



# **War in Japanese Popular Culture**

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## Introduction

Since 1995, two sides of Japan's cultural landscape have grabbed international attention. The first is tension with neighbors China and Korea over the history and legacies of World War II in the Pacific, Japan's "Asia-Pacific War." The second is the explosion in popularity and international reach of Japanese pop culture products including anime, manga, J-pop, and TV dramas. This reader brings together eight articles that describe the diverse, and often divergent, ways in which Japanese popular culture has represented the country's wars of the 1930s and 1940s.

## Background: Modern Japan and the Asia-Pacific War

Between 1600 and 1868 (the Edo Period), the Japanese archipelago was home to an advanced early modern society. From the beginning of the 17th century the Shoguns of the ruling Tokugawa family launched a slate of reforms designed to promote stability after more than a century of civil war. Society was divided into four hereditary classes—samurai (the ruling warrior class), peasants, artisans, and merchants—and a draconian legal system put into place to control the populace. Hundreds of feudal lords continued to rule over semi-autonomous domains, but the Tokugawa had the final say in areas like taxation and law. From the 1630s, the Tokugawa also enacted the *sakoku* (closed country) policy which prevented outsiders, apart from a small number of officially sanctioned Korean, Chinese, and Dutch traders, from visiting Japan. Japanese were also barred from venturing overseas. For nearly 250 years, Japan had limited contact with the outside world. Tokugawa leaders believed that these reforms would ensure their continued hegemony.

In 1853, American Commodore Matthew Perry sailed to Japan with a fleet of warships and a mandate to open the country by negotiation or by force. American politicians, eyeing increased trade with China and lucrative Pacific whaling, and with the settlement of California in mind, wished to use Japanese ports as a trans-Pacific base to expand the country's influence overseas. Edo Period Japan had developed a complex economy, sophisticated urban planning, and had literacy rates which arguably exceeded those of Europe or America. During its isolation, however, Japanese military technology stagnated, and the Tokugawa had no choice but to sign "unequal treaties" with America and other world powers such as Britain and France. Foreign powers gained access to ports, control over tariffs, and extraterritoriality, meaning that their nationals would not be subject to Japanese law. These concessions were considered an insult by many samurai and capitulation to outside demands eroded confidence in Tokugawa rule. Samurai from the feudal domains of Satsuma and Choshu used the emperor Meiji, head of a line that had not held real political power for about 1000 years, as a rallying point and defeated the Tokugawa in the Meiji Restoration of 1868.

The Meiji government was an oligarchy made up mostly of the samurai who had played key roles in overthrowing the Tokugawa. Emperor Meiji reigned as a figurehead and new nationalist symbol. Leaders immediately launched a series of reforms designed to strengthen Japan and control the population. The class system was abolished and a conscription system became the backbone of modern military forces in 1873. Meiji policy was guided by two broad goals—protecting Japan from Western imperialism and pressing for revision of the "unequal treaties." To accomplish these goals, technology and systems of

governmentality were imported in an ambitious reform program that “modernized” Japanese society while crushing local autonomy and diversity.

As Japanese leaders were becoming more aware of the community of nations and international system of the 1870s, European powers controlled virtually the entire globe. India was a British colony considered “the brightest jewel in the crown.” The so-called “scramble for Africa” saw the continent (save Liberia and Ethiopia) divided up under European rulers. China was subjected to treaty arrangements even more humiliating than Japan’s “unequal treaties.” Japanese leaders decided that the best way to prevent Japan from becoming a victim of imperialism was to become an imperialist power.

Japanese leaders expanded their sphere of influence, first forcibly assimilating the Ainu and Okinawan people in the north and south of the Japanese islands, and then fighting wars with neighbors China and Russia in a drive for expansion. After defeating China in 1894-95, Japan took Taiwan as a colonial possession and established political and economic hegemony over Korea. Japan then defeated Russia in 1904-05, secured its power over the Korean peninsula, which it annexed in 1910, and gained control over railway lines and other concessions in the northern Chinese region of Manchuria. In all areas, colonial police and the Imperial Japanese Army crushed local resistance. The United States, Great Britain, and France had overseas colonies during this time and they saw Japan’s moves as legitimate. Having improved its power position in East Asia, Japan was welcomed into the international alliance system hitherto dominated by Europe and America. The “unequal treaties” of the 1850s were finally done away with, Japan entered into an equal alliance with England in 1902, and went on to side with England, France, and eventually the United States in World War I, seizing German territories in the Far East and sending material aid and naval support to Europe.

During the 1919 Paris Peace Conference which followed the end of World War I, contradictions in Japan’s global position and role as a colonizer became clear. Japan attempted to have a “racial equality clause” written into the Covenant of the League of Nations, a new international body much like the later United Nations. The proposal was strongly opposed by Australia. American President Woodrow Wilson was also opposed because he relied on the support of pro-segregation Southerners. At the same time that Japan was pushing for equality on the international stage, however, Japanese colonial forces responded to the March First Movement for independence in Korea with a brutal crackdown. In addition, through the 1910s, Japanese elites moved to increase their power in China, pushing for more “unequal treaty” privileges of their own.

During Japan’s version of the “Roaring 20s,” liberal reforms saw the introduction of universal male suffrage at home and Japan’s entry into arms limitation treaties abroad. In addition, a cosmopolitan consumer culture took root in Japanese cities. In 1931, however, the national direction changed dramatically after Japanese forces based in the northern Chinese region of Manchuria bombed the railway lines that they were ostensibly there to protect. Acting without the knowledge of the civilian government in Tokyo, the troops, known as the Kantogun or Kwantung Army, placed the blame on “terrorists” and used this as an excuse to seize control of Manchuria. The Japanese government supported these moves after the fact and from this point on, the Japanese military greatly increased its influence on the country’s direction.

In 1932, Japan turned Manchuria into a puppet state called Manchukuo. This move was condemned by the League of Nations, and Japan responded by withdrawing from the

League in 1933. Japan became increasingly isolated internationally. At home, authorities relied on the “Special Higher Police,” a network of thought police, to enforce ideological orthodoxy. Communists, social democrats, union organizers, feminists, pacifists, and others who resisted the shift in national direction were arrested and held without charge. Many were tortured; this state violence meant that resistance to militarism in Japan was all but silenced.

More and more, Japanese elites viewed Britain and the United States as imperial rivals. They believed that the Monroe Doctrine—which stipulated that any attempt by a European or Asian power to encroach on the US sphere of economic and political influence in Latin America would be considered an act of aggression—was hypocritical, given that America insisted on an “Open Door” policy in China, meaning equal exploitation by all powers. Japanese politicians, military leaders, and ideologues believed that Japan had special interests in neighboring East Asian regions and resented the imperial presence of distant Euro-American powers. In addition, racist immigration policies enacted in English-speaking countries like the United States, Canada, and Australia, combined with rhetoric by populists in areas like California and British Columbia that attacked Japanese immigrants in racist terms as dirty, disease-ridden, and dishonest, made Japan’s leaders feel that the country was being singled out and had little hope of being treated as an equal in international affairs.

These feelings of discontent with the prevailing international order were heightened by the Great Depression. The New York stock market crash in 1929 initially had little effect on Japan, but economic hardship in America and other countries eroded consumer economies and with them, markets for Japanese exports such as silk and tea. Japanese farmers relied on this trade for their livelihoods, and the decline caused a considerable increase in rural poverty.

Japanese leaders took from the Great Depression two ideas that—to them—justified imperial expansion. The first was that Japan needed more overseas territory where poor farmers could settle. The second was that international trade was no guarantee of Japanese prosperity and that stable growth could only be achieved if Japan had its own sphere of influence—exclusive access to massive markets like China’s to sell Japanese manufactured goods and unfettered access to raw materials like Manchurian coal and steel to power industry. These ideas were often couched in terms of salvation for impoverished Japanese and mutually beneficial development across Asia, but while these feelings may have been genuine in some cases, the military elites saw an opportunity to increase their power, prestige, and share of the national budget, while big business, particularly the big industrial combines, called *zaibatsu*, supported imperialist expansion as a way to increase profits. Liberals who favored a more conciliatory approach in international affairs were sidelined.

Japan increased its troop presence on the continent through the 1930s, and things came to a head when Japanese and Chinese troops exchanged fire near Beijing in July 1937. Called the Marco Polo Bridge Incident, this clash sparked the beginning of what historians refer to as the Japan-China War. War was never formally declared and Japanese leaders referred to the conflict as “The China Incident,” even as they poured millions of troops into the fighting.

Japan’s forces conquered China’s coastal regions in rapid succession but were forced into a stalemate in the interior. The United States and Great Britain condemned Japan’s actions in China, and these tensions led Japan to sign the Axis Pact with Nazi Germany and



fascist Italy in 1940. Japan's attack on China was poorly planned. Not only were there no clear war aims and thus no way to secure victory save a total domination of the huge expanse of Chinese territory and its massive population, but Japan also relied on imports of strategic material such as oil and steel from the United States, one of the sternest critics of Japanese aggression. Tensions soared through 1940 and 1941 as America launched a trade embargo against Japan and issued an ultimatum, demanding that Japan withdraw its troops from China. Seeing war as inevitable, the Japanese leadership launched a surprise attack against the American Pacific fleet at Pearl Harbor and coordinated strikes on American, British, and Dutch territories across the Asia-Pacific region in December 1941. By mid-1942, Japan had captured the Philippines, an American colony; British-held Malaysia, Singapore, and Burma; the Dutch East Indies (Indonesia); and innumerable Pacific islands. Japan organized its empire into the so-called "Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere."

By mid-1943, the Japanese advance had been turned back by a string of American victories, and the American Navy's "island hopping campaign" began in earnest. The Philippines was invaded in 1944 and Japanese surface and air forces were all but wiped out. In the first part of 1945, American troops took Okinawa, the southernmost of the Japanese islands, and began an intense campaign of aerial bombardment of Japanese cities. An atomic bomb was dropped on the city of Hiroshima on August 6. On August 9, a second bomb was dropped on Nagasaki, and America's Soviet allies invaded Manchuria, breaking Japan's last defensive bulwark on the continent. Japan surrendered unconditionally on August 15 and was occupied by multinational forces dominated by the United States.

### Violence and War Experience

A basic account of the events leading up to a conflict on the scale of the Asia-Pacific War cannot do justice to the experiences of violence, terror, and loss of millions of victims. In the following four sections **victimizers**, **victims**, **varied positions**, and **heroes**, I will outline the basic thematic categories through which Japanese have understood wartime violence. Each of these has played a significant role in Japanese representations of the Asia-Pacific War in postwar popular culture.

### Victimizers

Since the 1990s, Japanese war crimes of the 1930s and 1940s have garnered increasing global attention. Japanese atrocities against American POWs had been well known since early in the war, but it is only in recent decades that there has emerged a broader awareness of the extent of Japanese military and imperial violence against Asian victims.

The Nanking Massacre took place in late 1937, in the early months of the Japan-China War. After the fall of the Chinese capital of Nanking and the flight of Chiang Kai-shek's government to the interior, Japanese soldiers looted towns and burned buildings, raped women and girls, and killed tens of thousands, perhaps hundreds of thousands, of unarmed prisoners of war and civilians in a series of atrocities that have become emblematic of Japanese wartime violence.

While the Nanking Massacre has been the major focus, bloodshed did not stop after the fall of the Chinese capital. Japanese armies on the continent were always poorly supplied and expected to find food as they marched. This meant attacks on Chinese

peasant villages, innumerable killings, and forced dislocations. Similar acts of violence against civilians characterised Japanese military behavior through the entire war. In 1944 and 1945, for example, Japanese forces in the Philippines killed tens of thousands of civilians during the American invasion to retake the islands.

Japanese military and imperial brutality extended to the management of the war economy. In many cases, populations in territories captured by Japan and existing colonies like Korea were treated as expendable resources. Hundreds of thousands were kidnapped and forced to labor in mines or construct roads and railways. Many did not survive. Late in the war, Japanese troops seized the entire rice harvest in Vietnam, leading to the starvation of hundreds of thousands.

“Comfort Women” was the name given to women, mostly from Korea, who were forcibly kept in Japanese military brothels. Survivors have described horrific conditions. Girls in their early teens were raped dozens of times in a single day. Any resistance or attempt to escape could be met with violence by soldiers or the Korean and Japanese gangsters who organized many of the camps. Ostensibly a means of directing the sexual energy of Japanese soldiers away from civilians like the women victimized after the fall of Nanking, the Comfort Women system stands out as one of the most notorious examples of the Japanese military’s official disregard for human rights and the dignity of civilians under empire.

Medical unit 731 is notorious for its terrible callousness toward human life, although the death toll is low compared to other patterns of Japanese military violence. Japanese military doctors in Manchuria and northern China carried out a program of biological warfare and human experimentation. Plague infected fleas were used to spread disease through strongholds of Chinese resistance. Prisoners were injected with plague, and doctors studied the progress of the disease as they wasted and died. Unnecessary, fatal surgeries were performed on healthy patients to gather medical research data. Scholars now believe that Unit 731 doctors gained immunity from prosecution by the United States after the war in exchange for their research results.

For many, these and other atrocities have defined Japan’s Asia-Pacific War.

## **Victims**

Until late 1944, most of the hardship suffered by Japanese civilians came in the form of material shortages as well as the deaths of sons, husbands, and fathers killed in the fighting overseas. All of this changed when the United States captured island bases that put the Japanese home islands within bombing range.

American air raids took the lives of hundreds of thousands of Japanese civilians, many of them women and children. On the night of March 9-10, 1945 alone, over 100,000 civilians were killed in the firebombing of Tokyo. Millions more across Japan saw their houses burned and were thrown into homelessness and poverty. In the article “A Forgotten Holocaust: US Bombing Strategy, the Destruction of Japanese Cities and the American Way of War from World War II to Iraq,” Mark Selden describes the ideological shift in America from harshly condemning Japanese bombing of Chinese civilians in the late 1930s to embracing the practice in America’s own war against Japan. Selden argues that through the Korean and Vietnam Wars and beyond, aerial bombardment of cities became the representative “American way of war” beginning in 1945.

In *War without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War*, John Dower has described actions by American soldiers identical to acts for which Japanese were tried as war criminals, including the mistreatment and executions of prisoners of war. In addition, during the fighting in 1945 and the occupation of Japan, many women were raped by American soldiers. In *Japan's Comfort Women: Sexual Slavery and Prostitution during World War II and the US Occupation*, Yuki Tanaka describes in detail some of these atrocities, seldom discussed in postwar America. Many rapes took place throughout the occupation, but two mass attacks happened in a single week: On April 4, 1946 fifty GIs broke into a hospital and raped seventy-seven women. One victim had just given birth and soldiers killed her two-day-old baby by tossing it to the floor. On April 11, forty U.S. soldiers cut the phone lines of one of Nagoya's city blocks and stormed houses, "raping many girls and woman between the ages of 10 and 55 years." In Okinawa, which remained under American control after Japan regained its independence in 1952, activists stress that thousands of women were raped and brutalized by American troops, while few perpetrators were ever brought to justice.

Indeed, few parts of Japan's civilian population suffered as much as the people of Okinawa. American forces indiscriminately shelled and bombed the Okinawan islands in what locals have come to call the "Typhoon of Steel." One third of the Okinawan population of 300,000 lost their lives in the fighting.

The atomic bombs remain the most forceful images of the wartime victimization of Japanese civilians. More than 250,000 are believed to have died in the bombings within the first few months after detonation alone, with cancer and radiation-related symptoms plaguing survivors for the rest of their lives. Japanese leaders had made several surrender overtures before the bombs were dropped. In *Hirohito and the Making of Modern Japan*, Herbert Bix outlines how the only major surrender condition sought by Japan, that Emperor Hirohito be spared prosecution and allowed to remain on the throne, became the official US occupation position anyway.

## Varied Positions

ODA Makoto (1932-2007), one of the leading Japanese anti-war activists of the postwar era, was a staunch critic of American actions in the Vietnam War. Despite his hard anti-war stance, however, he was hesitant to condemn ordinary American soldiers or pilots engaged in bombing raids like the one he survived as a youngster in Osaka in 1945, "I had enormous sympathy with American soldiers who got drafted against their own will. They had to go to Vietnam to shoot people. This was the same situation as Japanese soldiers fighting in China [in WWII]. They were drafted, so they had to go there to fight with and to shoot Chinese. We have to get rid of this kind of vicious cycle...."<sup>1</sup>

For Oda, the direct acts by perpetrators of military violence needs to be placed in the context of draft systems, propaganda, and military indoctrination. Militarism meant that the victimizers in war were themselves victims.

Not all Japanese troops were involved in war crimes but all were subjected to brutal totalitarian military discipline. Beatings for trivial offenses were common. To hesitate when ordered to take a civilian's life made one a target. To refuse an order could mean

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.indybay.org/newsitems/2006/03/14/18076761.php>

death. Conscientious objectors existed, but most were jailed and tortured as peace activism was criminalized. “Cowards” on the battlefield or resisters at home knew that their families could be targeted, ostracized, or denied rations. Likewise, civilians who had doubts about Japan’s wars of aggression were bullied or brutalized into silence. Japanese on the home front were never given a realistic account of the war situation. Atrocities were covered up and Japanese at home were told that Asians welcomed them with open arms. Retreats became “strategic repositioning.” After the war, many Japanese were shocked by the extent of misinformation used to win support for the war effort and to this day, *Daihonei happyo* (Imperial General Headquarters Report) is an idiom meaning “propaganda and lies.”

The environment of casual violence that typified the Japanese military only became worse as the war against America and its allies turned against Japan. Mass starvation took the lives of countless Japanese soldiers across the Asia-Pacific region. Instead of medicine or treatment, sick or wounded soldiers were given hand grenades to take their own lives. Poorly equipped troops were ordered to charge at American machine gun positions or clutch powder charges and throw themselves under the treads of approaching tanks. Even on hopeless battlefields, Japanese soldiers were ordered to die to the last man. The *kamikaze* suicide attacks—which included not only the piloting of explosive-laden aircraft at American ships but such desperate measures as manned “suicide torpedoes” and divers armed with mines—were born from this milieu.

The Okinawan people were “Japanese” by nationality, but were often treated as ethnic or cultural others. During the Battle of Okinawa, Japanese officers executed some civilians simply for speaking their local dialect, accused of spying for the United States. Since 1945, Okinawans have asserted that the Japanese army, far from defending the civilian population, simply became another enemy. Okinawan civilians were pressed at gunpoint into hopeless suicide attacks against American troops. Others were driven to take their own lives by an Imperial Army ideologically drilled to consider surrender to be a traitorous act. Nevertheless, many Okinawans, like mainland Japanese, voiced passionate support for Japanese empire and militarism, and Okinawans drafted into the Japanese military participated in bloodshed elsewhere. Did they, like many others in Japan, have any choice given the surveillance state and violent controls in place? Okinawans cannot be easily categorized as “victims” or “victimizers” in war, and their historical experience shows us the fundamental ambiguity of those types of absolute categories.

## Heroes

Alongside representations of Japanese as victims, victimizers, or occupying a grey zone between those categories, are more controversial postwar images of military men as tragic or even glorious heroes. While most Japanese welcomed peace after the country’s 1945 surrender, the old discourses of military valor persisted and were incorporated into entertainment culture. Japanese fighter aces like Sakai Saburo (1916-2000) published bestselling autobiographies which skirted larger questions of war responsibility and violence in favor of simple stories of exciting sky battles against American pilots and paeans for the shattered Japanese air forces. Films like *Taiheiyo no arashi* (Storm over the Pacific, 1960) and *Daikusen* (Great Battle in the Sky, 1966) took up this narrative of a heroic struggle to defend the Japanese homeland, coupling special effects with the teary

melodrama of military sacrifice. While now less common, Japanese war films featuring pilots and sailors as tragic heroes have appeared periodically over the years. Famous boy band SMAP even starred in an air war film of their own, the sappy *Kimi wo wasurenai* (I'll Never Forget You) in 1995. These popular works typically do not demonize the United States and are similar in tone to America-Japan co-productions like *Tora! Tora! Tora!* (1970) and the later *Letters from Iwo-jima* (2006). War is decried, peace praised, but there is also a soft spot—a mix of melodrama and nostalgia—for the men who gave their lives defending Japan. From other viewpoints, however, these individuals can be seen as either a part of Japan's brutal military machine or helpless draftees sent to their deaths by unfeeling planners. Each of these positions has had an important place in Japanese popular culture.

Far more problematic than “tragic heroes” is a trend that began in earnest in the 1990s to redeem Japan's wars of the 1930s and 1940s. This mode of representation is typically referred to as **neo-nationalism** or **historical revisionism**. Proponents of this view of history, which include some prominent conservative politicians, have argued that Japan's wars were part self-defence against aggression by America and its allies and part righteous quest to free Asia from Western colonial rule. This framing borrows directly from the rhetoric of the “Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere” of the war period. Japan's wartime violence is denied, whitewashed, or simply explained away as chastisement of guerillas who contravened the laws of war. Right-wing pundits have written a string of books on these themes, and revisionists have attempted to introduce their “positive” story of Japanese history into middle schools in the form of the *Atarashii rekishi kyokasho* (New History Textbook). Japanese school boards can choose from a number of government approved books, and the revisionist one has only been adopted by a tiny number, but its description of empire in more positive terms and the fact that it has received official certification sparked controversy in Japan and neighboring countries several times since the first version of the book appeared in 2001.

While it is true that Japanese Empire did bring industrialization and population growth to areas like Taiwan and Korea, neo-nationalists and revisionists ignore the violence of empire, even going so far as to claim that events like the Nanking Massacre and the suffering of Comfort Women were fabricated as part of an “anti-Japanese conspiracy.” Using extreme rhetoric, these ideologues condemn Japanese who research or write about Japanese war crimes as “anti-Japanese Japanese.” These viewpoints are tied very closely to political conservatives who wish to overturn Article 9 of the Japanese constitution which declares that “Aspiring sincerely to an international peace based on justice and order, the Japanese people forever renounce war as a sovereign right of the nation and the threat or use of force as means of settling international disputes.” The desire for a more glorious, heroic story of the Asia-Pacific War is tied closely to a wish to expand Japan's military role at present and shed what are seen as the fetters of postwar pacifism. While neo-nationalists and revisionists have been extremely vocal and produced some notable works of popular culture, a majority of Japanese support Article 9 and express contrition for past war crimes and atrocities. The “culture war” between neo-nationalist deniers and progressive writers and educators, however, continues unabated.

## War Memory and Popular Culture

Since the 1980s, “memory” has evolved into a key academic topic. Between 1984 and 1992, French historian Pierre Nora headed the “Realms of Memory” (Les Lieux de Mémoire) project. He wished to tell “a history in multiple voices... less interested in causes than in effects... less interested in ‘what actually happened’ than in its perpetual re-use and misuse, its influence on successive presents; less interested in traditions than in the way in which traditions are constituted and passed on.”<sup>2</sup>

“History” is understood in diverse ways and studies of memory seek to elucidate the ways in which events have come to be remembered and represented and the stakes that they can have in society sometimes long after those involved have passed from the scene. The history of slavery has a different set of meanings in the United States today than it did in 1950 or 1850. Likewise, the “War on Terror” will mean something very different in fifty or a hundred years than it does at present.

Pierre Nora’s work focused largely on government projects. When we consider monuments, museums, approved textbooks, and presentations by presidents and heads of state, it is evident that governments often set the tone for national memory cultures. In the 1990s, however, other scholars helped to introduce a very different approach. John Bodnar’s *Remaking America: Public Memory, Commemoration, and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century* (1992) and Raphael Samuel, *Theatres of Memory* (1994), along with other contemporary works, opened up discussion of what can be referred to as “vernacular” or “popular” memory. Large groups of people obviously do not “remember” events as one. What they do, however, is discuss, consume, commemorate, debate, form narratives and counter-narratives in fiction, non-fiction, and hybrid media, and in doing so, establish widely shared notions of why certain events are important and how they are relevant to the present. It is crucial to note that which historical events are considered to be important and why change dramatically over time. For example, in *The Holocaust in American Life* (2000), historian Peter Novick argues that the Holocaust, something now considered an essential part of history education, was all but ignored in the United States for decades. Novick’s arguments about the political uses of the Holocaust are controversial, but his assertions about a lack of public discussion or representation of the Holocaust in the United States is supported by other scholars such as Henry Greenspan, a psychologist who was one of the first to conduct in-depth interviews with Holocaust survivors who later moved to the United States.

Since the mid-1990s, the study of memory in academia has further diversified. In *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization*, Michael Rothberg argues that focusing on memories surrounding a single event or series of events is too limited and that memory is in fact “multi-directional”—understandings of a past conflict can be radically shaped by a present one, other subsequent historical events, or dialogues between different groups. This is true even when a country, group, or subculture is not directly involved. For example, Japanese memories of WWII were influenced by the subsequent American war in Vietnam in a number of ways—America’s bombing campaign evoked memories of the bombings of Japanese cities and violence against Vietnamese civilians sparked debate about Japanese war crimes in China decades earlier. Honda

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<sup>2</sup> (Nora, *Realms of Memory*, 1: xxiv)

Katsuichi, the Japanese journalist who travelled to China to collect testimony about Japanese violence against civilian populations in Nanking and elsewhere, was inspired to do so by the bloody quagmire in Vietnam. Rather than referring to “Japanese memory” as if it is a single, homogeneous thing, it is best to consider “cultures” of memory in Japan, taking up different Japanese understandings of war in complex dialogue with understandings prevalent elsewhere.

Popular culture can be one of the best resources for gauging the tone of public memory as well as shifts in what is valued or controversial. The eight articles that make up this collection show the diversity of points of view on the wars of the 1930s and 1940s that exist in Japanese popular culture, as well as problems and prospects for reconciliation.

## **“War and Japan: The Non-Fiction Manga of Mizuki Shigeru”**

Matthew Penney

September 21, 2008

<http://www.japanfocus.org/-Matthew-Penney/2905>

Relatively few creators of Japanese popular culture works about the Asia-Pacific War are military veterans. More Japanese experienced the bombings of Japanese cities and accompanying hardship than fought overseas and survived to return to Japan. Japanese who experienced traumatic events such as the atomic bombings or the destruction of Tokyo and Osaka through firebombing used popular media such as anime, manga, and film to come to terms with their experiences. Typically they have not dwelt only on that experience.

Tezuka Osamu (1928-1989), the famed creator of *Astro Boy* and *Jungle Emperor* and known in Japan as the “God of Comics,” lived through the bombing of Osaka in March 1945 and was nearly killed by incendiaries dropped by American bombers. In the 1970s, he wrote about his experience in the manga *Kami no toride* (Fortress of Paper). Even earlier, Tezuka drew on his war experience frequently in his manga and consistently condemned organized violence of all kinds. In 1967 he sent Astro Boy to battle American bombers over Vietnam. He also illustrated the Japanese Army’s brutality against civilians in China in his epic history manga *Adolf ni tsugu* (“To Adolf,” 1983-85, or just *Adolf* in its English release).

Chiba Tetsuya (1939-), who drew the boxing manga series *Ashita no Jo* (Tomorrow’s Joe, 1967-73), one of the most popular sports comics of all time, was born in Tokyo but settled in Manchuria with his family at age two. Some of his most vivid early memories are of fleeing before the advancing Soviet Red Army in 1945. Chiba has penned several autobiographical sketches about his experience in Manchuria that combine text and manga images. He also created the popular war manga *Shidenkai no taka* (Hawk of the Shidenkai, 1963-65). Like Tezuka, Chiba did not focus only on Japanese wartime suffering. *Shidenkai no taka* shows the Pearl Harbor attack from the point of view of American civilian victims gunned down by Japanese planes and also features a story arc in which the protagonist bonds with an American prisoner of war, only to see his friend cruelly murdered by his superiors.

Mizuki Shigeru (1922- ), creator of the *Kitaro* ghost story manga series and known for bringing *yokai* (traditional ghosts and goblins) back into wide public awareness after they fell by the cultural wayside during Japan’s rapid urbanization in the 1950s and 1960s, stands with Tezuka and Chiba as one of the pioneering manga artists who built up the medium and expanded its narrative possibilities in the first postwar decades. He is also one of the few veterans of the Asia-Pacific War to make it big in the manga industry. Barely making ends meet as a poverty-stricken freelancer, Mizuki rocketed to fame when *GeGeGe no Kitaro* became a hit in the late 1960s. Financial stability and mass market popularity gave Mizuki the opportunity to take risks, and he began to draw a series of award-winning manga based on his war experiences such as *Soin gyokusai seyo!* (1973), released in English by Drawn and Quarterly as *Onward Towards Our Noble Deaths*.

Mizuki experienced the horrors of war firsthand. During the fighting in New Britain in the South Pacific, he was injured in an American air attack and his left arm was amputated without anesthesia. In Mizuki’s manga, the real “enemy” is Japanese militarism, and he has borne a lifelong hatred for the army that sent him to fight without adequate



equipment or supplies and forbade surrender. Translated here is *Senso to Nihon* (War and Japan) a short manga that effectively brings out the **varied positions** in Japanese war memory, with an emphasis on the image of Japanese as **victimizers** of others, evoking both the suffering of the author and other ordinary Japanese draftees under militarism as well as the violence of Japanese forces across the Asia-Pacific.

## War and Japan: The Non-Fiction Manga of Mizuki Shigeru

### Matthew Penney

Many Japanese neonationalists contend that it is “masochistic” to look critically at the nation’s wars of the 1930s and 1940s. They assume that criticism of Japanese militarism and love of the country and its traditions are somehow mutually exclusive. In place of an honest look at past crimes, revisionists present Japan as a victim, originally of Western imperialism, and now of a conspiracy of defamation by its neighbors.

Manga artist Mizuki Shigeru (b. 1922), creator of the famous supernatural series *GeGeGe no Kitaro*, is one individual who could not be blamed for feeling like a victim. A veteran of the fighting in the South Pacific, Mizuki was felled by malaria and lost his left arm in an American air raid. He suffered life-long health effects from the abuse he endured as a new recruit. Mizuki, however, has not slipped into a comfortable “victim’s view” of the war. Through non-fiction manga, Mizuki has explored the full range of Japanese war experience, seeking to reconcile images of Japanese as victims of their own elites and victimizers of others.



**Mizuki in front of drawings of some of his most famous characters**

Mizuki is also one of postwar Japan’s most prolific and influential interpreters of traditional ghost stories and folklore. He wrote that he wanted Japanese ghosts, previously thought of as grotesque or the products of an undignified plebian tradition, “... to be loved like fairies.” [1] His work has contributed to an enduring boom in interest in Japanese folktales. Mizuki, who unlike most prominent revisionists actually experienced the horrors of war firsthand, sees no contradiction between a love for Japan and its traditions, and a willingness to look honestly at the nation’s war history. His war stories contain many shocking images, but he still reflects, “... on the way back to Japan from Rabaul, the moment that I saw Mount Fuji from the sea, I thought, ‘I’m back’, and I felt, ‘I’m Japanese’.” [2]

Mizuki is also one of Japan’s most honored manga artists. His home town, Sakaiminato in

Tottori prefecture, is home to the [Mizuki Shigeru Museum](#). In addition to the Mizuki Shigeru Road in Sakaiminato – a major tourist spot lined with bronze sculptures of his most famous characters – a Mizuki Shigeru Road was named in Rabaul in 2003.

