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Review: Lewis, Diane Wei. *Powers of the Real: Cinema, Gender, and Emotion in Interwar Japan*. Harvard East Asian Monographs. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2019.

Jennifer Coates

Diane Wei Lewis' beautifully written book on interwar cinema in Japan argues for the years following the Great Kanto earthquake (1923) as charged with a particular emotive mood that characterised certain modes of presentation, representation, and communication as feminine. As Lewis notes, a number of scholars have approached the topic of cinema in the interwar period in Japan with a view to assessing the dissemination of images of Westernized modernity (Lewis 2019, 4). The innovative contribution of this book is to connect cinema culture of the era to other arts and culture production and reception, tracking "how the rise of the commercial media culture in a time of national crisis drew intensive scrutiny to the affects and emotions" associated with the rapid changes in everyday life occasioned by, or occurring alongside, the Great Kanto Earthquake (2019, 4).

In this sense the framing of the study around the earthquake and its aftermath is very effective, focusing the manuscript around how the disaster impacted media and public communications, and in turn how those same media forms shaped discourses of disaster and recovery. Lewis argues that the earthquake itself "imbued emotion with new importance in the public sphere" (2019, 5) and subsequently boosted sales, readership, and viewership of those media that conveyed this heightened emotion. Newspapers covering the crisis are analysed alongside documentary film footage (or "actualities") and fictionalised representations of the earthquake and its aftermath in cinema and cinema-related publications. Analyses of wider art practices of the period are interwoven to give a holistic sense of the popular culture and artistic environment of the era.

This wide-ranging approach chimes with a trend in Japanese visual media studies emerging from discussions of "media mix" (Steinberg 2012) and "media ecologies" (Lamarre 2018) which seeks to produce broader accounts of the role of media and technology in Japanese everyday life, without limiting the scholar to textual analysis, media theorising, industrial history, or reception study alone. Lewis' cohesive and convincing account of the years following the earthquake and the media culture that reflected and interacted with public response to this crisis lends a historical aspect to this scholarship.

Perhaps the least well-connected chapter is that on the life and work of Murayama Tomoyoshi (Chapter 5), which deals with questions of celebrity as the phenomenon developed in this early period of Japanese film history. While the linkages between the national crisis of the Great Kanto earthquake, the outpourings of emotion that the event initiated, and the gendering of that emotion as feminine through the association of women and particularly actresses with heightened affect, vulnerability, and risk is quite clear, this chapter's move to Murayama's experience in Germany and writing on theatre and art at first seems like a shift away from the main concerns of the volume. However, the following chapters work to weave Murayama's concern with gender and sexuality more closely into the themes of the manuscript, and position Murayama's celebrity as a new form of consumer product in 1920s Japan, understood as both pejoratively feminised and suffused with affect. Chapter 5 further makes the significant contribution of highlighting that not all cinema-related public culture was necessarily exhibited in cinema theatres. Murayama's scenario for the unfilmable work *Actress* is a notable example of the kind of film-adjacent materials that were produced and consumed around cinema culture without becoming cinema texts in themselves. This chapter demonstrates the impact of these cinema-adjacent phenomena, and the need to incorporate analyses of these materials into our scholarship on film culture.

The most useful section of the book for historians of technology is “Backgrounds: The Great Kanto Earthquake and Mass Media.” This section presents a coherent account of the impact of the earthquake on the Japanese cinema industry, tracing the mass migration of the major studios from Tokyo and its surrounds to Kyoto and the Kansai region, which subsequently became known as “The Hollywood of Japan.” This is the first extended account that this reviewer has seen published in English on the “Kyoto-isation” of Japanese cinema in the 1920s, and as such will be invaluable to scholars working on regional identity, diversity, and industry in Japanese Film. Lewis’ closely researched and insightful book will be of use to scholars of Japanese cinema, early films cultures, and the visual arts more broadly, and offers an accessible introduction to the period.

References

Lamarre, Thomas. *The anime ecology: A genealogy of television, animation, and game media*. University of Minnesota Press, 2018.

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Bio

Jennifer Coates is Senior Lecturer in Japanese Studies at University of Sheffield. She is the author of *Making Icons: Repetition and the Female Image in Japanese Cinema, 1945-1964* (2016) and co-editor of *Japanese Visual Media: Politicizing the Screen* (2021 with Ben-Ari, E.) and *The Routledge Companion to Gender and Japanese Culture* (2019 with Fraser, L., and Pendleton, M.).