

Notes on *Mothra* (1961)

- Music more mellow in beginning. Not surprising given that this film was scored by Yuji Koseki and not Akira Ifukube, who's known for his bombastic film scores.
- Opens with a typhoon. This film was produced shortly after Typhoon Vera hit Japan, so it was an event fresh in the minds of the Japanese.
- The irradiated island is indicative of the aftermaths of real-life atomic tests.
- The ship's crew is trapped between the typhoon and radiation. It could be argued that this is symbolic of Japan's plight, especially during the Cold War. As the only nation to have nuclear bombs dropped on it, they were quite nervous being caught between the U.S. and U.S.S.R. Being that Japan is a disaster-prone nation, they were under constant threat of destruction.
- Harkens back to *Gojira* with shipwrecked sailors being affected by radiation, but the tone is much lighter.
- Polynesia myth: once one landmass like Atlantis (or Seatopia? Or Mu Empire?) Could be reference to the ancient supercontinent of Pangea.
- There are lots of western actors and spoken English in this film, more than is usually seen/heard in a Japanese kaiju movie. Turnabout is fair play, so the westerners speak decent Japanese. Most of them lived in Japan, so it's no surprise.
- Interestingly, the nation isn't enthusiastic about Nelson's expedition, but he defies them. Does this indicate something of a conscience on their part?
- However, they later back Nelson when he escapes with the fairies, saying they will protect their property. Later, though, they order Nelson to renounce ownership of the fairies.
- Nelson is a wonderful, almost over-the-top villain. Another Sekizawa trademark. Jerry Ito's performance comes just short of being cartoonish, thankfully never crossing the line. He's greedy, exploitative, opportunistic, and violent. "Dealer of artifacts": In many ways, he reminds me of Belloque from *Raiders of the Lost Ark*. He's also introduced and presented much like Denham was in *King Kong*, although Nelson is much more despicable. He learned all his lines phonetically.
- "Look over there! It's a matte painting!"
- They wisely make sure not to show the Shobijin dolls for very long.
- *Mothra* appears (as a caterpillar) 46 minutes into the film. Adult form appears 84 minutes in.
- There's a potent spirituality, obviously inspired by the symbology of Christianity, in this film. The *Mothra* glyph looks like a cross. The natives and fairies have a religion centered around *Mothra*. They offer prayers to *Mothra* and have faith in her, even when she's an unhatched egg. The fairies have an unwavering belief that *Mothra* will come rescue them. *Mothra* would continue to be a spiritual kaiju, but the religious overtones are most potent here. Another symbol, as seen in later films, is that *Mothra* goes through a cycle of death and rebirth. When one dies, another egg hatches, revealing new larva to replace her. Even her metamorphosis is not unlike death. In all likelihood, the authors of the story were simply borrowing from Christianity in order to craft an interesting story. I doubt any of them were Christians, as Christianity is a rare religion in Japan, even to this day.

- Zen's editor (Takashi Kimura) reminds me a lot of J. Jonah Jameson from the *Spider-Man* comics/films. Even he kinda exploits Mothra for headlines.
- The SFX are fantastic and meant to illicit wonder from the audience. My favorite SFX scenes are the breaching dam and the napalm attack on Mothra.
- First instance of a "kaiju kid"? Predates Gamera. Hides in a chicken.
- Mothra's cocoon looks like a giant white peanut.
- First use of "mecha" in a kaiju film. In this case, it's the atomic cannon provided by Rolisica to attack Mothra. They would become a staple of most Godzilla films to follow.
- (Nelson loves evil laughter).
- 20 minutes passes in less than one minute of cuts. The anti-DBZ?
- Why do Nelson and his men speak Japanese in Rolisica? Probably because the Japanese actors only spoke that language.
- The fairies shed their last vestige of slavery at the end by discarding the fancy robes Nelson made them wear, revealing their earthen-brown native garb.
- "Never disturb the peace of Infant Island again"...NOPE!
- The film ends on a joke.
- The ending narration expresses Honda's pacifism.

