The Deception of Spiritualism: Reading J. G. Ballard's *Empire of the Sun* through Bushido

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Introduction

In his autobiographical and semi-autobiographical writings that depict his own childhood experience as a prisoner in Lunghua Camp in Shanghai during World War II, J. G. Ballard repeatedly deals with the image of "bushido," which stems from the chivalry of Japanese samurais in the Edo period (1603–1867). In his essay "The End of My War" (1995), for example, Ballard talks about his memory of participating in kendo practice with Japanese soldiers. As Inazo Nitobe (1862–1933) famously notes in *Bushido: The Soul of Japan* (1900) that "[b]ushido made the sword its emblem of power and prowess" (65), kendo, which derived from traditional swordsmanship in the feudal times, has been regarded as an embodiment of Japanese bushido. "The younger soldiers," Ballard notes in his essay, "invited me into their bare and unfurnished rooms." He continues: "They strapped me into their kendo armour and taught me to fence, a whirl of wooden swords that usually sent me back to G block dazed, head ringing from a dozen blows" (*User's Guide* 291). As well as in "The End of My War" and in his 2008 autobiography entitled *Miracles of Life*,[1] Ballard also describes this episode in one of his most famous novels, *Empire of the Sun* (1984), mainly emphasizing the protagonist's sensuous recollections of Japanese soldiers' "elaborate ceremony," "the ripe smell […] that filled the helmet and shoulder guards," and "the burst of violence as Private Kimura attacked him with the two-handed sword" (*Empire* 133). In addition, in the same novel, Ballard frequently refers to Japanese soldiers' bayonets, which "formed a palisade of swords that answered the sun" (34).

As well as kendo and sword, both of which are connected to the direct image of bushido, Ballard also refers to the various elements of its very "spirit." As a matter of fact, not only in what Umberto Rossi named the "life trilogy" (66) — *Empire of the Sun, The Kindness of Women* (1991), *and Miracles of Life* — but also in his interviews and essays, Ballard eloquently talks about his innocent admiration of "Japaneseness," which seems to

have something to do with the social influence of bushido during World War II. In a 1993 conversation with Joan Bakewell, for example, he says: "I think as a boy, in my naive way, I admired their [Japanese people's] tremendous courage" (*Extreme* 277).[2] Moreover, in *Empire of the Sun*, while the young British protagonist called Jim is afraid of Japanese soldiers' "patience" (7), he "like[s] their bravery and stoicism" (13). Jim, a boy with an "over-heated imagination" who "is hungry […] for stimulation, for inspiration, [and] for excitement" (Gasiorek 148), even identifies himself with faithful Japanese suicide attackers: "He imagined himself at the controls of one of the fighters, falling to earth when his plane exploded, rising again as one of the childlike kamikaze pilots who cheered the Emperor before hurling their Zeros into the American carriers at Okinawa" (*Empire* 167–68). Besides, in *The Kindness of Women*, writing about "the Emperor Hirohito's broadcast" to call "his armies to lay down their weapons," Ballard stresses that Jim "laughed aloud at this," believing that "[n]o Japanese would ever surrender" (38).[3]

Importantly, Ballard's emphasis on Japanese soldiers' never-surrender ethos, patience, courage, bravery, loyalty, stoicism, and discipline all reminds us of Nitobe's somewhat idealized definition of bushido, which is the ways that "fighting nobles should observe in their daily life as well as in their vocation" (11). According to Nitobe's explanation in his book, not only "courage" (21) but also "elaborate discipline of politeness" (31), "[t]he sense of honour" (39) that leads to self-sacrifice, the duty of "loyalty" (43), and "fortitude" or self-control based on "a national trait of apparent stoicism" (52) are regarded as the essential elements of bushido. Furthermore, just as Nitobe highlights that "[b]enevolence to the weak, the downtrodden or the vanquished, was ever extolled as peculiarly becoming to a samurai" (28), Ballard's *Empire of the Sun* tells an anecdote that "the Japanese High Command had begun to eulogize the bravery of [British] Captain Polkinghorn and his men," who were defeated at the battle triggered by the Attack on Pearl Harbor. He writes: "On the second day, the commander of the *Izumo* sent a party of uniformed officers to the hospital, who paid tribute to the wounded sailors in the best traditions of bushido, bowing to each one of them" (italics in original; 37).

Although it does not seem that Ballard actually read Nitobe, in the historical context during World War II, what is more important is the fact that this novelist not simply plays with such superficial images of bushido but also represents its political role as a wartime ideology to propagate the so-called "Japanese military spirit" (*gunjin seishin*). In other words, Ballard's writings — especially *Empire of the Sun* — can be regarded as the texts

that respond to Japanese imperialism, colonialism, and totalitarianism in the late 1930s and the early 1940s, in which the code and spirit of bushido were strategically utilized by the military regime in order to transform young innocent civilians into the Emperor's faithful and patriotic soldiers.[4] Actually, as Alexander C. Bennett puts it, martial arts (budo) — particularly kendo as an embodiment of bushido — "were viewed by the Occupation forces as potent weapons for brainwashing gullible minds" in the post-war period, due to "the state control of budo for militaristic purposes" before and during World War II (25).

