Japanese Disaster Narratives of the Early Twenty-First Century: Continuity and Change

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While Japan has had a long history of disaster movies, there was a period during the late twentieth century, at a time when the genre had regained popularity in Hollywood, that few were being made. However, from the start of the twenty-first century there has been a new wave of disaster movies. Building upon my previous study (Hood 2020) that compares the contents of Japanese and English-language disaster narratives, this article provides in-depth analysis of fourteen Japanese disaster narratives and considers the degree to which they include 'continuity' and 'change'. In terms of 'continuity' and 'change', the paper will be concerned first with the way in which conventions found in disaster narratives are used and second with issues such as the portrayal of the protagonists, women, and the way in which some of the narratives handle actual historical events.

Disaster movies have a long history. As Kay and Rose (2006) note, 'Ever since some of the first silent films were produced, catastrophe and spectacle have been important parts of the movies' (p. 1). Some studies of disaster narratives have been about trying to understand the appeal of such movies (e.g., King 2000), others have looked to understand the movies within the wider social context (e.g., Keane 2001), and others have looked in detail at specific disaster narratives (e.g., Bergfelder and Street 2004, concerning narratives about the sinking of the *Titanic*). While disaster narratives are primarily to entertain, they can even lead to people changing their perceptions of risk and how to respond to a disaster (Mitchell et al. 2000; Quarantelli 1985). Movies can also have an impact upon how people understand past events, although Tipton (2002:9) points out that '[e]nthusiasts of history communicate a sense of frustration and disgust when assessing Hollywood's treatment of the past'.

Building upon the idea by Mileti (1999) that disasters themselves are 'designed' by a range of cultural and social influences, my previous study (Hood 2020) involved an extensive analysis of English-language and Japanese-language disaster narratives to consider what conventions may be found within such narratives. That study found that there are some significant similarities and differences. Building upon that study, this article looks in more depth at the Japanese disaster narratives made in the early Twenty-first century. In so doing, it considers the variation in the degree to which conventions are used in these movies compared to those made in the previous century, while also keeping in perspective their usage in English-language disaster narratives. In particular, the study analyses the degree to which the narratives handle issues such as the portrayal of the protagonists, women, and the way in which some of the narratives deal with actual historical events.

This study is significant as it highlights issues relating to the differences in how Japanese disaster narratives are constructed. Being aware of this is important for those involved in the movie industry, for example, when considering the likely appeal of narratives in different cultures/societies/countries. Furthermore, the article points out that while there may be similarities and differences across language or geographic areas, there are also areas where there are changes within Japan too. By highlighting these areas of 'continuity' and 'change', it becomes possible for plans to be made about how to construct future disaster narratives.

Understanding What A Disaster Narrative Is

Keane (2001:1) notes that '…in contrast to classic genres like the western and popular contemporary genres like horror and science fiction, disaster movies have remained relatively neglected within film studies'. However, as Yacowar (2012:313) argues, 'Disaster films constitute a sufficiently numerous, old, and conventionalized group to be considered a genre rather than a popular cycle that comes and goes'. Yet, the database *IMDb* does not include a 'disaster' genre. Consequently, one must question what constitutes a disaster narrative.

The problem with defining a disaster narrative has its roots in the lack of a definition of a disaster itself. While some studies (e.g., Perry and Quarantelli 2005; Rodríguez, Quarantelli, and Dynes 2007; Stallings 2002) seek to define what a disaster is or how they should be researched, Levinson and Granot (2002) point out 'There is no clear and universally accepted definition of when an accident becomes a disaster' (p. xi). Fundamentally a disaster stems from a society's inability to respond to, or be prepared for, a natural or human-made event (Hood 2012:32).

While Mitchell et al. (2000:389) suggest that a disaster narrative is one where the key was whether the 'hazard might be described as the "star" of the film'. This definition is slightly different to that of Quarantelli (1985:33) who considered films with 'substantial scenes or footage of disaster happenings'. My previous study (Hood 2020), however, used a revision to Mitchel et al. and considered narratives where there would have been no story if it were not for the disaster. On top of this, certain types of narratives are not considered within the disaster 'genre'. These include satire movies, animated narratives, 'clear-cut science fiction' (which is taken to mean those that involved attacks from extra-terrestrials or fictional monsters), and horror and super-natural movies (Hood 2020:181-2).

As noted above, *IMDb* does not have a 'disaster' genre, and so all the movies that were considered for my previous study were classified as being between one and three other genres on *IMDb* (Hood 2020:183). However, the previous study found that there are seventeen conventions that may appear in disaster narratives, made up of three distinct groups of narratives (see Table 1).[1] The first group, Group A, is made up of 12 conventions that are found in both at least 60 percent of English-language disaster narratives and Japanese disaster narratives. The second group, Group B, is made up of three conventions that are found in at least 60 percent of English-language disaster narratives, but less than 60 percent of Japanese disaster narratives. The third group, Group C, of two conventions are those that are found in at least 60 percent of Japanese disaster narratives, but less than 60 percent of English-language disaster narratives.

Table 1. Conventions of Disaster Narratives

Group	Convention
A	**1.** Pillars of truth **2.** Mood of dread/threat **3.** Primarily impacts nationality of narrative makers **4.** Image of disaster **5.** Dominance of male characters **6.** Mini-victories **7.** Family **8.** Suffering protagonist **9.** Cross section of society represented **10.** Savagery but optimism **11.** Death of main character **12.** No distancing in time (may not apply to historical narratives)
B	**13.** Conflict between characters, but unite against disaster **14.** Panic **15.** Isolation
C	**16.** Show dead bodies **17.** Contemporary significance

Based upon Table 2 in Hood 2020:196.