Treaty of Mutual Cooperation

- The treaty established that both countries would resolve international issues between them peacefully with prominence given to the U.N. when dealing with aggression. (Wikipedia)
 - Article 5 stated that when facing attacks from a third party, the U.N. Security Council must be involved and actions by both countries be ceased "when the Security Council has taken the measures necessary to restore and maintain international peace and security."
 - Article 10 stated that the treaty could be abrogated if the U.N. assured the peace and security of the country, i.e. if and when the United Nations System of Collective Security is in effect.
- Both countries assumed responsibility for defense, but Japan, having renounced war, couldn't assist the U.S. (Wikipedia)
- Opposition to the treaty over the years has come mostly from Okinawa, where the U.S. has many bases. These have included complaints over noise and environmental pollution. Numerous noise pollution lawsuits against Kadena Air Base and MCAS Futenma resulted in awards of \$59 million and \$1.3 million to residents, respectively (Sumida, Chiyomi (27 November 2009) "Futenma Questions and Answers". Stars and Stripes.) (Sumida, Chiyomi (1 March 2009). "\$57 million awarded in Kadena noise suit". Stars and Stripes.) Runoff from live fire exercises has damaged the tourist Okinawa's coral reef, which is a key tourist attraction (Japanese Communist Party (February 2000). Problems of U.S. Military Bases in Okinawa Japanese Communist Party")
 - The most contentious, though, are the crimes committed by U.S. military personnel and their dependents, the latest being the kidnapping and molestation of a 12-year-old by two marines and a Navy corpsman. (Packard G. (2010). "The United States-Japan Security Treaty at 50". *Foreign Affairs* :92–103. Retrieved from: Military & Government Collection, August 2, 2010.) Secretary of State

Condoleezza Rice apologized for this series of crimes in 2008 (including the rape of a 14-year-old girl by a marine) (Justin McCurry (February 28, 2008).

"Condoleezza Rice apologizes for US troops behavior on Okinawa as crimes shake alliance with Japan". The Guardian. UK.) However, some statistics show that crime rates among U.S. personnel are lower than those of Okinawan residents (MICHAEL HASSETT (February 26, 2008). "U.S. military crime: SOFA so good?The stats offer some surprises in wake of the latest Okinawa rape claim". The Japan Times.)

- In 2006, in an agreement between the Bush Administration and the Japanese government, MCAS Futenma was moved farther north to the Okinawa city of Nago and 8,000 Marines and their dependents were moved to Guam (Packard, George R. "The United States-Japan Security Treaty at 50". Foreign Affairs. Retrieved 2013-04-23.)
- According to a 2007 Okinawa Times poll, 73.4% of Japanese citizens appreciated the mutual security treaty with the US and the presence of the USFJ. (自衛隊・防衛問題に関する世論調査, The Cabinet Office of Japan)
- In 2014, President Obama declared that any attack made against the disputed Senkaku Islands would be covered by this treaty. He was the first sitting President to do so. (Wikipedia)

OTHER SOURCES

Honda Bio

- While Sekizawa and Kimura were polar opposites, Koji Kajita said Honda was good at bringing out the best in each of them.
- This was made at the height of Toho's (and Japanese film's) "golden age." It had the enormous budget of 200,000 yen (\$560,000). It was Honda and Tsuburaya's biggest film yet.
- "We wanted to do something that was new, for the whole family, like a Disney or Hollywood type of picture. We wanted to be brighter, nicer." –Honda
- Loosely based on *The Glowing Fairies and Mothra*, a serialized novel by Shinichiro Nakamura, Takehiko Fukunaga, and Zenei (Yoshie) Hotta. It was published in *Weekly Asahi*. Sekizawa cherry-picked elements and left much out (including a romance between the Fairies and the male protagonist and nods to AMPO treaty protests). "What's most important is entertainment. If there's too much detail...the audience won't be interested. So my philosophy is [to] just add enough to tell the story and keep moving along." –Sekizawa
- Frankie Sakai wasn't a regular for Honda, let alone tokusatsu.
- Honda hoped one day the film would be rebooted/remade as an animated feature a la Disney.

Commentary by Ryfle and Godzisewski

- ("Jelly Ito"?)

