

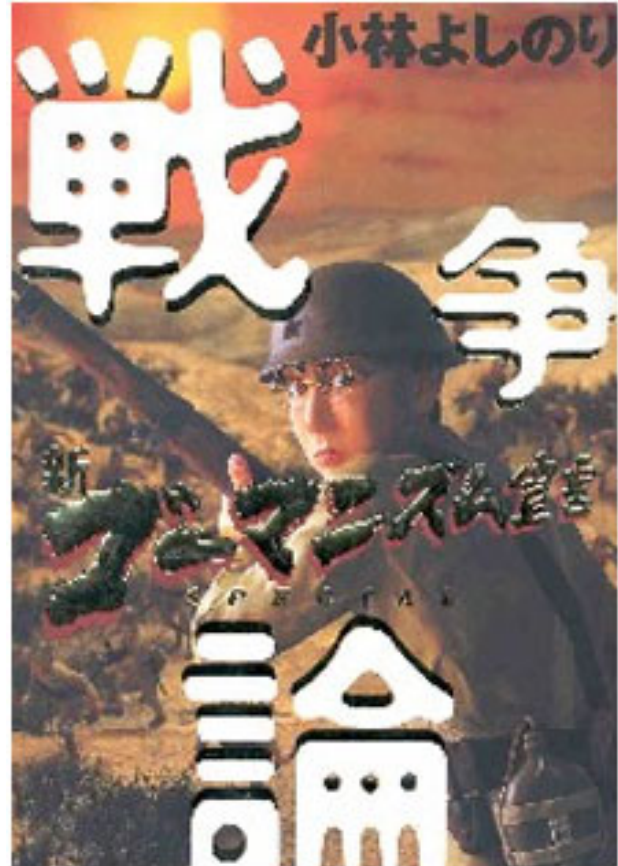
"Will you go to war? Or will you stop being Japanese?" Nationalism and History in Kobayashi Yoshinori's *Sensoron*

Rumi Sakamoto

"Will you go to war? Or will you stop being Japanese?" Nationalism and History in Kobayashi Yoshinori's *Sensoron*

Rumi SAKAMOTO

As a study of the influence and nature of popular nationalism in Japan, this article examines the relationship between nationalism and history in Kobayashi Yoshinori's best-selling manga comic, *Sensoron* (On War, 1998). *Sensoron* heralded the recent trend of nationalistic manga targeted at younger generations [1] and has been instrumental in popularizing the ideas of new-generation rightists and historical revisionists over the last decade. Kobayashi explains his strategy as "using the language of daily life in order to discuss politics and ideas" [2], adding that he created *Sensoron* as "something that intellectuals cannot write - something that young people find pleasure to read and get completely absorbed in, and yet is not light but deep". [3] He also emphasizes that what he writes is based on the "common sense of common folks (*shomin no joshiki*)". Such an anti-elitist strategy, along with constant caricaturizing of academics, journalists, political activists and politicians as "uncool old men (*dasai oyaji*)" as well as his well-constructed and marketed charismatic personality, has proved very successful. Indeed, via the popular medium of manga, Kobayashi has ostensibly "created a discourse that is more influential than that of any other "theorist" in the 1990s". [4]



Sensoron

Kobayashi's practice of using a popular cultural product for disseminating nationalistic perspectives about Japanese modern history is important as it potentially links the "naïve" or "pop" nationalism with more political forms of nationalism. On the one hand, there is a considerable distance between "pop" and political nationalisms. Those who wave rising-sun flags at the World Cup do not necessarily support Japan's recent political moves towards the amendment of the peace constitution, the PKO (Peacekeeping Operations), or former

Prime Minister Koizumi's visits to the Yasukuni Shrine. On the other hand, popular and political nationalisms are not completely isolated from each other. Popular nationalism as a socio-cultural and symbolic phenomenon may inform, support, or influence the decision-making process of political elites and contribute to the formulation of the more overtly political environment. The nature of the relationship between popular and more political strains of nationalism, therefore, needs to be carefully examined rather than simply assumed. And Kobayashi's manga, which weaves a nationalistic interpretation of history around controversial issues such as the Nanjing Massacre, the "comfort women" and the Yasukuni Shrine, is a useful site for examining this interface.

Popular nationalism in contemporary Japan

Recent works on nationalism in Japan point out the ahistorical and apolitical nature of contemporary popular nationalism. Kayama Rika coined the term "petit nationalism" referring to the "pop" and "innocent/naïve (*mujaki-na*)" patriotism among Japanese youths ("I love Japan!") seen in such phenomena as the enthusiastic national football-team supporters and "Japanese-language boom". [5] Iida Yumiko has examined a new type of nationalism, in which identification with the "pop and imaginary national community" is achieved via consumption of national icons, such as rising-sun face-painting as pleasurable and fetishized symbols that are void of memories of the past and the war. [6] From a slightly different angle, Kitada Akihiro has argued that post-1980s nationalism is characterized by post-postmodern "romantic cynicism", the product of a complicit relationship between an extreme preoccupation with "form" without historical consciousness on the one hand and desire for connection and emotional attachment on the other. [7]

These studies suggest that the new "pop" nationalism in contemporary Japan has little to do with people's serious belief in nationalism as an ideology or with their identification with the state as a political and historical entity. Rather, it involves a naïve, almost unthinking (in Kitada's case "cynical") acceptance of the proposition "I love Japan because I am Japanese" and the desire to connect with others here and now via some de-historicized, empty symbols ("forms" for Kitada). [8] This popular appetite for national pride and enjoyment in contemporary Japan is often associated with the loss of meaning and identity in advanced capitalist/consumer societies and also the high level of uncertainty that has characterized Japan's post-bubble economy. Consuming the "nation" as a depoliticized icon alleviates the pain of oppression in a highly "managed" society, compensates for the uncertain sense of self, and creates an imaginary connection with the other atomized individuals in the urban, often dehumanized, life-worlds of today's generations. Oguma and Ueno's term "nationalism as 'healing'" [9] captures this aspect well.