Recently, as I will discuss later, some historians distinguish what they call "modern bushido" or "Meiji bushido" from traditional bushido in the Edo period, the former of which was "(re)created" by Nitobe and other thinkers in the Meiji period (1868–1912) and was utilized as a political ideology in the early Showa period (1926–1989). In fact, defining the nation as a "warriors' country," Japanese leaders in the 1930s attempted to incorporate bushido into the notorious project to justify totalitarianism and the establishment of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere (*Daitoa kyoeiken*). In this sense, Ballard's references to kendo or sword, as well as to the Japanese "military formality and never-surrender ethos," reveal the influence of modern bushido hidden behind his portrayal of Japan's acts of atrocity and imperialist invasion of China.

In a 1976 interview with David Pringle reprinted in *Extreme Metaphors* (2012), Ballard notes that the horrible landscape of Shanghai under the Japanese "had a tremendously powerful influence on" his creative activity in later years (82). Although Ballard often writes about his experience of war in many of his later autobiographical and semi-autobiographical pieces, *Empire of the Sun*, the 1987 film adaptation of which by Steven Spielberg is also well-known, is not only the most commercially and critically successful work,[5] but also the text that focuses more on the author's early years in Japanese-occupied Shanghai. Even though Ballard admits that he and Jim "are not one and the same person" (*Extreme* 221),[6] according to Samuel Francis, *Empire of the Sun* can be seen as the novel in which he "most directly addresses the formative traumas of his wartime experience" (134). Likewise, David Paddy claims that even though Ballard's fictionalization of his past has led many critics "to draw attention to the problems of counting on" it as a "reliable" work of autobiography, the novel does show us how he "chose to highlight central points of his early life again and again" (*The Empires of J. G. Ballard* 11).[7] Taking these accounts into consideration, the present essay, which aims to reconsider *Empire of the Sun*, will investigate Ballard's literary response to bushido

in relation to his critical representations of Japanese imperialism, colonialism, and totalitarianism during World War II. Moreover, paying particular attention to the political or military role of modern bushido as a counter-ideology against European powers and the rising American empire, I will also seek to delineate how the novel — despite the fact that Ballard himself could not be free from his extremely ambivalent attitudes toward Japanese war victims — exposes the deception of wartime "spiritualism" socially promoted under its huge influence.

Bushido: From Samurais to Militarism

In *Bushido*, Nitobe not only seeks to update the concept of traditional bushido but also traces its historical origin, calling it as "the noblesse oblige of the warrior class" or "the code of moral principles which the knights [samurais] were required or instructed to observe" (11). Although it was generally an unspoken or unwritten code handed down from generation to generation, according to Nitobe, there were several important sources of traditional bushido, such as Buddhism, Shintoism, and Confucianism (11–18). Makoto Takemitsu, whose recent work historically contextualizes Nitobe's epoc-making volume, discusses that some private books on family precepts or on swordsmanship — such as *Koyo gunkan* (1585) by Toratsuna Kasuga (1527–1578), *Mikawa monogatari* (1626?) by Tadataka Okubo (1560–1639), *Gorin no sho* (1645) by Mushasi Miyamoto (1584–1645), and *Hagakure* (1716) by Tsunetomo Yamamoto (1659–1719) — can also be seen as important texts that had contributed to shaping the traditional notion of bushido (60–71).

However, even though Nitobe's *Bushido* still has a huge influence on our general understanding of this concept, as researchers such as Kakumyo Kanno and Shinichi Saeki point out, what we now know as "bushido" was socially and politically "invented" in the latter part of the Meiji period. To borrow Kanno's expression, what he calls the "Meiji bushido" — including Nitobe's notion of bushido — was nothing but "fragments, or remnants, of [traditional] bushido" in the past (233). From a similar point of view, Saeki calls this phenomenon the "regeneration" of bushido (245). In fact, though samurais had lost their privilege and ruling position after the 1867 collapse of the Tokugawa shogunate and the start of the Meiji Restoration that led to the Westernization and modernization of society, the concept of bushido was redefined and utilized by the leaders of the new government, most of whom were from the lower samurai class.[8] When Aritomo Yamagata (1838–1922), one of the founding fathers of the Meiji government and the Imperial

Japanese Army, established the Conscription Ordinance in 1873, he defined the people's army as "the Emperor's honorable subjects" (Takemitsu 106). Then, after suppressing the Satsuma Rebellion (*Seinan Senso*) caused by a group of dissident ex-samurais in 1877, Yamagata and other political and military leaders issued the Imperial Rescript to Soldiers and Sailors (*Gunjin Chokuyu*) in the name of Emperor Meiji in 1882. While traditional bushido from the medieval period through the Edo period was a moral code only for the ruling class, the brand-new idea of "the nation's bushido" shown in this Imperial Rescript functioned to re-educate ordinary citizens as the Emperor's loyal soldiers (Takemitsu 118–19). In the same period, in addition to Amane Nishi (1829–1897), an "Enlightenment" thinker working under Yamagata, Tetsujiro Inoue (1856–1944), a philosopher who co-edited the anthology of historical texts on Japanese chivalry (*Bushido sosho*, 1909), played an important role in establishing the nationalist aspect of this new bushido.[9]

