Japanese Filmography

Films In Japanese

A vain young doctor learns a valuable lesson from the dedicated director of a clinic for destitute patients.

The Mamiya family is seeking a husband for their daughter, Noriko, but she has ideas of her own.

Late spring (Banshun) tells the story of a widowed father who feels compelled to marry off his beloved only daughter.

--Biruma no Tategoto (The Burmese Harp): VIDEO 3022
Following the actions of a young Japanese officer separated from his battalion at the close of the Pacific War in Burma, the film shows one man's journey from the comforts of companionship in adversity to a solitary confrontation with, and the eventual grasp of, mass death in the name of patriotism.

--Dodes Ka-Den: VIDEO 1123
The story of a group of Tokyo slum dwellers who huddle together on the desolate fringes of the city. Some are drunk ; some are physically handicapped. All have been cheated by life. They survive on illusion and imagination.

Tale of a married shopkeeper in love with a prostitute. Bound by duty, and too poor to pay her way out of bondage, Jihei asks Koharu to enter a suicide pact, the only way they can be free.

--Funto to Seiko: Afurikan Amerikan no Nihon Keiken (Struggle and Success: the African American Experience in Japan): VIDEO 3119
Examines the complex relationships of African Americans with Japanese culture and people experienced by several Black Americans living as foreigners in Japan.

--Gojira (Godzilla): PN1995.9.G63 G65573
Gojira: A prehistoric monster, Godzilla, ravages metropolitan Tokyo. Scientists suspect that H-bomb tests awakened it from a two-million year sleep and they try to develop techniques to stop the monster.

A visit from her grandchildren and the discovery of a half-American relative cause an elderly woman to relive her memories of the atomic bomb that fell on Nagasaki.
A young woman named Sophie is cursed by the Witch of the Waste and is turned into an old woman who is unable to tell anyone of her plight. Unable to continue her job at her mother's hat shop, she goes to the ambulatory castle of the notorious wizard Howl and insinuates herself into his household. Sophie befriends Calcifer, the fire demon who powers the castle and who is bound to Howl by a contract, the terms of which Calcifer cannot reveal. They promise to help each other with their problems. Like Calcifer, Howl can also see through the Witch's spell, and he and Sophie fall in love. Sophie helps Howl confront his former teacher, and the Witch of the Waste.

A complex crime thriller in which a wealthy shoe manufacturer's chauffeur's son is kidnapped in mistake for his own, and he faces a moral dilemma.

--Hotaru no Haka (Grave of the Fireflies): NC1765 .H670 1992
Based on an original story by Akiyuki Nosaka. Orphaned and homeless from a fire-bomb attack on their city, 14 year old Seita and his 4-year old sister Setsuko set out to survive on their own in the face of a society no longer able to help them. They come to realize that they cannot escape the hardships of war or even find enough food on which to survive...

Discovering that he is in the terminal stages of cancer, a clerk spends his last months in search of the meaning to life. After his pursuit of pleasure has failed, he finds self-realization in bringing about the building of a children's playground in the slums and dies quietly fulfilled.

Reconstructing the splendor of feudal Japan and the pageantry of war, Kurosawa creates a soaring historical epic about a peasant impersonating a nobleman in battle. Kagemusha is presented in its original 180 min. uncut Japanese version, not the shortened "international version" presented by 20th Century Fox.

A blend of comic satire and drama, Odd obsession follows an elderly man's attempts to satisfy his younger wife. When "potency" injections fail, Mr. Kenmochi incites his own jealousy by orchestrating an affair between his wife and his doctor, who happens to be his daughter's fiance.

A princess must escape across enemy lines with the royal treasure, guarded only by a loyal general and two greedy peasants.

Lonely nine-year-old Masao leaves Tokyo in search of his mother, whom he has never met. He's accompanied on his journey across the Japanese countryside by the surly, middle-aged crook
Kikujiro, who is none too happy being the chaperone. When Kikujiro gambles away all the travel money, the two must rely on their wits and the kindness of strangers.

Adaptation of Shakespeare's Macbeth, set in feudal Japan. Tells the story of a Samurai lord who kills his master and usurps his power in fulfillment of a witch's prophecy.

Four tales of the supernatural adapted from the works of Lafcadio Hearn.

Set in postwar Japan, the film follows the last two decades in the life of Hyakken Uchida, a free spirited writer and teacher, highlighted by his relationship with his students who venerate him in his old age.

