War and Visual Culture
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Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus

Course Reader no. 1
2012
VOLUME EDITORS

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York University and Wittenberg University

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## War and Visual Culture

### Introduction

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Recommended Further Reading
Introduction

War and Visual Representation

This course reader explores representations of war, the most violent form of human disaster, in visual culture ranging from fine art to popular film. It gathers essays that deal with war as it is defined by individuals, institutions, and nations; and critically engage with the ways in which experiences and memories of war are interpreted, exhibited and challenged in various visual terms and methods. The essays not only concern the question of historical truth but also pay attention to the ways in which narratives and images of war are constructed and how they in turn produce meanings and effects in particular political, social and cultural contexts. In this reader representation refers to the process through which we create meaning of the world around us. Marita Sturken and Lisa Cartwright point out that “The world is not simply reflected back to us ... but we actually construct the meaning of the material world through these systems (of representation)”; our values, opinions and beliefs are not simply shaped by re-presentation of some aspects of the real world but by representation of it.\(^1\) As our surroundings have been increasingly dominated by visual media, it is crucial to understand how visual images convey messages and how they help us make sense of our society.

The traumatic experience of war—destruction, dislocation and loss—both in a physical and emotional sense is deeply inscribed in individual and collective psyches. The selected essays, with a focus on Asia, explore the question of how war violence affects people’s lives and how it formed and transformed identities. Representations of war are also crucial to private mourning of war victims because they create meaning for them. War memorials, for instance, convert the pointlessness of death by war into a narrative of self-sacrifice to fulfill national destiny. Here the war dead has tied citizens to the nation as individual memories meet collective memories in the form of national museums, monuments and rites of commemoration. Representations of war often take the form of a consolidated national narrative which transforms personal pain into collective suffering and redemption. However, in many cases national narrative of sacrifice makes death a conscious choice. We could say that the willingness to die for the nation, as Benedict Anderson points out, is made possible by the representations of war and the dead.\(^2\) Propaganda in visual media and in war museums during both the wartime and the postwar periods constructs narratives that promote righteousness, victimization and perseverance of the nation. Yet, national identity is never a complete project. It is a process that needs to be mediated and managed through a series of representations, which in turn allow the nation-state to create its history, imagine its identity, and legitimize its rule.

Representations of war are far from stable and this contributes to the instability of national identity when it involves representations of war that the state engaged in. They


are always subject to a challenge. In Asia, the transformation of post–Cold War geopolitics has opened new possibilities for inter-Asian relations and inevitably has led to a rigorous interrogation of the region’s recent past. In this context, battles between nations over history have become more intense and domestic tensions between official and societal memories have also become more divisive. The selected essays interrogate controversies, challenges and negotiations surrounding the question of how to represent war.

Such contestation appears in different forms of visual culture such as anime, manga, film, photography and painting. The state is not the only source of representations of war: various members of civil society and different institutions and media industries all generate images. Popular culture and art often push the boundaries of official narratives of war and inspire critical and alternative thinking about national community, war memory and subjectivities. It is also noteworthy that the growing influence of virtual media has been shaping popular culture in a new direction. Its capacity to connect individuals and groups on a great scale and with rapid speed allows people to express their ideas and opinions more freely than ever before and provides the potential for them to more fully participate in public spheres. Yet it must be noted that this media can enhance as well as challenge hegemonic narratives of war since interest groups or the state may try to manipulate the virtual media precisely because of its popular appeal. In any case, we cannot dismiss the fact that new media add a vibrant dynamic to popular culture in the visual field.

This reader includes essays that deal with various visual media such as photography, film, documentary, anime, manga, painting, drawing, textile art, video, performance, TV and exhibition displays. Each medium has its own conventions, capacities and limits in creating meanings and also in soliciting responses from viewers. Despite their differences, it is essential to recognize that visual images convey not only intentions, problems or ambitions of individual artists or producers, but also, more critically, collective mentalities. The essays locate visual productions within particular historical and political contexts and relate them to larger issues of propaganda, national history, popular memory, historical injustice, reconciliation and therapeutic dialogue.

Organization of the Reader

The reader consists mainly of the cases related to Japanese involvement and experience in the Asia-Pacific War (1931-1945). It also deals with the Korean War and the Vietnam War, which affected, among other places, South Korea, North Korea, China, Taiwan, Vietnam, all of Southeast Asia, and the USA. The wide coverage of regions, sometimes explicitly comparative, allows readers to recognize similarities and differences in representations of wars. Contributors look at various sites of representation in their investigations: war memorial museums and history museums (Hein and Takenaka; Kal; Kingston), anime and manga (Napier; Tanaka), documentary film (Li, Junkerman and McNeil), and film (Shim and Yecies). Although variations exist across these media in terms of the level of accessibility, these sites of representations can be characterized as having ‘popular appeal’ due to their capacity to circulate images of war widely. Exhibits in museums, for example, are publicized mostly through educational channels, inviting school groups and families, whereas other media are propelled by the profit-driven industry that aims to reach general populace. Some contributors also consider individual artists’ art-
making processes as an important site of representation. They elaborate on the roles of artists in communicating with audiences on the issues of propaganda, memory, history and trauma of war as a way of reconciling with the past: war propaganda photography (Germer) and painting (Ikeda), dialogues between generations of artists (Jennison and Hein) and between two American artists who express their views on history and memory differently (Truong and Slavick).

Despite their diversity in covering forms, narratives and places, the works of these contributors share the following three aspects. First, they situate visual productions and receptions in political, social and economic conditions. Second, they investigate what the representation tells us about collective identity in the context of war. Third, they analyze the distinctiveness of various kinds of visual media, revealing their potentials or limits in dealing with contested historical issues. This course reader emphasizes the relationship between war and visual culture as well as the historical significance and impact of war violence, which continues to affect contemporary politics and culture throughout the region.
“Visual Propaganda in Wartime East Asia – The Case of Natori Yōnosuke”
Andrea Germer
May 16, 2011
http://www.japanfocus.org/-Andrea-Germer/3530

This essay investigates the relationship between art and politics by exploring the wartime activities of a Japanese photographer, Natori Yōnosuke, during the Asia-Pacific War (1931-1945). Natori was an active participant in the production of propaganda photos and photo magazines that were aimed particularly at reaching non-Japanese speaking audiences, such as different groups of Asians living in Asia or Americans and Europeans in North America and Europe. Germer analyzes the political significance of Natori’s aesthetics, his wartime political agency in China, his activities in the contexts of tourism and imperialism, and his direct involvement in the state’s cultural propaganda. The author focuses on Natori’s political agency as it is reflected in three particular areas: his creative work, his visual strategies, and the management of magazines that he edited.

Germer introduces some of the representative state-sponsored photo magazines in which Natori was directly involved, such as *Shanghai* (1937), which justified Japan’s invasion in China, and *Manchukuo* (1940), which represented Japan’s rule of Manchuria as benevolent. This essay discusses the format, visual strategies, and the management of the state-sponsored magazines and the private *Nippon*; and problematizes Natori’s postwar silence about his wartime activities. This essay includes images of photo magazines and provides Natori’s views on the role of photographs in propagating wartime ideologies.
INTRODUCTION

Visual propaganda that targeted the home-front in wartime Japan has recently been examined by scholars who have drawn attention to such aspects of material culture as clothing and textiles (Atkins 2002; Dower 2002), postcards and ephemera (Barclay 2010; Kishi 2010; Ruoff 2010) and propagandistic photo magazines (Kanō 2004, 2005; Earhart 2008) that normalize and popularize colonial and militarist policies by way of aesthetic artefacts of everyday use and consumption. Others have examined underlying developments in political infrastructure and mass media as channels of propaganda transmission (Kasza 1988; Kushner 2006). Still other scholars have focussed on visual and other propaganda that targeted Western and later Asian audiences by way of cultural diplomacy by the Kokusai Bunka Shinkōkai (Society for International Cultural Relations) affiliated with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Shibaoka 2007; Park 2009) and thereby highlighted the State’s efforts to distribute an alternative image to the militaristic state portrayed in the West, as well as to enhance its image in the occupied territories.

Propaganda in each of the countries that participated in the Second World War varied with its own political structures, cultural roots, creative agents and targeted audiences. While propaganda reception is a generally much understudied subject, it becomes even more difficult to approach in the case of a dispersed and undifferentiated ‘foreign’ (taigai), ‘Western’ or ‘Asian’ audience. In order to successfully sway a foreign audience, however, the creative agent must be versed in the mentalities and cultural expectations of the receiving side.

One of these creative agents in wartime Japan was Natori Yōnosuke (1910-1962), who can be said to have started his career proper with the Manchurian invasion of 1931.
The invasion ignited the interest of foreign media in the subject ‘Japan’, which is why Natori, who was working as a contract photo journalist with Ullstein Press in Germany at the time, was sent to Japan to create an extensive photo documentary. Natori's photo documentary of Japan laid the groundwork for his international recognition as a photographer as well as making him financially independent. Natori’s various activities after relocating to Japan in 1933 until the end of World War II included producing the photo and design magazine NIPPON (1934-1944), publishing photographs and albums on Japan, the United States, and Germany, developing his ‘workshop’ Nippon Kōbō into a limited company with branches in occupied East and South East Asia, and publishing a number of propaganda magazines financed by the Japanese Imperial Army, Navy and the semi-governmental Society for International Cultural Relations (Kokusai Bunka Shinkōkai, KBS). After the war, Natori continued his career as publisher of an illustrated magazine, lead editor of the 286-volume Iwanami Shashin Bunko, award-winning photographer (1953, 1954) and influential photo critic.

Until recently, Natori’s work has been mainly appreciated from the standpoint of aesthetics and design, and he won his highest praise in the context of the history of photography. The recollections of Natori’s former students and his staff (the so-called ‘Natori School’), and of colleagues in the postwar worlds of publishing, editing, photography, and design, abound in admiration of their former mentor and boss. Another approach to Natori’s legacy started with an exhibition on his photo book Grosses Japan. Dai Nippon (Great Japan, Natori 1937) in 1978, followed by publications that included Natori’s contribution to the wartime regime. The resurfacing of these works helped to demystify Natori’s previously one-sided image as the creator of monumental aesthetic works. The reprint of his first illustrated magazine NIPPON (2002-2005) laid the basis for a broader re-evaluation of the political significance of Natori’s aesthetics (Kaneko 2005: 3). Shibaoka’s (2007) erudite study examined the state’s cultural propaganda strategies through KBS and Natori’s involvement, while Gennifer Weisenfeld’s article (2000) shed light on the nexus of tourism and imperialism in NIPPON’s editorial strategies. Lastly, Koyanagi Tsuguichi’s reflections (Koyanagi and Ishikawa 1993) enabled a closer look at Natori’s wartime political agency in China, for which Shirayama and Hori (2006) provided the visual material. Drawing on the above studies, in this paper, I focus on Natori the photographer and editor-cum-artist from an angle that interrogates his political agency as seen in his creative work and his visual strategies, as well as in his management of the various magazines he edited during the Asia-Pacific War (1931-1945). Moreover, I discuss the extent to which Natori’s legacy of Japanese wartime propaganda has been critically reflected or obscured in his own postwar writings, in those of his disciples, as well as in scholarly literature on photojournalism. While even some of the critical scholarship on Natori shows apologetic tendencies and fails to sufficiently address his agency in the production of wartime propaganda, I argue that Natori’s legacy and its treatment provide a showcase for the unresolved ways of coming to terms with the wartime past in Japan.

THE BEGINNING OF A CAREER IN PHOTOJOURNALISM

Natori was born into a wealthy and influential family associated with the Mitsui Conglomerate and the insurance company Teikoku Seimei. When ‘bad boy’ (furyō shōnen) Natori (2004: 98) repeatedly failed to enter the preparatory school for Keio University, he was sent to Germany at the age of 18. Subsequently, he studied design at an arts and crafts school in Munich and became acquainted with new trends in the emerging field of photojournalism. At the time, the portable, lightweight and high-quality German cameras Ermanox and Leica greatly
facilitated the emergence of the profession (Gidal 1972). Natori equipped himself with the newest model compact camera, a 35mm Leica. With the help of his wife and partner Erna Mecklenburg (1901-1979) and his friend Hermann Landshoff, Natori became affiliated first with the Münchner Illustrierte Zeitung (Munich Illustrated News) and was later hired as a contract photographer for the competitor of the Munich paper, the Berliner Illustrirte Presse (sic!) (Berlin Illustrated Press; published by Ullstein Press) in November 1931. Just two months earlier, on 19 September 1931, the Kwantung Army had invaded Manchuria, which could have been one reason for Natori’s employment. Only three months later, in February 1932 and at the age of 22, he was sent to Japan. On his three-month stay in Japan, Natori took approximately 7000 photos on 30 themes, such as Japanese family life, Japanese inns (ryokan), beer factories, geisha schools, Yasukuni Shrine, tea ceremony, festivals, and Germans in Tokyo. According to Natori, photos of this journey had been published at least 270 times by 1939. He established his reputation as a photo journalist through this collection of photographs and earned enough money to finance himself for the next 10 years (Natori 2004: 121). Natori’s mission was to present Japan as respectable, modern and at the same time rich in cultural tradition, in order to ameliorate Japan’s international isolation after its withdrawal from the League of Nations (1933) and to work for its international recognition as a ‘normal’ modern nation-state. He worked ‘from home’, so to speak, and only later would travel to China and eventually settle there in order to pursue his propagandistic work of covering up Japanese colonialist and imperialist warfare.

After returning from Japan to Berlin, Natori was asked by Ullstein Press to cover the Japanese Army in Manchuria and he spent February through May 1933 there. When back in Japan for a break, Ullstein informed him that political conditions in Germany had changed such that it was impossible for German media to employ ‘non-Aryan’ staff. Nonetheless, they offered him affiliation as a foreign correspondent. Uncertain of the future but financially independent, Natori declined the offer and decided to establish his own business in Japan. The timing was good as the photo magazine Kōga (Photograph) had just been founded the previous year and the photographic avant-garde was looking for ways to express itself. In 1933, Natori thus founded Nippon Kōbō together with photographer Kimura Ihei (1901-1974), designer Hara Hiromu (1903-1986), photo and art critic Ina Nobuo (1898-1978), and the very influential producer, actor and photographer Okada Sōzō (1903-1983; stage name Yamanouchi Hikaru). Supporting members were poet and writer Takada Tamotsu (1895-1952), journalist and critic Ōya Sōichi (1900-1970) and journalist Ōta Hideshige (1892-1994).

NIPPON KŌBŌ: FROM WORKSHOP TO CORPORATE BUSINESS

The artists and writers who would come to be associated with Nippon Kōbō were interested in the modern trend of ‘new vision’ and the German Bauhaus concept of Neue Sachlichkeit (new objectivity) that was to influence arts and crafts worldwide. They were attracted by the technical and conceptual knowledge of photojournalism, arts, crafts and design that Natori had brought back with him from Germany and they aimed to start a practical movement along the lines of Neue Sachlichkeit in Japan. The first two Nippon Kōbō exhibitions were both successful. The team planned to run a photo news agency to send photographs from Japan to other countries and to produce commercial photo art. Due to differences in thinking and financial difficulties, however, the group that had been formed by professionals on an ‘equal level’ dissolved less than a year after it had been founded. Natori (2004: 137) explained this as ‘a matter of course as this
was a group of very strong individuals.’ However, the fact that Kimura, Ina and Hara subsequently founded Chūō Kōbō together suggests that the reason for the break-up was a conflict between Natori and the other members. Natori and Erna Mecklenburg meanwhile re-established the second Nippon Kōbō with new, younger and less experienced staff.

