

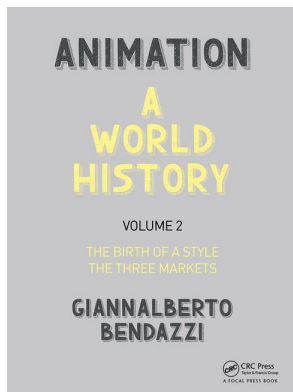
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## **Animation: A World History Volume II: The Birth of a Style—The Three Markets**

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### **Asia**

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# 5 ASIA

## Japan<sup>1</sup>

The Allied occupation lasted from 1945 to 1952: the influence the United States exercised over Japan was remarkable. However, it was just during the reconstruction years that animators and animation studios tried – despite the post-war chaos that pervaded even the world of cinema – to turn the isolated and craft-oriented business into an industrial venture.

In September 1945, veteran animation director and producer Yamamoto Sanae<sup>2</sup> met with the official in charge of the occupying American military General Headquarters cinema department, and was allowed to reopen the animation film production. In October, about a hundred specialists gathered at Shin Nihon Dogasha's studio. Among them were people of the renown of Murata Yasuji and Masaoka Kenzo. The following month, the company changed its name to Nihon Manga Eigasha and was joined by Seo Mitsuyo. However, the associative spirit dispelled after just two years, when Masaoka and Yamamoto left to create the studio Nihon Dogasha. Seo remained at Nihon Manga Eigasha and succeeded in finishing the difficult project *Osama no shippo* (The King's Tail, 1949); however, the film was never distributed for fear of a commercial flop that would have resulted in a collapse of the studio.

The Nihon Dogasha studio, founded in 1947, produced Masaoka's film *Suteneko Torachan* (Torachan, An Orphan

Kitty, 1947), which was a great success; other noteworthy works were Masaoka's *Torachan to hanayome* (Torachan and the Bride, 1948), Kumagawa Masao's<sup>3</sup> *Poppayasan Nonkina ekicho* (Poppayasan, the Good-natured Station Master, 1948) and Furusawa Hideo's *Kobito to aomushi* (The Dwarf and the Green Caterpillar, 1950).

After a few short films, Masaoka retired for health reasons and, in 1952, Nihon Dogasha became Nichido Eigasha, once again due to the indomitable Yamamoto. The colour, short film *Ukare Violin* (The Merry Violin) by Yabushita Taiji (Osaka, 1 February 1903–15 July 1986)<sup>4</sup> dates from 1955 and was commissioned by the Toei production company. The work made such a good impression on President Okawa Hiroshi that he asked Yamamoto's studio for an animated feature film, thus originating *Hakujaden* (literally, 'The White Snake Enchantress', but known in Western countries as *The White Snake*, *The Legend of the White Serpent* or *Panda and the Magic Serpent*), the first Japanese colour animated feature film. In the meanwhile, Toei was officially taking over Nichido.

## Toei Doga's Start-Up

Toei – a film and, later, television production and distribution company (which, at this writing, still exists) – was created in 1951 from the merging of a number of companies

<sup>1</sup> By Marco Pellitteri and Lisa Maya Quaianni Manuzzato.

<sup>2</sup> We have already met him in the 1920s, as producer of the well-known *The Mountain Where Old Women Are Abandoned*.

<sup>3</sup> Kumagawa had already worked with Masaoka, but when he returned to Kyoto in the post-war period he made the short film *Maho no pen* (The Magic Pen, 1947) as an independent. The plot is not particularly original, but the quality of the animation is noteworthy.

<sup>4</sup> He was initially working for the Film Division of the Ministry of Education for the live-action movies. When the war ended, he was employed by Nihon Dogasha (later Nichido) and once Toei Doga took the studio over, Yabushita became its executive producer and directed many of its first feature films. He left the company in 1968.

in the field, in those days on the brink of bankruptcy. One of these, Toyoko Eiga, was of great importance; it produced and released educational pictures, also making use of animation techniques. Toei's backer and chief was Okawa Hiroshi (30 December 1896–17 August 1971), a tycoon coming from Toyoko Railway Company and with deals in several fields, from transportation to baseball teams.

Okawa can be considered one of the outstanding figures in the Japanese post-war economic and financial fields: besides turning Toei into a leading company (well-known mainly for *jidaigeki*, the costume films), he was possibly the first to foresee a probable commercial opportunity in animation and in the emerging television field, too.

