laws that help the police restore order and new laws and agencies to address environmental destruction. The New Japan was strong, but it could not overcome powerful corporations and tens of thousands of protesting students while hampered by legal system.

The film ends with a strange montage. A soldier (representing those who are a part of culture), Miki (reconciled members participants in counterculture), and Ken (the next generation) all watch Godzilla leave. The threat to Japan, for the moment, is destroyed, allowing them to work together towards a better Japan. The next image we see is Katsushika Hokusai's *The Great Wave*, a famous Japanese woodblock print of fishing boats on rough seas. This is the image of a pristine Japan, an idea of unpolluted nature that Japan can, now that Hedorah has been defeated, return to. Next we receive a brief message of warning and an image of Hedorah from the beginning of the film. Japan can move towards a clean future; it could also keep polluting and have to face more angry kami of its own making.

For the second time, Japan is reconciled to a new identity. Now that it had dealt with the curse of the Miracle it can move forward to be conservationist instead of pollutionist. Similar to how it had reconciled its old identity, after the war, it had been able to reconcile itself to the pollution of the Miracle by identifying itself as the victim of government ineptitude and corporate greed. All of Japanese society did played a part in the Miracle and the pollution (just as much as the prosperity), the Japanese people did not have to create a victim identity. They were, without a doubt, victims of pollution. They

have also managed to reconcile the students and other participants of counterculture into larger society. Miki survives the final battle. She appears with everyone else watching Godzilla as the film ends.

Chapter 3: 2016s Shin Gojira; Return of the Angry God

Anno Hideki and Higuchi Shinji's film, *Shin Gojira*, literally translates as "New Godzilla." It stands out from all previous entries as one of the few films in the series that could be described as a horror film. *Shin Gojira* harkens back to the original with its tone and presents us with a slow film that is terrifying and touching through a conservative but effective portrayal of action and through graphic depiction of the human toll of the monster.

Apart from its novel and immersive blend of cinematography, the film is unique in the series for how it packages its politics by being upfront about its key points but tactful in their presentation. It is not about the monster, but rather about Japan reminiscing on the success of the Japanese Miracle or the optimism of 1954 when it was the success story of Asia. Now, Japan faces challenges to its very survival. At home, it has to cope with a geriatric government, economic stagnation, and a military with questionable ability to defend the country. Abroad, it has growing enemies who are long standing rivals and overbearing allies who are sometimes no better. Again, Japan faces the question of identity: as the old way of doing and being comes to an end, what identity will Japan make for itself?

A Chip on its Shoulder: Domestic Politics, Foreign Relations, and Military

Shin Gojira is often more political drama than *kaiju* film. The monster is used carefully, and large stretches of screen time are devoted to the government's attempts to respond to the crisis, or its relations with other countries. Japan's government appears cautious and bureaucratic, and the other nations of the world equally help Japan and hinder it. Even the JSDF is criticized in the movie for its inability to slowdown the

monster. How the government, military, and foreign powers are portrayed tells us just how anxious Japan is about its state of affairs.

Domestic

Japan would not be the first country to make a film critical of its government; neither is *Shin Gojira* the first Godzilla film to be critical. In *Godzilla Vs. Hedorah* we saw an element of this with the pollution problem, but in *Shin Gojira* criticism of government stagnation and bureaucracy is front and center.

Japan is an aging country. Those in power are old and getting older and want to do what is safe and conventional. This is what we see in *Shin Gojira's* critical depiction of the Japanese government. Throughout the film, the Prime Minister (PM) and the members of his cabinet are depicted as capable, if not exceptional, administrators during normal times. During a crisis, like the one depicted in the film, they are inflexible and cling to procedure.

Before they even know what Godzilla is, or that he is the cause of the current crisis, our protagonist, Yaguchi, and a fellow aid are discussing what to do since the PM is not in.⁶⁸ This presents the image of incompetence from the very start. The leader of the country is absent during a crisis. Even once the elderly PM arrives, his image does not much improve. He is not presented as an idiot; however, he is incapable of dealing with a crisis of such a monumental scale. A giant constantly evolving monster may be something that even the most exceptional leaders would struggle with. However, a

⁶⁸ Hideaki Anno, et al. dir., *Shin Gojira*, 2016, Tokyo: Toho Co. Ltd., distributed by Funimation Productions LLC.

monster can easily be replaced with invasion by a foreign power, an unprecedented natural disaster, or a historic nuclear catastrophe.

