

### *King Kong vs. Godzilla* (Japanese cut)

- Made to celebrate Toho's 30th anniversary.
- Toho beat Hollywood to not one, but *three* trends that it's been fond of the last ten years. The first, I would argue, was in this film with nostalgia. Kong hadn't been in a film for over thirty years. He was quite popular in Japan. Many older moviegoers undoubtedly remembered seeing the original film in the 1930s. Bringing him back in a similar, modern film was a huge draw. (You can almost hear the 'Member Berries from *South Park* while watching it.) It's also probably why this was also a huge success in America, as well.
- It should be noted that this isn't the same King Kong from the 1933 original. Toho's reimagined Kong is larger and stronger than he original, and he was given the ability to channel electricity in order to better combat the fire-breathing Godzilla.
- Is the Kong suit cheap compared to the Godzilla suit? Yes. Is that some meta commentary, as some have suggested? I'd say, no. It was probably a mistake on the production side. Ape suits are notoriously difficult to make believable, especially at this time.
- The film opens with a foreboding narration about the fragility of the Earth while a model globe spins, but then shifts suddenly to goofy scientist on a boring science show talking about how that might happen. Psyche!
- Mr. Tako is a buffoon, but unlike Nelson or the villains in the next film, he isn't evil. There's some hilarious comedy with his phone (talks in wrong end, boss overhears his complaints).
  - Tako at one point says their shows are boring. I agree!
  - In many ways, Mr. Tako is the Carl Denham of this movie. He's a man desperately publicity, and he thinks finding something extraordinary on an expedition to an island will get that for him. He's also quite animated and a bit of a showman. In the end, he's foiled by his own hubris. Unlike Denham, though, he's not an adventurous filmmaker (in fact, he seems averse to danger), and he manages to avoid being held responsible for the damage caused by Kong because the ape escapes before coming ashore. If Kong had made it, he would've been held responsible.
  - Tako drops the title!
  - He looks ridiculous in his explorer get-up, which is the point. It's meant to show that he's out of his element; it's a joke.
  - Irony: Tako falls on TNT detonator during a scuffle when he didn't want to blow up Kong. Lucky for him, nothing happens.
- American actors on submarine give subpar performances. They know English, but they can't act. No wonder most of them, if not all, were dubbed over in the Americanized version.

- There's a scene that was cut from the dubbed version that features Osamu playing drums for a drug commercial. Graphics pop up like the audience is seeing the actual commercial. It reminds me of the fake commercials in the original *RoboCop*. It's a satire of such things. Sadly, it only happens once. Not only was this film ahead of the curve, it still works despite being over 50 years old and in a different culture. Some things are just universal.
  - It also serves as foreshadowing for Osamu playing drums later to calm Kong when he's tranquilized. It helps that scene make more sense, unlike in the dubbed version.
- There's a slow, suspenseful build-up to both monsters' being revealed. In fact, the kaijus' appearances parallel each other.
  - Each is precipitated by a distant roar.
  - Each one has something crumble (Godzilla: iceberg. Kong: wall)
  - Each creature battles something after they appear, and it's something indicative of who they are (Godzilla: the JSDF. Kong: Oodaku)
  - Godzilla: Geiger counter increases, the sub gets stuck, the situation becomes direr.
- Oh, the islanders. They were the subject of a controversy in G-Fan recently. Again, I think this was done for practical reasons, not because of racism. Also, humor. Oh, and a kid gets a cigarette.
- How are they getting radio signals this far out?
- Sekizawa trademark: the human plot, for the most part, is humorous while the monster plot is serious.
- *King Kong* parallels:
  - A wall built by islanders to keep Kong out.
  - Islanders have an animated chief.
  - Expedition to the island.
  - Giant animals for Kong to battle.
  - Not much explanation for how they move him. They mention building a raft.
  - Kong derails a train when he reaches Tokyo much like the original Kong did in the original when he reached NYC.
  - The most obvious nod to the original is when Kong takes a liking to Fumi, grabs her, and then climbs the Diet building, where he is accosted by the military.
- Continuity: Godzilla emerges from an iceberg. He was buried in ice at the end of *Godzilla Raids Again*. The prime minister alludes to this.
- Godzilla appears 26 minutes in.
- Meta: One of Tako's associates mentions that a Godzilla movie is being made.
- For real octopuses were used to bring the Oodaku (giant octopus) to life. It's something unique in the franchise. Nowhere else does Tsuburaya attempt something like this. Hot

