The Candidate

The Candidate, to me, was just another bleak closeup of the stagnant state of Japanese politics. What made this particular documentary stand out among others of the same vein, however, was its forceful juxtaposition of the *kireigoto* culture of an insincere and shallow political scene and the stripped down and painfully straightforward method that the documentary employed in portraying that world.

The focus that this documentary places on the striking contrast between the glorious face of politics and its unsavory true colors were especially evident in the way that the protagonist changed throughout the film. It pained me to watch the ambitious candidate be educated about traditional practices and forced to conform to the standards of political campaigning within this country, his overzealous attitude constrained in order to construct a more presentable personality. This conflict between substance and appearance, *honne* and *tatemae*, reached its pinnacle in the bluntly forthright scene where the candidate is found arguing with his wife over rude and insensitive remarks thrown at her by male members of his campaign team. In the scene, the candidate implores his wife to dismiss the men’s comments without confronting them for their bigotry and insists that she be silent about her beliefs in order to maintain a good impression. This is a sharp break from his initial sincere attitude, making clear his adaptation to the two-sided world of politics.

The Candidate, in its excruciating honesty, reveals the “ugly truth” of a world that strives so hard to appear “clean.” Although depicting the filth and scum of a world of lies, there is some beauty to be found in the unflinching directness with which this film confronts the reality of politics.