

# REEDITING THE WAR IN ASIA: JAPANESE NEWSREELS IN SPAIN (1931-1945)\*

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## I. INTRODUCTION

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The fifteen years of conflict in Asia (1931-1945) were characterized by an unprecedented prominence of images, fuelled by the appearance of a new type of modern newsreel based on immediacy and a closeness to reality. The iconography generated became not only a key element for media representations of current affairs, but also an essential tool for social mobilization. The big screen acquired an extraordinary semantic load, subject to all kinds of powerful ideological constraints, transgressions and manipulations.

Today, the international reach of the iconography produced during the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) is well known. However, the recep-

tion in Spain of images from abroad, and particularly those related to the war in Asia, has received little attention. The distribution of newsreels made by the Japanese Empire reached unprecedented dimensions, especially after 1937, when the focus of the international press turned from Spain to East Asia (Sánchez-Biosca, 2007: 76). Japan, which had the most powerful film industry in the world after Hollywood in the 1930s, mobilized its best operators and directors, providing them with the most advanced filming technology for newsreel production, and the transnational circulation of this material also included film screens in Spain.

The purpose of this article is to assess the presence of the Japanese newsreel industry in Spain

between 1931 and 1945, focusing on the distribution mechanisms of these films and the strategies for adapting them to the context in which they were exhibited. Where did these images come from and under what circumstances were they filmed? What aspects of the war in Asia did they portray? How did they get to Spain? What kinds of concurrent interests was their reception subject to? This study aims to shed some light on this little known aspect of the mobilization, distribution and reuse of images during this tumultuous historical period.

## 2. MANCHURIA ON SPANISH FILM SCREENS

### 2.1 Mantetsu and the imaginary of a promised land

The production of newsreels for cinema in Japan is as old as filmmaking itself. Japanese filmmakers had been producing “proto-newsreels”, called *jiji eiga* (current events films) covering conflicts as early as the Boxer Uprising (1899-1901), when Shibata Yoshitsune and Fukutani Komakichi travelled to Beijing alongside the Japanese troops, equipped with a Gaumont camera (Nornes, 2003: 3). However, it was the Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905) that gave a definitive boost to this film genre: the production of these *jiji eiga* increased from sixteen in 1903 to twenty-seven in 1905 (Tanaka, 1957: 105) and the travelling exhibitions begin to be replaced by permanent cinemas (Waka, 1997: 19). The war was filmed by Fujiwara Kōzaburō and Shimizu Kumejirō, for the company Yoshizawa Shōten, although some authors estimate that there were at least a dozen Japanese filmmakers, and the images of the conflict even reached Spain in various film formats (Almazán, 2004: 220- 239). By this point, it had already been demonstrated that cine-

ma could become an effective propaganda tool. At the same time, there were experiments with reality like dramatizations (*renstageki*), which had been done since the Spanish-American War (1898), combining re-enactments with actors and footage taken from the front. This ambiguity between the real and the fictionalised continued even after the appearance of the first real Japanese newsreel, *Tōkyō shinema gahō* (1914) (Komatsu, 1991: 310-311), and had become the subject of theoretical discussion by the 1930s (Murayama, 1932: 8). During this decade, newsreels were still associated more with the press than with cinema (Nornes, 2003: 48). Starting in 1934, the first newsreels were produced periodically by the main national newspapers: *Daimai Tōnichi News* by the newspaper *Mainichi*, *Asahi Sekai News* and *Yomiuri News*. Two more newsreels appeared in 1936: *Dōmei News* by the news agency of the same name, and *Tōhō Hassei* by the Tōhō film studio (Imamura, Satō et al., 1986: 45; Purdy, 2016: 354). At the same

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time, “news films” appeared (Hori, 2017: 125) and it was in these years that critics began to realize the importance of the newsreel and to recognize nonfiction films as a distinct genre (Imamura, Satō et al., 1986: 45 ; Nornes, 2003: 53). Foreign news was also screened weekly in the German UFA newsreels,

as well as Paramount News (High, 2003: 92), at least until 1941, when film imports from the U.S. were banned (Baskett, 2008: 11). Meanwhile, the importing of German newsreels was secured with the German-Japanese Cinematographic Exchange Agreement (1937), with the aim of creating a shared fascist ideology through cinema, as well as censoring unfavourable representations of fascism, mainly in newsreels (Baskett, 2008: 119).

At the beginning of the 1930s, there was a proliferation of newsreels appearing mainly as a

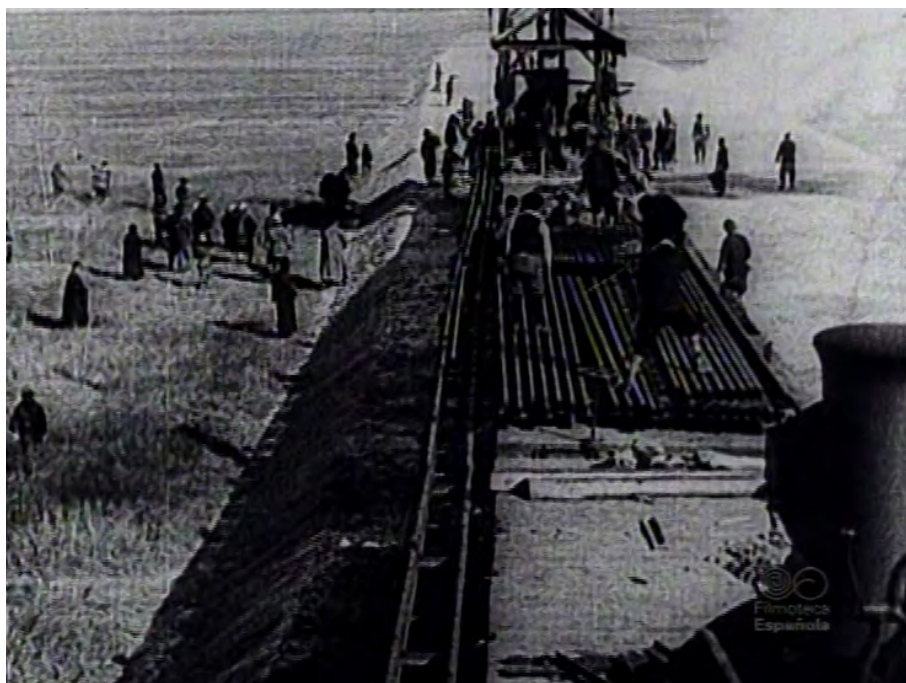
result of the events in Manchuria, a territory of great interest to Japan for its mining and heavy industry, which was being developed by Mantetsu (Southern Railway Company of Manchuria). This company was not only central to the colonial exploitation of this region but also played a crucial role in the construction of the imaginary surrounding the puppet state of Manchukuo, founded in 1932. Mantetsu had been at the epicentre of the Mukden incident, a staged attack on the railway orchestrated to justify the occupation of the Kwantung Army. The company was also responsible for the propaganda films made about the region, mainly through its subsidiary Man'ei, one of the largest film studios in Asia after 1934 (Yomota, 2019: 91-92), created with the clear intention of explaining the imperial expansion to an audience outside Japan (Baskett, 2008: 29-33). Given the circumstances, it is not surprising that the first newsreel about Asia shown in Spain was *New State of Manchukuo* (1932), which begins precisely with the building of the railway. Besides being an important element for the exploitation of