The second Nippon Kōbō published a quarterly illustrated review NIPPON for foreign audiences in English, German, French and Spanish. It appeared in 41 issues, including five Japanese editions, between 1934 and 1944.

The cover of NIPPON’s first issue (1934) visualises the combination of modernity and tradition, or the West and Japan, through a colourful and highly stylised female paper doll in traditional Japanese attire superimposed on a photograph of modern architecture’s functional style in black and white.

NIPPON claimed to represent ‘actual life and events in modern Japan and the Far East’ (NIPPON 1, 1934).
Cover page of NIPPON 4. The claim to represent ‘actual life and events in modern Japan and the Far East’ is a claim for truth and authenticity that is made and asserted on the front cover of the magazine. This is the only issue of NIPPON that does not provide a visual on its cover. All the same, the choice of the colours red and white and the red Japanese title in the centre of the scriptural design refer to the colours and the structural design of the national flag.

Clearly influenced by the modern trend of ‘new vision’ and Bauhaus aesthetics, it was masterful in terms of layout, design and photography. Rather than a review, however, it was a propaganda tool similar to later propagandistic journals and photo magazines, such as Shūhō (Weekly Report, established in 1936) or Shashin Shūhō (Photographic Weekly Report, founded in 1938) (Kanō 2005: 35, Earhart 2008, Weisenfeld 2005). Natori’s magazine was supported by corporate advertising and by the Foreign Ministry from 1934 (Koyanagi and Ishikawa 1993: 91). Its main advertisers were Kanebo, Mitsui and Mitsubishi conglomerates, and various other large companies in printing, insurance, textile, export and technical equipment. NIPPON was thus a state directed propaganda organ, the first of its kind in Japan, reflecting political and financial circles’ anxiety about the isolation that ensued with Japan’s withdrawal from the League of Nations in 1933. The first feature story of the first issue introduced foreign diplomats and their spouses in a ‘private’ relaxed setting during a weekend outing to the hot springs and resorts of Karuizawa and Nikko.

NIPPON 1, 1934: 4-5. These are some of the visuals that appear in a photo story on European, American and Chinese ambassadors and their wives on outings to Karuizawa and Nikko. The visuals depict more women than men and connote a feminised sphere of recreation, culture and friendship that is in stark contrast to the political world of diplomatic affairs.

Thus NIPPON set the stage for presenting an image of Japan that was neither militaristic and aggressive nor quaint and old-fashioned. By visually inviting foreign readers to join Western diplomats and their spouses on their joyful and relaxed trips to scenic spots of the country, it
cleverly combined ‘semi-official’ representation with a private, personal, cultural and peaceful context, displaying a community of friends hosted by the Japanese.

Although NIPPON was the product of Natori’s whole team at Nippon Kōbō, his influence as editor, art director, photographer and producer was so overwhelming that according to Kaneko Ryūichi (2005: 2) it reflected the world view of one man and needs to be treated as such. Indeed, neither in Natori’s own writings nor in those of his staff or his disciples is there any indication of pressure or intervention from the magazine’s sponsors. Rather, as Koyanagi repeatedly noted, Natori actively proposed strategies to advertise ‘Japan’, Japanese politics and Japanese products to foreign audiences (Koyanagi and Ishikawa 1993: 91-94).

The model for NIPPON was the German magazine Die Böttcherstrasse. Internationale Zeitschrift (The Böttcher Street. International Journal, 1928-1930). This magazine assembled high ranking international scholars, artists, intellectuals and politicians and carried völkisch-racist ideas combined with highly aesthetic design, luxurious layout and high quality print. Half cultural review and half advertisement paper (Schlawe 1962: 50), it was financed by the coffee industrialist Gerhard Ludwig Wilhelm Roselius (1874-1943). Natori, together with graphic designer Kōno Takashi (1906-1999) and the editor of the German magazine Albert Theile, produced a model for NIPPON. Natori took this blueprint to the chief executive of Kanebo, Tsuda Shingo, and explained its underlying ideas (Natori 2004: 139). Aware of the low image of Japanese products worldwide, Tsuda fully supported the plan and agreed to finance the first issue of NIPPON. In the same way that Roselius’ company Kaffee Hag had become the main sponsor and main advertiser for Die Böttcherstrasse, Kanebo became the main sponsor and advertiser for the magazine NIPPON.

The aim of Natori’s magazine was to present Japan as a country that was not reducible to ‘Fujiyama, cherry blossoms, geisha and maiko [apprentice geisha]’ (Natori 2004: 130), but as one that excelled as a modern nation-state. This aim is repeatedly asserted in the recollections of his staff (Fukkokuban NIPPON bessatsu 2005). Rather than deconstructing the stereotypes of ‘oriental’ Japan, NIPPON reconfirmed other established tropes such as its unique family system, the high value of tradition and the unbroken line of emperors, and simply added another technically advanced and modern image to it.

*NIPPON* 20, 1939: 23. This photograph illustrates the article ‘Family — Base of the Nation’ by Nakagawa Zennosuke. Neither the photographer's nor the family's name are noted. In its line-up in traditional Japanese wear with the tall male figure in the visual (though not numerical) centre, it serves to illustrate the concept or essence of the ‘Japanese family’ rather than individual and identifiable people.
**NIPPON 9, 1936.** The presentation of Japan as an equal technical and commercial partner to the West is emphasised repeatedly throughout the magazine. The close stylistic emulation of Bauhaus aesthetics and 'new vision' photography is particularly evident in this photograph.

**NIPPON 20, 1939,** has one of the most densely designed covers. It displays Japan as industrialised with modern land, sea and air infrastructure for commerce and travel, with an intact agricultural sector and scenic rural beauty. Superimposed is a shrine gate that resembles that of Yasukuni but could be any shrine. The image signifies the nexus of Shinto, family, and nation that is visualised and propagated inside the magazine.

As such it promoted Japan as a modern commercial partner as well as an attractive touristic site. As Weisenfeld (2000: 750) summed up, ‘*NIPPON* was both an attempt by state-sanctioned
representatives of the Japanese empire at self-representation and an invocation to the Western viewer to colonize the country through a kind of touristic gaze.’ With its use of montage and captioning – techniques that were also employed at the World Fairs that were covered in NIPPON – it self-reflexively presented ‘Japan-as-Museum’, displaying Japan’s “national strength, national character and national significance” for Western consumption (NIPPON 17, 1939: 48; Weisenfeld 2000: 774). Offering ‘a means of “specular dominance” over Japan’ as Weisenfeld (2000: 750) observed, did not, however, imply or engender the panopticist power of the viewer. Rather, the illusion of a specular dominance was created by means of clever, highly elaborate and aesthetic visual compositions that served to veil political interests. Natori, as art director and designer of the magazine, put the utmost care in its presentation. He was also recognized by the government and by the military as an expert in state propaganda and was sought after as a partner in subsequent propaganda strategies.

Natori approached the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Imperial Army to lobby for his project of advertising Japan to the West. While he did not find support from the Ministry at first, Natori (2004: 140) mentioned that it was ‘ironically the Press Unit of the Army Ministry (Rikugunshō no shinbunhan) that showed keen interest’. Soon, however, the civilian government would follow and from 1935 orders for stock photos came in from Kokusai Bunka Shinkōkai (Society for International Cultural Relations). KBS was established in April 1934 as an extra-governmental organisation affiliated with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the first organisation of this kind in Japan.¹⁰ Natori presumably had already aimed at a sponsorship by KBS, as NIPPON issues 1 and 3 carried articles that introduced KBS in detail (Shirayama 2005: 10-11). Cooperation with KBS intensified after the beginning of the Sino-Japanese War in 1937, when Natori became an associate (shokutaku) of KBS. Thereafter, production costs of NIPPON were borne by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Army and the Navy and the inter-Ministerial Information Committee (Gaimushō, Rikukaigun, Jōhō Iinkai) (Shirayama 2005: 15). Japanese officials had discussed using media for war propaganda since the end of World War I, but the Army did not request a ministry of propaganda until 1934 (Kanō 2005), following the Nazi model.¹¹ Natori, because of his knowledge and skills acquired in Germany, can be seen as a forerunner of such direct propagandistic efforts.

The Asia-Pacific War as propaganda war

From the time of the Second Sino-Japanese War, Natori became very busy on two fronts. In Nazi Germany he published a German photo album on ‘Great Japan’ (Grosses Japan. Dai-Nippon) in 1937 (second edition 1942) and organised two exhibits of Japanese arts and crafts there for KBS in 1938. Natori was even more active in occupied China. From his travels to Germany and the United States in 1936-1937 and on an assignment for LIFE magazine, he went straight from San Francisco to Shanghai after the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War (July 1937) and spent the rest of the war there. The 1937 October 4 issue of LIFE magazine published the famous press photo by H.S.Wong that became the most influential visual of anti-Japanese propaganda. The photo depicts a crying baby in rags sitting on a platform of the Southern Train Station of Shanghai that had been destroyed by the Japanese Army during their invasion of the city.
After the Japanese bombing of the South Railway Station Shanghai on 28 August 1937. This photograph by H.S. Wong became the most influential visual image of anti-Japanese propaganda.

Koyanagi Tsuguichi (1907-1992), who joined Nippon Kōbō in October 1937, suggested that the photo looked staged, but reported that everyone at Nippon Kōbō was stunned. Natori commented that the photo was very well taken and an excellent example of Chiang Kai-shek’s anti-Japanese propaganda. He stressed that Japan needed the same kind of photographic propaganda to find allies on the international level, and he told the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Army that he wanted to contribute to the war by making war propaganda (Koyanagi and Ishikawa 1993: 93-94). Natori went as far as travelling to visit the Shanghai Expeditionary Army where he persuaded the Group Leader of the Special Assignments Unit, Major Kaneko Shunji, that propaganda was needed against Chiang Kai-shek. In December 1937, Natori went to Shanghai with Koyanagi to join the Shanghai Expeditionary Army Special Assignments Press Unit. The deal that Natori struck with the Army was that three staff from Nippon Kōbō would be sent to Shanghai to serve as photographers for the Army and that the Army provide three cars and finance a service that would sell photographs to foreign publishers. The photos themselves were to be Nippon Kōbō’s property yet the negatives would belong to the Army (Nakanishi 1980: 231).

Of course, censorship was in effect. Immediately after the China incident, the Home Ministry issued pre-publication warnings. The Army Ministry, the Navy Ministry and the Foreign Ministry also banned items, culminating in so-called consultation meetings (kondankanai), the institutionalised feature of top-down press controls that also served to blacklist writers and drive press organs out of business (Kasza 1988: 168-172). Natori, in contrast, took the initiative to serve the interests of the Army in China and actively and creatively pursued cooperation. Within two months in Shanghai, he had set up a press agency ‘Press Union Photo Service’ and proved himself as a professional in the propaganda war. As foreign media were not allowed to
accompanied the Army, Natori had many requests for visual material from international publishers, which he also provided (Koyanagi and Ishikawa 1993: 99).

Camouflaged as a private institution, his press office was in fact completely financed by the Japanese Army. None of the pictures that Natori sold showed any trace of massacres or war crimes.\(^{16}\) Natori himself never went to the battle front, indeed, he reportedly said that he would not go where bullets fly (Koyanagi and Ishikawa 1993: 116). He would visit areas the Japanese Army controlled and have himself photographed by Koyanagi. Natori sent these *kinen shashin* (commemorative photos) off to foreign publishers to convey the impression that he was a frontline reporter (ibid.).

From November 1938, Natori also published the English language magazine *SHANGHAI* which was distributed in Shanghai.

The magazine *SHANGHAI* (image in Shirayama and Hori 2006: 82) presented as a Chinese production by a Chinese editor, was actually designed and produced by Nippon Kōbō in Tokyo and fully financed by the Japanese Army.

It was camouflaged as a Chinese cultural magazine produced and published in Shanghai by producer and editor Ching Cong Kan (Nakanishi 1980: 227-228; 1981: 56). In fact, Natori brought photographic material from China to Tokyo and had Nippon Kōbō produce the issues. *SHANGHAI* is thus a prime example of ‘black propaganda’ that either intentionally falsifies or does not reveal the identification of the sender (Bussemer 2008: 36). It carried the message that Japan brought peace and development to China and that only the Japanese Army could liberate China from communism and from the military clique of Chiang Kai-shek. The financial means for this magazine was provided by the Army Press Unit (Gun Hōdōbu) (Koyanagi and Ishikawa 1993: 144-145). Nippon Kōbō editor Iijima Minoru called *SHANGHAI* an aggressive propaganda magazine (*kōgekiteki senden zasshi*, quoted in Nakanishi 1980: 228; Nakanishi 1981: 56, 68) and co-worker Koyanagi quotes Natori as proposing that Koyanagi take foreign photographers out to
get them drunk while Natori would meanwhile search their rooms for material that could be
detrimental to the image of the Imperial Army (quoted ibid.). According to this account, Natori
was an active plotter in a conspiracy, not only on the level of profitable and productive
cooperation with the Army and KBS, but also on the level of suppressing any evidence that
would record a story different from his own propaganda.

By 1944, Natori is said to have witnessed war crimes by the Japanese Army in China (Nakanishi
also said he witnessed a young Chinese woman who was accused of being a spy being raped and
murdered by a Japanese soldier.17 According to some accounts, Natori discussed the wartime
state with Japanese intellectuals he invited to Shanghai, wrote a letter of protest (ikensho) against
wrongdoings of the Japanese Army stationed in China, and created posters carrying the appeal
‘Don’t burn, don’t steal, don’t rape (yakuna, nusumuna, okasuna)’.18 However, there is no trace
of such posters or record of a protest letter. In any event, Natori himself kept silent about his
activities in China.

Natori also established branch operations. Around the time of the Canton operation, in
September 1938, two more members of Nippon Kōbō were sent to China, this time to the Press
Unit of the Army in South China (Nan-Shi Hakengun Hōdōbu) in Canton. There, they
established a sister company to the Press Union Photo Service, the South China Photo Service.
There, Natori created the English language photo magazine CANTON, which was sponsored by
the Army Press Unit and produced by Nippon Kōbō in Canton itself. Natori argued for a similar
propaganda magazine in Manchuria and eventually founded the Manchurian Photo Service and
the magazine MANCHOUKUO in 1940. The orders from government agencies to Nippon Kōbō
increased dramatically between 1938 and 1939, making Natori’s company one of the many
businesses that profited from the occupation of China. Kobayashi Masashi, who during Natori’s
frequent absences from Tokyo was in charge of several of the new magazines (Kobayashi 2005:
90), called the three years between 1936 and 1938 ‘the golden years of development’ for the
team of Nippon Kōbō. In the course of the war, income generated through commercial
advertisements decreased while income and activities associated with the newly founded foreign
propaganda magazines as well as the number of overseas branches steadily rose.

In an interview published in the photography journal Shashin Bunka in September 1941, Natori
stressed that war was not only fought by weapons but also by ideologies, and that
photojournalism everywhere expressed national ideology (quoted in Shirayama 2005: 25).
Therefore, he said, it does not make sense to copy the West. Instead, Japanese must develop its
own photojournalistic expression of Japanese ideas. He went on to stress the need for active
expansion and indoctrination in East Asia, maintaining that,

[...] to say ‘we advance to Bangkok’, go over there, take photos and bring them back to
introduce them to Japan is not enough. Is not rather the most imminent task for Japanese
photojournalists to actively and relentlessly pursue their work in magazines published over
there? I really think the only way to do it is for Japanese photojournalists to go over there, install
themselves and work from the standpoint of Japanese thinking. (Natori 1941, quoted in
Shirayama 2005: 26)

This is precisely what he did, first when he commuted between Tokyo and Shanghai from late
1937, then when he and Mecklenburg relocated to Shanghai in 1940.19 After the outbreak of the
Pacific War, Natori would become even more explicit regarding his conviction that Japan should
turn away from Western models and aggressively propagate its agenda in its own way in the occupied territories.

