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Example 2: Student Project

Anime Propaganda During Imperial Japan

From *Dragon Ball Z* to *Pokemon*, Japanese anime is recognizable in almost all parts of the world. Anime plays a huge roll in Japanese exports with its market value to be estimated at \$2.7 billion in 2009 (Jetro US). Today, Japanese animation encompasses a plethora of genres, from Sci-Fi to historically accurate anime. Furthermore, in today's anime industry, authors and writers have the freedom to publish whatever they want. During war-time Japan, both of these scenarios were not the case. In the 1920's to the mid 1940's, a vast majority of Japanese anime were used as propaganda for the war. Based on my research, I have found overwhelming evidence that the Japanese anime industry was controlled by the Japanese military during WWII. I believe that a majority of anime films produced during the war were solely meant to be propaganda pieces, aimed at Japanese children and youth, and therefore recruiting them into the military. Furthermore, by masking the truth, with the use of anime, the Japanese people would become oblivious to the countless horrors Japan committed during its expansion.

In this wikipage, I will be looking at specific examples of anime propaganda and its connection to the Japanese military. I will be focusing on three different films, *Momotaro's Sea Eagles (Momotaro No Umiwashi)*, *Olympic Games on Dankichi Island (Dankichi-jima no orinppiku taikai)*, and a 1936 film from the *Omocho Bako* series. All three of these films, although at different levels, portray some form of propaganda imagery. I will be explaining the images seen throughout the three films, and how they were used to promote Imperial Japanese ideology, and to recruit young Japanese citizens into the military.

Imperial Japan

In 1926, Emperor Hirohito ascended to the throne as the new Japanese Emperor. Historians argue that this appointment was the start of what we now know as Imperial Japan. During the early years of his reign, Japan saw a surplus in right-wing, ultra-nationalists. This caused for a massive influx in military spending, and "feudal loyalties were replaced by loyalty to the state" (History UK). Further strengthening this loyalty was the 1924 Japanese Exclusion Act which prohibited Japanese immigration into the United States. Ultra-nationalists did not take the exclusion kindly, and soon focused their ideals on anti-ABCD powers (America, British, Chinese, Dutch).

Between 1928 and 1932, partly because of their willingness to not rely on many of the world's super powers, Japan was in a domestic crisis. Unemployment and social unrest, Prime Minister at the time, Hamaguchi Osachi, was shot by an ultra-nationalist. Due to the assassination, Japan's civilian government lost control of its military, and Japanese troops invaded Manchuria. Soon after the invasion of



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Manchuria, Japan expanded its occupation into China, reaching Shanghai and Nanking.

Upon invading China, and creating a pact with Germany and Italy, Japan's next objective was to weaken the United States and its allies. On December 7, 1941, Japan attacked Pearl Harbor, officially declaring war with the United States. Shortly after the attack on Pearl Harbor, Japan continued its conquest throughout Asia, attacking the islands of Guam, the Philippines, Malaysia, and Thailand. However, the biggest blow to one of the United State's biggest allies, Great Britain, would come with the fall of Hong Kong and Singapore. Both of these countries were crucial to the British, with Churchill quoting "the fall of Singapore was the 'worst disaster in British history'" (History UK). Japan, who appeared to be all powerful, would come to a complete halt in August 1945. The United States dropped two atomic bombs, one on Nagasaki, the other on Hiroshima, decimating both cities. Thus with the dropping of the two bombs, the reign of Imperial Japan came to an end.

Olympic Games on Dankichi Island, 1932

Olympic Games on Dankichi Island (ダン吉島のオリンピック大会), is an animated short film depicting Japan's colonialism through the Olympic games. The film has no recorded producer or director, but it is rumored to be a production of the Japanese Military, due to its poor quality. The film follows Dankichi, who is king of the island, hosting the Olympic Games. Dankichi and his team (Japanese) go up against the "natives" of the island (Philippino, Pacific Islander, etc.) in various events. Dankichi ends up winning, and the film ends with the "natives" tossing him into the air in celebration (Author Unknown, Youtube, 1 May 2016).



