

RESEARCH MATERIAL JAPAN 2021

A QUICK HISTORY OF JAPANESE CINEMA

1890's- 1920's: the silent era



Matsunosuke Onoe

Cinema arrived in Japan at the end of 19th century, but the Japanese had already a rich tradition of moving pictures with pre-cinematic devices such as *Utushi-e*, a type of magic lantern that become popular in Japan in the 19th century.

Early 20th century, most of Japanese cinema theatres employed Benshi and live musicians. The Benshi are Japanese storytellers performing live narration for silent films.

The 1923 earthquake, the bombing of Tokyo during WWII and Japan's natural humidity partially destroyed the film stock of this period. There are no many surviving films.

Films

- *Geisha No Teodori*, 1899: first film produced in Japan.
Only some fragments of the film remain intact.

Important names:

Matsunosuke Onoe, a Kabuki actor who appeared in over 1000 films between 1909 and 1926, he's considered the first star of Japanese cinema.

Shozo Makino, director and film pioneer, he popularized the Jidaigeki (period pieces)

The 1930s



Heihachirō Ōkawa and Sachiko Chiba in Wife! Be Like A Rose, directed by Mikio Naruse, 1935

Talkie films arrived in Japan in the early 30s, but silent films were still being produced, until the Benshi's strike (1932).

In the early 30's, Kenji Mizoguchi and a group of progressive filmmakers produced left-leaning "social tendency films". But Japan's increasingly militarist government instituted a crackdown on the political content of films, which were expected to conform a national policy of pro-family and pro-military values.

Films

- *The Neighbor's Wife and Mine*, Heinosuke Gosho, 1931: first Japanese talkie film
- *Wife! Be Like A Rose*, Mikio Naruse, 1935: one of the first Japanese films to gain theatrical release in US
- *Osaka Elegy*, Kenji Mizoguchi, 1936

Important names

Kenji Mizoguchi | Sadao Yamanaka | Mikio Naruse | Yasujiro Ozu

More info:

[Kenji Mizoguchi: 10 essential films](#)

[Ozu Yasujirô: the master of time](#)

[Mikio Naruse: 10 essential films](#)

The 1940s



The 47 Ronin, directed by Kenji Mizoguchi, 1941

After WWII and with the Allied occupation, Japan is exposed to American Animation (beginning of decades of revolutionary Japanese anime).

The experienced directors Mizoguchi and Ozu achieved national recognition with *The 47 Ronin* for the first and *Late Spring* for the second. Meanwhile, Akira Kurosawa directed his first feature film, *Sugata Sanshiro* (1943), and begun his collaboration with the actor Toshiro Mifune, in *Drunken Angel* (1948).

Films

- *The 47 Ronin*, Kenji Mizoguchi, 1941
- *No Regrets of Youth*, Akira Kurosawa, 1946
- *Late Spring*, Yasujiro Ozu, 1949

Important names

Kenji Mizoguchi | Sadao Yamanaka | Mikio Naruse |
Yasujiro Ozu | Akira Kurosawa

More info:

[Akira Kurosawa: 10 essential films](#)

The 1950s



Gojira, directed by Ishiro Honda, 1954

The 1950s decade is considered as the Zenith of Japanese cinema. The decade started with Kurosawa's *Rashomon* (1950), which won the Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film and marked the entrance of Japanese cinema onto the world stage.

In 1954, two of the Japan's most influential films were released: *Seven Samurai*, by Kurosawa (remade in Hollywood as a Western, *The Magnificent Seven*) and *Gojira* by Ishiro Honda, translated as *Godzilla*, it became an international icon of Japan. Great filmmakers produced some of their finest films which are cult nowadays.

Films

- *The Life of Oharu*, Kenji Mizoguchi, 1952
- *Tokyo Story*, Yasujiro Ozu, 1952
- *Late Chrysanthemums*, Mikio Naruse, 1954
- *Ugetsu*, Kenji Mizoguchi, 1953: Silver Bear at the Venice Film Festival
- *The Burmese Harp*, Kon Ichikawa 1956
- *The Human Condition* Trilogy, Masaki Kobayashi, 1958
- *Floating Weeds*, Yasujiro Ozu, 1958

Important names

Kenji Mizoguchi | Mikio Naruse | Yasujiro Ozu | Akira Kurosawa | Masaki Kobayashi | Kon Ichikawa | Ishiro Honda

The 1960s



Onibaba, directed by Kaneto Shindo, 1964

Success of mainstream Japanese cinema of the 50's enabled studios (such as Shochiku and Nikkatsu) to allow a greater sense of directorial freedom of expression and breakdown of classic genres.

The industry began to decline after 1963, due to the introduction of television. The industry tried to hold on the remaining audience with young directors and their favoured theme of youth: a New Wave. Technicolor arrived in Japan in 1960s.