As part of its growth strategy in East Asia, Nippon Kōbō was renamed and restructured in 1939 as a corporation, the Kokusai Hōdō Kōgei Kabushiki Kaisha. Four years later it was renamed the Kokusai Hōdō Kabushiki Kaisha. In 1940, the Tokyo-based firm had branches in Osaka, Nanjing, Shanghai, Canton and Shinkyō (today’s Changchun), the capital of the Manchurian puppet state. It employed around 80 photographers and designers, producing several openly propagandistic or ‘propagandistically interspersed’ cultural magazines, all of them of high quality and combining arts, culture, photos and illustrations. The magazines Natori initiated and Nippon Kōbō produced were NIPPON (from 1934, KBS, Imperial Army), COMMERCE JAPAN (April 1938, Bōeki Kumiai Chūōkai), SHANGHAI (November 1938, Naka Shina Hakengun), CANTON (April 1939, Nan-Shi Hakengun), SOUTH CHINA GRAPHIC (April 1939), MANCHOUKUO (April 1940, South Manchurian Railways), EASTERN ASIA (1940, South Manchurian Railways), CHUNHA (Naka Shina Hakengun), KAUPĂPU KAWANŌKU [Tōa Gahō, East Asia Picture Post] (December 1941, in Thai language) and others. Covers of some of the propaganda magazines initiated and produced by Natori Yōnosuke’s company (images in Shirayama and Hori, 2006: 100-127). MANCHOUKUO’s front cover visually connotes the ideology of the ‘empty’ Manchurian territory, the wide, open, and fertile lands awaiting the Japanese settlers. Its back cover carries an advertisement by the main sponsor, the South Manchurian Railway. The veins of a leaf indicate the railway tracks and traffic infrastructure that signify S.M.R. as the ‘carrier of civilization into Manchuria’, using natural structures to in effect naturalise colonial expansion. S.M.R. also sponsored
EASTERN ASIA that propagated the ideology of the ‘Greater East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere’. Published mainly in English, summaries were in French and German, and the captions appeared in all three languages. The propaganda magazine KAUPĀPU KAWANŌKU [Tōa Gahō, East Asia Picture Post] appeared in the Thai language with some English and katakana captions. It advertised Japan and propagated the Japanese advances in South East Asia.

Other press-related companies that Natori established between 1938 and 1944 included a publishing company in Tokyo called Natori Shoten (1940) and a printing company that the Japanese Army had requisitioned in Nanking and for which Natori received the managing rights in 1941, renaming it Taihei Insatsu Shuppán Kōshi (Pacific Press Publishing Company). In Shanghai, he established the publisher Taihei Shokyoku (1942) that produced propaganda publications in Chinese for KBS and the Imperial Army. Apart from magazines, his company designed and produced propaganda photo exhibitions that were presented in China as well as photo albums for the Imperial Army (Jūgun kiroku shashinshū). From 1944, it published Chinese translations of Japanese literature as part of the cultural propaganda strategy. This may have been a product of Natori’s connections to Iwanami Shoten. The Publishing Business Decree, announced in February 1943, effected another round of consolidation in the publishing business (Kasza 1988: 223), including the forced merger of Kokusai Hōdō (and one other company) with Iwanami (Shirayama and Hori 2006: 155). Natori was also asked to run an office in Nanjing for the South China Expeditionary Army Press Unit (1944) as he fervently supported Wang Jingwei’s collaborationist government in Nanjing. In 1944, his company became an officially affiliated organisation of KBS, and Natori thus ran a major organisation for the production of state propaganda (Koyanagi and Ishikawa 1993: 146).

‘Manchoukuo’ as propaganda

The Japanese term most often used for illustrated magazines during the 15 year war is senden zasshi, a highly ambiguous term that can be rendered as ‘advertisement magazine’ as well as ‘propaganda magazine’. The term blurs the borders between advertisement, business and politics and at the same time obscures their intimate connections. On the other hand, as Bussemer (2008: 25) noted in his study on propaganda, it is indeed difficult to distinguish propaganda from advertisement, public relations, persuasion, and political communication. Nazi strategies, for instance, attempted to control not only all means of political expression but also non-political popular mass communication for propagandistic purposes – not least in order to suppress older competing discourses in youth and workers’ movements (Bussemer 2005: 56).

The topic of Manchuria lends itself to a clarification of the question of how and when NIPPON developed from an international advertising magazine presenting Japan and Japanese products to an aggressive organ of wartime pan-Asian propaganda. With regard to its political stance towards Japan and East Asia, one can observe a continuum rather than any break in the course of NIPPON’s existence. In the very first issue (NIPPON 1934), Japan’s amicable foreign relations, modern industry, and traditional culture form the overarching themes, and the colonies rather casually appear as part of the advertisement for tea produced in ‘Formosa, Japan’ (p.31), of Kirin Beer’s branch in Seoul (p.39) and as the scientific examination of the sun’s total eclipse from Lasop Island (part of the Caroline Islands) identified as under Japanese control (p.38). In the third issue,
The cover of *NIPPON*’s third issue reflects the mixed messages that visuals and accompanying texts within the issue convey: Harmonious cultural background in impressionist colours and technological advancement in black and white -- Peace and at the same time the readiness for war.

The portrayal of several politicians marks *NIPPON* as a full-fledged propaganda magazine. Foreign Minister Hirota Kōki (1878-1948) is introduced as the ‘maker of Oriental peace’ (*NIPPON* 1935, 3: 4-5, no page numbers) and Araki Sadao (1877-1966), Minister of War during the Manchurian invasion and supporter of the secret biowarfare Unit 731, authors an article in which he asserts that Japan is the guarantor of ‘peace and humanity’ (Araki 1935: 10).
Minister of War Araki Sadao (NIPPON 3, 1935), ‘For Peace and Humanity’.

The political tension surrounding the Manchurian puppet state was a major reason for the existence of *NIPPON*, and *NIPPON*’s treatment of this state renders it a propagandistic tool from the journal’s very inception. With the beginning of the Second Sino-Japanese War in 1937, a belligerent tone takes over and reflects a sense of wartime crisis. While this forms an accommodation to wartime rhetoric, it does not represent a break in the general character of the magazine as a propaganda tool justifying and naturalising Japan’s colonisation in Asia. A Japanese edition of *NIPPON* had already in 1938 displayed military motifs such as Koyanagi Tsuguichi’s cover photograph of a Japanese soldier in combat in China.
However, the focus on cultural inclusion and appropriation of East Asia remains a marked feature, even after the beginning of the Pacific War and issue No 30 (1942),\textsuperscript{24} when the articles on military achievements increase and the cover design of every single issue of the foreign languages edition becomes a military- or war-related visual.

\begin{center}
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{nippon31_cover.jpg}
\end{center}

\textit{NIPPON 31, 1943, Cover}

Weisenfeld (2000: 774) amply demonstrated ‘\textit{NIPPON}’s subtle interweaving of colonial subjects into the fabric of Japan’, and her examination of the collage and photomontage cover\textsuperscript{25} of the special issue on ‘Manchoukuo’ (\textit{NIPPON} 1939, 19) brilliantly outlines the imperialist message that the issue transmitted (Weisenfeld 2000: 774-781).

\begin{center}
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{nippon1939_manchoukuo_cover.jpg}
\end{center}

\textit{A special issue on ‘Manchoukuo’ (NIPPON 19, 1939)}
Both text and image of that issue asserted Japan's benevolent rule in Manchukuo and the special and harmonious relationship between Japan and the new state. The text stated that, ‘Japan’s assistance toward Manchoukuo is purely that of a friend, there being no such relationship as exists between a principal and a tributary state’ (NIPPON 1939, 19: 16-17, no page numbers printed). Cut-out figures from the interior of the magazine that are identifiable by costume as Japanese, Western, Korean, Han-Chinese, Mongolian and Manchurian are superimposed on an orange map of Manchukuo and visualize a variation of the ideology of the ‘harmony of the five races’ in Manchuria. The composition of the ‘five races’ was not entirely stable. While the official ideology of the five races does not include Westerners, NIPPON’s feature article on agriculture states ‘In Manchoukuo, with Manchurians as the nucleus, the Mongolians, Koreans, Japanese, White Russians and various other races combine in mutual harmony to carry on agriculture’ (NIPPON 19, 1939: 16). The visual and textual inclusion of White Russians can be seen as part of an explicit appeal to Western audiences to accept the Manchurian puppet state. The colours of the Manchurian flag that represent the ‘five races’ are also reflected in a subdued tone in the colouring of the cover montage itself. It is instructive to remember what was not covered in the propaganda magazine NIPPON, such as Unit 731, which began operating in 1932 in the Manchu puppet state (Harris 2002: 37). The Unit tortured and killed several thousand mostly Korean and Chinese political prisoners, POWs and civilians (men, women and infants). It also developed germ warfare that killed several hundred thousand people in East Asia (Tanaka 1996, Harris 2002). Natori and his team were actively reproducing and ‘designing’ the lies that the Japanese Government and Imperial Army invented.

There is an interesting twist particularly in the issue on the Manchu state, which carried mostly material that Natori had brought back to Tokyo from the puppet state. The cover montage’s cut-out figures of various inhabitants and settlers in Manchuria shows only one figure standing outside the frame of the Manchurian map and pointing to it with great purpose. According to Nakanishi (1980: 231; Nakanishi 1981: 62), this male figure wearing the Manchu state’s uniform, the so called harmony-clothes (kyōwafuku), is none other than Natori himself. This staging highlights the production of propaganda as a creative invention of de-contextualised cut-and-paste elements and visually underscores Natori’s personal complicity and active involvement in this fabrication of lies.

POSTWAR CAREER – A NEW beginning or ARTICULATE SILENCE?

Iizawa Kōtarō’s 1993 history of postwar Japanese photography begins with an account of the personal fate of Natori Yōnosuke and his new magazine Shūkan San Nyūsu (Weekly Sun News). Iizawa’s book illustrates the central position that Natori inhabits in the historiography of postwar Japanese photography and the importance of the so-called Natori School. By the time of Japan’s capitulation, Natori had returned to Nanking. Following an order of the Army, he destroyed his negatives and other material accumulated during the war. The same was done with any compromising material (all except cultural photographs) in the main Tokyo branch. Because Natori had to have an emergency operation and his new wife Tama was giving birth just at that time, it was not until April 1946 that they returned to Japan via Nagasaki. Natori apparently still had the excretion pipe extending from his stomach from the surgery. Nevertheless he resumed his activities straight away, drawing on the old network. With Matsuoka Ken’ichirō (1914-1994) from Sun News Photo Company (San Nyūsu Fotosha) he discussed plans to create a ‘LIFE magazine of Japan’. Matsuoka was the eldest son of former Foreign Minister Matsuoka Yōsuke (1880-1946) who had been a major advocate of the Tripartite Pact and President of the South
Manchurian Railway. Incidentally, the elder Matsuoka was portrayed by Sugiyama Heisuke (1940: 12-15) in a feature article in NIPPON 24, in which he was hailed for his role in Japan’s withdrawal from the League of Nations and his foresight in demanding the dissolution of the political parties.

Immediately after the war, a true magazine boom ensued, including a host of photo magazines. In this context of restarting or newly developing magazines and media, Natori produced Shūkan San Nyūsu (Sun News Weekly). This magazine, which came out on 13 January 1947, was first published in B4 format. It consisted of only 24 pages of poor paper quality and cost 20 Yen. The cover page showed photos taken by Kimura Ihei of three women’s faces in profile next to each other. This differed from the norm for cover portraits, of frontal shots of smiling female faces. It was also unusual that the magazine used horizontal script (yokomoji) instead of the common vertical script. The magazine’s first issue carried an article titled ‘The human population increases with the speed of 2.6 people per minute’ with illustrations, photos, and captions that dealt with the so-called population problem (jinkō mondai). Although 30,000 copies of Shūkan San Nyūsu’s first issue were printed, only 10,000 sold. According to Iizawa (1993: 7), with its political and economic topics it was meant to be a magazine of enlightenment, but the German functional style, layout, and the horizontal script did not meet the expectations of the mass audience it targeted. However, I would argue that Natori was continuing the same style that he had developed before and during the war, in terms of both content and form. The topic of worldwide overpopulation connects to the wartime ideology of Japan as an overcrowded country that needed the ‘empty spaces’ of Manchuria for its surplus population. During the war, Natori had created several magazines to please the Imperial Army and KBS, which financed his propaganda. That the Japanese readership he targeted with Shūkan San Nyūsu was different from the one he had targeted before, and did not appreciate his continuation in style and content, seems hardly surprising. In the eighth issue, the form, style and content of the magazine was changed towards a more popular appearance. Colour photographs, manga by artists Okabe Fuyuhiko (1922-2005) and Nemoto Susumu (1916-2002), and a serial novel by Ibuse Masuji (1898-1993), who had previously contributed to NIPPON, appeared. Nevertheless, the magazine was not successful. Publication stopped after 5 March 1949, the 41st issue.

Shūkan San Nyūsu was a commercial failure but nevertheless highly influential in the publishing industry of postwar Japan, as many writers, photographers, designers and manga artists who had been active during the war published there. This group—the ‘Natori School’—eventually became very influential and successful in postwar photojournalism and the media economy. Among its members were Koyanagi Tsuguichi, Kimura Ihei, Kojima Toshiko, Miki Jun, Sonobe Kiyoshi, Fujimoto Shihachi, Inamura Takamasa, Nagano Shigeichi, Tagawa Seiichi, and Kojima Toshiko. The Natori School thus comprised a host of photographers and editors who would shape the postwar Japanese photographic profession, some as professors and presidents of photo societies who would even lend their names to photography awards (Miki Jun award, Kimura Ihei award; Ina Nobuo award).

Natori himself remained influential in photojournalism and photo criticism. In a debate with Tōmatsu Shōmei (born 1930), winner of the 1958 Japan Association of Photo Critics Debut Prize for ‘Local Politicians’ (Chihō seijika), he criticised Tōmatsu’s photos as having left the realm of photojournalism or hōdō shashin:
Photojournalism values a certain fact (jijitsu) and a certain time (jikan). Tōmatsu has disposed of this high value that photojournalism places in a certain fact. He attempted to move in a direction in which there is no limit to time or location. To put it differently, by his detachment from time and location, he severed his photos from photojournalism.32

Tōmatsu rebutted that he was not of the Natori School and that he did not see himself as a photojournalist in the first place, ‘the heavy feeling (jūryōkan) that is associated with photojournalism [in Natori’s sense] is a thing of the past’ (quoted in Kishi 1974: 83).

A rare debate in photographic circles, the critique of Natori could have gone further. It could have led to question the ‘factuality’ of Natori’s own practice of propaganda photography and could have sparked a discussion on wartime imbrications of the photographic and publishing profession. But it did not. The silences continued. Photographer Domon Ken (1909-1990) who had worked for Nippon Kōbō from 1935 until 1939 and then for KBS started a new movement in postwar Japan with his proclamation of ‘realism in photography’ (riarizumu shashin undō). However, Julia Thomas (2008) critically discusses Domon’s postwar photography as a continuation rather than as a break with his wartime style in that he sought to capture an ‘authentic’ Japan; Kishi suggests that this ‘realism’ was in effect just what photojournalism had always claimed to be, but that Domon wanted to disassociate himself from the kind of photojournalism that was tainted by the smell of the Army.33 Kishi comments that ‘there should be many wartime photographers who will sense an ache in their hearts when they hear the word “photojournalism”’(Kishi 1974: 16), indicating that they might feel shame for their co-operation in the wartime propaganda.