Referring to Eric Hobsbawm's *The Invention of Tradition* (co-edited with Terence Ranger; 1983), Koshi Suzuki argues that in the period around the Sino-–Japanese War (1894–1895) and Russo-Japanese War (1904–1905), what we now call "bushido" (including Nitobe's) was (re)constructed as an ambivalent concept that could serve to spread and fuel nationalism inside the nation, as well as to propagate Japan's unique and inherent "ethical system" to the international community (47, 52). Consequently, bushido, an anachronistic relic of Tokugawa feudalism that was recreated and redefined at the turn of the century, started to influence the lives and behaviors of both soldiers and ordinary people in Japan. In his review of Stephen Prince's book on Akira Kurosawa's samurai movies, Ballard critically describes the atmosphere at that time as "the glacier-like rigidities of pre-war Japanese life," also referring to "the total deference to authority and social consensus, and the suppression of the smallest gleam of individuality" (*User's Guide* 25).

Significantly, Ballard's novel *Empire of the Sun* is set in this very era when Japan, declaring its aim to "liberate" East Asian countries from European and American powers, made full use of bushido as an ideological device for its military and totalitarian purposes. In fact, Suzuki calls this period of warfare the second peak of modern bushido (47). Although the country professed that it would expel Western imperialists from Asia between the late 1930s and the early 1940s, Japan's plan to establish the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere was not an antithesis of imperialism but in itself an imperialist or colonialist ambition. As Ballard himself asserts, "[t]he behaviour of the Japanese in

China from 1937 onwards was very close to genocide; they looked down on Chinese as an inferior people" (*Extreme* 476). In *Empire of the Sun*, Ballard satirically deconstructs the dichotomy between European imperialism and the Japanese project to "liberate" Asian nations in a metaphorical way:

> Although Jim had a deep respect for the Japanese, their ships were always being disparaged by the British in Shanghai. The cruiser *Izumo*, moored alongside the Japanese Consulate at Hongkew half a mile downstream, looked far more impressive than the *Wake* and *Petrel*. In fact the *Izumo*, flagship of the Japanese China Fleet, had been built in England and served in the Royal Navy before being sold to the Japanese during the Russo-Japanese War in 1905. (italics in original; *Empire* 27)

Indeed, as shown in his autobiography, Ballard once thought that the initial victory of Japan would lead to the end of European imperialism in Asia; he states that the "prestige" of the British Empire "plummeted" after "[t]he fall of Singapore, and the sinking of the British battleships *Repulse* and *Prince of Wales*" (italics in original; *Miracles* 56). In *Empire of the Sun*, however, deliberately revealing that the cruiser Izumo, which is represented as a symbol of "the best traditions of bushido" (37) or the Japanese "warrior spirit" that Jim admires, was actually built in the British Empire, he seeks to expose the homogeneity between the Japanese utopian vision for the Co-Prosperity Sphere and Western imperialism.[10] In such a situation, although bushido was positively presented as Japan's alternative "ethical system" against Western values, its nationalistic aspect ironically served to justify the country's oppression and invasion of other Asian countries.

In this way, rather than simply romanticizing or idealizing the bushido-oriented Japanese "warrior spirit," Ballard exposes the deception of modern bushido during the war, implying that its seemingly heroic aspect and its brutal aspect were two side of the same coin.[11] In fact, Ballard's novels such as *Empire of the Sun* and *The Kindness of Women* demythologize the Japanese "warrior spirit" that derives from modern bushido by describing the vestiges of the massacre and the soldiers' violence against prisoners and the weak. The former work, for example, mentions "the bodies of dead Chinese soldiers" that "lined the verges of the roads and floated in the canals" (*Empire* 21), while the latter refers to the character called Sergeant Kimura repeatedly slapping prisoners during an

interrogation (*Kindness* 33).[12]

Against American Materialism: Spiritualism in Modern Bushido

In *Empire of the Sun*, among Ballard's various references to Japanese soldiers' violent and atrocious acts performed under the name of "warrior spirit," the Attack on Pearl Harbor, along with the Rape of Nanking briefly mentioned at the beginning of the opening chapter (3), is one of the most crucial events that indicate the country's arbitrary use of the spirit of bushido. This is due to the fact that, from the perspective of modern bushido that wartime Japanese nationalists supported, such a "surprise attack" (*damashi uchi*) must be considered despicable and ignoble. According to Saeki, even though a sneak attack without any idea of "fair play" was quite common among samurais in the feudal times (22–23), modern bushido (especially Nitobe's), which had been (re)constructed as the nation's ethical or moral code, generally denied it as a barbarous, dastardly act (244–45).

