

Transnational Circulation of Images of the Pacific War (1941-1945): The Japanese Empire Seen through Spanish Newsreels

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Abstract

Spanish newsreels were an extraordinary witness of the worldwide circulation of images of the Pacific War. Between 1941 and 1943, they showed the Japanese side of the conflict by employing a strategy that had started in the Spanish Civil War—appropriating footage from different sources. Thus, Japanese news shot by *Nihon eiga-sha* operators reached Spain as re-edited versions of foreign newsreels, mainly from Nazi Germany. Beginning in 1943, when *NO-DO*, the only newsreel allowed in Spain, was founded, the Axis armies were in retreat, and the Franco Regime needed to shift its position regarding its sympathies for the Axis before the increasingly imminent Allied victory. Consequently, the representation of the Japanese Empire shifted from one of comrade to one of perpetrator, and the entire war was re-interpreted in retrospective. Because of agreements with Fox Movietone and *Deutsche Wochenschau* newsreels, *NO-DO* was able to show both sides of the conflict by editing scenes shot by both Japanese and allied operators. This privileged access to multiple perspectives on the war allowed Spanish editors to create visually astonishing newsreels, which, however, often lacked accuracy regarding current affairs. Instead, images were often decontextualised. Moreover, Japanese news was adapted and renewed in other propaganda works, including those of the enemy. This case study reveals how such “migrating” images reveal more about the changing interests of the new Spanish Dictatorship than about the events in Asia they were supposed to represent.

Keywords: Japanese newsreels, Pacific War, Spanish newsreels, *Nihon eiga-sha*, *NO-DO*.

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The newsreel has gone dithering on, mistaking the phenomenon for the thing in itself, and ignoring everything that gave it to the trouble of conscience and penetration and thought.

John Grierson, 1937

Introduction

In recent years, we have witnessed the release of an enormous number of films with images that became part of the memory of The Pacific War (1941-1945). In 2006, Clint Eastwood directed *Flags of Our Fathers*, a film that focused on the six marines who raised the U.S. flag on Iwo Jima, which was captured in an image taken by Joe Rosenthal in 1945.¹ In 2012, Peter Webber made *Emperor*, which depicted the early days of the Allied occupation of Japan and the photograph of MacArthur and Emperor Hirohito taken by Gaetano Faillace at the U.S. embassy in September 1945. The number of films and documentaries indicate that an interesting marketing operation has been sustained by the mysterious attraction to the iconography of World War II in our contemporary society. The portrayal of the Pacific War is unprecedented in the history of the newsreel. The Allies and Japan mobilised the best operators and directors as well as the most advanced film equipment of the time, putting them at the service of their propaganda. Both sides developed hidden strategies to depict the war in convincing and persuasive ways. The result was the most sophisticated newsreels available to date, which advanced modern war reportage and prompted stylistic and technical transformations that would be adapted in subsequent news programmes and even fiction films. This text seeks to explore a small part of the vast and rich repertoire of images that portray the Pacific War: those projected in Spanish newsreels during the years of the conflict, coinciding with the early years of Franco's dictatorship, which had just been installed following the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939). The study of the Pacific War through Spanish newsreels is particularly interesting because they became a privileged witness of the circulating images across the world by combining the Spanish screen footage of both the Allies and the Axis forces.

Occasionally, these images have been revisited, and some of them have become icons of the past. However, their ability to provide insights into the profilmic reality that they are supposed to represent must be called into question. I emphasise that the newsreels were ideological constructions, thus pointing to the problem of representation, which is the object of study for film historians and theorists. While it can be accepted that the messages are imposed on newsreels through mechanisms of composition and montage, their meanings are not fixed. What the images denote and connote is subject to a never-ending process of reinterpretation and adaptation as they are viewed in different contexts. Therefore, rather than a nostalgic review of the events portrayed, including the most dramatic ones, I propose a study of the discourses that overlap these moving images.

Mutual expectations of the Spanish and the Japanese

The relations between the Spanish Republic and the Japanese Empire had been tense since the invasion of Manchuria in 1931. Unlike Fascist Italy, Nazi Germany, and the Portuguese Salazar dictatorship, the Japanese government did not assist the military uprising that took place following the victory of the left-wing Popular Front in the Spanish elections of July 1936. However, during the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939), the Nationalist side and Japan regarded each other as potential allies. In fact, the Japanese government officially recognised

¹ For a study on the influence of some of these photographs on cinema, see Rebeca Romero Escrivá, "Riis, Capa, Rosenthal", *L'Atalante*. 8 (2008): 124-135.

the Rebel Government led by General Franco in December 1937 when the outcome of the Spanish conflict was yet to be decided.² In the Spanish Nationalist propaganda, the Japanese and Spanish armies had the same self-assigned roles as “saviours of civilization”.³ Many factions within the Franco dictatorship, which was definitively installed with the fall of the Republican army in April 1939, enthusiastically received the news of Japanese expansionism in Asia.⁴ Between 1939 and 1940, the government of the new Spanish Regime discussed the possibility of improving relations with the Nationalist Government of the Kuomintang; however, the dictatorship eventually took the side of Japan.⁵ Franco met the Japanese ambassador Suma Yakichiro several times between 1940 and 1941, expressing his desire to strengthen links between the two countries. The Spanish government also recognised the collaborationist government of Wang Jingwei in Nanjing and the puppet state of Manchukuo, which had permanent representation in Madrid beginning in April 1939. In November, the Spanish ambassador Méndez de Vigo visited Manchukuo and was welcomed by its head of State, Emperor Pu-yi. As evidence of the support for Japanese actions in Asia, the Spanish version of the Portuguese newsreel, *O Mikado recebe o imperador do Manchukuo* (The Mikado Welcomes The Emperor of Manchukuo), covered the event of Emperor Hirohito welcoming Emperor Pu-yi at Tokyo Station in January 1940.