Natori’s lack of reflection about his wartime role in Japanese Army propaganda is extraordinary. In the introduction to his posthumously published book Shashin no yomikata (Natori 2004: i-iii),34 Natori mused about the various advantages that photography had brought him. Full of praise for the limitless possibilities of creating stories by the means of photography, he also cautioned that one can create lies via the assemblage of photos, captions and text. In a chapter titled Shashin no uso to shinjitsu (The lies and truths of photographs), he chose the example of the Hungarian revolt against the Soviets as it was covered by LIFE magazine in 1956.35 While this was certainly a timely example when he wrote (around 1958), he fails to even hint at his own active production of so many lies about benevolent Japanese rule and harmonious co-existence in Manchuria and the rest of East Asia over the many years he spent in China. Nor does he mention his active involvement in destroying an archive of photo material that could have served as evidence for the activities or even atrocities of the Japanese Army in mainland China, some of which Natori may have witnessed himself. Instead, Natori started his discussion of ‘lies’ with the theoretical observations that the technology of photography itself bears ‘major lies’ when it turns the coloured object into black and white or when it reflects a three-dimensional reality in a two-dimensional photograph (Natori 2004: 36-37). He concluded his paragraph on lies by noting that the photographs we see are the result of the triangular relationship of the photographer’s intention, the editor’s choice and the reader’s expectation as presumed by the editor, and that these images are constituted by, as he put it, ‘the lies that they all need,’ making the veiled argument that the photographer and editor were responding to the as-yet-unstated demands of the viewer. (Natori 2004: 45). Hailed as a photographic theory that for the first time takes into account the ‘standpoint of the viewer’ (miru hito no tachiba kara) (Kimura and Inubushi, in Natori 2004: 204), it seems to me that with regard to Natori’s wartime practice of photojournalism, ‘the viewer’ must take an undue share of the responsibility for the choices the
photographer/editor makes. In the wartime situation of government-controlled publishing and increasingly severe paper rationing, it makes more sense to exchange ‘the viewer’ with Natori’s financial and political ‘patron,’ the Army and KBS.

Natori’s observations, arguments and examples seem carefully constructed manoeuvres to divert/deflect attention from the role of his own ever-growing business of war propaganda from the late 1930s until the end of the war. The personal agency he displayed in persuading the military, the state (KBS) and the business community of the need for propaganda, and the tools he created, shows that wartime propaganda was not only produced as a result of systematic or fateful structural changes in the wartime bureaucracy but was championed and produced by individual human activity. This leaves one wanting more investigation into these human political decisions, and into the costs, the gratifications and victimisations they involved. With the exception of a very brief mention by former Nippon Kōbō staff Inada Tomi, hardly any of Natori’s disciples have questioned his (or their own) role in producing the propagandistic fabrications in NIPPON and other overseas propaganda magazines or assessed their contribution to the wartime regime. Neither do we find one word of regret for recognition of the East Asian victims in this war that, according to Natori (1941, in Shirayama 2005: 25) was ‘also a thought war’ fought with ideological weapons. This may be because they were all implicated and chose silence to cover their shame (Kishi 1974: 16; Shibaoka 2007: 137) – it is at any rate indicative of the broader ‘alchemy of amnesia … forgetting atrocities and war crimes’ that Mark Selden (2008) attests not only to Japan but to the war nationalisms of all combatant powers including the U.S. Some have suggested that Natori reflected on his wartime activities by giving up photography for several years after the war and engaging in editorial work instead (Ishikawa 1991: 243; Shibaoka 2007: 137). Yet, this claim does not seem convincing because his years affiliated with the Japanese Army in China were marked more by the creation, editing and management of new propaganda magazines than by his work as a photographer. Rather, Natori’s biographers have abetted the silence about his wartime activities. In Iwanami’s 41 volume series on Japanese photographers, volume 18 on Natori (Nagano 1998) carries an introduction by Iizawa Kōtarō focusing on Natori’s accomplishments as a photographer who understood ‘photographs as signs (kigō)’ (Iizawa 1998: 3). The introduction includes only one short paragraph that comments on Natori’s wartime work:

Of course, as editor and art director his talents in dealing with photographs had become conspicuous before [the war], but one cannot deny that unfortunately when all of Japan was swallowed in the great wave of war he involuntarily was made to participate in military propaganda. (Iizawa 1998: 5)

This is indicative of the way in which, against considerable evidence, Natori is repeatedly portrayed as a passive actor, as someone who unwillingly had to go along with the tide of the time and who bears no responsibility for the choices he made. The image and underlying message of passive natural metaphors such as being ‘swallowed in the great wave’ excuses him and at the same time ‘all of Japan’ as victims of a natural disaster. When it comes to wartime agency and responsibility, the otherwise outstanding genius Natori suddenly becomes a passive commoner, one of ‘all of Japan’.

Nakanishi Teruo provides rare explicit criticism of Natori’s political stance:

Natori Yōnosuke gradually drifted away from photojournalism and leaned too much towards propaganda that targeted foreign audiences. He became absorbed with the demands of the time
and accommodated his own wavelength too much to the advances of the Japanese Army. The strategy to expand his business by adjusting his wavelength was expressed in the change of format that came about with the reorganisation [of Nippon Kōbō] into [the stock company] Kokusai Hōdō Kōgei [or Nippon Studio, LTD] (Nakanishi 1980: 231)

But Natori initiated this accommodation of his ‘wavelength’ with the advances of the Japanese Army in order to expand his own business. In the same way, Natori’s case must be seen not only as an example of how someone formed a mutually useful connection with KBS and the Army (Shirayama 2005: 30) but of how one individual encouraged this alliance of aesthetics, business, politics and the military to advance the wartime colonisation of China and make a profit.

Natori’s case raises issues of wartime responsibility and of ways of coming to terms with the Japanese imperial, colonial and ultra-nationalist past that are yet to be examined in depth. Placing beauty and aesthetics in the centre of his drive for perfection, Natori not only shared the regime’s colonial and ultra-nationalist goals but initiated and devised propagandistic means of concealing them. While other wartime artists who have become infamous for their art-as-propaganda, such as Fujita Tsuguharu (also known as Léonard Foujita, 1886-1968) in Japan or Leni Riefenstahl (1902-2003) in Germany, were repeatedly confronted with their wartime activities, Natori faced hardly any trace of such charges in his lifetime. For one thing, he died young, at the age of 52, in 1962. Also he did not occupy any official position, unlike Fujita, who had served as President of the Army Art Association during the war. In addition, the personal influence of the ‘Natori School’, which started in the 1930s as a network of people who were mostly in their early twenties and who grew to be influential in photography and graphic design in postwar Japan, cannot be underestimated. This group’s own implication in wartime activities would have made it difficult to criticize Natori. Also, Natori’s wartime propaganda primarily targeted foreign audiences and peoples in the occupied countries, and was little known in Japan until recently. But other facts suggest that the photography world was aware of Natori’s wartime activities. It was only in 2005 that the Japan Professional Photographers Society established the Natori Yōnosuke Award for young photographers under the age of 30. Given the fact that other of his contemporaries were honoured much earlier by awards that bear their names, the lateness of the establishment of the Award can be seen as an indicator of the particularly troubled legacy that Natori represented. At the same time, the Award and a number of publications and exhibitions of his work in the twenty-first century indicate the kind of ‘rehabilitation’ that Susan Sontag (1974) diagnosed for Leni Riefenstahl in the 1970s and that Ikeda Asato (2010) described for Fujita Tsuguharu in recent exhibitions in Japan. Natori’s rehabilitation may also be indicative of a general intellectual move to a more right-wing political culture in contemporary Japan (McCormack 2010) and a neo-nationalist revival in the context of the US-Japan security relationship (Selden 2008). At any rate, it serves as a showcase for the still unresolved ways of coming to terms with Japan’s ultranationalist and colonialist past.

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Acknowledgements. Research for this article was undertaken during my fellowship generously granted by Japan Foundation, 2010-2011. I would also like to thank the editors of Japan Focus, Laura Hein and Mark Selden, as well as Paul Barclay, Yuki Tanaka and one anonymous referee for their invaluable comments and suggestions. I am grateful for discussions on the subject with Ulrike Wöhr and Yulia Mikhailova and students from Hiroshima City University where I had the opportunity to present a version of this paper in the Special Colloquium Series on 17 December 2010.

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**Notes**

1 See for example the commentary articles in Natori’s photo albums that were published posthumously, *Amerika 1937* (Natori 1992); *Doitsu 1936* (Natori 2006) as well as Iizawa (1993, 1998) and Ishikawa (1991).

2 See Nippon Kōbō no Kai (1980), some of these are reprinted in the separate volume with commentaries on the reprinted edition of *NIPPON* (*Fukkokuban NIPPON bessatsu* 2005); see also Ishikawa (1991).


4 This meant that Natori’s income would depend on the photo stories he could produce and sell which at first left Natori and Mecklenburg who had given up her post in Munich in an extremely tight financial state (Natori 2004: 115-117).


6 In October 1933, Joseph Goebbels’ ‘Schriftleitergesetz’ (Journalists’ Law) § 5,3 stipulated that ‘only those who are of Aryan decent and not married to a non-Aryan spouse’ were allowed to work in the journalistic profession. The Law went into effect 1 January 1934 (Sachsse 2000: 274).

7 See Natori (2004: 131). Okada helped establish the publisher Tōhōsha, which produced the propaganda magazine FRONT. Ōta would later also contribute to this propaganda magazine (Tagawa 2003).

8 The magazine was published by the Angelsachsen Verlag in Bremen. Its name derived from the street Böttcherstraße in which coffee industrialist Gerhard Roselius bought the houses in a street and then turned them into an open air museum. It included the house of Paula Becker-Modersohn.

9 With a print runof 10 000, Natori (2004: 140) estimated production costs of 6000 to 7000 Yen, which proved to be far too low.

10 On KBS see Shibaoka 2007: 77-89. The successor to KBS in postwar Japan is Japan Foundation (established in 1972).

11 The Reich Ministry for Public Enlightenment and Propaganda (Reichsministerium für Volksaufklärung und Propaganda or Propagandaministerium) was the Nazi ministry dedicated to enforcing Nazi ideology in Germany and regulating its culture and society. Founded on 13 March 1933, the ministry was headed by Dr. Joseph Goebbels and was responsible for controlling the press and culture of Nazi Germany.

12 Koyanagi became a photographer of the Imperial Army Press Unit just three months after joining Nippon Kōbō in 1937 and served from the beginning of the Sino-Japanese War
throughout the Pacific War. He was one of the few who was not primarily dispatched by a newspaper or magazine publisher but directly served the Japanese army in China, Manchuria, the Philippines and various places in Japan (Koyanagi and Ishikawa 1993: 19).

13 Koyanagi mentions that he met H.S. Wong after the war and asked him straightforwardly whether the photograph was staged. He reports that Wong simply answered the question with a smile (Koyanagi and Ishikawa 1993: 94). For a discussion of the ongoing dispute on the authenticity of the photograph see Morris-Suzuki (2005: 72-74).

14 The Shanhai Hakengun was renamed Naka Shina Hakengun (Central China Expeditionary Army) in February 1938.

15 See Koyanagi and Ishikawa (1993: 94). Natori asked Koyanagi to accompany him to Shanghai and for the first three months there, they joined the Japanese Army without pay, as Natori thought he had more freedom in taking pictures if he stayed independent. However, later, Koyanagi earned around 120 Yen per month from the Army (Koyanagi and Ishikawa 1993: 98).

16 Koyanagi took the pictures while Natori selected the material for sale. Koyanagi’s photographs did not document the Nanking massacre. Photographs of war dead or war injured were off limits for both international and domestic use as it was assumed that they would weaken the fighting morale of the home front (Koyanagi and Ishikawa 1993: 100). Some of the photographs later reproduced in Koyanagi’s book of 1993 had been censored at the time, such as a visual of soldiers praying at the graves of their comrades who died in China (Koyanagi and Ishikawa 1993: 62-63).

17 The questions remain whether Koyanagi took pictures of this incident since at least the killing of the woman was something he witnessed (Koyanagi and Ishikawa 1993: 122).


19 Erna Mecklenburg’s expertise in design and bookmaking and her cooperation in the creative projects and organisation of Nippon Kōbō are repeatedly mentioned in the reminiscences of former Nippon Kōbō staff (NIPPON bessatsu 2003-2005). Her particular role and contribution during Natori’s time in China is unclear.

20 Examining Goebbels’ ideas on propaganda, Bussemer (2005: 55) notes that popular media and seemingly non-political popular culture that met the tastes of mass audiences were used to stabilize the political system and the result was a ‘propagandistically interspersed popular culture’.


22 After the defeat of the German Empire in World War I the German colony Caroline Islands was occupied by the Japanese Navy in 1914 and formally handed over to Japan as a Class C League of Nations Mandate to administer in 1920. The Mandates themselves were a cover up for
the division of the spoils of war between the major powers. In violation of the Washington Naval Treaty, Japan began with the construction of military sites on the islands in the 1930s.

23 Hirota can be counted as a member of the expansionist camp in the Second Sino-Japanese War (Boyle 1972: 44).

24 The size of NIPPON changed from A3 to A4 with issue 29 (1942), an issue depicting the map of East Asia with the tracks of ‘The Greater East Asia Railway’ and carrying a photo essay on Japan’s youthful and vigorous Air Force.

25 The cover was designed by Kamekura Yūsaku (NIPPON 19, 1939: impressum; Nakanishi 1980: 230; Weisenfeld 2000: 775).

26 See Iizawa (1993: 9) and the introduction to the exhibition on Shūkan San Nyūsu (in 2006) found here, accessed 10 November 2010 and Shirayama and Motohashi (2006) for the exhibition catalogue. LIFE magazine can be said to have been the model and aspiration of many popular magazines that were established in Japan in the immediate postwar period. The layout and contents of the magazines Hōpu (Hope, first published January 1946) or Asahi Gurafu (Asahi Graph, first published July 1948) are seen to be particularly close emulations of LIFE (Kuwabara Suzushi; accessed 11 November 2010).

27 The new magazine Shinsei (New Life) published in November 1945 sold out within three days. In 1946, the magazines Fujin Gahō, Bungei Shunjū, Chūō Kōron, Kaizō and others were published again, while Sekai, Tenbō, Chōryū, Heibon and others were newly founded (Iizawa 1993: 3).

28 In January 1946, Kamera (Camera) was re-published and the first issue was completely sold out. It had started in 1921 and was targeted at an amateur photo audience. When it was published again in the postwar, it advertised itself as a magazine that was now able to publish under politically liberated conditions. 1946 also saw the publication of Sekai Gahō (World Illustrated), which was a continuation of the prewar magazine Gurafikku (Graphic) with its focus on photo documentaries. Asahi Kamera (Asahi camera), which targeted amateur art photographers, was re-published in 1949 (Iizawa 1993: 4-5).

29 Nagano (1998) is one of the editors of the album on Natori (vol. 18 of the Iwanami series on Japanese photographers).

30 Tagawa previously worked for the propaganda magazine FRONT that appeared between 1942 and 1945 (altogether 10 issues). He wrote a book on his experiences in which he maintains that the expertise gained while producing propaganda was still valuable today (Tagawa 2005).