In 1955, Toei established a Manga Eiga Independent Production Committee within its Educational Film Department, and commissioned Nichido Eiga for the making of the above-mentioned *The Merry Violin*.

The actual turning point occurred in 1956, when the company took over Nichido, at that time facing financial difficulties, and adopted the new name of Toei Doga.<sup>5</sup> Toei Doga absorbed all the people employed in Yamamoto Sanae's company (including Yamamoto himself, who got to be the vice president of the new company), with Okawa as chairman.

Therefore, Toei Doga was the outcome of Okawa's industrial aims as well as the artistic abilities and skilled manpower of the no-longer-existing Nichido. This is a pivotal moment for Japanese animation – as Ilan Nguyễn declares, 'the starting-point of nowadays Japanese production'.<sup>6</sup> Okawa wanted to create a company able to compete with Disney's works, back on Japanese screens after the war; his ambitions to turn Toei into the 'Disney of the East' were significantly represented by the new building in Ohizumi (Nerima, Tokyo), designed for the animation studio and provided with technical equipment such as the multiplane camera, then the dream of all production

companies. In spite of the fact that up to 200 animators were involved, there was a great team spirit.

The first Toei short film was *Koneko no rakugaki* (Kitty's Graffiti, 1957), which can easily be traced back to the production of former Nichido as the staff (Yabushita Taiji, Mori Yasuji and Daikubara Akira) came from the previous studio. *Kitty's Graffiti*, a black-and-white film directed by Yabushita, using graphics of which Mori Yasuji played a predominant role,<sup>7</sup> introduces passages of surreal poetry (a cat draws on the wall of a house some sketches that come to life) making it a brief but valuable masterpiece.

In the meantime, the making of *The White Snake* involved the hiring of new animators (the rotoscope technique was employed, too). The feature film was finally released on 22 October 1958. The plot, based on a Chinese legend adapted by Uehara Shin, is about the love story between the beautiful snake princess Bai-Niang and the young boy Xu-Xian, thwarted by the knight Fa Hai: finally, the lovers fulfil their dream, thanks in part to Xu's two bright animals (Panda and Mimi, a red panda) and to Xiao Chin, the princess's handmaiden. The film received several international awards; its style is possibly too Disney-like,<sup>8</sup> but the production is made with care, down to the smallest detail, and the animation of some scenes, such as the fighting sequence, is outstanding. Directed by Yabushita, *The White Snake* owes a lot to the two creators of all key animations, the major animators from Nichido: Mori Yasuji, for the animal performance, and Daikubara Akira, for the human performance.

At Toei, they established the two dominant approaches for expressive motion, the first relating to features' roundness and to fluid gesture, the second to a rougher graphic symbol and a more emphatic movement. Also thanks to them, Toei marks a qualitative and quantitative historic and aesthetic turning point for the Japanese animation industry.

In the coming years, Toei Doga made a feature film each year, following the same stylistic line and with the same technical team, like *Saiyuki* (Alakazam the Great!, 1960) with the

<sup>5</sup>Toei Animation, since 1998.

<sup>6</sup>Ilan Nguyễn, *Un aperçu sur l'animation japonaise, 1956–1985*, Festival des nouvelles images du Japon, Film d'animation et cinéma digital du 15 au 22 décembre 1999, Paris, Conference catalogue.

<sup>7</sup>While Yabushita Taiji is credited as the director of *Koneko no rakugaki*, Mori's graphic contribution was of similar importance. Their cooperation was very close. Mori proposed a sequel (*Koneko no toranpetto*), which was rejected in favour of *Koneko no sutajio*, which later Mori directed (we acknowledge Ilan Nguyễn for this information).

<sup>8</sup>Some elements, such as talking animals, necessarily recall the American major, although their role in Toei productions is different, as they are more independent from human heroes. Also, it is important to point out that Disney was not the only influence arriving from the West: The influence was especially exerted by the Fleischer Brothers' productions, but also by Soviet or French films, for instance *The Shepherdess and the Chimney Sweep* by Grimault/Prévert. (Ilan Nguyễn and Xavier Kawa-Topor, 'Autour du *Serpent blanc*: sur la première période du studio d'animation de Tôei' (About the *White Snake*: On the First Period of Toei Animation Studio), *Lettre d'information de l'Afca*, December 2004 / January 2005, Paris.

collaboration of Tezuka Osamu; but the exhausting work pace Okawa demanded gave rise to union struggles that lasted several years. In 1963, it was decided to realize two feature films every year. At year, the studio released *Wanpaku oji no orochi taiji* (Little Prince and the Eight-headed Dragon, by Serikawa Yugo), which took an original stylistic route, thanks to the talented Mori Yasuji and Otsuka Yasuo.