air had to be shot at it to get it to flair. While the octopuses were never hurt, I doubt this could done now. There would be too much outcry about potential animal abuse. Ironically, three of the octopuses were released back into the wild—and the other become Tsuburaya's dinner. How many people can say they ate their special effects?

- King Kong appears 37 minutes in.
- Once again, there's lots of singing and dancing. Honda must've liked musicals.
- I like the pin with "tako."
- Kong is considered to be "smuggled goods." I suppose he's not unlike smuggled exotic animals.
- Toho's Kong can swim. A giant swimming gorilla is just something you have to accept.
- Radio broadcast says Kong is an animal and Godzilla is a nuclear mutation. So? Both are destructive creatures. How does being a mutant make Godzilla worse?
- Kong and Godzilla meet 61 minutes in.
- What's with Tako's coin flip? In the dubbed version, he does it to see who would win the fight. There's no explanation here. Cultural thing?
- There are several scenes where people debate/argue over who would win in a fight, Godzilla or Kong. Some even place bets on the winner (which would probably happen in real life). It helps lighten the mood and provides good comedy. It could be meta, too, though. There are talks like this frequently in the fandom/nerd/geek community.
- The JSDF seems a bit prejudiced toward Godzilla. It's not until much later in the film, after Godzilla has been deterred from Tokyo, that they start to consider Kong to be a threat. Before then, they have this single-minded focus squarely on Godzilla despite there being another dangerous kaiju on the loose.
- Kazuo and Fumi are always finding ways (or excuses) to stay together, much to her brother's chagrin. Some nice character-driven, down-to-earth humor.
- Why doesn't anyone worry about Kong dropping Fumi when they tranquilize him? She could easily have fallen to her death.
- I'll give the dubbed version credit for one thing: it explains the Soma berries and Kong's affinity for electricity better. The original version just throws those things at the audience with little or no explanation.
- (Soma is the drug given to the masses for free to keep them high and give them leads to hallucinations). Faroelectron here.
- Everyone decides to kill two birds with one stone by having Kong and Godzilla fight each other. "Let them fight."
- Appropriately, Mt. Fuji serves as the battleground for the climax. This marks the location's first appearance in the Godzilla series. It's always the setting for a momentous battle, as we'll see later.
  - The climactic fight features intentional sumo wrestling parody. We also see here and in their previous encounter some anthropomorphisms from both monsters. This was the first time Godzilla was characterized this way.

- The battle tactics in this fight are often hilarious (and even meme-worthy). My favorites are when Kong stuffs a tree down Godzilla's throat only for Godzilla spit it out with his atomic breath, launching the flaming tree back at Kong. The other is right after that when Kong judo-flips Godzilla like a blackbelt.
  - Who wins? That's been a point of contention among fans for years. Some argue that Kong's emergence says he's the victor. Others say Kong was retreating and Godzilla was hiding underwater (he's amphibious, after all). This propagated an urban legend that there were two endings filmed, one for the Japanese cut where Godzilla "wins" and another for the American cut where Kong wins. This has since been disproven since Americans have finally been able to see the original cut of the film.
  - Lightning is described as "Popeye's spinach" for Kong.
  - The U.S. version edits in the tsunami from *The Mysterians* to make the impact look bigger. It also has a satellite shot from *Battle in Outer Space*.
- It should be noted that while all of the Godzilla films are commercially available in the United States, *King Kong vs. Godzilla* is one of two weird exceptions. Only the dubbed version, which is owned by Universal Pictures, has been made available in the U.S. That is, until Criterion included it as a special feature in their Showa box set. Sadly, it's the laserdisc version, which was a cobbled version and shifts between quality.

