

The Film Industry in Japan & New Zealand



Author Barry Natusch

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Director Frank Capra once said about films: “I thought the drama was when the actors cried, but drama is when the audience cries.” You never forget how a great movie made you feel. But filmmaking is a business.

Filmmaking! As an Investment?

This discussion compares filmmaking, particularly feature films, in two precariously perched seismically shaky countries: Japan and New Zealand. Similar in size and geology, they are very different in terms of history, population and culture. Highlighted is the interplay between commerce and the aesthetics of filmmaking: what is successful at the box office, what critics praise, and how governments use filmmaking and guide it as an industry. Currency amounts are given in US dollars.

The two countries have a quite different history and investment in filmmaking. Japan’s film and TV production and distribution contributed nearly \$130 billion to the Japanese economy in 2018 in both direct and indirect impact. It employed more than 520,000 people. In New Zealand, however, with only 4% of the population of Japan, the film and TV industry contributed a proportionally smaller amount (\$3.3 billion) and employed 16,000 people (Chart 1).

Roulette: Chances for Making It Big or Losing It All

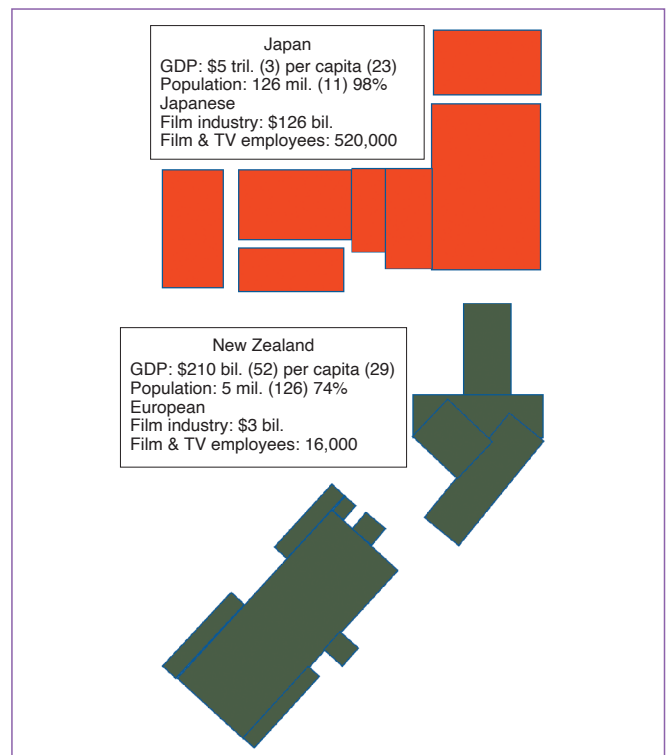
Does filmmaking make money? Many films do, though there are monumental box office losses and critical flops too. Table 1 shows how much money a handful of films have made, together with a few that haven’t. These are all Hollywood films in which big sums are invested in the hope that big profits can roll in.

On top of box office earnings, films now make money through media sales such as DVDs, and being streamed by Netflix or Disney. This is reflected in the money that continues to be made from even old Hollywood classic movies like *Gone With the Wind* and *Casablanca*.

The filmmaking industry employs a lot of people. In big productions, in addition to producer, director, actors, writer, editor, cinematographer, and so on, are support roles such as accountants, electricians, grips, gaffers, carpenters, painters, costumers, makeup artists, buyers, drivers, tailors, animal trainers, special effects crews, computer graphics artists, stuntmen, medical staff, lawyers, travel agents, risk assessors, insurers, caterers and hotels, website

CHART 1

Japan & New Zealand: markers of economics, demographics & film industries



Figures in brackets denote global rankings.
Source: compiled by the author

TABLE 1

Profitable (& unprofitable) films from big US film studios

Film	Production Cost (\$)	Box Office (\$)
<i>Gone with the Wind</i> (1939)	3.8 mil. (= 73 mil. 2021)	378 mil. (= 3.3 bil. 2021) ↑
<i>Casablanca</i> (1942)	1 mil. (= 17 mil. 2021)	5 mil. (= 80 mil. 2021) ↑
<i>Titanic</i> (1997)	200 mil. (= 312 mil. 2021)	2.2 bil. ↑
<i>Pirates of the Caribbean</i> (2011)	422 mil.	1 bil. (= 2021) ↑
<i>Mulan</i> (2020)	200 mil.	40 mil. ↓
<i>Mars Needs Moms</i> (2011)	150 mil.	143 mil. ↓
<i>John Carter</i> (2012)	350 mil.	113 mil. or 122 mil. ↓
<i>King Arthur: Legend of the Sword</i> (2017)	175 mil.	148 mil. ↓

Figures in brackets indicate costs adjusted to contemporary amounts.
↑ indicates profit, ↓ indicates loss
Source: compiled by the author

designers and social media staff.

