



**The Colonial and Transnational Production of  
*Suicide Squad at the Watchtower and Love and the Vow***

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**Abstract**

This article places two Japan-Korea collaboration films produced during the Pacific War—*Suicide Squad at the Watchtower* (*Bōrō no kesshitai*, 1943) and *Love and the Vow* (*Ai to chikai*, 1945)—within the broader colonial and transnational context of filmmaking. Specifically, it focuses on the relationship of these films to the careers of their co-directors, Imai Tadashi (1912–1991) and Ch’oe In-gyu (1911–1950?). At the same time, the article shows how cinematic and cultural conventions such as the bildungsroman and the “Victorian empire film,” which are more commonly associated with cultural production in the modern West, can, with appropriate adjustments, be fruitfully used to understand the power and entertainment value of these films. *Suicide Squad at the Watchtower* portrays a joint Japanese-Korean police squad controlling the border between Manchuria and Korea and its service to the Japanese empire; *Love and the Vow* is a story about a Korean orphan boy who, after interviewing the family of a kamikaze pilot, is inspired to become an imperial soldier himself. These two films were joint projects between Tōhō Film in Japan, where Imai was employed, and the Korean Motion Picture Production Corporation, the only film production company in colonial Korea (and the company into which all Korean film production companies had been absorbed during the war).

**Introduction**

Japanese filmmaker Imai Tadashi<sup>1</sup> (1912–1991) directed numerous films throughout his long career. *Blue Mountains* (*Aoi sanmyaku*, 1949), featuring Hara Setsuko as the main character is one of the most well-known works among them. This film portrays Japanese youths right after the Pacific War. Its theme song, sung by Fujiyama Ichirō, became a big hit, and the film is still remembered by many Japanese as a work that envisioned Japan’s bright future following the

devastation of the war. *Blue Mountains* is based on Ishizaka Yōjirō's novel of the same title, which Imai Tadashi adapted into a film in 1949; several additional remakes have been produced since then. In 1949, *Blue Mountains* was ranked second in a list of the "Ten Best Films in Japan" in the film magazine *Kinema junpō*, an indication of its great popularity. Imai went on to become one of the leading filmmakers in Japan, producing several others among the "Ten Best" selected by *Kinema junpō*. Imai dealt with social issues in his films, which included *Enemy of People* (*Minshū no teki*, 1946), *Still We Live* (*Dokkoi ikiteru*, 1951), *School of Echoes* (*Yamabiko gakkō*, 1952), *The Tower of Lilies* (*Himeyuri no tō*, 1953), *Darkness at Noon* (*Mahiru no ankoku*, 1956), *Kiku and Isamu* (*Kiku to Isamu*, 1959), and *The River Without a Bridge* (*Hashi no nai kawa*, 1969). Even his last film, *War and Youth* (*Sensō to seishun*, 1991), is an antiwar work. He is known today as a master of Japanese neorealism.

Imai directed a total of forty-eight films before he passed away in 1991. Five or six of his films were made before 1945, and several of them, such as *Suicide Squad at the Watchtower* (hereafter, *Suicide*) and *Love and the Vow* (hereafter, *Love*), sought to stimulate soldiers' fighting spirits during the war. *Suicide* and *Love* were both produced by the Tōhō Film Corporation, which dispatched a production crew to colonial Korea to shoot the film, thus involving collaboration with Koreans.<sup>2</sup> *Suicide* is about a Manchuria-Korea border control police squad and the Japanese and Korean officers' efforts to defend the border. The film's climax—a guerilla attack scene reminiscent of a Hollywood Western—was received well by the public. *Suicide* gained Imai his first public recognition as a film director (Satō 1996, 217). Although he had produced quite a few war films following his debut work, *Numazu Military School* (*Numazu heigakkō*, 1939), the two collaboration films he directed during the war bear particular significance, in part because they force us to reevaluate Imai as a symbolic figure of postwar Japanese democracy,<sup>3</sup> but also because they enable us to examine the coexistence of entertainment and propaganda elements within these coproductions. The Japan-Korea collaboration was also a significant event for the Korean film crew who considered collaboration with the Japanese and their technological innovations in the filmmaking process as an opportunity to elevate the overall cinematic quality of Korean films. An investigation of the elements of entertainment within these films along with the Korean film crew's complex attitude towards collaboration is important for understanding the historical significance of the Japanese war propaganda film beyond the simple binaries of resistance and collaboration. *Suicide* and

*Love* have not, however, been fully discussed to this date; thus, this article explores some of these neglected complexities by pointing out a few notable aspects of propaganda films that deserve further examination.

Besides the two films that are the focus of this paper, Imai was also involved in the production of films that dealt with the contemporary circumstances of Koreans, the Korean peninsula, and the military. These included *Volunteer* (*Shiganhei*, 1941), *You and Me* (*Kimi to boku*, dir. Hinatsu Eitarō [K. Hō Yōng], 1941),<sup>4</sup> *Figure of Youth* (*Wakaki sugata*, dir. Toyoda Shirō, 1943), and *Mr. Soldier* (*Heitaisan*, dir. Pang Han-jun, 1944). All of these films were in Japanese, except *Volunteer*, which was in Korean with Japanese subtitles, and all depict the outstanding courage of young Korean volunteer soldiers in the Japanese imperial army. Because they emphasize the disciplined everyday life of these soldiers in military training camps in an edifying way and lack sustained storylines, these films do not have the entertainment value of conventional feature films. The imperial army supported the production of these films with the aim of promoting national policies. When they were filmed in Korea, Japan was largely responsible for the production cost and technologies. Imai's *Suicide* and *Love* were also among Tōhō's so-called "dispatched shooting projects." In other words, they were collaborative productions between Japan and Korea, but not on equal footing; the Korean side relied heavily on Japan (Kurashige 1943, 8). However, regarding Tōhō's *Suicide*, some people emphasized the importance of the Korean film staff's involvement in the production, arguing that "the film cannot be made just by shooting in Korea" (Shimizu 1943, 10).

