

MAKING MOVIES FOR THE CHINESE: JAPANESE DIRECTORS AT MANYING¹

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The most important task is to cultivate the national consciousness among Chinese people in Manchukuo...They want to be entertained through watching movies rather than being imposed with national concepts. When they find Manying movies interesting and enjoy watching them, they would follow national policy.”

—Muto Fumio, Head of Information Office
of Manchukuo State Council²

“Manying cinema has made a major mistake due to the non-action of Japanese film makers who never truly explored what kind of movies that Manchurians liked...Now Manying must make films that the Manchurians enjoy. There is absolutely no need to make films that exoticize Manchukuo for Japan.”

—Amakasu Masahiko,
Managing Director of Manying³

Overview

In August 1937, Japanese authorities in Manchukuo established the Manchurian Film Association to serve Japan’s propaganda needs during its full invasion of China. Manying cinema – most of which resulted from co-production between Japanese filmmakers and their Chinese disciples –

¹ Note: Some material from this article is drawn from Yuxin Ma, “Collaborating with Japanese in Making Entertainment Movies for Chinese Viewers: Chinese Filmmakers at Manchurian Film Association,” *The Chinese Historical Review* 27/2 (2020): 119–145.

² Muto Fumio, “Manchuria Becomes One of the Film Countries in the World” [Manchu ha sekai ichi no eigakoku ni naru], *Eiga junpo*, August 1, 1942.

³ Amakasu Masahiko, “Making Film for Manchurian People” [Manjin no tameini eiga wo tsukuru], *Eiga junpo*, August 1, 1942.

served the dual goals of promoting Manchukuo national policy and competing with Shanghai movies for the Chinese film market. Manying Japanese directors failed to reach either goal in 1938–1939 due to their misunderstanding of Manchukuo national policy and their ignorance of Chinese culture, local customs, and Chinese movie aesthetics and tastes. As Manying focused more on making Chinese entertainment in 1940–1943, Japanese directors localized their movies' content and forms by working with Chinese scriptwriters and imitating popular Shanghai movie genres. Such efforts improved their movies' reception in the context of Japanese control of film in occupied China.

Introduction

There were two models of film industry around the world in the early twentieth century. One was the commercial business model, represented by Hollywood studios, which controlled film production, delivery, and exhibition as a vertical integration for maximum profits.⁴ The other was the European model of using film for cultural projects. In France, the Lumière brothers made films to record people's lives. In Germany after World War I, the state set up a German film industry to propagandize its national policies.⁵ Imperial Japan was skillful in deploying film to control its image throughout its territory. Manchukuo (1932–1945), as the final stage of Japanese imperialism, was a system of foreign political occupation which combined Japanese rule with the use of force to control the multi-ethnic peoples in Northeast China. When Japan invaded China in July 1937, Japanese authorities in Manchukuo established the Manchurian Film Association (滿洲映畫協會 *Manshū eiga kyōkai*, Jp: *Man'ei*; *Manzhou yinghua xiehui*, Ch: *Manying*, August 1937–August 1945) to promote film production efficiency and serve Japan's propaganda needs during its full invasion of the country. On October 7, 1937, Manchukuo Film Law (映畫法) made the state directly manage, inspect, and promote films produced by Manying. Like the Nazi-controlled UFA (Universum Film-Aktien Gesellschaft), Manying was expected to make *kokusaku*, “national policy” films, for Manchukuo. Peter High, who studied Japanese national policy films from the 1932–1945 period, defined *kokusaku* in three ways: (1) “exalt the spirit of the nation,” (2)

⁴ Douglas Gomery, *Movie History: A Survey* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company Press, 1991), 7.

⁵ Jack C. Ellis, *A History of Film* (Eaglewood, NJ: Eaglewood Cliffs Press, 1985), 15.

“stimulate national industry and research,” and (3) “provide wholesome public entertainment.”⁶ By 1939, the entire Japanese film industry was reorganized according to national policy principles, and all Japanese film workers joined the Japan Film Personnel Association.⁷

Although Manchukuo national policy films served Japan’s wartime needs, Manchukuo’s national policy was not identical to Japan’s. These Manchukuo films were supposed to promote state construction, ethnic harmony, and the special relationship between Manchukuo and Japan. Nominally as an independent state, Manchukuo struggled to mold a nation out of its multi-ethnic peoples. However, Japanese occupiers retained full sovereignty and extended their control beyond the military and economic dimensions into the cultural sphere. As a result, the art and literature portrayed nuanced differences as Japanese policy in Manchukuo changed in the following timeline: (1) promoting the Confucian kingly way and ethnic harmony to counter Chinese republicanism and nationalism in 1932–1937; (2) advocating national construction and Manchukuo’s special friendship with Japan under the “same virtue, same mind” in 1937–1939; (3) bringing Manchukuo under the protection of Amaterasu and Japan in 1939–1941; and (4) mobilizing Manchukuo to support Japan’s “Holy War” during 1941–1945.

Film rationalization in Manchukuo, through Manying, took place earlier than in Japan. The special issue of *Manchuria* in July 1939 stated that Manying would “carry on enterprises’ relating to the production of educational, cultural and entertainment films, with a view to contributing to the exaltation of the national spirit and to the promotion of national education.”⁸ Beyond such nationalistic claims, the business practices of Manying resembled Hollywood: monopolized profits from producing, delivering, and exhibiting films through vertical integration of the distribution and exhibition networks and by sending mobile projection teams to remote places.⁹

⁶ Peter B High, *The Imperial Screen: Japanese Film Culture in the Fifteen Years’ War, 1931–1945* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2003), 61, 293.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ “The Manchuria Motion Pictures Corporation: Its Structure and Work,” *Manchuria* 4/15 (1939), 5–7.

⁹ Michael Baskett, *Transnational Film Culture in Imperial Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2008), 32; Sookyeong Hong, “Between Ideology

Anika Culver found that arts and literature in Manchukuo were mobilized to create a unique space for cooperation among ethnicities.¹⁰ In her recent co-edited volume, she argued that Manchukuo, as a cultural and linguistic borderland, witnessed a transnational literary production in a colonial contact zone. The outcome was affected by censorship, Japanese propaganda, and the market.¹¹ Manying film production was another site of cultural cooperation between Japanese and Chinese in Manchukuo – most Japanese film specialists were recruited from major studios in Japan, and they trained Chinese into actors, directors, and cinema technicians and supervised them during production.¹²

Manying made three types of films: entertainment films (*gomin eiga*), enlightenment films (*keimin eiga*), and newsreels (*jiji eiga*). During its eight years of existence, it produced one hundred and seventeen feature movies (including unfinished ones), both for entertainment and to promote national policy, as well as more than two hundred educational and documentary

and Spectatorship: The ‘Ethnic Harmony’ of the Manchuria Motion Picture Corporation, 1937–45,” *Cross-Currents: East Asian History and Culture Review* 2/1 (2013): 116–138.

¹⁰ Annika A. Culver, “The Legitimization of a Multi-ethnic Literary Culture in Manchukuo,” in *Glorify the Empire: Japanese Avant-Garde Propaganda in Manchukuo* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2013), 168–92.

¹¹ Anika Culver, “Introduction: ‘Manchukuo Perspectives,’ or ‘Collaboration’ as a Transcendence of Literary, National, and Chronological Boundaries” in Anika Culver and Norman Smith, eds., *Manchukuo Perspectives: Transnational Approach to Literary Production* (Hong Kong: University of Hong Kong Press, 2019), 2–4.

¹² Wang Yanhua, “Manying yu dongbei lunxianshiqi de Riben zhiminhua dianying yanjiu – yi daoyan he zuopin wei zhongxin” [A Study of Manying and Japanese Colonial Films in Occupied Manchukuo: Film Directors and Their Works] (Ph. D diss., Northeast Normal University, 2009); Wang Hong, “Shijie de yingxiang – ‘Manying’ lunkao” [Disloyal Images – A Study of Manying] (Ph. D diss., Northeast Normal University, 2009); Yuxin Ma, “Public Performance and Private Choices: Manying Actresses as New Women,” *American Journal of Chinese Studies* 26/1 (2019): 15–42; Yuxin Ma, “Chinese Cinema Technicians at Manying: Professionalism Triumphed Ideologies,” *Virginia Review of Asian Studies* 22 (2020): 115–136.

films.¹³ Only Japanese directors were allowed to make enlightenment movies and documentaries, and they also monopolized the production of early Manying feature movies. Chinese directors did not appear until early 1940. Even then, they could only make entertainment movies.

Scholars in China and Japan paid close attention to the function of propaganda in Manying movies, while those in the English-speaking world focused on Manying movies' commercial success, artistic details, ideological ambiguity, and the incompatibility of their cinematic narrative and language.¹⁴ Michael Baskett studied the transnational film culture in imperial Japan and found that it gained reciprocal participation because it circulated an “attractive” and “modernist” vision of the Japanese empire and rendered Japan's culture and ideology appealing.¹⁵ Manying film production also served Japanese imperialist interests by circulating a modernist image of Manchukuo and a bright view of the Chinese living in co-prosperity, ethnic harmony, and material abundance. But what made Manying movies special was that they were primarily in Chinese and for a Chinese target audience in Manchukuo, not a Japanese one.

