

# A Confucianism Observed in Disaster Films of East Asia

Timothy Yoonsuk Lee, Jinhwan Yu, and Somi Nah

**Abstract**—Hollywood has produced various blockbusters on the subject of disasters. Entering the 2000s, disaster films began to be produced in the East Asian region as well, and as most of them were successful, disaster films have settled as a popular genre in the region. East Asian disaster films utilize a plot structure similar to Hollywood films but, at the same time, represent East Asian people's unique value system. East Asian people's social behavior pattern defined as collectivism is a characteristic that distinguishes this region from other cultural regions. In order to examine Confucian culture in disaster films on the premise of the difference, the author conducts this research as follows. This study first reviews the concepts disaster and disaster film, and understands the genre through analyzing the narrative structure and style. In addition, it discusses collectivism, a characteristic of the East Asian region distinguished from the West, and investigates Confucian culture in films and examines differences among Korean, Chinese and Japanese Confucianism. Films selected for this study are *Tidal Wave* (Korea, 2009), *After Shock* (China, 2006), and *The Sinking of Japan* (Japan, 2006). Using the characters in these films, we analyze how Confucian thought is described and reproduced.

**Keywords**—Confucianism, Disaster Film, East Asian Films, Three Basic Principles and Five Moral Disciplines in Human Relations

## I. INTRODUCTION

### A. Background and Objects

CONFUCIANISM is a central thought that has ruled the East Asian region including Korea, China and Japan for a long time. Recently, there have been pro-con debates over the value of Confucianism. Such controversies are the evidence that Confucianism is still highly influential in the East Asian region. East Asia has formed a cultural region based on Confucianism, and shows characteristics distinguished from other Asian or Western regions. In particular, the collectivist behavior pattern observed in the Confucian cultural region is clearly contrasted with Western individualism. Different from Westerners, East Asian people usually find themselves in their relationship with others, put the goals of their groups before their personal goals, get motives for their social behaviors from social norms, duties and responsibilities, and try to maintain a harmonious relationship with groups (e.g. family, colleagues, friends) even if it is disadvantageous [1]. A film has some features differentiated by each region's cultural characteristics. Michael Wood said, "Films are the social history of a country and the reproductions of the country's spirit and culture. [2]" In this way, a film reflects the thought of the place or culture where it was produced.

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Considering this fact, we expect to find Confucian thought, a cultural characteristic of East Asia, in films produced in the region. Disaster films, a popular film genre developed in Hollywood, are contemporary adventure movies characterized by high cost of production, star cast, luxurious and grandiose scale, and large screen. Characters in such a film make desperate efforts to survive and overcome insurmountable disasters. By seeing how they cope with a fatal crisis in the extreme situation that they have fallen in, we can understand their culture and value system more clearly [3]. In order to analyze East Asian people's behavior pattern in coping with disasters, this study selected three disaster films produced in Korea, China and Japan. We analyze Confucian culture observed in the films semiotically using practical morals *Samgangoryun* (Three Basic Principles and Five Moral Disciplines in Human Relations) and Christian Metz's syntagmatic and paradigmatic analysis. Films selected for the case study are *Tidal Wave*, *After Shock*, and *The Sinking of Japan*. Research questions are as follows.

First, what is a disaster film?

Second, what are the characteristics of Confucian thought?

Third, what is Confucian culture appearing in East Asian disaster films?

### B. Methods and Subjects

The author aims to see how Confucian culture in the East Asian region is described in the films. As to research methods, the definition and types of disaster are reviewed as a part of analysis of disaster films, and the genre characteristics of disaster films are identified. In order to understand Confucian thought appearing in the films, moreover, we have a theoretical review of Confucian thought and reinterpret the meaning of Confucian thought in a contemporary sense. The understanding of Confucian thought in the films requires considering *Samgangoryun*, the practical morals of Confucian thought, as well as semiotic analysis of Confucian culture represented by relations among the characters in the film. For semiotic analysis, we use Christian Metz's syntagmatic and paradigmatic analysis. Syntagmatic analysis is for examining the general narrative structure of the films, and paradigmatic analysis for analyzing relations among the film characters based on *Samgangoryun*. Selected films *Tidal Wave*, *After Shock*, and *The Sinking of Japan* are disaster films produced in East Asia. These films reflect the cultural characteristics of East Asian region, and at the same time, contain Confucian behavior patterns inherent in East Asian people. In particular, dramatic situations, which are a genre characteristic of disaster films, expose the film characters' value system unreservedly on the verge of death. Through the three disaster films produced with the East Asian region as their background, we examine East

Asian people's behavior patterns in disasters and analyze the influence of Confucianism implied by the patterns.

