

# A Hero's Defeat: Modernization Theory and Japanese Veterans' Asia-Pacific "War Tales"

Justin Aukema

**Abstract:** *After the Asia-Pacific War, many former Japanese soldiers wrote of their wartime experiences in an attempt to assign meaning to defeat. So many of these accounts were published that they eventually came to form a literary genre in their own right: the "war tale (senkimono)." Previous scholarship has looked at such war tales as examples of soldier trauma or examined them from the perspective of war responsibility. This essay takes a different approach. It highlights two works by veteran authors Furukawa Shigemi and Kamiko Kiyoshi which probed the causes of Japan's defeat. The works blamed Japan's defeat entirely on material and technological differences between the Japanese and American armies, and specifically on what they perceived as the Imperial Japanese Army's (IJA) "backward" traditions and inability to properly "modernize." This argument enabled such veterans to find meaning in defeat by aligning their narratives and memories with a dominant postwar discourse of modernization - a paradigm which did not disavow the underlying justifications of the war and militarism, and which simultaneously validated Japan's postwar model of development.*

**Keywords:** *modernization theory, Imperial Japanese Army (IJA), veterans, war tales (senkimono), nationalism*

## Introduction

After the Asia-Pacific War (1931-1945), Japanese soldiers struggled to make sense of Japan's defeat and their wartime experiences. Many probed the war through writing and literature. Indeed, veterans' "war tales" (*senkimono*) proliferated and were popular in postwar Japan (Takahashi 1988; Yoshida 2005). These works reveal how Japanese soldiers remembered and assigned meaning to the war. Some wrote to examine their individual trauma (see, for example, the case of Ogawa Masatsugu in Ryota Nishino's contribution to this special issue); others used humor to critique the military apparatus (see Matthew Allen's contribution). The current article analyzes the works of two veteran authors, Furukawa Shigemi and Kamiko Kiyoshi, who took yet another approach. They questioned *why* Japan lost the war in the first place. And while their contents and style differed, their conclusion was the same: Japan was defeated because the outdated military tactics and ideology of the Imperial Japanese Army (IJA) was no match for the American's superior firepower and modern fighting methods. Furukawa argued this point in his 1949 *Gate of Life and Death: Secret Records of the Battle of Okinawa* (*Shisei no mon: Okinawa-sen hiroku*), a semi-fictional portrayal of a Japanese military officer whose frustration with the IJA leads him to surrender to the Americans in the 1945 Battle of Okinawa. Kamiko, too, made a similar assertion in his 1965 *I Didn't Die on Leyte* (*Ware Reite ni shisezu*), a nonfiction account of

the author's experiences in the 1944-45 Battle of Leyte.

Using these two works as examples, this essay argues that some Japanese veteran authors used the genre of the war tale to advance what I identify as "modernity narrative" of defeat and to transform substantive defeats into imagined victories. In these stories, Japan's wartime defeat was purely the result of material differences between Japan and the US. The IJA had failed to "modernize" by clinging to ancient relics of the "feudal" past. An emphasis on willful self-sacrifice and death over surrender were no match for America's advanced weaponry. It is in this milieu that the protagonists jettison the IJA mid-battle and instead cast their lots with the Americans or bet on their individual survival skills. During the war, these actions would have been seen as dishonorable and disgraceful. But after the war, when the authors were writing, and when the military morality of the IJA had been entirely discredited, their actions were justified. In addition, the stories mirrored the logic of defeat in postwar Japan: surrender to the Americans was not a tragic disgrace but rather a saving grace since it had set Japan back on the course of "proper" modernization. This key underlying message of both stories served multiple functions. For one, it enabled veteran writers such as Furukawa and Kamiko to find meaning in defeat: it ensured that their comrades' deaths had not been in vain and even allowed praise of individual acts of heroism. At the same time, the narrative contained even broader Cold War geopolitical significance. Not only did the valorization of modernity justify Japan's postwar model of growth and development, but the celebration of *America's* role in this process echoed modernization theorists' vision of the US as the world's torchbearer of modernity. In this regard, it is notable that Furukawa and Kamiko's war tales did not exist in isolation but rather were amplified through cross-Pacific acts of translation and re-translation, thus

reinforcing a hegemonic discourse of Japan's defeat.

### ***Senkimono* and Modernization Theory**

Two main conceptual pillars underly this essay's premise: the war tale genre and modernization theory. In previous scholarship, Takahashi Saburō (1988) and Yoshida Yutaka (2005; 2011) have written most extensively on the topic of the modern war tale (*senkimono*) genre in Japan, highlighting what works reveal about veterans' war memories (Takahashi 1988) and individual war responsibility (Yoshida 2005), as well as their role in commemorating and mourning fallen comrades (Yoshida 2011). These scholars have also noted how war tales were a means for former soldiers to assign meaning and justification to the war. Meanwhile, Nils Gilman (2007) has given a detailed study of modernization theory's Cold War origins and its utility for American foreign policy, while Sebastian Conrad (2012) and Samuel Yamashita (2016) have investigated the propagation and reception of the theory in Japan. Yet despite the acknowledgement of modernization theory as a dominant Cold War paradigm as well as the recognition that memories are shaped vis-à-vis socio-political frameworks, prior scholarship has not examined how central tenants of the theory were negotiated in the context of Japanese veterans' war memories and, by extension, their war tales. In what follows, therefore, I elucidate the concepts of the war tale genre and modernization theory, and I lay out my case for investigating both in tandem rather than in isolation.