The lack of identification with the state suggests that unlike the wartime ultra-nationalism, in which the state subsumed individual consciousness and mobilized people towards the goals of the state under the emperor, [10] today's popular nationalism does not necessarily lead to militaristic, expansionist forms of nationalism. Although the possibility and danger of naïve/pop nationalism being mobilized by the state does exist, the majority of Japanese today, as Asaba argues, would not put the state before their own private lives and security. Ordinary people's desire for a sense of national pride is sufficiently fulfilled by, for example, the international success of Japanese athletes and artists. [11] And unless the security of individual life is (perceived to be) threatened by an external enemy, [12] this kind of "pop" and "petit" nationalism may remain largely unconnected to more political forms of

nationalism.



Kobayashi Yoshinori

The popular expressions of nationalism circulating in today's Japan, however, are not entirely free from political implications or the memory of the past and the war. With the bursting of Japan's bubble economy in the early 1990s and the subsequent economic recession, post-1980s Japan has seen the rise of a new-generation of rightists embracing a brand of historical revisionism that attempts to establish national pride not on claims of Japan's culturally based economic success and advantages - as had been the case during the 1970s and 1980s with the concept of *nihonjinron* (the discourse of Japanese uniqueness) - but by reinterpreting Japan's modern history, and this has found some expressions within popular culture.

The views emanating from this reassessment of

Japan's past and its role as a source of national pride and identity became widely available and popularized by the late-1990s and can be summarized as follows: i) it is natural and healthy to love one's country, and Japanese people should be proud of Japan; ii) post-war Japanese public discourse had been dominated by the left, which has presented a "distorted" and "masochistic" history to the public and children in particular;



Kobayashi denounces the brain-washing of children at peace museums

iii) Japan need not apologize (or has apologized enough) over its war-time deeds; iv) China and Korea's anti-Japanese sentiments and actions are unreasonable and irrational; and v) China and Korea are using history as a diplomatic card. Indeed, within the realm of popular culture, "history" itself - and here "history" largely means the history of the Asia-Pacific War - has joined an already popular array of dehistoricized signs and symbols that encourage consumers to see themselves as national subjects. [13]

So, what role do history and images of the past play in Kobayashi's construction of contemporary popular nationalism? In the following sections, I will examine *Sensoron* in more detail and analyze the relationship between nationalism and history he presents in this text. Examining Kobayashi's *manga* will

shed light on the “popular” dimensions of contemporary Japanese nationalism and historical revisionism and also the extent to which the effective use of popular media has contributed to its increasing presence over the last decade. [14]

Examining popular discourse is important because much of the so-called “debate” on contentious issues of memory and history (such as the Nanjing Massacre, the “comfort women” and the Yasukuni Shrine) is disseminated through popular media; there is a vast amount of popular writing on these topics in books, newspapers, general-interest magazines and very importantly on the web. Many scholarly works on these issues exist, but are yet to filter through into the public discourse or consciousness. Popular media material and its influence on perceptions needs to be taken into account in order to understand the current controversy over history and memory not only within Japan but also between Japan and China/Korea.

History as a place where boys can be heroes again

Kobayashi is a well-known manga artist, who is associated with the nationalist-revisionist movement that appeared in the 1990s. He is an honorary director of the New History Textbook Group, and has also been linked with Fujioka Nobukatsu’s Liberal History Group. [15] As well as authoring numerous manga and publishing a number of books both on his own and with some academics, Kobayashi edits *Washizumu* (Me-ism), a glossy “intellectual entertainment magazine that unites Japan” (according to the blurb on the front cover of the magazine), which he started in 2002. Since *Sensoron*, his first work to tackle historical issues in any detail, he has been consistently and energetically disseminating his perspectives on Japan’s modern history, the meaning of the Asia-Pacific War, and the importance of patriotism in contemporary Japan.



Washizumu (Me-ism)

Sensoron is a thick volume that appeared alongside his long-running series *Gomanizumu sengen* (proclamations of arrogance) [16] where Kobayashi offered his personal, and often provocative, opinions on various social issues. [17] The proportion of written text is very high, making this manga more like heavily illustrated political essays. It presents the Liberal History Group’s view that Japan fought a war of justice, aiming to liberate Asia from Western, “white” imperialism, and that today’s Japanese, who denigrate the war heroes as war criminals, are a product of US brainwashing since the occupation. In each chapter, Kobayashi appears as the protagonist, presenting opinions on such issues as the “comfort women”, the Tokyo War Crimes Tribunal, A-bombs, and, of course, the Nanjing Massacre.

The cover of *Sensoron* carries a provocative question: “Will you go to war, or will you stop

being Japanese?” and tells readers, “You can now understand Japan; Japan is going to change!” *Sensoron* has become a truly social phenomenon, selling more than 650,000 copies. It provoked wide public responses, including a number of serious (and often angry) criticisms by well-established academics; [18] one book-length critique by a left-wing academic even provoked a lawsuit, making Kobayashi and his manga even more newsworthy. [19] *Sensoron* also attracted wide overseas attention, and even rated mention in the new edition of *Sources of Japanese Tradition*, an authoritative collection of primary texts published from the Columbia University Press. [20]

Patriotism for Kobayashi clearly is a given. He maintains that he is merely “trying to wake up patriotism that exists in ordinary people, rather than trying to force upon them something that does not exist”. [21] Historical images, therefore, are invoked in his attempt to remind ordinary people of their “unconscious patriotism (*mujikaku-na aikokushin*)”. One way in which *Sensoron* attempts this is by illustrating the war-time heroism of “dying for the nation” with the poignant and powerful image of kamikaze soldiers, glorifying the idea of their self-sacrifice for something larger; something that is beyond mere individuals. This “something larger” is defined variously throughout the text as “loved ones”, “homeland”, “birth-town”, “family”, “the emperor”, “national future”, “history and geography [of Japan]” and “the public”, but “not ... the state system”. [22]

In other words, this intangible “something” emanates from what Benedict Anderson called “the beauty of *gemeinschaft*”, found in the unchosen “natural tie” between the individual and the nation as an imagined community. Dying for something that one has no choice over, as Anderson suggests, signifies a “disinterested love and solidarity” and is an ultimate act, pure sacrifice. [23] It also fits the cultural codes of bushido, the aesthetics of

honourable death. It is precisely this kind of profoundly self-sacrificing love and loyalty that *Sensoron* plays up via the image of kamikaze soldiers for the purpose of “waking up” ordinary people’s patriotism.



