

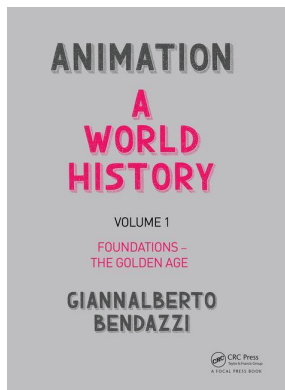
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ASIA

Japan¹

In the 1930s, Japanese militarism grew so much as to dominate national politics;² the Fifteen Years' War began in September 1931 with the invasion of Manchuria by the Japanese Army and, the following year, the foundation of the puppet state of Manchukuo. In 1933, the League of Nations condemned the Japanese way of acting, leading Japan to resign its membership: The population gradually entered into a sort of contrived isolation brought about by the major powers, thereby widening the ideological expansionist culture. At the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War in 1933, movie houses were forced to screen massive doses of pedagogical, documentary, and propagandist films. The Ministry of Army and especially the Ministry of Navy commissioned animated short films to be shown along with the newscasts to spread propagandist messages to younger people. With the invasion of China in July 1937, Japan started the Eastern Asian War and the 'total war', during which an economic restructuring to face the war effort was carried out, as well as an even stricter social authoritarianism and reorganization in policy and in political parties. People from every walk of life supported the imperialist war. As a matter of fact, since the Public Security Preservation Law had been issued and enforced in 1925, any display of class antagonism, or even

non-alignment with the ideology of the ruling power coalition, was persecuted and suppressed.

Regarding control over film production, the government took a further step by approving the Film Law in 1939, which fully reshaped the relationship between the film industry and the state, compelling film companies to file requests for authorization and register all those working in the field and imposing restriction on screening foreign pictures along with hard and fast censorship. In 1941, the Propaganda Department (in agreement with the two major movie companies of that time, Toho and Shochiku) made several amendments to the law in order to 'rationalize' the film industry: Small animation companies were consolidated into larger corporations, which resulted in the coordination of production.³

The war period continued with the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor – and the official beginning of World War II for the Asiatic nation. In the beginning, times were good for the Japanese, who occupied the Philippines, Malaysia, the Indonesian archipelago, New Guinea, Burma, and Singapore until, in 1942, the Americans started to prevail. Soon after China's invasion, starting in 1937, the Japanese submitted to the rationing of textile products and, by 1941, day-to-day necessities. With the worsening of the war situation, the civilian population endured air raids and bombings, which culminated in the dropping of the

¹ By Marco Pellitteri and Lisa Maya Quaianni Manuzzato.

² It is important to remember that Japanese expansionism has roots in the Meiji Period, so we can summarize the steps of the expansion: annexation of Ryūkyū Island in 1879; occupation of Taiwan, relinquished by the dying Chinese Empire with the Peace Treaty of Shimonoseki in 1895; sharing with Russia of hegemony over Manchuria and the acquisition of the South Manchuria Railway Company after the victory over the Tsarist Empire in 1905; imposition on Korea of protectorate status under Japan and final colonization of the peninsula in 1910; and recognition, at the Versailles Conference (1919), of the mandate over the Pacific islands (Caroline, Marianne, and Marshall) seized from defeated Germany in the First World War and of ex-German railway and mining rights in the Jiaochou peninsula.

³ In this decade, the book *Manga eiganon* (On Animation), Daiichi Geibunsha, Tokyo, 1941, by Imamura Taihei (1911–1986), a Japanese pioneer in animation theory, was published. Imamura – who wrote from a leftist perspective – was particularly attracted to documentary and animation.

atomic bomb upon Hiroshima (6 August 1945) and Nagasaki (9 August 1945).