Manchuria, the railway became a symbol of modernity in other cinematic traditions, such as the Soviet Union's socialist realism of the time.<sup>1</sup>

The first intertitle in *New State of Manchukuo* reads: "A new force is acting in Manchuria: the force of civilization." Modernization is portrayed in the urban development plans of the capital Hsinking and the city of Dalian. The railway company, which had almost a government role with dozens of development projects in urban areas, produced propaganda documentaries to attract new Japanese settlers and entrepreneurs, who would number more than one million by the 1940s. The report shows plans for several geisha houses in front of Dalian's colonial buildings, presented as an allegory for civilization under Japanese influence. The next intertitle reads: "Manchukuo responds to all the needs of the inhabitants. In 1929, refugees exceeded one million." The film uses a pan-Asian rhetoric that attempts to replace the idea of occupation with the idea of development amidst the chaos of Chinese division. The following sequence of Emperor Puyi

(1906-1967) receiving the title of chief executive is actually a scene staged by Tokyo to give the appearance of Manchurian independence. It was a dramatic ploy aimed at defusing international pressure in response to the serious crisis sparked by the military invasion. However, these images concealed Japan's superiority behind a supposed *harmony* with local ethnic groups and elided the forced labour of millions of Chinese workers. Despite this fact, this iconography probably had a significant impact in the Spanish Republic. The images appeared in a version of the French report *Le nouvel état de Manchukuo*.

*New State of Manchukuo* (1932)



During the Second Republic (1931-1936) there was an extraordinary boom in newsreels; non-fiction cinema increased from 3.5% of all films released in 1931 to 50.5% in 1936 (Paz Rebollo and San Deocracias, 2010: 743). In addition to British newsreels, those of Nazi Germany and fascist Italy's Luce newsreels, foreign news reached Spain from the United States (*Paramount News* and *Fox Movietone News*) and France (newsreels by the companies Éclair, Pathé and Gaumont). The images of Japanese actions in Manchuria divided public opinion along political lines. Condemnation by the Spanish right was ambiguous. In fact, as Rodao García (2002: 51) points out, the conservative press justified the need to deal with Chinese anarchy, referring to the occupation as "Japanese peace-keeping work in China."

## 2.2 Context after the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War (1937)

The events in mainland China continued to be a key factor in the development of the newsreel. In fact, the beginning of full-scale war with China in 1937 resulted in the "Golden Age" of Japanese non-fiction cinema. That year, newsreel cinemas grew from three to twenty-three in Tokyo and seventy-eight in the rest of the country (Hamasaki, 1999: 4). As several authors have noted (Nornes, 2003: 50; Shimizu, 1991: 23), their popularity had to do with a growing public interest in news from China, as the number of households with relatives at the front increased, and an increasing number of people received their information on the events of the war exclusively from newsreels (Imamura, Satō et al., 1986: 46). The teams of correspondents doubled in size and each of the four main news companies came to have about fifteen employees in China (Hamasaki, 1999: 34-35). The result was a vertiginous rise in production, which increased from 195 newsreels per week to 510 in 1937 (Satō, 1954: 183). The footage of these newsreels circulated around the world, and even came to be used by the Allies as a

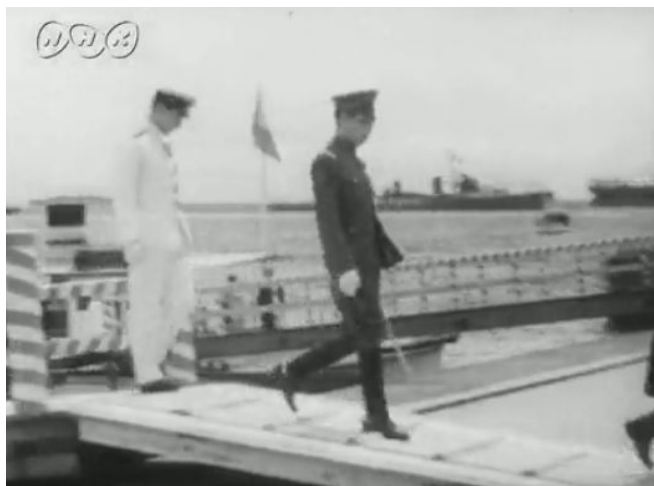
counter-propaganda tool (Centeno Martín, 2019: 106-108).

