



# **Absolute Erotic, Absolute Grotesque: The Living, Dead, and Undead in Japan's Imperialism, 1895–1945**

*Mark Driscoll*

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In this major reassessment of Japanese imperialism in Asia, Mark Driscoll foregrounds the role of human life and labor. Drawing on subaltern postcolonial studies and Marxism, he directs critical attention to the peripheries, where figures including Chinese coolies, Japanese pimps, trafficked Japanese women, and Korean tenant farmers supplied the vital energy that drove Japan's empire. He identifies three phases of Japan's capitalist expansion, each powered by distinct modes of capturing and expropriating life and labor: biopolitics (1895–1914), neuropolitics (1920–32), and necropolitics (1935–45). During the first phase, Japanese elites harnessed the labor of marginalized subjects as Japan colonized Taiwan, Korea, and south Manchuria, and sent hustlers and sex workers into China to expand its market hegemony. Linking the deformed bodies laboring in the peripheries with the "erotic-grotesque" media in the metropole, Driscoll centers the second phase on commercial sexology, pornography, and detective stories in Tokyo to argue that by 1930, capitalism had colonized all aspects of human life: not just labor practices but also consumers' attention and leisure time. Focusing on Japan's Manchukuo colony in the third phase, he shows what happens to the central figures of biopolitics as they are subsumed under necropolitical capitalism: coolies become forced laborers, pimps turn into state officials and authorized narcotraffickers, and sex workers become "comfort women". Driscoll concludes by discussing Chinese fiction written inside Manchukuo, describing the everyday violence unleashed by necropolitics.

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