Ofuji Noburo

After the debut of the pioneers in the 1910s, two important names were at the forefront of the artistic field in Japan: Ofuji Noburo and Masaoka Kenzo.⁴ The most famous artist was Ofuji Noburo (Tokyo, 1 June 1900–28 July 1961). When he was eighteen, he became the pupil and co-operator of Kouchi; in 1925, he founded Jiyu Eiga Kenkyujo. In *Bagudajo no tozoku* (Burglars of Baghdad Castle, 1926, a parody based upon the American film *The Thief of Baghdad*), he used *chiyogami* paper for the costumes of the characters and the backgrounds, a special ornamental paper that was at the time available only in Japan. In 1927, he changed the name of his company to Chiyogami Eigasha (Chiyogami Cinema Company). That same year, he made one of his masterpieces, *Kujira* (The Whale), a remarkable feat of action and suspense: After being shipwrecked and surviving in a whale, three men can only think to seize possession of a girl until the gods intervene, causing only the girl to survive. The movie was purchased by a French distribution company and circulated successfully in 1929 as an example of innovative animation. For that movie, Ofuji used a special technique, cutting off figures of *chiyogami* and setting them up on overlapped glass boards. Filmed in black and white, the movie offered an extremely charming world of transparencies and shadows. In *The Whale*, the audience can also admire the effort of perfectionist animation, pointing to ‘total’ fluid motion. Many years later, in 1952, Ofuji would remake the film in Konicolor: Inspired by the stained glass windows of churches, he used transparent, coloured cellophane as a new material, thus continuing with the same technique. That film, shown in 1953 in competition at the Cannes Film Festival in the short animation category, would win appreciation from Pablo Picasso.

Ofuji also experimented with film technology: His work *Kogane no hana* (The Golden Flower, 1929), drawn from a *rakugo* (comic monologue), was originally produced in Cinecolor (although it was released in black and white); with *Kuro nyago* (The Black Cat, 1929), he tried out the Tojo Eastphone sound recording system, even though the film was released as a silent movie. *Sekisho* (The Inspection Station), made in 1930, was his first actual talking picture, and *Katsura hime* (Princess Katsura, 1937) was his first colour film. Furthermore, the author also proved his versatility in comic animation movies, using traditional techniques such as drawn animation.⁵ However, following the war, most of his works were silhouette animations, often about religious themes, like Buddha’s mercy towards a man in the underworld in *Kumo no ito* (A Spider’s Thread, 1946), the first-prize winner at the Venezuela International Film Festival. This period was also full of international acknowledgements: In addition to the already-mentioned remake of *The Whale*, *Yureisen* (The Ghost Ship) of 1956, made with Fujicolor, was awarded a special prize at the Venice Film Festival in the children’s movies section. *The Ghost Ship* tells of a prince and his peaceful crew, killed by pirates, on whom the ghosts of the victims will take revenge.

A strict artist, Ofuji did not believe in animation as a comic art but fought for a dramatic cinema for adults that could comprise erotic themes; for a long time, he was the only producer of artistic films. His deeply personal style, great talent, and cultural background (as he proved in his later works) were partially overshadowed by the most superficial part of his work: his original technique based on *chiyogami* cuttings. After his death, his artistic prominence was acknowledged with the prestigious Ofuji Award – created by his older sister Yae – at the Mainichi Film Concours. Through the years, the Ofuji Award has been granted to such artists as Kuri Yoji and Tezuka Osamu, among others.

⁴ Surname first, given name second, according to Japanese customary usage.

⁵ He also made a curious propaganda movie: *Sora no arawashi* (Aerial Ace, 1938), where a Japanese Army airplane creates clouds that evoke the familiar figures of Popeye and Stalin.

Masaoka Kenzo

As previously discussed, small animation companies in Japan underwent a process of consolidation, which resulted in the coordination of production.

This also happened to the studio of Masaoka Kenzo (Osaka, 5 October 1898–23 November 1988), but he continued leading his group; in addition to propaganda movies imposed by the historical period, he managed to produce folk story-based short films.

Masaoka studied Japanese and Western music and painting. He started working in cinema as an assistant director, set designer, and actor; starting at the end of the 1920s, he worked in animation at the Nikkatsu Uzumasa Film Studio in Kyoto, starting off with the superb *Sarugashima* (The Monkeys' Island, 1930), which became so popular that a sequel was made. *Chikara to onna no yononaka* (The World of Power and Women, 1933) was the first animated talking picture made in Japan, for which some of the most fashionable actors provided the voices of the characters. The film, addressed to an adult audience, tells the funny story of an employee who falls in love with a secretary, despite his huge, jealous wife. Seo Mitsuyo also took part in the production as an assistant animator.