However, when the Sino-Japanese War began, Spain's Civil War had already been raging for a year, during which no records have been found of the screening of newsreels about Asia. Paz Rebollo and San Deocracias (2010: 715) indicate that from the time of the Second Republic there was a Japanese newsreel called *Newsreel of the Far East*, distributed by the German company Hispana Tobis, but neither in the Spanish Film Library nor in the RTVE archives are any examples preserved. This does not mean that there were no shared feelings between the two contexts. Despite the geographic distance, the war in China against Japan and the Spanish Civil War were both seen as part of a borderless struggle against fascism (Tsou and Tsou, 2013: 11). And on the nationalist side of the Spanish Civil War, Japan may have been viewed as an alter-ego of the crusaders against communism (Rodao García, 1998: 435-454), although interest in Japan was not immediate but began to increase for political reasons in late 1937, almost parallel with Japan's recognition of the nationalist side in Spain in December 1937.

## 2.3 Iconography on a platform: *The Mikado Receives the Emperor of Manchukuo* (1940)

Although certain Francoist factions discussed the possibility of supporting the Kuomintang Chinese nationalist government, Franco's dictatorship quickly chose to support Japanese expansionism (Rodao García, 2002: 171). As soon as the Spanish Civil War was over, the puppet state of Manchukuo was recognized and a permanent legation was established in Madrid in April 1939 (Rodao García, 2002: 165). The press reported Foreign Minister Méndez de Vigo's meetings with Emperor Puyi, and the receptions of the Spanish government with the Japanese ambassador Suma Yakichiro between 1940 and 1941. In this context, Spanish cinemas screened the newsreel *The Mikado receives the Emperor of Manchukuo* (1940), cov-





*The Mikado Receives the Emperor of Manchukuo (1940) (Nippon News, No. 3, 25 June 1940)*

ering Emperor Puyi's Japanese visit to meet Hirohito in January 1940. As noted in *Sensō to Nihon eiga* (Imamura, Satō et al., 1986: 46), the newsreels tended to follow the same order: first, news related to the imperial house; then, news about the war and politics; and finally, social issues.

The event was recorded by the cameras of the company Nippon Eiga-sha (or Nichiei), which began monopolizing newsreel production by the mid-1940s, once production was merged under the *Eiga Hō* (Film Law).<sup>4</sup> The first edition of its newsreel, *Nippon News* (Nippon Nyūsu), was released in June, and at the end of that same month, Puyi's visit was featured in newsreel number 3 (25 June 1940).<sup>5</sup> The narrator explains that Puyi was attending the celebrations for the 2,600<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Japanese Empire. The newsreel is structured as a kind of travelogue, beginning with Puyi's departure from Hsinking station in the first story and ending with his arrival in Tokyo, including his landing at Yokohama, his visit to a naval detachment, and his arrival at Tokyo station where Emperor Hirohito and his entourage awaits him, and finally his transfer by car to Akasaka Palace.

The footage of Hirohito welcoming Puyi on the platform was distributed all over the world and consolidated an iconic image of Japanese in-

fluence in Asia. The scene was anything but improvised, repeating the mise-en-scène arranged for Puyi's first visit to Tokyo five years earlier, which also received large-scale international media coverage. A comparison of the 1940 scene with that of 1935 (included in the *British Movietone* newsreel No. 3637) reveals a repetition of practically the same camera movements, frames and composition. However, there were a couple of significant changes: first, certain mistakes in the original mise-en-scène were corrected, as while the cameraman's field of vision is clear this time, in 1935 members of the imperial entourage were standing right in front of the camera, blocking its view of the precise moment when the two emperors shook hands. Also, the previous European-style ceremonial costumes worn in 1935 are replaced by military uniforms in 1940, more appropriate in a context in which Japan has been at war in China for several years and is on the brink of launching the Pacific War against the Allies.

The footage of the 1940 meeting between the two emperors was circulated widely, as it was not only exhibited in Spanish cinemas under Franco's dictatorship, but also on the film screens of the Allies and the Axis powers. In fact, only four months later, the mise-en-scène was repeated in Franco's meeting with Hitler in Hendaye on 23



Puyi's first visit to Japan in 1935, where the entourage conceals the moment when the dignitaries shake hands (British Movietone, No. 3637)



October 1940, the footage for which circulated throughout Spain although it had been filmed by German UFA camera operators with the UFA for the *Deutsche Wochenschau* newsreel. Meetings on a train platform, inspecting the troops in formation at the station, along with all the paraphernalia, including the arrival of a train—a symbol of power and industrialization—seemed to become a sort of typical mise-en-scène for the agreements between authoritarian leaders in the early days of World War II. Even the arrangement of roles in the scene was repeated: the leader of the expanding empire, in this case the Third Reich, waits on the platform for the arrival of the leader from the satellite regime or potential ally, Franco, who in June 1940 had abandoned his position of “neutrality” in favour of “non-belliger-

Meeting between Hitler and Franco in Hendaye (23 October 1940, *Deutsche Wochenschau* No. 530 reel 3)



ence”, moving Spain closer to entering the war on the Nazi side.

### 3. PACIFIC WAR AND RE-EDITIONS OF NIPPON NEWS

#### 3.1 Expansion in Southeast Asia: *Un Año de Guerra en la Gran Asia Oriental* (1942)

Although the idea of regulating screening in cinemas based on models from fascist Italy and Nazi Germany had been a topic of discussion since the early 1930s (Baskett, 2008: 117-118; Imamura, Satō et al., 1986: 3-4), state control of Japanese newsreels culminated with the merger of the existing newsreels into *Nippon News* in 1940, following the example of the fusion of German newsreel companies that same year. At the same time, the Film Law made it compulsory to screen at least 250 metres of short documentary films, referred to at the time as *bunka eiga* (culture films). As a result, non-fiction film production increased from 985 in 1939 to 4,460 in 1940 (Nornes, 2003: 63) and new theatres appeared that were dedicated exclusively to non-fiction films (Hori, 2017: 127). In addition, after the declaration of war against the Allies, the need for propaganda increased and Nichiei's budget rose from two million yen in 1941 to seven million in 1942. As the Japanese Empire expanded throughout Southeast Asia, the company created branches to produce local versions of *Nippon News* in the Philippines, Malaysia, Thailand, French Indochina, Burma and the regions of China.

