

# Godzilla and the Japanese after World War II: From a scapegoat of the Americans to a saviour of the Japanese

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**Abstract.** This paper examines how five Godzilla films illuminate the complicated relationship between Japan and the United States over the use of nuclear weapons. The United States dropped the first atomic bombs on Japan and created the first nuclear monster film, *The Beast from 20,000 Fathoms* (1953), which inspired the Godzilla series. The popularity of these Godzilla films derives from skilfully grappling with the political, social and cultural problems created by the use of nuclear weapons and science/technology, both inside Japan and in relations between Japan and the United States. This paper takes a historical perspective and shows how the Godzilla characters reflect these attitudes across time, moving from a scapegoat for the Americans to a saviour of the Japanese.

## *Gojira (Godzilla) series*

An ancient monster, deformed by a series of nuclear bomb tests and expelled from his natural habitat, lands in Tokyo and starts destroying Japanese cities. Given the name Godzilla, he destroys these symbols of civilisation as if seeking revenge on humankind for creating such technology. *Gojira*,<sup>1</sup> produced and released by Toho Studio, was a breakthrough hit in Japan in 1954.<sup>2</sup> It was followed by 29 Japanese sequels and two American versions of the Japanese films, *Godzilla*, *King of the Monsters* (1956) and *Godzilla 1985: The Legend is Reborn* (1984). *Gojira* was Japan's first export film and the series appealed to both Japanese and foreign audiences. Over the past 50 years, Godzilla has transformed in shape and character, playing various roles in the stories. In the first series of films, from 1954 to 1975,<sup>3</sup> Godzilla appeared as a horrible monster and destroyed big cities in Japan, but as the series progressed he gradually turned into a controllable and domestic monster, fighting other monsters rather than humans. At the end of this series, he even became a lovable pet. His son, Minilla, also appeared

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<sup>1</sup> *Gojira* is a mixture of 'gorilla' and *kujira* (whale) invented by the producer Tomoyuki Tanaka. Now we call him 'Godzilla'.

<sup>2</sup> According to *Eiga Nenkan* (Cinema Yearbook 1954), *Gojira* was the third bestselling film, following *Seven Samurai* directed by Akira Kurosawa and *Miyamoto Musashi* directed by Hiroshi Inagaki, which got an Academy Award.

<sup>3</sup> This series of 15 films is called the 'Showa Series'.

with him and Godzilla was becoming closer and closer to humankind. After a nine-year absence, Godzilla returned in 1984 as a horrible monster intent on destroying the major cities on Earth. In the second series, from 1984 to 1998,<sup>4</sup> and the third series from 1999 to 2004,<sup>5</sup> he continued to threaten to destroy civilisation. On some occasions, however, Godzilla and other monsters joined forces and fought together against aliens or monsters from outer space. Then, Godzilla became a guardian god to protect the Earth. In 2004, Godzilla was the longest running series in world cinematic history.

Why has Godzilla charmed us so much over the years? One answer to this question seems to lie, rather counter-intuitively, in Godzilla's destruction of modern cities. This destruction is closely related to Japan's experiences in World War II and to dramatic economic developments after the war. American critic Chon A. Noriega (1996, 61) observes that the films 'transfer onto Godzilla the role of the United States in order to symbolically re-enact a problematic United States–Japan relationship that includes atomic war, occupation, and thermo-nuclear tests'. He argues that Godzilla springs from the overwhelming influence of the United States since World War II. In fact, Godzilla was probably inspired by *The Beast from 20,000 Fathoms* (1953), the first nuclear monster film. And of course the United States dropped atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki and continued to carry out nuclear tests. Many scholars in both Japan and the United States have studied the Godzilla series.<sup>6</sup> Some have analysed individual films—*Gojira* (1954) and *Godzilla* (1984)—as expressions of the relationship between Japan and the United States, but no one has undertaken a historical study of the films in this context.

This paper examines five Godzilla films that are closely related to the United States: *Gojira* (1954), *King Kong vs. Godzilla* (1962), *Kaijyu Dai Senso (Godzilla vs. Monster Zero)*, 1965), *Godzilla* (1984), and *Godzilla vs. King Ghidorah* (1991). The paper analyses how Americans are depicted and the way attitudes toward the United States evolve during the films. It also explores what makes Godzilla a unique hero for each Japanese era after World War II.

### Godzilla formulas and Japanese culture

This paper employs John G. Cawelti's formulaic analysis to examine the Godzilla films. For Cawelti, the term 'formula' has the same connotation as a 'popular genre' as

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<sup>4</sup> This is the 'Heisei Series', also named after the era.

<sup>5</sup> This is the 'Millennium Series', named after the new century.

<sup>6</sup> Many books on Godzilla films have been published recently. In addition to Noriega, Toshio Takahashi (1998) analyses the relationship between the Godzilla myth and the Japanese in *Gojira no Nazo* [The Mystery of Godzilla]. Peter Musolf (1998) analyses the Godzilla series from the points of view of Americans.

a Western or detective story. Cawelti (1976, 5) points out two major uses for a literary formula: 'a conventional way of treating some specific thing or person' and 'large plot types'—'a combination or synthesis of a number of specific cultural conventions with a more universal story' (ibid., 6). According to Cawelti, a formula is created and restricted by its own context or culture, and in turn it has some sort of influence on the culture. Formulas become conventional ways of representing certain images, symbols, themes and myths; and at times they are vehicles for representing uncertain, ambivalent or even critical attitudes toward these conventions. Cawelti assumes that 'the process through which formulas develop, change, and give way to other formulas is a kind of cultural evolution with survival through audience selection' (ibid., 20). He suggests that continuity and change of formulas through the audience's selection testifies to the public's agreement with, and acceptance of, the underlying ideas, beliefs and ways of looking at the reality.

