



Asian Educational Media Service and
The Center for East Asian and Pacific Studies
of the University of Illinois present:

Asian Film Festival 2008: Young in Japan

Friday through Sunday

October 3-5, 2008

Boardman's Art Theatre
126 W. Church Street
Champaign, Illinois

The Taste of Tea
(Cha no aji)

Josée, the Tiger and the Fish
(Joze to tora to sakanatachi)

Kamikaze Girls
(Shimotsuma monogatari)

Train Man
(Densha otoko)

Hinokio

Wings of Defeat

Welcome!

On behalf of the Asian Educational Media Service and the Center for East Asian and Pacific Studies, welcome to the University of Illinois's sixth annual Asian Film Festival! This year we return to Japan for the first time since our inaugural Asian Film Festival in 2003.

Heirs to an innovative film industry with a long, rich history, Japanese filmmakers have produced a range of fascinating films in recent years, exploring from many different angles the dilemmas of Japan's youth. From anime and manga to cell phones and fashion, Japanese youth culture today is a global trend-setter, often perceived as a festival of Hello Kitty-styled cuteness fueled by unbridled consumerism. But despite these happy images, Japanese youth are also adrift and troubled in their affluence and leisure. Alienated from their own history and blocked from meaningful cultural and political engagement they struggle creatively to transcend their isolation, finding connection with one another through new technologies and subcultures.

From a down-to-earth love story to a kitschy, J-Pop romp; from a robot fantasy for kids to a surreal yet gentle family portrait, these films not only speak to the lives of Japanese youth but also echo how we navigate our own digitized, fragmented future and illustrate how we can still cherish our humanity.

The Asian Film Festival is the result of contributions and hard work from many individuals and organizations, recognized on this page and in the advertisements throughout, and we extend our appreciation and gratitude to all of them. Warm thanks also to those who can help support the Asian Film Festival with a small donation in the lobby.

Thank you for coming and we hope you will enjoy Asian Film Festival 2008: Young in Japan!

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Asian Film Festival 2008: Young In Japan

Friday, October 3

7:00 pm Taste of Tea (Cha no aji)

10:00 pm Kamikaze Girls (Shimotsuma monogatari)

Saturday, October 4

1:00 pm Hinokio

3:30 pm Wings of Defeat

7:00 pm Train Man (Densha otoko)

9:15 pm Josee, the Tiger and the Fish
(Joze to tora to sakanatachi)

Sunday, October 5

1:00 pm Taste of Tea (Cha no aji)

4:00 pm Josee, the Tiger and the Fish
(Joze to tora to sakanatachi)

7:00 pm Kamikaze Girls (Shimotsuma monogatari)

Written and directed by relative newcomer Katsuhito Ishii, and the winner of multiple international film awards, *A Taste of Tea* is a relaxed, meandering introduction to the members of the Haruno family, who live in a rural setting just outside of contemporary Tokyo. With the help of dazzling and appropriately surreal imagery, Ishii externalizes the internal lives of his characters, eventually tying their stories together into a poignant celebration of family love and the individual pursuit of dreams.



The Taste Of Tea

(Cha no aji)

Friday, 7:00 pm
Sunday, 1:00 pm

2004, 143 min.

Directed by Katsuhito Ishii

Ishii's effort to explore inner states is coyly suggested by the parents' occupations--Nabou, the father, is a clinical hypnotist who occasionally practices on his family, and Yoshio, the mother, is a professional animator trying to revive her career. Their young daughter, Sachiko, is literally overshadowed by a giant version of her alter ego looming on her horizons, while her older brother, Hajime, struggles to attract the attention of the proverbial girl of his dreams. Uncle Ayano drops in on the family for some rehab after his own battles with love, while grandfather Akira strikes absurd poses for Yoshio's artistic efforts, in between secret sessions of devoted attention to his own creative endeavors.

All of the actors exhibit a casual, natural grace that enhances the film's own dream-like atmosphere, and even the minor actors avoid descent into stereotypical, stock characters. Hailed by many critics as a masterpiece of Japanese cinema, the eccentric, gently humorous humanism of *A Taste of Tea* has made each subsequent effort by the young writer and director, Katsuhito Ishii, a highly anticipated event.