## II. DISASTERS AND DISASTER FILMS

### A. The Concept and Types of Disaster

A disaster may be defined as an accident that is caused by natural or social phenomena, inflicts damages on human lives and properties through changing natural and urban environments radically by large-scale external forces, and at the same time, disables the society from protecting itself. Here, natural phenomena refer to typhoon, flood, heavy rain, gale, wind and waves, tsunami, heavy snow, lighting, drought, sandstorm, red tide, etc., and social phenomena include fire, collapse, explosion, traffic accidents, chemical, biological and radiological accidents, environmental contamination, infectious disease, disrupted national infrastructure systems, and other similar accidents causing damages of a certain scale. Areas attacked by disasters suffer many casualties and are in need of help from outside for material and mental recovery [4].

### B. Understanding Disaster Films

In order to analyze disaster films, we first need to know the definition and genre characteristics of disaster films. A disaster film depicts stories about a multitude of people suffering from a natural or artificial calamity and struggling to get away from it. It was popular once in the 1930s, and revived during the 1970s as an effort to overcome the decline of Hollywood. Encouraged by the great success of such films, a large number of disaster films have been produced. In a contemporary sense, disaster films are characterized by high cost of production, all-star cast, luxurious and grandiose scale, and large screen. Characters in disaster films are largely divided into three groups according to their role in the drama, which are ordinary people exposed directly to disasters, experts working to deal with the disasters, and the government. Using these groups of characters, disaster films display their life. The ordinary people group usually plays the role of emphasizing humanism in a disaster film. As victims exposed directly to the disaster, they face their death or survive to the end and work for reconstruction. In disaster films, the expert group plays very important roles. Most of heroes or heroines described in disaster films are experts who know how to overcome disasters. The government is always passive in coping with the risk of disasters, and plays the role of aggravating the situation. Contradictively it is also the government's role to make belated efforts to solve the situation. Government officials are also divided into two types, one emphasizing humanity and attaching importance to human lives and the other assuming a pragmatic position, and the two often stand in opposition to each other over policies.

## III. CONFUCIAN THOUGHT

### A. The Characteristics of Confucian Thought in East Asia

The East Asian region has been classified as the same

cultural region because of Confucianism that has ruled over the area for a long period, and this thought has produced some common behavior patterns among the people. One of major cultural differences that distinguish East Asian people from those in other regions is the collectivist tendency influenced by Confucian thought [7]. In collectivism, individuals find their relations with others, put the goals of their groups before their personal goals, get motives for social behaviors from social norms, duties and responsibilities, and try to maintain a harmonious relationship with groups even if it is disadvantageous to the individuals. In East Asian society, people highly appreciate collectivist behaviors that are thoughtful and responsible more for family, colleagues and friends than for oneself, form and maintain harmonious relations with them, and take social norms and duties imposed on them seriously. According to scholars such as Markus, Kitayama, and Kagitcibasi who analyzed differences in the views of human and self between individualism and collectivism, there are various differences in cognition, emotion and motive between the two showing that people in individualistic society tend to have independent self-construal and those in collectivism society interdependent self-construal.

TABLE I [8]

KEY DIFFERENCES BETWEEN INDEPENDENT SELF AND INTERDEPENDENT SELF

Aspect of comparison	Independent self-construal	Interdependent self-construal
Definition	Separated from social context	Connected to social context
Structure	Economic, unit, stable	Flexible, changeable
Major characteristics	Internal, private (ability, thought, emotion)	External, public (status, role, relation)
Tasks	- Originality - Self-expression - Realization of inner self - Pursuit of own goals - Direct communication	- Membership, harmony - Finding an adequate position - Participation in appropriate activities - Pursuit of others' goals - Indirect communication
Others' role	Self-evaluation: Others are important as the objects of social comparison	Self-definition: Define the self in relation with others in a specific context
Base of self-esteem	- Ability in self-expression - Ability to justify the inner self	- Ability in self-control and suppression - Ability to maintain harmony with social context

### B. Historical Differences in Confucian Thought Among Korea, China and Japan

In order to see differences in Confucian culture described in the films of Korea, China and Japan, we studied the characteristics of Confucianism in each country. Because the three countries are different from one another in the receiving time and acceptance of Confucianism and related historical facts, the influence of Confucianism is also different among the countries. China is the origin of Confucian thought and had long been ruled by the thought, but with its defeat in the Opium War with the U.K. in 1842, the country attributed the defeat to Confucianism and began to reject their long Confucian tradition.

Witnessing the decline of traditional power China, Japan abandoned Confucian thought and insisted on policies to escape from Asia. Enlightenment thinker Hukujawa Ugichi, who laid the philosophical foundation of the Meiji Revolution, criticized Confucian thought and promoted Westernization. In contrast with China and Japan where Confucian thought declined during the modern times, Korea has suffered historical confusions and reached the present age without opportunities to reilluminate Confucian thought [9]. For this historical reason, Korea has preserved more conservative Confucian culture than China and Japan. These differences among the countries are reflected and expressed clearly in their films.

