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### When Honor Falls: A Study of Japanese Honor in Young Adult Literature

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When Honor Falls

A Study of Japanese Honor in Young Adult Literature

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A Thesis presented to

The Faculty of the Department of English

East Tennessee State University

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In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Bachelor of Arts

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by

Joshua Nave

April, 2021

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Dr. Scott Honeycutt, Faculty Mentor

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Junko Tezuka Arnold, Faculty Reader

“Both the victor  
and the vanquished are  
but drops of dew,  
but bolts of lightning –  
thus should we view the world.”  
- Japanese death poem, Ôuchi Yoshitaka

What is honor? Honor is a fundamental concept to human society that has been established for centuries, and yet the concept itself is simultaneously rigid and yet broad. Merriam-Webster’s dictionary defines honor in two primary ways: When used as a noun it is “a good name or public esteem,” a definition it shares with the term reputation. Furthermore, when used as a verb it means “to regard or treat someone with admiration and respect (Merriam-Webster).” While both meanings are accurate, those are but the literal definitions of the term. There is more connotative nuance to the concept than the literal denotations. One of the more colloquially western accepted meanings of the concept would describe the medieval system of chivalry, wherein the practitioner acts with respect and humility towards others, especially women. While chivalry does define many of the traits of honor, honor does not describe chivalry completely. It means many different ideas and has been interpreted many ways across the globe. Because of these varied interpretations, honor has been shaped in a largely diverse way in different societies. However, the presence of an institutionalized sense of honor has also shaped these cultures down to their very roots. One place that this is seen very well is in the rich history of Japan, and the interpretations of this history by its people. The Japanese people, having been shaped by a sense of honor and duty from their history, have in turn molded and shaped the concept of honor itself. It is this crucial junction between honor shaping people’s lives and people interpreting what honor means that Young Adult literature enters the conversation. By

examining representations of Japanese honor in Young Adult literature, readers can learn how honor developed Japanese culture and then discern what aspects of honor in Japanese culture should be scrutinized. Through this scrutiny, readers will be able to discover how honor may be applied to contemporary youth. These concepts can be discovered in; Pamela S. Turner's novel, *Samurai Rising: The Epic Life of Minamoto Yoshitsune* (2016), which details the early days of the samurai; Shigeru Mizuki's manga, *Onward Towards Our Noble Deaths* (1973), which demonstrates the tragedies of war in the Japanese army during World War Two; The joint novels of *So Far From the Bamboo Grove* (1986) by Yoko Kawashima Watkins, and *Year of Impossible Goodbyes* (1991) by Sook Nyul Choi, which work in unison to form a complete picture of the Japanese occupation of Korea; Finally, there is the memoir *Farewell to Manzanar* (1973) by Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston, which illustrates how the Japanese society was forced to change and adapt within the confines of the internment camps on United States' soil.

One of the most iconic ways honor has been interpreted in the country of Japan has involved an entire society that was built on a structure of fealty, a dignified code of conduct, and the consequences of breaking said code. Modern media can sometimes stereotype this history as grand and heroic, much like myths of old from Ancient Greece. An example of this would be in blockbuster films such as *47 Ronin* (1941) and *The Last Samurai* (2003). Furthermore, honor has firmly established itself in the realm of modern pop culture through anime such as *Kimetsu no Yaiba*, or *Demon Slayer in the West* (2019), and in video games such as *Ghost of Tsushima* (2020). *Ghost of Tsushima* is particularly notable for dealing with the role of honor in the context of warfare. While honor in Japanese history can be observed in this exquisite way, to do so blatantly ignores some of the more ignoble aspects of this history. For instance, an infamous example that is often seen in Japanese Samurai movies would be the act of *Seppuku*, which is the

act of ritually disemboweling one's self in order to atone for a breach in conduct (Turner 20).

This act is often done so that the one committing the act may retain their honor after death, rather than lose it in life (*Age of Samurai Battle for Japan*, Episode 1). While the act itself seems a product of cinema, *Seppuku* was a very real punishment in Japanese history (*Age of Samurai Battle for Japan*, Episode 1). It is also but one of the examples of how honor has shaped that history.

Like all societies, the Japanese have a vast and extensive timeline of how their culture was formed and took shape. Honor being the key tool in shaping Japanese society has been true for all of its lifespan. This truth is largely due to the influence of the Chinese philosopher Confucius. His teachings of Confucianism were translated and borrowed from in the formation of Japan's own unique culture. These teachings often consisted of ethical and moral dilemmas and training, which formed the foundation for Japanese codes of honor (Varley). Furthermore, honor was also developed through Buddhist practices also borrowed from China, as well as the Japanese Shinto faith (Watt). Though there are portions of its history in which honor is used as a method of suffering, such as with *Seppuku*, there are examples of honor benefitting the people of Japanese culture. One such example lies with what many would consider the archetypal samurai. Exemplifying loyalty, bravery, courage, and honor above all, the samurai are known across the world as the legendary warriors of Japanese history (Turner 161). They are the primary point of comparison between the Japanese and the rest of the world when it comes to honor, particularly in medieval Europe, which featured the equally legendary knights and their code of chivalry. Consisting of rules concerning acts of courtesy and kindness towards others, but also of loyalty to one's king and country, the knights of medieval Europe find in these aspects similarities to the samurai of Japan (Britannica). These attitudes are often considered to be noble ones in today's