Mizuki is a difficult author to classify ideologically. For example, unlike many other progressives who consider the “Imperial System” to be an invented tradition, Mizuki describes it as central to Japan’s history and culture, “From ancient times ... Japan has had gods like *ike no nushi* (master of the pond) and *mori no nushi* (master of the wood) so I think that it is safe to say that the Japanese people like this nushi idea. In a similar way, Japan’s oldest family – the Imperial Family – has watched over the people of Japan with kindness as the *kuni no nushi* (master of the country) and I don’t think that it is a bad system at all.”[3] He is, however, critical of the Imperial System in wartime, “... the *senso-chu no nushi* (master in wartime), was terrifying to me.”[4] He contextualizes this with reference to his personal suffering, “When I went to the front lines in the South Pacific, I was beaten half to death for dropping the ‘rifle gifted by his highness’.”[5] Mizuki’s historical perspectives, informed by his own experience of violence and the excesses of Japan’s wartime regime, do not fit comfortably with stereotypical “rightwing” or “leftwing” positions. Sharing elements of both, but with a strong progressive bent in the area of war responsibility, Mizuki has crafted a series of unforgettable war stories.

Mizuki has long played up anti-war themes in his work. In the 1960s, he railed against the American military’s practice of bombing civilian targets in the supernatural series *Akuma-kun* (*Lil’ Devil*, 1966-1967), a hit that helped to propel him from artistic journeyman – he got his start painting *kami-shibai* (‘paper plays’ – alternating pictures narrated by itinerant performers) – to a leader in the industry.[6]



### **Akuma-kun**

Buoyed by this success, he was also one of the handful of creators who experimented with the potential for serious non-fiction manga with *Hitler* (1971), a critical biography that turns a history of Nazi atrocities into a forceful anti-war parable for Japanese readers.[7] From the 1970s

he began to win critical acclaim with a series of autobiographical war stories such as *Soin Gyokusai Seyo!* (Death to the Last!, 1973), focusing on the abusive treatment of Japanese recruits and the cavalier attitude of their officers toward human life.[8] He has also consistently put forward positive images of South-Pacific Islanders, contrasting their charity and humanity with the brutality of the Japanese forces.

In the late 1980s, Mizuki's war manga took a different direction as he attempted to synthesize his own personal experiences with the grand narrative of Japan's modern history in Showa-shi (History of Showa).[9] This series, despite (or perhaps because of, given a spike of interest in the war period) graphic images of the Nanking Massacre, descriptions of forced labor, and other Japanese war crimes, became a bestseller and was awarded the Kodansha Manga Prize, one of the industry's highest accolades.[10] A critical view of Japan's wartime past was no impediment to success. Not only has Mizuki avoided significant criticism by the rightwing, possibly due to his iconic status and personal war experience, but he has also been the recipient of some of the Japanese government's most prestigious awards – the Shiju Hosho (Purple Ribbon Medal) in 1991 and the Kyokujitsu Sho (Order of the Rising Sun) in 2003.



### Mizuki's collection Air War

Below is a translation of Mizuki's "War and Japan", a short work in the style of Showa-shi, originally published in 1991 in *Shogaku rokunen-sei* (Sixth Grader), a leading edutainment magazine for young readers. The difficulty of the material presented raises a number of important issues. Japanese children are not passive receptacles of government-sponsored narratives. The varied perspectives in popular culture are also important. Many of Japan's most



famous manga creators, including Mizuki, Tezuka Osamu, Nakazawa Keiji and Ishinomori Shotaro, have penned honest and challenging war stories. These serve as a powerful counterpoint to revisionist manga like Kobayashi Yoshinori's *Sensoron* (On War) that have grabbed attention in the English-speaking world.[11] Several neo-nationalist manga have sold well, but a wide variety of progressive titles have also been successful. Importantly, anti-war themes introduced into the medium by Mizuki and others have helped to shape the trajectory of postwar manga. Explicitly apologist and pro-war titles like *Sensoron* may be shocking, but their success is dwarfed by that of anti-war visions like Arakawa Hiromu's current hit *Hagane no renkinjutsu-shi* (Full Metal Alchemist) which uses a science fiction setting to interrogate organized violence and atrocities.[12]

Order the Japanese original of Mizuki's war memoir manga *Aa Gyokusai* [here](#).



### Arakawa's *Hagane no renkinjutsu-shi*

Specific criticisms of Japan's wartime order are also prolific as in *Senso no shinjitsu* (The Truth of War), an August 2008 anthology that uses the visual grammar of shojo (girl's) manga to look at war from a variety of angles, including atrocities committed by Japanese forces.[13] Mizuki's "War and Japan", however, is unique in its simple, accessible diction, and thoughtful, autobiographical conclusion. Describing his motives for turning his war memories into manga, Mizuki writes, "I saw too many comrades die. Even now, I sometimes catch a glimpse of the shades of dead friends standing at my bedside... When I think of those who, now without voice, died pitifully in war, I am overcome with anger." [14] Mizuki thinks first of the deaths of those close to him, but he never allows this to settle into a simple "Japanese as victims" theme. As "War and Japan" demonstrates, the anger that he feels extends to those responsible for all victims

of Japan's wars.

## Notes

- [1] Mizuki Shigeru, *Honjitsu no Mizuki-san* (Today's Mr. Mizuki), Tokyo: Soshisha, 2005, p. 98.
- [2] Ibid., p. 39.
- [3] Ibid., p. 39.
- [4] Ibid., p. 39.
- [5] Ibid., p. 135.
- [6] Mizuki Shigeru, *Akuma-kun*, Tokyo: Kodansha, 2008.
- [7] Mizuki Shigeru, *Hitler*, Tokyo: Chikuma Shoten, 1990.
- [8] Mizuki Shigeru, "Soin Gyokusai seyo!" in *Aa Gyokusai* (Ah, Death to the Last), Tokyo: Ozora Shuppan, 2007.
- [9] Mizuki Shigeru, *Showa-shi*, Vol. 1, Tokyo: Kodansha, 1989.
- [10] Shimura Kunihiro, *Mizuki Shigeru no miryoku* (The Charm of Mizuki Shigeru), Tokyo: Bensei Shuppan, 2002, p. 43.
- [11] Kobayashi Yoshinori, *Sensoron*, Tokyo: Gentosha, 1998. See also Rumi Sakamoto, "[Will you go to war? Or will you stop being Japanese?](#)" *Nationalism and History* in Kobayashi Yoshinori's *Sensoron*"
- [12] Arakawa Hiromu, *Hagane no renkinjutsu-shi*, Vol. 1, Tokyo: Square Enix, 2002.
- [13] Ichikawa Miu, et al., *Senso no shinjitsu*, Tokyo: Bunkasha, 2008.
- [14] Mizuki Shigeru, "Naki senyu ga egakaseta senki manga" (War Manga that My Dead Comrades Made Me Draw) in *Aa gyokusai*, Tokyo: Azora Shuppan, 2007, pp., 185-186.

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*He wrote and translated this article for Japan Focus. Posted on September 21, 2008.*

**NOTE: This article originally included several pages of Manga, which for copyright reasons could not be reproduced in this reader. The Manga can be viewed at the end of the online version of this article: <http://www.japanfocus.org/-Matthew-Penney/2905>**

### **“Healing Old Wounds with Manga Diplomacy: Japan’s Wartime Manga Displayed at China’s Nanjing Massacre Memorial Museum”**

ISHIKAWA Yoshimi and KONO Michikazu

March 8, 2010

<http://www.japanfocus.org/-Kono-Michikazu/3315>

In 2009 China became Japan’s biggest trading partner, taking over the top spot from the United States. Japan is a popular destination for big-spending Chinese tourists, cited by some Japanese retailers as “salvation” in a time of economic downturn. On the flipside, the continent has only increased its allure for Japanese travellers, with tourists now more likely to hit Hong Kong than Hawaii. The number of Japanese and Chinese studying at universities and language schools in the other country continues to rise unabated.

Japanese popular culture is also big business all over East Asia. Cartoon characters like Dorameon and Shin-chan are as recognizable in China as in Japan itself. Cultural cooperation is also widespread. Kaneshiro Takeshi, a Japanese actor born in Taipei, has starred in hit Chinese films such as *Red Cliff* (2008) and *House of Flying Daggers* (2004), which have rivalled the success of Hollywood blockbusters in Japan and across Asia. Chinese star Zhang Ziyi is big in Japan where she has been featured on talk shows and in a slate of TV commercials.

Despite these close economic and cultural ties, however, history continues to cast a dark shadow over Sino-Japanese relations. According to a 2012 survey, the first thing that nearly half of young Chinese think of when they hear “Japan” is “The Nanking Massacre.” Violent protests over the lack of attention to historical crimes in Japanese middle school textbooks and visits to Yasukuni—Tokyo shrine which glorifies Japanese militarism and represents the war dead as **heroes**—by KOIZUMI Junichiro, Prime Minister between 2001 and 2006, rocked Chinese cities in 2005 and show the intensity of negative feelings toward Japan. Meanwhile, critics in Japan have condemned China’s human rights record in regions like Tibet and call on China to allow free discussion of its own bloody history. A territorial dispute over southern islands called Senkaku in Japanese and Diaoyutai in Chinese has also strained ties.

If there is to be stable reconciliation on historical issues between Japan and China, it is necessary for Japan to confront **neo-nationalist** and **revisionist** positions in its public sphere and promote more education about Japanese war crimes in textbooks and venues such as state-run museums. China, in turn, should ease censorship of debate on controversial historical issues and promote awareness of the work of not only manga artists like Mizuki Shigeru, but the countless Japanese academics and peace activists who have stressed contrition concerning Japan’s war record. The Nanjing (also spelled Nanking) Massacre Memorial Museum is the epicenter for education about Japanese war crimes in China, and the 2009 manga exhibit at the Nanjing Massacre Memorial Museum detailed in this article shows a potential way forward. Popular culture can show gaps in the understandings of history in different national contexts, but it can also be a bridge to more empathy and understanding. By presenting **varied positions** on the Asia-Pacific War to Chinese museum goers, the Nanking Massacre Memorial Museum took a notable step toward reconciliation.

## **Healing Old Wounds with Manga Diplomacy: Japan's Wartime Manga Displayed at China's Nanjing Massacre Memorial Museum**

**Ishikawa Yoshimi, interviewed by Kono Michikazu**

KONO MICHIKAZU This year I was in Nanjing on August 15, the anniversary of Japan's surrender in World War II. I was with you, in fact, attending the opening of an exhibit that was the product of three years of effort on your part: "My August 15," an exhibition by Japanese manga artists at the Nanjing Massacre Memorial Hall. One should probably note here that a contentious debate continues to rage between Japan and China, and among Japanese scholars as well, over the facts of the so-called Nanjing Massacre,\* including the number of victims and the authenticity of certain documents. And the Nanjing Massacre Memorial Hall, which has "300,000 Victims" engraved in large letters near the main entrance, is regarded by many in Japan as a kind of rallying point for anti-Japanese sentiment in China. What a bold, pathbreaking idea, to choose this memorial hall, and the symbolic date of August 15, to exhibit cartoons describing the wartime suffering of the Japanese, whom the Chinese have tended to view solely as aggressors!

I'd like to hear something about the origins and history of the exhibition. I understand that in August 2000 you led the Japan-China Manga Friendship Tour, which brought a group of fifteen manga artists to China—cartoonists like Chiba Tetsuya, Matsumoto Reiji, and Morita Kenji. Was that how it all began?

### **Touring China With A Busload Of Clowns**

ISHIKAWA YOSHIMI Yes, that's right. I happened to have gotten acquainted with several of the chief officers of the publisher of Renmin Ribao [People's Daily] over the years, and I was aware that for thirty years that organization had also put out a weekly cartoon newspaper called Fengci yu Youmo [Satire and Humor], one of the only publications of its type in the world. I found it fascinating that the organization responsible for the official news organ of the Communist Party of China put out a paper like this as well. And I found myself wondering if it would be possible to create some opportunity for Japanese manga artists to visit China and rub shoulders with Chinese cartoonists, and perhaps even compile and publish a book together. That plan came to fruition in August 2000. My contacts at the People's Daily put me in touch with a company that published the book, and the reception surpassed all expectations. There's been considerable cultural exchange between Chinese and Japanese economists, writers, musicians, and so forth, but this was the first attempt to bring Chinese and Japanese cartoonists together.





**The opening of the manga exhibit in Nanjing on August 15, 2009, the anniversary of Japan's surrender**

KŌNO Who was your point man among the manga artists?

ISHIKAWA Morita Kenji. As a child, Morita lived through the traumatic evacuation and repatriation of Japanese settlers in Manchuria following World War II, as did Chiba Tetsuya and the late Akatsuka Fujio. He's also a very well liked and respected figure and a director of the Japan Cartoonists Association. Cartoonists tend to be mavericks; it would have been impossible to get them organized without the help of someone like Morita. He persuaded others to take part so that the project could move forward.

KŌNO I've heard you say that for a trip to China, there are no more entertaining travel companions than cartoonists. In what way were they entertaining?

ISHIKAWA Well, in the first place these are people who make a living by thinking up nutty jokes and antics. Their behavior is no different from their comics. To put it another way, there's nobody less suited than they are to going about as a group. They're undisciplined. They're slob. You can't do a thing with them. Turn your back on one of them for an instant, and before you know it he's approached some woman and is drawing a caricature of her while a whole crowd of children gathers around. That sort of thing happens constantly, wherever you go, so as tour guide, I'm on pins and needles the whole time. Once we were supposed to meet with some VIPs, but one of the group hadn't shown up. Suddenly we heard a commotion. I ran out to see what was going on, and there he was, dressed sloppily, arguing with the doorman. He'd been stopped at the entrance because they couldn't believe someone who looked like that was on his way to meet with VIPs. You have grown men clowning the whole time and quoting that line from Akatsuka Fujio's manga—"Everything's okay!" You couldn't find a more entertaining group.

KŌNO I heard that on the first trip one of them was dressed up as a samurai the whole time.

ISHIKAWA That's right. And someone always goes missing. It happened this time in Nanjing, too—I won't say who. We tell everyone to please get on this boat, but someone decides he wants to get on that one instead. They don't care what anyone says. I guess if they weren't that way, they wouldn't be able to draw such funny cartoons.

### **Getting Past The Censors**

KŌNO How popular were Japanese manga in China at the time of the 2000 tour?

ISHIKAWA Oh, they were tremendously popular. When the government began to allow television stations to air Japanese programs, anime series like Tetsuwan Atomu [Astro Boy] and Ikkyū-san became an overnight sensation. All the children we met knew about them. Soon pirate editions of manga like Doraemon and Meitantei Konan [Detective Conan] were pouring onto the market, triggering a huge manga boom.

KŌNO And it seems you were quick to recognize the potential of manga. In the autumn of 2000, you stated that the time was approaching when manga would be Japan's most potent medium of international exchange.

ISHIKAWA Over the past ten years I've been involved in a variety of activities to promote exchange between Japan and China, sitting on the planning committee for programs commemorating the thirtieth and thirty-fifth anniversaries of the normalization of diplomatic relations, for example. I've discussed bilateral relations with China's political leaders, scholars, and others. And I've concluded that in the final analysis, the problems that continue to divide Japan and China all boil down to people's perception of the events of the 1930s and 1940s. The Chinese people remain very bitter about the war that raged on Chinese soil for fifteen years, beginning with the Manchurian Incident of 1931. Their feelings about this go far, far deeper than most Japanese people imagine. Unless we can overcome that somehow, there's always going to be bad blood between our two nations. On the other hand, the Chinese are almost completely unaware of the suffering endured by the Japanese people during World War II. That's because they've been taught since childhood that the Chinese people were the victims, that they stood up to the Japanese aggressors, resisted them valiantly, and ultimately prevailed. They've never given any thought to what sort of experience World War II was for the Japanese people.

I came to the conclusion that unless we could bridge this vast perception gap, the problem would simmer indefinitely, flaring up again each time someone in Japan said something that rubbed the Chinese the wrong way. I wondered if there wasn't some way at least to get the Chinese and Japanese people looking at things from a shared perspective. I began to think about what one could do to make the Chinese aware that the Japanese had their own painful memories of the war.

Just around that time, Morita had brought together a group of cartoonists, primarily people who had been involved in the evacuation from Manchuria, for his "My August 15" project. In 2003 he had the artists submit cartoons and short essays describing where they were and what they were doing on the day Japan surrendered. They held an exhibition of those works in the form of illustrated letters, and the following year they published a book.\*

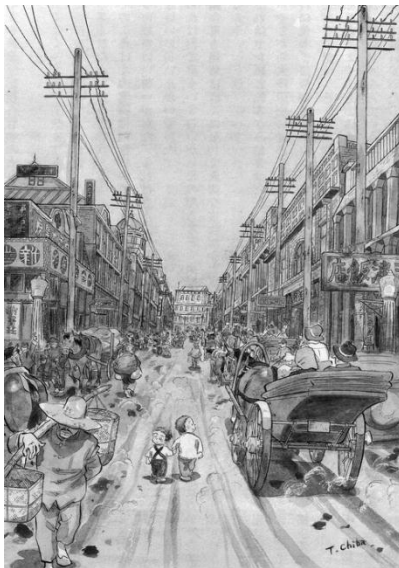
When I saw the book, it was like a bolt of lightning. I felt intuitively that we could make use of it to communicate the Japanese experience to the Chinese people. First of all, I wanted to translate it and get it published in China. Everyone in the Japanese Foreign Ministry and every China expert I talked to said it couldn't be done, but I figured nothing ventured, nothing gained. I inquired at four top publishing companies in China, but they all turned me down. "The Party will never allow it," they said. "Even if we published it, no one would buy it." Of course, I had never thought of it as something with real market potential. I just thought if we could only get a Chinese edition out in book form, somebody was bound to read it, and that could set something in motion.



**The Red sky and crows**  
© Akatsuka Fujio

Finally I decided to take it to the People's Daily. Xu Pengfei, the editor in chief of Satire and Humor, is a friend of mine, so I decided to ask him what he thought. He was enthusiastic about the cartoons, but he thought the text would probably run into trouble with the Party censors. So, I got the best translator I could find, had all the problematic parts translated with great care, and took the text to the top brass at the People's Daily. They knew me already, so they read it carefully, but their reaction was, "This is going to be a problem." I asked, "Which parts?" And they showed me in great detail everything that was wrong. I think they figured we'd give up at that point. But instead we reworded all those passages without changing the basic meaning, and I took it to them again. We repeated this process several times. The artists had agreed to leave all the negotiations to me on the understanding that I wouldn't compromise their work. It was looking like we were close to clearing the final hurdle when the publisher told me to bring in the cartoons. For the first time, I gave them the manuscript complete with the pictures.

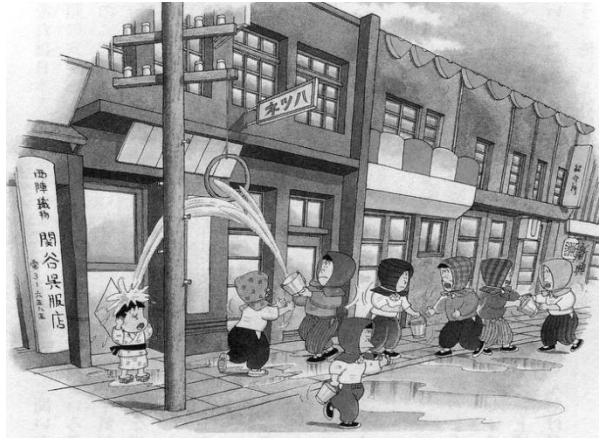
Three months passed with no word. I was beginning to think that it wasn't going to happen after all, when I received a communication asking that I come to Beijing. I figured I had no choice, so I went again, and this is basically what they told me: "We agree that these are highly artistic works that aptly convey the feelings of the Japanese people. But there's a danger that these pictures will inadvertently awaken memories among the Chinese people and stir up trouble. We're concerned that the reaction could snowball far beyond anything the artists intended. That would destroy the purpose of your project. So, we were wondering if you would mind cutting these five pictures." Finally we're getting somewhere, I thought.



Well, to make a long story short, in the end two of the five pictures were cut, two were slightly revised by the artists, and one made it into the publication just as it was. I knew from the beginning that we were involved in something akin to diplomatic negotiations and that we weren't going to get everything we wanted. The censors had to save face, after all. So, I was prepared to give way wherever it was possible to compromise. But there was one cartoon that I fought hard to preserve intact. In the end we were able to resolve the impasse thanks to Xu Pengfei, who is also chairman of the China Artists Association Cartoon Committee, which promotes exchange between Chinese and Japanese cartoonists. He said, "The artist who drew this is a friend of mine, and I'm going to make sure that it stays in no matter what."

Last year, after many months of this, we achieved our objective with the publication of the Chinese edition by the People's Daily.

This was huge. After all, the People's Daily is directly under the CPC Central Committee's Publicity Department, so the fact that they published it means that it cleared China's toughest censors. Everyone was amazed to hear that the People's Daily was publishing it. The whole process had taken about a year and a half. The book was distributed to school libraries and all kinds of institutions in China, and it elicited some amazing reactions. Children who had never heard about the US firebombing of Japanese cities shed tears before my very eyes, saying they had never seen such sad cartoons.



**Bucket relay fire drill**

© Kitami Ken'ichi

### A Risky Undertaking

Meanwhile, though, I was beginning to feel that it would be a shame to stop at publishing a book. I was wondering if it would be possible to exhibit the original artwork. People around me said, "Just be satisfied that you got the book published!" And when they heard that I wanted to hold the exhibition at the Nanjing Massacre Memorial Hall, they dismissed the possibility out of hand. But I was betting it could happen. I had no rational reason for hope, yet I felt oddly confident.

An opportunity presented itself by chance last November, after I was back in Japan. I happened

to be looking over a list of people visiting Japan from China, and I noticed that the group included Zhu Chengshan, chief curator of the Nanjing Massacre Memorial Hall. With the help of an acquaintance of mine in the Chinese embassy, I was able to set up an appointment. I went by myself, met him for the first time, and explained what I had in mind. I won't reveal the details of our conversation, but suffice it to say that Zhu expressed his openness to the idea on the spot. "I don't see why not," he said. "I'll give it serious consideration."

Immediately after the winter holiday, I traveled to Nanjing and started lobbying hard to let them know I was serious. Zhu responded very positively, saying, "By all means, let's do it." He said there would probably be some backlash in China, but reading the book, he had been impressed by the illustrations and the way the letters conveyed the feelings of the Japanese people at the time of Japan's surrender. He said, "This memorial hall wasn't built to fan anti-Japanese sentiment. Its purpose is to help ensure that our memories of the war don't fade, not to condemn the Japanese people." He said he was determined to be the first to mount an exhibition in China describing the wartime experiences of the Japanese.

I had some idea of the dangers involved in holding such an exhibition in China, and I was moved by Zhu's courage. It was a risky undertaking that could have ended in disaster if things went wrong. But Zhu said, "It's worth doing here precisely because it's risky." I was deeply affected by that. Zhu is a really decent and courageous individual. So many people in Japan had told me that he was as anti-Japanese as they come, and I had to wonder if they were talking about the same person.

KŌNO Was it your idea to have the opening on August 15?

ISHIKAWA No. I said that it would take about five months to finish all the preparations, so the exhibition could probably open in June. Zhu said, "Since the title specifically mentions August 15 as an important day to the Japanese people, why not have the opening on August 15?"

Nanjing would be at its hottest, but Zhu felt that it was the job of the memorial hall to convey what August 15 meant to the Japanese people, and he wanted to be true to that concept. He also said that his plan was to keep the exhibition open there for three months and then, if possible, have it travel to the Marco Polo Bridge Memorial Hall. After that, he wanted to install it as a permanent exhibit at the Nanjing Massacre Memorial Hall.



I went back to Japan all fired up, and two months later I returned to Nanjing by myself with 162 pictures for exhibition. We had talked about ways of attracting more visitors, such as a side exhibit of forty original drawings by famous manga artists and a display of bound Japanese manga, and we followed through on that. My feeling was that we needed to make the exhibit welcoming, accessible, and attractive to kids.

KŌNO Still, I imagine you had reason to worry right up until the opening.

ISHIKAWA You bet I did. This was the equivalent of exhibiting pictures of the wartime experiences of the Chinese at Yasukuni Shrine. That's how risky it was. And with all the activity on the Internet now, there was no telling what kind of flame wars might break out online. I did my best to appear unconcerned, but inside I was very uneasy. In China you can never be sure that a particular controversy won't ignite a wildfire of protest. I know for a fact that there were a lot of high-level discussions within the Chinese government before the exhibition opened, and the greatest precautions were taken on the day of the opening.



Fortunately, when I contacted the Memorial Hall a few days after the opening, I was told that there had been only two complaints lodged, and apart from that the reaction was largely favorable. Of course, there were people who commented that the Japanese had started the war, after all, so they were just reaping what they had sowed. But I was hoping people would express a variety of opinions, that the pictures and text would give rise to discussion, because I think it's important that we enter into a constructive dialogue concerning World War II. Soon after the opening, museums in places like Harbin

and Tianjin were expressing an interest in hosting the exhibition. I want it to receive as wide exposure as possible because, after all, it's a country of 1.3 billion people.



### Finding Common Ground

KŌNO I also met Zhu Chengshan, and the first thing that struck me about him was his youth. He's in his late fifties, and that's surprisingly young considering that he's held the post of chief curator for eighteen years of the memorial's twenty-four-year existence. Also, I had assumed he was of the prewar generation because I had heard he was an extreme hard-liner in terms of his historical perspective on Japan. In any case, Zhu said he had never met a Japanese like you before.

ISHIKAWA He told me that he had visited Japan about forty times and had met with any number of Japanese politicians, scholars, and others, yet he had

the feeling he had only met two basic types. On the one hand were the apologetic ones, who were constantly expressing their guilt over the brutal behavior of the Japanese in China. And on the other hand were those who focused solely on the casualty count of the Nanjing Massacre, taking issue with the Chinese position that the victims numbered three hundred thousand—or in some cases saying that the name of the memorial should be changed or a certain photograph removed from the exhibits. But according to Zhu, I didn't fall into either of those categories.

KŌNO Yet I understand that you suggested some changes in the memorial.

ISHIKAWA What I pointed out was that people from countries all over the world—regardless of their role in World War II—visit the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum to pay their respects to the victims of the atomic bomb. But it's still very difficult for Japanese tourists to visit the Nanjing Massacre Memorial Hall, notwithstanding all the efforts of those responsible for it, and I don't think that's because the Japanese are cowards. It's because the entire memorial is devoted to the atrocities perpetrated by the Japanese. The memorial may have been established to prevent people from forgetting about the war, but I think it has veered in a slightly different direction.

That's what I said. Then I showed him the book of pictures by Japanese cartoonists and proposed an exhibition. It would attract Japanese visitors to the memorial, and the Chinese would learn something about the Japanese people. I suggested that this kind of sharing of war memories was consistent with the fundamental purpose of the memorial, which was originally intended as a memorial to war and peace, not a monument to hatred of the Japanese. And Zhu agreed.

KŌNO The memorial gets a huge number of visitors, as many as six million a year. I understand that ethnic Chinese in other countries usually make it part of their itinerary when they visit Nanjing, China's old capital. Since the exhibition coincided with summer vacation, I saw a lot of Chinese families, too, but I was also surprised by the number of visitors speaking English. They said twenty thousand visitors were admitted to the exhibition on the opening day.



ISHIKAWA Before the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, large numbers of Chinese, particularly those loyal to the defeated Kuomintang [Nationalist Party], fled from the mainland to Taiwan, and many emigrated from there to North America and elsewhere. For two or three generations these émigrés have passed down the story of the horrors that occurred when the Japanese army overran China's beautiful ancient capital. These overseas Chinese communities have produced people like Iris Chang, author of *The Rape of Nanking* [1997]. The first place many of these second- and third-generation ethnic Chinese want to go when they visit China is Nanjing. They visit the Nanjing Massacre Memorial Hall and go home deeply shocked. The hall has undergone two major expansions, resulting in the large modern structure you see now, with a site area of seventy-four thousand square meters, and most of the funding for that was donated by overseas Chinese. From the beginning the memorial was built with contributions from ordinary people, not government funding, but we need to understand that today it's these passionate overseas supporters who are sustaining the memorial. These are the same people whose vigorous lobbying pushed the US Congress to pass a resolution that severely condemned

Japan for the Imperial Army's use of "comfort women" in the 1930s and 1940s. That's why it's so very important for these second- and third-generation overseas Chinese to see and respond to works by the creators of Doraemon and Anpanman.

### **Leveraging Our Cultural Assets**

KŌNO The Japanese were among the first to emphasize the concept of "soft power," and for a while we were feeling pretty good about our cultural impact, what with the overseas media praising Japan's "gross national cool" and so forth. But the government never pursued the idea wholeheartedly. It seems to me that South Korea and China have thought more seriously about the possibilities and taken concrete measures to realize them. For example, General Secretary Hu Jintao's report to the Seventeenth National Congress of the CPC talked about the need to "enhance culture as part of the soft power of our country."

ISHIKAWA Japan doesn't understand how to capitalize on its cultural assets. You might say we lack capable producers. Former Prime Minister Asō Tarō talked about the power of manga, and in a way he was right. But we don't have a clue how to use it. I think that's because we don't really understand what's so special about Japanese manga.

Of all the people in the world, children are the most exacting and truthful critics. And Japanese manga have totally captivated these most exacting of critics. These are people who judge purely on the basis of what they like, regardless of nationality or race or language. Conversely, once children decide they don't like something, nothing their parents say or do will make them like it. But one thing that entrances children all over the world is Japanese manga. I was sure the CPC would realize this. And adults can't say no to the things their children love. I was confident on that score.

Every time we do a demonstration of manga in China, we get the same question: Why are Japanese manga so popular? I answer this way. Where do Japanese cartoonists start when they draw a face? Generally speaking, they start with the eyes. There's no hard and fast rule, but that's how most of them go about it. That's because the eyes are the crucial element. The eyes of Japanese cartoon characters appeal to children the world over. Children judge people almost solely by their eyes—whether they're friendly eyes, angry eyes, or what. Think about whose eyes are the most appealing from a child's viewpoint. The eyes that Japanese cartoonists draw are so kind and gentle—huge, sweet eyes without a hint of malice. Children the world over are enchanted by those eyes.

What we need is producers with ideas about how and where to leverage the power of Japanese manga. And the same is true for Japanese cuisine and every other aspect of Japanese culture. Japan has plenty of great material, but we're lacking in people with the ability to translate all that into soft power. That's our biggest obstacle.

KŌNO Well, it's clear to me you've breached that barrier with the soft-power triumph of "My August 15," and I feel lucky to have caught a glimpse of that triumph. Unfortunately, we had to catch a plane back to Japan the morning after the opening, but I was touched that Zhu Chengshan got up early on his day off to see us off at the airport.

I hope your exhibition will go on to even greater success.

