Japan

Hikari Hori, *Promiscuous Media: Film and Visual Culture in Imperial Japan, 1926–1945*

Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2018. 312 pages. 23 black and white photographs. Hardcover, $55.00. ISBN: 9781501714542.

Promiscuous Media: Film and Visual Culture in Imperial Japan, 1926–1945 is a richly rewarding investigation of the mediascape of the early Shōwa period. This book ventures into one of the most extensively researched periods of Japan studies and illustrates clearly that media studies and gender studies have much to contribute to our understanding of the relationship between state-based ideology and popular cultural practices. The 1930s and 1940s bear witness to a "constant forging of nationalized idioms as seen in ideologues' writings and in legislation but also in popular culture" (1). Hikari Hori's underlying claim is that the media used to formulate this national identity are themselves impure and, as the title suggests, promiscuous: media tends to seek out and combine with other media.

Chapter 1 considers the visual culture surrounding the Shōwa emperor and the mediascape of the modern emperor system, following the observation that "the emperor was an institution of the mass media rather than a person" (25). One key element of this culture was the imperial photograph (the chapter identifies the portrait photograph known in Japanese as *goshin'ei* as "the Photograph"), an image at once highly restricted and venerated across the nation as the very body of the sovereign. Hori calls attention to a range of other popular viewing practices that compete with this restricted presence in the mediascape, practices that included viewing the emperor as a popular celebrity in newsreels and collectible postcards from the 1920s onward. The influence of this veneration practice with the photograph can be seen in radio broadcasting, which refrained from broadcasting the emperor's voice, and in newsreels, which eschewed close-ups in order to maintain distance between the emperor and his sovereign subject spectators.

Chapter 2 considers female agency in the evolving gender roles seen in 1930s and 1940s female films, which Hori defines as films with female leads intended for female

audiences. Motherhood and reproduction were important benchmarks of state ideology since the creation of the modern nation state in the Meiji period (1868–1912) and have been associated with the home and the domestic. Films of the 1940s reflect changes in wartime gender roles, as mothers are no longer reminders of home or nostalgic domesticity. Films like Kurosawa's *The Most Beautiful* portray women not as mothers but as militarized factory workers who sing military songs in a more masculinized identity. In *Three Women in the North*, the lead women have no time for romance, domesticity, or reproduction, as they focus all of their efforts on wartime military service as telecommunication operators. Rather than a specific "unitary discourse" (113) about women, these films depict diverse roles for women, including experimentation, masculinization, and imagined departure from state-bound ideology encouraging motherhood and reproduction.

Chapter 3 traces the history of Japanese documentary film in this period through an examination of the career of female pioneer Atsugi Taka (1907–1998), whose contributions to film history are underappreciated. Her writing of scenarios, her work as a filmmaker, and her translation of Paul Rotha's *Documentary Film* (1935) stand out as important contributions. In addition to making Rotha's ideas about filmmaking available to general and specialized audiences in Japan, Atsugi's use of the word *dokyumentarī* (documentary) was responsible for entering that term in the Japanese lexicon (117). Her contributions suggest that documentary film, too often seen as a mere reflection of state policy during the war, should be seen as a site of multiple messages, sometimes appropriated by the state, sometimes drastically if not diametrically opposed at the same time.

Chapter 4 takes up the question of animation in Japan, which underwent significant change in the 1940s, when it began to depart from European and American models. Funding from the military made it possible for Seo Mitsuyo to develop a national style of animation, but this required identifying what specifically was characteristic of Japanese animation. Seo's efforts to create a national animation style paradoxically demonstrated that national construction is based on a "promiscuous, heterogeneous process" (202). The national style developed during the war reflects a strong American visual style and awareness of contemporary Chinese animation models, and through state (especially navy) financial support, the exhibition practices during the war help to boost significantly the prestige of national animation. Seo's work draws from contemporary visual culture including recreated battle scenes from documentary film, painting, newsreels, and photographs.

The approaches taken to these four spheres of visual culture underscore the interrelated nature the media used to forge a national identity. In the epilogue, Hori suggests that the iconic postwar photograph of MacArthur and Hirohito—often taken as symbolic of the start of a new postwar order—also has affinities with the imperial portrait of the prewar years. The primary contribution of this study is that it underscores the importance of considering media as a diverse and complex site of negotiation, even during two decades of what are widely seen as a time of the most intense ideological and political identity building. Its methodology examining film in relation to other media and Japanese visual culture in relation to that of other countries at the time yields memorable and important insights. While it makes clear that it does not focus on the Japanese empire (17–18), or on the important relationship between colonial experience and mainland identity formation, it does set the stage for complementary

research in those areas. Hori's historically informed consideration of the emperor system, documentary film, and animation will be of interest to scholars in film and media studies, especially those interested in the global context of the 1930s and 1940s. Her transmedia and transnational examination of the early Shōwa period will no doubt be of interest to cultural historians and to scholars of Japan studies and gender studies.

Charles Exley
University of Pittsburgh