Kamikaze pilot Hoshikawa Hachiro

In *Sensoron* Japanese soldiers are said to be “heroes (*ei-yu*)” but not in the sense of specifically named individuals whose unique character, courage, intelligence, and so on lead the country to victory; rather, the essence of kamikaze is found in the anonymity of its heroes and their embodiment of Japanese aesthetics of honourable death. They were ordinary people who believed in the cause of the “justice in war” and gave up their own lives in order to protect their loved ones and homeland. Their anonymity and ordinariness

can powerfully represent a whole nation precisely because of the lack of individuality, which allows them to represent any and all.

This representation of ordinary people doing extraordinary things in a fictionalized past has both a nostalgic and utopian function as Kobayashi counterposes the heroism and self-sacrifice of the war-time soldiers with today's youths, who, according to him, only care about themselves. The opening scene of *Sensoron* comments on contemporary Japan's "sickening peace" [24] and its detrimental effect on people's morality. He says that today's youths are mere consumers; they are materialistic, egotistic and selfish individuals, who do not have a true sense of the self, let alone the willingness to die for the nation. He contrasts the image of today's youths who "have been living in a wealthy society without any inconvenience, isolated from the community and history that support their individuality" [25] with the image of war-time Japanese whose highly developed self-discipline and sense of community enabled them to sacrifice their personal feelings and even their lives for the public good. War-time Japanese had something to believe in; today's Japanese are apathetic relativists and nihilists. War-time Japanese felt and accepted a strong connection with their birth-place, family, history and community; today's Japanese ignore and even reject such connections, floating around without any solid sense of belonging. What is expressed here, then, is an anxiety over the growing effect of modernization, urbanization, and globalization in Japan. With many references to youth violence, cult religion, lack of order and security in contemporary civil life scattered through its text, *Sensoron* effectively speaks to and exploits the generalized sense of anxiety in contemporary Japanese society and nostalgically constructs war-time Japan as the good old days.

But while *Sensoron* utilizes history as a nostalgic projection against which Kobayashi's

disdain for today's society are contrasted, it has little to do with the reality of war-time Japan. He overemphasizes the glory and honour, paying little attention to the cruelty, misery, and hardship of the war. Kobayashi never questions the education and training aimed at creating the "emperor's subject" and the act of self-sacrifice. Neither does he mention that Japanese soldiers were aggressors and colonizers in Asia. Providing an accurate depiction of Japan's war-time history, however, is not the point here. What is important for Kobayashi is the representation of history and its effect, namely telling his readers that those kamikaze soldiers had something that today's youths do not but should have, and that the solutions for today's chaotic and amoral society, therefore, lie in the past. The image of heroic death in the past is a fiction that serves this purpose.

In addition to its function as a lost utopia, history in *Sensoron* also serves as a background for entertainment through the exploration of human dramas and intense emotion, which, of course, is the business of popular culture such as manga. *Sensoron* associates Japan's war with neither atrocity nor victimhood but rather with drama, romance and excitement as indicated in the repeated use of such words as "love", "courage", "thrilling (*tsukai*)," "moving/touching (*kando*)", and "emotion/human feelings (*jo*)". It is full of masculinized heroism based on discipline, honour and courage ("a man's got to do what a man's got to do"; "can you die for the one you love?"). [26] Operating within popular cultural conventions, *Sensoron* explores a heightened sense of connection with others, the painful awareness of human mortality, and the exhilaration of temporarily losing oneself in something beyond life, time, and space vis-a-vis the image of a kamikaze boy soldier visiting his family for the last time or friendship between two men who are destined to die together. As entertainment and consumer products, history manga (as well as historical novels and films)

have long been exploiting history as a background for fictionalized tales, intended primarily to entertain without any pretense to historical accuracy.

Using history as the backdrop for idealized narratives intended to entertain is, by and large, neither new nor particularly problematic. In *Sensoron*, however, Kobayashi employs both his critique of today's Japan and the popular cultural function of entertaining by appealing to emotion to construct national subjects in contemporary Japan. His call for public morality, intimate relationships, community, independent thinking, romance and meanings, in themselves, are hardly extraordinary. But as soon as he chooses the idealized "national" past (which he claims to be the "truth of history") as a means for critiquing today's Japan, problems arise. The aesthetics of willing sacrifice of oneself, most symbolically in the forms of *gyokusai* (honourable death) and kamikaze attack, are defined as quintessentially Japanese. Thus Kobayashi's presentation of human drama in an idealized historical setting also primarily functions to interpellate the readers into national subjects. Readers, addressed directly by the protagonist Kobayashi, are made to feel proud of being Japanese and experience intense emotions via their identification with the characters "as Japanese". Since the appeal to emotion, not logic, is central to the success of nationalism, popular culture's familiarity with modes for manipulating emotion is particularly useful for advocating nationalism.

"Our granddads" discourse

Kobayashi nevertheless does not tell his readers to die for the nation here and now. Such a demand is not (and cannot be) part of the structure of his nationalist discourse. He sees today's Japan as corrupted by selfish individuals and rampant consumerism; as far as Kobayashi is concerned, there is no longer a Japan that is worth dying for. The heroism of

kamikaze soldiers, the beauty of protecting the nation by sacrificing the self, the nation that is worth giving up one's life for, the aesthetics of self-discipline, and the strong sense of the "public" are all things that can exist only in the past he reconstructs, a past that is glorious and that one can be proud of.