Nevertheless, Japan did decide to attack Pearl Harbor in Hawaii without issuing a formal declaration of war since the country, whose military and economic strength, productive power, technology, and natural resources were apparently inferior to those of the United States, sought nothing but a "short war." As Katsuhiko Matsukawa remarks in his article, Isoroku Yamamoto (1884–1943), the commander-in-chief of the Combined Fleet who deeply understood the huge power of the American armed forces, ironically played a leading role in pursuing this foolhardy plan to conduct a surprise attack on Hawaii (253–54). To justify this decision, as Ruth Benedict points out in *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword* (1946), the military government of Japan fanatically claimed that the country would win "a victory of spirit over power" (22). To borrow Benedict's own phrase, "America was big, her armaments were superior, but what did that matter?" (22). She also writes:

> Even when she [Japan] was winning, her civilian statesmen, her High Command, and her soldiers repeated that this was no contest between armaments; it was a pitting of our faith in things against their faith in spirit. When we were winning they repeated over and over that in such a contest material power must necessarily fail. This dogma became, no doubt, a convenient alibi about the time of the defeats at Saipan and Iwo Jima, but it was not manufactured as an alibi for defeats. It was a clarion call during all the months of Japanese victories, and it had been an

accepted slogan long before Pearl Harbor. (22)

In this very context where "Japan was as completely consistent in playing up non-material resources as the United States was in its commitment to bigness" (23), though Benedict never argues, bushido's anti-materialist, anti-commercial, and anti-individualist aspects were strategically used as a political device not only to conceal Japan's material inferiority and propagate its spiritual superiority to the West, but also to re-educate, or even brainwash, the nation's ordinary people, as well as soldiers.

"Of all the great occupations of life," as Nitobe states, "none was farther removed from the profession of arms than commerce" (36). In this sense, the unworldly spirit of bushido, which intensely despised making or hoarding money and boasts of penury, could be utilized as a counterargument against American commercialism, consumerism, or materialism. According to Nitobe: "It is true that thrift was enjoyed by Bushido, but not for economical reasons so much as for the exercise of abstinence. Luxury was thought the greatest menace to manhood and severest simplicity of living was required of the warrior class, sumptuary laws being enforced in many of the clans" (49). In this respect, such spiritualism of bushido might have had a crucial effect not only on Japan's National Spiritual Mobilization Movement (*Kokka seishin sodoin undo*) under Fumimaro Konoe's (1891–1945) cabinet, but also on some of the notorious slogans during the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937–1945) and World War II, such as "Luxuries are your enemy" and "We won't ask for them, until we win." Moreover, in this period, it was the 1941 Instructions for the Battlefield (Senjinkun military code) issued by Hideki Tojo (1884–1948) that most effectively made use of such elements of bushido as ideological propaganda to lead the nation into the war against America, which it seemed to have no chance of winning. In fact, emphasizing the sacredness of the Emperor and the importance of faithfulness and "military spirit," the Instructions even ordered soldiers "never live to experience shame as a prisoner" (Takemitsu 172–73, 179).

Although he does not refer explicitly to the Instructions, in the latter part of *Empire of the Sun*, Ballard critically represents the collapse of Japan's reckless ambition by depicting a seriously wounded kamikaze pilot as a tragic victim. As Benedict writes, kamikaze "pilots who flew their midget planes in a suicidal crash" can be viewed simply as "an endless text for the superiority of the spiritual over the material" (24). In Ballard's novel, however, Jim feels sympathy with the pilot, noticing that this Japanese man "was

still in his late teens, with an unformed face, boneless nose and chin" (*Empire* 238). In the later scene where Jim finds the pilot dying "in the reeds a few feet from him" (285), he even sees this young man as his "imaginary twin" or "a replica" of himself:

> The face of the Japanese was more childlike than Jim remembered, as if in his death he had returned to his true age, to his early adolescence in a provincial Japanese village. His lips were parted around his uneven teeth, as if expecting a morsel of fish to be placed between them by his mother's chopsticks.
>
> Numbed by the sight of this dead pilot, Jim watched the youth's knees slide into the water. He squatted on the sloping earth, turning the pages of *Life* and trying to concentrate on the photograph of Churchill and Eisenhower. For so long he had invested all his hopes in this young pilot, in that futile dream that they would fly away together, leaving Lunghua, Shanghai and the war forever behind them. He had needed the pilot to help him survive the war, this imaginary twin he had invented, a replica of himself whom he watched through the barbed wire. (italics in original; 286)

Identifying himself with the kamikaze pilot who missed the opportunity to die heroically "in an attack on the American carriers at Okinawa" (239), Jim thinks that "[i]f the Japanese was dead, part of himself had died" (286). In this way, instead of presenting the Japanese as the absolute "Other," Ballard's work portrays this fatally wounded pilot as a victim of Japan's insane project founded on the distorted ideal of bushido, or its irrational propaganda about "the superiority of the spiritual over the material," rather than depicting him as a mindless killing machine who, like samurais, easily lays down his precious life. Conversely, the scene above also seems to debunk the deceit of the Japanese advocacy of spiritualism, which was ironically utilized by the military government to mobilize young innocent soldiers as lifeless "materials" that were compelled to charge and destroy the enemy with their planes.