Dankichi:

- The main character of the film.
- Character from a popular comic book series, *Boken Dankichi*, by Shimada Keizo.
- Said to be inspired by Mori Koben, one of the first Japanese settlers in Micronesia.



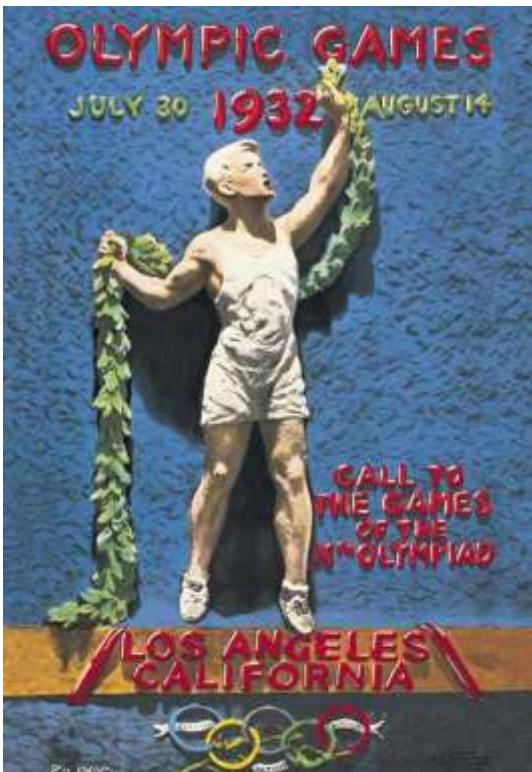
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Los Angeles 1932:

- Film was released in the same year as the 1932 Summer Olympics in Los Angeles.
- Japan's way of making their own Olympics.



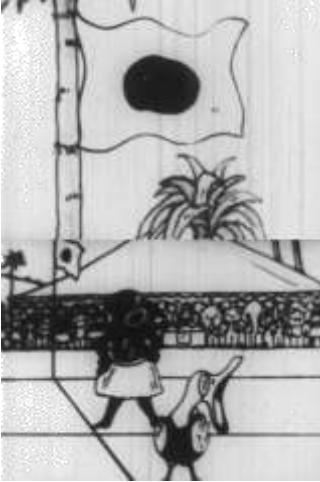
Occupation of Southeast Asian Countries:

- In the film, the Olympic Games are taking place in a tropical setting. In the very first scene of the animation, a Japanese flag hangs from, what appears to be, a palm tree. Continuous imagery of the *hinomaru* (Japanese flag).
- Dankichi is the king of the island.



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Island Natives:

- "Natives" of the island have a Minstrel Show look about them. All the "natives" are portrayed with dark skin, over-sized lips, and bald heads. *The Jazz Singer* was first shown in Japan in 1930, so the Japanese people were familiar with the Jim Crow stereotype (Nishikata).
- The "natives" are all wearing grass skirts, denoting that they are from the Pacific Islands.
- Many scenes consist of segregation where the "natives" are on one side, and the Japanese (portrayed as cute animals) on the other.
- Portrayed as fools, who continuously make mistakes throughout the Olympic Games.
- There are a few scenes where the "natives" speak in *katakana* nonsense, while the Japanese characters use proper words and kanji.



Promotion of Imperial Japan:

Although the film only runs for a little more than 2 minutes, it is packed with propagandary imagery. The main idea behind it all is that Dankichi and the Japanese are far superior to the "natives" of the occupied islands. Through the foolishness of the "natives", Jim Crow like appearance, and their defeat to Dankichi, children of Japan are taught that they are culturally superior to outsiders.

