

Perspectives

THE JAPAN FOUNDATION LONDON NEWSLETTER

Move Over, Ozu

Japan Foundation Touring Programme comes to the UK

Mention the words 'contemporary Japanese cinema' and most people overseas will immediately think of apocalyptic horrors, oddball animation or violent gangster movies. Is this a fair evaluation of all that Japanese cinema can offer? With 2006 bringing record box-office takings and the biggest domestic market share in decades, contemporary Japanese cinema shows itself to be no pale shadow of the 1950s Golden Era. Yasujiro Ozu, regarded among world cinema's greatest filmmakers and one of those working during the Golden Era, made his finest work within the housebound milieu.

When first brought overseas, Ozu's films' warmth and humanism won over the western audience; their simple stories revolving around such commonplace concerns as lone fathers fretting over their unwedded daughters, elderly parents neglected by their career-oriented offspring, or simple squabbles between siblings over the most trivial of things. After all, East or West, everyone can identify with having a family. Ozu's films also present a microcosm for a society in flux during the rapid redevelopment and modernisation of the post-war era. Fifty years on, and on the surface, Japanese society has changed, but the concern with the family and its changing nature and function has remained a central component of the work of many filmmakers.



Sway (2006)

So too, has the industry changed from a time when major studios dominated production. Recent years have seen an explosion in the independent sector, giving rise to an increased plurality in outsider voices from highly-talented new directors who use their art to pass comment on the modern state of the nation. The broad canvas provided by ensemble casts of characters, whose relationships are fixed from the outset but shift kaleidoscopically over time to form new interconnected patterns, provides a rich and flexible framework to look at issues like changing sex roles, external pressures imposed by the workplace, media representations of how a family should be, and on a broader level, also the

relationship between the individual and society.

One can also notice a slight difference in approach, more detectable in Japanese culture in general, between the soul-searching pessimism of the turn of the millennium works and the new hedonism of the younger filmmakers, for whom making great entertainment is the main aim. Challenging, elucidating, not to mention often highly entertaining, this type of film reflects the scope of vision and depth of ambition to be found within this definition of 'the contemporary family movie'.

Jasper Sharp, Editor of *Midnight Eye*, advisor to this programme

Move Over, Ozu

Japan Foundation Touring Film Programme

Does modern Japanese Cinema have more to it than ghosts, guns and gangsters? Find out in the 4th Japan Foundation touring film programme. Concentrating on the idea of family, this touring programme aims to show an alternative to the Japanese films we are accustomed to in the UK. None of these films have been seen in the UK outside of film festivals and some of these titles are UK premieres.

Watershed (Bristol)

4, 11, 18, 24, 25 February

www.watershed.co.uk

Filmhouse (Edinburgh)

23 February – 1 March

www.filmhousecinema.com

Showroom Cinema (Sheffield)

1, 8, 15, 18, 22, 29 March

www.showroom.org.uk

Queens Film Theatre (Belfast) 2 – 7 March

www.queensfilmtheatre.com

Riverside Studios (London) 9 – 11 March

www.riversidestudios.co.uk

For screening times, please contact the individual venues.

Films in this year's touring programme:

Hush! (*Ryosuke Hashiguchi/2001*)

Canary (*Akihiko Shiota/2005*)

Sway (*Miwa Nishikawa/2006*)

A Laughing Frog (*Hideyuki Hirayama/2002*)

Licence to Live (*Kiyoshi Kurosawa/1999*)

Hanging Garden (*Toshiaki Toyoda/2005*)



Licence to Live (1999)

Retail Cultures: Art and High-end Fashion Retail in Tokyo



Prada, Tokyo

Japan represents a significant market for luxury apparel, in particular, the high-end fashion sector, leaving Tokyo to now be considered a strategic city for international fashion retail. In the context of my PhD on the use of art in high-end fashion retail, I have come to research Japan's distinctive retail culture. In late 2006, I was awarded a grant by the Japan Foundation, which

supported me with the travel costs involved in conducting a research trip to Japan.