Footage taken by Japanese camera operators in Burma was seen in Spain in *Un Año de Guerra en la Gran Asia Oriental* [A Year of War in Greater East Asia] (1942), a 19-minute report summarizing the advance of the Japanese Empire since the start of the Pacific War (1941-1945): the capture of Singapore, the conquest of Rangoon in Burma, the paratroopers' assault on the island of Celebes in Indonesia, the Dutch capitulation in Java, and the landing on the Aleutian Islands.<sup>6</sup> The

first sequence deals with Singapore, with footage from *Marei Senki* [Record of the War in Malaysia] (Iida Shimbi and Miki Shigeru, 1942), presenting the historic moment when Percival surrendered Singapore to General Yamashita. This scene was included in *Nippon News* No. 90, and used widely in Japanese propaganda to ridicule the British (Imamura, Satō et al., 1986: 76).<sup>7</sup>

Another sequence in *Un Año de Guerra*, taken from *Nippon News* No. 107 (22 June 1942), shows the Japanese invasion of the Aleutian Islands. The story begins with a map showing the crucial nature of geographical location of the islands, not so much for their strategic value as for their symbolic value, as the only Japanese occupation of US territory. The film continues with shots taken from Japanese battleships as they advance. The next scene features the capture of American soldiers and ends with a salute to the Japanese flag. The invasion of the Aleutians was a big media event in Japan at the end of June 1942 and *Nippon News* presented another story on the topic in No. 108 (30 June 1942).<sup>8</sup>

The scene depicting the Japanese entry into British Burma in early 1942 contains footage from the documentary *Biruma Senki* [Record of the Burmese War] (1942), also produced by Nichiei and released in September. These events, however, had already been shown in Japan in *Nippon News*

Surrendering Singapore. *Un Año de Guerra en la Gran Asia Oriental* (1942) (*Nippon News*, No. 90, 23 February 1942)



Capture of the Aleutian Islands. *Un Año de Guerra* (1942) (*Nippon News*, No. 107, 22 June 1942)

no. 94 (24<sup>th</sup> March 1942). In the Spanish cut, the narrator tries to make it clear that the Pacific War was an act of self-defence to which the Japanese Empire has been pushed as a result of the historical aggression of Anglo-American forces, a point underscored with phrases like: "The fortresses of Singapore and Hong Kong were the strongest forces against Japan!"

The last part of *Un Año de Guerra* shows footage of Japanese troops entering British Burma, taken in January 1942 (Thai forces also participated in the taking of Burma, but this is ignored in the film). A group of locals are shown raising their arms as the Japanese troops pass by. This is a less than successful attempt to show support for the Japanese soldiers from Burmese civilians, who look at the camera as if clumsily following the cameraman's instructions. However, the filmmakers improved their staging techniques as the war progressed; for example, in the subsequent scene of the capture of Java, the expressions of jubilation look more natural.

Leaving formal aspects aside, the lack of information the film offers is significant. Pearl Harbor is not explicitly mentioned, and the importance of the Burma Road, the main route for supplies for the Allied forces in China, is not sufficiently explained. On the other hand, the Japanese newsreels did offer detailed information on the bombing of the US fleet in Pearl Harbor, and the simultaneous attacks on British positions in Hong Kong and Borneo in *Nippon News* No. 82 (30 December 1941). Explanations of the strategic role of the Burma Road also appear in *Nippon News* No.





Taking Burma. *Un Año de Guerra* (1942)  
(*Nippon News*, No. 107, 22 June 1942)

56 (1 July 1941) and are followed up on in No. 88 (9 February 1942), No. 91 (3 March 1942) and No. 103 (27 May 1942). The newsreels continuously highlight the local inhabitants' support for the Japanese advance, vesting the images with considerable symbolic power, fuelled by the idea of "The Great East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere" (*Dai-tō-a Kyōeiken*), which became official policy since 1940.

During these first years of the Pacific War, the newsreels reedited in Spain constructed an intense and passionate account of the "New Order" being brought about by the fascist powers, based on the visually spectacular nature of the footage. The filmed events are used merely as an excuse to articulate a discourse characteristic of the agitprop spearheaded by the Spanish fascist party, the Falange. On the other hand, the news in Japan provided the viewer with much more information, even if it was misrepresented or censored.<sup>9</sup> For example, maps were a common resource used by *Nippon News* to begin their newsreels. Similar to the narrative role of landscapes in Japanese newsreels described by Taylor-Jones

(2017: 42-53), maps also became metaphorical elements necessary for nationalist propaganda. Not only do they depict the physical occupation, but they also construct a figurative space that serves to negotiate the interactions between local inhabitants and Japanese ambitions. The space is politically redefined and shaped according to colonial fantasies. The graphic representation acquires a double function: linking the metropolis to its colonies and areas of influence, while at the same time marking the distance between colonizer and colonized, where Japan is at the centre of and at the same time outside Asia—or Asia is outside Japan, thereby conceptually perpetuating structures of power and domination.

News from Asia in this first stage of the Pacific War reached Spain through Nazi Germany, in versions of the *Auslandstonwoche* ("foreign weekly newsreel") produced by Deutsche Wochenschau GmbH, a company under the control of Joseph Goebbels, created after the fusion of German newsreel producers in June 1940 (Winkel 2004: 7-8). This newsreel in turn made use of footage from *Nippon News* with which it exchanged material. As the foreign version of *Deutsche Wochenschau*

*Un Año de Guerra* (1942) from the German report  
*Ein Jahr Krieg in Gross-Ostasien*.





(which was exhibited in the Third Reich), *Auslandstonwoche* was designed as propaganda for audiences outside the occupied territories. Its editing techniques had a big influence on the Japanese newsreel (Winkel 2004: 13), although it ironically was more successful in terms of distribution in neutral countries than in the Axis powers—unlike Japan and Italy, *Auslandstonwoche* had a branch in Madrid until 1943 (Winkel 2004: 12). This explains why *A Year of War*, which is the version of the German report entitled *Ein Jahr Krieg in Gross-Ostasien*, presents some maps in German and others in Japanese. There is no data on the reception of this film in Spain, but the reception of the original footage in Japan was mixed. According to High (2003: 372-373), *Biruma Senki* was a box office failure due to the lack of spectacular images from the battlefield—unlike the aforementioned documentary about Malaysia, *Marei Senki*, which had been extraordinarily successful and had a huge social impact (Imamura, Satō et al., 1986: 47).

