



## QUEER EAST FESTIVAL

# Summer Vacation 1999

### Summer Vacation 1999

(1999 nen no natsu yasumi)

Director: Shusuke Kaneko

Production Companies: New Century Producers, CBS-Sony Group

Executive Producers: Yutaka Okada, Eiji Kishi

Producers: Naoya Narita, Mitsuhsa Hida

Production Manager: Hajime Seta

Assistant Director: Hiroaki Tochihara

Screenplay: Rio Kishida

Director of Photography: Kenji Takama

Photographic Effects: Kenichi Yoshioka

Underwater Photographers: Makoto Shionoya,

Akihiro Uemura, Michiko Honda

Lighting: Hiroyuki Yasukochi

Editor: Isao Tomita

Art Director: Shu Yamaguchi

Set Decorators: Akira Yamazaki,

Keiichi Hasegawa, Satoru Suda

Make-up: Feng Qixiao, Motoko Watanabe

Music: Yuriko Nakamura

Music Director: Hiroyoshi Yanagida

Sound Recording: Koshiro Jinbo

Sound Effects: Masatoshi Saito

Subtitles: Tadashi Shishido, Donald Richie

Cast:

Eri Miyajima (*Yu/Kaoru/last new boy*)

Tomoko Otakara (*Kazuhiko*)

Miyuki Nakano (*Naoto*)

Rie Mizuhara (*Norio*)

Eri Miyajima (*voice of Yu*)

Minami Takayama (*voice of Kaoru*)

Nozomu Sasaki (*voice of Kazuhiko*)

Hiromi Murata (*voice of Naoto*)

Rie Mizuhara (*voice of Norio*)

Masaaki Maeda

Japan 1988

90 mins

35mm (courtesy of the ICA Archive)

+ intro by writer and film curator Ren Scateni

### Shusuke Kaneko on 'Summer Vacation 1999'

It's very hard to explain where the idea for *Summer Vacation 1999* came from. I did set out wanting to make a kind of film that had never existed in Japan before, and I thought about that a lot, but the eventual shape of the project emerged from a number of disparate sources, all of them related to questions of childhood. In my own junior high-school days, I was devoted to the novels of Hermann Hesse. That early fascination is acknowledged in the film, when Yu quotes some lines from *Demian*. I was going through what the Japanese call 'examination hell' at the time, intensive cramming for college entrance exams, and I tended (under the influence of Hesse) to see my situation as tragic.

I was really a very lonely child. This had nothing to do with my parents or anything like that; it was just the way I chose to see myself. Looking back, I can see now that those were the years when my present self was formed. And so part of the impulse to make *Summer Vacation* was a wish to re-examine my own past. After directing several other films, though, I came to the conclusion that it wouldn't serve my purpose to set this film in the past – in the years when I went to school myself. There have been great changes in Japan in the last 20 years, and to evoke the period of the late '60s and early '70s would have introduced all kinds of questions that I didn't want to deal with. And so I decided to make a leap and set the film in the future.

In the '70s Japan could have gone in one of many possible directions. Looking back, it seems inconceivable that Japan could have taken a socialist road, but at the time it seemed like a real possibility. By contrast, the '80s have seen the reassertion of a bedrock conservatism; Japanese society now is as stable and resistant to change as it has ever been. I suppose it's true that I have something of the 'disillusioned former radical' in me, but the factor that really shaped my own political development was purely domestic: my parents were Communists.

Another idea that fed into the project was an incident that happened in 1979. A 16-year-old killed his grandmother and then committed suicide. Before his death, he sent a long letter to the newspapers, a kind of testament. I read this letter, and found it extremely poignant. In his statement, the boy tried hard to present himself as a 'bad type', to explain his actions. This moved me, and I found myself wanting to make a film about it. I guess that I ended up superimposing the boy's experience on my own childhood when I began drafting the script.

