

The Museum of Modern Art

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PROPAGANDA PICTURES FROM JAPAN NEVER SEEN HERE

ACQUIRED BY THE MUSEUM ARCHIVES

Two important wartime Japanese propaganda films have been acquired by the Museum of Modern Art Film Archives it was announced by Donald Richie, guest film curator in the Department of Film. Both pictures were directed by Tomotaka Tasaka in 1939 during the Sino-Japanese conflict. "Five Scouts" (Gonin No Sekkohei) and "Mud and Soldiers" (Tsuchi To Hitai) have never been shown in the Western Hemisphere. The Nikkatsu Film Corporation of Tokyo donated them to the Museum. No other film archive in the world has these pictures except the Tokyo Museum of Modern Art.

Both films were intended as propaganda to encourage Japanese public support at home for the China adventure. "Five Scouts," a box-office success, was confiscated by the Allied Occupation when the war was over. The negative and all prints were presumably burned, like many other Japanese films requisitioned by the Eighth Army in Japan. Later it was discovered that a print of "Five Scouts" had been stored in America. After a long period of negotiation, this film was returned to Japan, and last year the thirty-year-old picture was re-released in major theaters there.

The Eighth Army was also reported to have destroyed "Mud and Soldiers," but apparently a single print was guarded in Washington and recently returned to Japan. The prints donated to the Museum's Archives are copies of the re-released versions of both pictures.

"Five Scouts" was one of the first major war films, according to Mr. Richie, critic and author of four books on Japanese films, who is currently preparing the Japanese Film Retrospective opening at the Museum this spring. This picture, Richie finds, has no counterpart in any of the wartime films of either the Allies or Axis nations. It lacks the ultra-nationalism of most propaganda films. The soldiers are caught in the middle of hostilities and the enemy is merely an impersonal void.

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Consequently this film, like all good war films, is not really about war. It is about survival.

"Mud and Soldiers" was the second propaganda film of Tasaka, and the director took his crew to the China front to film a number of scenes. The film has no plot and resembles a documentary in its realism. It creates a feeling of war itself -- what it must be like -- using the methods of the newsreel cameraman. The amount of propaganda for a film of this kind is negligible by Western standards, Richie claims. Nonetheless these films were intended to boost the morale on the Japanese home front, to instill pride in their armed forces; and the seizure of the films by the U.S. Eighth Army gives evidence of their effect at the time.

Both films will be part of the Japanese Retrospective Show which is scheduled for the spring, 1970.

Additional information available from Elizabeth Shaw, Director, and Lillian Gerard, Film Coordinator, Department of Public Information, The Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53rd Street, New York, New York. 10019. (212) 956 - 7501, 7296.