The Reception of American Cinema in Japan

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Summary and Keywords

Since the 1890s, Japanese movie-goers have engaged American cinema in a wide consumer marketplace shaped by intense media competition. Early fandom grew around educated urban audiences, who avidly patronized action-packed serials and Universal’s freshly imported films in the 1910s. During the 1920s and 1930s, U.S. cinema continued to attract metropolitan consumers but struggled in the face of Japan’s soaring narrative output. In the years following World War II, movie-goers encountered American films in big cities as well as provincial communities through the Occupation-backed Central Motion Picture Exchange. After the Occupation, U.S. film consumption began to slow down in theaters because of Japanese cinematic competition, but the sites of reception extended into television. The momentum of American cinema revived on the big screen with the rise of the blockbuster, though the years after the 1970s witnessed an intense segmentation of consumer taste. While U.S. cinema culture has become widely available via television, amusement parks, consumer merchandise, and the Internet, the contemporary era has seen renewed challenges mounted by domestic productions and alternative sources of popular entertainment.

Keywords: Hollywood, Japanese film, consumption, reception, cinema, fandom, hybridity

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