The Fukushima Dai-ichii Nuclear Disaster was the worst in history. It was a part of a string of events that began with a magnitude 9.0-9.1 earthquake. This, in itself was a tragedy, but Japan often experiences them and was prepared for one of this magnitude. Even the fifteen-meter tsunami that followed, despite being large enough to sweep over seawalls, was a possibility they had prepared for.⁶⁹ No one was prepared for the subsequent failure of the Fukushima Dai-ichii nuclear plant.

When the tsunami hit, power and cooling was lost at three of the reactors. Further damage to the roads made access difficult. Non-essential personnel were evacuated and a skeleton crew struggled to prevent a catastrophic meltdown and control any radiation leaks. Over the next few days, the situation became progressively worse as the reactors experienced explosions, leaks, and further damage. Eventually, a zone of evacuation was established around the plant. Four of the six reactors would suffer damage, and the presence of large amounts of spent—but still hot—radioactive fuel, as well as in-use fuel rods, complicated the situation.⁷⁰

Most of the radiation material that escaped from the plant went into the atmosphere and was primarily composed of elements with a radioactive half-life of only a few days.⁷¹ Small amounts of contaminated water were vented into the ocean. Exactly how much radiation was released into the environment can only be estimated since most sensors were destroyed by the quake. Mandatory evacuation was extended out to a

⁶⁹ “Fukushima Daiichi Accident,” *World Nuclear Association*, Oct. 2018, <http://www.world-nuclear.org/information-library/safety-and-security/safety-of-plants/fukushima-accident.aspx>.

⁷⁰ “Fukushima Daiichi Accident,” *World Nuclear Association*.

⁷¹ “Fukushima Daiichi Accident,” *World Nuclear Association*.

twenty-kilometer radius around the plant, which was later turned into an exclusion zone. Hundreds of thousands of people were evacuated from the area around Fukushima. It is considered the worst nuclear disasters since Chernobyl in 1986. The Fukushima Dai-ichii Disaster was an evolving and complex problem, only made more difficult by having to deal with quake and tsunami damage. Despite mitigating circumstances, it was not handled well. Later, the full scale of the incompetence with which the disaster was handled came to light.

Tokyo Electric Power Company (Tepco), the operators of the plant, failed to properly prepare for such a disaster. The government regulators were also complicit. The Japanese courts ruled that Tepco was negligent for the failure to make proper preparation for a quake and tsunami of such magnitude in a country prone to them. The government was ruled negligent for failing to regulate Tepco and ensure the safety of the plant.⁷² There were accusations of collusions between government regulators and the industry that created the lax standards, but this was not the end of controversy.

While the disasters—both the natural and nuclear—were still an ongoing crisis, the Japanese government was already facing accusations over lax regulation and their handling of the disaster, despite them having handled preceding natural disasters well.⁷³ Their response to Fukushima was disorganized. Over the several-day attempt to get the reactors and radiation under control, the government struggled to deal with constantly evolving problems. There was a lack of communication between the different offices and

⁷² Motoko Rich. “Japanese Government and Utility Are Found Negligent in Nuclear Disaster.” The New York Times, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/17/world/asia/japan-fukushima-nuclear-disaster-tepco-ruling.html>.

⁷³ Daniel Kaufmann and Veronika Penciakova, “Japan’s Triple Disaster: Governance and the Earthquake, Tsunami and Nuclear Crises,” Brookings Institute, 2011, <https://www.brookings.edu/opinions/japans-triple-disaster-governance-and-the-earthquake-tsunami-and-nuclear-crises/>.

teams trying to deal with the disaster. The PM at the time was not notified of the disaster until an hour after it had begun. There was a severe lack of cooperation between Tepco and the government.⁷⁴ Tepco was reluctant to cooperate and was defensive and lacked transparency. Instead of taking swift action, The Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency (NISA) was relatively passive. It did not send a representative to communicate with Tepco.⁷⁵ Centers set up close to the disaster area to help with quick crisis response were hindered by personnel failing to turn up.⁷⁶

At first, the government personnel in *Shin Gojira* believe the monster to be a strange natural phenomenon and they handle it in an orderly and professional fashion.⁷⁷ It starts as strange but not outside what Japan is prepared to tackle. It is only when the monster comes ashore that he becomes a disaster.