First, by way of explanation, let us focus on the war tale genre. Japan has a long history of writing war. This includes "warrior tales" (*gunki*) like the medieval *The Tales of the Heike* or modern-era war novels such as Sakurai Tadayoshi's 1906 account of the Russo-Japanese War (1904-05), *Human Bullets*

(*Nikudan*). But this essay is concerned with veterans' war tales (*senkimono*) which flourished after the Asia-Pacific War. Such tales span multiple genres including essays, fiction, and nonfiction. They are defined by their high degree of subjectivity and are notable for what they reveal about veterans' personal experiences and memories. Japanese veterans began publishing their wartime accounts almost immediately after the war ended. Early accounts often revealed details of the war which had been previously hidden under strict Japanese military censorship. Furukawa's *Secret Records of the Battle of Okinawa* falls into this category. Then, the 1950s witnessed a *senkimono* boom. The military magazine *Maru*, which began publication in 1948, printed over three-hundred soldiers' accounts in this decade alone (Takahashi 1988, 186-94). Many of these were written by former staff officers who blamed Japan's defeat solely on technological power and economic might. Often, they portrayed battle in a heroic way and with very little consideration of the author's personal war responsibility (Takahashi 1988, 36; Yoshida 2005, 96-100). Later, from the 1960s through the 1980s there was a great increase in war tales written by rank-and-file soldiers. Against the background of Japan's high economic growth, many veterans wrote from a sense of survivor guilt that only they lived to enjoy the fruits of prosperity (Takahashi 1988, 58-67). Some veterans also adopted a nonfiction style, combining their personal testimonies with research. Kamiko's *We Didn't Die on Leyte* is one such example.

The second concept under investigation is modernization theory. Put simply, modernization theory is the valorization of the Western, and specifically American, model of historical development as the most superior, advanced, and modern. It is also simultaneously the belief that Western cultural institutions and the entire *Weltanschauung* of liberal capitalism should be supplanted and emulated on a global scale. Modernization

theory has roots in the longer tradition of lionizing capitalist development, including the views of Japan's own Meiji era reformers. But it was most explicitly outlined and utilized by American academics and elites after WWII and during the Cold War (Gilman 2007; Yamashita 2016). This is because the notion justified both America's past and present roles. Namely, it provided the ideological rationale for decades of American interventionism and hegemony in the name of stopping communism and promoting "democracy" abroad. Modernization theory is also predicated on what can be called the "modernity narrative of history," the idea that all nations follow the same historical path of development away from pre-modern feudalism and toward liberal capitalist modernity. Consequently, the theory has a normative-prescriptive function in that it inherently rejects non-liberal capitalist norms and traditions as "feudalistic" (*hōkenteki*) and undesirable.

The discourse of modernization was ubiquitous in postwar Japan. The humiliation and painful sting of defeat at the hands of the materially and technologically superior Americans led to the common view that Japanese historical development was incomplete. American occupation officials and policy planners from 1945 to 1952 played this to their advantage. They loudly invoked modernization theory to decry Japanese political, social, and military institutions as "feudal" and stressed the nation's need to modernize and liberalize (US Joint Chiefs of Staff 1945). Many Japanese agreed with this assessment. Newspapers in the postwar and Cold War periods routinely invoked the need to "modernize" (*kindaika*) and to reform "feudal" elements in Japanese politics, industry, and society ("Hōkenteki na seiji keitai, kyōsei henkō ni wa bei ga josei," *Asahi shinbun*, 3 September 1945; "Sangyō kindaika ga hitsuyō," *Asahi shinbun*, 7 November 1952). Japanese intellectuals such as Ōtsuka Hisao, too, emphasized the need for Japan to develop a "modern type of human

being” based on Weberian notions of rationality (cited in Conrad 2012, 205). And many Japanese Marxists, especially from the Kōza-JCP faction, argued that lingering feudal or semi-feudal remnants continued to hinder Japan’s capitalistic development and to render the task of a bourgeois-democratic revolution still incomplete (Hoston 1986, Chapter 9). At the same time, in the context of the country’s high economic growth from the 1960s, Japan came to be seen as a successful example of modernization for other developing Asian nations to follow. This was evidenced when elite Japanese and American intellectuals, with the support of the Ford Foundation, met in Hakone in 1960 to positively evaluate Japan’s modernization. The results of the conference were published in 1965 as a collection of articles under the title *Changing Attitudes Toward Japanese Modernization*, edited by Marius Jansen.<sup>1</sup>

Yet what made the modernity narrative so appealing in Japan was its handling of Japan’s wartime past. Its proponents said that Japan had been “hijacked” by renegade militarists who clung to outdated feudal ideologies and who had derailed Japan’s otherwise smooth progression toward liberal capitalist modernity (Dower 1999). Defeat at the hands of the Americans, in this sense, was not shameful, therefore, but rather, serendipitous and liberating since it had set Japan back on the “proper” course of modernization. Of course, this narrative was mostly untrue. Many prominent liberals, intelligentsia, and most of the public in Japan had vociferously supported the war. Neither was the Japanese military the backwards apparatus that many made it out to be, nor was liberal capitalist modernity as guilt-free and innocuous as presumed.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, the narrative was convenient for US planners who desperately wanted to mold Japan into a staunch Cold War ally while keeping much of the former ruling class intact. It also served the interests of Japanese elites who could downplay their own war

responsibility by scapegoating the Japanese military.