That said, a film can also be made with very few people and the costs of making a film have come down dramatically with the wide availability of equipment and post-production software allowing professional-looking films to be made even by amateurs.

Films Seen in Our Youth

Here is a conversation which took place between Tanaka who is Japanese, and Johnson, a New Zealander, about films they recall that impressed them when they were younger. The films also happen to be ones highly rated by critics (*Image*).

Tanaka: So what were the most impressionable Japanese films you saw in your student days?

Johnson: There weren't many opportunities to see Japanese films in New Zealand in the 1960s and 1970s. They were shown at university occasionally. The ones I recall now, 50 years later, were *Ugetsu* and *Red Beard*. Then there were those at film festivals sometimes. *The Naked Island* was easy to understand, almost no dialogue. Simple story of a man, wife and two sons living on a steep waterless island in the Inland Sea. And *Tokyo Story*. Again, easy enough to understand being slow paced. But I watched it until the end because it seemed so authentic.

Tanaka: Notable examples from notable directors. A great era.

Johnson: And what attracted your interest in New Zealand films?

Tanaka: *The Piano* by Jane Campion. Landing that piano and transporting it through the muddy bush.

Johnson: And *The Lord of The Rings*?

Tanaka: Oh yes. I saw all three of the trilogy.

Tanaka and Johnson identify different themes. *Ugetsu*, a historical

supernatural drama, is about the results of war and family commitments; *Red Beard* a moral tale, powerfully acted. *The Naked Island* with no dialogue is a portrait of a repetitious life with no respite even after tragedy. And *Tokyo Story* with its beautifully understated emotions naturally earned a place in history. These films are but a few examples from the "Golden Era" of Japanese cinema.

As for the New Zealand films, *The Piano* was almost as surreal as *Ugetsu*, and tragic. And the successes of *The Lord of the Rings* speak for themselves. But whereas Johnson talks of several famous Japanese films, all with strong Japanese stories, Tanaka only names two New Zealand films; of those only *The Piano* is a dramatic evocation of New Zealand history.

Long Ago & Not So Long Ago

Filmmaking began in Japan after 1897 with screenings often accompanied by *benshi* or storytellers who narrated for the silent movies. As in most countries, sound films began to appear in the 1930s (although more slowly in Japan than in Western countries). The rise of the cinema from the early 1900s was accompanied by a strong interest in film magazines. Elements of film criticism were also reported on with schools of cinematography such as the "Pure Film Movement", emphasizing cinematic techniques, movements which used film to promote ideological, particularly leftist and Marxist, political agendas. Later the government began using film for propaganda purposes, particularly during World War II. Then, until 1952, censorship of films imposed by the Civil Information Educational Section in the Occupation was a heavy influence on films that could be produced. With the lifting of censorship Japanese directors such as Akira Kurosawa, Kenji Mizoguchi and Yasujiro Ozu, who had been through the trauma of war, began producing works that became icons of the Golden Era of Japanese cinema.

The 1960s saw some directors push out in new directions such as the "New Wave Cinema" which was more experimental and rejected traditions of filmmaking. With the advent of TV in the 1970s and 1980s films for television increased and feature filmmaking suffered somewhat. The 1980s were a tough time for the movie business but saw directors such as Juzo Itami making social awareness films and the rise of animation films leading to the establishment of studios like Ghibli. By the 1990s, the number of movie theaters had begun to increase again. This led to a resurgence of feature filmmaking in Japan with directors such as Hayao Miyazaki, Hirokazu Koreeda and Takeshi Kitano being internationally recognized. A particular satisfaction has been the first woman Japanese director to achieve international acclaim, Naomi Kawase, at Cannes in 2007.