Unable to speak Japanese, I encountered some initial difficulties but my research arose interest and I was able to organise visits, meetings and interviews. I met artists from different fields, at various stages of their careers and levels of notoriety. Interviewing these artists helped me understand the importance of in-store exhibitions, particularly in department stores, for Japanese artists' careers.

I also met representatives of art departments from key Japanese department stores and fashion retail groups' galleries and dedicated art centres. I visited galleries and cultural centres located within flagship stores of Japanese and international high-end fashion brands.

This research trip was very beneficial for my research. Visiting Tokyo allowed me to acquire an up-to-date, more accurate and improved understanding of the Japanese retail culture and art's presence in it. I could not have grasped certain elements, like the functioning of Japanese department stores or the importance of architecture for high-fashion retail design, without being there in person.

The information gathered will come to form a chapter of my dissertation in which I intend to discuss the position of art as a retail language. It will also serve to enrich my descriptions of the Japanese brands I am using

as case studies such as Comme des Garçons, Takashimaya and Mitsukoshi.

However, while organising this trip, I became aware of a lack of networks linking research students. I would therefore be keen to help build contacts between Japanese and British academics and research students in my field. In the near future, I hope to present papers and possibly organise seminars with students from my own university. I also hope to publish an article on my research subject, including a description of the Japanese retail culture.

Jessica Bush, Buckinghamshire Chilterns University College

Jessica Bush was in Japan in November 2006, assisted by the Japan Foundation Study Support Programme. Some of the others supported under this scheme in 2006-7 include:

Yew Meng Lai *The Politics of Pride? Rising Nationalism in Contemporary Japanese and Chinese Relations*

Graham Cooper *Project Japan – Art Media in Context*

The Study Support Programme provides assistance towards travel for those conducting research in Japan.

For more information about the Study Support Programme, please contact Esther Williams: esther.williams@jpf.org.uk

New Japan Cultural Profile Available Online

A new Japan Cultural Profile has just been added to the growing list of Cultural Profiles on the Visiting Arts website. This project was supported by the Japan Foundation. The Cultural Profile has general information about Japan and an extensive section on culture, including key contacts in different areas as the Cultural Profile Project tries to address the difficulty professionals have creating collaborations with their counterparts overseas. Sub-divisions in the culture section include heritage, literature, awards and competitions. Hopefully, this project will encourage many more collaborations in the Arts between Japan and the UK.

To see the Cultural Profiles Project, visit www.culturalprofiles.net/visiting_arts/Directories/overview/

JPF Recommends: Vertigo Magazine Japan Special

Vertigo is the UK's leading magazine dedicated to worldwide independent film, published quarterly with free monthly web issues. The new issue is a Japan Special with reports on the most important trends in Japanese independent filmmaking, plus, Cine-Manga, an exclusive 48 page full colour book of stunning photographs by world renowned director Takeshi Kitano, free with the magazine. Also included in the Japan Special are interviews with filmmakers Kiyoshi Kurosawa, Ryuichi Hiroki and Tetsuaki Matsue, full colour artists' pages, new fiction and articles on Japanese independent feature film and documentary.



Vertigo Magazine

Vertigo's Japan Special is available online at www.vertigomagazine.co.uk

Peter Fraser, Vertigo Magazine

Sky-scrapers, Sumo and Sushi

How do a class of 14-year olds view Japan? How do those views change as they learn about the country in school? These were the questions I hoped to answer during a 10-week school-based research project in Summer 2006. To form a detailed case study of the children's

scrapers. Many of the children's drawings of Japan showed a crowded, urban landscape with tall buildings and streets full of people and cars. However, some children also imagined a rural side, including mountains and fields, though few recognised the importance of rice farming.