A world of unusual love and lust. A housewife and two men compete for the love of a beautiful woman.

A bad day gets worse for rookie detective Murakami when a pickpocket steals his gun on a hot, crowded bus. Desperate to right the wrong, he goes undercover, scavenging Tokyo's sweltering streets for the thief, whose desperation has led him to a life of crime. With each step, the cop and the criminal's lives become more intertwined and the investigation becomes an examination of Murakami's own dark side.

Satiric comedy in which two young brothers refuse to talk until their parents agree to buy them a television set. Set in a 1950s residential suburb of Tokyo.

--Ran: PN1997.R23513 2005
An aging warlord decides to split his kingdom between his three sons, who will live in three separate castles. The two eldest sons are quite happy, but the youngest thinks his father has gone mad, and predicts that it won't be long until the two older brothers are fighting with each other.

Set in the Middle Ages, the nature of truth and subjective reality are probed in a series of flashbacks from four viewpoints to present the case history of a man's murder and the rape of his wife by a bandit.

--Saikaku Ichidai Onna (Life of Oharu): PN1995.9.J34 L573 1992 In 17th-century Japan, a samurai's daughter, Oharu, falls in love with a pretty servant. Caught together, the man is beheaded and Oharu and her family are exiled. After enduring further misfortunes as a concubine, a courtesan, wife, and prostitute, Oharu becomes a mendicant nun in her old age.
--Sansho Dayu (Sansho the Bailiff): PN1995.9.S557 S26 1994 In this legendary tale set in the 11th century, a kindly governor is exiled, his wife forced into prostitution, and his son and daughter sold into slavery to the tyrannical baliff Sansho. Ten years later, the son escapes, rises to power and searches for his mother.

--Sen to Chihiro no Kamikakushi (Spirited Away): PN1997.2. S657 2003 When a young girl gets trapped in a strange new world of spirits, she must call upon the courage she never knew she had to free herself and rescue her parents.

This epic masterpiece is about a group of 16th century samurai who are hired to defend a small Japanese village that finds itself annually raided by an army of bandits who steal the meager crops harvested by the peasants. Tired of relinquishing their food supply but woefully inept in combat skills, the villagers decide to hire a band of samurai to protect them. In addition to the primary conflict between the villagers and the bandits, much of the tale revolves around young Katsushiro's coming-of-age, both sexually and emotionally. Kikuchiyo's search for acceptance forms the other major storyline. Indeed, everyone in Seven Samurai is searching: for adventure, for experience, for freedom from their oppressors.

--Shall We Dance?: PN1995.9.C55 S465 1996 Comedy about a middle-aged businessman who secretly yearns to break out of the rigid conformity of his daily life by learning ballroom dancing.

A seasoned mobster goes to the island of Okinawa on a "peacekeeping" mission, even though he suspects his boss is secretly trying to eliminate him. Determined not to go down without a fight, he and his gang know exactly what they have to do.

An entomologist is tricked by villagers into spending the night in a shack in a sandpit with a widow whose task is endlessly to haul away sand. He finds he cannot escape and gradually develops an intense, erotic bond with his companion and resigns himself to a lifetime of hypnotic routine.

"Tanpopo" follows a young widow who runs a small noodle restaurant in Tokyo and Goro, a cowboy hat wearing truck driver, as they attempt to devise the perfect bowl of top ramen.

Zatoichi -- A classic samurai epic that tells of a blind assassin desperately struggling to adhere to the strict code of the samurai. Sonatine -- Several yakuza from Tokyo are sent to Okinawa to help end a gang war.
A modern-day Japanese woman's life experiences are inspired by the writings of Sei Shonagon, a female courtier who lived during the Heian Dynasty in 10th century Japan and her father's relationship with his publisher.

An elderly couple journey to Tokyo, where they are greeted less than enthusiastically by their adult children, until death quiets the conflicts.

Deep inside a tree trunk, two children discover a fascinating new world inhabited by Totoros, amazing, charming creatures who become their friends.

A skilled but slovenly ronin comes to the aid of a group of naive young warriors fighting their corrupt clan leaders and manages to keep them out of trouble and alive in spite of their high ideals.

In sixteenth century Japan a village potter and his brother-in-law set out for the city to seek their fortunes in the spoils of war. Their neglected wives suffer the bitter consequences of their husbands' ambition as one is murdered by soldiers and the other is raped and becomes a prostitute.

