

Dawn of Freedom  
(*Ano hata o ute*, also *Fire on that Flag!*)

Philippines/Japan *Direction*: Abe Yutaka, *Assistant Director*: Gerardo de Leon *Photography*: Miyajima Yoshio, *Cast*: Ōkochi Denjirō, Nakamura Tetsu, Fernando Poe Sr., Leopoldo G. Salcedo, Angel Esmeralda, Ricardo Passion, Norma Blancaflor, Ōkawa Heihachirō, *Production*: Tōhō and Sampaguita, *Print*: 35mm, sd., English, Tagalog, Japanese, b&w, 76 min. (incomplete), 1943.

As American troops converged on Japan after the surrender, the skies of Japan were filled with the smoke of burning documents. Contributing to this haze was the smouldering negative of *Dawn of Freedom*, which cameraman Miyajima Yoshio torched with a sigh of relief. We can only imagine what fears haunted him. Beyond being one of the slickest fascist productions of the war period, the film has documentary value for its (ab)use of POWs as non-actors and its cloak and dagger production history. It also reveals many attitudes the Japanese held towards both their enemies and supposed friends.

Despite Miyajima's attempt to destroy the film, Tōhō Studios still has a single master positive of the Japanese version (thus, it cannot be screened), and the Film Center holds on reel. Of the Philippines version prints, only one survived the war; the others were lost or destroyed. At least one copy was even attacked by Filipino guerillas, who vented their anger towards Japan by taking it out on the film. We can thank MacArthur himself for the surviving print.<sup>1</sup> In early 1943, he received intelligence reports about an anti-American propaganda film and ordered the Filipino resistance to kidnap a print. At the end of a run at a provincial theater, the resistance fighters presented fake receipts to the theater staff and made off with the print. Hiding their cargo in everything from mangos and horse feed, they smuggled the print to Australia by Japanese truck, push-cart, boat and submarine. Eventually the print wound up in the National Archives waiting to be found.

*Dawn of Freedom* represents the first Japan-Philippines co-production of the war. Though considered a co-production to this day, it would be best to en-

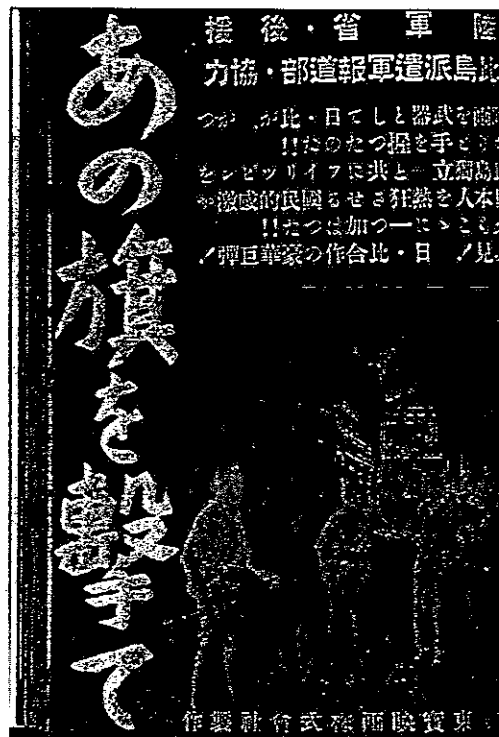


Fig. 20. Magazine ad for *Dawn of Freedom*. The subversive irony of Japanese soldiers holding Filipino civilians at gun point is such that it's difficult to believe it was unintentional. Text: "Japan and Philippines join hands to use films as a weapon!! ...Together, the Philippines and Japan rage with patriotic fervor, and here join as one!! It's a must see! The Japan/Philippines co-produced, magnificent, massive bullet"

was a dead one. By the end of the war attacking "The Jap" enemy meant attacking the military *and* civilians.