Tim Engles is an associate professor of English at Eastern Illinois University



Josée, The Tiger And The Fish

(Joze to tora to sakanatachi)

Saturday, 9:15 pm

Sunday, 4:00 pm

2003, 116 min.

Directed by Isshin Inudou



Isshin Inudo's 2003 feature, *Josée, the Tiger, and the Fish*, is a film that defies categorization. Based on a short story by best-selling author Seiko Tanabe, the film shifts effortlessly from comedy to melodrama and back, unraveling an involved tale about two complicated people and their changing relationships with one another. Tsuneo (actor and pop star Satoshi Tsumabuki) is a college student who seems to spend more time playing the field than doing his schoolwork, supporting himself by working nights in a mah-jong parlor.

Kumiko (Chizuru Ikewaki) is a disabled young woman who lives in poverty with her frail grandmother, and goes by the rather elegant name Josée, borrowed from the Françoise Sagan novel that provides an escape from her dismal everyday life.

To say much more about these two characters, or how they meet and interact with one another would do a disservice to a quiet and thoughtful work that rewards viewers with small surprises at every turn. Performances by Tsumabuki, the star of such hits as *Waterboys* (Shinobu Yaguchi, 2001) and *Sixty-nine* (Lee Sang-il, 2004), and Chizuru Ikewaki, who later appeared in the gritty-but-entertaining *Strawberry Shortcakes* (Hitoshi Yazaki, 2006) are both first rate.

At times ruthlessly heartbreaking, *Josée, the Tiger, and the Fish*, which enjoyed overwhelming critical and commercial success in Japan, is ultimately a life-affirming work with a final moment more cathartic than tragic. Like Josée herself and her beloved Françoise Sagan novel, found among the discarded belongings of her neighbors, Inudo's film is an easily overlooked treasure that reveals the wealth of beauty hidden beneath the dingy façade of everyday life.

Robert Cagle is the University Library Cinema Studies Specialist and an Assistant Professor in the UIUC Unit for Cinema Studies.



Asian Film Festival 2008: Young In Japan

Kamikaze Girls

(Shimotsuma monogatari)

Friday, 10:00 pm

Sunday, 7:00 pm

2004, 103 min.

Directed by Tetsuya Nakashima



“Fashion became my teacher. It taught me how to live. The clothes made me want to be worthy of them.” To Momoko, a seventeen-year-old girl in her frilly dress complete with a lacy bonnet on her dyed hair, “appearance is everything.” She doesn’t mind travelling 2.5 hours to Tokyo to shop at her favorite clothing shop, Baby, The Stars Shine Bright (an actual shop and brand name) and she even sells the fake “Versach” shirts of her “useless” ex-yakuza (gangster) father to pay for her indulgences. Although Momoko may be a fish out of water living in Shimotsuma

—where nobody seems to care about fashion and one supermarket takes care of all clothing needs of the town—she is still happy as long as she can live in her French Rococo fantasy world. Her “Gothic Lolita” dresses and her habit of disconnecting herself from the reality of 21st-century Shimotsuma is made possible by consumerism, pretension, and her principle of life: “all humans are born alone, think alone, and die alone.”

But Momoko’s world of comfort is penetrated in an awkward encounter with Ichigo in her “kamikaze” jumpsuit and shaved eyebrows, a dynamic young woman who was once an emotionally repressed adolescent and now belongs to an all-girl biker gang.

Perhaps the English title of the film (*Kamikaze girls*) is misleading, if not ironic, for it is not the superficial “toughness” of Ichigo’s biker gang, itself a product of Japan’s postwar transformation, that Momoko and Ichigo turn to, but to the inner strength they see in their friendship and in each other to stand firm against social pressure to conform. Seasoned with animated scenes and based on a popular novel by Takemoto Novala in a country where nine out of ten women own at least one Louis Vuitton item, this film provides a window to changing subcultures of Japanese teenagers from eccentric fashion consumerism to the rise and fall of the motorcycle gang phenomenon.

Jinhee Lee is assistant professor of history at Eastern Illinois University





Train Man

(Densha otoko)

Saturday, 7:00 pm

2005, 100 min.

