

REVIEWS

BOOK

Eiga: Cinema in the Philippines during World War II

Edited by Nick Deocampo

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Nick Deocampo's *Eiga: Cinema in the Philippines During World War II* is the third volume in his projected five-volume history of Philippine cinema. Deocampo has already published *Cine: Spanish Influences on Early Cinema in the Philippines* in 2003 and *Film: American Influences on Philippine Cinema* in 2011. These three volumes plot the history of Philippine cinema from its beginnings in 1897, through the revolution, and the birth of the Third Republic in 1946, tracing the legacies of Spain, the US, and Japan in Philippine cinema beyond the periods of colonization. Unlike *Cine* and *Film*, however, *Eiga* offers a new history of Philippine cinema during the Japanese occupation based on archival materials that were previously unavailable in Filipino and English.

Prior to *Eiga*, historical overviews on cinema during the Japanese colonization of the Philippines—the most essential of which were those written by film historian Agustin L. Sotto¹—for understandable reasons, focused on the Philippine perspective on the war years and drew mainly from materials that were accessible in the Philippines. As a result, our knowledge of the period's cinema tend to be characterized by caricature-like depictions of heroes and villains (6–7). Such a framing of history is predictable, or even expected, because Filipinos have been victims of this devastating historical juncture. For the same reason, however, writing the film history of this period has been stunted, owing both to the tragedies that befell Philippine cinema at the time and the tragedies that it had to come to terms with onscreen. *Eiga's* publication after more than 70 years thus signals a new reckoning in the field of cinema studies for a new generation.

Eiga has twelve chapters and an introduction, which contextualizes the materials presented that appears to mirror Deocampo's five-volume film history

project: 1897 to 1918, as early cinema, roughly corresponding to the materials covered in *Cine*; 1899 to 1941, the American colonial period corresponding to materials in *Film*; 1942 to 1945, the period scrutinized in *Eiga*; 1946 to 1972, as post-war cinema; 1972 to 1981/86, as the martial law period; the 1990s or post-EDSA; and, the 2000s as millennial.

The ultimate question addressed by *Eiga*, as well as *Cine* and *Film*, and presumably Deocampo's future volumes, may thus be: how have various historical conjunctures "contributed to the formation of the 'national' identity of cinema" (5)? The underlying assumption is that Philippine cinema has not always been "national" and that historical events—one crucible of which is the three-year period under Japanese rule—refract what at times may only be viewed as "cinema in the Philippines" into a particularly distinguishable "Philippine cinema."²

Chapter one chronicles the years leading to, as well as the onset of the Japanese invasion of the Philippines and its motivations. Chapter two analyzes the policies and laws enacted in Japan in the late 1930s to prepare the Japanese for the oncoming war, which would have significant implications on Japanese propaganda activities in the Philippines. Chapter three limns the shape of Philippine cinema prior to the war according to the Japanese inventory. Chapter four presents the Japanese critique of local film culture. Chapter five accounts Japanese film-related activities in the Philippines. Chapter six describes Japanese efforts to distribute propaganda newsreels and to produce new films.

The first six chapters of *Eiga* present the most important findings meticulously analyzed and problematized and the most nuanced reimagination of Philippine cinema during the Japanese occupation by any film historian. For sure, Deocampo has benefitted immensely from the works of other scholars. Motoe Terami-Wada, who wrote the insightful and subtly contrapuntal foreword for *Eiga*, grounds Deocampo's own historiography.³ Works by historians, Ricardo T. Jose, Akira Shimizu, and Peter B. High, among others, fill in archival and interpretive gaps, allowing Deocampo to reimagine and offer his own interpretations of key moments and concepts that defined the film culture of the period.⁴ Altogether, Deocampo makes available new materials from Nihongo-language sources that provide a solid background on Japanese views of Philippine cinema.