Another difference is that while *Marei Senki* contains images of the capture of British prisoners, *Biruma Senki* focuses on the quantity of material left behind by the British army: scenes of burnt trucks and destroyed oil barrels are followed by shots of a deck of cards and of a photo of Winston Churchill lying in the mud. The Japanese voice-over remarks: “Winston Churchill’s face looks reproachfully at the gutted and abandoned equipment.” While in the Spanish version, the narrator exclaimed in a more frenzied tone: “The game is lost, Mr. Churchill!”.

The reuse of Japanese footage in the German newsreel and then taken from there for the Spanish newsreel is an example that clearly illustrates the winding journeys made by these images of the Pacific War. In this process, the news was not exempt from distortions, deformations and reinterpretations. For Spanish audiences, there was no interest in explaining the aid that the Allies provided Chiang Kai-shek’s government in Chongqing, who was, after all, another authoritarian



*Un Año de Guerra* (1942), footage from *Biruma Senki*  
[Record of the Burma War] (Nichiei, 1942)

conservative leader; but there certainly was an interest in highlighting the British defeat through the figure of Churchill, as this reference would serve to feed Falangist fantasies of the defeat of the British Empire and even the hypothetical capture of Gibraltar.

### 3.2 Japanese news via the Third Reich: *Flota Imperial Japonesa* (1942)

Other Japanese footage that reached Spain via the German newsreel can be found in *Flota Imperial Japonesa* [Japanese Imperial Fleet] (1942), a 14-minute version of the *Die Kaiserlich Japanische Kriegsflotte* report, re-edited in Spain by the Falangist organization SEU (Spanish University Union).<sup>10</sup> The film is mainly composed of scenes of Japanese navy manoeuvres and contains texts in German, which are translated by a narrator into Spanish: “The tomb at the bottom of the sea. For the emperor and the fatherland we give our all.” Next, the voice-over praises the historic victories of the Japanese navy and leaves no doubts about the position taken on the conflict: “At the Washington Conference, Japan was forced to restrict the tonnage of its fleet to the following proportions: United States, five; Great Britain, five; Japan, three... From that moment there was just

a single watchword: prepare for a fight of three against ten!"

The display of the power of Japanese battle-ships constitutes a significant act of propaganda following the recent declaration of war by the Allies. The first part includes scenes of naval manoeuvres from *Nippon News* No. 50 (20 May 1941), released on the eve of the Pacific War. The second part is a montage with impressive sequences of counterattacks against British and American forces filmed from a battleship after Pearl Harbor, which were originally included in *Nippon News* No. 130 (1 December 1942). Although the date assigned to *Imperial Japanese Fleet* in the Spanish Film Library archives and the RTVE digital archives is 1941, an analysis of the footage used in the montage has revealed that it must have been edited at least one year later; moreover, the narration includes references to the Japanese occupation of Malaysia, Java, Midway, the Solomon Islands and the Aleutian Islands, events that occurred in the first half of 1942.

### 3.3 Versions of other newsreels: *Japón en Guerra* (1942)

Compared to the variety of newsreels that proliferated under the Spanish Republic, the number of newsreels produced by the nationalist side during the Spanish Civil War and in the early years of the Franco dictatorship was dramatically low. The newsreels distributed in Spain during this period were mainly the German UFA newsreels, the Italian *Luce* and the Anglo-American *Fox Movietone News*, although there were a few others with less of an impact. Of course, as of 1 July 1938 all these newsreels needed to have their footage approved by the military authorities and were censored or adapted as required. Alongside the international productions was the Spanish newsreel *El Noticiero Español*, created by the Falange, produced between 1938 and 1941, an unprecedented form of shock propaganda created with the support of the

Third Reich, edited and distributed by the German studio Tobis.

As a result, the German newsreels were not the only source of news from the Japanese Empire. For example, *Japón en Guerra* [Japan at War] (1942) was a version of the French film *Japon en Guerre. Reportages sur les hostilités entre le Japon et les puissances anglo-saxonne*, made by the Éclair Journal newsreel. During the Civil War, Éclair Journal was edited in Bilbao by the company Producciones Hispánicas and exhibited in Spain under the title *Noticario Universal*. The purpose of the 28-minute report was to explain the actions that had led to the Pacific War. The news story opens with a large meeting at which the Japanese PM, General Hideki Tōjō, announces that Japan has no option but to go war with the United States and Great Britain. This is followed by images of the air raids on Pearl Harbor, filmed from Japanese planes. The report continues with the capture of Singapore, and the completion of the Japanese advance with the entry into Burma and the arrival at Manila in the Philippines. The Spanish narration has only been preserved between minutes 14 and 20; the rest of the voice-over is in French. Actually, this sequence contains footage reused in *Flota Imperial Japonesa*. To justify the actions of the Japanese army, the narrator recalls the events of the Russo-Japanese War and the unfair international agreements imposed by the United States and Britain. The stance of the Spanish editors seems far less ambiguous than that of their counterparts in occupied France, as they use a much more enthusiastic tone than the French voice-over.

*Japón en Guerra* ends with two more historic events: the unconditional surrender of Hong Kong with images of British prisoners; and the occupation of Indonesia, which includes the famous assault on the Palembang oil refineries by Japanese paratroopers. Both were filmed for *Nippon News* No. 93 (17 March 1942), probably by the camera operator Abe Shirō.

This footage circulated around the world and became an icon of Japanese expansion in South-east Asia. As a matter of fact, it was reused in Spain for the ten-minute report *Paracaidistas nipónicos contra Palembang* [Japanese Paratroopers against Palembang] (1942). The editing of *Japón en Guerra* is particularly significant because it illustrates the extraordinary phenomenon of the migration of images from Japan, which were circulated constantly in German, French and Spanish newsreels.

