Publications on wartime Japanese cinema often focus on a number of directors and a selection of their works, whose content and style are roughly sketched. Propaganda function of films is perceived as reason to negate the necessity for closer analysis. Various other sets of questions, which presently guide historical and filmhistorical research on cinemas in wartime societies are not touched upon or not followed convincingly: How did the war years effect the development of Japanese cinema as a mass media? Which productions did contemporary government agencies support and promote because of propagandistic or other functions. What kinds of systems of production support and film promotion did exist, and how did studios co-operate? How did promoted films represent national identity, enemy identity, and for instance the war according to contemporary interpretations? What were the norms of personal behaviour they sought to propagate? Did the promoted productions actually reach a mass audience? Which factors such as advertising, exhibition context or explanatory texts influenced the spectrum of possible receptions of these films on the part of the audiences? How did governmental agencies try to frame this spectrum? Is it possible to sketch elements of actual audience reactions? How were the relevant films handled in postwar Japan?

In order to answer questions such as these, the various practices of governmental film promotion since the enactment of the film law in 1939 until the end of the war – most importantly the system of film recommendation of the Ministry of Education and the nation film project of the Office for Public Information – are examined. The analysis of films focuses on existing highly awarded productions of the time. The results of the analysis will be placed in the context of two larger, if partly converging groups: unawarded promoted films and box-office successes.

The research goals outlined are reflected in the choice of written sources. In addition to reviews in film journals and newspapers, other source types such as the data material in contemporary film journals and yearbooks, advertising, secondary literature of the years, the documents of filmpolitical guidance institutions and the documents left by the occupation forces are used.