

Giulio Tosi

The twilight of the *rondan*: The transformation of post-war Japanese criticism observed in the reviews of Italian films

The 1950s and 1960s are decades of transition for the Japanese cultural world. Critics and writers who established themselves in the pre-war period give way to new generations and, consequently, also the style and methods of film criticism change. After the war, the establishment of classical Japanese film criticism (*eiga rondan*) has its last phase of activity, comprising heated discussions and moments of reflection on the role and methods of criticism in the changing socio-cultural landscape. The critical production of the members of the *rondan* shows a conscious work of construction and self-representation of the critic as an expert figure, capable of discussing cinematographic art and establishing the ideal canon of Japanese and international cinema. The film review proves to be a useful basis for theoretical elaboration and for carrying out a political-ideological agenda, while strengthening the role of film critics as intellectuals on an equal footing with the colleagues of the more prestigious *bundan*, the capital's literary scene.

After a presentation of the forms and methods of the film review in the post-war Japanese specialized press, I will introduce as a case study the reviews of Italian films distributed in Japan in the 1950s and the 1960s. In the first half of the 1950s, Italian neorealist cinema enjoyed great fortune among the Japanese critical-theoretical world and was the subject of round tables and critical analyses published in influential film magazines such as *Kinema junpō* and *Eiga Hyōron*. In the next fifteen years, Japanese critics continue to look with interest at Italian cinema, extending their analysis to different film genres. Since the mid-1950s, the gradual decline of the *rondan* is accompanied on the one hand by unprecedented critical revaluations of popular cinema and of the role of the public, but, on the other hand, by ever-present essentialist and self-orientalist statements on film and national character centered on the conceptual pair western/"Italian" and eastern/ "Japanese" cinema. These transformations in the post-war critical world emerge in the reviews of Italian films distributed in Japan: controversies on cinematic realism or on the new post-war "art cinema", stimulated by neorealist cinema in the early 1950s; contrasting reactions to the arrival of Italian comedies, musical or historical films; contribution of intellectuals external to the *rondan* who occasionally write film reviews or essays on cinema. Numerous post-war intellectuals operate on the increasingly blurred border between *bundan*, *rondan*, and non-professional criticism. Renowned authors like Mishima Yukio or Shibusawa Tatsuhiko consider cinema a further cultural phenomenon to engage with and from which to draw useful elements in support of aesthetical or political ideas, while showing with their reviews an open and attentive attitude towards the specificities of the medium cinema.

Starting from my case study, I will show how the review is an important part of the rich post-war critical and theoretical debate on topics such as national identity, film genres, and the relationship between the critics and their public. My studies on post-war Japanese film criticism can offer a new contribution to the studies on the history of modern periodicals and on film criticism, and illuminate more sides of the history of international film circulation in the post-war period.