

*Chinese and Japanese Films on the Second World War*. Edited by King-fai Tam, Timothy Y. Tsu, and Sandra Wilson. Oxon and NY: Routledge, 2015. ISBN: 9781138791039

China and Japan engaged in a prolonged war called the Sino-Japanese War from 1937 to 1945. In world history this conflict is often understood as part of the Asia-Pacific War—the theater of WWII that was fought in the Pacific and East Asia. However, the people of the two countries have vastly different perceptions of how the Sino-Japanese War fits into WWII. In postwar Japan, WWII is primarily remembered and discussed as Japan’s conflict with America, whereas the Sino-Japanese War is dealt with as a separate issue and is often downplayed in its political discourse. For the Chinese, the Sino-Japanese War is a major part of WWII in Asia.

The films discussed in this anthology have confirmed such a conceptual discrepancy between the two countries regarding the meaning of their respective WWII. The Chinese films discussed in the papers all feature direct confrontations between Chinese soldiers and civilians and their Japanese enemies. The majority of the Japanese films, in contrast, depict the sacrifice and suffering of Japanese soldiers and civilians in the context of the Pacific War with the U.S., while downplaying or totally leaving out Japan’s wartime aggression in China. Thus, the anthology implicitly demonstrates that both China and Japan represent their WWII in terms of their own victimization. Their war films often focus on their own war traumas—the Nanjing massacre in China and the Lily Corps (*Himeyuri butai*) in Japan, as chapter five and chapter eleven have shown respectively. At the same time, however, war films from both countries also mock, question, and challenge the dominant ideology in order to provide alternative interpretations of the war and produce new and progressive understandings of history, such as the films of *San Mao Joins the Army*, *Devils on the Doorsteps*, *University of Laughs*, and the two desperado films that are discussed in the anthology.

Japanese and Chinese films have largely been studied from the perspective of a single country due to linguistic and disciplinary boundaries. Therefore, the anthology's transnational approach of examining the representation of WWII in Chinese and Japanese cinema is commendable. It not only fosters understanding and cooperation between scholars from both sides of the academic division, but also enables readers to compare two vastly different cinematic representations of the war. The anthology is also highly multidisciplinary in the sense that the contributors write from a variety of disciplines, ranging from anthropology to history, film study, and literary and cultural studies. Collectively, the papers not only provide readers with convincing analysis of specific films, but also shed new light on the politics of war memory and war interpretation and representation in contemporary Japan and China. Although the collection is not a comparative study as a whole, chapter eight is a truly comparative project in that it examines the common theme of salvation in postwar Japanese and Chinese war films. It convincingly argues that war films' depiction of individual survivors of the war and national rebuilding functions as a symbolic means for both nations to overcome their respective war and historical traumas in the postwar era.

The strength of the collection lies in the excellent quality of the papers. They cover a variety of subjects and a wide range of film genres, from documentary films to horror films, modernist films, Western-style films, comedies, propaganda films, and classical narrative films. The first chapter provides a highly informative and concise introduction to the political, cultural, and scholarly contexts for understanding war memory and cinematic representation of the war in the two countries. Chapter two is very helpful as it outlines the genealogy of Chinese films on the Anti-Japanese War and provides an excellent analysis of representative films, ranging from the classical revolutionary and patriotic film *Mine Warfare* to the recent satirical film *Cow*, which depicts a Chinese peasant's struggle to stay alive in the war and his alienation from national ideology. This

chapter helps the reader understand the tremendous influence of the dominant national ideology on Chinese war films, as well as Chinese filmmakers' attempt to break away from such an ideology in their representation of the war. Unfortunately, the anthology does not provide a corresponding chapter on the genealogy of Japanese war films. However, read together, chapter eight, ten, and thirteen collectively provide an outline of postwar Japanese war films' development trajectory—from the revisionist war films by Shin Toho in the 1950s, to the sentimental “August fifteenth” film series by Toho in the 1960s, and to the recent blockbuster war films since the 1990s that portray the war in a positive light and from the victim's point of view. Several chapters of the anthology discuss previously less-explored topics, such as the representation of ethnic minorities in Chinese war films and the issue of verbal and non-verbal communications in the hybrid martial arts/anti-Japanese film *Ip Man*.

It is impressive that all the chapters are well written and well documented, reflecting the editors' excellent job of checking errors and reinforcing consistency among the papers. The only minor criticism I have for this collection is the fact that like many collections of conference papers, this anthology lacks coordination and coherence in terms of the content of the papers. For example, there is no discussion of films about the atomic bombings, Manchuria, and the role of the Soviet Union—all are important aspects of the war. However, this should hardly be considered a real weakness because a conference collection cannot possibly include all the important subjects related to WWII in East Asia. Nonetheless, we should realize that it is a complex task to understand all the dimensions of the war(s) that China and Japan engaged in the early half of the twentieth century and that it is an equally complex task to understand the changing postwar political and social context for making war films in the two countries.

In summary, the editors and authors of this volume did an excellent job in providing both a critical framework and concrete examples for understanding the main issues, themes, genres, and

political implications of the cinematic representation of the WWII in China and Japan. This volume will be of great interest to students, scholars, and general readers interested in war films, interdisciplinary film study, and East Asian military history. This volume consolidated three conceptual points that merit repeated mention here: firstly, the papers collectively confirm that China and Japan remain divided on how they experienced, understand, and remember the war as demonstrated in their war films. Secondly, both Japanese and Chinese war films are highly influenced by their respective national ideology. Yet many war films also try to break free from such ideological constraints. Thirdly, the anthology shows that unlike their Hollywood counterparts, war films in East Asia are less about combat, but more about interpretation of the war and remembering the war dead.

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