Sensoron instead offers its readers the possibility of a different kind of heroism from that of their grandfathers, namely the heroism of fighting against the dominant post-war discourse on Japan's war of aggression and of "protecting" "our granddads" from contempt and the stigma of war criminals. Kobayashi argues that in the post-war hegemonic discourse of pacifism, the former soldiers – read "our granddads" – have been labelled as "militarists" and shunned by society. Referring to his own grandfather who was first "left behind in New Guinea during the war by the military elite, and then in the masochistic nation, Japan, by the antiwar pacifists ... and yet died without complaining once", [27] he sets up a dichotomy between "our granddads" who "fought for the country ... to fulfil the obligation as members of the nation and responded to the expectation of the nation" [28] and those in post-war government, intelligentsia, and media, who marginalized and cut off "our granddads" as something "dirty" and "evil".

Kobayashi's enemies in this symbolic war are thus largely domestic ones, namely, Japanese politicians, academics, bureaucrats, journalists, and the "lefties" who he says have been brainwashed by the US since the occupation in the immediate postwar period. Set against a domestic backdrop of strong anti-war sentiments and widespread condemnation of Japan's Pacific war, *Sensoron's* message seems to be that by fighting a discursive/symbolic war over the meaning of the past in order to protect "our granddads", "we" can be heroes again, here and now. Readers are invited to join the brave Kobayashi, who declares: "I will protect

our granddads, even if it means that others may call me a bad guy.” [29]

Kobayashi’s agenda is to tell and revive in contemporary Japan what he calls the “granddads’ story” - a story of a “just war” that protected Japan and liberated the “coloured race” from the “white race” - against the dominant narrative of the “mistaken war” in which Japan is an aggressor. While the rhetoric of just war had existed throughout the post-war period within the marginalized rightist discourse, Kobayashi, by heavily relying on the imagery of “our granddads” as voiceless victims (of the government, media, academics - in short, the elite), shifts such a rhetoric from freakish and anachronistic ultranationalism to a common sense stand by a silent majority wrongly suppressed in the hegemonic discourse of postwar Japan. The discursive structure of “recovering the voice and story of the victims” was a familiar one to the Japanese people in the 1990s because of the redress movements for the “comfort women” and other victims of Japanese war-time actions. Kobayashi uses the same logic in representing the Japanese soldiers as the silenced victims whose story now needs to be told in the public domain.

In Kobayashi’s telling of the “granddads’ story”, individual and national stories are merged with each other. Rejecting the view that Japanese soldiers went to war either forced against their will or brainwashed, Kobayashi insists that each soldier chose to believe, as a conscious agent, the subjective truth of a just war as well as the aesthetics of self-sacrificing, insisting also that this provided some meaning in their lives. [30] He neglects the well-documented practice of ideological education and training as well as the culture of absolute obedience within the Japanese military. Still, in so far as this remains an issue of the subjective belief of some individuals, one can readily agree with him that it is possible that believing in the cause of the war lessened

the sense of wasted life and suffering for some individuals. In his text, however, the above point regarding individual belief, slips into another argument that those who died for the nation have “protected the pride of Japan”, [31] that they died for the “future of the country, for us”, [32] and that “they believed it, and we can believe it now too”. [33] In this discursive move, a statement concerning individual and subjective belief in the past slips into one concerning a collective narrative today based on an objective truth. Past glory becomes a basis for today’s proud identity. [34] The symbol of “our granddad” in *Sensoron*, thus, sutures the gap between the heroic past and the corrupt present, presenting an unbroken narrative of the nation, as well as offering today’s Japanese a chance to be heroic again by choosing to honour “our granddads” by fighting against the dominant narrative of postwar Japan regarding its past aggression.

History as a site of the “information war”: Kobayashi on the Nanjing Massacre as a “fabrication”

The theme of symbolic war over history dominates Kobayashi’s treatment of the Nanjing Massacre. The 1937 Nanjing Massacre, in which Japanese soldiers killed, raped, and assaulted large numbers of Chinese soldiers and civilians (estimates vary, but at least tens of thousands), has been well-documented by historians, although important differences remain over the temporal and geographic scope of the massacre and the numbers killed. However, the Nanjing Massacre is a highly controversial political issue that continues to affect China-Japan relations. In both countries, the incident carries huge symbolic and emotional importance and has been avidly taken up in the context of contemporary national identity formation and reformation.

In Japan, around the time of the publication of *Sensoron*, the Nanjing Massacre left the

confined debate among historians and entered the public discourse and imagination. As the sudden increase in the number of Japanese publications questioning the Nanjing Massacre attests, [35] it has become one of the key issues in the politics of memory and representation in the revisionist re-interpretation of Japan's history. In China, on the other hand, the Nanjing Massacre is emerging as a foundation stone of the Chinese national identity built upon the notion of victimhood and collective suffering. [36] It is also offering a new point of identification for the Chinese of the diaspora. Joshua Fogel has observed that "many Chinese in the Diaspora with considerably less knowledge of their own traditions and history than their forebears have seized on the Nanjing Massacre as their own". [37]

Although the relevance of the Nanjing Massacre (and indeed many other issues of history and collective memory that Japan now faces) extends far beyond Japanese national history, Kobayashi attempts to confine it within a strictly domestic narrative primarily designed to protect national pride. Claiming that there is an "information war (*joho-sen*)" going on between Japan and China, he makes a vow to clear Japan's name by disclosing the error of "the stupendous idea that Nanjing was a Holocaust - a misunderstanding that is spreading through the world". [38] The exaggerated statement that the Nanjing Massacre-Holocaust equation is "spreading through the world" constructs Japan as a victim of international misunderstanding and attack, fitting well with his overall strategy of fostering nationalism by using enemy-figures that undermine Japanese national pride. For Kobayashi, the commonly held view that the Nanjing Massacre demonstrates the Japanese Imperial Army's cruelty is a prime example of how internal enemies are collaborating with Japan's external enemies to undermine Japanese pride and self respect.