These initial ideas were informed by goods from Japan, a wide range of TV programmes and films, food shops, and family and friends. Each child's views and sources were different, for example, Lawrence's family had connections with Burma so his ideas were informed by various pictures and photos from SE Asia displayed in his home (see picture). It was fascinating watching how the children's ideas changed over time as they responded to their teacher and all the different resources and experiences to which they had access.

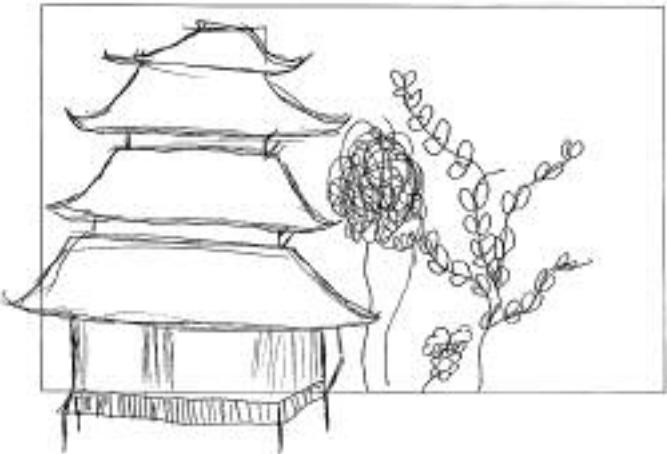
Reflecting back on the work, the majority of students found taiko drumming particularly memorable, found food most surprising and were keen to learn more about history, sport and popular culture.

Liz Taylor, Faculty of Education, Cambridge University

Liz Taylor was one of the participants on the Japan Foundation Study Tour in November 2006. She lectures in Geography Education at University of Cambridge and specialises in the teaching of 'distant places', often using Japan as an example.

understandings, I collected material from interviews, children's drawings, copies of work, videos of lessons and audio diaries. I followed the class through a varied and interesting programme of lessons on Japanese culture and daily life, including the highlight of the summer, Japan Day. This involved practical workshops on Japanese language, cooking, manga, and even taiko drumming!

The spread of the children's initial ideas about Japan was more diverse than I had expected. In a brainstorm, over eighty different elements of Japanese life and environment were mentioned. Those suggested by most children included: technology; sushi; earthquakes; sumo and sky-



JFLC News: 3rd Place in Shizuoka Junior Translation Competition for UK Learner

In December 2006, Tom Barrett, a Year 13 student from St. Augustine's Catholic College in Wiltshire, was awarded 3rd prize in the 4th Shizuoka Junior Translation Competition. When asked what interests him about Japanese, he says he was initially inspired by Japanese films and comics, an interest which has developed in the four years he has been studying Japanese. Tom was encouraged to enter the competition, in which he was required to translate an extract from Erika Tachihara's *Yuki no hi no Orugooru*, by his tutor, Lydia Morey, a prominent figure in secondary Japanese language education in the UK.

To find out more about the Shizuoka Junior Translation Competition go to www1.sphere.ne.jp/shizuoka/junior/index.html

Tom's tutor, Ms Morey, is also part of the team organising the Nihongo Cup Speech Contest (for secondary students), which will take place again in June 2007. For more information about the Nihongo Cup, contact Caroline Lewis, Project Manager: cml@japanesematters.co.uk

Bringing Young Musical Talent to Light 3rd Young Japanese Artist Series

Recognising that there are limited opportunities for young and gifted Japanese musicians to perform in London, the English Chamber Orchestra began the *Young Japanese Artist Series* in 2004. Its purpose is to support gifted young musicians by promoting them in the UK. The 2007 series continues this by presenting, in concert, Kiyotaka Teraoka (Conductor), Shohei Sekimoto (Pianist),

and Mayuko Katsumura (Violinist). With the English Chamber Orchestra they will perform pieces by M I Glinka, Prokofiev, Mozart and Elgar.