## Praiseworthy People

Some of the artists who were members of the Toei studio in that period deserve mention and praise.<sup>9</sup> Fukiya Koji (1898–1979), known mainly as a painter and illustrator, in 1958 made *Yumemi doji* (The Child and the Dream), bringing his personal style. Tsukioka Sadao (15 May 1939) started off in 1961 with *Nezumi no yomeiri* (The Mouse Marriage) and later got to be famous for art films as well as for mass productions.<sup>10</sup>

An important personality was animation director Daikubara Akira<sup>11</sup> (23 November 1917), who brought his quick and versatile technique to many of Toei's animated feature films and represented a master to many young talents of the studio.

## Mori Yasuji

But above all, Mori Yasuji (Tottori, 28 January 1925–5 September 1992) had a fundamental influence in Toei. Raised in Taiwan, he graduated in 1948 from Tokyo Art School<sup>12</sup> in Architecture. His watching of some American animation films inspired him to enter the animation field and seek work at Nihon Dogasha in 1947, where he met Masaoka<sup>13</sup> and Yamamoto. He approached animation of animals in this period – something he displayed a real talent for – by working on Masaoka's *Torachan and the Bride* as a colourist. Mori then left animation for a period, dedicating himself to advertising posters and pictures for reviews

and children's books, before returning to animation in the Nichido studio in 1955, where he directed, together with Yabushita Taiji, *Kousagi monogatari* (The Story of Little Rabbit). Mori then passed to Toei Doga; his talent was fundamental in the new company where he was a creator of some of the best sequences in full animation. Some of his best works are the aforementioned *Kitty's Graffiti* (1957) and *Koneko no sutajio* (Kitty's Studio, 1959, which he also directed), remarkable and delicate works with almost no dialogue, whose protagonists are a cat and two little mice engaged in funny adventures.

At Toei, Mori had the roles of animation director, character designer and animator; he was the first in Japan to draw all the characters of a movie and entirely supervise the animation as a *sakuga kantoku*.<sup>14</sup> After all, as he himself affirmed, his desire was not to draw characters, but to paint their 'heart motions'. His talent was spread in *White Snake* and the following feature films of Toei, especially *Little Prince and the Eight-headed Dragon*, by Serikawa Yugo: Mori succeeded in giving a homogeneous style to the whole film. Even his part in *Taiyo no oji: Horusu no daiboken* (Little Norse Prince Valiant, also known as *The Adventures of Hols, Prince of the Sun*, 1968) is worth a note. In this film, directed by Takahata Isao, Mori's depiction of the character Hilda displays his admirable gift for portraying female characters.

Mori left the studio in 1973 to enter Nippon Animation, for which he worked on a great number of TV productions: *Arupusu no shojo Haiji* (Heidi: Girl of the Alps, 1974) and *Furandasu no inu* (A Dog of Flanders, 1975) among others. He didn't give up drawing children's books and covers for the monthly magazine *Yōji to hoiku* (Infants and Nursing), and he did not stop working on animation until his death, on 4 September 1992.

Always remembered as meticulous and a worker who never tired, he was an outstanding figure for all the following generation of animators, so much that his importance in Japanese animation was defined 'incalculable' by Takahata Isao. It was also thanks to people like Mori

<sup>9</sup>Takahata Isao and Miyazaki Hayao also started their profession in this studio, in confirmation of the amazing number of outstanding artists Toei was bringing out in those days; though their debut is chronologically fixed in the next decade (1959 for Takahata; 1963 for Miyazaki).

<sup>10</sup>We remember the 1963 TV series *Ookami shonen Ken*.

<sup>11</sup>Sometimes transliterated as Daikuhara Akira.

<sup>12</sup>The current Tokyo National University of Fine Arts and Music.

<sup>13</sup>Mori considered Masaoka a real master: the film *The Spider and the Tulip*, which he watched during the war, influenced him very much.