#### *Kong Unmade by LeMay*

- The third film for both monsters after long absences and the first time both appeared in color and widescreen.
- The Diet building scene wasn't in the shooting script and was thought up on the spot by Honda to get Sahara in the scene.
- RKO insisted that this Kong look different, and Toho executives wanted a "semi-comedy."
- Tsuburaya loved working on this because the original *King Kong* inspired him to pursue special effects as a career. Ironic, given that many Kong fans hate this movie.
- Willis O'Brien's wife thought seeing this hastened Obie's death. Merian C. Cooper hated the film, thinking suitmation was cheap.
- Highest-grossing Godzilla film even after being adjusted for inflation (11 million tickets sold).
- RKO charged Toho \$220,000 to license Kong. This ate into the budget, forcing the production to film in Oshima Island instead of Sri Lanka for Faro Island. It also most likely contributed to the shabby Kong suit. It was covered in yak fur.
- Suit actor Hirose once wore the Kong suit for three hours straight, and it once caught fire.
- There's only one ending!
- Stopmotion was considered briefly, but Tsuburaya only did a few seconds of footage.

*Big Book... by LeMay*

- Both Mie Hama and Akiko Wakabayashi were Bond girl in *You Only Live Twice*.

*David Kalat*

- Toho's bread and butter at the time was comedies, so this fits.
- This is Sekizawa's first G-film.
- Ifukube's music is Ainu-inspired, but the actors playing the natives were spray-tanned perhaps to avoid offending them.
- Sekizawa wrote human problems the humans had to deal with: in this case, Tako's greed and the humans' need for a savior from Godzilla.
- Kenji Sahara is the most frequent actor in Godzilla films.
- Koichi Kawakita worked on this, uncredited.
- Starting here, Godzilla's attacks mostly caused property damage and not death (*Mothra* started this) thanks to the lighter tone. Sekizawa did show how these affected one person, Fumiko, as she is menaced by both Godzilla and Kong.
- Cinematographer Sadamasa Arikawa saw Kong and Godzilla as symbols of the U.S. and Japan and their battle as a symbol of the conflict between the countries. That's not flattering for either country. Kong is a drug addict and Godzilla is a brute.

*Apocalypse Then by Bogue*

- It grossed \$2.75 million in the U.S.
- There are several references to using nukes, but it's quickly dismissed. The U.S. version increases it slightly since the U.S. was trying to keep up with the USSR's stockpile.

*Galbraith*

- The U.S. version has Dr. Johnson using a children's book to explain the kaiju.
- Most of Ifukube's score was removed and replaced with Universal stock music from films like *Creature from the Black Lagoon*.
- First Godzilla film in stereo sound (U.S. version was mono).

*Honda Biography by Ryfle and Godzieszewski*

- Honda thought TV didn't take its audience seriously and took them for granted. At the time, pro wrestlers were biting each other on TV and, story goes, made elderly viewers pass out.
- Honda didn't like the comical portrayal of Godzilla, but he grinned and bore it.
- The film took cues from *keizai shosetsu* (business novels) and salaryman comedies of the time. Sekizawa had great insight into TV production because he was working in TV.
- The song on the radio is a politically incorrect tune about native family on a palm tree island: "Dad is Rumba, Mom is Mambo, and the kids are Conga and Bongo."
- Tsuburaya embraced the change in tone.

*King Kong... by Morton*

- He considers the Toho films to be Kong's lowpoint.
- Some sources—like Morton—say Fuminori Ohashi, who built the suits used in the two unofficial and lost Japanese Kong films, built the one used in this one. LeMay says that isn't true.
- There's speculation Kong was made to look silly to avoid frightening children and so audiences would root for him.
- He calls the portrayal of the natives "sincere but racially insensitive."
- The crew who worked on the U.S. cut wrote or directed for sitcoms.
- Contemporary critics gave it mixed reviews, praising it only as exploitation or kiddie fare.