### C. Contemporary Reinterpretation of Samgangoryun

Man is a social animal that leads its life in social relations with others, and people reveal their culture or value systems in the process of establishing relations with others. In East Asian region, Confucianism is the most influential thought on such relations, and it defines the relations through *Samgangoryun*. *Samgangoryun* suggests five human relations, based on which we can estimate the influence of Confucianism on relations observed in the films. However, because the virtues in *Samgangoryun*, which was for traditional society, may not be applicable directly to contemporary society, we need to reinterpret the meanings of *Samgangoryun* in a contemporary sense. When reinterpreted in a contemporary sense, *Samgang* is three basic principles for governing a state virtuously, which are *Gunwisingang* ('the subject must serve the ruler'), *Buwijagang* ('the child must serve the parent'), and *Buwibugang* ('the wife must serve the husband'). *Oryun* is five moral disciplines in human relations for harmonious society, which are *Bujayuchin* ('there must be closeness between father and son'), *Gunsinyueui* ('there must be justice between ruler and subject'), *Bubyubyueol* ('there must be distinction between husband and wife'), *Jangyuyuseo* ('there must be order between senior and junior'), and *Bunguyusin* ('there must be trust between friend and friend') [10]. The relations defined in *Samgangoryun* may be applied in the present age as follows.

TABLE II  
CONTEMPORARY INTERPRETATION OF RELATIONS DEFINED IN  
SAMGANGORYUN [10]

Relation	Traditional relation	Contemporary relation
Buja	Father and son	Parents and children
Gunsin	Ruler and subject	Leaders and members - Government leaders and citizens - Employers and employees,
Bubu	Husband and wife	Man and woman
Jangyu	Senior and junior	The old and the young
Bungu	Friend and friend	Friend and friend, colleague and colleague

When *Samgangoryun* is interpreted from a contemporary viewpoint, its meanings should be reinterpreted in accordance with the expanded scope of human relations. Furthermore, in contemporary society where the original meanings of *Samgangoryun* are twisted, it may be meaningful to explore the original meanings in contemporary society.

TABLE III

THE MEANINGS OF SAMGANG IN A CONTEMPORARY SENSE [11]

Samgang (three basic principles for governing a state virtuously)	Meaning
Gunwisingang (the subject must serve the ruler)	Society leaders should bear responsibility and sacrifice in leading their members by setting an example.
Buwijagang (the child must serve the parent)	Parents should bear responsibility and sacrifice in leading their children by setting an example.
Buwibugang (the wife must serve the husband)	Husbands or men should bear responsibility and sacrifice in leading their wives or women by setting an example.

TABLE VI

THE MEANINGS OF ORYUN IN A CONTEMPORARY SENSE [11]

Oryun (five moral disciplines in human relations for harmonious society)	Meaning
Bujayuchin (there must be closeness between father and son)	Benevolence: Parents and children should love each other intimately, and parents should take care of their children while children should serve their parents.
Gunsinyueui (there must be justice between ruler and subject)	Justice: National leaders and citizens, employers and employees, or society leaders and members should stabilize the country by treating and sharing with each other fairly instead of seeking selfish benefits only.
Bubyubyueol (there must be distinction between husband and wife)	Propriety: Men and women should distinguish themselves and keep a distance from each other in order to understand and respect each other, and they should consider and respect each other's areas and positions.
Jangyuyuseo (there must be order between senior and junior)	Wisdom: Seniors and juniors or the old and the young should consider and yield to each other by keeping order according to age.
Bunguyusin (there must be trust between friend and friend)	Trust: Friends or colleagues should keep faith with each other, and treat each other with sincerity and responsibility, and the more exemplary person should set an example of faith in order to maintain their relation peacefully.

Based on the contemporary meanings of *Samgangoryun*, we analyze Confucian culture appearing in disaster films.

## IV. SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS OF CONFUCIAN THOUGHT OBSERVED IN EAST ASIAN DISASTER FILMS

### A. Confucian Culture in Korean Film *Tidal Wave*

*Tidal Wave* has the Haeundae beach resort in Busan, the second largest city in Korea, as its background. Released in 2009, it is the first blockbuster disaster movie in Korea and ranked 5th in the box office chart of Korea by attracting over 11 million viewers [12].

The disaster in *Tidal Wave* is a tsunami, which plays the role of resolving conflicts among the characters in the drama. In the extreme situation caused by the tsunami, they realize that their issue is not a big matter and make peace with one another. In addition, the characters are induced to change and reborn as a different figure.

