

2. The Number of Films Released and Film Titles

The Number of Films Released

Between 1955 and 2004, the number of films released at theaters was up and down but was roughly 550 to 650 films per year, and has continued increasing in the years since 2004 primarily due to digitalization. In 2013, the number of films released was over 1,000, with more than 500 each of Japanese and foreign films. The year 2019 saw as many as 1,278 films released. In 2020, even during the COVID-19 pandemic, a total of 1,017 films were released in Japan. In 2021, the number of films released decreased to slightly less than 1,000 films, and in 2022, the number again increased and a total of 1,143 films were released. In 2023, 676 Japanese and 556 foreign films, a total of 1,232 films were released, almost back to the level in 2019 before the COVID-19 pandemic (according to the Motion Picture Producers Association of Japan's statistics).

fig. 07

[Changes in Number of Released films 2014-2023](#)

Box Office Incomes

In 2023, the total box office income in Japan was: 148,181,000,000 yen for Japanese films (101.1% of that in the year before), 73,301,000,000 yen for foreign films (110.2% of that in the year before), and a total, 211,482,000,000 yen, 103.9% of that in the year before.

Compared with the numbers in 2019, before the COVID-19 pandemic, the box-office income in 2023 did not reach that level, however, almost as large as that in 2018 (222,511,000,000 yen), and largely exceeding that of 2014 (207,034,000,000 yen). Motion Picture Producers Association of Japan made an announcement at the press conference announcing the Motion Picture Industry Statistics at the end of January 2024 that the box office income in Japan has almost returned to the level of the period prior to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The number of Japanese films and that of foreign films was 66.9% vs. 33.1% respectively. The foreign films share has remained low. Its share was more than 45% in 2018-2019.

fig. 08, fig. 09

[Chart 8: Changes in Box Office Income 2014-2023](#)

[Chart 9: Changes in Attendance per Film 2012-2021](#)

The Scales of Film Releases

Japan Community Cinema Center (JCCC) creates the list of released films based on online information. In 2023, 656 Japanese films and 634

foreign films, a total of 1,290 films were released (1,465 films including the films shown at special series only at 1-2 theaters in Tokyo). These figures are different from those of the Motion Picture Producers Association of Japan that lists 676 Japanese films and 556 foreign films, a total of 1,230 films. Despite some differences, we will see what films were released based on the JCCC data.

—The Scales of Film Releases

59 Japanese films and 30 foreign films were released at more than 300 theaters nationwide.

Among Japanese films, the following films were widely released at more than 370 theaters: 6 animated films including mega-hit films making more than 10 billion yen, *THE FIRST SLAM DUNK* (released in December 2022) and *DETECTIVE CONAN: BLACK IRON SUBMARINE* (released in April), and 4 others *THE BOY AND THE HERON* (released in July), *DORAEMON: NOBITA'S SKY UTOPIA* (released in March), *DEMON SLAYER: KIMETSU NO YAIBA — TO THE SWORDSMITH VILLAGE* (released in February), and *SPY x FAMILY CODE: WHITE* (released in December); *GODZILLA -1.0* (released in November) receiving the Academy Award Special Effects and the Japanese Academy Best Film Award; another film in the popular series *KINGDOM III: FLAME OF DESTINY* (released in July), *THE LEGEND & BUTTERFLY* (released in January), *SHIN KAMEN RIDER* (released in March), and *FLY ME TO THE SAITAMA — FROM BIWA LAKE WITH LOVE* (released in November).

Among theatrical films, TV drama adaptations such as *TOKYO MER — MOBILE EMERGENCY ROOM: THE MOVIE* and *DO NOT CALL IT MYSTERY* were released at more than 360 theaters and each made more than 4 billion yen. Other topical films attracted large attendance: Hirokazu Kore-eda's *MONSTER; KUBI MOVIE*, the first film in 6 years directed by Takeshi Kitano; and *FRAGMENTS OF THE LAST WILL* (released in December 2022), the opening film of Tokyo International Film Festival.

As for animated films, *BIRTH OF KITARO: THE MYSTERY OF GEGEGE* (released in November), *LONELY CASTLE IN THE MIRROR* (released in December 2022), *BLUE GIANT* (released in February), *TOTTO-CHAN: THE LITTLE GIRL AT THE WINDOW* (released in November), and others, targeting at a wide range of audiences, were released at many theaters.