society, and many children's tales include stories of these figures of knightly prestige, such as the legends of King Arthur and his legendary Round Table. Because it is specifically to today's society that this thesis applies, a more modern comparison is required to fully comprehend the elements of Japanese honor. Here is where Young Adult literature fills in the blanks.

Young Adult literature is marketed towards and centered on the selfsame audience that it shares its name with, young adults. Young adults are the future and present of any given society. They are the ones that will learn and grow and begin shaping society upon reaching adulthood. This aspect of life makes the literature geared towards those young adults particularly important, as that literature is what they use to learn and develop their own thoughts and opinions. When Young Adult novels make a big impact within a community, the ideas and concepts within can serve as a rallying cry for its young adult audience to support a cause or make a change that those young people want to see. A recent example of Young Adult literature causing this contemporary impact is in the novel *The Hate U Give* (2017) by Angie Thomas, which covers police brutality and murder against black Americans. It made such a cultural impact that a movie was made just one year later that received several awards and was a financial success at the box office (IMDB). It is because of these cultural impacts that Young Adult literature is the perfect way to focus this discussion on Japanese honor. By seeing how Japanese honor is portrayed to a Young Adult audience, it becomes easier to see how that honor influences people in history and culture.

But to find the beginnings of Japanese honor within Japanese history, one must look to the archetypal samurai, Minamoto Yoshitsune. Yoshitsune was a famous Samurai general during a time of great strife in Japanese history, namely the end of the Heian period. This period lasted from 794 to 1185 CE, and gave way to the Kamakura period, which Yoshitsune helped usher in

(Turner 175). Before this, the Emperor was essentially a puppet, the country was divided by a civil war, and Yoshitune's family was right in the center of it all (Turner 2). Through his loyalty and battle prowess, Yoshitsune proved to hold a standard of honor that would be held as example by all of Japan even today. He showed remarkable fealty to his brother and lord, Yoritomo, even when Yoritomo himself did not extend the same courtesy (Turner 81). Yet, despite this, it was Yoshitsune's story that became myth and extended into the consciousness of the Japanese people for centuries. This meant that Yoshitsune's idea of honor and the loyalty of his followers was the norm, right until just before World War Two, where many aggressive and ambitious people took power (Columbia University).

Written by Pamela S. Turner, *Samurai Rising: The Epic Life of Minamoto Yoshitsune* (February 2016) is a remarkable look at the life of the archetypal samurai in its entirety. This makes it an important text within the Young Adult genre, as the easily approachable nature of the book would allow for young readers to first encounter these concepts in a comfortable text and environment. The book also features beautiful illustrations that help to detail what these characters look like and are doing, which assists as a vital element of relatability for young adult readers. While it is still in the Young Adult genre, it is nonfiction and written in the third person much like a history textbook. This aspect of the book may seem odd at times, but it helps lend credence to the fact that the events in the book truly happened, albeit with some amount of dramatization. For instance, going back to the act of *seppuku*, it is believed that Yoshitsune's grandfather, a samurai in his own right, decided that instead of being captured, he would fall on his own sword (Turner 20). This instance of ritual suicide set the stage for samurai tradition going forward, just as Yoshitsune's life set the tradition of samurai in place going forward.

The book begins before Yoshitsune was born, with his father. Yoshitsune's father was a respected samurai in service to the retired emperor, as his family had served for generations (Turner 2). However, in an ensuing power struggle with the Taira clan in which the retired emperor was kidnaped by Yoshitsune's father, Yoshitsune's family were rooted out and killed (Turner 5). Yoshitsune was sent to study at a Buddhist monastery for his safety, as every member of the Minamoto family had been hunted down by their enemies (Turner 6). Beyond Yoshitsune, there was one other exception to this rule, however: Yoritomo, Yoshitsune's elder brother. Yoritomo would continue to lead the Minamoto clan's military efforts against the Taira in absence of his father (Turner 28). After several years of study and training from a northern lord, Yoshitsune departed to join his brother as a samurai in his own right. The addition of Yoshitsune to his forces was a tremendous boon to Yoritomo's forces, but it was a boon that largely became unappreciated. Despite the fact that Yoshitsune's unorthodox strategies and care for his men allowed the Minamoto clan to not only take many victories, but also control of Japan itself, Yoritomo was manipulated by those close to him into betraying his brother (Turner 114). This betrayal was the ultimate cause of Yoshitsune's death later in life (Turner 154).