The modernity narrative of defeat was embraced by Japanese veterans, too. In this regard, the common view of Japanese veterans’ narratives as either heroic accounts of battle or as tragic victim tales of suffering is incomplete. In reality, naked praise of the IJA or the Japanese empire was rare in most veterans’ narratives, while lower-ranking officers routinely critiqued their superiors. At the same time, the archetypal heroic image of the Japanese soldier loyal to the death became an uncomfortable anachronism. Instead, the new exemplar soldier was a rational, occasionally cynical, realist and individualist – in short, a “modern man.” In this milieu, the word “hero” became synonymous with soldiers who *abandoned* the IJA ethos instead of continuing to embrace it. This was precisely the heroic mold personified by the protagonists of Furukawa and Kamiko’s war tales. Moreover, the modernity narrative enabled veterans to find meaning in defeat by positing that their comrades’ deaths had not been in vain but, rather, had paved the way for the postwar “peace and prosperity” (*heiwa to hanei*). This served the dual function of justifying not only Japan’s past but also its *present*. Moreover, behind this seemingly benign assumption, lay the myth that liberal capitalist modernity represented an improvement over the past, as well as the implicit supposition that Japan’s “prosperity” was thanks largely to its postwar relationship with the US. In short, the modernity narrative of defeat, thus, signaled the formation of a new kind of postwar Japanese nationalism which, by putting key assumptions about modernity and the US-Japan alliance at its core, was able to reimagine the war not as a substantial defeat but instead as a symbolic victory.<sup>3</sup>

### **Furukawa Shigemi’s *Gate of Life and***

## Death

Aspects of modernization theory appeared in veterans' war tales almost immediately after the war ended. One author who expressed such sentiments was Furukawa Shigemi. Furukawa was an intellectual who was drafted into the Independent Anti-Aircraft 81st Battalion and sent to Okinawa in 1944. He was captured in the April-June 1945 Battle of Okinawa and held in an American POW camp. The experience of being held prisoner was transformative for Furukawa, and he came to see the Americans in an extremely positive light (*Ryūkyū shinpō*, 25 October 1973). Furukawa immediately began to write down his personal experiences of battle while in the camp, and these were published by Chūō-sha in 1947 as *Okinawa no saigo* (*The Last Battle at Okinawa*). The second half of that text described Furukawa's transformation from ardent Japanese militarist to devout believer in the superiority and benevolence of his American captors. The Americans, in his view, were "warm disciples of love" who had freed him and other Japanese from the bonds of slavery-like conditions. "The kindness of the Americans," he said, "was unparalleled in history" (cited in Yanai 2015, 327, 335). While these certainly may have been Furukawa's genuine feelings, the geopolitical significance of such portrayals for American-occupied Japan and Okinawa in the postwar also cannot be overemphasized. As Yanai Takashi wrote, *The Last Battle at Okinawa* was "a model text" for the occupying US General Headquarters (Yanai 2015, 342). This was not missed by critics at the time either. Okinawan scholar Nakahara Zenchū, for instance, criticized Furukawa for still being an "ultra-nationalist," saying that he had simply switched his loyalties after the war (Yanai 2015, 333-4). But this did not dissuade Furukawa from clinging to the key message of the text: that America had freed Japan from an ideology of death and given the Japanese a new lease on life.

Furukawa reiterated this message in his following novel, *Gate of Life and Death: Secret Records of the Battle of Okinawa* (*Shisei no mon: Okinawa-sen hiroku*), published in 1949. The story focused on the experiences of the fictional character Colonel Mihara, the chief battle strategist for the Battle of Okinawa. In fact, Furukawa based Mihara's character on the real-life Colonel Yahara Hiromichi. Yahara had originally intended to personally publish his memoirs of the battle; however, American occupation censors objected to publishing the testimony of a former high-ranking IJA officer. Meanwhile, Furukawa, who had met Yahara in 1947 through his publisher, Chūō-sha, suggested to Yahara to let him publish the account as a novel (*shōsetsu*) instead to bypass GHQ censors' objections. This was the origin of Furukawa's *Gate of Life and Death*. While the battle descriptions remained the same as those in Yahara's original account, Furukawa dramatized much of the rest and, as he explained later, interjected his own ideas and aims (*shukō*) into the text (see *Ryūkyū shinpō*, 27 October 1973).

Furukawa's key argument was that Mihara's eventual abandonment of the IJA and his surrender to US troops signified a "mental revolution," a move away from antiquated notions of glorified battlefield death toward the embrace of a new, more rational modernity which valued individual life above all else. Furukawa figuratively portrays this transformation as passing through the "gate of life and death," an idea which is further reinforced toward the end of the text through the symbolic imagery of Mihara emerging from the underground caves where he and much of the rest of the IJA had been hiding in the battle. As Furukawa wrote in the text's preface, "this past tragedy which, for the fallen tens of thousands was a 'gate of death' can also be a 'gate of life' to a better Japan and a better humanity, and [...] it can provide a point of reflection in the construction of a new Japan" (Furukawa 1950, 2-3). In this way, the story

appeals to normative discourses of “modernity” to find meaning in and to justify Japan’s wartime defeat. On top of this, Furukawa portrays Mihara as a new heroic archetype whose true heroic act is his ability to *overcome* the IJA’s “backwards” military traditions; his inversion of military values by embracing surrender makes him an “anti-hero-hero.”