Why did Tōhō actively embark on the production of policy films while another movie studio and production company, Shōchiku Company Limited, did not? This had to do with Tōhō's tight control over the production process. Unlike Shōchiku's director-centered system, Tōhō ran a producer-centered system, in which producers were responsible for selecting directors and casting actors. Compared with the director-centered system, in which a director's tastes dictate the entire production, the producer-centered system prioritizes the company's policies and mandates. Due to the management of this system, Tōhō was able to produce policy films as well as militarist films such as *Burning Sky* (*Moyuru ōzora*, 1940), *The Battle of Kawanakashima* (*Kawanakashima kassen*, 1941), *Blossoms of the South Sea* (*Nankai no hanataba*, 1942), *Naval Battles in Hawaii-Malay* (*Hawaii-Malay oki kaisen*, 1942), *Sugata Sanshirō* (*Sugata Sanshirō*, 1943), *To the Big Sky for the Decisive War* (*Kessen no ōzora e*,

1943), *Searing Wind* (*Neppū*, 1943), *Dawn of Freedom* (*Ano hata o ute*, 1944), *Katō's Falcon Fighters* (*Katō hayabusa sentōtai*, 1944), and *Suicide Squad at the Watchtower* (Yoshimura 1986, 231).<sup>5</sup>

We should perhaps be cautious not to attribute too much influence to Imai in Tōhō, since he worked within a system where producers' ideas were strongly reflected (Sato 1986, 24).<sup>6</sup> In fact, it is not easy to measure film directors' abilities or influence because, film, unlike literature, is a collaborative art by nature; we must take into account the role of the director, producers, screenwriters, stage designers, costume designers, actors, and so on, when evaluating a film. Nevertheless, Imai's reputation was elevated shortly after the release of the two Japan-Korea collaboration films. In addition, and more importantly, we cannot dismiss the fact that the cinematic quality of Imai's films improved significantly with the films *Suicide* and *Love*. This article highlights the latter point by investigating his role and directing ability in the making of the two films, which eventually helped him gain more directing opportunities in the Japanese film industry.

### **The Korean Film Industry at the End of the Colonial Period and Filmmaker Ch'oe In-gyu**

The first Korean film produced was *Just Revenge* (*Ŭirijōk kut'u*, dir. Kim To-san, 1919), followed by other silent films such as *A Vow under the Moon* (*Wōlha ūi maengse*, dir. Yun Paek-nam, 1923) and *Arirang* (dir. Na Un-gyu, 1926). As in Japan, the talkie era began in the mid-1930s. Right after the outbreak of the second Sino-Japanese War, the production and screening of Korean films came under the rigid control of the state, as also happened in Japan. Japan's Motion Picture Law was enacted in October 1939; soon after, in August 1940, the Korea Motion Picture Ordinance took effect in colonial Korea. The Cabinet of Information Board also reduced its distribution of film reels in Korea starting in January 1941. A few film production companies continued to exist in colonial Korea at first, but they were integrated into the Korean Motion Picture Production Corporation in September 1942. Just one month after the integration, the organization began to make films under the guidance of a committee, the Council of Film Programs (*Eiga kikaku shingikai*), which consisted of the Japanese Governor-General of Korea, representatives of other relevant government institutions, and people in the film industry. In addition, the distribution of films came under the control of a newly established institution called the Korea Film Distribution Company (*Chōsen eiga haikyūsha*) (Katō 2003, 215–217).<sup>7</sup>

Imai Tadashi directed two Japan-Korea collaborative films, both of which Ch'oe In-gyu (1911–1950?) codirected and produced. Ch'oe was born in Yŏngbyŏn, in the northern part of P'yŏngan Province. He went to P'yŏngyang Regular High School but quit school during his second year, in 1925, and went to Kyoto to study to become a film assistant. Realizing that it would be difficult to obtain a job as a film assistant in Japan, he returned to Korea and worked as an instructor at a driving school that his older brother, Wan-gyu, had established. Ch'oe's brother later founded an iron foundry in Sinŭiju, where Ch'oe worked as a driver. There Ch'oe met his future wife, Kim Sin-jae, a typist at the foundry. Kim Sin-jae would later appear in many of Ch'oe's films, mostly playing main characters (it has been said that Ch'oe was able to become a film director only after Kim took a leading role in one of his films). Ch'oe set up a film production company called Koryŏ Film with his brother in 1935, and he participated in the making of *The Border* (*Kukkyŏng*) as a screenwriter and director in 1940. Shortly after his participation in the making of *The Border*, he received opportunities to direct *Tuition Fee* (K. *Suŏmnyo*, J. *Jugyŏryŏ*, 1940), *Homeless Angels* (K. *Chip ŏmnŭn ch'ŏnsa*, J. *Ie naki tenshi*, 1940) *Suicide Squad at the Watchtower* (1943), *Love and the Vow* (1945), *Viva Freedom* (*Chayu manse*, 1945), *On the Eve of Independence Day* (*Tongnip chŏnya*, 1948), *Fish Market* (*P'asi*, 1948), and so on. Ch'oe was abducted by the North Korean army shortly after the outbreak of the Korean War in June 1950, and his whereabouts have been unknown ever since (Kim Chŏng-ok 1991, 472–473; Kim Chong-wŏn 2004, 624–627; Ch'oe 1948, 18).<sup>8</sup>

Ch'oe was not simply a collaborator on the Korean side who contributed to the production of *Suicide* and *Love*; rather, it seems likely that he was actively involved in the decision-making process as a director, because there are strikingly similar elements between these two films and the films he produced prior to them. For example, Ch'oe recalled that he was influenced by the French film *Pépé le Moko* (dir. Julien Duvivier, 1936) (Ch'oe 1948, 18), which shares some features with *The Border*. Ch'oe's film deals with romance and conflicts among smugglers at the border around the Yalu River. Even though the basic perspective is different from that of *Pépé le Moko*, its portrayal of the Japanese-Korean police squad's bravery and resistance against the attack of a ring of bandits is reminiscent of *Pépé le Moko*. *Tuition Fee* is based on a story written by an elementary school student who was awarded the Governor-General of Korea Prize in an essay competition. It is about a little boy who cannot afford to attend school and suffers a series of misfortunes: his father hasn't returned home from peddling,

and his grandfather has fallen ill. Yet the boy receives help from his female teacher and classmates, who pay his tuition fee. *Homeless Angels*, which is based on research on a real orphanage, portrays the lives of children living in such an institution (Chōsen Eiga Bunka Kenkyūjo 1943, 19). Also, in *Love* an orphan boy who works at a newspaper company as a page is sent to a rural village to interview a kamikaze pilot's family. The young boy is inspired by the dedication of the pilot's family members, like the school principal (the pilot's father) and the pilot's wife, so he decides to become a volunteer soldier. In addition, he suspects that the wife of the pilot who sacrificed his life for the empire is perhaps his own long-lost older sister; thus the boy feels "honored" as the deceased pilot's brother-in-law.

