Characteristic Features of Manchurian Films.

*Manchuria*,

VOL. 4, No.15, (Special Number, July 20, 1939)

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It is my conviction that in point of culture Japan is in no way inferior to any country. To be sure, she is superior to most of the nations of the world. So far as motion picture films are concerned, however, it is a matter for great regret that she has nothing in that domain to pride herself upon. This is due, it may be presumed, to the fact that in the production of movie films in Japan, only the lower stratum of the audience, which largely consists of the so-called movie fans, is invariably made the principal object of the movie exhibition, and that the producers, motivated dominantly by the sense of profitmaking, always aim at a theatrical hit in the most popular sense of the term.

Under the circumstances, it is quite natural that Japanese films are always left lagging far behind the other departments of her cultural attainments. Even if, therefore, some conscientious works, produced on the principle of "movie director first" are released on the screen, they are only disposed of as "subjective pictures" of movie directors and allowed no evolution whatsoever.

Another factor which has been deterring the progress of Japanese filmdom is that peculiar practice which is generally known as the "star system." Of course, I am not saying that all stars are so, but it is, indeed, a fact greatly to be deplored that today there are in fact so many movie stars who, having in reality no artistic qualities whatever in the true sense of the term, have had the fortune to be given the position of a movie star through very trivial circumstances. To be more concrete, it is very disheartening to see so many stars who appear to have been picked up from among the erotic waitresses of cafes, restaurants, etc., simply by appealing to the capricious mood of some movie company directors while they were under the influence of liquor. Needless to say, the frivolity of journalism must also share the responsibility for this deplorable state of affairs.

That stars, with cultural and artistic qualifications in the strict sense of the word, are quite indispensable a requisite for the advancement in filmdom goes without saying and so long as motion pictures have to deal with the general masses of people, the existence of the star system is also a matter admitting of no controversy.

It is, however, a matter claiming serious consideration that the highest policy of a producing company should tend to be affected by the popularity of its stars. In my opinion, one of the main reasons why Japanese motion pictures have made so little progress so far is that they have been affected too much by the so-called "amusement first" or "please the masses first" policy. But recently, there is a growing tendency in Japan to discuss and study problems concerning motion pictures from the viewpoint of national policy. This is, I feel, rather too late.

True, motion pictures, like popular novels, cannot make any steady advance without the support of the general masses of people, and for that reason require a considerable amount
of planning and self-sacrificing effort on the part of the producer in order to be elevated culturally while engaging the general trend in the taste of the masses.

Availing herself of the experiences of the advanced nations, Manchoukuo is now exerting herself to the utmost to build up a filmdom of her own as part of her national policy. It is now very gratifying to note that as a result of such policy both movie directors and players in Manchoukuo are now being given a free hand in their performances for the screen, a fact which in itself constitutes the very essential feature of the Manchurian filmdom.

For the present, however, the films actually produced in Manchoukuo are almost limited to those intended for her own people, and as for the distribution of Japanese pictures, she only has a right to be supplied with them together with China. Seen from the viewpoint of the possibility of finding a way into the world market, however, it may be safely assumed that Manchurian pictures have greater universality and adaptability than Japanese pictures. This is because life in Manchuria, being not only more cubic and expressive, but also containing more of Orientalism, is better able to satisfy the requirements of the Western filmdom.

The new studio recently completed on the outskirts of Hsinking on a site covering a space of 50,000 tsubo has for its highest goal the contribution towards the promotion of civilization and culture of mankind by opening its doors not only for the production of the so-called amity pictures to be exchanged among Japan, Manchoukuo and China, but also for the production of such pictures as, taken with the grand nature of the Orient as their background, may be exchanged for those produced in various countries of the world.

Below will be given some characteristic features of the policy pursued by the Training School for Movie Players in Manchoukuo, the very cradle of future movie stars in the screendom of this continent.

1. A systematic training in science and art is being given to those admitted as student actors and actresses;

2. In accordance with the fundamental principle underlying the State foundation, the student actors and actresses are strictly prohibited from any form of slovenly life or from any dangerous thought or conduct so as to make them really worthy of the members of the backbone element of the nation;

3. No one is given the position of a star or of an actress of a leading rank merely by such reasons as good looks, wealthiness or being related to the proprietors of movie halls who are customers of producing companies;

4. The salaries and ranks of actors and actres are fixed strictly by skill in performance and personality. and are in no case influenced by favouritism;
5. No such thing as the star system is admitted;

6. No one can become a movie actor or actress unless he or she has graduated from the Training School and has had his or her qualification, for an actor or actress officially recognized;

7. The Training School for Movie Players is being run in pursuance of the ideal to make it a virtual embodiment of the principles of Wangtao the cooperation with the Japanese people in one virtue and mind and the perfect harmony among the component races of the State.

From the above, it may be easily seen how earnestly the Manchurian filmdom is now trying to achieve its sound and steady progress in the interest of the motion picture policy of the State.