[1] Although Quarantelli (1985:34) notes that most of the movies in that study were only viewed once and those viewed more 'almost never evoked perceptions which were contradictory to or conflicting with initial ones', for my studies, more than one viewing became necessary. Initially, each movie was watched in full at normal speed. An Excel spreadsheet was used to note (using a '1') when a convention was found, and a comment added as appropriate to explain the observation. Where a convention was not found by the end of the narrative, a '0' was entered in the appropriate column. Further viewings were done when checking for additional conventions and other aspects of the study. On top of this, this article draws upon interviews with Hideo Yokoyama (author of *Kuraimāzu Hai*), Hisaaki Wakaizumi (director of *Kuraimāzu Hai* (2005)), Masato Harada (director of *Kuraimāzu Hai* (2008)), Rikei Kubo (producer of *Kuraimāzu Hai* (2008)), Makiko Okano (producer of *One-no-Kanata-ni*) and Sheldon Hall (Sheffield Hallam University lecturer and film critic). All interviews were semi-structured and conducted according to the appropriate research ethics.

Conventions in Japanese Disaster Narratives of the Early Twenty-First Century

This article considers those Japanese disaster narratives made in the early Twenty-First century. The full list of narratives that are analysed are listed in Table 2.

Table 2. List of Narratives Analysed (Chronological Order)

Film Title	Director	Year of Release
Doragon Heddo (*Dragon Head*)	Jōji Īda	2003
***Kuraimāzu Hai* (*Climber's High*)**	**Hisaaki Wakaizumi**	**2005 (TV drama)**
Nihon Chinbotsu (*Japan Sinks*)	Shinji Higuchi	2006
***Mari to Koinu no Monogatari* (*A Tale of Mari and Three Puppies*)**	**Ryūichi Inomata**	**2007**
252 Seizonsha Ari (*252: There Are Survivors*)	Nobuo Mizuta	2008
***Kuraimāzu Hai* (*Climber's High*)**	**Masato Harada**	**2008**
Kansen Rettō (*Pandemic/Infection Archipelago*)	Takahisa Zeze	2009
***Shizumanu Taiyō* (*The Unbroken/The Sun Which Doesn't Set*)**	**Setsurō Wakamatsu**	**2009**
The Last Message: Umizaru (*Sea Monkeys*)	Eiichirō Hasumi	2010
***Rokku: Wanko no Shima* (*Rock – Dog's Island*)**	**Isamu Nakae**	**2011**
***Itai: Asu-e no Tōkakan* (*Reunion/Corpses: 10 Days to Tomorrow*)**	**Ryōichi Kimizuka**	**2012**
Kibō-no-Kuni (*Land of Hope*)	Sion Sono	2012
***One-no-Kanata-ni* (*Inseparable Souls: Fathers, Sons, and The Crash of JAL123/Beyond the Ridge*)**	**Setsurō Wakamatsu**	**2012**
***Shizumanu Taiyō* (*The Sun Which Doesn't Set*)**	**Toshiyuki Mizutani and Kōsuke Suzuki**	**2016 (TV drama)**

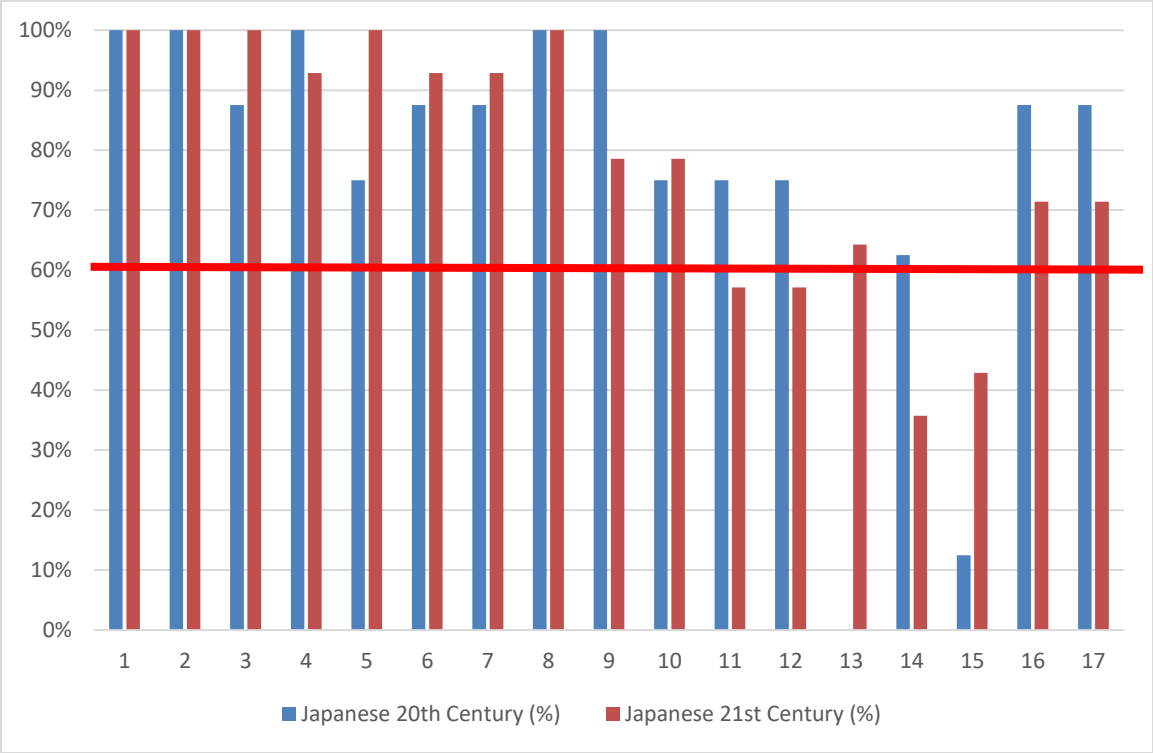
Note: Bold text is used to indicate narratives classified as being 'historical' (that is, they are related to actual historical events)