Cawelti's formula is useful for comparing and contrasting cultural productions from one time period with others in order to identify and examine specific cultural themes from a particular period. This can be achieved by defining common elements or changed elements among formulas. This paper compares and contrasts five Godzilla formulas in terms of the following elements: characterisations of Godzilla and the main characters, including Godzilla's enemy, a scholar or a scientist, politicians or defence forces, American characters, science and technology, and nature.

### ***Gojira (1954): The American shadow***

#### ***Gojira as a natural and nuclear disaster***

The original Godzilla is depicted as absolute terror. In the dark of night, he attacks a series of fishing boats. A survivor of one of the wrecked boats tells everyone that it was a monster. An old man infers that it is the legendary creature *Gojira*. The rumours spread, but Godzilla still does not show up on screen. When he attacks Ohdo Island on a stormy night, the film depicts destroyed houses, villagers escaping, and devastated trees and shores, but all we see of the monster is part of his foot in one scene. The only witness, a village boy, conveys Godzilla's existence.

The metaphor of typhoon and the legend of Ohdo Island create an image of Godzilla as an unpredictable natural disaster beyond our control. It is only 22 minutes after the title credit that we see Godzilla's face appear abruptly from the mountain on a serene, peaceful island. The horror is conveyed through a close up of the heroine, Emiko, struck with terror, and the ensuing shots of the islanders rolling down the slopes to escape. A research mission headed by Dr. Yamane, a palaeontologist, confirms the identity of a legendary monster, Godzilla, as 'a dinosaur of the Jurassic

Period produced by H-bomb tests. He used to live in a cave at the bottom of the sea, but repeated nuclear tests completely destroyed his habitat... The atomic damage forced him to leave his habitat'.<sup>7</sup>

The fears and anxieties of atomic bombs are depicted in many scenes of the story. The first shot, in which a fisherman's boat is attacked by Godzilla, shows complete devastation. A strip of paper at a seafood store advertises: 'We don't sell atomic bomb-damaged tuna'. The fishing industry people lobby for government support, directly referring to an actual accident, 'Daigo Fukuryu Go Jiken' (the Lucky Dragon No. 5 Incident) and its aftermath in Japanese society. In 1953, a fisherman's boat, the Lucky Dragon No. 5, was wrecked by an American atomic bomb test carried out in the Bikini Atoll in the central Pacific. The crew suffered from radiation and one of them died. The incident caused a public outcry, provoking a great deal of public anxiety and fear about the atomic bomb tests and nuclear weapons in general. Mr. Ogata, a friend of Mieko, Dr. Yamane's daughter, gives voice to these fears and anxieties: 'Doctor Yamane, don't you think that Godzilla is the very atomic bomb that threatens and shadows the Japanese?' Furthermore, the Geiger counter<sup>8</sup> used to measure the residual radiation during the research mission not only recalls the terrors of the atomic bomb tests, but also the suffering caused by the atomic bombs in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, as well as the air raids on Tokyo during World War II. These evocations of atomic bombings and air attacks are confirmed by a woman's conversation with her colleagues on the train: 'The radioactive rain and tuna are just so depressing, and then here comes Godzilla! What will happen to us if he lands in Tokyo Bay? I don't want to die now; I am one of the few survivors from the Nagasaki bombing'.

### *Godzilla's destruction: Metaphors of war and atomic destruction*

In the darkness, Godzilla abruptly emerges from Tokyo Bay. His violent destruction of the city is designed to provoke a series of war memories in the minds of the audience. A horrible flame radiates from Godzilla's mouth, vaporising people on the street; he instantly burns up police cars, throws tanks and trains around as if they were toy blocks, and easily bends a huge iron tower (shot 1).<sup>9</sup> Fighter planes attack him bravely but to no avail. Even the Japan Self-Defence Force's final plan to stop him with a 50,000-volt wire does not work. Nothing can stop him. He silences the chiming clock tower, crushes and burns the television tower, and destroys other buildings in the Ginza area one after another. The film portrays the monster from the perspective of

<sup>7</sup> Quotations from the film are transcribed and translated by the author.

<sup>8</sup> A well-known instrument used to measure residual radiation.

<sup>9</sup> The author takes all the shots used in this paper from Godzilla DVD Collections (Production and copyright: Toho Co. Ltd).

the announcer who televises Godzilla's assault upon the television tower. The close-up of his head is depicted like a mushroom floating in the sky (shot 2). The shot overlapping a roundish birdcage and a burning building behind it, along with other shots of burned-out buildings, are associated with the Atomic Bomb Memorial Dome and thus reproduce its terror (shot 3).

The shots of the people escaping with their belongings and running about also recall the helplessness of the crowds terrified by the Tokyo air raids. Interspersed with scenes of Godzilla's destruction, the film focuses on a mother holding her terrified children close to her, trying to calm them, saying, '[s]oon we will go and see your daddy'. This shot highlights the misfortune of the mother and her children and shows the fragility of the family's happiness.