In his memoir, Ch'oe refused to describe his collaboration on the making of *Suicide* and *Love* as a "forced mobilization." Rather, he writes about various technical advantages gained by joining the project, including the possibility of employing Japanese technicians in the peninsula; the opportunity to build a film studio in Korea with Tōhō's support; and the chance for people in the Korean film industry to interact with Japanese actors, engineers, and technicians (Ch'oe 1948, 18). Ch'oe's previous experience as a film director is clearly reflected in the films, revealing the Korean side's active involvement in these projects. An examination of some of the specific characteristics of these films will shed light on many facets of these collaborations.

### ***Suicide Squad at the Watchtower: The Western Form and Imperial Entertainment***

As previously mentioned, *Suicide* portrays the collaboration between Japanese and Korean police officers in a border control squad that fights off a ring of bandits from Manchuria.<sup>9</sup> Imai was its main director and Ch'oe In-gyu was the assistant director; indeed, most of the members of the production team were Japanese, including Yamagata Yūsaku and Yagi Ryūichirō, the screenwriters. However, the cast consisted of top film stars from both Japan and Korea: Takada Minoru, Saitō Hideo, and Hara Setsuko from Japan; and Chin Hun, Chŏn T'ae-gi, and Kim Sin-jae from Korea (figure 1).<sup>10</sup>



Figure 1. A scene of transcolonial collaboration defending the imperial border in *Suicide Squad at the Watchtower*. Courtesy of the Korean Movie Database (KMDb) of the Korean Film Archive (KOFA).

The film depicts Korean villagers who fear a band of Manchurian bandits who are planning to cross the Yalu River and attack the village once the river freezes over. In the meantime, one of the bandits is sent to spy on the village. The bandit confesses his spying mission to his father, who runs a restaurant in the village, without knowing that the other bandits are watching them. As a result, the bandits kill the father, and the son escapes but is soon captured by the police who arrive at the scene. While the son is being interrogated, the rest of the bandits launch their attack. The police squad faces a critical moment as its ammunition runs out. As the officers prepare to accept a seemingly inevitable defeat, an emergency police reinforcement arrives just in time to aid the officers. Together, they drive out the bandits, bringing peace to the village. At the end of the film, the villagers hold a spirit-consoling service for the fallen officers. Superimposed over this scene is a distant shot of the squad with the peaceful village in the background. These last scenes deliver a symbolic message by showing Japan and Korea sharing the memory of these deaths together.<sup>11</sup>

In his memoir, Imai mentions the American film *Beau Geste* (1939) when recalling the making of *Suicide*. *Beau Geste* was based on a British novel of the same title written by P. C. Wren in 1924. The book was adapted into two different films, but in the memoir Imai was referring to the 1939 version starring Gary Cooper, which was more popular and received Academy Awards in four categories. (Imai 1986, 203).<sup>12</sup> The plot goes as follows: Three brothers from a British noble family happen to become mercenary soldiers for France in North Africa due to an incident that involved a loss of jewelry in their home. When the oldest brother, Beau (Gary Cooper), gets killed during a battle, the mystery of the jewelry incident is solved, and conflicts among the brothers and their family members are resolved. *Beau Geste* is different from *Suicide* in terms of plot, but there are many common features between the two, such as the setting of the watchtower, the use of distant shots, and some of the fight scenes. Additionally, we cannot dismiss the fact that Ch'oe referred to *Pépé le Moko* when making his previous film *The Border*, especially for the portrayals of the tension around the border and circumstances within the circle of smugglers. Thus, *The Border* is an important text to examine since it shares a number of commonalities with *Pépé le Moko* and *Suicide* in terms of setting, shooting techniques, and the treatment of the border, among others.

Film became an important tool for disseminating information about war ideologies and the progress of war in the United States and Germany during the Second World War. Yet, as Peter B. High points out, films that were produced around the world during the war share similar narrative structures, such as morally corrupt enemies, guerilla attacks on powerless villagers, skeptics who would recognize the rightfulness of military actions at the end, the timely arrival of reinforcements at crucial moments, a glorious victory, gratitude and joy expressed by the villagers, and so on (High 1995, 404). Also, the prototype of this kind of narrative structure is the “classic Hollywood narrative form” as shown in Westerns, according to Takashi Fujitani (2011), or the “Victorian empire film” form, according to Richard Slotkin (1998). Fujitani points out that Hollywood Westerns’ motif of “defending civilization from the attacks of the barbarians” is shown in *Suicide* (Fujitani 2011, 310–311).<sup>13</sup>

According to Slotkin (1998), the genre of the American Western grew continuously starting in the early twentieth century, with increasing numbers of adaptations of popular literature (the dime novel in particular). During this time, and through the silent film era, three clear genres were formed: drama, comic, and Western. There was a temporary downturn in the

production of Westerns in the 1930s due to the distribution policies of the studio system and the emergence of the new wave film that emphasized socialist ideas. However, from the late 1930s on, Westerns branched out internationally. These films dealt with the global-scale invasion by Western powers that caused conflicts and disputes between armed forces of a colony and Western settlers and the theme of guarding Western civilization against barbarism. Slotkin names this genre “Victorian empire film” and includes *Lives of a Bengal Lancer* (dir. Henry Hathaway, 1935), *The Charge of the Light Brigade* (dir. Michael Curtiz, 1936), and *Beau Geste* as representative works (Slotkin 1998, 231, 255–271). Films in this genre have not only portrayed the dichotomy between civilization and barbarism but also dealt with contemporary political events around the globe, such as anti-colonial struggles in Asia, Africa, and Latin America; the progress of Fascism in Spain; the situations of Italians in Ethiopia; the growing influence of Germany in the European countries; and the barbarity and injustice committed by Japan in China. An important feature of this genre’s narrative structure, which is shared by the works discussed in this paper, is the existence of heroes who resolve conflicts because they are knowledgeable about the customs and manners of natives. These heroes transcend the dichotomy between civilization and barbarity and regain peace through their sacrifices (Slotkin 1998, 265–266).