31 See Iizawa (1993: 8) and the exhibition Shūkan San Nyūsu no jidai: Hōdō shashin to Natori gakkō (The time of Shūkan San Nyūsu: Press photography and the Natori school) in Tokyo in 2006 (Link, accessed 6 October 2010)


33 See Kishi 1974:16; on postwar discussions on ‘realism’ in Japan’s photographic circles with particular attention to Domon Ken and Kimura Ihei, see Thomas (2008).

34 The posthumous publication is based on Natori’s writings, mostly from the postwar period. Collected and arranged by Kimura Ihei and Inubushi Hideyuki into a loosely connected text of
book format, the compilers concede that had Natori lived to see the compilation he might have corrected and added to the format (Natori 2004: 204). Therefore, the silences of this book may to some extent be also the product of, or concurrent with, the silence produced by the specific choices that the compilers made.

35 While the photos in the LIFE report showed mainly Soviet forces and members of the Hungarian Security Police Force as victims of Hungarian rage over the invasion, the photos along with the captions and the explanation were read as the cruelty and pain that communists inflicted on another people (Natori 2004: 31).

36 In the collection of commentaries published with the reprints of NIPPON (Fukkokuban NIPPON bessatsu, 2005), only one member of the team, Takenaka [formerly Inada] Tomi, points briefly to ‘the lies’ that Nippon Kōbō reproduced with regard to Manchuria (Takenaka 2002: no page numbers). Incidentally, this editorial staff member was, apart from Mecklenburg (and two contract translators), the only female editorial staff in the young boys’ network. Rather than pointing to a sexual differentiation in the capacity to face up to one’s past, I assume that she had a greater distance from her work because she left Nippon Kōbō when she married in 1945 and did not pursue a professional career in the postwar publishing business. Watanabe Yoshio, another previous Nippon Kōbō staff unable to continue a professional career after the end of the war commented of his involvement in propaganda in 1977, ‘that I co-operated with the regime – albeit not actively but indirectly - remained somewhere at the bottom of my consciousness and, spending my days depressed and suicidal, I did not feel like working again’ (Watanabe 1977 quoted in Shibaoka 2007: 137).

37 Kobayashi Masashi’s recollections in particular seem an extension of the ideological justification for propaganda magazines as he praises their expertise and exceptionally high quality and continues to claim that their function was simply to present Japan to an international audience. Kobayashi had in fact acted as the editor in chief of NIPPON from the 9th issue on, when Natori was travelling between Germany, the United States, China and Japan, and was busy setting up new branches in East Asia. Kobayashi also oversaw the editions of COMMERCE JAPAN and CANTON (Kobayashi 2005: 90)

38 Natori (2004 [1963]) introduced the concept of semiology, the functioning of signs in the interpretation of photography without mentioning Barthes’ name. Barthes had published on semiotics in the 1950s and his Mythologies in which he discusses the iconography of Abbé Pierre (Barthes 2009: 49-51) appeared in book form in 1954, of which the earliest translation into Japanese I could find appeared with Shinchōsha in 1967.

39 Fujiita’s monumental war paintings were also published in NIPPON 27, 1941. For a discussion of Fujiita’s war art see Sandler (2001) and Ikeda (2010).

40 In this context, see also Thomas’ critical essay on a photography exhibition in a Japanese public art museum and its role in the making of a ‘usable past’ in Japan at the turn of the millennium (Thomas 1998).
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Hong KAL
September 6, 2008
http://www.japanfocus.org/-Hong-KAL/2880

This essay looks at two war memorial museums that commemorate military dead in their respective nations: the War Memorial of Korea (hereafter WMK) in South Korea and the Yushukan, the Japanese war museum located in Yasukuni Shrine in Japan, both of which play crucial roles in enhancing conservative patriotic nationalisms in the two countries. Like other war memorial museums, the WMK commemorates the war dead who sacrificed their lives for the defense of the nation and imbues with patriotic spirit the younger generations who have no memory of war. Yet it also constructs an “ethnic” lineage of the nation, a sacrifice of forefathers for the children of the nation. It seeks to form a national subject based on the idea of Korean ethnic nation as originated from ancient times. The author shows how the museum constructs a tradition of military patriotism in terms of shared ancestry, ethnic purity, and familial belonging and how this process of making a “we” is closely related to the construction of “others,” namely North Korea, Vietnam, and Japan. For a comparison, it examines how the Yushukan seeks to revive imperial Japan’s glorification of war based on the idea of the ethnic superiority of the Japanese. Comparing war museums in Japan and Korea, the author argues that despite their antagonistic discourses, they display similar strategies of representation: staging a ritual dedicated to the war dead as an embodiment of national identity. Although embedded in conflicting historical experiences of colonialism and postwar geopolitics, the two war museums demonstrate the growing obsession with the ethnic origin of the nation, which may develop into hostile attitudes towards resident ethnic minorities and foreigners in the increasingly globalizing contemporary social environment.
Commemoration and the Construction of Nationalism: War Memorial Museums in Korea and Japan

Hong Kal

Since 1990 both Japan and Korea have experienced “commemoration booms,” in which the number of private and public memorial museums and monuments has tripled.[1] These institutions provide narratives of each nation’s recent past and articulate the ideals of “nation” and “citizenship.” They recompose tales of a nation in order to make them relevant for public and private life. Like writing history, the museum collects and assembles fragments of the past and carefully re-contextualizes them into a narrative of the present. Precisely because of its role in institutionalizing social norms and values, the museum plays a crucial role in the production of national identity. It shapes the manner in which the nation creates its history, imagines its boundaries, and constitutes its citizenship.

Central to the “autobiography” of the nation is the representation of wars and death, memories of which are considered essential in guaranteeing the immortality of the nation. Benedict Anderson has written that:

Nations, however, have no clearly identifiable births, and their deaths, if they ever happen, are never natural. Because there is no originator, the nation’s biography cannot be written evangelically, ‘down time,’ through a long procreative chain of begettings. The only alternative is to fashion it ‘up time’ towards Peking Man, Java Man, King Arthur, wherever the lamp of archeology casts its fitful gleam.[2]

Since the nation has no fixed birth certificate, its biography can be written “up time” from its “originally present” toward its unlimited ancient past. The ancestral construction of the nation, according to Anderson, is marked by the narrative of death in reversed genealogy: “World War II begets World War I; out of Sedan comes Austerlitz; the ancestor of the Warsaw Uprising is the state of Israel.”[3] The war memorial museum creates a precedent for securing such an inverted genealogical construction of the nation’s ancient past. It supplies a formal structure for the nation to fashion itself toward its forefathers who died to guarantee the continuity as well as the immortality of the nation.[4] It also poses difficult questions. Can the forefathers be wrong when their wrongdoings secured “the goodness of the nation”? Can our heroes be killers? How should the enemy dead be represented? Can national war history be relational and plural when it is supposed to affirm the singularity of the nation?

In Asia, the transformations of post–Cold War geopolitics have opened new possibilities for inter-Asian relations and inevitably led to a rigorous interrogation of the region’s recent past. In the question of how to represent colonialism and catastrophic wars, war memorial museums based on the narrative of self-sacrificial death on behalf of a grateful nation have become among the most controversial sites. Especially as the battles over the history within and between Korea and Japan have become more intense and divisive, war memorial museums demonstrate the tension between official and societal memories of the past, revealing conflicting yet mutually constitutive assumptions of postcolonial Korea, divided Korea, and postwar Japan. While sharing much in common with other war museums, those in Korea and Japan led a life of their own according to particular temporal and geographical conditions.
I consider two war memorial museums: the War Memorial of Korea (hereafter WMK) and the Yushukan, a Japanese war memorial museum attached to the Yasukuni shrine, formerly a national sanctuary that enshrined the military dead as divine deities. Located in the center of each nation’s capital, both play symbolic and socially significant roles in the construction of nationalism. In Korea, the WMK was built “to commemorate martyrs and their service to the nation” and thus to prepare citizens “to face a future national crisis.”[5] In Japan, located in the shrine complex where conflicting memories meet, the Yushukan aims to nurture a sense of “lost” pride in being Japanese with a “glorious” history of war, posing a serious political question of how to come to terms with Japan’s recent past, colonialism, and wars. This essay examines how they write biographies of the nation with particular historical meaning. It focuses on the important role of the war dead in the creation of national immortality, and demonstrates that the source of this national ethos derives from the enactment of ethnic nationalisms in the two countries. I argue that the biographies of the nation written “up time” toward its ethnic “origins” are an attempt not only to create a linkage to the past, but also to produce an image of the future of the nation for today’s generation, who are experiencing forces of globalization. In doing so, this essay pays particular attention to the spatial and exhibitionary techniques to show how the museum stages carefully developed scenarios of the nation’s war histories and how it claims the heritage of patriotism and equates that tradition with the nation.[6]

My main concern here is ethnocentric nationalism in the two countries as staged in the war museums. Clearly they are embedded in different forms of nationalism, for Korea and Japan have mutually antagonistic historical trajectories—one the colonized and the other the colonizer. The conflicting experience of colonialism has harnessed them with different burdens over how to deal with histories. Even within national boundaries of each country, a discourse of the nation and nationalism has evolved in various ways in changing geopolitical and international contexts. In particular, Japan has experienced a shift in the dominant discourse of “Japan,” from the multi-ethnic empire to the mono-ethnic nation. [7] However, as Harumi Befu has elaborated, what has remained intact is a sense of Japanese ethnic homogeneity, uniqueness and superiority, enunciated as “nihonjinron.”[8] Also, while the WMK is a state-sponsored public museum, since the American occupation, the Yushukan has been an ostensibly private institution. However, given that the Yushukan attachment to the prewar State Shinto shrine, which is still strongly associated with the linked images of emperor, state, and nation,[9] the two museums are comparable in their political significance. Both demonstrate a growing obsession with ethnocentric nationalism. My contention is that the question of reconciliation with historical injustice cannot be seriously dealt with without problematizing ethnocentric nationalism, which is defensive, exclusive, and thus constraining. The self-reflection of nationalism is indeed at the core of the issue of reconciliation within as well as between nations.

I. The War Memorial of Korea (WMK)

The WMK, conceived in 1988 under the Roh Tae Woo government, was opened at the site of the former Korean Army Headquarters in downtown Seoul in 1994.[10] Despite public discomfort over its military appearance, the WMK survived the demise of the military dictatorship and was embraced by the civilian regime headed by President Kim Young Sam as a reminder to Koreans of the ongoing threat posed by North Korea.[11]

Like other war memorial museums, the WMK commemorates the war dead who sacrificed their lives for the defense of the nation and imbues the younger generations who have no memory of
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war with patriotic spirit. It provides historical grounds for safeguarding the country with “awareness of national security.”[12] However, there is something particular about the museum. It not only constructs a narrative of patriotism but also, more problematically, an “ethnic” lineage of the nation, a sacrifice of forefathers for the children of the nation: the Koreans. By doing so, it seeks to form a national subject based on the idea of Korean ethnic nation as originated from ancient times. The discourse of ethnic nationalism posits the state, nation, and ethnicity as identical categories. Ethnic nationalism has been a key organizing principle in Korea, yet its historicity, eternity, and naturalness have not been seriously questioned.[13] In the following, I explore a narrative construction of ethnic nationalism by analyzing the architectural and visual mechanisms of the museum. I focus on the ways in which the museum constructs the Korean ethnic nation in terms of war, kinship, and familial sacrifice and how this process of making “we” is closely related to the construction of “others,” namely North Korea, Vietnam, and Japan.

The spatial order of the memorial hall: national ritual in the ancestral temple

The WMK is designed like a temple secluded from the secular world outside. It nevertheless overpowers its surroundings with its perfect symmetry in classical Greco-Romanic style (Figure 1).[14]

Despite this Western façade, however, I would argue that the organizing principle of the museum space is that of a Confucian temple. The WMK memorial site is organized in the spatial sequence of the pathway, the steps, the moat, and the plaza. The spatial sequence of WMK creates a formal temporal sequence for visitors to follow. [15]

Upon entering the main gate, people embark on a ritual passage programmed by the museum. The spatial and temporal sequence heightens a sense of solemnity. Passing the pathway, the steps, the moat, and the plaza, all organized along the North-South axis, visitors are drawn to the museum building. They continue the procession by ascending to the Central Hall, a round room with a skylight in its domed ceiling. The Central Hall opens onto a long corridor lined on both
sides with half-body statues of heroic warriors. This corridor ends at the hemispherical domed Memorial Hall, the innermost “shrine,” located at the north end of the museum (Figure 2).

Concealed behind the layers of space along the axial line, the Memorial Hall recalls the ancestral inner shrine. At the apex of the dome, a blue beam is projected straight down onto a bowl. With the concentrated light from the sky, the bowl resembles an ancestral altar where visitors can contemplate and perhaps communicate with the war dead. The bowl and the light are the focal point where the spirit of the war dead meets with the living.

The movement from the exterior to the interior is thus a journey back to the “origin.” The trip from the present to the past is a search for a linkage with tradition to legitimize the current regime. Yet there is more to it than that. The logic of reversed genealogy is designed in the Confucian order of time, space, and origin. It is in the scenario that the patriotic present pays tribute to its ancestral past where it was born and to where it should return. The journey to the innermost shrine is not only for the living, but also for the dead. Like the living, the spirit of the dead returns to, and becomes part of, the family of ancestors from whom they came. Both the dead and living find themselves returning to the ancestor from whence they came and where their sacrificial life for the nation is legitimized.
The WMK seeks to produce a national subject based on ethnicity by encouraging people to recognize their shared origin and not to forget those to whom they owe their being. The museum suggests that as long as visitors identify with the dead, they will recognize their sacrifice, as well as their blood relationship, and therefore be united in a national community. In following the order of the exhibition, people pay tribute to the dead and reaffirm the shared ancestral heritage to which “we” all belong. Like an ancestral temple, the museum represents the origins of a lineage by reminding people of the historical existence of their ancestor and their duty to keep such a memory alive.

*The war history room: constructing the living war dead*

The museum tells of the linkage of the national dead and the national living. The dead and the living mirror each other to ensure the continuity of the nation within which ethnic Koreans are embedded. The exhibition sequence from exterior to interior and from secular to sacred is programmed to awaken the national dead to interpolate the living, demanding the cooperation of all the war dead to perform as the ancestors of the living. As an apparatus for the production of ethnic nationalism, the museum claims to speak for “Korean” war dead who did not know themselves to be such. By bringing together wars from the Great Victory at Salsu (612) to the Korean War (1950-53), the museum provides coherence for a larger historical context of a lineage of patriotic Korean ancestors. Speaking on behalf of the ancestors, the museum also speaks subtly to visitors about who they are in relation to the war heroes. The War History Room, for instance, narrates a history of Korea from the prehistoric age to the present. It stages weapons technology and military tactics of each period in a standardized format which enables visitors to see them as similar to each other and therefore sharing the same heritage. The display of military uniforms also operates by such a parallel logic. A window display presents a line of mannequins in variously styled military uniforms of the Taehan Empire (1897–1910). Yet the facial expressions of the mannequins are identical. There seems no need for the museum to explain who the military men were, not only because they all look alike but also they all look like “us,” Koreans, who are capable of changing costume. This group is immediately linked to another group from the Choson Dynasty, which is again linked to others from ancient times (Figures 3 & 4).
The question is not how different but how similar they are to each other. Who else would fit into this series of armor and helmets except “we” ethnic Koreans? They are standing there to represent a continuing military tradition across time, emblematic of an identical and collective Korean heritage.