In addition to identifying the various domestic

enemies (e.g., elite, media, bureaucrats, communists, citizens groups, the "lefties") and the US as the origin of Japan's "masochistic history", Sensoron introduces another enemy figure: China. In *Sensoron*, the Chinese at the time of the Nanjing Massacre appear as uncivilized ("hodgepodge military which cannot be understood within the concept of the modern military ... the common sense of modern war does not apply ... [Chinese troops] ignore all the rules"). [39] Cannibalism and other supposedly characteristically Chinese forms of cruelty are also invoked with details and illustrations. These representations operate within the codes of civilization versus barbarism that have circulated in Japan since the nineteenth century.

Kobayashi's description of the Chinese is reminiscent, for example, of the Meiji enlightenment intellectual Fukuzawa Yukichi's 1883 comment that if China waged a war and Japan lost, the Chinese, not knowing a "war of civilization", would "loot private and official properties, rape women and children, steal gold and money, kill the old and infants, and set fire to the houses." [40] Fukuzawa also tells an anecdote of a Chinese man who killed a French woman and stole her jewellery with her severed ears and fingers still attached. [41] Indeed, this long-standing theme of China's barbarism, which emerged as Japan adopted the discourse of civilization and progress along with the Western racist-Orientalist image of the primitive and wild "Other", is precisely what Kobayashi is anchoring his historical narrative upon. [42]

If the Chinese at the time of the Nanjing Massacre are represented as uncivilized and cruel, today's China and Chinese are represented in terms of "non-democratic government" and "childish/immature nationalism". [43] In fact this is an increasingly common rhetorical response within Japanese political circles to the rising tension between Japan and China. For example, Yamauchi

Masayuki, a member of the prime minister's advisory group on foreign affairs, has argued that the "intensity of [Chinese] nationalism and patriotism go way beyond anything seen in Japan". He has contrasted the "excessive" and possibly "damaging" nationalism arising out of the Chinese Communist Party's official interpretation of national history with Japan's, where historians are free to develop their own views without having to function politically in deference to national unity. [44] Similarly, an article written by the Minister of Public Affairs for the Japanese Embassy in Washington in the *International Herald Tribune* (January 2006) juxtaposes Japan's "mature democracy", which does not need nationalism to supply legitimacy of rule, with "non-democratic states with no freedom of expression" where "rulers tend to resort to ["dangerous"] nationalism in order to strengthen their authority". [45] Needless to say, the contrast between Japan's "mature democracy" and "healthy nationalism" versus China's "lack of democracy" and "childish nationalism" is a version of the old contrast between civilized/modern Japan versus uncivilized/backward China.

Although *Sensoron* contains clearly negative images of China and the Chinese, overall it is not an outright anti-China book. The first and foremost enemy of the nation in this text is the West and America along with Japanese intellectuals and leftist media as their domestic sympathizers. Reflecting the position that Japan fought for Asia as the representative of the "coloured race", Kobayashi's perspective towards China is often more patronizing than hostile. In problematizing the Nanjing Massacre, his main targets are firstly America, as he argues that the Nanjing Massacre was fabricated during the US-led Tokyo Tribunal where victor's justice prevailed, and secondly "the world" that believes Japanese atrocities were on a par with the Holocaust. [46] The main function of his discussion of the Nanjing Massacre is to create a sense of threat and conspiracy in order to construct Japan (a

maligned nation of "ordinary people and their "grand-dads") as a victim of misunderstanding and injustice that are the products of a conspiracy between the external enemy, America, and internal enemies, the intellectuals and media.

In terms of the Nanjing Massacre itself, his main points are as follows: i) since Nanjing's population was only 200,000, it is impossible that 300,000 Chinese were killed (300,000 being the "official" Chinese figure); ii) no journalist in Nanjing witnessed the Massacre; iii) only 49 murders were reported by the International Safety Zone Committee in Nanjing; iv) KMT guerrillas inside the International Safety Zone carried out robbery and rapes while disguising themselves as Japanese soldiers; and v) most photographs of the Nanjing Massacre are fake. Largely speaking, he presents a simplistic and extreme view by putting together selectively chosen materials from works of conservative historians and journalists, and adds his alarmist warning that Japan is a victim of international conspiracy and brainwashing.

This is not to say, however, that what Kobayashi presents is not based on "facts" or "research". Far from it, *Sensoron* frequently uses quotations and references as well as detailed analysis of what he calls "primary sources", which add an air of credibility to his manga. The chapter which questions the validity of some Nanjing photographs is a case in point; the photograph circulated by peace activists and left-wing publishers in Japan with the caption, "an execution with a Japanese sword" cannot, according to Kobayashi, be from Nanjing because of the summer clothing the soldier and the victim are wearing - the Nanjing Massacre took place in winter. On another photograph titled "dead bodies discarded in Yangtze River", he points out that the military uniform of the soldier is different from those actually worn by the Japanese soldiers, and demonstrates the differences with

detailed illustrations.

However, inconsistencies and errors among a few photographs do not challenge the status of the atrocity as an historical event of large significance; on the contrary, Kobayashi's assertion that the Nanjing Massacre is nothing but "fabrication" is obviously fraudulent. But via the function of metonymy, this kind of warped history building develops an alternative narrative for the Nanjing Massacre as an historical incident. In general, as with the above examples, there are some truths in what he says, especially if we focus on details such as the exact number of the victims or the accuracy of the caption of specific photographs. But he uses his materials selectively, ignores what contradicts his point, blows data out of proportion and rips it out of context, and generally jumps to unwarranted conclusions.

