Lost Histories

In 2002, the fourth highest grossing film in South Korea was a big-budget science fiction epic directed by Lee Si-Myung entitled 2009: Lost Memories. Based on a bestselling novel by Bok Geo-il, the film poses the intriguing question: “What if Japan had never lost its empire?”1 Lost Memories offers viewers an alternate history in which Korean nationalist Ahn Jung-geun (a real-life figure who assassinated Japanese Resident-General of Korea Ito Hirobumi in 1909) fails to assassinate Ito, with the result that Japan is not defeated in World War II but fights with the United States against Nazi Germany. Atomic bombs are dropped on Berlin, ending the war, and Japan retains its Asian empire intact. In 2009, Seoul is the third largest city in the Japanese empire, a high-tech postmodern metropolis awash with Japanese billboards, stores, and cars. The Japanese Bureau of Investigation (JBI) maintains colonial order, which is challenged only by an underground Korean resistance movement known as the furei senjin.2 The two main protagonists, Korean JBI agent Sakamoto (played by Korean actor Jang Dong-Gun) and Japanese agent Saigo (played by the Japanese actor Nakamura Toru), learn the truth about this false history late in the film.

Japan has tampered with the history that you know. In 2008, North and South Korea united after sixty years of separation to be reborn into a mighty East Asian nation with a stable economy and a powerful military. At that time, a movement started to take back land that once belonged to ancient Korea (Goguryeo).3 You may not know this, but all of the territory around Manchuria belonged to our ancestors. Naturally, the Chinese government denied any access to the area, but with persistence, [China] finally admitted a joint research team of Korea, China, and Japan. [The Japanese] discovered a doorway in time [that they used] to escape the shame of defeat in the Pacific War and Hiroshima and Nagasaki. A Japanese right-wing extremist group sent an assassin back a hundred years in time to change history. This was the start of our unfortunate history.4

Lost Memories concerns us because it is not simply anti-Japanese Korean nationalist propaganda. It is important to consider that Lost Memories was a mainstream box-office hit and not a documentary or art-house film produced for a limited
audience. Equally intriguing is why the film’s producers found the subject of Japanese empire to be commercially viable for both South Korean and Japanese film audiences. The casting of a well-known Japanese actor in a leading role and extensive use of the Japanese dialogue for most of the film acknowledges the producers’ conscious targeting of the Japanese market. This was a shrewd business decision in a year when the last barriers banning the importation of Japanese cultural products into the South Korean market were removed, and liberalization of the Korean market inspired a boom of interest in Korean cultural products in Japan. Lost Memories’ subplot of nascent Korean expansionist desires in China suggests that the attraction of empire is not limited to imperial Japan but may even be found in countries like contemporary South Korea, which not only did not possess colonies but were themselves the victims of colonialism. Even the film’s anti-imperialist resistance leaders cling to the notion that Korea once had an empire of its own and will actively seek to regain it in the future.

Lost Memories alerts us to the fact that over half a century after its official demise the cultural legacy of Japanese imperialism remains a heated and unresolved topic. A growing number of South Korean mainstream films like Lost Memories are popular responses to tensions created in part by official and semiofficial Japanese statements such as Tokyo Metropolitan Governor Ishihara Shin-taro’s claim that Japan never invaded Korea, Japanese politicians’ quasi-official visits to the Yasukuni Shrine for Japan’s war dead, the ongoing debates over Japanese history textbooks, and the comfort women issue, as well as the deployment of Japanese Self-Defense Forces to Iraq. Similarly, a steady flow of recent Japanese films such as Lorelei and Merdeka [Indonesian for “independence”] have fueled fears across Asia because they depict a rearmed, hyper-nationalist Japan as well as for their historical amnesia. That these films speak to political and historical issues, as well as to each other, should remind us that official histories are always and intimately linked with popular culture. In this sense, we should regard South Korean films as being not only in a dialogue with Japanese films but also as part of a broader international context of mainstream films emanating from East and Southeast Asia that are all attempting to rewrite their own histories of Japanese imperialism that were similarly “tampered with” or reinterpreted by the Japanese.

These films fully illustrate what cultural critics have been warning for years, that “we need to take stock of the nostalgia for empire, as well as the anger and resentment it provokes in those who were ruled, and we must try to look carefully at the culture that nurtured the sentiment, rationale, and above all the imagination of empire.” We need to understand that films about empire have a specific history, one that originated in what historians have called the “age of empire.” As filmmaking becomes increasingly dependent on globalized capital and the need to appeal to transnational audiences, we are witnessing a proliferation of “Pan-
Asian" coproductions that often recycle themes and images from their shared colonial history. This broader colonial history links the development of cinema in East and Southeast Asia, for Japanese imperialism either launched the film industry there or at the very least significantly transformed it.