*Mushroom Clouds and Mushroom Men by Brothers*

- Speculates that the film is less a satire of commercialism and more a cinematic bragging about how Japan's economy could take on western economies like the U.S.
- Radio announcer says Kong is a "real animal" but Godzilla is "a monster born from radiation," distinguishing Godzilla as unnatural.
- The song on the radio mocks *dojin* (a derogatory term for dark-skinned natives).
- This and my other sources say the final line is about learning how to treat plants and animals. The Criterion subtitles are about learning to adapt to one's environment.
- Nakajima hit his head while falling into the ocean in the finale. He nearly drowned. He needed mouth-to-mouth.
- Mie Hama didn't care much for genre films.
- Ichiro Arishima was described as "the Japanese Charlie Chaplin."
- Honda may have accidentally appeared in a reflection in a mirror in the apartment scene. A man in a white cap can be seen. (10:39-10:47)

Related Topics

*The Japanese Economic Miracle*

- This was a period of rapid economic growth Japan experienced from the end of WWII to the end of the Cold War. **The "Golden Sixties," when Toho tokusatsu films were at their peak, is considered to be the greatest period of growth during this era.** (Wikipedia). Japan's economy increased 55-fold from 1946-1976, accounting for 10% of the world's economic activity while only occupying 0.3% of the world's surface area and 3% of the world's population (Chalmers Johnson, *Miti and the Japanese Miracle: The Growth of Industrial Policy : 1925-1975*)
- There was doubt in the early 1960s in Japan about this growth. Japanese economists found it hard to believe and wrote cautionary articles saying the boom would fail. Western economists, however, praised it, seeing "expansion of demand, high

productivity, comparatively serene labor relations, and a very high rate of savings.”  
(Chalmers Johnson, Miti and the Japanese Miracle: The Growth of Industrial Policy : 1925-1975)

- **It was just beginning in 1962, the year the film was released.** A third of the growth happened from 1966-1975. Despite recessions in 1954, 1965, and 1974, the Japanese government passed more creative economic initiatives to continue to spur things on. The Japanese also moved from coal and textiles to oil and machinery/finished metal products, respectively, a process called heavy and chemical industrialization (Chalmers Johnson, Miti and the Japanese Miracle: The Growth of Industrial Policy : 1925-1975).
- National-character explanation: the economic miracle happened because of Japan’s “unique culturally derived capacity to cooperate with each other.” In other words, Japan’s tendency to emphasize the group over the individual makes it possible for them to agree more with each other, maximizing performance. (Chalmers Johnson, Miti and the Japanese Miracle: The Growth of Industrial Policy : 1925-1975)
- The “no-miracle-occurred” analysis: This states that the growth was only a natural outgrowth of market forces. It was brought about by individuals and enterprises responding to free markets. This is also called the “anything but politics” explanation because it minimizes the government’s involvement, saying it simply provided the right environment. (Chalmers Johnson, Miti and the Japanese Miracle: The Growth of Industrial Policy : 1925-1975)
- The *uchiwa* (“all in the family”) economic system: This system consists of the “Three Sacred Treasures System,” which are “lifetime” employment, the seniority wage system, and enterprise unionism.” It’s believed that these unique Japanese traits account for greater production value and time with fewer missed days, fewer strikes, greater innovation, better quality control, and greater labor commitment. (Chalmers Johnson, Miti and the Japanese Miracle: The Growth of Industrial Policy : 1925-1975)
- The “free ride” explanation: the economic growth is due to the alliance with the United States. This was brought about by a lack of defense expenditures, ready access to major export market, and relatively cheap transfers of technology (Chalmers Johnson, Miti and the Japanese Miracle: The Growth of Industrial Policy : 1925-1975)
- A key to the miracle was the creation of *keiretsu*, which were business groups that more or less replaced the pre-war *zaibatsu*, which were broken up during the Occupation. Businesses in these groups have interlocking relationships and shareholdings in order to better navigate market fluctuations and prevent takeovers. (Wikipedia)
- Mikiso Hane, said the period leading up to the late 1960s saw “the greatest years of prosperity Japan had seen since the Sun Goddess shut herself up behind a stone door to protest her brother Susano-o’s misbehavior.” He went on to say that the Japanese government contributed to this by instituting regulations and protectionisms to manage crises and by concentrating on trade expansions. (Hane, Mikiso. Eastern Phoenix: Japan Since 1945. Boulder: Westview Press, 1996.)