Mihara is portrayed as a brilliant strategist whose genius is stymied by the IJA’s outdated tactics. From the beginning, Mihara laments the military’s losing strategy of an all-out frontal attack against the materially superior US troops as a “defeatist ideology” and evidence that the IJA is a “third-rate army” (Furukawa 1950, 21). But his feelings of hopelessness are partly assuaged after he meets a young Okinawan woman, Kina Ryōko. Kina pleads with Mihara to “please, [...] be victorious in battle” (Furukawa 1950, 60). Her request convinces Mihara to fight to win. Mihara realizes that his sense of hopelessness and fatalism stemmed from his continued reliance on Japanese military morality which emphasized heroic war death and eternal enshrinement at the Yasukuni Shrine (on the Yasukuni Shrine, see Akazawa 2015; Takenaka 2015). But, he thinks, Japan cannot be protected just by a bunch of loyal spirits – the country needs living people to fight for it, too. So, Mihara muses, “for my sake and for Kina’s sake, I’m going to find a way to win this fight. I’m going to live [...] I’m going to do away with ideas of *kamikaze*, and military gods, and the eternal destiny of the imperial house – with all of this mysticism – and fight using all the power of my logic” (Furukawa 1950, 62). It is worth noting that Mihara is not abandoning *militarism* or *war*. Rather, he abandons his old military morality because he sees it as a stumbling block to victory. Moreover, he adopts this position because of Kina’s request for Japanese military protection and saving.

In this regard, Kina’s character, as a stand-in for Okinawa in general, serves two

metaphorical functions, both relevant to the author’s central thesis on Japan’s modernity. First, she illustrates an example of the stock literary trope of the “noble savage,” who, since she presumably lacks the means or autonomy to do so herself, requires outside “protection” from a superior force. That is to say, she is purely a functional device to justify Japanese colonial and wartime military rule in Okinawa. Second, her character reinforces Furukawa’s belief in a linear and hierarchical historical development on which the “modernity narrative” and modernization theory rest. This view simultaneously allows his protagonist, Mihara, to lament Japan’s “backwardness” vis-à-vis the US on the one hand, while lordling Japan’s supposed “superior” development over Okinawa, on the other.

At the same time, Mihara’s views on modernity cause tension between himself and other IJA battle officers. As American forces close in on the 32nd Army’s underground headquarters below Shuri Castle, Mihara squabbles with commanding generals Ushijima Mitsuru and Chō Isamu. The latter advocates for full frontal attacks against the advancing U.S. forces, while Mihara argues instead for a defensive war of attrition. The text is clear in its alliances, and the description of Chō and the other commanders is far from flattering: their so-called bravery is “nothing but emotion and impulse,” and “they completely lack the mental capacity for logic and calm calculation. Their understanding of modern warfare is next to nothing” (Furukawa 1950, 150-1). Moreover, Mihara contrasts what he sees as superior American battle strategy with the inferior tactics of the IJA.

These two armies couldn’t have been more dissimilar: one was fighting a battle, the other simply doing business; one was engaged in mad struggle while the other was level-headed; one was in disarray

while the other had a complete division of labor; one was physically laden with heavy baggage while the other looked like they were going out for a picnic. That these two armies, mismatched beyond comparison, should have been made to carry on in brutal and vicious combat for three long months, this can only be ascribed to two opposing worldviews: one which valued individual human life and one which did not (Furukawa 1950, 125).

Men, you have truly fought with incredible bravery. However, the fate of this battle has already been decided. [...] Bound by feudal customs, your superiors continue to believe that there is honor in death. But now it is your turn to decide. Live, and return home to your families who love you. We assure you that your lives will be spared (Furukawa 1950, 240).

In this context, the battle begins to seem like a cruel joke - a *devaluation* of individuality and human life. Yet Mihara's attempt to reassert his humanity reveals that he is more concerned about his own survival than protecting the lives of others. This is evidenced in his firm insistence to fight a war of attrition to the very last man, woman, and child. As the Americans close in on Shuri, Mihara decides to retreat to Mabuni on the island's southernmost tip. The irony is that most civilian and soldier deaths on Okinawa resulted from the 32nd Army's decision to continue fighting and to retreat south. While this facet is lost on Mihara and the novel in general, from the perspective of historical hindsight, we can critically interpret Mihara's fight for individual survival as a direct cause of other's suffering.

Ushijima and Chō ignore these pleas and, epitomizing the former IJA ethos against which Mihara struggles, ultimately commit ritual suicide (*seppuku*). Mihara critically attributes their inability to surrender to the "evil customs" (*rōshū*) of Japan's past (Furukawa 1950, 243-4). But Mihara is ready to step through "the gate of life" by surrendering to the Americans. His psychological transformation is reinforced through the imagery of him emerging from the tunnel where he and the others have been hiding. As the text describes it, "before he had even been aware of it, he had crossed that seemingly insurmountable divide; he had cast aside that monstrous entity, the military, shed the husk of his military clothing, and had become human" (Furukawa 1950, 263). Mihara moves from his military hideout to another cave occupied by Okinawan civilians. This is significant from the perspective of Mihara's transformation since, as the text implies, he had "completely abandoned his previous identity as a military planner" (Furukawa 1950, 280). The main narrative concludes with Mihara boldly and heroically leading the Okinawans to the safety of the Americans.