In 1933, Masaoka founded the Masaoka Eiga Kenkyujo at his house in Kitano, Kyoto; he contributed to the change from drawings on paper to celluloid sheets (very expensive in those days) and to the grand-scale development of the technique. *Chagama ondo* (A Dance Song with a Kettle, 1934), about forest creatures lured by the gramophone playing in a Buddhist monastery, and *Mori no yosei* (A Fairy in the Forest, 1935), were part of his new production studio. These films helped to increase his fame which, thanks also to the graphics and the attitude that characterized the *Silly Symphonies*, led him to be called the 'Japanese Disney'. He was also called the 'Japanese Méliès' for his skill in special effects, as shown in *Kaguya hime* (Princess Kaguya). But, due to the considerable

expense, his company had to close down. He worked by contract at the J.O. Studio⁶ until he set up another company, the Nippon Dogasha (Japanese Animation Company). *Benkei tai Ushikawa* (Benkei the Soldier Priest and Little Samurai Ushikawa, 1939), particularly commended for its expressive use of music, dates back to that period. Yet, the economic situation not being the most favourable, the company ended up being taken over. In 1941, Masaoka started working at Doga Kenkyujo, Shochiku's new animation department, where his masterpiece, *Kumo to churippu* (The Spider and the Tulip, 1943), was produced.

This poetic film was partly based on a country tale written by Yokoyama Michiko, a lady who won a literary competition published by the daily newspaper *Asahi Shinbun*. The story, which unfolds in a nature setting, depicts a ladybird that is chased by a villainous, Don Juan-like womanizing spider but manages to save herself, taking refuge in the tulip petals. The intervention of the Thunder God – who instigates a powerful storm – ultimately tears the spider away, letting the ladybird come out from her shelter and ushering in the return of harmony. The interesting direction – with such suggestive shots as the raindrops seen from below and the skilful usage of music, almost making it an operetta – incensed the military censorship, which disapproved of its non-propagandistic subject.⁷



Figure 15.1 Masaoka Kenzo, *Kumo to churippu* (The Spider and the Tulip), 1943.

⁶ The J.O. Studio, established in 1933, was an important landmark in Japanese animation during the 1930s, especially for its modern equipment which, in the passage from silent film to talkies, contributed to establishing Kyoto as an animation production centre.

⁷ The spider villain – whose features recall the blackface make-up used in American minstrel shows – is, in the context of the alliance period among axis power, sometimes interpreted as a racist characterization. However, it is improbable that the author's intentions included policy and ideological motives and in fact – as we have mentioned – this movie incurred the strict censorship of the time.

Masaoka also produced some films in the post-war period, such as *Sakura – Haru no genso* (Cherry Blossom – The Illusion of Spring, 1946), where he depicted the spring of Kyoto, and *Suteneko Torachan* (Tora-chan, an Orphan Kitty, 1947), a sugary story about a family of anthropomorphic cats that adopt a little orphan feline: These works express a personal and mature style that was clearly formed by watching, with admiration, productions from overseas. After *Torachan to hanayome* (Tora-chan and the Bride, 1948) and *Torachan no Kankan mushi* (Tora-chan's Ship Sweeper, 1950), Masaoka retired because of sight problems, continuing, however, to dedicate his life to animation by drawing storyboards, writing essays, and teaching. Seo Mitsuyo and Mori Yasuji were among his pupils.

Several animators continued to work in the difficult war environment, among them Seo Mitsuyo (26 September 1911–24 August 2010), who opened a studio under his name in 1933. Among his productions, a series about the fighting Osaru Sankichi (Sankichi the Monkey), which used to have a certain fame, *Osaru no Sankichi: Totsugekitai* (Sankichi the Monkey: The Storm Troopers, 1934), set during the Sino-Japanese War, is about the Imperial Army efficaciously attacking a fortress badly protected by Chinese pandas. But Seo Mitsuyo, too, suffered from the destiny of that period and, by 1940, his studio belonged to the bigger company Geijutsu Eigasha. During the war, he succeeded in producing the medium-length movie *Momotaro no umiwashi* (Momotaro's Sea Eagle, 1943) and, finally, *Momotaro, umi no shinpei* (Momotaro's Divine Sea Warriors, 1944), the first feature-length Japanese animation movie.

On a Pacific island, zoomorphic imperial sailors build a runway, do some training, and finally conquer an enemy base in New Guinea. Despite this being a propaganda film aimed at recruiting – as evident in the description of the joyful life of the natives under the Japanese soldiers – it is

fascinating in its own way, particularly due to the realism of the action; of particular value is the sequence in silhouettes (likely realized by Masaoka), where the occupation of Indonesia by European men is narrated. It is a remarkable work considering the productive effort required during a difficult period – an effort that was unparalleled for many years during the post-war period. Momotaro, the man of one of the most famous Japanese legends (famous for having defeated fierce demons in Onigashima with the help of a dog, a monkey, and a pheasant), assumed a key role in the period of war propaganda. In the post-war period, Seo would achieve *Osama no shippo* (The King's Tail, 1949), an animated musical, which was never distributed. He would eventually give up animation to become a draughtsman with the nickname of Seo Taro.