*Ishikawa Yoshimi, interviewed by Konō Michikazu, "Healing Old Wounds with Manga Diplomacy," was published in Japan Echo, Vol. 36 No. 6, pp. 52-56. Reproduced by permission of the publisher.*

*Translated from an original interview in Japanese. Interviewer Kōno Michikazu is former editor in chief of Chūō Kōron. The Japanese original, published by JB Press, is available [here](#).*

*The critic and non-fiction author Ishikawa Yoshimi (1947-) is the recipient of the 1989 Ōya Sōichi non-fiction prize for Sutoroberi rōdo (Strawberry Road, 1988). President of Akita Prefectural Junior College of Arts and Industrial Arts between 2001 and 2007, he serves on the Shin Chūnichi Yūkō 21-seiki Iinkai (Committee on China-Japan Friendship in the 21st Century). He is the author of, among others, Igi ari: ugokanu Nihon wo ugokasu tame ni (Objection! In Order to Move Japan that Does Not Move, 1998) and Roku-jū-nendai-tte nani? (What's the Sixties?, 2006).*

*Manga illustrations included here are from Boku no Manshū: mangaka-tachi no haisen taiken. Chūoku Hikiage Mangaka no Kai (ed.) Aki Shobō, (1995) 2005.*

*\*The Nanjing Massacre (also called the "Rape of Nanking") refers to the outbreak of atrocities by Japanese soldiers against Chinese citizens in Nanjing (Nanking) in the months after the city was taken by Japanese forces near the end of 1937.—Ed.*

*\*The book, Watashi no 8 gatsu 15 nichi (My August 15), is available for purchase [here](#). (site in Japanese only).*



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

Rumi SAKAMOTO

January 14, 2008

<http://www.japanfocus.org/-Rumi-SAKAMOTO/2632>

From the Japanese point of view, the 1990s and 2000s are characterised by two broad historical shifts. The first is globalization. The word has many nuances but is most often taken to mean the expansion of economic interconnectivity between countries. In 1970 just under a million Japanese went overseas; by 2000 that number had risen to nearly 18 million. Likewise, in the 1970s, China was relatively isolated, its foreign trade a mere 20 billion USD in 1978. Now it is the axis of production on which the world economy turns, with about 3 trillion dollars in total imports and exports. Globalization also signifies the more rapid movement of people, information, ideas, and cultural forms across borders. In 1986 Japanese Prime Minister Nakasone Yasuhiro made the shocking comment that “So high is the level of education in our country that Japan's is an intelligent society. Our average score is much higher than those of countries like the U.S. There are many blacks, Puerto Ricans and Mexicans in America. In consequence the average score over there is exceedingly low.” Why did he say what he was thinking? Perhaps he lacked awareness that something said in Japanese at a press conference in Japan would be picked up by the world outside Japan's borders. Japanese politicians are still gaffe-prone, but now all know their comments may be tweeted around the globe in seconds. Importantly, Japanese, Chinese, South Koreans, and others now have quick access to information about historical narratives prevalent in other societies.

The second major shift is the relative decline of Japan's economic strength. In 1979 American academic Ezra Vogel published *Japan as Number One: Lessons for America*. It was widely believed that Japan would unseat the United States as the world's number one economic power. Between 1989 and 1991, however, Japan went through a stock market and property crash that has some disturbing parallels to the American subprime mortgage fiasco of 2008. The Japanese economy entered a period of low growth at precisely the time that China's economy began to really take off. In 2010 the Chinese economy passed Japan's in overall size, and former colony and electronics industry rival South Korea looks to be on track to pass Japan in Gross Domestic Product per capita terms in the next decade.

Economic hardship in Japan has been tied to a dramatic rise in the suicide rate from around 20,000 per year in the 1980s to over 30,000 in the recessionary 1990s. Large-scale restructuring and job losses at major Japanese companies, poor prospects for new graduates, a slip from economic primacy in East Asia, a failure to find an answer to Apple's blend of hardware and software, and other factors have undermined economic-based nationalism. Japan has had 15 Prime Ministers since the economy was shaken in the early 1990s, a sign of political instability and a lack of confidence in the country's political direction. With Japan's overall fortunes looking dim, some embraced **neo-nationalist** views which paint Japan's wars of the 1930s and 1940s as heroic. In this world view, the neo-nationalists blame Japan's downturn on a lack of nationalist pride, the so-called “masochistic” historical views which have represented the Asia-Pacific War as a campaign of aggression characterized by horrific violence. If this could be done away with and replaced by a heroic narrative, neo-nationalists argue, Japan's fortunes could rise again.

Countries like China and South Korea have not only become more wealthy relative to Japan, they have also become more confident and assertive on issues such as apology and recompense for Japanese war crimes and colonial atrocities in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Contrary to popular opinion in those two countries, Japan has apologised to both South Korea and China many times. The Wikipedia article that includes the texts of major apologies is over 6000 words long.<sup>3</sup>

Japan paid a diverse compensation package to South Korea in the late 1960s. China gave up the right to reparations for war damages in the 1972 Treaty of Peace and Friendship. In lieu of reparations, Japan paid billions in development aid to China. Japan has been widely criticised, however, for not living up to German attempts to deal with war legacies which have included ambitious museums, comprehensive education on German war crimes, and more strongly worded apologies. Importantly, while Germany has paid a massive amount to individual victims of Nazi atrocities, Japanese politicians continue to insist that agreements with the Chinese and South Korean governments have settled all issues of war responsibility. The South Korean government, an American-backed totalitarian dictatorship at the time of reparations payments in the 1960s, was supposed to use a large part of the funds received from Japan to pay compensation to individual victims of Japanese colonial violence. It did not, and Japan has been criticised for not offering other forms of compensation after South Korea's dictatorship was replaced by popular democracy in the 1990s.

In Japan, conservatives kept detailed discussion of the darker side of Japan's wartime history out of textbooks until the 1980s, and progressive teachers could only respond by using their own educational materials. At present, all Japanese history texts from the middle school level mention war crimes, but these descriptions are often very brief or vague. While Japan has a number of museums and educational institutes devoted to studying and raising awareness of Japanese war crimes, they are all run by private educational institutions or citizen's groups. The Japanese government supports museums and efforts to commemorate Japan's war dead, but there is no central museum or even an official monument that commemorates the millions of Asian victims of Japanese Empire. **Neo-nationalists** and **historical revisionists** work to block any formal admission of Japanese guilt.

The official assertions on history by the Chinese and South Korea governments are not without problems. Few historians in English-speaking countries accept the Chinese government's claim that over 300,000 civilians were massacred at Nanking in 1937, although virtually all agree that war crimes were widespread. The South Korean government is right to condemn Japan's system of wartime brothels and argue that the suffering of the Comfort Women represents a crime against humanity. As C. Sarah Soh argues in *The Comfort Women: Sexual Violence and Postcolonial Memory in Korea and Japan*, however, South Korean politicians have condemned Japanese military prostitution, but have been hesitant to acknowledge that most of the Korean Comfort Women on whose testimony historians have relied were kidnapped and forced to work by other Koreans. The use of Comfort Women for Korean and American troops continued uninterrupted after Japan's surrender, and widespread human trafficking in Korea continued. By making the

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<sup>3</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_war\\_apology\\_statements\\_issued\\_by\\_Japan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_war_apology_statements_issued_by_Japan), last accessed September 2012

history of the Comfort Women into a simplified story of the victimization of one country / ethnic group by another, the lived experience of the survivors has been obscured.

**Neo-nationalism** is not, however, a simple search for “historical truth.”

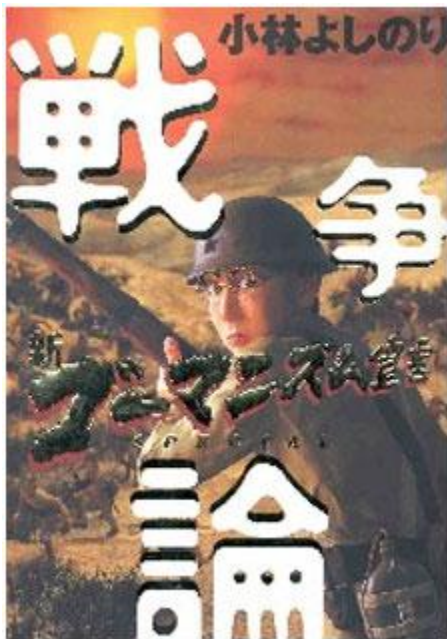
Conservative politicians and ideologues began to attack China and South Korea using terms that had seldom been aired publically since the end of WWII. For example, Nishio Kanji, who became a leading conservative opinion maker in the 1990s and was one of the individuals who spearheaded a drive to eliminate so-called “masochistic” views of history from Japanese schools, described Japanese imperialism and the invasion of China as an altruistic mission to bring order to China’s culture of chaos. He wrote in a newspaper editorial in Japan’s conservative daily *Sankei Shimbun*: “It is really difficult to assert that today’s China is the successor of the classical Chinese Empire. The true face of Chinese history is blood-splattered civil strife and the barren ruins left in the wake of destruction.”

On top of representing Japan’s neighbors as untruthful and corrupt, authors like Nishio placed blame for Japan’s economic downturn, not on the conservatives who had governed Japan uninterrupted through the postwar decades, but rather on Japanese young people who were depicted as lazy and aimless hedonists whose supposed selfish lack of patriotism and unwillingness to work for the public good had dragged Japan down. Vicious, denigrating rhetoric toward Japan’s neighbors, a desire to exclude “negative” points from the national narrative of Japanese history, and the idea that older conservatives needed to “fix” Japan’s youth, combined at their most bellicose in Kobayashi Yoshinori’s bestselling manga *Sensoron* (On War), one of the most important works of 1990s **neo-nationalism** and **historical revisionism**.

## “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.

*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 (*eiyu*)” 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 caricaturized "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.*

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## 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), *Shin-gomanizumu 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 *Puraïdo: 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 daigayakusatsu” 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 daigayakusatsu” no maboroshi (the new illusion of the “Nanjing Massacre”), Tokyo: Asuka Shinsha; Fujioka Nobukatsu 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 daigayakusatsu” (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.

## “Historiography and Japanese War Nationalism: Testimony in *Sensoron*, *Sensoron* as Testimony”

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<http://www.japanfocus.org/-Philip-Seaton/3397>

“Historiography” refers both to the study of history and to the body of research, writing, and debates about a specific historical theme or topic. In historical debates, historians have tended to place priority on written documents, even when dealing with recent events. More recently, however, oral history—interviews with eyewitnesses and survivors and attempts to come to terms with how ordinary people see their own historical experience—has become mainstream among academic historians.

One important concept in oral history is “shared authority.” Popularized by oral historian Michael Frisch in *A Shared Authority: Essays on the Craft and Meaning of Oral and Public History*, “shared authority” means that historians have an ethical responsibility to consider the interview-based accounts that they produce to be collaborative projects between interviewer and interviewee. More than trying to simply find out “what happened” or force the narratives of individuals into overarching stories of history, oral historians try to enter into dialogues that can offer insight into dimensions of lived experience lost in written documents, in short, how “history” has meaning for people. When it comes to historical suffering and loss in war, oral history is especially important.

Alessandro Portelli, an oral history pioneer, describes the practice as vital for historiography because it has “disarranged many accepted truths.”<sup>4</sup> Many historical documents are produced by institutions and show the priorities and biases of those institutions. In addition, groups like the wartime Japanese military officers deliberately destroyed countless important documents because they believed they would become vulnerable to prosecution at postwar war crimes trials. Historians use what is left, but serious scholars do not consider it to be a complete picture, especially when it comes to the experiences of people for whom the military paid little mind, people like the Comfort Women, Chinese prisoners, and forced laborers whose very existence, let alone their suffering or deaths, seldom made it into documents in the first place.

The selectivity of surviving documents is matched by the selectivity of “national history.” Textbooks and courses are often organized under headings like “American History” and “Japanese History,” but these categories are problematic in that they tie our understanding of the past to modern national categories that emerged in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Individual lives cross these arbitrary borders and are influenced by myriad international factors, just as many important events are not “national” in character. For example, national history is not an appropriate framework for understanding the Holocaust, a series of atrocities that took place across many countries. Relevant sources exist in literally dozens of languages. Any one “national history” is bound to leave out so much that the big picture disappears, just as those same national histories can have little meaning when trying to follow the story of an individual victim. The same is true for **victims** and **victimizers** under Japanese Empire.

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<sup>4</sup> Portelli, viii

More than anything, Japan's **neo-nationalists** and **historical revisionists** have tried to "protect" what they see as Japan's national story from the viewpoints of others. They argue that historical documents are necessary to "prove" that war crimes happened, knowing full well that mass destruction of incriminating evidence took place after the war. This is part of a strategy of pitting "us" and "our story" against "them" and "their falsehoods" that also involves disregarding a plethora of critical historical writing produced by Japanese academics, as well as popular historical perspectives by eye-witnesses like Mizuki Shigeru. One of the bestselling works of neo-nationalist revisionism is Nishio Kanji's *Kokumin no rekishi* (The History of the People). The very title of the work suggests that there is a history of "we Japanese" that exists independently from the histories of others and that the author can define what that history is and what it is not.

As Philip Seaton explains in this chapter, neo-nationalist writers like *Sensoron* (On War) author Kobayashi Yoshinori do not discount oral history and testimony. They *do*, however, discount the accounts of non-Japanese. Racist generalizations are used to justify this. Neo-nationalists have consistently put forward the view that Chinese are fundamentally untruthful. In *The Alleged Nanking Massacre—Japan's Rebuttal to China's Forged Claims* by Takemoto Tadao and Ohara Yasuo, the authors make the claim that "... Japanese culture, which has produced the serenity of the Noh play and the Tea ceremony, may be quite opposite contrasted with the Chinese culture, which is festively decorated with gongs and firecrackers. The peculiar Chinese [sense of] fantasy of such expressions as '30,000 feet of long white hair' may have produced The Rape of Nanking." This is a reference to a Chinese folktale, and its obviously exaggerated character becomes an argument that Chinese have an ethnic or cultural proclivity to simply make things up. Takemoto and Ohara are equally selective in choosing *noh* plays and the tea ceremony (the aesthetics of which originated in China) to represent Japan, ignoring the country's rich fantastical literature and folk traditions to make an essentializing point. Some neo-nationalists go even further. Rightist pundit Watanabe Shoichi argues that Japanese could not possibly have committed atrocities in Nanking because such concepts do not exist in Japanese culture: "Originally, the idea of 'massacre' did not even exist in Japan.... The Chinese, however, they loot, they kill, they'll do anything." Contempt for China combined with silly self-aggrandizement sets the pattern of much neo-nationalist writing.<sup>5</sup>

We should note as well that **neo-nationalists** are thinking about history as a form of struggle between nations over truth. They claim to be writing *Japan's* rebuttal against *China*. This is despite the fact that most mainstream Japanese academics and some of the best research on the extent of Japanese war crimes in China has been carried out by Japanese historians like Fujiwara Akira and Yoshida Yutaka. Indeed, David Askew has argued that "Japanese [scholarship] has produced the most advanced research, with the debate in English lagging years if not decades behind." None of this is relevant to Japanese deniers, however, who claim to speak for all Japanese against all Chinese as the true representatives of "national history."<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Watanabe Shōichi, *Chūgoku wo eikyūni damaraseru 100 mon 100 tō* (One Hundred Questions and Answers to Shut China Up for Good) (Tokyo: Wac, 2007), p. 36.

<http://www.truthofnanking.com/allegednankingmassacre1.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.japanfocus.org/-David-Askew/1729>



Philip Seaton's article explains how Kobayashi Yoshinori prioritizes Japanese experiences based on often emotional testimony while dismissing the viewpoints of others. This fetishism for documents in some cases but not in others shows the hypocrisy of Japanese neo-nationalism and the lengths that some of its ideologues will go to protect what they view as "Japan's story."

## Historiography and Japanese War Nationalism: Testimony in *Sensōron*, *Sensōron* as Testimony

### Philip Seaton

*This essay looks at the use of testimony by manga artist Kobayashi Yoshinori, a prominent neonationalist voice on war issues. It focuses on three themes to assess his 1998 manga Sensōron (On War): Kobayashi's stated position on the validity of testimony as evidence, how testimony is used within Kobayashi's arguments, and the inherently autobiographical nature of Kobayashi's writings. It reveals a key nationalist hypocrisy: while the rejection of personal testimony by victims of Japanese war actions as evidence on historiographical grounds remains central to nationalist denial strategies, testimony is used freely and uncritically to support nationalist agendas.*

**NOTE: This article originally included several pages of Manga, which for copyright reasons could not be reproduced in this reader. The Manga can be viewed at the end of the online version of this article: <http://www.japanfocus.org/-Philip-Seaton/3397>**

### Introduction

The bestselling manga *Sensōron* (1998) established Kobayashi Yoshinori as one of the most influential voices within Japan's neonationalist movement of the 1990s and 2000s. *Sensōron* was a collection of Kobayashi's writings on war in his *Shin gōmanizumu sengen* (New Declaration of Arrogance) column in the magazine *Sapio*.<sup>1</sup> This and Kobayashi's subsequent books have total sales of many millions.<sup>2</sup> Kobayashi also became a spokesman for the Japanese Society for History Textbook Reform (Atarashii rekishi kyōkasho wo tsukurukai, hereafter "Tsukurukai") as it produced its nationalistic junior high school textbook in the late 1990s, although he left Tsukurukai in 2001 following the dismal failure to achieve school adoptions of the book. From 2002 to 2009 he focused his energy on editorship of the magazine *Wascism* (Me-ism), and he continues to write his manga column for *Sapio*. In the twelve years since *Sensōron* was published, Kobayashi has lost none of his ability to stir controversy regarding important issues affecting Japan today and to regularly work his way onto the bestseller shelves in Japanese bookstores.

Kobayashi's manga covers many topics other than war history, but his chauvinistic war nationalism (the defense of Japanese war aims and conduct during World War II, and categorical denial of atrocities such as the Nanjing Massacre) combined with his undoubted talent as a manga artist have earned him a large, loyal fan base. He also has numerous domestic and international critics. There is an extensive Japanese literature dedicated to debunking Kobayashi's arguments in *Sensōron* and elsewhere.<sup>3</sup> Whereas these critiques are mainly by progressives aiming to discredit Kobayashi's evidence and historical narrative, in English his work has been analyzed more for the insights it provides into the state of contemporary war debates and ideological confrontations in Japan over war history. Aaron Gerow, for example, has analyzed *Sensōron* for its slick, new packaging of well-worn nationalist arguments;<sup>4</sup> Rumi Sakamoto focuses on what Kobayashi's eulogies to the kamikaze and exhortations to patriotism mean to Japanese youth in the twenty-first century;<sup>5</sup> and I have argued that *Sensōron* provides important insights into how family relationships and other personal experiences seemingly unrelated to the war can feed into understandings of war history.<sup>6</sup>

This essay does not focus on Kobayashi's politics per se, but on historiographical and methodological issues relating to his use of testimony in *Sensōron*. Throughout the manga the stories of numerous individuals are told, including those of Kobayashi himself. Kobayashi acts as his own narrator/central character and one of his trademarks is to appear at the end of a chapter and say "*Gōmanka mashite yoka desu ka*" ("Mind if I sound off a little arrogantly?" in Kyushu dialect – Kobayashi hails from Fukuoka) before making his point for the chapter.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, with many episodes recounted from his own family background and childhood, *Sensōron* can be read as an autobiographical account of how and why Kobayashi has come to hold the nationalistic views he does. In this sense, *Sensōron* is testimony: Kobayashi's testimony.

It is ironic that a prominent nationalist in Japan should have made such an impact with this kind of book given the litany of attacks by neonationalists on the introduction of testimony as historical evidence. Nationalists have typically promoted documentary-based positivist historiography, with a particular focus on official documentation, and made great efforts to invalidate testimony as a reliable historical source, particularly when the testimony is given by someone deemed to have an agenda hostile to Japan (such as former "comfort women" or forced laborers demanding apologies and compensation from the Japanese state). With tens of thousands of witnesses testifying to the atrocities of the Japanese military, it is far easier to make a blanket rebuttal of testimony as evidence than to rebut the evidence within each piece of testimony. There are concerted nationalist attacks on specific pieces of testimony considered especially "dangerous" or "damaging" (the best example, discussed below, being Yoshida Seiji's testimony – later withdrawn as a "fabrication" – that as a soldier he abducted women to make them "comfort women"), but the blanket discrediting of testimony is still necessary because not every witness can be discredited individually.

Within the context of war history, therefore, the appeal to nationalists of the methodology of traditional positivist history has far less to do with concerns for historiographical rigor than with legitimizing the obvious bias within Japanese documentary evidence. For example, in the historiography of the era of colonialism and war from 1895-1945, the voices of non-Japanese (or even Japanese) victims do not appear in official wartime documents, specifically in the documents that survived the willful destruction of all incriminating evidence at the end of the war. Rather, it is the authoritative voice of the state that commands the stage. But nationalists face a secondary problem: positivist history as methodology does not specify *whose* documents may or may not be used. The historiography of Japanese nationalistic denial requires another stage: the dismissal of documents in *international* archives as "wartime anti-Japanese propaganda". This fits into a broader campaign to say that the Japanese public today is easily "brainwashed" by Chinese use of the war as a diplomatic card, or duped by other foreign accusations of Japanese war guilt, such as the postwar War Guilt Information Program run by US Occupation forces.

Damning testimony, it goes without saying, is ipso facto unacceptable as evidence within this self-serving nationalist historiography. The inclusion of "favorable" testimony in so many nationalist texts, including *Sensōron*, however, indicates what is really going on: the mantra of positivist history is inconsistently applied and constitutes little more than an attempt to place a scholarly veneer on the real agenda of discrediting any testimonial evidence inconsistent with the line that Japanese war actions were just or noble.

It is within this context that Kobayashi's work assumes particular significance. This "Bible" of the Japanese rightwing relies heavily on testimony, which has been so frequently attacked by the rightwing. *Sensōron* is replete with named, drawn characters telling their stories, including Kobayashi himself. The depiction and treatment of the testimony varies markedly from case to case depending on whether the testifier's views are congruent or not with Kobayashi's own views. In other words, *Sensōron* epitomizes the inconsistent and self-serving use of testimony and evidence in nationalist texts.

### **Sensōron on Testimony**

Kobayashi's stated position on testimony, typical of that of many nationalists, is outlined in Chapter 12 of *Sensōron*: "*Shōgen' to iu mono*" (This thing called "testimony"). With no obvious sense of irony, Kobayashi introduces his subject through some testimony by describing one of his personal experiences: a murder plot against him hatched by the Aum Shinrikyō Cult (which perpetrated the 1995 sarin gas attack on the Tokyo subway). Kobayashi had been a strident critic of the cult, a stance that won him many plaudits, even from people who would later revile his stance on nationalism and war. Kobayashi describes how in December 1994 he reported to the police that he was being tailed by members of Aum. In addition, a member of Aum testified in police custody to the murder plot, and another witness positively identified a person acting suspiciously outside Kobayashi's home. Nevertheless, none of this testimony was sufficient to lay charges of conspiracy to commit murder. "There was no evidence" (*shōko ga nai*), he laments; by implication, testimony is not evidence.<sup>8</sup>

Kobayashi then makes a statement on the trustworthiness of testimony that would be familiar to testimony-based researchers, and would not be particularly disputed by even the most fervent practitioners of life history.

"Testimony" is mingled with various things: preconceptions, mistakes, embellishments, or lies. It changes over time and may be distorted according to the person eliciting the testimony. People may exaggerate, and in repeated tellings of the testimony it becomes a story. Any sensible person in a constitutional state must be aware of this.<sup>9</sup>

The subsequent warnings of the dangers of smooth-talking liars, or the prejudices that encourage people to believe false accusations are also eminently reasonable: he gives the example of a woman "crying rape" against rugby players, and discusses how rugby players in such circumstances face a battle to prove their innocence because people are often quick to assume rugby players would do such things.

So far so good, *or so it seems*. However, part of Kobayashi's skill in winning over people to his views is the way in which he makes reasonable points and then extends similar arguments to more controversial (and not necessarily comparable) arguments. The controversial arguments, therefore, seem reasonable. For example, shortly after discussing the issue of false accusations against rugby players, Kobayashi slips effortlessly into a seemingly comparable situation: "false accusations" against Japanese soldiers regarding the rape of "comfort women". According to Kobayashi, prejudices against Japanese soldiers mean that people all too readily believe the stories of "comfort women".

The comparison is disingenuous because it makes the point of comparison people's prejudices (namely the common assumption of guilt based on reputation rather than evidence) rather than

the crimes in question (which differ because rugby players do not commit such crimes in designated rugby player brothels set up on the instigation of the rugby authorities). Kobayashi is encouraging his readers to feel that the Japanese soldiers, rather than the “comfort women”, are the victims because they have been unfairly maligned, but he is avoiding the core issue. Given the coercive nature of the “comfort station” system, organized and controlled by the Japanese military, it is reasonable to assume that every time a “comfort woman” was visited by a Japanese soldier it was rape in the absence of proof that the “comfort woman” a) had freely consented to being a “comfort woman”, and b) truly wanted to have sex with Japanese soldiers. By contrast, in the case of rugby players, the absence of a dedicated rugby players’ brothel system set up by the rugby authorities means that the determination of whether a crime has been committed rests solely on the circumstances of the individual case: word of accuser against accused and any other available physical/circumstantial evidence.

Such issues clarify why Japanese nationalists are passionately dedicated to refuting the criminality of the “comfort station” system. The alternative is to accept that the state was liable for setting up a rape system, and that every soldier who visited a “comfort station” was by definition a rapist. Such a conclusion would be utterly antithetical to the nationalist claims of a just war, and the purity and nobility of the sacrifice of those Japanese soldiers who fought and died for the cause.

In the attempt to refute the “rape system” charge, nationalists have focused their energies on denying that there is any evidence (narrowly defined to mean “official Japanese government documents”) of “forced transportation” (*kyōsei renkō*, a euphemism for abduction or enslavement, which is also used in the context of forced labor in factories and mines).<sup>10</sup> If such denials are accepted, responsibility for any sufferings of “comfort women” lies with “comfort station” managers, recruiters and individual clients, not the Japanese military or Japanese state. Japanese soldiers were not rapists by definition, but (to cite an analogy proposed by nationalists that understandably caused a firestorm of indignation) were individuals purchasing a subcontracted service, just like civil servants eating at a canteen in their ministry building that is run by a private catering company.<sup>11</sup>

In this context, the “involvement” (*kanyo*) in the running of the “comfort station” system by the Japanese military – which was the major claim made by historian Yoshimi Yoshiaki on the front page of the *Asahi* newspaper on 11 January 1992 that forced an apology from Prime Minister Miyazawa Kiichi a few days later on a visit to South Korea – was a non-issue. Of course there was Japanese military “involvement”, in the same way that a government ministry is “involved” in a canteen within its building. So what? For Kobayashi:

“There were no women abducted (*kyōsei renkō*) by the Japanese military or turned into sexual slaves. There were women who sold their services to Japanese soldiers of their own volition (*jihatsutekina shōfu*) or because of unavoidable circumstances (*yamunaki shōfu*), and that’s all there is to it.”<sup>12</sup>

The implication within Kobayashi’s reasoning is that any “comfort women’s” sufferings were brought upon themselves.

But, unwittingly, Kobayashi’s comparison with rugby players illustrates precisely why “involvement” is the issue, and not simply “forced transportation”/abduction. The comparison

clarifies why the “comfort women” issue is a collective/state responsibility issue by introducing a supposedly “comparable” situation which is clearly only an individual responsibility issue.

Nevertheless, for nationalists the lack of documentary proof of “forced transportation” is the key. Kobayashi states that former Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary Ishihara Nobuo and even Chief Cabinet Secretary Kōno Yōhei (who delivered the [Japanese government’s official apology to the “comfort women” on 4 August 1993](#)) have admitted that there was no “evidence” (meaning “something other than testimony”) for “forced transportation” provided for the 1993 report. Admission of “forced transportation” had been made to appease political pressure from South Korea, Kobayashi claims.<sup>13</sup>

Kobayashi continues by trumpeting the recantation of the testimony of Yoshida Seiji, a soldier who said he abducted women to work as “comfort women” in a book titled *Watashi no Sensō Hanzai* (My War Crimes, published by Sanichi Shobō in 1983). Yoshida’s testimony, in Kobayashi’s view, is a classic example of “testimony” as “fiction”.<sup>14</sup> Kobayashi completes his dismissal of the “comfort women” as a war responsibility issue by portraying the testimony of “comfort women” as a product of contemporary political expediency. The “comfort women” were not testifying immediately after their wartime experience, but decades later on the incitement of leftist activists. Indeed, the first significant testimony by former “comfort women” only took place more than forty years after the end of the war. As Kobayashi put it:

There was no testimony then, but there is now. People are wrapped up by testimony tainted with today’s values of human rights, feminism and anti-war principles, *Gōmanka mashite yoka desu ka?* People who want to be good people don’t have the guts to distance themselves from testimony.<sup>15</sup>

These arguments reveal the three key mechanisms of nationalistic denial with regard to the treatment of testimony.

First, a distinction is made between “testimony” and “evidence”. Actually, testimony *is* a form of evidence, which, like any other piece of evidence, needs to be corroborated. It may not be “physical evidence”, but it is evidence nonetheless.<sup>16</sup>

Second, Kobayashi insists upon criminal court standards of “innocent until proven guilty” and “beyond all reasonable doubt” regarding the “charges” brought against Japan relating to the “comfort women”. In other words, as long as the testimony of witnesses may be disregarded and there is a lack of official documentary evidence, Japan remains “not guilty”. This helps explain the nationalist obsession with disputing individual pieces of evidence of Japanese war crimes, such as some gruesome photographs, allegedly of atrocities in China, dismissed by Kobayashi as fakes (Chapter 11, see below Figure 11). Kobayashi and other nationalists have had some success in exposing doctored or fake photographs, and this contribution to historiography must be recognized. But a photograph proven to be a fake is not evidence for the lack of Japanese atrocities. It is merely a statement about that individual photograph. The disingenuous feature of such nationalist tactics is creating the impression that each piece of evidence declared “unreliable” constitutes a step toward the “innocent” verdict for Japan that must follow if guilt cannot be conclusively proven.

But historians cannot operate in terms of simple black and white, or “innocent” and “guilty”. Historical evidence is often contradictory and incomplete, and defies a definitive reconstruction

of the past. Yet this does not mean that historians are unable to reach a conclusion “beyond all reasonable doubt”. Nobody denies that the “comfort stations” existed, and the compelling evidence of what went on inside them (extensive harrowing testimony from both “comfort women” and Japanese soldiers) is that the “comfort station” system subjected thousands of women to appalling and sustained sexual violence. Even so, we do not yet have a definitive history of the “comfort women” as there are many issues which remain to be uncovered – such as the extremely sensitive issue of how local recruiters, and not only the Japanese military, were complicit in the enslavement of, and abuses suffered by, “comfort women”. So, whether documents exist to “prove” the existence of “forced transportation” or the exact circumstances in a specific case is hardly the point, unless one is trying to “prove” the exact details of a specific individual’s case in a court of law.

Third, and most significantly, Kobayashi’s chapter on testimony reveals the nationalist double standard that exists throughout *Sensōron*: testimony supporting his historical views is acceptable, while all other testimony is ipso facto “unreliable”. Kobayashi started his chapter on testimony with the story of Aum’s plot to kill him. Using his standards of “evidence”, we should actually disregard this anecdote as “unreliable” because it is based on only three pieces of testimony (a far smaller body of evidence than exists concerning the brutalities committed in “comfort stations”). Using testimony, specifically his own uncorroborated testimony, to make the argument for why testimony is “unreliable” is ironic. ... or perhaps extraordinary hubris.

Kobayashi has been extraordinarily successful, however, in blinding many readers to such analytical inconsistencies. It is vital to recognize that nationalists like Kobayashi are not simply “extremists”. Kobayashi and others with similar views are dedicated to defending national honor and promoting their idealized view of Japan. Often these goals can be achieved using eminently “reasonable” or “moderate” arguments that resonate strongly in the mainstream of Japanese public opinion. For example, when going on the offensive about the war records of other nations, Kobayashi is hardly extremist in attacking the inhumanity of atomic and firebombing of civilian targets toward the end of the war, or the multiple atrocities committed by the Chinese state throughout the twentieth century. The problem lies in the failure to apply equivalent moral standards to Japanese actions.

Likewise, Kobayashi makes many sensible points about testimony. Spotting when the argument tips over from “reasonable” to “self-serving and inconsistent” is the key to assessing his work. Kobayashi as both polemicist and manga artist is highly skilled, however, in obscuring that tipping point.