Mihara's decision results in disaster. Along with Ushijima and Chō, Mihara hides in a cave overlooking the steep ocean cliffs and hills of Mabuni. But their location is discovered by the Americans who target the full weight of their ship cannons and aerial bombs on the area. Moreover, the Americans broadcast surrender announcements over loudspeakers to urge Japanese troops out of the caves. The announcements reinforce the novel's central premise that Japan's wartime defeat represented a symbolic shift from feudalism to modernity.



**Figure 1: The cave at Mabuni where Col. Yahara hid with Generals Chō and Ushijima toward the end of the Battle of Okinawa. The latter two ended their lives at the spot. Photo by author, 24 April 2017**

The tragic historical irony of *Gate of Life and Death* is that Mihara's personal odyssey was too late for the approximately 200,000 Okinawan civilians and Japanese and American soldiers who lost their lives in the fighting. Of course, the novel is partly fiction. But even in this fictional universe, we cannot ignore the fact that Mihara still bears responsibility for the results of his actual decision to stubbornly wage a futile war of attrition. None of this is addressed in the novel itself. Rather, for the text, even Mihara serves merely as a vehicle to emphasize embracing the ideological shift away from the outmoded and presumably "feudal" ethos of the former IJA. This is underscored in the last two pages of the text, where the narrative voice is taken up from the perspective of an unnamed American reporter flying back to the US after the battle has concluded.

It is clear that, by the end of the Battle of Okinawa, something was happening within the Japanese military. Prior to this point, having been educated that it was dishonorable to be taken prisoner of war,

Japanese soldiers had fought [...] bravely to the very last man, before invariably ending their own lives. Yet at Okinawa, those same soldiers [...] surrendered, one after the other, to American forces. This fact confirms that the Battle of Okinawa has caused a profound shift in the hearts and minds of the Japanese (Furukawa 1950, 286).

As these comments illustrate, the story was never just about Mihara but was instead an allegorical attempt to describe a "profound shift in the hearts and minds of *the Japanese* [emphasis mine]" (Furukawa 1950, 286). In this sense it is significant that the final passages are written from the perspective of an American journalist. In the context of modernization theory, the Americans' role in Japan was that of a benevolent harbinger of modernity. The final comments illustrate this paternalism. It was only after the Japanese surrendered to American forces that they could, to borrow another phrase from the novel's last pages, "cast off the scales of illusion" and "live [...] as human beings" (Furukawa 1950, 286).

### **Kamiko Kiyoshi's *I Didn't Die on Leyte***

In the context of the late 1940s, when Furukawa wrote *Gate of Life and Death*, many Western observers disparagingly saw Japan as a case of failed modernity. But by the 1960s, and with one of the highest growth rates in the world, Japan once again was seen as a model success story to be replicated elsewhere (Yamashita 2016, xxvii). Meanwhile, the idea that Japan had become strong again fueled a domestic revival of popular and political nationalism. In this background, many veterans' war tales re-evaluated the causes and meanings of Japan's wartime defeat. One such work was Kamiko Kiyoshi's 1965, nonfiction



memoir, *I Didn't Die on Leyte*. Kamiko had fought as a Corporal in the 1944-5 Battle of Leyte, the decisive battle on the Philippines, and he knew all too well about defeat. Yet he also saw Japan's economic prosperity *after* this. So, Kamiko causally linked these two phenomena through the idea of what Akiko Hashimoto called the "fortunate fall;" in Kamiko's words, the wartime sacrifices of Japanese soldiers "become the foundation of the prosperity that Japan enjoys today" (Hashimoto 2015, 10; Kamiko 1988, inside cover).<sup>4</sup> This view turned a literal defeat into a figurative victory. And it justified Japan's postwar model of growth and modernity.<sup>5</sup>

Unlike Mihara's character, when Kamiko arrives at Leyte in October 1944 as part of the 57th Infantry Regiment, he is brimming with confidence and pride as part of the "strongest Army unit in the world." "None of us were afraid of the enemy," he explains, "and we all were itching to see fighting at the front" (Kamiko 1988, v.1, 26). But his self-assurance is not enough to compensate for the power differential he observes between US and Japanese troops. This irks Kamiko not because of any moral qualms about war and killing. Rather, he is frustrated that factors beyond his control are making the battle an unfair fight. For instance, he observes of the American forces that, "as if by clockwork, their attacks commence at ten in the morning and finish at five in the evening. It's just like they're a government official or businessman going to work at the office" (Kamiko 1988, v.1, 81). And he contrasts this with the Japanese Army's round-the-clock marching and nighttime attacks, wryly musing that, "far from taking breaks to rest, we don't even have time to take a shit in the field." At which point he admits: "when I really thought about it, the American's way of fighting was far more rational (*gōriteki*)" (Kamiko 1988, v.1, 81-2).