Directed by Shosuke Murakami

Boy meets girl. Boy saves girl from drunk on train. Girl sends boy expensive thank-you gift plus phone number. Boy happens to be a socially inept otaku (obsessive fan of anime, manga and video games) and must consult a forum of other otaku to help him win her heart. As quirky as it sounds, it is not the plot of Murakami Shosuke's 2005 *Densha Otoko* (*Train Man*) so much as its lead character "Densha" (literally, "Train") that audiences find so compelling. Densha's story began on the popular online forum 2channel and was catapulted to mainstream attention when one of the forum members, Nakano Hitori, published the related threads as *Densha Otoko*, a "novel." Densha's story was so captivating it was quickly carried over into other mediums, including four manga series, an anime, a television drama, and of course, this film.

The film version of *Densha Otoko* differs from the original story, but is nonetheless credited with the widespread success of the franchise and more importantly, a marked change in the way otaku are viewed in Japanese society. Prior to the release of *Densha Otoko*, the term "otaku" had a relatively negative connotation, partially due to a serial killer named Miyazaki Tsutomu (aka "the Otaku Killer") who raped and murdered four elementary school aged girls in the late 1980s. But *Densha Otoko* succeeded in humanizing otaku and improving their image across Japan. American audiences will react similarly to the struggles and triumphs of "Densha" whose endearing awkwardness and perseverance will make audiences think twice before they dismiss someone as nothing more than a "geek."

Rachel Charlow Lenz is a graduate student of Japanese literature at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign.

Wings Of Defeat

Saturday, 3:30 pm

Directed by Risa Morimoto
Written by Linda Hoglund

2007, 90 min.

Filmmakers' Statement

Risa Morimoto was born and raised in New York, the daughter of Japanese artists. Linda Hoaglund was born and raised in rural Japan, the daughter of liberal American missionaries. Risa learned about World War II in American schools and always dreaded December 7th as the day her classmates would blame her for the Japanese "sneak attack" on Pearl Harbor. Linda learned about WWII in Japanese schools, dreading any mention



of Hiroshima, when all her classmates would stare accusingly at her. Despite her Japanese heritage, Risa never questioned that Kamikaze pilots were fanatics who happily crashed their planes into American ships. Linda, despite her American citizenship, grew up believing the Kamikazes were innocent victims who had willingly sacrificed their lives to a war in which hundreds of thousands of Japanese had been firebombed by American planes.

When Risa learned that her own uncle had trained as a Kamikaze, she was inspired to interview former Kamikaze pilots. Instead of meeting suicidal maniacs, she encountered gentle, sometimes resentful, always thoughtful men in their 80s, willing to share every detail of their fears, ambivalence, patriotism and survivors' guilt. Profoundly shaken by what they shared with her, she decided to make a film. When Risa asked Linda to join her, she instantly agreed, knowing this was a rare opportunity to re-examine the Kamikaze legacy and with it, the international record of WWII.

The resulting documentary film, *Wings of Defeat*, is an opportunity to examine the real history of the Kamikaze, reviled in the West as precursors of suicide bombers, while still hallowed by many Japanese as selfless martyrs. The stories of the survivors reveal something very different. The filmmakers hope that their unique collaboration will result in an unusual opportunity to revisit the history of World War II from a bicultural perspective, mourning all those who died in the war and the sacrifices demanded of them by militarists who refused to admit obvious defeat.

**Wings of Defeat:
A Teacher Workshop on
Japanese Kamikaze Pilots in World War II**

Monday, Sept. 29, 2008, 4:00pm – 7:00pm
Champaign Central High School
Library Lecture Hall

In conjunction with Asian Film Festival 2008: Young in Japan, AEMS offers an opportunity for educators to engage with documentary film as a tool to teach about Japanese and World War II history. This workshop introduces and contextualizes the 2007 documentary film *Wings Of Defeat*, by Risa Morimoto and Linda Hoaglund. Although targeted at secondary educators, educators of all levels (K-12 and undergraduate) are welcome to attend.

The workshop includes a presentation by Roger Purdy placing the kamikaze in historical context; a screening of the shorter, 56-minute version of the film; a introduction by Gary Mukai to the teacher's guide that he recently developed for *Wings of Defeat*; and opportunity for discussion over dinner.

General information and materials on Japan are also be provided and CPDU credit is available to teachers.