New Zealand also saw experiments with film from around the early 1900s. Having a small population and no substantial audience to entice into theaters, and no studios beyond those tied to national television, it wasn't until the 1970s that a handful of feature films began to attract curious local audiences. Then with the establishment of the New Zealand Film Commission (NZFC) in 1978 to encourage filmmaking and the defining characteristics of a New Zealand film,

IMAGE: Wikipedia creative commons



Tokyo Story (1953)

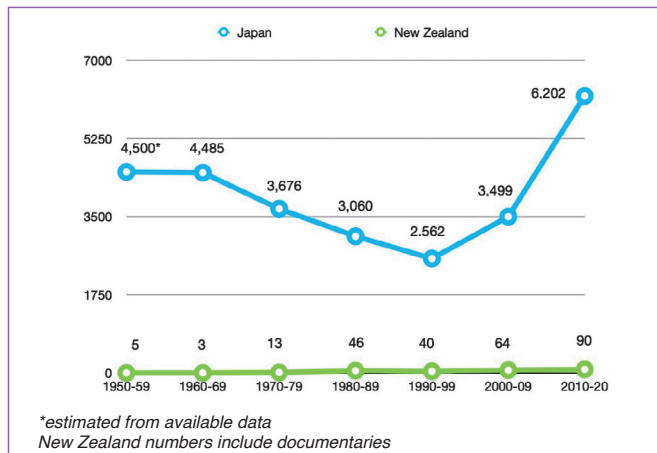
The Lord of the Rings (2001)

Source: Wikipedia creative commons

Posters of Tokyo Story and The Lord of the Rings

CHART 2

Japan & New Zealand film production timeline



Source: compiled by the author

this led to films made by independent filmmakers on shoestring budgets until, in the 1990s, Peter Jackson fired up the local industry by attracting serious overseas funding and establishing studios to make the films of *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy. Although in terms of numbers, New Zealand does not rank high up the list of world film producing countries, it has developed a unique filmmaking industry and marketed itself as a place for overseas countries to make films.

So the number of films produced in Japan and New Zealand differ because of their populations and historical cultures (Chart 2). Arising from a tradition of mass entertainment in Japan and substantial audiences, this attracted financing of filmmaking projects. New Zealand, however, as a newly developed country, took longer to establish filmmaking as a form of locally-produced mass entertainment. Both Japan and New Zealand have used film as a promotional vehicle for their cultures but New Zealand has seen film as a commercial strategy to promote the country to attract tourists and later as a venue to attract filmmakers and provide local employment. Both countries are nowadays, and for quite different reasons, well-regarded for their filmmaking industries, Japan because of its long history, unique culture and filmmaking mastery, New Zealand more recently because of its marketing drive as a government-supported location to make films.

Film Production: Show Me the Money

Film production costs and box office earnings differ in the two countries. Despite having had a Golden Era in filmmaking in the 1950s, profits in the Japanese film industry from films have been uneven and only recently improved with worldwide enthusiasm for animation films earning Hollywood-style returns on investment (Table 2). And little wonder filmmaking in New Zealand did not attract capital investment until recently since returns are usually only generated on big budget projects like *The Lord of the Rings* which

TABLE 2

Return on investment of selected Japanese & New Zealand films

Film	Production Cost (\$)	Box Office (\$)
Japan		
<i>Rashōmon</i> (1950)	250,000	100,000
<i>The Seven Samurai</i> (1954)	1.1 mil.	2.3 mil.
<i>Kagemusha</i> (1980)	11 mil.	33 mil.
<i>Fireworks</i> (1997)	2.3 mil.	500,000
<i>Spirited Away</i> (2001)	15-19 mil.	380 mil.
<i>Shoplifters</i> 2018	na	72 mil.
New Zealand		
<i>Goodbye Pork Pie</i> (1981)	250,000	500,000
<i>The Piano</i> (1992)	7 mil.	140 mil.
<i>The Lord of the Rings</i> (1999-2003)	280 mil.	3 bil.
<i>Whale Rider</i> (2002)	3.5 mil.	40 mil.
<i>The World's Fastest Indian</i> (2005)	25 mil.	18 mil.
<i>The Dark Horse</i> (2014)	1.4 mil.	1.2 mil.

Source: compiled by the author

can tap into global markets. It can be hard to make a quality and profitable film on a low budget which was the situation in New Zealand until recently. Even now, and only occasionally, do local-content New Zealand films make a profit.

In addition to feature films, cheaper equipment and more filmmaking education being offered has resulted in second-tier feature films, short films and documentaries being produced. These genres provide a training ground for film-related occupations with some apprentices ending up on the payroll of a feature film project.