Bushido, *Gyokusai*, and Atomic Bombs: Two Empires

From Tsunetomo Yamamoto's 1716 book *Hagakure*, whose impressive thesis "[t]he way of the warrior […] is to be found in dying" is still widely known (42), to Yukio Mishima (1925–1970), a post-war novelist who called himself a samurai and committed *seppuku* at

the military base in Tokyo, bushido has often been associated with the concept of death. However, it does not always blindly encourage suicide. Nitobe, for instance, points out that bushido regarded "[d]eath for a cause unworthy of dying for" as a "dog's death" (21). Paradoxically, even though bushido had stressed the necessity of dying for a "right" and "worthwhile" purpose, this very instruction led to its distortion and the production of military propaganda in the early Showa period stating that throwing away one's life for the Emperor was the most "honorable" death. In this historical context, while *Hagakure* was considered a book that everyone must read (Mishima 9), the Instructions for the Battlefield, which had simplified traditional bushido's romanticization of glorious death, finally functioned to encourage every Japanese soldier and civilian to carry out *gyokusai*, or to die a hero's death for the Emperor's divine nation (Takemitsu 192).

To a certain degree, *gyokusai* can be understood as a product of the Japanese military government's (or modern bushido's) emphasis on spiritualism, which paradoxically served to turn everyone into an inhuman war material. Without overtly using the term, Ballard frequently mentions *gyokusai* not only in *Empire of the Sun*, but also in other fiction or nonfiction works and interviews. For instance, while his autobiography *Miracles of Life* states that "[t]he huge Japanese armies in China were ready to defend the Emperor and the home islands to the last man" (95), Ballard talks in more detail about it in a 1985 interview: "In August 1945, nobody expected to see the Japanese surrender. Remember their hand-to-hand combat in each small island, to the last man. In Okinawa, even the civilians perished at the side of the soldiers at the time of the attack on the island by the Americans" (*Extreme* 221). Furthermore, in "The End of My War," he states:

> Countless times he [the Japanese soldier] had shown that as long as he had a rifle or a grenade he would fight to the end. The only infrastructure the Japanese infantryman needed was his own courage, and there is no reason to believe that he would have fought less tenaciously for his homeland than for a coral atoll thousands of miles away. (*User's Guide* 293)

Besides, as I discussed earlier, *Empire of the Sun* closely delineates Jim's empathic gaze at kamikaze pilots who are destined to sacrifice their own lives: "But Jim identified himself with these kamikaze pilots, and was always moved by the threadbare ceremonies that took place beside the runway. […] Even when they cheered the Emperor, shouting hoarsely at

the audience of flies, none of the anti-aircraft gunners noticed them […]" (157).

As well as these suicide attackers, Japan's official decision "to defend the Emperor and the home islands to the last man" was a result of the government's practice of distorted bushido that while claiming the superiority of spiritualism to American materialism, ironically functioned to utilize soldiers' lives only as inhuman materials for war. In this historical context, since it appeared that Japan did not intend to surrender, American President Harry S. Truman eventually decided to drop atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945 to end the war and stop the enemy's invasions and genocide. As Ballard himself witnessed, these nuclear explosions that killed hundreds of thousands of civilians "brought the war to an abrupt end." He also writes: "Prompted by Emperor Hirohito's surrender broadcast, the still-intact Japanese war machine ground to a complete halt within days, so saving millions of Chinese lives, as well as our own" (*Miracles* 90).

In *Empire of the Sun*, America's victory is shown as a victory of the country's military, economic, technological, and productive power against Japanese spiritualism, whose military ideology was spread and strengthened by modern bushido. In other words, American materialism finally defeated the Empire of Japan that had declared "the dominance of spirit over material circumstances" (Benedict 24). Indeed, according to Belinda Kong's article on Ballard, the chapter "The Empire of the Sun" is "the only one given the novel's title, prefiguring America's rise as the new 'empire of the sun' even as the Japanese one falls." She goes on to argue that "it inaugurates a kind of narrative afterlife where Jim, wandering like an atomic survivor in the allegorical nuclear wasteland, lingers on beyond the end of the Second World War even as he envisages the third one's onset" (288–89).