The film takes most of the shots of Godzilla's destruction of the city from the viewpoint of the attacked crowds, individual families like the one above, and the announcer. We only see part of the huge Godzilla, and subjective images convey the terror of those receiving his wrath. When the announcer tries to see Godzilla far from the tower, the film shows the whole city while describing the horrible devastation of Tokyo, with almost all the houses and buildings in flames. These shots lead to the audience's acknowledgement of the huge disaster, and at the same time, recall the devastation wrought by the Tokyo air raids during WW II. The



**Shot 1.** Godzilla and the Diet from *Gojira* (1954)



**Shot 2.** Godzilla's Mushroom Head from *Gojira* (1954)



**Shot 3.** Like Memorial Dome from *Gojira* (1954)

shots are very dark, making it very difficult to locate Godzilla, thus emphasising the random and uncertain nature of the menace. On the day after Godzilla's assault, the city is in ruins. Makeshift hospitals are filled with the injured, the dead, and their families. The film focuses on a girl, whose mother has just died and who is crying out, '[m]ummy'. These shots emphasise the human cost of Godzilla, the H-bombs that have produced him, and ultimately World War II itself.

*Fears and anxieties toward science and technology:*

*Dr. Serizawa's inner conflicts*

Dr. Serizawa's eye-patch and scars from the war are clearly visible on his face. Dr. Serizawa is unique among the series of Godzilla films, but his purpose becomes clear when he is compared to Dr. Tom, who fought bravely against the giant beast depicted in the first American nuclear monster film, *The Beast from 20,000 Fathoms* (1953). Tom uses an 'isotope', other scientific technology, to repel the nuclear monster created by the harmful effects of radiation. He does not have any fear, hesitation, or even any questions about this scientific technology. In contrast, Dr. Serizawa has a completely negative view of science; he is very fearful that the oxygen destroyer, which he discovered and invented, might be diverted for use in war. Dr. Serizawa has keenly felt the horror of scientific technology and the weakness of human nature in his experiences of the war. He was engaged to Mieko and he still loves her. When Mieko and her boyfriend, Mr. Ogata plead for him to use the oxygen destroyer to fight Godzilla, he rejects their request, insisting, '[o]nce the oxygen destroyer is used, it will add a new, horrible weapon to plague mankind—even worse than A-bombs versus A-bombs and H-bombs versus H-bombs. I can't allow it to happen as a scientist, as a human being'. He questions the use of science to create nuclear bombs, and the statesmen who misuse them. After looking over the ruined city, the injured and dead, and the maidens who sing in chorus, praying for peace and recovery, he decides to use his oxygen destroyer to kill Godzilla. After making sure Godzilla is dead, he commits suicide to keep his research a secret forever.

Serizawa's characterisation shows that a society cannot save itself only with the power of science and technology and that a strong sense of morality and responsibility are required for the scientists who create these new technologies. Godzilla's attacks recreate for the audience the atomic terror of the past, the H-bomb tests of the present, and the fear of science and technology in the future. The film contrasts the heedless use of new technology with Dr. Serizawa, who treats science as a noble ideal and sacrifices his life to keep his research from falling into the wrong hands. Dr. Yamane warns in the last shot, 'Godzilla is not necessarily the last one. If H-bombs should continue to be used, similar monsters might appear'.

### *The absence of the United States*

The H-bomb tests in the Bikini Atoll, atomic bombings, and Tokyo air raids were all manifestations of American military and scientific power; in the story however, the United States is absent. Godzilla thus becomes a kind of scapegoat that lets the United States off the hook. Godzilla burns Tokyo, moves in the darkness and destroys the most of the Diet buildings, but leaves the central tower, the symbol of Japanese imperial power, intact (shot 4). This pattern of destruction corresponds to the policy of the American army of occupation after the war, destroying the Japanese military and government but leaving Emperor Hirohito in place. In contrast to other periods of Japanese filmmaking, the absence of the United States is very common among the films released during and soon after the period of occupation. Other films with themes that involve nuclear bombings—*Nagasaki no Kane* (The Bell in Nagasaki, 1952), *Gembaku no Ko* (Children of Hiroshima, 1952), and *Hiroshima* (1953)—refer to A-bombs, but not at all to the country that actually dropped the bombs.



**Shot 4.** Godzilla avoiding the Tower from *Gojira* (1954)

Why do the Japanese omit the United States in their discussion of nuclear bombs and avoid criticising the United States for dropping them? Censorship was one of the principal reasons. According to Kyoko Hirano (1998), during the occupation any reference to the atomic bombing disasters was prohibited and information implying the existence of the army of occupation was also excluded. For instance, *Nagasaki no Kane* had to go through several modifications in response to the censors, who in the end only allowed a shot of the mushroom clouds and the debris of Dr. Nagai's house after the bombing. Even after the end of the occupation, there was a tacit agreement between the Japanese film industry and the United States Army, embodied by the Voluntary Control System of the Motion Picture Code of Ethics Committee. Two other films released after the end of the occupation mention the bodily damage caused by the radiation and the destruction of the two cities but never connect these events to the United States or Americans.