One of the primary takeaways of Yoshitsune's story is the loyalty he demonstrates, and the loyalty, or sometimes the lack of it, returned to him. Throughout his life and career, the most loyal people to Yoshitsune were his own personal team of troops. One of the most loyal of these men was the warrior monk Benkei, a warrior so rowdy that no temple would accept him (Turner 61). However, Yoshitsune extended a chance to him, and that loyalty was repaid all throughout Benkei's life, even sharing the same date of death with his lord (Turner 153). The loyalty of Yoshitsune's personal band is of particular note for his story, as it seems to deny the key trait of honor that is familial loyalty while exemplifying the loyalty to one's own friends. As noted in the



novel here, “Yoshitsune’s small circle of friends certainly loved him. Did he notice that not one of them was a Minamoto (Turner 148)?” While Yoshitsune was fighting for his brother’s approval, he was snubbed by his family. When he made his final stand, it was not his family that stood with Yoshitsune, but the friends and comrades he made over the years. The loyalty of his and to his followers and his family is a way that young readers can relate to Yoshitsune, and how this loyalty can be taught through a Young Adult novel. Familial situations are different for everyone, and it is thus important for young minds to appreciate that group of friends that sticks with them. The ending of Yoshitsune’s story teaches a message of loyalty and respect for the ones a person cares for. Yoshitsune’s end is the beneficial aspect of honor showcased in this text, but there is a darker side demonstrated by Yoshitsune’s immediate family.

Upon arriving at Yoritomo’s camp, reports state that the brothers “wept with joy” upon meeting one another (Turner 37). However, their relationship would considerably sour over the course of the war. Largely due to the efforts of a retainer of Yoritomo’s that felt snubbed by Yoshitsune, Yoritomo increasingly became paranoid of his brother (Turner 114). Because of this, Yoritomo repaid Yoshitsune’s incredible loyalty with betrayal and bloodlust. While Yoshitsune and his company can be seen as a good example of putting friendship and duty above blood relations, Yoritomo is himself an example of putting duty and ambition over those same blood relations. Yet, it was Yoritomo who ascended to leadership and Yoshitsune who was slain in disgrace (Turner 157). So the question then becomes, who is the honorable one in this scenario? Well, the answer is Yoshitsune, or rather, the model samurai that Yoshitsune became. The loyal, respected, inspiring, and brave commander who stood with his friends against a traitorous brother. That is the legend that persisted throughout history, and everything associated with that legend came with it (Turner 161). For instance, some of the most loyal figures in Yoshitsune’s

life were his wives. His wife Shizuka and her son by Yoshitsune perish after being held captive by Yoritomo's forces, never giving up on her love and loyalty to her husband, even after Yoritomo swore to kill the child if it was born male (Turner 134). This event led to the building of a narrative for wives and daughters to be loyal and honorable that is seen in other texts, such as the plight of the mother in *So Far From the Bamboo Grove*, who gives her very life to ensure her children are safe and cared for (Watkins 122). But his legend also allowed for the darker sides of honor to persist through it, such as the samurai's method of honorable suicide, *seppuku*. While it may have been an uncommon practice, it still became a large part of the samurai myth and has persisted as such to modern day (Turner 163). These narratives, both the good and the bad, are critical to the formation of a foundational concept such as honor, and that *Samurai Rising* does not censor the bad or overly endorse the good aspects of Yoshitsune's story is why this text becomes so useful to young adult readers. It allows them to grapple with all aspects of the story and decide for themselves what is worth taking away and what should be left behind.

While Yoshitsune's story is one of triumph, legendary deeds, and heroism, the more tragic and manipulative aspects of his story are the ones that continue forward into the modern day. Using Yoshitsune's heroic legacy, modern day officers following more of Yoritomo's example emerged in the Japanese military during World War Two, in the form of the deceitful and prideful officers who were more concerned with holding small plots of land than with soldier's lives. With the wars between lords a thing of the past, Japan moved forward to a more centralized and militarized government, with the major effects of such a government taking hold in the nineteen thirties ("Japan's Quest for Power and World War II in Asia"). In a summation by Columbia University, "By the time General Hideki Tōjō became prime minister and the war against the United States began in 1941, the nation was in a state of 'total war' and the military

