

Consul General Hisaeda Remarks
“Miyori and the Sacred Forest”
February 18, 2010

Good evening everyone, and thank you for attending tonight.

Today brings us “Miyori no Mori,” an animated film from Japan. Or, I should say, “anime.” Japanese animation is, after all, almost a world of its own!

These days, Japan is a major producer of animation, and Japanese anime is cleaning up in the American market. However, this has not always been the case. The fact is that once, the market was monopolized by American animations.

American animation developed alongside live action film history. It started in movie theaters, as animated shorts were used to fill a few minutes before the main event. But these early cartoons soon blossomed into the feature themselves thanks to the genius of Walt Disney. Long ago, I would enjoy these ancient films in the theaters in Japan. Films like “Bambi,” “Dumbo,” and “Lady and the Tramp.” The beauty of the colors and graceful motion had a huge impact on me.

In Japan, TV broadcasting began in the 1950s. Since the first TV networks lacked the infrastructural depth of America, they imported many shows from the US. Japan got to know America through television, and of course, animation. I fondly remember shows from many studios—from action series like Popeye, Dick Tracy, and Batman, to family shows like the Flintstones and the Jetsons, to the animalian antics of Heckyl and Jeckyl, Bugs Bunny, Winnie the Pooh, and Felix the Cat.

In the 60s, stimulated by these popular American shows, Japanese TV studios began making their own. Popular manga, or comic, series from magazines were adapted for the screen. Thus, “anime” was born as the child of manga and television.

Early anime was slow to develop technically. Frankly, it was pretty bad. If you watch any, I think you’ll agree. While Disney could produce smooth animation at 24 frames per second, Japanese companies created crude art on a low budget. At the time, I didn’t find it interesting, so I mostly stuck with American imports.

The slow growth of Japanese anime had one important side effect: telling good stories became the focus. In the US, comedy was king. The story of Tom and Jerry, for example, was very simple: a cat fights a mouse. Its pleasures came from the endless ways the creators presented the central gag, and their technical mastery of the animation. But early Japanese anime was missing these innovations. So instead, turning to its manga-roots, Japanese animation matured into the complex world of stories that we love today.

Modern anime is led by visionaries like Hayao Miyazaki, who combines charming stories and digital technology to the delight of audiences worldwide. Tonight’s

film is the first feature by Nizo Yamamoto, who has worked as Miyazaki's art director. Like Miyazaki, he draws inspiration from the magic of childhood and the natural world.

Today, as exemplars of modern Japanese culture, manga and anime appeal to young people around the world. This is exactly the kind of "soft power" that we at the consulate love to bring to you. And now you know a bit of the history behind it. But enough talk—let's watch!