The museum impresses people with the vast numbers of the war dead. A series of memorial panels in polished black marble inscribed with the names of Korean soldiers and policemen killed in the Korean War and the Vietnam War is located in the left and the right gallery wings which extend from the main exhibition building. The 170,585 names of the dead are ordered according to the year they fell and the military units. Their names appear in a standardized format and the rows of panels remind one of their mass sacrifice rather than their individuality. The 200 meter long gallery appears more like the space for the tomb of the unknown soldiers. Anyone can be there for the same reason. There seems no need to personalize any of them. Their presence and death for the survival of the nation are all that matter (Figures 5 & 6).
One could say that personal memories are not encouraged in the Confucian temple built for collective identification. Visitors can only see the names as interchangeable with one another and assembled as the collective body of national heroes. In the attempt to nationalize the war dead, no other identities are allowed except that of ethnic Korean. It in this ethnicity that official nationalism lives. The museum probably modeled its exhibition technique on that of the National Memorial Cemetery (Kungnip hyo’nh’ung won) which was built in 1956 as a military burial ground shielded by auspicious mountains and the Han River.[16] As a site of national mourning, it enshrines remains of soldiers and patriots as national heroes, physically and symbolically. In it,
the individual death becomes standardized and identical under the collective category of the Korean nation.\[17\] By rescuing the dead from obscurity and giving them a national meaning, the museum creates not only political legitimacy but also the “ethnic” lineage of the state. Once the war dead are enshrined as Korean heroes for all to see, the state claims its legitimacy as the rightful bearer of a Korean ethnic nation.

Just as the museum represents the war dead as equivalent Koreans, regardless of their glorious or shameful deeds, and regardless of rank, it also seeks to embrace visitors as collective Koreans. When the spirit of the dead conjures up a Korean ethnic collectivity, the past dead and the present living become one and indivisible. The exhibition also prepares the ground for the future war dead. Today’s young pilgrims to the memorial are placed in the position of future fellows of the dead. It is perhaps more than a coincidence that the museum provides an auxiliary facility for wedding ceremonies. This brings together the idea of normal family, unconditional loyalty, and the future reproduction of the “pure” national subject, as if ethnic purity itself guarantees the future of the nation. Who will guarantee the existence of the ethnic nation? The museum perhaps answers that it is the children. Moreover, it is for those yet-to-be-born “Koreans” that we work hard, sacrifice, and, if necessary, sacrifice our lives. Crucial to the unborn is the implied meaning: the innocent unborn descendants will honor us for giving life to them. The museum looks forward by constructing the idea of national (ethnic) “purity” against the fears of national degeneration. The sanitized space shows the museum’s obsession with “cleanliness” as a basis for “national health” and “national youth.” The task of the museum is thus to ensure the non-decay of the nation and to celebrate national virility.

**Representing the invading others: The U.S. and North Korea in the Korean War**

Consistent with the discourse of ethnic nationalism, the WMK degrades North Korean communism as anti-nation (ban minjok) which needs to return to the “normal” state (South Korea) to recover true Korean nationhood. The major focus in the exhibitions of the Korean War, seen as one of the most critical threats to the nation, is less the Cold War competition between hegemonic powers and more the confrontation between the two Koreas over the question of who is the rightful heir of Korea.\[18\] The Korean War Room, the largest exhibition section, presents the dominant narrative of the victimization of “innocent” South Koreans by the invasion of “tainted” North Korean communist aggressors backed by China. Two strategies of representation can be discerned here. First is the display of victimhood, and second the determinacy of South Koreans (especially civilians and students) to resist. Interwoven into this progression is the involvement of U.S. and U.N. forces in fighting for the “free world” against the Communist forces of North Korea and China. The first exhibition section of the Korean War indicates clearly that the war was started by North Korea. Civilians are shown suffering from the brutal acts committed by North Korean soldiers. The museum carefully explains the involvement of the U.S. as helping defend the territory of South Korea, emphasizing that the U.S. got involved only after the collapse of the crucial South Korean defense line at the Han River. The key message is that the U.S. (and later U.N. international forces) joined in only after South Korea had long sought to defend against invading North Korean forces.

The Korean War, however disastrous, is recast to highlight the resilience, idealism, and fulfillment of the Korean nation under the leadership of the South Korean state. In this narrative, the participation of U.N. forces on the side of South Korea is portrayed as an expression of international solidarity to defend the “free democratic world”, which includes South Korea.
Several panels, some with documentary videos, depict scenes of battles, weapons and wounds showing South Korean and U.S. soldiers working hand in hand to push back the North Korean invaders. The U.S. is presented through images of Douglas MacArthur, rifles, aircraft and medical support, all to help South Koreans to defend, to launch a counter offensive and even to move north to capture the North Korean capital, Pyongyang. The museum depicts the success of this cooperation as an indication of the capacity of South Korea to work together with nations of the “free world” to fight communism. The U.S. supporting role in the War is best illustrated in the dioramic scene of “Medical Activities by the Field Hospital.” Along with the panel description that “the medical support capability of the ROK armed forces were extremely insufficient. But through medical support from UN forces, the wounded were treated in timely ways,” the diorama scene displays the U.S. presence through the aid boxes at the entrance to the hospital (Figure 7). The message is clear. The U.S. came here to aid, but South Koreans were the major actors at the scene.

![Field hospital with aid boxes emblematic of the US army](image)

The U.S. is a major supporter of South Korea, but the survival of the nation relies on the resilience of the nation itself. Nothing more clearly demonstrates this than the depictions of the involvement of South Korean student volunteers and the Civilian Commando Units in fighting against the North Korean invasion. The displays of civilian voluntary forces seem more powerful than the war machines mobilized by foreign supporters. Right next to the panel on U.S. and U.N forces, the museum shows students fighting with bloody spears, their fallen bodies displaying university hats, school buttons and of course the Korean flag stained with signatures from students and traces of their struggles. The body, soil and blood represent most affectively the patriotic South Korean civilians who willingly and spontaneously formed their commando groups “to defend their country.” This patriotic spirit extends to Korean students overseas. Korean students in Japan are displayed alongside their counterparts in Korea in their fight against the North Korean invaders (Figures 8 and 9). With those (even foreign troops) who sacrificed themselves to defend the nation, visitors to the museum are asked to remember the goodness of the Korean nation. The nation is presented through the death and sacrifice of its “innocent” volunteering youths and embraces the free world.
While trying to minimize the historic dependency of South Korea on US forces, the museum finds ways to acknowledge the role of the U.S. In remembering the patriotic sacrifice of the children of the nation, it does not forget the American and transnational soldiers mobilized by the U.S. and the U.N. to fight on behalf of South Korea. One section of the memorial panels in the gallery wings is dedicated to these international soldiers who were ordered according to their nations and units. The U.S. with the largest number of war dead (33,642 out of a total of 37,645) occupies center stage. Unlike Korean soldiers who do not need to be introduced since they are all from “Korea,” American soldiers demand identification of where they were from. The fallen American soldiers are identified by their home states. Above the memorial panels dedicated to the U.S. and the U.N. soldiers killed in the Korean War, an inscription says “Our nation honors her sons and daughters who answered the call to defend a country they never knew and a people they never met,” a quotation from The Korean War Veterans Memorial in Washington D.C. In some ways, the willingness of the children of “all” nations to die for South Korea in the fight
against Communism seems to convey on South Korea a legitimacy to exist as a nation of the “free world.”

The Vietnam War and the recovery of the national self

The emphasis on the agency of the South Korean nation continues in the battle ground of Vietnam. In many ways, the section on Korean participation in the Vietnam War represents the psyche of the nation in overcoming the history of the Korean War. It shows not only Korean leadership in fighting against communism, but also in bringing Vietnam to the “civilized” world of freedom—something that South Korea would wish to do for North Korea in future. In this sense, the panels on the Vietnam War tell us much about the psychic recovery and the post-Korean War syndrome of South Korea, which was expressed in Vietnam with a vengeance. The sending of Korean troops to Vietnam (between 1965 and 1973) is thus represented as an act of a member of “freedom crusaders for world peace” and a chance to gain “confidence and experience in building a more self-reliant defense force” as well as a righteous mission to bring Vietnamese the democracy, freedom and peace that only become possible in the anti-communist state.[19] In addition to military operations, it highlights the Korean army’s engagement in the reconstruction of Vietnamese civilian facilities. For example, the museum displays at the center of the exhibition room Korean soldiers building a school, helping them mechanize rice production and constructing a new bridge in concrete (Figure 10).

(10) Korean solders constructing a new “superior” bridge in Vietnam which presumably rendered obsolete the old Vietnamese bridge seen in the background

Both North Korea and Vietnam are represented as objects of the patronizing mission of guiding communists to the “free world.” Yet there is a fundamental difference in the museum’s portrayal of Vietnamese and North Koreans. While the communist Vietnamese are portrayed as inhumane and barbaric perpetrators, the North Koreans are presented as dangerous communists yet “brothers” who have gone astray and pitifully left the family by adopting “foreign” communism. On this front it is instructive to examine the museum’s portrayal of a North Korean. Outside the museum there is The Statue of Brothers, a monument which depicts two soldiers in different military uniforms holding each other on a cracked hemispherical pedestal (Figure 11).
According to the catalogue, the two soldiers represent brothers who met on the battlefield as enemies, but finally reconcile with “brotherly love.”[20] The younger brother, here virtually a child, represents a North Korea soldier, politically communist yet ethnically Korean who, after losing everything in future will return to the embrace of the elder brother, the heir of the family’s house.[21] Here, a North Korean soldier is humanized as a “younger brother” who returns to the “elder brother,” who has preserved the unbroken heritage of the nation. The military heritage is then presented in the monument located at the other side, the replica of the memorial stele (erected in 414) dedicated to the military achievement of King Kwanggaeto the Great from the ancient Koguryo kingdom. These two monuments meet at the new structure, The Korean War Monument, which was built to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the Korean War with ancient and contemporary symbols of prowess. Erected at the centre of the museum complex, the 32 meter high monument in the shape of a divided bronze sword flanked by two gigantic groups of patriotic Koreans (4 meters high) embodies the museum’s obsession with masculinity (Figure 12). As indicated by Sheila Miyoshi Jager, “the masculinist logic of the official commemorative culture” makes a connection between “the military, manliness and nationalism.”[22] The association of familial piety and national virility further suggests that the future reconciliation would be framed within the code of the patriarchal ethnic family.
Where has Japanese colonialism gone?

The representation of Japanese colonialism in the WMK reveals another aspect of the political culture of postcolonial Korea. Despite the fact that modern Korea was profoundly affected by the colonial experience, the WMK virtually ignores Japanese colonialism. As Jager observes, the embarrassing time of colonialism becomes “a mere blank period” in the Korean military history narrated in “the masculinist language of the national self-definition.”[23] It is understandable that the museum pays close attention to the Choson dynasty, in contrast to the peripheral position of the colonial period, to prove Korean “manliness”. However, more is at stake than an enterprise to overcome a sense of being emasculated. The invisibility of the colonial past implies that Japanese occupation did not change the character of the Korean military tradition but merely proved Korean prowess.

By emphasizing heroism and resistance under colonialism, the museum projects the colonial past as a world absolutely divided into “we,” Koreans, and “they,” Japanese. “We” are related across generations in a homogeneous ethnic bond against “they.” Japan is counterpoised against Korea. These two antagonistic political forces confirm the ethnic coherence of the Korean nation, which was in fact constructed as a reaction to the Japanese colonial ideology that Japanese and Koreans share a common ancestor. The obsession with ethnic distinction as well as military strength indicates that the museum functions to redeem the humiliating experience of being colonized by staging a coherent story of the nation through images of family, ethnicity, patriotism, and masculinity. In this sense, the absence of the colonial period in fact actively constructs an ethnic lineage of the nation’s military patriotism. Japanese colonialism is a humiliating part of Korean history, one which remains difficult to integrate into the national imagination. Out of this
selective forgetting and remembering of Japanese colonialism, a “patriotic” community of the Korean nation emerged. In creating a seamless familial history of the Korean ethnic nation, the museum dissociates postcolonial Korea from colonial Korea.

The WMK’s effort to construct the nation’s military patriotism based on the idea of a common bloodline and shared ancestry is closely associated with the making of Korean “others,” namely North Korea, Vietnam, and Japan. These others, while constitutive of Korean nation, are featured so as to highlight the continuity of Korea. In this sense the nation is not created out of historical rupture but rather it lives on the basis of continuity while “others” serve to highlight its continuing prowess. A good illustration of this is the two groups of wall sculptures depicted on the pedestal of the museum building. On the left is the Righteous Army formed at the end of the dynastic era and on the right is the Independence Army created during the colonial period to fight against Japanese occupation (Figures 13 and 14). The effort to make connections with military tradition is clear, but in the museum there is no mention of how Japanese colonial rule contributed to the formation of the South Korean Army. Assumed here is the sameness, that is, the essence of being “Korean.”

(13 & 14) The Righteous Army (top) and The Independence Army (bottom)
North Korea has a particular significance as the most threatening but ethnically related other. Therefore, this otherness has to be reconciled but at the same time maintained as a political ground on which the South Korean state proclaims its legitimacy or at least superiority in terms of anti-communism, a dominant state ideology throughout the second half of the twentieth-century. Anti-communist nationalism has lost its hegemonic position over the emerging discourse of peaceful unification as symbolized by the the summit meeting between the leaders of the two Koreas, Kim Jong Il and Kim Dae Jung, in 2000. The WMK nevertheless maintains a tone of anti-communism as an underlying narrative of postwar history. It seeks to construct legitimacy for the South Korean state by staging ethnic patriotic nationalism against “others” from inside as well as outside.

Through selective remembering, the WMK creates a seamless history of the nation’s military patriotism based on a common bloodline and shared ancestry. The process of making a national subject of Korea is closely associated with the making of Korean “others,” namely North Korea, Vietnam, and Japan. North Korea has a particular significance. It is simultaneously the most threatening and an ethnically related other. Therefore, this otherness has to be reconciled but at the same time maintained as a political ground on which the South Korean state proclaims its legitimacy or at least superiority in terms of anti-communism. The museum seeks to position Korean visitors as an ideal citizen with a shared memory of the war. It does so, however, by suppressing discordant memories of the war such as the massacre of non-combatant prisoners by South Korean authorities in Taejon in July 1950 and the killings of villagers by the U.S. soldiers at Nogunri. The violence of South Korean and U.S. authorities have not found a place to be remembered. Likewise, the brutality against Vietnamese civilians is nowhere hinted at in the museum.[24]

II. The Yushukan and Japanese Historical Memory

The most important Japanese museum representations of the Asia-Pacific War indeed of any modern war involving Japan during the immediate postwar decades were the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum and the Nagasaki Atomic Bomb Museum. In emphasizing the horrors of nuclear war, and in presenting the people of Hiroshima and Nagasaki as the victims of that war, the museums underlined a Japanese commitment to peace and elided the military past that had culminated in empire, war, and defeat for Japan and had brought great suffering and mass death to the people of China and other Asian nations. The peace museums thus produced a narrative of the Japanese nation as both the victim of war and a force for peace. The resultant “peace culture” made it possible for many Japanese to “forget” the history of Japanese imperialism and aggression in Asia.[25] This peace culture has been countered by the new refurbished war memorial museum, the Yushukan in Tokyo. Situated at Yasukuni Shrine, it urges visitors to “remember” Japan’s “glorious” imperial past, and celebrates the Japanese who sacrificed for emperor and nation in the Asia-Pacific War.