In conducting the analysis, by going through each of the seventeen conventions detailed above, particular attention is paid to where there has apparently been a shift between those Japanese disaster narratives made during the Twentieth century and those made this century. The word 'apparently' is important to note as, due to the sample size (8 and 14 narratives respectively), there is a possibility of a relatively large shift with only one movie not meeting a convention, for example. With only 8 movies in the former category, each movie accounts for 12.5% and so has a large impact, when compared to the analysis done in the original analysis that considered all 22 narratives together (and so each narrative accounted for 4.5%).

The analysis also looks at whether there are indications as to whether the use of particular conventions should still remain in the same group as detailed in Table 1 or even remain as a

convention at all. To aid with the analysis, a summary is provided in Figure 1. A line at 60%, which was the threshold used when considering whether a convention was found to a significant degree or not, has been added.

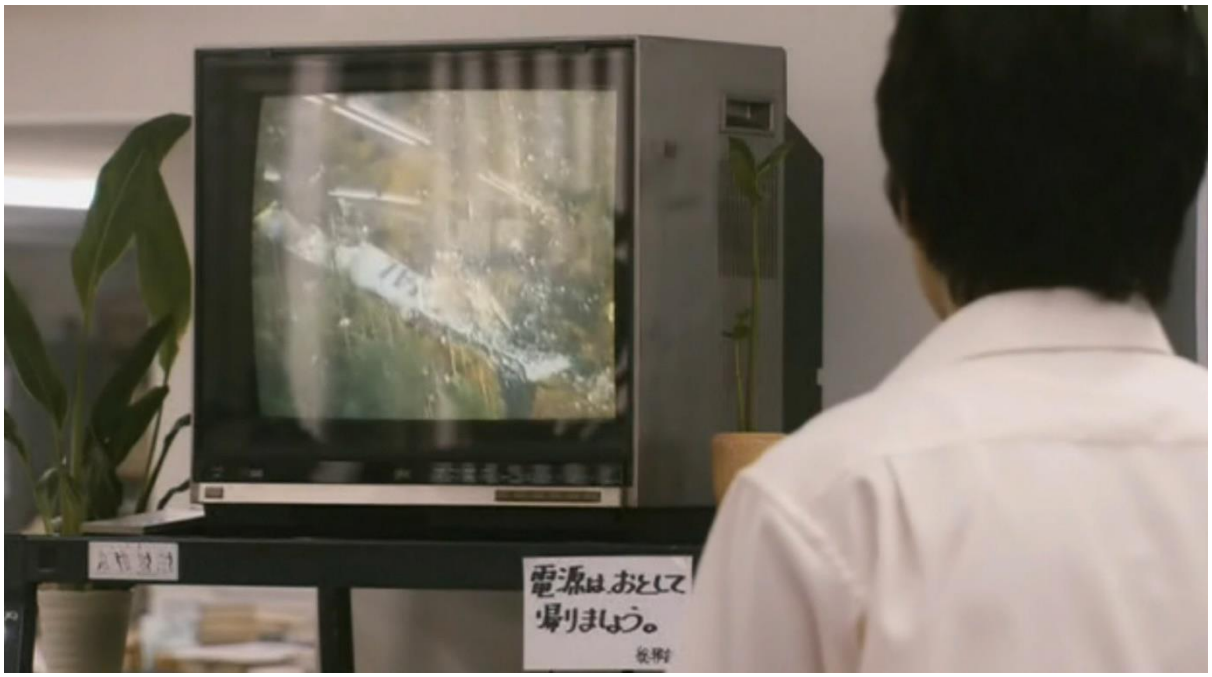
Figure 1. Comparing Japanese Disaster Narratives



The analysis begins with those conventions in Group A – those that were found in at least 60% of both English-language and Japanese-language disaster movies in the original study.

Throughout narratives, a variety of techniques are used to aid viewers with their 'suspension of disbelief' (Nye 1966:149) and to help them think that, when it comes to those events based on actual historical events especially, what they are seeing is accurate. However, this accuracy need not be restricted to factual accuracy but can also relate to more universal aspects of how people behave, for example. This is what Hideo Yokoyama (interview 2009), the author of *Kuraimāzu Hai*, calls 'pillars of truth'. Yokoyama argues that these 'pillars' aid with people 'flipping' the more unbelievable moments in between and finding the whole output believable. These 'pillars of truth' can be seen in all the dramatizations studied and can be found in the form of characters being knowledgeable on specialist issues, text on screen explaining things, voice-overs, as well as characters providing typical behaviour. For example, both versions of *Kuraimāzu Hai* use actual television footage from the 1985 JAL crash site, around which the story is based, to make the content seem credible.

Photo 1. Actual TV footage from 1985 being used in *Kuraimāzu Hai* (2008)



It is also possible to find the convention of mood of dread/threat in all of the disaster narratives. For example, both versions of *Shizumanu Taiyō* and *One-no-Kanata-ni* show rows of coffins, further underlining the traumatic issues that the narratives handle. In *Itai: Asu-e no Tōkakan*, part of the mood of dread/threat comes from the knowledge that the movie is based on an actual event – the Great East Japan Disaster of March 2011 – and what the movie is about (which is clear from the title and imagery on the cover/poster). However, while this convention applies to disaster narratives, it should be noted that this is the sort of convention that could be expected to be found in many thrillers, for example, and further underlines the fact that there are many cross overs between genre, even if one considers 'disaster narratives' to be a genre.