An important figure of the post-war period, Yokoyama Ryuichi (Kochi, 17 May 1909–8 November 2001), had already begun to operate during the war. He joined the research staff at Photo Chemical Laboratory (PCL), the forerunner of Toho, where he started studying animation production. He viewed Disney's *Skeleton Dance*, and it was love at first sight. In 1936, he started to publish (in the *Asahi Shinbun* of Tokyo) *Eddoko Kenchan*, a series of comics later called *Fukuchan*⁸: In 1944, Yokoyama made this into a medium-length propaganda movie called *Fukuchan no sensuikan* (Fukuchan and the Submarine), though the film was attributed to Sekiya Isoji.⁹

Much as in the United States, some of the best-known characters proved to be ideal vehicles for propaganda: Even Norakuro, the black dog of the Imperial Army and the protagonist of the homonymous manga (published since 1931, with popularity and merchandizing success uncommon for the era) followed *Fukuchan* and *Momotaro* in that direction. Norakuro appeared in five animation shorts, starting in 1933 with *Norakuro nitohei – Kyoren no maki* (Private Second-Class Norakuro), filmed by the cut-out animation master Murata Yasuji. Seo later also worked with the character.

Arai Wajiro (Kojimachi, 11 December 1907), a dentist who was interested in animation as a hobby, was

It should also be noted that the cultural-political climate in the pre-war years had (through the trendy Japanese 'modern boys', who were strongly westernized) spread through Japan a passion for contemporary American music, particularly black music, which probably influenced Masaoka's operetta-like film. The stereotyped representation of the character can also be explained by both the cultural and geographical distance between Japan and United States at that time (thanks to Ilan Nguyen for the information).

⁸ Yokoyama stopped the series of *Fukuchan* in 1971 with Episode 5534. He was awarded, for his importance in the cultural Japanese landscape, with the ministerial prize Person of Cultural Merit in 1994, the first cartoonist to receive that honour. He was also honoured, in 2000, with the dedication of the Ryuichi Yokoyama Memorial Manga Museum in his birthplace of Kochi.

⁹ Sekiya was credited due to the missing qualification of Yokoyama as director, a qualification that had been made compulsory by the Film Law since 1939.

encouraged by continuous praise to become a professional. The first of his films was *Kōgane no tsuribari* (The Golden Hook, 1939), made with silhouettes, which was soon followed by the well-received *Ocho fujin no genso* (Fantasy of Madame Butterfly, 1940), whose story – adapted from the famous Giacomo Puccini opera – was well suited for propaganda.

Oishi Ikuo is also well known for the funny *Ugoki ekori no takehiki* (The Fox versus the Raccoon, 1933): A fox disguised as a samurai spends the night in a desert temple, but a family of *tanuki* (Japanese raccoon dogs), thanks to their magic powers and ability to transform, throw the undesired creature out. Graphically, the characters have a style that is more caricatured and simple in comparison with other works of the same period, influenced by Felix the Cat and benefiting from very fluid movement.

Kimura Hakuzan

Another noteworthy artist is Kimura Hakuzan, a pupil of Seitaro. He made the first Japanese erotic animated film: *Suzumibune* (The Tourists' Boat, 1932). An individual work, it is a story outlined with a humorous touch, inspired by the erotic prints of the end of the eighteenth century. Censored by Japanese authorities, it was not distributed until 1945, when it was discovered by Americans and reproduced.

A Brave New World

The Changed Frame

Further to the defeat in World War II, Japan came under the control of the General Headquarters (GHQ) and of General Douglas MacArthur, Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers (SCAP) in particular. In September of the same year, the Civil Censorship Detachment (CCD) was created, controlled by the SCAP, which replaced military censorship and exerted strict control over all civil mass media. It was imposed to avoid issues involving Japanese imperialism, as well as any attempt to criticize the allied forces, or simply concerning topics such as A-bombs. Furthermore, the Civil Information and Education Section (CI&E) was supposed to try to infuse the occupants' way of life.