Imperial Japanese Film Culture

Film played a crucial part in the promotion and expansion of the Japanese empire in Asia from the first motion picture screening in Japan in 1896 right through the end of the Pacific War in 1945. We do not usually associate Japan’s film industry with either imperialism or the domination of world markets, and yet as early as 1905, Japanese cameramen were filming newsreels of the Russo-Japanese War in China for export around the world. Exotic thrillers like The Village at Twilight (Yuhi no mura, 1921) established Manchuria as a popular, accessible space to Japanese audiences a full decade before the Manchurian Incident. Filmmakers from Korea, China, Burma, and Taiwan traveled to Japan during the 1920s and 1930s to train in Japanese film studios. By 1937, Japan became one of the most prolific film industries in the world, out-producing even the United States. By 1943, Greater Japan was massive—covering most of Asia from the Aleutian Islands to Australia, to Midway Island, to India. With each Japanese military victory, Japanese film culture expanded its sphere of influence deeper into Asia, ultimately replacing Hollywood as the main source of news, education, and entertainment for the millions living under Japanese rule. Imperial Japanese film culture was far more than just the production of films set in exotic imperial locations. It was a complex network of interrelated media that included magazines, journals, advertising, songs, posters, and films. At the same time, imperial film culture was also a way of looking at empire. It presented the attitudes, ideals, and myths of Japanese imperialism as an appealing alternative to Western colonialism and Asian provinciality. Japan envisioned that its attractive empire would unify the heterogeneous cultures of Asia together in support of a “Greater East Asian Film Sphere” in which colonizer and colonized alike participated.

This book is the first comprehensive study of imperial Japanese film culture in Asia from its unapologetically colonial roots in Taiwan and Korea, to its more subtly masked semicolonial markets in Manchuria and Shanghai, and to the occupied territories of Southeast Asia. In my research, I have made three assumptions. First, I break with conventional film scholarship by recognizing the fact that Japan had a cinema of empire and that its film culture should be analyzed in its entirety. It is crucial to understand that the Japanese film industry was integral to Japan’s imperial enterprise from 1895 to 1945 and not simply a byproduct of mobilization for Japan’s wars in Asia. This relationship illuminates how film functioned outside the context of war in such areas as colonial management,
mass Japanese emigration in Asia, and the opening of semicolonial markets like Manchuria. Shifting our perspective from war to empire also realigns our vision of film culture at that time and how contemporary Asian audiences saw it—as part of an imperial enterprise.

Second, I contend that both in concept and reality Asia was central to the construction of Japan's collective national identity. I agree with cultural historian Iwabuchi Koichi that Japan's national identity has always been imagined in an “asymmetrical totalizing triad” among Japan, Asia, and the West. Japanese ideologues devoted enormous energy to the question of Japan's identity vis-à-vis that of other Asian nations. Throughout the imperial era, Japanese filmmakers produced films that placed Japan both in proximity and in contradistinction to various parts of Asia, alternately emphasizing or deemphasizing Japan’s Asian-ness according to the situation. Whether its image was positive or negative, Asia was the lynchpin for Greater Japan (and later, Greater East Asia) ideologically, industrially, aesthetically, and strategically. Japanese ideologues often claimed the colonial film markets of Taiwan and Korea as evidence of the modernizing and civilizing effects of Japanese imperialism that legitimized Japanese rule and simultaneously placed Japan on a par with other industrialized, film-producing nations. The promise of working in semicolonial film markets such as Shanghai and Manchuria became literal lifelines to Japanese film personnel unable to find
work in the Japanese homeland. The idea that Asia was an exotic Japanese space for adventure became a staple in the creation of an imperial Japanese worldview in which Japanese audiences situated themselves at the top of a hierarchy of East Asian co-prosperity.