As can be seen from Figure 1, all of the narratives considered in this study had stories that primarily impacts the nationality of narrative makers (Convention 3). That is to say that the narratives primarily revolved around Japanese characters and/or were set in Japan. Given the size of the Japanese market and the relatively small number of Japanese narratives that have an international release (particularly TV dramatizations), this is not a surprising finding. Indeed, in a study of 22 Japanese disaster narratives there was only one movie that this convention did not apply to (Hood 2020:193) - *Fukkatsu no Hi* (directed by Kinji Fukasaku 1980), which, although it had Japanese characters, was focused heavily on the impact of a virus upon Americans and the world.

In relation to the fourth convention, that the image of the disaster is shown, it is possible to see in Figure 1 that while this applied to all the Japanese narratives made in the last century, it does not apply to all of the disasters made in the early Twenty-First century. The single exception was *Itai: Asu-e no Tōkakan,* which, although it shows the build up to the earthquake and tsunami, and then most of the movie is about the period after the tsunami, does not actually show the earthquake or tsunami striking. While, when considering genre, it is tempting to suggest that the main defining feature of disaster narratives is that they do show the image of disaster, this case shows that this need not be so.

Photo 2. The Fuji TV Building being hit by a large wave in *252: Seizonsha Ari*

Of 38 English-language disaster narratives it was found that there was a dominance of male characters in 92% of them (Hood 2020:186). However, there were signs that this convention was less prevalent in more recent movies. When we look at the Japanese narratives, on the other hand, we see that the opposite is true. This is not to say that there are no female characters, but they are not the main characters. In one case, the movie version of *Kuraimāzu Hai*, a change was made compared to the original novel (and NHK version) so that one of the reporters, Tamaki, was female. At one point the film makers had even considered merging the Tamaki and the main reporter, Sayama, characters, but decided it would be a step too far to have the main reporter being female and the novel's author, Yokoyama, would probably not allow it (Harada interview 2011). The change was made in consideration of what a current audience may like to see, rather than being faithful to the novel or what would have been probable in 1985 when the Equal Employment Opportunity Law was only just coming into force (Harada interview 2011).

In many of the narratives, there are 'mini victories' where a protagonist manages to achieve a particular goal. Examples of these mini victories can be see with a child being saved from a fire in *Nihon Chinbotsu* (2006), the saving of some patients in *Kansen Rettō*, or when the dog Rokku helps its mother, Hana, to have some medicine in *Rokku: Wanko no Shima*. In some narratives, these mini victories may be undone, as is particularly apparent in the dramatizations of *Kuraimāzu Hai* whereby the main character, Yūki, has many of his decisions over-ruled, for example.

Another commonly found convention in disaster narratives is there to be families. In many cases we find young children, seemingly to draw in younger audiences and to cause a stronger reaction among parents in the audience. The most striking example of this relates to the true story of Ken Miyajima, who was 9 years old and travelling by himself for the first time when he caught the JAL flight JL123 (Hood 2012:158). Although a pseudonym is used, both versions of *Shizumanu Taiyō* feature him and his family. Similarly, *One-no-Kanata-ni* uses three families so that the narrative could focus on themes and issues which are pertinent in Japanese society (Okano interview 2019).

Photo 3. Characters based on the real Miyajima family in *Shizumanu Taiyō* (2009)

The next convention, that of the 'suffering protagonist' was found in all Japanese disaster narratives. This convention is found in many Japanese movies and is based on the tradition of there being a 'tragic hero' (Standish 2007) in stories such as *Chūshingura* (The Treasury of Loyal Retainers) about the 47 *rōnin* (masterless samurai), and *Abashiri Bangaichi* ([Abashiri Prison] directed by Teruo Ishii 1965). The key aspect of the 'suffering protagonist' is that, despite all the bad things that happen, they keep going and do not quit. Returning to Yūki in *Kuraimāzu Hai* we see that his position undermined or decisions over-ruled. In the novel and the NHK version, despite some outbursts, he continues his work. Only in the movie version, which was intended to have a more international release (Harada interview 2011), do we see a 'changing' approach, and Yūki resigns from the company. Similar to Yūki, the protagonist in *Shizumanu Taiyō* does not quit his company despite numerous overseas postings. In other cases, the suffering may be related to the death of a spouse, for example in *Mari to Koinu no Monogatari*, or a colleague, for example in *252: Seizonsha Ari*.

Photo 4. Yūki shows his disgust after one of his decisions is over-ruled in *Kuraimāzu Hai* (2005)

It is possible to see from Figure 1 that while the convention that a cross section of society is represented applies to the narratives being analysed, there is a drop when comparing the two periods of Japanese narratives. Part of the issues with this convention is how one is to define 'cross section of society'. If one is to define it literally, so that, for example, at least one disabled person, one LGBT person, one ethnic minority were shown, etc., then it is highly unlikely that any narrative would meet this convention. Rather, the analysis looked at whether the narrative broadly covered its impact on society rather than a relatively select group of people from a particular part of the population (e.g., due to their occupation). However, we see that in the Japanese narratives, there is a noticeable under-representation of people with disabilities or LGBT people, for example. Indeed, the only obvious example of a disabled main character was found in *252 Seizonsha Ari*, which contains a seemingly mute girl, but even she can speak by the end of the movie. Due to both the relative ethnic homogeneity of Japan and a higher degree of income equality than is found in many other developed countries (Hendry 2012), the likelihood of a cross-section being represented in a Japanese disaster narrative is high. In relation to ethnic minorities, while there were 22 foreigners on JL123 (Hood 2012:45), none were shown in any of the five narratives related to this crash.