and their supporters were able to force their policies on the government and the people (“Japan's Quest for Power and World War II in Asia”).” The actions of the military show the dramatic shift from a society similar to the one depicted in *Samurai Rising* to one primarily built on military officers with ideology similar to Yoritomo and his retainer, which were based on power and ambition. A chief example of this would be in the collection of stories turned manga from Shigeru Mizuki, *Onward Towards Our Noble Deaths*. Published in Japanese in 1973, and later translated to English in 2011, this collection is a series of manga detailing Mizuki’s own experiences as a soldier in the Japanese military (Schodt, Foreword, *Onward Towards Our Noble Deaths*). Mizuki had an over sixty-year long career as a manga artist, and this work specifically allows its readers to experience some of his own pain and struggles from the war, including the loss of a limb (Olukotun). This book features a slight deviation from the chosen lens of Young Adult literature, as it is both a more adult story and setting, and a manga. However, manga and Young Adult literature are often complimentary of one another in terms of themes and story elements. This is due to similar reading demographics overseas and manga being one of the primary sources of literary entertainment in Japan, holding similarities to comic books in America. While *Onwards Towards Our Noble Deaths* is a more adult story than most manga, the similarity of its art style to newspaper comics and the real historical setting could easily attract older high schoolers and younger college students alike. Similar comics have been published regarding American war poems, such as in *Above the Dreamless Dead* (2014), which is a collection of trench poems that later became collected and illustrated in a comic format. The chief roadblock to a manga such as this would be that it is read in the traditional Japanese reading format, from right to left starting from the “back” of the book. *Onwards Towards Our Noble Deaths* circumvents this problem by providing a warning at what a western reader would

consider the “front” of the book, informing the reader how the book is to be read. While the story and characters within are fictional, the account is a truthful retelling of what the experience was like for soldiers in the Japanese army during World War Two. Though, if one word were to be used to describe it, that word would be “horrific.”



(Image 1, Mizuki 194)

In short, life in the Japanese army during World War Two was nightmarish. Soldiers would perish from all sorts of ailments, ranging from fever to cannon fire (Mizuki 45, 156). It could even get to the point where one man’s own fellow soldiers would leave him to die a slow

and painful death (Mizuki 97). However, one could argue that these deaths were justified casualties of war, and that by dying for their country these soldiers died a “Noble Death.” In fact, this very argument is presented as a justification for ignoring a valid strategy for retreat to instead perform a death charge towards the enemy (Mizuki 162). But then, one must remember Japan lost the war, and even lost many battles before the atomic bombs dropped. What was the point then of these reckless death charges? True, victory was a part of it, but even the officers in charge of these ground troops understood how futile such charges were (Mizuki 205). An important point is raised here, in that the soldiers must sacrifice their lives before resorting to any form of retreat, as dying in such a manner was deemed noble and honorable by the commanding officers (Mizuki 206).

One of honor’s greatest flaws is exhibited here, as an unwavering loyalty and willingness to follow the orders of one’s superiors can sometimes lead to terrible consequences. The example from Mizuki’s work would be the generals ordering a suicide charge and the captain’s blind fanaticism for following this order (Mizuki 206). Another example would be the retainer Kagetoki’s own commitment to the idea that Yoshitsune was trying to outshine and betray him (Turner 86). These occasions of loyalty showcase a severe lack of wisdom that ends in disaster each time. For Kagetoki, his unwavering hatred for Yoshitsune resulted in his self-fulfilling prophecy coming to fruition in Yoshitsune’s rebellion (Turner 126). For the soldiers under orders in Mizuki’s tale, the end is much bleaker than a noble rebellion and heroic legacy. By the end of their doomed charge, the men in *Onward Towards Our Noble Deaths* have meet their titular fate, with naught but death and bones to show for it (Mizuki 362). This tragedy is easily honor’s biggest drawback in this collection and falls into the idea of too much of a good thing can still do harm. By so heavily submitting to the rule of honor, the soldiers in the Japanese army became

not honor-driven heroes such as Yoshitsune, but sad and lonely casualties of the vision of fanatics.

World War Two was an immensely unstable time for Japan. Old ways of thinking had become corrupted by ambition and desire, and the people suffered for it. This stress built up in Japan until defeat shattered the very ideological foundation Japan as a culture (Manhattan Project: Japan Surrenders, August 10-15, 1945). When the atomic bombs dropped, Japan had lost not just the war. They lost the trust of their people, trapped in their colonies with no way out but by their own ingenuity (Watkins). They lost the trust of the world, with countries having been oppressed by them rising up and countries having opposed them instituting strict sanctions on the government and the people. They lost their leader. The emperor, long believed to be a god in mortal form, was forced to publicly denounce himself after Japan's surrender (Manhattan Project: Japan Surrenders, August 10-15, 1945). It was all of these events and more that resulted in a philosophical paradigm shift amongst the Japanese people away from the corrupted ambition of its military leaders. These events also contribute to why looking at Japanese honor through Young Adult literature is so fruitful. The audience can use Young Adult literature to look back and reflect on these aspects of honor from a modern viewpoint, and thus more clearly see the strengths and flaws that honor presents.