Seijun Suzuki worked prolifically in the Yakuza genre and a new generation of filmmakers emerged through the decade.

Films and TV Shows:

- *Cruel Story of Youth*, Nagisa Oshima, 1960
- *Pigs and Battlehips*, Shohei Imamura, 1961
- *The Bodyguard*, Akira Kurosawa, 1961: huge influence on the entire Western genre
- *Woman in the Dunes*, Hiroshi Teshigahara, 1964: won the Special Jury Prize at the Cannes Festival
- *Onibaba*, Kaneto Shindo, 1964

- *Branded to Kill*, Seijun Suzuki, 1967

Important names:

Akira Kurosawa | Seijun Suzuki | Nagisa Oshima |
Kaneto Shindo Susumu Hani | Shohei Imamura

The 1970s



*Eiko Matsuda and Tatsuya Fuji in In The Realm of Senses,
directed by Nagisa Oshima, 1976*

In the early 70s the trend of the 60s continued: young filmmakers utilized the romantic pornography genre to inject into New Wave films. Nagisa Oshima directed *In The Realm of the Senses* (1976), taking the genre to hardcore pornography.

A new-style of Samurai films prospered in the early 70s, with stars like Shintaro Katsu. Such as the Yakuza genre film, often filled with more graphic violence..

Films

- *Dersu Uzala*, Akira Kurosawa, 1975
- *Battles without Honor or Humanity*, Kinji Fukasaku, 1975
- *In The Realm of the Senses*, Nagisa Oshima, 1976
- *Ballad of Orin*, Masahiro Shinoda, 1977
- *Vengeance is Mine*, Shohei Imamura, 1979

Important names

Nagisa Oshima | Shohei Imamura | Akira Kurosawa |
Masahiro Shinoda

More info:

[10 great Japanese gangster movies](#)

[10 great samurai films](#)

The 1980s



Ken Ogata and Sumiko Sakamoto in The Ballad of Nayarama, directed by Shohei Imamura, 1983

The Golden Age and New Wave excitement are over: only few new directors emerged in the 70s and 80s, and some occasional films by Kurosawa, Imamura and Shinoda are released. Critics have come to call this the “lost decade” of the Japanese cinema.

By the end of the 80s, it's the anime genre which took more and more importance with directors and films like Miyazaki's *Nausicaa of the Valley of Wind* (1984) and Otomo's *Akira* (1988). It's also the beginning of Kiyoshi Kurosawa's career.

Films

- *The Ballad of Nayarama*, Shohei Imamura, 1983:
Golden Palm in Cannes
- *Ran*, Akira Kurosawa, 1985
- *Tetsuo The Iron Man*, Shin'ya Tsukamoto, 1989

Important names

Akira Kurosawa | Shohei Imamura | Masahiro Shinoda | Hayao Miyazaki | Katsuhiro Otomo

The 1990s



After Life, directed by Hirokazu Kore-eda, 1998

Imamura won again the Golden Palm in 1997 for *The Eel*, and a new generation of filmmaker appeared through the decade. Takeshi Kitano emerged as a significant filmmaker with works such as *Sonatine* (1993) and *Hana-Bi* (1997).

Takashi Miike launched a prolific career mostly in Yakusa and horror genres: *Audition* (1999), *Dead or Alive* (1999). He also directed films which are depicting shocking violence and taboo sex, as well as some of the strangest movies ever made (*The Happiness of the Katakuris*, 2001).

Former documentary filmmaker Hirokazu Kore-eda launched an acclaimed feature career with *Marobosi* (1996) and *After Life* (1999).

Films

- *Like Grains of Sand*, Ryosuke Hashiguchi, 1995: one of the first Japanese directors overtly representing LGBT concerns
- *License to live*, Kiyoshi Kurosawa, 1998
- *After Life*, Hirokazu Kore-eda, 1998
- *The Bird people in China*, Takashi Miike, 1998

Important names

Takeshi Kitano | Takashi Miike | Hirokazu Kore-eda | Kiyoshi Kurosawa | Hayao Miyazaki

More info: [10 great Japanese films of the 1990s](#)

The 21st century



Battle Royale, Kinji Fukasaku, 2000

Kinji Fukasaku directed *Battle Royale* (2000). It gained the status of cult film in Japan and US. Some of Japanese Horror movies like *Ring* or *Dark Water* had a remake in English and met with commercial success. The 90s generation is still directing great films, joined by a new generation like Tetsuya Nakashima or Yuki Tanada.

The anime genre is an international success, Miyazaki's films are box office hits all over the world, and a new generation of Japanese animators and directors appears in the 2000s, such as Makoto Shinkai or Mamoru Hosoda.