The country, which had just come out of the war, was exhausted both in spirit and in terms of infrastructure:

Nearly seventy percent of its merchant fleet, the Archipelago's main means of connection, had been torpedoed; bombings and colonies' abandonment led to the loss of over two-thirds of its industrial strength. Finally, air strikes over urban areas had caused eight million homeless; nearly five million were unemployed from the destruction of production plants all over the country and from the abandonment of those in occupied territories and in the former colonies – not counting the over six million soldiers also repatriated from the front.¹⁰

The emperor himself, in a famous radio message on 15 August 1945, asserted that the Japanese had to 'endure the unendurable, tolerate the intolerable'.

Mochinaga Tadahito and His Legacy

Puppet animation also began during those years, thanks to founder Mochinaga Tadahito (3 March 1919–1 April 1999). He was born in Tokyo but soon after moved to Manchuria¹¹ with his family and, in the following years, he often came back to Japan. During secondary school, he discovered an interest in animation: He was charmed by one of the *Silly Symphonies*, *Water Babies* (1935) and, thanks to *Magic Clock* (1928), produced in France by Ladislav Starewitch, he also started to become interested in puppet animation.

He was employed by the Animation Department of Geijutsu Eigasha (Art Film Company) in 1939; as the assistant of director Seo Mitsuyo, he worked on *Arichan* (Ant Boy, 1941), a poetic short film for the Ministry of Education in which an ant is charmed by some violin music played by a cricket. The importance of this film lies primarily in the use of the first four-level multiplane camera used in Japan, which Mochinaga himself built for this production. He subsequently created settings and dealt with the image composition for *Momotaro's Sea Eagle*.

Sick from too much work and the repeated air bombardments, he migrated with his wife Ayako to Manchuria's

¹⁰ Francesco Gatti, *Storia del Giappone contemporaneo* (A History of Contemporary Japan), Mondadori, Milan, 2002, p. 112.

¹¹ Mochinaga's father used to work for the South Manchuria Railway Company, which came under Japanese control in 1905.

capital city Changchun in 1945, where he had some relatives. Changchun was under Japanese control until the end of World War II. Mochinaga entered Man'ei (the Manchurian Film Association, one of the greatest Asian studios of that age) and decided to stay there even when, as soon as the war finished, the company was taken over by the Chinese and renamed the Tong Pei Film Studio (North-east Film Studio). The civil war between the Nationalists, led by Chiang Kai-Shek, and the Communists of Mao Zedong forced the members of the studio to flee northward to the city of Hao Gang in 1946. There they founded the new Tong Pei Film Studio, where Mochinaga enthusiastically took part in the construction of new Chinese cinematography, helped by his wife.

He made the first puppet animation in China in 1947: a thirty-five-minute film entitled *The Emperor's Dream*, whose aim was to satirize an incapable Chiang Kai-Shek and denounce his control by Americans. Mochinaga also fulfilled several roles in the production of the Chinese cel animation *The Turtle Caught in the Jar* (also a caricature of Chiang) but was credited only as director under the Chinese name Tsuyon. In 1949, the group was able to go back to Changchun, working for the new animation division of the art department: Te Wei, an animator from Shanghai,¹² was the leader, and Mochinaga started a friendship with him. With the foundation of the Popular Republic of China, the Culture Division had a new policy for animated productions, now entirely addressed to a child audience. The animation division was moved to Shanghai – where Chinese animation was born and professional personnel were easily available – thus becoming a department of Shanghai Film Studios. Mochinaga directed *Thank You, Kitty* (1950), the story of a cat who watches a village during the night in order to protect its inhabitants. Thanks to the respect he had acquired over the years, Mochinaga was nicknamed Fan Ming ('bright direction').

Mochinaga and his wife Ayako returned to Japan in 1953 after years of cooperation that ended up professionally enriching both young Chinese animators and the Japanese artist. Throughout his career, Mochinaga personified a vital connection between the worlds of Chinese and Japanese animation.

