



Otoko ga otoko wo otoko to shite mitomeru:
Serial Reproductions of Masculinity in Tōei Studios' *Ninkyō* Films

Takakura Ken in *Shōwa Zankyōden* (1965); the text reads "Manliness lives in ninkyō ("chivalry")."

When film star Takakura Ken passed away in November, he was remembered as a “man among men.” While obituaries connected this to his later work in the 1970s as a romantic lead, the mythos of his unparalleled masculinity cannot be extricated from the moment his star rose: in the mid-1960s when he gained attention in Tōei studios’ yakuza films. Seen as the industry's answer to the loss of theatrical audiences to the domestic television set in Japan’s postwar consumer boom, the films eternally rehearsed the conceit of the gangster film: tirelessly reminding audiences that yakuza are, after all, men. To understand the stakes of ninkyō's claims to masculinity, and the significance of the mourning that continues around Takakura’s body, we must pay attention to the serial forms of reproduction the films aggregate. Not only were they released serially, relying on the televisual mode, but they called on a serial time that appropriated the language of ninkyō to create a serial chain of signification linking the yakuza to their noble early modern predecessors, resuscitating labor’s association with male bodies at a moment when a shifting family, labor, and consumer paradigm made patriarchy vulnerable within the social order. The cooperation of these forms of seriality betray the work of the films--to defend male labor within high growth.

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