In this novel, moreover, as well as his references to the bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Ballard's descriptions of American fighters such as Mustangs and B-29s serve to highlight the superiority of the superpower's materialism to the Japanese "warrior spirit," which often functioned to conceal the country's military, economic, and productive inferiority. Although "Jim admired Hayates and Zeroes of the Japanese," according to Ballard, "the Mustang fighters were the Cadillacs of air combat" (*Empire* 159). Furthermore, B-29s, "[t]he huge, streamlined bombers [that] summed up all the power and grace of America" strongly "awed Jim" in the latter part of the story (187). Ballard writes:

> Usually the B-29s flew above the Japanese anti-aircraft fire, but two days earlier Jim had seen a single Superfortress cross the paddy fields to the west of the camp, only five hundred feet above the ground. Two of its engines were on fire, but the sight of this immense bomber with its high, curving tail convinced Jim that Japan had lost the war. (187)[13]

For this author, in great contrast to Japanese fighters such as Hayates and Zeros, both of which were used for suicide attacks — *gyokusai* — that wasted the lives of kamikaze pilots, American high-tech products (or killing machines) such as Mustangs, B-29s, and even atomic bombs symbolize the pragmatic idea of "efficiency" in stopping the war and keeping the total number of the Allies' victims to a minimum.

Of course, while Ballard thus sees the victory of American mass production and capitalist prosperity over Japanese imperialism and its fanatic backbone — the spiritual, anti-commercial, anti-individualist, and unscientific aspects of bushido — he does not simply acclaim the US's rise as a new superpower in the middle of the twentieth century. After the publication of *Hello America* (1981) that satirically illustrates the post-apocalyptic situation in an imaginary future where American materialism, consumerism, and capitalism are no longer functioning, as critics such as Paddy state, Ballard actually "began to examine America and American imperialism more forthrightly" (*The Empires of J. G. Ballard* 167), problematizing "globalization as a new form of international imperialism" in many of his works ("Empires of the Mind" 191).[14] In *Empire of the Sun*, in addition to deconstructing the relationship between British (or European) imperialism and the Japanese plan for the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere, as I pointed out above citing Kong's article, Ballard negatively represents both America and Japan, the latter of which means "the land of the rising sun (Nippon/ Nihon)," as the horrible "empire of the sun." Ironically, the image of the sun is thus associated not only with the Japanese rising sun flag, but also with America's nuclear weapons that destroyed almost everything in two Japanese cities. In the novel, for instance, the man called the "Eurasian" says to Jim: "Kid, they dropped atomic bombs. Uncle Sam threw a piece of the sun at Nagasaki and Hiroshima, killed a million people" (234).

In the final part of his 1900 book, Nitobe regarded bushido as a concept incompatible with "materialism (including utilitarianism)" in the West (89). Then, in the middle of the twentieth century, by actually utilizing the spiritual aspect of modern bushido as a counter-ideology against American and European imperialism, the Japanese military and political leaders who issued the Instructions for the Battlefield eventually led the nation to the catastrophic defeat in 1945, when the atomic bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki (Takemitsu 192).

Set in the period of the fall of European powers and Japanese imperialist ambition and the total victory of American materialism, Ballard's *Empire of the Sun*, which was written in the early 1980s when the US's hostility against the Soviet Union intensified again, regards Hiroshima and Nagasaki as the historical watershed that determined the advent of "America's century" and the nuclear age in the near future.[15] In the novel, while taking a rest with other prisoners at the Olympic stadium in the western outskirts of Nantao, Shanghai, Jim indirectly "witnesses" the white flash of light of the atomic explosion somewhere far away:

> A Japanese soldier patrolled the cinder track nearby. He walked across the grass and stared down at Jim. Irritated by the noise, he was about to kick him with his ragged boot. But a flash of light filled the stadium, flaring over stands in the south-west corner of the football field, as if an immense American bomb had exploded somewhere to the north-east of Shanghai. The sentry hesitated, looking over his shoulder as the light behind him grew more intense. It faded within a few seconds, but its pale sheen covered everything within the stadium, the looted furniture in the stands, the cars behind the goal posts, the prisoners on the grass. They were sitting on the floor of a furnace heated by a second sun. (226)

Of course, the passage cited above is not a realistic description at all. Though Jim repeatedly insists that he did see "a white light […] stronger than the sun" (275), or "the afterglow of the atomic flash at Nagasaki" (266), it is almost impossible for us to believe his experience of witnessing the explosion 800 kilometers away from the ground zero, unless it was nothing but a hallucinatory vision in his mind.

The distance between Nagasaki and Shanghai emphasized in the novel seems to

expose Jim's — or probably Ballard's — contradictory attitudes toward Japanese people. While he partly admires the bushido-oriented "warrior spirit" of Japanese soldiers and identifies himself with some kamikaze pilots he frequently sees in Shanghai, Jim can never sympathize with countless numbers of innocent civilians killed in Nagasaki, simply regarding them as absolute "Others" in a foreign land. Moreover, like Jim, who can only regard hundreds of thousands of cruel deaths in Nagasaki as an unrealistic, even fantasy-like event far removed from himself, the very author of this novel overtly defends the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki as justifiable acts of saving the lives of "millions of Asian civilians and […] millions of Japanese in the home islands" (*User's Guide* 292–93). Intentionally distinguishing these incidents from the Nazi Holocaust, in his essay "The End of My War," Ballard says:

