FANTASY OF EMPIRE:
RI KŌRAN, SUBJECT POSITIONING AND
THE CINEMATIC CONSTRUCTION OF SPACE

by

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This thesis emerged from my emotional, tactile, and intellectual access to the actress, Yamaguchi Yoshiko (a.k.a. Ri Kōran or Li Xianglan), who embodied the cultural hybridity of Manchuria and represented a ‘modern girl’ on screen. I analyze four wartime melodrama-adventure films, in which she co-starred with Japanese actors: *Song of the White Orchid* (*Byakuran no uta*, 1939), *China Nights* (*Shina no Yoru*, 1940), *Vow in the Desert* (*Nessa no chikai*, 1940), and *Suzhou Nights* (*Soshū no yoru*, 1941).

The formation of domesticity played an integral part in the making of modern nation-states. Intertextualizing with the discursive formation of the *ie* (house/family) between the mid 19th and mid 20th centuries, I first demonstrate that Japanese film subjects are made to embody the imagined Imperial nation through gendered performances in *Song of the White Orchid*. The interior and exterior are constructed to mirror the notion of imperial nation and the Asian ‘other’.

Next, I extend the analytical framework to the three films, *China Nights*, *Vow in the Desert*, and *Suzhou Nights*, which employ films’ specific locations for different operations of gendered and ethnicized positioning. I also pay attention to some of the
climaxes, which unconventionally present psychological dramas outdoors and action scenes indoors. Especially, my interest in this part of analysis is in interrelating metaphors of bodily boundary and national border. As delineating the signification of body and nation, I situate the relay of the gaze in the simultaneous blurring of bodily boundary and national communities that coincides with melodramatic highlights located outdoors.

In order to shape a Japanese imperial subject, the films symbolically negotiate with three levels of power dynamics: the establishment of a national identity, the mimicry of the West, and the significance of China in Japanese imperial modernity. The delineation of cinematic space and subject positioning in Ri Kōran’s films reveals that Chinese, Japanese and the West are constituted as shifting positions that respectively represent past/obstructions, present/a mobile agency, and future/the envisioned goal. Ri Kōran attracts spectators’ gaze and mediates multiple locations to identify with, while Japanese male protagonists embody the gaze by making his corporeality absent.
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INTRODUCTION

Border-crossing and the Fantasy of Empire

Film is one of the significant sites through which a nation becomes felt and imaginable. Among many cultural procedures that create the meanings and feelings of the nation, the materiality of film is crucial in particular for negotiating objective presence and subjective engagements to make the nation. Film effects are not limited to the optical senses: the visuality can be “haptic,” invoking various senses and memories of the whole body beyond that defined as the optical (Marks 2000). The spectators’ multiple sensory responses permit not only their imaginary projections onto characters and places but also enable them to be ‘touched’ by what is presented by film. This thesis emerged from my emotional, tactile, and intellectual access to a film actress who symbolizes a place and a period of Japanese national history and the melodrama-adventure films that she co-starred in with Japanese actors. Her name is Yamaguchi Yoshiko, known as Ri Kōran or Li Xianglan when she appeared in these films.

Performing in multiple languages, including Japanese, Mandarin and Cantonese, Ri Kōran was the most popular among the actors in Japan who were advertised as Chinese during the Fifteen Years’ war (1931-1945). Her film persona was shaped via the cultural and geographic specificities of the State of Manchuria, imperial Japan’s first occupied territory on the Chinese mainland. Located next to the USSR and allowing Japanese military control over the government, the ‘puppet’ state developed industrial infrastructure while instituting cultural and educational systems under the state ideology
of ‘the cooperation and harmony among five peoples’ [gozoku kyōwa], although the slogan of gozoku kyōwa did not include Russian but Japanese, Korean, Han Chinese, Mongolian and Manchurian. Imperial Russia had strategically established its presence in Manchuria by building cities like Harbin and introducing European civil engineering, architecture, music and leisure, prior to Japanese domination (Iwano 2001). For emerging Japanese middle-class tourists in the early 20th century, Southern Manchuria was one of the targeted destinations to imitate colonialist excursion abroad, a place where they could nostalgically look for wilderness and forests untouched by industrial development (Perrins 2008). Born and Raised in Manchuria, Yamaguchi Yoshiko’s multilingual fluency was largely due to her father, who taught Mandarin to Manchuria Railway employees. Also, at an early age she began to study European opera with a music teacher exiled from Russia after the revolution of 1917 (Yamaguchi and Fujiwara, 1987; Yamaguchi 2000). Yamaguchi’s hybrid character was useful for the Manchuria Film Association, which aimed at facilitating locally produced entertainment films that appealed to the Chinese population in Manchuria.

While acknowledging the particular place and time that assisted the materialization of Ri Kōran’s film appearances, I show in this thesis how narratives about space are detached from specific localities but incorporated into the staging of gendered, ethnicized, and racialized subjects in the fantasy of empire. As current scholars have framed the characteristics as “border-crossing mobility and variable identity” (Wang 2007, 329), “cross-ethnicking” (Deboer 2004, 30; also see Robertson 1998), or “transcending national borders and transcending ethnic and linguistic boundaries” (Yomota 2001, 13), it seems appropriate to say that Ri Kōran was a cultural commodity
that mediated the fetishization of ‘border-crossing.’ Whereas the fetishization and accumulation of cultural objects corroborate the attempts to domesticate the colonial other and redistribute imperial power (Clifford 1988a; McClintock 1995; Mitchell 1988), I argue that the practices of cultural consumption also offer a slippage in which the fetish object mobilizes desires which do not necessarily conform to the orderly boundaries: “Fetishism, in spite of itself, unfixes representations even as it enables them to become monolithic ‘signs’ of culture” (Apter 1993, 3). Mediated by Ri Kōran’s representations, I demonstrate that ‘border-crossing’ is separated from a movement between actual places but emerges as a twofold utopian vision. First, Ri Kōran generates both extraordinary and familiar appearances to audiences, and attracts passionate responses in spite of ethno-cultural differences or political divisions (Washitani 2001; Wang 2007). Second, border-crossing in her films and ‘off-screen’ life connotes a counter-hegemonic act, that is, her innate freedom from, or voluntary violation of, the rules imposed by dominant powers (Yomota 2001).

It is intriguing that scholarly interest in Ri Kōran is increasing when the borderless world is no longer a futuristic vision but discussed as a common reality. The impact of so-called globalization is well encapsulated by the following claim: “places are no longer the clear supporters of our identity” (Morley and Robins 1993, 5). Yet, places have not lost their ground for projections and politics. Thus, Edward Said asserts: “[J]ust as none of us is outside or beyond geography, none of us is completely free from the struggle over geography” (Said 1993, 7). Although the transactions of global economy and digital information circuit surpass national territories, both corporate capital and workforce are aligned and transported via specific places, such as cities, homes, and Free
Trade Zones (Burn 2005; Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2006; Sassen 1998). The formation of diaspora nationalism is tied to territorial imagination, community gatherings and travels, thus needing to be articulated as “practiced relationship to homeland” rather than fixed to a physical location (Habib 2004, 10). In these contexts, ‘border-crossing’ does not mean a release from spatial limits but reconfigures the workings of space.

In fact, the continuing fascination for Ri Kōran’s multiple localities gives me a strange sensation since ‘border-crossing’ shapes my own restraints as much as benefits, being a Japanese woman graduate student in Canada (see Mayuzumi et al. 2007). Instead of presupposing border-crossing as a sign of desirability or freedom, I want to question what normative conditions about space would underpin the desire for border-crossing. As a utopian concept, border-crossing postulates that regulatory power works within a particular space. But my present thesis brings to light that the marking of national borders, at multiple levels of spatial operations, is where imperialism’s regulatory power is in action. In short, space is not simply an object or a background of subjects’ actions. Space shapes and mediates power.

Among various aspects of space, I especially deal with how the cinematic uses of the look interact with the representations of space. Films institute the power of vision in tandem with the construction of race, ethnicity, and gender. In particular, race, ethnicity, or gender in Ri Kōran’s melodrama films is not simply assigned as roles, but each hierarchical positioning is interrelationally produced via space and the gaze. This thesis’s theoretical contribution can be located in the following inquiry: how have race, ethnicity, and gender been intelligible through visual representations and narratives? The question has been differently treated by preceding studies in various academic disciplines,
including anthropology, art history, film studies, social history, cultural studies, and
cwomen and gender studies. A significant number of studies have analyzed modern
spectacles of race, including museums, photography, anthropological documentaries, and
ethnographic films. They delineate how the realist and scientific media shaped the ways
of knowing about the colonized subjects while reproducing colonial and imperial orders,
including hierarchical relations of race, gender and class (Clifford 1988a, 1988b;
Grimshaw 2001; Haraway 1989; McClintock 1995; Mitchell 1988; Oksiloff 2001; Pratt
1992; Rony 1996; Trinh 1991). They investigate the discursive formation of power and
knowledge while elaborating “the structure of meaning in a system of representation”
(Mitchell ibid., xiv). Besides, scholarly works on racialized and gendered looking are
encompassing “structures of feeling” in fictional narratives and analyzing emotion as a
site for social and political regulation and negotiation (Boler 1999, 20; Filmer 2003; Watt
2005; Williams 1977; Williams 2001). Melodrama film scholars in particular are
ascertaining the significance of sentiment in the inter-productive formation of racialized
and gendered subjects (Hsu 2006; Kakoudaki 2002; Williams 2001, 2001/2; also see
Ahmed 2005).

Whether they deal with fictional or non-fictional narratives, the common theme
of these researchers boils down to the power of looking, or how visual representations
and narratives at once shape the other’s ontological reality and register in seeing the sense
of immediate grasp of the other. As Timothy Mitchell argues in Colonizing Egypt,
representation is the system of meaning that produces the real and distinguishes the real
and non-existent at the same time (Mitchell 1988). Through visual reproductions of
bodies, the optical perception is organized around the notions that vision merely copies
what exists out there and that what is seen counts as objective reality. As the Hollywood
convention of ‘blackface’ implies, the objective status of vision permits the alignment of
the power in material production (i.e. filmmaking) and the power in the production of
meaning (i.e. speaking on behalf of the ‘other’) (Guber 1997; Trinh 1991). While the
visual media gains an objective and neutral status, Trinh asserts:

Language as voice and music – grain, tone, inflections, pauses,
silences, repetitions – goes underground. Instead, people from
remote parts of the world are made accessible through
dubbing/subtitling, transformed into English-speaking elements
and brought into conformity with a definite mentality. This is
astutely called “giving voice” – literally meaning that those who
are/need to be given an opportunity to speak up never had a voice
before (ibid., 60).

Since “the Insider’s subjectivity (understood as limited affective horizon – personal) is
that very area for which the objective (understood as unbiased limitless horizon – the
universal) Outsider cannot claim full authority,” it becomes crucial to prove that the
‘other’ has “participated in the making of his/her own image” in order to maintain the
authenticity of the film narrative (Trinh 1991, 70).

Whereas power relations shape what matters visually, the vision’s transparency
and scientific neutrality are legitimized via the body’s materiality (‘I see it because it is
there.’). I suggest that Judith Butler’s following deliberation on gender can be extended to
the production of subjects through the power of looking:

Power operates […] in the constitution of the very materiality of the
subject […]. Here the body is not an independent materiality that is
invested by power relations external to it, but it is that for which
materialization and investiture are coextensive. […] These material
positivities appear outside discourse and power, as its incontestable
referents, its transcendental signifieds. But this appearance is precisely the
moment in which the power/discourse regime is most fully dissimulated
and most insidiously effective (Butler 1993, 34-5).
Similarly, the operations of the gaze posit the gaze outside of the social systems as if the power of looking existed before the regime of vision and power. The notion of transparency and direct access grants the interconnected formation of fictional visual narratives, that mobilize feelings and meanings, and visual and non-visual discursive practices for modern nation-state building. The mechanical vision not only triumphed in science and technology but also permeated in literary imagination (see Golley 2008).

As Anne McClintock, Ann Laura Stoler and Ichirō Tomiyama among others suggested, the production of the disciplinary body of national subjects are interdependent with the construction of the colonial other (McClintock 1995; Stoler 1995, 2002; Tomiyama 1995; Valverde 1991). Indeed, the ‘other’ within was sought after in order to weave the bourgeois self into the systems of capitalist production, reproduction and consumption. The interrogative gaze towards the ‘other’ was reflected back to the introspective examination of the self. The interior space of bourgeois ‘home’ was, at the same time, separated from the exterior, and provided a spectacle of mass-produced goods while guarding an individual from outside disturbances: "In the interior [the private individual] brings together remote locales and memories of the past. His living room is a box in the theater of the world" (Benjamin 1999, 19). The important historical context to add here is that this extensive transformation of peoples’ lives was conducted in the name of ‘Westernization’ since the late nineteenth century in Japan (Nishikawa 2000). And the rigorous renovations entailed the reconfiguration of domesticity (‘home’), nation, and the colonial and Western ‘other,’ through technological developments, cultural productions, disciplinary practices and military expansions (Inoue 2003; Kurihara 2002; Koyama 1994; Mikami 2003; Muta 1994, 1996; Sand 2004; Satō 1982; Ueda 1982). As with many
entertainment films, Ri Kōran’s films employed the objective status of vision and the transparency of nation-state as imagined community, so that the fictional narratives are intertextualized with socially constructed realities, such as scientific discourse and political and bureaucratic maneuverings. In particular, the representation of the *ie* (family/house) was important among the interconnected operations of discourse and visual representations.

What mattered in the vision-power regime of Japanese imperialism were not only bodily differences but similarities. I insist that the absence of “colo[u]r code” (Lo 2002, 285) in East Asia should not be equalized with the absence of the operations of power activated in looking relations. Although the difference of skin colours does not significantly mark the hierarchy between Japanese and Chinese in the colonial and imperial order, my film analysis revealed that the symbolic mechanisms of subject positioning are organized around space, the gaze, and the multilayered making of exterior and interior, paralleling Euro-American formation of race and gender. Furthermore, the concept of fantasy was important for taking account of the particular geographic and political conditions that Japanese imperialism negotiated with. Due to centuries of Sino-centrism in Asia and the urge to compete with Western imperial powers, fluid and multiplied subjective positions were epitomized in the spectacles of empire rather than a dualistic power relationship between the colonizer and the colonized.

In this thesis, I explore the interconnected construction of gendered and ethnicized positioning in Ri Kōran’s major hit adventure-melodrama films, *Song of the White Orchid* (*Byakuran no uta*, 1939), *China Nights*, (*Shina no yoru*, 1940), *Vow in the Desert* (*Nessa no chikai*, 1940), and *Suzhou Nights* (*Soshū no yoru*, 1941). In the first three films, Ri
Kōran co-starred with Japanese star actor, Hasegawa Kazuo; in the latter, with Sano Shūichi. The three films starring Ri Kōran and Hasegawa Kazuo were later named the Continental Goodwill Trilogy or the Continental Trilogy (High 2003, 271-275; Baskett 2005).

Chapter One introduces my research subject, the actress Ri Kōran and the films that I chose for this research. I locate my study in relation to the three realms of collective memory practices on the Fifteen-years’ War and Ri Kōran: Japanese government-led production of national history, popular media representations of Ri Kōran, and academic research on Ri Kōran and her films. In this chapter, I point out interesting parallels between the construction of West and that of Japan in terms of knowledge production on the ‘other’ and the construction of a national identity through the mobilization of sentiments.

Also, in Chapter One, I examine the premises of previous studies, in which a direct reflective link is presupposed between the ethno-cultural positions in the films and socially operating identity categories. Chapter Two counters this problem by elaborating on my analytical tools, that is, subject positioning and film space. I explore the productive faculties of film representation as well as film’s mediation with socially constructed reality. In elaborating on the concept of subject positioning, I suggest dynamic and interconnected aspects of gendered and ethnicized subject construction in film. Next, I explore unique qualities of film’s spatiality by focusing on the phenomenology of film space, spatial metaphors and gaze-landscape interconnection.

1 Yomota, Baskett, and other authors use the terms, Continental Goodwill Trilogy and Continental Trilogy, but it is not specified if it is commonly used upon the initial screenings. When I looked the articles on the films in newspapers and magazines during the time period, I could not see the terms. So I suspect the terms were coined by postwar journalists or film scholars, but have not found the evidence either.
Also, the theoretical tools of subject positioning and cinematic space allow me to disrupt Ri Kōran’s films’ constructed past-ness and acknowledge the films’ sustaining effects on me as a spectator. I contextualize the film viewing experience within transnational practices that shift survivors’ memories from the margin to the centre.

Chapter Three and Chapter Four present my analysis of space and subject positioning in Ri Kōran’s films. In relation to the construction of gendered and ethnicized subjects, I examine extensively the production of ‘interiority’ in the modern nation-state building. The distinction between interior and exterior played an integral part in the making of national subjects, and Japanese imperialism was no exception. In these chapters, I examine each film’s construction of ‘interiority’ in accordance with particular operations of modernity, such as domesticity and hygiene. In Chapter Three, I analyze Song of the White Orchid by intertextualizing the film’s interior sites with the modern discursive production of the ie (family/house). By delineating each character’s shifting positions constructed by film space and interplayed gaze, I illustrate the film’s interconnecting production of gendered and ethnicized positioning. Chapter Four applies Chapter Three’s analytical framework to China Nights, Vow in the Desert and Suzhou Nights. Across the networks of social and cultural reproductions, I explore the ways in which melodrama constructs ie as a site for individuals to integrate the layers of spatial imaginaries and allows audiences’ empathetic investments to be part of the national community. In the preceding studies on visual representation, the house tends to be examined as a backdrop to subjects’ performances or an object of vision. These chapters investigate the interconnected productions of cinematic space and subjects, and reveal the active roles of interior sites in the establishment of the power of vision.
The working premise of my study was that the mechanisms of nation-making are registered at multiple layers of spatial representations and discourses. The notion of interiority is crucial in the reproduction of nation’s spatial identity, such as ‘home’ and ‘domestic,’ and organizes the reproductive and disciplinary mechanisms crosscutting many social, political, and cultural domains from miniscule levels to grand levels. In addition to cinematically constructed interior and exterior, my analysis dealt with how melodramatic performance affects the constructed national borders in the film. This chapter demonstrates that, through Ri Kōran’s emotional and ecstatic performances, her body is constituted as a site that reinforces the agency of Japanese imperialists and blurs the Japanese-Chinese divide.

Finally, Chapter Five offers a summary of the preceding chapters. In this chapter, I come back to the introduction’s theoretical inquiries on the power of vision and the interrelated construction of gendered, ethnicized and racialized positioning. I compare the spatial transgression of Ri Kōran’s characters and Japanese imperial males’ mobility. How are their corporeality differently constructed and affect the fluid construction of Japan, the West, and Asia in the films? I conclude the thesis with a discussion on the different modes of the gaze – the gaze of control and the gaze of touch – and their effects/affects in cinematic subject positioning.

The quotes from original Japanese sources, such as films, archival materials, and contemporary academic sources, are my translations. The name order of Japanese and Chinese authors follows how it was described in the publication: the family name follows the given name when published in Japanese; the given name proceeds the family name in English publications. The still images from Song of the White Orchid, China Nights and
*Vow in the Desert* were reprinted as courtesy of Tōhō Co., Ltd.; *Suzhou Nights* as courtesy of Shōchiku Co., Ltd. Reprint permissions are included as Appendix A and B.
Chapter One

Ri Kōran and her melodramatic features

A conversation begins with a lie. And each speaker of the so-called common language feels the ice-floe split, the drift apart as if powerless, as if up against a force of nature

A poem can begin with a lie. And be torn up.

A conversation has other laws recharges itself with its own false energy. Cannot be torn up. Infiltrates our blood. Repeats itself.

Inscribes with its unreturning stylus The isolation it denies.


Born in Manchuria as a daughter of Japanese expatriate parents, Yamaguchi Yoshiko was given the name Li Xianglan by a Chinese family friend. It became her stage name when she started her career in the Manchuria Film Association (Manshū Eiga Kyōkai). She

\(^2\) Parts of this chapter were published as “The Flux of Domesticity and the Exotic in a Wartime Melodrama,” Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society 34(2): 369-395. © 2009 by The University of Chicago. All rights reserved. 0097-9740/2009/3402-0008$10.00
started her film career in 1937, and performed in films co-produced by the Manchuria Film Association, major film companies in Tokyo, and/or Japanese-controlled film studios in Shanghai. Ri Kōran gained special renown for mega hit films co-produced by the Association and the Tōhō Film Company from 1939 to 1941. Her Japanese citizenship was concealed except to a few executives in the Manchuria Film Association during the war and officially revealed in public after Japan’s surrender. She was not only unprecedentedly popular at the time but also has retained celebrity status in the current Japanese media.

Adrienne Rich’s “Cartography of Silence,” cited at the beginning of this chapter, assists me to articulate the problematics of Ri Kōran and her representations. The “lie” in the poem does not simply resonate with Yamaguchi’s forged identity as a Chinese woman before 1945. It also echoes the imposition of ethno-cultural categories, either Chinese or Japanese, by today’s political discourse and some film studies scholars onto her hybrid persona. In my view, the labels are maintained through the dualistic but shifting notions of self and the ‘other,’ victim and aggressor, and past and present, that accumulatively reproduce divisive narratives supporting the patriarchal and ethnocentric paradigm which is believed to have been diminished after imperial Japan’s surrender to the Allies. The repercussions of national divides are as if the “false energy” of seemingly past imperialism was revived and transmitted via Ri Kōran/Yamaguchi Yoshiko’s sustaining public appearances after 1945. As “the dream of a common language” was recollected in reference to her multilingual and ‘border-crossing’ performances, gendered and ethnicized positions within the nation are reproduced. When national divides are

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3 Some scholarly works have transliterated her name as Ri Kōran as Japanese fans did, while others Li Xianglan, based on the Mandarin pronunciation. I chose to use Ri Kōran for congruence with the focus of my historical referencing.
summoned by historical narrations, Ri Kōran/Yamaguchi Yoshiko is appropriated for the re-making of the imaginary space and time of both nations. At the same time, the dual categories of Chinese and Japanese fabricate the homogeneity within ethno-cultural borders and negate the legitimacy of “subjugated knowledges” about the hybrid identities formed during and after the colonial regime (Foucault 1997/2003, 7). In this chapter, I explore how Ri Kōran/Yamaguchi Yoshiko and her border-crossing have been represented to maintain, or negotiate, the imagined communities of Japanese and Chinese nations in three different sites: the wartime film industry, post-war popular culture, and contemporary film studies.

1. Cinematic Mediation of Imperialism and Capitalism

During the war period, films produced in Mainland China were rarely shown to audiences in Japan (Monma 2001, 231; Furukawa 2003, 23-24). Although Japanese actors sometimes played the roles of Chinese in films and theatre during the period, or Chinese amateur actors played in a Japanese comedy troupe traveling across the country (Robertson 1998; Yano 2001), Ri Kōran was exceptional because of her multilingual fluency, including Japanese and Mandarin. Hara Setsuko’s role of a young Chinese woman in Shanhai rikusentai (The naval brigade at Shanghai, 1939) exemplifies the ethnic cross-performance by Japanese actors. Hara’s role illustrated anti-Japanese sentiment among Chinese civilians, as Ri Kōran’s roles often did. But Hara spoke with a poorly imitated Chinese accent that could only make sense as a language when assisted by Japanese subtitles. Liu Wenbing points out that, “The function [of Hara’s deficient linguistic manner] is to offer the sign of the otherness” (Liu 2004, 194). Ri Kōran was
unique in that she spoke Mandarin fluently when she performed the roles of Chinese women.

Ri Kōran had previously appeared in minor roles in Tōhō-Manchuria Film Association co-productions. *Song of the White Orchid* was the first film in which she played a lead and it vastly increased her fame. The film was her third appearance in a joint production of Tōhō Film Company and the association. *Nessa no chikai* (Vow in the Desert, 1940) and *Shina no yoru* (China Nights, 1940) were produced subsequently, starring Ri Kōran and Hasegawa Kazuo. I consider *Song of the White Orchid* especially significant since it launched a matrix of spatial representations and subject positioning also present throughout the trilogy and *Suzhou Nights*. *Suzhou Nights* was produced by the Shōchiku Film Company just after the trilogy’s popularity was established. As if it intended to act as an unofficial successor of the Tōhō’s series and appropriate its established reputation among filmgoers, *Suzhou Nights* replicated the melodramatic matrix established in the trilogy. The films adapted a dialectical narrative form of action-adventure and melodrama. Two intertwined forces created storylines: an action-centred Japanese male seeks to bring ‘modern civilization’ to China as a civil engineer, sailor, or doctor, while an active Chinese female seeks the man to fulfill her longing.

For this study, I chose the four films because of their exceeding popularity during the war, their present accessibilities and their similar thematic structures. Ri Kōran performed in 19 films before 1945, the year of Japan’s surrender to Allies. Among them, 8 films are said to remain and 7 are accessible through video copies. In terms of

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4 In 1937, there were 1749 film theatres in Japan. 562 Japanese films and 286 Western films were premiered. In 1940, the number of film theatres increased to 2363, which premiered 500 Japanese films and 52 Western films. After the great decline in domestic film production from 1941, only 35 Japanese and one Western film premiered in 1945 (Furukawa 2003, 20).
accessibility, *Sayon’s Bell* (*Sayon no kane*, 1943) and *My Nightingale* (*Watashi no uguisu*, 1943) have been also videotized and distributed by Shōchiku for personal viewing in addition to the four films which I focus on in this study. These two films, however, do not focus on the Chinese-Japanese binary: Ri Kōran played the main role of an Aboriginal woman in Taiwan in *Sayon’s Bell* and a Japanese female singer who was adopted by a Russian musician in Manchuria in *My Nightingale*.

The films that I analyze for this research were produced and screened from 1939 until 1941, overlapping the period when the concept of *tōa* [East Asia] was developed and established to support Japan’s military invasion of China. Koyasu Nobukuni argues that among Japanese historians and literature scholars *tōa* originally meant “the area which comprehends China as the origin of civilization and Korea and Japan as constituents of the same civilization sphere with China” (Koyasu 2003, 90). While *chūgoku bunmei* [Chinese Civilization], which was previously used, implied the hegemony of Chinese culture and a linear progressive order among ethnic cultures, the concept of *tōa bunmei* [East Asia Civilization] appropriated the cultural territory of Chinese Civilization but indicated the anticipated development of multiple cultures in the area. The concept of cultural geography, *tōa*, was then reconfigured after 1938 to add political nuances, *tōa kyōdō tai* [East Asian Cooperative Unit] which authenticated Japan’s colonial rule of East Asian countries in order to compete against the “old world order” of Euro-American imperialism. Prime Minister Konoe issued a statement called *tōa shin chitsujo* [East Asia New Order] after occupation of Wuhan in 1938, and declared that “the [Japanese] Empire seeks the construction of New Order which eternally secures the stability of *tōa* [East Asia]. This is also the ultimate goal of our present war” (Koyasu
From then on, scholars of history, philosophy, literature and social science were mobilized to work out the missionary vision of the New Order. Having established the assimilation of the Korean peninsula and Taiwan and treating them as shadows of the Empire, the tōa concept put forth an agenda for the unification of Japan-Manchuria-China. The focus of wartime propaganda shifted, however, in December of 1941, when Japan waged the war against the Allies and introduced the concept “daitōa kyōei ken [Greater East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere],” replacing East Asian Cooperative Unit. The geographic term of Great East Asia was coined to include nanpō-ken [Southern sphere], that is, English, US, and Dutch colonies in the southern Atlantic and tōa [East Asia]. This reduced attention to China and Manchuria was reflected on Ri Kōran’s films, as her roles shifted away from ‘Chinese woman falling in love with an ambitious Japanese man’ in 1941. Half the roles she played after 1941 were Japanese women.

The collaboration of Tōhō and the Manchuria Film Association was said to improve the aesthetic and technical qualities of the association’s productions. The association’s agenda was not overtly political and did not aim at delivering obvious propaganda messages. But the association intended to increase the production of local films in Manchuria in order to impede the influx of films from Shanghai and other parts of China. In spite of the glorious pan-Asianist ideals, such as “gozoku kyōwa” (The cooperation and harmony among five peoples) that the association was designed to carry out, the preceding films were not aesthetically or commercially successful. The

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5 The statement of “The East Asia New Order” was immediately criticized as “a different name for Japan’s absorption of China” by Chiang Kai-shek of the Kuomintang [National Party] of China (Koyasu, ibid., 106).