This article studies Japanese directors at Manying who were tasked with producing national policy films for Manchukuo and entertaining Chinese movie viewers. The primary sources are from Manchukuo's print media, such as *Shengjing Times* (*Shengjing shibao*), *Great Unity Herald* (*Datong bao*), *Binjiang Daily* (*Binjiang ribao*), and leading bilingual film magazine *Manzhou yinghua* (renamed *Dianying huabao* in June 1941).¹⁶

¹³ Furuichi Masako, “*Manying*” *dianying yanjiu* [A Study of ‘Manying’ Cinema] (Beijing: Jiuzhou chubanshe, 2010), 1.

¹⁴ E. Mei, “Commerce and Culture: The Manchukuo Film Industry from 1937–45” (MA thesis, National University of Singapore, 2009); Ying Guo, “‘Making Dreams with the Enemy’ Chinese Collaborationist Filmmakers in Manchukuo, 1937–45” (MA thesis, The University of British Columbia, 2018); Yue Chen, “Between Sovereignty and Coloniality – Manchukuo Literature and Film” (Ph. D diss., University of Oregon, 2018); and Hong, “Between Ideology and Spectatorship,” 116–138.

¹⁵ Michael Baskett, *The Attractive Empire: Transnational Film Culture in Imperial Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2008), 5, 8.

¹⁶ *Manzhou yinghua* was Manying's institutional magazine for advertising and popularizing its production. It began in December 1937 with two versions with different content: the Chinese version was *Manzhou yinghua*

Since most Japanese directors hesitated to write about their Manying past in postwar years, and Japanese authorities largely destroyed archives of Manchukuo after Japan's defeat, Manchukuo print media still preserves the vestiges of Manying's film production and cultural activities.

This article addresses questions such as: Who were those Japanese directors, and what brought them to Manying? How did they produce movies with the competing purposes of serving Japanese imperialism and entertaining the Chinese? Did their professional experiences in Japan help their film directing at Manying, and how did they work with Chinese filmmakers? How did they negotiate the cultural and aesthetic differences between Japanese and Chinese cinema and meet the Manying and the Chinese film market demands? And how did the Chinese film world respond to Japanese directors' movies over time? The study sheds light on how colonial cultural producers negotiated between the colonialist culture and the culture of the colonized in finding appropriate artistic forms to convey the fixed ideology of the colonialist state while being accepted by the colonized, and how they entertained the colonized without contradicting the culture of the colonialist state.

Japanese Filmmakers at Manying

After Japan invaded North China on July 7, 1937, Japanese authorities immediately sent cinematographers to the Film Institute of the Southern Manchuria Railway Company to travel with the Japanese Kwantung Army to North China and make warfront "documentaries."¹⁷ As a

edited by Jiang Feng, proclaiming to construct a distinct Manchukuo film culture; the Japanese version *Manshū eiga* was edited by Iida Hideshi 飯田秀世, and was more like a colonial magazine introducing metropolitan Japanese film culture to Japanese in Manchukuo. The two versions merged into a bilingual version with most content in Chinese in September 1939 under the editorship of a Manying Chinese employee Wang Ze. In November 1940, Manying turned the magazine to a commercially successful publisher Manzhou zazhisshe. In June 1941, the magazine assumed a more authentic Chinese title *Dianying huabao*.

¹⁷ Hu Chang and Gu Quan, *Manying: guoce dianying mianmian guan* [Aspects of National Policy Films at Manying] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1990), 62; Sato Tadao, *Paosheng zhongde dianying* [Cinema and the Rubble of Gunfire], trans. Yue Yuankun (Guangzhou: Shijie tushu chubanshe, 2016), 81.

result, the Manchukuo government and Southern Manchuria Railway rushed to found Manying in August 1937. They gathered some Japanese cultural workers in Manchukuo from the Information Office of the State Council, the *Manshū shinbun* (Manchurian News) agency, the Concordia Society, and the Department of Culture and Education, and brought others from Japanese film companies. In addition, a few former Purokino (Proletarian Film league) filmmakers in Japan who coerced *tenko* joined the Manying documentary division.¹⁸ By September 10, 1937, Manying had one hundred employees. Some were professional film workers, while others merely showed an interest in cinema.¹⁹

From 1938 to 1939, Japanese screenwriters, directors, and film technicians dominated Manying's feature movie production. The urgent need to produce national policy films made Manying use amateur Japanese filmmakers in Manchukuo to direct its earliest feature movies, probably inspired by the success of Atugawa Kozo at Mantetsu Film Institute. The Department of Security commissioned Manying to produce a movie to promote conscription at Manchukuo in December 1937. State Council Japanese writer Naka Yoshinori 仲禮賢 wrote the draft, while Tsuboi Atae 坪井與, a journalist at *Manshū shinbun*, revised it into the script *The Ambition* (*Zhuangzhi zhutian*), which he also directed into Manying's first national policy movie.²⁰ Tsuboi Atae had no filming experience and let cinematographer Ōmori Ihachi 大森伊八 take control of the camera. They relied on two assistants – Wang Wentao 王文濤, who graduated from Meiji University, and Yahara Reizaburō 矢原禮三郎, who knew Shanghai cinema well – to communicate with Chinese actors who received training at the Manying Actor Training Center.²¹ The war with China and the Japanese control of film in Manchukuo had sharply reduced the supply of Shanghai movies there in the second half of 1937. Chinese moviegoers in Manchukuo had high expectations for Manying movies²² yet were greatly disappointed

¹⁸ High, *The Imperial Screen*, 124–125.

¹⁹ Hu and Gu, *Manying*, 31.

²⁰ Sato, *Paosheng zhongde*, 84.

²¹ *Shengjing shibao* [Shengjing Times], December 19, 1937; Hu and Gu, *Manying*, 44.

²² “Manzhoukuo zhi dianying-xu” [Cinema in Manchukuo-Continuation], “Yinghai yushen” [The Screen], *Shengjing shibao*, December 5, 1937. After September 18, 1931, Shanghai films with “anti-Japanese, anti-Manchukuo

by *The Ambition* because of its propaganda of the “paradise of kingly way,” “harmony of five ethnicities,” and “friendship between Japan and Manchukuo.”²³ Inspired by two famous comedians in Shanghai cinema (the overweight Yin Xiuqin and skinny Han Langen), Matsumoto Mitsutsune 松本光庸 made the first Manying entertainment movie, *The Birth of A Star* (*Mingxing de dansheng*), based on the studio’s first recruitment of student actors, with Yin Baoyuan 尹寶元 as his assistant. The movie’s selling point was lead actor He Qiren, who weighed three hundred and sixty pounds. Thirty-four additional actors and actresses displayed their talents on screen.²⁴ Due to promotion in print media, Chinese movie fans in Manchukuo swarmed into theaters to watch the movie.²⁵ For more than two weeks, *Shangjing shibao* carried readers’ critiques of the movie’s plain plot, insufficient cinematic techniques, violations of local customs, and actors’ and actresses’ performance.²⁶

Japanese film critic Yahara Reizaburō also directed a romance movie, *The Jigsaw Puzzle* (七巧圖 *Qiqiaotu*), scripted by former Manchu royal Yu Zhenmin 裕振民 and with Yu Mengfang 於夢堃 as the assistant.²⁷ Yu graduated from Beijing Railway University and was a former lecturer at a Japanese girls’ high school.²⁸ Yahara came to China as a child and studied Russian literature for three years. He had been impressed by the progressive ideas and positive social impact of Cai Chusheng’s *Song of the Fishermen* (*Yuguangqu*, 1932) and described the excitement of Chinese audiences

content were prohibited by Kwantung army in Manchukuo. By December 1937, 30% of the movies shown in Manchukuo were from Japan, 30% from the United States, 25% from China, and 15% were from other nations.

²³ Zhang Yi, *Manying shimo* [The Beginning and the End of Manying] (Changchun: Changchunshi Zhengxie wenshi ziliao weiyuanhui, 2006), 18.

²⁴ “Xinpian kaipai zaji” [On the New Movies in Production], “Yinghai yushen,” *Shengjing shibao*, December 5, 1937.

²⁵ Zhang Yi, *Manying shimo*, 19.

²⁶ “Guangyu Mingxing zhi dansheng de piping” [A Critique on *The Birth of a Star*], *Shengjing shibao*, May 4–16, 1938.

²⁷ *Shengjing shibao*, May 15, 1938 and May 25, 1938; “Manying xinpian *Qiqiaotu* kaipai ji’ nian sheying” [A Picture Taken Upon the Beginning of the Shooting of Manying New Film *The Jigsaw Puzzle*], *Shengjing shibao*, March 8, 1938.

²⁸ *Shengjing shibao*, December 12, 1937.

watching anti-Japanese films in his article “The Spirit of Chinese Cinema.”²⁹ Yahara had attributed the essence of Chinese cinema to rising Chinese nationalism, the humorous representation of loneliness, and mellow lyricism.³⁰ In *Manshū eiga*, he criticized Japanese movies for failing to effectuate positive social changes and Japanese actors for being hedonistic.³¹ When he was invited to work for Manying in late 1937, Yahara was uninterested in making national policy films, so he directed Chinese love story *The Jigsaw Puzzle* instead. The movie was not well received,³² but it was shown in North China through Manying’s exchange network with Xinmin Film Association in Beiping.³³ At Manying, Yahara wrote articles in *Manshū eiga* introducing Shanghai cinema.³⁴ Also at Manying, Tsuboi Atae directed *Looking for Mother* (*Wanli xunmu*), with Wang Wentao as his assistant, in May 1938. It tells the story of a child sold by his evil uncle to a woodcutter family in Northern Manchuria and tries to find his biological mother.³⁵

Chinese audiences were disturbed by the Japanese bias, poor film techniques, and violations of Chinese culture and customs of early Manying feature films. For example, in those movies, the simple Japanese phrase “Gomen nasai” was rigidly translated into “*duibuqi*” in Chinese, which made Chinese viewers mock Manying movies as “*duibuqi*” films.³⁶ Manying’s dire need for professional directors led it to recruit from studios in Japan such as Shōchiku, Nikkatsu, and Shinkō. When Negishi Kan’ichi 根岸寛 – the father of Nikkatsu Tamagawa studio, known for his many humanist war movies –

²⁹ Yahara Reizaburō, “Shina no eiga no seishin” [The Spirit of Chinese Cinema], *Eiga hyoron* (September 1937).