Film Directing: There Has to Be a Captain

While filmmaking needs the financial and logistical planning of a competent producer, employing a talented director ensures that the finished film will be appreciated by film critics. Although filmmaking is due to the effort of a large team, nevertheless, as Ridley Scott points out, "There has to be a captain." So it is that the director receives the greatest attention for a finished film. What does it take to be a good director? Views vary. George Lucas maintains that having a good understanding of history, literature, psychology, and sciences is important for making films." Steven Spielberg notes that audiences are critical of special effects but are easier to please if it is a good story. And it's certainly not easy. Alejandro Inarritu says, "To make a film is easy. To make a good film is war. To make a very good film is a miracle."

Directors then are the ones who step up to receive awards on behalf of the team they captain. Japan had talented directors as early as the 1940s and 1950s which led to its Golden Era, resulting in four Japanese films being listed in 2012 in *Sight and Sound* as being in the top all-time great films establishing Akira Kurosawa, Yasujiro Ozu, and Kenji Mizoguchi as classically famous directors. Kon Ichikawa and Masaki Kobayashi used film to revisit Japan's military adventures. In the 1970s and 1980s Kinji Fusaku took a darker look

at Japanese society, Shohei Imamura explored “New Wave cinema” themes, Yoji Yamada became famous for the Tora-san series among many of his films, while Juzo Itami bravely satirized elements of Japanese society. In recent years Takeshi Kitano and Hirokazu Koreeda have taken up the torch to keep Japanese films in festival spotlights.

New Zealand has talented directors but suffered until recently, being remote and not particularly supportive of the arts, leading to filmmakers like Roger Donaldson and Lee Tamahori working outside New Zealand. The NZFC and Peter Jackson deserve a mention for helping to create an environment in New Zealand fostering local filmmaking so that in the 2000s New Zealand’s film industry is beginning to flourish.

Women directors in both Japan and New Zealand are underrepresented, as in many countries, but those that do succeed are gradually gaining greater acceptance: Naomi Kawase being selected to direct the film for the Tokyo 2020 Olympics, for example. And there are other Japanese women directors such as Mika Ninagawa, Yuki Tanada, and Yui Kiyohara. New Zealanders Jane Campion and Niki Caro have between them won international recognition.

A genre of films which has in recent years boomed in popularity, with Japan being a significant driving force, is the animation sector. Directors such as Studio Ghibli’s Hayao Miyazaki have been at the forefront and collected prizes for their works, although these are generally awarded in separate categories to feature films.

Besides feature films there are also documentary films. These are not necessarily mutually exclusive types of filmmaking but there are differences in approach as Alfred Hitchcock dryly remarked: “In feature films, the director is God, in documentary films God is the director.” Kon Ichikawa had made many feature films before directing the momentous documentary *Tokyo Olympiad* in 1964 using feature film techniques and focusing on human interest and even a dry detachment towards the subject. Naomi Kawase approached feature filmmaking having spent the formative part of her career as a documentarian. In New Zealand, Gaylene Preston’s work as a documentary filmmaker is worth seeking out, for example, her *War Stories Our Mothers Never Told Us*.

International Awards

Good films become unforgettable classics and benchmarks for the industry not because they were good for business but because they tell great stories that critics applaud and may even move audiences to tears.

How are films judged? By experts or film critics, or by the general film-going public? The two groups don’t always agree. The big award systems include Academy Awards (Oscars), British Academy of Film and Television Arts (BAFTA), Cannes (Palme d’Or), Berlin (Golden Bear), Venice (Golden Lion), and the Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF). Japanese films which were nominated or won awards by these organizations are compared in [Table 3](#) and New Zealand in

[Table 4](#). There are also respected bodies of film critics such as the British Film Institute’s magazine *Sight and Sound* which publish rankings of the greatest films. And there are the popular aggregators such as *Rotten Tomatoes* which average a large number of critical reviews to score films on a percentage basis. There is often some agreement between these evaluation systems on what constitutes a truly great film. On the other hand, there is sometimes controversy over awards with accusations of favoritism towards or discrimination against a country, or an ethnic group, or lobbying from within the film industry itself.

According to these measures, let’s consider some notable Japanese and New Zealand films which have won international awards. This will make the pool of films much smaller than considering the total output of either film industry. We do this since global recognition is a kind of peer review or an objective standard for deciding the merit of an achievement. Japanese awards and New Zealand awards are not included since the focus is on the international recognition of films.