The Spanish reaction to the outbreak of the Pacific War in December 1941 was similar to that of Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy. In January 1942, Ramón Serrano Suñer, leader of the fascist party *Falange* and Foreign Affairs Minister at that point, congratulated Japan for its attack on Pearl Harbour. In some aspects, Spain’s willingness to collaborate with Japan was even greater than that of the other totalitarian countries, which was indicated by the creation of a Spanish–Japanese spy ring in 1938 by Serrano Suñer.⁶ Among the Spanish *Falangists* and other conservative elements of the Regime, Japanese militarism was regarded as the Spanish alter ego in the Far East: they were the “crusaders” who would continue in Asia, completing the holy mission of ending the Communist threat that had begun during the Spanish Civil War.⁷

² Although the Japanese press published the German and Italian recognition of the Franco regime in November 1936 (see “Dokui Supein Kakumengun seiken shōnin” [German and Italian Recognition of the Rebel Army Administration], *Mainichi Shinbun*, November 16, 1936), the Japanese government did not officially recognise the rebel army in the Spanish Civil War until a year later. See “Kyō seishiki ni Tsūkoku Furanko Seiken shōnin” [Today, official recognition of Franco’s Government], *Mainichi Shinbun*, December 1, 1937.

³ For an overview on the similarities promoted in Spain between the Spanish Civil War and the Sino-Japanese War, see Florentino Rodao, *Franco y el imperio japonés. Imágenes y propaganda en tiempos de guerra* (Barcelona: Plaza & Janés, 2002), 262–285.

⁴ Only days after the beginning of World War II with the German invasion of Poland, Franco proclaimed “neutrality” although the regime was unable to conceal the propaganda machinery in favour of the Axis. In June 1940, the Spanish government transformed “neutrality” into the ambiguous “non-belligerency”, echoing Mussolini’s early position, which placed Spain at the threshold of entering the war, awaiting negotiations with the Third Reich. The position was not uniform within the Regime; ministers such as Serrano Suñer defended unconditional support of the Third Reich and fascist Italy, while others, such as Jordán, were pro-Allies. On the relations between Spain and the Third Reich, see Klaus-Jörg Ruhl, *Franco, Falange y el III Reich. España durante la II Guerra Mundial* (Madrid: Akal, 1986).

⁵ After all, its leader Chang Kai-shek was a conservative and authoritarian military man, which fit well the ideology of the regime, and a delegation led by Pedro de Iguar was even sent to China. However, the Kuomintang had had diplomatic relations with the Spanish Republic and had never recognised the Nationalist side. Rodao, *Franco y el imperio japonés*, 171.

⁶ Rodao, *Franco y el imperio japonés*, 262; José Luis Hernández Garvi, “Franco contra el imperio del sol naciente”. *Historia de Iberia Vieja. Revista de Historia de España*, 75 (2005): 60–63.

⁷ Nationalist propaganda included anachronistic rhetoric by linking the military uprising to an imaginary that had more to do with the Catholic kings and the *Reconquista* than with contemporary affairs in the world: Rafael R. Tranche and Vicente Sánchez-Biosca, *Nodo. El tiempo y la memoria* (Madrid: Cátedra, 2006), 290; Alberto

In Japan, the press published reports on the rebel side right after the military uprising in Spain. After the Civil War, Japan organised a propagandistic campaign to support Franco in joining the fight against the British Empire.⁸ In October, the *Asahi Shimbun* published an article about Franco (November 10, 1940). Its weekly version, *Shukan Asahi*, also published a report on the Spanish dictator, which praised him as a brilliant politician and military strategist.⁹



Figure 1. The Japanese reported on General Franco after the military uprising in Spain.¹⁰

Despite the initial expectations, this comradeship became contradictory. First, Spain joined the Anti-Comintern Pact in 1939. However, the bonds of friendship with Japan were based on their common enemy, the Soviet Union, which the Nationalists considered responsible for the Spanish Civil War.¹¹ Yet, after the Nomohan Battle, the Japanese learnt about the difficulties of that war, and they did not fight the Soviet Union again from 1939 until the last days before their surrender in 1945. The truth was that Japan did not follow Germany when Hitler invaded the USSR and in fact, the Japanese–Soviet Non-aggression Pact, which was signed in 1941, was evidence of the failure of the Anti-Comintern Pact. Second, although the invasion of Gibraltar was key in the discussions with the Third Reich, Franco never declared war against the British Empire, and the Spanish expansionist aspirations stopped with the occupation of Tangier, Morocco in 1940.

Appropriation of images

Despite the contradictions, the news screened in Spain at the beginning of the Pacific War were unmistakably aligned with the Japanese stance. Spanish newsreels made beginning in

Reig Tapia, *Franco 'Caudillo': Mito y realidad* (Madrid: Tecnos, 1992): 62; Julian Casanova, *La iglesia de Franco* (Madrid: Temas de Hoy, 2001), 76.

⁸ See the Japanese report on General Franco after the military uprising in Spain, which indicated a possible alliance with Nazi Germany. *Mainichi Shimbun*, August, 14, 1936. For Japanese news about Franco Regime after the Civil War, see the *Yomiuri Shimbun* July 1940; an enthusiastic article on the Spanish occupation of Tangier in the *Yomiuri Shimbun* June 15, 1940. In September 1940, after Serrano Suñer visited Berlin, the same newspaper stated that the day that Spain would march on Gibraltar was close, *Yomiuri Shimbun* September 18, 1940.

⁹ Interestingly, the Japanese press used narrative strategies similar to those used in Spain by linking legendary myths of both countries, such as the Spanish “chivalrous spirit” and the “*Bushidō*” knights and samurais. Rodao, *Franco y el imperio japonés*, 123.

¹⁰ “Supein no kakumeigun no shinzō wo saguru” [Investigating the at the Heart of the Spanish Rebel Army], *Mainichi Shimbun*, August 14, 1936, left. Japan’s recognition of Franco’s government during the Spanish Civil War. “Kyō seishiki ni Tsūkoku Furanko Seiken shōnin” [Today, official recognition of Franco’s Government], *Mainichi Shimbun*, December 1, 1937, right.

¹¹ The Japanese press published the news of Spain joining the Anti-Comintern Pact in “Supein seiken sankā. Nichi-Doku-I sūji sarani kyōka” [Participation of Spanish Government. The Tripartite Pact is Strengthened Further], *Mainichi Shimbun* April 4, 1939.