Although the U.S. vehemently condemned the bombing of China's civilians by the Japanese military (in films as late as *The Battle of China* (1944) and *Justice* (1945)), the American government was preparing new technology for this very same practice. Both the incendiary bomb and the atomic bomb were designed for the hateful slaughter of civilians. Most Americans have forgotten the first large-scale test of the incendiary bomb on Tokyo's *shitamachi* on 9 March 1945. Home to upwards of a million people in an area four miles by three, it was the most populated place on earth. With only 2,000 tons of payload, the Army Air Force made them all homeless within hours. Between 70,000 and 140,000 people died, making it comparable to the un-"conventional" attacks on Nagasaki and Hiroshima.<sup>1</sup> Young Americans do not know that by the end of the war most other urban populations met the same fate, nor do they know that the last raid over Tokyo (though it already lay in ruins) involved 1,014 planes. Staged as a "finale" to the war, the raid occurred two days after Nagasaki and only hours before the end of the war. Some planes did not touch earth before Truman announced Japan's complete surrender.<sup>2</sup> To put a human face on these vast numbers, I might tell you about my mother-in-law, who was in her 20s during the war. She came from a fairly wealthy family, and lived in a beautiful, large home in Tokushima. A month before the end of the war — on the Fourth of July — American planes appeared in the sky, and when they disappeared 70% of the city was rubble. Their house, with its generations of *kimono* and furniture, was completely destroyed. She fled the burning city, carrying her mother on her back, and was lucky to survive the attack.

These atrocities against civilians were made possible in part by the lack of distinction between Japanese people and their government. Popular culture, and its documents such as *Justice* and *Let's Have a Drink*, constantly reinforced these attitudes through image and word. The fact that the killing of Iraqi civilians was considered a crime against humanity during the Gulf War can be partly attributed to the comparison of Hussein to Hitler. Politicians and journalists alike were careful to separate an evil Hussein and the unfortunate populace that happened to live under him.

When the Gulf War allies officially apologized for the civilian casualties shown on world-wide television, the famous Japanese cartoon *Fujisantarō* featured a Japanese grandmother watching CNN and wondering what happened to their apology for the targeting of civilians in her youth. *Let's Have a Drink* affords a glimpse at the prevalent exterminationist attitudes that made the dropping of the atomic bomb the logical extension of the policy of bombing civilians.

#### NOTES

1. Calvoressi, Peter, Guy Wint, and John Pritchard. *Total War: The Causes and Course of the Second World War*, (New York: Pantheon, 1989), 1175-1176.
2. Dower, John W. *War Without Mercy: Race & Power in the Pacific War* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1986), 301.

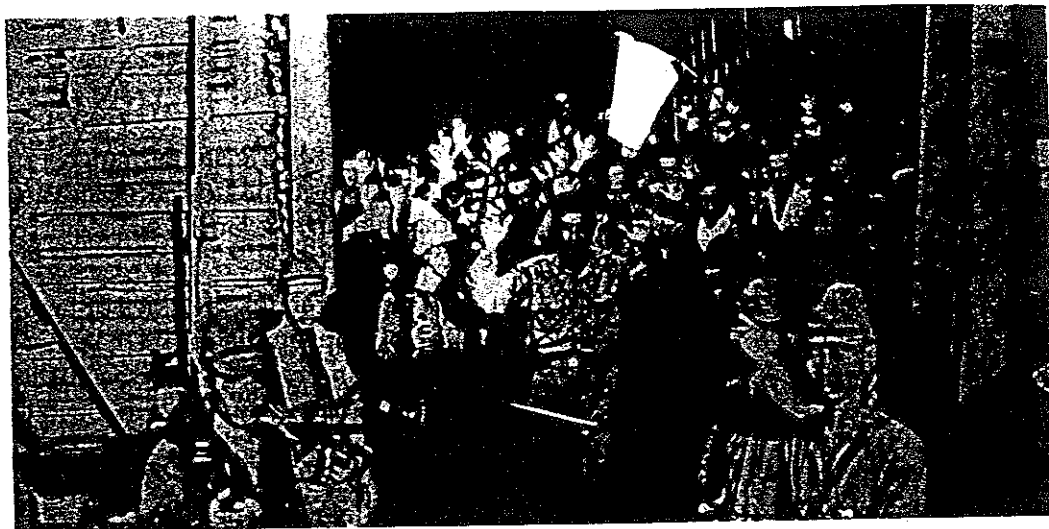


Fig. 21. Japanese photograph captured by U.S. troops: Americans surrender at Bataan, one of the scenes later recreated by POWs for *Dawn of Freedom*.  
(Credit: National Archives)