### 1. Syntagmatic analysis of Tidal Wave

TABLE V  
 SYNTAGMATIC ANALYSIS OF *TIDAL WAVE* FOCUSING ON THE NARRATIVE  
 STRUCTURE OF THE DISASTER FILM

Act	Syntagmatic context of <i>Tidal Wave</i>
Act I	Choi Mansik, a seaman of a deep-sea fishing vessel, is the President of the Store Prosperity Association in the Haeundae area and is living with his son Seunghyeon and his mother Geumryeon. Choi Mansik always helps Kang Yeon-hee, the daughter of his colleague who was lost while they were fishing in the same boat. It is a behavior out of his guilty feeling that her father was killed because of his greed and, at the same time, his love to her. Mansik's younger brother Hyeongsik, a rescuer at the Haeundae beach, meets Kim Hee-mi who visited Haeundae for a summer vacation and was rescued from drowning by him. Oh Dongchun was Kang Yeon-hee's schoolmate and Choi Mansik's colleague on the same deep-sea fishing vessel, but is now spending time meaninglessly as a penniless bum. On the other hand, geologist Dr. Kim Hwi has a daughter with his ex-wife Lee Yoojin but the daughter does not know that Dr. Kim Hwi is her father.
Act II	Choi Mansik's uncle Choi Eokjo is promoting the construction of a shopping center through the redevelopment of local stores at Haeundae. For this, he needs the store owners' consent but because there are some opponents, he asks help of Choi Mansik, the President of the Store Prosperity Association. However, Choi Mansik does not cooperate but hates him, attributing the death of Kang Yeon-hee's father to Choi Eokjo who forced fishing operation although a typhoon was coming. Kang Yeon-hee, who does not know that Choi Mansik is also responsible for her father's death, receives Mansik's proposal, but as Oh Dongchun discloses the secret to Yeonhee, she is shocked and declines the proposal. The conflict between Dr. Kim Hwi and Lee Yoojin elevates as Yoojin puts her daughter under her boyfriend's care and the daughter is missing.
Act III	Based on the results of his investigation, Dr. Kim Hwi warns the government against a tsunami and insists that some actions should be taken, but government officials regard his opinion as unrealistic and ignore it.
Act IV	The feared tsunami turns out to be real, hitting the coastal area of Haeundae. Choi Mansik and Kang Yeon-hee escape from the tsunami, but Choi Eokjo loses his life for Choi Mansik's life. Kim Hee-mi encounters the tsunami at sea while cruising in a yacht and the boat is wrecked, but she is again rescued by Choi Hyeongsik. However, Hyeongsik loses his life in the rescue operation. Dr. Kim Hwi and Lee Yoojin evacuate to the rooftop of the building, but after saving Jimin, they are swept away by the tsunami.
Act V	Those who survived the tsunami hold a memorial service for the victims. Choi Eokjo finds that the permit for redevelopment, which he obtained with difficulty before the tsunami, has been canceled, and Oh Dongchun receives an award as a brave citizen who saved people from the tsunami but weeps over his mother's death. Kang Yeon-hee decides to marry Choi Mansik and makes peace with his mother Geumryeon.

### 2. Paradigmatic Analysis of Tidal Wave

#### Conflict between Yeonhee and Geumryeon at the Market

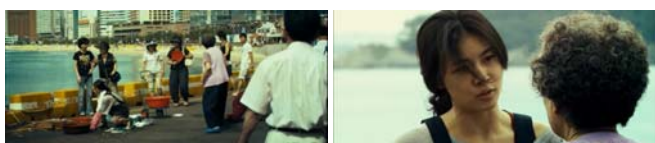


Fig. 1 Geumryeon and Yeonhee fighting at the market

Geumryeon who sells at the market rebukes Yeonhee who does business without license. Although she is a senior, Geumryeon behaves and speaks violently to young Yeonhee without hesitation. Yeonhee does not confront Geumryeon only because of her old age, but when Geumryeon mentions that Yeonhee is without parents, Yeonhee loses her temper and stands against Geumryeon. She expresses her filial piety toward her parents by resisting Geumryeon, and criticizes Geumryeon's violation of *Jangyuyuseo*, seniors and juniors or the old and the young should consider and yield to each other. Troublemaker Dongchun ;

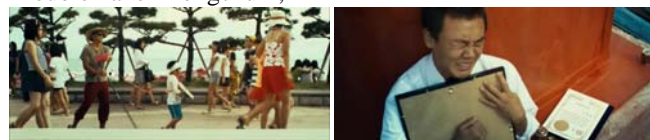


Fig. 2 Begging Dongchun with Seunghyeon, and Dongchun regretting with holding his mother's portrait

In the film, Dongchun is described as a person who is criticized by others and causes troubles. Penniless bum Dongchun pretends to be blind and goes out with his young son Seunghyeon for begging, or rejects a job arranged by his mother and is tempted to make a fortune at one swoop. As he loses his mother to the tsunami, however, he sheds tears of belated remorse with holding his mother's portrait. Although he has been a rebellious son to his mother, he still shows the moral of *Bujayuchin*, parents and children should love each other intimately, under the influence of Confucianism.

