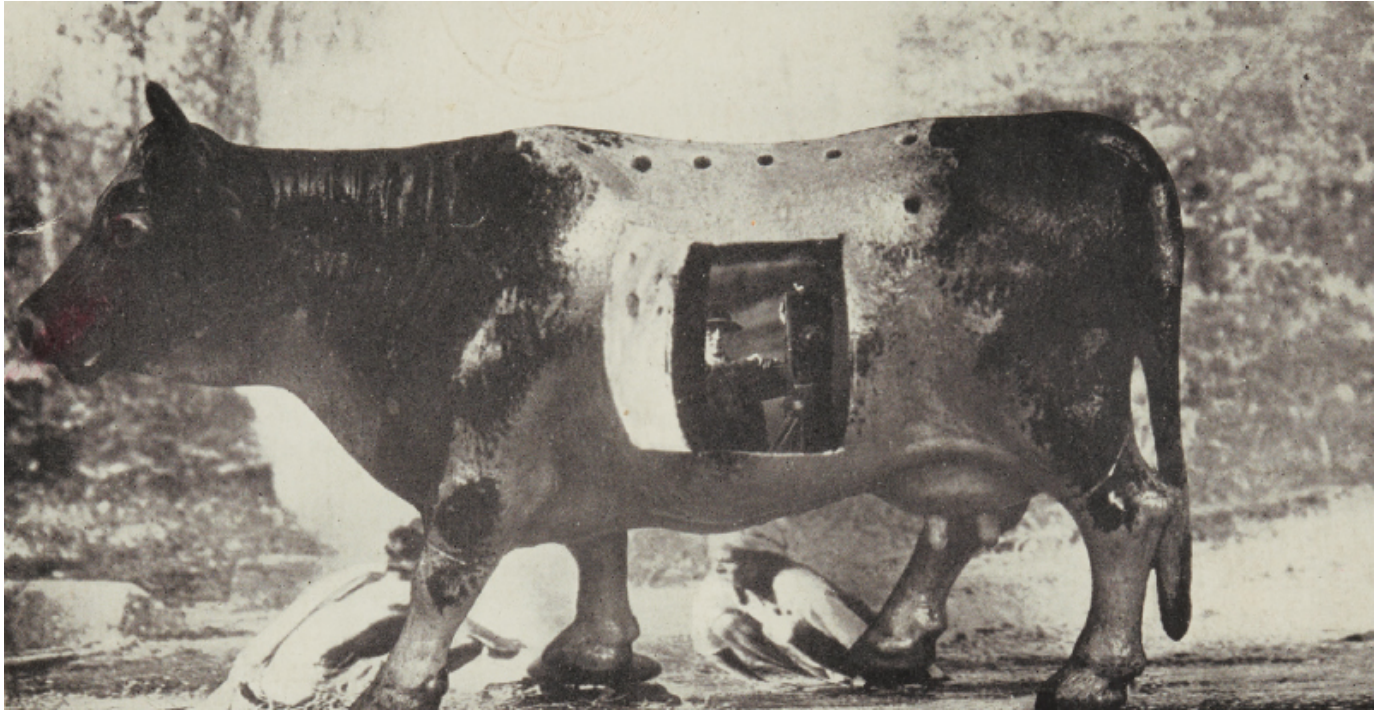


Selections from NDL collections

## Edogawa Ranpo and Motion Pictures — Research at the Imperial Library

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An illustration from *Practical Cinematography and Its Applications* written by Frederick A. Talbot, published by W. Heinemann in 1913, NDL Call no. 203-166

A papier-mâché cow with a hole in its side, through which we see a man with a movie camera. What is happening here?

Soon after debuting in 1923 with publication of the short story "The Two-Sen Copper Coin" (*Nisen doka*), Edogawa Ranpo<sup>1</sup> quickly established himself as one of Japan's premiere writers of mystery fiction. It was not long before his considerable reputation as a writer, bibliographer, and mentor to younger writers was affectionately called the Great Ranpo.

Of course, every successful person has a period of finding the way by trial and error. It is well known that Ranpo ran a secondhand bookshop before finding success as a writer,

but he also had a major interest in the motion picture industry.