While Yoshitsune's legacy as the archetypal samurai lead to the rise of heroes and fanatics alike, honor is not purely a warrior's creed. The concept of honor does not simply dictate what is appropriate for a soldier to do, but it is a way of life for all members of society. There are the roles of the father, the mother, the children, and even strangers. Each role possesses a different sense and meaning for the concept of honor, and likewise each has their own story to tell. Much like the role of honor for the soldier, honor was significantly shaped in Japan by the

events of World War Two, and it is here where various narratives coalesce into being. Firstly, is the matter of Japanese citizens, both domestic and abroad. In the novel *So Far From the Bamboo Grove*, published in April 1986, author Yoko Kawashima Watkins details an account of her own flight from the Japanese colony in Korea at the end of the war. Korea had been occupied for about 35 years at the time of Japan's defeat in the war, and thus the colonizers had formed entire lives that were upended by Korea's emancipation (Britannica). It is in this chaotic transition that Watkin's tale takes place, but it is not the only story that takes place in this setting. Much like how there is the story of the Japanese in Korea, there is the story of the original inhabitants of the country facing the prospect of independence, only to have it stolen away once again. *Year of Impossible Goodbyes*, published five years later in 1991, features a similarly fictionalized account by Sook Nyul Choi, and tells of a family's flight from North Korea down to the South in order to escape new tyrants in the form of the Soviet Union. While the tale may focus on a Korean family, the influence of Japanese honor is keenly felt throughout the story as the former Japanese rulers are deposed by the new Soviet threat. All the while, this Korean family is caught in the middle and must do everything they can to survive.

Beginning with Yoko's journey, honor inhabits many individuals that she comes across in her exodus to the mainland. One such individual who becomes a relevant source of strength and happiness for her is Corporal Matsumura. In stark contrast to the cynical and lonely soldiers from Mizuki's work, Matsumura proves to be a ready ally for Yoko's family in their escape. His aid begins when Yoko first meets him while he is recovering in the hospital (Watkins 12). While his appearance is quite daunting for a young child, given his bandages, Yoko nonetheless gives to him kindness and respect, and the corporal enjoys her company. Upon his recovery he visited Yoko's family a great deal and grew close with them (Watkins 15). It is also here where the

readers learn of his interest in poetry, showing his interest in the artistic and setting up his return at the end of the tale. Eventually, after growing close with the family, the corporal is the one to give them the advance warning to leave town. He also is the one to secure the family passage to Seoul, acting as a protector for the family even if he cannot accompany them in person (Watkins 21). This pillar of protection would return at the end of the novel when Yoko catches his attention by chance in an essay contest (Watkins 156). His return to Yoko's life after being apart for so long, especially after Yoko's mother passed away, served as a way of emotionally grounding Yoko in her new life. The reader also learns of the importance that the corporal put onto Yoko's existence, as he kept a gift she made for him in the hospital all throughout the war (Watkins 160).

Another figure of strength in this story is Yoko's older sister Ko, who becomes Yoko's pseudo guardian figure after their mother passed. In an example of pure selflessness, her sister works in the cold streets to earn money for the two of them after their mother's passing, just so that the two may live in some semblance of comfort (Watkins 146). She does this primarily through her effort as a shoe shiner (Watkins 144). Here is where an important reminder needs to be made. This is a short Young Adult novel, quite unlike *Samurai Rising* and *Onward Towards Our Noble Deaths*. But more than that, this book and *Year of Impossible Goodbyes* are stories told from a young adult perspective. It offers a level of relatability and familiarity with the protagonists, and allows them to see these traits of familial honor in a context that they may be able to imagine themselves in. When Ko is on the street struggling to raise money for her and her sister to live adequately, someone who may be struggling in their own life with their own family may be able to see themselves in such a position. That is why this text is so important for young readers, as it may also teach other readers about what a situation as desperate as this is like. For



many people, either they or someone very close to them had to be the “Ko” of their family, and shoulder that responsibility. “Suddenly I saw Ko. She sat on the cold ground polishing a man’s shoes. I froze. I realized then that with this *idea* she had been feeding me... Oh, Honorable Sister! I swallowed lumps (Watkins 144).” It is in this revelation to Yoko that the readers see the admiration she has for her sister, and the lengths that Ko is willing to go to provide for her. That responsibility towards her sister is one of the greatest showings of familial honor in the book.

These people exhibit the honorable traits that are desirable for a familial unit, but what about honor and decency for one’s common man? In as tumultuous a time as World War Two, kindness between strangers is not something to be necessarily expected, but certainly appreciated. It is this unexpected assistance that Hideyo, Yoko’s brother experiences in his own journey from Korea to Japan. Barely surviving his flight from the border, he arrives at a small farmhouse nearly frozen to death (Watkins 163). He is taken in by this Korean family, nursed back to health, and kept safe until he was fit to travel (Watkins 165-167). This kindness is of special note because this was a Korean family saving a young Japanese boy, by all accounts a member of the enemy, while under the threat of the communist army. Hideyo repaid their kindness with work around their farmstead, and they in turn helped him to flee towards Seoul such that he might be reunited with his sisters and mother (Watkins 166).