1941 are interesting objects of study because editors developed a singular process for re-editing material from diverse sources, a phenomenon that had started during the Spanish Civil War. This conflict received unprecedented visual coverage. However, when the military uprising took place in Africa, most of the Spanish film equipment, professionals, and studios were on the Republican side mainly in Madrid and Barcelona.¹² Consequently, the rebels articulated the effective propaganda strategy of appropriating footage from the other side of the front. That meant attacking the Republic with Republican images. To that end, *Falange* created the Service for Recovery Documents (*Servicio de Recuperación de Documentos*), which was responsible for confiscating material from the enemy in order to use it as a powerful counter-propaganda tool. Thus, the rebel forces launched *El Noticiero Español* (*The Spanish Newsreel*) in April 1938, which disseminated unprecedented “shock” propaganda with the support of the Third Reich. It was edited by Geyer laboratories in Berlin and distributed by TOBIS Filmkunst, and it was screened until March 1941.¹³ One of the most remarkable examples of the strategy of footage re-appropriation is *Reportaje del movimiento revolucionario en Barcelona* (*Reportage on the Revolutionary Movement in Barcelona*), which portrays the inception of a social revolution in Barcelona by Mateo Santos and anarchist cameramen for the C.N.T.–F.A.I. union on July 19–23, 1936. The film’s anticlerical and anti-capitalist tone was widely used in Nationalist propaganda to justify the military uprising.¹⁴ Vicente Sánchez-Biosca eloquently explained how the meanings of images changed as they circulated from the Republican to the Nationalist side and from Spain to other countries.¹⁵

Between 1938 and 1943, several foreign newsreels were screened on the Nationalist side and the subsequent Franco Regime, such as the Spanish version of the German *Deutsche Wochenschau* and *UFA-Wochenschau*, the Italian *LUCE*, and those produced by the American and German branches of Fox Movietone.¹⁶ The case of Fox Movietone newsreels is especially remarkable, as they had been distributed in Spain since the silent film era. At the beginning of the Civil War, they were edited on the Republican side. However, the company reached an agreement with Franco’s government to screen an edition of its German version, *Fox Tönende Wochenschau* from January 1939, in addition to their own reports. However, after the unification of newsreels by Goebbels in June 1940 under *Deutsche Wochenschau* newsreels, Fox reduced its activities, and R. Tranche argued that the version screened in Spain probably was the American edition from that point.¹⁷

While all production companies were obliged to put their footage at the State’s disposal beginning on July 1, 1938, and all newsreels were censored or adapted when

¹² With the outbreak of the war in July 1936, the press activities, graphic journals, posters, and films produced by Republican institutions, political parties, and unions far exceeded those of the rebels. See Rafael R. Tranche, “Circulación de imágenes y contrapropaganda en el cine del bando nacional durante la guerra civil española”, *Archivos de la Filmoteca*, 60-61 2 (2008): 29. For an detailed account of the Nationalist use of cinema during the Spanish Civil War, see Rafael R. Tranche and Vicente Sánchez-Biosca, *Nodo*, 26-27.

¹³ By the time it disappeared, *Noticiero Español* had made 32 editions containing 164 news. Do not confuse the fascist *Noticiero Español* with the earlier newsreel *Noticiero Español* existing during the Spanish Republic, see Ramón Sala, *Diccionario de cine español* (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1998), 631-633.

¹⁴ For a detailed account of this phenomenon, see Vicente Sánchez-Biosca, “Propaganda y mitografía en el cine de la guerra civil española (1936-1939)”, *CIC Cuadernos de, Información y Comunicación*, vol. 12 (2007): 75-94.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *UFA-Wochenschau* started to be screened from early 1938 on the nationalist side, and in 1940, a branch was established in Spain in order to make an edition with footage shot locally. The *LUCE* Institute settled an office in Spain in January 1937 in order to disseminate the fascist ideology across the nationalist side and its newsreel was screened from the following year.

¹⁷ R. Tranche and Sánchez-Biosca, *NODO*, 29-30.

required, it is significant that Francoist screens contained images from multiple sources: the Republican Side (until the end of the Spanish Civil War), Axis countries, and even the Allies. The complex phenomenon of the appropriation of images subsequently became predominant during World War II. In fact, one of the first moving images shown in Spain about the Japanese Empire was *Japón en Guerra* (Japan at War), which was probably a version of the French newsreel *Japon En Guerre. Reportages sur les hostilités entre le Japon et les puissances anglo-saxonne*, which was edited for the *Éclair Journal* newsreel between 1941 and 1942.¹⁸ However, most news of the Pacific War during this period reached Spain through *Noticuario UFA*, which by then was a version of the only German newsreel, *Deutsche Wochenschau*.

The most significant production of this period was probably *Un Año de Guerra en la Gran Asia Oriental* (One Year of War in the Great East Asia, a version of *Ein Jahr Krieg in Gross-Ostasien* (1942), a nineteen-minute report made one year after the attack on Pearl Harbour to explain that the Japanese Empire had been unavoidably prompted to lead a war against the Western powers. Most of the reportage consists of a map of the Pacific with a voice-over giving a historical review of the previous 100 years, during which Japan is portrayed as constantly under siege and threatened by Britain and the United States of America. The British colonies in China and the American possessions of Hawaii, Midway, Wake, Guam, and the Philippines are explained as hostile acts that formed parts of the systematic march on Japan. It is interesting to note that during these early years, the enthusiastic support for Japanese actions left Spanish imperialistic aspirations in the region in second place, and no references to the old Spanish colonial rule on Guam and the Philippines were added. The narrator explains that the “Singapore and Hong Kong fortress constituted the most solid siege against Japan” and illustrates it by two threatening arrows surrounding the Japanese archipelago. The voice-over then concludes, “The 8th December of 1941, Japan started to demolish England and U.S.’s bastions in the Pacific”. Hence, the Pacific War is portrayed as a defensive act that resulted from the historical aggression by the American and British powers. The last part of the reportage presents footage of the Burma Campaign, which began in January 1942. These images are used to show the Japanese as “liberators” of Asia from the Western powers.

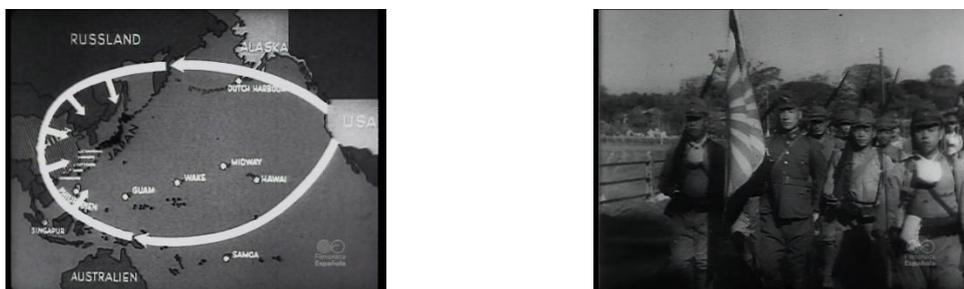


Figure 2. Spanish newsreel, *Un Año de Guerra en la Gran Asia Oriental* (One Year of War in the Great East Asia, 1942). The images are from a *Nihon Nyūsu* newsreel but edited through a *Deutsche Wochenschau* newsreel.