### **Testimony in *Sensōron***

Having established Kobayashi’s double standard in the use of testimony, instances of the double standard in practice become glaringly obvious as one reads the rest of *Sensōron*. Despite debunking testimony in Chapter 12, in Chapter 15, “*Tsūkaina sensō taiken*” (Thrilling War Experiences) Kobayashi spends 64 pages (pp. 209-272, just under one sixth of the 381-page book) recounting the “war experiences” of one individual: Takamura Takehito.

Before turning to Takamura’s story, however, the chapter title “Thrilling War Experiences” deserves discussion. Kobayashi judiciously avoids the word *shōgen*, “testimony”, although the chapter clearly *is* testimony – in other words, a personal narrative account of experiences, whether written or oral. Instead, he used the word *taiken*, “experiences”, which somehow makes



it sound as if the narrative has been substantiated and can thereby join the canon of “historical fact”.

The tremendous irony is that Kobayashi actually depicts himself doing what any conscientious life-history researcher would do when confronted with testimonial evidence: cross-referencing the testimony to other forms of evidence to verify the testimony’s utility as evidence, and following up inquiries with the witness.

“I [Kobayashi] am not a military history buff and am lacking in knowledge, but I tried to write this section making the best use of the available materials (*shiryō*). [His assistant adds] I was touched by how Takamura-san gave frank answers to our ignorant questions.”<sup>17</sup>

On the surface, Kobayashi’s rendition of Takamura’s war service appears to constitute a model example of how to use testimony and demonstrates that Kobayashi is perfectly aware of what is required to satisfy professional codes of life-history research. He has chosen as his witness an upstanding, “reliable” member of postwar society in Japan (Takamura had a distinguished career in business after the war). The story that Kobayashi recounts is of one man’s service as an artilleryman in the Philippines, Burma and towards the end of the war back in Japan as a training officer. As a member of a named unit, the Sakaguchi Unit, Takamura’s testimony (presented in extensive diaries kept at the time) could certainly be cross-checked against the documentary record in the form of the unit history and contemporary newspaper reports. Kobayashi indicates he has done this.<sup>18</sup> The witness was questioned for clarification on certain issues and Kobayashi says there has been a rigorous process of checking the story. This is all one can ask the researcher using testimonial evidence to do.

However, there must be three notes of caution, despite the appearance of rigor in the historiography.

First, Takamura’s testimony is obviously used precisely because it supports Kobayashi’s broader political aims: to present “thrilling war experiences” as a counterargument to Japan’s many peace groups with their mantra of “war is bad”. Kobayashi is heavily critical of progressives for the way, he believes, that they actively seek out testimony compatible with their political agendas to press Japan into apologizing more. Such accusations merely sound like hypocrisy, however, when one sees Kobayashi’s own selective use of testimony in action, and, in particular, his overwhelming reliance on a single witness.

Second, some have questioned the story itself. In a discussion on the anonymous internet chat room 2 Channel during 2009 there was an ongoing debate about the reliability of Takamura’s story (running to over 150 postings) under the title [“Takamura Takehito-tte” \(About that Takamura Takehito\)](#). One person noted that Takamura’s diaries and other materials that could have been used to verify his story do not appear in Kobayashi’s bibliography. Indeed, they do not. An innocent oversight on Kobayashi’s part perhaps, but it constitutes a serious omission given Kobayashi’s attempts to portray himself as a rigorous researcher. Consequently, Takamura’s story in *Sensōron* is effectively an unsourced story. Kobayashi nowhere indicates precisely what materials were used. Other netizens question why a person whose war experiences have achieved such prominence seems to exist only in Kobayashi’s book. My own net searches have drawn a blank regarding alternative presentations of Takamura’s story – either in print or online form. Takamura undoubtedly existed: he fought (and lost) an election in 1976 in his native Yamaguchi (running against Kishi Nobusuke of all people!). But it seems Kobayashi has a complete

monopoly on his story. If a “comfort woman” had her story told in such an opaque fashion, Kobayashi would surely have been the first to decry it as “unreliable”.

Third, the chapter is an exciting adventure story cum morality tale in which Takamura is the heroic central character. The chapter has almost a cinematic feel, helped in no small part by the visual format of manga. This significantly increases the danger of the semi-fictionalization of Takamura’s experiences for the purposes of both providing an exhilarating read and conveying the intended message. As Rumi Sakamoto argues (about the whole book, although it is particularly applicable here), “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.”<sup>19</sup> One may only speculate at what “inconvenient” aspects of Takamura’s story were altered or omitted (either by Takamura or Kobayashi).

Most important, however, is the fact that Kobayashi’s treatment of this veteran’s story is in stark contrast to the treatment of the testimony of soldiers confessing to atrocities. This is clearest in Chapter 13, where Kobayashi ridicules the testimony and confessions of members of the Chinese Returnees Association, Chūkiren. This group of around 1,000 soldiers was interned at the Fushun War Criminals Detention Centre after the war, where they reflected on and came to acknowledge their crimes. The soldiers returned to Japan in 1956. In the half-century thereafter, they continued to speak out about their personal crimes and those of their units in an effort to prevent such crimes occurring again. Kobayashi portrays them as sniveling wrecks brainwashed by their Chinese gaolers, rather than ordinary men whose treatment at the hands of their erstwhile enemies placed their own wartime brutality in stark and painful perspective.

The contrast between the treatment of Takamura with his “thrilling” war experiences and this “sniveling” soldier confessing to war crimes is also noteworthy because it illustrates the power of manga as a visual format to influence readers’ views by means other than the use of “evidence”. Through the way people are drawn within the manga, the perceived reliability of witnesses can be portrayed in far more underhanded ways than explicit statements about them. Compare for example Kobayashi’s then colleague in the Japanese Society for History Textbook Reform (Tsukurukai), Nishio Kanji, describing the barbarity of an American soldier in sending a Japanese soldier’s skull to his fiancé as a souvenir (a story made famous by being featured on the cover of *Life Magazine* in May 1944),<sup>20</sup> with arch-opponent historian Yoshimi Yoshiaki (the man whose scoop in the Asahi newspaper on 11 January 1992 ignited the “comfort women” debate in Japan and whose subsequent book became a classic study of the “comfort women”) having to back pedal on the issue of the “forced transportation” of “comfort women” following the 1996 confession of Yoshida Seiji that his testimony of rounding up women was “fiction” (Kobayashi’s term).<sup>21</sup>

The use of testimony in *Sensōron*, therefore, is revealing not only for the clear imbalance between the treatment of testimony supporting and opposing a nationalist agenda, but also in the way that the visual format of the manga is utilized to sway the reader’s opinion about the reliability of both the testimony of historical actors and the views of scholar-activists participating in war debates in Japan.

### ***Sensōron* as Testimony**

*Sensōron* was published in 1998 and a lot has happened in Japanese war discourse since then. Nevertheless, *Sensōron* remains relevant to our understanding of Japanese war nationalism

twelve years after its publication because it remains an influential text and because it frankly reveals why its author, Kobayashi Yoshinori, came to hold nationalistic views.

*Sensōron* can be read as testimony. Kobayashi himself appears frequently throughout the manga, either as narrator or as central character in the story. He often recounts stories from his own life (the Aum death plot incident described above, or his parents' fights, see Figure 2), he depicts himself in the process of researching his topic (see Figure 7), and he often faces his readers and tells them his views.

The autobiographical episodes provide great insight into why Kobayashi has come to hold the views he does. Two particularly important themes emerge: first, his playground scraps with other boys; and second, his reverence for his grandfather in contrast to some thinly veiled disdain for his parents.

First, in Chapter 6 ("The Sprouting of a Moral Individual", *Rinri aru ko no Mebae*), Kobayashi describes being an avid reader of military adventure manga as a boy. The heroic stories of wartime kamikaze pilots were an inspiration during playground fights at school, where he often suffered a beating at the hands of bigger boys.

As an adult, Kobayashi's reverence for the self-sacrifice of kamikaze is transformed but undiminished. "The Kamikaze Spirit" (*Tokkō Seishin*, the title of Chapter 7) is juxtaposed with the selfish individualism and consumerism of modern Japanese society (detailed in Chapter 1, where he concludes by saying, "Japanese individuals are just consumers").<sup>22</sup> The individual (*ko*) and public (*ōyake*) are two key themes for Kobayashi. He finishes Chapter 7 with his trademark *Gōmanka mashite yoka desu ka?* "The kamikaze did not lose their individuality. They discarded it for the sake of the public. They died for the future of the nation, in other words, they died for us."<sup>23</sup>

The second autobiographical theme concerns his grandfather. Kobayashi paints a very unflattering portrait of his parents, particularly his father. There are scenes of Kobayashi as a young boy being hit mercilessly and being held head down by his ankles over a waterfall. This is in marked contrast to the depiction of his grandfather, who was a soldier and member of Katō Daisuke's theater troupe in New Guinea that has been the subject of the book (and later two films) *Minami no shima ni yuki ga furu* (Snow Falling in a Southern Island).<sup>24</sup> Kobayashi has great respect for his grandfather and depicts himself listening intently to the stories of his grandfather as a little boy.<sup>25</sup> At his grandfather's funeral, Kobayashi mourns the passing of a man first "abandoned by the military leadership in New Guinea" and then "abandoned by a masochistic nation of peace activists". But for Kobayashi he was the kind grandfather who tried to stop a little boy from being dangled over the waterfall by his feet.<sup>26</sup> For Kobayashi the thought of his grandfather and other former soldiers being demonized is too much: "Even if they are called evil, I want to defend our grandfathers."<sup>27</sup>

These episodes provide insight into the roots of Kobayashi's nationalism. Both are perennial themes within studies of war memories: the uses to which war history can be put in contemporary circumstances (inspiration in playground fights) and importance of the war narratives of those with whom there are strong ties of blood or identification (his grandfather, and also the kamikaze). Once the strong moral and emotional agenda is defined, treatment of other issues follow suit. If his grandfather was fighting and the kamikaze were dying for Japan, then that Japan must be a nation that was worthy of sacrifice. It cannot be a rapist state complicit

in the forced transportation of thousands of “comfort women”, nor can it be the perpetrator of a heinous massacre in Nanjing or other war crimes. Japan’s honor must be defended at all costs.

Kobayashi’s views may have been taken to an extreme in the length to which he goes to deny Japanese war crimes, but he is utterly “normal” in one important way: his views of history are inextricably linked to personal circumstances. In this sense, Kobayashi’s book has much in common with that of Kurahashi Ayako (see [‘War Responsibility and the Family in Japan’](#)), although Kobayashi’s and Kurahashi’s positions on war history and responsibility could not be further apart. Both books interweave autobiography with historical investigation and clarify how the priorities of the latter are so often driven by the personal/family experiences cataloged in the former. As Japanese people look back on war history, there are few lenses that refract their views of the past more strongly than love and respect for relatives from the war generation.

### **Positivism as the Default Historiography of Japanese Nationalism**

This paper has looked at Kobayashi Yoshinori’s arguments in *Sensōron* from the perspective of testimony: his stated position on testimony, his use of testimony, and possible readings of *Sensōron* as testimony. One must conclude that there is precious little consistency in Kobayashi’s treatment of testimony: the flaws of testimony as “evidence” are explicitly stated in a book whose emotional power rests on the author’s personal testimony; the testimony of those with “friendly” views is treated utterly differently from the testimony of those with “hostile” views; and by becoming his own narrator/central character, Kobayashi blurs the boundaries between personal statement and historical research.

Such inconsistencies place into sharp relief what is really happening in nationalist historiography. Historical positivism has almost become the default methodology for nationalists in Japan, in theory at least (on the evidence of *Sensōron*, as we have seen, the practice may be very different). If one is to continue denying Japanese aggression and atrocities during World War II, one must work to exclude or invalidate the voluminous evidence to the contrary. An important component of this agenda is to insist on Japanese official (government and military) documentary evidence, which to this day remains the basic position of the political right in Japan on war issues. In the October 2009 edition of *Seiron* (the rightwing monthly opinion magazine), for example, Abiru Rui repeated the old mantra that there was no documentary evidence to demonstrate that “comfort women” were forced into military prostitution.<sup>28</sup> Abiru’s arguments were explicitly stated in the context of the Democratic Party of Japan’s election victory, explaining that Prime Minister Hatoyama had to be prevented from going any further than previous governments in repeating the [Murayama communiqué of 1995](#) (the apology repeated by all subsequent Japanese governments as the standard wording of Japan’s official apology). The flaws of such positivist approaches and nationalist historiography have been exposed at length by many researchers,<sup>29</sup> but as long as these disingenuous historiographical practices persist, it is necessary to draw attention to them.

With the installation of the Democratic Party of Japan government in September 2009, the war issue has disappeared somewhat from the international political agenda in East Asia (or perhaps it has just been drowned out by the controversy over the Futenma base relocation issue on the Japanese public agenda). But this does not mean that the historical consciousness debate has been resolved. Japan’s political rightwing may be in the temporary wilderness of opposition, but rightwing voices remain influential and maintain the ability to stir controversy. Kobayashi Yoshinori remains an active publisher, and former Air Self Defense Forces Chief of Staff

Tamogami Toshio (who was forced to resign after winning a prize for an explicitly nationalistic and militaristic essay denying Japanese war guilt) has become the new darling of the rightwing and recreated himself as a prominent pundit following his dismissal from the ASDF in 2008.<sup>30</sup> One can be sure that such people will not lie down and accept a Japanese government taking an apologetic stance, particularly on the “comfort women” issue, based on what they consider to be the “flimsy” evidence of testimony by victims. Consequently, however calm the diplomatic waters seem to be given the more conciliatory stance of the Democratic Party of Japan government toward China and South Korea, Japan’s war memories will remain heavily contested, and the use of testimony will remain an issue of historiographical contestation at the heart of Japan’s unresolved national debate over colonialism and war.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The ‘Shin-Gomanizumu Sengen’ column started in *SPA!* in 1991 and moved to *Sapio* in 1995. See Frederik L. Schodt, *Dreamland Japan: Writings on Modern Manga* (Stone Bridge Press, Berkeley: 1996); pp. 224-8.

<sup>2</sup> Kobayashi’s other books include: *Taiwanron* (On Taiwan, 2000), *Sensōron 2* (On War 2, 2001), *Sensōron 3* (On War 3, 2003), *Okinawaron* (On Okinawa, 2005), *Yasukuniron* (On Yasukuni, 2005), *Iwayuru A-kyu senpan* (The So-Called Class A War Criminals, 2006), *Heisei Jōiron* (Expelling the Barbarians in the Heisei Period, 2007), *Tennōron* (On the Emperor, 2009).

<sup>3</sup> For example, Uesugi Satoshi, *Datsu Gōmanizumu Sengen, Kobayashi Yoshinori no “ianfu” mondai* (Breaking Away from the New Declaration of Arrogance, The “Comfort Women” Issue According to Kobayashi Yoshinori) (Tōhō Shuppan, Osaka: 1997); Obinata Sumio et al, *Kimitachi wa Sensō de Shineru ka, Kobayashi Yoshinori “Sensōron” Hihan* (Can you die for your country in war? A criticism of *Sensōron*) (Otsuki Shoten, Tokyo 1999); Uesugi Satoshi, *Datsu Sensōron, Kobayashi Yoshinori to no Saiban wo Hete* (Breaking Away from *Sensōron*: The Kobayashi Yoshinori Lawsuits) (Tōhō Shuppan, Osaka 2000).

<sup>4</sup> Aaron Gerow, “Consuming Asia, Consuming Japan: the neonationalist revisionism in Japan” in Laura E. Hein and Mark Selden (eds) *Censoring History: citizenship and memory in Japan, Germany and the United States* (M. E. Sharpe, New York: 2000).

<sup>5</sup> Rumi Sakamoto, “Will you go to war? Or will you stop being Japanese? Nationalism and History in Kobayashi Yoshinori’s *Sensōron*”, [The Asia-Pacific Journal](#), 2008.

<sup>6</sup> Philip A. Seaton, *Japan’s Contested War Memories: the “memory rifts” in historical consciousness of World War II* (Routledge, London: 2007), pp. 199-200.

<sup>7</sup> Schodt, *Dreamland Japan*, pp. 225-6.

<sup>8</sup> Kobayashi Yoshinori, *Sensōron*, Tokyo: Gentōsha; pp. 176-7.

<sup>9</sup> *Sensōron*, p. 177.

<sup>10</sup> A further argument is that the high wages “comfort women” could receive in comparison to the soldiers they “comforted” explains why women might *want* to work as “comfort women”. However, refuting abduction (“forced transportation”) is the primary goal for nationalists.

<sup>11</sup> There are various renditions, but one prominent proponent of this analogy was Fujioka Nobukatsu. See Fujioka, Nobukatsu, *“Jigyakushikan” no byōri* (An Analysis of Masochistic Historical Views in Japan (Bunshun Bunko: Tokyo 2000), p. 126.

<sup>12</sup> *Sensōron*, p. 180.

<sup>13</sup> *Sensōron*, p. 179. Following the publication of the Japanese government’s initial investigative report into the “comfort women” on 6 July 1992, the Korean government complained that it was based solely on documentary evidence and ignored “comfort women’s” testimony. The second report, issued on 4 August 1993, which precipitated Kōno’s apology, did include testimony. The testimony was central to the report’s conclusions that there had been the “forced transportation” of women. This is Kobayashi’s primary objection to the second report and Kōno statement. For details see Philip Seaton, “Reporting the ‘comfort women’ issue, 1991-1992: Japan’s contested war memories in the national press,” *Japanese Studies*, Vol. 26, No. 1, May 2006, pp. 99-112.

<sup>14</sup> The leading figure in the campaign to expose Yoshida as a liar was historian and Tsukurukai member Hata Ikuhiko, who visited the areas where Yoshida said he had served and abducted women to become “comfort women”. Hata’s conclusion that Yoshida was lying was published in the nationalistic magazine *Seiron* in the June 1992 edition: “Shōwa shi no nazo wo u – Jūgun ianfutachi no shunjū” (In Pursuit of the Mysteries of Showa History – the age of the “comfort women”). Yoshida was forced to admit he had fabricated parts of his story.

<sup>15</sup> *Sensōron*, p. 182.

<sup>16</sup> Kobayashi suggests through his introductory anecdote (the murder plot against him) that testimony on its own is insufficient to bring criminal charges, but this is somewhat misleading. Groping on trains (*chikan*) is a crime for which there is typically little or no physical evidence, and court proceedings rest solely on the word of accuser, accused and witnesses. Such cases are notoriously difficult to prove (leaving thousands of molested women with little recourse to justice) but have also led to some well-publicized miscarriages of justice. Nevertheless, the existence of such trials (and the admission of testimony in all other trials) clearly indicates that testimony is an important form of evidence that will stand up in court.

<sup>17</sup> *Sensōron*, p. 271.

<sup>18</sup> *Sensōron*, p. 248.

<sup>19</sup> Sakamoto, [“Will you go to war?”](#).

<sup>20</sup> John Dower, *War Without Mercy: Race & Power in the Pacific War* (Pantheon Books, New York: 1986), p. 65.

<sup>21</sup> *Sensōron*, p. 180. See also Yoshimi Yoshiaki, *Comfort Women: Sexual Slavery in the Japanese Military in World War II*, (Columbia University Press, NY: 2000).

<sup>22</sup> *Sensōron*, p. 18. It is highly ironic that such a critique of consumerist Japanese society exists in a text that has become so representative of “consumerist nationalism” on the war issue (see Gerow, “Consuming Asia, Consuming Japan”). Not only Kobayashi but also other nationalist

writers put out dozens of mass-market books regurgitating the familiar nationalist arguments of “Japan did no wrong” or “Japan has been tricked into accepting war guilt”. A consumerist public that feeds on nationalism and the sensational controversy it creates is what enables Kobayashi to become extremely influential (and wealthy!) as an individual.

<sup>23</sup> *Sensōron*, p. 96.

<sup>24</sup> *Sensōron*, pp. 57-64.

<sup>25</sup> *Sensōron*, p. 59.

<sup>26</sup> *Sensōron*, p. 208.

<sup>27</sup> *Sensōron*, p. 64.

<sup>28</sup> Abiru Rui, “Dai-ni Murayama danwa wo soshi seyo” (Let’s prevent a second Murayama communiqué), *Seiron* September 2009, pp. 92-3.

<sup>29</sup> For a good recent example see Yonson Ahn, ‘Japan’s “comfort women” and Historical Memory: The Neo-nationalist Counter-attack,’ in Sven Saaler and Wolfgang Schwentker (eds) *The Power of Memory in Modern Japan* (Global Oriental, Folkestone: 2008), pp. 32-53.

<sup>30</sup> Herbert Bix, “Tamogami's World: Japan's Top Soldier Reignites Conflict Over the Past”, [The Asia-Pacific Journal](#), 2008.



**“Hiroshima: The Autobiography of Barefoot Gen”**

NAKAZAWA Keiji; Translated by Richard H. Minear

September 27, 2010

<http://www.japanfocus.org/-Nakazawa-Keiji/3416>

Hiroshima atomic bomb survivor Nakazawa Keiji's (1939-) manga *Hadashi no Gen* (Barefoot Gen, 1973-85) is one of the most powerful graphic novels ever produced. Running over 2000 pages, the manga is loosely based on the experiences of the author, who lost his father, sister, and younger brother to the bomb. *Barefoot Gen* has been enduringly popular and sold millions of copies. It has been adapted into other media numerous times including two harrowing animated films, which opened in Japan in 1983 and 1986 and are available in English translation from Geneon, a live action film trilogy in the 1970s, and a 2007 TV drama.

In *Barefoot Gen*, the devastation of Hiroshima is seen through a child's eyes and strongly evokes the image of Japanese as **victims** in war, but the story is extremely nuanced in the way that it deals with Japan's war experience. While Nakazawa expresses ire toward American GIs who, laughing and carrying on, casually posed for photos in the ruins of the devastated city, like Mizuki Shigeru, he reserves most of his anger for Japan's wartime leaders. Nakazawa's work is notable for condemning the ease in which Emperor Hirohito, the wartime head of state, was redeemed and incorporated back into public life as a symbol of “peace and democracy.” He also rails against hypocritical elites who preached a fight to the last against “American devils” late in the war only to vigorously cooperate with the American occupiers' crackdowns on unions, socialists, and communists, some of the very groups and individuals who had done the most to resist Japanese militarism.

In articulating a critique of wartime Japan in *Barefoot Gen*, Nakazawa sketches a vision of Japan's war experience that is difficult to characterize. That diversity is one of the strengths of the work. While the hellish scenes of the destruction of Hiroshima and the grim suffering of survivors in the aftermath of the bombing are the manga's most powerful and memorable images, Nakazawa does not dwell on the image of Japanese as **victims** of war. In the manga, protagonist Gen's father condemns militarism and tells his son about the atrocities committed by Japanese troops in China. His anti-war beliefs make him a target of the thought police and he is arrested and tortured. The family are branded “traitors” and are shunned by Japanese neighbors. They are helped, however, by Park, a Korean neighbor who shares his rice ration to help them get by. In the aftermath of the bombing, Park's father, badly burned in the blast, is refused treatment by a Japanese doctor who yells, “Do you think we have time to waste treating you Koreans!?” In this way, Nakazawa puts forward **varied positions** on war history, coupling his experience as a victim whose family was shattered by the bomb with honest reflection on the violence, racism, and stifling ideological controls of wartime Japan.

Throughout his career, Nakazawa remained a consistent critic of nuclear armament and militarism of all kinds. While they remain un-translated, Nakazawa penned other manga on themes as varied as Japanese atrocities in China and the suffering of Okinawan civilians under American occupation which lasted into the 1970s. These are available as part of his “Complete Works” in Japanese.

Presented here is an excerpt from Nakazawa's autobiography which, in prose as powerful as his manga penmanship, gives a stark look at the atomic bombing of Hiroshima.

## **Hiroshima: The Autobiography of Barefoot Gen**

**Nakazawa Keiji**

**Translated and Edited by Richard H. Minear**

*The Asia-Pacific Journal* is honored to offer a preview of *Hiroshima: The Autobiography of Barefoot Gen* by Nakazawa Keiji, including Richard Minear's introduction and a chapter of the book, with Nakazawa's manga illustrations.

### **Translator's Introduction**

**Richard H. Minear**

*Many in the English-speaking world need no introduction to Barefoot Gen.<sup>1</sup> They have read the manga, available in ten volumes in fine translation, or they have seen the animated movie, available on YouTube and elsewhere. Barefoot Gen is already international. It started in Japan, as a manga serial, in 1973. Then a relatively unknown manga artist, Nakazawa Keiji completed the serial in 1985. By then it had grown into a ten-volume book. Barefoot Gen's Japanese readers number in the many tens of millions. And there have been film versions: a three-part live-action film (1976–1980), a two-part anime (1983 and 1986), and a two-day television drama (2007). There is a book of readers' responses, *Letters to Barefoot Gen*. On GoogleJapan, "Hadashi no Gen" returns more than two million hits.*

*What has its impact been outside of Japan? In the late 1970s there was a first, partial English translation of the manga. It has now appeared in a second, complete translation (Last Gasp, 2004–2009). Volume I has an introduction by Art Spiegelman, creator of Maus. Spiegelman begins: "Gen haunts me. The first time I read it was in the late 1970s, shortly after I'd begun working on Maus. . . . Gen effectively bears witness to one of the central horrors of our time. Give yourself over to . . . this extraordinary book." R. Crumb has called the series "Some of the best comics ever done." Wikipedia has articles on Barefoot Gen and Keiji Nakazawa and on the films, the anime, and the television drama. On YouTube, the anime sequence of the dropping of the bomb—in English—has racked up more than one hundred thousand views, and the rest of the anime is also available. There are translations into Dutch, Esperanto, German, Finnish, French, and Norwegian, with others in the works.*

*The Autobiography of Barefoot Gen may well come as a surprise to those in the English-language world who don't read manga or watch anime. I hope it will lead them to seek out both versions. Even those who already know Barefoot Gen may wish to relive that story in a different genre. After all, manga has its conventions, and they differ from the conventions of prose autobiography. In his introduction to the ten-volume English translation of the manga, Spiegelman mentions the "overt symbolism" as seen in the "relentlessly appearing sun," the "casual violence" as seen in Gen's father's treatment of his children, and the "cloyingly cute" depictions. Under the latter category Spiegelman discusses the "Disney-like oversized Caucasian eyes and generally neotenic faces." Neotenic? Webster's Encyclopedic Dictionary (1989) defines neoteny as "the retention of larval characters beyond the normal period; the occurrence of adult characteristics in larvae." Spiegelman has the latter definition in mind: consider our cover and its faces of Gen, age six, and Tomoko, a few months old.*

*Apart from the illustrations he drew specifically for the autobiography, those conventions do not apply to Nakazawa's autobiography. Beyond the conventions Spiegelman mentions, I would comment that even though he writes of the extreme hunger that most Japanese experienced in 1945, he depicts all of his characters as remarkably well-fed. Such is also the case with the almost Rubenesque figures in the Hiroshima screens of Iri and Toshi Maruki.<sup>2</sup> Nakazawa had no formal training in art, but perhaps conventions of the art world trumped memory.*

*The autobiography has appeared in two editions. It appeared first in 1987, with the title *The Void That Is "Hiroshima"—Account of the Nakazawa Clan*. Nakazawa revised that version and reissued it in 1995 in the version that I have translated.<sup>3</sup> It poses few problems of translation, but I should mention one issue: the names of family members. Throughout the autobiography, Nakazawa refers to his older brothers as "Oldest brother" and "Next oldest brother." I have identified them always by given names, Kōji and Akira. He uses given names consistently for his older sister, Eiko, and baby sister, Tomoko. He refers to his younger brother throughout as Susumu. (The manga calls him Shinji. Susumu and Shin are alternate readings of the same character.)<sup>4</sup>*

*Nakazawa's *Autobiography of Barefoot Gen* makes compelling reading. Mark Selden has written that it is "in certain ways the most riveting book we have on the bomb." Suitable—if that's the right word—for readers of all ages, this may be the single most accessible account of the Hiroshima experience. Needless to say, it is Nakazawa's account, and it is colored by his biases. These include an intense aversion to the wartime Japanese government and its policies, domestic and foreign, and an understandable hatred of the American military that dropped the atomic bomb on Hiroshima.*

*This translation preserves the character and quality of the original. To reach the broadest possible English-language audience, I have left few Japanese terms beyond manga and anime untranslated. I have even translated the term hibakusha as "bomb victim" or "bomb victims." I have deleted specific place names where it was possible to do so without altering the narrative. I provide maps of Nakazawa's Hiroshima, a limited number of footnotes, and five excerpts from *Barefoot Gen*. But these additions are not essential to a thoughtful reading of the book. As an appendix I include an excerpt from an interview with Nakazawa that took place in August 2007.*

*This book is a translation of Nakazawa Keiji's prose autobiography. It also includes, between the prose chapters, four-page excerpts from Nakazawa's graphic novel *Barefoot Gen*. The complete *Barefoot Gen* fills ten volumes, a total of some twenty-five hundred pages. These excerpts are intended to give readers who have not read it a taste of the manga.*

*Graphic novels are works of art with their own conventions and perspectives. They are not "creative nonfiction," an oxymoron I encountered for the first time in a discussion of a recent fraudulent book on Hiroshima.<sup>5</sup> They are fictional even if based on actual events. Like Spiegelman's *Maus*, *Barefoot Gen* is an artistic representation of reality. Compare *Barefoot Gen* and this autobiography, and numerous contrasts emerge. Nakazawa himself has pointed to one important one:*

*What differs about the death of my father from *Barefoot Gen* is that I myself wasn't at the scene. Mom told me about it, in gruesome detail. It was in my head, so in the manga I decided to have Gen be there and try to save his father. Mom always had nightmares about it. She said it was unbearable—she could still hear my brother's cries. Saying "I'll die with you," she locked my*

*brother in her arms, but no matter how she pulled, she couldn't free him. Meanwhile, my brother said, "It's hot!" and Dad too said, "Do something!" My older sister Eiko, perhaps because she was pinned between beams, said not a thing. At the time, Mom said, she herself was already crazed. She was crying, "I'll die with you." Fortunately, a neighbor passing by said to her, "Please stop; it's no use. No need for you to die with them." And, taking her by the hand, he got her to flee the spot. When she turned back, the flames were fierce, and she could hear clearly my brother's cries, "Mother, it's hot!" It was unbearable. Mom told me this scene, bitterest of the bitter. A cruel way to kill.*<sup>6</sup>

*Gen's presence at a crucial moment when Nakazawa Keiji was absent is not the only difference. To sustain the twenty-five hundred pages of Barefoot Gen, Nakazawa invented subplots. One example is the character Kondō Ryūta, who appears nowhere in the autobiography. Astonishingly, the recent fraudulent book treats Ryūta as a real person, including him, for example, in his appendix "The People": "A five-year-old Hiroshima orphan, unofficially adopted into the family of Keiji 'Gen' Nakazawa. He lived in the same neighborhood as Dr. Hachiya." It's as if a historian of the European holocaust were to treat one of the characters in Art Spiegelman's Maus as a real person.*<sup>7</sup>

*Barefoot Gen is art. This book is autobiography. Even if, as a genre, autobiography is notorious for a bias in favor of the author, sheer fabrication is beyond the pale. RM*

### ***The Day of the Flash and Boom***

August 6, 1945, Monday. B-29s had flown over Hiroshima twice the night before, and air raid sirens had sounded constantly. I awoke unhappy that I hadn't gotten enough sleep. The weather the morning of August 6 swept that unhappiness away. The sky was cloudless and absolutely clear, bright sunlight pierced our eyes, and houses and trees stood out as if painted in primary colors. My eyes felt as if they'd been washed clean, and my unhappiness over lack of sleep vanished, too.