Throughout the film, the monster is a constantly evolving threat. He changes his form during different acts of the film (similar to Hedorah in *Godzilla vs. Hedorah*) in parallel to Fukushima, and the incompetence with which he is handled is an equal parallel to the earlier film. The PM and his cabinet are consistently portrayed as indecisive and inept. Often they wait too long to make decisions because they do not have the stomach for hard choices. They spend so much energy trying not to make mistakes that they seem to fall into them. Early in the film, the PM and his cabinet members dismiss the idea that what is happening in the bay could involve a creature. In the same scene, it is proven that it is a monster, making them appear comically incompetent.⁷⁸ Nothing significant is

⁷⁴ Akiyama Nobumasa, et al. *The Fukushima Nuclear Accident and Crisis Management*, The Sasakawa Peace Foundation, (2012), https://www.spf.org/jpus/img/investigation/book_fukushima.pdf. 21.

⁷⁵ Nobumasa, *The Fukushima Nuclear Accident*, 21.

⁷⁶ Nobumasa, *The Fukushima Nuclear Accident*, 21.

⁷⁷ Anno, *Shin Gojira*.

⁷⁸ Anno, *Shin Gojira*.

achieved by the cabinet or the PM. The work that led the to the defeat of Godzilla does not come from firm leadership at the very top, but driven and innovative thinking from lower levels. The real change is driven by young and ambitious citizens who are beginning to become politically active and are eager to create change.⁷⁹

This criticism is from not just the directors of this film, but the Japanese people. In the wake of the mishandled Fukushima event, a downward trend in government trust only accelerated.⁸⁰ Japan is a country that has a chronic problem of public mistrust of the government, and the Japanese government's handling of Godzilla, like its handling of Fukushima, is a clear criticism coming from public discontent.

Japan and its "Military"

The JSDF is not a military; it is a self-defense force. The important difference is that a self-defense force is limited to only possessing those arms and equipment with defensive value, and not those with primarily offensive value. This JSDF has tanks, helicopters, and enough artillery to repel an invasion. It does not have long-range bombers, aircraft carriers, or sufficient offensive weaponry to use aggressively. For Japan, especially with the pacifist sentiment that has dominated for the last few decades, this has not been a problem. While under the protective umbrella of the Cold War era American military, and not facing any real challengers in the region, there was no reason to change the status quo. But in recent years things have changed. American military dominance is not what it used to be, even if the American commitment to Japan is no less

⁷⁹ "Students finally find their voice," The Japan Times, 2015, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2015/08/15/editorials/students-finally-find-voice/>.

⁸⁰ Kerstin Lukner, et al., "Japan's Political Trust Deficit," *Japan Forum* 29, no. 1 (2016): 1–18, doi:10.1080/09555803.2016.1227349. 12.

now than it was twenty years ago. New threats have risen in the area, not just military threats in a nuclear-armed North Korea and a strengthening China, but economic threats as well.

In *Shin Gojira*, the JSDF does not make a good show of itself. The government is hesitant to let them do anything that might bring about civilian casualties, and so are they. The politicians are shown to be inflexible and overly cautious. It is clear that that JSDF is playing politics as well to guard its reputation. Unlike previous entries where the JSDF is sometimes instrumental in Godzilla's defeat, Godzilla does not even notice them in this film, even when they are allowed to act.

The JSDF is not thought of as a military by many in Japan, it is considered more akin to a well-armed search and rescue service.⁸¹ After WWII, The Japanese were afraid of a military as strong as the Imperial Army and Navy. For decades, the people were willing to accept the pacifist constitution given to them. They have kept the JSDF close to home and been very reluctant to do anything that resembled a show of force. Although they JSDF is respected for their high professionalism in humanitarian efforts, they are a small force that depends on the US to make up for the firepower they lack.

The last time the JSDF is featured prominently is when they attempt to stop Godzilla from reentering Tokyo after he returns. The JSDF throws everything it has at Godzilla—tanks, artillery, bombs, missiles, guns—but nothing works. A brilliant display of firepower becomes a spectacular display of impotence. The monster is not only unharmed but unfazed.⁸²

⁸¹ John Traphagan, "How Japan Sees its Military," *The Diplomat*, 2012, <https://thediplomat.com/2012/08/how-japan-sees-its-military/>.

⁸² Anno, *Shin Gojira*.

This is an interesting departure from other examples. In the first film, Godzilla takes notice of the JSDF, even if they cannot stop him. In *Godzilla vs. Hedorah* when the JSDF attempts to kill Hedorah, they draw the monster's attention without doing damage. In this film, Godzilla's utter disregard makes them look particularly useless. In contrast, although the American assault still fails to kill Godzilla, they wound him badly with considerably less effort.