But then the film was directly inspired by a graphic novel, published in a comics magazine for girls. *Toma no Shinzo (Toma's Heart)* by Hagio Moto was serialised as a long and very complex story; it stands in the tradition of the Tolstoyan novel. It's set in a school dormitory in Germany, and it has a large number of characters. It centres on religious questions as much as sexual questions. The central boy (who becomes Kazuhiko in the film) has a deep, inner trauma. He has declared that God doesn't exist, and he suffers mentally and physically for his professed atheism – physically because he is tortured by the older boys. The story in the film is quite different, but I was inspired by

### BECOME A BFI MEMBER

Enjoy a great package of film benefits including priority booking at BFI Southbank and BFI Festivals. Join today at [bfi.org.uk/join](http://bfi.org.uk/join)

### SIGHT AND SOUND

Never miss an issue with **Sight and Sound**, the BFI's internationally renowned film magazine. Subscribe from just £25\*

\* Price based on a 6-month print subscription (UK only). More info: [sightandsoundsubs.bfi.org.uk](http://sightandsoundsubs.bfi.org.uk)



### BFI PLAYER

We are always open online on BFI Player where you can watch the best new, cult & classic cinema on demand. Showcasing hand-picked landmark British and independent titles, films are available to watch in three distinct ways: Subscription, Rentals & Free to view.

See something different today on [player.bfi.org.uk](http://player.bfi.org.uk)

## QUEER EAST FESTIVAL

### Saving Face + intro

Sun 21 Apr 15:20

### Abang Adik + intro

Wed 24 Apr 20:30

### Summer Vacation 1999

1999 nen no natsu yasumi + intro

Fri 26 Apr 20:40

### Closing Night: Bye Bye Love – 50th anniversary

screening Baibai rabu + intro

Sun 28 Apr 17:10



[queereast.org.uk](http://queereast.org.uk)

## BFI SOUTHBANK

Welcome to the home of great film and TV, with three cinemas and a studio, a world-class library, regular exhibitions and a pioneering Mediatheque with 1000s of free titles for you to explore. Browse special-edition merchandise in the BFI Shop.

We're also pleased to offer you a unique new space, the BFI Riverfront – with unrivalled riverside views of Waterloo Bridge and beyond, a delicious seasonal menu, plus a stylish balcony bar for cocktails or special events. Come and enjoy a pre-cinema dinner or a drink on the balcony as the sun goes down.

Join the BFI mailing list for regular programme updates. Not yet registered? Create a new account at [www.bfi.org.uk/signup](http://www.bfi.org.uk/signup)

some of the dialogue in the original strip, and sometimes also by individual graphic frames. Hagio Moto considered the script completely different from the original, and asked me not to call it an adaptation. But I still think that the experience of reading the *manga* graphic novel and seeing this film may be quite similar.

I wrote the first three drafts of the script myself, but they somehow didn't seem to work out. It started out as a project with many characters, but at a certain point I made the decision to limit it to four. From that, it followed that I needed to create some kind of theatrical world, and that was why I turned to Rio Kishida for help with the script. I thought that she would be good at creating a theatrical atmosphere. [Ms Kishida was a regular collaborator with the theatre and film director Shuji Terayama in the four years before his death in 1983.] But the idea of casting girls in the boys' roles was already there at the outset. When I first read *Toma no Shinzo*, I found myself seeing the characters in feminine terms. I mean, the boys in the story were *like* girls ...

I wanted the film to deal with 'love' in a very pure or even abstract sense. I've never thought of it primarily as a homosexual story, partly because Japanese culture currently seems incapable of taking homosexuality seriously; it's always an object of laughter or scorn. Anyhow, I was aiming for something altogether more androgynous. A lot of pains were taken to eliminate the physical aspects of love. In a sense, I was reacting against earlier Japanese films (particularly Nikkatsu's *roman-porno* genre), in which sex provides the only real motive energy.

I've made two more films since *Summer Vacation*, both straightforward commercial projects. It's important to me to prove that I can work within the system, and I'm quite happy to have made these films. Actually, I've always found commercial films as interesting as auteur films, and I don't make any great distinction between them when I see other people's films. I do have another personal project that I'm developing: a film about my own experience of growing up that will also deal with larger changes in Japan. It will be very hard to do it within the system; it's the kind of film that doesn't fit. Until I find the chance to make it, I'm content to direct assignments for the major companies, which always give me valuable experience. If I'd made *Summer Vacation* as my first feature, it would probably have turned out to be incomprehensible to most audiences. There are geniuses who can get everything right from the very start of their careers, but I'm certainly not one of them.

Shusuke Kaneko interviewed by Tony Rayns, London, November 1989.

Thanks to Takenari Maeda for translation. *Monthly Film Bulletin*, March 1990