While a Japanese film is fairly easy to recognize since most are produced, directed and filmed in Japan by Japanese actors speaking Japanese, New Zealand films can be a bit more difficult to recognize. Not all New Zealand films owe their origins to the country, especially since New Zealand is trying to attract overseas filmmakers to invest and film there. While *The Piano* can be called a New Zealand film with confidence, *The Lord of the Rings*, a fantasy film and an international cast, may not be a quintessential New Zealand film. But without it the New Zealand film industry narrative would be much less robust. Not all film-awarding institutions choose the same films to award prizes to each year. There is little unanimous consensus as [Table 3](#) and [Table 4](#) show. Such comparison does, however, provide an international measure for best pictures produced by Japan and New Zealand respectively.

Japanese Films: Winners & Nominees

[Table 3](#) lists 26 Japanese films which have won or been nominated for best picture in the six international competitions. Eighteen of these feature in the Academy Awards. Categories and criteria vary somewhat between the institutions; one notable example is that the Academy Awards shortlist about half a dozen nominations annually whereas Cannes only awards a winner from the “Official Selection” list in which 56 Japanese films have appeared. In their various ways, all these organizations have recognized the quality of around 70 Japanese films since 1950.

What do these Japanese films which have won or been nominated for international awards have in common that might appeal to non-Japanese audiences? There is great genre variety. There are the historical dramas like *Rashōmon*, samurai films like *Seven Samurai*, war stories like *The Burmese Harp*, family stories like *Tokyo Story* and *Shoplifters*, and films with an element of exotic ghostliness like *Ugetsu*, *Woman of the Dunes* or *Kwaidan*. The masterly animations from Japan are acknowledged in *Spirited Away* being a best picture.

TABLE 3

International successes of Japanese films which have been nominated or won Best Picture or Best International Picture

Year	Academy Awards (Oscars)	BAFTA	Cannes (Palme d'Or)	Berlin (Golden Bear)	Venice (Golden Lion)	Toronto (People's Choice)
1950	<i>Rashōmon</i> honorary award					
1951		<i>Rashōmon</i> nomination			<i>Rashōmon</i> winner	
1954	<i>Gate of Hell</i> honorary award	<i>Gate of Hell</i> nomination	<i>Gate of Hell</i> winner			
1955	<i>Samurai: The Legend of Musashi</i> honorary award	<i>Seven Samurai</i> nomination				
1956	<i>The Burmese Harp</i> nomination				<i>The Burmese Harp</i> winner	
1958					<i>Rickshaw Man</i> winner	
1960		<i>Hiroshima mon amour</i> nomination				
1961	<i>Immortal Love</i> nomination					
1962		<i>The Naked Island</i> nomination				
1963	<i>Twin Sisters of Kyoto</i> nomination			<i>Bushidō zankoku monogatari</i> winner		
1964	<i>Woman in the Dunes</i> nomination					
1965	<i>Kwaidan</i> nomination					
1967	<i>Portrait of Chieko</i> nomination					
1971	<i>Dodes'ka-den</i> nomination					
1975	<i>Dersu Uzala</i> winner <i>Sandakan No.8</i> nomination					
1980	<i>Kagemusha</i> nomination	<i>Kagemusha</i> nomination	<i>Kagemusha</i> winner			
1981	<i>Muddy River</i> nomination					
1983			<i>The Ballad of Narayama</i> winner			
1997			<i>The Eel</i> winner (1st equal)		<i>Fireworks</i> winner	
2002	<i>Spirited Away</i> nomination			<i>Spirited Away</i> winner		
2003	<i>The Twilight Samurai</i> nomination					<i>Zatoichi</i> winner
2008	<i>Departures</i> winner					
2018	<i>Shoplifters</i> nomination		<i>Shoplifters</i> winner			
Win	5	0	5	2	4	1
Nom	13	6	0	0	0	0
Official selection			56*			

Total wins = 17, total nominations = 19

*Not shown are 56 "nominations" for Cannes. These are "official selections" competing for the Palme d'Or 1951 to 2018, recognized by judges.

Retrospective awards: *Rashōmon*, *Gate of Hell*, *The Legend of Musashino*

1st equal results are counted as a winner.

Academy Awards, BAFTA, Cannes, Berlin and Venice awards decided by judges but Toronto uses a people's choice system.