The JSDF is a well-trained and equipped force, with some of the most advanced technology available. However, Japan is surrounded by some of the largest militaries in the world and by many countries that are much more militant. China, Russia, and North Korea have historically confrontational relations with Japan, dating back to WWII or farther. Most of its neighbors still hold lingering resentments over 20th-century wrongs, even among allies. The image of a Japan surrounded by enemies is not hard to understand. Their display of firepower shows us that the JSDF is a capable force. The quality of its men and equipment make it the equal of any military, but, what it does not have puts it at a disadvantage. It lacks offensive weapons like intercontinental missiles, heavy bombers, and nuclear weapons, which have the power to actually hurt Godzilla. Yet surrounding countries such as China and Russia do possess intercontinental missiles and nuclear weapons and the ability to deliver them.

Every year, the JSDF conducts live fire drills called the Fuji Firepower Demonstration near Mt. Fuji. Similar to the scene from *Shin Gojira*, it is a well-orchestrated and impressive display but some commenters argue that, as is seen in the film, it would only be a grand but ineffective show against a real enemy. In the face of

fundamental flaws in the JSDF, well-orchestrated drills mean little.⁸³ In recent years, Japan has faced a number of threats from other countries. The firing of North Korean missiles over Japan helped bring current prime minister, Abe Shinzo, and his more hawkish policies to the forefront. This chain of events was already building in the background when *Shin Gojira* premiered. At that time, and arguably today, the much greater threat lays in China and its aggressive push to become a regional naval power to contend with the US.⁸⁴ These threats, and a rising nationalism that PM Abe fosters, suggests that a more expansive and capable JSDF is called for.

PM Abe, when he was elected in 2014, made it clear that one of his goals was to change the constitution, article 9 in particular, and strengthen the JSDF's position, allowing for it to be deployed abroad if necessary. He upgraded the Defense Agency to a ministry and has taken other steps towards his goal of a more powerful JSDF.⁸⁵ Looking at current events, and back on the film, we can see the beginning of current trends already being illustrated in the weakness of the JSDF.

Japan is not fully committed to turning the JSDF into an army, navy, and air force. Although the memories of WWII are no longer fresh, the lesson is still hard to forget, especially for Japan's elderly population. For this reason, it may be too soon to say that the film points to the beginning of an inevitable remilitarization. In recent years, however, Japan has started acquiring technologies and capabilities that are questionable

⁸³ Grant Newsham, "Japan's Military Has Some Serious Problems (As China's Military Gets Stronger)," *The National Interest*, 2016, <https://nationalinterest.org/blog/the-buzz/japans-military-has-some-serious-problems-chinas-military-17613>.

⁸⁴ Ronald O'Rourke, *China Naval Modernization: Implications for U.S. Navy Capabilities – Background and Issues for Congress*, Congressional Research Service, 2018, <https://fas.org/spg/crs/row/RL33153.pdf>. 5-6.

⁸⁵ Rajeswari Pillai Rajagopalan, "Where is Japan in Its Military Under Abe?" 2018, *The Diplomat*, <https://thediplomat.com/2-18/03/where-is-japan-in-its-military-push-abe>.

under Article 9.⁸⁶ It is clear that Japan recognizes its relatively weak military posture. It is falling behind its neighbors and remains dependent on the US. China has already overtaken it economically, and recent events point to its continued dependence on the US to supplement its defense. The filmmakers present a Japan critical of the JSDF and through this points to some of Japan's shortcomings.

America and the International Community

It is easy to see this film as anti-American with the US portrayal. The US fluctuates between being Japan's closest friend to its biggest bully from scene to scene. When you look more closely at the criticism and the context it is not directed as much at America, as it is at Japanese dependence on America and the position of "tributary" that this attitude has left the country.⁸⁷

The US is the most actively involved foreign nation in the film and its military power is featured prominently. Apart from the mention of countries like China, or organizations like the UN, there are two scenes where countries besides Japan or the US are shown contributing. In one we see a German computer lab, and the other the French ambassador.

One of the main supporting characters is a Japanese-American representative from the US named Kayoko. In her first appearance, she is a stereotypical assertive American. She makes a John Wayne-esque arrival, wearing an aviators jacket and immediately takes control of the conversation, presenting Yaguchi with a deal for information exchange that seems non-negotiable.⁸⁸ Next time, after the JSDF has failed

⁸⁶ "Long-range cruise missiles for the SDF's arsenal," The Japan Times, 2019, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2017/12/19/editorials/long-range-cruise-missiles-sdfs-arsenal/>.