Then, as the battle takes a turn for the worse, Kamiko begins to have serious doubts about the

IJA's methods. When most of his Yahiro Battalion is wiped out in the November Battle of Breakneck Ridge, Kamiko is forced to retreat. Yet since the term "retreat" is not in the Japanese military lexicon, the commander instead uses the euphemistic term "*tenshin*" meaning literally to "change course." This comes as a shock to Kamiko who "had been taught the idea of retreating itself sullied the glory of the emperor's army (*kōgun*)" (Kamiko 1988, v.1, 101). Accordingly, Kamiko is initially wracked by shame and guilt. "What in the hell were we doing?" he thinks, "Weren't we fleeing battle? Fleeing of our own accord? Wasn't this a complete rejection of ourselves as military men? A total collapse?" (Kamiko 1988, v.1, 104). Yet after further self-reflection, Kamiko realizes that his actions were "nothing to be ashamed of" and that it was only human to want to save his life (Kamiko 1988, v.1, 105). This leads him to change his outlook on the battle. Instead of "needlessly throwing my life away," he determines, "I would fight my utmost until my very last breath." And he continues, "I convinced myself that there was no contradiction between honoring a spirit of rationality and a spirit of bravery at the same time" (Kamiko 1988, v.1, 104-5).

In light of his earlier positive appraisal of US troops, Kamiko's invocation of the notion of *rationality*, which subsequently becomes his *modus operandi* and basis of critique against the IJA, is significant. As he explains, "a military instruction that didn't teach how to retreat and only focused on how to die in battle - was this really a rational education? What's more, did such education really make us stronger fighters?" (Kamiko 1988, v.1, 112). Thus, Kamiko's main contention is purely a strategic one focused on making the Japanese military *stronger*. These feelings are further reinforced in subsequent scenes. For instance, he marvels at the US's "mechanization of war" and critiques the IJA's emphasis on hand-to-hand combat as "a barbaric relic from the ancient past" (Kamiko 1988, v.1, 159-60).

Differences in the two armies' food supplies are also striking. While the Japanese were fighting with "just some specks of rice floating in soup" the Americans were "doing battle on stomachs full of nutritious rations" (Kamiko 1988, v.1, 184). "A fight between a starving army on the one hand and an army full of stamina on the other. We didn't stand a chance," he concludes (Kamiko 1988, v.1, 184). By viewing the war as simply a problem of material resources, Kamiko is able to abstract questions of individual responsibility. "Responsibility for this facet didn't lie with any individual soldier," he thinks, "rather it was the fault of those far away from the battlefield: Japan's leaders and their ways of thinking" (Kamiko 1988, v.1, 185). Ultimately, the feeling that Japanese "leaders were ordering us to our deaths, even though they knew we had no chance of winning" leads Kamiko to give up on the IJA and attempt to escape the island (Kamiko 1988, v.1, 227).

Thus, Kamiko sees desertion as the *logical* decision. As Kamiko and a small band of like-minded escapees flee Leyte to Medellin on the northern section of Cebu Island and then to Negros Island, robbing from Filipinos, Americans, and other Japanese units along the way, his grudge against the IJA grows stronger. At the same time, Kamiko goes to pains to emphasize his patriotic credentials, saying: "if it was to save Japan, I would gladly die for my country. But now our military leaders were just throwing men's lives away just to preserve their empty senses of pride or out of some irrational sense of duty, even when there was no chance in hell of winning" (Kamiko 1988, v.2, 263-4). And he speculates on the reasons for their dire situation, concluding that "it was all because of the [...] Imperial Japanese Army which says that it's dishonorable to retreat, or that surrender is a crime worthy of death. [...] The Japanese military philosophy, formalism, and emphasis on spirit had halted their progress and had eventually caused Japan to lose the war" (Kamiko 1988, v.2, 264-5). In this passage, Kamiko even breaks the temporal

continuity of his narrative to argue his reasons for Japan's wartime defeat. After spending months roaming the mountainous jungle of Negros in near starvation, Kamiko is eventually captured and held as a POW by the US until his repatriation to Japan in December 1945.

The narrative of *I Didn't Die in Leyte* ends shortly after Kamiko's capture. But the author's personal odyssey continued, and twenty years later, Kamiko returned to Leyte under very different circumstances. His nonfiction novel had attracted wide attention; Kamiko's desertion was no longer a disgrace; and for all intents and purposes, Japan had become one of the most modern countries on earth. But, for Kamiko, one thing remained incomplete: the remains of the approximately 81,000 Japanese troops who died in Leyte still lay uncollected where they fell. For Kamiko, who saw Japan's postwar prosperity as made possible precisely because of Japanese troops' wartime sacrifices, this was unforgivable. And it threw the entire question of Japan's postwar modernization into question. This was made clear when Kamiko met American author John Toland in 1966. Toland, who was in Japan conducting research for his forthcoming book, was shocked to discover that most of Japanese soldiers' remains still lay uncollected in the Philippines, and he reportedly told Kamiko that such a situation was "a disgrace against civilization!" (Kamiko 1967, 233).