Fig. 22. Bataan Death March — captured Japanese photograph.  
(Credit: National Archives)

close "co-production" in ironic quotes, for at least half of the staff was working under the gun (figuratively and literally). Contemporary reviews and publicity for the film made much of the pan-Asian cooperation. An ad in the 11 November 1943 issue of *Eiga Junpō* proclaims, "Japan and the Philippines join hands to use film as a weapon!!... Together, the Philippines and Japan rage with patriotic fervor, and here join as one!! It's a must see! The Japan/Philippines co-produced, magnificent, massive bullet!" Ironically, the still accompanying this ad copy features two Japa-

nese soldiers holding two Filipino civilians at bayonet point. In the film, these Filipinos are thieves the soldiers captured, but the ad does not explain this crucial plot point. Rather, it unwittingly sums up the terms of the "co-production". Today, Japanese critics still refer to this film as a co-production, but what exactly this means under the terms of military colonization should be examined closely.

After the Japanese invasion, the Philippines' film industry was at a standstill.<sup>2</sup> Most of the actors and technicians had moved to the theater, where short plays were still being produced. When the Japanese moved to revive the film industry for propaganda purposes, they went to the theaters and rounded up the nation's best professionals and coerced them into work. Under these conditions, the Japanese producers formed an all star cast and crew for *Dawn of Freedom*. Though early in his career, Gerardo de Leon was already a major director. Ricardo Pasion and the other children were well-known child actors. Norma Blancaflor, Leopoldo Salcedo, and Fernando Poe were all stars before and after the war. Poe held particularly strong propaganda value for the Japanese because he had been a captain in the American military. For this reason, he was perfect to fill the role of Capt. Gomez, who realizes the Japanese' benevolence and switches sides. Salcedo was apparently caught spying for the Americans. His co-conspirators were executed, but he himself was spared when his captors discovered he was the star of *Dawn of Freedom*. Despite these conditions, some Filipino and Japanese crew members (including Abe and De Leon) struck up close friendships and kept in touch long after the end of the war.

The two American leads were, in fact, Filipino-Americans that worked in the pre-war industry. Frankie Gordon, the mustachiod American officer, dubbed songs for actors who couldn't sing in the early sound era. Burt Leroy, *Dawn of Freedom's* despicable Capt. Adams, was known for playing heavies. In 1992 critic Teddie Co screened a video tape of the film for some old film hands, who pointed out that the man playing Capt. Adams was not Burt Leroy. They identified the actor as Johnny Arville, a radio personality that cooperated with the Japanese as an announcer for the "Neighborhood Hour" and the "Republic Hour". Further digging produced post-occupation intelligence reports confirming Arville's role in the film.<sup>3</sup> These interrogation summaries by the US 457th Counter Intelligence Corps Detachment and the Philippines Department of Justice illustrate the difficult position media workers found themselves in. After Manila fell, Arville was asked to work for the Japanese, and consented because he felt he had no choice. He admitted to his interrogators that the meager pay did help him support his family through difficult time. Apparently caught sabotaging radio equipment, he claimed he was imprisoned, interrogated and tortured. His co-workers were believed to have been executed. After the occupation, American and Filipino intelligence officers subjected him to more interrogation, comparing his answers to those of his colleagues. While the agents ominously note inconsistencies in their stories, Arville was fortunate. His Filipino inquisitor finally determined he was a "victim of circumstance". Bert Leroy was nowhere near as lucky. No one knows why he was taken off the *Dawn of Freedom* production, and according to film lore he was castrated by the Japanese.