When we consider English-language disaster narratives, we find that despite all that happens, there is often (87% of narratives studies in Hood 2020) optimism and survivors. The climax to many of the narratives is that rather than a 'mini victory', there is an ultimate victory, even when all hope at some point had seemed lost. Two clear examples of this are *Armageddon* (Michael Bay, 1998) and *Deep Impact* (Mimi Leder, 1998) which, in both cases, see all life on Earth not being wiped out by asteroids, despite the concerns that they would be extinction level events. When it comes to Japanese disaster narratives, however, we see that this convention appears in fewer narratives, although it remains relatively high (79% for those made in the Twenty-First century). However, this relatively high percentage masks the fact that many do not end with a positive ending or that movies will not overly focus on survivors. Rather the focus is on some sort of return

to normality. In relation to this, Okano (interview 2019) points to the concept of *tōijō* put forward by Kuramoto (2013). Kuramoto argues that Japanese dramatizations are like a Japanese sweet, *tōijō*, a sugar-coated pill. As argued elsewhere (Hood 2020:192), the analogy may not work as neatly as suggested, but the underlying concept, that many Japanese people are prepared to watch dramas that have traumatic parts and not necessarily a happy ending, remains valid.

The lack of focus on survivors is most apparent when we consider the narratives relating to the actual JL123 crash.[2] Even though four survivors found at the crash site, the survivors are largely ignored in the narratives and the focus of Japanese narratives is on those who died and the bereaved families. Similarly, the movie *Itai: Asu-e no Tōkakan* focuses on the identification and treatment of the dead following the devastating tsunami of 2011 rather than on the survivors themselves. *Mari to Koinu no Monogatari* stands out as one of the few narratives with a clearly happy ending.

Photo 5. A rare happy ending. *Mari to Koinu no Monogatari*

One of the last conventions in Group A is that the narrative sees the death of a main character. However, as can be seen in Figure 1, not only is the percentage of such Japanese disaster narratives made in the Twenty-First century below that of those made in the Twentieth century, it is also below the threshold of 60%. In other words, had the previous study (Hood 2020) been done only considering the Japanese disaster narratives in the Twenty-First century, this convention would have been in Group B. In terms of narratives where such a death is seen, it includes the death of the Prime Minister in *Nihon Chinbotsu*, Professor Nishi in *Kansen Rettō*, and an old couple taking their own lives in *Kibō no Kuni*. But no such deaths are seen in either version of *Kuraimāzu Hai, The Last Message Umizaru*, or *Rokku: Wanko no Shima*, for example.

[2] The JL123 crash (also known as JAL123) was a JAL plane crash on 12 August 1985. Of the 524 passengers and crew on board the Boeing 747, when the search and rescue team reached the crash site (Osutaka-no-One) the next day, only four survivors were found. It is the world's deadliest single plane crash. See Hood 2012.

Just as a study focussing solely on Japanese disaster narratives made in the Twenty-First century would have seen the previous convention move to Group B, so would the convention of 'No distancing in time'. One of the key reasons for this was the large number of narratives that were related to actual events. Indeed, if it were not for the fact that *Kuraimāzu Hai* has two timelines (with one set in the present day), the percentage of narratives meeting this convention would have been even lower than the current 57%.

Let us now move on to the three conventions in Group B, whereby the convention was found in at least 60% of English-language narratives, but less than 60% of Japanese-language ones. The first of these relates to whether there is conflict between characters, but that they unite against the disaster. As can be seen in Figure 1, this convention was not found at all amongst the Japanese disaster narratives made in the Twentieth century but was found in 64% of those made in the Twenty-first century. In other words, had the previous study (Hood 2020) only considered these narratives, this convention would have been in Group A. Conflict is found in *Dragon Heddo*, both versions of *Kuraimāzu Hai, Kibō no Kuni*, and *252: Seizonsha Ari*. However, it is not found in either version of *Shizumanu Taiyō*, for example, where the conflict between the protagonist and management remains until the end of the film let alone in dealing with the disaster(s).

Conversely, when it comes to the convention of 'panic' we can see that the percentage of Japanese disaster narratives with this convention has dropped. Indeed, had the previous study only considered those made in the Twentieth century, this convention would have been in Group A, whereas now, and overall, the convention is in Group B. Within those narratives that do have this convention, we see panic portrayed in different ways. For example, in *Nihon Chinbotsu* people run and scream when seeing an approaching tsunami, in *Kibō-no-Kuni* one woman walks around in an Haz-Mat suit due to her excessive fear of possible radiation poisoning following an accident at a local nuclear power station, and in both versions of *Shizumanu Taiyō* passengers scream aboard the stricken airplane. The pertinent question to ask here is why panic is not normally shown. In many respects to this, the answer could be that the Japanese narratives are aiming to be more realistic. For, as the studies by Quarantelli (1985) and Mitchell et al. (2000) point out, such behaviour (and some others shown in disaster movies) tends not to be seen in the wake of real disasters.

Photo 6. Radiation panic in *Kibō-no-Kuni*

As can be seen in Figure 1, while a higher percentage (43%) of Japanese disaster narratives made in the Twenty-first century have the convention of isolation than those made in the previous century (32%), it remains low enough to suggest that this is not a convention found in Japanese disaster narratives. While English-language disaster narratives often have storylines in which a group of people are facing a disaster and cannot expect outside help, most of the Japanese narratives showed that the disaster affected many people and there could be outside help, including from other countries, as seen in *Nihon Chinbotsu*. Where isolation does exist, it may be used to help with another convention – such as that of the suffering protagonist as can be seen with *Shizumanu Taiyō* when the protagonist is on overseas postings, sometimes without his own family even.