The impact of the Palembang images lies in the immediacy and closeness of the cameramen, who travelled among the troops and worked with light cameras, mainly Eyemos. Their visual pow-



Taking Palembang Oil Refinery. *Japón en Guerra* from *Nippon News*, No. 93 (17 March 1942).

er undermined any informative function. The events are decontextualized in Spain and there is no mention of the fact that Palembang was a strategic source of petroleum for Japan following the embargo imposed by the United States, the United Kingdom and the Netherlands. In short, *Paracaidistas nipónicos contra Palembang* exemplifies how the images lose their referential character and omit specifics in the interests of expressing general ideas. As Sánchez-Biosca (2008; 2009) explains, in many images produced during the Spanish Civil War and the subsequent dictatorship, the fleeting nature of current events is replaced by a transcendental quality, aimed at creating enduring messages. In other words, the images become

a symbol, or represent symbolic acts, whose objective in this case is to portray a New World Order, and to legitimize the actions of the Japanese Empire and, indirectly, of the Spanish dictatorship itself.

#### 4. TWILIGHT OF THE JAPANESE EMPIRE IN THE NEW NO-DO NEWSREELS (1943-1945)

##### 4.1 Narrative turn

From this point, the representation of the Japanese Empire begins a transformation in accordance with the changing needs of the Franco dictatorship. In February 1943, the Axis armies were already in clear retreat after the German defeat at Stalingrad and the expulsion of the Japanese from Guadalcanal. The Franco government needed to take a turn in its international policy in order to position itself more favourably in the face of an increasingly imminent Allied victory. Franco thus switched back from “non-belligerence” to “neutrality” in the war in April 1943 and dissolved the Blue Division, the Spanish unit sent to support the German Army on the Eastern Front.

How were these changes expressed on Spanish movie screens? Control of Francoist propaganda shifted from Ramón Serrano Suñer's pro-Nazi leanings to Gabriel Arias Salgado's pragmatic strategy, which adapted the representation of World War II in accordance with the course of events. All the newsreels that had been exhibited to that date, including the Falangist *Noticario Español*, disappeared and were replaced by the new NO-DO newsreels. This company began to operate with newsreel professionals from Fox, as well as equipment and logistical support from the German UFA. NO-DO adopted a tremendously contradictory strategy, maintaining its agreement with the UFA while simultaneously coordinating a gradual process of distancing itself from the Axis. It should be noted while NO-DO was the sole authorized voice of the only legal party in Francoist Spain (*FET y de las JONS*), rather than acting as



the mouthpiece of the official discourse of the dictatorship, it reflected the different factions of the regime that were active at any given moment.

In terms of reception, *NO-DO* enjoyed the exclusivity of being the only permitted newsreel, as well as being required screening in cinemas. The news it presented thus served to project a particular vision of the world and of Spain that the viewer had no other sources to compare with. The objective of this newsreel was absolute control of information. However, unlike the German and Japanese film newsreels, the aim of *NO-DO* was not the mobilization of the masses but the demobilization of the audience through a negative depiction of politics (Rodríguez Tranche and Sánchez-Biosca, 2005: XI; Sánchez-Biosca, 2009: 100). The characteristics of *NO-DO* need to be assessed in a context in which, in order to guarantee the survival of the Franco regime, it was necessary to replace pro-fascist discourses with a traditionalism and political Catholicism that would facilitate a contradictory strategy of rapprochement with the Allies. To this end, *NO-DO* articulated a unique portrait of World War II that fit in with the Francoist argument that there were three different wars: the first on the German-Soviet front, where Spain supported Nazi Germany; the second in the European Theatre, between the Allies and the Axis Powers, in which Spain was neutral; and the third, the Pacific War, in which Spain began supporting the Allies as of 1943 (Preston, 1998: 616; Rodao García, 2002: 404-406).

This background explains the gradual disappearance of the camaraderie with Japan on Spanish screens. The strategy was twofold: first, *NO-*



Eclipse in Japan (*NO-DO* No. 103B)

*DO* continued to rely on footage from the German newsreels to show images of the Japanese Empire, but between 1943 and 1944 only the least newsworthy stories were selected. For example, the news about Japan would focus on the training of naval candidates (*NO-DO* No. 60), tourism (No. 99B), the Diet or Japanese parliament, Himeji Castle, children's competitions and an eclipse (No. 103B). Among the news related to the military, only stories related to the least controversial aspects of the war was included. For example, *NO-DO* No. 46B, entitled *Desfile Hirohito* [Hirohito Parade], moves away from the front to cover the emperor inspecting the troops in the traditional New Year's military parade, edited with footage from *Nippon News* No. 136 (12 January 1943), filmed at Yoyogi Park in Tokyo on 8 January 1943.

Second, the editing began incorporating the Allies' point of view with an increasing number of images from the American *Fox Movietone Newsreels*. Not only did this change have political implications, but it also provided a powerful visual effect, as it presented the viewer with the devel-



opments of the war from both sides of the front-line. This does not mean that the Spanish public had more privileged access to world events; on the contrary, the representation of events was increasingly confusing, decontextualized and contradictory.

#### 4.2 End of Nippon News footage in Spain

By the second half of 1943, the Japanese army's high command could no longer conceal the turning tide. The Aleutian Islands disaster between May and August 1943, where practically the entire Japanese detachment perished and of which there is no footage in either Spain or Japan, marked a change of mood in Japan (High, 2003: 489).<sup>11</sup> Images of the dramatic defeat at Saipan in June 1944, which precipitated the fall of Prime Minister Tōjō, were not shown in Japan either. However, *Nippon News* does refer to the event in No.216 (22 July 1944), with a sombre tone very different from that of previous newsreels. The news story contains no images of the battle, but includes a statement by the navy in which the defeat is acknowledged. This story even contains a dire warning about its consequences, as one scene shows a meeting of female workers being warned that from Saipan it is possible to bomb Taiwan, the Philippines, Okinawa, and even the islands of Shikoku and Kyūshū. On the other hand, *NO-DO* does include footage of the battle of Saipan, in No. 89B, entitled *Asalto a Saipán* [Assault on Saipan], but the story is much less informative. Footage filmed by American camera operators is used, seeking to amaze the audience with the exoticism of both the location and the American war machine. However, the informative function is side-lined: the importance of Saipan in the global context of the war is not explained and the presence of Japanese troops on the island is not even mentioned.