This newsreel justifies the conquest of the Pacific as an act of defence first and an act of liberation later; however, only these ideas are clear, as this piece offers very little information on current affairs. Pearl Harbour is not mentioned, and the subsequent images of Japanese soldiers marching on Burma are not contextualised. The voice-over announces, “with the bombing on Midway islands, one of the most important U.S. attacking positions against Japan was reached”. It then continues, “Japan armed forces enter the city. Burmese

¹⁸ During the Spanish Civil War, news from the *Éclair Journal* was screened in Spain within the *Noticuario Universal* (*Universal Newsreel*) edited by *Producciones Hispánicas* in Bilbao.

people greet their liberators”. Through this misleading geographical jump, the narration seems to say that the Japanese forces entered an unidentified city in the Midway Islands rather than Burma. Finally, the reportage concludes, “at the starting point of the Burmese road, more than one million tonnes of war material destined for Chongqing armies were found. The game is lost, Mr. Churchill!” This closing sentence demonstrates blatant indifference to whether the newsreel has an informative function, which contrasts the interest in creating messages that could be re-read and interpreted in local terms. Thus, the reference to Churchill and the occupation of Burma fuelled Spanish aspirations to take Gibraltar.

There is another significant omission in this piece. Although the images show Japanese soldiers taking the Burma Road, the importance of this route, which was China’s main source of supplies from the Western forces, is not explained. Similarly, two other newsreels about the Japanese Empire, which were sourced from German newsreels, were shown in Spain: *Flota Imperial Japonesa* (Imperial Japanese Fleet, from the German newsreel *Die Kaiserlich Japanische Kriegsflotte*) and *Paracaidistas Japoneses* (Japanese Parachutists),¹⁹ in which information is again replaced by a display of the power of the Japanese army by showing spectacular scenes of the imperial navy and parachutists taking over an oil refinery in Palembang, Indonesia. In both cases, the facts are decontextualized, and the spectator can barely tell to where and when these events belong. *Japanese Parachutists* closely portrays a group of soldiers climbing over a wall but fails to explain that Palembang had a strategic airfield, and its fuel supply was key for the Japanese army after the oil embargo imposed by the U.S., Britain, and the Netherlands.

These newsreels were unable to accomplish any instructive role. However, they became an efficient ideological transmitter of Spanish *falangism*. They privileged propaganda over any form of informative neutrality, and they articulated a modern strategy aimed at stimulating a thrilling response to the “glorious victories” of the Axis through montage as well as visual and sound composition. Through the dramatic force of their visual content and the emotional shock they provoked, these images lost their concreteness and embodied only general ideas. Rather than a referential function, the strength of these images relies on their transcendental function: they became icons of the new order brought by the totalitarian powers. This process explains how the facts in South East Asia became meaningful in the remote Spanish context. The “liberations” of Burma and Palembang were easily linked to the fantasies of the Spanish fascist party to occupy Gibraltar. In addition, beyond the ephemeral events displayed on the screen, the images were used to illustrate long-lasting messages aimed at justifying Axis actions abroad and, more importantly, legitimising the new Spanish dictatorship, as they allowed Japanese actions to be seen as a continuation of the violent fascist revolution that had started in Spain in 1936.

Original sources: the Japanese news industry

It is important to note that while the images of the Pacific War were versions of either German, Portuguese, or French newsreels, they were from the same origin: the weekly Japanese newsreel *Nihon News* (*Nihon Nyūsu*).²⁰ *Nihon News* was produced by the Nihon

¹⁹ The Imperial Japanese Fleet was supported by the Falange youth organisation, the Spanish University Syndicate (Sindicato Español Universitario [SEU]), which edited and translated several newsreels until 1943. The location of the original German newsreel *Japanese Parachutists* is unknown.

²⁰ The newsreel featuring the meeting between Emperor Hirohito and Emperor Pu-yi in 1940 was comprised of Japanese footage that had previously been used in *Kōtei fugi no hōnichi* (Visit to Japan of Emperor Pu-yi), in the newsreel TTT0269-01, *Oudō satari* (The Splendorous Royal Road, 1940). *Japanese Parachutists* was edited with footage filmed for the report TTT0049-02, *War Record of Nippon Parachute Troops* (directed by Abe Shirō in 1942). The capture of the Burmese Road in *One Year of War in the Great East Asia* used scenes

News Film Company (Nihon Nyūsu *eiga-sha*, later known as *Nihon eiga-sha* or *Nichiei*), which monopolised the production of newsreels in Japan beginning in 1940. The Film Law (Eiga Hō), which was enacted in 1939 after the negotiations between the heads of the four news companies, representatives from the Foreign, Home, and Education Ministries, the army, and the navy, established that the production of newsreels should be centralised. *Nihon eiga-sha* was founded on April 15, 1940 and financed by the Council of Information Cabinet (Naikaku johobu).²¹ Furuno Inosuke was named head of the new newsreel company, and the first edition of Nihon Nyūsu was issued on June 11, 1940.

However, during the 1930s, a prolific newsreel industry had flourished in Japan. The first periodical newsreels were produced by the main national newspaper companies in 1934. These included the *Asahi Sekai Nyūsu* (*Asahi World News*), which was followed by Mainichi newspaper's *Daimai Tōnichi Nyūsu* (*Mainichi Osaka-Tokyo Daily News*) and *Yomiuri Nyūsu* (*Yomiuri News*). In addition, the Tōhō *Sound News* (*Hassei*) started operations in February 1934, and the Dōmei News Agency launched its own newsreel *Dōmei Nyūsu* (*Dōmei News*) in 1936.²² Nevertheless, it was the outbreak of the war in China in 1937 that marked the rise of this industry and ushered in the “Golden Age of newsreels” in Japan.²³ After the China Incident, the number of newsreel theatres in Japan rose from three before the China Incident to 101 by the end of 1937.²⁴ Between 1937 and 1939, production and distribution were propelled by the competition among the four companies. In addition, the popularity of the newsreels was based on the growing interest among the Japanese audience in receiving news from China, as an increasing number of families had relatives enlisted at the front.²⁵ Consequently, newsreel production doubled. Before the war, the Asahi, Mainichi and Yomiuri companies produced about 195 newsreel prints per week. After the beginning of the conflict, these three newspaper companies, along with Dōmei, produced over 510 prints a week.²⁶

from the news no. 94 *Tokuhō rangūn senryō* (Occupation of Rangoon Special News) in TTT0019-01, *Biruma Senki* (Burma War Record).