This act of kindness from a stranger serves as one of the greatest displays of honor in the novel, as it is easy to show respect and kindness towards people that one is close to, but with strangers there is no excuse to do so beyond courtesy. This is a lesson for not just the readers, but Hideyo himself as well. He does not simply abandon the family when his wounds were healed, and he did not merely lay about the house either. He aided them in their work and became so ingratiated with the family that they all were begging him to stay (Watkins 166). Had he not his

own family to return to, he very well may have stayed with this kind and loving family, but his own familial loyalty won out. This familial loyalty acts as a counterbalance to the darker aspects of humanity all around him and his family during the war, aspects that are explored in full in the tale told in *Year of Impossible Goodbyes*.

*Year of Impossible Goodbyes* largely tells a similar story to *So Far From the Bamboo Grove* in that it focuses on families forced to abandon their homes due to the fallout of war, dealing with differing amounts of separation, and being told from the perspective of young girls. However, the most obvious difference between them is that one is a Japanese family returning to the mainland, while the other is a Korean family forced to flee south from Soviet Oppression. *Year of Impossible Goodbyes* is also a historical fiction account much akin to *So Far From the Bamboo Grove*, thus allowing the two works to coexist and tell the author's stories with the creative leeway needed to make the stories entertaining to the young adult audience. This book serves well as a companion piece to *So Far From the Bamboo Grove* because it demonstrates to the readers that these concepts of honor that are intrinsic to Japanese society are not exclusive to Japanese society. Many of the family members in *Year of Impossible Goodbyes* demonstrate similar traits to Japanese honor, such as Sookan's aunt willingly staying behind in the north to help others escape the Soviets (Choi 122). This selfless act comes across as similar to the help that Hideyo receives on his journey from the strangers on his way to Japan. Ultimately, Sookan's aunt pays for her selflessness with her life (Choi 169).

The Soviet soldiers are not the only ones to commit terrible atrocities, and in this story, they were not even the first. Much like in *Onward Towards Our Noble Deaths*, the Japanese military is not depicted in the greatest light in Choi's narrative. The Japanese soldiers occupying Korea commit various heinous acts, such as setting fire to villages and disgracing village

scholars (Choi 37). However, one of the worst acts committed in this book is the sad reality of the *Comfort Women*. “You should all be very proud and honored that it is now your turn to serve Our Heavenly Emperor. You will give the soldiers the special spirit to fight harder against the White Devils,” this is the speech given by Captain Narita when he carts the Korean girls working for Sookan’s mother away to act as legal and unwilling bed partners for the Japanese soldiers (Choi 59). His exact wording tries to justify this institutionalized rape as an honor for the girls involved, showing an in-depth example of how the concept of honor was twisted to serve the purposes of the officers in the war. However, tragic though these atrocities are, learning about them is the primary way to learn as a society and prevent them from occurring again. Thus, these acts of brutality are important within a piece of Young Adult literature. Young Adult literature not only provides the expected reading level for the market, it also acts as a relatable window for young adults to view themselves. Young adults can look at these atrocities and see the injustice in them, and that can change their views on life and help them grow as people.

*Year of Impossible Goodbyes* is a story that showcases this darker side of life after the war. While *So Far From the Bamboo Grove* had dark and depressing moments, particularly the passing of the mother, *Year of Impossible Goodbyes* reveals the horrors that some of the survivors in North Korea faced both before and after the war ended (Watkins 122). This is not to downplay Yoko, Hideyo, and Ko’s struggles, but it does serve as a unique comparison to show just how similar their journeys are. It confirms how the values that these families hold are able to transcend national borders and old grudges. For young adult readers of this text and *So Far From the Bamboo Grove*, one of the primary takeaways is the importance of kindness and help, both for family and complete strangers. Kindness is a key theme in *Year of Impossible Goodbyes* that appears in Sookan’s family. With that theme of kindness, the question then becomes, “how does

one balance societal expectations of honor with morality and kindness?” Because from the demonstrations of what honor means to certain characters, notably the Japanese soldiers and Captain Narita, honor as a concept appears in these stories to be divorced from the small acts of kindness needed for the family to survive their journey. Yet, recall the actions of the family that took Hideyo in. They could have very easily left him to die in the woods, he was Japanese, their enemy, after all. But they did not, and instead they chose to show kindness to this boy (Watkins 164). Given that honor as a concept began in Japan with Confucianism, which itself is built on the foundation of ethical dilemmas, the truly honorable action in this situation is to show kindness and to give assistance to someone in need.