Films

- *Battle Royale*, Kinji Fukasaku, 2000
- *Spirited Away*, Hayao Miyazaki, 2001
- *Memories of Matsuko*, Tetsuya Nakashima, 2006
- *Love Exposure*, Shion Sono, 2008
- *Still Walking*, Hirokazu Kore-eda, 2008

Important names

Kinji Fukasaku | Takeshi Kitano | Kiyoshi Kurosawa | Tetsuya Nakashima | Shin'ya Tsukamoto | Takash Miike | Hirokazu Koreeda | Yuki Tanada | Mamoru Hosoda

More info: [10 great Japanese films of the 21st century](#)

DIRECTORS AND FILMS

- Kenji Mizoguchi (M) (1898-1956): *The Water Magician* (1933), *Sisters of the Gion* (1936), *Women of the Night* (1948), *The Life of Oharu* (1952), *Ugetsu Monogatari* (1953), *Street of Shame* (1956)
- Yasujirô Ozu (M) (1903-1963): *I Was Born But...* (1932), *Late Spring* (1948), *Tokyo Story* (1953), *Early Spring* (1956), *Tokyo Twilight* (1957), *Floating Weeds* (1959)
- Tazuko Sakane (F) (1904-1975): *New Clothing (Hatsu Sugata, 1936)*: Japanese first feature film directed by a woman. It was not a box office success, and Sakane never had a chance to direct a feature film again.
- Hiroshi Inagaki (M) (1905-1980): *Samurai I and II* (1954-1955), *Chushingura* (1962), *The Rickshaw Man* (1958), *Samurai Banners* (1969), *Machibuse* (1970)
- Mikio Naruse (M) (1905-1969): *Every Night Dreams* (1933), *Wife! Be like a Rose!* (1935), *Late Chrysanthemums* (1954), *Floating Cloud* (1955), *Sudden Rain* (1956), *Flowing* (1956), *When a Woman Ascends the Stairs* (1960), *Yearning* (1964)
- Kinuyo Tanaka (F) (1909-1975): *Love Letter* (1953)
- Akira Kurosawa (M) (1910-1998): *No Regrets of Youth* (1946), *Rashomon* (1950), *Seven Samurai* (1954), *Yojimbo* (1961), *Dersu Uzala* (1975), *Ran* (1985), *Madadayo* (1993)
- Ishirô Honda (M) (1911-1993): *Godzilla* (1954), *Destroy All Monsters* (1968), *Godzilla's Revenge* (1969), *Frankenstein conquers the World* (1965)
- Kon Ichikawa (M) (1915-2008): *The Burmese Harp* (1956), *Fires on the plain* (1959), *An Actor's Revenge* (1963), *The Makioka Sisters* (1983), *Tokyo Olympiad* (1965)
- Masaki Kobayashi (M) (1916-1996): *Harakiri* (1962),

Kwaidan (1964), *The Human Condition I, II and III* (1959-1961), *Samurai Rebellion* (1967), *Black River* (1957)

- Seijun Suzuki (M) (1923-2017): *Youth of the Beast* (1963), *Tokyo Drifter* (1966), *Branded to Kill* (1967), *Zigeunerweisen* (1980), *Kagero-za* (1981), *Yumeji* (1991)
- Shohei Imamura (M) (1926-2006): *Vengeance is mine* (1979), *Ballad of Narayama* (1983), *The Pornographers* (1966), *Pigs and Battleships* (1961), *Black Rain* (1989)
- Hiroshi Teshigahara (1927-2001): *The Face of Another* (1966), *Pitfall* (1962), *Woman in the Dunes* (1964)
- Sachiko Hidari (F) (1930-2001): actress and director. She directed and starred in the film *The Far Road* (1977).
- Kinji Fukasaku (M) (1930-2003): *Battle Royale* (2000), *The Yakuza Papers, Vol1, Vol2, Vol3, Vol4, Vol5* (1973-1974), *Graveyard of Honour* (1975), *The Shogun's Samurai* (1978)
- Nagisa Ôshima (M) (1932-2013): *Empire of Passion* (1978), *Death by Hanging* (1968), *The Ceremony* (1971), *In the Realm of the Senses* (1976), *Double Suicide: Japanese Summer* (1967)
- Takeshi Kitano (M) (1947-): *The Blind Swordsman: Zatoichi* (2003), *Fireworks* (1997), *Kikujiro* (1999), *Sonatine* (1993), *Dolls* (2002), *Violent Cop* (1989)
- Kiyoshi Kurosawa (M) (1955-): *Cure* (1997), *Tokyo Sonata* (2008), *Pulse* (2001), *Before We Vanish* (2017), *Retribution* (2006), *Séance* (2000)
- Tetsuya Nakashima (M) (1959-): *Confessions* (2010), *Memories of Matsuko* (2006), *Kamikaze Girls* (2004)
- Shin'ya Tsukamoto (M) (1960-): *Tetsuo The Iron Man* (1989), *Kotoko* (2011), *A Snake of June* (2002), *Tokyo Fist* (1995), *Bullet Ballet* (1998)
- Takashi Miike (M) (1960-): *Audition* (1999), *Rainy Dog* (1997), *Shangri-La* (2002), *13 Assassins* (2010), *Ichi The Killer* (2001)