The most intriguing and eye opening of these new materials are the: Japanese inventory of the local movie industry, which provides empirical data on the political economy and the material situation of film culture before the war as well as Japanese opinions on the situation; articulation of the cinematic and artistic philosophies of Tsutomu Sawamura and Hidemi Kon, main architects of culture and the leaders of the *bunka senshi* (cultural warriors) during the Japanese occupation. From this side of history, Sawamura's notions of "new cinema" and "ideal cinema" and Kon's notion of "cultural construction" may be seen to prefigure the anti-American and nationalist tendencies of Filipino film scholars

and critics after the war; the detailing of how the Japanese engineered the production and dissemination of film propaganda in the islands, most especially the full-length documentary, *Victory Song of the Orient* (1943), the feature films, *Dawn of Freedom* (1944) and *Tatlong Maria* (1944), and the aborted film that was to feature Japanese, Chinese, and Filipino female movie stars. These films were the concrete outworking of the ideas of Sawamura and Kon, which were not only pro-Japanese and anti-American, but also nativist and pan-Asianist.

Eiga's last six chapters deal with American and Filipino responses to the Japanese occupation. Chapter seven delves into the thorny subject of collaboration and resistance and sketches the careers of some movie artists and workers based on their memoirs and biographies, as it pries into previously confidential memoranda that provide vivid images of how the so-called "collaborators," who helped the Japanese produce films in 1943 and 1944, were tried in court after the war. Chapter eight presents another dimension to the historical narrative, detailing how the Americans produced and disseminated counter-propaganda media during and after the war. Chapter nine closes the historical narrative by showing how local cinema was reconstructed in the postwar years and how it began to assume the national identity of Philippine cinema. Chapter ten jumps forward in time and assesses a number of films produced from 1946 to 2004, that depict the war years in increasingly more nuanced ways.

In Chapters eleven and twelve, Deocampo returns to his ultimate thesis question. Here, he reflects on the possible impact of the Japanese period in the creation of a hybrid postcolonial Philippine cinema. Because the Japanese period only lasted three years, it is impossible for him to draw solid conclusions in terms of Japanese influence on local film culture. Even the resonances of postwar nationalist sentiments that he detected in Sawamura's and Kon's philosophies remain unconnected as causes and effects. In fact, we can very well argue that such sentiments were already present among politicians and artists even before the invasion of the Japanese. But because Deocampo plots a linear history of cinema, he concludes that the Japanese occupation was the last historical event in the prelude to the coming of a genuinely national cinema, which he identifies to be in 1946, with the American declaration of independence. Up to this point, he dismisses or refuses the possibility of thinking about a "national" cinema, characterizing certain expressions of nationalism in film culture prior to 1946 as essentially flawed and colonial. I would like to argue, however, that Deocampo's *Cine*, *Film*, and *Eiga* already possess a latent and sustained argument in favor of conceiving of a national cinema even prior to 1946, one that can only be conceptualized and theorized in historical terms. Such tasks, however, are left to us readers who have already reaped scholarly insights from an indefatigable and conscientious film historian.

Notes

1. See Sotto's *The Japanese Hand in Philippine Movies*, in *Sunday Inquirer Magazine*, 25 Oct. 1992; *War and the Aftermath in Philippine Cinema*, in *Panahon ng Hapon: Sining sa Digmaan, Digmaan sa Sining* (1992); and "Philippine Independence and National Cinema," in *Cinemaya 24* (1994).
2. I discuss this aspect of Deocampo's historiographic project vis-à-vis other approaches to the historicization of Philippine cinema and in light of the rise of digital cinema in *The End of National Cinema: Filipino Film at the Turn of the Century* (2016, 252–257).
3. See Terami-Wada's *The Cultural Front in the Philippines, 1942–1945: Japanese Propaganda and Filipino Resistance in Mass Media* (1984); *The Japanese Propaganda Corps in the Philippines: Laying the Foundations*, in *Japanese Cultural Policies in Southern Asia during World War II* (1991); and *Strategy in Culture: Cultural Policy and Propaganda in the Philippines, 1942–1945*, in *Panahon ng Hapon* (1992).
4. See Ricardo T. Jose, *The Japanese Occupation and Philippine Culture: An Overview*, "in *Panahon ng Hapon* (1992); Akira Shimizu, *War and Cinema in Japan*, in *Media Wars: Then and Now, Yamagata International Documentary Film Festival Catalogue* (1991); and Peter B. High, *The Imperial Screen: Japanese Film Culture in the Fifteen Years' War, 1931–1945* (2003).

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