Finally, let us turn to the conventions in Group C, in which conventions were found in less than 60% of English-language movies but at least 60% of Japanese-language ones. As can be seen in the case of both the convention of showing dead bodies and there being contemporary significance, there is a drop between those made in the last century and this one, but still over 70% of the narratives have these two conventions. This compares to 57% and 50% of English-language narratives, respectively. That the first of these two conventions exists may stem from early Japanese disaster movies such as *Hiroshima* (dir. Hideo Sekigawa, 1953) that may have ensured that graphically showing dead bodies was never a taboo. Second, Japan only adopted a rating system for its movies in 1998, ensuring that there has been a long period when filmmakers did not to worry about such things, and even now many do not worry about such restrictions (Hood 2020:194). This situation in Japan is different to the norm that developed in Hollywood and other English-language movies that largely avoided showing overly graphic deaths in movies. Indeed, in some, such as to *Zulu* (dir. Cy Endfield 1964), although killing was shown, there were also cases where dead bodies were removed between scenes so as to reduce the spectacle of death (Hall interview 2018).

Photo 7. A survivor among dead bodies in *Hiroshima*

In terms of contemporary significance, as a country that is often beset by events that may become a disaster (keeping in mind that a disaster is almost always the result of human response to an event or lack of preparedness for such an event), there is a much greater chance for Japanese disaster narratives to have this convention. In some cases, the contemporary significance is not as directly obvious as showing how people respond to an earthquake, for example. Makiko Okano (interview 2019) points out that the TV station WOWOW originally planned to make a dramatization to show how people responded and recovered from the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami in 2011 but considered it too soon, in 2012, to do so and so made a dramatization covering these themes by focusing upon the JL123 crash instead.

Continuity, Change and Historical Events

What is clear that when considering the three groups of conventions, when we look at the Japanese disaster narratives made in the Twentieth Century and those made in this century, there is both 'continuity' and 'change'. There are a number of cases whereby certain conventions still appear to remain core to Japanese disaster narratives, and so there is 'continuity'. However, there are also cases of 'change', where the use of the convention has varied, to the degree that it may have altered the grouping into which the convention fits, for some reason. These 'changes' may reflect broader changes that are occurring in Japanese society and/or the making of dramatizations in Japan. However, to understand the issues better, this article will now look in

more detail at the issues of 'continuity' and 'change' in relation to portraying a particular storyline. In that respect, it is most effective to be considering narratives that surround a single historical event so that a fuller comparison can be done. Consequently, the article considers the narratives related to the crash of JAL flight JL123, namely *Kuraimāzu Hai, Shizumanu Taiyō*, and *One-no-Kanata-ni*. That there are two versions of the first two is particularly beneficial here in looking at the degree to which there is 'continuity' or 'change' and what the reasons for this may be. Before looking at these issues, the article briefly introduces the three stories in turn.

The novel *Kuraimāzu Hai* ('Climber's High'), published in 2003, tells the story of one reporter's experiences as his paper attempts to cover the story of the JL123 crash. Although the author, Hideo Yokoyama, had been a journalist at the Gunma-based Jōmō Shimbun in 1985 and reported on the crash, Yokoyama himself (interview 2009) is keen to stress that it was not based directly upon what happened to him in 1985. In 2005 the novel was turned into a two-part television drama by NHK and a movie followed in 2008. An official English translation, *Seventeen*, was published in 2018. Both dramatizations were about the same length, but neither covered all the content of the novel. The story has two timelines – one in the present and the other during the week of the JL123 crash. During the narratives there are conflicts within the company, the protagonist, Yūki, and his colleagues look to publish a scoop about the cause of the crash, writing the truth is important to Yūki, and Yūki, in the present-day timeline, climbs a mountain.

Shizumanu Taiyō, written by Toyoko Yamasaki, was published in 2001 after being serialized between 1995 and 1999. The novel is in three parts and a total of five volumes. The third volume, called the 'Osutakayama-volume', is clearly based upon the events surrounding JL123. *Shizumanu Taiyō* was made into a movie in 2009, and the satellite channel WOWOW made a 20-part dramatization in 2016 as part of the channel's 25th anniversary celebrations. In relation to the 2009 movie, the production company, Kadokawa Pictures, stressed to me that the movie was based on the novel, itself a work of fiction and so there was 'no connection' between JL123 and the film (Kadokawa email 2008-12-18). However, the link between the movie and actual events is clarified by the fact that more could have been done to change the details of the plane, the crash site's location and where families gathered, for example. Furthermore, one of the DVD's bonus features shows that on one of the final days of filming, which took place on a recreation of the crash site, the cast and crew faced the real crash site and held a minute's silence. The DVD also shows that the lead actor, Ken Watanabe, went to Irei-no-Sono, a memorial dedicated to the JL123 crash (Hood 2012, 2019) to pay his respects. The 2009 movie boasted one of the biggest budgets for a Japanese film of all time (*Shinema Hōchi* 2009-11-27) and runs for about three-and-half hours, and even includes an interval. Although the literal title is the 'Sun Which Does Not Set', the official title in English is 'The Unbroken', but it had a limited international release. The narrative includes scenes in Africa, Karachi, Tehran, and Japan, features the protagonist, Onchi, having a variety of conflicts within the airline, a plane crash, support being given to the bereaved, and corruption.