There are multiple heroes in *Suicide*, starting with Takada Minoru, who plays the role of the Japanese chief police officer. All the officers, both Japanese and Korean, are in fact heroes in the film, as is the chief’s wife (Hara Setsuko), who selflessly supports the members of the squad and their families. The film’s interweaving of the main narrative and subnarratives grasps the audience’s attention throughout (Rhee 2008, 225–232; Mizuno 2012) (figure 2).<sup>14</sup>

In the beginning of the film, a suspicious-looking man (the spy sent by the bandits) appears in the village. A Korean officer tries to interrogate him, but the officer is killed during the tussle. The sister of the fallen officer (played by Kim Sin-jae, one of the two top actresses in colonial Korea at the time) studies medical science at a university, yet she decides to quit school when her brother, who supported her studies, dies. However, she receives help from her brother’s Korean colleagues and the Japanese chief officer so that she can continue her studies. The sister returns to the village during her winter break, pays a visit to her brother’s grave, and assists the squad during the fight.



Figure 2. Hara Setsuko (above) and Kim Sin-jae (below) in *Suicide Squad at the Watchtower*. Courtesy of the KMDb of KOFA.

The chief officer is hardworking and devoted. When he receives a telegram from Japan that informs him of his mother's serious illness, he cannot bring himself to visit his mother since winter is approaching and it is a crucial time for the squad. When the other officers are invited to the chief officer's house on New Year's Day and served rice cake soup, they open the door of a family altar (*butsudan*) to offer the soup to the soul of the fallen Korean officer. There they discover a portrait of the chief officer's mother hanging beside the portrait of the officer. Realizing that the chief officer's mother has died, the other officers then feel the depth of his self-sacrificing spirit toward his duty.

Major and minor stories about self-sacrifice and devotion are portrayed in this film, and descriptions of both Japanese and Korean folk customs and manners are interwoven throughout. For example, at the beginning of the film, a Korean officer sings a Japanese folk song at a drinking party. Encouraged by the audience to sing something Korean, he then starts singing a Korean folk song, moving his shoulders to the rhythm; there are also scenes in which children have fun skating and playing on a Korean-style seesaw. Japanese customs and manners, such as eating Japanese-style rice cake soup on New Year's Day and practicing kendo, are also presented.

However, it must be noted that, although unity and collaboration between different ethnic groups are visible in examples such as those mentioned above, there are no moments when these elements are fused together or exist in harmony (Fujitani 2011, 315–318). Hara Setsuko unites all the characters into one family by transcending their blood ties, thus fulfilling her role as the “mother” of both Japanese and Koreans; however, there is no event that creates affection between the Japanese and Korean officers. In this way, the film maintains a narrative structure typical of propaganda films, since there is not a single event that challenges the ethnic difference between Japanese and Koreans, who are forced to live and work side-by-side in *Suicide*.<sup>15</sup>

### **The Motif of “Orphans as Little Citizens” and Bildungsroman in *Love and the Vow***

*Love and the Vow* was filmed in Korea in May 1945 and screened in July of the same year. The Japanese cast included Takada Minoru (as Shirai, the editor of the newspaper; he also played the role of the police chief in *Suicide*), Shimura Takashi (as a school principal who is the father of the deceased pilot), and Takehisa Chieko (as Shirai's wife). Korean cast members included Tok Ũn-gi (as Murai, the kamikaze pilot; Murai is his Japanese name according to the

colonial government's implementation of the name-change system), Kim Sin-jae (as Murai's wife and possibly the older sister of an orphan boy, Eiryū), and Kim Yu-ho (as Eiryū, a Korean orphan boy raised by the Shirai couple). As noted earlier, the film was codirected by Imai and Ch'oe and sponsored by the Naval Department and the Governor-General of Korea.<sup>16</sup> The naval branch of the Imperial Headquarters of Information Board and other military departments were also involved in the production of the film. The Korean Motion Picture Production Corporation produced the film, and Tōhō participated as a supporting partner. The war ended shortly after the release of the film, and perhaps this was why only a few reviews of the film were written at the time (figures 3.1 and 3.2).<sup>17</sup>

Before discussing *Love*, we must revisit Ch'oe's previous work, *Homeless Angels* (1941), because the lives of orphans hold symbolic significance in both films. *Homeless Angels* depicts the separation and reunion of a brother and a sister forced to beg on the street by a group of delinquent youths, children gathered at an orphanage and their stories, and the challenges of running an orphanage. The lead actors were all top stars in Korean film at the time: Kim Il-hae plays the role of a man who establishes an orphanage, Mun Ye-bong plays Kim's wife, and Kim

Sin-jae appears as the sister of the aforementioned sibling. The film is a story of orphans' circumstances and a vision of building an orphanage, yet it was the portrayal of the orphans as "little citizens" at the end of the film that was most positively received, earning the film a nomination as the fourteenth recommended film by the Ministry of Education for its contribution to the actualization of the ideal of "the unity of Japan and Korea." However, the script was written in Korean (with Japanese subtitles), which elicited criticism because of the "Japanese language at all times" policy that was promoted by the colonial government. The film was allowed to be screened in Japan only when it had been labeled "a revised version," meaning that the original version was not recommended by the Ministry of Education. In reality, however, the "revision" was made in name only. The Ministry of Education went ahead and released the original; the labeling was just a tactic to avoid criticism. As it turned out, the film was not received well at all in Japan (High 1995, 275–276; Katō 2003, 219–220).<sup>18</sup>



Figures 3.1 and 3.2. Kim Sin-jae and Kim Yu-ho (above) and Shimura Takashi and Takada Minoru (below) in *Love and the Vow*. Courtesy of the KMDb of KOFA.

