Recent years have seen an explosion of worldwide interest in Japanese popular media, including manga (comics), anime (animation), and films. These works in fact circulate so widely in global markets that they are often said to constitute one of the few viable rivals to the dominance of American popular cultural products. Yet Japan’s current success in exporting films and anime abroad is by no means just a recent phenomenon. Japan’s rich tradition of filmmaking caught the interest of Western film critics early on, and continues to exert an influence on the work of many directors.

This course will explore Japanese live action film and animation from its origins in the early 20th century to today. Students will learn to read films as narrative texts, view them as art on visual and aural levels, and critique them on multiple levels. In the process, we will attempt to seek out what about Japanese cinematic art has caught the attention of Western critics, and keep our eyes on several important questions. Is Japanese film and/or Japanese animation really something different from film and animation produced elsewhere? Do notions of Japan as a distinct cultural and national entity play into these works? What historical, social and cultural issues are Japanese filmmakers responding to, and how do their responses engage with broader trends both within and outside Japan?

This course treats both live-action cinema and animation in parallel, and aims to expose students to the development of both media in chronological fashion. We will begin with the origins of Japanese cinema in the prewar period, follow it through the Pacific War (what we know as World War II) and into its renaissance in the 1950’s and ‘60’s, when it truly began to catch the global eye. We will watch how film and animation provide forums for understanding recent history, and challenging contemporary ideas of society in the 1970’s and 80’s, and how it reflected the deep disturbances of the Lost Decade of the 1990’s, before returning to a mostly hopeful, if cynical, view of the near future in the 2000’s.

No knowledge of Japanese language, culture or history is necessary for this class; likewise, although those students already acquainted with basic film studies terminology and methodology may find it helpful, no knowledge of film or literary criticism is necessary to take this course.

Films and reading assignments are available for streaming and download (respectively) on LATTE. Students are expected to watch each film and do the reading assignments before class. Writing down your key observations while or just after watching the films is recommended to facilitate discussion. Very brief questions concerning the films and/or readings will be given several times during the semester. In addition, students will be asked to submit two short papers (5 pages each) during the semester that focus on films we have seen and ideas we have read or discussed for class, and one final paper (about 8-10 pages in length) that offers the opportunity to engage with a film not seen for class alongside or in similar fashion to those we have watched. A list of films for this project will be made available, along with suggested critical readings relevant to those films. Students will be encouraged to choose one of the listed films,
but films not on this list can be chosen in consultation with the instructor. Both the mid-term short papers and the end-of-term long paper will be evaluated for their coherence, critical argumentation, persuasiveness, and thoroughness of engagement with the material. All films and readings are in English, or will have English subtitles. There will be screenings for some of the films to attempt to recreate a public, theatrical-style experience; these are optional and only for your added enjoyment.

**Grades will be determined as follows:**

- Attendance and class participation 20%
- Quizzes 15%
- Short Paper 1 20%
- Short Paper 2 20%
- Final Paper 25%

**Disabilities:**

If you are a student with a documented disability on record at Brandeis University and wish to have a reasonable accommodation made for you in this class, please contact me immediately.

**Academic Integrity:**

You are expected to be familiar with and to follow the University’s policies on academic integrity (see http://www.brandeis.edu/studentlife/sdc/ai). All suspected instances of dishonesty will be referred to the Office of Student Development and Conduct. Instances of academic dishonesty may result in sanctions including but not limited to, failing grades being issued, educational programs, and other consequences.

**Late Work:**

Extensions are not granted except in cases of medical or family emergency. Late work will be penalized one grade per day late; e.g. a paper turned that would have earned an A-had it been turned

**Class Schedule**

08/27 -- Introduction

09/01 -- The Origins of Japanese Film


  *Orochi* (“The Serpent;” 1925, dir. Futagawa Buntarō)

09/03 -- The Height of Silent Cinema: Ozu Yasujirō’s Early Films


  *I Was Born But…* (“Otona no miru ehon -- umarete wa mita keredo,” 1932, dir. Ozu Yasujirō)
09/08 -- Talkies Come to Japan: Mizoguchi Kenji’s Prewar Cinema


*Osaka Elegy (“Naniwa erejii,” 1936, dir. Mizoguchi Kenji)*

09/17 -- Prewar Animation: From Disney to Momotarō


Optional Screening

09/22 -- Responses to the War: Enter *Gojira*


*Godzilla (“Gojira,” 1954, dir. Honda Ishirō)*

09/24 -- Jidaigeki and the Historical Epic


*Rashōmon* (1950, dir. Kurosawa Akira)

Optional Screening

10/01 -- Postwar Ozu and the Changing Family


*Tokyo Story (“Tōkyō monogatari,” 1953, dir. Ozu Yasujirō)*

10/06 -- Tezuka Osamu and the Emergence of “Anime”


10/08 -- The First Giant Robots and Magical Girls: Anime of the 1970’s


*Science Ninja Team Gatchaman (“Kagaku Ninja-tai Gatchaman,” TV series, 1972-74)*
http://www.theanimenetwork.com/Anime/Gatchaman-TV/Info

**Paper 1 Due; Optional Screening**

10/13 -- Big Films and Pink Films: Cinema of the 1970’s and 1980’s


*Ran* (1985, dir. Kurosawa Akira)

10/15 -- Filming Excess During the Bubble Economy


*Tanpopo* (“Dandelion,” 1985, dir. Itami Junzō)

10/20 -- Realism and War in Anime


*Mobile Suit Gundam* (“Kidō senshi Gundam,” TV series, 1979-80)

10/22 -- Studio Ghibli’s Impact and Anime as Cinema


*Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind* (“Kaze no tani no Nausicaä,” 1984, dir. Miyazaki Hayao)

10/27 -- The Group of 24 and the Development of Shōjo Anime


10/29 -- YAOI and Yuri


Optional Screening

11/03 -- New Monsters at the End of the Bubble


Godzilla vs. Biollante (“Gojira tai Biollante” 1989, dir. Ōmori Kazuki)

11/05 -- Beat Takeshi’s Nihilistic Nineties


Sonatine (1994, dir. Kitano Takeshi)

11/10 -- Post-Humans and Dystopian Futures


11/12 -- How Evangelion Changed Everything


11/17 -- Blurred Genders and Living Stories, or “The Shōjo Evangelion!”


11/19 -- The Post-Bubble Family


Shall We Dance (1996, dir. Suo Masayuki)

Optional Screening

11/24 -- Soft Power and National Identity in the New Millennium


Spirited Away (“Sen to Chihiro no kamikakushi,” 2001, dir. Miyazaki Hayao)

Paper 2 due

12/01 -- Kon Satoshi’s Non-Anime Anime


Millennium Actress (“Sennen joyū,” 2001, dir. Kon Satoshi)

12/03 -- Voices of Contemporary Japan

Love Exposure (“Ai no mukidashi,” 2008, dir. Sono Sion)

12/08 -- Anime in a Superflat World


Summer Wars (2009, dir. Hosoda Mamoru)