<sup>14</sup>A role that roughly corresponds to animation director in the Western animation productions – often shortened to *sakkan*. His task was supervising and correcting the drawings of key animators and checking the quality of the work, both on a drawing and motion level, in order to keep visual coherence in the project.

if the animators, who during those years used to work for Toei Doga, were fully involved in projects of the same studio.<sup>15</sup>

## Otogi Pro

Another studio played an important role in this period. Already-cited filmmaker Yokoyama Ryuichi also continued his career in the animation in the post-war period. Sent out as a reporter in the United States in 1951 from the daily *Mainichi Shimbun* to follow the signature of the Peace Treaty, he was eventually able to visit the Disney studio and meet Walt Disney. Back to his country, he began the production of a short film, *Onbu obake* (Piggyback Ghost), setting up his own studio<sup>16</sup> with eight more people. Yokoyama had several roles, working on scripts, drawings, direction, photography and animation. *Piggyback Ghost* was shown in December 1955 only for a restricted number of people, among them the writer Mishima Yukio and the literary critic Kobayashi Hideo.

The following year, Yokoyama officially founded Otogi Production<sup>17</sup> (often shortened into Otogi Pro) and, in 1957, *Fukusuke* (The Top-Heavy Frog) was produced.<sup>18</sup> A ‘personal’ film, it tells the comic story of a frog arriving up to the sky and having to face the God of Thunder. New animators, such as Suzuki Shinichi, contributed. This short film is important because it marked the beginning of a distribution deal with Toho, which enabled the production of *Hyotansuzume* (Gourd Sparrow, 1959), a remake of a 1956 project. In the meanwhile, Yokoyama had designated, in the garden of his dwelling, a small building as

the official workplace of Otogi Pro, increasing his crew to twenty-seven persons.

In 1960, the only feature film of the studio, *Otogi no sekai ryoko* (Fairylend World Tour),<sup>19</sup> was finally completed: an anthological work composed by seven episodes, created by several members of the staff. The production of Otogi Pro was clearly more original and authorial than Disney’s or Toei’s, and Yokoyama’s decision to distribute the film through Toho – a company that could guarantee a huge distribution – effectively put Otogi directly in competition with the great studios devoted to commercial works.<sup>20</sup> However, the film, endowed with a pleasant handicraft style, was not considered by Toho sufficiently commercial, and suffered a delay in distribution, which only arrived in 1962, together with *Kingu Kongu tai Gojira* (King Kong vs. Godzilla).

Following this troubled project, Otogi Pro gave up film production, but produced a famous, early animated series for television: *Otogi manga calendar* (Manga Fairy Tales, also known as *Instant History*, 1961–62). Comprised of 312 episodes, three minutes each in black and white, it showed historical events and was also helped by photographic images, archive cinema pieces and animated portions (about one minute per episode).

In the following years, Otogi Pro realized other short productions,<sup>21</sup> finally closing in 1972.

## Experiments

The making of *Kinecalligraph* (1955) is worth a note.<sup>22</sup> ‘Usually considered to be the starting point of the history of

<sup>15</sup> Kotabe Yoichi (Taiwan, 15 September 1936) is a relevant example on this topic. He worked with Toei Doga from 1959 until a short stand at A Production together with Takahata and Miyazaki, having during the years the roles of key animator drawings, animation director and character designer; he then worked with Nintendo Co., Ltd., for productions such as *Super Mario Brothers* since 1985. At a Paris conference within the Festival des Nouvelles Images du Japon in 2003, he spoke about the feature film *The Adventures of Hols, Prince of the Sun* (the first one directed by Takahata) as a fractured attempt with the former ways of production of Toei: ‘Until then, the system worked on the freedom given to the animators, rather than a single personality director. The animators would begin their artwork based on the scenario. Takahata rather wanted a completion of a work around a single person’. Kotabe Yoichi en conférence. Un animateur d’exception, Animeland.com; <http://www.animeland.com/articles/voir/447/KOTABE-Yoichi-en-conference>.

<sup>16</sup> In his house.

<sup>17</sup> Otogi = ‘fairy tale’.

<sup>18</sup> The specialized magazine *Kinema Junpo* classified it in eighth place among the ten best cultural films.

<sup>19</sup> Alternative titles are *Journey in Fairylend* and *Otogi’s World Tour*.