³⁰ Zhang Quan, “Rijuqu dongfang zhimin zhuyi dianyingzhan de huan mie-yi Manzhouguo lisan dianying ren wei zhongxin” (November 12, 2015), 5 (accessed May 10, 2021, <http://twcinema.tnus.edu.tw/en>).

³¹ “Cong Zhongguo dianying tandao Riben dianying,” *Manshū eiga* 2/1 (January 1938), 16–17.

³² Xinxian, “Ping Manying xinpian *Qiqiaotu*” [On Manying’s New Film *The Jigsaw Puzzle*], *Great Unity Herald*, June 12, 1938.

³³ *Shengjing shibao*, May 15 and May 25, 1938.

³⁴ “Zhi’na yinghua jie jinkuang,” *Manshū eiga* 3/7 (July 1939), 53.

³⁵ *Manzhou yinghua* 2/2 (February 1938) and 2/5 (May 1938); “Wanli xunmu benshi” [Story of Wangli Xunmu], *Shengjing shibao*, May, 8, 1938.

³⁶ *Shengjing shibao*, July 24, 1938 and September 4, 1938.

joined Manying as production chief on June 20, 1938, Makino Mitsuo 牧野満男 followed him as vice production chief.³⁷ Some professional filmmakers, cinematographers, and art designers also followed him to Manying.³⁸ Tsuboi Atae remembered that most Japanese filmmakers were either colleagues of Negishi and Makino at Nikkatsu studios or their acquaintances in the Japanese film world. Among directors, these included Mizugae Ryūichi 水ヶ江龍一 from Shōchiku, Ueno Shinji 上野真嗣 from Shinkō, and Yamauchi Eizō 山内英三 from Nikkatsu. Among major scriptwriters, there was Araki Yoshirō (荒木芳郎) from Nikkatsu, Nakamura Noriyuki 中村能行 from Shōchiku, and Takayanagi Haruo 高柳春雄 from Shinkō.³⁹ Meanwhile, at the Manying cultural film division, Takahara Fujirō transferred to produce feature movies.

With the arrival of professional filmmakers from Japan, Makino Mitsuo told Manchukuo press in August 1938 that Manying would make more entertainment movies for Chinese viewers, hoping to rescue its reputation.⁴⁰ Since the Japanese film industry was still thriving in June 1938, joining Manying for Japanese filmmakers was more like seeking refuge rather than opportunities.⁴¹ Most Japanese directors who joined were not first class. An exception was Suzuki Shigeyoshi 鈴木重吉 (1900–1976), who had directed the influential silent film *What Made Her Do It* (1930). Makino told Chinese theater managers that they could make a profit from the movies Manying made. He informed them that Manying was making *Melody of Intimacy* (*Zhixinqu*), *Honeymoon Express* (*Miyue kuaiche*), and *Garden of Maidens* (*Chunü de huayuan*).⁴²

Japanese directors from major studios in Japan lacked the linguistic skill and the knowledge of Chinese culture to produce movies for Chinese.⁴³ Instead, they communicated with the actors through their Chinese assistants, who were fluent in Japanese, and relied on their filming experiences in Japan to make national policy films for Manchukuo and entertainment movies for

³⁷ Manying's early production chief Toshiya Kumiya joined North China Film founded by Yu Zhenmin. Sato, *Paosheng zhong*, 85.

³⁸ Hu and Gu, *Manying*, 39–40.

³⁹ *Shengjing shibao*, October 16, 1938.

⁴⁰ *Shengjing shibao*, August 28, 1938.

⁴¹ Sato, *Paosheng zhongde*, 85; High, *The Imperial Screen*, 273.

⁴² “Quannei shangxia zuotanhui” [Roundtable Within the Movie Circle], *Shengjing shibao*, September 18, 1938.

⁴³ Wang Yanhua, “Manying yu dongbei,” 35–78.

the Chinese. As a result, some struggled with Manchukuo national policy and often misinterpreted China, while others remade popular Nikkatsu B-movies with Chinese dialogue due to a lack of Chinese scripts. Still, others imitated Shanghai or Hollywood movies.⁴⁴ For instance, Manying's *National Law Was Selfless* was a remake of Nikkatsu's *The Prosecutor and His Sister* (1937) and *Tears of a Loving Mother* based on *Three Mothers* (1930).⁴⁵

The second wave of professional Japanese filmmakers came at the end of 1939 when Manying completed its new structures and became the state-of-the-art film company in Asia with the most advanced technology and facilities. According to issue number 64 of *Man'ei News*, Manying had 690 employees by December 1, 1939, including 142 actors.⁴⁶ On March 6 that year, Japan issued the Film Law, which listed many "musts" for Japanese filmmakers. Article 9 introduced pre-production censorship by installing script-censors for the "protection of film producers," while Article 5 demanded that directors, actors, and cameramen be tested for aptitude and registered with the legally designated agency of their profession. Those tests probed the political thinking of the applicants, as well as their citizenship and cinematic knowledge. The Greater Japan Film Association administered the certification. The law spelled out strict regulations for theater owners to no movie screening for more than three hours. Articles 12 and 16 restricted the distribution and exhibition of foreign films and made it impossible for American movies to be aired in Japan, while the Currency Exchange Law made it harder to buy films.⁴⁷ Four film companies' news sections merged into Nihon News Film Company (*Nichiei*) in April 1940.⁴⁸ Discouraged by the state's film industry regulation, some Japanese filmmakers were attracted to Manying, which promised better income, greater artistic freedom, and advanced technology. Director Ōya Tashio from Toho, some scriptwriters, and many film technicians flocked to Manying in 1939.⁴⁹

The third wave of Japanese experts came in 1942, when the ongoing Pacific War exhausted Japanese resources at home and the shortage of film stock led to a sharp decline in film production and the unemployment of

⁴⁴ Baskett, *The Attractive Empire*, 83.

⁴⁵ Sato, *Paosheng zhongde*, 85.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ High, *The Imperial Screen*, 70.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 96.

⁴⁹ Hu and Gu, *Manying*, 89.

many professional filmmakers. Yet Manying had entered its most productive years and even established a film academy. Amakasu, the new managing director of Manying, hired some top Japanese scriptwriters. These included Yagi Hotairō 八木保太郎, known for his humanist and artistic scripts. Yagi replaced Makino as the director of entertainment movies in June 1942. Tsuboi Atae remembered Yagi as a hardworking person who arrived early to take care of everything in his department. Consequently, all employees in the production department became more disciplined, ambitious, and hardworking.⁵⁰ Manying Film Academy attracted the famous director Kimura Sotoji 木村莊十二 to be its full-time professor since his dream of establishing a film academy in Japan could not be realized during wartime.⁵¹ Tazuko Sakane 坂根田鶴子, a female student of Kenji Mizogushi 溝口健二 and the first female director in Japan, joined Manying's enlightenment movie department.⁵²

The last group of Japanese filmmakers arrived at Manying in May 1945 to avoid air raids in Tokyo. Famous cinematographer Sugiyama Kōhei 杉山公平 trained Chinese assistants, including Li Guanghui.⁵³ Famous director Uchida Tomu 内田吐夢 and animator Mochinanga Tadahito 持永只仁 also went to Manying.⁵⁴ Most of them joined other Japanese who traveled with the Northeast Film Company to Northern Manchuria before the Chinese civil war. Mochinanga took apart and reassembled special cameras for making cartoons and produced a short political satire of Chiang Kai-shek called *Wengzhong zuobie* (*Catch the Turtle in a Jar*, 1948) trained the first generation of animators for the new China.⁵⁵

⁵⁰ Wang Yanhua, "Manying yu dongbei," 39.

⁵¹ Kimura Sotoji was a director of leftwing tendency dramas in 1930 and led a strike against Shino Kinema in 1931 and departed with 30 members. Later, he moved to the right and was an active participant in Japan Film Association. He made war documentary for Toho, such as *Yangtse River Fleet* (Yasuko Kantai, 1938) *Naval Bomber Squadron* (Kaigun Bakugekitai).

⁵² Wang Yanhua, "Manying yu dongbei," 39.

⁵³ Lu Ren, "Zhuming sheyingshi jian daoyan Li Guanghui" [Famous Cinematographer and Director Li Guanghui], *Changchun wenshi ziliao* 2 (1986): 73–139.

⁵⁴ Wang Yanhua, "Manying yu dongbei," 39–43.

⁵⁵ Nan Longrui, "Tadahito Mochinanga and Chinese Animation," *Contemporary Cinema*, 56–60.