In the 1920s, there were many literary figures who became actively involved in film. Tanizaki Jun'ichiro was an advisor to the Japanese film studio Taishō Katsuei<sup>2</sup>, and Kawabata Yasunari produced motion pictures together with Kinugasa Teinosuke<sup>3</sup>. Ranpo's foray into the field, however, came even before that, when movies were still little more than curiosities. At that time, prior to the advent of the "talkie," silent films were accompanied by music played and live narration or commentary provided by a performer called a *benshi*.

In his essay *Eiga yokozuki* (Keen on motion pictures)<sup>4</sup>,

<sup>1</sup> His real name was Hirai Tarou, but he loved Western mystery writers and the penname Edogawa Ranpo was devised as a tribute to Edgar Allan Poe, forming a pun in Japanese on the American name.

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.ndl.go.jp/en/publication/ndl\\_newsletter/225/22504.html#ref2](https://www.ndl.go.jp/en/publication/ndl_newsletter/225/22504.html#ref2)

<sup>3</sup> Kinugasa Teinosuke (1896-1982) was a Japanese actor and film director. In 1926, together with the Shinkankakuha Japanese literary group led by Yokomitsu Riichi and Kawabata Yasunari, he produced an avant-garde silent film entitled *Kurutta Ippeji* (A Page of Madness). He later won the 1954 Palme d'or at Cannes for *Jigokumon* (Gate of Hell).

<sup>4</sup> This essay is included in *Edogawa ranpo zenshu* (Complete works of Edogawa Ranpo), vol. 10, published by Heibonsha in 1931, pp.501-508. NDL Call No. 613-56. Available on [the NDL Digital Collection \(limited to access on the premises at the NDL and partner libraries\)](#). In this essay, he wrote that he fell in love with motion pictures as a child after seeing the French film *Zigomar* directed by Victorin Jasset with the performance of Komada Koyo, a massively popular benshi of the time, at Nagoya Misonoza. Also, he was

which was first published in 1925, Ranpo claims that he attempted to apprentice himself to benshi, but was refused. He then set out to become a film director and frequented the Imperial Library in Ueno, in order to study filmmaking from books.

Next, I wanted to be a film director.

Around 1918 or 1919, I had gone from job to job and was running a secondhand bookshop in Dangozaka, Sendagi, Tokyo. At that time, I was not working just to earn my daily bread. However, I got a little bored with the used book business, and was thinking about doing something else when I decided to focus once again on motion pictures, which always fascinated me. Do what you love and success will follow you.

I don't remember if it was when I was studying to be a *benshi* or maybe after that, but for some time I frequently visited the Ueno Library to read books on motion pictures. It was too expensive for someone like me to order books from Maruzen. The best I could do was to read all of what little they had at the library. Looking over my diary from those days, there is probably what is a complete list of everything they had at the Ueno Library.

The following is a bibliography of all the books Ranpo refers to in this essay.

1. Rathbun, John B. *Motion Picture Making and Exhibiting*. London: T. Werner Laurie, 1914. NDL Call No. 209-182. Purchased February 3, 1915.
2. Talbot, Frederick A. *Moving Pictures: How They Are Made and Worked* (revised edition). London: William Heinemann, 1912. NDL Call No. 170-178. Purchased March 27, 1912.
3. Hulfish, David S. *Motion-Picture Work*. Chicago: American School of Correspondence, 1913. NDL Call No. 198-76. Purchased July 4, 1913.
4. Dench, Ernest A. *Making the Movies*. New York: Macmillan, 1915. NDL Call No. 217-64. Purchased February 10, 1915.
5. Ball, Eustace Hale. *The Art of the Photoplay*. Veritas Publishing Company, 1913. NDL Call No. 209-55. Purchased October 3, 1914.
6. Münsterberg, Hugo. *The Photoplay: A Psychological Study*. New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1916. NDL Call No. 219-181. Purchased November 21, 1916.
7. Talbot, Frederick A. *Practical Cinematography and Its Applications*, London: William Heinemann, 1913. NDL Call No. 203-166. Purchased March 3, 1914.
8. *The Policy and Standards of the National Board of Censorship of Motion Pictures: Reissued Oct. 1*. New York: National Board of Censorship of Motion Pictures, 1915. NDL Call No. 205-365. Purchased November 21, 1916.
9. Umeya, Shokichi. *Katsudo shashin hyakka hoten* (A

Treasure Book of Motion Pictures). Tokyo: Shokichi Umeya, 1911. NDL Call No. 342-16. Donated February 26, 1912. Monochrome images available in the [NDL Digital Collections](#).

