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Far East on Film

Rich Johnson

Week 2

STRANGE BEASTS

Japan's relationship with monsters is deep rooted in their folklore. This talk delves into how Japan have used the monster metaphor to reinvent film in the post-war period; a nation in the shadow of nuclear fallout and the rise of an iconic giant lizard. Many incarnations of 'Kaiju' (Japanese for 'strange beast') have followed including Bong Joon-ho's South Korean monster from *The Host* (2006), based on more recent environmental threats.

Main films:

Japan

Godzilla (1954)

Director(s): Ishirō Honda

Studio(s): Toho Co., Ltd

Mothra (1961)

Director(s): Ishirō Honda

Studio(s): Toho Co., Ltd

Gamera, the Giant Monster (1965)

Director(s): Noriaki Yuasa

Studio(s): Daiei Film

South Korea

The Host (2006)

Director(s): Bong Joon-ho

Studio(s): Chunggeorahm Film

Sego Entertainment

Notes:

Japanese periods:

The Shōwa era: Reign of Emperor Shōwa (Hirohito). December 25, 1926 until his death on January



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7, 1989.

The Heisei era: Reign of Emperor Akihito. January 8, 1989 until his abdication on April 30, 2019.

On August 6, 1945, the B-29 Superfortress Enola Gay dropped the atomic bomb called “Little Boy” on Hiroshima.

Kabuki – which began in 1603 - focussed heavily on action and fight scenes.

Bunraku is also a heavy influence; a form of traditional Japanese puppet theatre that also implemented the earliest forms of special effects.

Tokusatsu – pronounced tock-sat-ser - (‘special effects’) has originates from in early Japanese kabuki theatre.

Modern tokusatsu, did not begin to take shape until the early 1950s with the birth of Godzilla.

Godzilla special-effects artist Eiji Tsuburaya and director Ishirō Honda became the driving forces behind the film and this specific movement in post-war Japanese cinema.

Design reminiscent of hannya, a mask used in Japanese Noh theater, representing a jealous female demon.

Mothra Toho's second most popular kaiju character after Godzilla.

Original story was titled “The Glowing Fairies and Mothra”.

Starred The Peanuts who were a Japanese vocal group consisting of twin sisters Emi and Yumi Itō. The country Rolisica is an amalgam of Russia and America and is portrayed as an overbearing capitalist superpower.

Based on Authors Steve Ryfle and Ed Godziszewski’s 2009 DVD commentary, “Rolisica's bombing of Infant Island to America's bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and Nelson's kidnapping of the Shobijin to America's occupation and forced Westernization of Japan.” The film therefore can be seen as a bad portrait of the United States with the exploitation of natives for atomic testing and commercial gain.

Daiei Film Co. Ltd. (pronounced die-e-ay)

Also produced Akira Kurosawa's *Rashomon* (1950) and Teinosuke Kinugasa's *Gate of Hell* (1953), which was the first Japanese color film to be shown abroad.

Daiei studio head Masaichi Nagata was inspired by the success of Alfred Hitchcock’s *The Birds* (1963) as much as Toho's *Godzilla* films and began to produce *Giant Horde Beast Nezura*, a film that would have featured overgrown rats attacking Tokyo but the production was shut down by the health department, due to the project wanting to use live rats.



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Nagata then conceived *Gamera* to replace *Nezura* but due to a low budget and tight schedule, Yuasa was forced to use dated equipment, faulty props, and faced belittlement from colleagues.

To the studio's surprise, on release, it was a bigger hit than expected.

A legacy of films and TV shows from *Ultraman* (1966-1967) to the original *Mighty Morphin Power Rangers* (1993–1996).

The Host was (in part) inspired by an incident in 2000, in which a Korean mortician working for the U.S. military in Seoul reported that he was ordered to dump a large amount of formaldehyde down the drain.

This incident all started when the so called environmental group Green Korea released reports over the internet about the dumping of formaldehyde on Yongsan followed by leading protests against USFK (United States Forces Korea)

Press release concerning the 2000 water dumping:

“Nowadays the U.S army’s toxic fluid dumping to Han-river is main issue in Korea. On February 9th, in the US Eighth Army Mortuary Building, 480 bottles of formaldehyde, used for embalming were dumped in a drain without any detoxification. It has been confirmed that the US Army has been releasing Formaldehyde for long periods of time into the Han-River.”