Suddenly, at about 7:20, soon after the whole family, gathered about the round table, had finished breakfast, the sirens sounded. I was surprised. Strange: I didn't remember sirens sounding that early in the morning. Dad muttered, "Mr. Enemy is coming really early. Unusual." Urged on by Mom, who said we'd be in danger if bombs fell, we made our preparations and headed for the neighborhood air raid trench. Mom's due date was approaching, and clutching her swollen belly, she huffed and puffed as she ran. In the trench, I said, "At worst, it's another observation plane. No need to worry," and played with Susumu. Sure enough, the megaphone voice came, "All clear!" and we returned home, kidding ourselves for getting all flustered over the alert—"An observation plane, after all."

Looking up into the clear blue sky, I could still see the contrail of the B-29, a white strip; in the distance it had already fanned out. Dad said to Mom, burdened by her big belly, "Today will be hot." The B-29 that flew in that morning was a reconnaissance plane to check the weather



conditions over Hiroshima and to photograph the target before the bombing. Had the atomic bomb been dropped then, many would have survived because they'd run to the trenches.

The "all clear" came, and reassured, the four hundred thousand residents of Hiroshima all began the day's activities. City trolleys went busily on their rounds, car after car disgorging its passengers; a continual flow of people headed for businesses and factories. People began their activities. Children headed to school. Housewives cleared away breakfast things and set about cleaning or doing the wash. Soldiers started drilling. Mobilized for labor service, women and students collected the detritus from collapsed houses and carted the stuff off.

At that time the elementary school we were going to had no summer vacation; we had to go to school to study to become strong "little patriots." With my air raid hood hanging off one shoulder and my satchel on my back, I went out onto the clothes-drying porch off the second floor and said to Mom, who was hanging laundry out to dry, "I'm off." In her apron, wiping off sweat, Mom went on hanging out the clothes.

On the drying porch, flowers and plants in pots were lined up, models for Dad to paint. A strange thing had happened with these potted plants. There was fruit on the loquat. The whole family stared: "Fruit on a *potted* tree?" Dad told us, sharply, "When it's ripe, I'm going to paint it, so hands off!" With a sinister premonition, Mom worried, "Something must be out of kilter meteorologically." I'm not a fatalist, but Mom's sinister premonition turned out to be accurate.



With one eye on the loquat, I went downstairs. Eiko was sitting in the nine-by-twelve-foot room leading to the entryway. On the round table she'd lined up textbook and notes and was sharpening a pencil. I called to Eiko, "C'mon." For once Eiko said, "I have to look something up; you go on ahead." Beside the entryway was a nine-by-nine-foot room, and Dad, clad in kimono, was setting to work. I said to Dad, "I'm off," and he nodded and straightened his kimono. In the entryway my younger brother Susumu (age four) was plumped down, holding a model warship, pretending that it was making headway through waves. He was singing in a loud voice, "Tater, tater, white potato, sweet potato."<sup>8</sup> Seeing me, Susumu urged, "Hurry home after school. We'll go to the river and sail this ship."

I never dreamed that this would be the last time I saw Dad, Eiko, and Susumu. With Susumu's song at my back, I joined the neighborhood kids, and we went to Kanzaki Elementary School, less than half a mile from our house. Kanzaki Elementary School faced the trolley street linking Eba and Yokogawa. It was surrounded by a concrete wall. The gate on the trolley street was the back gate. In the center of the schoolyard towered a huge willow tree, spreading its branches wide. Behind it was the two-story wooden school building, L-shaped. Those of us in the lower grades would enter the school singing, led by students in the upper grades:

We owe it to the soldiers  
That today, too, we can go to school  
Shoulder to shoulder with our classmates.

Thank you, you soldiers  
Who fought for country, for country.

Singing at the top of our lungs this totally militaristic anthem, we'd advance up the trolley street and go through the gate.

A person's fate—life or death—truly is a matter of sheerest chance. Had I entered the gate that day as I always did, I would have been wiped off the face of the earth. Standing in the broad schoolyard with absolutely no cover, I would have been bathed—my whole body—in the rays the atomic bomb radiated, more than 9,000 degrees Fahrenheit, hot enough to melt iron. Burned pitch-black, I would have died.

That day, a moment before entering the gate, I was stopped by a classmate's mother. She asked me, "The air raid alert sounded a bit ago. Are today's classes at the school or at the temple?" At that time, those in the lower grades alternated between the school and a local temple as place of instruction because of the danger that we wouldn't be able to flee if bombs fell. The concrete wall on either side of the gate was a foot thick. Moving close to it, I replied to her, "We won't know till we ask Teacher," and I happened to look up.

In the sky, the vapor trail of a B-29 stretched along the mountains of the Chūgoku range, seemingly headed for the center of Hiroshima. The sun reflected off the nose of the plane's glittering duralumin body. Pointing at the B-29 approaching steadily, I called, "Ma'am, it's a B. . . ." She too looked up and said, "You're right: a B-29. Strange that the air raid alert hasn't sounded," and the two of us looked up at the approaching B-29.

Had the sirens sounded at this point, as they had earlier that morning with the reconnaissance plane, many people would have fled to air raid trenches and survived. I think it was truly a clever psychological tactic on the part of the U.S. military. To make the residents short of sleep from having the air raid alarm go off twice the previous night and to foster the mind-set "Hiroshima is safe": that's what enabled the *Enola Gay*, carrying the atomic bomb, to fly over majestically on the attack. That way, even if a B-29 flew over, we'd think, "It's only a reconnaissance plane," and let our guard down.

"Why didn't the air raid alert sound?" That thought has stayed in my heart forever, a gap in the Hiroshima story. After the war, I checked the documents and found that NHK Hiroshima began to broadcast an air raid alert at 8:15. It was at 8:15 that the bomb was dropped and exploded. If only the alert had sounded earlier!

The *Enola Gay* cut its engines, penetrated quietly to the heart of Hiroshima, and dropped the atomic bomb, raising the curtain on hell. Even today, if I close my eyes, the colors of the atomic bomb the moment it exploded come floating right up. A pale light like the flash of a flashbulb camera, white at the center, engulfed me, a great ball of light with yellow and red mixed at its outer edges. Once that violent flash burned itself onto my retinas, all memory stopped.

### ***Pictures of Hell***

How long was it? When consciousness returned and I opened my eyes, it was pitch dark. I was confused: "Huh? A moment ago it was broad daylight, and suddenly it's night?" When I rolled over and tried to stand, pain shot through my right cheek. "What happened?" I focused and looked about and saw that a six-inch nail sticking out of a board had pierced me. Raising my

head had torn my cheek. Blood was flowing. The weird atmosphere frightened me. I realized I was sweating.

I tried to stand up, but my body didn't move. Turning my head, I saw that bricks, stones, tree branches, scraps of lumber lay on top of me. The concrete wall, too, had fallen over and was covering me.

Frantically I pushed at the stones and wood on top of me and scrambled my way out. Instinctively, I looked about for the satchel that had been on my back and the air raid hood that had been hanging from my shoulder. But I didn't find them—perhaps they'd been sent flying, torn off in the blast? Turning to look at the trolley street, I gasped.

Until just a moment ago, the mother of my classmate had been standing right in front of me and, like me, looking up at the B-29. Her entire body had been burned pitch-black. Her hair was in tatters. The workpants and jacket she'd been wearing, charred and looking like seaweed, hung about her neck and waist. And she'd been blown across to the other sidewalk and was lying on her back. Her white eyes, wide open in her blackened and sooty face, glared across at me.

Confused, not knowing what had happened, I stood in the middle of the trolley street. This familiar street had been transformed shockingly; I stood in amazement. The trolley wires had been cut from the poles lining either side of the street and were coiled like spiderwebs on the pavement; thick telephone line sagged from telephone poles like a great snake sleeping on a tree branch. It sagged into the distance. The rows of two-story houses on each side had been crushed, and the lower stories had collapsed utterly like popped paper balloons, flat. Atop them, the second stories lay piled, undulating off into the distance. Drop India ink into water, and it thins and spreads. Smoke just like pale ink covered the sky and wafted all about. The sky was like an ink painting; boards and sheets of metal danced helter-skelter into the sky, quite like birds. Every now and then, out of the collapsed rows of houses a dragon's tongue of bright red flames crawled, disappeared, moved. Aghast, I burned that scene onto my retinas.

I learned that when people are thrust suddenly into extremity, they are without emotion. They act only by instinct. Returning instinctively to the nest, my feet moved on their own in the direction of home. There's an expression, "Spinning your wheels," and that's precisely the way it was. I felt I was running and running, yet getting nowhere. Up ahead, the pale-ink smoke drifted, as if bubbling up. When people materialized out of it, I was shocked and raced up to them, wanting to know what on earth had happened to them.

First I met five or six women. Hiroshima's summers are very hot, so they'd probably been wearing only simple chemises as they tidied their kitchens or cleaned house. One after another, the women I saw had chemises on. As I got near them, I was amazed. They had countless slivers of glass sticking in their flesh: in the front of some of the women, on the right sides of others, on the left or on the backs of still others.

People who'd been in rooms with windows to their right had been pierced only on the right sides of their bodies as the bomb blast pulverized the windowpanes. They were like pincushions, with blood flowing. People who'd been in rooms with windows straight ahead of them had their fronts covered with glass splinters. The glass splinters had pierced even their eyeballs, so they couldn't open their eyes. They felt their way along, like blind people. How they'd been standing in



relation to the windows determined where on their bodies the glass splinters stuck, and one person differed from the next.

I noticed one woman. Her hair was dusty and swirling in disarray, the shoulder strap of her chemise was cut and her breasts exposed, and her breasts were blue, as if tattooed. As I was able to understand later, the glass splinters looked blue, and she had so many piercing her, mainly her breasts, and countless splinters buried in her that the glass splinters seemed like a tattoo dying her breasts blue.

The women pierced by glass splinters were bleeding. They walked silently. Countless pieces of glass were embedded in their bodies, so that each time they took a step, the glass splinters jingled. Aghast, I watched these women go by, then raced for home.

On the sidewalk on the left side of the trolley street, naked people burned so black that I couldn't tell male from female sat with both legs outstretched, eyes wide and fixed on a point in the sky, cowering, as if simpleminded. Pumps for firefighting had been installed earlier at set intervals along the sidewalk on the right side of the trolley street. Uninjured people hurried to those pumps, twisted the cocks, and scooped up water. People clustered suddenly about the pumps. The women with innumerable glass splinters in them took the pump's water with both hands and poured it all over themselves. Washing their blackened bodies covered with blood and dust, they exposed the glass fragments that stuck into their bodies and silently pulled them out.

On the opposite pavement, too, were people with not a stitch on, dazed and burned so black I couldn't tell male from female. Seeing water flowing from the pumps, they crawled sluggishly along the ground and approached the pumps, each of them sticking their hands into the flow of water, scooping up water and lifting it trancelike to their mouths. Around the pump women gathered, absorbed in washing off the blood and picking out glass splinters, and people burned black were drinking water blindly. The same scene occurred at each pump. They were acting simply on instinct. The glass was sticking into them, and it hurt, so they pulled it out. They'd been burned all over by the rays, and they were thirsty, so they drank. Neither words nor poses showed conscious intent.

In scenes of carnage—fire or calamity—in movies or plays, voices cry, “Ouch!” “Horrible!” “Help!” People suffer and writhe. But those scenes are unreal. When people are thrown suddenly into the carnage of an extreme situation, they utter not a single emotion-laden word but act silently on instinct. Just as if watching a silent movie, I, too, looked on at the quiet scene, not saying a word. From time to time gasoline drums exploded, the sound carrying in all directions.

Coming to myself, I took the street leading to our house. But at the beginning of the lane to our home, fires were spreading along the row of structures on either side. Flames crept along the ground. The two fires stretched forward from either side, as if joining hands, and in an instant the road became a sea of fire. The roadway functioned as a chimney, and a hot wind gusted through. The road ahead became a wall of fire, and flames completely blocked the way.

Sensing instinctively that I'd burn to death if I went farther, I reversed course, as if in a daze. I followed the trolley street, and suddenly, for the first time, like an electric current running through my body, wild terror ruled. Loneliness—my family's abandoned me!—and terror—I'm all alone!—seized my mind. I ran back and forth on the trolley street, searching desperately, crying “Daddy!” “Mommy!”

The trolley street from Funairi Naka-chō as far as Saiwai-chō was a human exhibition, inhuman forms utterly transformed. Naked bodies moving sluggishly, burned by rays and trailing blackened bits of clothing like seaweed. Moving forward, glass splinters from the explosion sticking into all parts of their bodies, spurting blood. People whose eyeballs hung down their cheeks and trembled; they'd been blown out by the sudden pressure of the blast. People whose bellies had been ripped open, trailing a yard of intestines, crawling along on all fours. Shrikes impale fish and frogs on dead tree branches, storing them to eat later; people, too, had been sent flying and hung from branches, impaled. I ran among these horrific humans, threading my way, crying out, searching for family.

Black smoke eddied violently, covering the area. Flames danced crazily, wildly. The trolley street, too, became dangerous. The terror I felt then sank into my heart; I will have it with me as long as I live.

### ***Black Rain***

Luckily, a neighbor found me as I was running about and crying. She too wore a chemise, and bits of glass pierced her entire body. She was dousing herself with pump water to wash off the blood. Her white chemise was dyed bright red. It was as if it had been red to begin with.

"Aren't you Nakazawa Kei?" she asked. "Your mother's on this road at the Funairi Kawaguchi-chō trolley stop. Quick, go!" In a trance, I headed for the Funairi Kawaguchi-chō trolley stop. The crowd fleeing in the same direction proceeded, naked bodies blackened, each holding both hands chest-high, leaning forward, just like the specters depicted in paintings.

In this sluggish procession, I noticed a strange thing. The parts of a person wearing white clothing—white shirt, white pants—were completely uninjured. White shirt, white pants alone caught my eye, bright, as if dancing in space, flickering. When the instant rays, hotter than 9,000 degrees, shone on people on the ground below, their white clothing acted as a mirror, reflecting the rays. By contrast, people wearing black were consumed instantly, clothing and body, by the radiant light. During the war, clothing stood out and was easy for enemy planes to spot was outlawed, so most people wore dark clothes. Hence the number of those suffering from burns over their entire body increased several times over.

Struck by 9,000 degree rays, your skin immediately developed countless blisters, one connected with the next; scattered over your whole body, they grew to eight inches in diameter. When you walked, the fluid inside the large blisters sloshed with the vibration, and finally the fragile blisters burst, the liquid poured out, and the skin peeled off.

I wouldn't have thought human skin would peel so easily. The skin of the chest peeled off, from the shoulders down; the backs of the hands peeled; the skin of the arms peeled off, down to the five fingernails, and dangled. From the fingertips of both hands, yard-long skin hung and trembled. The skin of the back peeled from both shoulders, stopped at the waist, and hung like a droopy loincloth. The skin of the legs peeled to the anklebone and dragged, a yard long, on the ground. People couldn't help looking like apparitions. If they walked with arms down, the skin hanging off their fingertips dragged painfully on the ground, so they raised their arms and held them at shoulder level, which was less painful. Even if they wanted to run, the skin of their legs was dragging along on the ground, impeding their steps. Shuffling one step at a time, they proceeded, a procession of ghosts.

In this procession of ghosts, I made my way to the Funairi Kawaguchi-chō trolley stop. On both sides of the trolley street in Kawaguchi-chō were sweet potato and vegetable fields. The farmhouses scattered in the fields were leaning from the blast. Wide-eyed, I looked about the trolley street. There, on the sidewalk on the left, sat Mom. She had spread a blanket on the sidewalk, set some pots beside it, and was sitting in her apron, face sooty, a vacant expression on her face. I stood in front of her. We looked each other in the face, silent, exhausted, and I sank to the ground beside her. I was overcome with joy and relief that I had finally found family. Soon I noticed that Mom was holding carefully to her chest something wrapped in a dirty blanket. I peeked inside the blanket and saw a baby, newborn, face red and wrinkled. It was a mystery: “Huh? Suddenly a baby. . . .” I looked again at Mom’s tummy, and it had shrunk.

The shock had sent Mom into labor, and in the carnage of atomic hell she had given birth on the pavement to a baby girl. As she writhed in pain on the pavement, several passersby had gathered and helped with the birth.

Exhausted, I squatted on the pavement. Perhaps because of the effect of the radiation, I was nauseous. I vomited a yellow fluid, and I felt bad; I hadn’t the energy to sit up. Trying to hold back the urge to vomit, dazed, I watched the scene unfolding before me. From the direction of town, the procession of ghosts continued one after the other, passing before me. Right before my eyes, skin trembled from arms now completely skinless, drooping twenty inches from fingers. I watched in amazement, “Skin really does come right off!”

Each person shuffled, dragging a yard of skin from each leg, so from way back in the direction of town, dust swirled into the air. When the procession of ghosts reached the trolley street, they climbed down into the potato and vegetable fields on either side, collapsed atop the plants, and fell asleep. Burned by the rays and blistering, their entire bodies were hot and painful, and the cool of plants against their skin felt good. Instead of blankets, they lay on plants. As I watched, the vegetable fields turned into row upon row of people whose skin had melted.

The sky suddenly turned quite dark, and when I looked up, a stormy black cloud had covered the sky. Large raindrops spattered against the asphalt and created a pattern of spots. Large drops of rain struck my head and my clothes. The surface of the drops was oily and glittering; it was “black rain.” Black spots clung here and there to Mom’s clothing and mine. When I wiped the drops from my face with my hand, they were slippery. I didn’t like how they felt. Somehow or other a rumor spread:

“Those damned Yanks! This time they’re dropping heavy oil from the sky to make Hiroshima burn easier!” The black cloud moved rapidly to the west, the black rain stopped, and the sky cleared. I never dreamed that this black rain contained radioactivity that forever after destroyed your cells.

We were lucky. Had we fled to the northwestern part of Hiroshima, we would have been soaked in radioactivity, quickly contracted leukemia, and died. Black rain continued to fall, concentrated in northwestern Hiroshima. Where we were, it rained a bit and then stopped, and we avoided being drenched in a lot of radioactivity. While I watched the pavement, patterned with large



black raindrops and gleaming eerily, I was overtaken by drowsiness and, before I knew it, dropped off to sleep.

When, feeling as if I was choking, I opened my eyes, night had fallen. With no electricity and virtually no lights, it should have been pitch-dark, but all Hiroshima, leading city of the Chūgoku region, was going up in flames, a waterfall flowing upward instead of downward. By the light of the fires, you could see clearly. The heat reflected from the flames blazing brightly had made me gasp for air and wakened me. I turned my eyes to the right, and on the shore of the lower reaches of the Honkawa, thick tree trunks had been piled high in a long row. The hot wind quickly dried the wood, and the fire spread to them, one after the other. The tree trunks made loud sounds, split apart, and flew up into the air. The heat reflected from the flames was hot; we moved right up next to the field's stone wall and shielded ourselves from the heat. The stones were cool and felt good. I looked up at the night sky, dyed red, scorching; smoke eddied in columns, and the flames reflected off the smoke. It was as if a double red curtain covered us. Watching that night sky, I fell asleep again.

Twice, three times, I was awakened by a sound as if dozens of insects had flown into my ears, flapping their wings. Already confused, I kept thinking, "What a racket! What is it?" As time passed, the sound became louder, and I couldn't sleep. When I listened carefully, it turned out to be a one-word chorus: "Water!" "Water!" From the fields on either side resounded the agonized chorus. I looked at Mom, and she too had been awakened by the chorus crying, "Water!" Mom said, "Those poor people—let's get them some water. Go scoop some up." At her urging, I picked up a metal helmet that was rolling about on the pavement and pumped it full of water.

Mom found the cup we needed, scooped water from the helmet I was holding, and offered it to a person groaning, "Water! Water!" With a start, as if he'd caught the scent of water, he bent his head over the cup, and emptied it in one gulp. Then, three or four seconds later, he collapsed, his head striking the ground. Alarmed, Mom shook him and cried, "What's wrong?" but he was already dead. We offered the cup of water to others groaning "Water! Water!" and each and every one buried his or her face in the cup and drank it off in one gulp. And then, three or four seconds later, they all died, their heads hitting the ground. When we gave them water, they died, one after the other. Amazed at this strange phenomenon, Mom and I stood stock-still in the field.

*Editor's note: Toward the end of volume I of Barefoot Gen, Nakazawa depicts the events of August 6. Gen and his mother try to rescue Shinji and Gen's father from the ruins of their home. We know from the autobiography that Nakazawa himself was not present, that he learned about these events only after the fact, from his mother. But in Barefoot Gen, Gen is the focus throughout, and here he tries heroically first to rally neighbors and then to lift the roof beams himself.*

*The treatment of bomb damage begins fourteen pages earlier and includes a striking variety of forms: one panel fills the entire left half of a page (the explosion itself), one panel stretches across the top half of two pages (a scene of collapsed houses on either side of a highway down the middle of which run trolley tracks), and one panel fills a full page (a burning horse). This treatment of bomb damage completes volume I and extends through much of volume II.*

**NOTE: This article originally included several pages of Manga, which for copyright reasons could not be reproduced in this reader. The Manga can be viewed at the end of the online version of this article: <http://www.japanfocus.org/-Nakazawa-Keiji/3416>**

One can purchase the book *Hiroshima: The Autobiography of Barefoot Gen* [here](#).

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He is also the author of *Victors' Justice: The Tokyo War Crimes Trial* (1971) and the editor of *Through Japanese Eyes* (4th edition 2007). He is translator of *Requiem for Battleship Yamato* (1985), *Hiroshima: Three Witnesses* (1990), *Black Eggs* (1994), the autobiographies of *Ienaga Saburo* (2001), *Nakazawa Keiji* (2010), and *Oishi Matashichi* (2011 forthcoming), and writings of *Takeyama Michio* (2007) and *Nambara Shigeru* (2010 forthcoming). He has written and translated a number of essays for *Japan Focus* and is a *Japan Focus* associate.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> *Gen* is pronounced with a hard *g* and a short *e*, as in *again*, where the second syllable is pronounced to rhyme with *then*. *Hadashi* means barefoot. Hence, "Gen of the Bare Feet." In the final chapter of this autobiography, Nakazawa explains the origin of the name: "I called the protagonist 'Gen' in the sense of the basic composition of humanity so that he'd be someone who wouldn't let war and atomic bomb happen again." (*Gen* is the first half of the compound *Genso*, meaning chemical element.)

<sup>2</sup> *The Hiroshima Murals: The Art of Iri Maruki and Toshi Maruki*, ed. John W. Dower and John Junkerman (Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1985).

<sup>3</sup> "*Hiroshima*" *no kūhaku*—*Nakazawa-ke shimatsuki* (Tokyo: Nihon tosho sentā, 1987); *'Hadashi Gen' no jiden* (Tokyo: Misuzu, 1995).

<sup>4</sup> Nakazawa refers to his mother throughout as Mother/Mom, but on August 6 his father cries out to "Kimiyo." The *manga* gives her name as Kimie. In the *manga*, she calls her husband "Daikichi."

<sup>5</sup> Charles Pellegrino, *The Last Train from Hiroshima: The Survivors Look Back* (New York: Henry Holt, 2010). A *New York Times* account of the brouhaha that has greeted Pellegrino's book quoted Jeffrey Porter of the University of Iowa, "There's a hazy line between 'truth' and invention in creative non-fiction, but good writers don't have to make things up." Motoko Rich, "Pondering Good Faith in Publishing," *New York Times*, March 9, 2010, p. C6. For an extended discussion of the issues involved in this hoax, see my "Misunderstanding Hiroshima," [Japanfocus.org](http://Japanfocus.org).

<sup>6</sup> "*Barefoot Gen, Japan, and I: The Hiroshima Legacy: An Interview with Nakazawa Keiji*," tr. Richard H. Minear, *International Journal of Comic Art* 10, no. 2 (fall 2008): 311–12. An excerpt from this interview is an appendix to this book.

<sup>7</sup> Pellegrino, *The Last Train from Hiroshima*, 325. Without footnotes, without a list of interviewees and the dates of the interviews, Pellegrino's assertions are impossible to evaluate and hence virtually worthless. At best, those survivor accounts are sixty-year-old memories of the event, and intervening events and experiences have played a major, if undocumented, role.

<sup>8</sup> This ditty was a take-off on the “ Battleship March,” which had the syllable *mo* twice in its opening line. *Imo* is the Japanese word for potato.

## **“Writing Hiroshima and Nagasaki in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: A New Generation of Historical Manga”**

Michele Mason

November 23, 2009

<http://japanfocus.org/-Michele-Mason/3260>

Japanese war memory has diversified since 1945, but the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki have retained their importance.

Scholars and critics have written in detail about how Japanese **neo-nationalists** have attempted to whitewash or deny war crimes committed by Japanese troops across Asia. Less widely discussed, however, is the fact that their **revisionist** school textbooks have also given short shrift to Japanese wartime suffering, or the understanding of Japanese as **victims**. Notably, while the *Atarashii rekishi kyokasho* (New History Textbook) failed to give even tentative numbers of the victims of Japanese wartime violence, the editors of the controversial first edition also left out the number killed by the atomic bombs. Since the early 1990s, neo-nationalists have argued that the Japanese population suffers from *heiwa boke*—a sort of “senility” brought on by peace. Since most Japanese oppose an expanded military role for the country or the development of nuclear weapons, neo-nationalists accuse their countrymen of unrealistic idealism. Downplaying the atomic bombings and focusing instead on “heroic sacrifice” and “service to the nation,” as Kobayashi Yoshinori does in *Sensoron*, is a way of undermining what scholar Thomas Berger has described as postwar Japan’s “culture of anti-militarism.”

There are significant contradictions in Japan’s official pacifism. The country maintains a large army, navy, and air force that is among the best funded in the world. Postwar conservative governments preached peace and prosperity at home while voicing support for American wars abroad. Critics have called this stance *ikkoku heiwashugi* or “single country pacifism.” Japan, it is said, has simply ignored violence outside of its borders.

It must also be said, however, that for all its contradictions, Japanese peace philosophy has placed considerable restraints on conservative governments. While other US client states such as South Korea participated in the Vietnam War, Japan stayed out of what became a bloody quagmire with millions of civilian deaths across Indochina. Japan has also not developed nuclear weapons. Doing so could spark a potentially disastrous arms race and atomic brinkmanship in East Asia. Voices from Hiroshima and Nagasaki in particular have added strength to international disarmament movements and maintained criticism of nuclear weapons.

With survivors like Nakazawa Keiji, now elderly and retiring from public life, it falls upon new generations of authors, artists and creators without direct experience of the atomic bombings to continue Japan’s anti-war, anti-nuclear legacies. Neo-nationalist bestsellers have raised the stakes, but the nuclear weapons development and dramatically accelerated armament that the authors call for have not been seriously debated by political elites.

Importantly, the works described in Michele Mason’s article do not rely solely on the image of Japanese as **victims** of war to develop their critical narratives. The story of Korean *hibakusha* (literally “the bombed,” the Japanese term used to refer to atomic bomb



victims) was touched upon in Nakazawa Keiji's *Barefoot Gen* and is also dealt with in Kimura Kana's *A Summer Afterimage*, described in this article.

These manga do not only present diverse representations of the atomic bombings in 1945, they also reflect on the importance of memory and how traumatic events are remembered and passed on to children and grandchildren. In a 1988 article, John Whittier Treat described a "documentary fallacy" in interpretations of atomic bomb literature. While critics have often interpreted novels and short stories by *hibakusha* as communicating their experience of the bombings to readers, Treat argues that authors are seldom trying to set out an "objective" account of their experience, that is, a documentary-style account. Instead, they work through subjective concerns such as the meaning of memories, the way that comfortable life stories were fragmented by an experience difficult to put into words, and the many things which are meaningful to victims of violence but do not translate easily into "realistic" representation in prose or artwork. Metaphors and symbolism abound. Works of literature and popular culture are very different from standard narrative historical accounts. They attempt and accomplish very different things. Mason's article details how these subjective concerns have been taken up by a new generation of creators of popular works about the atomic bomb.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> John Whittier Treat, "Atomic Bomb Literature and the Documentary Fallacy," *Journal of Japanese Studies*, Vol. 14, No. 1 (Winter, 1988), pp. 27-57.

## Writing Hiroshima and Nagasaki in the 21st Century: A New Generation of Historical Manga

Michele Mason

*This article addresses the struggles of two manga artists, Kōno Fumiyo and Nishioka Yuka, who attempt to portray the unprecedented tragedies of Hiroshima and Nagasaki for a contemporary audience, and how they come to terms with their authority to write this history as non-*hibakusha*.*

While historical comics (*manga*) have generally not captured the popular imagination in the United States, they regularly rate among the top bestsellers of the medium in Japan. Examples range from the mostly fictionalized “chanbara” works that glorify samurai swordsmen to narratives featuring prominent historical figures, such as Miyamoto Musashi, Caesar, and Gautama Buddha, as written by Tezuka Osamu in his biography *Buddha* (1972-83). While the era of the samurai remains a particular favorite, other historical moments have also provided rich source materials for this genre of graphic novels. For example, Tezuka’s work, *Shumari* (*Shumari*, 1974-76), set in Meiji era (1868-1912) Hokkaido and Gomikawa Junpei and Abe Kenji’s *The Human Condition* (*Ningen no jōken*, 1971), which treats Japanese imperialism during the Asia-Pacific War (1931-1945).

Some historical *manga* go beyond simple entertainment and take explicit pedagogical or propagandistic aims. There is, for instance, Ishimori Shōtarō’s monumental *A Comic Book History of Japan* (*Manga nihon no rekishi*, 1997-99), whose fifty-five volumes cover over a millennium of Japanese history. In the vein of tackling overlooked and controversial subjects are Sato Shugā’s two critical volumes on the history of the emperor system (*Nihonjin to tennō*, 2000 and *Tennōsei wo shiru tame no kingen daishi nyūmon*, 2003), Higa Susumu’s *Kajimunugatai* (2003), depicting the Battle of Okinawa, and more recently the collectively produced *Ampo Struggle* (*Ampo tōsō*, 2008). Yamano Sharin’s *Manga: Hating the Korean Wave* (*Manga: kenkanryū*) is just one example of the growing number of revisionist and nationalistic histories. In *The Past Within Us: Media, Memory, History*, Tessa Morris-Suzuki states, “...comic book versions of history – whether fictional or non-fictional – have probably shaped popular understandings of history at least as much as any textbook.”<sup>1</sup> With their compelling combination of visuals and text, historical *manga* clearly represent a powerful means for constructing modern notions of the past and shaping national collective memories.

Recently, two Japanese manga artists have tried their hand at writing about one of Japan’s most significant historical events, namely the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The bestselling and award-winning *Town of Evening Calm, Country of Cherry Blossoms* (*Yūnagi no machi sakura no kuni*)<sup>2</sup> by Kōno Fumiyo first appeared in 2003, with a live-action film version debuting in 2007. In 2008, Nishioka Yuka published *A Summer’s Afterimage: Nagasaki – August 9* (*Natsu no zanzō: Nagasaki no hachigatsu kokonoka*).<sup>3</sup> Both feature prominent female protagonists and inter-generational narratives that address such topics as discrimination against *hibakusha* (atomic bomb survivors),<sup>4</sup> living in post-A-bomb poverty, the plight of Korean survivors, and the uncomfortable implications of both the denial of Japanese aggression in Asia and the American myth that continues to justify the bombings.

