



JAPAN 2021 100 YEARS OF JAPANESE CINEMA

Moving (Ohikkoshi)

Moving talks about present-day problems in Japan. The story takes place in the town of Kyoto, a town where the richness of traditional language and a certain way of thinking in relation to human emotions still very much exists. This is a simple story of parents wanting to divorce, but seen through the eyes of their daughter. I wanted to describe what she sees beyond divorce. I would be happy if you'd discover this with Renko.

Shinji Somai

Renko's mum and dad are splitting up, and her heart is burning. So she plays with fire, tears up the rule book, holds herself hostage, and even starts talking to the weird girl in school who's the only other one with divorced parents. But as Renko watches her childhood go up in flames, she learns how to forge a new self from the embers. Director Shinji Somai is hugely regarded in Japan, but only starting to be known in the West, more than a decade after his death. Surprising and emotionally thrilling, *Moving* is the work of a remarkable filmmaker at the height of his powers.

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Critic Shigehiko Hasumi once suggested that Japanese filmmaker Shinji Somai – who died young aged 53 in 2001, after directing 13 features – 'is the missing link between the end of the studio system of Japan and the rise of independent filmmaking'. In their compassionate depictions of loneliness and alienation, you can certainly see the influence of Somai's films in the works of several younger directors who followed, including Shunji Iwai (*All About Lily Chou-Chou*) and Kiyoshi Kurosawa (*Pulse*).

So why is Somai relatively unknown in the west? It's all down to the mysteries of international distribution. For whatever reason, none of Somai's films got released in the UK, with opportunities to see them relegated to festival appearances or one-off repertory screenings. Even a particularly high interest in contemporary Japanese cinema in Britain in the early 2000s – the time of the J-horror boom – didn't result in distribution for Somai's final features, *Wait and See* (1998) and *Kaza-hana* (2000).

In recent years, the Edinburgh International Film Festival showcased a full retrospective of his work in 2012, while *Moving* (1993) was part of the touring programme in support of Mark Cousins' *A Story of Children and Film* (2013). At the time of writing, we've just seen the first ever home-video outing for any of Somai's features in the west: Arrow Video's Blu-ray of *Sailor Suit and Machine Gun* (1981). It's hopefully a sign of good things to come, as Somai's CV includes some of the finest Japanese films of the 1980s and 90s.

Although he worked in different genres and also made some films centred on older leads, the majority of his 13 features are based around young people going through rites of passage. These might play out in either very recognisable or completely outlandish scenarios – *Sailor Suit and Machine Gun*, for example, concerns a teenage schoolgirl inheriting a yakuza clan's loyalty. But he always captures a palpable feeling of adolescence, meeting youths at their level and trying to get inside their heads, without engaging the prejudice of an adult's mindset.

His youth-focused films contain the most striking use of his trademark long takes, which always heighten the feeling that anything can happen, with some of the more ambitious examples involving stunt work. In his earlier efforts, in particular, the camera is nearly always on the move, and often placed at a considerable distance from the actors. At times it seems as though its focus is being directed beyond the narrative concerns of the scene, moving to capture something ephemeral within the given environment, especially in outdoor scenes in busy urban areas.

Moving is the ideal starting point and more representative of Somai's output as a whole. It centres around a young girl called Renko (an incredible performance from Tomoko Tabata), who begins acting out in light of her parents' messy divorce.

The domestic drama morphs into something altogether more elemental and abstract in its incredible final half hour, set around a countryside fire festival. Although most of Somai's film narratives are told in a linear fashion, there's a degree to which they all play with the concept of time in some way. Temporality combined with the surrealistic bending of reality and memory is key to much of Somai's work. In *Moving*, Renko's literal embrace of a physical manifestation of her younger self is one of the most touching examples.

Josh Slater-Williams, bfi.org.uk, 13 December 2021

MOVING (OHIKKOSHI)

Director: Shinji Somai

Production Companies: Kitty Film, Yomiuri TV, Dentsu, Engine Film, Herald Ace, Argo Project

Executive Producers: Kei Ijichi, Masahiro Yasuda

Producers: Hiroshisa Mukuju, Hiroyuki Fujikado

Screenplay: Satoko Okudera, Satoshi Okonogi, Satoru Kobiki

Based on the novel by: Hiko Tanaka

Director of Photography: Toyomichi Kurita

Editor: Yoshiyuki Okuhara

Art Director: Shigenori Shimoishizaka

Music: Nariaki Saegusa

Sound: Hidetoshi Nonaka

Cast

Tomoko Tabata (*Renko*)

Junko Sakurada (*Nazuna, Renko's mother*)

Kiichi Nakai (*Kenichi, Renko's father*)

Shofukutei Tsurubei (*Kimekome, Renko's teacher*)

Taro Tanaka (*Yukio*)

Mariko Sudo (*Wakako*)

Japan 1993

125 mins

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Moving (Ohikkoshi) Sat 18 Dec 20:35; Wed 29 Dec 20:30

The Long Darkness (Shinobugawa) Sun 19 Dec 12:40

The Demon (Kichiku) Sun 19 Dec 16:00

Pale Flower (Kawaita hana) Sun 19 Dec 18:20

Fire Festival (Himatsuri) Mon 20 Dec 17:50; Mon 27 Dec 13:20

Suzaku (Moe No Suzaku) Tue 21 Dec 17:45; Thu 30 Dec 21:00

Shall We Dance? (Shall we dansu?) Tue 21 Dec 20:30; Thu 30 Dec 17:40

In the Realm of the Senses (Ai no corrido) Wed 22 Dec 18:20

Love Letter Wed 22 Dec 20:50; Tue 28 Dec 12:10

Tokyo Drifter (Tôkyô nagaremono) Thu 23 Dec 18:30

Muddy River (Doro no kawa) Thu 23 Dec 20:40

Funeral Parade of Roses (Bara no sôretsu) Mon 27 Dec 15:50

The Emperor's Naked Army Marches On (Yuki Yukite, Shingun)

Mon 27 Dec 18:20

Tampopo Tue 28 Dec 15:10

Black Rain (Kuroi ame) Tue 28 Dec 18:15

After Life (Wandafuru raifu) Wed 29 Dec 14:20

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