²¹ At the end of the 1930s, there were calls to combine the four newsreel operations into a single company by government leaders who wished to control the information more effectively and by the news industry because of the growing scarcity of resources, mainly raw film. R. W. Purdy, “The Creation of the Nippon Newsreel Company. Nihon nyū sueiga-sha”, *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 36/3 (2016): 4.

²² Purdy, *ibid.*

²³ Satō Tadao, *Renzu kara miru Nihon gendai shi* [Contemporary Japanese History Viewed through a Lens] (Tokyo: Gendai Shichō-sha, 1954), 183.

²⁴ Moreover, by 1938, the size of the newsreel crews on the Chinese front had doubled, and each company had fifteen staff members. Kōji Hamasaki, *Nyūsu eiga no kōkogaku 1: Katsudō shashin kara Shadan hōjin Nihon Nyūsu-eiga-sha setsuritsu made: 1896-1940* [Newsreel Archaeology 1: From the Early Period to the Creation of Nihon Nyūsu eiga-sha: 1896-1940], *Kawasaki-shi shimin myūjiamu kiyō*, 11 (March 31, 1999): 34-35.

²⁵ Shimizu Akira, “Nihon ni okeru senso to eiga” [War and Film in Japan], in *Nichi-Bei eiga sen* [Japan-US film war] (Tokyo: Seikyūsha, 1991), 23.

²⁶ Tadao Satō, *Renzu kara miru Nihon gendai shi* [Contemporary Japanese History Viewed through a lens] (Tokyo: Gendai Shichō-sha, 1954), 183.

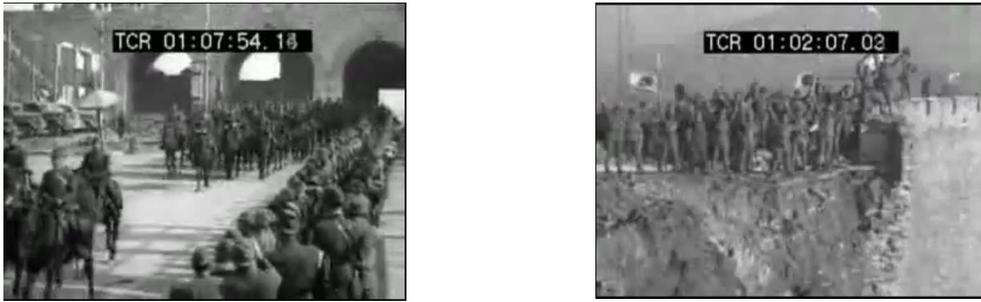


Figure 3. *Asahi Sekai Nyūsu* (*Asahi World News*, no. 206), screened in Japan on December 23, 1937

The vast number of images shot during the Pacific War by Japanese operators was widely circulated across the world and became part of other editions overseas, such as in German or Spanish newsreels. Furthermore, these images never stopped circulating. They also fell into enemy hands and even ended up being part of the Allied propaganda.²⁷ One of the most remarkable examples is the *Why We Fight* series, which consists of documentary films commissioned by the U.S. War Department to convince the American public of the need to become involved in the war. Frank Capra and Anatole Litvak, directors of the sixth episode, *The Battle of China* (1944), used footage from Japanese newsreels to accompany the voice-over, which explains that the Nanking Massacre was perpetrated by the Japanese army in 1937. After the fall of Shanghai, the General Headquarters in Tokyo ordered the capture of Nanking, the then-capital of the Chinese Republic on the December 1, 1937. Two weeks later, teams from all the news production companies of the time—*Asahi*, *Mainichi*, *Yomiuri*, and *Domei*—in addition to a team from the Tōhō Culture Film Unit (*Tōhō Bunka Eiga*), the main producer of documentaries during the war, were ready to film the fall of the city.²⁸ Capra and Litvak used footage shot by cameramen embedded with the Imperial forces, who captured scenes of soldiers climbing the walls of the city, marching across its ruins, inspecting Chinese citizens, and issuing them identification papers as “proof of living peacefully”. *The Battle of China* also includes footage of the Japanese army led by General Matsui Iwane entering the city on December 17, 1937, an event that was orchestrated for Japanese photographers and cameramen.²⁹ The *Why We Fight* episode also includes scenes of executions that are not included in the newsreels consulted for the present research. These scenes were not included either in Tōhō documentary, *Nanking* (Akimoto Takeshi, 1938).³⁰ Scholars have noted that taping of the massacres was completely forbidden.³¹ For example, Tōhō cinematographer Shirai Shigeru stated in his memoirs that he witnessed long lines of

²⁷ *Nihon nyūsu* was also edited using footage from other newsreels: the German newsreel *Deutsche Wochenschau*. For more than one year, until the attack on Pearl Harbour in December 1941, footage from American newsreels was used, including Paramount, RKO, and Movietone. *Nihon Eiga-sha* also reached an agreement with Paramount y Pathé to edit their footage in its section *Nichiei Foreign Films*.

²⁸ According to Yonezawa, around 120 Japanese journalists and cameramen gathered in Nanking during the early days of the capture of the city. Yonezawa Akiyoshi, “Nanking satsuei nisshi”, *Eiga to engeki*, 1938. Also see Tsuchimoto Noriaki, “Kamei Fumio’s ‘Shanghai’ kara ‘Tatakau heitai’ made”, in *Kōza Nihon eiga*. 5. *Sengo eiga no tenkai*, edited by Imamura Shōhei et al. (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1987), 330-331; Fujii Jinshi, “Shanghai, Nanking, Beijing. Tōhō bunka eigabu (Tairiku toshi sanbusaku) no chiseigaku”, in *Nihon eiga-shi sōsho*. 2. *Eiga to ‘Daitōa kyōeiken’*, edited by Iwamoto Kenji (Tokyo: Shinwasha, 2004), 111.