Both Kōno and Nishioka, who grew up in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, respectively, have commented on their struggles over how to portray these unprecedented tragedies and how to come to terms with their authority to write this history as non-*hibakusha*. Committing to their

projects more than sixty years after the events, these two *manga* artists negotiate difficult ethical terrain. Motivated to reach a new audience that knows little of the truth of this period of history, Kōno and Nishioka grapple with balancing the need to create stories that will capture readers' attention and the imperative to maintain ethical limits of representation that respect both survivors and the dead.

In this article, I elucidate how narrative structure and perspective in *Town of Evening Calm*, *Country of Cherry Blossoms* and *A Summer's Afterimage: Nagasaki – August 9* are linked to their creators' position in history. Namely, Kōno's and Nishioka's narratives creatively interweave stories of the past and present viewed from the vantage point of the children and grandchildren of survivors, prioritizing the long aftermath over the immediate effects of the bombings. This choice is also manifested in the scant number of frames "recreating" August 6 and 9. The "point of view," anchored in the central characters, might more appropriately be characterized, especially in the case of *A Summer's Afterimage*, as the "point of listening." Ultimately, Kōno's and Nishioka's narrative strategies ensure that these works are not just a "re-telling" of these two historical events, but make crucial connections to their relevance to global citizens living in the 21st century.

### **Non-*Hibakusha* Writers and the Ethics of Representation**

The thorny issues related to the representation of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki – for instance, the inability of language to fully convey the reality of survivors' experiences and the significant chasm between the victim-writers' experiences and the non-victim readers' ability to "understand" them – have sparked debate among and presented challenges to the *hibakusha* community. In his invaluable work, *Writing Ground Zero: Japanese Literature and the Atomic Bomb*, John Whittier Treat remarks that the belief on the part of some survivors that their experiences are "unspeakable" and inaccessible to outsiders, poses a "considerable technical and even ethical hurdle"<sup>5</sup> to the writing process. Moreover, in confronting the decision to write or remain silent, survivors feel a justified apprehension towards the "stylization" of language necessitated when committing one's experiences to paper, fearing outsiders may dismiss the truth of their "unimaginable" narratives as "fiction," or, equally troubling, as "too real."<sup>6</sup> As Treat notes, even the most capable stand frozen in the face of the task. "*Hibakusha* who were or become professional writers, and who thus might be thought to have the talent to make the 'incredible' available to us, ... confess an emotional surplus that paradoxically paralyzed the expression of those emotions and that made ordinary communication impossible."<sup>7</sup>

Still, *hibakusha* have taken up the pen for a great many reasons. Some seek to comprehend their experiences or attend to grief by addressing the trauma. Some feel compelled to document the pain and losses for themselves and others. Recording their testimonies and personal experiences is sometimes understood as a moral imperative to challenge those who write history in such a way that justifies the use of atomic weapons. Due to the perseverance of many writers, professional and otherwise, a vast and varied collection of prose, poetry, and drama now constitutes a genre in and of itself known as "atomic-bomb literature" (*genbaku bungaku*).

The non-*hibakusha* who attempts to depict such a disturbing and monumental event confronts a different, yet sufficiently challenging, set of problems. Her preparation begins not only in the factual historical research – which may be emotionally challenging enough in and of itself to forestall the project – but also the task of framing her legitimacy to write on the subject. If one

considers Hiroshima writer Fumizawa Takaichi's statement, "It was a primal event that denies all but other *hibakusha* its vicarious experience,"<sup>8</sup> or *hibakusha* poet Hara Tamiki's question of "whether the meaning of the atomic bomb could be grasped by anyone whose own skin had not been seared by it,"<sup>9</sup> it is only natural that a non-victim should pause and even doubt the feasibility of writing on the subject.

In the essay "The Ethical Limitations of Holocaust Literary Representation," Anna Richardson, examines contentious debates on representing the Holocaust, tracing tensions between arguments for keeping silent and speaking out, testimony and fictionalization, survivor and non-survivor writing and ethics and aesthetics.<sup>10</sup> In weighing the argument that the writing of fictional narratives of the Holocaust by non-victims can be disrespectful to survivors, Richardson quotes Imre Kertesz, who writes, "the survivors watch helplessly as their only real possessions are done away with: authentic experiences."<sup>11</sup> As numerous scandals over fake memoirs in recent years suggest, there is a moral prohibition against falsely claiming legitimacy to write traumatic memory.<sup>12</sup> The tacit bond of trust between the writer and reader is paramount, and Richardson cautions that representations of extreme horrors by those who are not victims "...runs the risk of negating similar excesses of violence represented in actual testimony, and, in the worst case scenario, opening the door for Holocaust deniers to claim that other accounts are equally fictitious."<sup>13</sup> While cognizant of the charged nature of representation, Richardson makes a case for the benefits of Holocaust fiction, by both survivors and non-survivors, suggesting it is not a question of *whether* but *how* one represents these events.<sup>14</sup> She points out that fictionalizations may have the advantage of being "more accessible than a survivor memoir,"<sup>15</sup> have important pedagogical value, and, above all, ensure that the Holocaust is not forgotten.

New generations of writers, in fact, continue to address the Holocaust in a variety of media. The Pulitzer Prize-winning *Maus* by Art Spiegelman, son of two Holocaust survivors, is arguably the most famous and courageous historical graphic novel from the United States. This groundbreaking work that portrays its ethnic/national characters through anthropomorphic animals - Jews as mice, Poles as pigs, and Nazis as cats - explicitly illustrates the struggle of the second-generation in its self-referential mode. In *Maus: A Survivor's Tale, II: And Here My Troubles Began*, the author depicts his own struggle to engage with and portray the unfathomable horror of his topic. Speaking to his therapist, he bemoans, "My book? Hah! What book?? Some part of me doesn't want to draw or think about Auschwitz. I can't visualize it clearly, and I can't BEGIN to imagine what it felt like."<sup>16</sup> Addressing Holocaust fiction, Sara Horowitz states, "Because second-generation writers lack... validation in the personal history of the aesthetic project, they must struggle to define artistic parameters to represent Auschwitz in the ways that avoid the pornographic, the voyeuristic, the sensational, or the sentimental."<sup>17</sup> In the cases of the Holocaust and the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki there is a reasonable "discomfort with the idea of an aesthetic project built on an actual atrocity"<sup>18</sup> with which both writers and readers must engage directly.

As for atomic-bomb literature, we are certainly provoked by Ota Yōko's *City of Corpses*, stunned by Tōge Sankichi's graphic poems, and touched by Hara Tamiki's short stories. We have little trouble believing the veracity of their "testimony" even in these survivors' "fictional" and "literary" works. Still, we are likewise moved by the "storytelling" of Ibuse Masuji, who is not a *hibakusha*. His *Black Rain* remains one of the most famous works of this genre that continues to pass on larger truths of the atomic bombings.<sup>19</sup> At the same time that we respect the authority that comes with being a survivor, we can recognize the merits of works by those who

are committed to an ethical rendering of such tragic events (whether it be Hiroshima, Nagasaki, or the Shoah) by those who possess no direct experience.

Second generation *hibakusha* or children of Holocaust survivors are often particularly aware of their families' histories, sometimes through oral stories and sometimes by the palpable absence of them. Discussing artistic works of second-generation Holocaust survivors, Stephen C. Feinstein writes, "This is an event they did not live through, yet the event, or the memory of the event, has a compelling presence."<sup>20</sup> In their secondary materials, Kōno and Nishioka, ever cognizant of their native cities' tragic histories, express sentiments similar to those of fellow comic-book-artist Spiegleman – apprehension, doubt, hesitancy – as they articulate their motivations and honestly record their complicated engagement with the painful subject of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

### Kōno and Nishioka's Narrative Strategies

Among historical *manga*, Nakazawa Keiji's *Barefoot Gen* (*Hadashi no Gen*, serialized from 1973-1985 in *Weekly Shōnen Jump*), stands out as something akin to a "manga memoir,"<sup>21</sup> based as it is on the author's personal experience as a survivor of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima. After his mother's death in the late 1960s, Nakazawa began writing on the atomic bombing in his "Black" and "Peace" series, but it was not until his editor urged him to write about his own experiences that he penned "I Saw It" (*Ore wa mita*), which he expanded to make what would eventually become the ten volumes of *Barefoot Gen*.<sup>22</sup>

In *Barefoot Gen*, readers get to know third-grader Gen (Nakazawa) and his family beginning in April 1945, "witness" the catastrophe on August 6, and then take in the frightful scenes and confusion of the immediate aftermath. Unable to rescue three of his family members, Gen attempts to carve out a precarious existence in the atomic wasteland with his mother and infant sister, who is born prematurely on the day of the bombing. Framed through Gen's experiences, the narrative portrays emotional reunions and deaths, ordeals of privation and discrimination, and the harsh realities of life during the occupation years. Nakazawa deftly weaves light-hearted humor, centered on the antics of young Gen and his "brothers" and friends, in this compelling depiction of both the horrors of the nuclear attack on Hiroshima and the struggles of *hibakusha* in the early postwar period. It might be said that such a juxtaposition of playful and painful scenes is the prerogative of a survivor like Nakazawa, who speaks of being haunted by "the stench of corpses" when he conjures up his many disturbing memories to write on Hiroshima.<sup>23</sup>

For writers like Kōno and Nishioka, who are not survivors or descendents of survivors, the questions related to writing on the atomic bombings are inflected in a decidedly different way. Although Kōno and Nishioka state clearly that their works are not based on personal experience, they still tremble in front of their projects and search for a narrative mode that will allow them to use their voices and create their visions. Both speak to how deeply affecting it is to listen to *hibakusha* testimonies, view photographic images and artistic renditions, read personal stories, and imagine the events in the course of preparatory research. They acknowledge the impossibility of "understanding" the experience of being an atomic bomb victim and never claim a legitimacy that is not rightfully their own.

Kōno was first encouraged to write on "Hiroshima" by her editor. Mistaking her editor's meaning at first, Kōno delighted in creating a story set in Hiroshima and being able to use the local dialect freely. When it finally occurred to her that he was talking about "the Hiroshima,"

she was immediately overcome by doubts. She recalled nearly fainting more than once when faced with disturbing artifacts at the Hiroshima Peace memorial or viewing historical footage of the aftermath of the bomb. She admits having convinced herself that the atomic bombing of Hiroshima was “a tragedy that occurred in the distant past” and that she had “tried to avoid anything related to the bomb.”<sup>24</sup> However, when Kōno realized that many people outside of Hiroshima and Nagasaki knew little or nothing about the bombings, she felt it “unnatural and irresponsible to remain disconnected from the issue.”<sup>25</sup> “This was no time to hold back. I hadn’t experienced war or the bomb firsthand, but I could still draw on the words of a different time and place to reflect on peace and express my thoughts.”<sup>26</sup> While initially hesitant, Kōno finds that her past experience in drawing *manga* gave her “courage” to take on a story that was not her own. After all, she decided, “drawing something is better than drawing nothing at all.”<sup>27</sup>

Nishioka, as well, found her decision to produce *A Summer’s Afterimage* accompanied by uncertainty and misgivings. A native of Nagasaki, Nishioka grew up thinking she would like to some day write on the city’s tragic history. However, she recalls, “... as I turned the pages of collections of survivors’ testimonies, my fingers would simply freeze. How can one convey the cries of people thrown into this hell and stench of death, which are ‘beyond imagination’ and ‘impossible to express with words’?”<sup>28</sup> It was a seemingly unconnected international incident, Israel’s bombing of the Lebanese city of Qanaa on July 30, 2006, that pushed her hand.

Several days later, Japanese people who had been pained by the bombing gathered together, and a man, who was an atomic bomb survivor took the microphone and made an appeal, saying, “Soon it will be August 9. People like me who have experienced the tragedy of atomic bombs, cannot allow another war in which innocent children are killed in this way.” This gave me a shock. The war-torn city [of Qanaa] and Nagasaki were connected through suffering.<sup>29</sup>

In linking Qanaa and Nagasaki, Nishioka realizes that she could write from an outside perspective, which allows her to create Kana, her female protagonist named after the city in Lebanon.<sup>30</sup> Even after this insight, however, Nishioka’s malaise continued. To make it possible for her to take on the project she visited the monument that marks the epicenter in Nagasaki, prayed to the many victims of the atomic bombing, and asked for permission to create her *manga*. With the same tenuousness displayed in Kōno’s phrase “It was better to draw something rather than draw nothing at all,” Nishioka laments. “I was only able to merely skim the surface of the atomic bombing.”<sup>31</sup>

Kōno and Nishioka take pains not to present their work as autobiographical. To address this overwhelming concern, both artists center most or all of their narratives around a descendent, daughter or granddaughter of survivors. *Town of Evening Calm, Country of Cherry Blossoms* interweaves stories that move between the 1950s and 2005. The first narrative, *Town of Evening Calm*, portrays the lives of survivors Hirano Minami and her mother, Fujimi, as they cope with privations in the “atomic slum” (genbaku suramu) of Hiroshima,<sup>32</sup> long-term illness related to radiation poisoning, and the loss of three family members. Yet this constitutes just one-third of Kōno’s text. *Country of Cherry Blossoms*, begins in the late 1980s, focusing on fifth-grader Nanami, the daughter of Asahi Ishikawa, Minami’s brother who was not in Hiroshima in August 1945. Nanami’s deceased mother was a *hibakusha*. Much of Nanami’s life is shaped by visits to a hospital where her grandmother (Fujimi) and younger brother Nagio are treated regularly for chronic illnesses. Part Two, set in 2005, finds Nanami on a mission to discover the reasons

behind her father's recent odd behavior and disappearances. When she and an old friend follow him, they discover that, occasioned by the 50th anniversary of his sister Minami's death, Mr. Ishikawa had been traveling to Hiroshima to hear stories about her from people who knew and loved her.



**Nanami follows father to family grave in Hiroshima.** Kōno Fumiyo, 2004. Courtesy of Futabasha Publishing.

Through flashbacks and subplots, Kōno fleshes out the story of how Nanami's parents met and grew to love each other, Nanami's mother's death, and discrimination against both first- and second-generation *hibakusha* as marriage partners.<sup>33</sup>

The main character and our portal to memories in Nishioka Yuka's ambitious work, *A Summer's Afterimage*, is Kimura Kana whose grandparents survived the Nagasaki atomic bombing. This work grapples with not only the painful memories and trauma of Japanese survivors, but also the discrimination Korean *hibakusha* faced, the legacy of Japan's colonial past, the American

“atomic myth,” and questions of the morality of science. One of just a few works that focuses on Nagasaki,<sup>34</sup> *A Summer's Afterimage* follows protagonist Kana through five vignettes, in which she hears the testimonies of Japanese and Korean *hibakusha* and other persons who share their wartime experiences as she travels to Nagasaki, the United States, and Korea.

Kōno and Nishioka reinforce their historical positionality by directing the transmission of memories from survivors of the war and atomic bombings to contemporary characters and readers.<sup>35</sup> In much the same way that their *manga* pass on the history of Hiroshima and Nagasaki to a new generation, the elders in their texts share their “authentic memories,” bequeathing them to younger individuals. In *Country of Cherry Blossoms*, Nanami's father, Asahi, who was sent to live with relatives in Mito during the war, travels to Hiroshima to hear (and collect) stories about his beloved sister so that he can properly commemorate her death. Pushing the limits of memory is the touching and humorous scene wherein Asahi asks Kyoka to marry him. This “memory” in fact comes to us in a “flashback” by their daughter, Nanami. She muses: “Perhaps I'd heard these stories from my mother. Somehow, I remember these scenes. From before I was born...I was watching them. I looked down at those two and decided to be born to them. I am sure of it.”<sup>36</sup> Kōno suggests that when we listen to history – to the stories of those who lived history – it can become our memory. In this way she moves away from the idea of proprietary memory towards one of shared memory across generations.

Notably, Nishioka's narratives emphasize active listening and the recognition of historical “others” as she ponders the potential of healing personal pain, families, and nations. The five vignettes in *A Summer's Afterimage* maintain the complexity of people's differing experiences (from person to person and across nationalities) and highlight the importance of acknowledging the suffering of others who were once an “enemy.” The section “Manhattan Sunset,” follows Kana and her grandmother, who travel to New Mexico to attend an exhibit, which features a film-clip of Kana's grandmother soon after the dropping of the bomb. When the grandmother takes ill, Dr. Smith, provides medical assistance and shares a narrative of his childhood in Los Alamos where his father worked with Dr. Oppenheimer to produce the world's first three atomic bombs.





**Dr. Smith as a child at Los Alamos.** Nishoka Yuka, 2008. Courtesy of Gaifū Publishing Inc.

A trip to the Trinity Test Site reveals Dr. Smith's conflicted feelings, but ultimately he cannot let go of the idea that the bomb was necessary.<sup>37</sup>

The last episode, "Asian River," concentrates on Kana's visit to Korea, where she is guided by the grandson, Soyon, of a Korean *hibakusha*, Mrs. Park, who was treated by Dr. Kimura, Kana's grandfather, in Nagasaki after the bombing. Kana listens to Mrs. Park's moving story and visits the demilitarized zone (DMZ), "the Berlin Wall of Asia." Her short trip turns out to be an important lesson for Kana on the history of Japanese colonialism, the discrimination against Koreans after the atomic bombing, and the legacy of the Korean War.



**Mrs. Park faces discrimination in immediate aftermath of the bombing.**  
Nishioka Yuka, 2008. Courtesy of Gaifū Publishing Inc.

On August 15, the day Koreans celebrate liberation from their Japanese oppressors, Kana and Soyon build and launch a “spirit boat” that they name “Asia” for all who passed away in the war.



**Kana and Soyon launch a “spirit boat” in the name of all who perished in the Asia-Pacific war.**

Nishioka Yuka, 2008. Courtesy of Gaifu Publishing Inc.

“The Portrait,” finds Kana and her grandmother getting ready for anniversary services on August 9 when they run into a German who shares his story of returning from the war to find nothing more of his wife, a painter, than her self-portrait. He has come to Nagasaki to pay his respects believing that it could just as well have been Germany that the U.S. bombed with the new weapon. Together the three remember the dead and pray for their repose.

In their plot lines and textual organization, both Kōno and Nishioka create room for collective memories grounded in the inter-generational transmission of “stories.” For most of Kōno and Nishioka’s texts both characters and readers are firmly located in our current historical moment, occasionally traveling back in time via survivors’ testimonies and memories. In a variety of ways, they attempt to link the summer of 1945 to the contemporary moment, pointing to the lingering

social and political ramifications of history that can otherwise seem distant and cut off from the present.<sup>38</sup> Nishioka's brief epilogue, in which Kana joins other high school students collecting signatures for a petition calling for nuclear abolition, goes one step further in urging members of a new generation to seek their own place in this ongoing history.

Given that Kōno and Nishioka's works are undoubtedly *about* Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the dearth of scenes depicting August 6 or 9 is striking. Both eschew drawing scenes that attempt to "recreate" the period immediately after the atomic attacks. Whereas readers of Nakazawa's *Barefoot Gen* join Gen and his family in August 1945 and "witness" the *pika-don* moment (the initial flash and blast), for most of Kōno's and Nishioka's texts, both characters and readers are firmly located in our current historical moment, occasionally traveling back in time via survivors' testimonies and memories. Just three frames in all ninety-eight pages that comprise *Town of Evening Calm, Country of Cherry Blossoms* depict the immediate aftermath of the bombing. In these Kōno usually keeps the character Minami in her body and clothing of 1955 – a mingling of the present and the past. In one frame, the heavily pinned hair, shoes, and bags of Minami and her suitor first draw the reader's eye to the lower left corner. Then we notice the mass of indistinguishable bodies floating in the river under a cracked bridge strewn with debris.



In another frame, the Minami of 1955 runs past a group of children's vacant faces, as she relives those initial moments of panic, while one scene shows the postwar Minami following behind her sister Kasumi and walking amongst the dead bodies and detritus.

Only eight pages in *A Summer's Afterimage*, a work numbering 132 pages, feature scenes of the initial moments of the bombing – for instance, a flash and a mail carrier blasted into the air. In one episode, we see a pile of skulls and bones and a woman screaming in tattered clothing. Still, even though some disturbing images are included, many of the visuals are one step removed. In one case, we see only the faint details of four photographs that are part of the exhibit in Los Alamos. In one episode, a highly stylized version of the mushroom cloud symbolizes the Nagasaki bombing.

There are no attempts to overwhelm our senses with the violence of the atomic bomb. Rather the *manga* artists choose to portray the quieter suffering of *hibakusha* and their loved ones. In *Town of Evening Calm* this is revealed through the character Minami who survives ten years only to find that she too will join the ranks of dead victims. Her last thoughts are, “This isn’t fair. I thought I was one of the survivors.”<sup>39</sup> Nanami and her brother Nagio in *Country of Cherry Blossoms* represent the “second generation” of survivors who endure (atomic related) diseases and the silent pain of older relatives who continue to grieve for family members lost to the bombings. Depictions of the mundane details of survival are prioritized over visuals of the flash, blast, or heat that a rare and simple line of text informs us seared a barrette into Minami’s hair and melted the soles of her shoes.

If these two historical *manga* focus on the living more than the dead, it is not because the authors have forgotten them. One critic of John Hersey’s 1947 Hiroshima made the provocative observation that “The living occupy all the foreground, and the mounds of dead are only seen vaguely in the background,”<sup>40</sup> while another claimed, “To have done the atom bomb justice, Mr. Hersey would have had to interview the dead.”<sup>41</sup> Richardson maintains that this is precisely the task that fictional works can perform; “... a work of fiction has the power to take the narrative to places that survivor testimony cannot,”<sup>42</sup> namely to let the dead speak. *Hibakusha* have made similar claims, such as when Numata Suzuko states “... that as a survivor who was ‘made to live among thousands of those who fell victim to the bomb,’ she feels a need to ‘embrace the voiceless voices of the dead – so that they do not have to feel they died in vain.”<sup>43</sup> Nishioka’s words echo this idea in her commentary on the episode called “The Last Letter.”

There is a model for the character who is a postal carrier. I finally realized something upon hearing this person’s testimony given after the bombing, when he told me in a lively fashion about the beautiful townscape and the lives of the people before the bomb when he was going about delivering mail on his red bicycle. Until “that moment,” people were going about their modest daily lives just as we do today. When I faced the fact that before 1945 an atomic weapon had never been used in war, I came to understand how presumptuous I had been, and I felt compelled to say in front of the epicenter monument “All you who died, it was not in vain. Certainly, it was not in vain.”<sup>44</sup>

Nishioka also allows those who perished to have the last word in each of her stories. “All five stories collected here end with the words of the dead. In lending my ears to the voices of the afterimages and bringing them back to life today, I want to offer the only tribute to them that I can.”<sup>45</sup> The moving words of characters or, in the case of the episode “Manhattan Sunset,” the lines of a poem by the Nagasaki survivor and poet Fukuda Sumako, resonate as they bring each

chapter to an end.<sup>46</sup> Even more directly Kōno depicts Minami's last moments in *Town of Evening Calm*. Pictures of Minami on her deathbed are interspersed with completely blank frames that convey the heaviness of death better than any number of strokes Kōno's pen could have. Eventually all renderings of Minami's body give way to images of faces hovering over her, placing us in her viewpoint. Readers are privy to her thoughts, which are printed in otherwise empty frames. In one instance there is the single word "pain" and in another we "hear" Minami thinking, "It's been ten years. I wonder if the people who dropped the bomb are pleased with themselves – 'Yes! Got another one.'"<sup>47</sup>



Empty frames contain Minami's dying thoughts. Kōno Fumiyo, 2004. Courtesy of Futabasha Publishing.

As many similarities as these two works share, it is imperative to note several significant differences. *Town of Evening Calm*, *Country of Cherry Blossoms* concentrates on the memories of Hiroshima *hibakusha* and specifically the personal experiences of members of the

Hirano/Ishikawa family. Although emotionally powerful, Kōno's work focuses its "humanist" lens narrowly on Hiroshima, failing even to make the obvious connection with Nagasaki. One of the two references to a wider conversation on nuclear issues is a large sign announcing the 1955 World Conference Against Atomic and Hydrogen Bombs (*gensuibaku kinshi sekai taikai*) that Minami passes in the street on her way home from work. The other is a tattered flyer version of the sign, imprinted with the phrase "the power of peace for Hiroshima," which flutters in the air and falls to the ground in the frames immediately preceding Minami's death. This ending of the first story begs the question of whether the text aims to equate the futility of fighting radiation sickness to the peace movement's struggle against nuclear proliferation.

Nishioka's *A Summer's Afterimage* on the other hand, takes a much broader perspective, including the memories of Germans, Americans, and Koreans and addressing a wide range of issues. Although its discursive format may be considered a weakness, it maintains the complexity of history as it addresses the history of Japanese colonialism, recognizes the humanity of those who justify the U.S. decision to drop the atomic bombs, and poses uneasy questions regarding science and technology. If the ending of *Town of Evening Calm* suggests a dim prospect for "peace in Hiroshima," Nishioka's work concludes on an optimistic and outward-looking note as Kana joins a group of youth bearing a banner that calls for global nuclear abolition.

Their differing framing of and commitment to broader issues can be seen in other ways as well. It is notable that reviews of Kōno's work routinely remark that the antiwar stance is subtle. Otaku USA writes that the "anti-war message is unspoken, and comes naturally from the desire not to see the characters die,"<sup>48</sup> and *Manga: The Complete Guide* salutes its "understated antiwar statement."<sup>49</sup> Kōno's biography on the backflap is devoted completely to her impressive training and accomplishments as a *manga* artist, and she does not seem to have thought about producing a work about the subject until her editor suggested the project. Nishioka's author profile, however, makes explicit her engagement with the peace movement, such as her circumnavigation of the globe on the Peace Boat, her participation in the Hague Peace Conference, and her volunteer work in a Palestinian refugee camp. She also writes, as stated above, that she had long hoped to create a *manga* on the atomic bombing of Nagasaki.

These differences are not, however, merely manifestations of personal inclinations. They also reflect distinctions between the way the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Kōno and Nishioka's respective hometowns, reflect on their atomic legacy and engage with its significance today. The Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum, even in its updated version, centers on Hiroshima, giving scant attention to the larger question of nuclear issues, even the atomic bombing of Nagasaki. The Nagasaki Atomic Bomb Museum, on the other hand, goes well beyond the summer of 1945 and the boundaries of its city. Visitors do not leave the building without passing through a hall whose exhibits present the scope of contemporary proliferation and make crucial connections with world-wide environmental degradation and human suffering connected to nuclear testing (Marshall Islanders, downwinders in the United States) and nuclear power plant accidents (Three Mile Island, Chernobyl) and more.

Still, both Kōno and Nishioka clearly see their aim to be, in large part, educational. Because they conceive of their audience as a younger generation who knows little of the facts or truth of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, they include maps, historical information, and bibliographic references for further reading. Kōno's supplementary materials, for example, provide contextualization of

what were called the “atomic slums” in Hiroshima and the history of the preservation of the Atomic Dome. Nishioka appends a short essay to explain the events upon which each chapter is based and briefly provides factual details of the Nagasaki bombing, discusses problematic tenets of the American “atomic myth,” and introduces youth participation in post-war nuclear abolition movements. In order to speak of the past and of the dead to the living, Kōno and Nishioka build on their organic “education” from growing up in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. In these two *manga*, they bequeath critical historical truths in a medium that has the power to reach younger people in the narrative and visual language of their generation.

## Conclusion

Different historical periods, events and personages permit different degrees of license to fictionalize. Writing on singular, unprecedented events such as the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki raises particular issues for both survivors and later generations. For survivors there are numerous challenges, not least of which is reliving the traumatic memories in the writing process. How to overcome the inadequacy of language to depict the truth of their experiences and the fear that non-survivors might too readily assume they can “understand” the trauma are also common concerns. For later generations the issues revolve around questions of authorial authenticity, literary license, historical imagination, and truthfulness. Kōno and Nishioka are the first non-victims to marshal the popular medium of *manga* and produce nuanced full-volume treatments of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Despite their temporal and experiential distance from the events and the fact that some may consider their works “non-literary,” I believe we need not hesitate to add their works to the impressive body of atomic-bomb literature. In their organization, themes, and tone, these two works are distinct. Yet, both writers creatively engage a weighty subject, and in doing so they eschew any hint of a memoir, instead aligning their narratives’ temporality with a new generation of readers who also find themselves far removed in time from the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Both Kōno and Nishioka speak to the psychic and conceptual hurdles that had to be overcome to undertake their projects. That Kōno and Nishioka detail their conflicted feelings about their subject seems a necessary part of ethically representing Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Ever careful of the bond of trust between writer and reader, Kōno and Nishioka take great pains to position themselves as non-*hibakusha*, as well as to be faithful to the personal accounts inherited from those who experienced Hiroshima and Nagasaki firsthand. Through the depiction of people and experiences not so removed from our own lives and historical moment, they have effectively drawn characters and created stories to which their contemporaries can relate. I would guess that they would be sympathetic to German artist Lily Markiewicz’s statement:

Mine is an exploration of an aftermath, of a past which has become a present, of the absence of a traceable reality which has become the presence of memory. I am not concerned with the Holocaust directly, the event, its causes, reasons and details. I am concerned with the ripples, the ramifications, the consequences and our perceptions of it – our place ‘in it.’<sup>50</sup>

This idea is suggested in Nishioka’s title, *A Summer’s Afterimage*, which evokes the personal and collective memory that lingers long after the summer of 1945.

Representations of those fateful days in August that ruptured history and anointed the atomic age with flames and the stench of human flesh play a crucial role in keeping historical memory alive.



Yet, it is equally important to think beyond that one month in 1945 to the years that stretched out before the “survivors” and contemplate the strength and courage needed to live on. Kōno and Nishioka offer a solemn and respectful tribute to both the dead victims and the *hibakusha*. Moreover, they give those of us who care to reflect on the relevance of past suffering to that of our world not just a reminder of historical events far removed from the present but two fictional *manga* that speak important and timely truths. Stephen Feinstein’s statement that “The art that memorializes the Holocaust may itself become the subject of memory, a memory of a memory, or memory within the complex remembrance of the Holocaust”<sup>51</sup> seems particularly applicable to these two works. Kōno and Nishioka’s historical *manga* – two articulations of “memory” within the complex remembrance of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki – offer powerful “afterimages” that can inform and shape our collective memory and future.

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### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Tessa Morris-Suzuki, *The Past Within Us: Media, Memory, History* (London: Verso, 2005), 177.

<sup>2</sup> The two stories were originally published separately in the youth-oriented weekly serial *Weekly Manga Action* in 2003 and 2004, and debuted as a single volume in 2004. The response to Kōno’s work has been impressive. A radio drama version was produced in 2006, and both Sasabe Kiyoshi’s live-action film and Kunii Kei’s novel adaptation came out in 2007. The Japan Media Arts Festival awarded *Town of Evening Calm, Country of Cherry Blossoms* the Grand Prize for manga in 2004, and it received the Tezuka Osamu Cultural Prize Creative Award in 2005. Both the film and actor who played Hirano Minami, Aso Kumiko, garnered critical acclaim and numerous awards. It has been released on DVD and a soundtrack is available. Last Gasp published the comic in English, and it has been translated into Korean, Chinese and French as well. Kōno Fumiyo, *Yūnagi no machi sakura no kuni* (Tokyo: Futabasha, 2004). Quotes herein are from the English translation by Naoko Amemiya and Andy Nakatani. *Town of Evening Calm, Country of Cherry Blossoms* (San Francisco: Last Gasp, 2006).

<sup>3</sup> Nishioka Yuka, *Natsu no zanzō* (Tokyo: Gaifūsha, 2008). Gaifūsha produces books that address a wide range of political, economic, and social justice issues. All translations of this work are my own.