By the way of contrast, a surprisingly pleasant aspect of this "co-production" was the on-screen appearance of hundreds of Allied prisoners of war. In the context of the fiction film, they are particularly bad non-actors. However, their presence

schizoid; it shifts between two apparent styles from scene to scene. One style features the melodrama de Leon was known for; the other, which we can safely attribute to Abe, is archetypally fascist. Because both can be seen in the same film, *Dawn of Freedom* is instructive example of fascist cinematic conventions.

According to Ricardo Pasion, de Leon directed all the scenes involving Tagalog dialog. The camerawork in these scenes is fluid, as is the mise-en-scene. Actors appear natural, especially the kids. The scenes among family members are reminiscent of de Leon's other work. They are notable for their melodramatic excess, particularly in regard to sexuality. Those familiar with Japanese war films may be surprised to see one of *Dawn of Freedom's* Filipino soldiers with a girlfriend. Romantic sexuality between Japanese men and women is, as a rule, disavowed in fascist films.

This, and other conventions of fascist style, may be clearly seen in *Dawn of Freedom's* English and Japanese-language scenes. In regard to sexuality, most Japanese war films focus on the relationship of soldier and mother. Fathers (whose potential to upset this relationship is threatening) have usually died in other wars, from inexplicable natural deaths, or they are simply out of the picture. Soldiers have sisters, but they don't have lovers. Thus, the main focus is the love between soldiers, funnelling sexual energy into the war effort. Films like *Five Scouts* (*Gonin no sekkōhei*) and *Young Soldiers of the Sky* (*Sora no shōnenhei*) emphasize the comradeship of the group and the beauty of the male body, while at the same time disavowing homosexual connotations through violence and action. However, *Dawn of Freedom* comes close to bringing the latent to light. The scene in which Gomez says goodbye to his Japanese friend is shot like a love scene with Ingrid Bergman. The two stare lovingly at each other and spout absolutely amazing lines:

- JAPANESE SOLDIER:** Now we must part company. You may not understand me  
**(IN JAPANESE)** now, but you must feel the mutual sympathies between us.  
That's all.
- GOMEZ:** I know you are going to Corregidor and saying goodbye to  
**(IN ENGLISH)** me now, but I'm sorry I cannot understand what you are saying.
- JAPANESE SOLDIER:** Capt. Gomez, please understand just this. Nippon and Phil-  
ippines are not enemies.
- GOMEZ:** Nippon ... Philippines.
- JAPANESE SOLDIER:** Nippon ... Philippines.  
[They hold hands and stare dreamily into each other's eyes  
in a pretty, backlit CU.]
- GOMEZ:** Nippon ... Philippines ... Peace.

Outside of this remarkable love scene, the other parts directed by Abe feature typical fascist conventions. The scenario often screeches to a halt for long speeches and pep talks. Actors tend to deliver lines at a shouting pitch, and appear de-humanized or robot-like. Mise-en-scene is wooden, unmoving, statue-like. If anything, the actors look simply arranged in the frame, like human *ikebana*. They are shot from below, turned slightly away for a heroic line, and they rarely move. In fascist films, the chain of command is made spectacle, usually mapped out physically by the set with the officers inside and the enlisted men outside. In *Dawn of Freedom*, the officers

pushes the film from the realm of fiction to that of documentary. *Dawn of Freedom* features extraordinary documentary scenes of POWs reenacting their own surrender at Corregidor. I have been able to find a few former prisoners of war who participated in the filming of *Dawn of Freedom*. E.S. (Ted) Lockard was one of the American extras for the opening scenes of Americans fleeing Manila. He had never told anyone about this wartime experiences as a POW, but after the string of 50th WWII anniversaries in 1991-2 convinced him it was valuable to share his story:

"One day, I think it was in early 1943, they gave us new everything — trousers, belts, shirts, helmets, and guns (without, of course, the important stuff). They took us into the city, and we drove down the streets in these big trucks past big movie cameras. And you know the funny thing was, word about the filming had spread among the Filipinos, and they came out and just bombarded all our trucks with fruit and food. I think it was just a sign of the Filipinos' hope. It exasperated the Japanese.