However, direct censorship does not seem to be the only reason that Japanese films from this period that address the bombings never refer negatively to the United States or Americans. The original novel of *Nagasaki no Kane* depicts the sufferings

caused by the atomic bombings as God's trial, and this transcendental explanation was essential to its status as a best-selling book and film. *Nagasaki no Uta wa Wasureji* (Never Forget the Song in Nagasaki, 1952) describes one American character as a man with a warm heart who heals the souls of the Japanese. The film became the 10<sup>th</sup> bestselling film the year it was released. This conversion of Americans from destroyers to protectors, as John Dower argues, probably sprang from tensions between the Japanese people and the power elites who brought the nation to war. The notion that Americans should bear the burden as saviours was evident in the very American version of 'Gojira', *The King of Monsters* (1956), which was modified by an American director, Terry O. Morse.

***Hidden cultural conflicts resolved:  
Anti-science technology and economic needs***

In 1950, the Korean War broke out, and in 1952 the United Kingdom first tested H-bombs, followed by the United States, and in 1953 the Soviet Union. In March of the same year, the Lucky Dragon Incident occurred. These events provoked a strong anxiety about being involved in the war. The terror of the new H-bombs and memories of the past war were much on the minds of the Japanese. The figure of Godzilla manipulates these fears and anxieties in order to highlight the danger of nuclear weapons and the devastating consequences of war. As is clear from Godzilla's devastation and from Dr. Serizawa's stubborn reluctance to disclose his scientific invention, fear and distrust of science was an important part of the Japanese mind-set during this time.

On the other hand, Japan's economic recovery depended on the embrace of technology, as seen in the Economic White Paper written under the direction of the United States. Noriega points out these Japanese conflicts in those days: 'Japan in 1954 is a transitional monster caught between the imperial past and the post-war industrial future, aroused by the United States H-bomb tests' (Noriega 1996, 56). He adds, 'The film must balance two anxieties, but cannot resolve them' (ibid., 57). The film works to resolve this deep cultural tension by creating an ethically superior scientist who sacrifices his life for the nation. The film thus serves as a vehicle for the Japanese public to see a future that reconciles the beneficial uses of technology with its use for war and destruction. This was probably a major reason that *Gojira* was such a big hit. In contrast, *Ikimono no Kiroku* (The Records of Living Creatures, 1955), directed by Akira Kurosawa, was a flop. The main character is so fearful of atomic bombs that he becomes insane. The film confronted the atomic bomb head on, but was unable to resolve the fears and tensions the bomb provoked.

***King Kong vs. Godzilla:***  
**The influences of American culture**

In the second film of the Godzilla saga, *Gojira no Gyakushu* (Godzilla Raids Again, 1955), Godzilla is trapped in the ice by Japan's fighter planes, which are depicted as *Zero-sen* fighters<sup>10</sup> flown by pilots who bravely fight and sacrifice their lives to save the country. Thus, Godzilla continues to play its role as a scapegoat for the United States. When *Godzilla, King of the Monsters* was released abroad and became a big hit, Godzilla came to be seen as a symbol of Japan at home and abroad. In the third film of the series, *King Kong vs. Godzilla*, Godzilla represents Japan and confronts King Kong, clearly representing the United States. Unlike the first film, this film is much more entertainment than angst. The nature of Godzilla and his destruction are very different from those of the original Godzilla, and the appearance of King Kong introduces a new element into the Godzilla story.

***Lovable monsters: Godzilla and King Kong***

The film starts with Godzilla coming out of an iceberg and assaulting the atomic submarine Sea Fork. He shoots flames at tanks and is too strong for the Self-Defence Force to stop but is not depicted as a threat to the survival of the nation. He comes across more as a bad-tempered pet. When he inflicts damage on King Kong, he claps his hands with pleasure and leaps for joy. Godzilla is depicted as a lovable being with something of an affinity for humans. This Godzilla does not appear in Japanese cities or destroy them; rather, the object of his violence is King Kong. The Japanese version of King Kong follows the character of the original King Kong in the American film *King Kong* (1933). He shows an interest in a beauty and climbs up the tall, symbolic tower of the National Diet Building, the Japanese equivalent of the Empire State Building. Like Godzilla, King Kong is very strong but behaves basically like a human. When he kicks Godzilla, he strikes his own breast for joy. King Kong is also depicted as a lovable animal. In the second fight with King Kong, the two monsters destroy Atami Castle, but this is just a by-product of the fight, not an intentional target. The significance of this destruction will be considered in the next section.

***Americanised Japanese and the destruction of tradition***

The cameraman who works in the advertising department at the Pacific Medicine Company and who takes King Kong from a South Pacific island to Japan is depicted

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<sup>10</sup> *Zero-sen* were fighter aircrafts during World War II. While flying them, *Tokko Tai* groups were famous for their self-sacrificing attacks.

as a very American character. The very early scenes of the story show a cameraman playing the role of drummer with a hat on his head during the filming of a commercial. This shot occupies most of the screen, while a sword-fighting play is being shot behind it. The scene dramatizes the displacement of old Japanese culture with a new, American-style commercial culture. When the cameraman and his colleague go to the South Pacific islands to search for King Kong, they offer a transistor radio and cigarettes to the native people on the island. This shot recalls the Japanese audience's experiences with the soldiers of the army of occupation. The natives on the South Pacific islands are depicted as backward. They have black make-up, wear primitive clothes, and pejorative expressions are used to describe them. The film contrasts the