<sup>4</sup> The contested and complicated use of the word *hibakusha* is rightly receiving more attention recently. In this paper, however, I use the term interchangeably with the English translation “survivor.” For more information on this subject, see Takemine Seiichirō’s “‘*Hibakusha*’ *toiu kotoba ga motsu seigisei*” [The Political Aspects of the Word *Hibakusha*], *Ritsumeikan heiwakenkyū*, No. 9, (March 2008): 21-30.

<sup>5</sup> John Whittier Treat, *Writing Ground Zero: Japanese Literature and the Atomic Bomb* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 27.

<sup>6</sup> There is plenty of evidence, unfortunately, to confirm this fear in the case of images. Tessa Morris-Suzuki offers one example in *The Past Within Us*. After Nakazawa Kenji’s *Barefoot Gen* began serialization in *Shōnen Jump* in 1972, serious criticism was aimed at his visuals for being too graphic and disturbing. “In response, Nakazawa admits, he was forced to exclude from his testimony some of the darkest images engraved on his memory.” Later he commented, “When I reread my own work, my flesh crawled with loathing. I fell into a state of thinking ‘how could I have done it so badly?’ And this was so painful that I could not bear it. I immediately hid the magazines in which my work was serialized in a drawer. The plot of *Gen* kept running through my head, but I had spent half a year trying to alter my mood by writing entertainment comics (Nakazawa 1994, 215).” Morris-Suzuki, *The Past Within Us*, 162-63.

<sup>7</sup> Treat, *Writing Ground Zero*, 26.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>10</sup> Anna Richardson, “The Ethical Limitations of Holocaust Literary Representation,” *eSharp* No. 5 (2005): 1-19.

<sup>11</sup> Richardson, “The Ethical Limitations of Holocaust Literary Representation,” 7.

<sup>12</sup> I am thinking here of, for example, the 2008 discovery that the best-selling work *Misha: A Memoire of the Holocaust Years* was completely fictionalized and written by a Belgium woman who was not Jewish, the scandal of Herman Rosenblat’s authorial liberties in *Angel at the Fence*, and the scholarship over the last decade on fake slavery narratives (written by white abolitionists) and “autobiographies” about if not by people of the first nations (e.g. Asa Carter’s *The Education of Little Tree*). One excellent example of this scholarship is Laura Browder’s *Slippery Characters: Ethnic Impersonators and American Identity* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2000). Richardson’s article treats Benjamin Wilkomirski’s *Fragments* (1995), which was marketed as a “memoir” and “personal testimony.” A controversy over its categorization erupted when it was revealed that the author, whose real name is Bruno Dösseker, was a non-Jewish Swiss national. It has not been reprinted since 1999.

<sup>13</sup> Richardson, “The Ethical Limitations of Holocaust Literary Representation,” 9.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 5-6.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>16</sup> Art Spiegelman, *Maus: A Survivor’s Tale II: And Here My Troubles Began* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1991), 46.

<sup>17</sup> Sara Horowitz, “Auto/Biography and Fiction after Auschwitz: Probing the Boundaries of Second-Generation Aesthetics,” in *Breaking Crystal: Writing and Memory after Auschwitz*, Ed. Efraim Sicher (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 278.

<sup>18</sup> Horowitz, “Auto/Biography and Fiction after Auschwitz: Probing the Boundaries of Second-Generation Aesthetics,” 277.

<sup>19</sup> For excellent translations and commentary on the work of the first three writers see Richard H. Minear, *Hiroshima: Three Witnesses* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990). John Bestor’s wonderful translation of Ibuse’s *Black Rain* (Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1988) stands the test of time. Another important resource for short stories by both survivors and non-survivors is the anthology edited by Ōe Kenzaburō *The Crazy Iris and Other Stories of the Atomic Aftermath* (New York: Grove Press, 1994).

<sup>20</sup> Stephen C. Feinstein, “Mediums of Memory: Artistic Responses of the Second Generation,” in *Breaking Crystal: Writing and Memory after Auschwitz*, Ed. Efraim Sicher (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 201.

<sup>21</sup> I use the term “*manga* memoir,” cautiously, realizing the contentious issues surrounding the definition of such a reference. It brings to mind an interview (conducted by Stanley Crouch) on the Charlie Rose Show (July 30, 1996), wherein Art Spiegelman asserts, “I kind of like living in the space between categories” when he explains that he wrote the New York Times to complain that his Pulitzer Prize-winning graphic novel, *Maus*, had been listed as “fiction” on the bestseller list. He adds that he would “have done so no matter which side of the list it had appeared on.” ([link](#))

<sup>22</sup> Subsequent *anime* and live-action film adaptations and the completion of the full English translation attest to *Barefoot Gen*’s wide reach and long lasting popularity. Yamada Tengu directed three live-action adaptations, which came out between 1976 and 1980. *Barefoot Gen* (1983) and *Barefoot Gen 2* (1987) were both created by Mori Masaki. The English translation of Volume 10 of the *manga Barefoot Gen* was released November 2009.

<sup>23</sup> For more details see the interview of Nakazawa Keiji in *Japan Focus*. Nakazawa Keiji, “*Barefoot Gen*/The Atomic Bomb and I: The Hiroshima Legacy.” ([link](#))

<sup>24</sup> Kōno, *Town of Evening Calm, Country of Cherry Blossoms*, 103.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 103.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 104.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 102.

<sup>28</sup> Nishioka, *Natsu no zanzō*, 133.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 133.

<sup>30</sup> Nishioka writes, “Thinking I would engrave this day on my heart, I gave my protagonist the name ‘Kana’” (133). Michael Rothberg’s excellent new work, entitled *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization*, speaks to how collective memory emerges out of a dynamic process that is frequently inspired and shaped by seemingly unrelated events in time and place. One of the most important interventions of this book lies in Rothberg’s

notion of “multidirectional memory,” which he characterizes as “subject to ongoing negotiation, cross-referencing, and borrowing; as productive and not privative” (3). Thus, in the same way that the Algerian War constituted a cite of “transfer,” which stimulated articulations of memories of the Holocaust, the production of *A Summer’s Afterimage* can be attributed in part to Nishioka’s association of the bombing of Qanaa with that of Nagasaki. See Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009).

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 137.

<sup>32</sup> In 1960, approximately 900 households were located along a strip of land running along the Hon River. In 1968, a development plan was proposed, everyone evicted, and over a span of ten years the land redeveloped. Today, in addition to an apartment complex, there exists a municipal art museum, youth center, swimming pool, and several libraries where the “atomic slum” used to be.

<sup>33</sup> For instance, Fujimi Hirano expresses disappointed when her son Asahi, who was in Mito at the time of the atomic bombing in Hiroshima, decides to marry a *hibakusha*. In the contemporary story, Nagio tells the woman he has been dating, Toko, that her parents have instructed him to never see her again because he is a second-generation survivor with a history of health problems.

<sup>34</sup> The many writings of Hayashi Kyoko, a survivor of Nagasaki, stand out as particularly important contributions to the genre of Atomic Bomb Literature. Numerous works by Hayashi have been awarded prestigious literary prizes, such as “Procession on a Cloudy Day” (Kumoribi no Kōshin, 1967, trans. Kashiwagi Hirosuke, 1993) and *Ritual of Death* (*Matsuri no ba*, 1975, trans. Kyoko Selden, 1984). Readers can also find English translations of her short stories “Empty Can” (*Akikan*, 1978, trans. Margaret Mitsutani, 1985) and “Masks of Whatchamacallit: A Nagasaki Tale” (*Nanjamonoja no men*, 1968, trans. Kyoko Selden, 2005). (For the latter work see [this link](#).) Another widely available work in English is Dr. Nagai Takashi’s *The Bells of Nagasaki* (*Nagasaki no kane*, 1949, trans. William Johnston, 1984), which can help fill in this overlooked history.

<sup>35</sup> This strategy of casting both characters and readers as the audience of oral testimonies recalls Spiegelman’s ever-present tape recorder in *Maus*.

<sup>36</sup> Kōno, *Town of Evening Calm, Country of Cherry Blossoms*, 93-95.

<sup>37</sup> See Hayashi Kyōko’s poignant novella “From Trinity to Trinity” (*Toriniti kara toriniti e*, 2000), which describes her 1999 visit to Los Alamos, New Mexico and, specifically, the Trinity site where the U.S. tested the first atomic bomb. ([link](#))

<sup>38</sup> Other historical novels make explicit links between the past and present, especially those that seek to “revise” the historical record in order to place it within the “proper” light of the times. *Manga: Hating the Korean Wave and Japanese and the Emperor*, although from the opposite ends of the political spectrum, can be considered in this light. Both employ “straw man” devices to present their arguments, building their storylines around contemporary college students discovering the “truth” about the past. In the former, this is facilitated through a debate with Zainichi and Korean exchange students who lose to the “superior” neo-nationalist narrative. In the latter, conservative, authoritarian school officials who attempt to punish a student for not singing the national anthem are shot down and shamed by an older supervisor who uses his

personal experience during the war to bolster his authority to speak and teach everyone a lesson. For more on the former work see Rumi Sakamoto and Matthew Allen's "'Hating 'The Korean Wave'' Comic Books: A Sign of New Nationalism in Japan?" ([link](#)).

<sup>39</sup> Kōno, *Town of Evening Calm, Country of Cherry Blossoms*, 34.

<sup>40</sup> Treat, *Writing Ground Zero*, 55.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 55.

<sup>42</sup> Richardson, "The Ethical Limitations of Holocaust Literary Representation," 7.

<sup>43</sup> Lisa Yoneyama, *Hiroshima Traces: Time, Space, and the Dialectics of Memory* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 135-6.

<sup>44</sup> Nishioka, *Natsu no zanzō*, 134.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 135.

<sup>46</sup> These lines come from the poem entitled "One Note for the Creators of Atomic Bombs" whose original first lines read "Creators of atomic bombs! For a short while, lay your hands down and close your eyes!"

<sup>47</sup> Kōno, *Town of Evening Calm, Country of Cherry Blossoms*, 33.

<sup>48</sup> Jason Thompson, "Town of Evening Calm, Country of Cherry Blossoms" in *Otaku USA* (October 30, 2007).

<sup>49</sup> Jason Thompson, *Manga: The Complete Guide* (New York: Del Rey, 2007), 371.

<sup>50</sup> Feinstein, "Mediums of Memory: Artistic Responses of the Second Generation," 204.

<sup>51</sup> Feinstein, "Mediums of Memory: Artistic Responses of the Second Generation," 202.

## “War and Nationalism in Yamato: Trauma and Forgetting the Postwar”

Andrew Gerow

June 13, 2011

<http://japanfocus.org/-Aaron-Gerow/3545>

In many ways, Hollywood sets the tone for global cinema, at least of the blockbuster variety that big-budget war movies must almost inevitably become to justify their huge budgets. After 1998, many countries tried to produce their own *Saving Private Ryan*. Canada has the 2008 World War I melodrama *Passchendaele*. Russia, grappling with issues of national identity in the decade after the fall of the Soviet Union, has the “Great Patriotic War” epic *The Star* (2002). South Korea’s *Brotherhood* (2004) was an attempt to understand the fraternal violence of the Korean War. While each of these national epics presents an account of war coherent with that country’s memory culture, visual and narrative nods to *Saving Private Ryan* are evident in each.

The first scenes of *Saving Private Ryan*, depicting the Normandy landings, are some of the most discussed movie moments of the 1990s. The extent of the violence and the visceral point of view of the ordinary soldier facing overwhelming firepower awed critics and moviegoers. *Otoko-tachi no Yamato* (literally “The Men’s Yamato,” but just *Yamato* in the official English release), a 2005 Japanese film about the sinking of the Imperial Japanese Navy’s largest battleship, tried to bring a similar style to Japanese screens.

Many have taken the extreme violence of these films as representing powerful anti-war statements. Some critics, however, have described how the return of the epic war film has a different type of significance. In the article “Saving Private Ryan and Postwar Memory in America,” John Bodnar writes that despite the violence and visual innovation, “At its rhetorical core, [*Saving Private Ryan*’s] story’s argument would have seemed very familiar to audiences in the 1940s.” Family men and wide-eyed youngsters do their duty. All suffer, some die. This type of film is a paean to sacrifice and heroism.<sup>8</sup>

The style of war film represented by *Saving Private Ryan* fell out of fashion in the United States in the 1970s because of the horrors of the Vietnam War. In the article “*Saving Private Ryan*” World War II veteran and historian Howard Zinn wrote, “Vietnam caused large numbers of Americans to question the enterprise of war itself. Now *Saving Private Ryan*, aided by superb cinematographic technology, draws on our deep feelings for the GIs to rescue, not just Private Ryan, but the good name of war” (139). Violent imagery alone does not make a popular work “anti-war,” and on this level *Saving Private Ryan* and the Japanese *Yamato* have ambiguous messages.

Historian of Japanese wartime violence Yoshida Yutaka has elaborated on a “Naval View” of the Asia-Pacific War important in postwar Japan. Following wartime nationalist investments in Japan’s naval technology, like the battleship *Yamato*, the largest big-gun warship in history, and the “Zero” fighter which ruled the skies in the first years of the war, postwar filmgoers and readers have preferred works about Japan’s sea and sky battles.

The “naval view” reproduces a narrative arc of tragic **heroism**. Japan’s naval and air forces struck a series of “glorious” victories between late 1941 and the end of 1942 and then battled to the last against the increasingly technologically and materially superior American forces until defeat in 1945. Importantly, the “naval view” of the war has allowed

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<sup>8</sup> John Bodnar *The American Historical Review* Vol. 106, No. 3, Jun., 2001 805

ex-naval officers, their families, the Japanese entertainment industry, military hobbyists, and others to salvage a form of heroic narrative from the often grim history of the Asia-Pacific War. While the Imperial Navy was certainly complicit in Japanese Empire, the organization was not central to the massacres of civilians for which the Imperial Army has become notorious. As horrifying as deaths in naval battles can be, and *Yamato* pulls no punches in this regard, often surpassing the bloodshed of *Saving Private Ryan* by showing young navy men torn apart by American bombs and shells, it is a historical viewpoint that skips the worst horrors of Japan's Pacific battlefields.

In *Uejini shita eirei-tachi* (The 'Heroic Spirits' Who Starved to Death), historian Fujiwara Akira makes the striking argument, based on broad assessment of primary historical documents and testimony, that as many as a million Japanese soldiers died from starvation or related diseases. On some battlefields, starving soldiers, cut off from chain of command and any chance of supply, turned to cannibalism. These facts support an understanding of Japanese troops as both **victimizers**, the killers of innumerable civilians and prisoners, and **victims** of military and political elites who treated them as "resources" to be expended in a hopeless fight against a much more numerous and better armed enemy, sending them to fight for the Emperor without even enough food to survive. Ooka Shohei, a veteran of the fighting in the Philippines, who became one of Japan's most highly-regarded postwar authors, describes his war experience in the 1951 novel *Nobi* (Fires on the Plain). Ooka has the novel's protagonist tell his commander that he is too sick to march, and instead of receiving medicine or even sympathy, he is told that he is a burden and should just "lie down somewhere and die." This type of brutal indifference to the lives of draftees on the part of officers runs through much autobiographical writing about the Asia-Pacific war including Mizuki Shigeru's manga. Compared to these horrors, taking a "naval view" of the war allows for a relatively clean heroic story of Japanese battling Americans in a modern technological war distant from the grime, face-to-face slaughter, and emaciated corpses of the land fighting. *Yamato* is not a **revisionist** work, but by taking such a narrow view of the war, it offers a skewed vision of tragic heroism. In this article, Andrew Gerow expands on the themes of *Yamato* and where it and similar works stand in Japan's 21<sup>st</sup> century memory culture.



## War and Nationalism in Yamato: Trauma and Forgetting the Postwar

Aaron Gerow

The recent spate of Japanese films dealing with World War II or with Japan fighting modern wars raises questions about what kind of histories are being narrated, both wartime and postwar, what they say about Japanese responsibility for war and atrocities in the Asia-Pacific War, and how they relate to current trends in nationalism. The fear is that such movies resonate with other phenomena, from the comments of Japanese officials, most recently exemplified by the speeches and writings of retired General Tamogami Toshio, Japan's former Air Self-Defense Force [ASDF] Chief of Staff, to popular manga like Kobayashi Yoshinori's work, that seem to legitimize Japan's pursuit of war in East Asia and deny Japanese responsibility for atrocities.<sup>1</sup> I have already argued in *Japan Focus*, with regard to two cinematic imaginations of Japan at war, the alternative World War II history *Lorelei* (Rōrerai, Higuchi Shinji, 2005), and the Maritime Self-Defense Forces mutiny movie, *Aegis* (Bōkoku no Ijisu, Sakamoto Junji, 2005), that such fears of a rising revisionist nationalism in cinema are not always justified.<sup>2</sup> Both works present a "victorious" Japan, populated by young people willing to sacrifice themselves for their community, but through an entertainment cinema that appears so conscious of a consumer base with conflicting opinions about the war and nationalism, that it attempts to construct a hegemonic vision of the nation that appeals to all sides, only to end up portraying an empty Japan that can mean anything to anyone.

One could argue that this emptiness is a product of the fact that these films, both of which are fantasies, do not carry the burden of the real memory of WWII and its aftermath. What of the recent films that take up actual historical moments and figures, such as kamikaze pilots or other suicidal missions? *Yamato* (*Otokotachi no Yamato*, 2005), for instance, about the final days of the famed battleship, was a significant box office success, grossing ¥5.1 billion in ticket sales, the fifth best selling Japanese film in a year when Japanese movies out-grossed foreign films for the first time since 1985 (it was also the most successful Japanese war film in decades).



Advertisement: *Yamato* "rattles the soul"

Yoshikuni Igarashi has argued that post-2000 kamikaze films such as *Fireflies* (*Hotaru*, 2001) respond to the end of the Shōwa Era and the Cold War by moving away from narratives that previously marked a division between the war and the postwar by depicting the heroic deaths of the kamikaze, as if their demise signified the end of the war and its problems. Newer films are considering the lingering traumatic effects of the war on postwar Japan in the form of surviving kamikaze.<sup>3</sup> I contend, however, that the effect of many of these films is to engage not their manifest subjects, the post-1989 present or even the wartime, but the problematic, usually unrepresented history in between. Igarashi argues that *Fireflies* avoids dealing with the trauma of the war by narrating a second set of deaths in the present, which cleanly conclude the postwar and divide it from today. I contend that *Yamato*, on the other hand, which offers no such deaths, performs wartime trauma in a vicarious fashion, using the disruptive effects of depicting WWII trauma so as to divert the audience's attention away from what might



be for the majority of the audience, born after the war ended, the greater trauma: the postwar era and its history of economic upheaval, American bases, student protest, or “democracy.” That these films are also appearing at the time of the “Shōwa 30s” boom, featuring nostalgic narratives of Japan between 1955 and 1965 such as the successful film series *Always—Sunset on Third Street*, is no coincidence. Some films ignore the war and the long history of postwar conflict to construct an idyllic postwar, while others “remember” wartime trauma in order to skip to a present where that trauma has been solved. Both, however, construct a postwar empty of problems in order to avoid dealing with its traumatic and divisive history, primarily in order to establish the illusion of a more unified present.

*Yamato* was produced by Takaiwa Tan, the chairman of Tōei, and Kadokawa Haruki, a maverick producer who in the 1970s and 1980s introduced into the Japanese film industry new marketing strategies for big-budget spectacles. The film was Kadokawa’s return to success after his cocaine bust in 1993 and reunited him with director Satō Jun’ya, who had helmed such early Kadokawa blockbusters as *Proof of the Man* (Ningen no shōmei, 1976). Purportedly budgeted at 2.5 billion yen, quite high by Japanese standards, *Yamato* featured an all-star cast, including Nakadai Tatsuya, Sorimachi Takashi, Nakamura Shidō, Matsuyama Ken’ichi, Okuda Eiji, Suzuki Kyōka, Aoi Yū, Terajima Shinobu, and Watari Tetsuya, and a colossal set: a life-size reproduction of the front half of the Battleship Yamato, itself the largest battleship ever constructed.

*Yamato* narrates the last days of the famous battleship, which was sunk off Japan on 7 April 1945 with a loss of 2740 lives after being sent on a suicidal mission to defend Okinawa. It does this through two structuring devices: the first focusing on several young recruits who were only 17-years old at the time of the last battle,

and the second, a framing narrative in which one of those recruits, Kamio Katsumi, is asked sixty years later by Makiko, the daughter of Uchida Mamoru, one of his former shipmates, to take her to the site of the sinking. Both are central in articulating the film’s ambiguous, if not contradictory politics. By concentrating on the young men, the film, which was based on the award-winning book by Henmi Jun (Kadokawa Haruki’s



**Lost youth: Kamio (by the flag) and the other recruits**

sister), is able to narrate a tale of innocent, promising spirits needlessly sent to their grisly deaths by a central command that even the fleet commander, Itō Seiichi, registered objections to. Although the older, adult trio of Moriwaki Shōhachi, Uchida, and Karaki Masao, who are directly in charge of these young recruits, can convincingly voice their desire to sail to their deaths because of their love for Yamato (and, correspondingly, the nation it is named for) and their hope of defending their families at home, the greenhorns’ similar statements lack force and are even questioned by Moriwaki at one point. Quite a number of voices, including that of the director, claimed *Yamato* was an anti-war film, one revealing the horrible waste of life caused by a reckless leadership.<sup>4</sup> Yet right-wing commentators could also point to the same chaste sailors and, especially by citing other texts like Nagabuchi Tsuyoshi’s honorific ending song, claim they were presented as an example of selfless patriotism that all Japan should follow.<sup>5</sup>

The framing structure only reinforces these possible, contradictory readings. Kamio's narration of what happened after Yamato's loss, especially the deaths of his girlfriend Taeko and Uchida's lover Fumiko in the atomic attack on Hiroshima, prompts him to declare that even the hope of dying to save their families came to naught. Kamio in particular is presented as a victim of trauma after the war, unproductive (without wife or children) and reclusive (he did not even know Uchida had survived the Yamato sinking), whose problematic relation to memory is exemplified both by his refusal to take part in Yamato memorials, and a physical debilitation (a heart ailment) that worsens as the site of his traumatic experience nears. Coupled with Uchida, who was presumably rendered sterile by the war (his children are all adopted), Kamio represents the loss of the masculine bravura that Moriwaki and Uchida exemplified during the war.

The present-day narrative is supposed to show the overcoming of such trauma, and, like films in a similar vein, such as *Titanic* and *Saving Private Ryan*, makes *Yamato* a film that combines ostensibly accurate spectacles of past events with the work of processing memory for contemporary purposes. Perhaps it belongs in the "trauma cinema" that E. Ann Kaplan, Joshua Hirsch, Janet Walker, and others have discussed.<sup>6</sup> One would initially think not, however. Given that mental trauma is usually theorized as coming from an experience so shocking and forceful that normal psychological structures are unable to manage it, thus leaving the traumatic memory in the mind unprocessed and occasionally able to wreak havoc, many have labeled trauma cinema those motion pictures which deal with experiences so overwhelming that normal modes of film, particularly the classical realism of Hollywood, cannot properly deal with it. Prominent examples of trauma cinema are then films like Alain Resnais' *Night and Fog* that are modernist in form, which evince in their disjunctive cinematic structures both symptoms of the rupturing effects of trauma, as well as innovative methods of representing experiences that are inherently difficult to represent. *Yamato*, however, as many critics noted, even when judging it favorably, is largely conventional, if not clichéd in style. The form it relies on is not just the war film, but the television history program, since it features both the familiar voice of TV Asahi announcer Watanabe Noritsugu as the narrator, and the explanatory titles common to Japanese television documentaries and historical dramas. Actually starting with documentary footage and images of the Yamato Museum in Kure, *Yamato* manages a loss that, at least in terms of its own film form is not hard to represent, that has already been memorialized in conventional ways. In some ways, it is simply a reminder for those who haven't gone to the museum.

That, however, does not account either for the film's pretensions or its effects and popularity. Uchida's daughter, Makiko, visits the Yamato Museum at the beginning, but must go further to the spot where the Yamato sank.



**Makiko's visit to the Yamato Museum in Kure is not enough**

Yet this is a place where there is nothing, not a trace of the ship or the event. The film must fill in for such absences. Nakamura Hideyuki has argued, both with regard to kamikaze films in general and *Yamato* in particular, that such works function as ceremony, representing those on suicide missions as essentially divine.<sup>7</sup> Makiko, Kamio, and even the 15-year-old deckhand Atsushi thus travel to this place of nothingness because the

odyssey itself ceremoniously honors the dead. The fishing boat's journey is also ostensibly therapeutic, since it is directed not just at the honored dead, but also at the troubled living; not just at a heroic past, but at a crippled present. Narratively, the voyage to this location is the occasion for Kamio's remembrances, with the authentic geography working to double their veracity. What specifically triggers his recollections is photography: the portrait of Moriwaki, Uchida, and Karaki that Makiko shows him.

And just as the photo introduces his exploration of the past, so *Yamato* the film similarly offers itself to the audience as a privileged means of not only accompanying the travellers on this authentic journey, but also obtaining unique access to the truth of the traumatic event. If the trip helps cure Kamio, so should it—and the movie--presumably help Japanese audiences manage a problematic history.



**A photograph of Karaki, Uchida, and Moriwaki summons the past**

Before considering how it does that, we must ask what it is that the film ostensibly cures them of. One can debate whether the trauma of WWII and Japan's defeat is still felt, over sixty years after the fact, with an audience that was mostly not alive at the time and, we are repeatedly told, not fully educated about those events. What is more important is that the film itself cites no such problem for average Japanese. Even their representatives on the boat, Makiko and the 15-year-old deckhand Atsushi, fail to speak of haunting memories that require resolution. Perhaps theirs is not a narrative of trauma, but a coming of age journey: through Atsushi, the adolescents who boarded *Yamato* (at the same age as Atsushi) but who could not grow up can finally become adult, largely, as with Makiko, by discovering the identity of the absent father. The question is how the audience is supposedly inserted into these larger issues. Recent Japanese war films, I have argued, share the difficulty of linking individual narratives to the collective. *Yamato* also bears this problem, but attempts to overcome it through what I call vicarious trauma.

*Yamato* was in some ways a traumatic film for spectators, too. Viewer comments on Yahoo Japan and other sites often describe the difficulty of speaking or communicating after the film, as if aphasia was one of its effects. What tends to be shocking is less the general narrative of the loss of the *Yamato*, than the way the innocent young recruits are killed through quite graphic cinematic representation.



**A vicariously traumatic depiction of young deaths**

The gore exceeds narrative necessity, and while it might somewhat be justified thematically if the film is anti-war, it is a brutal form of filmmaking that can be cruel both to its characters and its audience. To begin with, the violence can function to collectivize Kamio's individual trauma, to form a national experience that is epitomized by the



salute of three generations to the honored dead at the end of the film.

As a disruptive phenomenon, however, trauma helps disguise the inherent differences between these generations. For while Kamio's trauma is rooted not just in the meaningless loss of young lives, but in the guilt over surviving and the powerlessness to alter history—his problem is precisely linear, based in the inability to turn back the clock—the spectator's trauma is circular because it

refers to itself and allows for revisiting. The film touts its ability to access the source of trauma just as it offers viewers the chance to relive it multiple times, even during the same viewing. This is a different form of vicarious trauma than the one described by Joshua Hirsch, who valorizes some cinema as “a traumatic relay,” actually transmitting, sometimes in analogous form, aspects of the original traumatic experience.<sup>7</sup> There might be an element of this in *Yamato*, but here the vicariousness functions more as an indirect substitute than as empathic identification, one that allows spectators to experience trauma in a safe, detached circularity. This is confirmed at the end of the film, which after giving audiences a strong emotional experience, allows them to remember and memorialize it only minutes later through slow-motion flashbacks of the same brutal battle scenes under the credits. Just as trauma reflects back on cinema itself, the process of remembering that experience is directed towards the movie. It is thus quite fitting that when *Yamato* became a hit, the set of the movie became a tourist attraction in the six months after the film's release for over one million people interested in reliving their experience.<sup>9</sup>



**Makiko, Kamio, and Atsushi salute the nation's dead**



**Remembering war through its reproduction: the movie set at Onomichi**

Kamio's trauma can only be solved by becoming similarly circular. On the personal level, it is the assertion that he has lived in order to remember and memorialize the dead. This is a common refrain in war films, but it doesn't answer the traumatic question of why these young men died, especially in a film that minutes before questioned the meaning of their sacrifice. If Kamio lived to memorialize the dead, did they die only that so that they could be memorialized? This perverse circularity is somewhat reinforced on the collective level by the film's quotation of the legendary statement made by Lieutenant Usubuchi Iwao<sup>10</sup> on the *Yamato* the day before its final battle: that Japan can only progress through defeat, and that the *Yamato*'s demise

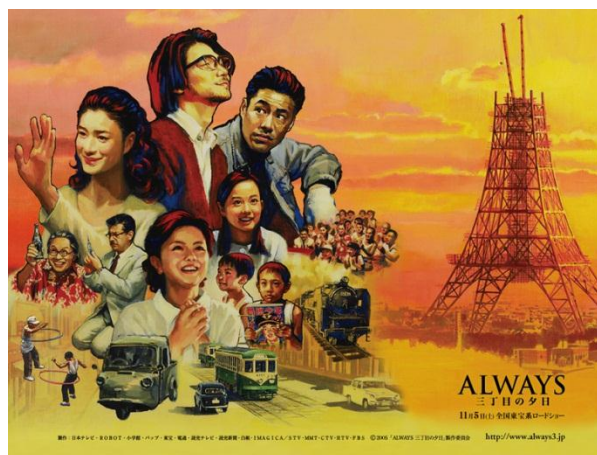
was necessary for the rebirth or awakening of Japan.<sup>11</sup> How this cause is supposed to bring about the effect is uncertain, but the paradoxical victory of Japan through defeat clearly depends on the constant reiteration of that defeat. This may be the justification for the film *Yamato* in a time of political and economic stagnation in Japan, but it writes a peculiar history, because linear

progress can only be based on a repeated return to the past if part of that history is ruptured, dismembered, and forgotten. It takes the operations of trauma—by definition an often unprocessed, unmediated, and disruptive experience—to make this possible, and that is one of the main functions of the film's vicarious trauma.

In *Yamato*, what is excised and forgotten is the history of postwar Japan. That is practically acknowledged by Kamio, who, at his moment of resolution, declares that for him the Shōwa era is finally over. He has overcome his problem with history by recalling what happened sixty years before, as if that alone is sufficient to deal with the entire problem of Shōwa, which continued until 1989. Such resolution is possible only if the postwar is rendered inconsequential or a mere reverberation of the wartime. Gone is the long-standing narrative of the postwar as return to and continuation of Taishō democracy, as the formation of a new international economic power. The erasure of the postwar is evident in how *Yamato* rewrites one of the emblematic moments in postwar Japanese cinema: the scene in Kurosawa Akira's 1947 film *No Regrets for Our Youth* (*Waga seishun ni kui nashi*) where Yukie, played by Hara Setsuko, sets out during the war to tend the rice paddies belonging to her mother-in-law, despite the public approbation sparked by her husband's execution as a political traitor. *Yamato* shifts this into the immediate postwar, as Kamio tends the paddies of his dead buddy Nishi's mother not out of determination to maintain his values or to change society, but out of guilt that he and not Nishi survived. Memorable postwar transformations are morphed into postwar paralysis and impotence that supposedly last for the rest of the Shōwa era and become the focus of male melodrama—until they are to be forgotten. Next to shock, tears were the most common response reported by *Yamato*'s audiences, and as Mitsuhiro Yoshimoto has argued, melodrama was also a crucial narrative in immediate postwar cinema.<sup>12</sup> But whereas 1950s cinema used the melodrama of postwar suffering as a means of forgetting wartime atrocities, *Yamato*, if not other recent kamikaze films as well, uses wartime suffering to forget not only Japanese war responsibility, but also a postwar increasingly defined, especially in contemporary popular culture, by emasculation and hypocrisy, or ahistorical idealization. The latter is evident in the cultural nostalgia for the “Shōwa 30s” (1955 to 1964) that peaked around 2005. In cinema, this was exemplified by the two successful “Always” films that featured a late 1950s *gemeinschaft* community of lower class residents of Tokyo, apparently free of the political or cultural strife that defined those years.<sup>13</sup>

Such nostalgia for the postwar, however, should be seen not as the opposite, but as the other side of the coin of the attempt to forget or bypass the postwar, since both phenomena reveal a fundamental aversion to confronting the historical transformations and socio-political divisions that occurred in that era.