The Yushukan and Yasukuni Shrine

The history of the Yushukan tells of Japan’s modern history. It was first built in 1882 in order to honor soldiers who fell in combat at the time of the restoration that inaugurated the Meiji imperial state. It was expanded in 1908 to accommodate the increased collections after the Sino-Japanese War and the Russo-Japanese War and rebuilt in 1932 after the Great Kanto Earthquake. With Japan’s surrender in 1945, the museum was closed. Restored in 1986, it was reopened after renovation in 2002 with a new exhibition hall. Sharing much in common with war museums of
other former imperial powers, the Yushukan is notable for its association with the symbolism of “emperor, war, nation and empire.”[26]

The Yasukuni shrine where the museum is located is notable for its close ties to the emperor and its links to modern Japanese warfare. Built in 1869 on the order of the emperor Meiji, it enshrines as deities over 2.4 million Japanese military dead from 1853 to 1945, the vast majority of whom died in the final year of the Pacific War.[27] It also includes Koreans and Taiwanese who fought and died with the imperial army as well as Okinawans, not just soldiers but also youths such as nurses and the male corps that were called up in the final days of the war. In return for sacrificing their lives for the emperor and the nation, the shrine rewarded them by elevating them as deities, hence objects of worship by the nation. In short, Yasukuni shrine glorifies self-sacrificial death while celebrating the imperial legacy. The authority of the shrine in fact depends on the practice of visiting, in which the living and the dead constitute a mirror image of the circle of decay and renewal, death and rebirth and bequeath and inheritance. One of the most special rites was attended by the emperor (in the person of his emissary) with offerings to the deities which in turn would bestow their blessings upon the emperor and the whole nation.[28] Although under the US occupation the shrine was formally separated from the state and made a private religious institution, the Showa emperor continued to visit, and his emissary participated in major rites each year. In addition, Prime Ministers, cabinet members and diet members regularly visited the shrine, in most cases in a private capacity. When Prime Minister Nakasone Yasuhiro visited in his formal capacity in 1985, a storm of controversy led to an end of the practice until 2001, when Koizumi Junichiro made the first of five successive official visits. The visits both divided the Japanese polity and sparked criticism in China, Korea and other Asian nations, given the shrine’s association with the wartime ideology of emperor-centered nationalism.[29] Within this context, after several years of renovation, the Yushukan was reopened in 1985 and again, with new exhibits in 2002, its mission to renew a sense of pride in being Japanese by displaying the nation’s “glorious” war history.

Like Yasukuni, the Yushukan poses political questions that reverberate beyond Japan’s borders. The reopening of Yushukan is emblematic of the rise of Japanese neonationalism which celebrates the nation’s military past. In the 1990s neo nationalists launched a campaign to rewrite a “new history” that neither imposes “victim complex” on Japan nor assigns all blame for the catastrophic wars on the Japanese military state.[30] Strongly opposed to any apology or compensation for Japanese war atrocities, they claimed that affirmation of wartime Japan is the path toward full realization of Japanese identity, which was forcefully suppressed and abandoned under U.S. hegemony. The revival of the Yushukan is one important attempt to connect the present to the imperial past, a link that they believe has been undermined by the peace culture.

The Yushukan presents a version of the nation’s modern, which elevates the war dead as a symbol of sacred patriotism and celebrates its military past. In this sense the museum not only looks back at the imperial past as a proud tradition but also looks forward to reconstruct the nation on foundations of empire and war. In what follows, as in the WMK, I analyze the museum’s exhibition displays and spatial arrangements and examine how they rewrite nationhood.

Into the exhibition space: The spirit of the samurai

Yasukuni shrine is protected by a series of Torii gates that create a hierarchy of spatial transition from the world of mortal beings to the realm of the Shinto deities (kami). Passing the three gates
built along the east-west axis, visitors proceed to the Inner Shrine where they can worship the war dead transformed into deities through a rite of apotheosis. Behind it is the Main Sanctuary, which is unapproachable by visitors and hidden from the view. The arbitrary denial of entry and the partial revelation of the shrine grant visitors a glimpse of the world beyond, while suggesting that the ultimate truth is reserved for those privileged to enter: the war dead and the priests who perform the rituals of apotheosis and propitiation. This deepest site is where the priests, accompanied by the imperial representative and others, make offerings to the deities and in return receive blessings from them for the nation. Located at the north side of the Main Sanctuary, the war museum seeks to incorporate the deification of the war dead into its exhibition space by conveying the aura of sacrificial death.

The renovated Yushukan features a new extension which has transparent glass walls and slightly tilted roofs (Figure 15). In stark contrast to the old Japanese imperial style of the main exhibition building, the new extension is modern and contemporary. As if to connect the past to the present, the new extension functions as an entrance lobby. It creates a brighter, modern, welcoming atmosphere where the individual and the national subject can be linked in “love of nation.”[31]

Upon entering the new lobby, a semi-open plaza with transparent glass walls, visitors first encounter the Zero fighter, the leading Japanese plane and one which frequently outclassed US fighters in the early phases of the war. Standing like a sublime object on the sanitized floor with no trace of blood and no hint of the disaster that confronted the Japanese air force, the immaculate object has been elevated into a sanctified object. The care that has been put into polishing the aircraft signifies the living who care for the dead. Cleanliness is indeed next to godliness. Once used by the war dead, the military artifact embodies their spirit. Preserved by the living, it becomes an inheritance that can be bequeathed to future generations to remind them of those who sacrificed their lives for them.
The Yushukan is organized to create circular movements starting from and returning to the Zero fighter in the hall (Figure 9). From the entrance lobby, visitors ascend from the entrance lobby to the exhibition halls, a passage that resembles the crossing of a bridge constructed to divide the realm of the living from the domain of the dead. This movement from the profane to the sacred also leads visitors to the past, from where the nation started. As the WMK traces back its military tradition, the Yushukan looks to the timeless “spirit of the samurai.”

In the middle of the dimly lit room named the Spirit of the Samurai, a vertical glass case enshrines a sword labeled “a marshal’s saber” with an explanation that “When the nation was in crisis, warriors were bestowed a sword from the emperor. Also in the modern battlefield, soldiers placed the sword on their waists. Since the age of the gods, the sword has reflected the spirit of Japan and the soul of the warrior. The sword is a symbol of justice and peace.” As the military weapon turns into a sacred object, war is given a noble and transcendent meaning. This single object represents “pure Japaneseness,” and in this purity “the spirit of Japan” is secured. This messages echoes from the scrolls hanging at the four corners of the hall. One of the scrolls writes, “We shall die in the sea, we shall die in the mountains. In whatever way, we shall die beside the emperor, never turning back.” Then, who is “we”? It continues, “The painful lives of those who cared for their country piled up and up, protecting the land of Yamato.” The story then goes back thousands years ago, “More than 2,600 years ago, an independent nation was formed on these islands… Japan’s warriors fought bravely, defending their homes, their villages, and the nation.”[32]

The museum asks visitors to value its antiquity as containing the spirit of the warrior which is the spirit of the nation. The museum is, it claims, precisely the place where people can witness and experience the timeless essence of heroism, loyalty and self-sacrifice for the nation. In this exhibition space, war death becomes an honorable and righteous act of obligation for a life of the nation inhabited by ethnic Japanese for thousands of years.

Liberating Asia

Like the WMK, the Yushukan displays an unbroken tradition of the sacrificial spirit of the nation that invokes Japanese military prowess. The Japanese war museum, however, long faced a dilemma: how to represent the aggressive and defeated war. This no longer seems a problem. The museum stages a seamless history of “glorious” warfare leading up to “the Greater East Asian War.” Before proceeding to the modern wars, it puts on display the rooftop of the (Ise) Shinto shrine decorated with forked finials and reminds visitors of the significance of the spirit of Shinto renewal in the foundation of the Japanese modern state. This link between the ancient Shinto shrine and the modern nation-state prepares visitors to understand that war is not a mere human tragedy but a sacred mission for the renewal of Japan and further to assure “the peace of Asia.” The museum presents Japan’s unavoidable yet heroic actions to achieve pan-Asian peace in the face of the encroachment of Western powers, including the Sino-Japanese War, the Russo-Japanese War, the invasion of China and the Asia Pacific War. In this narrative, the annexation of Korea is presented as liberation from China.[33] The story ends with celebration of the legacy of Japan for postwar independence movements in Southeast Asia: “When the war ended the people of Asia returned to their homes. Those whose desire for independence had been awakened were no longer the obedient servants of their [Western] colonizers… One after another the nations of Southeast Asia won their Independence and their successes inspired Africa and other areas as well.”[34]
The museum thus offers a history which affirms Japan’s military acts in Asia as a holy and defensive mission to protect the “Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere” from Western imperialism. In doing so, it not only erases the atrocities committed by Japanese forces but also revives the imperial discourse of pan-Asianism.

**Ethnic nationalism in the Yūshūkan**

While invoking the wartime rhetoric of pan-Asianism, the Yūshūkan renew the concept of “Greater Japanese Empire.” In the exhibition section dedicated to “Mementos of war heroes enshrined at the Yasukuni shrine,” the wall is covered with individual photographs of those who died in the Asia Pacific War (Figures 16 & 17).

![Photographs of the war dead](image)

Each photograph, as small as the palm of a hand, shows the name and age of the individual dead. Yet, despite this personal identification, the soldiers remain nameless. They are all immersed in
the vast canvas of collective death, a single body of the nation, stripped of all social and cultural significance. Yet this abstraction of individual death into a collective national whole brings up a compelling question regarding nation and ethnicity in Japan.

Tracing the genealogy of the discourse of the Japanese nation, Eiji Oguma has argued that the myth of Japan as a homogeneous and pure-blooded nation is largely a postwar construction. With the collapse of the Japanese empire, for instance, the broadly accepted idea of the prewar period that Japanese and Koreans shared a common ancestor was transformed into the belief that Japanese and Koreans were fundamentally different in their culture and ethnicity. In postwar Japan, Koreans and Taiwanese living in Japan, including veterans of the Japanese army, would be deprived of Japanese citizenship. Despite the instability of the concept of Japan, oscillating between the homogeneous nation and the mixed nation, however, as Harumi Befu has aptly pointed out, what has been maintained beneath the discursive shift of the nation in modern Japan is the idea of ethnic nationalism.

Yasukuni shrine nevertheless enshrined some 50,000 ethnic Korean and Taiwanese soldiers who were mobilized to serve the Japanese empire and died in combat during the Asia Pacific War. Some bereaved families, who were informed only recently of enshrinement, demanded that the shrine return the souls to them. The shrine, however, rejected the demand saying that all had died for the emperor and nation and would be honored for their sacrifice. Like the shrine, the museum erases any reference to the multiethnic nature of those who died in Japanese uniform during the war. In the museum, these ethnic others, who were Japanese but not quite Japanese, are subsumed in a unitary Japanese identity that elides their ethnic identities.

III. A Crisis of Ethnic Nationalism in the Era of Globalization

The war memorial museums aim to convey an aura of sacrificial death that supposedly transcends individual physical annihilation. Yet the problem arises precisely in this practice of museumization of death. The attempt to present divine souls threatens the sacred aura as such. As Arjun Appadurai and Carol A. Breckenridge have argued, the museum is needed especially when “the separation of sacred objects (whether of art, history or religion) from the objects of everyday life has occurred.” In the case of the Yushukan, the museumization of ritual suggests the decline of the shrine as a social practice and thus a need to remind people of its “sacred” meaning. Likewise, in the WMK, heroic death is presented as prime material for the foundation of national identity through objects in the form of exhibition displays, and monuments, extending even to souvenirs. The serialization of images can be seen as “a replica without aura” in Anderson’s term. In this sense the two museums represent not the power but the loss of popular faith in military nationalism. In 1993, even before its opening, the WMK faced criticism of the lack of accountability of government spending for the museum and questioning the very need to build a war museum with such a belligerent appearance in the center of the city. The museum in fact proved unpopular. In particular, in the emerging new political relations with and public perceptions of North Korea, has faced continued pressure to accommodate the change. Perhaps partly as a response to such pressure, in 2002 the museum added a new monument, The Clock Tower of Peace, which portrays two young girls holding two watches, one stopped at the moment of separation of the two Koreas and the other moving toward future unification (Figure 18).
These new images of young girls and stopped watches remind us of the familiar icons of peace culture as presented in the Hiroshima and Nagasaki museums in Japan. Despite such a gesture to modify its militaristic and masculine image, the presence of the museum with a message of anticommunism and military patriotism continues to elicit criticism. In 2003, a group of citizens launched a campaign for an alternative peace museum, stating that “the WMK teaches our children how stronger weapons can kill more people… In this country with experiences of wars and state killings, we need a place to teach peace to our children.”[42] Some people resist the official representation of the museum by consuming it in ways different from its intended meanings. One popular website, for example, issued a call for “a new millennium techno party” to be held in the museum restroom:

A fun, weird party in the restroom at War Memorial Hall…The restroom of War Memorial Museum is the cleanest and largest in Seoul. This restroom will be totally changed to a wonderful party place. Some snacks, BBQ, cocktails and beer will be served…also, some funny events such as graffiti contest… and the performance by a five-man band Barberbershoporno led by the self-styled keeper of the women’s toilet.[43]

The restroom party fantasy illustrates how the museum can lead a life in popular consumption quite independent of the original official context. The celebration of nonsense, decadence, and obscenity is exactly what the museum tried to keep out of the public for the production of the “pure,” “healthy” and “normal” state of patriotic ethnic nationalism.

The Yushukan provoked similar reactions on the part of some.[44] Especially for those who painfully remember “stepping on dead bodies” and “there is nothing glorious about the war,”[45] the museum is deeply disturbing. A Japanese visitor regretted that, “the exhibits express neither condolences to victims of the U.S. air raids and atomic bombings nor remorse for Japan as an aggressor in Asia. I felt as if I had been exposed to the specter of Japanese militarism. … The
museum souvenir shop sells T-shirts displaying the wartime slogan, “We Shall Win.”[46] In the project of securing the future embedded in the idea of nation with singular history, ethnicity, and identity, the museum continues to suppress the past violence, fear, and anguish experienced by both “Japanese Japanese” and other “non-Japanese Japanese.”

In a way all the different visual and spatial devices employed in the WMK and the Yushukan merge into what can broadly be termed ethno-conservative nationalism, which invents an ethnic-based tradition of military prowess. The obsession with military prowess is related to historical amnesia that both Korea and Japan have experienced. Both museums still find it difficult to integrate the dark past into their histories. The dark past is, therefore, kept in the family closet to avoid embarrassment. Or simply denied. Each only tells a story that the nation-family wants to hear about its ancestors and does not tell other stories, such as those of military aggressions at home and abroad, civilian participations in wrongdoings and collaboration with colonial rulers. “We” do not have to talk about the embarrassing deeds in “our family.” Out of the selective forgetting and remembering of the past, a seamless familial history of the ethnic nation and the idea of a patriotic and ever glorious national community have emerged.

