George Aylwin Hogg (played by Jonathan Rhys-Meyers), a young adventurer and independent reporter for Associated Press time of the Second Sino-Japanese War, and friend of Mohandas Ghandi. This was the time travelling to Japan with his aunt, Muriel Lester, a well-known pacifist and personal friend of Mohandas Ghandi. This was the time of the Second Sino-Japanese War, and Hogg assisted an Australian Red Cross aid worker, Lee Pearson (played by Radha Mitchell), in smuggling food and medicine to the Chinese people. It was in Nanjing that Hogg witnessed and photographed the atrocities committed by the Japanese against the Chinese people, and for this he was captured and nearly beheaded. Hogg is rescued by a Chinese revolutionary, General Nie Rongzhen (played by Chow Yun-Fat) and he then travels to Shaanxi where he involves himself in a forgotten lice-infested facility and dilapidated orphanage. The lice-infested facility was made safe and nurturing environment for the children and Hogg even attended to their health needs. Hogg became a safe and nurturing environment for the children and medicine and books in order for the boys to grow and develop out of their impoverished and isolating circumstances. The Children of Huang Shi, also known as The Bitter Sea and The Children of the Silk Road, was released in 2008 in 2008 and so in that sense it is not a current movie. However, the issues raised by the film are significant. Notwithstanding technological and scientific advancement, discrimination, war and flagrant abuse by one nation of another remain. The film has a rather tragic and sorrowful end which I leave up to the viewer to discover. Hogg remains a national hero in the Chinese culture for saving the lives of those 60 boys.

The Second Sino-Japanese War is famous for the ‘rape of Nanjing / Nanking’ in which mass murder, rape and plundering of the city took place by the advancing Imperial Japanese Army. To this day the ‘rape of Nanjing / Nanking’ remains a contentious political issue between China and Japan, and many Chinese citizens hold Japan’s former Emperor Hirohito to blame for the atrocities committed. The complex Japanese political system on the other hand remains firm in their view that this specific event was greatly exaggerated. This has had dire consequences not only for Chinese-Japanese relations, but also for Japanese relations with South Korea and the Philippines. Many millions of people lost their lives in the Sino-Japanese War, although Japan would not confirm the estimate given by the Chinese authorities during the Nanjing War Crimes Tribunal and other post-war investigations. The culmination of Japan’s conflict with the world followed the infamous Pearl Harbour attack in 1941 – during World War II - and the two atom bombs that were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945, after which Japan surrendered.

The film leaves the viewer inspired to be and to do more in life, to explore and investigate the past- not as stumbling blocks for the future, but as valuable learning opportunities to prevent history from repeating itself. We can do more, and we can be more, especially towards those individuals in need, and to those who are less fortunate than we, as Hogg and his friends proved in this epic story. After the film ends, short testimonial vignettes from some of the actual orphans saved by Hogg at the time are given, and from these the actual impact of Hogg’s actions becomes clear. The film is brilliantly made, and the cinematography is outstanding. It is worth every minute of viewing.

A Sony Pictures Classics Release
Directed by Roger Spottiswoode
Written by Jane Hawksley / James MacManus / Simon van der Borgh

A film review by Franco P. Visser

THE CHILDREN OF HUANG SHI

A film review by Franco P. Visser

George Aylwin Hogg (played by Jonathan Rhys-Meyers), a young adventurer and independent reporter for Associated Press arrived in Shanghai China in January 1938 after travelling to Japan with his aunt, Muriel Lester, a well-known pacifist and personal friend of Mohandas Ghandi. This was the time of the Second Sino-Japanese War, and Hogg assisted an Australian Red Cross aid worker, Lee Pearson (played by Radha Mitchell), in smuggling food and medicine to the Chinese people. It was in Nanjing that Hogg witnessed and photographed the atrocities committed by the Japanese against the Chinese people, and for this he was captured and nearly beheaded. Hogg is rescued by a Chinese revolutionary, General Nie Rongzhen (played by Chow Yun-Fat) and he then travels to Shaanxi where he involves himself in a forgotten lice-infested facility and dilapidated orphanage. The lice-infested facility was made safe and nurturing environment for the children and Hogg even attended to their health needs. Hogg became a safe and nurturing environment for the children and medicine and books in order for the boys to grow and develop out of their impoverished and isolating circumstances. The Children of Huang Shi, also known as The Bitter Sea and The Children of the Silk Road, was released in 2008 and so in that sense it is not a current movie. However, the issues raised by the film are significant. Notwithstanding technological and scientific advancement, discrimination, war and flagrant abuse by one nation of another remain. The film has a rather tragic and sorrowful end which I leave up to the viewer to discover. Hogg remains a national hero in the Chinese culture for saving the lives of those 60 boys.

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