One-no-Kanata-ni is based on the book *Kaze-ni Soyogu Bohyō* by Ryūshō Kadota. While this is primarily based on interviews with bereaved families, it should still be noted that it, like *Shizumanu Taiyō,* contains details, such as conversations, which are very unlikely to be faithful to what was said at the time. Kadota was a journalist for a magazine and covered the JL123 crash, interviewing both the bereaved and survivors (Kadota interview June 2018). In 2012 WOWOW dramatized sections of the book, in two parts, using the title *One-no-Kanata-ni* and the book was subsequently reissued with this title. All three versions have the same subtitle of the 'fathers and

sons of the JAL crash'. The story revolves around the crash and that the focus is on three families where there is a strong link between the sons and their fathers.

When considering these narratives in relation to 'continuity' and 'change', and by extension, the degree to which they portray what may have actually happened in 1985, an obvious starting point is the plane crash itself. All five, conservatively, refer to the crash site being Osutaka-yama (Mt. Osutaka). However, this reveals an issue with accuracy, as, although the crash site is commonly referred to as being on Osutaka, and the crash site is officially Osutaka-no-One (literally 'the ridge on Osutaka'), the crash site is on another mountain, Mount Takamagahara. The misuse of the crash site name seems to stem from what the site was announced as being by the best-selling newspaper, *Yomiuri Shimbun*, and its linked TV station on 13 August 1985 after several hours of confusion and 18 different locations being suggested as the correct location (Hood 2012:60). That the dramatizations maintain the 'continuity' position of using 'Osutaka-yama' underlines the fact that their default position is not to perform a documentary role and the preference is to use nomenclature with which most viewers would be familiar. Indeed, as Hall (interview 2018) says in relation to *Zulu* (dir. Cy Endfield 1964) when judging films we need to remember that they are not documentaries and they deserve 'fair consideration' on their own terms'.

Both versions of *Shizumanu Taiyō* and the movie version of *Kuraimāzu Hai* have a re-creation of the crash site. Although there is a degree of accuracy in these, there are also some important differences. First, while in reality, most of the 'J' of 'JAL' was missing from the only large piece of wreckage that remained, the movie version of *Kuraimāzu Hai* includes the whole 'J'. In the case of *Shizumanu Taiyō*, the letters are now 'NAL', as the airline name has been changed to 'National Airlines', and all letters are visible. Although the 2005 version of *Kuraimāzu Hai* and *One-no-Kanata-ni* do not have re-creations of the crash site, they do include actual news footage of the crash site from 1985, as is also done in the other dramatizations. The crash site becomes the focal point of one of the key scenes in both versions of *Kuraimāzu Hai*, with the NHK version using archive footage as a backdrop. This was done because a recreation of the crash site would have been prohibitively expensive (Wakaizumi interview 2010).

In terms of the cause of the crash, *Kuraimāzu Hai* largely presents a version based on the official investigation. However, the 2008 version also includes a scene, not in the original novel, where a reporter talks to one of the local search and rescue team and is told that they were following orders, that they knew where the crash site was, and that they could have got there earlier and saved more people. The movie finishes with text pointing out that while the official report concluded that the plane had probably experienced rapid depressurization following a failure in the rear bulkhead, which had not been correctly repaired by Boeing after a previous accident, there are those who question the official report and continue to seek a reinvestigation. Harada (interview 2011) said that he felt obligated to include this having discussed the crash with many people and having read books about the crash which brought the official narrative into question. Both versions of *Shizumanu Taiyō*, on the other hand, includes nothing equivalent to this, which is somewhat surprising given that the novel raises the question of whether the plane was struck by a missile (Yamazaki 2001:153-6), for example, for which there is some corroborating evidence (Hood 2012).

With the main story being set in 1985, the dramatizations provide a range of visual clues to help connect with the events of that year. The most notable of these is the heavy usage of Hanshin Tigers memorabilia in many of the dramatizations. Over half of the victims came from the Kansai area (Hood 2012:45), where the Hanshin Tigers baseball team is based, and the President of the team was one of those who died in the crash. Following the crash many people supported the

Tigers to win their first ever championship, which they achieved, as a way of supporting the team, families and region as it recovered from the crash (Hood 2012:236). However, in terms of overall accuracy, there is an issue with the depiction of one of the victims, based upon Ken Miyajima (discussed further below) who was actually a Kintetsu Buffalos fan (Miyajima interview 2009) and not a Hanshin Tigers fan as shown in the 2009 version of *Shizumanu Taiyō*.

Although all five narratives involve the plane crash in some form, they also feature many other locations and the degree to which these are accurate also impacts the believability of the narrative. Both versions of *Shizumanu Taiyō* and *One-no-Kanata-ni* recreate the scenes in Fujioka where families waited for news and the identification of remains was performed. Looking at photographs of these sites in 1985, there is no doubt that the recreations look authentic, although one should note that most viewers would probably be unaware of the authenticity. In the case of *Kuraimāzu Hai*, perhaps the most noticeable difference between the two versions are the offices of the newspaper company. While some (e.g., *Kinema Junpō* 2008:36) criticised the 2008 version for looking too much like the *Daily Planet* in *Superman* (Richard Donner 1978), the director (Harada interview 2011) suggests that it was authentic and the NHK version was pandering too much to what people's expectations would be rather than accuracy.

Photo 8. The make-shift morgue in *One-No-Kanata-ni*

Both versions of *Kuraimāzu Hai* and *One-no-Kanata-ni* maintained the real name of JAL. In the case of NHK, it was the first time that a real company's name was used in a television drama and was something that led to a lot of deliberation before being agreed (Wakaizumi interview 2010). *Shizumanu Taiyō*, like the novel itself, used the name National Airlines (NAL) instead of JAL, and Prime Minister Nakasone's name is changed to Tonegawa, a river in Nakasone's home prefecture, Gunma, for example. In the case of *Shizumanu Taiyō*, the visual nature of dramatizations meant that one issue that had to be addressed was the logo of the airline. While both versions came up with differing solutions, both managed to provide a hint to the original JAL *tsurumaru* logo of a red circle, based upon the Japanese flag, with a stylised crane. In the case of the movie, the red circle was largely kept by using a crescent moon inside which there was a single cherry blossom

(*sakura*), a potent symbol of Japan (Hood 2015:104-5). In the 2016 version, the logo is a red circle in which there is a stylised picture of a mountain based on Mount Fuji, another of Japan's well-known symbols.