Source: compiled by the author

Well-regarded critics judging the greatest films of all time support this. *Tokyo Story* was ranked 3rd in the BBC's 2018 list of its 100 greatest foreign language films voted for by 209 film critics from 43 countries. Furthermore, films from *Rashōmon* to *Shoplifters* are

rated very highly on sites which aggregate the views of film critics such as *Rotten Tomatoes*. Such films all score in the 90-100% zone.

TABLE 4

New Zealand films which have been nominated or won Best Picture

Year	Academy Awards (Oscars)	BAFTA	Cannes	Berlin	Venice	Toronto
1993	<i>The Piano</i> nomination	<i>The Piano</i> nomination	<i>The Piano</i> winner (1st equal)			
2001	<i>The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring</i> * nomination	<i>The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring</i> * winner				
2002		<i>The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers</i> * nomination				<i>Whale Rider</i> winner
2003	<i>The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King</i> * winner	<i>The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King</i> * winner				
Wins	1	2	1	0	0	1
Nominated	3	2	0	0	0	0

Total wins = 5, total nominations = 5

*The Lord of the Rings, NZ-US production

1st equal results counted as a winner.

Academy Awards, BAFTA, Cannes, Berlin and Venice awards decided by judges but Toronto uses a people's choice system.

Data to 2018

Source: compiled by the author

New Zealand Films: Winners & Nominees

One New Zealand film has decisively made its mark on the international scene in terms of being nominated or winning international awards. *The Piano* by Jane Campion stands out since it received one best picture award (Cannes) and one nomination (BAFTA). For this *The Piano* deserves special recognition since it was a quintessential story of New Zealand early settlement time. Directed by a woman, it acknowledged the multiculturalism of New Zealand, and portrayed unflinchingly the difficulties of pioneering settlement in the early 1900s.

The Lord of the Rings trilogy has a problem in fitting into the canon of New Zealand films. Although jointly produced, directed and filmed in New Zealand, it is not a New Zealand story nor does it use New Zealand actors and actresses extensively. Production relied heavily on overseas resources. For those reasons many critics suggest that it is not a typical New Zealand film. Peter Jackson, however, deserves credit for attracting overseas capital, and setting up his own production companies which led in turn to the local film industry contributing significantly to the economy and helping the New Zealand government to recognize filmmaking as a viable job-creation concept.

An interesting award at the Toronto International film festival is that of *Whale Rider* in 2002: an example of a film about one of New Zealand's minorities which received NZFC funding. The film was not nominated for best picture in any of the "big five"; audience choices are sometimes at odds with those of the critics.

In conclusion, Japan with its longer history and bigger studio-driven film industry has produced a very creditable number of highly regarded films despite, or perhaps because of, its unique culture and language. New Zealand, on the other hand, has just begun, focusing on maximizing a business approach to filmmaking (as the government does with tourism). Government funding and grants

help in setting up film schools, creating jobs for those who graduate with film and media skills. As yet, however, not many distinctive New Zealand films have appeared.

Diegesis & Diversity

To conclude we will suggest that studios have influenced the production side of the feature film industry in Japan, whereas in New Zealand government policies have been influential. Tanaka who is Japanese, and Johnson, a New Zealander, whom we met at the beginning, will offer some final observations.

The Guiding Hand of Government on the Film Industry

Japan's Big Four film studios are Toho, Toei, Shochiku and Kadokawa which trace their origins from around 100 years ago. With shareholders and other companies invested in them, these are the backbone of the Motion Picture Producers Association of Japan (MPPAJ). They are companies with long histories and have built up capital over many years, and like Hollywood do much of the funding of Japanese film production.

There is also money available for film production in Japan through subsidies available from the Cultural Affairs Agency. This can be up to 20% of the total budget, up to a maximum of \$640,000. The Japanese broadcaster NHK relies on government support through mandatory fees paid by viewers to fund programming. This means that major film funding might not come from television broadcasters, but from investors who hope that a film will be successful. In the end though, the demand for movies is audience-driven.

The emphasis of government funding for the television industry has effects on the creative side too. The argument has been made that many movies produced for TV are for popular television dramas.

TV dramas are however made for smaller screens and content has a local focus. Experience in TV production doesn't always transfer to feature film creativity because feature film productions require a different approach and, some say, a higher level of creativity in concept and technical matters.

Without a studio system as extensive as that of Japan what's a filmmaker in a country like New Zealand to do? New Zealand government policy is, shall we say, agile. There is a history of making rapid and sometimes unusual political decisions.

