Japanese Cinematic Activities in Manchuria

Beginning in the 1920s, and continuing for nearly a quarter century, the South Manchuria Railway Company (SMR) was involved in the financing and production of films. Its motion picture division released more than two hundred unique titles, some of which garnered international praise, before the Second World War forced its doors shut. SMR was also instrumental in establishing the now notorious Manchoukuo Motion Picture Corporation (Man'ei). Filmmakers for these two studios produced travelogues, documentaries, proto-ethnographic films, educational shorts, industrials, reportage, advertisements, and political propaganda. They also recorded newsreel footage and worked on theatrical movies. SMR and Man'ei filmmakers borrowed techniques and artistic forms from around the globe, integrating them with their own aesthetic sensibilities to create a signature style. Despite their numerous cinematic achievements, the legacy of these two closely-linked studios remains unappreciated and their place in East Asian filmmdom misunderstood. This presentation is an introduction to this fascinating topic.