> The claims that Hiroshima and Nagasaki constitute an American war crime have had an unfortunate effect on the Japanese, confirming their belief that they were the victims of the war rather than the aggressors. As a nation the Japanese have never faced up to the atrocities they committed, and are unlikely to do so as long as we bend our heads in shame before the memories of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. (*User's Guide* 293)

For Ballard, America's nuclear attacks on Japan were unavoidable means to stop not only the latter's uncontrollable "aggressions" that had been promoted by the spirit of bushido, but also its insane acts of victimizing soldiers and civilians. Moreover, in his 1985 conversation with Tony Cartano and Maxim Jakubowski, Ballard even asserts that he is "in favour of nuclear armament," describing the atomic bomb as "an instrument of protection" (*Extreme* 221–22).

These statements are more or less problematic in that without deeply understanding what actually happened in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Ballard blindly trusts the deterrent effect of nuclear weapons and justifies the killing of numerous innocent civilians in these cities. Even though he properly demythologizes both the bushido-oriented Japanese "warrior spirit" and American materialism in his literary writings, when it comes to Hiroshima and Nagasaki, why is he not free from the "otherness" of the former nation in the Far East? Or why does he seek to justify these events ignoring the existence of actual victims and survivors? It is probably due to the fact that Ballard, like Jim, strongly

believes that his own life was saved by the American atomic bombs. Since his “fate [was] at the hands of the Japanese” (*Miracles* 89), in Ballard’s view, it was these bombings that prevented him from being murdered by the administrative soldiers of Lunghua Camp. He writes:

> Many years later, my mother told me that in 1944 there were strong rumours relayed from the Swiss neutrals in Shanghai that the Japanese high command planned to close the camp and march us all up-country, where they would dispose of us. The Japanese armies in China, millions strong, were falling back to the coast, and intended to make their last stand near the mouth of the Yangtze against the expected American landings. This must have deeply alarmed my parents and other adults in the know, however uncertain the rumours. (*Miracles* 89–90)

If *Empire of the Sun* was written after his mother had told him these “uncertain” rumours, Ballard’s attitude toward Hiroshima and Nagasaki shown in this novel, as well as his statements about nuclear weapons in his later life, must be founded upon this ironic possibility that the atomic bombs might have allowed him to survive.

Just like every European imprisoned in the Japanese internment camp during World War II, as can be seen in the novel, Jim, who becomes less patriotic and willingly buys his “way into the favour of the Japanese and thereby helped” his “fellows with small supplies of food and bandages” (138), is always haunted by the problem of “which side he was on” that he has “never really solved” (245). Although Jim has been protected to some extent in “the familiar and reassuring world of the camp” run by the enemies (153), he gradually begins to realize that “[t]his confusion of loyalties, [or] the fear of what would happen” to the prisoners once the Japanese were defeated by the Allies “affected everyone” around him, as the shortage of food and hunger become increasingly serious in the final phase of the war (196). In this severe situation, Jim is convinced during his march with other prisoners that “they [a]re being taken up-country so that the Japanese [can] kill them without being seen by the American pilots” (209). Consequently, while expecting the Allies to defeat the Empire of Japan, Jim is forced to rely on the latter just in order to survive.[16]

Jim, therefore, is accordingly saved by the Japanese surrender triggered by Hiroshima and Nagasaki, while he never clearly thinks about those who are victimized in

these cities. Likewise, whether or not he denies American imperialism and materialism, from Ballard's point of view, the fact that he was saved by the American victory over the Japanese "warrior spirit" was definitely undeniable. But, of course, even if we keep in mind that his opinion might be inseparable from his own traumatic personal experience as a prisoner during the war, it is certain that Ballard's advocative attitude toward nuclear armament, as well as his description in *Empire of the Sun* that the tragedies in Hiroshima and Nagasaki are "lucky" for Jim and his parents (234), are rather controversial. Nevertheless, exposing the homogeneity between European powers, the Japanese "ideal" of liberating Asia from their colonialism, and the final triumph of the American empire over all of them, this semi-autobiographical novel set in the historical watershed at least explores the problems of imperialism both in the past and in the future. In this sense, Ballard's references to the dropping of atomic bombs and the surrender of Japan in the novel imply the total loss — and the deception — of the spirit of modern bushido as a counter-ideology not only against European imperialism since the nineteenth century, but also against American empire from the mid-twentieth century onward. As Ballard shows in his work, the ideal of modern bushido neither liberated Asia nor changed the world to be a better place. But now that European and Japanese imperialism had gone, in his view, the world saw the advent of "America's century" characterized by materialism, consumerism, capitalist prosperity, and nuclear power.

Notes

1 In *Miracles of Life*, Ballard writes as follows: "I also made friendships of a kind with several of the young Japanese guards. When they were off duty I would visit them in the staff bungalows fifty yards from G Block, and they would allow me to sit in their hot tubs and then wear their kendo armour. After handing me a duelling sword, a fearsome weapon of long wooden segments loosely strung together, they would encourage me to fence with them. Each bout would last twenty seconds and involved me being repeatedly struck about the helmet and face mask, which I could scarcely see through, every dizzying blow being greeted with friendly cheers from the watching Japanese. […] I knew they could be viciously brutal, especially when acting under the orders of their NCOs, but individually they were easy-going and likeable" (78).