6 See Hu (2003) on the film production and distribution in China from 1920s until 40s. There were political initiatives for utilizing films to project and mobilize a ‘Chinese nation’ in tandem with resistance movements against Japanese imperialism. See also Liu (2004), Chow (2007) and Zhang (1999), regarding the films produced in Shanghai during 1920s and 30s.
association’s preceding films did not develop a good reputation among film distributors and critics, thus they were rarely shown in Japan. The films starring Ri Kōran and Japanese star actors were exceptionally well attended.

Although Japanese film producers insisted on Japanese filmmakers’ ‘contributions’ to the association, I consider that the Tōhō Film Company was indebted to the association for the box-office success gained by the collaboration in the increasingly competitive market. Louise Young asserts that, during the 1930s and ’40s’, the Japanese publishing and entertainment industries cooperated with army propagandists because “imperial warfare offered producers of mass culture irresistible opportunities for commercial expansion and profit” (Young 1998, 56). The incomparable success of the Ri Kōran-Hasegawa Kazuo trilogy was achieved through the collaboration of multiple entertainment industries. The script of Song of the White Orchid was developed from a serial novel of the same title by a popular writer, Kume Masao. The serial appeared regularly in Osaka Mainichi-Tokyo Nichinichi Newspaper from August 1939 to January 1940. The film’s premiere on November 30th, 1939, was followed by the release of the theme songs Byakuran no uta (Song of the white orchid), performed by Itō Hisao and Futaba Akiko, and Itoshi ano hoshi (My loving star), by Watanabe Hamako from the Columbia Record Company. The full edition of the novel was published the following January. Watanabe was already known for her ‘sweet’ voice and had several major hits. Watanabe disseminated her reputation widely associated with her ‘China melody,’ covering theme songs for Ri Kōran’s films and performing in qipao, the Manchurian female dress modified and popularized across urban Asia in the first half of the century (Wang 2007). Off stage, she actively visited war sites to entertain Japanese soldiers in
Shanghai and other places in China.

Two months prior to the premiere of *Song of the White Orchid*, an anonymous film critic in *Kinema Jumpō* (Cinema Ten-day bulletin) wrote that planning for the serial story and the film began nearly simultaneously. The *Osaka Mainichi-Tokyo Nichinichi* Newspaper sent the writer Kume Masao to Manchuria to gather ideas for a new serial novel. The adaptation of newspaper serials was not unusual at this period of film production (Furukawa 2003). The newspaper convinced the South Manchuria Railway to finance the film production after the popular writer’s visit. A Tōhō director, Yamamoto Kajirō, was first chosen to work with Kume and a script writer, Kimura Chiyoo. However, Yamamoto resigned after their initial meeting because, according to the critic, he could not agree to the producer’s request that “whatever will do, as long as a woman and a man are snuggling [in the film]. Don’t care if the Continent [becomes the theme of the film or not].” Another Tōhō director, Watanabe Kunio, was assigned to continue the film. The anonymous critic suggested that the film was being realized so as to fulfill the sponsorship obligation to the South Manchuria Railway. Thus he was suspicious of the quality of the film.

The film’s promotional campaigns vigorously registered the impression of newness by employing the iconic representations of the leading actors. Hasegawa Kazuo, who played Kōkichi, first appeared on screen in *samurai* roles in historical features. *Song of the White Orchid* was his debut in a modern man’s role. His fresh start in this

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7 *Kinema Jumpo* 694, October 1, 1939, 147. My translation.
8 In fact, Watanabe Kunio was known among his colleagues and producers as a “quick shooting” (*hayadori*) film director.
9 Ibid.
10 Hasegawa Kazuo is a *nimai*me [handsome] actor whose exceptional popularity lasted over 60 years since 1920s (Satō 1984, 71-85)
film was marked by a well-publicized incident: he was attacked by a mob and scarred on his face during the production of the previous film, Hasegawa’s first appearance after switching from Shōchiku. The incident was caused by the rivalry between Tōhō and Shōchiku during the restructuring and amalgamation of the film industry. Upon his return to the screen after plastic surgery, the actor changed his stage name from Hayashi Chōjirō, which was passed down from his kabuki master who had a strong influence on Shōchiku, to Hasegawa Kazuo, his birth name. The sign of struggles in the increasingly competitive industry was, I would argue, appropriated to dramatize his comeback and increase audience anticipation of the film, by adding Hasegawa’s “first appearance in modern drama,” in Song of the White Orchid’s promotions. Situated in this context, the film’s advertisements, such as “Manchuria’s Nightingale,” appear not merely as Ri Kōran’s ethnic profile, but as a catch phrase to lure consumers to a fresh product. Ri Kōran was distinguished from other contemporary actresses by her stage ethnicity and by her association with a new era of Japan, the materialization of the Japanese imperialist goal, Manshūkoku (Manchukuo, or, the State of Manchuria). The synthesis of the imperialist ideology and showbiz marketing is seen in the rhetoric of one advertisement: “New culture is in the new land! While fragrant flowers blossom, all East Asian nations’ strong will causes the excitement in the continent: let us build and construct!”

The link to Manchuria Railways, which furnished the film’s intertextuality with imperialist messages, and the collaborations with popular entertainment industries, which exploited the melodramatic spectacle of Ri Kōran, resulted paradoxically in a much more
complex text of *Song of the White Orchid* than the monolithic propaganda discourse originally intended. I suggest that the films should not be considered to be a mere dogmatic burden imposed on audiences. Rather, they were commodities, specifically packaged to attract consumers’ attention and elevate their excitement.

2. **Ri Kōran and War Remembrance**

Earlier in this chapter, I suggested that current representations of Ri Kōran reinforce the ethno-cultural binary of Japanese and Chinese. This caution is in response to Shelly Stephenson and Yiman Wang, who call attention to the different contexts and perceptions of Ri Kōran during wartime and after 1945. Stephenson asserts that “national identities emerged as more fixed” after the war, whereas the “boundaries [between screen, off-screen, nation, and race] were once blurred in the elusive career of Li Xianglan” (Stephenson 2002, 12). Although Wang stresses that nation-building was a major concern for both Japan and China in the 1930s and 40s, she agrees with Stephenson that “the concept of nation was in flux during wartime” (Wang 2005, 17). Indeed, Ri Kōran’s unprecedented “pan-East Asian stardom” coincided with the period when the ‘Greater East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere’ was condemned by the Japanese government in 1940-45 (ibid.). Consequently I now explore biographical accounts about Ri Kōran and Yamaguchi Yoshiko in contemporary popular culture, which, I argue, constitute a site for ethno-cultural identification through war remembrance.

Ri Kōran/Yamaguchi Yoshiko provides a unique and considerably active site of

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14 Greater East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere connotes the final stage of Japan’s imperialist maneuverings before (and in anticipation of) the defeat, and the ‘Greater East Asia’ in the slogan meant to cover Euro-American colonies in the Pacific to justify the war against the Allies. The war against the Allies resulted in various forms of material shortage, including the extreme reduction of domestic films due to the lack of films (as material) previously imported from the U.S. (Furukawa 2003).
war remembrance through which Japan as an “imagined community” is reified and negotiated (Anderson 1988). Various narratives have been crafted about Ri Kōran, momentarily reviving the State of Manchuria, which was never approved by the League of Nations and was demolished upon Japan’s surrender in 1945. By speaking of her and listening to the stories about her, the continuum of the past and the present is recreated, and the moment inhabited by the speaker/listener is reconnected with the collective memories of the past, which go beyond Japan’s present national boundary.

Yamaguchi Yoshiko’s celebrity status has been sustained in Japanese popular culture and politics until the present. While the Manchuria Film Association was disbanded after Japan’s surrender, she restarted her acting career as Yamaguchi Yoshiko, taking major roles in several theatre productions during 1947-8 and in eighteen Japanese films from 1948 until 1958. She also starred in two Hollywood films, *Japanese War Bride* (also known as *East Is East*, dir. King Vidor, 1952) and *House of Bamboo* (dir. Samuel Fuller, 1955), as Shirley Yamaguchi. While residing in New York, Yamaguchi Yoshiko was introduced to the Japanese-American artist, Isamu Noguchi, with whom she was married from 1951 until 1956 (Duus 2000, 40-137). She continued to use the name, Li Xianglan, when she performed roles of a Chinese woman in the two Hong Kong films, *Jin ping mei* (a.k.a. *Ching ping mei*, or ‘The plum in the golden base,’ dir. Wang Yin, 1955) and *Shen mi mei ren* (‘The lady of mystery,’ dir. Wakasugi Mitsuo, 1957), as well as a co-production of Shaw Brothers (Hong Kong) and Tōhō (Japan), *Byaku fujin no yōren* (*Pai-she chuan* or ‘Legend of the white serpent,’ dir. Toyoda Shirō, 1956) (Shimizu

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15 She initially traveled to the US in order to offer recitals for Japanese-Americans in Hawai‘i and Los Angeles, and had a visa for 3 months. Her US visit was the second by a Japanese star actress, following Tanaka Kinuyo. Yamaguchi Yoshiko’s arrival to the US was widely reported in Japanese and US media, with her own remark that she “came to learn how to kiss” (Yomota 2000; 223-224).
et al. 1991; Yomota 2000, 250-56; Stephenson 2002). Though she ended her film career upon her second marriage to the Japanese diplomat, Ōtaka Hiroshi, in 1958, Yamaguchi Yoshiko maintained her public presence as a TV reporter and broadcaster, followed by a political career as Ōtaka Yoshiko, a member of the upper house of the Diet of Japan (1974-92). The trajectory of her life and career has been published in two autobiographies and one co-authored biography (Yamaguchi 1993; Yamaguchi 2004; Fujiwara and Yamaguchi 1987). Her wartime life story was adapted as a TV drama, a long-run musical, and a comic book (Shimizu et al. 1991; Gekidan Shiki 1995; Fujita 1996; Yomota 2000). Even a character in a computer game is named Ri Kōran (Monma 2001).

Yamaguchi Yoshiko’s public images in post-1945 Japanese media reinstate Ri Kōran's characters in Tōhō-Manchuria Film Association co-production during the war era. In those films, she played the role of ambassadorial peacemaker between different nations under intense conflict. Her post-war images recycle the idea of 'border-crossing' while updating the geopolitical context. Her marriage with the Japanese American artist, Isamu Noguchi, took place just six years after Japan’s surrender to the US, when the antagonism against the US could resurface in public if a chance was given. As a TV reporter, she visited Saigon (now Ho Chi Minh City) during the Vietnam War and Cambodia when it faced US military invasion in 1970 (Yamaguchi 1993, 133-135). She interviewed leaders of resistance groups in the Middle East between 1971 and 73, including Yasser Arafat of the Palestina Liberation Organization. During her visit, she was given an Arabic name, Jamila, by Palestinian people (ibid., 138). Her 1973 interview with Shigenobu Fusako, an executive member of Japan’s Red Army in Lebanon which

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16 The star actress Tanaka Kinuyo faced her fans' hostile reactions when she returned from a three-month stay in the US as a Japan-US ambassador in 1950. Her style, wearing sunglasses and a summer dress, and throwing kisses in public, became a target of criticism that she was spoiled by Americans (Shindō 1983).
supported the Palestine Liberation Front, resulted in Yamaguchi Yoshiko being awarded the best individual prize in the Terebi taishō [TV Award of Excellence] in the same year (ibid., 148-150). In 1995, she was appointed as the director of the government-sponsored foundation, the Asia Women’s Fund, which sought compensation for women who were forced to accompany Japanese military and suffered sexual violence during the 15 Years War (a.k.a. jūgun ianfu or military “comfort women”). The primary aim of the Fund was, "in cooperation with the people of Japan, [to] promote projects expressing the atonement of the Japanese Government and people to the former comfort women, and promote other projects aimed at the resolution of contemporary problems faced by women" (The Asian Women’s Fund n.d.).

She became prominent in East Asian politics not only because of her continuous presence in popular culture. It was the Prime Minister, Tanaka Kakuei, known for his achievement in the normalization of Japan’s relations with the People’s Republic of China in 1972, who backed her political career at the beginning. Before launching the Asian Women’s Fund, Yamaguchi (Ōtaka) Yoshiko had already been a foreign relations specialist and taken leading roles to connect major Japanese politicians with political

17 C. Sarah Soh (2003) provides an extensive analysis of the making and operation of the Asian Women’s Fund, by covering diverse political forces and points-of-view within and outside of the Fund. According to Soh, the forced recruitment of Korean ianfu (translated as “comfort women”) first gained a critical attention in the Diet of Japan in June 1990, after an official visit of the Republic of Korea President, Roh Tae Woo. In August 1991, Kim Hak-sun offered the first public testimony as a Korean former ianfu, and a class-action lawsuit against the Japanese government was commenced by 35 Korean war victims and bereaved families, including Kim and two other former ianfu in December 1991. In January 11, 1992, the disclosure of several official documents by the Japanese historian, Yoshimi Yoshiaki, testified the imperial army’s official involvement in ianfu project. In the same month, Prime Minister Miyazawa Kiichi issued a public apology to Korean people upon his visit to South Korea and indicated the government’s compensation for surviving former ianfu (Soh 2003, 209-210). Soh argues, however, that the transnational movement against sexual slavery originated in South Korea in the early 1970s, which is much earlier than the ianfu redress movement, when they started to call critical attentions to Japanese men’s sex tourism. Launched on July 19, 1995, the Fund was officially called Joseino tameno asia heiwa kokumin kikin, literally translates as ‘the Asian Peace National Foundation for Women.’ But the Fund is commonly called as Asia Women’s Fund or ajia josei kikin, which I use in this thesis, or kokumin kikin (the National Fund).
leaders from Asia and Africa (Yomota 2001, 272). Reflecting upon her involvement with the Fund for twelve years, Yamaguchi Yoshiko emphasizes her empathy towards “(former) comfort women”: “Their humiliation and pain can never be compensated, but the foremost reason that I participated in the Fund is my wish that those women have more peaceful life if possible” (Yamaguchi (Otaka) n.d., my translation). As referring to a former soldier who confessed in front of her in a town meeting that he has been to an ianfu station in a town meeting and donated his saving to the Fund, Yamaguchi Yoshiko asserts that the Fund is characterized by lay people’s honesty and courage: “I was moved by his courage. People’s feelings like his have been supporting the Fund” (ibid.). She also underscores her physical closeness with one of the survivors that the Fund approached: Accompanying imperial soldiers, the “former ianfu” happened to have dropped by at an outdoor film shooting that Ri Kōran was part of, and kept contacting her to have phone conversations since the Fund started until the woman passed away (ibid.). However, transnational feminist activists leading redress movements accused that the Fund denied the Japanese government’s responsibility for sexual slavery but attempted to offer compensation as a private sector. The Japanese government maintained that it supports the Fund out of “moral responsibility” for ianfu, but did not respond either to the criticism that the ianfu system was “war crime” nor to the assertion that the government had “legal responsibility” (Soh 2003, 223). Therefore, many women entitled to the

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18 Over time, the Japanese government has shifted attitudes even towards the moral responsibility, influenced by the changes of leadership and international politics. In February 2007, Japanese supporters of redress movement, including Yoshimi Yoshiaki, issued “Appeal on the issue of Japan’s military ‘comfort women’” which claimed that “the Japanese government spent as much as $60,000 per month to hire lobbyists in order to influence [the US] Congressional discussion” on the resolution bill on the issue of Japan’s military comfort women in the fall of 2006 (Yoshimi et.al. 2007).

19 In order to adjudicate the military violence, “The Women’s International War Crimes Tribunal on Japan’s Military Sexual Slavery” was organized by Asian women and human rights organizations in Tokyo, Japan, on December 8-12, 2000. Yun Chung Ok (Korean Council for the Women Drafted for Military Sexual
compensation refused to receive the allocated money from the Fund (Soh 2003, 226-231). Yamaguchi Yoshiko’s insistence on her genuine feeling for and close relationship with the survivors repeats the critical problem highlighted by the redress activists: How can the Fund take sides of the survivors when it fails to acknowledge survivors’ agencies that have been shaped through existing redress movements? In the above comment, she represents the ‘good will’ of the Fund by subsuming a survivor’s and a soldier’s voices as the cause of the Fund. I argue that she activates the politics of rescue that reproduces the power position of Japan as rescuer in the political binary of ‘us versus them’ (Briskin 2004).

In biographical adaptations, Yamaguchi Yoshiko/Ri Kōran seems to pivot around a peculiar ambiguity. The adaptations commonly locate her in war remembrance aiming at peace pedagogy, in which she is cited as a passive witness to the violence caused by the Japanese imperial army. The young Yamaguchi Yoshiko typically occupies the position of a passive victim while military aggressions stand for the historical moment of imperial nation. The opening scene of The Musical Ri Kōran, for example, captures the courtroom where she is tried for treason against the Chinese government. When she receives a death sentence, she confesses that she is a Japanese national and sings a ballad: “What can I say?/ My heart is torn/ and stranded in-between the two home countries/ Please don’t refuse my shedding tears/ Trust me, I loved the country where I was born” (cited in Yomota 2000, 275, my translation). Written by the prolific popular songwriter

Slavery by Japan), Yayori Matsui (Violence Against Women in War Network Japan), and Indai Sajor (Asian Centre for Women’s Human Rights) were the convenors, and sixty-four survivors from Asia-Pacific region took part. More than a thousand people attended the tribunal each day. The Tribunal issued its preliminary judgment, which found Emperor Hirohito guilty, and the State of Japan responsible, for the crimes of rape and sexual slavery as crimes against humanity (VAWW-Net Japan n.d.).
Iwatani Tokiko, and first performed in 1991, the lyrics posit the nations as an abstract totality, towards which the young female protagonist is only allowed to respond by the melodramatic display of emotion. Meanwhile, the comic book *Ri Kōran* uses a third-person narrative like a documentary film and the voice of a male university student, Sugiyama, to give historical and political context to the events around the young Yamaguchi Yoshiko (Fujita 1996). Her passive position is constructed against the all-knowing voices that represent the grand narrative of history. Sugiyama is a fictitious character that does not appear in Yamaguchi Yoshiko’s biography but was created for *The Musical Ri Kōran*. The 1987 biography closely depicts men whom the actress, Ri Kōran, encountered: Major Amakasu Masahiko of the Manchuria Film Association, Kawakita Nagamasa of the China Movie Company (*Zhonghua dianying gongsi*) in Shanghai,\(^{20}\) the popular writer, Kume Masao, and the son of the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Matsuoka Ken’ichirō, the socialist film critique, Iwasaki Akira, to name a few. Such associations inspired the film historian Yamaguchi Takeshi to speculate on Ri Koran’s strong personality, the determination of which is not influenced by romantic sentiments or approaches by men (Yamaguchi 2000). Yomota Inuhiko suggests that the musical omits the complex dynamics of political connections around Ri Kōran. Instead, “a melodrama is played assuming that the past militarism is only to blame and individuals were mere victims of the militarism” (Yomota 2000, 277, my translation).

What is peculiar to me is that, in the citing of Ri Kōran and her surroundings, the State of Manchuria, as well as the then prevailing military dominance, become alive and real. The dramatized representations seemingly permit audiences direct access to the

\(^{20}\) Fu (1997) extensively discusses the Japanese Imperial Army’s efforts to intervene the film production and distribution in China by the establishment of China Movie Company.
place, as if the place had continually existed in the public memory over the past six decades. Such a direct access to the past, either through video copies of wartime films or current adaptations of her biography, however, masks the fact that the State of Manchuria once was made to be an inaccessible subject: Cued by the USSR’s attack in August 1945, Japanese expatriates attempt to leave Manchuria. Infants, pregnant women, elderly and disabled persons were abandoned during the hasty evacuation, and survivors who sought refuge in Japan were not always welcomed. 21 Most of the films made during WWII were destroyed after Japan’s surrender. Some by Manchuria Film Association were not destroyed but seized by the USSR, and after years of negotiation by government officials, their copies, including one of Ri Kōran’s films, recently became available to Japanese researchers (Yamaguchi 2000).

Commenting on The Musical Ri Kōran, a high school student writes:

[The musical] allowed me to realize what Japan did. So easily, they surrounded and killed innocent people in front of them. In today’s Japan, it is inconceivable why they could do it. Probably because the Constitution was different and people’s thinking was different from today. But the worst thing was that Japan had a military and behaved arrogantly. Japan thought they were number one. As the result of the misbehaving, Japan was punished by the Atomic bomb. Life and war are somewhat similar […] (Gekidan shiki 1995).

This is one of the two students’ reflections included in the brochure sold to theatre audiences. I can only assume that the theatre company chose this writing to exemplify their work’s pedagogical effect on a Japanese youth. In the student’s words, the war is represented as the power struggle of imperial nations, whereas personal resistances and

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21 In the documentary film, Yesterday is Now (dir. Rumalean 2002), Watanabe Yoshiji recalls his relatives’ hostile reaction when he came to seek refuge in Japan with his expatriate father, mother and siblings from Manchuria as a child. Watanabe’s father was a high-ranking imperial army officer during the war. In Watanabe’s view, his family was seen not only an economical but also emotional burden to the relatives, as if the returnees symbolized something they did not want to touch upon.
negotiations don’t appear as a focal point for the audience. In the dramatized versions of
Yamaguchi Yoshiko’s biography, I would contend that the colonial space, which was an
unsettling and subversive “contact zone” for the colonizer’s authority, tends to be
remembered to fix the past colonial dominance (Pratt 1992, 1). Yamaguchi Yoshiko’s co-
authored biography (1987), on the other hand, notes messy encounters of the colonizer
and the colonized that led her to question the validity of her work. In a 1943 press
conference in Beijing to promote the first Chinese film in which she appeared, Wan shi
liu fang (dir. Bu Wancang and Ma-Xu Weibang, 1943), she was questioned by a Chinese
reporter:

I would like to ask your true intention why you played in those Japanese
films like Song of the White Orchid and China Nights. Not only they do
not properly understand China but even worse, they insult Chinese. Aren’t
you Chinese? Why did you play[d] in those films? In doing so, you
abandoned your ethnic pride” (Yamaguchi and Fujiwara 2000, 69).

Prior to the dissolution of the Manchuria Film Association, Yamaguchi resigned from it in
1944. In the biography, she recites the words that she said to the director of the
Association, Amakasu: “I cannot disguise myself as Chinese anymore. I have greatly
suffered between Japanese and Chinese. I can no longer bare life as Ri Kôran. Please
cancel my contract” (ibid., 274). In her recollection, she is quite a vocal person with clear
mind and keen observation, though she did not have a chance to reflect on the political
significance of her film roles, or entirely view the films featuring her, until mid-1980s
when she started to prepare her biography (ibid., 393-394).

As illustrated above, Ri Kôran’s biographies and their adaptations are part of
narrative sites of national history in which gender and ethnic identities are performed,
contested, or negotiated. The depictions of passive and innocent Yamaguchi Yoshiko in the
musical and the comic book resonate with the empathetic formation of national self in war remembrance. Koyasu Nobukuni asserts that the remembrance of the Fifteen Years’ War has produced divided positions: on the one hand, those who revise the historical facts of aggression and conceal their alteration, and on the other, those who criticize the concealment (Koyasu 1996, 199-227). The Japanese military’s perpetration of mass violence against citizens in neighbouring countries has been marginalized in public discourse, including history textbooks. Journalists, academics and human rights activists have made transnational efforts to create spaces and opportunities where the voices of survivors of Japanese aggression are heard. Their testimonies have been employed to give authentic accounts of the aggressions (ibid; also see, Ueno 1998/2004; Takahashi 1999). The authorities’ concealment has been also the target of accusations by government representatives in neighbouring countries. While Japan’s profile as militant aggressor has been the subject of contestations, its victimized past has been widely acknowledged in Japan’s collective memory. Koyasu argues that “what should be interrogated now again, in terms of the sense of ‘victimization,’ is the fact that historical representations of Japanese war-past were unified as ‘the only A-bomb victim country in the world.’ The question is: what is made invisible, covered, and deceptive for Japanese themselves” (Koyasu 1996, 238). Koyasu poses the question but does not articulate what exactly is made invisible for Japanese. His question rather implies, I would say, that the ability of self-knowledge is continually tested via these struggles over national history.

There are various strategies to manage anxiety about incompetent knowing and thus preserve the sense of national collectivity. Rightwing nationalists do not, in my observation, completely deny the events of wartime atrocities. Rather, they attempt to
politicize the ground of knowledge according to national divides, Japanese and Chinese most typically (Ōguma and Ueno 2003). By implying people’s inherited belonging to their country of origin, nationalists decide a cluster of knowledge which Japanese citizens are expected to know. In opposition to this position, some scholars and activists seek to collect the evidence of atrocities and help to present the survivors’ testimonies so that they would draw people’s recognition of “Japan’s aggressive side.” Thus acquired comprehensive historical knowledge is considered to be an ethical engagement in order to carry out “wartime responsibility” or “postwar responsibility” (Takahashi 1999). By learning the facts of the past, educators assert, one can become an appropriate citizen and contribute to the improvement of international relations. If I apply the analogy used in Said’s *Orientalism* (1979), Japan’s self stands against the ‘other’ by taking a mixed aggressor-victim relationship. Japan requires the authentic voices of the ‘other’ to complete its self-knowledge like the West. In contrast to the West, however, which assumes a competent capability of the knowledge production for the ‘other,’ Japan is characterized as a challenged knower. In fact, academics and activists quite commonly consider the history textbook issue as a proof that a civil society like that in the West has not been realized in Japan: “In today's Japan, people don’t express their opposition [against rightwing populists] but only pray that serious trouble will not occur. It cannot be helped if the overall lack of courage among citizens in this instance is seen as evidence that a trustworthy civil society does not yet exist in Japan. If this was in Western Europe, […] anti-rightwing demonstrations by tens of thousands would be organized […]” (Kondō 2001, 84, my translation).

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22 Japanese peace activists and history educators emphasize the importance to increase the recognition of “Japan’s aggressive side” [*nihon no kagaisha sei*] among Japanese citizens in Celine Rumalean’s documentary film *Yesterday is Now* (2002).
In the context of concealments and contestations, Ri Kōran’s obvious connection with Japanese colonial history allows her to be a unique mediator for war remembrance. Her films provide some traces of Japan’s imperialist projects, and her biographies allow readers to engage with her firsthand reflections on the wartime events. However, the films and Yamaguchi’s accounts do not escape from the continuous production of progressive time through media representations and technological developments. Her wartime films, providing a distance to the past through black-and-white form, have been copied and distributed on video to the public. Meanwhile, Yamaguchi’s contemporary media appearances in vivid colour have overridden the multilayered historicity of our present. A concern for me is that contemporary TV dramas and theatrical treatments of Ri Kōran circulate her images, bypassing any immediate examination of the wartime films featuring her. In the contemporary popular culture, I assert, Ri Kōran has been reconstituted to maintain the shared temporality of Japan and the progressive transition from the past to the present, as indicated in the student’s comment on the musical. While the spectacles of Ri Kōran and the imperial army allow audiences to ‘consume’ a period of the past, the student assumes a superior position of liberated postwar individual who can judge wartime consciousness. I would prefer to use the films to distort the sense that the past and the present are separated in order to pay attention to their sustaining forces to move and speak to present audiences.

3. Previous Studies

23 The trilogy became available in a Japanese classic video series from Kinema kurabu, the video distributor created by Tōhō, Nikkatsu, Daiei, and Kokusai Hōei in the mid 1980s. The video of Suzhou Nights was distributed by Shōchiku. The videos are currently out of print but still circulated in used video stores and public libraries.
Ri Kōran’s multilingual performance and diverse audiences across borders have lead present-day scholars to question the dominant assumptions of film studies regarding spectatorship and identity, colonialism and space, propaganda discourse, and audience desires (DeBoer 2004; Liu 2004; Stephenson, 1999, 2002; Wang 2005, 2007; Washitani 2001). Previously, scholars typically stereotyped her films by reading them simply as oppressive and deceptive propaganda texts. These researchers claimed that the fact of Japan’s aggressive and invasive war was displaced and justified by Japanese male protagonists’ affectionate relationships with the Chinese women performed by Ri Kōran (High 2003; Satō 1995; Yomota 2000). In contrast to these views, recent scholarship has begun to question Ri Kōran’s film identity while speculating about the audiences’ diverse perceptions of, and responses to, her films.