Lost Directing Manying Movies: Japanese Directors in 1938-1939

Japanese directors at Manying were influenced by the film language of their colleagues in Japan, Japanese ideology and censorship in Manchukuo, and the company's production policy. Starting in the mid-1930s, some directors in Japan switched from military films to national policy films with Japanese civilians as the central figures, emphasizing emigration to Manchuria as Japan's solution to the agrarian crisis. Films with the happy endings of Japanese emigration to Manchuria included Ozu's *Brothers and Sisters of the Toda Clan*, Shimazu's *A Brother and his Younger Sister*, and Franck and Itami's *The New Earth*. Unfortunately, those movies misleadingly represented Manchuria as vast stretches of fertile land where tractors were used for farming to encourage Japanese settlement.⁵⁶ Similar films were continually made in Japan during Manying's existence, including Toyoda's *Ohinata Mura* (Toho 1940) and Kurata's *A Vast and Fertile Land* (Yokudo Manri, Nikkatsu, 1940). Both suggested that the wildland in Manchuria could be tamed for wet rice cultivation.⁵⁷

Japanese directors at Manying contributed to a discourse that portrayed the Japanese as an integral part of Manchuria and brought modernity when native Chinese governments seemed incapable of doing so.⁵⁸ From 1937 to 1939, Manying focused heavily on producing cultural films and documentaries since its Chinese actors were still under training, professional directors were lacking, and the company had only one temporary studio with poor facilities. Overall, Manying produced a total of sixty cultural films and only 17 feature movies.⁵⁹ Those cultural films and documentaries were mostly in Japanese and Chinese, with the Japanese ones aimed at attracting Japanese at home to Manchukuo with depictions of abundant resources, rich cultures and interesting customs, and rapid modern development. Cultural films and documentaries in Chinese had the goal of educating Chinese about Manchukuo, promoting conscription, and introducing modern Japan. Some bilingual enlightenment films preached the

⁵⁶ High, *The Imperial Screen*, 268.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 268–270.

⁵⁸ Rana Mitter, "Evil Empire?: Competing Construction of Japanese Imperialism in Manchuria, 1928–1937," in Li Narangoa and Robert Cribb, eds., *Imperial Japan and National Identities in Asia, 1895–1945* (London: Routledge, 2003), 146–147.

⁵⁹ Hu and Gu, *Manying*, 58–61.

unity of Japan and Manchukuo, the harmony of five ethnic groups (*gozoku kyowa*), and the spirit of national construction.

By making feature movies at Manying, some Japanese directors committed to constructing New Asia and building Sino-Japanese fraternity, while others tried to entertain Chinese audiences without conflicting with Manying's mission. Most of the early Manying national policy films were commissioned by the Manchukuo government to praise its army, police, and judiciary. Such films aligned with Manchukuo official discourse, highlighting the country's modern construction, good social order, improved lives, and ethnic harmony. Most early national policy films are no longer extant, but film literature preserves their plots, promotional campaigns, and feedback. Amateur director Tsuboi Atae's *The Ambition* (1938) was about a Chinese rural youth whose life was disturbed by local bandits; he joined the Manchukuo army to round up outlaws and defend local order to unite with his fiancé.⁶⁰ State Council and Security officials attended its premiere, and *Shengjing shibao* carried the recommendation letter from the Minister of Security, who praised the movie for "lifting the national spirit and popularizing military knowledge."⁶¹ Professional director Uesuna Taikura's 上砂泰藏 *Rainbow over Continent* was a joint production of Manying and its branch company Xinmin Film Association in Beiping, founded in February 1938. The story was about an honest Manchukuo policeman whose many good deeds contrasted with those of the corrupt police of the old days before the founding of Manchukuo. *Shengjing shibao* advertised the movie for "promoting proper behaviors" and "entertaining people with a pure love story."⁶²

Mizugae Ryūichi was from Shōchiku studio, known for its American-style family dramas and *shoshimin-geki* movies on the lives of salarymen. When he arrived at Manying in October 1938, he struggled to direct national policy films. His first movie, *National Law Was Selfless* (*Guofa wusi*), was commissioned by the Supreme Court of Xinjing. Mizugae borrowed the story of the Nikkatsu B-movie *The Prosecutor and His Sister* (1937) to praise the integrity of a Manchukuo prosecutor.⁶³ *Shengjing shibao*

⁶⁰ Hu and Gu, *Manying*, 44.

⁶¹ "Zhuangzhi zhutian' tuijian shu" [Recommendation for *The Ambition*], *Shengjing shibao*, April 10, 1938.

⁶² Wang Hong, "Shijie de yingxiang," 43; Hu and Gu, *Manying*, 46.

⁶³ Sato, *Paosheng zhongde*, 85

promoted the movie by carrying the Chinese lyrics of its theme song.⁶⁴ His next movie, *The Flower at the National Border* (*Guojing zhihua*), was a national defense movie which distorted the Nomonhan Incident (Kwantung army's invasion of Soviet-controlled Outer Mongolia) of summer 1939 into a foreign invasion and praised Mongolian youth in the Manchukuo army who risked their lives defending the border. Mizugae also directed *The Opium Addict* (*Yan gui*), a story about a Manchukuo policeman who unknowingly kills his father, an opium-smuggler, while suppressing the opium trade.⁶⁵ Besides making national policy films, Mizugae also remade Nikkatsu B-movie *Three Mothers* (1930) into *Tears of a Loving Mother* (*Cimulei*), an ode to maternal love.⁶⁶ That movie was better received than his national policy films and helped Mizugae see that overt propaganda did not work.

One national policy film that received much attention and investment from Manying was *Dawn's Light* (*Liming shuguang*) of 1940, dedicated to Kwantung soldiers and Manchukuo policemen who sacrificed their lives rounding up bandits in Andong. In the spirit of Article Seven of the Film Law, Manchukuo Prime Minister Zhang Jinghui commissioned this movie from Manying to commemorate the fallen Japanese soldiers who founded Manchukuo.⁶⁷ Also, the Kwantung Army, the National Security Department, and the Concordia Society assisted with the film, and famous scriptwriter Aramaki Yoshio revised the scenes five times. Manying not only deployed its best actors but also invited leading performers from Datong Revue in Xinjing and brought Japanese ones from Shōchiku Ofuna studio. Director Yamauchi Eizō spent six months filming the movie, paying great attention to aesthetic details. The film began with a dedication “to honor those heroes who sacrificed their lives to found and defend Manchukuo.” Japanese authorities in Manchukuo were pleased and called the production a real national policy movie with an exciting story. Japanese film critic Tatsumi Ryuji 辰巳龍吉 commented that it “overcame the lack of entertainment in other

⁶⁴ Wang Hong, “Shijie de yingxiang,” 43.

⁶⁵ “Dianying jianshangze, dianying shangren, dianying zhizuoze: Sanwei yiti kentanhui” [A Triune Roundtable Among Film Critics, Film Businessmen, And Film Producers], *Manzhou yinghua* 3/8 (August 1939).

⁶⁶ Sato, *Paosheng zhongde*, 85.

⁶⁷ Wang Yanhua, “Manying yu dongbei,” 47.

national policy movies, and captured audience's interest."⁶⁸ The movie was made at a time when the domestic situation in Japan was chaotic, and the Japanese Prime Minister hoped to use it to unite all Japanese to carry out the divine mission of the Japanese emperor. But when Shōchiku company showed the movie in Japan, it was criticized harshly.⁶⁹

The only extant national policy film that Manying co-produced with Toho is *Journey to the East* (*Azumaasobi ki; Dongyouji* 1939), directed by Ōya Toshio 大谷俊夫. Ōya had the most impressive credentials among Japanese directors at Manying: he had studied under famous directors Naruse Mikio and Yamamoto Kajiro pursued a fifteen-year career in Japan, and directed eleven movies at Nikkatsu, PCL, and Toho before he joined Manying.⁷⁰ He stayed with Manying from 1939 until Japan's defeat and directed eleven feature movies and some cultural films. Ōya was from Toho studio, known for producing Japanese national policy films. He first experimented with ghost movie *The Wronged Soul Avenged* (*Yuanhun Fuchou*), which Manying criticized for its disagreement with national policy.⁷¹ Then, Ōya led two national policy movies through joint production with Toho: *Journey to the East* (*Dongyouji* 1939) and *Contemporary Japan* (*Xiandai riben* 1940), introducing modern Japan to the Chinese. *Dongyongji* had included two famous Japanese actresses, Takamine Hideko and Hara Setsuko. Yet, it portrayed Chinese people as backward and morally flawed. The two peasants played by Manying comedians Zhang Shuda and Liu Enjia, lacking knowledge and experience with modern urban life, became rural bumpkins in Tokyo.⁷² Such visual representation angered Chinese movie viewers, who criticized Ōya for his clownish worldview and dehumanizing real people.⁷³ In *Modern Japan*, two Chinese students finish their college education in Japan and travel as lovers around the country, appreciate the beauty of Kobe, Osaka, Nara, and Kyoto and attend the celebration of the

⁶⁸ *Manzhou yinghua* 4/3 (March 1940); Wang Hong, "Shijie de yingxiang," 44; Wang Yanhua, "Manying yu dongbei," 47–48.

⁶⁹ Sato, *Paosheng zhongde*, 203.

⁷⁰ Hu and Gu, *Manying*, 124.

⁷¹ "Manying zhipian buhe guocen yinqi gefang tonglie paiji" [Manying Movies Were Bombarded for Their Disagreement with National Policy], *Shengjing shibao*, May 12, 1939, 2.

⁷² Wang Yanhua, "Manying yu dongbei," 61.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

2600th anniversary of the Japanese nation. Despite their admiration for modern Japan, they decide to return home to construct Manchukuo.