Third, this book assumes that film cultures, like empires, are popular projects that cannot exist on terror alone but depend on and gain reciprocal participation on all levels and not simply from the top down. This book examines a broad range of participation in empire through the concept of imperial Japanese film culture, which I define as an integrated system of film-related processes including legislation, production, distribution, exhibition, criticism, and reception. This approach replicates how films actually circulate within any film culture. Imperial film culture was not dictated solely by what ideologues legislated or the personal vision of individual directors. The visions of empire that circulated throughout imperial Japanese film culture were by necessity attractive. As a multicultural, multilingual, multi-industrial enterprise, imperial Japanese film culture wove together a wide fabric of participants who brought with them any number of motivations—patriotism for some, opportunism for others, independence for still others, and so on. Images of Japan’s attractive empire were meant to inspire voluntary participation in the imperial project through what contemporary political scientists have called “soft power.” As opposed to military or hard power, soft power is the process of rendering a state’s culture and ideology attractive so that others will follow. This is not to deny the violence inherent in colonialism: imperial film culture was brutal, at times even deadly, to those involved with it. Participation in Japanese imperial film culture, however, was complex, and we must not limit our discussion to terms of either collaboration or resistance.

The notion of imperial film culture poses troubling questions that cannot be easily answered by national cinema paradigms that call attention to gaps and contradictions in existing film histories. For example, examining the origins of colonial filmmaking in Taiwan and Korea immediately raises questions of collaboration and resistance to Japanese rule: What constitutes “Korean” within the context of Japanese colonialism? Who financed, directed, distributed, and produced films and for what types of audiences? How does one discuss the concept of influence within a colonial or semicolonial context? Perhaps more importantly, which films remain unclaimed by Japanese and native film historians and why? If early films produced in Korea like Arirang (1926, dir. Na Ungyu) and You and I (Kimi to boku, 1941, dir. Hae Young) were both made during the “dark” era of colonialism by Korean directors and multiethnic crews, why is the former hailed as a classic example of “pure” Korean cinema, while the latter remains missing from filmographies of Korean film? Conversely, if film producers Zhang Shankun and Wang Qingshu both openly worked in Shanghai under the Japanese, why is the former regularly mentioned in contemporary Chinese film histories, while the
latter is entirely ignored? The answers are far more cumbersome than simply evaluating the post-1945 legacy of either film or director; they go straight to the need to reexamine this period from the point of view of imperialism. Imperial Japanese film culture did not exist in isolation; it was very much part of an international fraternity of film imperialists.

Film and Imperialism

Two of the most significant events of the nineteenth century were the advent of industrial technologies and the rise of the “new” imperialism that would ultimately dominate and exploit most of the territories in Africa, Asia, and the Pacific. Some contemporary historians argue that the real triumph of imperialism was essentially one of technology rather than ideology. That is, after all the rhetoric of empire has been forgotten, what will remain are technologies—medicine, transportation, communication. The development and employment of these industrial technologies must not be considered as separate but rather understood as having developed simultaneously within an imperial context.