In 1959, Yasujiro Ozu remade his 1934 silent film: A Story of Floating Weeds in color and sound with the cinematographer Kazuo Miyagawa (Rashomon, Ugetsu). Setting his later version in a seaside location, Ozu otherwise preserves the details of his elegantly simple plot wherein an aging actor returns to a small town with his troupe and reunites with his former lover and illegitimate son, a scenario that enrages his current mistress and results in heartbreak for all. A Story of Floating Weeds reveals Ozu in the midst of developing his mode of expression; Floating weeds reveals his distinct style at its pinnacle. In each, the director captures the joy and sadness in everyday life.

A young executive hunts down his father's killer. A tale about corruption in the boardrooms of postwar corporate Japan as seen through the rising executive eyes.

"Yojinbo": the masterless samurai Sanjuro, who slyly manipulates two warring clans to his own advantage in a small, dusty village. "Sanjuro": A crafty samurai helps a young man and his fellow clansmen save his uncle, who has been framed and imprisoned by a corrupt superintendent.
Films About Japanese Culture

--A Working Couple: Urban Family Life: VIDEO 1211
Explores the pressures of urban life in Japan. Focuses on a typical middle-income couple, both of whom work six days a week to repay loans and buy a house, as they go about their daily lives.

--High Tech and High Touch Japan: VIDEO 1681
Dr. Tomorrow shows some of the areas of Japanese life that are being affected by technological innovations, as well as some of the areas of Japan that have been left untouched by technology.

Examines Japan's changing cultural climate by focusing on an atypical family where a Japanese man has married an American woman and gained the acceptance of his family.

--Island of the Spirits: DS894 .I84 1999
In this episode, Nova travels to Japan's northernmost island, Hokkaido, a rarely seen wonder filled with towering volcanoes, steaming lakes, marshy valleys, fairy tale forests and wondrous wildlife. Here the native Ainu people revere the island's special creatures and extraordinary landscape, uniting the natural and spiritual worlds.

A five part series that explores Japan's history and civilization from the 7th century to the present.

Exciting adventures appear at every turn as children are introduced to the interesting geography, history and culture of Japan. Children also learn about the lives of Japanese Americans who first came to the United States over 100 years ago, and how their descendants live today.

--Lifetime Employment: Conditions of Industrial Work Life: VIDEO 1207
Examines Japanese industry and takes a close look at how the individual makes out within Japan's gigantic economy. Shows the pros and cons of Japan's paternalistic capitalism and the underlying fragility of the economy.

--Raw Fish and Pickle: Traditional Rural and Seafaring Life: VIDEO 1208
Focuses on one of the rural areas of Japan, Iwate prefecture, and examines how it is being transformed by the country's technological boom and new-found prosperity. Presents comments by Iwate's vice-governor and glimpses of the lives of farmers and fishermen.

Conveys some idea of the religious feeling which infuses the Japanese contemplation of nature and the gods or 'kami' the Japanese detect in landscapes, trees, waterfalls; and which prompts them to build simple Shinto or more complex, Buddhist-influenced shrines marked by a balance between natural and man-made space. Includes many views of the Japanese landscape, forests and woods, some rituals of purification, shrine carpenters, rice festivals and Shinto priests and Japanese people at their worship. The following shrines are depicted: Ise Grand Shrine, Izumo Grand Shrine, Kasuga Grand Shrine, Kitano Temmangu, Kumano Hyatama, Kumano Nachi, Munakata Shrine, Nishna Shinmei and Omiwa Shrine. The cinematography is gorgeous; the mood contemplative.

--The Art of Kabuki: VIDEO 1912
A study of the traditional, bombastic theater of Japan, with attention given to the symbolism of the performances.

--The Career Escalator: Education and Job Competition: VIDEO 1206
Describes the path which leads to a successful career in business or government in Japan and the extreme difficulty of gaining entry to that path through the only available door--a top university. Examines the lives of a striving young student and an already successful executive.

The Tale of Genji is one of the world's earliest novels, antedating Don Quixote by 600 years. Its author, Murasaki Shikibu, is likely the world's first woman novelist. This program traces the novel's plot, which centers on the romantic relationships of the noble hero Genji, through the panels of a series of illustrated handscrolls dating from the early 12th century.