Some Japanese directors remade Nikkatsu B-movies in Chinese dialogue to entertain the Chinese viewers yet were frustrated that their Japanese filming experience was inadmissible in Manchukuo.⁷⁴ Ueno Shinji 上野真嗣 from Shinkō studio expressed his excitement and frustration in *Manshū eiga* in June 1939. He genuinely hoped to reach out to Chinese people by learning the language and making good films that would out “decadent Japanese and Shanghai movies.”⁷⁵ However, even after living in Manchuria for a year, he still could not speak basic Chinese. Impressed by the romantic Manchurian landscape and rustic Chinese village life, he struggled to reveal human emotions with camerawork against the seemingly changeless landscape. His first movie *Honeymoon Express* (*Miyue kuaiche*), from 1938, was a remake of popular Nikkatsu comedy *The Bride Who Has Been Peeked At* (1936), directed by Ōya Toshio. Ueno’s hot temper and lack of respect for actors created much tension in the filming process. He kept hurling insults at performers. But the leading actress Ro Koran/Li Xianglan was Japanese, and actor Du Hanxing had studied at Waseda University, so both understood Japanese.⁷⁶ Li Xianglan could not bear Ueno’s insulting remarks and returned to the hotel to cry her heart out.⁷⁷ Plus, this movie represented Chinese characters as flawed: a married Chinese man had an affair, and his unreasonable wife, who followed him around. To Ueno’s discouragement, Chinese moviegoers did not find the movie funny due to cultural differences between Japan and Manchuria.

Ueno suffered from one setback after another. He and Shōchiku filmmaker Yoichi Saiki 岡齋與一 started making a movie called *Garden of Maidens* in early 1939, but it shortly got canceled.⁷⁸ While making *Smiling*

⁷⁴ High, *The Imperial Screen*, 273.

⁷⁵ Ueno Shinji, “The Garden of Manchurian Cinema,” *Manshū eiga* 3/6 (June 1939), 40–41.

⁷⁶ *Shengjing shibao*, July 24, 1938, 4.

⁷⁷ Yamaguchi Yoshiko, *Wo de qianbansheng – Li Xianglan zhuan* [The Early Half of My Life – Biography of Li Xianglan], (Beijing: Shijie zhushi chubanshe, 1988), 67–70.

⁷⁸ “The Production of *The Paradise of Virgins* was Delayed,” *Manshū eiga* 3/1 (January 1939), 70–71. *Manchurian Cinema* carried a shooting scene

Earth (1938), commissioned by the Ministry of Industry to improve the countryside and enlighten peasants, a frustrated Ueno resorted to violence against Chinese actors.⁷⁹ He and his Chinese assistant Jin Ying took a film crew of thirty people to shoot outdoor scenes in Baichengzi during hot summer days.⁸⁰ Peng Bo, a journalist at *Shengjing shibao*, wrote about what he saw on the filming site.⁸¹ A new actress, Jiang Xiuwen, drew water from a well and was criticized for her inappropriate expression, but she did not know how to make it right. Ueno rushed towards her and knocked her on the chest, making her fall unconscious to the ground a few steps away. Others quickly rushed the actress to the hospital.⁸² Leading actor Guo Shaoyi could not bear Ueno and returned to Manying in tears, quitting his role in the movie.

Another journalist sympathized with both the performers and Ueno: the Japanese director did not know that student actors were paid very little for their jobs, nor did he understand Chinese customs. Here the journalist still questioned whether a modern film company should adopt the uncivilized practice of beating actors as opera revues did in the past.⁸³ The journalist wondered whether Japanese directors were qualified to direct movies on Chinese lives and exposed the harsh treatment of Chinese actors at Manying. *Smiling Earth* changed its leading actor yet was canceled “for weather reason.”⁸⁴ Ueno also contributed four episodes to *Fugui chunmeng*, directed by Suzuki Shigeyoshi, a movie with five episodes on different people’s attitude towards money. In early 1939, Ueno finished the national policy movie *Xingmeng biaoqi*, but it was banned from exhibition due to “its disagreement with national policy, its inappropriateness in dealing with

with Yao Lu, Xia Peijie, Ji Yanfen, Hou Feiyan, and Lu Xuan as students in uniform, Li Ming as their teacher, and Yu Yi as their dormitory supervisor.

⁷⁹ *Shengjing shibao*, September 4, 1938.

⁸⁰ *Shengjing shibao*, June 13, July 10, 17, and 24, 1938.

⁸¹ Peng Bo, “Guanguang Manying: Sanhecun waijingdui” [Visiting Manying: On Outdoor Shooting Team at Sanhe village], *Shengjing shibao*, July 17, 1938.

⁸² “Yanyuannan, Daoyan yinan” [Both Director and Actors Had Their Hardship], *Shengjing shibao*, July 24, 1937.

⁸³ “Erci Guanguang Manying Sanhecun waijingdui de jishu” [A Report on My Second Visit of Man’ei Scenery-Shooting Team at Sanhecun], *Shengjing shibao*, July 24, 1938.

⁸⁴ “Yinghai yushen,” *Shengjing shibao*, July 24, 1938 and September 4, 1938.

Mongol issue, and its wrong understanding of Manchukuo army.”⁸⁵ Despite his ambition and effort, Ueno was not accepted at Manying.

Takahara Fujirō 高原富士郎 was transferred from the division of cultural films to produce entertainment movies from 1938 through 1941. He directed six movies.⁸⁶ His first movie, *Melody of Intimacy (Zhixinqu)*, focused on urban lives and praised the triumph of justice over evil by weaving together a story with all the selling points of a Hollywood commercial movie – a dancing girl, a ruffian, a rich girl, a robber, and a policeman. His next movie, *Spring in the Countryside (Tianyuan chunguang)*, was a national policy film praising the rural development in Manchukuo through a love story. His *Sisters (Zhenjia zimei)* adopted the literary archetype of two sisters, criticizing the elder one for her vanity and praising the younger one for her purity. After 1940, Takahara began adopting scripts by Chinese writers: *New Life (Xinsheng Life)*, by Jiang Xueqian and Zhou Lantian, comedy *Safe and Sound (Renma pingan)*, co-authored by Nakamura Noriyuki and Zhou Lantian, and another comedy, *Every Dog Has His Day (Shilai Yunzhuan)*, by prolific playwright Zhang Woquan. Takahara pioneered the comedy genre in Manying cinema, although his comic film language was immature. Zhang Yi remembered Takahara as an eccentric artist who lived in his own world yet was friendly to Chinese actors and actresses. Takahara influenced Chinese director Zhu Wenshun, who had been his assistant.

Other Japanese directors at Manying did not produce many movies. Uesuna Taikura 上砂泰藏, from Shinkō studio, was the first professional Japanese director at Manying. He graduated from Doshisha University in Kyoto and only directed one national policy movie, *Rainbow over the Continent (Dalu changhong)*, which praised Manchukuo policemen. Suzuki Shigeyoshi, from Shōchiku studio, was invited by Kagakita Nagamasa (川多喜长政) to direct propaganda movie *The Way to Oriental Peace* in December 1937 for the East Harmony Film Company in Beiping.⁸⁷ He then joined

⁸⁵ “Yinghai yushen,” *Shengjing shibao*, February 26, 1939 and May 12, 1939, 2.

⁸⁶ *Shengjing shibao*, July 17, 1938; Hu and Gu, *Manying*, 114.

⁸⁷ *Shengjing shibao*, April 24 and May 29, 1938, 6. They recruited amateur actors Zhang Jizu (a cross-talker), Xu Cong, Bai Guang, Li Yufei, Li Ming, and Zhong Qiufang in December 1937 to make the movie, and brought those actors to Japan to meet the Japanese audience for its premiere. Li Yufei was

Manying as a production manager in 1938. Suzuki only directed one feature film, *Dreams for Wealth* (*Fugui chunmeng*, 1939), and other cultural ones.⁸⁸ Famous Shōchiku scriptwriter Aramaki Yoshio directed his own script, *A Beautiful Spouse* (*Ruhua meijuan*), at Manying in 1940, while Shimada Taichi 島田太一 directed *The Autumn* (*Dadi qiuguang*) in the same year. In Manying's later years, actor-turned-director Kazuo Hirose 廣瀨数夫 directed a few action movies. Kasai Huiji 笠井輝二 directed *The Beauty with a Mole* (*Heizhi Meiren*) and supervised Chinese director Liu Guoquan.

Japanese directors were expected to produce national policy films for Manchukuo without clearly understanding the differences between national policy in Japan and Manchukuo. They often imposed Japanese imperial ideology in Manying cinema to the distaste of Chinese,⁸⁹ which made leading Chinese writer Wang Qiuying refuse to take Manying cinema as art.⁹⁰ Additionally, these directors' Japanese film language and aesthetics estranged Chinese moviegoers who had developed their tastes watching Shanghai commercial movies on romance, family, and social issues; they disliked the Japanese flavor, propaganda, and unnatural stories and dialogues of Manying movies.⁹¹ Even *Manzhou yinghua*, edited by Manying, criticized early Manying movies for entertaining audiences by showing off actors' skills rather than satisfying spiritual needs and catering to low taste by showing actresses' legs and physique.⁹² Still, the magazine credited Japanese directors for their hard work and sympathized with their dilemma and distress: "Japanese directors who came afar did not understand Manchurian environment, Chinese people and their material lives. But they worked hard

from a banner household and was used to being attended by servants. He lived constantly under the fear of being scolded by Suzuki while making the movie. When the crew was in Japan, they worked till two or three o'clock in the morning.

⁸⁸ Hu and Gu, *Manying*, 61, 232.