A quote from Confucius expresses this idea of kindness very well, “Not feeling compassion for a stranger is like not feeling when one's foot has caught fire.” What this illustrates and what both *Year of Impossible Goodbyes* and *So Far From the Bamboo Grove* both show examples of is that to be honorable, one must first be compassionate. Not having this compassion is to not have honor at all. This is an important lesson to take from these books, as compassion is a human trait that Young Adult literature understands very well. Aunt Tiger in *Year of Impossible Goodbyes* displays this simple kindness perhaps the best out of any character in these two novels, and in a way that any reader can understand. “I now have many people whom I love and most of all, I am able to help many people. I’ve found a new purpose in life. This simple woman is going to do some good (Choi 123).” Aunt Tiger is willing to lay her very life on the line to save others from the tyrants she faces. She is up against overwhelming odds, and the only thing motivating her is a willingness to show compassion and do the right thing by others. In her stand against injustice, Aunt Tiger displays the same remarkable fortitude that Benkei held when he stood at Yoshitsune’s defense in their final moments (Turner 153). This

inspiring declaration proves that compassion is the best way for these regular people, much like the audience, to stand against tyranny and corruption.

These families suffered on the mainland of Japan and its closest colonies, but that is not the only place that Japanese culture was shaped. Across the Pacific Ocean a different form of strife was plaguing the Japanese. In the United States on February 19th 1942 President Franklin Roosevelt issued Executive Order 9066, which ordered all of the Japanese citizens in the country to be sent to internment camps (National Archives). One narrative from within these camps is from the point of view of Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston in the memoir *Farewell to Manzanar*, published in 1973. Houston's perspective is one that reveals the hearts and minds of the many people within these camps and proves how even in such dire confinement Japanese culture survived and evolved. This story is especially important due to Houston's young age at the time of the internment, as it demonstrates how she was shaped over the years by her culture, her circumstances, and the actions and honor of those around her. Unlike *Year of Impossible Goodbyes* and *So Far From the Bamboo Grove*, which are both works of historical fiction, *Farewell to Manzanar* is a non-fiction account of the author's life in the internment camps. This creates a connection between the readers and the author as they know from the beginning that these events actually happened to Houston as they have been described. It is a connection that is not present when reading *Year of Impossible Goodbyes* and *So Far From the Bamboo Grove*, because both of those novels are, while certainly mirroring reality a great deal, still known to be historical fiction.

Much of the honor presented in *Farewell to Manzanar* centers on the patriarch of the Wakatsuki family, Ko Wakatsuki. He has several moments in the story in which he is trying to recreate or recapture the old traditional sense of samurai honor to which he holds himself. In one

instance, upon finally coming to Manzanar he wielded his walking stick as if it were a blade (Houston 42). The men in many of these Japanese families were taken to a different camp called Fort Lincoln in North Dakota (Houston 65). “He liked it, as a kind of swagger stick, such as military officers sometimes use... I see it now as a sad, homemade version of the samurai sword his great-great-grandfather carried in the land around Hiroshima (Houston 42).” The father in this story is using this stick as a method of coping with the disastrous blow to his culture that he has suffered. He grew up in mainland Japan and was rigid in his belief in the societal caste system that was present in Japan from its history. His adherence to tradition was so strong that when his own father began running a “teahouse,” which the book describes as an equivalent to a cabaret, the idea is unthinkable to Ko. “For papa, at seventeen, it made no difference that times were hard; the idea of a teahouse was an insult to the family name (Houston 44).” Furthermore, Ko was shamed by his time in Fort Lincoln, and further shamed within Manzanar. The reason was described quite well by Houston. “It was the charge of disloyalty. For a man raised in Japan, there was no greater disgrace (Houston 65).” From these attitudes and events, it becomes quite clear that Ko Wakatsuki’s own personal honor was tarnished by the declaration for all Japanese American citizens to be interned. For him, the physical hardship would never break him, he was a fisherman and Houston admits as such (Houston 65). What broke him and subsequently indicates the fragility of honor is how he was treated as a criminal who had cast aside his honor and betrayed the country, even if that country was not Japan.

Honor and the concepts characterizing Japanese honor specifically are capable of transcending borders. This was seen in *Year of Impossible Goodbyes* and *So Far From the Bamboo Grove* with the actions of non-Japanese people acting in ways consistent with Japanese honor. Similarly, Japanese honor can persist outside of a nation’s borders if the people

themselves maintain it. This is the chief conflict of *Farewell to Manzanar*, as the denizens of Manzanar find different ways to cope with being forced into a large communal cage. Some were content to remain in the camps and resolutely accept their fate, such as Ko Wakatsuki. Others were more proactive in their attempts to regain their standing in America. An example of this would be Houston's older brother Woody, who after filling out his loyalty oath to the country was drafted to fight in the American Army (Houston 111). His willingness to fight for America caused a rift between him and his father, which reveals an interesting conflict between the two characters (Houston 74-76). On Ko's side, he believes that his son should not risk his life for the possibility that their people may be freed from the camps (Houston 75). But on Woody's side, he believes he should fight for his country and his people (Houston 76). But Ko's arguments are all based on his interpretation of what Japanese warriors should be like, "When a soldier goes into war he must go believing he is never coming back. That is why the Japanese are such courageous warriors. They are prepared to die. They expect nothing else. But to do that you must *believe* in what you are fighting for (Houston 74-75)." This is the same ideology that was in the minds of the officers presented in *Onward Towards Our Noble Deaths* and was established by the historical precedent of the samurai inspired by Yoshitsune. By Ko's metric, the soldier's life is an honorable way to live and die. He does not want his son to die in war, but he seemingly has no compunction with the idea of a noble death on its own. His family's reaction to the constant swagger with his cane and his interpretation of samurai honor is quite poor. In the same discussion that Ko and Woody have about enlistment, he pushes the women of the family aside and forces Houston's grandmother to tears (Houston 74). His belief in his role as a patriarch has become so twisted and tarnished that he has lost the essential elements of honor that have been previously discussed, loyalty and compassion. This causes even Houston herself to lose respect

