

Manufacturing the Enemy

The Educational System of Japan

U.S.A. Production: Signal Corps, Print: 35mm, sd., English, b&w, 32 min., 1945.

It's obvious that whoever wrote *The Educational System of Japan* loved Japan. Unlike the better-known films which attempt to explain away the enemy (for example, *Japanese Behavior*, *The Enemy Japan — Dream of Empire*, *The Battle of China*, *Our Enemy — The Japanese*, and especially *Know Your Enemy — Japan*) this film makes a sincere attempt to separate the military from the culture. It emphasizes the beauty of the latter rather than conflating and condemning the two. Significantly, it is one of the few American films of the period that does not use the word "Jap." Japanese civilization's appreciation of nature and its artistic achievements are called "remarkable," but government-controlled education is equated with "inculcation" and "indoctrination."

This was produced for use in Civil Affairs Training Schools, along with two companion pieces, *The Government of Japan* and *The Geography of Japan*. Like the two other editions, *The Educational System of Japan* was edited from found footage, including a travelogue, an unidentifiable Japanese propaganda film and even Ozu's *I Graduated, But...* (*Daigaku wa deta keredo*). The narration's tone is straight to the point of being comical. It's difficult not to snicker when the deadpan voice of the not-so-skilled narrator recites poetry ("Blooming Blooming, Cherry Blossoms are Blooming") or attempts a limp joke ("When the weather permits, much of the teaching is done out of doors, under the sun which they hope will never set").

From this material, the film crafts a thesis that viewers may find convincing, despite the thick American rhetoric: "In recent years there has been an increasing trend toward regimentation of the Japanese youth [Over typical Japanese images of group exercises]. This is all a part of the government's plan to destroy any individuality or free thought by the people. It is another of the methods for ensuring future power by teaching the emperor's young subjects from the very beginning that they do not exist as individuals but they exist only as a part of the State. They are never to realize what it means to be a free citizen of a democratic nation." The film establishes a clear difference between the current "totalitarian regime" and Japan's rich civilization. For every scene offering evidence of inculcation and anti-individualism, there are two about tea ceremony or poetry. The importance of this separation is discussed elsewhere in this volume (see *Let's Have a Drink*).

Viewers will be as ambivalent about the narration as the narration is about Japanese culture, for among the cogent critiques of Japanese education is the latent

racism of war-time rhetoric. Stereotypes abound (stereotypes, it should be pointed out, that are as strong today as ever): the Japanese are "small people," and lack individuality and creativity (the film never passes a chance to point out Western influence or "imitation"). This orientation is partly due to a second difference introduced by the film, that of class. The beautiful aspects of Japanese civilization are associated with "elites," while the lower classes are "natives." The latter's crafts are referred to as "crude" and "primitive." At the same time, *The Educational System of Japan* is refreshing for its sincerity and will to stress the positive aspects of Japanese culture in an era of rampant race hatred.

— *Abé Mark Nornes*

Superman: Japateurs

U.S.A. *Producer:* Seymour Kneltel, *Animation:* Myron Wildon, Nicolas Tafaly, *Story:* Bill Turner, Carl Mayor, *Voices:* Bud Collier, Joan Alexander, *Production:* Famous Productions, *Print:* 16mm, sd., English, color, 8 min., 1942.

Story: The familiar dialogue of "What's that?! — It's a bird! — It's a plane! — No, it's Superman!" is followed by scenes explaining Superman's origin. In the far reaches of space, a scientist on the planet Krypton places his beloved son in a rocket and launches him into space shortly before the planet's destruction. After drifting to Earth, the child is found by the childless Kent couple and raised as their own. Before long, he begins to exhibit strange superhuman powers, a result of his alien origin. Under the name Clark Kent, he works as a reporter for the *Daily Planet* newspaper. But when danger threatens or an emergency arises, he changes into Superman and fights for truth and justice. "Faster than a speeding bullet...More powerful than a locomotive...Able to leap tall buildings in a single bound..."

The opening narration above is standard with this series. This time, Kent, along with fellow reporter Lois Lane, is sent to cover the maiden flight of a new military airplane and gets involved in the hijacking of the plane by a Japanese spy. The fighter planes sent out to intercept the hijacked plane are themselves shot down and destroyed. Kent, deciding that "This is a job for Superman," hides himself and changes into his costume — a scene we see as a silhouette through a glass door. Lois, who has been taken hostage, is in danger of being thrown from the bomb bay. Just in the nick of time, Superman flies up and defeats the villains. The plane and the crew land safely in a happy ending. This is the tenth episode in the 17-episode series.

Commentary: During the War, the Fleisher brothers (who also created Popeye and Betty Boop) were involved in the creation of the animated version of this popular comic character. This is essentially the last work of the brothers, who split up in the middle of production and faded without a sound into animation history afterwards. This work was made after the Fleishers broke up. The producer, Seymour Kneltel, was the son-in-law of Max Fleisher (the older of the two brothers). The title is a play on words, combining the words "saboteur" and "Japan" to make a beautiful patriotic story where the alien Superman captures the Japanese spy! This episode was made when the staff Fleisher had trained was still in the studio, which accounts for the excellent, forceful animation.

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