2 Here, Ballard also says: "I think I also admired a sort of melancholy strain in the Japanese. I think in a curious way the Japanese enjoy being sad. It's a strain in their make-up. I was never sad as a child, and I haven't often been sad as an adult, but there's something about that sort of wish for sadness which is very close to a sort of philosophical attitude of life. It's fatalistic"

(*Extreme* 277).

3 Furthermore, in *Miracles of Life*, Ballard asserts that in the final phase of the war, "[n]owhere had Japanese soldiers surrendered in large numbers," adding that "[f]atalism, fierce discipline and a profound patriotism shaped their warrior spirit" (95).

4 In his book review of Edward Behr's *Hirohito: Behind the Myth* (1989), Ballard briefly writes about Emperor Showa's (Hirohito's) responsibility for the war: "Edward Behr points out that Hirohito was exceptionally methodical and industrious, read everything to which he put his seal, and was aware of whatever took place within the Supreme War Command and the cabinet" (*User's Guide* 50–51). He also notes: "[A]s General MacArthur remarked, it is hard to understand how someone powerful enough to end the war could not have prevented it in the first place" (51).

5 For example, in her book review of this novel, Angela Carter describes Ballard as "one of those rare beings who talk in grammatically correct sentences," saying that his fiction is characterized by postmodernist features such as "restless and brilliant formal innovation, highly stylised, extreme and shocking violence, [and] pitch-black humour" (559). Carter also describes him as "the great chronicler of the new, technological Britain" (560). Furthermore, the critical reception of this particular novel is summarized well by Luckhurst in "Petition", 688–708.

6 Unlike Jim, who is alone in Lunghua Camp, Ballard was always with his parents (*Extreme* 221).

7 In addition, Michael Delville defines this novel as a "bildungsroman that retraces Jim's development from childhood to maturity through a double process of initiation and individuation" (68).

8 According to Nitobe, "The great statesmen who steered the ship of our state through the hurricane of the Restoration and the whirlpool of national rejuvenation, were men who knew no other moral teaching than the Precepts of Knighthood" (81). For example, in addition to Aritomo Yamagata, the following prime ministers were all from the samurai class: Hirobumi Ito (1841–1909), Kiyotaka Kuroda (1840–1900), Masayoshi Matsukata (1835–1924), and Shigenobu Okuma (1838–1922).

9 In addition, Inoue published several works on bushido before World War II, such as *Bushido* (1901) and *The Essence of Bushido* [*Bushido no honshitsu*] (1942).

10 In his article, Paddy analyzes Ballard's anti-imperialist fiction: "A British child born in Shanghai, Ballard waged war, implicitly and explicitly, on the insularity of post-war England and its archaic imperial dreams in their many variegated forms. At the heart of Ballard's resistant work is a resistance to imperialism" ("Empires of the Mind" 180).

11 In *Miracles of Life*, Ballard seeks to analyze the origin of cruelty hidden behind Japanese soldiers' "fierce discipline and a profound patriotism." He writes: "In some way, I think, the Japanese soldier assumed unconsciously that he had already died in battle, and the apparent life left to him was on a very short lease. This explained their vicious cruelty. I can still see two of the guards beating to death an exhausted Chinese rickshaw coolie who had brought them from Shanghai. As the desperate man sobbed on his knees the Japanese first kicked his rickshaw to pieces, probably his only possession in the world and sole source of income, and then began to beat and kick the Chinese until he lay in a still and bloody pulp on the ground" (95).

12 See also Empire 6, 66, 84, 99; *Kindness* 10, 16.

13 In his autobiography *Miracles of Life*, Ballard recollects this impression of seeing these

American fighters more candidly: "However brave the Japanese soldiers and pilots, they belonged to the past. America, I knew, was a future that had already arrived" (99).

14 Although *Hello America* has been poorly reviewed since its publication (Baxter 259), it does succeed in denouncing the "nightmares" created by America in the mid-twentieth century (*Hello* 9) by telling a dystopian story about an imaginary dictator President "Charles Manson" that constructs and destroys his "new America" by utilizing nuclear power after a catastrophic energy crisis and environmental changes.

15 In fact, during the so-called Second Cold War after the collapse of the détente triggered by the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, America, as a capitalist or neoliberalist superpower, had already overwhelmed the socialist bloc in decline.

16 In a 1986 interview, Ballard talks about Jim and the camp as follows: "For Jim it represents complete security. It's the only secure world that he has known, and as the war draws to a close, and it's clear that the Japanese are losing the war, he becomes more and more worried. He's terrified of what will happen to them when the Japanese are no longer guarding the camp, and this of course is what happened in fact" (*Extreme* 225–26).

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