Yamanaka, Sadao (November 7, 1909–September 17, 1938)

Sadao Yamanaka was a Japanese film director known for bringing a modern, critical touch to the period film in the 1930s. Born in Kyoto, he entered the film industry in 1927 and directed his first film at age twenty-two. He soon became known for his deviations from the period film genre, presenting samurai who avoided violence or, when he transitioned to sound, dialogue in modern Japanese. His stories could vary from the parodic (*Tange Sazen yowa: Hyakumanryo no tsubo* [*The Million Ryo Pot*, 1935]) to the tragic (*Machi no irezumimono* [*The Town’s Tattooed Man*, 1935]), but his film style, while learning much from Hollywood continuity editing, developed a poetic and humanistic concern for the material conditions of everyday life. Films like *Ninjo kamifusen* (*Humanity and Paper Balloons*, 1937), his last work and to some his masterpiece, depicted the daily sufferings of groups of individuals on the margins of society, using the period film to critique modern Japan. Yamanaka was drafted the day that film was completed and died of an illness on the China front at age 28. Only three of his films are extant, with *Humanity and Paper Balloons* frequently rated by Japanese critics as one of the best Japanese films of all time.

Further reading:

Chiba, N. (ed.) (1998) *Kantoku Yamanaka Sadao*, Tokyo: Jitsugyō no Nihonsha.

Chiba, N. (1999) *Hyōden Yamanaka Sadao: Wakaki eiga kantoku no shōzō*, Tokyo: Heibonsha.

Freiberg, F. (2007) “Turning Serious: Yamanaka Sadao’s Humanity and Paper Balloons,” in Japanese Cinema: Texts and Contexts, eds. A. Philips and J. Stringer, London: Routledge, 50–62.

Fujiwara, C. (2009) “Fleeting Glimpses: The three-film universe of Sadao Yamanaka,” *Moving Image Source*: http://www.movingimagesource.us/articles/fleeting-glimpses-20090911

Kato, T. (1985) Eiga kantoku *Yamanaka Sadao*, Tokyo: Kinema Junposha.

List of works:

*Iso no Genta: Dakine no nagadosu* (Sleeping with a Long Sword, 1932)

*Kunisada Chuji* (1935)

*Tange Sazen yowa: Hyakumanryo no tsubo* (The Million Ryo Pot, 1935)

*Machi no irezumimono* (The Town’s Tattooed Man, 1935)

*Kochiyama Soshun* (1936)

*Mori no Ishimatsu* (1937)

*Ninjo kamifusen* (Humanity and Paper Balloons, 1937)

Paratextual materials:

Remaining films should be in public domain, but Eureka has released them in the UK. I can prepare clips or frame grabs.

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