Omocha Bako Series, 1934 (3rd Story)



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Omocha Bako Series also known as *Ehon (Coloring Book)* 1936, is a 3 part animated film which originally aired in June of 1934. The duration of the whole series is about 228 minutes, but the story I am focusing on is the 3rd one, which only runs for 8



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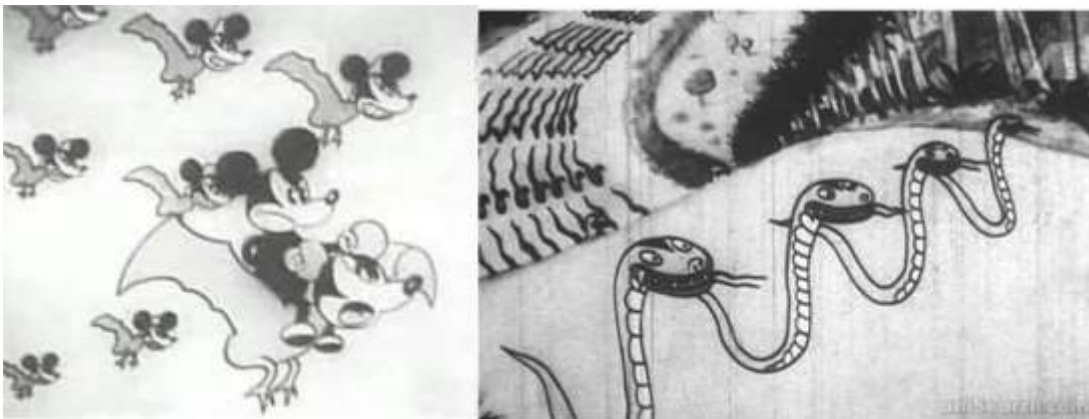
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minutes. Unlike *Olympic Games on Dankichi Island*, *Omocha Bako* has an official production company called J.O. Talkie Mangabu (manga sector). The story begins on a peaceful island where its cute animal inhabitants are dancing and singing. Chaos erupts on the island when an evil Mickey Mouse comes flying in on what appears to be a bat, and begins to attack the island's inhabitants. To combat Mickey and his soldiers, the islanders call upon Momotaro and other characters from Japanese folklore. With the help of Momotaro and his friends, the islanders defeat Mickey, and the film concludes with them dancing under cherry blossom trees (J.O. Talkie Mangabu, Youtube, 1 May 2016).



"American" Invasion:

- The most obvious reference to an American invasion is the fact that Mickey Mouse, an iconic American character, attacks the peaceful island (Japan).
- Mickey, who comes flying in on a bat, represents the air force. While the navy is represented by crocodiles and the army by snakes.
- Mickey drops a piece of paper on the island which reads "give us your island". He is also seen dropping bombs, while gunfire sound effects are added to coincide with the snakes moving their necks. Furthermore, Mickey is also seen kidnapping the children of the island.



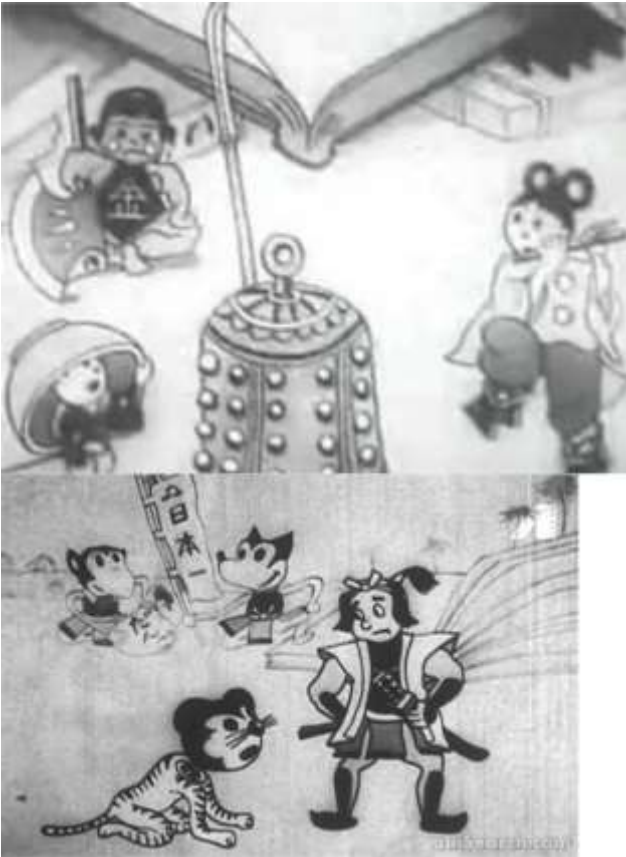


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Japan Fights Back:

- As the invasion is taking place, one of the islanders bangs on a Momotaro book, to summon the Japanese folklore hero Momotaro.
- Momotaro calls on plenty of other Japanese folklore heroes such as, Kintaro (Golden Boy), Issunboshi (One-inch boy), and Urashima Taro (the boy who turns old by opening a box).
- Along with the famous heroes, the film makes reference to many other folklore stories. For example, The Crab and The Monkey, Shita-kiri Suzume (tongue cutting sparrow), and Hanasaka Jisan (old man who makes flowers bloom).