Peter B. High (2003) argues that her films supported Japan's invasive war through her roles as Chinese women who enjoy romantic relationships with Japanese male partners. He suggests that the Continental Trilogy compared male-female relationships to Japan-China politics, where Japan=man was a conqueror and China=woman was a conquered. He asserts that “[“Continental Trilogy”] were stupendously successful in Japan because they confronted the well-known hostility of the Chinese people toward the Japanese invaders and recast it as a “misunderstanding”. If only the Japanese would show the same patience and consideration Hasegawa [Japanese male character] shows toward [Ri Kōran], domestic audiences were told, the hostility would melt away and the Chinese would realize that the apparent aggression is but the affectionate prodding of a lover” (High 2003, 272). Similarly, Satō Tadao views that men’s sexual desire for women in the conquered land was typically inscribed in wartime
propaganda films. The erotic images provoked cinematic pleasure, as images of aggression and violence did, while realist description of rape or murder committed by soldiers was avoided. Instead, an illusion was created through cinematic narratives in which “a charming Chinese woman approaches a gentle and reliable Japanese man, and he allows her to love him” (Satō 1995, 75, my translation). Here, Satō only assumes the referentiality between film narrative and Japanese audience’s consciousness towards China, arguing that Ri Kōran’s popularity was supported by “her roles which distributed the illusion that Japan’s military attack would be willingly accepted by Chinese women” (ibid.). Yomota Inuhiko also argues that the Continental Trilogy tells us about the “ideology” which “justified Japan’s invasive war and colonial practices”: “[Each film in] the Continental Trilogy concludes its story by leaving a message that Japanese should show good examples to Chinese, save them from confusion and savageness, and allow them to receive the benefit of the civilization which Japanese belong to” (Yomota 2000, 118, my translation).

In High’s, Satō’s and Yomota’s attempts to articulate the trilogy’s propaganda effects, they postulates that gender and ethnic identities are inscribed as distinctive categories within the film. The scholars assign gender and ethnic categories, such as “Chinese,” “Japanese,” “man,” or “woman,” to film subjects including Ri Kōran’s characters. They inadvertently assume that a fixed substantiality of nation, gender, and language marked by a national border existed before the films. Thus, they preclude an understanding of how the categories are only reproduced in the film narrative. I would rather consider that the film narrative itself provides a site for constructing identity.

24 A few recent scholars question whether the trilogy strictly qualify as wartime propaganda films as government did not thoroughly control the films’ production and distribution in contrast to other officially approved “national policy” films (Furukawa 2003, 2, 10-11).
categories.

By postulating the films’ propaganda effects on audiences, the above scholars’ arguments invoke a question about audiences’ identification with film characters: did audiences gain pleasure through associating themselves with a male protagonist? The above interpretations of audience identification could only make sense when audiences locate themselves in the film narrative through the male protagonist’s agency. This reading obviously fails to account for varied audience desires beyond the identity categories of ‘Japanese’ or ‘man.’ Recent studies on Ri Kōran’s films have dealt with audiences’ multiple identities, as well as the circulation of desire within pan-Asianism in the 1930s and 40s. Washitani Hana, for example, directs our attention to Japanese female spectators and their mimicking relationship with the actress, as well as to the fantasy of cultural transgression offered by Ri Kōran’s performances (Washitani 2001). According to Washitani, Ri Kōran was so popular that “among young female students the trend was to give each other ‘Chinese’ nicknames, such as ‘You are Ri Bairan’, ‘You are Ri Hōran’” or to imitate Ri Kōran’s eyebrows in their make-up (Yomota ed. 2001, 270, my translation).25 That is, Ri Kōran presented a style into which a female viewer could slip with ease. Hers was a performance that could be imitated with pleasure, and was not merely a Chinese-ness essentially constituted by its definite biological differences from Japanese-ness. The films’ transnational appeal has been illustrated by Tamura Shizue’s interviews with Taiwanese fans (Tamura 2000), and by Shelley Stephenson’s analysis of the construction and reception of the star in the Japanese-controlled Shanghai press (Stephenson 1999). In search of a localized account of the imageries of Asia in an

25 More precisely, these were Japanized pronunciation of (pseudo-)Chinese names. The transliteration of Chinese characters into more familiar sounds was quite common and has a long Japanese literary tradition.
encompassing geopolitical framework, Yiman Wang discusses Yamaguchi Yoshiko’s representation of “borderless fantasy of Asia” in contrast to two other “border-crossing” actresses, Anna May Wong (1905-1961) and Maggie Cheung (1964-) (Wang 2007).

In my film analysis, I closely attend to Ri Kōran’s “border-crossing,” a notion through which one could postulate fixed geographical boundaries as locating the cinematic subject beyond or in between ethno-cultural borders. The previous studies tend to parallel her multilingual ability, her birthplace, and her film roles, and consider her as beyond or in-between ethno-cultural border(s). In other words, Ri Kōran is seen as an extremely fortunate and able person who transgressed pre-existing ethno-cultural borders, within which ordinary people were contained. However, I would argue that her actual performances in Manchuria-Japan co-produced films suggest a more nuanced mode of ethnocultural positioning. I would contend that Ri Kōran did not merely move across ethno-cultural borders, but participated in the actual ‘making sense’ of the borders as the films reframed ethno-cultural differences. Here are a couple of suggestive instances:

First, she performed in Japanese for the most part, except for minor sequences where she speaks to her character’s relatives or friends in Mandarin. Ri Kōran does not treat the two languages equally in the films. In addition, the actress was trained to demonstrate an idealized Japanese femininity and to erase any traces of her ‘native’ mannerisms, which she later referred to as Chinese-like. To further complicate the making of the “Chinese actress” Ri Kōran, it was her co-actor Hasegawa Kazuo, a former man-performing-woman actor (oyama) in kabuki, who taught her how to act like a woman (Yamaguchi and Fujiwara 1987, 124-5).²⁶ Ri Kōran’s identification with Manchuria was, ironically,

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²⁶ See Kano 2001 for further discussion on the performative construction of sex/gender in Japanese modern theatre.
reinvented by Japanese men so that she would appear as an authentic representation of femininity. Ri Kōran’s cinematic appearance, in that sense, destabilizes the notion of ethnic border-crossing that points to a spatial division of ethnic origins. If Ri Kōran, as a cultural commodity, refuses to be located within any geographic definition of ethnocultures, her performances can be usefully explored in relation to the specific power structures constructed through cinematic space and the interplays of the gaze in each film.

The crucial task in this research is to demonstrate how discursively produced subject positions in the wider context of Japan’s imperialism were incorporated or transformed in the particular subject positioning in the trilogy and Suzhou Nights. My analytical method treats gender and ethnicity as interconnected categories produced through spatial constructions rather than treating them as separate entities or as attributes of identity. In doing so, I avoid the assumption that the actress simply reflected or represented any particular preexisting positions or desires. With this approach I unpack intricate cultural codes and meanings woven in the narrative that possibly allowed audiences multiple and fluid projections of their own social and cultural circumstances.

The following chapter begins with an illustration of my initial responses to the films: what sort of relationship was created between me, as a spectator and researcher, and the wartime melodrama films? I use the autoethnographic account as a point of departure to elaborate on how a spectator’s subjective investments are solicitated by different assets of melodrama film. I show that the present bonding between a spectator and the wartime films unsettles the discursively constructed ‘war past.’
Chapter Two

Epistemology and methodology:
A strange spectator’s conversation with the past
through a reflexive examination of films

As historians have become increasingly self-conscious of history’s always-constructed and representational nature and its always-motivated and selective focus, history has lost its stability as the grounded site upon which knowledge of the past is accumulated, coherently ordered, and legitimized; rather, it has become an unstable site in which fragments of past representations do not necessarily ‘add up’ or cohere but, instead, are subject to ‘undisciplined’ (and often ‘undisciplining’) contestation and use.

(Sobchack 2000, 300)

1. Introduction

My first viewing of the Continental Trilogy films and Suzhou Nights made me quite upset. One of the things that troubled me the most was Ri Kōran’s characters’ derogatory comments about “Manchurians” or “Chinese people”, whose behaviors are explained in a generalizing and depoliticized manner, while at the same time re-presenting a ‘Chinese woman.’ In Song of the White Orchid, Sekkō apologizes to Kōkichi in fluent Japanese for Manchurians’ “rude manners” and explains that they are actually good at heart. This is her attempt to reconcile the situation when a man, “a person of Manchuria” according to Sekkō, pretends that he was run down by the rickshaw which Kōkichi is riding.27 The

27 The Qing Dynasty (1644-1912) was found by the Manchu people, and the last Qing Emperor Puyi became the nominal emperor of the State of Manchuria (1932-45). At this historical point, the majority ethnic group that constituted the state was Han people, who largely immigrated after the late 19th century (Duara 2003, 43-44). They are distinguished from ethnic Manchurian and continue to be the majority in the Chinese mainland. However, Manshū no hito, which literary translates a person of Manchuria, then largely
man perhaps intended to ask for reparation for his injury. The settler’s strange encounter with a native could indicate the economic hierarchy established between the two and the latter’s day-to-day resistance against the former. But Sekkō’s swift intervention paraphrases the hint of anti-colonial struggles as an issue of moral development, which simultaneously situates the native on the side of the underdeveloped. In *Suzhou Nights*, Kōran reflects back upon the hostility that she used to have against him and the Japanese and tells Kanō that the negative feeling was caused by her “foolish” misconception of their true intention. Again, she implies that the intellectual enhancement of the colonized would solve the battles between the two nations. The self-proclaimed ignorance also sounded as if it demonstrated Kōran’s humility. The gesture of humility can be seen as the performance of ‘feminine virtue’, but the rationale for represented social value is quite ambiguous. Kōran was supposed to represent “Chinese”, but the humble gesture rather recuperates the alleged virtue of the Japanese woman in nationalist discourse.

The gap between the four films’ modernist romantic flavor and the apparent ‘racist’ handling felt huge to me and left a lasting impression on my mind. Indeed, Ri Kōran’s singing performances in the films are undeniably remarkable. The depictions of growing intimacy between two actors are also fascinating. Spontaneous laughter and soft touches to each other betray my original expectation of an old, wartime film. They can rather solicit the emotional involvement of today’s audiences. In addition, the shots of city views and rural landscapes trigger my emotional reactions, such as awe, excitement, comfort, and nostalgia. More than half a century after they were premiered, the films sustain a certain quality to entertain audiences like me. The films’ strong impact implies these films’ uniqueness as a medium for historical inquiry. The films are not simply connoted Han Chinese rather than ethnic Manchurian.
archival materials that allow me to interrogate cultural practices during the war era; they also implicate the multilayeredness of time as perception, bodily experience and discursive practice. On the one hand, the films maintain cinematic force to move an audience; on the other hand, the political statements seem to be restricted to the past war period.

In retrospect, my unsettled feelings upon the initial viewing inspired me to question the assumptions about gender and ethnic identities, which I discussed in the previous chapter, and to develop my own framework for film analysis. My research was conducted as a bilateral feedback process: Existing theories of modern nation-state building informed my analysis of the particular power relations mediated by space and the gaze in the films starring Ri Kōran, while my epistemology of subject construction was further elaborated through my film analysis. In this chapter, I describe my epistemology and methodology developed through this feedback process.

2. Subject Positioning and Ideal Viewer

The main focus of my analysis is the mechanism of subject positioning provided through the trilogy and Suzhou Nights. I argue that the idea of subject positioning assists the theorization of cinematic space and subjects. Using this concept, I highlight dynamic and fluid aspects of subject construction that go beyond the limited notion of identity.

Identity could refer to various social and political categorizations, such as gender, race, ethnicity and class. Since the notion of identity is both “a category of practice and a category of analysis,” the adoption of ‘identity’ for analysis risks “unintentionally reproducing or reinforcing such reification” of politically fictitious categories (Brubaker
and Cooper 2000, 4-5, emphasis in the original). Since “identity” hinges upon the notion of fixed and definite material differences pre-existing before each category, I contend that an uncritical application of ‘identity’ to socio-cultural analysis could contribute to masking the productive processes of the categories. On the other hand, the notion of subject positioning allows researchers to pay attention to interactive processes in which identity categories are formed, assumed, confessed or revised.

Bronwyn Davies and Rom Harré argue that subject positions are not fixed but produced and negotiated in discursive practices (Davies and Harré 1990). Subject position is not considered as a normative social order that exists before people’s interactions, rather “rules are explicit formations of the normative order which is immanent in concrete human productions, such as actual conversations between particular people on particular purposes” (ibid, 1). The notion of subject positioning can also be applied to the intersectional constitutions of gender and other social categories (Straunøes 2003). The term intersectionality refers to “individuals with simultaneous membership in two or more social categories,” and “the consequences that result from that combination” (Pinderhughes 2008, 49; see also hooks 1988). It would be misleading to assume that human interactions and experiences can be fully represented through these analytical categories. Yet I relate my approach to the discussions about intersectionality as the scholars and I similarly seek to converse with existing analyses of socially and culturally constructed identities. The key difference is that I emphasize co-productive and multiple dimensions. When identity categories are seen as fixed, the productive mechanisms for each category are assumed to add up to make the whole social system. Dorthe Straunøes suggests that the intersectional approach can specify the workings of
social categories in the actual “doing” of concrete subjects (2005, 102, emphasis in the original). I consider that the intersectional approach effectively extends Davies’ and Harré’s “‘immanentist’ view” that focuses on the immediate sites of the day-to-day reproduction of gendered, ethnicized and racialized subjects.

The concept of subject positioning helps to articulate people’s participation in the production of social reality. As I go on to explore in this chapter, whereas film presents itself as continuous with the real, I do not consider that film representation is a replication of ‘reality’ that exists somewhere else beyond the medium. I would rather argue that film is a constitutive part of the real, a mediator that creates people’s realities. Here I want to clarify the linkage between subject positioning in lived experience and in film representation. After illustrating shifting and often conflicting images of cultural artifacts that represent ‘English’ identity, Stuart Hall suggests that subjective experiences mediated by cultural representations allow us to take on certain identities as true to ourselves:

[…] identity emerges, not so much from the inner core of our ‘one, true, self’ alone but in the dialogue between the meanings and definitions which are represented to us by the discourses of a culture, and willingness (consciously or unconsciously) to respond to the summons of those meanings, to be hailed by them, to step into the subject positions constructed for us by one of the discourses on ‘Englishness’ – in short, to invest our sympathies and feelings in one or other of those images, to identify. What we call ‘our identities’ are probably better conceptualized as the sedimentations over time of those different identifications or positionalities we have taken up and tried to ‘live’, as it were, from the inside, no doubt inflected by the particular mix of circumstances, feelings, histories and experiences which are unique and peculiar to us individual subjects (Hall, 1997).

Hall clarifies ‘identification’ by situating subjectivity in the categorical correspondence between concepts (gender, race, ethnicity, nationality, etc) and the existence of ‘I’. If I
paraphrase, identity categories gain the appearance of integrity and materiality through subjective investments of ‘I’. Film representation is one of the immanent sites through which subject positioning becomes ‘real’ by people’s subjective investments.

By assuming subject positioning through film representation, however, I do not mean to deny various ways of reading and multiple accesses to film narratives. In spite of film apparatus’ attempts to deliver totalizing effects, a spectator is not simply a passive receiver of offerings but can engage with visual texts creatively and/or critically (Ang 1989; Furukawa 2000; Gaines 1990). As discussed in Chapter One, Japanese female fans’ mimicry of a ‘Chinese’ star, Ri Kōran, transgressed national identity categories. The slide between the socially assigned category of a spectator, such as Japanese woman, and the identified image, ‘a Chinese star actress,’ can be theorized in reference to Judith Butler’s “The Force of Fantasy: Feminism, Mapplethorpe, and Discursive Excess” (2000). In this essay, Butler provides a psychoanalytical articulation of readers’ multiple “identificatory access” to visual representations (496). She suggests that spectators do not necessary identify with film subjects along the line of dualistic gendered positions projected by a film text. Her contention builds upon the analysis of fantasy by Jean Laplanche and J. –B. Pontalis, who claim that “fantasy is not the object of desire, but its setting” (Laplanche and Pontalis 1986, 26). Echoing Bulter as well as Laplanche and Pontalis, Mark Driscoll asserts that the setting of fantasy inscribe multiple positions, such as “active, passive, and verbal action of the scene,” through which a subject proliferates identities (Driscoll 1999, 235; see also Cowie 1997; Mayne 1997).

These accounts of the spectator’s multiple access complicate Laura Mulvey’s early theorization of “the male gaze,” which prominently tackles the construction of
gendered subjects through Hollywood films (Merck 2007; Mulvey 1975). Mulvey’s argument extends the concepts of Freudian psychoanalysis, including ‘scopophilia,’ the erotic pleasure tied into looking at objects, and traces the origin of the visual pleasure back to the early stage of ego development. The stark contrast between male and female subjects, whom a film respectively constructs as the owner of the gaze and the object of the gaze, inspired a generation of feminist film criticism not only to turn its attention to female spectatorship but also to what is absent in dominant films (Bobo 1988; Cowie 1997; de Lauretis 1985; Gledhill 1988; hooks 1992; Kuhn 1982; Merck 2007; Stacey 1990). For example, by underlining simultaneous formations of the object of the gaze and the ‘other’ through absence, bell hooks delineates the intersectional formation of gendered and racialized spectators in Hollywood films (hooks 1992). Hooks asserts that black woman spectators respond to the absence of black female protagonists in Hollywood films, in contrast to the objectification of white women, by doubting the legitimacy of the cinematic apparatus and by performing resistant readings against projected images.

The concept of ‘suture,’ or stitching, has been used to illuminate the work of a spectator who negotiates with the gap between the projected image and one’s desire to find a place in the film narrative (Hayward 2000, 378-385; Heath 1978; Koch 1985; Stacy 1993, 1994; see also Gledhill 1988). When a spectator projects an ideal and faultless self-‘image’ upon a star actor as if looking into a mirror, the spectator at the same time negotiates the perceived gap between the actor (ideal and whole) and the ‘I’ (partial and ‘lacking’), while viewing the film. Empathic response is another way for a spectator to manage the cognitive distance with the image. “[T]he operative mode” of
melodrama is, Linda Williams asserts, not simply a powerful force to entice audience sentiment (Williams 2001, 15). More precisely, it lies in the staging of moral conflict and the shaping of empathetic audience in response to the suffering victims: “melodrama is the cultural force that, beginning in the nineteenth century, supplied story materials about race, gender, and class already organized into visually compelling forms of pathos and action, already performable in pictures through a system of gesture and demeanor, and already given musical accompaniment on the stage” (ibid., 23; also see Brooks 1976).

Again, in William’s view, identity categories are in flux and woven into film narratives that mobilize spectators’ engagements. The bipolar sentiment, “pro-Tom” sympathy and “anti-Tom” antipathy, constitutes a major framework that determines ethical reasoning in American popular culture (Fiedler, 1982, Williams 2001/2002, 15). Rather than inspiring audiences’ critical intervention into unjust legal systems, Williams maintained, the narrative mode of melodrama enacts racial projections in which “a predominantly white America needs to believe in its own virtue vis-à-vis either the extreme suffering or the extreme villainy of the black male body” (Williams ibid., 20). Thus Williams shifts the notion of identification to consider spectators’ subject formation vis-à-vis film narratives.

The above arguments suggest that films do not necessarily deliver social and cultural categories to be realized as they are in people’s daily interactions. At the same time, the arguments do not fully reject the idea that film representation can mediate any sort of subject positioning in social reality. My initial feeling of unease with the trilogy and Suzhou Nights perhaps derived from the films’ limited success in making the protagonists desirable for me. Through the Japanese language used in conversations and subtitles, cultural and racial familiarity, as well as the specific genre(s) (‘Japanese film’
and melodrama), the films situated me as a ‘Japanese woman,’ as part of the projected film subject. My racial, ethnic/linguistic, and gender identities were projected by the films. In addition, being a bilingual speaker living away from Japan, Ri Kōran’s seemingly perfect multilingual performance outside of the present boundary of Japan looked both desirable and identifiable. Knowing her career path ahead, her films were to me archival records of the earliest works by one of the most active and prominent modern Japanese women. Literally and also in a broader sense, she spoke my language. It now seems that my raw fascination with Ri Kōran’s performing persona fueled my aggravation with her political position in the film.

What would my contradictory response indicate in terms of the spectator’s subject positioning provided by film? Judith Mayne pointedly summarizes the contested arguments on film’s address and perception: “[i]t is one thing to assume that […] cinema is a discourse (or a variety of discourses), and to assume, that is, that the various institutions of the cinema do project an ideal viewer, and another thing to assume that those projections work” (Mayne 1997, 159). My complex reactions demonstrate a gap between an ideal spectator projected by a film and an actual spectator’s unsuccessful identification with the film’s projection. It is also suggested here that a film spectator can inquire into the manners of subject positioning in cinematic imageries even when summoned as an ideal spectator.

In what follows, I first elaborate on the notion of film space in general. I then discuss the significance of film space and subject positioning for my analysis of the binary construction of Japan and China in my study.
3. Film Space

Focusing on four melodramatic adventure features co-starring Ri Kōran, this thesis abstracts and theorizes key mechanisms through which subject positioning is produced vis-à-vis film space. I consider that film space is intertextualized with the social production of space. At the same time, since film space is not a simple reflection of socially produced space, my task is to develop an epistemology that acknowledges the unique qualities of film space. In what follows, I explore three aspects of the spatiality in films: phenomenology of film space, spatial metaphors, and gaze-landscape interconnection. These three are not independent components of film narrative, but rather interrelated systems of subject production in film representation. Also, viewers’ interpretation of film space is referenced to various chains of significations within the given film, as well as to the systems of meanings beyond the film narrative.

Phenomenologically speaking, film space is constructed as a part of the reproduction of physical ‘reality’ to which film characters belong. The film’s depictions of places can be either artificially created in studio sets or they capture actual locations, buildings or landscapes. In either case, it is up to the audiences’ reading whether the images attain coherence to become part of the foundational geographic setting and spatial continuity of a film world. In classic narrative cinema, especially, “space and time are coherently represented in order to achieve the reality effect” (Hayward 2000, 343). Shots are organized within spatial continuity and chronological time, and audiences make sense of the relationship between characters and objects according to the provided scheme. “Given that mainstream classic cinema assumes an unfolding of the traditional narrative of ‘order/disorder/order-restored’ (or enigma or resolution), time is implicitly
chronological and so must be seen to run contiguously with space” (ibid.). To put it differently, the matching of specific place, characters’ actions, and the chronological marks within film narrative plays a crucial role in film narrative’s coherency. Unless it is intended to challenge the ordinary perception of the ‘real,’ film narrative is synthesized so that the characters’ relation to objective reality in the filmic world should parallel audiences’ relation to their own sense of reality. Characters may display extraordinary physical abilities but the basic time-space coherency in the film world is organized to be an extension of audiences’ lived experiences. Thus cinematic space represents the physicality of the film world and mediates the realness of film narrative. The constructed realness entails a naturalist assumption about the physical presence of cinematic space: any places captured in film exist, or at least existed at the historical moment when the sequence was filmed, regardless of the fictitious components of a given film. In this context, studio set, architecture, and landscape grant a similar sense of physical reality in representations of film narrative. In addition to the sense of versimilitude, the mechanical neutrality of cinematography enhances the impression of ‘realness’: “The mechanical bears testimony to its true existence and is a guarantee of objectivity. ‘Seeing is believing’”(Trinh 1991, 54). As Trinh argues, the erasure of the camera operator from the photographic document provides the view that film ‘reproduces’ rather than merely represents the world.

While cinematic space is presented as extended physical reality and claims its natural status, films tend to employ polarized spatial contrasts to visualize social relations on screen. Through contrasts, cinematic space provides something more than a depiction of physical reality, a spatial metaphor. The extreme heights and depths of, for example,
the screen’s vertical axis has been employed to dramatize an individual’s relation with powerful political or historical forces. According to Kristen Whissel:

Precisely because verticality automatically implies the intersection of two opposed forces – gravity and the force required to overcome it – it is an ideal technique for visualizing power. Verticality thereby fascinates a rather literal naturalization of culture in which the operation and effects of (social, economic, military) power are mapped onto the laws of space and time (Whissel 2006, 23).

Whissel also points out that ascent and descent are associated with emotional connotations and feelings. Upward mobility “implies lightness, vitality, freedom, transcendence, defiance, and lofty ideals”. On the other hand, downward mobility suggests “heavy burdens, inertia, subordination, loss and the void” (ibid, 24). The uses of a vertical axis became prominent with the recent developments of digital special effects, but available technologies had already promoted the metaphorical connection between verticality and the notion of power in association with high rise buildings or stairs since early 20th century (Whissel ibid., 23-24; also, see Liu 2004, 37-38).

Whissel’s take on film space can be called a formalist approach to spatial metaphors. The approach tends to separate the implication of spatial contrasts in film narratives and the meanings of space that constitute social life. This distinction significantly limits the reading of film text. Mitsuko Wada-Marciano stressed the intertextuality between cinematic space and the symbolization of space in other forms of popular culture: “When filmic technique is placed in a cultural context, the spaces start revealing other cultural codes and meanings, intertextualized with other spheres of the period’s popular culture” (Wada-Marciano 2001, 161). The connotations of the spatial inscription in film can go beyond the physicality of space and can provide more intricate meanings in reference to other vehicles of cultural production than film representation. In
juxtaposing the analyses of the social production of urban space and culturally constructed notion of the rural, Wada-Marciano argues that “the film invents a country space appealing to the nostalgia of city dwellers, and by obscuring class differences it legitimizes a middle-class audience or community” (Wada-Marciano 2001, 162). The polarized depiction of rural and urban not only serves to appeal to urban audiences, but the socio-cultural position of the film’s idealized spectator is projected by the ways in which the spatial contrasts are presented.

In addition to the rural/urban contrast, the contrast of interior and exterior is a means of spatial metaphor that delineates film subjects’ gendered positions. The different characteristics of indoor and outdoor spaces are articulated through the gendered polarization of action in classic Hollywood films. Action-taking and issue-solving are typically restricted to male characters, who lead the stories to unfold. Conversely, melodrama films are commonly centred upon the actions and relationships of women characters. In melodrama, grand politics and public matters are projected onto the interpersonal drama of tensions and resolutions, where characters often experience coincidental and unforeseen consequences that go beyond their control. In the dualistically gendered scheme, actions take place in open exterior space, and psychological dramas are staged indoors (Elsaesser 1972; Grodal 1997). I should note here that spatial construction of gender is not solely defined within cinematic narratives but also overdetermined through various social structures. The exclusion from political and economic arenas shapes women’s differentiated mobility and particular relations with time-space have shaped women’s lives (Rose 1993). The imagined bonding between national subjects and the land is also gendered, through which men are assembled into the
nation metonymically (Sharp 1996). By taking actions to guard or promote the nation, every male citizen comes to embody the nation. On the other hand, as McClintock asserted, “[women] are typically construed as the symbolic bearers of the nation but are denied any direct relation to national agency” (1993, 62). I argue that one’s gendered position and national belonging is constructed and sanctioned through one’s relationship to socially constructed interior and exterior space.

Meanwhile, film subjects’ gazes, at each other and at the landscape, delineate the power relations among them. In “When the Woman Looks”, Linda Williams applied the spectators’ voyeuristic pleasure, which Christian Metz (1982) and Laura Mulvey (1975) had suggested, to her readings of film characters: “[T]he female protagonist often fails to look, to return the gaze of the male who desires her. In the classical narrative cinema, to see is to desire. […] The relay of looks within the film thus duplicates the voyeuristic pleasure of the cinematic apparatus itself” (Williams 1984, 83). Williams illustrated how main female characters’ looks are regulated in film narratives and thus provide them with distinctive subjective positions: “the failure or frustration of her vision can be the most important mark of her sexual purity” (ibid), or “the woman’s gaze is punished […] by narrative processes that transform curiosity to masochistic fantasy” (ibid, 85).