- In 1954 under Prime Minister Hayato Ikeda, who is called "the single most important individual architect of the Japanese economic miracle," pursued a policy of over-industrialization, which led to the practice of "over-loaning." This was where the Bank of Japan issued loans to city banks who in turn loaned to business conglomerates. The conglomerates, which were called the *keiretsu* (essentially replacements for the *zaibatsu*), would borrow too much money from the banks, who would in turn borrow too much from the Bank of Japan, giving the bank control over them all. This fostered diverse investments and close relationships, protecting against takeovers (Wikipedia).
- Keiretsu shifted managers; focuses away from short-term profits and stock dividends and more toward interest payments. Two-thirds of shares in most companies were traded, allowing them to plan for the long-term. (Wikipedia)
- From 1965 to 1980, Japan GDP grew from \$91 billion to a record \$1.065 trillion. (Wikipedia)
- Under Prime Minister Ikeda, Japan undertook the ambitious "income doubling plan" in the 1960s. Taxes and interest rates were lowered for private players to increase spending. He invested in infrastructure, building new highways subways, airports, and the like, and also invested in communications, which were previously neglected. This took Japan closer to a mixed economic model. (Wikipedia)
- Ikeda also pushed trade liberalization (or free trade). In 1960, trade imports were 41% liberalized, and he planned to take them to 80% in three years. This saw opposition from industries and the public. The Japanese press described it as "the second coming of the black ships," "the defenselessness of the Japanese islands in the face of attack from huge foreign capitalist powers," and "the readying of the Japanese economy for a bloodstained battle between national capital and foreign capital." Ikeda was only being pragmatic, though, hoping to secure a protected market through regulations that favored Japanese industry and products. By the time he left office, Japan's GNP was growing at an astonishing 13.9%. (Wikipedia)

#### *The Ministry of International Trade and Industry (MITI)*

- This was once one of the most powerful government agencies in Japan. It was created in May 1949 with the split of the Ministry of Commerce and Industry. It was tasked with coordinating international trade policies between various groups, such as the Bank of Japan and other commerce-related cabinet agencies. This was done to counteract deflationary regulations affected by SCAP. It was needed because the country was still recovering from WWII. In 2001, its role was taken over by the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI). (Wikipedia)
- MITI was in charge not only of imports and exports, but also all domestic businesses not covered by other ministries, pollution control, energy and power, some aspects of foreign economic assistance, and consumer complaints. This allowed them to integrate what would've normally been conflicting policies to minimize damage to exports.



- **I can imagine that Tako would've dealt with MITI if he'd managed to get Kong into Japan, especially since the JSDF labeled him "smuggled goods."**
- MITI created industrial policy with the objective to strengthen Japan's industrial base. It didn't manage things like a planned economy, as is done in socialist countries, but it did provide both formal and informal guidance to businesses on such things as modernization, technology, and investment, among other things. (Wikipedia)
- MITI gained control over all imports in 1952 with the disbanding of the Economic Stabilization Board and the Foreign Exchange Control Board. This also gave it control over the Japanese foreign exchange budget. (Wikipedia)
- MITI lost some power in 1971 when the U.S. and Japan switched to a floating exchange rate. This was brought about by lobbyists from other countries, particularly the U.S., wanting Japan to have more liberal trade laws, thereby lessening MITI's control of the economy. By the 1980s, MITI was helping foreign corporations establish themselves in Japan. (Wikipedia)
- By establishing the Japan Development Bank, MITI provided the private sector with much low-cost capital to use for long-term growth. This included the Fiscal Investment and Loan Plan, a massive pooling of individual and national savings, which at one point controlled four-times as much money as the world's largest national bank. (Wikipedia)

**Commented [1]:** We probably won't discuss this for the sake of time.