**Shot 5.** 'Atami Castle' from *King Kong vs. Godzilla* (1962)

Japanese with the natives in a way that clearly recalls the behaviour of American soldiers during the occupation.<sup>11</sup> The underlying theme in the movie is the conflict between traditional Japanese culture and a new Americanised identity that is quickly displacing the old ways. This is a cultural rather than a political conflict. The climactic fight scene between Godzilla and King Kong

dramatizes this cultural destruction. The scene starts with a long shot of the castle. The camera closes in on the castle in a series of shots. As the two antagonists get closer to the castle, it gradually becomes affected by the fight (shot 5). The scene ends with a close up of the castle being crushed by the two fighting monsters. These series of shots have a special significance; Japan, symbolised by Godzilla, is fighting against King Kong, who represents the process of Americanisation and the destruction of Japanese traditions, symbolised by the castle. It is worth taking into consideration the doctor's last words, 'Human beings should learn the power of survival that animals and plants have to adapt themselves to nature'. From this perspective, the film calls into question the rush to accept an Americanised modernity: ultimately, there is too much confidence in science and technology.

<sup>11</sup> The Japanese have had an inferiority complex toward Americans and Europeans and very often use the native people on the South Pacific islands to overcome the complex. For instance, an animated Japanese propaganda film, *Momotaro to Umi no Shimpei* (Momotaro, Divine Warriors of the Sea, 1945) depicts the people on the South Pacific islands as naked animals while it depicts the Japanese as animals in clothing.

### *Ambivalence toward American culture*

After the destruction of Atami Castle, Godzilla rolls down to the sea. King Kong returns to his own island while Godzilla sinks into the sea and disappears. The story ends without the audience finding out whether Godzilla is alive or dead. The rivalry between the two has no clear winner. The US–Japanese duel ends in a draw. This ending of the story reflects Japanese ambivalence toward American culture. As the example of the transistor radio shows, Americans and their advanced technology and civilisation are the object that the Japanese long for and imitate. On the other hand, as the example of Atami Castle and the Japanese traditional sword-fighting play shown behind the American drummer symbolise that too much emphasis on American culture, science, and technology threatens the destruction of nature and Japanese tradition.

### ***Kaijyu Dai Senso (Godzilla vs. Monster Zero, 1965): The USA as our partner***

After fighting King Kong as a symbol of Japan, Godzilla becomes a bad guy again in *Mothra vs. Godzilla* (1964). In *Sandai Kaijyu Chikyu Saidai no Kessen* (Ghidorah, the Three-Headed Monster, 1964), Godzilla and Mothra fight against King Ghidorah to protect the earth. Starting with this film, Godzilla's violence is focused on other monsters rather than on the destruction of civilisation. As the formula of the plot changes, conventions such as the characterisation of Godzilla and his function in the story begin to change. In *Kaijyu Dai Seinso* (Godzilla vs. Monster Zero, 1965), Godzilla cooperates with Ladon and fights King Ghidorah. In this story, an American astronaut plays an important role. This section examines the role of the astronaut and changes in characterisation and role in the plot of Godzilla.

### ***Controllable Godzilla***

The critical difference between this Godzilla formula and conventional formulas is that an alien on Planet X can manipulate Godzilla with electromagnetic waves. In these films, Godzilla can be controlled by humans, who use technology to domesticate him along with other monsters on the islands. The Godzilla of this film is very famous for his comical gesture 'Shé!' which imitates a popular character in a cartoon (shot 6). His gestures and actions are similar to those of humans. For example, he picks up a huge rock and throws it at King Ghidorah, and he expresses his joy by clapping his hands after kicking King Ghidorah. He changes from a threatening being to one similar to us. As the distance between Godzilla and humans diminishes, the distance between Japanese and Americans, and between mankind and science, also diminishes. The fact that Godzilla is controllable means that humans can control science; in



**Shot 6.** 'Shé!' from *Kaijyu Dai Senso* (1965)

can be controlled by science and technology, which becomes clear by comparing the nature of the American astronaut, Glen, with the alien from Planet X.

other words, the peaceful use of science is guaranteed. The film questions science and technology's negative influence on humanity apart from the terror of using modern technology for wars. The film suggests that excessive belief in science deprives humans of freedom; in other words, humans

### *An autonomous selfhood with free will: Glen*

The American astronaut, Glen, takes off with a Japanese astronaut, Fuji, on a mission to explore Planet X together. The friendly relationship between the two is symbolised by the three flags that Fuji sets on planet X: the flags of the United Nations, the Rising Sun, and the Stars and Stripes. Glen is very kind to women and comes to love Ms. Namaikawa, a woman on Planet X, but he does not surrender his free will to the alien. He has a strong sense of freedom, judges the situation for himself, and acts on his own volition. He has 'autonomous selfhood'. He argues with her when she asks him to become a citizen of Planet X. 'Do you know, Namikawa, we are not robots. How can we be happy when we are controlled by machines? We people on the Earth will fight it out to the last. Is your conscience lost to large-scale calculators?'<sup>12</sup> In contrast with Glen, who insists that beauty lies in individuality and diversity, the men and women from Planet X wear the same uniforms; men wear sunglasses and women all have the same face as Namikawa. They are controlled by machines and have no individuality, which leaves them unable to adjust themselves to unpredictable situations. When the large-scale calculators that control them are out of order they find themselves at a loss. The film shows the dangers of too much emphasis on science and technology: humans could lose their ability to act and think independently.