Kamiko agreed. That summer, he and Toland visited the Philippines on their own personal bone-collecting campaign (on bone-collecting campaigns in postwar Japan, see Trefalt's contribution in this special issue and Trefalt 2017). But the trip was about more than just assuaging feelings of personal guilt: it was also part of a modernizing mission. Kamiko found Filipinos largely willing to help him collect soldiers' remains. Yet when one group of villagers asked him to pay for the remains they had gathered, Kamiko was outraged. "There's no way I'm buying those bones," he reportedly

said. “No amount of money in the world could buy the precious bones of those who gave their lives for their country. [...] However, if you give me your cooperation, I’ll show you a token of my gratitude” (Kamiko 1967, 242). The “token of gratitude” to which Kamiko referred was Japanese development of the Philippines. As Kamiko later explained, in return for this he hoped that Filipinos would care for and memorialize the remains of fallen Japanese soldiers. From the perspective of modernization theory, Kamiko’s comments were revealing. His 1966 visit to the Philippines was an attempt to rectify Japan’s “uncivilized” treatment of its war dead on the one hand, while at the same time bring the gifts of Japan’s superior modernity to the less-developed Philippines, on the other.<sup>6</sup> In this sense, his lecture on the proper treatment of the war dead echoed Toland’s earlier critique of Japan’s equally inadequate response.

### The Internationalization of *Senkimono*

Kamiko and Furukawa’s war tales show how some Japanese veteran authors negotiated their war memories in the context of larger, transnational discourses of geopolitical significance, i.e., modernization theory. This problematizes a tendency of prior scholarship to perceive Japan’s war memories purely in national contexts. Indeed, it complicates the notion of postwar Japanese *nationalism* in general. Like modernization theory, war memories and war tales were never just a one-way street; rather they were subject to and were partly products of processes of mutual transference. A facet which illustrates this phenomenon is the translation and retranslation of many Japanese veterans’ war tales, including the ones analyzed in this essay, between English and Japanese. That is to say, translation in this case acted as a kind of ideological amplification for war tales that espoused the modernity narrative of Japan’s

defeat on both sides of the Pacific.

First, the contents of Furukawa’s *Gate of Life and Death* gained a new lease on life when the original figure on which the story was based, Colonel Yahara Hiromichi, finally published his own records of the Battle of Okinawa in 1972 (*Okinawa kessen: kōkyū sanbō no shuki*). While much of the figurative language was absent in Yahara’s straightforward description of military operations, he nevertheless reached the same conclusion as the fictional Mihara: that Japan’s defeat ultimately boiled down to a problem of “outdated” Japanese military vs. “modern” American forces. For instance, he criticized the “absurd suicide tactics” of the IJA and stated that, “there is no room for outdated tactics in modern land warfare,” and, “to the extent possible [sic], one must remain rational at all times” (Yahara 1997, 196-7). Yahara was also unrepentant about his war responsibility. He praised the “valorous fighting” of Japanese troops and portrayed the mass deaths of Okinawan civilians as “regrettable” (Yahara 1997, 105).

Yahara’s text was translated into English in 1995 by Frank Gibney. In fact, Gibney was not an impartial observer. He had fought in the Battle of Okinawa as a Lieutenant in the Naval Reserve and later befriended Yahara after being assigned to his interrogation. More importantly, he was sympathetic to Yahara’s self-assessment and worldview. His depiction of the Colonel as cool and rational, in particular, contrasted with his negative evaluation of the feudalistic characteristics of the former IJA. Yahara, wrote Gibney, was not influenced by the “cult of *Bushido*” that swept the rest of the military. “In his [Yahara’s] mind, action was useless unless based on cool, rational assessments of a situation. [...] His pitilessly rational view of military situations was uncomfortable, stripping away as it did the bulk of the *samurai* bravery myths by which they [IJA officers] lived - and were to die” (Yahara 1997, xix).

Kamiko's account of the Battle of Leyte also reached international audiences when major portions were reproduced in John Toland's 1970 Pulitzer Prize winning account of the Asia-Pacific War, *The Rising Sun: The Decline and Fall of the Japanese Empire, 1936-1945*. The nearly 900-page, narrative history of the war was based on extensive personal interviews with high-ranking diplomatic officials and average Japanese soldiers and civilians. Toland was sympathetic to the wartime suffering of average Japanese and was critical of war in general. But he shared with Kamiko common assumptions about the reasons for Japan's defeat and which echoed key claims of modernization theory. For instance, he wrote:

What Westerners did not realize was that underneath the veneer of modernity and westernization, Japan was still Oriental and that her plunge from feudalism to imperialism had come so precipitously that her leaders, who were interested solely in Western methods, not Western values, had neither the time nor inclination to develop liberalism and humanitarianism (Toland 2003 [1970], 59).

Toland also blamed the IJA for being "caught up in a medieval system" and praised historical colonialism which he said had "helped raise Asia out of the mire of its past" (Toland 2003 [1970], 147, 448). Such statements reinforced the modernization theory myth that equated the liberal capitalist modernity of the Occident with peace and traditional societies, represented here by the Orient, with feudalism and militarism.

So, the internationalization of *senkimono* amplified a shared understanding of the war's origins on both sides of the Pacific. And it was no small coincidence that this historical

interpretation nicely coincided with the dominant Cold War paradigm, modernization theory. Acts of translation in this regard were far from apolitical. Moreover, the trans-Pacific translation of war tales and histories formed a circuit for the conductivity of ideas and gave them an extended shelf life. Just one year after it was published, for instance, Toland's *The Rising Sun* was translated into Japanese as *Dai-Nihon teikoku no kōbō* by major Japanese news outlet, the Mainichi Shinbun Company, and it remains in print today.