Photos 9 and 10. The airline (NAL) logo on display in *Shizumanu Taiyō* (2009) and (2016) respectively.

All five of the JL123-related narratives only focus on a few key people. What is interesting is the relative overlap that we see of certain families in these narratives and elsewhere, such as in documentaries and in the media. Given that the crash impacted over 400 families (8/12 Renrakukai 2005:4), there should not be a need to have such restrictions. Perhaps due to the familiarity of certain families, there is a desire for production companies to focus on the same

families. It could also be that only these families are prepared to have their story told. In addition to the change of name of company, *Shizumanu Taiyō* also changes the names of families. This also happens in the case of *One-no-Kanata-ni*. For those wanting to consider the historical authenticity of the dramatizations, the change is notable. Further, it stands out in the case of *Shizumanu Taiyō* due to the inclusion of Ken Miyajima, mentioned earlier, and his mother, Kuniko Miyajima, in the story. Mrs Miyajima became the head of the 8/12 Renrakukai, the association for the families of the JL123 crash. While the novel contains the real names of Miyajima and other families, after some late pressure from the publisher despite the original draft having pseudonyms and Miyajima agreeing, with some regret now (Miyajima interview 2009), to the change, the dramatizations do not. Only one bereaved family is shown in *Kuraimāzu Hai* and no name is included, although the movie version also gives passing reference to Ken Miyajima and alters the story about Yūki and his son to make an element of the story, that of Yūki's son travelling by himself on a plane, comparable to Ken's experience of flying by himself for the first time. As noted above, Ken Miyajima and his family also appear in *Shizumanu Taiyō*, and Mrs Miyajima is probably the most recognisable and well-known of the bereaved families related to JL123 and is also involved in activities to improve support for families of other disasters (Miyajima interviews 2009, 2017) as well as being in the news and documentaries. That her name is not used in *Shizumanu Taiyō* is perhaps a little odd in this respect, though many viewers would soon make the link between the character on screen and the real person. Like *Shizumanu Taiyō*, *One-no-Kanata-ni* shifts from using real names. According to the producer of *One-no-Kanata-ni*, the names of the families were changed, even though real names had been in the media, as there was concern about any negative impact on their day-to-day life (Okano interview 2019).

One aspect of the JL123 story that features heavily in each of the dramatizations, are the *isho* written by some of the passengers. In total six notes written by passengers and one by a crew member were found (Hood 2012). *Kuraimāzu Hai* and the movie version *Shizumanu Taiyō* include the longest and most well-known of the passenger *isho*, written by Hirotsugu Kawaguchi. In the case of the movie version of *Shizumanu Taiyō* we even see the *isho* being written inside the plane, as well as being discovered by the son and read out again at a later point (with the names changed). In *One-no-Kanata-ni* the focus on the Uesugi family allows for inclusion of Masakazu Taniguchi's *isho* (with the name changed). As discussed elsewhere (Hood 2012:104-5), the *isho* are one of the factors for which the crash is best known, so it would have been surprising for one not to be included.

Photo 11. The Kawaguchi *isho* being written in *Shizumanu Taiyō* (2009).

Conclusions

This article has noted how the studying of disaster narratives is complicated by the fact that there is no recognised 'disaster' genre, an issue which partly stems from the lack of clarity about what constitutes a disaster. Disaster narratives tend to be an amalgam of other genres. Yet, despite this, a previous study (Hood 2020) revealed how there are certain conventions which are regularly used in disaster narratives. However, that study also noted that there are differences between English-language and Japanese disaster narratives in relation which conventions are used. That study found that there are three groups of conventions – those which appear in both types of narratives, those which appear in English-language ones but not usually in Japanese ones, and those which do not appear in English-language ones but do appear in Japanese ones.

This study looks in greater detail at the Japanese disaster narratives, and particularly focusses upon those which have been made in the early Twenty-first century. In doing this it was able to identify that there are certain conventions that continue to be used – what could be considered a form of 'continuity' within the movie-making industry. However, the study also noted that there are some significant changes, which, in some cases, could mean that in the future a reclassification of the conventions and the group in which they appear may become necessary.

In order to better understand the issues of 'continuity' and 'change', the article consider the narratives made this century in relation to the handling of an actual historical event, the JAL flight JL123 crash of 1985. It was found that there were elements where there is a tendency for the narratives to maintain a 'continuity' approach – that is to use terms or facts that the majority of the public would be familiar with, for example. However, it was also found that there were also elements of 'change', whereby changes were made to storylines when compared to other versions or the actual events. The article has found that there appear to be two key factors driving the 'changes' to the conventions used. First, some of these may be due the needs of movie-making

companies to consider their potential market, which, in turn, may also reflect changes within the expectations of those in Japanese society. Second, the influence of the director, for example, themselves, also appears to be a factor in determining whether certain conventions continued to be applied or not. Although those in the movie industry are undoubtedly influenced by those who come before them, which would tend to increase the degree of 'continuity', when it comes to certain actual events, for example, it seems that their own research and knowledge about the event may push them to want to make 'changes' so as to alter the debate and understanding of the event by the wider public.

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