### *The United States as a partner for Japan*

The positive depiction of Americans such as Glen is common during this period. The Gamera Series,<sup>13</sup> which begins with *Dai Kaijyu Gamera* (The Giant Monster,

<sup>12</sup> The Japanese did not use the term *computer* in those days. 'Large-scale calculator' is the literal translation of the Japanese term by the author.

<sup>13</sup> This nuclear monster film series, along with *Mothra* series, is inspired by the Godzilla series. Taken together, these films form a new genre, '*Kaijyu Eiga*' (monster films).

Gamera, 1965), describes a Japanese child and an American child working together to help Gamera repel aliens from the earth. In 1961, both the Soviet Union and the United States succeed in launching a manned rocket, bringing about the dawn of the space age. Anti-American feelings, ignited by the Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security between the United States and Japan, gradually subsided with its conclusion in 1961. After the signing of the Partial Test Ban Treaty by the United States, Britain and the Soviet Union, movements against atomic and hydrogen bombs began to subside and the tense relationship between the United States and Japan became much friendlier. The *Asahi Shimbun* (3 January 1965) cites a contest in which the healthiest child goes to the United States and visits an elementary school on behalf of the United Nations as a 'child ambassador'. The depiction of American and Japanese astronauts working to repel invaders from outer space reflects the warming relations between Japan and the United States.

### ***Godzilla* (1984): The scapegoat of human kind**

After *Kaijyu Dai Senso* (*Godzilla vs. Monster Zero*, 1965), nine more films were released for a total of fifteen films in the series. The peak of this series is *King Kong vs. Godzilla* (1962), which attracted over 11 million spectators. As *Godzilla* becomes more human, perhaps in order to appeal to children, the number of viewers began to diminish. Japan was entering a period of rapid economic growth, and the Japanese were becoming increasingly self-absorbed. The *Godzilla* films follow this trend by focusing mostly on internal problems. *Godzilla vs. Hedora* (*Godzilla vs. Smog Monster*, 1964) is a very unique film that criticises industrial pollution, but it only attracted 1.7 million spectators. *Godzilla* loses power in the story, and in the film industry as well, and the last film of the series, *Mekagojira no Gyakyushu* (*Terror of Mechagodzilla*, 1975), drew less than one million spectators. After this film, the series was stopped.

Responding to pressure from *Godzilla* fans however, Toho Studio resumed producing the *Godzilla* series in 1984. Producer Tomoyuki Tanaka created the slogan, 'Go back to the original', and the Toho *Godzilla* team reproduced *Godzilla* as a threatening creature aloof from the concerns of humans. This film follows the original storyline, emphasising nuclear weapons as the origin of *Godzilla* and referring to political debates about nuclear weapons in the 1980s. Unfortunately, the film does not resolve these issues as skilfully as the 1954 film. This section examines the character of the renewed *Godzilla* first and then looks at how he is repelled. The film provides clues to new attitudes about the relationships between humankind and science, between Japan and the United States, and between *Godzilla* and the Japanese.

*The conventional image of Godzilla  
as the terror of nuclear power*

The strong Godzilla returns in the 1984 version, which uses almost the same formula as the 1954 Godzilla. Above all, the film has a similar character to that of the 1954 Godzilla. In the opening sequence, he again attacks fishing boats. The connection with nuclear power is emphasised. The monster attacks a Soviet nuclear submarine and destroys a nuclear plant in Shizuoka. He absorbs the nuclear power and heads for Tokyo Bay. Just as in the 1954 film, he destroys Tokyo and the nuclear plants, the symbols of civilisation.

The storyline also follows the conventions of the 1954 film, but with current political preoccupations. Godzilla ignites the political tension between the Soviet Union and the United States: Godzilla's assault of the submarine is mistaken for an American action by the Soviets, and the tension between the two is heightened. Both sides insist that nuclear weapons should be used to repel Godzilla. By mistake, a missile is launched from the Soviet Union to attack Godzilla in Tokyo. At the request of the Japanese prime minister, the US Air Force intercepts the missile and the destruction of Tokyo is narrowly avoided. Thus, the film relays to the audience the terror of nuclear missiles and the Cold War.

*Godzilla as the Japanese scapegoat:  
A tragic hero as the guardian god of mankind*

While the film follows the conventional formula of the 1954 Godzilla, the monster is viewed in a completely different way. All the main characters—the politician, the defence force, the scholar, and others—are sympathetic with Godzilla and view him as a victim of modern technology. The audience is encouraged to understand him as a warning of the danger of nuclear weapons and war. The following conversation between Dr. Hayashida and a newspaper reporter, Mr. Maki, brings this theme to the forefront:

Mr. Maki: Doctor, is Godzilla an animal? Most people consider that he is a *bakemono* or monster that nuclear radiation has created.

Dr. Hayashida: It is human beings who created the radiation. We should call human beings the monster. Godzilla is like a nuclear weapon, only he's alive. He moves around since he likes destroying things, and moreover he is immortal.

Mr. Maki: You mean that we are helpless.

Dr. Hayashida: I don't mean that. He is an animal, too.