For a long time, the film industry in New Zealand was very quiet. Television only arrived in New Zealand in the 1960s. But some years later, government funding for the arts, and this included film, picked up. The government seemed to recognize the potential benefit to the economy too in creating jobs in sectors such as tourism and the arts.

Reflecting goals of New Zealand government policy, the NZFC has the responsibility for overseeing and promoting film production in New Zealand administering grants and loans. The mission statement of the NZFC includes reference to promotion and distribution of New Zealand films both domestically and internationally. It is hoped that this will develop the economy and create jobs in the industry and attract funding from overseas. Hollywood money coming in has helped boost the New Zealand film industry, creating jobs, drawing in overseas ventures, and feeding tourism.

The NZFC also supports the notions of inclusivity and diversity in film productions to support up to 12 feature films per year through New Zealand Screen Production grants partially funded by a state lottery and New Zealand taxpayers. Specific goals include targeting festivals and funding travel to overseas festivals in order to promote New Zealand and hold cultural activities to attract international productions and to foster New Zealand screen talent.

As far as film studios in New Zealand go, there is a group of Peter Jackson-related companies such as Wingnut Films, Weta Workshop and Weta Digital dating from the late 1980s. A few other companies specializing in television programs, documentaries and post-production are also active.

Final Comments by Tanaka & Johnson

Johnson: What direction do you think the Japanese film industry will go in the future?

Tanaka: Well a lot of recent Japanese films have been about Japan and have been popular both inside and outside Japan. Japanese people are proud of their culture; films have a market inside the country. And there is a lot of interest in Japanese culture internationally. Films are therefore an easy way to understand Japanese culture even if you don't visit the country. So I think that Japanese films will continue to be interesting for a wide audience even outside Japan.

Johnson: Do you think that Japanese filmmakers will continue to produce films mostly in the genres that they've been producing up until now, like dramas of various eras, samurai stories, horror flicks, monsters, *yakuza*, science fiction and animation?

Tanaka: The Japanese film industry will probably continue to focus on films about Japanese culture across a variety of genres. And what direction will the New Zealand film industry go in the future?

Johnson: I think the New Zealand film industry is still finding its way. Japanese films such as *Rashōmon*, *Seven Samurai*, and *Tokyo Story* are all-time greats, but New Zealand films have yet to achieve such recognition. Maybe there will be more big budget blockbuster epic-style films like *The Lord of the Rings* but there will also be more of the smaller scale films like *The Piano*. There's funding from the government to encourage diversity in film but there hasn't yet been a great deal of genuine diversity with ethnic groups such as the Chinese, Indians or Koreans making their own films set in New Zealand. That would be an interesting direction for New Zealand filmmakers to become more well known in the world, not just among local audiences. The starting point is as director Gaylene Preston puts it: "I believe that the basic responsibility of New Zealand filmmakers is to make films principally for the New Zealand audience. If we don't, no one else will."

Tanaka: So is there a lesson here for either country?

Johnson: Yes. For remarkable and sophisticated cultures like Japan, celebrate the distinctiveness of the culture. For multicultural countries like New Zealand, highlight the multiethnic nature of society but don't let one culture dominate the rest. Have the characters express their culture uniquely. Burt Munro in *The World's Fastest Indian* captures New Zealand stoicism: "At my age any day above ground and vertical is a good day."

Tanaka: And unique stories. Telling different stories, remembering what Kurosawa said, "If you want to be a great director, be a great screen writer." *Seven Samurai* finishes with Kambei reflecting on the relative happiness of samurai and farmers. "So. Again we are defeated. The farmers have won. Not us."

Johnson: Filmmaking is not just about big budgets and throwing enough money at a film and hoping something good will come out of it. The award ceremonies choose an increasing number of controversial winners. Many filmgoers will recommend films that only a handful of other people have heard of. Big budget films can appeal to a mass audience, and smaller ones to a niche of aficionados. In the music industry this trend is well underway. On Spotify there are millions of songs and chances are that when you suggest a song you like to someone, they will not have heard of it. Back in the 1950s and 1960s, there were only a few films, and everyone saw the same ones. Now there's something for everyone to see. In the age of YouTube, Tik Tok and viral videos we can all be filmmakers. As director of *Titanic* and *Avatar* James Cameron puts it: "Pick up a camera, shoot something. Put your name on it. Now you're a director. Everything after that, you're just negotiating your budget and your fee."

JS

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