Gillian Rose extends the notion of voyeuristic pleasure to her feminist analysis of cultural geography. Rose sees the ‘masculine gaze’ at work in both field work and images of landscape in geography and elaborates the close tie among pleasure, power, and knowledge: “[‘masculine gaze’] sees a feminine body which requires interpreting by the cultured knowledgeable look; something to own, and something to give pleasure. The same sense of visual power as well as pleasure is at work as the eye traverses both field
and flesh: the masculine gaze is of knowledge and desire” (Rose 1993, 98-99). Rose’s notion of gaze-landscape relation is applicable to my study. As I will illustrate in the following two chapters, film characters’ power positions are delineated through the interconnection of gaze, landscape and a sense of ownership in the trilogy and Suzhou Nights.  

As mentioned earlier, Mulvey’s application of psychoanalysis has been criticized for its universalizing tendency and the essentialization of dualistic sexual differences, whose schematic problem is found in Rose’s theorization (Nash 1996). Rose’s significant implication for me is to see landscape not as a material object but as a locale that mediates the production of subject positioning. I assert that cinematic representation of space also mediates both film characters’ positioning and audiences’ positioning. I also want to suggest that the power of the gaze is frequently demonstrated referring not only to gendered subjectification but also to racial privilege and domination (Gaines 1988; Griffin 2003; Hall 1990; hooks 1992). As mentioned earlier, I consider that identity categories, such as gender, ethnicity and race, are flexible and intersecting constructs. The relay of looks, along with the gaze at landscape, registers intricate power relations among film subjects more complex than a vertical hierarchy.

By paying particular attention to the interconnected production of film space and the interplay of looking, I examine film’s reification of the Japanese-Chinese binary. Theoretically, the binary postulates that the national boundary derived from existing geographic and linguistic borders. As I discussed in the previous chapter, however, these borders were in flux before 1945. Nonetheless, the marking of border is significant as it was not only incorporated into, but also reconstituted by, visual representation and
subjects’ performances in Ri Kōran films.


The current theoretical abstraction of race in colonial studies centers upon the geopolitical contexts of U.S. and European colonialism. Ming-cheng M. Lo pointed out that “[o]ne central feature of this Eurocentrism of colonial studies manifests itself in the inadequate historization of the ‘colo[u]r code’” (Lo 2002, 285). To merely apply this concept of ‘race’ in studies of East Asia ends up obscuring the specificity of how the politics of borders and bodies manifest in this region. He suggested that the theoretical language of colonial studies “is inadequate in addressing the cases where the dynamics of hierarchical ethnic categories are not constructed along the axis of marked physical differences” (ibid, 286). While the absence of ‘color code,’ produced by geopolitical positioning of subjects through modern epistemologies and technologies, creates the appearance of the continuity among Asians, I want to suggest that Japan’s colonial imagination and practices were constructed around both differences and sameness.

Japan’s imperialist culture is not simply deduced by Orientalism’s theoretical premises based on Euro-American cultural practices in the 18th and 19th century. In her discussion on Japanese modern literature, Atsuko Sakaki asserts that:

For Japan to reproduce China was never a simple act of borrowing. In order to achieve its status as civilized in Sinocentric East Asia, Japan had to become a microcosm of China. This strategy inevitably involved an inquiry into Japan’s own identity: the irony of “being someone else in order to be oneself,” like the irony experienced by colonies in the time of imperialism, cultivated a consciousness of self-contradiction, dilemma, and hybridity. […] The relationship between a subordinate and a hegemony, was transformed after the confirmation of another hegemonic power, the “West,” in East Asia in the 1840s. […] China, in the Japanese literary imagination, began to offer either a model of
resistance to Westernization or a potential object of colonization (Sakaki 1999, 187).

Also, Sakaki suggests that Mieke Bal’s model of “two mobile positions as entanglement” is applicable to the polarized formation of China and Japan, as the essence of contrasted entities is postulated differently and the connections between the two are reinvented accordingly in the different phases of cultural exchange (Sakaki 2006, 12; see also Bal 1999). As I demonstrate in the following chapters, the films featuring Ri Kōran mediated Japan’s imagined embodiment of the West and manipulated the ambiguous symbolic boundaries between Japanese and Chinese, in order to confront and strategically incorporate the “self-contradiction, dilemma, and hybridity” of Japanese nation.

One of the strategies in the promotion of Japan’s imperialism and colonization was, as Oguma Eiji asserts, the discursive practices of “Asianism” (ajiashugi), which claimed Japan’s inherited belonging to Asia. Japan’s cultural continuity with neighbouring countries, which in fact testifies to centuries of Sino-centrism in East Asia, was appropriated in the rationalization of Japan’s ‘leadership’ among (to-be) allied Asian countries. As Oguma indicated, Japan was ambiguously positioned, claiming to occupy and control subordinate ‘Others’ while presupposing the West’s threatening power over ‘us’ (Oguma 1998, 3-9). In the same vein, Gao Yuan’s study of tourist development in Japan explores the juxtaposition of its imperialism and the Western gaze in the early and mid-19th century (Gao 2002). The politics of the gaze was far more complicated than the dualistic power relations between the owner of the gaze and the one being looked at. She examines the discourse around international tourism and articulates the complication of interrelated representations of Japan-Asia-West. In the development of the international tourist industry from the late 19th century, the stereotypical images of ‘primitive’ Japan
were appropriated – geisha, fujiyama – to appeal to Western tourists. On the other hand, tourists from neighbouring countries to Japan were impressed by the stories of allegedly undefeated modern civilization of Japan, stories to justify its colonial dominance and invasive wars. The advancement of an international tourist route, through China, Manchuria, Korea and Japan, went hand-in-hand with Japan’s military encroachment in the Chinese mainland. As a self-claiming ‘host country’ of international tourism, equipped with modern accommodation and transportation, “Japan internalized the Oriental gaze on the East imposed by the West and made attempts to discover, evaluate, and preserve ‘tourist resources’ of ‘True East’” (Gao 2002, 155, my translation). At the same time, Gao argues, Japan had constantly suffered the dilemma to be seen as ‘untrue East’ by the West, and ‘untrue West’ by the East. The mobilization of tourists, as indicated by Gao, was a simultaneous process in which the meanings of culture, time, and space were also defined.

According to Mark Driscoll, these ambivalent and shifting positions shaped in relation to the ‘West’ and Asian ‘other’ were performed as “splitting and reversals of identification (between gender, ethnicity, colonizer and colonized)” in literary works in the early 20th century (Driscoll 1999, 232). Driscoll contends that the “Japanese male imperial subject enjoys a radical slippage between seemingly contradictory identifications” (ibid., 235). Through the essays by the colonial journalist, Ishimori Shin’ichi, in the 1920s, Edogawa Rampo’s detective novels in 1920s, and Yumeno Kyūsaku’s ‘erotic-grotesque-nonsense’ novels, Driscoll traces common threads of “field work” to visit urban centers and colonial peripheries as well as “dream work” to utilize fantasy that “reverse[s] and multipl[ies] identifications and desire” (ibid., 234; 239,
emphasis in the original). Dressed in drag, disguising gender, ethnicity, race and class, and speaking in multiple languages such as French, Russian, Korean, Japanese and Chinese, Ishimori introduced various scenes and the somewhat exaggerated “decadent glory” of people in the colonial cities of Seoul, Pusan, and Dalian to the readers of the popular monthly magazine, *Korea Digest*, widely read by Japanese, Koreans and Chinese in Japan’s colonial cities (ibid., 231-234). Radically split “detective, victim, and criminal” characters who sometimes look and act like the colonized ‘other’ were, according to Driscoll, prominent in Edogawa’s major detective horror fictions in 1920s and 30s, whose characteristics were shared by Yumeno’s novels (ibid., 238-39).

I would suggest that the radical splitting and disguise can also be seen as a repercussion of “colonial mimicry” in which “the excess or slippage produced by the ambivalence of mimicry (almost the same, *but not quite*) does not merely ‘rupture’ the discourse, but becomes transformed into an uncertainty which fixes the colonial subject as a ‘partial presence’” (Bhabha 1984, 127). In the radical splitting that Driscoll suggested, the colonizer imitates the colonial subjects’ labour of assimilation and presents himself as traces of the “partial presence” of the colonial subjects. In the fantasy of Empire, however, it seems that the multiple positioning of Japanese imperialists was a sign of their prestige since “*not quite*” assimilated subjects were constantly sanctioned by the colonizer so as to retain the power of domination.28 The splitting subject positions parallels the characters that Ri Kōran played in melodramatic adventure films and the

28 A friend of mine, whom I met in Toronto, is an ethnic Korean raised in Japan. He told me a story passed down from his grandfather who was in colonial Korea. Imperial assimilation policy imposed on Koreans Japanese names and prohibited them from speaking in Korean. But colonial officials discriminated food supply for non-Japanese from Japanese by screening who were *not Japanese enough*. For example, when rice was provided by Japanese colonial officials to residents, recipients were told to pronounce a Japanese phrase (‘gojū goen gojū gosen’) which contained the consonant (‘g’) that was difficult to distinguish for people who acquired Korean as the main language.
way diverse fans projected their desires onto her. The films did not construct ethnic
differences between Chinese and Japanese as the expression of bodily essence. Rather,
the bodily similarities were appropriated when the performers of Japanese origin played
the roles of Chinese men and women. The bilingual fluency and familiar appearance
provided Ri Kōran with an authentic voice, a position from which to represent sentiments
and decisions of Chinese people to Japanese spectators. Conversely, communists are
depicted as irrational, coercive enemies, thereby making Japan’s efforts to achieve
economical and military dominance in China look righteous. Ri Kōran thus represented
the goal of Pan-Asianist cultural campaigns, which attempted to erase cultural and
linguistic differences by promoting Japanese “imperialization” (kōminka) among people
in the colonies and occupied territories (Robertson 1998; Baskett 2005; Wang 2007).

It should be noted here that the binary logic of ethnicity, Chinese and Japanese, is
constructed in the films through performances of cultural and language exchanges
between the characters performed by Ri Kōran and Japanese male leading roles. For
example, *Song of the White Orchid* suggests that Sekkō has not yet attained the flawless
mastery of Japanese in spite of her obvious fluency in conversations. Kōkichi corrects her
errors word by word while Sekkō learns to read and write in Japanese. He also mentions
that she needs not only to master the language but also to make efforts to understand the
real feelings of Japanese people. Meanwhile, Sekkō at times acts as Kōkichi’s demanding
instructor when he learns to converse in Mandarin. While these scenes are not explicitly
eroticized, they suggest a growing intimacy, represented through laughs and soft body
touches during the mutual exchanges. With the connotation of an emerging romance, they
seem to open themselves to, and merge into, each other. At the same time, their
interactions sustain a binary notion of Chinese and Japanese, both as cultural categories and as people. In effect, the hybrid nature of Japanese imperialism is transmuted into a notion of binary differences in their exchanges. What they share, in fact, is the authority to correct the other’s ‘errors’ in speech and writing when adopting the other’s language. In other words, their instructions of each other prohibit the hybridization of cultures at the very moment when it is most likely to occur. The division of Japanese and Chinese nations is produced through prohibition, thus situating the film’s characters so as to claim, negotiate and contest their positions according to the Japanese-Chinese border constructed in the films.

The performed Japanese-Chinese binary is an important context for me to locate the cinematic space of the trilogy and Suzhou Nights. The films’ narratives are located mainly on the Chinese mainland. The physical and geographic senses of the Japan-China border do not do much to determine the positioning of the film’s subjects. Instead, it is the film’s cinematic space that enacts binary differences by allowing the actors to play out polarized qualities, such as progress and backwardness, unity and destruction, affection and distrust. Each of these qualities is associated with the Japanese-Chinese binary. Indoor space, in particular, provides miniature sites into which the conditions of the two nations are projected. The contrasted spatial qualities of the *ie* (house/family) and differently assigned subjects’ mobilities provide signifying grids to which characters’ power positions are elaborated in relation to each other. The discursive construction of national subjectivity, which regulates one’s behavior and sense of self through gendered relationships to space, offers reference points for the positioning of subjects in the films.

In Song of White Orchid and the following Ri Köran melodrama features,
representations of the *ie* ('house/family') maintain great power as metaphorical materializations of the spatiality and imagined unity of the imperialist nation. The interior space at the same time serves as a site where film characters’ national desirability is presented through their gendered performances. These two layers of significations operate interdependently while also situating the films intertextually in the political and cultural discourses of the *ie* and domestic space. As I examine in detail in the next chapter, it is through the metaphors of the *ie* and the characters’ interior performances that the films delineate the mutually productive hierarchies of gender and ethnic positioning in the imperial order. While the film characters’ locations within the power structure are assigned to each through spatial representations, the politics of the gaze interacts with the spatial hierarchy and occasionally counteracts it.

5. Melodrama Film as a Mediator of Historical Continuities and Contiguities

My approach to using films for mediating objective and subjective notions of national history was motivated by numerous encounters prior to and during the research. The utterances of friends and acquaintances as well as public deliberations shed lights on the particular processes of colonial dominations and violence during the Fifteen Years’ War. In collective and individual forms, persistent attempts have been made at once to bring back the memories and disrupt homogenizing discourses securing a national unity hinged upon an allegedly shared temporality. I was not a researcher to objectively investigate historical material detached from my circumstances but frequently involved in the retelling of wartime events from the perspectives that were disqualified as illegitimate through the standardization of national history.
The urban sphere serves as a “contact zone” that enables the meetings of the marginalized and the centre, the past and the present. The contacts assist the “insurrection of knowledges,” which works against the institutionalized and centralized productions of knowledge organized in a society (Foucault 1997/2003, 9). Urban centres, like Toronto and Kyoto, where I have lived during the last 18 years, enabled my postcolonial encounters. I call them “postcolonial encounters” because they included a spectrum of pedagogical agendas and effects, varying from explicit and well-planned educational events to cultural entertainment, and to a spontaneous utterance. Since my first entry to Canada in 1998, I have participated in at least three war-remembrance projects related to Japanese military aggressions. First was “The Forgotten Holocaust in Asia and the Pacific, 1931-1945: Japan's Germ Warfare in WW II” organized by the Global Alliance for Preserving the History of WW II in Asia. Opening in San Francisco in July 5th 1998 and traveling to several cities in the US and Canada, the exhibit included visual presentations of video and photography of atrocities committed by the Japanese military in China. In 2001, I worked as a volunteer for a theatre play performed by Yoshiji Watanabe and his company, Saikai (The Reunion). My role was to project English and Mandarin subtitles on a small screen over the stage, in order to present the translations of Japanese lines. From 2000 to 2002, I worked as a translator and editing assistant for a documentary film, Yesterday is Now, produced by a friend of mine, Celine Rumalean. The film features a wide range of activists and artists dealing with the

29 This notion of urban sphere as “contact zone” was inspired by Baryon Posadas’s unpublished paper, “History in a Hall of Mirrors: The Spatial and Temporal Logics of Detectives and Doppelgangers in Abe Kōbō’s The Box Man.” See also Pratt (1992) which articulates the concept of “contact zone” between the colonizer and the colonized.

30 Coincidentally, a few days after their show in Toronto occurred the 911 incidents, and the theatre company was in New Jersey when it happened.
remembrance of the 15 Years’ War and the Japanese government’s compensation for survivors victimized by Japanese military. Also, through personal connections and academic conferences, I became acquainted with Theodore Goosen, who authored “Writing the Pacific War in the Twenty-First Century” (2003), and two novelists that he discussed in the article, Rui Umezawa and Kerri Sakamoto, who are based in Toronto. Goosen’s analysis covered Umezawa’s The Truth about Death and Dying (2002) and Sakamoto’s One Hundred Million Hearts (2003) in addition to Dennis Bock’s The Ash Garden (2001), asserting that WWII has never been “treated on this scale, or with so much attention to the Japanese side,” in Canadian literature.

These transnational movements assured my sense of continuity between Toronto and Kyoto, Japan, where I previously lived as a university student and a graduate student for about 7 years. In 1997, I attended a testimonial talk by a Nanking Massacre survivor and a screening of the documentary Murmuring (dir. Byun Young-Joo) on Korean women survivors who had been forced into military sexual slavery. Through friends involved in the testimonial talk and the screenings, I became acquainted with students of Korean descent who told me about the issues of citizenship, ethnic discrimination, and their responses. Around the same time, in the graduate school, I met a student who was investigating documents related to Ishii Yoshirō, who studied medicine in the university and became the leader of the biological warfare unit called Unit 731, which is known today to have experimented on Chinese prisoners of war and civilians in the State of Manchuria during the Fifteen Years’ War. As these instances suggest, the urban sphere assists not only the “resurrection of knowledges” but also motivates networking among the actors who actively put-together subjugated knowledges and circulate them in various
forms. The urban space situates a film spectator within diverse contexts that a film can be read against.

I should note here that the encounter between the margin and the centre does not necessarily entail a harmonious unison but can cause aggressive reactions. Among the few hundred in the audience in the testimonial talk by a Nanking Massacre survivor, three ‘extreme right’ activists attended. Now I am reconstructing the event from my memory: Accompanied by a translator, the survivor spoke about what he saw when he entered Nanking following the massacre. The activists were completely mixed in with the audience members until one of them stood up, in the middle of a Japanese professor’s talk, and began to accuse him of misrepresenting historical facts. They persistently questioned the death toll of the massacre. The professor and another Japanese presenter responded in a somewhat calm manner but disagreed with them. The Chinese presenter was quietly sitting beside the Japanese presenters. When a man sitting close to the two vocal activists pulled out a weapon to threaten the presenters, the audience began to panic. Many stood up and some shouted at the activists. I saw the three men from a distance and was not sure what the weapon actually was. But a female friend of mine told me during a break that she was just a few feet away from them, one of whom held a knife, which frightened her. At the end of the meeting, I went out and saw the old man from China coming out of the lecture room. Guarded by young men, he looked much smaller than on the stage, which again emphasized the inappropriateness of the armed threat. At the same time, I thought about my grandfather, around the same age as the Nanking survivor, who had taken part in the Japanese Imperial Army in Northern China.

31 I don’t exactly remember the numbers, but as far as I recall, the professor indicated the death toll was twenty to thirty thousands, and the accusers mentioned the evidences to make the death toll several hundreds.
This projection led me to wonder at the elderly Chinese presenter’s age and the length of the journey that he had to take from where he lived to appear at this meeting. His labour in submitting his voice to correct the constructed void in historical knowledge – or collective ignorance, if you will – was never mentioned in the meeting. The incident alerted me that the aggression and sacrifice that once instituted imperialism were not over yet. They tend to repeat so that “subjugated knowledges” are in ‘their place’ at the moment when the bearers of these knowledges publicly contest the system of domination (Foucault 1997/2003; Felman 2002). At the verge of the violent attempts to sanction public discourses, personally told stories from friends, acquaintances and relatives gain the notion of local resistances against the totalizing forces. The stories allowed me to pay attention to the agencies and subjectivities that are not represented as primary makers of national history.

The nation as “imagined community” is a cultural artifact produced through the articulation and dissemination of concepts, commodities and technologies (Anderson 1991). The following three characteristics of the nation are drawn from Anderson. First of all, the nation is imagined as a limited community. In other words, national space and population are managed in order to maintain national boundaries against other nations. Secondly, the nation assumes its sovereignty. Thirdly, the nation is imagined as a community, in which the members share a homogenous space and shared temporality and

32 Here I want to clarify a difference between Anderson’s assumptions and mine. Anderson mainly examines Euro-American nations and theorizes the political transition from religious state to secular government. My study deals with Japan in 1930’s and ’40’s, in which the Emperor played both political and religious roles. The state religion, kokka-shintō or state shintō, was a modern product and an invented tradition (Hobsbawn 1992), and the state promoted the demolition of local religious communities and practices, including Shugendō or shamanism. While the actual power to make political decisions was divided between the parliament, the civil bureaucracy, the military, and the imperial household, the sovereign power of the Emperor was confirmed by the Constitution of Empire of Japan, or, Meiji Constitution, that came into effect in 1890.
maintain the sense of togetherness without being directly acquainted with each other (ibid. 1991, 7). The notion that a nation is an imaginary community indicates manifolds of the relationship between cinematic representation and nation-making. Films constitute a part of “a series of multi-layered intertextual tales” that maps out dominant cultural or regional identities and how the border should be maintained (Mains 2004, 253).

While Anderson’s definition of nation insisted on the shared temporality of nation, the technology and aesthetics that made the Trilogy and Suzhou Nights a nation-making tale were bounded by the time when the films were produced. Since the emergence of television broadcasting, video, satellite, and cable systems, the status and experiences of film viewing have been significantly changed. Miriam Hansen argues that “[t]he spatioperceptional configurations of television within the domestic environment has broken the spell of the classical diegesis; the compulsive temporality of public projection has given way to ostensibly more self-regulated yet privatized, distracted, and fragmented acts of consumption” (Hansen 1997, 135). Hansen suggests that theoretical speculations on cinematic apparatus and ideal spectator hinged upon the film-spectator relationship of classical Hollywood films, and “the mode of reception this spectator was supposed to epitomize is itself becoming a matter of the past” (ibid., emphasis added). I agree with him in that the recent technological and industrial shifts in film distribution and consumption offer different senses of the public sphere and individuality that did not exist in 1930’s or ’40’s. I would suggest that the distribution of wartime films might be perpetuating a consumerist desire for commodity fetishism. Yumiko Iida contends that the fetishization of the commodities that stand for ‘Japan’ is in fact the unifying force of
Japanese post-modern nationalism (Iida 2003).\textsuperscript{33} The consumption of classic films through videos and DVDs ought not be simply equalized with film narratives’ sustaining totalizing effects on spectators but instead understood in relation to the specific economy of signs that situates the viewers/consumers.

Hansen’s argument targets positivist historical studies in which a film and its viewers coexisted in a shared cultural, economical and political circumstance in the same time period. But what about today’s retrospective viewers of classic films? If the ideas of simultaneity which underpinned the formation of modern nation-states were created and maintained by cultural and pedagogical means including public media, and if what was contended to be lost by Hansen in the contemporary visual culture is this imagined spatial and temporal commonality among national subjects, what would be the temporal and spatial conditions of present viewership? While the spatial grounds for nation-states and national histories seem fragmented, classic popular films, including Ri Kōran’s, are located now in the complex layers of historical re-telling and remembrance. As I presented some of the cases in Toronto and Kyoto, political assertions and artistic representations of the Fifteen Years’ War have destabilized the regulated chronology of past, present and future. Public and private expressions, debates and discourses have reconstituted the wartime \textit{past} interwoven into our multilayered senses of reality at personal and collective levels (Leung 2001).

Gilles Deleuze describes our sense of the present as follows:

\textit{Between the past as pre-existence in general and the present as infinitely}

\textsuperscript{33} Since the indigenization of Euro-American popular culture(s) is central in the formation of Japanese popular culture, Iwabuchi Kōichi contends that cultural traditions have lost its restrictive status to claim national representation (Iwabuchi 2001). Only ‘J’ sign works, such as in J-pop (a genre of popular music) and J league (national succor league), to mobilize mass desire for national collectivity, Iida asserts (Iida 2003).
contracted past there are, therefore, all the circles of the past constituting so many stretched or shrunk regions, strata, and sheets: each region with its characteristics, its ‘tones’, its ‘aspects’, its ‘singularities’, its ‘shining points’ and its ‘dominant’ themes. Depending on the nature of the recollection that we are looking for, we have to jump into a particular circle. It is true that these regions (my childhood, my adolescence, my adult life, etc.), appear to succeed each other. But they succeed each other only from the point of view of former presents which marked the limit of each of them. They coexist, in contrast, from the point of view of the actual present which each time represents their common limit or the most contracted of them. What Fellini says is Bergsonian: ‘We are constructed in memory; we are simultaneously childhood, adolescence, old age and maturity.’ What happens when we search for a recollection? We have to put ourselves into the past in general, then we have to choose between the regions (Deleuze 1989, 99).

If the present is conceived as various layers of memories and a recollection means to “choose between the regions,” why film cannot be a vehicle for us to embrace the present-ness of the past and to directly work with a chosen “region”?

The regions of memories are constituted of sights and sounds as well as touch, taste and smell, which can be kept and retrieved in various forms. In The Skin of Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses, Laura Marks stresses that the critique of visuality should not solely focus on the instrumental faculty of the vision which created objects for control and consumption (2002, 131). She maintains that films and videos can be used for the attempts “to reconstruct those memories by engaging with the object,” as “memory is encoded in objects through contact” (ibid., 129). Marks’s utterances, I suggest, open up the circuits of recognition that have been located remote from the legitimised historical knowledge. Is any sense of touch implicated in the re-telling of histories? I would say, the “contact” enabled in the “contact zone” is not a mere metaphor but precisely describes what is happening in the encounter between the bearer of colonial memories and the listeners. The contacts with presenters, friends, and
acquaintances, as well as various forms of representations, accompany different levels of physical involvement and ‘touch.’ And when these encounters are remembered, as my memory of the testimonial talk implies, the remembering triggers the resurfacing of sense memories. Marks also asserts that “cinema itself appeals to contact – to embodied knowledge, and to the sense of touch in particular – in order to recreate memories” (ibid., 129). Films have a great potential to entice viewers’ engaged viewing and bodily reactions. Especially in melodrama films such as the trilogy and Suzhou Nights, the images of female body mediate the direct tie between film narrative and viewers’ reaction (Williams 1991). The shared position as the spectator-subject of the films indeed unsettles the assumption of chronological time that the past, when a film was produced, and the present, when the film is viewed, are separated by a crucial discontinuity.

I call the conception of time underlining the studies on wartime films into question. While my critical interrogation of Ri Kōran’s films might look similar to High (2003), Satō (1995), and Yomota (2000), who differentiated their positions from past propagandist film narratives and indicated their ‘moral improvement’ by criticizing them, the underlying assumption of liberated post-war Japan in their work is a socially constructed myth assisted by the intervention of Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers (SCAP, also known as GHQ or General Headquarters in Japanese history). Also importantly, GHQ intervened to rename the Great East Asian War (Daitōa Sensō), the name which was commonly used until 1945, as the Pacific War. This was an attempt to erase the warfare between Japan and China from history in order to prioritize the US-Japan relation in Japan’s policy and national consciousness (Kang ed. 2003, 23-40).

Acknowledging the fabrication of “Japan’s [post-war] rebirth” (ibid, 38), I discuss
the films’ persistent effects on contemporary viewers, including me, that is, their ability
to call upon viewers in the present as the spectator-subject of the films. I contend that
time does not pass without human intervention. Instead, the chronology is regulated by
social and cultural means that define the shared space and time of imagined community.
And a sense of belonging to the linear progressive temporality might itself be a sign of
the person’s socially and culturally constructed privilege. Takahashi Tetsuya indicates
that testimonies by wartime violence survivors appear as a resistance to the common
temporality, since national chronology is based on the forgetting of survivor’s past
(Takahashi 1999). I argue that High, Satō, and Yomota contribute to the maintenance of
the temporal discrepancy between present scholars and the films by postulating the
scholars’ subjectivities as detached from their research materials. While treating the
trilogy and Suzhou Nights as research objects, High, Satō and Yomota avoid questioning
whether and how the films situate them in an ideal viewer’s position. I assert that Ri
Kōran films offer a complex site for a spectator’s projections. Furthermore, she does not
only present an image of a desirable/desired woman, but also participate in the making of
historical narratives.

I suggest that remembrance does not merely deal with historical facts and events
that are external to one’s consciousness. It means (re)engagement with, and
(re)construction of, one’s subjectivity. Roger I. Simon et al. states:

[W]hatever its site and social form, remembrance is an inherently
pedagogical practice in that it is implicated in the formation and regulation
of meanings, feelings, perceptions, identifications, and the imaginative
projection of human limits and possibilities. In binding remembrance and
pedagogy, we are suggesting that all formations of memory carry implicit
and/or explicit assumptions about what is to be remembered, how, by
whom, for whom, and with what potential effects. [...] In this sense, remembrance/pedagogies are political, pragmatic, and performative attempts to prompt and engage people in the development of particular forms of historical consciousness. (Simon et al. 2000, 2)

I contend that film analysis becomes an engaged act of remembrance when a researcher ascertains one’s subject position in film representation and elaborates on how it attempts to speak to her/him through optical effects and emotional impacts.

6. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have elaborated on my analytical tools: subject positioning and film space. I suggest that the concept of subject positioning is useful for the examination of the flexible and intersectional processes that produce social categories such as gender, race, ethnicity and class. Subjective positioning in film narratives becomes real and lived by spectator’s investments to empathically respond to, and confirm the meanings of, the images. I have discussed that idea that spectators are the active readers of visual representations and associate various meanings and feelings to the positions provided in film. Although projecting physical continuation with social space, I suggest that film presents a fantasy in which a spectator possibly takes up multiple positions, some of which may counteract or contradict with her or his socially assigned identity. Thus, I assert that what matters for a spectator in film as fantasy is a ‘setting,’ or, interrelations and dynamics between different subjective positions.

The shift from identity to subjective positioning assists the conceptualization of film space as a distinctive mechanism for subject production. The subjective positions are formed even when film characters don’t directly interact, since these positions are
mediated by characters’ relationships with space. The polarized spatial contrasts in film entail emotional impacts as well as metaphorically describe the forces beyond film subjects’ control. Intertextualizing with the gendered construction of public space and nation-state, I argued that gender and nationality in film are performed through characters’ relationships with visually contrasted interior and exterior. At the same time, film subjects’ gazes at each other and at landscapes provide the relay of looks that arranges power positions of the subjects.

My emphasis on the fluid processes and complexity of subject production might appear to contradict the forceful execution of colonial policies and ‘grassroots’ discriminations that have divided the colonizer and the colonized. However, these theoretical perspectives allow my articulation of distinctive logics of film representations that incorporated hybridization and shifting locations for the construction of gender and nation. Whereas the multiplicity of identity plays a significant part in Ri Kōran films, I will demonstrate that the Japanese-Chinese national border is presented as what is to be contested and negotiated at abstract and symbolic levels. The border is not an immediate replication of boundaries marked on maps or distinguished by linguistic divisions. Also, the notion of subject positioning will be used in my attempts to describe how the national history, as a series of narratives and contested site of knowledge production, becomes a ‘real’ reference for a spectator viewing a film representation.

In the following chapter, I demonstrate how gendered and ethnicized subject positioning produced in the wider discourse of Japan’s imperialism were incorporated or transformed in the specific subject positioning in Song of the White Orchid
Chapter Three

The flux of domesticity and the exotic in Song of the White Orchid

1. Introduction

This chapter examines Song of the White Orchid (1939), directed by Watanabe Kunio, the first major hit melodrama in which Ri Kōran co-starred with Hasegawa Kazuo. I demonstrate that, in Song of the White Orchid, colonized space is familiarized through spatial metaphors recognizable to diverse audiences as signs of home and homecoming. Rather than invoking the conventional narrative of transgression of boundaries by imperialist males, the film develops an immediate connection and smooth transition between Japan and the Chinese mainland. In particular, representations of the ie (‘house/family’) maintain great power as metaphorical materializations of the spatiality and symbolic unity of the imperialist nation as well serving as a site where the characters’ national desirability is presented through their gendered performances. These two layers of significations operate interdependently while also situating the film intertextually in the political and cultural discourses of the ie and domestic space. Through the interdependent and intersecting operations, the film representation establishes links to a socially constructed reality and provides the appearance of material substance.

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34 An earlier version of this chapter was published as “The Flux of Domesticity and the Exotic in a Wartime Melodrama,” Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society 34(2): 369-395. © 2009 by The University of Chicago. All rights reserved. 0097-9740/2009/3402-0008$10.00
2. Modern Domesticity and the Brides of the Continent

*Song of the White Orchid* dramatizes the life of an expatriate Japanese family in Manchuria and the South Manchuria Railway’s expansion. The 1939 film establishes a realistic chronology by referring to the increasing Japanese military presence in China. After the title roll, the film opens with texts positioned side-by-side, that read the eleventh year of Shōwa and the fifth year of Kōtoku, implying the film’s time is set in the eleventh year since the Emperor Shōwa’s entitlement and the fifth year since the creation of the State of Manchuria. Also the China Incident in 1937 is briefly indicated by the sequences in the middle of the film that show the printing of newspaper front pages and military gunshots.  

The main character, Kōkichi (Hasegawa Kazuo), is an engineer for the South Manchuria Railway Company and lives in Shenyang (Hōten). When Kōkichi’s father in Japan dies and leaves his family in debt, Kōkichi’s younger brothers, Norio (Saitō Hideo) and Tetsuyuki (Nakamura Hideo), as well as an adopted sister Kyōko (Yamane Hisako), join Kōkichi in Manchuria. Kōkichi starts to believe that his urgent call is to live and work in an agricultural village populated by Japanese expatriates. Thus he resigns his position in the railway company and starts farming in a remote expatriate village. Kōkichi writes letters to Ri Sekkō (Ri Kōran) in Shenyang, who is his romantic interest and a Manchurian native sympathetic to the Japanese. But she is ill and bedridden and her cousin intercepts their correspondences. Meanwhile, Kōkichi leaves the village and returns to his duties in the South Manchuria Railway. Sekkō misunderstands Kōkichi’s

35 The beginning of the second Sino-Japan war is marked by the military skirmish between Japanese occupation army (*Kantōgun* or *Kwantung* Army) and the Republic of China’s National Revolutionary Army at the Marco Polo Bridge in July 1937.
motives, and her cousin successfully convinces her to participate in his militarized anti-Japanese ‘communist’ group. A group member, however, later reveals to Sekkō that it was he who hid Kōkichi’s letters to her under her cousin’s order. She leaves the militant group and meets Kōkichi to tell him about the group’s up-coming siege of Manchuria Railway’s construction site. The story ends with the simultaneous deaths of Kōkichi and Sekkō as the result of the attack by the communists.

*Song of the White Orchid* has been recognized by scholars as a part of the media campaign to promote “brides of the continent”, women for whom marriages were arranged with Japanese men settling in Manchuria (Tanaka 2006).³⁶ Evoking the sense of release from conventions and parental pressures, the conceptual linkage between progress and expatriation to Manchuria is mediated by the notions of the modern nuclear family in the government-driven media campaigns. Popular media such as newspapers and magazines participated in disseminating the idealized imagery of Manchuria. The campaign connected images of immigration with women’s liberation, a release from women’s traditional roles and community. In an analysis of novels dealing with Brides of the Continent, Aiba Kazuhiko and others argue that the images of the Continent were constructed outside of the *ie* (family-house) structure, as a space where brides were released from the traditional community structure in which they would have been subordinated to the obligations of the patriarchal family. Also, the brides in literature were portrayed as innocent beauties, who took part in the transformation of the rather

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³⁶ There were a number of key objectives for Brides of the Continent: To assist the settlement of male expatriates, increase agricultural production, and populate the land. Kantōgun considered Manchuria as a ‘fortress’ state that would prevent Russia’s invasion of Japan (Aiba, et al. 1996). The fictitious images of Brides of the Continent provided in the campaign did not reveal the militaristic agenda of the nation. Nor did it indicate that the authorities planned the mother-wife roles of the brides for the sake of managing and expanding the Japanese community.

In ideologies of the imperial nation-state, the *ie* offered an imaginary ground to the fictitious borders and bonds of the nation. The concept of nation-state is described as "kokka" (国家) in Japanese. The first character ‘国’ means country and the second ‘家’ means the *ie* (home/family). I would suggest that the combination of two characters symbolizes the constitution of modern nation-state: the formation and conceptualization of nation-state was inseparable from the modernization of *ie*.

The concept of *ie* was incorporated into the enforcement of a nationwide *koseki* (family registration) system in 1872, which was one of the bureaucratic and intellectual maneuverings to overtake and compete with European and American imperial powers. The universal registration system overall located all national subjects within *ie* units and captured household members’ birth, marriage, divorce and death. In comparison to the *ie* in feudal system, the new *ie* system allowed increased mobility for individuals and produced necessary labour force for the rapid capitalist development centralized in major cities. Some principles of *ie*, such as a shared dwelling, entitlements to inheritance, and the representation and supervision by a male head, were initially subsumed into the

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37 In the 1930’s and ‘40’s, a number of Japanese films presented Manchuria as a hopeful destination where protagonists would be released from the disturbances and limitations in Japanese society. The list of the works include Itami Mansaku and Arnold Fanck’s collaborative project, *Atarashii tsuchi* (The New Earth, 1937), Ozu Yasujirō’s *Toda ke no kyoudai* (Brothers and Sister of the Toda Clan, 1942), Simazu Yasujirō’s *Ani to sono imōto* (A Brother and His Younger Sister, 1939), and Toyoda Shirō’s *Ōhinata Mura* (Ōhinata Village, 1940) (High 2003, 268; Satō 2004, 271).

38 Emiko Ochiai suggests that “the *ie* is closer in concept to the English term "household,” and closer still to the German *Haus* or the French *maison*” (1997, 58), although it is often translated as “family”. The *ie* is not only a residential unit but also a continuous familial lineage that passes on residential as well as professional belonging over generations. In addition, it passes down “the memory of the ancestors” who are commemorated by living members through rituals and gatherings (Hendry 1981, 15).
koseki system. The koseki system differentiated itself, however, from the feudalistic ie system in terms of its individualistic treatments of taxation, property ownership, and the legal rights of individuals. Although referring to a traditional practice of familial lineage, the koseki is one of the "invented traditions" to authenticate the system of modern governance by symbolically connecting it to people's inherited commitments passed down from their ancestors (Hobsbawm 1983). Nishikawa Yūko asserts that the establishment of the modern ie was Japan’s “survival strategy among [competing] sovereign states” (Nishikawa 2000, 13). When the Meiji government registered the ie system and assigned the male house head the authority and responsibility over his household members, the family-state ideology was also organized so that national subjects embraced the Emperor’s family as the family of origin and the Sun Goddess Amaterasu, the Emperor’s mythical ancestor, as the ancestor of all the nation (ibid, 13-14). The modern ie provided material conditions for very rapid industrialization and urbanization by simultaneously allowing greater mobility to workers and endowing the symbolic collectivity of the nation-state as a unified family.

The Meiji registration system overall located all the national subjects within ie units, through which tax payers, potential soldiers, the minimal bodies of child rearing and elderly care were comprehended. Also, the universal registration made people

39 The historical period of Meiji began in 1868, which followed the year when the political authority of feudal Shogun in Edo was transferred to the emperor then residing in Kyoto. Emperor Mutsuhito moved to Edo, renamed the city Tokyo, and commenced the Meiji government. The Meiji period is known for the intense restructuring of the country as a nation-state, rapid industrialization, militarization and peasant resistance, and the launch of international trade and “Westernization” of every aspect of the society. The period ended in 1912 on the death of the Emperor and the Taisho period started the same year embracing the son of Emperor Meiji, Yoshihito, as the successor.

40 In spite of its initial intention to renovate the country by abolishing old traditions, such as class and caste system, koseki has provided grounds for the discrimination among citizens as well as the exclusion of foreign residents from citizenship. For instance, the residence records in koseki are accessed, though illegally, to determine the descendants of outcast communities and discriminate against them in marital arrangements and employment.
members of the imperial nation. The introduction of an individualistic basis to the new
*ie* system draw severe criticism. Before the Meiji restoration in 1868, property was
regarded as belonging to the *ie* as a whole. But the new registration system required
property to be registered as legally belonging to the head of the *ie* as an individual
(Hendry, ibid: 15, 31). The unit for taxation was previously local communities, such as
villages, but now the *ie* became the primary unit. The criticisms addressed the following
issues: 1. The ownership of property limited to individuals and family property was not
acknowledged. 2. The relationship between parents and children was not considered to
be based on filial piety, which was rooted in traditional Japanese morals, but on
individualistic concepts of rights and obligation. 3. A head of household had the right to
admit marriages and transfers of registration by household members. But the registrars
were now to accept any submission of marriages and transfers, including those not
admitted by house heads. (Murakami et. al. 1979, 461-463; Muta 1996, 16)

The dissemination of the new *ie* structure and its incorporation into the nation-
state was completed by the promulgation of the Great Japan Imperial Constitution
(known as Meiji Constitution) in 1889 and the enforcement of the Civil Law in 1898.
Although the family registration system promoted a substantial departure from previous
communal sense of the *ie*, modern progressive literary discourse accused the *ie* as being
"the primary obstacle to the formation of modern individualism" (Hashikawa 1974, 119,
quoted in Kurihara 2002, 147). Modern literati sought liberation from the oppressive
spaces and the imposed roles within the *ie*. Their nearly destined desire for liberation

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41 The family registration system was applied to colonial subjects in Taiwan and Korea to make them
imperial subjects. But discrimination between Japanese and colonial others persisted because the *koseki*
distinguished the place of origin as Japan (*naichi* or inland), Taiwan, and Korea (Morris-Suzuki 1998, 189).
42 The Constitution was drafted based on the form of constitutional monarchy in nineteenth century Prussia,
and the Civil Law was based on the German Civil Code.
from the *ie*, resonating with the linear progressive concept of time, might have testified to the strengthened regulatory power of the invented tradition. Kurihara Yōko argues that the ideal of *ie* in Meiji was organized and strengthened simultaneously when the village communalism of the *ie* was dismantled. After the enforcement of the Civil Law, according to Kurihara, the ideal gradually permeated into people’s consciousness and exerted strong regulatory power in people’s discipline and morality. The more people assimilated to the norm, the further the criticism of the *ie* accelerated (Kurihara 2003, 149).

The disciplinary power of the *ie* was enhanced in the late 19th century by a new family consciousness, which embraced “domestic happiness and an affectionate relationship among family members” (Muta 1994, 54). The concept of “home”, or *katei*, which emerged towards the end of the 1880’s, was based on the gendered division of labour (Koyama 1994; Muta 1996). The Meiji Emperor and Empress, and subsequent royal couples, played a pivotal role to endorse the modernized gender roles across the country, as the emperors were engaged with military activities and the empresses participated in cultural, educational and charitable activities (Katano 2003). The new conceptualization of domesticity offered universal norms that were associated with particular spaces, which simultaneously hierarchized individuals and nations. *Ie* was a site for one to perform gender, and at the same time, to participate in the nation’s enterprise of colonialism and imperialism. The spatial contrasts of urban/rural/suburb, East/West, and Japan/China, were delineated through assigning different domestic qualities (Inoue 2003; Muta 1996).43 The differentiation delivered a hierarchical structure

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43 “Lifestyle improvement” (*seikatsu kaizen*) was one of the key programs that instituted the notion of modern family in people’s lives. The advocacy of a “rational, simplified, and democratic mode of family
of subjects positioned along the linear progressive order of time (past, present and future) that posited the West as the front-runner of human kind. The progress and prosperity of the nation and the society were closely tied to the state of the family.

In this imperialist order of space and time, I would suggest, the representations of women were the mediator and generator of desires towards different places and times, either in acting as a home-maker of a modern family, in becoming a “modern girl” and transgressing traditional boundaries (Barlow et. al. 2005; Barlow 2006; Chaplin 2001; Sato 2003), or in playing the role of the ideal mother and demonstrating a good, old “tradition” of the nation (Koyama 1994). This spatial and temporal articulation of the ‘interior’, modern nation-state, and woman was preceded by the discursive production of gender and race in Euro-American imperialism.

As mentioned in the Introduction, modern science produced the spectacles of race in which racial categories were treated as given. The racial differences were interrelated to the notion of progressive time through biological, medical, and anthropological studies in the 18th and 19th centuries (Clifford 1988b; McClintock 1995; Stoler 1995; Rony 1996). In the scheme of social evolution, non-Europeans were situated not only distant from Europe geographically, but also historically; non-Europeans don’t share the present time with Europeans, rather they belong to the past. The metaphorical association of space and time projected not only onto historical imagination, but also onto physical movements across space (McClintock 1995, 37-39). Japanese imperialism borrowed the

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progressive time-space paradigm in order to differentiate itself from the West and Asian others (Kang 1996). Moreover, I would argue, the modern reformation of the *ie* and the discourse on *katei* indicate that the chronological and spatial measure of domesticity operated to materialize and ground the highly abstracted notion of nation-state in individuals’ interpersonal relations and emotional experiences.

The imperialist order imitated familial relationships between the Emperor (father and mother) and subjects (Kano 1982; Kanō 2002; Muta 1994, 1996). To deepen patriotic feeling, metaphors were often used to describe the emperor-subject relationship, such as calling the Emperor “Imperial Mother” (*kōbo*) and his subjects, “The Emperor’s babies” (*tennō no sekishi*), in official statements and media reports. Ōmikokoro (“His divine heart”), another propagandist expression, speculated that a mother’s love was devoted to all of her children and all living creatures as the sun shed its light on them equally. The Emperor’s love was distributed equally to his subjects and is to be extended to the people of Asia and the rest of the world. Since inheriting ōmikokoro, women were expected to raise their children with intense care but essentially out of sincere devotion to the Emperor. Children were conceived as the Emperor’s treasures (*ōmitakara*) and mothers were required to have the determination to give back children to him with pleasure whenever called upon (Kanō 2002, 135). The metaphor of familial unity, hakkō *ichiu*, or ‘(to make) eight corners of the world under one roof’, idealized the imperial army’s expansion across the continent and former European colonies in Asia. The motto, hakkō *ichiu*, began to be widely disseminated throughout the country around 1938 in

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44 Issued in 1890, the Imperial Rescript on Education took the form of the Emperor’s words delivered to his subjects. It taught that “filial piety should be second only to loyalty to the Emperor” and was learned by heart by schoolchildren.
government-led campaigns assisted by commercial cultural productions. The motto was said to refer to a word of Emperor Jinmu, a mythical figure who traveled across the country and established the first Imperial Court, allegedly in the 7th century BC (Edwards 2003, 306).

The first three decades of the 20th century were marked by a significant increase in middle-class female wage earners. The demands of capitalism and the state were, however, competing with each other at times because “whereas industry demanded women’s cheap labour, the state looked on women’s increasing entry into the work force as a potential threat to the institution of the Japanese stem family (ie)” (Miyake 1991, 269). At the level of state ideology women were admonished to stay home, give birth, raise children and be “the mother of emperor’s state” (kōkoku no haha). Women’s active engagement with pro-war women’s groups became one of the limited social spaces in which they could legitimately participate. But even this commitment worried policy makers concerned about the possible erosion of the family system. Yamashita Etsuko observes a split between heterosexual desire in women, which drove their passion for the missions to support soldiers outside of their homes, and their imposed obligation of mothering based on an asexual notion of motherhood. She argues that this idealized motherhood only made sense as an ideology to circulate the fantasy of collectivity signified through mother-ness (Yamashita 1988, 159). Yamashita’s argument runs parallel with Kanō’s conceptualization of imperial motherhood discussed above. The

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45 Among responses to a government’s call in December 1937, a junior high school student submitted the words for a song, “Patriotic March” (aikoku no koushinkyoku), which drew on the rhetoric of hakko ichiu: “(marching) in step to the thunderous tempo received from the distant Age of the Gods’, as striving together, in compliance with the Imperial Virtue, to ‘make the world a house’ (hakko wo ie to nashi)” (Edwards 2003, 306). The student’s tactical use of imperialist imageries, including hakko ichiu, exemplifies the nation’s militarist literary.
propagandist metaphors that associate the Emperor with motherly heart mediated the notion of motherhood beyond bodily materiality. I assert that the abstracted notion of collectivity centred upon the maternal Emperor symbolically replaced women’s productive engagements, including manual labours and giving births, devoted for maintaining the nation. The Emperor-mother linkage reinforced the imaginative aspect of motherhood, which reorganized women’s factual realities into people’s normative recognitions and prioritized how mothers should be rather than what mothers really do. While the ideal motherhood is constituted as what the Emperor ‘naturally’ embodies, women are positioned to approach feminine ideals through performances in domestic space.

3: Constructions of Gender and Ethnicity through Film Space

Throughout Song of the White Orchid, the sites within and around the ie take pivotal roles in providing the senses of quasi-nations, which are explicitly or implicitly portrayed as gatherings of Japanese or Chinese family members. The boundaries of rooms and houses mark the metaphorical inside and outside of national communities. The border-marking of places, enabled by the cinematic translation and abstraction of nations, strengthens the construction of the fictitious Chinese community signified through the ‘othering’ of language in the film. During the war era, 1931-45, two major collective political agencies, the Kuomintang (the Nationalist Party) and the Chinese Communist Party, sought to resist the expansion and aggression of the Japanese occupation army (Kantō gun or Kwantung Army). Song of the White Orchid avoids acknowledging these two agencies.

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46 For the normative aspect of social imaginary, please see Strauss (2006).
political movements. Instead, the only ideological opposition to Japan’s imperialism is represented as *kyōsan'hi* (‘communist evil(s)’), whose abnormality is not only signified by this name-calling but also illuminated by domestic instability and discomfort. Sekkō’s young male cousin is a communist activist who does not adhere the patriarchal authority of his father who, in turn, deplores his son’s anti-Japanese political attitude. The space allocated for the father-son relationship is a small room, where they engage in constant arguments. The argument sequences are followed by outdoor scenes in which Kōkichi and his siblings work together to cultivate a wide and fertile land. In contrast to the small indoor spaces that confine the Chinese characters, the vastness of the farm and the far-reaching view seem to represent the freedom that the Japanese characters inherit and enjoy. In reinforcing the fantasy of peaceful settlement, the sights of the family farm are accompanied by bright and lighthearted background music. The music sometimes imitates a calm and gentle European symphony and, at other times, bouncy tunes in a Hollywood musical comedy. The music simultaneously shapes the empathetic response of audiences and weaves the specific colonial place into a generalized narrative of domestic happiness.

It is also worth noting that Chinese domestic space is associated with illness and family disintegration. For months, Sekkō was sick when her contact with Kōkichi was interrupted by her ‘communist’ cousin. Kōkichi provokes Sekkō’s active and expressive behaviors, but she becomes ill when she loses his attention. In fact, Chinese domestic space in the film is without mothers and wives, an absence that reinvigorates the notion that the Chinese national community lacks the tie that secures its integrity. Sekkō is an orphan, whose uncle and cousin occasionally appear in the film. She is bereft of female
family members, such as mother, aunt, or grandmother.

In addition to the spatial deployment of the Chinese characters, the Japanese subtitles which accompany Mandarin conversations in the film, offer a textual intervention to create a distance between monolingual Japanese-speaking audiences and the ‘other’ side of the voices. These characters are prohibited from having the agency afforded to Japanese male characters. It is indeed only Sekkō, fluently speaking both languages, who can move across political boundaries and who can enjoy a comfortable public presence that is not permitted to the other main Chinese characters. Although given the most prominent agency among Chinese characters, Sekkō is not allowed to invent an original opinion. Her inclinations change depending on her romantic interests in Kōkichi, thus the politics is reduced to a matter of sentiment. The outdoor appearances of Chinese ‘communist evils’ are treated as illicit border-crossings, life-threatening interruptions against the ‘good-willed’ civilizing enterprises of the Japanese characters. Through a gender-space scheme, we can see how Chinese characters are denied proper citizenship through ‘feminization’ by their captivity within indoor shots and performances of psychological tensions.

While Chinese interior space has no sign of mothering figures, Kōkichi’s brother’s fiancé, Kyōko, performs as the ideal imperial mother for Kōkichi and his brothers. There is no sign of sexual intimacy between her and her fiancé, and her appearances are limited in the interior shots of their home or the family farm. The sequence captured in Figure 3-1 is, I suggest, a precise cinematic description of the ideal
family in the imperial order. A mother figure, Kyōko, sits in the centre of the room and passes a bowl of rice to each three men, Kōkichi, Norio and Tetsuyuki, who are engaged in the physical work of occupying and cultivating the colonial space. In contrast to clear profiles of the brothers, Kyōko shows her back to the camera. In effect, her individuality is reduced to a role of care provider. Moreover, she is the only person among the four who wears *kimono*, which symbolizes the four characters’ ethnic tradition. It is not only the physical labour for material production and reproduction but also the symbolic labour to maintain an ethno-cultural heritage that are divided along the gender line.\(^{47}\) Under one roof centred around a mother figure, this shot reveals a striking resemblance to the imperial ideology of *hakkō ichiu*, ‘(to make) eight corners of the world under one roof’.

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\(^{47}\) For my conceptualization of women’s roles in the symbolic reproduction of a modern nation, Handa (2003) and Heller (2001) have been insightful.
Since motherhood symbolized the fundamental organizing principle of the imperial nation, the presence and absence of mother figures in interior sites can suggest the degree of integrity and unity of each ethnic community. The abstract notion of national unity, with which people share imagined identity, becomes visible via the particular gendered activities in interior sites. The nation is an imagined assemblage of themes abstracted from individual performances. The abstraction allows individuals and familial units to detach from geographic specificities and yet to claim to be part of the national unity through gendered performances. In *Song of the White Orchid*, the family-like communion headed by Kōkichi is not securely anchored in one location. Rather, it is characterized by movements and the changes of memberships.

4. Colonization as Ideal Home-Coming

The beginning of *Song of the White Orchid* positions viewers as tourists traveling across Northern China. Accompanied by a lyrical and rhythmic theme song, sung in Japanese, landscapes and historical buildings are presented one by one in long shots. With no sights of people, the panning camera provides panoramic views of the places, as credit titles are imposed on the sceneries and keep an observer’s distance from the framed objects. Following the subtitle, “The eleventh year of Shōwa, the third year of Kōto,” imposing the Imperial and the State of Manchuria calendars onto the cinematic space and the viewers, Sekkō and Kōkichi begin an affectionate conversation in Japanese. On a broad and sunny promenade by a pond, Kōkichi is established as a traveling subject by Sekkō’s first words: “I wonder if I can live in Hōten (Fengtian) without you. I will miss you.”

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48 Japanese tend to call the city Hōten, which was a transliteration of Fengtian, originally the name of a prefecture established in Qing Dynasty (1644-1912). The historically common name of the city was,
The remark allows audiences to anticipate Kōkichi’s departure to another place, while Sekkō, in Chinese dress, authorizes Kōkichi’s residency in the Manchurian city. The open setting of the conversation invites audiences to view their relationship in terms of openness and freedom, released from the constraints of the ie, a patriarchal family structure and binary ethnic communities. In spite of the connotation of liberty, however, the use of the gaze by the two characters is restricted by gender roles. The camera captures both Kōkichi and Sekkō as he is looking at her, then offers a close-up look of Sekkō’s face from Kōkichi’s position. Her gaze is cast downwards, turning away from the camera. Sekkō is constructed as a spectacular site through Kōkichi’s point of view. Soon she starts to sing a song in Chinese in the same close-up shot, in which the connection of body and voice further assists her fetishization. The traveling subject, Kōkichi, is simultaneously situated as a subject of looking, while the audiences are positioned to share his views of the landscapes and Sekkō’s body.

Motivated by his father’s serious illness, Kōkichi’s trip to Japan is the first depiction of travel in the film. The theme of travel as return similarly appears in the other films of the trilogy and in Suzhou Nights. The frequent depiction of the travels overlaps with repetitive movement between urban home and rural jikka. Japanese film audiences, mainly residing in urban cities, might have experienced similar movements in their actual lives. I argue that the representation of modern family in Japanese modern popular

however, Shenyang in Mandarin or Mukden in Manchu (See Elliott 2000). A Independent Garrison Unit of the Japanese Imperial Army guarding the South Manchuria Railway planned and executed an explosion near Shenyang, which led to Japanese military occupation of Manchuria in 1931 (a.k.a. the Mukden Incident).