Choi Eokjo giving up his own benefits for members ;



Fig. 3 President Choi Eokjo rebuked by merchants and giving a bribe to a politician

President Choi Eokjo accepts Haeundae local merchants' will and gives up redevelopment. Considering all his efforts for redevelopment with enduring all kinds of attacks and even giving bribes to government officials, it is a big decision to give up redevelopment. This reveals his moral of *Gunwisingang*, society leaders should bear responsibility and sacrifice in leading their members by setting an example, as an influential person who considers members first. Kim Hwi and Lee Yoojin couple who sacrifice themselves for their child;



Fig. 4 Kim Hwi and Lee Yoojin couple who sacrifice themselves for their child

Kim Hwi and Lee Yoojin, who have a daughter between them, were divorced from each other. They love their daughter but are too busy to take care of her properly and even they lose the child. When the tsunami arrived as well, the child was alone. As Dr. Kim Hwi comes to save the child, however, he struggles to play his role as the father, and Lee Yoojin shows her

motherly love by protecting the child at the risk of her life. The couple has not fulfilled their responsibility as the child's parents, but at the last moment, they do their best by sacrificing themselves. This shows the spirit of *Buwijagang*, parents should bear responsibility and sacrifice in leading their children.

### B. Confucian Culture in Chinese Film *After Shock*

*After Shock*, which has as its background the worst earthquake in human history occurring in Tangshan, China on July 28, 1976, is a fiction film produced in China in 2010. As a disaster movie blockbuster that cost over US\$15 million hit a new record of box office over *Avatar* in China. As implied by its title *After Shock*, this film contains stories after the earthquake more than the earthquake itself. It tells the story about a mother who had to give up one of her twins in the earthquake and about the twins. In *After Shock*, the earthquake raises conflicts and, at the same time, resolves them in the drama. While the characters misunderstand and become estranged from one another in the first earthquake, they have opportunities to scatter the misunderstandings in the second earthquake. The disasters in *After Shock* play the role of a medium connecting the characters.

#### 1. Syntagmatic analysis of *After Shock*

TABLE VI

SYNTAGMATIC ANALYSIS OF *AFTER SHOCK* FOCUSING ON THE NARRATIVE STRUCTURE OF THE DISASTER FILM

Act	Syntagmatic context of <i>After Shock</i>
Act I	The twins' mother Li Yuanni, father and the twin sister and brother Fang Deng, Fang Da live peacefully in Tangshan.
Act II	One day an earthquake occurs in Tangshan, and the father enters the house to rescue the twins and dies as the building collapses. The twins are also caught under the building broken down. In the situation that she has to give up one of them in order to save the other, the mother saves the son and their fates cross each other. The mother thought that the daughter died but she was alive and adopted by an officer's family.
Act III	Over time, the twins grow and live a different life. The daughter enters a university and gets pregnant by her boyfriend, and because of this, she quits the school. The son leaves Tangshan and starts a business in a big city. After several years, the daughter marries a foreigner and lives in Canada with her own daughter, and the son becomes a successful businessman.
Act IV	Another big earthquake occurs in China in 2008. Seeing this, the daughter and the son visit the place for rescue activities and they meet each other by accident.
Act V	The daughter, hurt by the mother's choice in the first earthquake, does not visit her, but the rescue activities and reunion with the mother, she comes to understand the mother's choice and learns that the mother has been suffering since the accident. Then, the daughter asks forgiveness and makes peace with the mother.

#### 2. Paradigmatic analysis of *After Shock*

Li Yuanni devoted to her role as a parent



Fig. 5 Li Yuanni devoted to her role as a parent

As the earthquake occurs, the twins' mother Li Yuanni shows her responsibility and spirit of sacrifice as a mother by trying to enter the collapsing building at the risk of her life in order to save the children trapped inside. In the situation that she has to choose only one between the children caught under the collapsed building, she chooses son Fang Da. Then, through her life, she suffers from the guilty feeling that she should have saved daughter Fang Deng. It was self-reproach for her failure to fulfill her responsibility as a parent. Believing that the daughter's soul may return home, she does not leave but stays in the city. She punishes herself severely for not discharging her duties to take care of the daughter. Lost one of her hands to the earthquake, she supports her son devotedly while working at a factory. In order to receive phone calls from her son who left for a city to make money, she buys a telephone and works hard for the son's study. In these ways, she fulfills her responsibilities by doing her best for the child, and set an example of *Buwijagang*, parents should bear responsibility and sacrifice in leading their children. Thanks to her devoted support, the son also becomes a successful businessman and makes efforts to serve his mother.