Also, in order to screen the film in Japan, Ch'oe later explained that he had to cut about two thousand words in thirty-five different places in the script due to heavy censorship (Ch'oe 1948, 18). There were various restrictions for screening *Homeless Angels* in Japan, but generally it was a well-made work, and it prepared Ch'oe for making *Love*. As mentioned earlier, the two top Korean actresses in the mid-1930s were Mun Ye-bong (1917–1999) and Kim Sin-jae (1919–1998). During the 1930s, Mun appeared in many more films than Kim; from the 1940s on, however, the situation turned around for Kim. She gained more attention and started receiving bigger roles, largely because she could speak Japanese more fluently than Mun. As film companies were integrated into the Korean Motion Picture Production Corporation in 1942, it became policy to have actors in films speak Japanese only. If Mun had been able to speak Japanese fluently, she could have advanced herself in places like Japan and Manchuria just as well as Ri Kōran (Li Xianglan), the most popular actress in Manchuria Film Production at that time. In fact, she speaks Japanese in the film *The Strait of Chōsen* (J. *Chōsen kaikyō*, K. *Chosŏn haehyōp*, 1943), but this was the result of rigorous training. Kim, on the other hand, had no problem speaking Japanese from the very beginning of her acting career. As a consequence, Kim inherited the title of “top actress” from Mun starting in 1942. Kim played the role of the medical school student whose brother died in the line of duty in *Suicide* and the wife of the deceased kamikaze pilot in *Love*. In *Suicide*, she is implicitly depicted as the long-lost sister of Eiryū, who is sent to the village to interview the family of the kamikaze pilot. It seems likely that Kim's husband Ch'oe might have helped her to obtain roles in these two films, but Kim's fluent Japanese was in fact the main reason for her casting (see Park 2008, 165–170).<sup>19</sup>

The orphan motif is central to *Homeless Angels*, yet it is not exclusively related to the idea of training little imperial citizens. The film simply shows the complicated circumstances of the orphans, the internal conflicts they endure, and the hardships of managing the orphanage. Scenes of children playing war games in the backyard of the orphanage and cheering at a fighter jet flying over their heads merely appear as episodic. In other words, they are not crucial to the overall content of the film. In contrast, the “orphans as little citizens” motif becomes an essential part of *Love*. In a way, the narrative of this film is like a bildungsroman (educational novel or coming-of-age) story for the main character, Eiryū, an orphan boy who volunteers to become an imperial soldier after overcoming his defensive personality and wandering spirit.

Takashi Fujitani points out that *Love* can be read as a bildungsroman in terms of its theme of perseverance and self-realization (2011, 319). However, there is more to this film that cannot be fully explained by Fujitani's view. The protagonist in *Love* has a contradictory and conflicted relationship with the world in which he lives, and he experiences various kinds of trouble as a result. Along the way, he is influenced by people and events that motivate him to study and help him mature. With this plot, however, the film does not simply portray the protagonist's life; rather, it depicts the heroic life of a human being who manifests his potential to the fullest.

According to Franco Moretti, this kind of moral attitude towards one's life was endorsed especially by middle-class men in the West throughout the nineteenth century. The appearance of middle-class, male protagonists in novels during this period is essential to the bildungsroman, since the genre generally depicts middle-class men who occupied a position between aristocrats and bourgeoisie and enjoyed the freedom of developing their professional lives and broadening their culture (Moretti 2000, viii–x).

Moretti was not entirely against the application of the definition of bildungsroman to similar narratives that existed in different eras and geographical regions and between different classes and genders, yet he was unwavering about his definition being rooted firmly in Western history. However, narratives about middle-class men were not just seen in the nineteenth-century West; they were also evident in nineteenth-century Japan. The establishment of the Japanese nation-state was influenced by Western countries such as England, France, and America as the Meiji Restoration began. During this time, Japan was adopting various kinds of modern systems and forms of culture from these countries. As a result of the state support of education for its citizens, people in Japan were freed from the feudal class system and started enjoying leisure time, during which they became infatuated with readings that were quite similar to the bildungsroman. At the time, works in the bildungsroman genre were translated into *kyōyō shōsetsu* (educational novels) or *seichō shōsetsu* (coming-of-age novels), which appealed to a large population of educated Japanese youths. The genre was so popular that some Japanese writers produced works that were near copies of Western bildungsromans.

Bildungsromans can be reproduced in any place where people are fearful and anxious about their future due to abrupt changes in their temporal and spatial living conditions. The bildungsroman is not a literary genre of the past; rather, it is a genre that remains pertinent in the present and in the foreseeable future. When modern civil society goes through turbulent changes,

thus presenting challenges to its people, the question “How shall I live?” arises naturally in the minds of people actively searching for new ways of constructing the meaning of their lives. *Love* deals with the maturation process of a Korean youth in colonial Korea and his decision to become a soldier for the Japanese empire.<sup>20</sup> At the same time, the film’s narrative of perseverance and self-realization constructs the work as a bildungsroman aimed at producing citizens for whom this question has become imminent.

The film cannot, however, be defined simply as a bildungsroman. Ethnic and gender differences and obstacles are intertwined in the film in a complex way (Fujitani 2011, 318–323). A Korean orphan, Eiryū is picked up and raised by Shirai, the Japanese chief editor of the Keijō newspaper. Shirai’s wife, who always appears in Japanese dress (*kimono*), treats Eiryū kindly whenever her strict husband is not around. In short, the Japanese couple become Eiryū’s foster parents and assist this Korean orphan to “grow.”<sup>21</sup> Also, when Eiryū is sent to the family of the deceased kamikaze pilot, Murai, in a rural area, Murai’s father and his wife, Eiko—who always appears in traditional Korean dress (*hanbok*)—do not reveal sadness about Murai’s “brave” passing; they appear calm and are proud of Murai’s death. Eiryū, in turn, is deeply moved by their attitude. Eiko senses that Eiryū could be her younger brother from whom she was separated when she was young, while Eiryū—seeing that Eiko and Murai’s newborn baby has the exact same bell as the one he has been keeping—seems quite convinced that Eiko is his long-lost sister. However, he does not venture to prove his conviction.

