Japanese Cinema in the Global System: An Asian Classical Cinema

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Abstract

This essay argues that the Japanese cinema of the studio era, roughly from 1930 to 1960, should be considered as a “classical cinema” that occurred in parallel fashion to classical Hollywood cinema, which flourished during the same period. Various definitions of the classical are examined, and the industrial, commercial aspects of Japanese cinema are discussed as modes of melodrama and vernacular modernism. If scholars are to consider this era of Japanese cinema as its classical phase, it would inevitably entail a coextensive rethinking of the term and a decentralization of global cinema. Japanese classical cinema designates another structure of cultural imperialism, and another discourse of modernity, that became a dominant form of mass culture in the 20th century. The essay argues that it is important to shift the discussion from the terms of an art cinema to those of a popular, industrial cinema to fully understand the potential influence of Japanese cinema in Asia and globally as a body of films recycled on broadcast TV and in DVD formats.

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