<sup>20</sup> A different road would be taken, just in those years, by Mushi Production of Tezuka Osamu which, in 1962, released *Tale of a Streetcorner*, adopting a distribution in small theatres, without courting a major company like Toho.

<sup>21</sup> Yokoyama also realized some shorts shown for *Animeshon samin no kai*, among them *Kokki* (The National Flag, 1965).

<sup>22</sup> The movie was lost in the 1970s and remade in 1994 by Otsuji, one of the central members of the group. Usually the work is credited to him only, as in Nakajima Takashi, ‘A Brief History of Japanese Experimental Cinema’, *Cinemaya*, Vol. 21, 1993, New Delhi, India, pp. 16–19, while Sawa Takashi quotes Ishimoto and Tsuji, too. In fact, the ‘starting point’ claim is false: many avant-garde films had been produced in the previous years, especially by Ogino Shigeji.

experimental film in Japan',<sup>23</sup> it was a work by Graphic Shudan (Graphic Group), and particularly by Otsuji Kiyoji (1923–2001), Ishimoto Yasuhiro (1921) and Tsuji Saiko. An abstract animated film, it was made by impressing the colour directly on the 16mm film. Graphic Shudan was a photographers' association, working between 1953 and 1956 in Tokyo, which participated in a blooming of the artistic Japanese culture at the end of the allied occupation.<sup>24</sup>

## China

In 1949, twenty-two people, including the caricaturist Te Wei (by his real name Song Sheng, Shanghai, 22 August 1915–Shanghai, 4 February 2010) and the young intellectual Jin Shi (1919–97, by real name Zeng Diping), assembled in Changchun, Manchuria, forming the core of what would later become the large Shanghai Studio. The following year, the animators were transferred to Shanghai and the team expanded to include painters, puppeteers, children's writers and pioneer Wan Chaochen himself who, during 1946–48, had migrated to Hollywood and studied the equipment and the methods of American animation. In 1954, the other pioneers Wan Laiming and Wan Guchan, who had migrated to Hong Kong during the war, joined the Shanghai Studio, too. In 1956, the studios included 200 workers and, by the 1960s, had grown to include 380.

The films were mainly for children. According to Jin Shi, the studio director, films had to be entertaining and educational while at the same time maintaining a national character. These points had already been made by the Wan brothers twenty years earlier. As examples, Jin Shi held up his own animated puppet film *The Magic Paintbrush*

(1955) and Te Wei's *The Braggart General* (1957). Within the Maoist climate of ceaseless ideological turmoil, animation, as well as all other Chinese intellectual and cultural forces, experienced constant mobilization and debate.

The politics of the 'One Hundred Flowers' and the 'Great Leap Forward', as well as all other ideological vacillations to left or right, influenced the content of films (sometimes indirectly, with allusions and allegories, other times by openly imposing propaganda).

The Shanghai Studio was closed in 1965. The filmmakers were sent to educational camps and the studio did not reopen until 1972. By 1962, almost one hundred movies had been filmed, some of them excellent. In the area of cut-out animation, the experienced Wan Guchan created *Zhu Baizhe Eats the Watermelon* (1958), an original episode of the traditional novel *Journey to the West*. Humorous, cleverly ironic and expertly animated, this film was the precursor of many films made with this technique. Wan Guchan's works include *The Little Fisherman* (1959), based on a popular story from the Boxer rebellion and *The Spirit of the Ginseng* (1961), about a child who is sold as a slave to a landowner, but who overthrows the tyrant with the help of the spirit of a ginseng plant. Hu Shionghua (29 December 1931–14 November 1983) was responsible for *Let's Wait for Tomorrow* (1962) and *More or Less* (1964), while Qian Yunda (21 December 1928) made *The Red Army's Bridge* (1964). Set in the Hunan province at the time of the peasants' revolt, the film forcefully tells of a bridge, which is destroyed by landowners and rebuilt by Mao's soldiers. Eventually, the bridge becomes a trap for the Kuomintang troops. The commander of the nationalists is given a sarcastic characterization.

As for animated drawings, the finest short was *Where Is Mama?* by Te Wei and Qian Jajun (1960).<sup>25</sup> From the viewpoint of style, the film deserves mention for its

<sup>23</sup> Sawa Takashi (Image Forum Festival Director), in Anet ter Horst (ed.), *Holland Animation Film Festival 2002: Utrecht 13–17 November 2002: catalogus: catalogue*, Stichting Holland Animation Film Festival 2002.

