Kamei, Fumio (April 1, 1908–February 27, 1987)

Fumio Kamei was one of Japan’s foremost documentary filmmakers, whose politically charged works resulted in repeated clashes with authorities. Born in Fukushima, he travelled to the Soviet Union in 1928 to study cinema in Leningrad, where he encountered first hand the practice of revolutionary montage. Returning to Japan, he eventually began filming documentaries at P.C.L., a precursor to Toho, including three films about Japan’s actions in China: *Shanghai* (1938), *Peking* (1938), and *Tatakau heitai* (*Fighting Soldiers*, 1939). Kamei took advantage of the predominant mode of documentary at the time, the edited film, to complicate the narrative of Japanese war success through montage effects creating irony, symbolism, and commentary. *Fighting Soldiers* earned the ire of authorities, and after a few films exposing poverty in Japan, Kamei became the only Japanese filmmaker arrested and jailed during World War II. After the war, his film *Nihon no higeki* (*The Japanese Tragedy*, 1946), which combined existing newsreel images with sound to condemn the Japanese leadership as war criminals, ran into trouble with a new power: the Occupation, which banned the film soon after its release. Kamei tried his hand at fiction filmmaking, with mixed results, before returning to documentary with a series of films protesting American bases, nuclear weapons, discrimination in Japan, and environmental destruction.

Further reading:

Fumio, K. *Tatakau eiga: Dokyumentarisuto no Shōwa-shi*, Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1989.

High, P. B. (2003) *The Imperial screen : Japanese Film Culture in the Fifteen Years' War, 1931-1945*, Madison : University of Wisconsin Press.

Hirano, K. (1992) *Mr. Smith goes to Tokyo: the Japanese cinema under the American Ooccupation, 1945-1952*, Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institute.

Nornes, A.M. (2003) *Japanese Documentary Film: The Meiji Era through Hiroshima*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Paratextual materials

I can prepare clips from Fighting Soldiers and The Japanese Tragedy. Both should be in the public domain.

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