- Reinvigorated Japanese fantasy and sci-fi films, prolonging it for a decade when the genres had run their course in America.
- Hiroshi Koizumi was one of Toho's most popular actors in the 1950s.
- Ito is Japanese-American, and his father went back to Japan during WWII to avoid being tried for espionage. Ito met him while serving in the Occupation.
- The voiceover for Chujo in the cave is the only time this happens in the film. Inconsistent.
- The Peanuts' given names mean "sun" and "moon." They celebrated their 20th birthday during production. Emi has a mole next to her left eye, so her sister had one drawn on. They were experienced with speaking in unison.
- Paved the way for Godzilla return the next year.
- They feel the score is played "to the film" as opposed to being part of the film.
- Ifukube felt he couldn't write music for the Peanuts.
- Most of the English-speaking actors in this were amateur expatriates who were moonlighting.
- In the original draft, Michiko led a student protest against Nelson to release the Fairies.
- Honda liked to use a triangle of main characters, 2 men and 1 woman.
- The American poster is a lot scarier and spicier than the movie.
- The Mothra larva suit used in this was the largest ever made by Toho: 7 meters (23 feet) long. Nakajima was one of two men in it.
- Hey, Robert Dunham!
- Honda was the son of a Buddhist monk but was disturbed by how people would kill each other over religion. Asked, "Where's the love"? Answers it by advocating a universal religion in something like this.

The Kaiju Film by Jason Barr

- Argues that Mothra's glyph is less religious and more natural. Nature is her "religion," and she represents balance.
- The natives represent a "counteridentity" that compares cultural values, ruralism and urbanism, and tradition and capitalism.
- The ravaged Infant Island is like Bikini Atoll.
- Mothra protects the *spirit* and *tradition* of Japan, not the property.

Kalat

- He wrote all but one of Mothra's subsequent appearances in the next films.
- Sekizawa is much like Zen. Producer Fumio Tanaka called him "childish, but in the most positive way."
- It's telling that Nelson overlooks the natives' anti-radiation juice in favor of showbiz with the Fairies.
- Trendmasters Mothra figures had low sales because kids couldn't recognize Mothra as a monster.

Galbraith

- American critics dismissed the film as a poor attempt at replicating a Hollywood picture (ignoring the fact that Mothra would never get made in America, especially at that time).
- The Japanese pay little regard to realism so long as the story is compelling. Americans look for it.

Japan's Green Monsters

- Japan was a patriarchal society for centuries, and despite some reforms in the Meiji era, the mantra for women was still “good wife, wise mother.” There was some pushback to this in the 1920-1930s with the “moga” (“modern girls”), who were similar to American flappers.
- The postwar period did see the exploitation of foreign non-Japanese Asian women by the Japanese. This is seen in the “pan-pan girls,” who were basically legal prostitutes during the Occupation, who served to protect the chastity of native Japanese women.
- Protests against the renewal of the Treaty of Mutual Cooperation included 13,000 mothers.
- The idea for Mothra supposedly came to Tsuburaya in a dream.
- Infant Island and its natives is a complex collection of symbols. Represents a Japan ravaged by radiation, but the idyllic portions represent an idealized Japan untouched by it. The natives are both the “Other” and the “Self,” in this regard. They are foreign to the Japanese, but they are the Self as they represent how the Japanese saw themselves in relation to other nations, especially the U.S. and USSR. In this sense, Japanese actors donning “blackface” makeup is expressive of this dichotomy.
- The Fairies show female mobility and modernity despite being kept at bay.
- Nelson’s massacre of the natives is indicative of the Battle of Okinawa, escalations in Vietnam, and unchecked greed.
- The Fairies’ dance, with gestures and movements, is reminiscent of traditional Thai dance.
- Mothra = kamikaze (divine winds)
- Mothra is natural; she brings life out of death. This is in contrast to Godzilla and other kaiju.

LeMay – Big Book

- He says the Mothra suit was 40 feet long.
- Mothra is the only kaiju to spin in and out of the Godzilla series.
- Meant to appeal to women.

LeMay – Writing

- The original story features a creation myth with gods tearing themselves apart, resulting in four fairies called Ailenas. Also, Nelson is assassinated by an angry Rolisican citizen.

- Both the original story and an early draft of the script refer to Godzilla, showing there were plans of a shared universe sooner than we thought.

LeMay – Lost Films

- Honda wanted this to be like *King Kong* except with a happy ending.
- There's a taller fairy in the original story (60cm/2 feet). The fairies glow.
- The fairies hide in a compartment in Mothra's eye, and they all fly into space in search of a "negative earth."