When a young Korean man, following the example of Murai, is set to leave the village to join the imperial army as a special forces soldier, Eiryū becomes jealous of the “honor” he will have, so he empties the gasoline tank of the bus scheduled to transport the soldier. As a consequence, the soldier ends up running to a nearby train station. When Eiryū confesses his wrongdoing to Eiko, she scolds him by saying that even if her brother is still alive she will not face him again if he is such a bad person. Eiryū then renounces his mistake. In this whole sequence, a rich landscape of the so-called local or folk color of Korea fills the screen: a folk dance performed for the departing soldier, a street lined with sycamore trees, girls having fun riding on swings, a castle wall and a fortress by the entrance of the village, and so on.<sup>22</sup>

Eiryū receives “collaborative” support from his Japanese foster parents, who raise Eiryū, and from his Korean sister, who helps him to grow spiritually. At the end of the film, Eiryū walks along a street of cherry blossom trees; he is heading to a training camp set up for volunteer

soldiers. He is accompanied on one side by his foster mother and on the other side by Eiko with her baby, who have come to see him off. The foster mother and sister are now wearing the same style of *mompe* (baggy trousers for women), rather than their usual Japanese and Korean traditional dresses. It is not that Eiryū lives as a brother of Eiko in real life; he now exists as a foster brother of Eiko's deceased husband, Murai, ready to live and die for the empire. This scene reflects the bildungsroman format quite faithfully. Feelings of acceptance and nostalgia float around in the conventional bildungsroman, in which the many mistakes committed and despair experienced by youths are resolved. Yet in *Love*, the collaborative support Eiryū receives from both Japanese and Koreans to become a “grown up” ultimately means death (figures 4.1 and 4.2). His impending death surfaces around the text without revealing this irony explicitly, yet this is where the characteristics of war propaganda are most intensely conveyed.

### Epilogue

During the prewar and war periods, films were censored by the Cabinet of Information Board. Yet, in a memoir Imai wrote in his later years, he recalls that his films were censored even after the war. For example, his *Enemy of the People* (1946) was censored by the GHQ (General Headquarters, the Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers), which in turn recommended that he make biographical films about revolutionary figures or films that criticized business conglomerates (*zaibatsu*) and the emperor instead. Imai also states that he was severely challenged by the company union during the planning meeting for *Blue Mountains*: he was told by the union to make films such as an adaptation of a novel that deals with bourgeois lifestyles (Imai 1986, 206–209). His memoir shows how filmmakers' freedom of expression was suppressed incessantly during the prewar and war periods and how this continued in postwar Japan. However, despite the restrictions he faced, Imai consistently demonstrated his talents as a filmmaker, especially interweaving distinctively entertaining elements into themes of great social importance.



Figures 4.1 and 4.2. Kim Sin-jae and Takehisa Chieko, in their respective Korean and Japanese dress, conversing by the side of a street lined with sycamore trees (above). Eiryū (Kim Yu-ho), heading to a training camp set up for volunteer soldiers, accompanied by his foster mother on his left and Eiko with her baby on his right; both women are wearing *mompe* (below). Courtesy of the KMDb of KOFA.

Ch'oe In-gyu, who incited Koreans to sacrifice their lives for the Japanese empire through his collaborative works with Imai during the war, moved swiftly after liberation in 1945 to direct *Viva Freedom* (1946), a film that expressed a deeply elated response to Korea's liberation from Japanese rule. However, this film does not greatly differ from the films he produced prior to liberation in terms of its response to nationalistic ideologies (Yi Hwa-jin 2005, 102–103). In *Homeless Angels*, actor Kim Il-hae played the role of a Korean man who tries to practice the Christian notion of love by helping out numerous Korean orphans flooding the streets of Seoul. No Japanese characters appear in the film, despite the fact that it was produced during the colonial period, but when considered as an expression of the social hierarchy created by colonialism, this film coheres with the colonial power's aim to enlighten the Korean elite class (Yi Yöng-jae 2008, 192).

In *Suicide*, it is the Japanese chief officer, Takatsu (Takada Minoru), who shows love and generosity toward Koreans and a readiness to sacrifice his life along with both the Japanese and Korean officers. And in *Love*, it is the Japanese journalist Shirai (also acted by Takada Minoru) and his wife who pick up the orphan Eiryū from Chongno Street in Seoul and raise him as their own. In other words, the Japanese empire's task to enlighten the colonized was mediated concretely through the creation of such characters. However, after liberation, at the very moment when the “outside” force—that is, the colonial authority—vanished from the peninsula, it was ultimately male elites who seized leadership for the enlightenment of Koreans (Yi Yöng-jae 2008, 193–194). Ch'oe's films have been constantly associated with “realism” in both colonial and postcolonial film history. In this regard, perhaps we can say that the subject of the enlightenment was the colonized individual who could sustain its subjectivity in the postcolonial era.

*Naoki Watanabe is professor of Korean language and culture at Musashi University in Tokyo, Japan. The author would like to thank Fujitani Takashi at the University of Toronto for his useful advice and comments. In his recent book, Race for Empire (University of California Press, 2011), and in other publications, Fujitani discusses Suicide Squad at the Watchtower and Love and the Vow in detail. While previous scholarship on Imai Tadashi mainly dealt with the process and background in which these works were produced, Fujitani focuses on analyzing the narratives of the films in his recent works. The author is indebted to Professor Fujitani's groundbreaking analytical framework, which has been tremendously helpful in developing the discussion in this paper.*

## Notes

1. I have kept Korean and Japanese names in their original order, surname first. I have followed the Hepburn system for romanizing Japanese words and names and the McCune-Reischauer system for romanizing Korean words and names except for a few cases, such as Pyongyang. Names of institutions, titles of films, and policies appearing before 1945 are romanized as they are pronounced in Japanese.
2. These two films can be viewed at the Korean film database of the Korean Film Archive (KOFA): <http://www.koreafilm.or.kr>. In these films, the scripts, including the lines spoken by Koreans, were written in Japanese. Note that the Korean subtitles that appear on the screen were not inserted at the time of production; they were created by the KOFA when the films were added to its database.
3. During his school years, before the war, Imai was arrested a few times for his leftist activities. However, during the war years, he submitted a statement of thought conversion and made a few war collaboration films. In a biography written during the last years of his life, Imai reflected on his involvement in the production of collaboration films as “the greatest mistake he made in his life” and confessed that this deprived him of confidence after the war. See Imai (1986, 204–205).
4. The film reel of *You and Me*, which deals with intermarriage and Korean volunteer soldiers, had long been lost. However, about 20 percent of the entire film (approximately twenty-four minutes) has recently been discovered, and it was presented to the public at the Tokyo Film Centre in April 2009. Only fragments of the whole film are pieced together in this twenty-four-minute reel, so it cannot be determined how faithfully the narrative of the film followed the original script (Iijima and Hinatsu 1941, 132-145). However, we can see Kim Chŏng-gu, who played the role of a boatman in the film, singing one of his representative songs, “Nakhwa samch’ŏn” [The fall of three thousand flowers] in Korean, as well as Ri Kōran, the top star in Manchurian film at the time. For further details, see Utsumi and Murai (1987). The film was reputedly rejected by Shinkō, Hinatsu’s studio, but eventually supported by the Chōsen Army General, Nakamura Kōtarō. See Katō (2003, 220).
5. Also, the Chōsen Film Production planned to expand its market to Japan and Manchuria by using the celebration of the 2,600th anniversary of imperial reign in 1940 as a springboard, and the collaboration proposal was accepted through negotiations with Tōhō Film undertaken by the director of Chōsen Film, Ko Kyōng-hŭm, and the company’s Tokyo branch director, Lim Sil. Shortly after the agreement was signed by Tōhō and Chōsen Film, the first collaboration film, *Ch’un-hyang chŏn* (The tale of Ch’un-hyang), was produced in a studio in Ŭijŏngbu, Korea. Chōsen Film produced two films that were aimed at the Japanese and Manchurian markets, and four that targeted only the Manchurian market; these were distributed by Tōhō (Anonymous 1940, 30).
6. In addition to this corporate-oriented system, Imai later recalled that, until *Blue Mountains* (1949) became a hit, all of his films were made according to the company’s plans, thus making him a mere “directing technician.” See Satō (1986, 24).
7. Until recently, most films produced between the late 1930s and early 1940s had been thought to be lost. However, in the year 2000, the Korean Film Archive (KOFA) initiated the search for these films; some were found in places like Beijing and Moscow. As these discovered films have been digitized, and thus made available to the public, research on