French cultural critic Paul Virilio maintains that out of the countless technologies invented and developed in the nineteenth century, two in particular—visual and military technologies—are crucial to understanding the establishment of the power base of modern nation states. The symbiotic relation between visual and military technologies is both material and ideological in nature. Taking into consideration the fact that an army cannot destroy what it cannot see, the need for military progress spurs the development of visual technologies and vice versa. Advances in film lens technologies were reintegrated into military technology to create better gun sights. The military depended on advances in visual technologies, which adapted faster film stocks, for example, to enhance aerial reconnaissance. Likewise, the film industry grew exponentially with each new technical advance—the timing mechanisms that made airplane-mounted machine guns a reality were incorporated into early film camera motors. The possession of these advanced technologies was, by itself, an ideological power that divided those nations able to wage modern warfare from those that could not. Moreover, the technology that enabled these twin enterprises of expansionism was also used to justify the use of national might, that is, they both supported a worldview as seen by the colonizer. Materially, film and military technologies enabled armies to fight wars against enemies of far greater number and in distant lands. Ideologically, the possession of film and military technologies demarked “advanced” nations from “underdeveloped” ones, and the power of the images created by these technologies in large part helped regimes consolidate and maintain power at home and abroad. The same technologies needed to wage wars also made the logistics of empire building a reality.
Media scholars remind us that the largest film-producing nations of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries also “happened” to be “among the leading imperialist countries in whose clear interest it was to laud the colonial enterprise.” Almost immediately after the Lumière brothers first projected films on screen in 1895, British, French, and German imperialists set to work applying the new technology of film to the ethnographic classification of indigenous peoples as part of the imperial reordering of the world. In 1897, just two years after Japan gained its first colonies after the Sino-Japanese War, Constant Girel, a cameraman for Lumière, screened the first motion pictures in Osaka, Japan. The twenty-three films represented the world as Western imperialists saw it—a virtual catalog of modern technology ranging from state-of-the-art trains to factories and bridges. These films unequivocally illustrated that it was the royalty, aristocracy, and military of the world’s advanced nations that controlled these new technologies. The stark contrast between the onscreen images of wealthy abundance in places such as London, New York or Paris and the squalor of the underdeveloped countries staggered viewers. Japan’s newly won status as a colonial power notwithstanding, the West generally categorized Japan as underdeveloped and did not consider it an empire of equal standing. Lumière films such as The Ainu of Ezo [Hokkaido] (Les ainu a yeso, 1897), Japanese Fencing (Escrime au sabre japonais, 1897), Japanese Actors (Acteurs japonais, 1898), and Geisha Riding in Rickshaws (Geishas en jinrikisha, 1898) focused on Japanese exotica—the performance arts, “primitive” martial arts, and the indigenous aboriginal population. Imperial Japan understood the ideological value of modern technology and quickly took steps towards controlling its own imperial image. In 1900, during the Boxer Rebellion, the Imperial Japanese Army dispatched the first Japanese newsreel cameramen to China along with the Fifth Regiment. In 1904, the Imperial Japanese Army again dispatched newsreel cameramen to film the Russo-Japanese War, this time alongside their counterparts from the Lumière, Pathé, and Edison companies. Japanese newsreels of this time showed Japan’s well-trained modern infantry and navy using the latest technology to fight and beat the Russian army—images that troubled many in the West. British propaganda scholar John MacKenzie describes British film audiences at that time who found themselves inundated by newsreels about “[t]he Boxer rising in China, the developing industrial and naval might of Japan, and the battles of the Russo-Japanese War . . . the latter conflict helped to spread the many false perceptions, both professional and popular, of the nature of the twentieth-century warfare, and fueled the naval race which was kept prominently in the public eye by repeated newsreels and of the launchings and dreadnaughts.” Among modern nations, the Japanese were the first to use searchlights during the battle of Port Arthur in 1905, prefiguring the target acquisition technology of modern warfare. In the space of just under four decades since the opening of Japan to the West, Japan had gained sufficient
technological and military power to militarily conquer a Western nation and become part of the imperial world order.

Images of a modern Asian nation defeating a Western empire promised hope to many throughout Asia of liberation from Western colonial rule. The Japanese model of empire was an attractive alternative to Western modes of imperialism, at least initially, due to the fact that Japan had itself only narrowly escaped Western colonization, and many believed its success could be replicated. This resulted in what some historians have called a “trawling” of Japanese culture by other Asian nations eager to discover elements that they might import and adapt to modernize their own societies. This realization is similar to what Einstein called an “information explosion” and helps explain in part why Japanese Pan-Asianist slogans such as “Asia for the Asians” initially did not fall on deaf ears.22

Because Japanese expansion was often opportunistic, improvised, or in response to a crisis rather than motivated by grand ideologies or powerful cultural forces, Greater Japan came to mean a project of civilization and assimilation of diverse Asian cultures. Japanese films legitimized Japanese imperial expansionism sometimes even before the fact; newsreels such as The Korean Crown Prince at Oiso Beach (Oiso kaigan no kankoku kotaishi, 1908) or travelogues like A Trip around Korea (Kankoku isshu, 1908) naturalized the presence of Korean royalty traveling to Japan or future Japanese Resident-General Ito Hirobumi’s tour of Korea a full two years before Japanese annexation of Korea.23 Likewise, Japanese-sponsored films presented Japan’s empire in its own image, as an Asian success story. Films depicting Japanese-built, state-of-the-art bridges in Taiwan, factories in Korea, and trains in Manchuria were an important part of the construction of an attractive modernist vision of empire, where indigenous populations were presented as living in co-prosperity, ethnic harmony, and material abundance. Japanese imperialism was the logical extension of the Meiji era ideology of “blending Japanese spirit with Western technology” (wakon yosai) and these films were its fulfillment.24

Filmmakers may have presented Japanese imperial rule as a modernizing force, but they also showed the antiquated and sometimes contradictory elements of the imperial project. Empire always involved ethnic, cultural, and linguistic diversity. Diversity was one way that Japanese ideologues justified their conquest of non-Japanese populations as a civilizing mission. Japan’s status as a modern empire was based precisely on its difference from subjugated or “backward” Asian cultures.25 By the 1940s and the rise of Japanese Pan-Asian rhetoric, the real paradoxes of Japan as the only Asian nation to hold colonies, while simultaneously presenting itself as a liberator of Asia from Western colonial oppression, blemished nearly every aspect of Japan’s imperial ideology. Therefore, it was entirely consistent to hear politicians, critics, and filmmakers state that they were opposed to imperialism, but a friend to the Japanese empire. Despite these contradictions
and paradoxes, interaction within the rubric of empire inevitably made various kinds of cultural exchange possible.