<sup>24</sup> Otsuji, a well-known photographer, was also part of Jikken Kobo (Experimental Workshop) in those years, an artistic movement born in Tokyo in 1952 with the purpose to create avant-garde works inspiring to Bauhaus; the group, which musicians and visual artists belonged to as well, created interesting multimedia experiments.

<sup>25</sup> Here is the account of the classic historian of the cinema in the Marxist countries, Jay Leyda. 'The Shanghai Animation Studio produced one outstanding, lasting experimental cartoon. One of their tasks was to animate contemporary Chinese paintings that used traditional techniques: the first trials were to be based on the work of Chi Pai-shih. The trial film on Chi Pai-shih motifs was a complete success. Each motif, whether crabs or chicks or fish, worked perfectly. The trial film was followed by *Where Is Mama?*, the watery adventures of newly born tadpoles – it made both children and adults laugh. It was wonderful to see a kind of *Chinese* animation on the screen that had its own fluidity, wit, and charm. The making of this apparently simple thing must have cost much more labour and struggle than we could guess, because the animators had discarded the usual hard-edge, enclosed forms of the animated cartoon to animate the much more difficult, almost diffuse forms of Chi Pai-shih's ink and watercolour. They also used his white backgrounds, minimal colour, and open compositions – it was a completely new film experience and deserved international attention'. (Jay Leyda, *Dianying – Electric Shadows*, Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1972, p. 294.)



cinematic adaptation of the traditional technique of mixing watercolours and India ink. The animation was so good as to appear almost virtuoso. It was the animation of the tadpoles, however, with its clever developments (the tadpoles do not know their mother's features and must identify her among the various animals of the pond before finally meeting her) which fascinated spectators. In 1963, the same two directors made *The Cowherd's Flute*. More traditional animated drawings appeared in *The Little Carp's Adventures* (1958), by He Yumen (8 May 1928), and in the featurette *The Chwang Tapestry* (1959, from an old legend of the Southwestern Chwang people) by Qian Jajun. *A Golden Dream* (1963), by Wang Shuchen (4 September 1931–23 November 1991), is about five kings who torment their subjects by drinking their blood and eating gold and diamonds – helped by such villains as a general, a tax collector and an intellectual. *The Two Heroic Sisters of the Steppe* (1965) tells of two little girls who, when entrusted with a commune's herd, save it from a blizzard. Traditionally styled but ideologically schematic, the film shows hints of the coming Cultural Revolution.

Animated puppets were also a lively genre. One particular type was made of paper folding, using a traditional Chinese technique. Yu Zheguang's (1906–91) *The Intelligent Little Ducks* (1960) was the first of many films of this type. Others using this technique include Jin Shi's *Small Heroes* (1953, the first colour film of this genre); *The Carved Dragon* (1959), from the old tale of a carpenter who carves a dragon to defeat a monster raging in his

province, by Wan Chaochen, You Lei (11 April 1926) and Zhang Chaoqun (25 August 1921); and the feature film *The Peacock Princess* (1963), also by Jin Shi. Based on an old legend of the ancient Tai (a southeastern people), this film tells the story of a prince who is given a strong bow that only superhuman strength can flex. In troubled 1964, You Lei made *The Rooster Sings at Midnight*, based on the autobiography of Red Army fighter Kao Yupao. The film tells how the protagonist foiled the plans concocted by the exploiter Chou, the 'skinner', against his labourers.

The most challenging and prestigious work of post-war Chinese animation was *Uproar in Heaven*, Wan Laiming's second feature film. The first part was released in 1961, followed by the second part in 1964. Lasting approximately two hours, the film was also based on *Journey to the West*. Here, Sun Wukong – the Monkey King – takes possession of the pillar that supports the Sky in the palace of the Dragon King, and with it he challenges the Jade Emperor. Once he has become a celestial mandarin, Sun Wukong faces attacks by the 100,000 warriors of the Jade Emperor. Sun Wukong personifies the human character, whose courage and shrewdness are superior to any strength. The film is memorable for its rich scene design and animation as well as for its vigour, but is marred by its slow rhythm. Its many sources include Buddhist frescoes and the popular images of the Beijing Opera. Shown at the Locarno Festival in 1965, *Uproar in Heaven* was also well received in the West.