After the fall of Saipan and the air raids on Tokyo beginning in November 1944, the production of newsreels decreased dramatically. In addition



*Nippon News* (No. 216, 22 July 1944)

to the shortage of celluloid, many cinemas were closed, seized by the authorities or destroyed. Despite these circumstances, *Nippon News* kept operating until a month before the end of the war. However, in 1945 its footage was no longer reaching Spain (it should be remembered that this footage arrived via Nazi Germany, which would fall in April). As a result, coverage of the news about the Japanese retreat from the Philippines, Taiwan and Burma, as well as the subsequent defeats in Okinawa was provided exclusively by the Allies. *NO-DO* presented the Battle of Luzon in the Philippines in No.114B and No. 117B with point-of-view shots taken from American B-29 bombers. The liberation of Manila by General Douglas MacArthur appeared in No. 124A and No. 124B, showing the ruins of the city after the battle. Kamikaze attacks, which were beginning to be organized in the Philippines in October 1944, were shown in *Nippon News* No. 232 (9 November 1944), No. 234 (23 November 1944) and No. 235 (30 November 1944), and in the documentary *Rikugun Tokubetusu Kougekitai* [Army Special Attack Squad] (Nichiei, February 1945). *NO-DO* presented these attacks only using sequences filmed from American battleships, in No. 137B. Similarly, while the bombings over Taiwan appeared in *Nippon News* No. 249 (5 April 1945), with shots of B24 bombers taken from the ground, the same event is presented in *NO-DO* No.120 with shots taken from inside the American planes.

### 4.3 Final reports: from liberators to perpetrators

The representation of the Japanese Empire changed dramatically in the *NO-DO* newsreels screened during the last months of the Pacific War. With the fall of the Third Reich, the Franco dictatorship took advantage of the deaths of Spanish citizens in Manila to attempt a rapprochement with the Allies by breaking diplomatic relations with Japan on 12 April 1945, and even proposing to send volunteer divisions to the Philippines to fight on MacArthur's side (Rodao García, 2002: 479-510). In these circumstances, *NO-DO* articulated an urgent retrospective revision of the war, transforming the Japanese from honourable comrades to bloodthirsty criminals. *NO-DO* No. 138, entitled *Campaña de Birmania* [Burma Campaign] (1945), illustrates this process well: while the Japanese entering British Burma had been described as "liberators" in *Un Año de Guerra* (1942), now it is the British who are praised. The montage includes scenes of British paratroopers taking Rangoon, a very different view from that presented in *Nippon News* No. 245 (8 February 1945), which focuses on the destruction caused by American B-29s. In the same *NO-DO* newsreel, the story *Últimos episodios bélicos. La batalla de Okinawa* [Last War Episodes: The Battle of Okinawa] follows the Allies in the Battle of Okinawa, which was also shown in *Nippon News* No. 250 with scenes of Kamikaze pilots.

The latest Spanish newsreel about the war in Asia, *Victoria sobre Japón* [Victory over Japan] (*NO-DO* No. 142A), presents the most abrupt discursive change of all. Ironically, the exalted tone of Falangist propaganda is used now to denounce the atrocities of the Japanese Empire, to which end the narrator holds nothing back:

Japan, the first of the aggressors in this war, launched an international campaign of con-

quest and looting fourteen years ago [...] Japanese diplomats in the League of Nations tried to justify their crimes against peace and decency, then they left [...] while continuing the negotiations, their compatriots struck a savage blow unequalled for its infamy... Pearl Harbor!

The description of events in China is equally striking. Although the Franco government had been one of the few in the world to recognize the puppet state of Manchukuo, the *NO-DO* narration describes Japan's intervention in China as follows: "...China, looted and bled dry, was a scene of desolation and death." The rewriting of the Pacific War was not only discursive, but also on a visual: Pearl Harbor is given a central focus for the first time on Spanish screens, but rather than using images taken from Japanese airplanes (like those included in *Nippon News* No. 82), it shows *Fox Movietone* footage, shot from the American docks. Similarly, although the issue of Kamikaze attacks was addressed in Japan in several newsreels of *Nippon News* in 1944, *NO-DO* depicts them now as a corps of "suicide bombers" with images taken from an American battleship.

## 5. CONCLUSION

In a context of major political tensions and ideological mobilization, cinema became a modern propaganda tool that was distributed widely, even in times of war. Many of the images studied above were engraved in the collective memory and have played a key role in the socialization of history. Although there were not enough resources in Spain

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**ALTHOUGH THE FRANCO GOVERNMENT HAD BEEN ONE OF THE FEW IN THE WORLD TO RECOGNIZE THE PUPPET STATE OF MANCHUKUO, THE NO-DO NARRATION DESCRIBES JAPAN'S INTERVENTION IN CHINA AS FOLLOWS: "...CHINA, LOOTED AND BLED DRY, WAS A SCENE OF DESOLATION AND DEATH."**

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Kamikaze attacks from the American point of view,  
*Victoria sobre Japón* [Victory over Japan] (NO-DO No. 142A)

to provide news coverage of the fifteen years of conflict in Asia, the newsreels projected on Spanish screens reveal a truly global flow of images. However, it is necessary to interrogate this continuous circulation critically in relation not only to production but also to reception. Although this footage was of distant origin, it produced an iconography of immediacy with the potential to make a local impact. The reproduction of the *mise-en-scène* featuring the Asian emperors on a platform in the meeting of European dictators in Hendaye is an example of these new global phenomena. Similarly, *Nippon News* footage portraying the Japanese expansion in Asia was used to feed the imperialist aspirations of the Franco dictatorship, and particularly of the Falange, which illustrates the local relevance of this transnational iconography.