10. Sandaya, Hiraku. *Katsudo shashin ni kansuru chosa* (Survey of Motion Pictures), Japan: Hiraku Sandaya, 1916. NDL Call No. 326-191. Donated December 6, 1916. Monochrome images available in the [NDL Digital Collections](#).
11. Gonda, Yasunosuke. *Katsudo shashin no genri oyobi oyo* (The Principles and Application of Motion Pictures), Japan: Rokakuho Uchida, 1914. NDL Call No. 349-414. Received from the Home Ministry October 22, 1914. Monochrome images available in the [NDL Digital Collections](#).



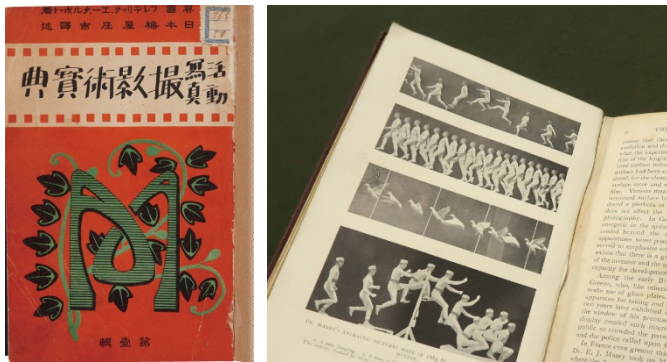
This photo shows the first seven books listed above. Although Ranpo describes this collection as "what little they had at the library," the selection does provide an overview of the basics. Books 1, 2, 3, and 6 were listed by Kaeriyama Norimasa as references in his early book on film theory, *Katsudo shashingeki no sosaku to satsueiho* (How to Create and Shoot Motion Picture Plays), Seikosha, 1921.

strongly inspired by films like *Fantômas* directed by Louis Feuillade and *Protéa*, directed by Victorin Jasset.

Ranpo continues:

I went through all these books in just few days. I felt like I had a thorough understanding of what a motion picture is, and I even wrote an essay called "Motion Picture Tricks"<sup>5</sup>. In fact, I still have the manuscript of this essay, in which I described my own ideas on motion picture tricks with reference to what is written in those books. I wrote several articles like this one and sent them to motion picture companies, asking for a position as an apprentice movie director.

Ranpo states that this all happened "around 1918 or 1919," but based on a description of the draft articles and a record of his residences, it seems more likely that Ranpo was looking for books on motion pictures at the Ueno Library during June or July 1917. In support of this hypothesis is the fact that a translation into Japanese of the second book, *Moving Pictures: How They are Made and Worked*, was donated to the Imperial Library on September 21, 1917, but does not appear in this list.



The Japanese translation of *Moving Pictures: How They are Made and Worked* (revised edition) by Umeya Shokichi was published in 1917. NDL Call no. 365-50. Monochrome images available in the [NDL Digital Collection](#). The photo shows an explanation of the mechanism of frame-by-frame playback.



*The Policy and Standards of the National Board of Censorship of Motion Pictures: Reissued Oct. 1.* It is surprising that this book, which is little more than a pamphlet, was imported. But it is clear evidence of people's interest in how to control the growing influence of a new media at that time.

