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# A Critical Handbook of Japanese Film Directors: From the Silent Era to the Present Day

Alexander Jacoby

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**Alexander Jacoby : A Critical Handbook of Japanese Film Directors: From the Silent Era to the Present Day** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised A Critical Handbook of Japanese Film Directors: From the Silent Era to the Present Day:

13 of 13 people found the following review helpful. A very useful book; comprehensive and coolBy Little Roy

Blue This is an excellent reference work for anyone who has even a passing interest in Japanese cinema. Jacoby structures the book well, proceeding through all of the major Japanese directors (and many minor ones) in alphabetical order. For each director's entry, he provides a broad career overview - offering his own opinions of the major films - then includes a filmography. While I don't agree with absolutely all of his statements, his opinions are always interesting to read and well-informed, and it's nice to get a fresh (to me) perspective on such classic Japanese filmmakers as Kobayashi, Kurosawa, Ozu, Mizoguchi... Another striking thing about this book is that Jacoby isn't snobby about which directors he includes. So he has "classical" directors like Mizoguchi in here, and also genre directors like Ishiro Honda of "Godzilla" fame and Takashi Miike. His willingness to cover drama, horror, science fiction, and gangster films in a single volume makes him more open-minded than most other aficionados of Japanese cinema, who tend to limit themselves to one or two genres. (Indeed, rare is the critic who enjoys both *Tokyo Story* and *The Mysterians*, as I do.) Another highlight is that Jacoby includes some useful appendices, such as an overview of the major Japanese film studios and a list of historical eras in Japan (handy for figuring out when all these samurai movies are supposed to take place). Of course, since the book covers a lot of ground, Jacoby doesn't delve too deeply into any one director's work. Even "big guns" like Ozu and Kurosawa have short entries; and while Jacoby has room to challenge some common theories about Ozu, he doesn't have quite enough room to properly develop his counter-theories. Also, like most handbooks, this can get a little dry if you try to read it all in one go; I prefer to sample individual entries whenever I feel like it. Overall, this is good stuff, and I look forward to using this book to track down the more obscure classics of Japanese cinema. As a pointless aside, many of the movies covered in this book have very amusing titles (in translation), on the order of: "Ninja Mountain Attack Saga: Duel by Autumn Moonlight!" Just thought I'd mention that, because it gave me a few chuckles.

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful.  
Definitive (Or Pretty Darn Close)! By William Flanigan  
If you are a Japanese film enthusiast (or just have a casual interest in films from Japan), you will want to have this hard-copy guide close on-hand. To make sense of the Japanese cinema past and present (circa 2008 - the date of publication). The text is written in plain language for the general reader. It is a far cry from the essentially unintelligible volumes out there written by academic film scholars. Contents also include a substantial glossary of terminology, a historical overview of releasing studios, and a description of each Japanese cultural period addressed by currently-known Japanese films (starting with the Nara period, circa year 700). There are, however, some issues to be raised, one minor and a few more than minor. The index is substantial, but does not list films by generally-accepted translated titles in English. More irritating, films listed in the text for each director are cited first by their Japanese title (in romaji, thankfully) and then by their English translated title. This makes sense, since English title translations can vary. However and on balance, it does not make sense, since the readers of this handbook are likely to have English as their primary language. Further, film titles (in either Japanese romaji or English) are not listed alphabetically across years or within years. This makes the reader work harder than necessary to get at information of interest. Bottom line: Consolidated, comprehensive, invaluable, and in print. WILLIAM FLANIGAN, PhD.

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Nicely Done  
By Jessica Salmonson  
Now that quite a good selection Japanese silent films are actually available on dvd, it's nice to have a book about them that doesn't just make me think "Damn, I wish I could see that one!" -- because I can!

This important work fills the need for a reasonably priced yet comprehensive volume on major directors in the history of Japanese film. With clear insight and without academic jargon, Jacoby examines the works of over 150 filmmakers to uncover what makes their films worth watching. Included are artistic profiles of everyone from Yutaka Abe to Isao Yukisada, including masters like Kinji Fukasaku, Juzo Itami, Akira Kurosawa, Takashi Miike, Kenji Mizoguchi, Yasujiro Ozu, and Yoji Yamada. Each entry includes a critical summary and filmography, making this book an essential reference and guide. UK-based Alexander Jacoby is a writer and researcher on Japanese film.

About the Author  
Freelance writer and film critic. Graduate of Cambridge U (2000) with M.Phil. in Renaissance Lit. Employed at BBC Broadcast (Red Bee Media, Ltd). In Japan 2002-2005. Continues to publish essays and reviews on Japanese film in magazines and film journals. Donald Richie has been writing about Japan for over 50 years from his base in Tokyo and is the author of over 40 books and hundreds of essays and reviews. He is widely admired for his incisive film studies on Ozu and Kurosawa, and for his stylish and incisive observations on Japanese culture.