Among foreign films, *THE SUPER MARIO BROS. MOVIE* released in April became a huge hit, making 14.02 billion yen. Following the release of *TOP GUN: MAVERICK* the year before, Tom Cruise's *MISSION: IMPOSSIBLE—DEAD RECKONING PART ONE* was released at more than 380 theaters, drawing a wide array of age groups of viewers and becoming a great hit making 5.43 billion yen. It was feared that middle-aged and senior viewers would no longer go to see movies at theaters, however, they went to see this big star at theaters. The latest installments of popular series like

WILD SPEED FIRE BOOST (released in May), INDIANA JONES AND THE DIAL OF DESTINY (released in June), and JOHN WICK: CHAPTER 4 (released in September) were released and attracted attention. LITTLE MERMAID with real-life actors (released in June) and the animated SPIDER-MAN: ACROSS THE SPIDER-VERSE also drew large audiences.

In 2020, multi-screen theaters began to show a variety of films that had not been shown at these theaters. Until 2019, most films released at more than 150 theaters were screened only at multi-screen theaters. In 2021, more and more films widely released began to be screened at mini-theaters as well. The new trend began during the COVID-19 pandemic as more titles screened both at multi-screen theaters and mini-theaters. 104 such Japanese titles (18%) and 125 such foreign titles (24%) were released in 2019; in 2023, 208 such Japanese titles (32%) and 302 such foreign films (48%) were released, showing large increases. On the other hand, mini-theaters began to show much talked about films and large-scale films possibly expecting to attract many film-goers even after the film's release at multi-screen theaters. The type of theaters a film could pick for its release became more diverse.

Nonetheless, the ratio of films screened only at mini-theaters has not changed much and many films are still shown exclusively at mini-theaters. 431 Japanese and 431 foreign films were released at less than 49 theaters nationwide. Among these films, 268 Japanese titles and 222 foreign titles, a total of 490 films (38%) were shown only at mini-theaters.

The kind of films shown only at mini-theaters includes: films highly praised at international film festivals; films by internationally renowned masters; important documentaries; and ambitious films by many young filmmakers. The last group includes a large number of films produced thanks to the support by ARTS FOR THE FUTURE (hereafter: AFF), sponsored by the Japanese Agency of Cultural Affairs (Support Project to Encourage Culture and Art Activities in order to Overcome the Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic) in 2021-2022. (In 2022-2023, the number of released Japanese films increased from 538 to 656, and the reason behind this increase is most likely that many films were able to be produced thanks to the support of AFF.) As we will see later, the revival screenings of the digital restoration version of film classics and director's retrospectives are mostly held at mini-theaters.

fig. 10

[Chart: The Scale of Distribution of the Films Released at Theaters in 2023](#)

—Kinds of Films Released

656 Japanese films were released in 2023, more than that in 2019 (577 films) prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. The number includes 384 new theatrical films (increase of 26), 93 new animations (increase of 8), 84 documentaries (increase of 7), and 18 ODS on theatrical performances and

live music concerts. In addition, 72 films of special projects (including the digital restoration versions of classic films).

As we saw above, animations (THE FIRST SLAM DUNK, DETECTIVE CONAN: BLACK IRON SUBMARINE, THE BOY AND THE HERON, etc.) attracted overwhelmingly huge audiences. Among the 93 animations released, the new installments of popular series such as DORAEMON, CRAYON SHIN-CHAN, DEMON SLAYER, PRETTY CURE, SUMMIKO GURASHI, etc., were shown widely and attracted many filmgoers. Recently, animations targeting wide age groups, for example, BIRTH OF KITARO: THE MYSTERY OF GEgege, LONELY CASTLE IN THE MIRROR, BLUE GIANT, CITY HUNTER: ANGEL DUST, and MABOROSHI, have been steadily accepted. In 2003, Niigata International Animation Film Festival started screening such kind of films, attracting attention. In addition, in 2023, 4 installments from the popular series MOBILE SUIT GUNDAM: SEED SPECIAL EDITION, were released and much talked about.

Among theatrical films, in addition to the previously mentioned big films released in large-scale, the following films were screened both at mini-theaters and multi-screen theaters, attracting large audiences: SEPTEMBER 1923 (released in September), THE MOON (released in October), and films highly praised at foreign and domestic film festivals including OKIKU AND THE WORLD (released in April), SHADOW OF FIRE (released in August), and SMALL, SLOW BUT STEADY (released in December 2022). The films by young directors also attracted attention, including TEA FRIENDS, TSUGARU LACQUER GIRL, EGOIST, ICHIKO, A FAR SHORE, and HOYAMAN.

Among the 384 theatrical films released, 249 films, nearly 65%, were released in a small scale at less than 49 theaters, and most of them were shown only at mini-theaters.

A number of documentary films were released in theaters in 2023. Among the 84 films released, 63 titles were released only at mini-theaters. On the other hand, more than 20 titles were screened at more than 30 theaters nationwide. More and more multi-screen theaters began to show documentaries and the theatrical release of documentary films has become a norm.