films in colonial Korea has actively progressed. Films discovered by the KOFA are available on DVD under *The Past Unearthed* series. Since the sale of the first volume, *A Collection of Feature Films from 1940s Colonial Korea*, in October 2007, four volumes have been released. The four films in the first volume are *Homeless Angels* (*Ienaki tenshi*, dir. Ch'oe In-gyu, 1941), *Spring of the Peninsula* (*Hantō no haru*, dir. Yi Pyōng-il, 1941), *Volunteer* (*Shiganhei*, dir. An Sō-gyōng, 1941), and *The Strait of Chōsen* (*Chōsen kaikyō*, dir. Pak Ki-ch'ae, 1943).

8. According to Fujimoto Sanezumi, who was chief producer of *Suicide* and *Love*, Ch'oe In-gyu was inspired by John Ford's *Stagecoach* (1939). Fujimoto recalls Ch'oe as a perfectionist: Ch'oe rented the film from a theater and counted the cuts in the scene where the coach was followed by a group of Native Americans. Meanwhile, Fujimoto also testifies that Ch'oe was arrested by the North Korean Army during the Korean War for allegedly collaborating with the U.S. Allied Forces by producing the film *Chayu Manse* [Viva Freedom] (1946) right after liberation. Fujimoto's testimony was made around the time when he went to Seoul to participate in an Asian Film Festival (exact year unknown) and met with Ch'oe's wife, Kim Sin-jae. Considering that he mentions Kim Sin-jae, who was still acting when they spoke, and her son, who was studying in America, the testimony about Ch'oe was presumably based on his conversation with Kim at that time (Fujimoto 1981, 179).
9. By 1943, Japan's main target was Southeast Asia, not Manchuria. One of the spectators at that time, Takasaki Ryūji, recalls thinking it strange that a film set in the mid-1930s would focus on the border between Manchuria and Korea. In his opinion, the location itself was not significant, but he argues that the issue perhaps was the promotion of the "unity of Japan and Korea" ideology in colonial Korea in order to proceed more smoothly with conscription. Takasaki's statement exposes an ambiguity in the film as a propaganda piece: he was confused as to why, despite the fact that this film was supported by the Government-General of Korea and the police department of the colonial government, bandits appeared in Manchuria, where the "harmony among five ethnic groups" was supposedly already established. See Takasaki (1981, 104-109). Also, Shin Gi-su, a *zainichi* (a Korean resident in Japan) historian, states that he watched the film in a temporary theater in Kyoto during the Pacific War. He said he was invigorated by the film for its depiction of the Japanese and Korean police who collaborated on equal footing under the ideology of the "unity of Japan and Korea." It was only after the war that Shin learned, to his surprise, that the film was directed by a famous director, Imai Tadashi. Shin contacted the Tokyo National Art Museum (in which the Tokyo Film Centre is located), where the film was stored, in order to persuade them to screen the film in public. His attempts, three times in total, failed. He was told by the museum that it was Imai's wish not to lend or show the film to the public (Shin Gisu 1992, 210-212).
10. Ch'oe Sōng-uk argues that the project was not forwarded from the Japanese side; rather, it was Ch'oe In-gyu who presented the project to the producer Fujimoto Sanezumi (Ch'oe, S. 2010, 165). Ch'oe based his argument on Fujimoto's statement, which he likely encountered in a roundtable discussion about *Suicide* (Imai 1943, 88-93). Participants in the discussion were Imai Tadashi, Ch'oe In-gyu, Takada Minoru, Fujimoto Sanezumi, Iijima Tadashi, and Futaba Tozaburo. In this discussion, Ch'oe In-gyu also talked about his father's experience of being attacked by bandits when he was working in a border control police squad.