⁸⁹ Laohan, "Ribei yinghua manxi dianyingyuan peiji shangying zhi jiantao" [A Reflection on the Distribution and Exhibition of Japanese Movies in Chinese Theaters], *Manzhou yinghua* 2/10 (October 1938).

⁹⁰ Qiuying, "Suiyu chao" [Random Talk], *Manzhou yinghua* 3/8 (August 1939).

⁹¹ Zhang Yi, "Wo suozhidao de Manying," *Changchun wenshi ziliao* 1 (1986): 1–43.

⁹² Wang Yanhua, "Manying yu dongbei," 45.

to establish Manchukuo cinema by studying Chinese customs and human relationships and tried their best to accommodate the Chinese audience. Their hard work did not achieve satisfactory results due to their movies' overt Japanese flavor and their effort to cater to the low taste, alienating the audience. It is not hard to understand the frustration of Japanese directors."⁹³

Early Manying national policy movies depicted Manchukuo and Chinese people according to Manchukuo official discourse in Japanese film.⁹⁴ As a Chinese theater manager noticed, those entertainment movies were either unpopular remakes of Japanese movies or immature Hollywood and Shanghai movies imitations.⁹⁵ Since the political and cultural identities of Manchukuo print media were often separated,⁹⁶ Chinese film critics frankly expressed their disappointments with Manying movies therein. Japanese-edited *Shengjing shibao* ran the weekly cinema column "Yinghai yushen" (The Screen) from February 20, 1933 to April 28, 1940. With Manying's establishment, the column introduced Manying movies, personnel, filming activities, and news to entertain cinema fans. Manying's monthly magazine *Manzhou yinghua* (*Manchurian Cinema*), aimed at film education and entertainment, often carried Chinese criticism of Manying movies. Chinese critics seldom criticized the political message of said films, yet they lashed out at their boring stories, unnatural dialogues, Japanese music, the juxtaposition of Japanese and Chinese elements, violation of Chinese culture and custom, actors' poor performances, and lackluster film technique.⁹⁷ By restricting their criticism to cultural and artistic aspects, Chinese critics questioned the authenticity of Manying cinema and the legitimacy of Japanese producing movies for Chinese.

⁹³ Wang Yanhua, "Manying yu dongbei," 64.

⁹⁴ Baskett, *The Attractive Empire*, 83.

⁹⁵ "Harbin: Dianyingyuan guanxizhe zuotanhui" [A Roundtable Among Film Theater Owners in Harbin], *Manzhou yinghua* 2/11.

⁹⁶ Chen Yan, "Wu Si mailuo xide 'manzhouguo xushi'" [The Narrative of Manchukuo Along the May Fourth Lineage], in Liu Xiaoli, ed., *Chuangshang: Dongya zhimin zhiyi yu wenxue* (Shanghai: Sanlian shudian, 2017), 275–276.

⁹⁷ Zhang Yi, "Wo suozhidao," 2, 9–10.

Entertaining Chinese: Japanese Directors in the Period of 1940–1943

The failure to transplant Japanese filming experiences forced Japanese authorities to reform Manying to produce better entertainment movies. In November 1939, Kwantung army appointed Amakasu Masahiko 甘粕 正彦 as the new managing director of Manying upon completion of its new offices and studios. Amakasu had been imprisoned for his extrajudicial execution of anarchists after the Great Kantō earthquake.⁹⁸ He participated in planning for Manchukuo,⁹⁹ helped establish the civilian police force in Xinjing,¹⁰⁰ and was notorious for his brutality.¹⁰¹ He declared that “Manying must make films that the Manchurians/Chinese enjoy”¹⁰² and switched the film production’s focus from enlightenment to entertainment.¹⁰³ Amakasu instituted many reforms to improve Manying management and productivity. He traveled to Germany to purchase the most advanced video cameras, invited Japanese movie stars, directors, and scriptwriters to participate in Manying film production, and built cinematic networks with the film industries of Japan, Germany, Italy, and occupied China. He established the Manying Film Academy (*Manying Yangchengsuo*) to train all film majors,¹⁰⁴ founded the Manchurian Film Society to control Manying’s film distribution and local cinemas, turning Manying magazine *Manzhou yinghua* into the Manchurian Magazine Society for commercial publication.¹⁰⁵ Amakasu led the film company into its most productive and profitable years.

During 1939–1942, the propaganda policy in Japan shifted to “thriving Asia (Koa)” or “Construction of Greater East Asia.” Japanese documentaries advocated Sino-Japanese “amicability and cooperation,” despite the anti-Japanese sentiment of the Chinese populace.¹⁰⁶ Various

⁹⁸ Marius B. Jansen, *The Making of Modern Japan* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2000), 573.

⁹⁹ Edward Behr, *The Last Emperor* (Toronto: Futura, 1987), 193.

¹⁰⁰ Hu and Gu, *Manying*, 87–88.

¹⁰¹ Louise Young, *Japan’s Total Empire*, 16.

¹⁰² Amakasu Masahiko, “Manjin no tameini eiga wo tsukuru” [Making Film for Manchurian People], *Eiga junpo*, August 1, 1942.

¹⁰³ Zhang Jin, “Li Min fangtan lu,” *Changchun Yingshi: Dongbei juan* (Beijing: Minzu chubanshe, 2011), 90.

¹⁰⁴ Hu and Gu, *Manying*, 90.

¹⁰⁵ Furuichi, “*Manying*” *dianying*, 53, 59.

¹⁰⁶ High, *The Imperial Screen*, 265.

Japanese directors depicted China/Manchuria as a land with a long history, rich cultures, and impressive achievements. In Toho studio's movie *Vow in the Desert*, directed by Watanabe Kunio, a Japanese character marvels atop the Great Wall: "This is the foremost testimony to the greatness of the human will." Then he pointed to Beijing and announced that the military highway being constructed by Japanese engineers would be a second Great Wall of China.¹⁰⁷ Manying Japanese directors of the same period had to adjust their direction to produce popular entertainment movies for the Chinese market. Some adopted film scripts by Chinese writers or experimented with popular Chinese movie genres – historical costume, martial art, detective, and comedy. Others imitated Shanghai movies, which made their directing lack distinctive features that became rather "ambiguous."¹⁰⁸ Chinese writer An Xi pointed out that Manying entertainment movies could not absorb elements of the Japanese and Shanghai cinemas for their own use, but simply included both, which caused the criticism that "Manying cinema was the combination of Japanese cinema and Shanghai cinema."¹⁰⁹

Manying movies during 1940–1943 reflected the change in Japanese imperialist ideology by representing Manchukuo and China in a better light. Female Chinese characters in Manying cinema were mostly positive with traditional feminine virtues, and Chinese children were good and innocent.¹¹⁰ Due to the reduced supply of Shanghai movies caused by film control in Manchukuo, Manying entertainment movies of this period were better received by Chinese audiences. Film critic Airen praised a Manying children's movie, titled *The Smile of Love (Ai de weixiao)* and directed by Yamauchi Eizō, as "animated with innocent and lively air" and was "better than Shanghai movie with similar content."¹¹¹ Most Japanese

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 271.

¹⁰⁸ "Manzhou qida daoyan zong pian" [A General Criticism of Seven Directors in Manchuria-on Mizugae Ryūichi], *Dianying huabao* 7/3 (March 1943).

¹⁰⁹ An Xi, "Miaoyuan de xiwang" [A Distant Hope], *Dianying huabao* 7/1 (January 1941).

¹¹⁰ Liu Wenhua, "Manying dianyingzhong de Zhongguo xingxiang lun" [On the Image of China in Manying Movies] (MA thesis, Changchun University of Science and Technology, 2016).

¹¹¹ Refer to Yamauchi Eizō's *Aide Weixiao*, Mizugae's *Cimulei*, Ikeda's *Haohaizi*, and *Huayu chunfeng*. Airen, "Qunian Manying de chengongzuo"

directors produced better-received entertainment movies through trial and error, and some movies were even exhibited in occupied Shanghai and Beiping through Manying's exchange networks.¹¹²

Manying let Chinese and Japanese scriptwriters co-author scripts. The most productive team was that of Chinese writer Zhang Woquan and Japanese scriptwriters Yagi Hiroshi 八木寛, who was fluent in Chinese, and Nagatsuku Hiroshi 長佃博司. They assumed the collective pen name "Xiye 熙野" and got some of their scripts screened.¹¹³ Nakamura Noriyuki worked with Chinese writer Zhou Lantian, fluent in Japanese, and wrote comedy script *Safe and Sound*. Yamauchi Eizō's script for Japanese martial art film *The Thief Wearing a Black Mask (Heilianzei)* was rewritten into Chinese by Wang Du, who added many details and rearranged the plot.¹¹⁴ Mizugae's 1940 romance movie *Voyage in Love (Qinghai hangcheng)* used Aramaki Yoshio's script adapted from *Konjiki Yasha* by Meiji novelist Ozaki Koyo.¹¹⁵

However, Chinese scriptwriters Yang Ye, Zhou Lantian, and Zhang Yinghua localized the story in a Chinese setting before it was filmed. Manying often sent Chinese and Japanese writers to travel together to gather sources for writing. Liang Shanding and Yagi Hiroshi went to Rehe to visit ancient historical relics,¹¹⁶ while Wang Du and Yagi Hiroshi went to Northern Manchuria to experience life.¹¹⁷ The mechanism of co-authoring film scripts suggested that even during wartime, writers from two East Asian cultures could still find common ground and reach an agreement in their writing.

[A Successful Movie Manying Made Last Year], *Dianying huabao* 7/1 (January 1943).