49 Kaja Silverman argues that a female subject position is embodied through the constant alignment of her voice and body images in film text, while male voice-over, detached from his corporeality, is frequently imposed upon images other than his and “speak[s] from a position of superior knowledge” (Silverman 1988, 48). In the gendered sound-image system, Silverman views a theoretical consensus that “the theological status of the disembodied voice-over is the effect of maintaining its source in a place apart from the camera, inaccessible to the gaze of either the cinematic apparatus or the viewing subject” (ibid., 49).
culture was ambiguously located in the mapping of progressive time as well as the
differentiation of the metropolitan centre and the margin. The urban family’s nostalgic
recourse to *jikka* assured its indigenous roots, which served increasingly as a symbolic
origin of familial unity than a site for immediate support and obligation. The modern
family simultaneously longed for further advancement to suburbs and colonies, the places
where the ultimate modern life style would be realized. The glittering ideas of modern
homes were mainly realized in newly built suburban areas in the Tokyo-Yokohama and
the Kyoto-Osaka-Kobe areas, located alongside rapidly developing transport
infrastructures (Mikami 2003). Urban dwellings were rented in many cases. Following
natural disasters, economic recession and war, nuclear families gave up on their urban
residences and returned to their original *ie* in the countryside (Nishikawa 1998). The
family was often registered nominally at the places of *jikka*, and *katei* families increased
not only in urban cities but also in the colonies. As discussed by Inoue (2003), Koayama
(1994) and Muta (1994, 1996) among others, educational and political discourse,
architecture competitions and popular culture idealized the lives of the nuclear family as
*katei*, or ‘home’, typically residing in suburbs, to be more progressive and modernized in
comparison to the extended family. Nishikawa Yūko points out that modern novels
assisted a popular myth that settling in the colonies would guarantee a more affluent life
than in urban areas in Japan; the myth postulated that the emigration would allow for
living in wider houses than in Japanese cities and for hiring helpers for domestic chores
(Nishikawa 2000). I would suggest here that the metaphorical parallels drawn between
the colony and the suburb in the popular novels as well as the trilogy and *Suzhou Nights*
served to translate colonial border transgression into the matter of linear progress across
Kōta Inoue intricately analyzes the interrelated representations of the suburb and the colony in Japanese modern literature and cinema. In the popular imagination, Inoue argues, the suburb is constructed as the Other and “the power relations […] inscribed in suburban conditions […] can be aptly called colonial” (Inoue 2004, 2-6). Suburbanization and colonization not only “transform the existing social order and the economic system to accommodate the demands of the metropolitan center” (ibid 2), but also textual markers reveal “the system of unequal wealth distribution involving the suburb, or the processes depicted in which a new mode of production alters the existing, agrarian rules of social relations” (ibid 4). To obscure the process of colonization, I argue, the colony was situated in a spatial imagery reached by extended travel from jikka (family of origin) via the suburbs.

In Song of the White Orchid, outdoor scenes of the Japanese mainland scarcely appear. The characters are confined to interior shots, such as in a train or in Kōkichi’s parents’ house. According to custom, jikka (‘the real family’, or parents’ house) commonly stands for one’s patriarchal roots. Therefore, indoor shots of family gatherings ‘back home’, in which Kōkichi’s father and elder male members of his family are present, visualize the symbolic entity of the ie, providing a signifier of his nationality (Figure 3-2). I would argue that it is not the film characters’ belonging to any particular place that signifies their authentic nationality. Rather, it is the recourse to jikka, or one’s will to return, that marks them as genuine Japanese. The invisibility of the Japanese landscape creates the continuative oneness between colony and homeland and allows the film to detach the characters’ nationality from any particular geography. After their
departure from *jikka*, Kōkichi, Norio and Kyōko arrive at a port on the continent, where an anonymous crowd surrounding them is rendered transparent as a background for a passionate welcome by a Japanese settler friend. Upon their visit to an imperial shrine and war dead monuments they encounter meaningful cultural objects on the continent. In the absence of landscapes or cultural artifacts from the Japanese mainland, the artificial structures of the shrine and war monuments become conspicuous as symbols of Japanese culture and people. While specific landscapes do not appear to provide the concrete image of Japan, Japanese nationality is, in this setting, represented through a direction to which people or the souls of the dead return. The ultimate home-return is summed up at the end of the film when Kōkichi’s cremated bones arrive at the Japanese settlers’ village after he was killed by the attack of *kyōsan’hi*.

Whereas the film lacks an actual view of the Japanese mainland, the landscapes of
the Chinese mainland are offered at great length with substance and detail. As she travels from the city to home, and from home to Kōkichi’s settler community, Sekkō’s active movement nearly matches that of Kōkichi. However, Sekkō’s departure from home recasts the viewer-landscape relationship established in the opening credits. The extensive view of rural scenery, including an open field, tile-roofed architecture and hills, furnish a background for the donkey rides that she and a friend take to the train station. The spectacle constructs viewers again as travelers/observers who impose their views onto the landscape, turning the given subjects into objects (Figure 3-3). Sekkō, her friend, and a servant are seen at a distance, nearly immersed in the landscape. They are depicted as part of the scenery, as objects to be seen, rather than traveling agencies. The distanced bodies, absorbed by the panoramic view, are juxtaposed with close-ups of female bodies, which reinforces the feminization of the rural landscape (Nash 1996).
As discussed above, the ethnic hierarchy between Japanese and Chinese is established through the normalization and abstraction of Japanese masculine agency, the identification of the male gaze with audiences, and the feminization of landscapes on the Chinese mainland. However, the ordered representation of ethnic communities is complicated when the positions of Kyōko and Sekkō are examined. I will now consider the workings of the women’s gaze in order to discern this positioning.

5. When and to Whom Is the Woman Allowed to Look Back?

While the characters’ locations within power structures are assigned to each through spatial representations, the politics of gaze interacts with the spatial hierarchy and occasionally counteracts it. On account of this more subtle specification of power relations, gendered and ethnicized positioning do not obstruct Ri Kōran’s outstanding cinematic appeal.

Sekkō’s active and expressive performances across various spaces contrast with Kyoko’s inhibition. Her performances are mainly confined to interiors and the family farm. Kyoko’s image conforms to the idealized motherhood promoted by imperialist campaigns. Assuming mobility on her own terms, Sekkō manifests attributes resembling those of the modern girl, or moga, the iconic image of urbanized consumerist culture in the 1920’s and 30’s (Chaplin 2001; Sato 2003).

In addition to physical mobility, the structuring of looks also registers the power relations among film subjects. Kyōko’s ability to see is strictly conditioned, reinforcing the restriction of her mobility. When she works at the farm with Kōkichi and Norio, dust gets into her eyes. Kōkichi notices her discomfort and examines her eyes to help remove
the dust. Norio appears jealous when he sees their closeness. Norio’s role here is as an interpreter of the gaze: Kōkichi’s look at Kyōko’s eyes while she is ‘blinded’ works as a signal of his transgressive desire for her. Kyōko never works alone in the family farm, but she is always accompanied by her step-brothers. This incident implies that the outdoor presence makes her, a mother figure, vulnerable to the male gaze and brings problems into the domestic sphere. Later in the film, her metaphorical ‘blindness’ is indicated once more when she asks Kōkichi to read aloud for her the letter from their mother. The film narrative does not clearly indicate whether or not she is actually illiterate. Rather, in this sequence, Kōkichi’s voice becomes her vision so that she can learn the news from abroad.50

While Sekkō is established as a sight for voyeuristic pleasure throughout the film, she is also depicted as a person who is actively in the process of acquiring vision. Kōkichi teaches her to write and read Japanese. When they are apart, however, Kōkichi’s letters do not reach her because of her communist cousin’s interventions. Her vision-in-progress presumably parallels the progressive modernizing impulse that she represents.

The difference between Sekkō and Kyōko is vividly illustrated in the following sequences (Figure 3-4 and 3-5): There Kyōko looks absent-minded because she was beaten by Norio who became jealous of her closeness to Kōkichi. Norio has left Kyōko alone and gone to his usual bar in the city where he spends family savings. In the sequence, Kyōko’s despair and loneliness is emphasized by the empty and shaded interior of the house. The camera’s relative distance from her body intensifies Kyōko’s

50 I would suggest that another of the director’s films also strikingly employs the notion of gaze. The main female role in the melodrama, *Nīzuma kagami* (New Bride’s Mirror, 1941), loses her sights in the middle of the story. Watanabe effectively used her lost vision to symbolize her vulnerability and repressed sexual desire. I contend that the director had high sensitivity to the interplay of gaze in delineating the positioning of film subjects.
vulnerability. In the following scenes, Sekkō appears in a dream state aboard a train looking away from the camera with a confident smile. She is on her way to see Kōkichi
after a long separation. In medium close-up, Sekkō’s body relaxes in the seat, exposing her bare arms. While Kyōko passively accepts the audiences’ gaze, Sekkō is deliberately displaying her body with sensual pleasure. The two women’s different degrees of mobility and contrasting relations to the gaze seem to disrupt the linear progressive order that the spatial hierarchisation of ethnic subjects attempts to establish. Sekkō occupies the progressive end of the order, while Kyōko remains in the traditional side.

What will happen when Kyōko and Sekkō meet? Will they look at and see each other? Or will one of them dominate the power of looking? Their accidental meeting occurs in the middle of the film, when Sekkō visits Kōkichi’s house after the sequence discussed above. It is a stormy night of drenching rain. Looking out the window, Kōkichi sees Sekkō approaching the door. He opens it for her and they immediately embrace each other in the rain. As Kōkichi and Sekkō step into the house, soaked in water, Sekkō is caught by Kyōko’s gaze. Kyōko is shot at a distance, her whole body captured in the frame. She sits in the middle of a dim room, occupying the centre of the house, again appearing as a mother figure. Kyōko casts down her eyes after a brief look at Sekkō, and the face of Kōkichi’s female friend (Kiritachi Noboru) appears, as Sekkō’s flashback. The close-up image of the friend’s face is placed next to Sekkō’s as if looking at Sekkō closely beside her. Sekkō is reminded of the woman’s advice: “ Whatever happens, you should accept it as God’s intention”. Now Sekkō is unable to walk into the room and rushes back into the showery, dark street, where Kōkichi tries to hold her and convince her to come back. In the pouring rain, Sekkō stubbornly rejects him.

Considering that the spatial boundary of the ie symbolizes the boundary of ethnic community, I read this sequence as Sekkō’s attempt to break into the Japanese imperial
order. Whereas Kyōko’s body is securely framed at the centre, Sekkō and Kōkichi’s bodies are moving across the frame as they enter and exit the house. In response to Sekkō’s spatial transgression, two Japanese women stop her through the power of their gaze. Interestingly, the boundary of the cinematic frame itself is also blurred – by the pouring rain – when the order of the ie is challenged. The mobility that she has enjoyed in the open outdoor spaces now turns into a justification for her exclusion. Or, more precisely, it marks her ‘otherness’.

Sekkō’s expressive actions for the sake of heterosexual longing might have been recalled nostalgically by audiences, as if moga’s self-motivated agency was projected onto her travels and border-crossings. However, her freedom is only expressed temporally outside of the ie. Sekkō loses her life with Kōkichi in the same incident, but her funeral is never shown in the film. It is as if without belonging to any ie or ethnic community, her soul has no place to go.

6. Conclusion

My reading of Song of the White Orchid suggests that the fascinating border-crossing subjects are not released from the politics of ethnic and gender positioning but rather configured by intricate politics of prohibition and control. The mechanisms of subject positioning in Song of the White Orchid are summarized in terms of spatial contrasts of the interior and the exterior, the interplays of the gaze and power dynamics among subjects.

A. Spatial contrasts of the interior and the exterior
The interior space serves as a miniature site of the nation-state. It is provided for characters to perform specific gendered roles. The indoor site for female subjects is a primary place for them to embody their authentic ‘nature’, that is, nurturing and caring for other interior members. Meanwhile, outdoor activities produce national agencies. Outdoor activities signify spatial domination (ie. Land cultivation, railroad construction), and the belongingness to the nation are claimed through these activities. The containment to the indoors deprives a subject of the opportunities to participate in and/or represent nation. Japanese female subjects and Chinese male subjects are mostly depicted indoors, and their outdoor presences are sanctioned. Thus Japanese male subjects remain to represent the national agencies described above. The film minimizes Japan’s geographic specificity and provides smooth trips in-between Japan and the Chinese mainland. At the same time, a Japanese-Chinese divide is established by the qualitative differences of indoor activities: While the nurturing figure in the Japanese protagonist’s interior, performed by Kyōko, stands for national unity, the lack of a mothering figure in the Chinese characters’ interior is associated with disputes and illness. As an imagined community, the Japanese imperial nation is maintained by acting out abstracted qualities based on gendered spatial themes. In this gendered scheme of national subject construction, Sekkō is given male-like outdoor mobility, while she is not allowed to participate in nation-building through interior activities.

B. The interplays of the gaze and power dynamics among subjects

The panoramic views of landscapes and historical buildings posit film audiences as tourists traveling through Northern China. Then the tourist gaze is passed down to match
Kōkichi’s point-of-view, which constructs Sekkō as an object of gaze. Throughout the film, she enjoys exterior presence in contrast to Kyōko, but her outdoor performances are constantly appropriated to make her body a spectacular site. The mode of Japanese subjects’ looking at Sekkō, either by male (Kōkichi) or female (Kyōko), are synchronized with conversations or actions that claim their spatial dominance. Thus the interplays of gaze register an ethnicized hierarchy among the film subjects.

In the orchestration of spatial contrast and the interplays of the gaze, Ri Kōran’s body is a site and sight that activates the power of the gaze and proliferates gendered and ethnicized divides. In spite of the spatial transcendence implied by her multiple linguistic ability and man-like mobility, Ri Kōran’s spectacular displays equate her with scenic views and position her as the ‘exotic,’ countered by the absence of the Japanese male’s spatial specificities. Whereas mobility provides Japanese male protagonists with agency, her character’s outdoor appearances are exploited for voyeuristic pleasure.
Chapter Four

Dreams of common space and the melodramatic excess:  
*China Nights, Vow in the Desert, and Suzhou Nights*

1. Introduction

In the previous chapter, I discussed how key mechanisms of space and the gaze construct subject positioning in *Song of the White Orchid*. In this chapter, I will extend the analytical framework to the three films, *China Nights, Vow in the Desert,* and *Suzhou Nights*. In the analysis of *Song of the White Orchid*, I elaborated the ways in which the dualistic notion of interior and exterior deploys the interconnected positioning of ethnicized and gendered subjects. Especially crucial in this analysis was the contrasted formation of interior and exterior that mirrors the notion of imperial nation and the Asian ‘other’. As discussed in Chapter Two, the Japanese-Chinese binary in the trilogy and *Suzhou Nights* is not a mere reflection of socially produced geographic and linguistic borders. Intertextualizing with the discursive formation of the *ie* (house/family), Chapter Three demonstrated that Japanese film subjects are made to embody the imagined Imperial nation through gendered performances. My analysis delineated the gender-space scheme in which doing gender ‘properly’ means representing the symbolic unity of the nation by differently reiterating the ideologies and practices of imperialism according to one’s gender and locations. In this chapter, I examine how the specificities of each film’s location contribute to the symbolic construction of the *ie* and gendered and ethnicized subject positioning in each film.
Continuing from the previous chapter, this chapter illustrates how outdoor settings are arranged with each character played by Ri Kōran in *China Nights*, *Vow in the Desert*, and *Suzhou Nights* to create a sensational spectacle. Furthermore, the analysis elaborates on how the orchestrations of the gaze and the landscape affect relationships between national subjects constructed via the unique spatial deployment of each film. The precious chapter indicated the qualitative distinction between interior and exterior that differentiates optical effects on spectators: outdoor shots shape spectators’ visual pleasure in relation to scenic views as their gaze travels with the protagonists’ excursions; indoor sequences tend to emphasize psychological drama and protagonists’ personal feelings. This dualistic spatial contrast corresponds to the premise in the studies of classic Hollywood melodrama films which contend that melodrama “shifts” ‘public’ concerns, such as war, politics and class-conflict, into personal ethical dilemmas and the victimizations and sufferings in a ‘private’ terrain (Elsaesser 1987, 47). Echoing Linda Williams’ extensive critique of melodrama studies, I would suggest that the separation of private and public and the evaluation of melodrama as abnormal ‘excess’ over the conventional narrative cinema mimicks the gendered and racialized formation of modern nation and subjectivity (Williams 2001).

In these films, I pay attention to some of the climaxes, which employ a reverse strategy to present psychological dramas outdoors and action scenes indoors. The limited indoor view increases tension and the sense of danger in action scenes. Characteristic landscapes add specific psychological nuance to interpersonal drama in outdoor locations. Especially, my interest in this part of the analysis is in interrelating metaphors of bodily boundary and national border. As delineating the signification of body and
nation, I situate the relay of the gaze in the simultaneous blurring of bodily boundary and national communities which coincides with melodramatic highlights located outdoors.

Before presenting individual film analysis, I want to briefly portray the films’ locations and their symbolic connotations. Large parts of *China Nights* and *Suzhou Nights* are located in Shanghai. *China Nights* mainly features downtown scenes, utilizing the contrast between residential space, representing the Japanese community, and the marginal sites of the city, indicating the ‘other.’ Additionally, mediated by Shanghai’s modern buildings, the film characters’ upward and downward gazes construct hierarchical power relations among them. In contrast, *Suzhou Nights* implies various aspects of rural space as well as urban space, and thus provides urban-rural oppositions that define gendered and ethnicized positioning in the film. Meanwhile, city views rarely appear in *Vow in the Desert*. Different types of architecture are used to establish the interior/exterior distinction in the film. We can observe an obvious differentiation of West/Japanese/Chinese depicted through architectural metaphors in *Vow in the Desert*.

Wenbing Liu asserts that the city, Shanghai, has been produced by film representations as much as it has produced them (Liu 2004). Shanghai was one of the ports opened for international trade based on the Treaty of Nanjing after the First Opium War in 1842. In 1854, the foreign-controlled Shanghai Municipal Council was established to represent and reorganize existing foreign concessions, including American and British settlements. Along with the French Concession that maintained its own municipality, SMC introduced infrastructures that implanted their homelands’ culture, including architecture, engineering, advertisement, and film theatres. As a result, Shanghai had become the centre of modernist urban culture in East Asia before the occupation by
Japanese Imperial Army in 1937 (a.k.a. the Battle of Shanghai). In contrast to other port cities, a substantial amount of Chinese capital was invested in Shanghai’s business and the city played a key role in disseminating western contemporary culture to other parts of China (Liu 2004; Yue 2006). While the city retained age-old establishments such as brothels, teahouses, and opera houses, the settlements allowed the introduction of Westerners’ urban nightlife, such as cafés, night clubs, and dance halls, after the Great War (Field 2001). Shanghai’s urban culture fascinated Japanese dilettantes and artists motivated them to visit the city to absorb the latest western popular entertainment. Also Shanghai’s semicolonial situation drew the attentions of Japanese novelists and journalists. Japanese were Shanghai’s largest foreign population in the 1930s, followed by White Russians and Russian Jews who had fled from the newly established Soviet Union (Fogel 1998).

Liu argues that the cinematic representation of Shanghai was established by *Shanghai Express* (1932, dir. Josef von Sternberg). In this film, Shanghai’s vast international transactions are paralleled by a high-class prostitute with many male clients, played by Marlene Dietrich. Following *Express*, Hollywood films located in Shanghai unexceptionally included prostitutes. Liu asserts that the German actress, who was fast approaching the stardom as a ‘femme fatale’ in Hollywood, and Shanghai, which was the

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51 Leo Ou-fan Lee contends that “the nation as imagined community in China was made possible not only by elite intellectuals like Liang Qichao, who proclaimed new concepts and values, but, more important, by the popular press” (Lee 2000). Shanghai’s print culture greatly contributed to the making of Chinese modernity.

52 Hattori Ryōichi, a popular music composer and performer, recalls that he longed to travel to Shanghai because of the live performances by American Jazz musicians, which he could not access in Japan in the 1920’s-30’s (Hattori 1993).

53 Novelist, Akutagawa Ryūnosuke, urged writer Yokomitsu Riichi to visit Shanghai. His one-month stay in 1928 resulted in his first novel *Shanghai* (Shanghai, 1928-1932). In the novel, Seiji M. Lippit asserts, “modernity is figured as a type of grotesque body, one in which the borderlines of national subjectivity blur in the expansion of global capital”, while the cosmopolitan subjectivity in the contemporary Japanese literature typically was based on the foreclosure of other Asian cultures and an identification with European civilization (Lippit 2002, 76-77).
most commercially active East Asian city in 1920’s and ’30’s, reinforce each other’s
appeal in the film (ibid, 22). In fact, many Shanghai-produced contemporary films soon
mimicked the filmic gaze at prostitutes (Zhang 1999). I would suggest that the
metaphorical linkage between promiscuity and semi-colonial Shanghai constructs a
similarity between bodily boundary and spatial border, and at the same time, construes
what lies within her bodily interior – or her ‘sexual appeal’ – as the source that invites
outsiders’ transgression.

The metaphorical relation between space and body is not a characteristic peculiar to
the film representations of Shanghai. It is rather a common theme in the formation of
modern nation-states and subjects. C. S. Goto-Jones argues:

Boundaries became something of an obsession in the political and
intellectual discourses of East Asian nations at the turn of the twentieth
century – not only the territorial boundaries that were constantly under
threat from the European ‘Great Powers’, but also the symbolic
boundaries that enwrapped national cultures and traditions (Goto-
Jones 2005, 793).

The boundaries were the political and economical terms of imperialism that expanded
territories and sustained the priority of “new (modern) borders over the claims of
(allegedly pre-modern) indigenous peoples,” Goto-Jones asserts (ibid). I also suggest that
bodily borders became one of the ‘symbolic boundaries’ that marked the identity and
integrity of the modern nation-state. The promotion of health and hygiene provided a
discursive framework to establish the symbolic link between individual maintenance of
bodily borders and nation-state management (Barlow et al. 2005; Lo 2002; Narita 1999;
Tamanoi 1999; Tomiyama 1995). Alison Bashford delineates the conceptual connection
of hygiene and imperialist nation-building:

The pursuit of ‘health’ has been central to modern identity formation. It
has become a way of imagining and embodying integrity, and problematically, homogeneity or purity of the self, the community, and especially in the early to mid twentieth century, the nation. Nation-forming has found one of its primary languages in biomedical discourse, partly because of its investment in the abstract idea of boundary, identity and difference, but also because of the political philosophy that thinks of the population as one body, the social body or the body of the polity. […] Signaling the constant need for purification from the ever-present contaminating threat over the border, however imagined, hygiene became a primary means of signification by which those borders were maintained, threats were specified, and internal weakness managed (Bashford 2004, 4).

The three films variously depict the symbolic links between bodily boundaries and spatial borders of the Japanese imperial nation. In China Nights and Suzhou Nights, the notion of hygiene provides a set of values to make sense of the protagonists’ actions. Japanese male protagonists are assigned the authority to improve and maintain hygiene among film subject(s), and in doing so, simultaneously guard and embody the modern nation-state. In Vow in the Desert, the merger of Japanese and Chinese communities corresponds with Ri Kōran’s tearful melodramatic performance, which signifies the collapse of bodily boundary (Williams 1991). In this ecstatic moment, her character’s empathic feeling towards Japanese men is turned outwards and viewed by other characters and film audiences. In addition to Vow in the Desert, the other two films that I analyze in this chapter each allocate a distinctive place for Ri Kōran’s melodramatic performances. China Nights depicts Keiran’s past in relation to a specific place that distinguishes her from Japanese characters’ locations. A memory of her father’s house surfaces upon her visit to the remains of a battle on the outskirts of Shanghai. In Suzhou Nights, Kōran’s virtuosic singing accompanies a spectacular highlight, while she walks through a herd of sheep in a vast meadow, as if a fantasia of European rural scenery. She embodies nature in contrast to the Japanese male protagonist, Kanō, who embodies
modernity. Here Kōran does not represent ‘Chinese’ in a narrow ethno-cultural sense, but rather situates the abstracted femininity at Japan’s exterior. In these films, Ri Kōran’s body is a material frame that contains emotions, memories and desires, which allows spectators to be touched by her dramatic performances. At the same time, she plays a metonymy of modernity by gathering film subjects’ gaze of admiration that alludes to the expectation of social progress towards future.

2. Hardboiled Masculinity and Denied Fragmentation in *China Nights*

*China Nights* is a tale of a flanêur, whose mobility and gaze characterize the individuality of the modern consumerist society. In *The Arcades Project*, Walter Benjamin’s meditation on the flanêur suggests that a middle-class male subject is shaped through his ambiguous relationship with an exterior space. The exterior offers him opportunities for excursion when it is simultaneously constituted as an extension of the interior (Benjamin 1999; also see Buck-Morss 1985; Gunning 2003). My reference to the flanêur in the analysis of *China Nights* is motivated by Angela Devas, who considers that the notion is reflected in “the right of the male hero to wander, gaze and appropriate different space and place for his own” in *The 39 Steps*, the 1935 classic directed by Alfred Hitchcock (Devas 2005, 45). The film narrative develops around a male role, Richard Hannay, who enjoys a gendered privilege of mobility, which is denied to his female counterpart. Devas asserts that the cinematic hero’s course of action resonates with imperial adventure, in which the hero “renounce[s] the domestic arena” and “submit[s] himself to tests of intelligence, strength and endurance” (Devas 2005, 46). *China Nights* contains two layered detective-like chases – one is presented as a leading thread of the film via the Japanese male
protagonist, Hase, while the other emerges after a careful tracing of the thread plodded by Keiran. While Hase investigates ‘Chinese’ gangs’ attempted crime, Keiran’s untold past is discovered by Toshiko, who secretly longs for Hase. The two narrative threads create gendered and ethnicized positioning by differentiating the characters’ agency (active/passive) and location (exterior/interior).

Hase’s spontaneous detective role utilizes the vertical and horizontal axes of downtown Shanghai. After the title rolls, China Nights opens with a view of Shanghai capturing various skylines of the city. Located high in the film are modern high-rises, government offices and banks, which represent colonial power. The potential views from the modern buildings construct the modern and imperialist male gaze, cast upon nameless crowds of common people who fill the urban streets.

Following a sequence of several city views, Hase appears in a crowded street of Shanghai after sunset. The camera posits his body at the centre of the frame while other

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54 In the film, Hase is called by his family name; Keiran and Toshiko by given names.
people on the street are unfocused and passing through the frame. His head is under the three lights of a building, drawing the eyes of the film audiences towards his face. He stands still and his face is directed diagonally. His unusual posture and stillness distinguishes him from the swift-footed passers-by (Figure 4-1). In the orchestration of lights, the body movement, and the focus, it is as if the actor is surrounded by an invisible bubble which separates his body from his surroundings. The boundary between him and the anonymous throng implicates the character's autonomy and independence from an ordinary city crowd (Figure 4-2).

Figure 4-2

The separation of his body from the urban mass signifies the integrity and purity of the self. Analogous to the establishment of foreign settlements in Shanghai, segregation is the means to establish the Japanese protagonist as an ‘honored western.’ The theme of the Japanese male body’s imagined purity, which also means his
entitlement as modern national subject, is followed by *Suzhou Nights*.

In the film, Hase’s untainted cleanliness is a precursor to his authority to force Keiran to bathe and clean herself. As Yomota Inuhiko argues, the forced bathing stands for the process of assimilation, the process of passing from a barbarian state to civilized state (Yomota 2000). Yomota’s argument can be taken further by examining Keiran’s shifting location in the residential building. Her subsumption to Japanese patriarchal-imperial structure is implied by her gradual inclusion in Hase’s room and the common room. At the end of the story, Keiran marries Hase. Their marriage ceremony takes place in the common room.

The hotel in which Hase stays, Yamato House, provides two places that represent the notion of domesticity: the common room, seemingly located between the entrance and the bathroom on the first floor, and his bedroom on the second floor. The common room and the hallway are divided by a wooden-framed clear glass, and the view from the inside of the common room towards the hallway is often inserted in the film. The entrance of the house or the exterior sight of the architecture is rarely shown in the film. Instead, the living room symbolizes the whole of the House, and presumably also the Japanese settler community. At the very first appearance, people ‘at home’ present explicitly divided gender roles in the room: a man in western jacket is reading a newspaper, another man playing chess, and a boy is watching the game beside. Women in *kimono*, an ethnic symbol, are sewing or chatting (Figure 4-3, 4-4). There is no other place in which Japanese people are shown by themselves in the film. Separated from the dirty city crowds and replicating imperialist gender roles, the room stands for the

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55 The name of the hotel, Yamato House, is not clearly stated in the film, but the cover of the film’s video distributed by Kinema Kurabu describes it as this.
Japanese community on the mainland.

When Hase and his friend encounter Keiran for the first time, she is wearing a dirty *qipao* and arguing with a rude Japanese man on the street. Hase brings her to Yamato House and forcefully takes her to the bathroom located at the end of the hallway.
The people in the common room curiously watch the conflict between Hase and Keiran in the hallway, as if watching the violent process of Keiran’s assimilation (Figure 4-5). Hase smiles at her for the first time when Keiran appears on the second floor in clean pajamas that he has given her. Then he suggests she use his bedroom for a rest.