- Hideo Nakata (M) (1961-): *Dark Water* (2002), *Ring* (1998), *Don't look up* (1996), *The Complex* (2013), *Curse, Death and Spirit* (1992)
- Hirokazu Kore-eda (M) (1962-): *I Wish* (2011), *After Life* (1998), *Maborosi* (1995), *Nobody knows* (2004), *Still Walking* (2008), *Like Father, like Son* (2013), *Our Little Sister* (2015), *Shoplifters* (2018)
- Shinji Aoyama (M) (1964-): *Eureka* (2000), *Helpless* (1996), *Tokyo Park* (2011), *Backwater* (2013)
- Nami Iguchi (F) (1967-): *Inuneko* (2001), *Don't laugh at my romance* (2008)
- Naomi Kawase (F) (1969-): *Sweat Bean* (2015), *The Mourning Forest* (2007), *Still the Water* (2014), *Suzaku* (1997), *Radiance* (2017)
- Naoko Ogigami (F) (1972-): *Glasses* (2007), *Toilet* (2010), *Rent-a-cat* (2012), *Close-Knit* (2017)
- Miwa Nishikawa (F) (1974): *Wild Berries* (2003), *Sway* (2006), *Dear Doctor* (2009)
- Yuki Tanada (F) (1975-): *Moon and Cherry* (2004), *One Million Yen Girl* (2008), *The Cowards Who Looked to the Sky* (2012), *My Dad and Mr. Ito* (2016)

ARTICLES

- Gangster movies: <https://www.bfi.org.uk/news-opinion/news-bfi/features/10-great-japanese-gangster-movies>
- Samurai Films: <https://www.bfi.org.uk/news-opinion/news-bfi/lists/10-great-samurai-films>
- Films set in Tokyo: <https://www.bfi.org.uk/news-opinion/news>

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- Films of the 21 st century: <https://www.bfi.org.uk/news-opinion/news-bfi/lists/10-great-japanese-films-21st-century>
- Films of the 90s: <https://www.bfi.org.uk/news-opinion/news-bfi/lists/10-great-japanese-films-1990s>
- 5 Masterpieces of Japanese widescreen: <https://www.bfi.org.uk/news-opinion/news-bfi/lists/five-japanese-widescreen>
- 100 years of Japanese animation: <https://www.bfi.org.uk/news-opinion/news-bfi/lists/100-years-japanese-animation-one-great-film-decade>
- Japanese New Wave: <https://www.bfi.org.uk/news-opinion/news-bfi/features/where-begin-japanese-new-wave>
- Ozu vs Godzilla: <https://www.bfi.org.uk/news-opinion/news-bfi/features/ozu-vs-godzilla>
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- Takeshi Kitano: <https://www.bfi.org.uk/news-opinion/news-bfi/features/where-begin-takeshi-kitano>
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- Kaneto Shindo: <https://www.bfi.org.uk/news-opinion/news-bfi/features/where-begin-kaneto-shindo>

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To discuss any aspect of your project pitch, your ideas, or to ask a question about our seasons, please feel free to contact us at:

What is the Film Audience Network?

The Film Audience Network (FAN) was set up in 2012, using funds from the National Lottery to support a stronger and more connected approach to growing audiences for British and international film on the big screen.

FAN is made up of eight regional and national Film Hub Lead Organisations (FHLO) providing a comprehensive geographic reach across the UK with the aim of increasing the breadth and depth of film available to audiences.

FAN is central to the BFI's commitment in BFI2022, its current five year plan, to giving everyone, everywhere in the UK the opportunity to enjoy and learn from the richest and most diverse range of great British and international filmmaking, past, present and future.

number of audiences engaging with FAN activity and increasing the quality and cultural depth of their experience

Broadening film choice - increasing access to a wide range of independent British and international film for audiences - especially those outside London

Diversity - increasing the diversity of audiences engaging with FAN activity

Young audiences - boosting participation of 16-30 year olds in FAN activity

Screen heritage - facilitating greater access to archive content with a particular focus on national and regional collections

About Major Programmes

Major Programmes is a 'cross FAN' project, led by Film Hub Midlands, to deliver two UK wide audience facing programme of creative, accessible, and culturally ambitious screenings and events annually.

Our two seasons for 2021 are Film Feels Hopeful, July-August 2021 and BFI Blockbuster Japan 2021 in October - December 2021.

The priorities for Film Audience Network under BFI2022 are as follows:

Engaging audiences - maximising the