¹¹² Liu Xiaochen, "Ri wei baokan yanjiu jiqi Manying xuanchuan" [Japanese-Ran Periodicals and Their Reports on Manying] (MA thesis, China Film Art Research Center, 2014).

¹¹³ Those six scripts were *Qinghai hangcheng*, *Shui zhidao tadexin*, *Yuanlin chunse*, *Lipan huaxiang*, *Xinhunji*, and *Baozitou Lin Chong*. Nagatsuku also wrote his own scripts: *Huaping tanan* (under penname Lu Ping), *Yinying lineage*, and *Su Xiaomei*; Yagi wrote *Jieda huanxi*, *Baima Jianke*, and *Yan Qing yu Li Shishi*.

¹¹⁴ Zhang Jin, "Li Min fangtan lu," 87.

¹¹⁵ Wang Yanhua, "Manying yu dongbei," 54.

¹¹⁶ *Shengjing shibao*, July 27, 1941.

¹¹⁷ Li Yu, "Li Min Fangtanlu," 100.

Japanese directors made genuine efforts to learn Chinese history and culture while producing popular Chinese movies. Ōya Tashio, known for his early national policy films, directed the well-received historical costume drama *Rogue (Yanzhi)* in 1942, which received positive feedback. *Rogue* was based on Japanese sinologist Shibata Tenma's translation of a short story by Qing novelist Pu Songling. When Ōya Toshio directed the movie, he consulted Chinese lyricist and artist Yu Yuanshou in Jilin city many times to verify the story's historical background, characters' costumes, and hairstyles with his Chinese colleagues Sen Yan and Wang Xinzhai. While filming the movie, Ōya faithfully followed the original story's twisted plots and chain of wrongs by varying the lighting in different scenes and employing different camerawork to convey themes of love, sex, crime, detection, justice, and happiness. He confessed that his goal was to make the piece precise, artful, detail-oriented, and holistic rather than to pursue the pompous air of Shanghai flicks. He praised actress Zheng Xiaojun, whose performance made the heroine intelligent, elegant, and delicate.¹¹⁸ Chinese audiences liked the movie better for this new style and scene arrangements. It was even received quite well in Shanghai.¹¹⁹

More Japanese directors adopted scripts by Chinese writers, making their movies more reflective of Chinese people's lives and culture. The most productive Japanese director, Mizugae Ryūichi, led twelve movies during his five years at Manying, between 1938 and 1942. Following Amakasu's call to produce Chinese entertainment movies, Mizugae began adopting scripts by Chinese and experimenting with popular Chinese movie genres. He first directed two movies on married life – *A Friend from Faraway (Youpeng zi yuanfang lai)*, 1940), written by Zhang Woquan, and *Tears of Two Girls (Shaungshu lei)*, 1941) with An Longqi. He later directed a detective movie, *Vases and Detectives (Huaping tan'an)*, scripted by Japanese writer Nagatsuku Hiroshi.¹²⁰ Finally, Mizugae made a few historical costume dramas with Chinese scriptwriters and established his fame in his last two years at Manying. The scripts for his martial art movie *Heroes (Longzheng hudou)*, 1941) and the fairy tale *Temple of Goddesses (Niangniangmiao)*, 1942)

¹¹⁸Otani Tashio, "Zatan *Yanzhi*" [Random Talk on Beauty], *Dianyinghuobao* 6/7 (July 1942).

¹¹⁹Liu Xiaochen, "Ri wei baokan yanjiu jiqi Manying xuanchuan" (MA thesis, China Film Art Research Center, 2014).

¹²⁰Hu and Gu, *Manying*, 117.

were both by Wang Du, who wrote the film under the penname Jiang Yan. *Heroes*, which adapted Tang legend *Shigongan*, gained box office success in Manchukuo and was later shown in Shanghai. *Temple of Goddesses*, on the other hand, was based on Manchu folklore on three fairies who descended from heaven to right wrongs. Mizugae also directed *Unruly Monk Lu Zhishen* (*Huaheshang Lu Zhishen*, 1942) scripted by Zhang Woquan and He Qun and based on a story from the Chinese classic *Heroes of the Water Margin*. Mizugae's last movie *Spring Wind and Wild Grass* (*Chunfeng yecao*, 1942), adapted the script of Chinese writer and director Yang Ye.

Mizugae had a pleasant personality and enjoyed a good working relationship with Chinese actors and actresses. He praised child actress Yang Manli for her natural performance in *Cimulei*,¹²¹ mentored Chinese actress Ji Yanfen on how to reveal her character's emotions,¹²² and wrote an article praising several Manying actresses.¹²³ Actor Zhang Yi remembered Mizugae as a "*laohaoren* (a good man)" who greeted others with a smile and addressed actors politely as "*xx-san*." Mizugae not only shared his opinion on how to create characters but also listened to actors' and actresses' ideas.¹²⁴ As head of the Acting Personnel Office (*yanji ke*), Mizugae led Chinese actors with wisdom. For example, when the film *Safe and Sound* had difficulty assigning unpopular roles, he asked cadre actors what to do and got them to volunteer. He later decided to return to Japan in late 1942.¹²⁵

Zhang Yi praised Mizugae's directing as "subtle and detail-oriented," influencing leading Chinese director Zhou Xiaobo. But Chinese film critics criticized Mizugae for his ambiguity in *Dianying huabao*:

Manchurian cinema has an ambiguous character which can be seen in the ambiguous directing style of its directors... Take Mizugae Ryuichi for example... To win the audience, he explored different genres to see which one the movie

¹²¹ "The Screen," *Shengjing shibao*, March 26, 1939; and *Binjiang Ribao*, March 21, 1939.

¹²² "Dianyingcun fangwenji," *Manzhou yinghua*, June 1940, 56–58. It carried a picture of Mizugae and Ji Yanfen.

¹²³ "Kantoku no tasimeru Man'ei no sita" [Actresses Who Were Praised by Director], *Manzhou yinghua* 4/5 (May 1940), 86.

¹²⁴ Zhang Yi, "Wo suozhidao," 36–37.

¹²⁵ Hu and Gu, *Manying*, 121.

audience liked better, just like a physician who gave a patient several different medicines to see which one worked. Directors had their struggles with the radical shift in film production direction. But this is not a good phenomenon. For an ambitious director, that is a tragedy. The tragedy of Mizugae Ryūichi is the tragedy of other directors as well.¹²⁶

Besides criticizing Mizugae for lacking a distinctive personality and directing style, the critic also found flaws with his film technique: his pacing was uneven, and his camerawork lacked variety, which made viewers feel that his film language was plain and straightforward.¹²⁷ Yamauchi Eizō also achieved success during his later years at Manying by making popular entertainment movies. When he arrived at the company in June 1939, Yamauchi wrote for *Manshū eiga* while directing his first national policy film, *Blood and Wisdom (Tiexue Huixin)*, which was about police suppression of opium in Manchukuo. His decision to join Manying made his mother in Kyoto worry about his safety in “bandit-filled Manchuria” and brought tears to his wife. So he went to Manying to create national policy films and thus avoid conflicts with colleagues. In addition, he was bothered that Manchukuo Chinese enjoyed watching Shanghai movies (which were much worse than Japanese ones) and resolved to produce better Manying movies to “oust Shanghai movies in the movie war.”¹²⁸ Despite Yamauchi’s efforts to give a politically correct backstory for his presence in Manchukuo, he followed Negishi to Manying, likely due to personnel issues at Japanese studios.

Known for directing ten feature movies at Manying, Yamauchi had two advantages over other Japanese directors: he spoke Chinese and could write scripts. His script for *The Thief Wearing a Black Mask* was revised by Jiang Yan and screened by Mizugae, while another script, *Blood and Shadow (Bixue yanying)* was filmed by Chinese director Liu Guoquan.¹²⁹ Yamaguchi was a perfectionist who shot movies slowly yet artistically. Most Manying

¹²⁶ “On Seven Manying Directors: Mizugar Ryuichi,” *Dianying huabao* 7/3 (March 1943).

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*

¹²⁸ *Manshū eiga* 3/6 (June 1939), 88–89.

¹²⁹ Guo Yanping and Liu Shenwu, *Zhang Jing yu Guo Fenyang* (Changchun: Zhengxie wenshi ziliao weiyuanhui, 2007), 8.

movies were completed in twenty days, shooting forty or fifty scenes per day.¹³⁰ He only shot two or three scenes a day and spent half a year in each of his early national policy films. Wang Du praised Yamauchi's films for their artistic value and thought his movies were even better than Ōya's. Some of Yamauchi's movies reflected Chinese life at the bottom of Manchukuo society, while others were historical costume dramas adapted from classical Chinese literature.¹³¹ He produced family melodramas, including *The Flame of Love* (*Ai'yan*) and *Wandering Songstresses* (*Liulang genü*), scripted by Yang Ye; *Ironman* (*Tiehan*), scripted by Shang Yuandu; *Storm Destroyed Flower* (*Yubao huacan*), by Liu Guoquan; and *Princess* (*Yingluo gongzhu*), by Jiang Yan. His Chinese proficiency enabled Yamauchi to scout talented actress Zhang Jing for Manying from a Fengtian stage.¹³² Yamauchi invited leading Chinese actors and actresses to a feast at Yamato Hotel to celebrate the premiere of his *Yubao huacan*.¹³³ He wrote an article praising Chinese actresses he worked with: Zhao Aiping, who skillfully played the suffering wife of an opium addict, Yao Lu, who performed as a lovely maiden in her first filming experience; and Zheng Xiaojun, who looked more like a Japanese beauty though her expression was a little rigid.¹³⁴

Yamauchi also wrote scripts under the pen name Ding Ming. He was the scenarist-director for three movies: *Modern Men* (*Xiandai naner*, 1940), *Mr. Liu Changed* (*Liu Xiansheng Huitou*, 1940), and *The Diary of a Star* (*Mingxing Riji*, 1941). He adapted Liang Shanding's novel *The Sorrow of a Songstress* (*Genühen*) into a script that Zhu Wenshun directed in 1942. His script, *Blood and Shadow Bixue yanying* (1943), was directed by Liu Guoquan and praised by audiences in Beiping.¹³⁵

The movie that best represents the radical change of Japanese directors' depictions of Manchuria and Chinese during 1940–1943 is *Yingchunhua* (*Winter Jasmine*), directed by Sasaki Kang in 1942 and a co-production between Manying and Shōchiku studio. Like most Japanese imperial cinema, which presented an attractive and modernist vision of

¹³⁰ "Sanwei yiti kentanhui," *Manzhou yinghua* 3/8, 42–44.