²⁹ This footage was immediately airlifted to Japan. For example, the nine-minute newsreel *Asahi Sekai Nyūsu* (*Asahi World News*) no. 206 featured these events, which was screened in Japan on December 23, 1937.

³⁰ *Nanking* was part of the trilogy that Tōhō made on the war in China. Nornes provides an in-depth analysis of the other two, *Shanghai* and *Peking*, directed by Fumio Kamei; Nornes, *Japanese Documentary Film* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 148-156.

³¹ Noda Shinkichi, *Nihon Dokyumentarī eiga zenshi* (Tokyo: Shakai Shisosha, 1984), 86.

Chinese being sent to the banks of Yangtze River to be executed, which he was not allowed to film.³² The original footage of these scenes of executions has not yet been located.

Tracing the origins of *The Battle of China* would have been extremely difficult because of the complexity of different sources, materials, and footage. Nevertheless, Capra and Litvak made an extraordinarily powerful film, in terms of both the narrative and the visual imagery. They provided multiple points of view and showed the front lines from different perspectives through scenes captured by journalists positioned on both sides of the conflict. However, despite the unprecedented visual effects, Capra did not undermine the informative function of the documentary. On the contrary, unlike the decontextualised and ahistorical representations of events in the Spanish newsreels, these directors followed a different direction and based the U.S. propaganda strategy on the conviction that the American audience could be persuaded through the detailed explanation of events.³³

Migration of images

At this point, it is important to note a paradoxical fact: although the images of the Japanese army entering Burma and Nanking were initially used to represent the Japanese army as “liberators”, they were subsequently used to represent it as the aggressor in the war. The images in effect were self-accusatory and therefore “signed” by the perpetrators. If the same images could be used to illustrate opposite meanings, what kind of historical approach did they allow Antony Aldgate in providing some of the earliest attempts to defend the value of the newsreels made during the Pacific War as a source of history? Aldgate used films of the Spanish Civil War to illustrate the power of these images as a medium for mass communication, but he also warned about their potentially misleading nature as the consequence of editors’ manipulations. In fact, Aldgate showed several examples that led him to conclude that newsreels helped to prevent the Spanish conflict from being understood.³⁴

These facts force us to redefine contemporary approaches to wartime propaganda images. The scholarship in the sociology of cinema has often drawn on newsreels made since the Spanish Civil War to study how images can be blatant manipulations rather than documents of factual truths. Pierre Sorlin warned about the uselessness of using cinema to understand the profilmic reality, as every film could be considered an ideological expression of the time.³⁵ However, far from considering ideological constructions an obstacle to obtaining insights into the past, Sorlin pointed out that they could become enriching objects of analysis. Unlike the Soviet formalist theories of montage, ulterior meanings, or the “generalized idea” in Eisenstein’s terms, do not depend on editing and composition techniques but on the context in which they are used. In effect, Sorlin called into question the ability traditionally assigned to filmmakers and editors to convey meanings. The power of newsreels goes beyond the intentions of directors, operators, and editors, as ultimately, the meanings of images and messages are not set in stone. News is subject to an everlasting

³² Fujii, “Shanghai, Nanking, Beijing”, 113-116.

³³ For an account on the propaganda strategies developed by Capra in the *Why We Fight* series, see Ramon Girona, “Frank Capra’s *Why We Fight* and Film Documentary Discourse in Public Relations”, *Public Relations Review*, 38 (2012): 40-45.

³⁴ A clear example is the Gaumont newsreel no. 299, November 9, 1936, which purports to show the Fall of Madrid to British audiences what was generally felt at the time to be a likely occurrence by taking shots of General Franco at Burgos at his supposed arrival in Madrid. Anthony Aldgate, *Cinema and History British Newsreels and the Spanish Civil War* (London: Scholar Press, 1979), 43.

³⁵ Pierre Sorlin, “That Most Irritating Question: Images and Reality”, *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 16: 2 (June 1996): 263-265.

process of creating meanings because filmed objects themselves do not project political and ideological messages.

The polysemic nature of visual content is incomprehensible without considering the incessant phenomenon recently tackled in the *Archaeology of Images*: the notion of “migration of images” coined by Vicente Sánchez-Biosca. This scholar demonstrated that the construction of meaning is an indefatigable process that takes place as images are transferred across different geographies and historical contexts. This migration is possible because in the media’s construction of events, images do not reproduce facts but only represent them; therefore, they show only one version of reality. Thus, it is impossible to liberate images from synchronic needs and interests of any kind.³⁶

Delocalised events in the official newsreel *NO-DO* (1943–1945)

In the light of the discussion so far, any hermeneutic approach to the representations of the war must consider the understanding that images are detached from the referent they are supposed to portray. The shifting narratives articulated by the voice-overs in Spanish newsreels of the Pacific War between 1943 and 1945 exemplify the malleability of visual content. By February 1943, the Axis armies were in clear retreat after the defeat of the Eighth Germany Army in Stalingrad and the U.S. landing at Guadalcanal. Franco had no choice but to change his foreign policy to be in a better position before the increasingly probable Allied victory. The Spanish government officially declared its “neutrality” in October 1943, and, with caution, Franco initiated the apparent “defascistisation” of the Regime.³⁷

The fascist party *Falange* had gradually lost the power of its propaganda in the press. The new person in charge of the National Department of Film (*Departamento Nacional de Cinematografía*), Gabriel Arias Salgado, implemented a pragmatic propaganda strategy, sensing the change and shaping the representation of the war according to the developments of the current affairs in the world.³⁸ On December 22, 1942, a decree established the creation of a new newsreel, *NO-DO* (*Noticiarios y Documentales*), which began after the dismissal of Serrano Suñer as the foreign affairs minister and the fall of the radical *Falangist* faction in August. From January 1, 1943, all other newsreels and documentaries were banned and *NO-DO* became the only newsreel in Spain during the following four decades.³⁹

However, unlike the Japanese and German proactive propaganda, which was aimed at mobilising the population during the war, *NO-DO* sought to demobilise its audience, especially while the Axis defeats proliferated. Consequently, the Spanish government initiated the contradictory strategy of approaching the Allies with calculated ambiguity. *NO-DO* articulated a singular portrayal of World War II, which fitted Franco’s idea of the three wars: first, the Eastern front between Germany and the Soviet Union, in which Spain was pro-Axis; second, the European theatre between the Axis and the Allies in which Spain was neutral; third, the Pacific War in which, surprisingly, Spain was now for the Allied forces. *NO-DO* did not have the means to produce its own news about the rest of the world, but it secured agreements to use *Deutsche Wochenschau* and Fox Movietone newsreels. Hence, in

³⁶ Vicente Sánchez-Biosca, “Imágenes, iconos, migraciones, con fondo de guerra civil”, *Archivos de la Filmoteca*, 60 (October 2008): 38.