In 1953, television started broadcasting in Japan; in 1955, Mochinaga founded Ningyo Eiga Seisakusho (the

Puppet Animation Film Studio) in Tokyo, thus starting advertisement production for the new medium. Among his followers there were Kawamoto Kihachiro and Iizawa Tadasu. From 1956 to 1959, he directed nine short puppet films for children, often shown in primary schools, based mainly on Japanese traditional legends but also on foreign fairy and folk tales, such as *Chibikuro Sanbo no tora taiji* (Little Black Sambo and His Twin Brother, 1957). Thanks to the screening of *Little Black Sambo and His Twin Brother* at the Vancouver International Film Festival, Mochinaga was contacted by Arthur Rankin, Jr. (born in 1924) of the American production company Videocraft International and, in 1961 – together with the surviving personnel of Geijutsu Eigasha – founded MOM Film Studio to animate puppet films for Videocraft (later, Rankin/Bass Productions) to broadcast on American television. MOM started with 130 segments (five minutes each) of *The New Adventures of Pinocchio* (1961), followed by such works as *Willy McBean and His Magic Machine* (1963), *Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer* (1964), *Ballad of Smokey the Bear* (1966), and *Mad Monster Party*.² (1967). Videocraft directed all the productions, sending the script and pre-recorded voices and sounds to Mochinaga and the members of his team, who handled creation of the puppet models and the animation.¹³ With such commissions, MOM represented an example of remarkable industrialization in animation, with a staff of 130 people (Okamoto Tadanari, Nakamura Takeo, and Oikawa Koichi among them). Mochinaga directed the studio until his departure in 1967.

In the following years, he continued to promote cooperation between artists in China and Japan, maintaining a relationship with Shanghai Film Production and teaching the technique of animation from 1985 to 1989 at Beijing Film Academy. He also organized original initiatives such as the Retrospective of the Shanghai Animated Film Studio in Tokyo and collaborated with the Hiroshima and Shanghai Festivals. He produced and directed his last short film in puppet animation in 1992: the melancholic *Shonen to kodanuki* (A Badger and a Boy), in which a badger is transformed into a baby girl to follow a boy riding her bike. He presented the work at both the Hiroshima and Shanghai Festivals,

¹² Te Wei had worked in animated productions for anti-Japanese propaganda; subsequently, he was well known as a director of films realized with the Chinese brush-and-ink technique.

¹³ Mochinaga was credited as 'Tad Mochinaga'.

confirming himself as a Japanese animator who lived in two worlds.¹⁴

Ichikawa Kon

Born in Uji Yamada,¹⁵ in the province of Mie, on 20 November 1915 (he died in the same town on 13 February 2008), Ichikawa Kon discovered his vocation while watching Walt Disney's movies. As he recalled later, in them he found everything that interested him: cinema, painting, and drawing. During 1936–1937, the J.O. Studio, which had a small animation department, opened in Kaiko No Yashiro, near Kyoto, and Ichikawa was hired. Animation, however, turned out to be an economic liability for the studio and was gradually eliminated: Production decreased and, eventually, the team dissolved. 'I was the only one left', Ichikawa recalled, 'and I did everything. I would draw, animate, film and write the scripts'.¹⁶ In 1939, he directed a short, *Kachikachi yama* (The Hare Gets Revenge over the Raccoon, 1939); the film, which definitely derives its drawings and structure from the *Silly Symphonies*, makes remarkable use of music.¹⁷

When the animation department finally closed, Ichikawa was assigned to a group of assistant directors for

live-action movies. In 1944, the studio (which, meanwhile, had been renamed Toho Eiga and had moved to Tokyo, following a merger with other companies) decided to produce an animated puppet film and promoted young Ichikawa, the only animation expert, to director. The movie, entitled *Musume Dojoji* (A Girl at Dôjô's Temple, 1947), was an adaptation from a Kabuki drama. Those who were able to view it proclaimed it excellent, but the American authorities commanding the occupation troops in defeated Japan prohibited the showing of the film. Late in his life, Ichikawa claimed that *A Girl at Dôjô's Temple* was his best work.¹⁸

In the 1950s, the director turned to live-action films. After some comedies, in 1953 he made his first masterpiece, the dramatic *Pusan* (Mr. Pu). In 1956, he attained well-deserved international fame with *Biruma no tategoto* (The Burmese Harp). In 1959, he directed his third masterpiece, *Nobi* (Fires on the Plains). Ichikawa can be considered one of the masters of Japanese cinema, along with Kurosawa Akira, Ozu Yasujiro, and Mizoguchi Kenji. His inspiration, however, waned with his documentary on the Tokyo Olympic Games of 1964, and among the many uninteresting dramas he was then appointed to direct, some films brought him back to his animator past (*Topo Jijio no botan senso* [Topo Gigio and the Missile War], 1967; *Hinotori* [The Phoenix], 1978).

¹⁴ In October 1986, he was the only Japanese officially invited to witness the celebrations of the sixty years of Chinese animation at Shanghai Animation Film Studio. In the *China Cinema Encyclopedia* (Shanghai: Shanghai cishu chubanshe, 1996), Mochinaga is listed as 'Fan Ming: an animation director, Japanese'.