¹³¹ Li Yu, "Li Ming Fangtanlu," 87; Hu and Gu, *Manying*, 126.

¹³² Guo Yanping and Liu Shenwu, *Zhang Jing*, 8.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 26.

¹³⁴ Yamauchi, "Director Praised Manying Actresses," *Manzhou yinghua* 4 (1940), 82.

¹³⁵ Liu Xiaochen, "Ri wei baokan yanjiu jiqi Manying xuanchuan," 38.

empire where indigenous people lived in co-prosperity, ethnic harmony, and material abundance, *Winter Jasmine* showed Manchukuo markets of 1942 full of meat, fish, and staple foods despite the harsh reality of food rationing, inflation, and the black market.¹³⁶ It also highlighted Xinjing's impressive modern buildings, factories, urban planning, and landscape and presented Japan and Manchukuo as nations with similar cultures that shared a common origin. Although the movie suggested that Chinese lacked good hygiene – a Chinese clerk says that he seldom takes a bath and Chinese people spit in public – it characterized Chinese employees at a Japanese company as capable, diligent, and frugal. Chinese in the movie live content, love exercise, and are friendly to Japanese. They teach Japanese hero Murakawa to speak Chinese and influence him with their virtues of frugality and moderation.

Moreover, *Winter Jasmine* reversed the power relations between colonizer and colonized. Instead of depicting the Japanese as superior modernizers, *Winter Jasmine* represented Chinese heroine Bai Li as an ideal modern career woman who is more virtuous and competent than Japanese hero Murakawa and Japanese woman Ya'e. Bai Li is bilingual and moves easily between Chinese and Japanese, family and profession, and associates with men freely at work, sports, and business trips, without the struggle of Japanese career women.¹³⁷ Her sufficiently modern lifestyle is balanced with preserving the traditional feminine virtues of frugality, moderation, and self-control. The movie promoted ethnic harmony in Manchukuo by showing that the Japanese and Chinese mutually appreciated each other's culture. Also, Bai Li's family home is decorated with Chinese and Japanese artifacts, and her father discusses art and plays *go* with his Japanese friend. Japanese live among Chinese and converse with them in hybrid *xieheyu*.¹³⁸

Unlike most Manying movies, *Winter Jasmine* was shown in Japan because it was a joint production between Manying and Shōchiku. But Japanese film critics were unimpressed with its ideological message and

¹³⁶ Michael Basket, *The Attractive Empire*, 8.

¹³⁷ Chen, "Between Sovereignty and Coloniality," 116–138.

¹³⁸ *Xieheyu* was invented by Japanese writers and cultural workers in Manchukuo. They picked easy words in Chinese and arranged them in Japanese grammatical order or render Chinese names or terms in Japanese fashion. Since it can be easily understood, Chinese people also used *Xieheyu* to communicate in Japanese. In addition, *Xieheyu* was commonly used in Manchukuo literature and print media.

criticized it sharply. Murakami Tadahisa 村上忠久 wrote in *Eiga junpo (Film Ten Day Reports)* on April 21, 1942, “The movie is empty and boring and offers little entertainment to please the audience. The story is not bad, but its film language and techniques are poor. The only positive thing about the movie is that actress Ri Koran/Li Xianglan has contributed to a good box-office sale. The structure of the movie follows the routine of Ofuna movies which makes two women symbolize Japan and Manchukuo, respectively. However, the movie fails to portray two women’s psychological world clearly.”¹³⁹ Murakami thought it was inappropriate to attribute its artistic achievement to Manying since Shōchiku filmmakers mainly produced it.

Both Mizugae and Yamauchi left Manying in late 1942, but Ōya stayed until Japan’s defeat. In the final years of 1944–1945, many Japanese and Chinese filmmakers left Manying due to Japan’s adversities in the war and intensified police surveillance in Manchukuo.¹⁴⁰ To correct Manying’s severe personnel shortage and boost Japan’s martial spirit, Amakasu revived national policy films. Ōya directed three more national policy movies in 1943–1945: *Romance of the Airplane (Yin’yi lian’ge)*, *Driving Out the Invaders Miaosao langyan*, and *The Fight Between the Tiger and the Wolf (Hulang douyan)*. Those three movies avoided overt propaganda by telling love stories with twisted plots that praised Manchukuo airplane pilots and army officers.¹⁴¹ He also directed the unfinished *The Illusion to be a Star (Mingxing huanxiangqu)* in 1945. Ōya relied more on scripts by Japanese. Although his two comedies adapted scripts by Chinese writers Wang Du and An Xian,¹⁴² Wang could not remember writing *Jinghua shuiyue*, which was clearly not his best. Ōya was domineering and discomfited by newly-promoted Chinese director Wang Du when they shot outdoor scenes together in June 1943. Manying assigned Ōya to mentor Wang, yet he constantly gave orders.¹⁴³

¹³⁹ Murakami Tadahisa 村上忠久, *Eiga junpo (Film Ten Day Reports)*, April 21, 1942; Sato, *Paosheng zhongde*, 203–205.

¹⁴⁰ Furuichi, “Manying” *dianying*, 105.

¹⁴¹ Hu and Gu, *Manying*, 85.

¹⁴² *Huangjin meng* (1941) was about a Chinese miner who dreamed of making a fortune from stocks, and *Jinghua shuiyue* (1941) was about the dream of a poor Chinese labor who could conceal himself to punish those who bullied him.

¹⁴³ Zhang Jin, “Li Min fangtan lu,” 97, 102.

Although Ōya was mostly known as the director of five national policy movies at Manying, he also directed six entertainment movies, including two comedies, a ghost movie, historical costume drama *Rogue (Yanzhi)*, and two-family melodramas. Ōya belonged to the circle of Japanese film artists around Negishi and disliked the militaristic Amakasu. But he had to follow Amakasu's orders even if he later cursed him in private.¹⁴⁴ His Manying directing career corresponded with the changes in Manying's production policy: from the overt national policy films of 1938–1939 to the entertainment movies of 1940–1943, then back to covert national policy films in 1944–1945. Ōya's two comedies influenced the film language of his Chinese assistant, Wang Xinzhai, who specialized in directing comedies in Manying's later years. Amakasu had criticized Japanese filmmakers in 1942 for their early mistake of never researching what Chinese people truly liked.¹⁴⁵ Ōya did not know what movies the Chinese enjoyed until the end of Manying and simply followed the lead of Amakasu, whom he resented.

Manying movies depicted Chinese and China/Manchuria more positively during 1940–1943 due to the change in Japanese imperialist ideology. To reconcile the differences between the Japanese colonialist vision of Manchukuo and the everyday reality of Chinese people, Japanese directors localized their entertainment movies by turning to Chinese culture and history, adopting Chinese scripts, and focusing on the lives of ordinary Chinese people. To negotiate the contrast between Japanese and Chinese film aesthetics, some Japanese directors consciously imitated Shanghai movies. Because of Manchukuo's film control, Chinese movie viewers could only watch Manying entertainment movies. In these circumstances, some Japanese-directed movies achieved commercial success. A comparison of Manying entertainment movies directed by Japanese with those helmed by Chinese in 1940–1945 suggests major differences in their views on Manchukuo and Chinese, which is beyond the scope of this article.

Conclusion

Manying, as a film company of national concern, was fundamentally more interested in indoctrination that advanced the national policy of Manchukuo for Japanese imperialist interests than in letting filmmakers practice their favored artistic forms to please Chinese movie

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 96.

¹⁴⁵ Sato, *Paosheng zhongde*, 88.

viewers. This priority set restrictions on the artistic creativity of both Japanese and Chinese filmmakers. They did not have the freedom to experiment with movies as a possible artistic expression of their social values but had to explore how to convey fixed ideology to reach Manying's political and commercial goals with artistic forms that Chinese audiences could accept.

Japanese directors were handicapped by their unfamiliarity with Chinese culture and local customs, their misunderstanding of Manchukuo national policy, the shortage of "proper" Chinese scripts, and the incompatibility of their Japanese film language with popular Chinese aesthetics. Japanese directors' early movies alienated Chinese movie viewers due to their propaganda and disagreeable film aesthetics despite their strenuous efforts. By making adjustments to rely on scripts that reflected ordinary people's lives or Chinese culture and history, imitating popular genres of Shanghai movies, Japanese directors made their work more acceptable to the Chinese since the latter was limited under Manchukuo's film control. Their collective experiences suggest the irreconcilable tension between the official colonial culture and the culture of the colonized.