It is also in this common room that Hase later declares to his fellow Japanese men that he is going to change Keiran’s hostile attitude towards the Japanese. His fellows don’t take his words sincerely and appear indifferent to Keiran or Japanese settlers’ relationship with Chinese locals in general. In spite of Hase’s coercions of Keiran, he gains a heroic status differentiated from ordinary Japanese men by this idealist statement, resonating with gozoku kyōwa (the cooperation and harmony among five peoples) policy of the State of Manchuria. Turning our gaze to Figure 4-5, captured from a sequence when Hase forcibly takes Keiran to the bathroom, his distinctiveness from other Japanese men is indicated by a dividing glass window. But the power relation between the hero and the common Japanese men is rather ambiguous. The interaction of looks and Hase’s relative smallness imply Japanese common people’s dominance over the action-oriented man’s idealism. In addition, the camera puts the pair at a marginalized place by intensifying the room’s distance from the hallway.
What is granted for him is an outsider status in relation to the establishment, the Japanese settler community. This detachment from the centre at the same time, I would argue, underpins the hero’s detective-like mobility and freedom to cross ethnic boundaries.

While he is separated from common Japanese settlers, Hase’s power position is reinforced by situating him above the city’s space, and the view from his hotel room. He lives on the second floor and the city view from his balcony is often depicted at night. The city is reduced to a sight that is subjected to the male hero’s gaze and lures him out into exploration. It is this room’s window from which Hase’s Japanese male friend finds out that Keiran is secretly communicating with suspicious Chinese-speaking men behind Hase’s back. The friend casts his downward gaze from Hase’s window while they are talking in the backstreet. In the same street, Keiran briefly encounters her Chinese-speaking acquaintance whom she has known from long ago. The appearances of Chinese-speaking characters are limited to this shadowy backstreet or a warehouse, a typical ‘gangs’ retreat’ on the city’s margin. Darkness, spatial marginality and submission to the gaze are aligned to produce the ‘Chinese’ position in the topography of *Suzhou Nights*.
In this logic of spatial deployment, Keiran’s bathing – the metaphor of becoming ‘white’ – intersects with her movement from fragmentation to integrity. Keiran’s identity is kept mysterious and sporadic while the story unfolds. She becomes sick after taking a bath in Yamato House. Her longing for her departed parents and her emotional suffering are indicated by her sobbing and unconscious talk while asleep. The reason for her turmoil becomes clearer when Keiko follows Keiran and steps into a field filled with the ruins of destroyed buildings. In Figure 4-6, a deserted building is enlarged by the camera frame and Keiran’s small figure is intensified by the long shot, implying her loneliness and helplessness. Keiran then stops at the pleasant smell of a flowering tree, miraculously left in the debris, which brings back the memory of her father’s house. Keiko finally realizes the cause of Keiran’s pain and tries to console her. But Keiran refuses Keiko and walks away.

Figure 4-6

The women are the only moving objects seen in the ruins – the women and the
place seem completely detached from everything else in the film. The sequence makes a stark contrast with the high rises and busy streets which have represented Shanghai so far in the film.

The treatment of war ruins in *China Nights* reminds me of Kamei Fumio’s feature-length documentary, *Shanhai* (*Shanghai*, 1938), produced prior to *China Nights*. Kamei’s Shanghai is enduring fragmentation without a definitive closure: the film documents, at length, the holes in buildings created by gun shots, while the narrator describes the intense resistance against the Imperial army (High 2003, 98). Also the film presents a notable critique of Japan’s Imperial assimilation (*kōminka*) campaign near the end. In the sequence, Shanghai’s children are singing the Japanese nursery song, “*Otete tsunaide*” (Holding our hands). At the beginning, the children sing clear Japanese lyrics while holding each other’s hands, but the lyrics soon become messy. The children continue singing, in loud and somewhat energetic voices, in what does not sound a decipherable language. The children are singing as if they were refusing audiences’ identity projection or sympathetic response.56

In *China Nights*, the ruin implies massively destructive force(s) surrounding the protagonists’ lives, but the film completely obscures the agency behind it - who destroyed the buildings for what reason? The ruin is rather used as a scenic object, through which Keiko and film audiences look into Keiran’s ‘internal’ reality. Ironically, Keiko’s sympathetic bond with Keiran emerges as her response to the sight of buildings that are

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56 The documentary *Shanhai* contains both war propagandist cliché and subtle subversive contents. When it was screened, the film received severe responses from military backers of the film production, but it was well received by audiences and critics (High 2003, 98; 102-107). Kumagai Hisatora’s dramatic war film, *Shanhai rikusen tai* (*The Naval Bridge at Shanghai*, 1939), also features the battle between Japanese Imperial Army and resistance forces in Shanghai. Both films have been videotized and circulated commercially.
perhaps destroyed by the Imperial Army. Keiko goes close enough to witness the past interwoven in Shanghai’s – and her own – present. She mediates, however, the enabling of imperial subjectivity: she refuses to incorporate the fragmented pieces of time and space as her own mirror image. In Chapter Three, I demonstrated that Japan’s modernity consumed the site/sight of the rural and incorporated it as the nostalgic past preceding the modern. Instead of making the destruction as a reflection of where she is coming from, however, Keiko quickly establishes the Japanese-Chinese divide by re-projecting the fragmented image to Keiran’s interior. While Keiko shows sympathy for Keiran’s misery, she situates herself to be so complete and content, that she would save Keiran. In this sequence Keiko does not make friends with Keiran, but her sympathetic gesture is enough to affirm Keiran’s victim position that is saved by Hase towards the end of the story. Although Keiko gives up her longing for him, her empathetic response corroborates very well with her male counterpart in consuming the city’s landscape and producing the ethnicized divide.

3. Hybrid and Excess in *Vow in the Desert*

As mentioned earlier, *Vow in the Desert* uses architectural metaphors to symbolize the West, Japanese and Chinese. Not only to conceptually tailor ‘modernity’ for Japanese imperialism’s own terms but also to disregard the preceding modern engineering projects of the *Kuomintang* (Chinese National Party), the film’s straight-forward glorification of industrial development is in fact accompanied by complex negotiations with representations of the West and Chinese.\(^{57}\) The concreteness of architecture is effectively

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\(^{57}\) William C. Kirby suggests that Chinese National Party aimed at rebuilding Nanking, the old “southern capital” that was destroyed in the civil wars during the mid-nineteenth century and the early 20th century,
employed to this end by having each building stand for a set of cultural practices and discourses and allowing Japanese protagonists different levels of access to them. The film’s introductory sequences feature the Great Wall and a white European-style hotel, each of which connotes ethno-cultural identities of Chinese and the West. Meanwhile, Hōran, the character played by Ri Kōran, personifies the hybrid of the West, Chinese and Japanese. Importantly, Hōran’s appearance is first overlapped with the West, but the film organizes spectators’ and film subjects’ looks towards Hōran so that the distinctions between the West, Chinese and Japanese are eventually diminished at the melodramatic climax.

The key thread of the film is patriarchal succession, from father to eldest and younger sons, of his profession and role that aim to establish ‘modern civilization’ in the Chinese mainland. The solidarity of pan-Asian brotherhood is romantically celebrated in one of the film’s theme songs, Vow in the Desert, also known as Kensetsu no uta, or, Construction Song. The lyrics go: “1. At joyous chorus/ shines golden clouds over the wilderness/ the sun is rising, the sun is rising/ in the Continent bursts our Construction Song/ 2. In that mountain, in this valley/ courageously brothers shed their blood/ now show your smile and listen/ our shout of victory, Construction Song.” As the lyrics indicate, the film brings together civil engineering, physical labour and the sacrifice of lives in the name of brotherhood and friendship. While only a few traces of maternal lineage are presented throughout the film, ‘the brotherhood through civilizing mission,’ or to become the new capital of industrial reformation and economic development since the party’s military occupation of the city in 1927. The economic boom had begun in several major cities in China a decade earlier and the first national integrative economic plan was designed by Sun Yatsen in 1935. Nationalists’ “Nanking decade” was ended, however, by Japanese military conquest, known as the Nanking Massacre or the Rape of Nanking (Kirby 2000; Chang 1998).

58 The song was recorded by a star singer, Ito Hisao, and released from Nihon Columbia record company prior to film’s release.
'participatory modernity,' as I would call it, is presented as an open and progressive process of bonding. Similar to *Song of the White Orchid* and *China Nights*, the individuality and mobility are the signs of imperial Japanese male subjects in *Vow in the Desert*. Again, like *China Nights*, Chinese males are largely presented as nameless crowds, but the anomalous state is rather situated at the emergence of participatory modernity, as I demonstrate later.

The film frames the symbols of Chinese and the West along a linear progressive order, reifying a modernist idea of the history. Film subjects’ placing vis-à-vis each building implicates the distance between Japanese imperialism and the represented historical moments. In the first sequence appear two Japanese males, the protagonist’s elder brother, Sugiyama Ichirō, and his colleague, gazing upon its long stretch from the top of the Great Wall (Figure 4-7, 4-8). As framing the Wall, the camera captures two men in an upward point-of-view from behind, and the panoramic view is also provided for film audiences. The men’s physical closeness to the architectural structure signifies Japan’s intimate distance with Chinese civilization. The men are so close to the stone bricks that they can be seen as a single continuum in the panorama. Sugiyama’s gesture, at the same time, conveys his mastery of the Western civilization. The main character is stepping his foot on a brick of the Wall in Figure 4-7, which implies that he conquered the past civilization as well as that he is making the following remarks in a casual manner. His relaxed body movement replicates modern acting rather than stylistic manners established by Japanese ‘traditional’ arts, such as *noh* or *kabuki*. Thus, the cultural forces of Chinese and the West are symbolically negotiated through the men’s immersion in Chinese history and acquisition of a modernized body.
Along with the point-of-view and body language, the protagonists’ conversation positions them as modernists who apply universal values to assess the Great Wall’s significance.

Ichirō: Whenever I imagine the extraordinary plan upon which the Great Wall was built, I am made to think how great human power is.

Colleague: Well, however, this is also useless [in addition to other things].

Ichirō: I don’t think so. The Great Wall delivers something in the most eloquent manner – the sturdiness of human efforts. How much efforts are put in between these bricks [to build the Wall].

Colleague: But a truck cannot be driven on the Wall.

Ichirō: Truck? Ha-ha-ha. No trucks, that’s it. So, let’s make another Wall on which a truck can be driven. The modern Great Wall, that is undefeatable by this one.

Colleague: Mmm…

In this conversation, Ichirō speaks as an intellectual romantic, whose life’s meaning is built upon the subjective connection with history, humankind and progress. His colleague, on the other hand, portrays a commoner’s practical sensibility. Yet the two men’s different voices agree upon one point, that the Wall cannot represent modernity.

Whereas the Great Wall is made to symbolize a past civilization, a white European-style hotel represents modern civilization. An intelligible contrast of spectators’ looks is offered between the two architectural structures. Spectators are led to look down on the Great Wall, but after a few indoor scenes, now they are guided to look up to the white hotel at a distance following the point-of-view of young members in Sugiyama family (Figure 4-9). The European-style hotel is located somewhere near Ichirō’s hometown.
The modern building symbolizes the family’s dream, in which Ichirō’s younger brother, Kenji, is about to succeed. Kenji has decided to go to the continent and work as a civil engineer. The Sugiyama family, including Ichirō’s father, mother, younger brothers and sisters, has come up to the top of a hill from which they can view the gorgeous white hotel that the father has built. They came here after having a pleasant chat in their living room. The living room with European-style furniture symbolizes the intimate closeness of the idealized modern family, and the white hotel is made to reflect the family’s oneness and stability. But Ichirō’s mother is not included in the living room. She is ill and joins Sugiyamas near her hospital, a somewhat remote place located at the seashore. The father tells her about the plan to send Kenji to Northern China, and the mother plays her role for Kenji by saying, “take good care of yourself.” The distance between the mother and the
sons created by her illness would imply the protagonists’ release from their physical bond with the community of origin. The men are instead mobilized to build the symbolic familial unity that supposedly encompasses all human beings – modernity. Indeed, sharing far-reaching views with audiences in the above sequences, Ichirō and Kenji mediate the senses of endless possibilities and freedom associated with Japanese men’s self-assigned mission in the Chinese mainland. Watching the white hotel on the hill, the Sugiyama family’s youngest boy asks, “why is our father always making somebody else’s houses?” Kenji responds, “The largest house our father built is in Northern China.” When children enjoy the view by naming the distant objects that they can see from the height, the father tells them, “There you go – it is such a nice scenery,” as if he must authorize his children’s gazes. The patriarchal authority, the gaze, and the admiration of technological development are tied together in the family excursion.

Figure 4-10
The first appearance of Hōran, played by Ri Kōran, overlaps the exquisite presentation of the European-style hotel. Her body becomes a spectacular sight, which pertains to the particular position that Hōran occupies in this film. Before she comes into view, her singing reaches the family when they are rejoicing in the scenery near the hotel. Figure 4-10 shows the hotel at a distance and positions Hōran in the middle, making the Sugiyama family’s gazes at the hotel smoothly transfer onto her body. Kenji’s gaze is captured by the camera, followed by Hōran’s close-up, again establishing her as a sight through the male protagonist’s gaze (Figure 4-11, 4-12). Mr. Sugiyama’s friend says that she is a daughter of a famous scholar in Beijing and is studying music in Japan. When the members of Sugiyama family are looking, Hōran steps down the hill. In the sequence, the white hotel is mediating the gaze of the Sugiyamas and film audiences being projected at the landscape and the woman’s body. Her singing performance simultaneously provides her body as an object of the gaze and establishes her corporeality as the undeniable origin of her voice. Hōran’s movement is emphasized by other film subjects’ stillness and continuous gaze. Emerging from the European-style hotel, she plays a metonymy of modernity: a single woman liberated from domestic restrictions and pursuing her artistic interest. The exposure of her body and voice translates into the nuance of a *moga* (‘modern girl’), that she is free to express herself through singing and releasing her body (Barlow et. al. 2005; Barlow 2006; Chaplin 2001; Sato 2003).
The parallel between the gazes at the white hotel and Hōran is the precursor of the two desires for the West and for the beautiful woman that this film attempts to reconcile. Japanese imperialists seek to become one with the West but they cannot, so they will make things that represent the West instead. They want to become one with the beautiful woman but they cannot, so they will become one by symbolically collapsing bodily boundaries. As in other Ri Kōran films, Hōran’s outdoor presence is used to make her as
an object of the gaze. The gaze at her body shapes her gendered place. But it is noteworthy that the gaze at Hōran is initially set out as that of admiration and awe in this film.

Following the sequence of the Sugiyama family’s excursion, Hōran and Kenji encounter each other on board a ship when they are traveling to the Chinese mainland. Kenji’s gaze in the previous sequence is now passed down to Hōran’s self-indulgent look towards herself – she is looking into a hand mirror and gently touching her cheek. When Hōran drops her mirror onto the floor, Kenji appears and picks it up for her. This is their second meeting. She says the mirror was left to her by her departed mother. Recalling Japanese men’s gaze, which implies the desire to reach the distant West, Hōran’s look towards herself begin to appear as a sign of self-reliance and confidence.

In addition to her similitude to the West, Hōran’s fluent and decent speech in standardized Japanese projects a desirable quality as a Japanese woman. The standardized spoken tongue was introduced in Japanese sound films in the early 1930s. The sound film pretends to reflect and reproduce the ordinary spoken language used in the centre of a nation, and strengthens the notion of imagined community that shares a geographic boundary and a common language.⁵⁹ Ri Kōran’s bilingual fluency is sometimes contrasted with other characters’ prattle in Vow in the Desert and Suzhou Nights, as Chinese female characters, performed by Ri Kōran and other women, are depicted to be diligent language learners. The arranged display of fluency and prattle provides a corporeal sample of ‘nation-as-becoming,’ a process of kōminaka (imperialization)

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⁵⁹ At the emergence of talkie films, the film critique Iwasaki Akira argued that American talkie films became “a new tower of Babel” by replacing the international language of silent films and disseminating a monolithic culture of capitalist imperialism which makes foreign language interpreters unintelligible to each other (Iwasaki, Tōkō no Nendaiki [Chronicle of the talkies], 1931; quoted in Silverberg 2006, 198).
(Robertson 1998). As in the other trilogy films and Suzhou Nights, the verbal exchange of two different languages reinforces the dualistic cultural substance of Japanese and Chinese nations. At the same time, the films equalize the language ability and political agreement, as sometimes stated by Japanese male characters.

When language is a vehicle for bridging two separate groups, the capability in the other language signifies the ability to understand the people in the other community.

Faced by Chinese villagers’ persistent resistance against Ichirō’s road construction project, Kenji utters mortifyingly, “Only if I was fluent in [Chinese] language, I could make myself understood.” Kenji is standing beside Ichirō’s bed with Ichirō’s colleagues and Hōran. Ichirō has just been shot by a gun, possibly by a villager, and seriously injured. In the interior of a small hut, Chinese- and Japanese- speaking co-workers surround the bed, illustrating a closely unified bi-ethnic community (Figure 4-13).

Figure 4-13

They watch over Ichirō’s last breath. Kenji’s words, “Only if…,” follows the death of Ichirō, who blamed “communist guerillas” for the shooting and defended the notion of
“righteous Chinese people.” In the extremely intense moment, Hōran tells Kenji, “Let me do it. I know what you mean.” She rushes out from the constructor’s hut, stands in front of a crowded of villagers, and delivers a tearful speech: “We are deceived by the communist guerilla. Mr. Sugiyama, whom we admire the most, was just killed by a communist. He was concerned about our life and belongings until his end. […] Who is the worst among us? It is those who are deceived by the communist guerilla.” Her tears and Ichirō’s unseen bloodshed signify breaking bodily boundaries and the merger of two ethnic groups. Also, the close-up shot of Hōran’s face releasing tears makes her body a spectacular site.

It is worth noting here that Ri Kōran’s sensational performance mediates the gaze of the film subjects and spectators. When the spectators sympathetically gaze upon the close-up of her ecstatic face, they are moved by the fully embodied emotion. The engagement through the gaze at once allows the spectators to capture the female body and lets them be caught by her. Now, the spectators’ sentiment is mimicking Hōran’s. Linda William’s concept, ‘bodily excess’ would be useful to highlight the temporary bonding between Ri Kōran’s body and the spectator. As “a filmic mode of stylistic and emotional excess that stands in contrast to more ‘dominant’ modes of realistic, goal-oriented narrative” (Williams 1995, 142), ‘bodily excess’ provides a set of framework for the relationship between spectators and the particular films that Williams grasps as “the body genre,” such as melodrama, horror films or pornography. As the primary embodiment of intense emotions, such as pleasure, fear and pain, she suggests, the body of female protagonist offers the most sensational sights, thus functions as both “moved and moving” (ibid, 143). Distinguished with other dominant genres for “lack[ing] of
proper aesthetic distance” (ibid, 144), these particular genres provide intense emotional and sensational relationship between the viewers and the filmed female body. The direct relationship often exerts as the audiences’ mimicry to what is seen on the screen, ie. sobbing, fear, or orgasm. Explosive release of fluids could accompany, or implied in, the filmic representation of body, such as tears, bloods, and sexual fluids. The ‘bodily excess’ also provides a breakthrough from preceding feminist film scholarship, which tended to conceive the gaze as objectifying and failed to comprehend female agency in film texts and the spectatorship (Mulvey 1973).

In this relay of bodily mimicry, Chinese villagers in the film and the spectators are placed in the same position, by sharing the same view and being saturated with overwhelming emotions. Thus, the melodramatic climax at the outdoor site successfully dissolves the symbolic national boundary once established between Japanese and Chinese through architectural representations while reinforcing the metaphorical continuation of the desire towards the West and Hōran. The symbolic blurring of the bodily and spatial boundary recurs when Japanese and Chinese men work together to rebuild a bridge damaged by a fierce flooding before the finale of the film. However, the leadership of the Japanese imperialists is not explicitly challenged through the merger of the communities.

In the melodramatic highlight of Vow in the Desert, Hōran’s speech is heard and her body becomes the spectacular sight at the same time. Whereas the equalization of language and community is established, Ri Kōran’s linguistic strength is depreciated. In offering her corporeal presence and confining her voice into her body, her ability is reduced to a tool for achieving imperialist goals. Meanwhile, Ichirō and Kenji are positioned as the authoritative voice, who can speak the universal ideal for the progress
of humanity. As Kaja Silverman states in “Dis-Embodying the Female Voice,” “the male subject enjoys not only specular but linguistic authority” (Silverman 1984, 131).

Ri Kōran’s crying situates her body as the origin of her voice, locating her feeling within her body and underlining the spontaneity of her passionate support for her love interest, Kenji, and further, for foreign forces’ intervention in the local transportation system. Kaja Silverman asserts that the female subject is associated with unreliable speech. “The participation of the male subject in the production of discourse maybe limited, and contingent upon his ‘willingness’ to identify with the existing cultural order, but the participation of the female subject in the production of discourse is nonexistent” (ibid., 132). If there is a chance that her speech is counted as reliable, it is when she presents her body fully in the gaze as the spectacle. Ri Kōran’s intensely ecstatic performance would counter-balance her linguistic excellence that exceeds every male performer in the film. To override the curtailing of her competence, her leg becomes injured when she escapes from a violent attack by guerrillas. Near the end of the film, Hōran hears the arrival of Kenji’s road construction troupe lying in bed. The sound of military march permeates the window of Hōran’s room decorated with Chinese-style ornaments, connoting the imperial army’s approach to Chinese people’s hearts.

This ‘macho’ turn of the film narrative seems peculiar when the initial framing of the romantic admiration towards Hōran is taken account. It can be read as the film producer’s attempt to balance between “Ri Kōran’s […] music appeal that significantly absorbs the public” and patriotic responses for China Nights such as that the film “used the war ruins where our troops shed precious bloods as the background of […] idiotic
behaviors of a man and a woman,” which was “unbearable for nationals.”  

4. Guarded and Exposed Bodies in Suzhou Nights

The story of Suzhou Nights is centred upon a developing intimacy between two individuals, Kanō (called by his family name) and Kōran (called by her given name), who are temporary independent from familial restrictions. In this film, the symbolic connection of the ie (house/family) and the nation-state permeating the previous films is paraphrased to the space of an urban clinic and an orphanage, located next to each other, in which the protagonists work at. The functions of the clinic and the nursery home in Suzhou Nights resemble the operations of the ie in Song of the White Orchid, in a sense that each place represents a nation in which gendered performances delineate the characters’ desirability as national subjects. Moreover, the miniature sites of nation produce imperial subjects through biomedical management, in which the boundary of nation is symbolically maintained as the line between bodily interior and exterior. Like soldiers who guard national borders, doctors and nurses protect bodily borders, so that no harmful microorganisms would invade.

In the film, Kanō’s clinic offers a safe zone in the midst of urban jungle. Outside of the clinic, the urban space is filled with clutters and darkness, paralleling the concept of hygiene that is being promoted by Kanō and Kōran. It is in the urban sanctuary of Kanō’s clinic in which the couple’s first friendly conversation begins. Meanwhile, rural space, such as meadow and open fields, indicates a release from the city’s tension and provides a stunning backdrop for the modern couple’s growing romance. The melodrama

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60 Tsumura Hideo, “Nihon eiga seisaku gaihyō [A General Summary and Comments on Japanese Film Production from the 16th year of Shōwa],” Eiga jumpō [Film Quarterly] 37: 5 (February 1, 1942) and “Shin eiga hyō: Shina no yoru [New film critique: China Nights],” Tokyo Asahi Shinbun, June 6th 1940, 3.
of tension, resolution and separation between the two is ended by Kōran’s submersion to patriarchal family and Kanō’s departure to pursue his mission as a doctor – the Chinese woman’s confinement to a domestic sphere and the Japanese man’s renewed adventure.

Unlike the trilogy films that attribute a sense of exclusivity to interior sites, the boundary of the clinic is open and flexible: the space accepts constant visitors who cross the border between inside and outside of the building. Kanō is one of the foreign doctors who promote health and hygiene across local communities in and around Shanghai. His presence is established as necessity rather than invasive annoyance for people’s bodies and spaces. Doctors and patients share a common enemy, the threat of illness and death. Despina Kakoudaki points out the prominence of non-human enemies, such as unknown epidemics, insect-like aliens or natural disasters, in Hollywood Sci-Fi apocalypse films of the 1990s (Kakoudaki 2002). These films similarly depict the faceless enemies as the cause for the solidarity of racially diverse subjects. Although recent films are distinguished by digital manipulations of the images and the extreme degree of speed, the common thematic structure to Suzhou Nights is indicative of a sustaining narrative force in popular entertainment films. Perhaps the plot pattern reconciles two levels of imagined collectivity: racial/ethnic differences are curtailed when the urgent public goal is shared, whereas the symbolic alignment of the body and nation is sustained.

In the interior space of the clinic, the roles are strictly divided by gender and ethnic groups. Japanese men, including Kanō, hold the authority as doctors and are occasionally assisted by female nurses. Chinese-speaking characters and Japanese-speaking characters are distinguished as patients and doctors, respectively. The authoritative position of the Japanese doctor over Chinese patients is reinforced by the hierarchical age structure, in
which patients are frequently (but not always) Chinese children while doctors are adult Japanese men. The hybrid characteristic that the modern medicine is based upon is metaphorically replaced by the patriarchal dominance of Japanese in the clinic: the young civilization of China is to be raised under the guidance of Japanese men. The clinic is located next to a nursery home, where Kōran and her Chinese-speaking female co-worker are taking care of children. The main characters in the clinic and the orphanage present the intersection of gendered and ethnicized positioning in the film: the masculine and Japanese are identified; so as the feminine and Chinese. When Kōran is first introduced to the spectators, her nurturing role is presented by the shot where she is washing children’s bodies in a bathroom (Figure 4-14). Her performance of mothering, depicting the feminine character of the nursery home, simultaneously illustrates that the institution’s primary agenda is the purification of Chinese children’s bodies and the promotion of hygiene.

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61 Modern discourses of law, politics, education, medicine, natural and social sciences were introduced to Japanese elites via Chinese characters, which contain numerous abstract concepts and had been instrumental for Japanese intellectual system for centuries. Working closely with the Meiji government, Japanese translators appropriated conventional Chinese idioms and assigned new meanings to them (eg. 'hygiene'), or invented a combination of characters to signify newly introduced concepts (Rogaski 2004, 136-137). Some concepts were first introduced by Chinese intellectuals and transplanted into Japanese discourse (eg. ‘right’ and ‘obligation’); some new idioms first used by Japanese were imported into Chinese semantics (eg. ‘epoch’ and ‘civilization’) (Katō 1991, 358-359; Lee 2000, 31-2).
Figure 4-14

The clinic functions both as the manifestation of the imperialist ideal of an inclusive multiethnic community and the centre for producing disciplined modern subjects. The temporality of the film narrative seems to be situated after the Imperial army’s attack on Shanghai, as a sequence shows war-ruin in distance (Figure 4-15). When Kanō voluntarily treats a sick child in the orphanage, his spatial transgression draws Kōran’s severe hostile reaction. Her distrust against Japanese settlers cannot be reconciled by Kanō’s suggested donation to the orphanage. Kanō’s spatial transgression resonates with the military invasion. Kōran’s remark at their reconciliation indicates that her initial hostility against him was caused by her general doubt about Japanese

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Imperialism. However, her antagonism diminishes when Kanō rescues a female child from Kōran’s institution from drowning in a river. Once the difference between the two is set up as that of nations in the personal interactions and verbal utterances, but the characters’ tension is reconciled not through a political negotiation but as a protagonist’s bodily boundary symbolically dissolves.

When Kanō jumps into the water to rescue the female child, the symbolic alignment among doctor, masculine body and the status of savior is intensified. Kanō’s body shows a hint of vulnerability when he is soaked in water, but he swiftly recovers in the sequence immediate after the heroic rescue: he appears in the white medical lab coat examining the child’s body. Kanō’s clinical gaze assures his position of dominance and authority (Figure 4-16). As if the child’s accidental drowning connoted a purifying process to provide a good luck for her, the child’s mother is found after the incident and she returns home. The tension between Kanō and Kōran is then resolved. Their
reconciliation is located as a signal that Kōran’s and Kanō’s gendered labours have common goals: saving people’s lives by promoting public health and hygiene.