"The guards told us they wanted all the new stuff returned. The next day, we were supposed to put everything in a pile. Well, what they found was every gun, every helmet, and the biggest pile of ragged, dirty clothing. For a few days, the guards gave us a hard time for keeping the uniforms, but all of a sudden they just quit."<sup>4</sup>

Weldon Hamilton acted in the Bataan surrender scene:

"We had no idea what they wanted, they gathered us and sent us out with a bunch of food. We drove into the mountains to this open, hilly area. There were awfully tough looking troops around the outside of the area, but inside they were nice. They had us go over a ridge with all these explosions going off; I think they were just duds, you know. Then we had to walk over this hill in a line, throw our weapons in a huge pile and act like we were surrendering. We were treated really nicely that day. It was a real outing... like a picnic."<sup>5</sup>

Burton C. Galde was a sailor before being captured. He also reenacted the surrender at Bataan:

"I did a bit part in a Nip movie... The Americans in charge sent out a different detail every day, so we could steal whatever we could. I stole the sling from the rifle I was to carry and used it for a belt, and the helmet for a wash basin. We were made to do a surrender act as we came over a knoll. We had the rifles over our heads as we marched by the cameras we threw the weapons in a pile. Oh! There were no bolts in them. The Japs in charge spoke good English, and told us they had been trained in Hollywood by Americans. They treated us pretty good. They weren't mean and we did fare somewhat better than we had back at camp. I am glad that some of us survived so we could live to tell the tale of our life as guest of the emperor."<sup>6</sup>

There's a bizarre contrast between these (real) American soldiers woodenly delivering their lines before Japanese (actors) playing soldiers. The Americans look pathetic and uncomfortable before the cameras, while their Japanese actors are artfully arranged in heroic poses. Presumably, the political implications of this all-around bad acting led Miyajima to fear reprisals from the Occupation forces.

*Dawn of Freedom* is one of the finest Japanese war films in terms of production values. Some critics might attribute the film's effectiveness to Abe's pre-war experience in Hollywood, however, I would be more inclined to give a measure of credit to the great Filipino director Gerardo de Leon. In terms of style, *Dawn of Freedom* is

give speeches from positions above their assembled soldiers. They strike stiff, heroic poses as their subordinates go off to battle. Deaths at the front are always aesthetically pleasing, and accompanied by pretty songs like "Umi yukaba" ("If We Go to the Sea").

Critics also praised this kind of filmmaking, and a short quote from *Eiga Hyōron* reveals how the fascist beautiful deaths in *Dawn of Freedom* were received in 1942. Tsumura Hideo compliments the film for the "quality of [Leonardo Salcedo] being slaughtered in the mountains by an [American] plot," and the "spectacle of Filipino soldiers being annihilated by sweeping machine gun fire." The critic continues, "I said there are at least four magnificently intense and convincing depictions in *Dawn of Freedom*. Except for the latter one, three describe the beauty of cruelty. Not only do they pursue the beauty of cruelty, but they attempted to create a new *sublime beauty* which can only be derived through the beauty of cruelty [original emphasis]." Audiences today may wonder if this writer saw the same film. At least the quote suggests that film criticism as an institution is deeply implicated in encouraging and interpreting proper responses to fascist filmmaking.

Documentaries never showed the beautiful death directly, but all of the other conventions are common to both. The primary difference between the two is the melodrama of feature film. *Young Soldiers of the Sky* and *The War at Sea from Hawaii to Malaya* (*Hawai, Marē okikaisen*, 1942) are basically carbon copies of each other, save the latter's individualized boy and his family. The narrative of *Dawn of Freedom* is far more complex, with the splitting of Filipino loyalties across the front line, as well as nice narrative touches like Ōkawa's donation of blood for little Tony. Outside of story, however, there are few differences between documentary and fiction filmmaking in terms of the manner in which they represent warfare.

One final point relates to this film's presence in our program of "Enemy Images". It has been widely assumed that the enemy rarely appears in Japanese war films. I would argue that, while Japan never made a "Know Your Enemy — The United States," nearly every film features enemies, and that the assumption they don't partially comes from the traditional privileging of image over soundtrack. Even if *images* of an enemy never reach the screen, the narrator and on-screen Japanese constantly *talk* about the "teki". This is an appearance of the enemy, and we need to look closely at how the enemy is portrayed through the soundtrack, as well as the screen.