--The Japanese Economic Bubble: VIDEO 2496
Explores the basis of Japan's postwar economic success, how the consensus of its shared culture broke down in the boom years, how Japanese society and the Japanese economy have changed forever, and how the country must now adapt to lower growth in a mature economy that is moving closer to the Western model.

--The Rice Ladle: Changing Roles of Women: VIDEO 1209
Considers the role of women in Japan's work force, focusing on a young, would-be pop star and a widow who supports herself as a cook's assistant in a sushi shop. Shows how young working women are often called "seat warmers" because they work while waiting for marriage.

This documentary peels back the rice-paper curtain for an intimate look at the culture, history, training and private lives of geisha.
--The Yamaguchi Story: Buddhism and the Family in Contemporary Japan: VIDEO 3196
This film discusses the relationship between traditional Buddhist beliefs and modern life in Japan. It follows the Yamaguchi family, who are struggling to cope with today's social and economic pressures. They are trying to save their marriage by reaching back into their cultural roots to revitalize their traditional beliefs and practices of Buddhism.

--Time of Fear: D769.8.A6 T56 2005
In World War II, more than 110,000 Japanese-Americans were forced into relocation camps across the US. This film traces the lives of the 16,000 people who were sent to two camps in southeast Arkansas, one of the poorest and most racially segregated places in America. It explores the reactions of the native Arkansans who watched in bewilderment as their tiny towns were overwhelmed by this huge influx of outsiders. Through interviews with the internees and local citizens, the program explores how it affected the local communities, and the impact this history had on the issues of civil rights and social justice in America then and now.

--Tomorrow and Yesterday: Modern Technology and Ancient Culture: VIDEO 1210
Examines the paradox in Japanese society that most mystifies Westerners on their first visit to Japan -- the continued existence of ancient traditions alongside the trappings of a modern, industrialized society. Focuses on the mixture of old and new in the life of a Japanese family.

--Traditional Japanese Architecture: NA1553.5 .T73 2005
Katsura Detached Palace, an Imperial villa in Kyoto, Japan is said to be one of the three finest buildings in the world. Built in the early 17th century, the compound contains gardens and a tea house in addition to the main building. It is a stunning example of the best in traditional Japanese architectural technique and design, and this film observes the complete renovation and restoration process begun in 1976. The project required six years to complete, and the processes and techniques used by master craftsman during the restoration provide a further dimension to understanding the materials and the esthetics of traditional Japanese architecture.

In the spring of 1942, more than 110,000 American citizens of Japanese ancestry were uprooted from their lives and incarcerated in relocation camps. Their stories, along with those who refused to go, are told in this Oscar nominated film.

--We Are Driven: VIDEO 1150
Compares labor-management relations between Japan and the United States through analysis of the Nissan Motor Corporation's facilities located in Tennessee and Japan.

Hollywood Films About Japan

--Lost in Translation: PN1997.2 .L67277 2003
A middle-aged actor and the wife of a photographer meet while on business in Tokyo. They strike up an unusual friendship in the hotel bar that helps them both overcome boredom and loneliness.

In 1929, an impoverished nine-year-old named Chiyo is sold to a geisha house in Kyoto's Gion district and subjected to cruel treatment from the owners and the head geisha Hatsumomo. Her stunning beauty attracts the vindictive jealousy in Hatsumomo and she is rescued by Hatsumomo's bitter rival, Mameha. Under Mameha's mentorship, Chiyo becomes the geisha named Sayuri, trained in all the artistic and social skills a geisha must master in order to survive in her society. As a renowned geisha, she enters a society of wealth, privilege, and political intrigue.

Tormented Civil War veteran Capt. Nathan Algren is coerced by a mercenary officer to train the Japanese Emperor's troops in the use of modern weaponry. Opposing this modernization are the samurai warriors who are holding fast to their traditions of honor, despite their strategic disadvantage. As a captive of the samurai leader, Algren learns, appreciates, and adopts the samurai code, switching sides for a climactic battle that will put everyone's honor to the ultimate test.

--Shogun:  VIDEO 1100
Chamberlain plays Blackthorne, an English navigator shipwrecked on the coast of feudal Japan, who becomes a samurai. Mifune is Toranaga, the warlord driven to become Shōgun - supreme military dictator. Shimada plays Mariko, Blackthorn's interpreter and ill-fated lover.