Using manga as a mixed media of visual and written texts, Kobayashi effectively blurs the boundaries between fact and fiction, history and ideology, past and present. As the protagonist, Kobayashi freely goes back and forth between the past and the present, reality and fiction, sometimes appearing even as one of the soldiers. Photographs appear alongside his illustrations, the latter challenging the former. Quotations from other sources are also accompanied with his illustrations of, for example, deformed and evil-looking Chinese, Japanese boy-soldiers with shining eyes, and an intelligent and serious looking Kobayashi warning the reader not to accept the "distorted" history that has been "forced" on the Japanese (with bold Gothic letters for emphasis). [47]

Uninformed readers can easily be persuaded of Kobayashi's authority as they, page after page, see Kobayashi the protagonist reading published works on the Nanjing Massacre, commenting on them, refuting their points with his "evidence" and urging them to: "Learn the facts that have been hidden from the Japanese!

We cannot talk about history while averting our eyes from the facts!" [48] Kobayashi creates a sense that there is some sort of conspiracy against Japan going on, and that he, the hero-protagonist, is unveiling the "truth" before the reader's eyes, exposing the lies of mainstream academia and journalism. What the reader cannot see, however, is Kobayashi's selective use of the "facts". For example, when Kobayashi presents a 1937 Japanese newspaper cutting with a photograph of a peaceful Nanjing city - thanks to the Japanese troops - he does not mention the severe censorship that Japanese media was placed under at the time. Elsewhere Kobayashi says that he is teaching his readers the "media literacy" [49] needed for the "information war over the Nanjing Incident". [50] Ironically, it is publications like *Sensoron*, with its seductive blend of carefully selected facts and emotional appeal, which provide the strongest case for media literacy.

Conclusion

Sensoron exemplifies the recent trend of nationalism articulated within the realm of the "popular", promoted via consumer culture and "enjoyed" by the masses. It stands in contrast to nationalist ideals and perceptions propagated traditionally by the intellectual and political elite. However, there also are some important differences between Kobayashi's manga and the "pop" nationalism discussed earlier. "Pop" nationalism is about ordinary people's modes of relating to the nation-state and it is often mediated by the dynamics of mass/popular culture. It relies heavily on images and icons that are cut-off from their historical meanings. It is not always clearly articulated or even overtly nationalistic in terms of the content - hence the characterization of it as being "unthinking" and "non-intelligent". Kobayashi's manga, in contrast, while clearly a popular and commercialized product targeted at "ordinary" people, carries far more explicit and detailed

political messages of nationalism, using many references to Japan's wartime history. If the icons and symbols of pop nationalism - immediately appealing, fashionable and pleasurable - are dissociated from history and politics and do not call for intelligent, ethical, and critical judgement, [51] Kobayashi's text combines the immediate appeal of the visual images with complex textual messages, openly combining the pop and the political. In other words, it is popular and accessible in its style and medium, but not totally naïve or "unintelligent" in its content. It requires some thought on the readers' part and challenges readers (Kobayashi tells his readers to doubt everything and everyone - even Kobayashi himself), and may possibly appeal to a different segment of the population from those who are attracted to "pop" nationalism. [52]

Sensoron is an entertainment product, and at one level its use of history is utopian, fictional and popular cultural. But it also contains strong historical truth-claims and constructs a nationalist discourse in today's Japan around historical images of brave soldiers and the rhetoric of "our granddads". By incorporating detailed explanations and interpretations of historical events such as the Nanjing Massacre, it exerts much tighter control over the readers' interpretations of its content compared with "pop" nationalism's use of the national icons and symbols such as the rising-sun flag, national football team, samurai ethics or the Royal Family. Furthermore, while these icons do not identify any particular group or country as the national enemy, images of the enemy are clearly, unequivocally and eloquently articulated in *Sensoron*. Maruyama Masao has argued that the production of a national enemy or at least national threat is the precondition for the shift from apolitical national consciousness to more exclusivist and aggressive forms of nationalism. [53] If this is true, then Kobayashi's portrayals of various enemy figures clearly has the potential to mobilize people beyond the pleasurable

consumption of national icons, whose primary function is to create a sense of connection in an otherwise alienating and meaningless world, into the realm of a far more politicized form of nationalism.

Sensoron clearly shows that history is important in popular expressions of nationalism in contemporary Japan. Popular culture has now become a site for contesting historical truth, and this manga functions as a ground for a political battle over memory and history, promoting nationalism. For the Post-Cold War revisionists' hegemonic project aimed at creating a new consensus over the interpretation of history and cultivating national pride among Japanese, the realm of culture that is accessible and familiar to ordinary people, as opposed to the purely political or intellectual realm, has become increasingly important. As a reserve for the collective imaginary, too, popular culture is an important site for the politics of emotion, which Japan's new nationalism is largely about.

Using popular culture as a vehicle for politics, however, comes at a price. As a form of entertainment, it has a different impetus and logic from academic work on history or political negotiations. The fiction/reality boundary is collapsed, and the tendency towards oversimplification, sensationalism, polemic, and controversy dominates. Instead of complex and nuanced history that captures the multi-dimensional reality, history is reduced to the matter of taking a clear-cut either/or position. Historical events such as the Nanjing Massacre is morphed into a caricatured "debate" that fascinates many but does not create a new, shared meaning.

History is a collective narrative that needs to be told and retold without ignoring the views and sensitivities of "the other"; it must be a process underpinned by commitment to a common future. The modern history of Japan inevitably concerns and contains "others", for

Japanese imperialism has inescapably connected the history of the Japanese people with histories of people in Asia. In the era of globalization and digital communication, no “national” history is insulated from the input of and scrutiny by these “others”. It is not possible to tell a purely “national” narrative, for example, about the Nanjing Massacre. And yet *Sensoron* attempts exactly that, insistently excluding what it stipulates as the nation’s Others from its short-circuit of the author and readers as both proud Japanese. In fact the whole thing depends on the construction and exclusion of various Others - not just China, other Asian nations and the Japanese left, but also former Japanese soldiers who denounce Japan’s war-time atrocities, or bereaved families who demand that the souls of their loved ones be taken out of the Yasukuni Shrine. History in *Sensoron* is closed-off from any possibility of participation by them as co-authors of a collective narrative. In the domestic context of postwar Japan’s intellectual discourse, Kobayashi’s manga does have a critical function challenging the mainstream interpretation of history and opening up a dialogue over important issues such as the continuity between Japan before and after 1945; however, this potential is unrealized because of its exclusive focus on the nation and the closed nature of his language. His challenge may make sense domestically and internally; externally, however, it is closed off and simply unacceptable. At the end of the day, what is provided is a narrowly national story woven around the image of the heroic struggle against the external enemy in the past as well as in the present. History thus becomes a mere sign: plenty of images and accounts of the last war circulate in the public domain, but history, in all its abundance, is here reduced to an empty signifier for the nostalgic desire for the unity of the nation.

