

## Chicagoans' hearts moved and morality questioned at first American film screening of THE CLONE RETURNS HOME from Japan

The Consulate-General of Japan in Chicago's screening of the Japanese film *THE CLONE RETURNS HOME* (*Kuron wa kokyo wo mezasu*) took place, as a part of Cinema/Chicago's 12th annual International Screenings Program on Wednesday, August 5, 2015 from 6:30 PM at the Chicago Cultural Center's Claudia Cassidy Theater. Roughly 200 attendees gathered consisting of various ages from teenagers to over 50, ethnicities, and interests gathered with the common interest of enjoying Japanese cinema. Emotions in the theater ranged from few chuckles to attendees in tears, in this extremely complex and sophisticated film.



Some attendees described the film as "thought-provoking" and commented on its "beautiful symbolism" and "originality." This film's unique style, with its long takes, use of silence and particular sounds to differentiate the significance of the scenes, or even the characters' own views of the morality of cloning and the concept of souls, lead the audience on an emotional and mental rollercoaster. These motifs and ambiguity that surround the moral stance that the director portrays, challenged the audience to think for themselves the meaning of certain scenes or symbol, and to reflect upon themselves on how they feel about the issues.

The discussion and Q&A, immediately following the film, led by Patrick Noonan, an Assistant Professor at Northwestern University, discussed the "topics of interest in today's modern society, such as cloning and rapidly advancing technology." Due to the complex and heavily symbolic and philosophic nature of the film, the audience were extremely engaged and offered every insightful and complicated discussion.



Though the discussion was only for 30 minutes, the complexity of the movie inspired the audience's imagination enough for them to eagerly share their reactions, interpretations, and questions with the rest of the theater. Professor Noonan, an expert in Japanese culture and cinema, personally chose this film for the program and shared his in-depth insight on his perception of the film as well as background information of the movie, director, and Japanese culture that most of the audience members would not have known, such as the

concept of “home” in Japanese culture or the significance of the word choice of the original Japanese title. He explained, the word “kokyo” literally means homeland and the word “mezasu”, slightly different from “returns,” refers more towards one’s goal or desire to return to his homeland, rather than the return itself. The variety of the discussion ranged from the subliminal stance of the morality of cloning and advancing technology the film reflects to the different motifs and filming techniques used throughout the film. For instance, an audience member mentioned the background landscape blurring as the film went silent for emotional scenes, and professor Noonan responded that he feels this technique was utilized so there are less elements of the film telling the audience what to think or feel so this ambiguity allows the viewer to interpret their own emotions and interpretation. Other than sharing their perspectives, the audience members were very interested to hear professor Noonan’s own opinions and interpretation on the film.

### **Story of THE CLONE RETURNS HOME**

*Directed by Kenji Nakajima, 2008, 110 minutes.*

When Kohei, a young astronaut who volunteers to have his brain “backed up,” dies during a space mission, scientists are able to regenerate him as a clone. As problems arise, the new Kohei flees the lab in pursuit of his childhood home and his long deceased twin brother. A meditative study of memory and identity, this gorgeously photographed film is a smart and resonant work of science fiction. *Japanese with English subtitles.*

### **Assistant Professor Patrick Noonan**

Assistant Professor Noonan earned a Ph.D. in Japanese Literature with a Designated Emphasis in Film Studies from the University of California at Berkeley and currently teaches courses at Northwestern University in Chicago on modern Japanese literature and culture as well as on Japanese cinema from all periods.

### **Cinema/Chicago’s International Screenings Program**

THE CLONE RETURNS HOME is part of the 12th annual International Screenings Program, taking place Wednesday evenings through September 23 at the Chicago Cultural Center. Cinema/Chicago, together with the City of Chicago Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events and their International Connections Committee, made up of consular and cultural partners, presents this free weekly film series that celebrates the richness and diversity of international and independent filmmaking. This series showcases 18 international films that embody genres and styles ranging from thoughtful coming-of-age dramas and inspiring documentaries to poignant love stories and laugh-out-loud comedies. For more information, visit [www.chicagofilmfestival.com](http://www.chicagofilmfestival.com).

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