### Conclusion: The Irony of Defeat

The war tales by Japanese veteran-authors examined in this essay, Furukawa Shigemi's *Gate of Life and Death* and Kamiko Kiyoshi's *I Didn't Die on Leyte*, illustrate attempts to find meaning in wartime defeat through an investigation and repudiation of its causes. And in both cases, the authors reached a similar conclusion: Japan had lost because it had not sufficiently overcome its "feudal" past and embraced modernity. For the authors, this only happened *after* Japan was vanquished and with the help of the postwar American occupiers. The idea of benevolent Americans guiding the developing world from the feudal past into the light of the liberal capitalist present conveniently also aligned with one of the dominant Cold War paradigms: modernization theory. So, what for veteran-authors such as Furukawa and Kamiko seemed a rational explanation of the causes of war and defeat, also in fact had broader geopolitical and ideological significance. Moreover, by attributing the lost war to feudalism or simple differences in material resources, the authors abstracted thorny issues of individual war responsibility and implicitly endorsed Japan's postwar model of growth.

But there were major problems with this argument. The first was its overestimation of the roles of feudalism. Despite claims

otherwise, mid-twentieth century Japan was not a feudal society but was instead already one of the most modern and advanced nations in non-Western world. Still another, deeper problem was its overvaluation of the perceived benefits of liberal capitalist modernity. Both authors painted a rosy picture of the new world order represented by the “modern” Americans. But the reality was different. Material wealth, advanced technology, and superior weaponry were not liberatory agents but were, for the war’s victims including those killed or injured in American firebombing and nuclear bombings especially, causes of unprecedented horrors and atrocities. In the same way the American liberal postwar order did not end militarism and war but was instead predicated on their continuation. This is not to mention the model of capitalist growth based on rationality and individualism which have failed to achieve social emancipation and led instead to skyrocketing inequality and climate catastrophe.

Yet probably none of this mattered much for Furukawa or Kamiko. For them, Japan’s postwar development was itself enough of the proof of modernity’s successes. They did not need convincing that things had improved. Japan had indeed risen like a phoenix from the ashes; and the ideology and methods of the former IJA had been thoroughly torched in the fire. In this milieu, Kamiko and Mihara’s abandonment of the IJA were posthumously justified and heroized. The irony is that it was defeat, not victory, which made this possible.

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**Justin Aukema** is an Associate Professor in the Faculty of Economics at Osaka Metropolitan University. He received his Ph.D. from Sophia University in 2020. Aukema has written broadly on topics of war history and memory in Japan. Some of his previous articles include "The

Need to Narrate the Tokyo Air Raids: The Literature of Saotome Katsumoto” in *The Routledge Handbook of Modern Japanese Literature* (2016) and “Cultures of (Dis)remembrance and the Effects of Discourse at the Hiyoshidai Tunnels,” *Japan Review*, No.32 (2019). He can be contacted at [aukemajk@gmail.com](mailto:aukemajk@gmail.com)

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> This was the first in the four-volume *Studies in the Modernization of Japan* series published by Princeton University Press. The other volumes were *Political Development in Modern Japan*, ed. Robert Ward (1968), *Tradition and Modernization in Japanese Culture*, ed. Donald Shively (1971), and *Urban Networks in Ch’ing China and Tokugawa Japan*, ed. Gilbert Rozman (1974).

<sup>2</sup> Indeed, Japan’s Meiji oligarchs had made modernization the nation’s guiding principle from the late nineteenth century. And, as Sheldon Garon has demonstrated, Japanese elites with broad public support mostly continued programs to modernize and rationalize society even throughout the war years (1994). Similarly, Tessa Morris-Suzuki has explained that, far from being backwards and feudal, the Japanese military was *at the forefront* of scientific innovation and technological advancement before and during the war years (Morris-Suzuki 1994, 124-44). Even attempts by some wartime intellectuals to escape Western influence and to “overcome modernity,” such as the well-known 1942 symposium “Overcoming Modernity” (*Kindai no chōkoku*), demonstrated, as Richard Calichman has argued, the extent to which Japan was *already* modern (Calichman 2008, ix).

<sup>3</sup> In a similar vein, Shirai Satoshi has also stressed the significance of the U.S.-Japan alliance for the formation of postwar Japanese nationalism. See Shirai 2013 and Shirai 2018.

<sup>4</sup> Kamiko originally published *I Didn’t Die on Leyte* in 1965 with the publisher Shuppan kyōdōsha. The novel then went through its second reprint with the same publisher in 1977. In 1988, it was picked up by the major popular publisher, Hayakawa, for its third reprint. In this essay, I cite from the 1988, Hayakawa version.

<sup>5</sup> The idea that Japanese soldiers’ war deaths were not in vain but had contributed to postwar “peace and prosperity” (*heiwa to hanei*) was shared and voiced widely throughout the postwar by politicians, veterans, and bereaved family members. Critical scholarship has already taken this notion to task for attempting to justify and beautify soldiers’ war deaths and the war (Hashimoto 2015, 10; Kingston 2017). Yet what I want to point out, in addition to this, (and what I am even more skeptical of), is that proponents of the “peace and prosperity” narrative also took for it granted that the present represented an *improvement* over the past. It was in this sense that the notion was most similar to, and indeed even reinforced, modernization theory.

<sup>6</sup> Arnel Joven’s paper in this special issue examines in more detail war memory and commemoration in the Philippines.