At the end of the story, Godzilla is lured to the crater of the Asama Volcano with an instrument recording bird cries. He jumps into it as if he were going home or

committing suicide. This last scene takes place in slow motion, accompanied by mellow music. Mixed with the shots of Godzilla falling to his death are the shots of the faces of the Japanese prime minister, the commander of the defence forces, and the scholar, who watch him falling into the crater with a complicated look of sorrow, guilt and awe. This final scene characterises Godzilla's heroic image as a kind of guardian god. In the export version of *Godzilla* (1985), the following narration is added (there was no narration in the original 1984 film):

Nature reminds us human beings of our tiny existence. Nature criticises the horrible effects our arrogance has produced. It makes us confront a storm, an earthquake or Godzilla and makes us feel our weakness. Our arrogance prevents us from our ambitions. Godzilla, an innocent, tragic monster disappeared to the bottom of the Earth. Anyway, we will never see him and only lessons from him will remain.

***Strong defence force:***

***Progress in science and technology and the absence of anti-science***

Another difference in the 1984 formula is the dramatic development of the defence force. In the 1954 film, the defence force is too weak to fight Godzilla. Tanks and air fighters are no match for the huge monster. However, in the 1984 formula, Super X, a fortress in the air, matches him. A cadmium warhead developed by Super X causes him to sleep and seems to have been successful. Super-X seems to enjoy showing off its advanced technology. The military strength of the defence force is depicted as strong enough to match the power of Godzilla. The strength of the defence force reflects the fact that Japan has become one of the world's powers in the 1980s. The skyscrapers in Shinjuku also reflect Japan's progress as a nation. Godzilla, wandering among skyscrapers that are taller than him, symbolises this change (shot 7). After the Japanese lost World War II, they keenly felt the weakness of their national power, attributing it to the gap in science and technology between the USA and Japan. Since then, the Japanese have single-mindedly devoted themselves to developing a country with advanced science and technology. *Japan as Number One* by Ezra F. Vogel (1979) argues that Japan has dramatically progressed in science and technology, catching up with other advanced countries. The dramatic improvement of the Japan Self-Defence Force and the shots



**Shot 7.** Godzilla from Tokyo in *Godzilla* (1984)

taller than him, symbolises this change (shot 7). After the Japanese lost World War II, they keenly felt the weakness of their national power, attributing it to the gap in science and technology between the USA and Japan. Since then, the Japanese have single-mindedly devoted themselves to developing a country with advanced science and technology. *Japan as Number One* by Ezra F. Vogel (1979) argues that Japan has dramatically progressed in science and technology, catching up with other advanced countries. The dramatic improvement of the Japan Self-Defence Force and the shots

of Godzilla wandering among the skyscrapers reflect the Japanese consciousness of the country's development.

The depictions of Super-X further reflect a different attitude toward science and technology. In the 1954 formula, Doctor Serizawa embodies a suspicion and fear of science, reflected in his reluctance to use the oxygen-destroyer. The 1984 film shows no reluctance to use science and technology and shows an image of Japan that has overcome its inferiority complex through scientific and technological prowess.

What continues in the 1984 Godzilla formula is the absolute trust in and awe of nature. In the 1954 film, Godzilla is compared to a storm or earthquake; in the 1965 formula, the importance of nature is confirmed by the scientist; and in the 1984 film, the importance of nature is once again emphasised. What stops the monster in the end is not the scientific power of technology, but the power of nature and Godzilla's own instincts.

### *Unresolved conflicts: The Japanese dependence on the United States*

Like the 1954 film, it is the Japanese who kill Godzilla in the 1984 film. The Japanese biologist Dr. Hayashida develops an understanding of Godzilla's instincts that saves the Earth. Though Godzilla is repelled once again, political problems still remain. In the film, the Japanese prime minister flatly rejects the United States and the Soviet Union, which want to use nuclear weapons to expel Godzilla from Japan. The prime minister argues against them, saying '[w]e will not make, possess or allow nuclear weapons. We will observe this principle, even in this difficult situation'. Though he strongly rejects their offers, he has to request the United States Air Force to use a nuclear missile when the Soviet Union by mistake launches one at Japan. The film reveals the continued Japanese dependence on the US military, as well as the gap between Japanese ideals and the reality of the Cold War. In the overseas version of the 1984 film, *Godzilla 1985: The Legend is Reborn*, the scene involving the USA and the USSR offering to use a nuclear weapon is removed.

### *Godzilla vs. King Ghidorah (1991)*

After *Godzilla* (1984), a new team from Toho Studio headed by producer Motoyuki Tanaka, director Kazuki Omori, and special effects director Koichi Kawakita released *Godzilla vs. Biollante* (1989), a story involving modern biotechnology. The new team's second film, *Godzilla vs. King Ghidorah* (1991) explores the theme of the 1984 *Godzilla*: the Japanese economy rather than science.

### *The plot*

Since the plot of this story is complicated, a little explanation is necessary. Three persons from the 23<sup>rd</sup> century, including a Japanese woman named Emi, come to the

Earth on a mission to destroy Godzilla in 21<sup>st</sup>-century Japan before he is able to spread nuclear pollution in the 23<sup>rd</sup>, making most of the country uninhabitable. They choose a zoologist and a freelance writer who knows Godzilla to carry out the mission with Emi. Using a time machine, they go to Rago Island in 1944 in order to take the dinosaur, which will be deformed by the atomic bomb into Godzilla, to the Bering Straits so that he can avoid the radiation. The mission is successful, but it creates another problem. Instead of Godzilla, King Ghidorah appears in Kyushu and goes on a rampage in the north, destroying the big cities of Japan. While the Japanese are considering a way to stop King Ghidorah, Godzilla appears in Hokkaido after feeding on the debris of a nuclear submarine. With the help of Emi, who deceives the other two visitors from the future, the Japanese can finally expel both King Ghidorah and Godzilla.