¹⁵ This is currently Ise.

¹⁶ Quoted in Angelo Solmi, *Kon Ichikawa*, La Nuova Italia, Florence, 1975, p. 75.

¹⁷ More information about this period comes from an interview given by Ichikawa to Mori Yuki:

We made a series called *Hana yori Dagonosuke*. Dagonosuke, who is a sort of mixture between Mickey Mouse and Momotarô, is the protagonist, and he dispatches bad guys in each episode. It was a simple story. We began with a scenario. Music was composed next, and recorded with dialogue and sound effects, which were completed before we drew the pictures, basing the continuity on the soundtrack. . . . We were not able to draw pictures unless we could read music. So I took piano lessons, but I did not progress quickly because my fingers were already so stiff. I gave up at page sixty of the basic textbook. [Laughs]

(Ichikawa Kon and Mori Yuki, 'Beginnings', in James Quandt [ed.] *Kon Ichikawa*, Cinematheque, Toronto, 2010, p. 24)

¹⁸ More information about this film comes from an interview given by Ichikawa to Mori Yuki:

The army was making consolation films for southern countries at that time. . . . First I tried to make Ryûnosuke Akutagawa's *Hana*, and I even started writing a scenario. I changed my mind and instead reinterpreted the classic *Dôjôji*, because I thought it would be better for foreign audience to see something Japanese and gorgeous. I wrote the script with my friend Keiji Asabe. . . . The film violated the censorship system of Ghq [General Headquarters of the American occupying forces]. Films whose scripts were not censored before shooting were not allowed to be public screened. We started making *A Girl at Dôjô Temple* before the war was over, and completed it in the fall of 1945. There was no such censor system when we started.

(Ichikawa Kon and Mori Yuki, 'Beginnings', in James Quandt [ed.] *Kon Ichikawa*, Cinematheque, Toronto, 2010, p. 32)

Although he quit animation except for a few sporadic productions, his precious compositions of images and pictorial shot balance illustrate his figurative achievements and his expertise in the field.

China

Historically, China has been one of the most restless countries of the twentieth century, troubled by civil war, foreign invasions, and internal upheavals. Chinese live-action cinema felt the influence of these events both in production and, more significantly, in content. The beginning dates back to 1923, when foreigners and Chinese entrepreneurs financed the construction of movie theatres in Shanghai, followed by developments in Hong Kong, Beijing, Nanking, and Chengchow.

For a long time, China was represented in the field of animation only by the four Wan brothers – the twins Wan Laiming (1900–1997¹⁹; his real name²⁰ was Wan Jiazong) and Wan Guchan (1900–1995; his real name was Wan Jiaqi), Wan Chaochen (1906–1992; his real name was Wan Jiajie), and Wan Dihuan (1907; his real name was Wan Jiakun). Having been attracted since childhood to figures in movement, the brothers made their first animated film, *Uproar in the Art Studio*, in 1926, followed by *The Revolt of the Paper Figures* in 1930. The Wans, who were set designers for live-action cinema, made these films in an amateurish fashion, repeating the Fleischers' formula of drawings that come to life independent of the will of a human protagonist.

In the early 1930s, their production increased and included two tales (*The Race of the Hare and the Tortoise* and *The Grasshopper and the Ant*) and patriotic films inspired by the Japanese attacks on Shanghai on 28 January 1932 and on Shenyang on 18 September 1931 (*Compatriot*, 1932; *Wake Up*, 1931; *The Price of Blood*, 1934).

In 1933, the Wans (now three, as the youngest, Dihuan, had left the group to devote himself to photography) found some stability within the production company Mingshin, which asked them to develop an animation department. For four years after 1933, they produced the *Cartoon Collection*, a series of six films. Some, such as *The Year of Chinese Goods* (the third of the series), encouraged audiences to buy national products.

The Painful History of the Nation (the fourth of the series) and *The New Wave* (the fifth of the series) denounced imperialist aggression. Another series was centred on Miss Lu's father (a little man with a square jaw who dressed in Western clothes). Another series mixed live-action shots (with child actress Zhang Minyu) with animated drawings.

In 1935, the Wans made the country's first animated sound film, *The Camel's Dance*.