Confucian culture appearing between husband and wife;

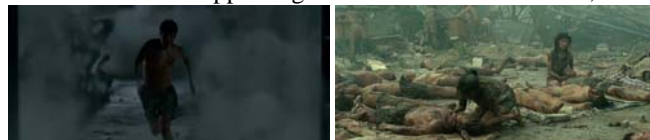


Fig. 6 The husband and wife trying to rescue their children trapped in the collapsing building

Instead of Li Yuanni who is trying to enter the collapsing building, her husband rushes inside to rescue the children. However, the building breaks down soon and he is buried under the building and dies. For him who has loved and sacrificed for her, she pledges herself to live as his wife through life, and lives alone with a yearning for the husband. Through this, we see the moral of *Buwibugang*, husbands or men should bear responsibility and sacrifice in leading their wives or women by setting an example, that is, husband and wife fulfilling responsibilities and sacrificing for each other and keeping faith with each other.

Li Yuanni holding a memorial service for her dead husband and daughter every year;



Fig. 7 Li Yuanni holding a memorial service for her dead husband and daughter every year



Li Yuanni holds a memorial service every year for her husband and daughter died of the earthquake. Memorial service is originally out of filial piety for deceased parents, but as the meaning has been expanded it is held not only for parents but also for the deceased. Through the memorial service, she expresses her thanks to the husband for his sacrifice and her regret to the daughter for leading the daughter to death through her choice. Her behavior as such shows the morals of *Bubuyubyeol*, men and women should distinguish themselves and keep a distance from each other in order to understand and respect each other, and they should consider and respect each other's areas and positions, and *Bujayuchin*, parents and children should love each other intimately. Her behaviors of holding memorial services, believing the returning of their souls, informing the souls of the new address and arranging food in front of their graves are characteristics observed in Confucian rituals.

Twins participating rescue activities in an earthquake;



Fig. 8 The twins participating in rescue activities in the earthquake area

Before the occurrence of the second earthquake, twins Fang Da and Fang Deng have been living in abundance and in a high social and economic status. As another earthquake takes place, the twins support medicine at their own expense and do volunteer activities. This shows higher-class people's compassion and devotion for society members. Moreover, like they were rescued by soldiers in a critical moment, now they help others in crisis, and this virtuous cycle represents *Gunwisingang*, society leaders should bear responsibility and sacrifice in leading their members by setting an example, defined in *Samgangoryun*.

### C. Confucian culture in Japanese film *The Sinking of Japan*

*The Sinking of Japan* is a Japanese disaster film remade in 2006 based on a film produced under the same title in 1973. The background of this film is Japan with frequent earthquakes. The story depicts people in various areas and classes who have to live together with natural disasters such as earthquakes. This film has been at issue because the latest earthquake and tsunami in Japan are quite similar to the disastrous situations in the film.

## 1. Syntagmatic analysis of *The Sinking of Japan*

TABLE VII  
 SYNTAGMATIC ANALYSIS OF *THE SINKING OF JAPAN* FOCUSING ON THE NARRATIVE STRUCTURE OF THE DISASTER FILM

Act	Syntagmatic context of <i>The Sinking of Japan</i>
Act I	Toshio and Reiko have experienced the pains of earthquake, but Toshio is working as a geological surveyor and Yusuke as a rescuer. Yusuke, Toshio's superior and geological doctor, predicts crustal movements in Japan and Saori, who was divorced from Yusuke 20 years ago, is a government official and is appointed as the minister in charge of crisis management.
Act II	It has been found that the Japanese Islands will sink after several decades, and in order to cope with this, the government conducts surveys for predicting crustal movements and requests assistances of other countries.
Act III	Through geological surveys, it is found that the archipelago will sink within a year, much earlier than expected.
Act IV	The forecasted disasters begin with the eruption of volcanoes, and as tsunamis over the land, Japan begins to sink under the sea. The government plans to evacuate people to overseas, and tries to save Japan from sinking using bombs.
Act V	The plan is executed successfully, and Japan is saved from sinking. Those who have survived commemorate the victims, praise heroes and heroines who have saved them, and determine to make a new start.

## 2. Paradigmatic analysis of *The Sinking of Japan*

Toshio taking care of the child in a dangerous situation



Fig. 9 Toshio protecting the child as earthquakes occur

In an extreme situation brought by earthquakes, Toshio tries to rescue the child exposed to danger. Even when he has escaped from the danger, he covers the child with his clothes and comforts him not to fear. When another earthquake occurs, he protects the child by throwing his body upon him. These behaviors express an adult man's heart thoughtful of a child. Toshio's altruistic behavior represents clearly the meaning of *Jangyuyuseo*, seniors and juniors or the old and the young should consider and yield to each other, in *Samgangoryun*.

