

Document Citation

Title	A full life, Japanese new wave master Susumu Hani rediscovered
Author(s)	Donald Richie
Source	<i>Cinematheque Ontario/a division of Toronto International Film Festival Group</i>
Date	1999 Jan 20
Type	article
Language	English
Pagination	4
No. of Pages	3
Subjects	Hani, Susumu (1928), Tokyo, Japan
Film Subjects	Mitasareta seikatsu (A full life), Hani, Susumu, 1962 E o kaku kodomotachi (Children who draw), Hani, Susumu, 1956 Te o tsunagu kora (Children hand in hand), Hani, Susumu, 1963

A FULL LIFE

J A P A N E S E N E W W A V E M A S T E R

SUSUMU HANI REDISCOVERED



INFERNO OF FIRST LOVE

"Susumu Hani is a major artist."

— **Film Comment**

"Susumu Hani has attempted for today's Japanese woman what Mizoguchi did for her sisters who lacked freedoms inconceivable in Japan until after the Second World War."

— **Joan Mellen**

Cinematheque Ontario
Jan. 20. Feb 28 '99

Once a fixture of the art cinema scene in North America, the films of Susumu Hani (b. 1926) have recently been all but invisible. Thanks to the concerted efforts of Donald Richie, pre-eminent historian of Japanese cinema and long-time champion of Hani, and the assistance of The Japan Foundation, who prepared several new prints of Hani's films, we are now able to screen the core works of this important oeuvre. The selected retrospective comes to us after its presentation at the Telluride Film Festival, The Museum of Modern Art, New York (for which Richie wrote the following essay), and the Pacific Film Archive, Berkeley. (Edith Kramer of PFA generously coordinated the North American tour of the Hani films.) We are grateful to all involved for giving us this rare opportunity.

The tribute to Hani can be seen as companion to the retrospective Cinematheque Ontario dedicated last winter to the work of Yasuzo Masumura. The two directors are often paired as the fathers of the Japanese New Wave, though their films are markedly different in tone and style. (They are, however, similarly liberal progressive in outlook, and share a central theme: the instinctive authoritarianism of Japan Inc. and its crushing repression of individual identity.) Hani's freer, notational style, with its frequent use of hand-held camera, non-professional actors (sometimes as leads, sometimes in secondary roles), and elements of *cinéma vérité*, documentary and neorealism, contrasts with the hyperbolic formalism, the vaunted "ultra-modernism" of Masumura, which was characterized by frenetic pacing, eccentric compositions, virtuoso studio shooting, high-pitched acting, and the ironic use of colour and design. Hani falls more in the tradition of classic humanism, his work devoid of Masumura's acid irony, florid flourishes, and occasionally outré taste.

Hani's themes – the oppression of the Japanese woman; the dissolution of the family; the sins of the father (the legacy of Japanese authoritarianism) – are also more subtly limned than are Masumura's. Where the latter is extravagant, Hani is contained, observant. (When he does go to extremes, as in the S&M photo session in *INFERNO OF FIRST LOVE*, his vision gains ferocity from the lyricism of the surrounding material.) Hani has frequently been cited as the foremost psychologist of Japanese cinema; his acuity and empathy derive from an intent watchfulness and are combined with a formidable formal sophistication. In an interview he gave to James Blue, Hani said: "I want to find out how we can know things *entirely* without intellectual analysis. A Japanese critic said of my work, 'Hani's pictures are very isolated from the rest of Japanese cinema, because he is talking about living persons. All others analyze and reconstitute character.' I think we need intellect to go beyond. With my films I try to get this kind of insight. As I observe small things intensely, they change their meaning...." — James Quandt

SUSUMU HANI

Cinematheque Ontario
Jan. 20 / Feb 28 '99
p. 33

Despite their initial fame, the films of Susumu Hani, overshadowed by the more direct and dramatic work of his contemporaries – Nagisa Oshima, Yoshishige Yoshida, Masahiro Shinoda – have been relatively neglected. Yet it was Hani who first heralded the “Nouvelle Vague Japonaise” with his documentary techniques, his freshness, his devotion to the children, to adolescents, to those adults who are lucky enough to remain childlike.

His own childhood in wartime Japan was perhaps responsible for this abiding interest in the young, in innocence, in the problems of maturing. Afflicted from youth with a lifelong stammer, he was naturally drawn to other “problem” children and it was about these that he made his films. The children in the classrooms turned into the boys in the reformatory, turned into the innocent teenaged would-be lovers facing experience, turned into the women determined to find some meaning in their lives. Everyone in the Hani film is learning to be who they are. His films are segments of the arc which is said to end with self-knowledge.

Such consistency to a theme is rare, particularly in Japan, as is such devotion to virtues now as old-fashioned as innocence. It is perhaps as a consequence of this that Hani’s films are also neglected in his own country. Though more likely his distinction as a filmmaker has been eclipsed by his great local fame as the producer-director of the best TV series on African animal life.

Hani himself would see no difference between his earlier films and his later TV series. They are all about young beings learning the hard rules of the world in which they live, learning to persevere. He is there with his camera to record this inspiring process. — Donald Richie

 THE JAPAN FOUNDATION



3p #25620

A FULL LIFE (MITASARETA SEIKATSU)

Director: Susumu Hani

Japan 1962 107 minutes • Cast: Ineko Arima, Koshiro Harada

A beautiful, penetrating look at the "full life" of Junko, a former actress who realizes that her marriage is meaningless, and tries to establish a new existence apart from her unloving husband. After leaving him, she ends up doing demeaning work at dog shows, her hard-won independence less liberating than she had hoped. When Junko falls in love with a playwright who is an activist against Japan's security pact with the Americans, the struggle for national autonomy becomes a metaphor for her own search for a new, free identity. Hani's hand-held Scope cinematography is superb, its nervous energy a reflection of his heroine's psychological state. "Perhaps the most revolutionary film made up to that time in Japan about a contemporary woman's quest for independence" (Joan Mellen).

Tuesday, February 23 6:30 p.m.

NEW 35MM PRINT!

CHILDREN HAND IN HAND (TE O TSUNAGA KORA)

Director: Susumu Hani

Japan 1963 100 minutes • Cast: Hideo Sato, Yukiko Hojo

Some consider this Hani's best film, despite its rather unpromising title. Based on a work by the father of late director Juzo Itami, it is "a beautiful parable about Japanese society" (Joan Mellen) that, typical of Hani, takes as its central character an outsider abused for his debility. Set in an elementary school class in a small Japanese city, the film centres on Nakayama, a boy who is both intellectually and physically slower than his classmates. He is singled out for taunts and bullying, his classmates' cruelty a manifestation of Japanese fear of "the other," the disabled, and – tellingly – of failure. "Life's like a race," says one child, "If you don't win, you lose." Using a hand-held camera and some extraordinary long takes to capture the dynamics of the children's world, Hani offers a portrait of a country which masks insecurity with sadism. Some of the sequences you will not be able to shake off. "This beautifully detailed picture contains some of Hani's most evocative pictures of childhood" (Donald Richie).

preceded by:

NEW PRINT!

CHILDREN WHO DRAW (E O KAKU KODOMOTACHI)

Director: Susumu Hani

Japan 1956 38 minutes

Long considered a classic of international documentary, winner of several prizes including the Robert Flaherty Award, this lovely film "made Hani famous overnight" (Tadao Sato) and was so popular, it was screened with a commercial feature throughout Japan. Showing his sympathy for outcasts and oddballs, Hani focuses on a boy who cannot draw very well.

Thursday, February 25 8:45 p.m.

CHILDREN WHO DRAW