A list of Ranpo's draft manuscripts on motion pictures held by the [Rikkyo University](#)<sup>6</sup>

- i. "Eigaron (On Motion Pictures)" transcribed and reprinted by Noriyuki Ochiai, in *Taishu bunka (Popular Culture)* No. 6, October 2011, pp. 57–68, Rikkyo university Edogawa Rampo Memorial Center for Popular Culture Studies. NDL Call no. Z71-W5
- ii. "Katsudo shashin no torikku wo ronzu (Motion Picture Tricks)" transcribed and reprinted by Noriyuki Ochiai, in *Taishu bunka (Popular culture)* No. 5 in April 2011, pp. 69–87, Rikkyo university Edogawa Rampo Memorial Center for Popular Culture Studies. NDL Call no. Z71-W5
- iii. "Torikku bunrui soko (Categorizing Motion Picture Tricks)"
- iv. "Torikku shashin no kenkyu (Studies in Trick Films)," transcribed and reprinted by Noriyuki Ochiai in *Taishu bunka (Popular Culture)* No. 7, April 2012, pp. 88-130, Rikkyo university Edogawa Rampo Memorial Center for Popular Culture Studies. NDL Call no. Z71-W5
- v. "Shashingeki no yuuetsusei ni tsuite (The Advantages of Motion Picture Plays)" transcribed and reprinted by

<sup>5</sup> Motion picture tricks were fortuitously discovered by French illusionist and film director Georges Méliès (1861-1938) in around 1896 when his camera did not work well. One of his representative works is a science fiction film *A Trip to the Moon* (French: *Le Voyage dans la Lune*) (1902). In the late 1890s, facing financial troubles because of continuous sluggish sales, Méliès lost everything, but in the 1920s there was a movement in the French film industry to reevaluate Méliès's achievements and a retrospective exhibition was held in Paris in December 1929.

After Méliès, the French film industry was led by Pathé a company which continues today. One of the cineasts producing films under the company was Ferdinand Zekka who was good at motion picture tricks, but contrary to the fantastic touch of the works of Méliès, his works were full of realism. One of his representative films is *History of a Crime* (*Histoire d'un crime*) (1902).

<sup>6</sup> Rikkyo University has the [Edogawa Rampo Memorial Center for Popular Culture Studies \(The Edogawa Rampo Residence\)](#) at its Ikebukuro Campus.

Yusuke Hamada in *Bungaku* (Literature) Vol. 3, Issue 6 in 2002, pp.172–178, published by Iwanami Shoten. NDL call no. Z71-D437

In the draft manuscript for the essay "Torikku shashin no kenkyu (Studies in Trick Films)," Ranpo says that he learned much about aesthetic values from Hugo Münsterberg's work (Book 6), which led him to reorganize how these techniques were categorized, because of his dissatisfaction with what he found in Books 1, 3, and 11. From that statement, we can assume that Ranpo was familiar with these works. The illustration of a papier-mâché cow at the beginning of this article is included in Frederick A. Talbot's *Practical Cinematography and Its Applications*, which is a handbook on film production for amateurs. This work is concerned with how to use film for scientific research, and has many pictures and illustrations of animals shot on location.

Ranpo did not say anything about the book, but insofar as detective work involves people-watching and murders is an expression of human beastliness, it is no wonder that the various ways of observing animals would have some impacts on his creative writing. For example, Seikei University Professor Yusuke Hamada points out in an article entitled "Akumagaiwa kaisetsu" in the mook (magazine book) *Edogawa Ranpo* published by Kawade Shobo Shinsha in 2003, NDL Call no. Y94-H5594, that Ranpo often compared cruel criminals to animal in his works, especially after the novel *Inju* (Beast in the Shadows) written in 1928.

There might be some link between the images of a papier-mâché cow, the human chair, and the phantom thief dressed up as a mailbox in "*Kaiki Shijyu Menso* (The Phantom Thief with Forty Faces)."

#### Quotes from Ranpo's writing

I feel frightened when watching a film.

It is like seeing the dreams of opium addicts.