⁸⁷ Anno, *Shin Gojira*.

⁸⁸ Anno, *Shin Gojira*.

to stop Godzilla, the United States informs the Japanese government that it plans to use conventional high-power bombs against Godzilla while he is in Tokyo. The film takes the time to tell us the bombers are carrying Massive Ordnance Penetrator, one of the largest non-nuclear weapons in the US arsenal. The US government does not request permission. The Japanese government makes a chaotic attempt to save face and respond to a potentially wide-area urban bombing in a sly reference to the WWII bombings so heavily symbolized in the 1954 film. The next time America appears is to tell Japan that the US is ready to use nuclear weapons to kill Godzilla. A closer look at these two scenes reveals some enlightening context.

America's role in the film, though often incredibly helpful, is usually that of a schoolyard bully, telling Japan what it should do or dictating what it will do to Japan. Before the bombing of Godzilla by B-2 heavy bombers (a weapon the JSDF cannot possess) the Americans have been helpful. They are not selfless but did not extort anything in exchange. Earlier in the film, a cabinet member even asks if the government can just have Americans kill Godzilla so it can avoid a controversial deployment of its own forces.⁸⁹ In this scene, and several others, we see references to the long-standing security arrangement between the US and Japan. During the Miracle, relying on the US for defense allowed Japan to put all their resources into economic recovery, and it worked. The recently pacifist Japan is unwilling to break that mold and take action for itself and is still trying to shift its security burden onto the US.⁹⁰

⁸⁹ Anno, *Shin Gojira*.

⁹⁰ Anno, *Shin Gojira*.

Bombing the middle of Tokyo without permission seems like a callous move by the Americans. When considering the long-standing security partnership between the two it is not surprising that the Japanese government does not seem upset. The PM and his subordinates are merely insulted they had so little warning or input, not that the Americans intervened. During the bombing scene, Yaguchi and several others are apparently excited by the American success. This is the only point in the film where Godzilla is actually wounded.⁹¹ Even in the final showdown when he is defeated, no blood is ever drawn. At no point is the American attack condemned. In fact, the attack forces the monster into hibernation and gives the film's heroes time to find a way to defeat Godzilla. This scene may seem like American overbearing, but it only comes after the Japanese fail to stop the monster.

The next noteworthy moment for the Americans as the bully is when they tell the Japanese that, on behalf of the UN, they intend to launch a nuclear missile at Godzilla before he wakes up, despite the resultant destruction of Tokyo.⁹² This decision is condemned throughout the film, and many characters are clearly emotional at this apparent betrayal. Many not only come to accept this fact, but also begin to rationalize it as the only correct decision. In one scene, a character tries to convince Yaguchi that, due to Japan's building economic and humanitarian crisis, the only way to save Japan from imploding is with international aid promised in return for Japan's cooperation with the nuclear plan.⁹³

⁹¹ Anno, *Shin Gojira*.

⁹² Anno, *Shin Gojira*.

⁹³ Anno, *Shin Gojira*.

The nuclear option was not, originally, an American plan. Kayoko tells Yaguchi that it was not Americans, but the Russians and Chinese, who pushed forward the plan.⁹⁴ Both Russia and China have long-standing disputes with Japan and in the case of China it is becoming an active challenger in the region.⁹⁵ At this first mention of the plan, there is little to suggest that, with the backing of the UN, the US will be taking the lead against Godzilla.

The international community's decision to nuke Godzilla seems callous. It is important to note that the focus is never solely on the Americans in this respect, but often on the UN, and surprisingly, Japan. The Japanese would consent to making Godzilla a UN problem, with America at the lead. The only people who can be said to be acting strangely are the Japanese, who are consenting to being the victims of a third nuclear attack. It is not unusual to see Americans taking the lead in multi-national military actions. Japan is a long-standing junior security partner to the US. The Japanese response is, unfortunately, not out of keeping with one of the major approaches to Japanese foreign policy, which is to simply follow the American lead. It is a strange parody of the victim identity depicted in the 1954 film to see Japan trying to justify something it finds so appalling. This scene is not simply critical of the rest of the world; it is critical of Japan. Japan continues to do as it always has—follow the American lead and consent to American wishes.

This reflects on two of the major political divides in Japan. The conservative approach of keeping closely tied to the US security and foreign policy in Asia, and the

⁹⁴ Anno, *Shin Gojira*.