This book aims to explore more fully how imperial film culture represented the idea of an attractive Japanese empire to Asian subjects as well as to Japanese audiences both at home and abroad. It is this idealized notion of Japan’s empire in Asia rather than any preexisting “reality” that is implied in the title of this book. Similarly, it was precisely the notion of Asia—rather than its physical reality—that was important for most Japanese of this period.

The Historiography of Japan’s Cinema of Empire

There is no complete history of Japan’s cinema of empire. Sources before 1945, such as Ichikawa Sai’s *The Creation and Construction of Asian Film* (1941), Hazumi Tsuneo’s *Fifty Year History of Japanese Film* (1942), Tsumura Hideo’s *Film War* (1944), or Shibata Yoshio’s *World Film War* (1944), all portrayed Japan as a massive transnational film network with a dominating presence throughout most of the film markets in Asia—but the specific term empire was only rarely used. Much like popular writers of fiction in Britain after World War I, Japanese film critics and historians appear to have been “covert in their fables of imperialism.” For Japanese filmmakers, too, avoided the term imperialism, reserving it for use against their (usually Western) enemies. Japanese film journalism, unique prior to 1945, is perhaps unique in its obsession with chronicling the history of individual territories. Film journals such as *Motion Picture Times* (*Kinema junpo*) and *Film Criticism* (*Eiga hyoron*) often ran stories on the histories of film production in individual territories such as China, Korea, Taiwan, and the Philippines. The writing of history then, as now, was a powerful way to naturalize the hierarchy of authority. Just because Japan’s empire did not always call itself an empire does not mean it did not exist. More often than not, what functioned as the idea of empire was an uncritically accepted notion of Asia as simply being Japan’s “place in the modern world system.”

References to Korea, Taiwan, and Karafuto (Sakhalin) as colonial markets (*shokuminchi*) gradually disappear by the 1930s. The nature of colonial discourse was changing at this time in Japan, just as it was throughout the world. After the Japanese military’s massive sweep throughout Asia and the Pacific and then following December 7, 1941, discussions of Japan’s film activities in Greater East Asia gradually slip into the discourse of war with the United States.

Film histories written after 1945 have largely ignored or obscured the history of empire. In 1955, film critic Iijima Tadashi’s two-volume *Japanese Film History* offered only the following two sentences on Japan’s film activities in Asia: “Along with the Japanese army’s advance into Manchuria, China, and Southeast Asia, film construction in the outposts of empire, which had been implemented from
before, became more active and local film production companies were established in each territory. Japanese production personnel from the home islands were sent to each of those areas for that purpose.” The following year, leading film historian Tanaka Junichiro devoted one intriguing chapter in his five-volume Developmental History of Japanese Film to film production in Japan’s “overseas territories.” While Tanaka’s knowledge is encyclopedic, and he offers an institutional history of most of Japan’s film territories, he does not consider them to be linked to each other in any significant way. Neither Iijima nor Tanaka can be accused of ignorance of this system, for both lived in Shanghai and Mainland China at various times during the 1940s and were active participants in imperial film culture. Apparently what these critics failed to appreciate was the depth and breadth of imperial film culture from the 1910s throughout the 1940s, a culture that included film-related books, music, radio programs, magazines, museum exhibits, exchange programs, talent contests, and traveling projection units. The commitment by powerful official and private interests to Japan’s imperial film culture legitimized its existence.

There is a growing body of film scholarship on Japan’s film activities in individual territories such as Manchuria and Korea, but most stop short of linking these territories into the Japanese imperial project or the world film order of the time. Part of the problem lies in the fact that the Japanese film industry, for all its output, never developed to the point of being able to absorb films produced in its newly acquired markets or to supply those markets with enough films to sustain demand. But comparisons with Hollywood always unfairly characterize Japan’s cinema of empire in terms of failure both industrially and ideologically. Another reason that the cinema of empire has not been studied has to do with the discourse of war itself. After defeat and decolonization in 1945, that Japanese audiences defined the preceding decades of violent struggle solely in terms of war and not empire suggests a desire for closure for many to decades of imperial expansion. By subsuming the discourse of empire into that of war, Japanese defeat in the Pacific War marked an end for any need to reexamine the causes and tensions that led to all of the wars fought until that time on behalf of the Japanese empire.

