

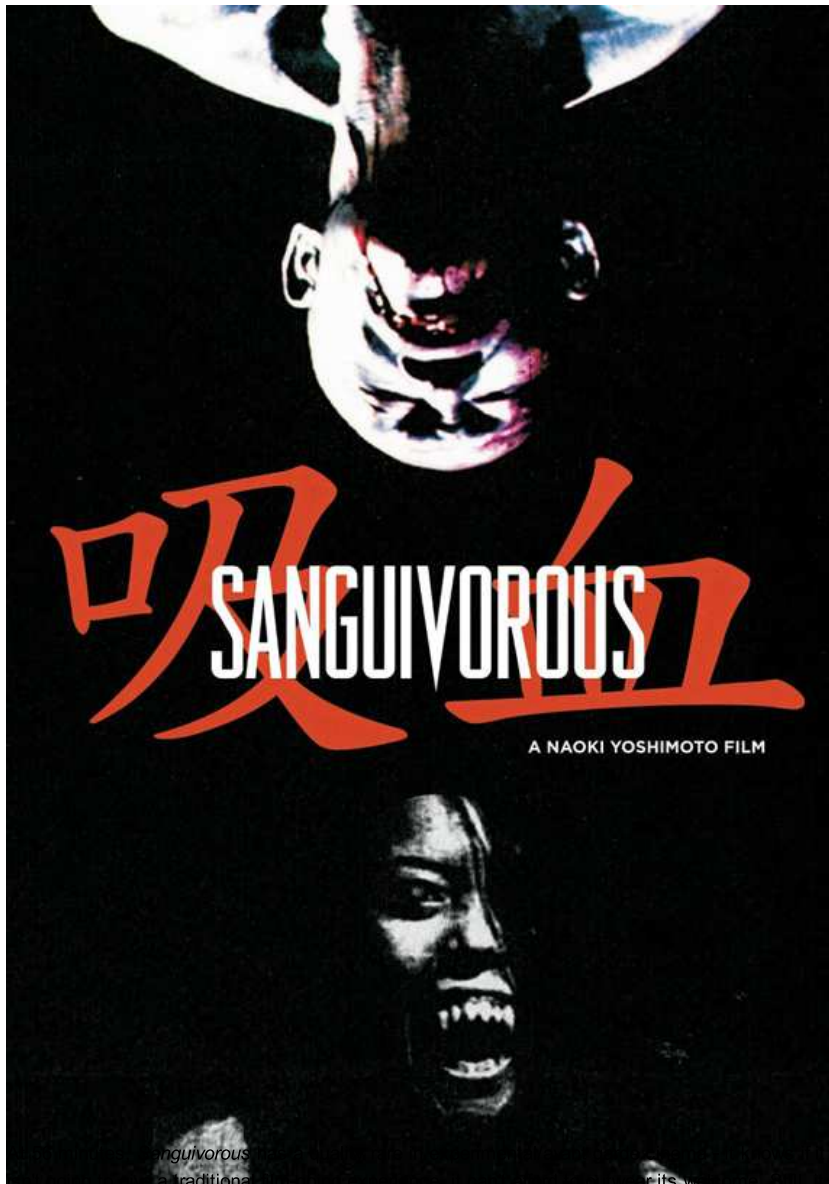
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Sanguivorous DVD Review: Super-Arty Asian Vampires

By [Kent Conrad](#) on November 21, 2013 2:04 AM | [0 Comments](#)

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comes close. Its story is told in an abstract fashion, in that avant-garde way that keeps the audience at a distance. Sometimes scenes follow logically, sometimes the images carry the emotional weight of the story while having no discernible narrative content. Sometimes it is silent, with title cards, sometimes there is production sound and dialog (which makes the advertising claims that this is a "silent movie" somewhat dubious - there are silent sections, but there's also

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plenty of sound - dialog, effects, and music.)

Sanguivorous is a Japanese vampire film telling not a terribly original vampire story, for anyone familiar with that kind of thing. A girl (apparently Christian) starts coughing up blood. Her boyfriend jokingly reads to her from a book about a legend of a Romanian vampire being brought to Japan, and how he created a lineage that would one day awaken and start attacking the humans. No prizes for guessing where this leads.

How it leads there, and whether it is successful or tedious, depends on one's patience. While there are plot points in common with typical vampire stories (the old vampire guy shows up, he has an older female consort, the boyfriend ends up a sometimes-willing victim) they are told largely in imagery, not narrative. The head vampire, played by renowned Batoh dancer Ko Murobushi, has a distinctly Nosferatu flavor - bald, long nails, long stare. He is fascinating to watch on screen, particularly in the middle silent sections of the film where the high-contrast, black and white images create some of the film's most striking visuals. Unfortunately, not all of the visuals work. When the girl is first in the throes of vampirism, we are treated to endless shots of her writhing against city walls with what could have been '80s music video effects overlaid on the digital video footage. It is not arresting, it does not move, and it goes on for far too long.

It would not be hard to argue that that critique fits the whole film. It is an art piece, which carries its own considerations and expectations. As a piece of narrative art, it doesn't work too well. The characters are just things posing on screen, and there isn't a moment of real audience connection - the abstract style and focus on visuals precludes any sort of identification.

In modern Japanese cinema, there is a strong heritage of the weird arty genre movie. The most obvious example is Shinya Tsukamoto's entire oeuvre, particularly his masterpiece of madness, *Tetsuo*. That was an assault on the senses, constantly inventive to nearly the point of being mind-numbing. *Sanguivorous* isn't nearly as adventurous. As an image delivery system, there's maybe 30 minutes of interesting stuff here. Half of that is cribbed from *Nosferatu*, but that's a hell of a source to take things from. The rest is more unique, more specifically Japanese - the vampire girl standing stark still in her pink kimono against an abstract landscape, a long, long sequence of Ko Murobushi flexing and shivering in some sort of Batoh performance that is odd, creepy, and certainly not something I had seen before. *Sanguivorous* is peculiar, and requires a peculiar mind set to appreciate.

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