Date: 25 April 2007 7.30pm – 9:40pm
Cadogan Hall, London

For more details see
www.englishchamberorchestra.co.uk



English Chamber Orchestra

Photo: Clive Barda

Director's Note



A Belated Happy New Year! Just as in other countries, 'New Year' is a very special time for the Japanese.

Many return to their hometown to spend time with their family and visit a shrine or temple to pray for peace and happiness for the year. It is also a time to renew and refresh our minds and often to set certain goals to achieve, whether modest or ambitious, e.g. I will stop smoking, I will swim the channel, I will keep a diary, etc.

Our London office is also planning to start a new endeavour: creating an e-bulletin, the aim of which is to reach far more people than we do now, in order to expand wider and closer relationships and to further potential collaboration between all those involved in UK-Japan cultural exchange. Consequently, this will be the last issue of Perspectives.

Our first issue was printed in June 2000. In that issue, the then director-general expressed the importance of the human connection between our two countries in the cultural field and hoped the newsletter would contribute to this. Our desire does not change. Moving towards internet based communication is a new step towards this goal.

I would like to express our sincere gratitude to you all for your support these six years and look forward to seeing you all in our new e-bulletin, with which, together with our website, we will be able to communicate with you more frequently, with more up to date information on our activities. So see you soon!

Fumio Matsunaga, Director General

Sadly, this will be our final issue of Perspectives. We hope to issue a new e-bulletin soon to keep you up to date with Japan Foundation news and events. Up to date information is also available from our website: www.jpf.org.uk. If you complete and return the contact details form, you can ensure we have your e-mail address for the e-bulletin.

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Events organised by, or with support from, the Japan Foundation

20 January – 15 April

Indigo – Exhibition of art, craft and fashion using indigo dye – Includes *shibori* and *sashiko*. Whitworth Art Gallery Manchester www.whitworth.manchester.ac.uk

This exhibition then tours to Plymouth City Museum and Art Gallery (19 May – 1 September 2007), Brighton Museum and Art Gallery (29 September 2007 – 06 January 2008)

12 February – 13 April

World Heritage in Japan – A Photographic Exhibition – Premiere UK viewing of World Heritage Panels by Kazuyoshi Miyoshi. For details visit www.jpf.org.uk/whatson.html

Dates in February/March

Move Over, Ozu – Japan Foundation Film Touring Programme – Belfast, Bristol, Edinburgh, London and Sheffield. See cover page for details of venues and dates.

16 February – 9 March

A Season of Contemporary Japanese Films 2007 – The Europe-Japan Centre, University of Glasgow, presents a season of Japanese films entitled *Japanese High School*. For more information please contact the Europe-Japan Centre.

22 February – 13 May

Alvar Aalto Through the Eyes of Shigeru Ban – First UK retrospective of Aalto's work, by Japanese architect Shigeru Ban. For details visit www.barbican.org.uk

14 –18 March

Optronica – Visual Music on the Big Screen. *Big in Japan* programme features Ryoichi Kurokawa. For more details visit www.optronica.org

31 March

E-learning and Japanese Language Education – Oxford Brookes University. Contact sanai@brookes.ac.uk for details

23 June

Nihongo Cup (Speech Contest for Secondary School Students) For more information, please contact Caroline Lewis, Project Manager: cml@japanesematters.co.uk

2007 is the 10th Anniversary of the establishment of the Japan Foundation London Language Centre!

OPTRONICA – Visual Music on the Big Screen

The Optronica festival returns for 2007, with a line-up of the world's most cutting edge creators of audiovisual music. The Japan Foundation supports the *Big in Japan*



Teppei Kuroyanagi

programme – featuring the UK debut of audiovisual artist Ryoichi Kurokawa and his unique style of crossmedia electronica, as well as a separate screening programme of Japanese work, featuring Hideaki Motoko, Enlightenment, +Cruz and Kloma.

Date: March 14 –18 2007

BFI IMAX Cinema and BFI Southbank, London

For further details, please visit:

www.optronica.org



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