Prime Minister making an exceptional appointment for the members' safety;

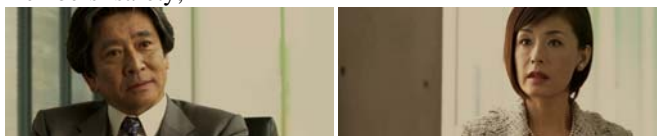


Fig. 10 The Prime Minister appointing Saori as the minister

Faced with tremendous disasters, the Prime Minister who wants to save as many people as possible shows the image of a society leader who considers society members. He appoints as the minister in charge of crisis management Saori who is believed to consider every member instead of bureaucrats insisting that the weak and the old should be excluded from those to be rescued. Saori, a young woman, seems not qualified for the position, but the Prime Minister refuses conventional seniority-based promotion in the bureaucratic society, and appoints her. This shows the image of a leader complying with *Gunwisingang*, society leaders should bear responsibility and sacrifice in leading their members by setting an example, by giving the highest priority to the members.

Yusuke disclosing the state's top secret for colleagues' safety



Fig. 11 Yusuke warning his colleagues of the danger

In the situation that the government hides the fact that Japan will sink within a year in fear of social disorder, Yusuke discloses the fact to his team members. Yusuke's behavior of telling a top secret to his colleagues out of his concern over the colleagues of his research team can be regarded as Confucian culture corresponding to *Bungyusin*, friends or colleagues should keep faith with each other, and treat each other with sincerity and responsibility, in *Samgongoryun*.

Prime Minister wandering between personal and social roles

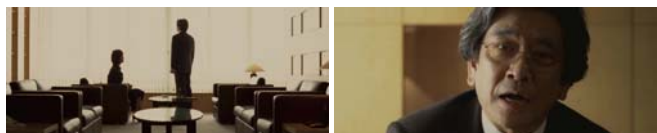


Fig. 12 The Prime Minister confessing his conflict between his personal and social roles

In a survey on the future of Japanese people in case Japan loses its economic power and is alienated by other countries in the world due to natural disasters, the Prime Minister hears the opinion, "It is better to do nothing and be buried together with my beloved at my hometown." He confesses that he is personally attracted by the opinion, but should not do that because he has social roles to play. This shows his sense of responsibility as a society leader for the society members.

Toshio's mother who decides not to leave the house that she has lived with her husband

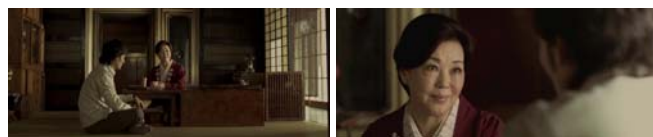


Fig. 13 Toshio's mother who decides to die where she has lived with her husband

Toshio's mother says that it was the happiest time when she lived with her deceased husband. Although she is able to escape from tsunamis, she decides to stay at the house in order to be together with her husband to the last moment. By telling Toshio that love is more important than life, she devotes herself as a wife to her husband and shows the moral of *Bubyubyool*, men and women should distinguish themselves and keep a distance from each other in order to understand and respect each other, and they should consider and respect each other's areas and positions.

Government officials evacuating from disasters but facing death



Fig. 14 A bureaucrat engrossed in his own security

The bureaucrat who ignored Yusuke's warning of disasters gets aboard an airplane with his family. Showing citizens kept away from the airplane by barbed wire and soldiers and the government official getting into the airplane in safety, the film emphasizes society leaders' irrational privilege. After all, the airplane explodes during its flight and, by showing this, the film condemns society leaders who do not set an example.

Saori fulfilling her responsibilities and roles as a society leader

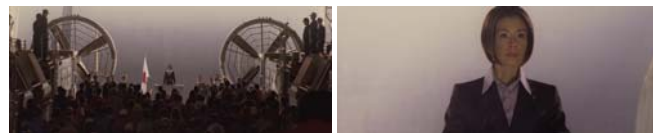


Fig. 15 Saori who fulfill her responsibilities and announce a statement

Government official Saori remains in Japan and fulfills her responsibilities and roles as a society leader to the end in order to save as many people as possible and to keep Japan from sinking, and in the end, she stops the disaster. In recognition of her merits and sacrifice as a society leader, she represents the government in announcing its statements. In the film, Saori represents the image of a society leader observing the moral of *Gunwisingang*, society leaders should bear responsibility and sacrifice in leading their members by setting an example.

#### D. Analysis results

Korea, China and Japan, though varying in degree, share the characteristic of collectivism under the influence of Confucian thought and form the Confucian cultural region. Reflecting this characteristic, East Asian disaster films show societies distinguished from those in disaster films from other regions. Among characters in East Asian disaster films, those who deviate from the norms of Confucian thought are criticized and those who follow the norms succeed.