The number of the special screenings of Japanese classic films (in digital restoration version) has been increasing. In 2023, 8 projects and 72 titles were screened. Among them, the trilogy of Detective Mike Hama and director Seijun Suzuki's romantic trilogy "SEIJUN RETURNS in 4K" were screened at many theaters.

As for foreign films, 634 titles were released in 2023, much more than the 514 titles in 2019. 304 were new theatrical films, 25 were new animations, 55 were documentaries, 53 were ODS, 43 were revival releases of the digital restoration version of classic films, in addition to the special screenings of 26 classic film projects (154 titles). Among the classic film's digital restoration

version presentations, TITANIC (directed by James Cameron, the 25th anniversary 3D remaster version) was released at more than 200 theaters, making over 1 billion yen.

Following the trend in 2022, the popularity of special screenings of classic titles was noteworthy. 26 projects, more than the 22 projects in 2022, were screened with 154 titles.

The followings are among the most popular projects.

10 AM Film Festival: LAWRENCE OF ARABIA complete version, and others

Cinema Relay: THE LAST EMPEROR 4K restoration version, and others

BOND 60: 10 titles from the 007 series, 4K restoration version

INFERNAL AFFAIRS trilogy 4K version

WORLD BRUCE LEE CLASSICS 2023 (5 titles)

IN MEMORIAM: JEAN-LUC GODARD Film Festival (9 titles)

OTAR IOSSELIANI Film Festival: Georgia and Paris (21 titles including shorts)

CHANTAL AKERMAN Film Festival 2023 (5 titles)

JEAN EUSTACHE Film Festival (4 titles)

RAINER WERNER FASSBINDER Masterpieces

ROBERT ALTMAN Masterpieces

JEAN COCTEAU Film Festival: THE 60TH ANNIVERSARY AFTER HIS DEATH

LEE CHANG-DONG Retrospective in 4K (6 titles)

LARS VON TRIER Retrospective 2023

ULRIKE OTTINGER Berlin Trilogy

MESZAROS MARTA Retrospective (5 titles)

JOHN CASSAVETES Retrospective Please (6 titles)

NEW DISCOVERY BAKHTYAR KHUDOJNAZAROV Joyful and Sorrowful Dream Trips (5 titles)

EVERYBODY'S JACQUES ROGER (6 titles including shorts)

The 10 AM Film Festival taking place in multi-screen theaters has been revived, and in 2023, various interesting titles were screened at 67 theaters. These titles include mega-hit films such as LAWRENCE OF ARABIA complete version, THE EXORCIST Director's Cut, GREEN MILE, JURASSIC PARK, THE LOST WORLD: JURASSIC PARK, and JURASSIC PARK III, as well as THE SPIRIT OF THE BEEHIVE. BOND 60: 007 4K RESTORATION VERSION 10 TITLES were screened only at around 50 multi-screen theaters.

12 MONTH CINEMA RELAY is operated by Tohoku Shinsha (with cooperation of Tokyo Theatre and Musashino Kogyo) circulating films nationwide. In 2023, they screened smash hit films of the 1980s such as THE LAST EMPEROR, THE NAME OF THE ROSE, CARAVAGGIO and INSIGNIFICANCE.

A variety of projects were initiated one by one, and circulated

nationwide: retrospectives of Jean-Luc Godard and Otar Iosseliani, both of whom passed away last year; retrospectives for the first time after a considerable span of time of John Cassavetes, Jean Eustache, Jacques Roger, and Korean master Lee Chang-dong, etc. Such phenomenon of classic film series attracting many people is not limited to Japan. In Europe, this has also been seen, helping to expand young audiences coming to see films at theaters after the COVID-19 pandemic.

The revival release of restoration versions of classic films has been active, and a wide range of films from classic films of the 1930s to mini-theater hits of the 2000s, attracted many fans.

fig. 11

[Kinds of Films Released in 2023](#)

■ Films That Made More Than 1 Billion Yen Box Office Income/Films That Made Less Than 1 Billion Yen Box Office Income

In 2023, a total of 49 films made more than 1 billion yen box office income (41 films in 2022, 37 films in 2021 and 65 films in 2019), occupying 4.0% of the total of 1,232 films released in Japan. The total box office income from these 49 films was 146.33 billion yen including the 98 billion yen from Japanese films and 8.33 billion yen from foreign films, 66.1% of the total box office income of Japan (in 2022, 72% and in 2021, 62.2%).

fig. 12, 13, 14, 15, 16

[Chart: Films That Made More Than 1 Billion Yen Box Office Income \(Japanese Films\)](#)

[Chart: Films That Made More Than 1 Billion Yen Box Office Income \(Foreign Films\)](#)

[Chart: the Top 20 Box Office Income Films in 2023](#)

[Chart: Films that Made More Than 1 Billion Yen Box Office Income/Films That Made Less Than 1 Billion Yen Box Office Income](#)