Japan is Victorious:

- Momotaro, who is flying on the tongue cutting sparrow, takes down the bats (airforce). The crabs take down the snakes (army), and finally Issunboshi and Urashima Taro take down Mickey Mouse by turning him old and decrepit. This is done by using the box that contains old age, from the story of Urashima Taro.
- With the war over, all the trees on the beautiful island are now dead and burnt. So, the islanders call on Hanasaka Jisan, who is able to bring the trees back to life, and cherry blossoms bloom all across the island.
- Film ends with island animals dancing and singing tradition Bon Odori, under the cherry blossom trees.



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Promotion of Imperial Japan:

The film pits America against Japan by using each nation's most iconic characters. The film portrays an evil Mickey Mouse, who invades peaceful islands and kidnaps their children. On the other hand it shows the heroics of Japanese folklore legends, who protect the people from evil. This portrayal of bad vs. good using children's characters, would be a great tool in brainwashing the Japanese children and youth.

Momotaro No Umiwashi, 1943 (Momotaro's Sea Eagles)

Momotaro's Sea Eagles, directed by Mitsuyo Seo, is an animated Japanese propaganda film, loosely related to its folklore origin. Momotaro (Peach Boy) and his story, is arguably the most iconic folk tale in the history of Japan. From children to grandparents, nearly everyone in Japan knows the story of Momotaro. Endorsed by the Japanese Navy, Mitsuyo would use this heroic tale to portray the great victory Japan achieved by attacking Pearl Harbor. The 37 minute long film includes all the details from the original folk tale including Momotaro's soldiers (dog, pheasant, and monkey), the use of kibi dango (millet dumpling), and the inclusion of Onigashima (island of Oni, monsters). As you can imagine, the film concludes with Momotaro congratulating his crew for their bravery, and the Japanese Aircraft Carrier sailing away into the distance (Mitsuyo Seo, Youtube, 1 May 2016).