This is a revised version of Rumi Sakamoto’s chapter, ‘Will you go to War? Or will you stop being Japanese?’: Nationalism and History in

Kobayashi Yoshinori’s ‘Sensoron’, in Michael Heazle and Nick Knight (eds), [China-Japan Relations in the Twenty-first Century: Creating a Future Past?](#), Cheltenham, UK and Northampton, MA, USA: Edward Elgar, 2007. Posted at Japan Focus on January 14, 2008.

Rumi Sakamoto is Lecturer in Asian Studies at Auckland University and a Japan Focus associate. She is the coeditor with Matt Allen of [Popular Culture and Globalisation in Japan](#).

Notes

- [1] Kobayashi Yoshinori (1998), *Sensoron* (on war), Tokyo: Gentosha. Other examples include Akiyama Joji (2005), *Chugoku nyumon* (introduction to China), Tokyo: Asuka Shinsha; Yamano Sharin (2005), *Ken-kanryu* (hating Korean wave), Tokyo: Shinyusha.
- [2] Kobayashi Yoshinori, Takeda Seiji and Hashizume Daizaburo (1997), *Seigi, senso, kokkaron* (on justice, war and state), Tokyo: Komichi Shobo, p. 25.
- [3] Kobayashi Yoshinori (2002), *Shingomanizumu Sengen* (new proclamation of arrogance) Vol. 5, Tokyo: Shogakkan Bunko, p. 54.
- [4] Kitada Akihiro (2005), *Warau nihon no ‘nashonarizumu’* (laughing ‘nationalism’ of Japan), Tokyo: NHK Books, p. 211.
- [5] Kayama Rika (2002), *Puchi-nashonarizumu Shokogun* (petit nationalism syndrome), Tokyo: Chuko Shinsho Rakure.
- [6] Iida Yumiko (2004), ‘Kashi-ka sareta kokumin-kokka to kairaku no ideorogî: johoshihonshugi-ka ni okeru nihon no nashonarizumu (visualized nation-state and ideology of pleasure: Japanese nationalism under information capitalism)’ in Ito Mamoru (ed.) *Bunka no jissen, bunka no kenkyu* (practicing culture, studying culture), Tokyo: Serika Shobo, 2004.
- [7] Kitada (2005), *Warau nihon no ‘nashonarizumu’* (laughing ‘nationalism’ of Japan).

[8] In this respect it is suggestive that Ueno Yoko's ethnography of a grass-roots conservative movement - which officially focused on history textbooks - has also shown that its participants were more interested in sharing a communicative space with other members via the use of certain key words than in the nation-state as their object of identification or nationalism as a political movement. See Oguma Eiji and Ueno Yoko (2003), 'Iyashi' no nashonarizumu (nationalism as healing), Tokyo: Keio-gijuku daigaku shuppankai.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Maruyama Masao (1964), *Gendai-seiji no shiso to kodo* (thought and behaviour in modern Japanese politics), Tokyo: Miraisha.

[11] Asaba Michiaki (2004), *Nashonarizumu* (nationalism), Tokyo: Chikuma Shinsho.

[12] Kang Sangjung (2001), 'Togi: kugatsu juichinichi ikou no nashonarizumu (discussion: nationalism after 9/11)', *Gendaishiso* 29 (16), p. 40; Kayama Rika and Fukuda Kazuya (2003), *Aikoku-mondo* (A debate on patriotism), Tokyo: Chuko Shinsho Rakure, pp. 9-10.

[13] In addition to nationalistic comic books such as Akiyama's *Chugoku nyumon* (introduction to China) and Yamano's *Kenkanryu* (hating Korean wave), a number of films such as *Puraido: unmei no toki* (pride: fateful moment, 1998), *Otoko tachi no Yamato* (men's battleship Yamato, 2005), *Kyoki no sakura* (madness in bloom, 2002) also indicate the use of history in recent popular culture.

[14] This is not to say that Japanese popular culture only or even mainly transmits nationalist messages. For example, Matthew Penney has argued that the prevalent antiwar images in postwar Japanese popular culture have contributed to the considerable support of Japan's Peace Constitution today. See Penney, Matthew (2005), "The 'most crucial education': Saotome Katsumoto, Globalization and Japanese anti-war thought", in Allen, Matthew and Rumi Sakamoto (eds) (2006) *Popular Culture, Globalization, and Japan*, London: Routledge. The use of popular culture for

carrying right-wing and nationalist messages is a new phenomenon.

[15] The new history textbook group is a collection of conservative academics and others. They have produced a history textbook that glorifies Japan's past, and attempted to have it adopted in schools. Although the adoption rate was negligible, their activities sparked a lot of debate in Japan regarding to the interpretation of history and revisionist tendency within society.

[16] Originally serialized in *Weekly Spa*, from 1992 to 1995 but moved to *Sapio* in 1995.

[17] Prior to Kobayashi's "turn to history" he had addressed such issues as the HIV lawsuit over the infections via contaminated blood and Japan's new cult religion, Aum Shinrikyo. In both, he was actively involved, supporting the victims, fighting with the cult, and even at one point becoming a target of the assassination plot.