If *Yamato* deals with or reflects historical trauma, it is less that of the war than of the postwar; it is that history which its audience had really experienced and desired to see erased by means of the shock of defeat and the tearful eyes of Japanese masculinity. It is this trauma that the film cannot really face except through displacement, and so the postwar can only directly appear



Forgetful nostalgia: *Always—Sunset on Third Street*

in the film through absurd plot inconsistencies (how on earth could Kamio not know Uchida had survived?) and the blatant inability to acknowledge contemporary political reality (i.e., showing MSDF ships returning from a “refueling mission in the Indian Ocean” without daring to state this is part of Japan’s support for the Iraq War).



**Hidden reality: MSDF ships on a “refueling mission”**

This displacement, at least in *Yamato*, is rendered possible, I argue, through the deployment of vicarious trauma. By definition, trauma is an experience that has not been properly processed or mediated, that thus repeatedly returns, disrupting time and narrative. Vicarious trauma in *Yamato* allows spectators to share in the experience proposed by the story, while also enabling the movie to jump between past and present, in the

story and in Japanese history, while avoiding the mediations and digestive processes of postwar history.

Recent war films such as *Yamato* certainly seek a consensus in propounding a direct link between the wartime and present-day Japan, but in the end they differ little from the empty national consensus that their more fantastic brethren rely on. Postwar trauma is to be avoided—or displaced through such techniques as vicarious trauma—precisely because of the intense divisions and turmoil it created; *Yamato* can only imagine a unified audience if it renders the disputes of the postwar null and void, creating an imagined community only if an empty postwar is equally imagined. That, of course, is the danger of such a text but it can also be said to be the symptom of the very postwar trauma and turmoil it tries to elide. A new history that severs and skips the postwar (just as previous histories skipped the wartime), and re-members a cycle of return between the present and the memorialized wartime, is a problematic one, especially for a film like *Yamato* that bears at least some anti-war pretensions. This is partially the source of its contradictory nationalism: celebrating life and survival like many other contemporary war films, yet also depending on death and defeat for its reworking of postwar history; imagining an adult Japan in the new millennium, but without being able to narrate either a history of Japan’s recovery (its becoming adult?) or its geopolitical dependency on the United States. *Yamato* strategically uses the ruptures of trauma to try to efface these aporia, all the while reassuring its shocked audiences with a familiar, conventional film style. Remembering is here re-mem-bering, but with the dismembered parts of the nation, cinema and history, still poorly connected after their rearrangement.<sup>14</sup>

This is a revised version of a paper initially presented in December 2008 as part of the conference “Divided Lenses: Film and War Memory in Asia” held at Stanford University. A greatly expanded version will appear in an anthology of the conference papers, provisionally titled “Divided Lenses: Asia Pacific War Memories on Film,” edited by Chiho Sawada and Michael Berry.

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[Cinema, Nation, and Spectatorship, 1895-1925](#), was published in 2010 (the Japanese version will be coming out from the University of Tokyo Press). He also co-authored the [Research Guide to Japanese Film Studies](#) with Abe Mark Nornes (Center for Japanese Studies, 2009).

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> In October 2008, General Tamogami won a lucrative prize for an essay entitled "Was Japan an Aggressor Nation?" in a contest sponsored by a construction company whose CEO has espoused rightwing views. His main arguments were that Japan was manipulated into participating in World War II by China and the United States under the influence of the Comintern, and that Japan's reliance on America for military defense is destroying its national culture. In the ensuing controversy, he was eventually relieved of his post and pressed into retirement. Kobayashi's manga, beginning with the notorious *On War* (*Sensōron*), have aggressively attempted to rewrite Japan's history of war and colonization and advocate a nationalism that abandons the selfishness of today's youth and emulates the sacrifices of the *kamikaze* pilots.



<sup>2</sup> Aaron Gerow, "[Fantasies of War and Nation in Recent Japanese Cinema](#)," *Japan Focus* (20 February 2006)

<sup>3</sup> Yoshikuni Igarashi, "Kamikaze Today: The Search for National Heroes in Contemporary Japan," in *Ruptured Histories: War, Memory, and the Post-Cold War in Asia*, eds. Sheila Miyoshi Jager and Rana Mitter (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007): 99-121.

<sup>4</sup> Shūkan Kinyōbi (6 January 2006); or Julian Ryall, "[Raising the Yamato](#)," Foreign Correspondents Club of Japan.

<sup>5</sup> See, for instance, the rightwing blog: [red.ap.teacup.com/sunvister](http://red.ap.teacup.com/sunvister)

<sup>6</sup> See E. Ann Kaplan, *Trauma Culture: The Politics of Terror and Loss in Media and Literature* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2005); Joshua Hirsch, *Afterimage: Film, Trauma, and the Holocaust* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2004); or Janet Walker, *Trauma Cinema: Documenting Incest and the Holocaust* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

<sup>7</sup> See Nakamura Hideyuki, "Tokkōtai hyōshōron," in *Iwanami kōza: Ajia, Taiheiyō senno*, vol. 5: *Senjō no shosō* (Iwanami Shoten: 2006): 301-330; and Nakamura Hideyuki, "Girei toshite no tokkō eiga: *Otokotachi no Yamato/Yamato no baai*," *Zen'ya* 7 (Spring 2006): 134-137.

<sup>8</sup> Hirsch 13.

<sup>9</sup> "Onomichi fan kakutoku ni kōken," *Chūgoku shinbun*, 8 May 2006.

<sup>10</sup> Played by Nagashima Kazushige, son of baseball legend Nagashima Shigeo.

<sup>11</sup> While there are doubts about the authenticity of this statement, it was popularized by Yoshida Mitsuru's *Requiem for Battleship Yamato*. The same sentiment is uttered in *Lorelei* as well.

<sup>12</sup> Mitsuhiro Yoshimoto, "Melodrama, Postmodernism, and Japanese Cinema," *East West Film Journal* 5.1 (1991): 28-55.

<sup>13</sup> *Always—Sunset on Third Street* (Always—sanchōme no yūhi) was released in 2005 and *Always—Sunset on Third Street 2* (Always—zoku sanchōme no yūhi) hit theaters in 2007. Both were based on the manga by Saigan Ryōhei and directed by Yamazaki Takashi. The first film was the seventh best-grossing Japanese film of 2005, and its sequel the third best of 2007.

<sup>14</sup> The longer version of this essay considers other recent kamikaze films such as *For Those We Love* (*Ore wa, kimi no tame ni koso shini ni iku*, 2007) and *Sea Without Exit* (*Deguchi no nai umi*, 2006). Few such films have been made since 2008, but the rewriting of the postwar has continued with remakes of classic postwar films such as Kurosawa Akira's *Sanjuro* (Tsubaki Sanjūrō) and *Hidden Fortress* (Kakushitoride no san akunin) or Kudō Eiichi's *Thirteen Assassins* (Jūsannin no shikaku). It will be important to see whether the trauma of the March 11 disaster will be used as another means for avoiding the problems of the postwar—including the institutional structures that themselves led in part to the Fukushima accident.



## “World War II as Trauma, Memory and Fantasy in Japanese Animation”

Susan J. Napier

May 31, 2005

[http://www.japanfocus.org/-Susan J -Napier/1972](http://www.japanfocus.org/-Susan_J_Napier/1972)

As the essays in this collection suggest, representations of war are varied and memories of war are expressed in many different ways. Apart from works that seek to represent the Asia-Pacific War directly, there are also examples of popular culture that refer to the conflict obliquely or even use fantasy or science fiction scenarios as a metaphor or allegory to address the historical conflict and its postwar ramifications.

In this article, Susan Napier looks at the perennial popularity and importance of the *Yamato* story. The historical battleship that featured in Andrew Gerow’s article was resurrected as a “space battleship” in the 1974 anime series *Uchu senkan Yamato* (Space Battleship Yamato). The show, which has spawned a range of spin-offs down to the 2012-2013 *Uchu senkan Yamato 2199* (Space Battleship Yamato 2199), follows a Japanese crew who protect the earth from alien invasion and radioactive destruction.

The *Yamato* has popped up in other forms as well. In Kawaguchi Kaiji’s manga *Chinmoku no kantai* (The Silent Service, 1988-1996), also detailed in Napier’s article, a Japanese Self Defense Force captain hijacks a nuclear-armed submarine that Japan developed jointly with the United States. Renaming it *Yamato*, he seeks to break Japan’s military ties with America.

*Uchu senkan Yamato* and *Chinmoku no kantai* are pop culture visions that draw on the memories and legacies of the Asia-Pacific War in ways very different from the other works detailed in this reader. Neither fits easily into **victim**, **victimizer**, or **neo-nationalist** categories. Instead, both combine a “war as entertainment” tone with some serious discussion of Japan’s place in postwar geo-politics and reflect on the overall meaning of war in contemporary culture. The anime and manga mediums have produced many such works, some of which rank among the country’s most popular cultural exports. *Hagane no renkinjutsushi* (Full Metal Alchemist, 2001-2010) features a team of protagonists who participated in a genocidal war years before and continue to struggle with memories of the atrocities they committed or allowed to take place. *Ghost in the Shell: Stand Alone Complex* (2002-2003) and the follow-up *2nd Gig* (2004-2005) look at the concept of Japan’s *ikkoku heiwa shugi* (“one country pacifism”) and question the place of the Japanese military and military alliance with the United States in the context of Article 9, the “peace clause” of the Japanese Constitution. The film version, *Solid State Society* (2006), even casts **neo-nationalists** as the villains. Susan Napier’s article provides an excellent foundation for considering the prevalence of themes related to the Asia-Pacific War in Japanese twenty-first-century popular culture.

## World War II as Trauma, Memory and Fantasy in Japanese Animation

By Susan J. Napier

In her book *Hiroshima Traces* Lisa Yoneyama discusses how recent scholarship has tended to define memory in opposition to history, suggesting that “Memory has often been associated with myth or fiction and contrasted with History as written by professionals. [1] Yoneyama herself problematizes this opposition as a “false dichotomy,” stating that “the production of knowledge about the past ... is always enmeshed in the exercise of power and is always accompanied by elements of repression.” [2] She exhorts her readers to remember that, “we begin our investigations into the past with an awareness that historical ‘reality’ can only be made available to us through the mediation of given categories of representation and processes of signification.” [3] This article examines how one of the most significant events in modern Japanese history, defeat in the Second World War, is represented through the medium of animation, a medium which allows history and memory to transform into myth and even into fantasy, ultimately creating for the viewer an experience which allows for a working through of what might be called historical trauma.

Japanese popular culture has engaged with memories of the Second World War since at least the early 1950’s when the first *Godzilla* (*Gojira*) film took on atomic testing, wholesale destruction and the American enemy in the form of a *kaiju eiga* or monster movie. Japanese manga (comic books) have revisited WWII often, especially in the works of Matsumoto Leiji whose depictions of aerial dogfights and last minute sacrifices gained a wide following. Since the 1960s, animated films and television series have produced some of the most memorable visions of the war. The two most famous of these are the remarkably faithful recreations or rememorations of cataclysmic events such as the atomic bombing of Hiroshima depicted in *Barefoot Gen* (*Hadashi no Gen* 1983) and the final days of the war as seen by two children in Kobe shown in *Grave of Fireflies* (*Hotaru no haka*, 1988). In these two films personal memory on the part of the writers of the original texts (respectively Nakazawa Keiji on whose autobiographical manga *Barefoot Gen* is based and Nosaka Akiyuki who wrote the semi-autobiographical short story *Grave of Fireflies*), became part of a collective Japanese memory as the films were seen by millions of Japanese schoolchildren. But the war, the defeat and the atomic bomb also manifest themselves consistently in more displaced forms, most obviously in the overall fetishization of apocalypse which has been a staple of Japanese animation since the 1970’s to the present.

Here discussion focuses on one anime depiction, the *Space Battleship Yamato* (*Uchu Senkan Yamato*) television and film series from the 1970’s and what might be called the *Yamato*’s descendant, the series *Silent Service* (*Chinmoku no Kantai*) from the late 1990’s. Both works refer explicitly to the Second World War at the same time as they go beyond history and memory to produce a cathartic and fantastic reworking of the loss.



The Space Battleship Yamato series premiered in October of 1974, three years earlier than the first Star Wars film. Like Star Wars and the 1960's American Star Trek series, however, Yamato can be seen as an immensely entertaining science fiction series, with memorable characters, cutting edge special effects (for the period), and compelling story lines, that also possesses a strong ideological subtext. In the case of Star Trek and Star Wars, this subtext is clearly linked to the period in which each was created. Star Trek with its introspective, racially mixed crew and regular invocation of the Enterprise's mission, "to seek out new worlds and new civilizations" may be seen as an optimistic answer to American anxieties during the Vietnam War, when many at home and abroad perceived America's advance into Southeast Asia as racist and imperialist. The original Star Wars trilogy, on the other hand, with its evil Galactic Empire and largely Caucasian cast, took place mainly during the manicheism of the Reagan years when American triumphalism coexisted with heightened Cold War tensions.

The Yamato series can also be seen as a product of its time when Japan was one generation away from the war, an era in which technology and economic success seemed to promise a bright future, but also one in which many expressed anxiety over loss of basic Japanese traditions, including notions of community, sacrifice, and respect for the past. Unlike Star Wars and Star Trek, however, which take place in the science fiction continuum that Fredric Jameson describes as "the defamiliarization of the present" (my italics), the action of the Yamato films is predicated on coming to terms with a past event, the sinking of the battleship Yamato off Okinawa in the final days of the war, an incident that, in its iconic significance for the Japanese people, may be interpreted as an originary event, linked with the supreme originary event, the loss of the war. Furthermore this is an event which, in displaced form, is revisited constantly throughout the series, a dip into a quasi-repressed nightmarish past which, through the medium of animated science fiction, is reworked into a dream of success.

Interestingly, when the series was initially shown on Japanese television it garnered relatively low ratings, forcing the producer, Nishizaki Yoshinobu, (the actual creator of the series was Matsumoto Leiji and there were a number of different directors involved), to shorten the original 39 week broadcast to 26 weeks. It was with the opening of the first Yamato film, however, (essentially a compilation from the season's episodes), that the film and series began to become a pop culture phenomenon. In fact, the Yamato film series is widely credited with having inspired the beginnings of anime fandom, as fans from around the country came to camp out on the cinema's steps the night before the opening. [5] As the editorial staff of Animerica puts it, "the first film] ignited a 'Yamato craze' which would go on to consume Japan-and eventually many other parts of the world-for the next ten years." [6]

The four films comprising the 1970's cinema series range over a *mise en scene* that varies from Earth to the Magellanic Clouds and beyond, even to the fourth dimension, but always calling attention to the WWII historical framework. [7] This is most obvious in the first film of the series Battleship Yamato (Uchusenkan Yamato), when an increasingly radioactive future earth is menaced by alien invaders known as the Gamilans. For somewhat enigmatic reasons, the government decides that the only way to save humanity is to revive the actual battleship Yamato from its watery grave off Okinawa. The sequence in which the Yamato is raised is clearly calculated to be both thrilling and deeply evocative of the actual historical event of the Yamato's sinking. In a several minute sequence the film flashes back to the sailing of the original Yamato,

the largest battleship ever created. As the film indicates, the battleship Yamato was freighted with far more iconic significance than an ordinary ship. Its name itself consciously refers to Japan, since “Yamato” was the ancient name for Japan and warriors were urged to have Yamatodamashii (Yamato spirit). Equally important, the ship bore the final hopes of warding off, or at least slowing the advance of invading Americans on the eve of the battle of Okinawa.

The film shows the 1945 Yamato setting sail, waved off by ordinary Japanese hopeful of its success, then offers a detailed depiction of its destruction. The film then cuts to the future, showing the ship’s literal resurrection. Through the astonished eyes of two young soldiers, we see the reconstituted Yamato breaking through mud and rock (the accretions of history), to the strains of moving music. The following scene shows its successful first flight, also accompanied by emotionally charged music. In these few minutes the film encapsulates emotions ranging from despair to hope, the basic emotional trajectory of the entire series.

In an article on the Yamato phenomenon originally published in *Bungei Shunjuu*, the Japanese writer Yoshida Mitsuru sums up the first film in the following manner:

Space Cruiser Yamato fights alone as best it can against the swarms of enemy forces, its unassisted fight reminiscent of how the battleship Yamato accompanied by only 10 ships and with no air protections, fought a fatal battle and sank off Okinawa before the onslaught of 300 American warships and 1,200 American planes. But unlike the tragic demise of its prototype, the space cruiser Yamato successfully obtains the radioactivity-removing device with the help of Stasha, a mysterious beauty who lives on the planet Iscandall, destroys the Gamilus forces and returns safely to earth. [8]

The Yamato's successful saving of the earth becomes the basic diegetic pattern for the series. Battles are fought, new worlds are discovered, the earth is menaced and then saved, always by the Yamato which miraculously survives destruction time after time. Indeed, throughout the spaceship’s interstellar journeys one tactic is particularly common: faced with a particularly menacing threat—one that seems impossible to escape—the crew consistently chooses, not simply to confront the menace, but to head straight into it, courting almost inevitable disaster but somehow emerging intact. At one point in *Space Battleship Yamato* (the first film of the series), for example, the crew of the Yamato is attempting to engage with an alien attack force, only to be stymied by the intensity of a star that blocks their passage. Rather than trying to go around the star and lose precious time, the crew suits up in special heat suits and skims the fiery surface, plunging through awesome solar flares that almost consume it and finally just managing to escape. Later in the same film the Yamato is nearly destroyed by a metal-eating oil sea while being attacked by an enemy above the surface. Rather than emerge from the water, however, the Yamato submerges into the sea just long enough to start a chain reaction on the planet’s surface that will annihilate the enemy. At the end of *Farewell to Space Battleship Yamato* (Saraba Uchusenkan Yamato, 1978), the brave and handsome young captain Kodai Susumu, alone on the ship with his dead girlfriend, plunges the ship into a kind of death star disguised as a white comet in order to save the earth even at the cost of the Yamato and his own life. In *Be Forever Yamato* (Yamato: Eien ni, 1980), the fourth film of the series, the ship is forced to go into the center of the terrifying Black Nebula, where it is bombarded by both asteroids and enemy forces in a virtual visual and aural symphony of destruction. At the last moment, however, the crew

discovers an exit space from the Nebula that places them above a planet that seems to be an exact twin of the Earth, 200 years in the future.

All these exciting sequences no doubt provide suspenseful pleasure for the series' target audience of children and adolescents, as the Yamato comes again and again within a hair's breadth of being annihilated. But the craft's constant plunges into danger followed by miraculous recovery can also be looked at psychoanalytically as plunges into the collective unconscious of the postwar Japanese citizenry, a form of "working through" the collective national trauma of defeat. By offering the audience the chance to vicariously approach the moment of Yamato's (Japan's) annihilation and then successfully escape what seems like inevitable destruction, the films can be seen as a form of cultural therapy in which loss is revisited in a fundamentally reassuring manner.

One of the most interesting examples of this "cultural therapy" may be seen in *Forever Yamato* when the ship, after going through what is perhaps another dimension, discovers what seems to be a future earth. This is an earth however, in which according to its history, the Yamato never returned from its current mission and much of earth's culture was lost. The present day inhabitants of the future "earth" attempt to convince the Yamato's crew that they should simply stay in the future since history tells them that they will only be annihilated if they try to return. Just as the crew is about to despair, however, one of the crew begins to notice suspicious differences between our earth and the future earth (such as the fact that Rodin's "Thinker"'s hand is the wrong one). Realizing that this future earth is actually a simulacrum, a trap set up by the alien enemy, the Yamato escapes, battles its way back across the universe and, of course, saves the earth.

Even more than the first film, *Forever Yamato* addresses and plays on postwar Japanese anxieties, perhaps the most fundamental of which is that the successes of the postwar period were not sustainable. Like a dream within a dream the film's diegesis allows for an initial reworking of the defeat only to suggest that this reworking was itself a fake, (just as when we "wake "from a nightmare only to realize that the nightmare is still continuing) and that in "reality" the Yamato never does make it back to save the earth. At the last moment however, the film offers an alternative "true" reality in which the nightmare future is seen as only a simulacrum and the Yamato sails triumphantly on.

Of the postwar attitude toward the defeat, Yoshikuni Igarashi writes, "...the desire to return to the traumatic experiences of the Pacific War did not disappear with Japan's prosperity, since the narrative of progress posited its losses as the origin of the postwar Japanese society." He goes on to say that "the familiarity of the narrative simply transformed the eyewitness accounts into clichés " and that "the articulation of the war experience could take place only in the form of repetition, trapped between the contradictory needs to remember and to forget the traumatic war experience." [9]

I would suggest that the *Space Battleship Yamato* series goes beyond both remembering and forgetting. Through its medium (animation) and genre (futuristic science fiction) the series defamiliarizes the war experience, allowing not only a working through of the trauma of defeat (through innumerable repetitions of attack and destruction) but ultimately a reworking of the defeat, both through the final success of the Yamato in every encounter and, even more

importantly, through the fetishization of the spaceship Yamato itself, not only a symbol of Japan's final battles in WWII but also a symbol of the Japanese nation. Even more than the atomic bomb, which has become what Marilyn Ivy calls a metatope for loss in contemporary Japan, [10] the Yamato, both the original and the animated versions, are tropes of the Japanese identity, initially configured as one of loss and destruction but, through the medium of animated fantasy, able to become a trope of renewal and hope. For in many ways this reworking is a positive one, as the Yamato is more or less transformed from the emblem of prewar Japanese militarism to a global (literally) emissary of peace and love to the universe. This universalization of the Yamato's iconic significance is made abundantly clear throughout the series. The earth is now a single nation united against alien blue-skinned enemies (although the characters' names are all Japanese and some, such as "Tokugawa" or "Okita" have historical significance) and the theme of love of humankind is constantly evoked, sometimes explicitly in the lyrics to various theme music, and in the second film Farewell Yamato's subtitle Soldiers of Love (*Ai no senshitachi*).

If the atomic bomb was a symbol for Japanese of powerlessness and victimhood, as a result of an unexpected outside force the sinking of the Yamato is a more culturally specific vision of defeat and despair. While some Japanese criticized the film on its initially appearance as potentially reviving militarism [11] the films project a very explicit message of universal love, not simply among the inhabitants of earth but involving at least some of earth's alien enemies as well. Furthermore, the Yamato unlike the Enterprise in Star Trek is always in a reactive rather than proactive mode, defending the earth rather than seeking out adventures.

A more complex situation is limned in the 1990's film and manga series *Silent Service*. This series, set in the contemporary era, features a nuclear submarine, originally under joint. U.S.-Japanese command and originally called the "Seabat." In a surprise twist, however, the Japanese crew takes over the submarine and turns it into a rogue vessel, no longer under the command of any nation. Most of the series consists of the travels of the submarine and the attempts by the international community to find and seize it, constantly defeated by the plucky and resourceful Japanese captain who masterminded the takeover in the first place. Although unexpected, the takeover is actually presaged by a significant action taken by the Japanese commander early on in the story. Alone with the Seabat, he takes out his knife and carves a single word into the hull. The word (in Japanese) is "Yamato."

Although the overall diegesis of *Silent Service* is less specifically evocative of history than was the Yamato series, history is still an important emotional catalyst behind the plot, as the above incident illustrates. This more recent series is a reworking of defeat and loss on a more proactive level. No longer in the therapeutically safe and dreamlike realm of the outer space of the future, *Silent Service* suggests a world of increasing international tension and rising Japanese nationalism, with the Americans clearly delineated and made to appear foolish.

Whether this contemporary reworking of loss and defeat is therapeutic or problematic remains open to question. Yoshida Mitsuru, himself a survivor of the Yamato's sinking, insists that, "Fortunately the space cruiser Yamato is decisively different from the battleship Yamato." [12] The same may not be said as easily of the Japanese appropriation of the Seabat, clearly a symbol of the desire for Japanese autonomy from America.

In his seafaring novel *Lord Jim*, Joseph Conrad creates a character (Jim), who cannot escape or even completely acknowledge a tragic mistake in his past, one that involved the lives of many innocent passengers on a pilgrim ship. In a famous and much critically debated scene, Jim's two mentors, Stein and Marlowe, discuss what to do with him. It is Stein who has the last word, telling Marlowe that Jim must "in the destructive element immerse," advice that I take to mean that Jim must confront his past and his own identity. In a sense Jim does accomplish this task although in a somewhat displaced and deeply romantic form, and one which ultimately involves the sacrifice of his life. Both the crew of the *Yamato* and the former *SeaBat* are also plunging into a destructive element, one composed of memory, history, loss and desire. That these "immersions" are also popular entertainment does not lessen their impact.

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[1] Lisa Yoneyama. *Hiroshima Traces: Time, Space and the Dialectics of Memory*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999) 27.

[2] *Ibid*, 27

[3] *Ibid*., 28.

[4] I am indebted to two former students for my initial interest in the *Yamato* series. Karlaine McLain's paper "Remembering the Past, Recasting Identity" linked the sinking of the *Yamato* to the atomic bombings while Eric Carmen's presentation on the original battleship *Yamato* made me aware of how accurate was the anime version of the historical event and inspired me to explore reasons behind this obsessive attention to verisimilitude.

[5] See "All Aboard to the Land of Dreams," an interview with Ishiguro Noboru, one of the *Yamato* directors, for an account of the beginning of *Yamato* fandom. (*Animerica*, Vol. 3, No. 8, 1995), 7 and 9. Ironically, the *Yamato* series, renamed *Star Blazers* and edited for an American audience, is also considered to be the initial inspiration behind American anime fandom. See Robert Fenelon, "Talking about my *Star Blazers* Generation," (*Animerica*, Vol. 3, No.8, 1995), 8 and 10, and Walter Amos, "The *Star Blazers* You Didn't See" (*Animerica*, Vol. 3, No. 8, 1995), 10.

[6] *Animerica* Editorial Board, "Yamato Forever," (*Animerica*, Vol. 3, No. 8, 1995), 6.

[7] More so than either *Star Wars* or *Star Trek*, space itself becomes a character in the *Yamato* series since much of the action takes place while the ship is on interstellar voyages (beautifully rendered in lush, dreamlike imager), rather than on planets. The fascination with the element of space may connect with the modern Japanese consciousness of the Pacific Ocean, which surrounds their island nation, and more specifically, with the crucial role the Pacific in both the successes and failures of World War II. For a discussion of the Pacific in Japanese science

fiction see Thomas Schnellbacher, "Has the Empire Sunk Yet? –The Pacific in Japanese Science Fiction," in *Science Fiction Studies*, Vol. 29, Part 3, 2002, 382-396.

[8] Yoshida Mitsuru, "The 'Space Cruiser Yamato' Generation," (*Japan Echo*, Vol. VI. No. 1, 1979), 82.

[9] Yoshikuni Igarashi. *Bodies of Memory*. (Princeton, N.J. Princeton University Press, 2000), 167.

[10] Marilyn Ivy. *Discourses of the Vanishing: Modernity, Phantasm, Japan*. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), 14.

[11] See the discussion by Yoshida Mitsuru, "The 'Space Cruiser Yamato' Generation," *op cit.*, 85-87.

[12] *Ibid.*, 86.



***Asia-Pacific Journal* Articles Recommended for Further Reading**Popular Culture**“‘To Protect Japan’s Peace We Need Guns and Rockets:’ The Military Uses of Popular Culture in Current-day Japan”**

Sabine Frühstück

August 24, 2009

<http://www.japanfocus.org/-Sabine-Fruhstuck/3209>

This course reader has explored the ways in which past wars are presented in Japanese popular culture. In this article, Sabine Frühstück brings the discussion forward to explore how Japan’s contemporary armed forces are represented in pop culture and particularly how the military has used manga, models, and teen idols to build a “peace” brand for public consumption.

**“Nationalism and Anti-Americanism in Japan—Manga Wars, Aso, Tamogami, and Progressive Alternatives”**

Matthew Penney

April 26, 2009

<http://www.japanfocus.org/-Matthew-Penney/3116>

This article describes ways that the Japan-US relationship has been represented in popular culture. While some works engage in demonization of America because of complex concerns about Japanese sovereignty and American militarism, others seek a more varied or positive portrayal, looking at Japanese war crimes alongside different contexts of American violence.

**“‘Hating ‘The Korean Wave’” Comic Books: A sign of New Nationalism in Japan?”**

Rumi Sakamoto and Matthew Allen

October 24, 2007

<http://www.japanfocus.org/-Mathew-Allen/2535>

*Sensoron* (On War) author Kobayashi Yoshinori has a rival for the title of the most popular and influential of Japan’s right-wing cartoonists. Yamano Sharin’s *Kenkanryu* (Hating the Korea Wave) is an anti-Korea screed that is representative of the xenophobic culture of online comments and videos that has emerged in Japan in the 2000s. Sakamoto and Allen explain why South Korea, a democracy that like Japan is a close ally of the United States, has become the primary target of the online right.

**“Koreans, Go Home!’ Internet Nationalism in Contemporary Japan as a Digitally Mediated Subculture”**

Rumi Sakamoto

March 7, 2011

<http://www.japanfocus.org/-Rumi-SAKAMOTO/3497>

In this article, Rumi Sakamoto expands on her critique of *Kenkanryu* and looks at the rhetoric of online rightists, exploring how the internet as a medium of communication has shaped ultra-nationalist expression.

**“Godzilla and the Bravo Shot: Who Created and Killed the Monster?”**

Yuki Tanaka

June 13, 2005

<http://www.japanfocus.org/-Yuki-TANAKA/1652>

Godzilla is one of the most famous characters in Japanese popular culture and is deeply tied to memories of the Asia-Pacific War, especially the atomic bombs and firebombing of Japanese cities. In this article, Yuki Tanaka explains the significance of Godzilla in Japanese historical memory and how the famous series reflects Japan’s postwar relationship with the United States.

**“War and Peace in the Art of Tezuka Osamu: The Humanism of His Epic Manga”**

Yuki Tanaka

September 20, 2010

<http://www.japanfocus.org/-Yuki-TANAKA/3412>

Tezuka Osamu (1928-1989) is known in Japan as “The God of Comics.” He is the creator of innumerable famous manga such as *Astroboy*, *Jungle Emperor*, *Phoenix*, and *Black Jack* and also produced Japan’s first TV anime. Anti-militarism, including reflection on Japan’s wartime past, was a consistent theme in Tezuka’s work. In this article, Yuki Tanaka presents an analysis of Tezuka’s career and a personal reflection on the manga artist’s importance as an anti-war thinker.

Other ThemesTextbooks Controversies**“Japanese Textbook Controversies, Nationalism, and Historical Memory: Intra- and Inter-national Conflicts”**

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The Sumida Local Culture Resource Center, Translated by Bret Fisk

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