Figure 4-16

Kanō’s medical practice is not restrained in the urban clinic, as he travels around with a truck. The mobility is typical of the Japanese imperial subject which, however, puts Kanō’s in risk at times. He suffers from an unidentified infectious disease when he stays in a remote village clinic to help other doctors. The distances from the city and from the modern hygiene consciousness are paralleled when a doctor in the rural clinic scolds his patient, “don’t leave your food at such a place [like floor].” If Driscoll’s argument that I mentioned in Chapter Two is recalled here, this sequence provides multiple positions (“detective, victim and criminal”) for spectators would identify with at the same time: the Japanese male doctor who is eager to find out others’ failure in scientific knowledge or bodily discipline, and the villager who anticipates punishments for further improvement.
(and microorganisms that wait to invade whenever a chance arrives). Indeed, the interreferentiality between the urban subjects and the rural ‘other’ is crucial in the dissemination of hygiene, since “in identifying marginal members of the body politic, they have mapped the moral parameters of […] nations”(Stoler 1995; 7). Kanō’s trajectory from the visit to the empire’s periphery, through the edge of life and to the safe return to the metropolitan centre impart an imperial adventure similar to the Japanese male protagonist, Hase, in China Nights. Unlike Hase, who willingly put his body in danger in the exchange of gun shots, doctor Kanō’s body is protected against direct contacts with external influences. Guarded by his lab court, gloves and medical tools, the doctor does not immediately touch the Chinese-speaking patients’ bodies. Though the clinic is open for visits, the doctor’s body is firmly guarded so as to avoid a direct contact with ‘exterior’ bodies.

As mentioned earlier, one of the spectacular highlights of the film shows a far-reaching view of a meadow, in which Kōran is saturated with joy in singing a lyrical popular song in Japanese (Figure 4-17). The herd of sheep, the vegetation in the field, and the roadside trees – all present typical scenic features that are not seen in Japan-located
films. Because of the narrative’s continuity, the scene is located in somewhere reached by car from Shanghai. However, the scenery is crafted as European without typical ethno-
cultural icons of Chinese. And the camera captures Kanō watching her from behind a roadside tree at distance (Figure 4-18). While Kōran’s body is exposed to Kanō’s eye in the middle of the meadow, his body is half-hidden behind the tree, confirming his status as the gaze. Here Kanō represents modern man’s abstracted agency, and Kōran’s singing situates her body as a source of her vocal expression. As opposed to Kanō’s body, which is protected by his mask and lab coat in this outdoor scene, Kōran enjoys immersing herself in enormous natural surroundings.

The placing of Kōran in the archetypical European meadow entails ambiguous connotations. In the eyes of doctor Kanō, the feminine body and the nature is set side by side, alluding to women’s essential difference from men, as framed by European epistemology (Hekman 1990). The idea of naturalized motherhood was introduced by Japanese intellectual elites through pedagogical philosophies and scientific discourses around 1880s, and offered an ideological support for the women’s participation as mother and nurturer in the Imperialist regime. Muta Kazue argues that the conceptualization of womanhood as essential and embodied nature was crucial in the discursive construction of individuality in feminist movements (Horiba ed. 1991; Muta 1996). When the notion of essential femininity marks Japan’s modernity, the symbolic link between nature and Kōran not only reaffirms the film’s gendered role assignment given at the opening, but also makes her a sign of new era. Kanō’s remote look at her duplicates Kenji in Vow in the Desert who simultaneously gazes at Hōran and the white European hotel, as if admiring her status of modern woman. Infused with the European rural fantasy, the look cast towards Kōran confers a desire only allowed through a distance.

To elaborate on the space between Kanō and Kōran, it is important to be aware of
the emphasized transparency of the vision. No obstacle interferes the two protagonists, which strengthens the romantic unity in the natural environment. As Kōjin Karatani points out, when Japanese intellectuals and political authorities sought to reform the society in the image of Enlightened Europe, the dominant use of Chinese ideograms, that had traditionally characterized intellectual and political communication, was viewed as an obstacle to the anticipated social progress (Karatani 1993, 44-7; see also Cazdyn 2002, 41-43; Lamarre 1999, 24-25). In this context, the absence of cultural artifacts and urban clutter, as well as the direct gaze at Kōran, synonymously represent an undistracted progress towards an enlightened state, the phantasm of the West.

In the clinic, Kanō’s gaze is that of medial scrutiny: the gaze is a utilitarian tool for control and dissection. Now his gaze is that of touch (Marks 2000). When the distance underpins the desire and admiration for the Western ‘other,’ he can only reach her by looking. Though situating her as the symbol of the yet-to-come but promised future, the intimate sight is felt by the male protagonist. Again, like Vow in the Desert, the melodramatic highlight mediates the gaze, through which film spectators mimic the bodily sensation of the film subjects. The spectators share the modernist vision and owe for the brilliant future at the sight of Ri Kōran.

5. Conclusion

The mechanisms of subject positioning in China Nights, Vow in the Desert, and Suzhou Nights are summarized in terms of spatial contrasts of interior and exterior, the interplays of the gaze and power dynamics among subjects, and co-production of bodily boundary

63 The genbun ichi (the Unification of Speech and Writing) movement was the most active in the first decade of Meiji period (1868-1912) and aimed at replacing Chinese characters by a phonetic writing system.
and spatial border.

A. Spatial contrasts of the interior and the exterior

Interior sites are constituted as the metaphorical representations of ‘domesticity.’ Interior space symbolizes the degree of unity and collectivity of a nation. While the male protagonist’s house functions as the character’s residential space, as well as a symbolization of Japanese Imperial nation in *Song of the White Orchid*, the three films analyzed in this chapter provide multiple interior sites to represent the nation.

Women’s caring and nurturing performances are located in the interior sites (i.e. Yamato House’s hostess in *China Nights*, a female friend taking care of Hōran’s injury in *Vow in the Desert*, Keiran’s role at *Suzhou Nights’* orphanage). But a woman is not always present in each interior site, even when the place serves to symbolically establish a Japan-China divide. The interior sites instead inscribe abstracted notions of domesticity that go beyond ‘woman’s space’: Hase’s room in *China Nights* offers Japanese men’s power position through their downward gaze towards the city and Chinese-speaking subjects; the construction hut in *Vow in the Desert* represents the achievement of Imperial assimilation; Kanō’s clinic provides a safe space that is guarded against viruses’ invasion. What do these uses of space tell us about the notion of ‘domesticity’? Similar to *Song of the White Orchid*, these films guarantee Japanese male subjects’ outdoor mobility and their entitlement as modern subject is expressed through exterior actions. Their indoor activities are a continuation of these outdoor activities, where men’s interior actions utilize the power of looking, and the spatial boundaries do not obstruct the men’s looking, as symbolized by Hase’s ‘looking out’ from his room. The gaze also provokes the
abstracted notion of power and dominance, in contrast with the bodily materiality and emotional investment that women’s domestic actions involve.

The men’s indoor actions don’t create their attachment to the place, but rather entice their desires to go out and make use of their distinctive abilities or qualities. Their indoor activities are a precursor to their exterior mobility. As the interior/exterior boundary does not obstruct their actions, they are granted an exceptional spatial permeability.

B. The interplays of the gaze and power dynamics among subjects

Japanese male and female subjects’ dominant position is established through looking down upon others, Chinese(-speaking) subjects and/or landscapes, in accordance with the subject positioning in *Song of White Orchid*. The working of the gaze constitutes the male protagonists’ agencies and provides the grounds for their exterior mobility. Kenji’s ‘mission’ in *Vow in the Desert* is represented by a surveying machine, an optical system that assists in sighting a distant object. Additionally, characters’ gazes often provide the means of sanctions and prohibition against what or who attempt to cross the boundary between the interior and the exterior in body and/or space. In *China Nights*, it is exemplified by Hase’s friend’s downward gaze toward Keiran and her cousin speaking in a back alley behind Yamato House. Kanō’s clinical gaze through the microscope similarly stands for his control over human body and illness in *Suzhou Nights*. In both films, the gaze directly works as the sanction and/or prohibition that constitute gendered and ethnicized positioning.
C. Co-production of bodily boundary and spatial border

A spatial connotation of a film narrative is strengthened by paralleled implication(s) on bodily boundary. Also, metaphors dealing with one’s bodily boundary point to how one is positioned in a certain territory. *China Nights* parallels Hase’s travel to Shanghai’s margin and his physical danger. In *Vow in the Desert*, Höran’s tearful melodramatic performance, which metaphorically breaks her bodily boundary, coincides with her speech supporting Chinese communities’ merger into Japanese Imperialism. Kanō in *Suzhou Nights* promotes health and hygiene in which the act of ‘protecting nation’ is equalized with ‘protecting body.’

The notion of bodily interior, such as feelings, wills and memories, is constituted through the combination of Ri Kōran’s close-up shot, singing or crying, and/or spectacular scenery. The scenic background is sometimes used to project Ri Kōran’s characters’ ‘internal reality,’ and turn her ‘inside out’ for audiences. *China Nights*’ war ruin echoes Keiran’s turmoil from the past; *Suzhou Nights*’ vast meadow visualizes Kōran’s feminine nature. Because of these internal realities, they are situated away from modernity/present, while Japanese male characters embody modernity through their in-film activities. In the same sequence, the camera captures a Japanese character seeing her, that is, Keiko in *China Nights* and Kanō in *Suzhou Nights*. This shot construction allows the film character’s gaze to be passed down to the audiences, who are positioned to look at Ri Kōran’s body.

In the previous chapter, I argued that there is a qualitative difference between the Japanese male protagonist’s mobility and Ri Kōran’s character’s. Her outdoor presence at
the same time exposes her as an object of the gaze. The Japanese male protagonist’s agency, on the other hand, is established through his exterior mobility. Devoting themselves to spatial domination, men embody national agency through exterior activities. This chapter’s analyses have further clarified the male protagonists’ mobility. The mobility is not merely presented as subjects’ movements across distance. Men’s mobility also means their spatial permeability, their ability to ‘pass’ the interior/exterior boundaries. At the same time, spatial boundaries function to construct women and ethnic ‘other,’ while the same boundaries are appropriated to represent male subject’s spatial dominance. Ironically, his safe transgression means that he is the ‘rule’.

The three films inscribe visual metaphors that make Japanese male protagonists racially ‘white’ – Hase’s untainted cleanliness, the European white hotel representing Kenji’s and his family’s dream, and Kanō’s white lab coat. I would assert that the characters’ whiteness is not a false association, but a carefully constructed embodied reality. In “A Phenomenology of Whiteness” (2007), Sara Ahmed argues that whiteness is “effect of racialization, which in turn shapes what it is that bodies ‘can do’”(150). Ahmed paraphrases racialization as spatial politics:

[W]hiteness becomes a social and bodily orientation given that some bodies will be more at home in a world that is orientated around whiteness. […] The politics of mobility, of who gets to move with ease across the lines that divide spaces, can be re-described as the politics of who gets to be at home, who gets to inhabit spaces, as spaces that are inhabitable for some bodies and not others, insofar as they extend the surfaces of some bodies and not others” (Ahmed 2007, 160-2).

Whereas the bodily property of Japanese male characters doesn’t appear ‘white,’ the men’s relations to space, as examined above, exactly replicate the social construction of ‘whiteness’. In the concluding chapter, I further discuss the orchestration of the gaze and
cinematic space in order to produce the ‘whiteness’ of Japanese male protagonists, and how this symbolic operation is different from how Ri Kōran is situated.
Chapter Five

Concluding Remarks

Power is not an institution, and not a structure; neither is it a certain strength we are endowed with; it is the name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society (Foucault 1990, 93).

1. Theoretical Implications

In the last two chapters I presented my analysis of the interconnected construction of gendered and ethnicized positioning in the melodramatic adventure films, Song of the White Orchid (1939), China Nights (1940), Vow in the Desert (1940), and Suzhou Nights (1941), in which Ri Kōran co-starred with Japanese male actors and performed the roles of ‘Chinese woman’. I troubled and reconfigured the notion of ‘border-crossing,’ or a symbolic alignment of mobility and freedom, which the popular media and academic analyses have often postulated through spatial representations in her films and biographic accounts. In previous chapters, I argued that Ri Kōran’s film performance was distinguished from other “cross-ethnicking” Japanese actors by her connections with multiple ethno-cultural sites, including her multilingual fluency, association with the ‘multiethnic’ colonial state, Manchuria, and frequent movements across borders
(Robertson 1998). In the film analysis, I questioned whether the characters performed by Ri Kōran are “completely free[d] from the struggle over geography” (Said 1993, 7).

Although each Ri Kōran character presents exceptional mobility not granted to other female characters and Chinese male characters, her outdoor exposure is utilized to align the audience’s gaze with the gaze of Japanese male imperialists or Chinese villagers. Only for Japanese male protagonists is mobility synchronized with imperial-colonial agency, which is metaphorically established through their gaze. Japanese female protagonists are given limited mobility but their power of looking is activated via Ri Kōran’s presence. Thus I illustrated that Ri Kōran does not transcend or become free from the making of ethno-cultural borders, but becomes a significant site through which gendered and ethnicized positioning is reinforced through looking relations.

In sum, my film analysis delineated the ways in which gendered and ethnicized divides are formulated as interconnected constructs in the symbolic operation of the imperial nation. In the films, the categories of gender and ethnicity are not positioned along a vertical hierarchy. Rather, gendered and ethnicized significations are interdependent products of each film narrative that seeks to establish the Japanese male protagonist’s agency via his mobility and gaze. As pointed out in Chapter Two, political discourses of Japanese imperialism utilized ambivalent and fluid positions of the ‘West’ and Asian ‘others’ to assert its dominance (Oguma 1998; Gao 2002). My research borrowed and extended the idea in previous studies that cultural continuities and differences across Asia were manipulated as a symbolic resource either to justify Japan’s military encroachment or to assert its exceptional entitlement to represent modernity. I grappled with what preceding scholars portrayed as the oscillation between two poles, the
West and Asian ‘others,’ and delineated systematic operations that distinguish Japanese male agency. I illustrated that Japanese male agency is not simply placed in-between the West and the Other. The power relations inscribed through geographic representations, such as ‘the West and Japan,’ or ‘Japan and Asia,’ are not transmuted into horizontal divisions in cinematic space. Chinese, Japanese and the West are rather constituted as shifting representations of the past/obstruction, present/mobile agency, and future/envisioned goal, respectively, which provide multiple (and perhaps simultaneous) locations for spectators to place themselves in the linear progressive order of social reformation.

In order to avoid oversimplification, I should acknowledge that not only Ri Kōran but also Japanese male actors are exposed to spectators’ gaze. It is notable that Hasegawa Kazuo, who co-starred with Ri Kōran in the Trilogy, started out his acting career as oyama (man-performing-woman actor) in the traditional kabuki theatre. His fame of beauty remained even after he turned into a modern film actor playing male characters (Yamada 1986). Sano Shūichi, the co-leading actor in Suzhou Nights, was also praised as exceptionally handsome. But the protagonists were differentiated from others by the privileged use of the gaze to metaphorically (re)establish their power and authority when allowing a glimpse of their vulnerability. Kanō’s rescue drama in Suzhou Nights is exemplary of this. The male protagonist’s risk-taking adventure, a crucial ingredient of imperial adventure, also accommodates a dominant narrative pattern of ‘order/disorder/order-restored’ in mainstream classic cinema discussed in Chapter Two.

In Chapter Three and Four, I demonstrated that the male protagonists’ agency is established through their outdoor activities. In Song of the White Orchid, the activities are
land cultivation and railroad construction, which are directly linked to the occupation of colonial space. The male protagonists in *China Nights*, *Vow in the Desert*, and *Suzhou Nights* enjoy outdoor mobility, but their works do not necessarily aim at dominating concrete space. While Kenji in *Vow in the Desert* engages in road construction projects, *China Nights*’ Hase is a spontaneous detective and *Suzhou Nights*’ Kanō is a doctor.

What is similar in their outdoor activities is, as I discussed in Chapter Four, that they utilize and activate the power of the gaze. Although the use of the gaze is not apparent in his ‘mission’, Kenji’s power position is also organized around the gaze, in contrast with Kyoko’s optical disadvantages in *Song of the White Orchid*. The male protagonists’ mobility, associated with their optical faculty – looking at what is not seen by ‘ordinary’ or ‘natural’ eyes – simultaneously symbolizes and justifies their presence in the public space and spatially permeating acts.

The men’s permeability should be differently evaluated from Ri Kōran’s spatial transgression. Her acts of border-crossing stages her body as an object of the gaze. The exceptional mobility that Ri Kōran presents does not efface ethnic and gender relations in the trilogy or *Suzhou Nights*. On the contrary, the men embody the gaze when they cross the same boundaries. Their corporeality is made absent when he is the gaze. Again, here is a significant parallel between ‘whiteness’ and Japanese male protagonists: “[T]he ‘absent’ but imperializing ‘white eye’; the unmarked position from which all these ‘observations’ are made and from which, alone, they make sense. […] The ‘white eye’ is always outside the frame – but seeing and positioning everything within it” (Hall 1990, 14). As long as agency is identified with the gaze and his corporeality does not matter, he is indeed acting as a ‘white man’. Whiteness is inhabited by the gaze that *unmarks* spatial
boundaries.

Through this research, I developed sensibility to multi-layered spatial operations, which allows me to discern two theoretical implications. First, my research entices a conceptual shift from the theory of the gaze to vision-in-relation, or, to the power of looking examined along with social and cultural mapping of space. As I mentioned in Chapter Two, Laura Mulvey’s conceptualization of the male gaze relied upon Sigmund Freud’s sexual identity theory and contended that the gaze inscribed in film serves as a metaphor of male-to-female sexual desire and reproduces patriarchal domination through objectification of the female body (Mulvey 1975). As pointed out in Chapter Two, many authors have complicated Mulvey’s assumptions, by demonstrating audiences’ diverse accesses to film texts (Ang 1985; Butler 2000; Hall 1997; hooks 1992; Mayne 1997). To confirm these theoretical elaborations, my analysis of Ri Kōran’s films have indicated that two Japanese women characters (Kyoko in Song of the White Orchid and Toshiko in China Nights) are positioned to exert the power of the gaze, though only temporarily, upon Ri Kōran’s characters: Kyoko’s gaze stops Sekkō’s spatial transgression into the ie; Toshiko’s empathetic look into Keiran’s interiority parallels Hase’s detective-like chase towards the outskirt of city. The female-to-female gaze, however, cannot be explained as the expression of power or sexual intimacy by Mulvey’s theory. Indeed a key problem of Mulvey’s identification of the gaze, power and sexuality was the heterosexualization of visual pleasure, which excluded racial or ethnic relations from a gender category and left the female-to-female gaze as unintelligible.64 I want to repeat here that the haptic

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64 I want to note here that Freud’s theory of sexuality was based upon the triangular relationship of child(son)-father-mother and narrated via a backward glance towards the closed interiority of home. Hinged upon Freud’s theory, I would argue, the concept of the male gaze assumed a phase of sexual identification before spectator’s film viewing and anchored the conceptual tie between psychoanalytical subject and
visuality contributes to the shaping of ethnic/racial relations in Ri Kōran films: her melodramatic performance creates an affective bond between spectators and film characters, which effectively mediates multiple positioning of gendered, ethnicized and racialized subjects.

This finding leads to the theoretical implication, which responds to the audience studies of Ri Kōran films discussed in Chapter One. Speculating on passionate fans from diverse ethno-linguistic backgrounds, the scholars postulated audience projections to her multi-locality (Stephenson 1999; Tamura 2000; Wang 2007). In contrast to preceding studies claiming the restrictive propagandist effects of the films, these studies implied that Ri Kōran provided an ‘inclusive package,’ so to speak, for identity projection through the use of language, costume, mobility and forged nationality. They did not, however, elucidate causal links between audience desires and film representations. Although I provided only a limited historical reference to Japan, Manchuria, and Shanghai, my analysis indicated that each film provides distinctive methods to symbolically deal with the issues entailed by “alternative modernities”: the establishment of a national identity, the idealization and mimicry of the West, and the negotiation with conventional and new cultural and political representation systems (Mitchell 1999, xii; also see Chatterjee 1997). Though the films’ reconciliation is temporal, it is intriguing that the affective and tactile senses of looking are implicated in the cinematic negotiation with the Western ‘other,’ as seen in *Vow in the Desert* and *Suzhou Nights*. I would suggest that my research illuminates possible ways in which the films spoke to audiences at different locations of colonial modernity. If gender relations, the construction of tradition/modernity, the sexuality in the event prior to film viewing. My theoretical treatment, on the other hand, does not employ the moment of sexual subjectification before spectator’s access to a film but rather focuses on the making of gender, ethnicity and race by way of film’s presence.
process of nation-building, and the notion of mobility are further studied in each location, audience desires can be discussed in relation to a specific form of modernity.

In the context of Japanese imperial modernity, I suggest, the films symbolically negotiate with three levels of power dynamics: the establishment of a national identity, the mimicry of the West, and the significance of China. By delineating cinematic space and subject positioning in Ri Kōran’s films, I illustrated that Chinese, Japanese and the West are constituted as shifting positions that respectively represent past/obstructions, present/a mobile agency, and future/the envisioned goal. Ri Kōran attracts spectators’ gaze and mediates multiple locations to identify with, while Japanese male protagonists embody the gaze by making his corporeality absent.

2. After Thoughts

How did I arrive at this research topic? I once heard the filmmaker, Richard Fung, saying that he makes films about what “bugs” him. In the case of this thesis, I wrote about the questions of national identity and historical memory that have been bugging me for a long time, certainly longer than the thesis project itself. The physical sense of “bugging” implies that the questions are not simply solved in a cognitive framework that attempts to separate and manage bodily senses.

This process began with research on National Film Board of Canada documentary films on Japanese culture and people produced during WWII. I met a number of people who were working on the histories of Japanese Canadians at a 2002 conference, *Changing Japanese Identities in Multicultural Canada*, in Victoria, B.C. Through various

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65 I recall this was one of the annual Images Festival in Toronto, in which Fung introduced his work, *Islands* (2003).
methods, their work questioned how to approach collective memories when they have not been part of the dominant narratives of the nation (Kess et al. eds 2003; see also Oikawa 2002; Sugiman 2007). At the conference, I presented a paper on an NFB propaganda film, *The Mask of Nippon* (1942) and my research did not go much beyond that. I felt I was oddly positioned to the research subject - that I was a superficial observer to a subject that has profound meanings to some people. Although I was implicated in the construction of ‘Japanese’ race by the NFB film, my ethical concern was whether I was permitted to touch upon “this side” of historical trauma (the ‘Internment’) when I am seemingly located at “the other side” (Imperial Japan). Yet, I wanted to see the two positions not as a contradiction but rather a continuum. The discrepancy speaks to the difficulty to describe the meanings of the *war past* without evoking any national divides.

I met two Japanese visitors, whose reactions to the narratives of ‘Internment’ marked contrast to my response: one called it “the history of our country,” and the other commented, “I am proud of you [the Internment survivors] as the same Japanese.” What had been “bugging” me was the oneness of a nation implied in these utterances, which I was unable to articulate at that point. It was shortly thereafter, during my research stay in Nagoya, Japan, that I learned about Yamaguchi Yoshiko/Ri Kōran and her wartime films, which has proven a great medium for me to elaborate on the issues about sentiment and nation.

Film helps to articulate the elements of cultural and social codes that might not have been acknowledged otherwise, and to systematically organize them in order to make sense in a larger system of meanings (Wagner 2006). While thinking and writing about the films, I figured out applicable methods and theoretical supports to make sense of what
I see or feel in them. Moreover, this film analysis assisted me to unlearn the meanings of vision. Laura Marks’s concept of “haptic visuality” was especially significant for me to attend the synthetic terrain of knowing/touching/seeing (Marks 2000). The concept allowed me to reflect on neglected senses and recognize how presence and absence have been intricately connected in events, narratives and memories.

In this research process, I began remembering three encounters that I did not directly connect with the notion of political resistance when they occurred. The two men and one woman, between 70-80 years old, spoke the exact same phrase to me in fluent Japanese in different places: “Nihon no kata desuka?” [Are you a Japanese person?] The first man was a shopkeeper of a small pharmacy in the Bloor and Christie area, so-called Korean Town. The next encounter was with a mother-in-law of the owner of a corner store in my previous neighbourhood, not far from Korean Town. And the last man was working in a coffee shop at the University of Toronto at Scarborough. Somewhat different from a casual chat, they posed the question almost out of blue. But “nihon no kata” is a polite way to ask origin. On these occasions, it signaled that they were not Japanese but had learned the language. I felt the urge to communicate something, to search for words and respond with a question, again in Japanese: “Yes, I am Japanese. Where did you learn the language?” I felt rude for asking, because I almost knew the answer: “I learned in Korea.” But I would have similarly felt guilty if I did not ask – by not asking, I would have taken the process of language acquisition (‘imperial assimilation’) for granted. These interactions were uneasy.

It took a while – in fact, it took writing a whole thesis – for me to realize their approach can also be considered as a testimonial. This testimonial does not fill the gaps
of factual recognition in the way Japanese peace education activists would ask for; the question does not specify when and how each person witnessed the process and impacts of colonization. Thus it requires a certain reading on the part of the recipient in order to connect the utterance to a broader historical knowledge. (When I responded, “where did you learn the language?,” the woman whom I met in a corner store replied with dismay, “Nowadays young people don’t know about the history.”) In a very subtle way, the phrase “Nihon no kata desuka?” illustrates the form of ‘we’ that exists but rarely comes to the surface in the war remembrance of Japanese history education and popular culture. The discontinuity between the war past and the present created through the national discourse is disrupted by the testimony of embodied history. At the same time, their question reveals that the monolithic community of Japanese nation – postulated to share a common language, physicality, collective memories, and empathy – is a fantasm.

International marketing of popular culture is now increasingly connecting audiences in East Asian countries and forming an appearance of collectivity that presumably shares the gaze and desires (Iwabuchi 2001, 2002; Huat and Iwabuchi 2008). The historical testimony should not be heard as a supplement of an imaginary ego (“You are like us.”) but a critique against the desire that underpins the intensified unification of market economy (“Why am I made to seek after a larger ‘we’ as if it does not exist even though it has been once created?”).

Identity is constructed and negotiated through interactions. If a nation is a fantasm constituted through exchanges and projections, the position of ‘I’ as a coherent national subject is also a cultural artifact. This thesis, however, has been employing ‘I’ to explore a speaking and viewing position, and a point for subjective investments, called upon by a
series of films implicated in a national history. The intersections of subject formation, film viewing, and urban space, have also been delineated through the elaboration of ‘I.’ The exploration of ‘I’ through writing this thesis meant ‘doing a history’ as much as ‘knowing a history.’ It has been a process of creative negotiation with the forces that subsume my here and now, inevitably constructed through a series of call and response with others, into a fixture of national history. While admitting films’ multiple effects and their affects upon me as a spectator, my social and cultural circumstances are reflected and my knowledge reorganized so that my position can be called ‘transnational’ or ‘diasporic.’
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Dir. Richard Fung, Video/Colour.

*My Nightingale (Watashi no uguisu*, 1943*)
Manchuria Film Association and Tōhō Film Company, dir. Shimazu Yasujiro. Black and White, VHS Video (Toho Ltd.)

*New Bride’s Mirror (Nīzuma kagami*, 1940*)
Tōhō Film Company, dir. Watanabe Kunio. Black and White, VHS Video (Toho Ltd.)

*Sayon’s Bell (Sayon no kane*, 1943*)
Shochiku Film Company, Manchuria Film Association and Governor-General of Taiwan, dir. Shimizu Hiroshi. Black and White, VHS Video (Shochiku).

*Shanghai (Shanhai: shina jihen kōhō kiroku*, 1938*)
Tōhō Film Company, dir. Kamei Fumio. Black and White, VHS Video (Toho Ltd.).

*Song of the White Orchid (Byakuran no uta*, 1939*)
Tōhō Film Company, dir. Watanabe Kunio. Black and White, VHS Video (Toho Ltd.).
*The Mask of Nippon (1942)*
National Film Board of Canada, dir. Margaret Palmer. Black and White, VHS Video (NFB).

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*Vow in the Desert (Nessa no chikai, 1940)*
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Dir. Celine Rumalean, Video/Colour.
(Japanese version: *Rekishi no kizu ato, 2004*)