The brothers were outspoken about their ideas and beliefs concerning art. In 1936, they wrote an article for a journal published by the production company for which they worked. In it, they praised American, Soviet, and German animation but also maintained the need to find an indigenous Chinese style and humour and stated their goal of teaching, not merely entertaining. All these themes would reappear later in the People's Republic of China.

When the Japanese invaded Shanghai (13 August 1937), the filmmakers escaped to the still-free city of Wuhan. The events inspired their new productions, including five films for the Manifestos of the War of Resistance series and seven for the series Songs of the War of Resistance (featuring the Fleischers' theme of the bouncing ball). Then Wuhan also fell into the hands of the Japanese army. Since it was not possible to work in Chungking, where the Wans' production company was based at the time, the brothers returned to Shanghai in 1940. There, Wan Laiming and Wan Guchan established another team of animators inside the unified Shinhwa Company and began their most daring venture – the first Chinese feature film.

Work began under shaky diplomatic protection, since the animators' atelier was located in the French concession (which the occupation troops respected, like other foreign concessions, until 1941). The film (shown to the public in 1941) was entitled *The Princess with the Iron Fan* and was based on a chapter from the traditional Chinese novel *Journey to the West*. In it, a monk, Shwangzang, crosses a mountain of flames in search of sacred Buddhist texts, accompanied by the pig Zhu Baizhe; the priest Shaseng; and Sun Wukong, the Monkey King. After many adventures, the film's true protagonist, Sun Wukong, manages to get a magic fan from the Buffalo King's wife and extinguishes the flames. Marie-Claire Quiquemelle wrote:

¹⁹ Sources indicate that the twins were born in Nanking on 18 January 1900; however, according to Wan Laiming himself, the year was 1899.

²⁰ In China, many artists and writers become famous by their pen names instead of their real names given by their parents. For instance, Wan Laiming, Wan Guchan, and Wan Chaochen are all pen names.



Figure 15.2 Wan Laiming and Wan Guchan, *The Princess with the Iron Fan*, 1941. Credit: Cinema Epoch.

This production, on the ‘orphan island’ of the French Concession in the middle of the war, was a real feat not only on the artistic level but also on the technical level: seventy artists, in two teams, worked without a break for a year and four months, all in the same room, in limited space, in the cold of the winter, and in the atrocious heat of the summer.

To ensure the accuracy of the movement, certain scenes were filmed with actors to serve as a guide to the artists.²¹

The film was well received in China, Singapore, and Indonesia. Its success was probably helped by a veiled patriotism, particularly as Sun Wukong’s victory over the Buffalo King was obtained with the alliance of the people. From an aesthetic viewpoint, the film made interesting contributions. Quiquemelle writes: ‘This film, with its many inventions, sparkles with humour, fantasy and

poetry. It is a delight to the spectator.’²² While this statement is probably an exaggeration (the narration often drags, the drawings and the animation of the characters are flawed, and the fusion between American teaching and Chinese artistic tradition is not in sync), the originality and autochthonous strength of the film compensate for its defects.

As the war and the political situation grew worse, production on the following work, a feature film entitled *The World of Insects*, was stalled. In the meantime, other Chinese artists had turned to animation. In 1941, a group of young Hong Kong artists, founders of the Association of Chinese Animation, released *The Hunger of the Old Stupid Dog*. In Changqing, Qian Jajun (26 November 1916) produced some shorts. In 1946, in Manchuria, the Communist Party sponsored *The Emperor’s Dream* (by Chen Bo’er, with animated puppets; screened in 1947) and the previously mentioned *The Turtle Caught in the Jar* (1948, by Fan Ming – i.e. Tadahito Mochinaga).

²¹ Marie-Claire Quiquemelle, ‘I fratelli Wan, sessant’anni di cinema d’animazione in Cina’, in Marco Müller (ed.) *Ombre elettriche – Saggi e ricerche sul cinema cinese*, Electa, Milan, 1982; and *Les frères Wan et 60 ans de dessins animés chinois/ The Wan Brothers and 60 Years of Animated Films in China* festival booklet, Festival d’Annecy, Annecy, 1985.

²² Marie-Claire Quiquemelle, ‘I fratelli Wan, sessant’anni di cinema d’animazione in Cina’, in Marco Müller (ed.) *Ombre elettriche – Saggi e ricerche sul cinema cinese*, Electa, Milan, 1982; and *Les frères Wan et 60 ans de dessins animés chinois/ The Wan Brothers and 60 Years of Animated Films in China* festival booklet, Festival d’Annecy, Annecy, 1985.