Finally, the images of the Pacific War are characterised by advanced editing and filmmaking techniques beyond the means available in post-Civil War Spain. Nevertheless, they did not provide the Spanish viewer with a clearer insight

into the events unfolding in Asia. On the contrary, the Spanish newsreels were often contradictory and deliberately confusing. In the processes of migration and re-edition of footage, the news stories were adapted and revised in every context they were used, acquiring different nuances and becoming a kind of palimpsest of meanings. This explains why these images of the Japanese Empire actually seem to tell us more about the changing interests and sensibilities in Spain than about the events in Asia they are supposed to represent. ■

## NOTES

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- 1 The Spanish newsreels found with news or reports on the war in Asia are kept in the archives of the Spanish Film Library in Madrid. There are eighteen news stories: seven in newsreels prior to 1943 and eleven in NO-DO newsreels, which monopolized the newsreel in Spain from that year on. Although it may seem so, this is not a small number given the circumstances. On the one hand, many of the newsreels made before and during the Spanish Civil War have not been preserved or could not be located, including the *Noticiero de Extremo Oriente* (Far East Newsreel) mentioned by Paz Rebollo and San Deocracias (2010: 715). After the Civil War, the number of newsreels screened in Spain was dramatically reduced. This is evident in the fact that *Noticario Español*, the precursor to NO-DO,

only managed to produce one newsreel in 1940 and 1941 (Sánchez-Biosca, 2007: 89). On the other hand, NO-DO constructed an imaginary that was practically indifferent to what was happening outside Spanish borders, so the existence of these news stories between 1943 and 1945 is qualitatively significant. Some of these examples have been recently digitized and are available online on the RTVE Historical Archive website (Radio Televisión Española, 2019).

- 2 Japan's recognition was officially announced a year later in the newspaper *Mainichi* on 1 December 1937.
- 3 The title of the copy preserved in the Spanish Film Library in Madrid is in Portuguese: *O Mikado recebe o imperador do Manchukuo*. It may therefore be the version of a newsreel that was first shown in Portugal.
- 4 Nichiei also signed agreements with Paramount and Pathé for the exchange of international news. These were screened under the title *Nichiei Foreign News*.
- 5 Nippon Eigasha newsreels produced until the dissolution of the company in 1951 can be found in the archives of the Japanese public television network NHK. In 2013, they were digitized together with the war-related news produced by *Asahi News* and NHK, as part of the *Sensō Shōgen Ākaibusu* (War Testimonies Archive) project and are available online (NHK, 2019).
- 6 It is possible that the footage in this report is the same footage that appears, at least in part, in the Japanese medium-length film *Dai tōa sensō isshūnen kinen eiga* (1940) described by Akira Yamamoto (Imamura, Satō et al., 1986: 69).
- 7 According to Yamamoto (Imamura, Satō et al., 1986: 76), the images appear in higher speed due to the effect produced by the Eyemo camera when filming with poor lighting, and this happened to reinforce the power of Yamashita's gestures.
- 8 This footage was reused in Spain for the news story *Desembarco japonés en las Islas Aleutianas* [Japanese landing in the Aleutian Islands], but it is possible that it was screened as a NO-DO newsreel in 1943, which would have only confused the viewer, because, by then, the United States was retaking the islands at great cost to the Japanese.

- 9 According to Satō (1986: 46), news stories of the war always carried the label *Rikugun-shō ken'etsu sumi* (Censored by the Ministry of War), showing that the footage had been reviewed to eliminate any military secrets or other sensitive information.
- 10 SEU edited newsreels until 1943.
- 11 However, the huge ceremony for the fallen is shown in *Nippon News* No. 174 (5 October 1943).

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*Un Año de Guerra en la Gran Asia Oriental* aka *Ein Jahr Krieg in Gross-Ostasien* (1942)

## RE-EDITING THE WAR IN ASIA. JAPANESE NEWSREELS IN SPAIN (1931-1945)

### Abstract

During the fifteen-year conflict in Asia (1931-1945), the Japanese industry of newsreels experienced an extraordinary growth, prompted by the incidents in China in the thirties and by the propaganda needs particularly from 1940, when all news films were fused in *Nippon News*. The images on Asia seen in Spanish cinemas had been originated in the Japanese newsreels, at least until the last stage of the Pacific War. To a great extent, they reached Spain as versions of Nazi Germany's newsreel *Auslandstonwoche*, but there were also other sources. This article seeks to cast light on the impact that the Japanese newsreel industry had on Spain, tracing how these images circulated and determine how they conditioned the local reception of the events in Asia.

### Key words

Japanese Newsreels; Non-Fiction Film; *Nippon News*; Spanish Civil War; Franco; Pacific War; Manchukuo; Japanese Empire.

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## REEDITANDO LA GUERRA EN ASIA. NOTICIARIOS JAPONESES EN ESPAÑA (1931-1945)

### Resumen

Durante los quince años de conflicto en Asia (1931-1945), se experimentó un extraordinario auge de la industria del noticiario cinematográfico en Japón, impulsada por los incidentes en China en los años treinta y por las necesidades de propaganda, especialmente a partir de 1940, cuando todos los noticiarios se fusionaron en *Nippon News*. Las imágenes de Asia proyectadas en las salas de cine españolas tenían su origen en estos noticiarios japoneses, al menos hasta casi la fase final de la Guerra del Pacífico. En gran parte, llegaron a España como versiones del noticiario de la Alemania nazi *Auslandstonwoche*, pero hubo también otras fuentes. Este artículo busca arrojar luz sobre el impacto que tuvo la industria de noticiarios japonesa en España, rastrear aquella circulación de imágenes y determinar cómo condicionaron la recepción local de los acontecimientos en Asia.

### Palabras clave

Noticiarios japoneses; Cine de no ficción; Nichiei; *Nippon News*; Guerra Civil española; Franco; Guerra del Pacífico; Manchukuo; Imperio japonés.

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