³⁷ As an example of this strategy, the *Blue Division*, a unit of Spanish volunteers sent to the Eastern Front to fight alongside the German Army, was officially dissolved on November 17, 1943.

³⁸ Gabriel Arias Salgado was also *falangist* but against the powerful minister Serrano Suñer.

³⁹ *NO-DO* staff and equipment were mainly from the Spanish branch of *UFA Newsreels*, and some qualified members of Fox Movietone. The first pass took place on January 4, 1943. From that point, it was compulsory for all cinemas to screen it before any film. For an exhaustive account of the history of *NO-DO* see R. Tranche and Sánchez-Bisoca, *ibid.*

narrating the events of the Pacific War, *NO-DO* counted on footage that was shot on the one hand by German and Japanese operators of *Nihon eiga-sha* through *Deutsche Wochenschau* and, on the other hand, footage that was filmed by American and British operators from Fox Movietone. The footage obtained from the Allied crews was increasingly prominent as the war proceeded. The addition of material produced by the U.S. had not only political implications but also a powerful visual effect because it allowed Spanish spectators to witness significant events from both sides of the conflict. News no. 114B and no. 138A show scenes taken from inside American airplanes that were ready for combat and already fighting. The in-air fighting is also portrayed in no. 137B, which shows Japanese air attacks and *kamikaze* airplanes filmed with handheld cameras. These privileged views of the conflict and the access to multiple angles allowed the creation of visually astonishing newsreels. However, *NO-DO* did not take advantage of the opportunity to offer more accurate information on the war. On the contrary, *NO-DO* was often misleading, presenting decontextualised images, such as *Guerra en el Mar* (War at Sea), no. 33A, which is comprised of scenes on a battleship. The narration focuses on the ship's armaments and powerful weapons. However, while it may appear that this footage is American, it does not mention where the battleship is or against whom it is fighting. Furthermore, this piece seems to anticipate the turn in the war. The subsequent newsreels portray the gradual Allied advance. The Japanese retreat in the Philippines is featured in no. 114B, which includes the battle in Luzon Island. No. 117B presents point-of-view shots taken from American B-29 bombers as well as the liberation of Manila by General MacArthur. Nos. 124A and 124B show the ruins of the city after the fight. No. 120A depicts the air raids over Taiwan and the occupation of Iwo Jima. Finally, the march over Okinawa is shown in no. 139A and no. 140A.

NO-DO continued to use footage from *Nihon Nyūsu* in its editions, but they gradually take a linguistic turn, and the tone used to describe Japanese victories becomes less and less frantic. The news *Desembarco Japones En Islas Aleutianas* (Japanese Landing on Aleutian Islands), a version of the *Deutsche Wochenschau* newsreel, was originally comprised of scenes filmed for *Nihon Nyūsu* no. 174. It was entitled *Yamazaki butai gōdō ireisai* (Yamazaki Military Units Memorial Service), which featured Colonel Yamasaki Yasuyo, the commander in charge of holding the Japanese position in the Aleutian Islands, conducting a military ceremony in a valley on the island of Attu in March 1937. The next newsreel on Japan, *Desfile Hirohito* (Hirohito's March-past), no. 46B, was institutional and definitively signalled the end of the enthusiasm about Japanese expansionism. This newsreel probably belonged to *Nihon Nyūsu* no. 136, which was titled *Daigensui heika shinrin rikugun hajime kanpei-shiki* (His Majesty's New Year Military Review) and filmed at Yoyogi Park, Tokyo, on January 8, 1943. *Hirohito's March Past* fitted better with the traditionalist and monarchist views of the Spanish Regime, and it shifted away from the most controversial aspects of the war. Thus, this newsreel, in which Catholic traditionalism supplants fascist *falangism*, marks a change in the depiction of the Pacific War.

In 1944, the Japanese army experiences one defeat after another; however, none are explicitly portrayed by *NO-DO*. The newsreel *Asalto a Saipán* (Assault on Saipan) presents the Battle of Saipan. This fight between the American and Japanese forces was portrayed in *Nihon Nyūsu* no. 216, *Kokudo senjō saipan tō shubi-tai gyokusai* (Honorable Death in the Battlefield Defending Saipan) and screened in Japan in July 1944. However, the Spanish newsreel seems to have been edited to include scenes filmed by the Allies. Unlike previous maps displayed in German, this newsreel uses maps in English, and the remaining scenes show the American assault on the island without reference to the enemy. *NO-DO* continued using German newsreels to provide news about Japan but selected only the least newsworthy, such as the training of candidates for the Japanese marines in no. 60; news

recalling tourist reports, such as in no. 99B; portraying the Japanese parliament; Himeji Castle; sport competitions and children practising gymnastics; and citizens looking at an eclipse through telescopes in no. 103B. Throughout 1943, *NO-DO* did not inform audiences about the German defeats and focused instead on Nazi machinery, technology, organisation (nos. 20 and 35), and their supposed sources of supremacy.

Inverting senses: From allies to enemies

During the last months of the war in 1945, the sources used to compile *NO-DO* newsreels about the Pacific War changed dramatically, and the German and Japanese footage was completely replaced by American and British news. Ironically, the earliest representation of the events in Asia presented citizens celebrating the Japanese “liberation” of Burma, whereas in one of the last newsreels, the piece *Campaña de Birmania* (Burmese Campaign, *NO-DO* no.138) showed the same population welcoming the new liberators. The montage draws on British news to depict General Louis Mountbatten’s forces taking Rangoon (Yangon) while the remaining Japanese detachments are captured, and the Burmese population now acclaim the former British “Western oppressors” as rescuers. The same newsreel *NO-DO* no. 138 adds Allied content that features the American advance on Okinawa in the piece *Últimos episodios bélicos. La batalla de Okinawa* (Last War Episodes: The Battle of Okinawa). *Nihon eiga-sha* also filmed combat between the Japanese and U.S. armies in Okinawa. *Okinawa Kessen* (Okinawa Decisive Battle, *Nihon News* no. 250) was screened in Japan in May 1945. However, these scenes were likely not available in Spain because of the capitulation of Nazi Germany in the same month. The lack of images of the Axis is evident in *Últimos reportajes de guerra* (Last War Reports, *NO-DO* no. 141B), which is comprised exclusively of American news. This report includes no Japanese footage that illustrates the events in the Pacific and no German footage that shows the end of the war in Europe.



