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Far East on Film

Rich Johnson

Week 5

THE ART AND SOUL OF ANIME

Often dismissed as adolescent in nature, Japanese animation is not all about mecha violence and infantilised heroines; at the heart of 'Anime' is a deep-seated spirituality and mysticism that speaks to a global audience. This session explores everything from the post-war period to the explosion of Anime in the UK during the early '90s right through to the success of Studio Ghibli's Oscar-winning *Spirited Away* and how the medium has grown into a multi-billion dollar industry.

Main films:

Japan

Akira (1988)

Director(s): Katsuhiro Otomo

Studio(s): Tokyo Movie Shinsha

Ghost in the Shell (1995)

Director(s): Mamoru Oshii

Studio(s): Kôdansha

Grave of the Fireflies (1988)

Director: Isao Takahata

Studio: Studio Ghibli

Spirited Away (2001)

Director: Hayao Miyazaki

Studio: Studio Ghibli

Tokyo Godfathers (2003)

Director: Satoshi Kon

Studio: Mad House Ltd. / Sony Pictures Online (Japan) / Sony (Japan) / Sony (US)

Sword of the Stranger (2008)

Director: Masahiro Andō

Studio: Bones



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Notes:

Anime Exploded during the early 1990s beginning with *Akira* and the home invasion of Japanese animation in the UK.

Manga Entertainment mainly worked on dominating the market through 'exploitation'; both in content and their marketing.

Due to this movement across the West, anime output quadrupled from the previous decade.

The original publication of *Akira* in 1982 arrived at a time the cyberpunk movement (a science fiction subgenre) was brought to the forefront.

In watching the film there is a compromise as it condenses 2,000 pages into two hours.

Grave of the Fireflies is based on a 1967 novel by Akiyuki Nosaka.

It was initially distributed with *My Neighbor Totoro* in 1988. This is because it was the only way that Miyazaki was able to make *Totoro*.

This is the main reason it is overlooked due to their contrast; audiences attracted to *Totoro*'s more whimsy, positive nature.

A devastating watch, *Grave of the Fireflies* is more aligned with *Where the Wind Blows* (1986) in terms of its themes of nuclear fallout.

Isao Takahata was the only living animator involved on the project who had survived the bomb blasts.

Incredible animated choreography. The fight sequence in *Sword of the Stranger* (2018) matches *anything* in live action.

Every scene and the characters in them, by extension, make even the simplest of movements with the smoothest of animation.

Beautifully designed with a stunning sense of environment and set pieces.

A must for samurai fans; the story has a driven antagonist and interesting protagonist at its centre.

Yeon Sang-ho directed *Train to Busan* (2016), animated prequel, *Seoul Station* (2016) and sequel *Peninsula* (2020).

To distinguish it from its Japanese counterpart, Korean animation is often called 'hanguk aeni' (Korean animation) or 'guksan aeni' (domestic animation). It has, most recently been referred to 'K-animation' as part of the 'K-wave'.



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A boost in confidence: the success of animated feature thriller *Beauty Water* (2020) was a film festival circuit hit and the “Baby Shark Dance” animated video by South Korean education company, Pinkfong, has almost 10 billion views.

In China, ‘donghua’ is used to describe all animated works regardless of their country of origin.

The first animated film of notable length was *Princess Iron Fan* in 1941.

China’s golden age of animation came to an end following the onset of the Cultural Revolution in 1966.

The State Administration of Radio, Film and Television (SARFT) have a history of taking protectionism actions such as banning foreign content.

1950s: First time Television sets were in the homes. During this period they were often referred to as ‘electric Kamishibai’.

Early TV series – anime the perfect medium. *Mighty Atom* was exported as *Astro Boy* to the US.

In terms of anime, there is everything BEFORE *Astro Boy* and everything AFTER.

Toei Company were considered ‘The Disney of the East’ – with the outlook: ‘Dreams of export’.

Hakujaden was aimed at the Chinese / Asian market but was also recognised in the West by larger studios.

First feature to successfully imitate Disney in terms of style and characteristics.

Toei went onto recruit Hayao Miyazaki and Isao Takahaka – two of the founders of Studio Ghibli.

Magic Boy released by MGM – another key example of a successful import – but still few and far between.

Japanese animation has grown into a 6.5 billion a year multimedia industry and remains instrumental in keeping traditional animation alive at home and in the cinema.

Many genres & Styles: Hōnen ‘boy’ | Shōjo ‘girl’ | Seinen ‘young man’ | Kodomo ‘child’ to name a few.

The best examples of anime are aimed at no one but appreciated by everyone.