for her father after leaving Manzanar and growing up in America, away from the broken traditions of her culture (Houston 147). It is in this exploration of Ko Wakatsuki and his family that *Farewell to Manzanar*'s importance as a Young Adult novel is revealed. *Year of Impossible Goodbyes* and *So Far From the Bamboo Grove* showcase how the elements of Japanese honor are used to reunite families and help them through tragedy, but *Farewell to Manzanar* reveals how these elements of honor drive a family apart. The strain of captivity and idolatry Ko Wakatsuki holds for the old traditions cause the family unit to crack under the pressure, showing a sadly relatable situation for many readers.

*Farewell to Manzanar* does not only have showings of honor as a negative element for the people in the camp, however. Woody's loyalty to his country is admirable and it brings him to visit his extended family in Japan itself after the atomic bombs dropped (Houston 130). Upon his arrival at his relative's home, he was immediately treated as family. "But he knew, as soon as he arrived, that he did not need the sugar to cancel out his GI crewcut and his American smile. Being Ko's son was enough, being family. That was all they saw (Houston 130)." This display of fierce familial loyalty is a much more positive display of honor than Ko Wakatsuki's views. In much the same way as the Korean family that took in Hideyo in *So Far From the Bamboo Grove*, Woody is immediately brought into his relatives' home despite being a member of the occupying force. They show him compassion despite his affiliation and the distance that Ko has put between the family. This contrast between the positive representations of tradition and the negative reality is a central theme within *Farewell to Manzanar*. The positive traits of Japanese honor are seen and told to the audience by the actions of the Wakatsuki's extended family and some of Ko's stories, but the reality is that Ko's constant holding onto the past drives the family apart, resulting in Woody gladly enlisting in the military, and Houston passively going against



her father's traditions by accepting more American social norms, such as becoming prom queen (Houston 160). Thus, this book serves well for young adult readers to see the culture differences between Japanese culture and American culture. It allows them to learn about the struggles of growing up in a confined and stressful environment and how the destruction of one's culture can affect not just one person but entire families.

Because honor as a concept itself is rather vague, further defining Japanese honor and what that means to people is a challenge. By using Young Adult literature as a way to properly articulate these arguments, however, the picture of honor becomes much clearer. So, to ask again, what is honor? To the samurai of Yoshitsune's day, it was an unflinching loyalty to one's family, friends, and master. But that honor could be tainted by ambition. To the soldiers during World War Two, that ambition for power resulted in the abuse of thousands upon thousands of men and women, and ultimately caused a paradigm shift for the entire country. For the citizens within the Japanese Empire's territories, honor was more often a matter of kindness and respect for one's elders. It was reverence for family, and the compassion towards one's own fellow human beings that allowed heroes much like the samurai legends of old to rise up and help save the lives of those around them. But for the people outside of Japan, whether they were trapped within the confines of a country that accused them of treason or had built up a life away from Japan that was ripped away from them, honor was present in national pride and the ability to adapt past the failings of the past. This national pride was not towards Japan, but rather the country that they had truly called home, thus showing that Japanese honor could grow and adapt outside the confines of a single nation. Japanese honor is all of these characteristics. It is respect, loyalty, courage, kindness, generosity, and pride for one's nation and family. But because honor is so many things, it can be easily manipulated and abused for the sake of power, ambition, and

cruelty. Thus, when looking at the concept of honor through these works of Young Adult literature, it is important to see how the positive aspects of honor can be learned from and inherited for today's world, such as the loyalty of Benkei, or the kindness of Corporal Matsumura. It is then equally important to learn how to prevent the needless cruelty of Captain Narita and to curb the ambitions of those officers in *Onward Towards Our Noble Deaths* who ordered a suicide charge for the sake of blind duty. It falls to young people to shape the future of society, such that outdated traditions do not hold society back like it did with Ko Wakatsuki, while also ensuring that those traditions are not abandoned and forgotten. As Houston's afterword states, "We can never afford to forget what happened at Manzanar and the other wartime camps. Those events remind us that this lesson must be learned and learned and learned again (Houston 188)."

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