Generally, the sonic energy is hateful and amorphous. It's out there and it's hateful (*nikui*), but its nationality or race is vague at best. The films are quick to point out that the enemy hates Japan and threatens Japan's future prosperity, but it's often unclear who exactly they're talking about. The reason for the ambiguity is debatable (see the essay by Ueno), but the constant talk about the "the enemy" is not.

Furthermore, as the films of this retrospective show, the argument that the enemy never (visually) appears is tentative at best. In feature films like *Five Scouts, General, Staff and Soldiers* (*Shōgun to sanbō to hei*), *General Katō's Falcon Fighters* (*Katō hayabusa sentotai*) and *Mud and Soldiers* (*Tsuchi to heitai*), Anglo or Chinese enemies make brief appearances, often in the distance. *Dawn of Freedom* and *The Tiger of Malaya* (*Marai no tora*) have full-blown caricaturizations of Asian and American enemies. Documentaries give more detailed attention to dangerous foreigners.



They often focus on Westerner's white faces, mustaches and round eyes, as in *Weapons of the Heart* (*Kokoro no busō*) and *Oriental Song of Victory* (*Tōyō no gaika*). In the latter, as well as *Malayan War Front* (*Marē senki*) and *Yaburetaru shōguntachi* (*Officers Who've Lost — Life of POWs*), hundreds (even thousands) of captured Westerners are put on display and roundly denigrated. Ueno Toshiya's essay amply proves that to simply state that the enemy rarely appears in Japanese film is to miss a valuable opportunity to understand Japan's actions during the war.

*Dawn of Freedom* is particularly rich with images of self and other. The Japanese portray themselves as ethical, benevolent liberators, while the Americans are vicious and bloodthirsty. These bald stereotypes are to be expected in times of war, but what's really fascinating are the Filipinos caught in the middle. The plot separates friends and family across the front line. Divided loyalties provide an opportunity for Filipinos to "discover" the true nature of friend and enemy. Little Tony asks his brother to bring back an enemy (ie., Japanese) helmet, but both come to realize they were wrong. Tony receives kindness and a blood transfusion (!) from a Japanese soldier, and his brother is murdered by an American officer. Before he dies, he scratches a message to Tony on his own (American) helmet, telling Tony the real enemies are the Americans. All Japanese war films are rich in terms of (aural and visual) images of the enemy. Rather than stating the enemy is rarely seen in Japanese films, it's much more valuable to look at where, when, and how the enemy appears, and attempt to discover the work of these images of the other.

— Abé Mark Nornes

#### NOTES

1. Barrano, Vic. "They Smuggled the Dawn of Freedom." *Examiner Newsmagazine* [Manila], (April 1976): 6, 27.
2. Teddie Co has provided me with the background of the film from the perspective of the Philippines. His invaluable research included interviews with Leopoldo Salcedo and Ricardo Pasion, private screenings of the film, and the articles in notes 1 and 3.
3. Smith, Jr., Capt. T.D. Headquarters, 457th Counter Intelligence Corps Detachment (area), United States Armed Forces, Pacific (APO 75, File No. 53-1091, 11 June 1945), 5 pages. Agent No. 2, Commonwealth of the Philippines, Department of Justice, Division of Investigation, Manila (File No. 65, 10 December 1945), 2 pages.
4. E.S. Lockard, extra in *Dawn of Freedom*. Interviewed by telephone, 17 May 1992.
5. Weldon Hamilton, extra in *Dawn of Freedom*. Interviewed by telephone, 10 May 1992.
6. Burton C. Galde, extra in *Dawn of Freedom*. Letter to Abé Mark Nornes dated 10 May 1992.
7. Tsumura Hideo, "Sūko no bi to tekkishin no kōyō" [Sublime Beauty and Promoting Hostility Toward the Enemy]; *Eiga Hyōron* 10 (October 1943): 24.