11. The film's location was Manp'ojin (current day Manp'o, Chagang Province in North Korea). Around the time when *Suicide* was released, a police officer named Koide Takeshi, who was working at a Japanese police station in Manp'o, wrote about the geographical and social conditions of the area in detail in an essay. He states that the Manp'o Railroad had gone into operation shortly before he wrote the essay, and that villagers relied on propeller-driven boats to cross the Yalu River. He also adds that people rode horses and cows to cross the frozen river during the winter, that women in the village carried out shooting exercises, and that there were no medical facilities or medical doctors in the area. Thus, the squad members had to carry out medical-related duties and could not go back to Japan to attend to their sick family members and relatives; there was, in fact, a ring of bandits on the other side of the river that was led by a leader known as "Wanghwang gegou." Koide testifies that it took a long time for a relief squad to arrive when the bandits attacked his own squad. All of these conditions are strikingly similar to the living conditions depicted in *Suicide* (Koide 1943, 42–43).
12. Actually, it is not known precisely when and where Imai watched the film, *Beau Geste*. According to Yi Hwa-jin, it is quite possible that Imai was referring to the other remake of *Beau Geste*: the American film was banned in December 1940 due to censorship in Korea, and eight American film distribution companies were forced to close down in Japan that same year. Yi also points out that there is no record of the film *Beau Geste* being released at that time. In addition, it was December 1952 when the 1939 remake was released in theatres in Japan (Yi Hwajin 2010, 186).
13. Fujitani also interprets *Suicide* as a representation of universal imperialism and humanism that transcends ethnic nationalism during the war. On the other hand, he points out a difference between Victorian empire films and *Suicide*: the former depicts the white race's continual efforts to exclude other races from their community, whereas the message in the latter is that Koreans and Chinese will become imperial citizens depending on the level of their loyalty toward the empire, Japan (Fujitani 2006, 42–44).
14. Jooyeon Rhee analyzes how the cooperative effort made between Japanese and Korean women is portrayed by female characters from the position of mothers, daughters, and sisters (Rhee 2008, 225–232). Mizuno Naoki pays attention to the differences between the actual film and the scripts published in *Nihon eiga* (September 1942) and *Taedong'a* (March 1943) and argues that ethnic hierarchy was constructed in the film due to the Korean woman Eishuku's lowered status. See also Mizuno's article in this special issue of *Cross-Currents*.
15. Nishigame Motosada, who helped with the script of *Homeless Angels* at the Chōsen Film Production, expressed dissatisfaction with the content of *Suicide* in detail. Nishigame's points were not meant to challenge why such a work was produced; rather, they were raised in order to produce "better" propaganda films (Nishigame 1943, 95–96).
16. *Love* is not listed in some of the publications that have compiled Imai's works. For example, it is not listed in a book that was published when Imai was still alive, and it was based on the list of works that Imai gave to the editorial team (*Eiga no honkōbō* Arisu, 1990). Ōhashi Kazuo explains that the film was confiscated by the Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers after the war, and it was returned to Japan in the late 1980s. However, he points out that there is no concrete evidence to identify Imai as the director of *Love* since his name doesn't appear in the actual film's credit section: it simply shows that it was "sponsored by the Korean Motion Picture Production Corporation and Tōhō Film" (Ōhashi

2012a, 2–4). According to Ōhashi, the press preview of the film was held in the Kyōngsōng(Seoul) City Hall on May 23, 1945, and it was released in Korea the next day. But according to Fujimoto, the collaboration crew was still shooting the film in late May of that year at the Tōhō Kinuta studio, shortly after Tokyo was heavily bombed (Fujimoto 1981, 179). For this reason, Ōhashi raises the question of whether the film existed in two versions (one for Koreans; the other for the Japanese) (Ōhashi 2012b, 6). Although no supporting materials exist to prove Ōhashi’s hypothesis, it is important to note his following observations: first, that the film was released in Korea only a day after the press preview and second, that the shooting of the film was still going on at the Tōhō Kinuta studio in late May.

17. In one of these rare reviews, Ch’oe Kŭm-dong made the following four points about the film: First, it interwove current topics, such as the spirit of the suicide squad, the ideology of “the unity of Japan and Korea,” and the enthusiasm for becoming volunteer soldiers. Second, it didn’t leave a strong impression in terms of its main purpose: promoting the prowess of the Japanese navy. Third, Ch’oe In-gyu’s involvement in the script caused the film to have a Korean flavor. And lastly, in order to accommodate a Korean audience for the film, a Korean-language version was made (Ch’oe Kŭm-dong 1945). A lieutenant colonel and advisor to the Great Japanese Navy Information Force, Hirota Masugorō, by contrast, stated in another review that the value of the film rested on its commemoration of the fortieth anniversary of the Japanese naval force without commenting on the content of the film at all (Hirota 1945).
18. For details about the issue of recommendation raised by the Ministry of Education, see Kim Kyōng-suk (2004, 207–236).
19. After liberation, Mun went to the North and came to Seoul once to serve the North Korean army as an embedded actress during the Korean War. Shortly after the war, the North Korean state ordered her to stop acting, but in her later years she gained Kim Ilsōng’s favor and received the title of “People’s Actor.” Kim Sin-jae, by contrast, remained in South Korea. Until the 1970s, she appeared in a few films, and in the early 1980s she moved to the United States with her son, who went there to study. Her son got a job as a teacher at an American university but faced an untimely death due to cancer. Kim Sinjae was brokenhearted after the incident and died in her house in Virginia in 1998. For details on the lives of these two actresses after the liberation, see Park (2008, ch. 5).
20. Takashi Fujitani argues that the motif of the “adopted son” in *Love* imposed Japanese-style adoption system to colonized Korea (Fujitani 2011, 319, 438n37). This is a salient point, yet as Fujitani points out elsewhere (2006), when we consider the ambiguity of the ethnic origin of the foster parents, although they appear to live in a Japanese style on the surface, the “adopted son” motif can be interpreted differently.
21. Fujitani makes an interesting point about the ethnic background of the foster parents: he raises the question of whether the Japanese foster parents, who appear in kimonos throughout the film, are in fact Koreans. (Fujitani 2006, 51). Yet, it is difficult to determine whether Shirai is in fact Korean by looking only at these scenes. Also, there is no clear evidence whether Shirai’s wife is Korean or Japanese. Fujitani further points out that the film itself creates an ambiguity around whether many characters in the film are Japanese or Korean. In fact, it is difficult to determine whether a specific character is Japanese or not when one can only look at the way Japanese speech was delivered or the way that a Japanese lifestyle would have been lived in the colonial situation at that time. Therefore,

when a late colonial film emphasizes the collaboration between Japanese and Koreans, it is inevitable for it to emphasize how the ethnic specificity of each group is portrayed at the same time. In other words, we cannot deny the fact that some Koreans were already “Japanized” in terms of their lifestyle at that time. A detailed discussion on this issue is made in Yi Hwa-jin (2012, 229–262).

22. Yi Hwa-jin points out that Korean talkies from the mid-1930s propagated the ideology of “the unity of Japan and Korea” by presenting Korea as imperial Japan’s province and emphasizing Korea’s local color, such as its folk dances, music, and traditional theater. She adds that the process through which the Korean film industry aimed to export its films to Japan was an expression of internalized Orientalism (Yi Hwa-jin 2010, 124). We can apply her observation to *Love* and *Suicide*, but we cannot determine who actually took the leading role in the production of these kinds of collaborative works. Thus, it is difficult to argue whether the process of self-Orientalization was contemplated by the Korean side or the Japanese side.

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