

The Cinema History of Japan

Such Items like The Kinetoscope, The Vitascope and Cinematograph were not shown in Japan until late 1896 even though most of these items were released in the U.S in 1894, the reason for this big gap is unknown.

While the equipment used for film making by U.S standards was not available until late in 1896 the idea of moving picture was around in Japan for 100s of years with the use of their rich traditions of pre cinema devices such as the Gento or the magic lantern that was a very early type of projector using pictures on sheets of glass.

In 1897 the first successful Japanese film was made and it showed sights within Tokyo.

In 1898 various ghost films were made such as Shiro Asano shorts "Shinin no sosei" and "Bake Jizo" and the first Japanese documentary "Geisha no teodori" was made in June of 1899.

Very Early Japanese films were influenced by traditional theatre with things such as Kabuki and Bonraku.

At the start of 20th century theatres in Japan hired Benshi – Japanese performers who provided narration for silent films not only for Japanese films but Western films too, Benshi could at times be accompanied by music similar to silent films in the west but with the advent of sound in motion picture in the 1930s the Benshi gradually disappeared.

Popular Actors of the Silent era in Japan – Matsu Isuke Onoe and Tokihiko Okada

Shozo Maki was considered a pioneering director of Japanese film.

1950 was the golden age of Japanese cinema and was also the introduction of colour in film the first being Carmen comes home directed by Keisuke Kinoshita.

1954 is the year that one of the biggest and most iconic Japanese films was released, Godzilla was realised in 1954 and was directed by Ishiro Honda and has gone on to become an international icon and even spawned its own subgenre of Kaiji.