⁹⁵ Andrew L Oros, "Japan's Relative Decline and New Security Challenges in a Multipolar Asia," *Japan's Security Renaissance: New Policies and Politics for the Twenty-First Century*, 66-95, New York: Columbia University Press, 2017, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7312/oros17260.10>. 66-67.

anti-clientelist who want Japan to carve its own path.⁹⁶ These ideologies roughly correspond to the Liberal Democratic Party, and the former Democratic Party of Japan, two of the largest parties in Japanese politics at the time. The competition between the young officials striving to make change and the older leaders looking to follow convention illustrates the competition between the LDP and the DPJ. In this case, the directors are clearly taking the anti-clientelist perspective, portraying Japan as a country that lacks the determination to solve its problems on its own terms, or the resolve to fight America and the other world powers. It is a tributary, but only because it acts like one. If Japan stands up for itself, it can carve its own path instead of the one America, China, or the UN creates for it.

What does the Future Hold?

The film ends the same way as both *Gojira* and *Godzilla vs Hedorah*. Humanity has won this time, but we are warned that there may be more monsters, and we are shown that there are with every new Godzilla film. At the end of *Shin Gojira*, the constantly evolving monster Godzilla is shown to have been on the brink of splitting into thousands of smaller forms, which may have made it unstoppable.⁹⁷ This time, they just barely managed to stop the monster. But will they be able to next time?

This is the question the movie leaves us with and the question analysts must ask themselves. We have looked at two other films, and with the benefit of hindsight we can see how the film spoke to the times and what identity Japan was struggling to make for itself. Since *Shin Gojira* premiered less than three years ago, the issues in the film are still

⁹⁶ Margarita Estévez-Abe, "Feeling Triumphant in Tokyo: The Real Reasons Nationalism Is Back in Japan," *Foreign Affairs* 93, no. 3 (2014): 165-71, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24483416>. 167.

⁹⁷ Anno, *Shin Gojira*.

the issues of the day. Whether Japan will redefine itself as independent from America or anyone else, remain a pacifist nation, build a military capable of meeting any challenge, or bring new and innovative leadership to government is anyone's guess. What we can see in this film is a society looking for its new identity in the face of metaphorical monsters that are actively changing the world as they know it. You could call this monster North Korean aggression, or China's increasing political, military, and economic power in Asia. It could be the rising number of natural and man-made disasters that call into question the health and safety of the Japanese. But what has happened since the film's release makes it clear that Japan is still in the process of this transformation. What it will become will be something different than the Japan pre-*Shin Gojira* and will see the creation of a new identity for the next generation of the Japanese people.

Conclusions: Godzilla, the Monster of a Thousand Faces

Appropriately, the face of Godzilla has changed several times over the years. The monster has changed with each team of filmmakers to create him. The changes can be subtle or substantial, but just as his appearance changes so does his message.

For every Godzilla film there are different themes at work. The giant lizard, the wide scale destruction, and the dramatic battles are common to them all, but this allows us more clearly to see how each film is unique to its time and place and how filmmakers tried to depict these issues. He has been a monster threatening to destroy Japan in 1954 and 2016. When conventional weapons could not stop him, the enterprising spirit of Japan and the will of its people found a way to destroy the monster and the courage to make the necessary sacrifices. When Japan is facing threats and uncertainty about its present and future, Godzilla is a destroyer.

In 1954 he was a metaphor for the horrors of war Japan had experienced in such recent memory, war that was once again rearing its head with the Cold War and nuclear testing. Godzilla represented the conflict between the old and the new as a Japan recovered from the war and began its climb into prosperity while having to deal with the clash between the traditional and modern and the heavy baggage that came with its recent history.

In 2016 to the present, Godzilla embodies the challenges Japan faces today: natural disasters that test its infrastructure and its government and bring into question the effectiveness of the government. Could the current way of doing things work, or are fresh faces in government needed to make important changes? While many begin to question what Japan's military position should be in a region with more enemies, like China, than

friends on all sides, should it continue to trust in America, a not disinterested ally, or make its own path?

In 1975, it faced similar questions over its environment and met the challenges to redefine itself and move forward from the social and environmental problems of the day. For Japan, Godzilla is a means of expressing the anxieties of the social zeitgeist. Through this film series, and by extension all Japanese media, society finds a way to express its hopes and fears, experiment with identity, and to come to redefine itself as it moves through times of crisis into the future.

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Appendix 2. Estimated Calorie Needs per Day, by Age, Sex, and Physical Activity Level,

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