Figure 4. *Campaña de Birmania* (Burmese Campaign, *NO-DO*, no.138, 1945).

The last newsreel about the Pacific War shown in Spain was *Victoria sobre Japón* (Victory over Japan, *NO-DO* no.142A), which announces the Japanese defeat and uses the opportunity to present a historical review of the Pacific War, attempting to change the Spanish regime’s interpretation of the conflict. Thus, *Victory over Japan* offers a chronicle of all stages of the war through which the representation of the Japanese Empire shifts from honourable Asian comrades to bloodthirsty perpetrators of numerous war crimes. It starts with the occupation of Manchuria where the voice-over states, “Japan, the first of the aggressive nations of this war leapt fourteen years ago into an international campaign of conquest and plundering”. Then scenes of the Japanese air raid on Shanghai accompany the narrator, who asserts, “China, bleeding and plundered continued to be the scene of devastation and death. Millions of its inhabitants were helpless”. This piece continues with an account of Pearl Harbour, which had never before been included in Spanish newsreels. Four years later, the attack is heavily criticised: the “Japanese delegation in the U.S.

pretended to be missionaries of friendship and peace. While negotiations continued, their compatriots delivered an unseen savage and infamous blow”. This footage is followed by scenes featuring the most shocking elements at the end of the war, the *kamikaze* attacks, which are described as being carried out by “suicidal fanatics”.

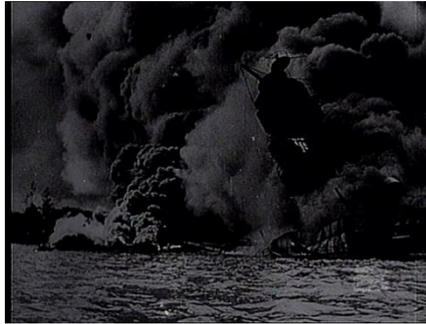


Figure 5. Portraying the attack on Pearl Harbour in *Victoria sobre Japón* (Victory over Japan, *NODO* no. 142A, 1945)

This example shows the efforts of the Spanish dictatorship to seek rupture from the Axis, but this strategy was contradictory for two reasons. First, the Spanish dictatorship did not actually break diplomatic relations with Japan until the very end of the war when it used as a pretext the Manila Massacre, in which several Spanish citizens died at the hands of the retreating Japanese army. Franco opportunistically declared war on Japan on April 14, 1945. Second, Franco never withdrew his support for Hitler. In fact, while the Japanese defeat is openly depicted in *Victory over Japan*, the entrance of the Red Army into Berlin was never shown in Spain.⁴⁰ Thus, unlike the discursive efforts to dissimulate the fall of Nazi Germany, the Japanese surrender was not only presented in the *Victory Over Japan* but also was highlighted in other two pieces: *Así se rindió Japón* (Japan Surrounded Like This, no. 41) and the reportage *A lomos de las olas* (On the Back of Waves). The latter features the iconic images of MacArthur landing at Atsugi airfield and the signing of the unconditional surrender on the Missouri battleship. In addition, America’s use of atomic bombs was shown in two newsreels without any indication of criticism. *NO-DO* no. 143B, which was screened twenty days before the attack on Hiroshima, includes details about the experiments conducted to create the atomic bomb, which is described as a technical, scientific, and military achievement. Similarly, no. 144A, *Japón bajo las bombas* (Japan Under the Bombs), depicts the devastation caused by the atomic bombs, which are ultimately described as extraordinarily useful inventions with potential applications for peacetime.

Conclusion

The ambiguous position of the Franco regime in World War II transformed Spanish newsreels into privileged witnesses of the images of the Pacific War, which were circulated worldwide. Francoist editors, who had been well trained in the strategy of re-appropriating footage from the enemy to create their own propaganda material, expanded this cinematic technique in the wide context of World War II. They re-used American and British newsreels on one hand and Japanese newsreels on the other hand, both of which reached Spain in a large range of formats. The footage shot by operators working for *Nihon eiga-sha* included a wide variety of visual content that included not only Axis propaganda in Nazi Germany

⁴⁰ The news from the Eastern Front vanished little by little until it finally disappeared. The fall of Nazi Germany is finally portrayed very ambiguously in editions 124A and 124B (1945) at the beginning of the long-awaited peace.

but also American documentaries. Hence, this case study presented an extraordinary opportunity to obtain deeper insights into the range of images and their unsteady nature. In addition, this exploration of their transnational usage provides methodological contributions that are crucial to the better understanding of wartime propaganda strategies and are key in overcoming traditional approaches limited to a national perspective.

Although Spain did not have the resources necessary to cover the conflict on its own, Spanish newsreels used the most advanced film techniques and projected a rich variety of perspectives sometimes from both sides of the same battle, which was a singular cinematic phenomenon. However, this phenomenon is misleading because, contrary to potential assumptions, none of these “migrating images” faithfully reproduced the narrative of either side of the conflict, and they did not help to provide an accurate account of the war. Images migrated across the world, and their meanings mutated. They were adapted, renewed, and eventually perverted. The careful analysis of this process presented here helps to explain the reason that the delocalised use of images of the Pacific War reveals more about the changing interests of the new Spanish dictatorship than about the events in Asia, which they are supposed to represent. For instance, the portrayal of the Japanese occupation of the British colony of Burma was shown in Spain in 1942 not to explain the importance of this military tactic in continental Asia but to fuel the aspirations of Spanish nationalists when the talks with Nazi Germany regarding Gibraltar were to be concluded. However, as the war turned in favour of the Allies, the new official newsreel *NO-DO* incorporated decontextualised Japanese footage as temporary transition before the last depiction of the Japanese army as responsible for the conflict, which was supported by the increasing use of footage shot by American and British operators. Thus, Spanish newsreels became a palimpsest of narratives, which could be of interest to archaeologists of images, whose tasks should be not only to determine the origins of the footage but also to assess the messages, ideological connotations, and symbolic meanings that have accumulated throughout their incessant displacement.

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