Presenters:

Roger W. Purdy is associate professor of history and coordinator of East Asian studies at John Carroll University in Cleveland, Ohio. He received his BA in History and Asian Studies from Brigham Young University and his Ph.D. in History from the University of California, Santa Barbara. He is currently doing research on Japan's wartime news media with special focus on Japanese war-time newsreels.

Gary Mukai is the director of the Stanford Program on International and Cross-Cultural Education (SPICE). Before joining SPICE in 1988, Gary was a teacher in Japan and in California for ten years. He is a graduate of the University of California, Berkeley, and Stanford University.



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Asian Film Festival 2008: Young In Japan

Takahiro Akiyama's *Hinokio* opens in a hospital emergency room as a pre-teen boy named Satoru (Kanata Hongo) regains consciousness just in time to see his mother pass away. From this sad beginning emerges a heartwarming story in which technology both alienates and unites its characters.



Hinokio

Saturday, 1:00 pm

2005, 111 min.

Directed by Takahiko Akiyama

Left temporarily disabled by the accident that took his mother's life, estranged and reluctant to heal, Satoru locks himself in his darkened bedroom, refusing to talk to his father. So his father builds him a robot, named Hinokio, whom Satoru sends to school in his place. Hinokio immediately becomes the center of attention at school. Like Pinocchio, after whom he is named, the little wooden (and plastic and titanium) boy soon finds himself entangled in a variety of misadventures that form a series of subplots, interweaving with one another, and raising increasingly complex and troubling questions about the experience of young people in contemporary Japan. Most notable among these is the issue of "shut-in" culture, a phenomenon prevalent among Japanese teens who retreat into lives completely mediated by electronic devices.

But despite its specifically Japanese context, the lessons the film teaches are universal: its uplifting story, which at first glance seems simple and geared toward a very young audience, is sophisticated enough to address mature themes, encouraging meaningful discussions about topics as diverse as friendship, love, loss, disability, alienation, suicide, and bullying. It tackles some of the most common challenges that we face in our day-to-day communications with others, approaching them with a mixture of laughter and pathos, outstanding performances and breathtaking special effects.

Robert Cagle is the University Library Cinema Studies Specialist and an assistant professor in the UIUC Unit for Cinema Studies.



E|A|P|S | The Center for
East Asian and
Pacific Studies

The Center for East Asian and Pacific Studies (EAPS) is the steward of campus-wide teaching, research, programming, and outreach on East Asia, as well as Southeast Asia and the Pacific. EAPS serves almost 100 affiliate specialists, as well as over 30 off campus affiliates across the state. EAPS strives to broadly support the research, teaching, and service missions of the University of Illinois.



Asian Educational Media Service

The Asian Educational Media Service (AEMS) is a program of the Center for East Asian and Pacific Studies at the University of Illinois. Our mission is to promote understanding of Asian cultures and peoples and to assist educators at all levels, from elementary schools to colleges and universities, in finding multimedia resources for learning and teaching about Asia.

AsiaLENS

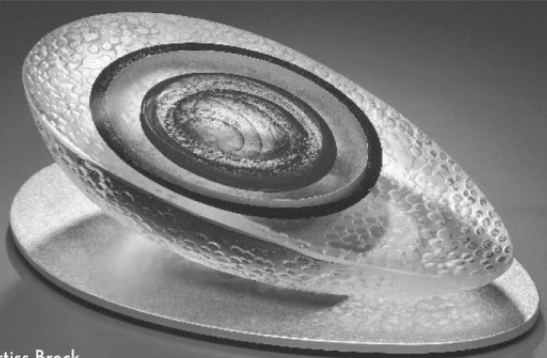
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Concert Prep, 6:15pm, Foellinger Great Hall Free



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Global Transfer Afterglow: Yang Ying Band

Yang Ying was the founder of Cobra, the first all-female rock band in China, and before that, she was renowned as the principal erhu soloist with the Chinese National Song and Dance Ensemble. *Blurring Boundaries*, her latest CD with a talented band of instrumentalists from across genres, celebrates Yang's many facets by combining ancient Chinese rhythms with jazz improvisations and unexpected inflections. Thursday, November 6 at about 10pm | Free

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Asia

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