Surprisingly, however, popular images of Japan’s imperial project did not disappear from Japanese screens after defeat and decolonization in 1945. Despite official U.S. Occupation directives prohibiting the production of films set in Japan’s former empire, exotic melodramas like Bengawan River (Bungawan Soro, 1951, dir. Ichikawa Kon) and Woman of Shanghai (Shanghai no onna,1952, dir. Inagaki Hiroshi) were huge hits with Japanese audiences. Directors such as Inagaki Hiroshi and Ichikawa Kon, who began their careers in the imperial era, made several films after 1945 that were critical of the war but benignly sympathetic to the imperial impulses that motivated it. Yamamoto Satsuo is representative of another
group of directors who lamented being coerced into collaborating with Japan’s wartime regime, but almost never questioned their own participation in empire. In post-1945 narratives, the war was coercion, but empire was a separate matter.

Attractive Empire

This book is broken into four chapters that examine Japanese imperial film culture’s collective significance and cumulative impact on the creation of a transnational empire in Asia as an ideological construct.\(^\text{33}\)

Chapter one charts the development of film institutions within the formal colonies of Taiwan and Korea and its extension to the semicolonial film market of Manchuria. I detail how legislation, production, exhibition, and reception conditions differed in each territory and document salient shifts in official and popular perceptions by Japanese film journalists and filmmakers. How the nature and vocabulary of colonialism changed is illustrated in the attitudes of people like Manchurian Film Studios chief Amakasu Masahiko, who said: “We must never forget that our focus is the Manchurians, and after we make headway nothing should stop us from producing films for Japan.”\(^\text{34}\) Amakasu was a strong advocate of independence from the Japanese film industry, which challenged his authority, and he maintained that the Manchurian film market was a separate but equal member of the empire.

Chapter two surveys three areas of imperial film culture—manga, popular music, and film journals—in order to analyze how film interacted with a variety of media. Each of these media attracted audiences that were not necessarily dedicated film audiences and crossover appeal was not simply the result of government consolidation but grew out of a complex interplay of official and unofficial interests. The result was the development of a mass audience linked together through filmic discourses over a variety of media all supporting the representation and consumption of Asia.

Chapter three analyzes Japanese assumptions about Chinese, Korean, and Southeast Asian difference through elements of mise-en-scène, specifically, acting styles, gestures, makeup, and dialogue in specific feature films. My analysis centers on Japanese representations of culture, ethnicity, and language, and the ways in which they masked Asian difference in order to construct a seamless and attractive image of an idealized Pan-Asian subject. I focus on how the Japanese filmmakers producing these films attempted to represent what properly assimilated Asian subjects looked, acted, and spoke like. We need to remember that for most of the nineteenth and even well into the early twentieth century, assimilation was an idea not always considered taboo and frequently encouraged. Assimilation was the goal for vast numbers of colonial elites educated in the colonial system.\(^\text{35}\) In this chapter, I discuss non-Japanese reception of Japanese
performances of Asian identity in order to examine schisms between Japanese and non-Japanese imperial subjects.

Chapter four analyzes Japan’s struggle to create and define its empire as a unique entity vis-à-vis the West. In the first half of the chapter I examine how Japan clashed with Hollywood for market domination and the “hearts and minds” of Asians. The rise of Japan’s imperial power in Asia threatened American film dominance there and led to a film war. Japan restricted access to Asian markets, censored or banned American films, and finally conducted a comprehensive embargo on all Hollywood films. This prohibition led to secret meetings among Japanese film industry representatives, Hollywood representatives, and the U.S. Department of Commerce in which the United States threatened to stain Japan’s national reputation by making Japanese villains in American films. The second half of the chapter interrogates Japan’s paradoxical status as a member nation of the Axis at a time when it was preaching anti-Westernism throughout Asia. Although Japan presented itself to the world as a liberator in Asia, ironically, Japan could emphasize little in common with its Axis allies other than the fact that they all shared the status of colony-holding empires. This chapter discusses a broad range of the film interactions among the cinemas of imperial Japan, Nazi Germany, and Fascist Italy on the legislative, distribution, and exhibition levels.

Finally, chapter five highlights connections between pre- and postimperial Japanese film culture with regard to a longing for empire. I examine two films produced after 1945 and set in the final days of empire that replicate verbatim the structure of the imperial era “goodwill” films. Not only does the desire for empire that remains in postwar Japanese society warrant our attention, but also the representation of hierarchies of power link back to Japan’s imperial past and suggest areas for further study.