[18] They were not just scholars of media or popular culture, but those from a more traditional disciplines such as historians, philosophers, and sociologists.

[19] Uesugi Satoshi won in court and went on to write another book on this legal battle over the copyright issue regarding the use of Kobayashi's manga in his book.

[20] de Bary, WM T., C. Gluck, and A. E. Tiedemann (2005), *Sources of Japanese Tradition: 1600 to 2000*, Vol. 2., second edn, New York and London: Columbia University Press.

[21] Kobayashi Yoshinori (2000), *Ko to koron* (on the individuals and the public), Tokyo: Gentosha, p. 276.

[22] Kobayashi, *Sensoron*, p. 287.

[23] Anderson, Benedict (1991), *Imagined Communities*, London: Verso, pp. 141-4.

[24] Kobayashi, *Sensoron*, p. 9.

[25] Ibid., p. 354.

[26] Ibid., p. 281.

[27] Ibid., p. 208.

[28] Ibid., p. 203.

[29] Ibid., p. 64.

[30] Ibid., pp. 292-6.

- [31] Ibid., pp. 363-4.
- [32] Ibid., p. 96.
- [33] Ibid., p. 312.
- [34] Similarly, individual heroism in the past slides into the image of Japan as the brave Asian nation that fought against “white imperialism”, despite the fact that individual heroism cannot establish Japan’s role as the “liberator of Asia” as an objective historical reality.
- [35] For example, Fuji Nobuo (1995), “Nankin daigyakusatsu” wa ko shite tsukurareta (this is how the “Nanjing Massacre” was created), Tokyo: Tentensha; Higashinakano Osamichi (1998), “Nankin gyakusatsu” no tettei kensho (a thorough examination of the “Nanjing Massacre”), Tokyo: Tendensha; Matsumura Toshio (1998), “Nankin gyakusatsu” e no daigimon (A big question on the “Nanjing Massacre”), Tokyo: Tentensha; Suzuki Akira (1999), Shin “Nankin daigyakusatsu” no maboroshi (the new illusion of the “Nanjing Massacre”), Tokyo: Asuka Shinsha; Fujioka Nobukastu and Higashinakano Osamichi (1999), “Za reipu obu Nankin” no kenkyu (study of “the Rape of Nanking”), Tokyo: Shodensha; Takemoto Tadao and Ohara Yasuo (2000), Saishin “Nankin daigyakusatsu” (the alleged “Nanjing Massacre”), Tokyo: Meiseisha.
- [36] Buruma, Ian (2001), ‘The Nanking Massacre as a historical symbol’, in Li, Fei Fei, R. Sabella and D. Liu (eds) Nanking 1937, London and New York: M. E. Sharpe.
- [37] Fogel, Joshua (ed.) (2002), The Nanjing Massacre in history and historiography, p. 3.
- [38] Kobayashi (2000), Ko to koron, p. 233.
- [39] Kobayashi, Sensoron, pp. 120-35.
- [40] Fukuzawa, Yukichi [1883] (1981), “Toyo no koryaku hatashite ikansen (how to capture the East)”, Fukuzawa Yukichi Senshu (selected works of Fukuzawa Yukichi) Vol. 7, Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, p. 147.
- [41] Ibid.
- [42] The image of China in Japan sharply changed in the nineteenth century from that of civilization and the Middle Kingdom to that of a backward and uncivilized people.
- [43] Kobayashi, Sensoron, p. 123.
- [44] Yamauchi, Masayuki (2005), ‘Restraint in the uses of history: recent developments in Japan-China relations’, Gaiko Forum, Fall, pp. 11-23.
- [45] Kitano, Mitsuru (2005), ‘[The myth of rising Japanese nationalism](#)’, International Herald Tribune (12 Jan 2006), , accessed on 10 April 2006.
- [46] Despite the use of the sensational word “fabrication”, Sensoron does not actually deny the fact of violence itself; rather it minimizes the scale of the atrocity and justifies the action of the Japanese troops. This is also the case with most of the so-called “illusion-school” writers who write on the Nanjing Massacre.
- [47] Uesugi Satoshi (1997), Datsu-gomanizumu sengen (leaving the proclamations of arrogance), Tokyo: Toho Shuppan, pp. 11-12. According to Uesugi, Kobayashi’s visual style is similar to war propaganda used by Japanese military, while Tessa Morris-Suzuki has pointed out the similarity between Kobayashi’s manga and the former Soviet Union’s poster arts, which also used techniques of juxtaposing of past and present images, collage and photomontage, the contrast between realistic and nice-looking ‘we’ versus exaggerated and deformed ‘them’. See Morris-Suzuki, Tessa (2004), Kako wa shinanai (the past within us), Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, pp. 230-5.
- [48] Kobayashi, Sensoron, p. 127.
- [49] Kobayashi Yoshinori, Fukuda Kazuya, Saeki Keishi, and Nishibe Susumu (1999), Kokka to senso (state and war), Tokyo: Asuka Shinsha, p. 42.
- [50] Ibid., p.48.
- [51] Iida Yumiko, ‘Kashi-ka sareta kokumin-kokka to kairaku no ideorogî: johoshihonshugi-ka ni okeru nihon no nashonarizumu (visible nation-state and ideology of pleasure: Japanese nationalism under information capitalism)’, p. 172.
- [52] Kayama and Fukuda have observed that the readers/supporters of Kobayashi’s works tend to be students who take social issues seriously. They speculate that those who in the

past would have been attracted into student movements or volunteer work with some affiliation with the left, are now drawn to Kobayashi due to the diminished attraction of the traditional left in Japan. See Kayama Rika and Fukuda Kazuya (2003), *Aikoku-mondo* (A

debate on patriotism). This portrait of the readers also fits with Kobayashi's stated target group as thinking young people who take history and society seriously.

[53] Maruyama Masao (1964), *Gendai-seiji no shoso to kodo* (thought and behaviour in modern Japanese politics), p. 274.