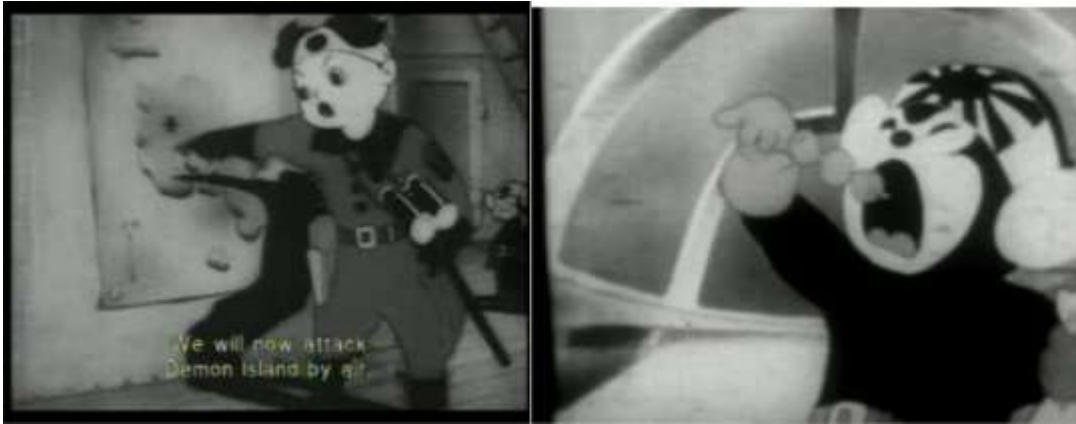


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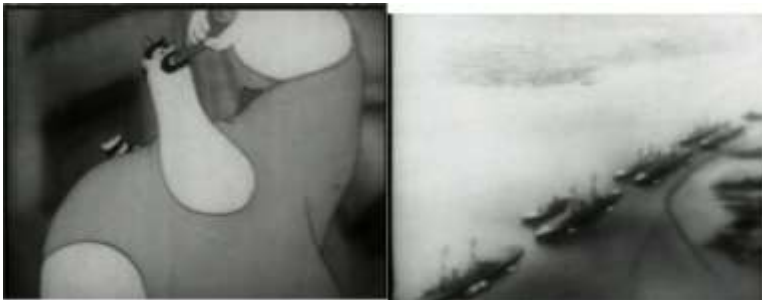
The Story of Momotaro:

- The basis of the entire film is the iconic tale of The Peach Boy, Momotaro.
- Traditionally, Momotaro is the one that goes to battle with the Oni, but in the film he plays the role of a military leader. Instead he sends his soldiers, the dog, pheasant, and monkey, to do the fighting.
- Pearl Harbor is portrayed as Onigashima in the film, with the American people being the Oni.



Pearl Harbor:

- As stated above, Pearl Harbor represents Onigashima. The American troops are all made to look like Popeye, who was a familiar character to the Japanese.
- Bluto, a famous character from Popeye, can be seen in the film with horns and a tail. He is also portrayed as a drunk and a fool who mumbles nonsense all throughout his on-screen time.
- Scene that blatantly shows the American Flag.



Comedy and False Information:

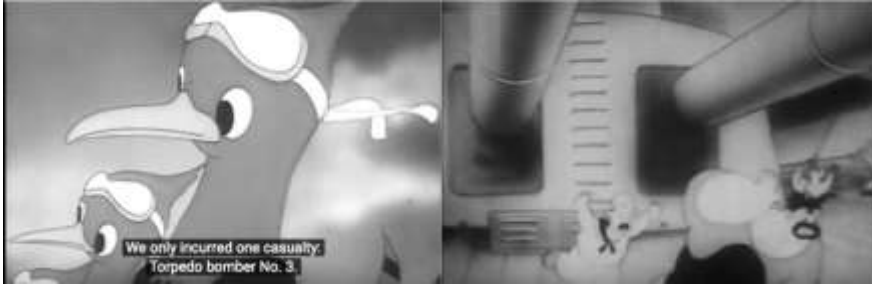
- The film provides many slapstick, comical scenes. This would work well with the Japanese audience, especially those younger in age.
- Despite the attack on Pearl Harbor producing thousands of American deaths, the film manages to make the attack appear more light-hearted and comical.
- The film also contains false information which could be misleading to younger Japanese audiences. Toward the end Momotaro says, "we only incurred one casualty, but the crew was rescued, and they are on their way back", when in fact



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"55 Japanese airmen and 9 submariners were killed in action" (Nishikata).



Promotion of Imperial Japan:

As the film is fully backed by the Japanese Navy, it is no surprise that it glorifies, what is arguably, Imperial Japan's biggest coup. The film uses a traditional children's tale allowing them to market to and recruit Japanese youth into the military.

Furthermore, the film provides false information regarding the many deaths of the Japanese airmen. By extremely undervaluing the death toll, it promotes this false idea that even if I join the military, chances are, I will return home safely.

Summary

Despite Japan's relatively small population (compared to the United States), they were able to maintain a sizable military all throughout the war. In my opinion, this was made possible with the continued propaganda aimed at Japanese children and adolescents. Despite the vast differences in their story lines, each film has a common denominator; the use of popular children's characters. In *Olympic Games on Dankichi Island*, a popular comic book character Dankichi is used as the protagonist. In *Omocha Bako Series* and *Momotaro's Sea Eagles*, Momotaro, along with many other popular characters, make appearances. These characters, at the time, would have been idolized by many Japanese children. By growing up seeing their idols colonizing countries and killing Americans, they would surely want to do the same when they have the ability to do so. This is why Imperial Japan was able to recruit so many young soldiers, and which is why, in my opinion, they played a huge part in the anime industry.

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