East Asian disaster films imply the influence of Confucianism as a social climate of the region. Parents commit their life in order to protect their children, and those who fail to fulfill their responsibilities for children suffer a guilty feeling through life. The children of such devoted parents also make efforts to serve their parents, and those who do not are described as a negative character.

In the films, husband and wife keep their faith with each other, and if one dies earlier, the other lives with a yearning for the deceased spouse. The bereaved lives unmarried or divorced couples are reconciled with and embrace each other. This story setting also evidences the influence of Confucianism.

In East Asian disaster films, leaders who are negligent in their responsibilities are punished, and those who are responsible and devoted are described as a great person and praised by people. Friends or colleagues in the films give a character practical helps or positive realizations and, by doing so, make the character a better being. This also reflects the spirit of *Bungyusin*, friends or colleagues should keep faith with each other, and treat each other with sincerity and responsibility, in Confucianism.

#### V. CONCLUSION

The answers to the research questions raised in the introduction are as follows.

First, a disaster film is a movie depicting the process that a multitude of people go through and overcome natural or artificial disasters. The genre emerged in Hollywood in the 1930s and settled as a popular genre through great box-office successes in the 1970s. In a contemporary sense, disaster films are contemporary adventure movies characterized by high cost of production, all-star cast, luxurious and grandiose scale, and large screen.

The narrative of disaster films usually has its turning point at a disaster. That is, the stems of story are prepared through various episodes before the disaster and they develop through the disaster. It is also typical that conflicts are resolved in the course of overcoming the disaster and the survivors anticipate a new future.

The characters of disaster films are largely divided into ordinary people, experts, and the government. The characters of each group sometimes lead the story independently, but usually those from the three groups interact with one another and weave a story together through their connections. The ordinary people group commonly plays roles emphasizing humanism at the center of the story, and the expert group finds

how to cope with disasters and save mankind by executing the method. The government solves problems by supporting experts, and summarizes the situation.

Second, the characteristics of Confucian thought appear in the form of totalitarian behavior, and implemented specifically through *Samgangoryun*. In these films, the totalitarian characteristic, which is a remarkable difference between East Asia and the West, bears an altruistic tendency, giving thought to family, colleagues and friends before oneself and attaching importance of harmony with the whole.

*Samgangoryun* is morals for practicing Confucian thought as such. *Samgang* is three principles for virtuous politics and government. According to the principles, society leaders, parents and married couples should take responsibilities and sacrifice for their members, children and spouse. *Oryun* is five moral disciplines for harmonious society, meaning that husband-wife, father-son, leader-follower, friend-friend, and senior-junior should interact with, help and understand each other.

Third, Confucian culture appearing in East Asian disaster films can be understood through *Samgangoryun*, the practical morals of Confucianism. Characters in the films are punished or described negatively if they deviate from the morals in *Samgangoryun*, or are successful and described negatively if they observe them.

In *Tidal Wave*, Choi Mansik who failed to be responsible for his colleague is oppressed by nightmares and takes care of the colleague's daughter, and Choi Eokjo pushes redevelopment for his own benefits but dies in the end. These characters demonstrate the influence of Confucianism in the film.

In *After Shock*, twins' mother Li Yuanni tries to enter the collapsing building in order to rescue the children, and she lives alone at her old house through lifetime, waiting for her beloved husband and her daughter who died because of her choice of the son. These devotions as a spouse and mother also show the influence of Confucianism on her.

The society leaders' viewpoint in *The Sinking of Japan* also suggests Confucian influence. The bureaucrat who was negligent at the warning of disasters evacuates with his own family but is killed by a plane crash, which is regarded as a punishment for his violation of *Gunsinyueui*, national leaders and citizens, employers and employees, or society leaders and members should stabilize the country.

Films produced in East Asia view, evaluate and describe their characters from the viewpoint of Confucianism. Parents always rear their children sacrificially and with responsibility, and children are also thankful for the parents' devotion and do their best to serve the parents. Married couples are faithful to each other, and respect and understand each other's role, and friends or colleagues lead the characters in a constructive direction based on trust. Society leaders take care of society members by setting an example, and sacrifice themselves with responsibility in an emergent situation.

As presented above, disaster films produced in East Asia reflect the characteristics of the Confucian cultural region and differentiated themselves from those in other regions by such



characteristics. Although the influence of Confucianism is diminishing gradually, it still maintains its life among East Asian people based on its long philosophical tradition. These days there are two confronting views that Confucianism impedes the development of society and that solutions for today's social problems may be found in Oriental philosophies such as Confucianism, Apart from the confrontation, efforts have been insufficient in understanding Confucianism, the philosophical background of East Asia for a long time, while Western values have been prevailing. Thus, we need to diagnose the value of Confucianism through interpreting and applying Confucianism from a contemporary viewpoint. What is more, faced with numerous moral and social problems, we should discuss actively whether Confucianism may be a meaningful alternative for people throughout the world.

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