— Essay *Eiga no Kyohu* (The Horrors of Film), 1925

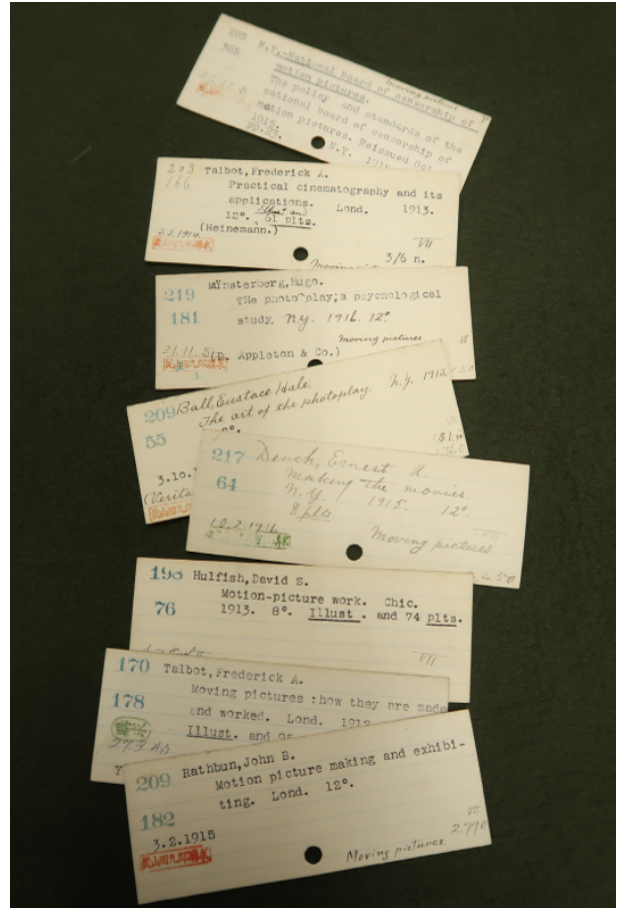
Boys were skipping rope. A long string rope beat the ground and went up to the sky repeatedly. A boy roughly wearing a kimono with stripe pattern jumped again and again. That scene seemed to be very slow like a motion picture taken with a high speed camera.

— Short story *Hakuchūmu* (The Daydream), 1925

The mirage was something like what India ink dripped onto the surface of an opaque white film and gradually allow to seep in would look like if it were projected onto the sky like some ridiculously huge motion picture.

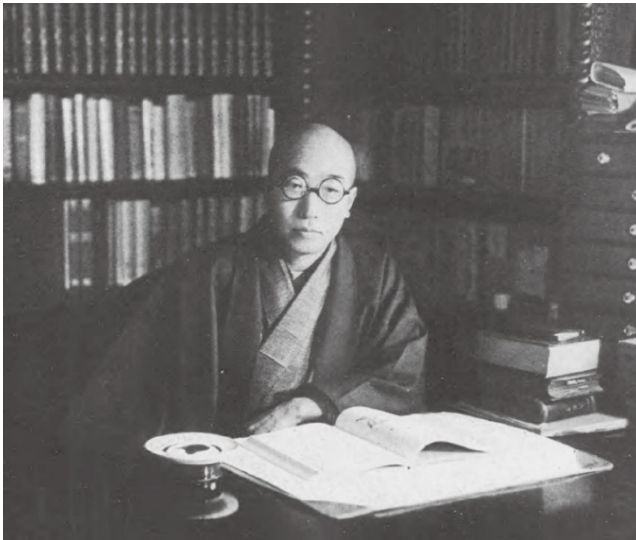
— Short story *Oshie to Tabi-suru Otoko* (The Man Traveling with the Brocade Portrait), 1929

Base on *Edogawa ranpo zenshu* (Complete works of Edogawa Ranpo) published by Shun'yodo in 1955, NDL call no. 918.6-E22e. Available in the [NDL Digital Collection](#). (Limited access on the premises at the NDL)



These are the catalogue cards of Books 1 to 8, showing which bookstores they were ordered from and the date of acquisition.

Books 3 and 4 were purchased from Maruzen and the others from Yamada Kuro/Nakanishiya Shoten, which started their business by selling dead stock or damaged books from Maruzen. These books were purchased just as Nakanishiya Shoten was at its peak; it later merged with Maruzen in 1920.



Portrait of Edogawa Rampo included in *Shomotsu tenbo*, Vol. 9, Issue 4, No. 94, published by Shomotsu Tenbosha in April 1939. NDL Call no. Z020.5-Sy1. Available in the [NDL Digital Collection](#) (Limited access on the premises at the NDL)

(Annotated and translated by Yuko Kumakura)