### *The image of a guardian god further reinforced*

In this formula, Godzilla reinforces his role as the guardian god of Japan depicted in *Godzilla* (1984). Godzilla's background is reconstructed: a dinosaur, living on Rago Island, which expelled the American military (shot 8). Later, when the H-bomb tests were carried out at Bikini Atoll, the dinosaur was exposed to the radiation and deformed into a monster, Godzilla. Shindo, a Japanese officer tells 'godzillasaurus' when he and his



**Shot 8.** Godzilla Attacking the American Force from *Godzilla vs King Ghidorah* (1991)

men leave the island, 'We will never forget how much we appreciate you for saving us'. Godzilla's role as a protector of the Japanese is thus given historical justification. Shindo, who has helped reconstruct the Japanese economy and prosperity since World War II, murmurs when he sees Godzilla, 'The guy will fight for us again!'

### *Japan's arrogance in its economic prosperity*

The most distinct factor in this Godzilla formula is that the films do not criticise science and technology, but the Japanese economy. This tendency can be seen in *Godzilla* (1984), but it is extended and explored even more in other films. The visitors from the 23<sup>rd</sup> century actually come to Japan to warn the people against the problems associated with too much wealth and power. They try to prevent these problems by putting a dent in the Japanese economy of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The reason why Japan

is attacked by King Ghidorah and later by Godzilla is that Japan has become too prideful on its economic prosperity and has forgotten the past. In the climax of the film, Shindo is at last killed by Godzilla, and with him the dream of an economically omnipotent Japan. The intention of the film is very obvious. Another surviving soldier from Rago Island appeals to the people who come to the dinosaur museum:

A long time ago I saw a dinosaur. You don't know him or what he is. I know that the dinosaur is watching us whenever and wherever we go. He always shows up when we are caught in a dead end or when we are almost defeated. I saw him when we were at the edge of despair on the battlefield. What do you think of this country now? On the surface, it looks peaceful, but at the innermost level, it at a standstill. Have we lost our will to live?

### ***Counter-attack against the United States forces by Godzilla***

What is to be noted about the relationship with the United States here is Godzilla's attack on the United States Forces on Rago Island. In *Gojira* (1954), Godzilla was created as a scapegoat for the United States. Fear of American military power, the H-bomb tests, and anxieties associated with the Cold War were all projected onto Godzilla. In *King Kong vs. Godzilla* (1961), Godzilla, representing Japan, fights King Kong, representing the United States. The ambivalence toward Americanisation and the fear of losing Japanese tradition was projected onto Godzilla. In *Godzilla vs. Monster Zero* (1965), Godzilla does not represent either Japan or the USA but is domesticated as a controllable monster that is close to humans and helps Japan become allied with the United States. In *Godzilla* (1984), Godzilla returns as a threatening monster that attacks and destroys Tokyo, becoming a guardian god of the Japanese. Respect, awe and even love of the Japanese were attributed to Godzilla. In *Godzilla vs. King Ghidorah* (1991), Godzilla finally attacks the United States forces during World War II, enabling the Japanese audience to entertain a hidden, repressed fantasy of revenge against the United States. After *Godzilla vs. King Ghidorah* (1991), four more Heisei Series films were released, followed by six more in the Millennium Series, including *Godzilla: Final Wars* (2004).

## **Godzilla and the Japanese after World War II**

After World War II, the Japanese public generally welcomed the American military occupation; Americans offered the Japanese chocolates, cigarettes, and a variety of food. Americans were symbols of wealth and objects of longing. Godzilla appeared in the ninth year after the war. During the occupation, any reference to atomic bombings or to United States occupation soldiers was not allowed under the censorship agreement; and even after the occupation was over in the early 1950s,

there was a tacit agreement that the Japanese could not question the United States' bombings during the war or the H-bomb tests. *Gojira* (1954) questioned these very critical and sensitive issues by camouflaging himself in a monster suit. In the mid 1950s, a Japanese anti-American movement began to rise as the Korean War dragged on, and the fear of being involved in the war and fear of nuclear bombs increased.

This movement peaked in the early 1960s during the controversies surrounding the Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security between the United States and Japan. *King Kong vs. Godzilla* (1962) refers to the American cultural influences upon Japanese traditions near this period by hiding in the popular style of entertainment films depicting the two monsters fighting. When the Japanese economy began to develop at a high speed and both countries started the mass production of large-size calculators, *Kaijyu Dai senso* (Monster Zero, 1965) attempted to portray the harmful effects of what we now call 'computers'. *Godzilla* (1984) again discloses the danger of the Cold War and the arms race in the early 1980s, further questioning Japan's dependence on American forces. In the 1980s and the 1990s, when Japan's economy reached a level rivalling that of the United States, *King Ghidorah vs. Godzilla* (1991) questions Japan's prosperity, offering a warning for the future.

These films establish an appropriate distance from the United States, pick up the critical issues of the period, and project the fears and struggles of the Japanese against the Americans, the Japanese themselves, science and technology, civilisation, and later politics and the economy. This might be one of the reasons why *Godzilla* has been a hero for each of the major historical periods after the war and why the films' popularity continued to attract audiences. *Godzilla* formulas have proved to be very adaptable in confronting underlying themes and anxieties in the Japanese cultural psyche.

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