The WMK performs an enactment of manliness in the discourse of ethnic nationalism, one which was suppressed under Japanese colonialism. It can be seen as an enterprise for overcoming a cultural crisis with respect to historical memories of colonialism, war, and the current phase of globalization. Hence, we see in the WMK a communal quest for a rooted identity expressed in the urge for ethnic unity, a role that can be most decisively played by the loud voice of military prowess. As in Japan, however, in a period which has witnessed a growing population of non-ethnic Koreans, it is a serious question whether a “democratized” and “globalized” Korea will further ethnicize or de-ethnicize the idea of nation and national membership. The issue of ethnicity and national membership becomes more complicated and even contradictory, as Katharine Moon aptly notes: “What is the meaning and content of the Korean nation if foreigners purport to claim Korea as their ‘second homeland’? Does Korea’s pursuit of democracy and globalization require that it alter its definition of nation?”[47] Furthermore, the changing relationship between women and the state also challenges the patriarchal definition of the Korean ethnic nation.

The Yushukan similarly calls for the recovery of Japanese military identity by affirming the wartime past at the center of national character and identity. Toward the end of the twentieth century, Japan confronts a divide between those who share the memory of wartime and those who grew up or were been born after the war. As the older generation passes, some neonationalists feel the need to bequeath to the younger generation “heroic” memories of the war that have been forgotten. The Yushukan’s mission to reestablish the linkage between the national subject and the individual can also be understood as a reaction to globalization in contemporary Japan. One of the visible signs of this is the growing visibility of postcolonial Asia along with the influx of Asian pop cultures and migrant populations from surrounding Asian countries. Postcolonial Asia threatens to disrupt the putative wholeness of the citizenship project that neonationalists attempt to maintain. The Yushukan is the showcase for an ethnic-based reactionary nationalism which retreats to the military tradition, a symbol of loyalty to and sacrifice for the nation, at the moment when the idea of the nation based on ethnic homogeneity is being undermined by domestic and international transformations.
Juxtaposing Korea and Japan, we see interconnected discourses of ethnic nationalism. Comparing war memorial museums in Japan and Korea, I have suggested that despite their antagonistic discourses, they display similar strategies of representation: staging a ritual dedicated to the war dead as an embodiment of national identity. The dispute over the museums suggests a change in the social and political landscapes of Korea and Japan. However, the public in both countries, although critical of militarism, still seems to take for granted the core idea of ethnic nationalism, which often develops into xenophobic sentiment toward “non-ethnic” Koreans or Japanese and migrant foreign workers. The unchallenged concept of nation and citizenship based on an ethnic collectivism poses a critical obstacle to the task of reconciling historical injustice between nations as well as within them. Without critical self-reflection regarding the exclusive and aggressive nature of ethnic nationalism, it will be difficult to move ahead. In this essay, rather than placing the two war memorial museums in the category of colonized versus colonizer or victim versus victimizer, I have paid attention to their similar ambition to exhibit the nation bounded by ethnic, not civic, sentiments. They urge citizens to be exclusively Koreans or Japanese and to unquestioningly identify themselves with the ethnic national community. Such visions can best be countered by recognition of the terrible price that Koreans, Japanese and Asian people have borne as a result of colonialism and aggressive wars, including those waged in the name of nationalistic purity and liberation of oppressed people.

*I am indebted to Mark Selden for critical comments on an earlier version of this article.*

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*This is a revised and expanded version of a chapter that was published in Rethinking Historical Injustice and Reconciliation in Northeast Asia, edited by Soon-Won Park, Gi-Wook Shin, and Daqing Yang. New York: Routledge, 2007. Posted on Japan Focus, September 6, 2008.*

**Notes**


[6] My approach to the museum draws on Carol Duncan’s analysis of the museum as a modern *ritual* in which visitors are prompted to enact and internalize the values written into the exhibitionary script. See Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals*.


[8] Befu has emphasized that *nihonjinron* constitutes a broadly based ideological stance for Japan’s nationalism. See Befu, “Nationalism and *Nihonjinron*,” p.107.

[9] Indeed, the shrine still has a strong association with the state, as evidenced by the controversial visits to the shrine by prime ministers and cabinet members. The renovation of the *Yūshūkan* was extensively funded by the Japan Bereaved Families Association, a private organization that is closely connected to the conservative Liberal Democratic Party.


[14] In 1989, the war museum construction committee issued an open competition for architecture design. Of the twenty designs submitted, Lee Song Jonjaeng kinyomgwan konlipsa, 181–89.

[15] The temporal sequence is also emphasized by outdoor monuments which depict the military tradition from the first century to the present.


[17] The National Memorial Cemetery enshrines those who sacrificed themselves for the defense and development of the nation. Established in 1956 as a military cemetery for the war dead from the Korean War, in 1965 it was elevated to the national cemetery and included patriots who fought for the liberation of the country and men of merit who sacrificed their lives for the country. It is also a ceremonial site for national anniversaries and is regularly visited by politicians to demonstrate their allegiance to the nation. Since the late 1990s, however, the status of the cemetery as the only national sanctuary has been challenged by the establishment of new national cemeteries. For example, the 4.19 cemetery which buried those killed in the protests against government corruption and dictatorship in April 1960, and the 5.18 cemetery which
buried those killed in the Kwangju civilian uprising in May 1980, were rebuilt as official national cemeteries respectively in 1997 and in 2002.

[18] With no winner in the war, the ground was open for claims represent the ideal “Korea.” The museum seeks to confirm the political legitimacy of South Korea as the only legitimate son who has preserved the unbroken heritage of the Korean ethnic nation against successive foreign invasions. Even after the summit meeting between the leaders of the two Koreas in 2000, the museum’s narrative of the Korean War was little revised, as can be seen in the special exhibition, entitled “Ah! 6.25: For Freedom That Time, for Unification This Time,” held in the same year.

[19] See exhibition panels in the Expeditionary Forces Room and also War Memorial of Korea, 28.

[20] War Memorial of Korea, 42.

[21] The original project before The Statue of Brothers was The Peace Tower, a monument initiated to be a symbol of “free and democratic world” along with the WMK in 1988. The Peace Tower was designed as an abstract vertical tower 330 meters high (later adjusted to 120 meters). However, this project was cancelled in 1991 and converted to The Statue of Brothers. Both were designed by the same architect, Ch’oe Yong Jip.

[22] Jager, Narratives of Nation Building in Korea, Chapter 7, 118.


[25] The major Peace Museums, notably those at Hiroshima and Nagasaki, seek to teach peace through documenting the nuclear destruction of the city and conveying a sense of the impact of the bombs on its citizens and the built environment. Until recently, there was no representation of Japanese colonialism or Japanese invasion of Asian countries, or even, of the United States as the nation which dropped the atomic bombs. Japanese citizens, portrayed as atomic victims, are projected as a metaphor for all human suffering in war, particularly nuclear war. Thus the museums barely mentioned the perpetrators of the violence that produced the Asia-Pacific War, with exhibits limited to the human and material consequences of the atomic bombings. The suppression of the role of U.S. in the dropping of atomic bombs entails a forgetting of the equally violent history of Japan’s militarism in Asia Pacific.

[26] Mark Selden has emphasized that the problem of Japanese nationalism needs to be located within the broader frameworks of competing nationalisms in Asia such as in China and Korea; the divisions among the people regarding memories of colonialism and war; and the Japan-US relationship. See Selden, “Nationalism, Historical Memory and Contemporary Conflicts in the Asia Pacific.”

[27] Shintoism, often referred to as Japan’s indigenous religion, centered on a reverence for deities (kami) that animistically inhabit nature. It was elevated to the state religion when the new Meiji government placed Shinto at the center of the nation’s religious and social life. The Yasukuni Shrine embodied the idea that the emperor is at the center of the religious and social life of Japanese people. With Japan’s surrender in 1945, the shrine was separated from the state.
The close bonds between Yasukuni and the emperor are delineated in Takahashi, “The national politics of the Yasukuni Shrine” and Takenaka, “Enshrinement politics: War dead and war criminals at Yasukuni Shrine.” More critical articles on the politics of Yasukuni Shrine can be found in Japan Focus.

[28] For a discussion of the ritual space in the Yasukuni shrine, see Breen, “The Dead and the Living in the Land of Peace: A Sociology of the Yasukuni Shrine.”

[29] Some people commemorate the war at alternative sites, such as in the Chidorigafuchi, a national nonreligious cemetery built in 1959 to accommodate the remains of 350,000 unknown soldiers. In December 2002 a government advisory panel proposed a plan to construct a new non-religious national war memorial that would include non-Japanese war dead. This proposal sparked controversy, however, and was never implemented.


[31] See the Yushukan exhibition brochure.

[32] From the exhibition panel in the section entitled “Spirit of the Samurai.”

[33] From the exhibition panel entitled “The Korean Problem” in the section entitled “From the Russo-Japanese War to the Manchurian Incident.”

[34] From the exhibition panel.


[37] See Befu, “Nationalism and Nihonjinron.”

[38] Appadurai and Breckenridge, “Museums are Good to Think,” 39.


[40] Donga Ilbo (8 June 1993).

[41] A newspaper column deplores that “The young people visit the museum led by teachers or only to enjoy cultural events or festivals held in the outdoor plaza. For those in their thirties and the forties, the war is no longer a subject they want to talk about.” Donga Ilbo (26 June 2001).

[42] Hankyoreh (24 September 2003). They started from a campaign to publicize atrocities committed by Korean soldiers to Vietnamese civilians. For the on-line peace museum, click here.


[44] Not unlike the WMK, the Yushukan has been unpopular since it opened in July 2002. Until May 2003, approximately 226,000 individuals had visited the museum, a small number compared with the atomic bomb peace museums in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, each of which has received more than one million visitors every year for more than two decades. The daily newspaper Sankei reported in 2002 that no schools are currently making field trips to the museum, nor does any school incorporate the museum’s pedagogical apparatus into its curricula.
See Yoshida, “Revising the Past, Complicating the Future: The Yushukan War Museum in Modern Japanese History.”


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“Exhibiting World War II in Japan and the United States”
Laura Hein and Akiko Takenaka
July 20, 2007
http://www.japanfocus.org/-Akiko-TAKENAKA/2477

This essay compares museum representations of WWII from Japan and the USA and discusses how museum curators responded to the changing international and domestic environment in their exhibits. The authors also identify challenges that museum curators in these countries have often faced. In Japan, for example, when the newly opened peace museums in Osaka, Kawasaki, Saitama, and Kanagawa began to depict Japan's role in the Asia-Pacific War from a critical angle by including photographs of the Nanking Massacre, they drew heated criticism from conservative nationalist groups. This in turn eventually led some of the museum curators to revise their exhibitions, while other museums like the Peace Osaka remained firm about keeping their original exhibitions. This kind of tension was also evident at the National Air and Space Museum in the USA, where the curators’ initial plans to display war artifacts such as the Enola Gay (the airplane used to drop the atomic bomb on Hiroshima) had to be restructured to be more “American” due to pressure from veterans’ groups. What to display in exhibitions and how to display it are sensitive issues for museum curators, who are expected to serve racially and culturally diverse audiences, and this is one reason why the pedagogic role of the public museum has become increasingly challenging since the 1990s. The authors of this essay introduce the ways in which museum curators in these regions have developed their strategies to accommodate public demands in ways that contribute to a more inclusive environment.
Exhibiting World War II in Japan and the United States

Laura Hein and Akiko Takenaka

Like most people, museum professionals generally dislike being at the center of a firestorm of criticism. Yet in recent years, many Japanese and American museum curators have suffered this fate for their exhibits on World War II. As many scholars have noted, war remembrance is fraught with difficult issues, prominently including how to portray the motives, policies, and conduct of one’s own government during the war. In both countries, curators, particularly those at public institutions, faced a sudden increase in vitriolic political criticism in the mid-1990s over how to remember the wartime past.

The controversies over exhibiting war have highlighted the relationship between museums and their audiences and the professional responsibilities of curators. Controversy has erupted most often when the target audience was young people, both in Japan and America. In the United States, museum professionals have endured fierce battles over depictions of racial minorities, including foreigners, as well as the morality of the two atomic bombs dropped on Japan. Japanese curators have struggled over whether to explain Japan’s involvement in the Asia-Pacific War as a battle of self defense or of imperial ambition, and what to say about war crimes committed in other Asian countries. Debate in both countries often has assumed that the important constituencies are all domestic, even though some of these museums are significant international tourist destinations.

There was little conflict over museum portrayals of World War II in either country until the huge battle over the National Air and Space Museum’s 1995 exhibit on the Enola Gay (the airplane used to drop the atomic bomb on Hiroshima) and a series of conservative attacks on Japanese peace museums that began in 1996. The curators at the National Air and Space Museum in Washington D.C. had originally planned to locate the Enola Gay’s historic run in the context of the war that led up to that event and also depict the destruction of the city of Hiroshima and its inhabitants using artifacts borrowed from the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum. Their proposal also explored the implications of having entered the nuclear age. However, when they circulated the initial draft for comments, veterans’ groups publicly attacked these aspects of the planned exhibit as anti-American and unacceptable. In the end, the curators capitulated, and the new annex to the museum in Virginia now displays the Enola Gay without discussing the human suffering caused by its use or the ambiguous legacy of nuclear weaponry since 1945.

Postwar public opinion in Japan has been strongly pacifist since 1945, at least until the end of the Cold War and the death of the Showa emperor led to a major reassessment of the war years. Many older Japanese root their pacifism in personal memories of loss and suffering. In the
1990s, however, many Japanese began taking a more self-critical look at their wartime past. War remembrance soon grew more polarized over such issues as the stance of the wartime government toward its own citizens and the culpability of ordinary Japanese in mistreatment of Asians. Finally some Japanese today believe that postwar peace and prosperity was only possible because the wartime leadership was defeated and discredited, while others argue for a more positive legacy from the war years. In other words, in the 1990s in Japan the war was remobilized as an ideological site of nationalist remembrance, with one side asserting the right to an American-style militarized national identity and the other continuing to insist on a pacifist interpretation of war remembrance.

This fast changing international and domestic climate soon affected museum depictions of the war. Several cities and prefectures, including Osaka, Kawasaki, Saitama, and Kanagawa opened peace museums in the early 1990s that both critically depicted Japan’s role in the Asia-Pacific War and also preserved local Japanese memories of their own war losses, while Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum and Nagasaki Prefectural Peace Museum incorporated new material critical of Japan’s war. In 1996, Japanese conservative nationalist groups, alarmed by these changes, went on a counter-offensive. These groups, such as the Liberal View of History Study Group (Jiyushugi shikan kenkyukai), led by Fujioka Nobukatsu, had earlier attacked middle-school textbooks as “self-flagellating” and sought not only to end Japanese criticism of Japan’s wars in the 1930s and 1940s but also to change public opinion in favor of future rearmament. They attacked the Nagasaki museum curators’ plan to “include in their exhibit” photographs of “the Nanjing Massacre, Unit 731 and their experiments with biological weapons, and the comfort women.” In response, the Nagasaki museum removed some of the new exhibit.[1]

So how did museums respond to these attacks on their patriotism? Japanese and American museums have deployed many of the same strategies—some effective and some self-defeating—for meeting those challenges. Neither has found ideal ways of addressing these issues, although, as we explain, some directions seem to hold greater promise than others.

**War and Peace Museums**

Japan is home to over two hundred museums and exhibit halls that focus on the Asia-Pacific War, and the United States has well over one hundred. The stances of these museums vary considerably within each country, reflecting the highly politicized and diverse nature of war remembrance everywhere. In both nations, many museums unabashedly celebrate national military actions. In Japan, this is particularly true of those managed by the Self Defense Forces (SDF). The Army, Navy and Air Force divisions of the SDF own and operate 130 so-called Public Relations Facilities (koho shisetsu), usually inside their bases throughout Japan. Their exhibits celebrate Japan’s war in China, which started in 1931 and expanded into the Pacific in 1941. In fact, the ultimate goal of the SDF museums seems to be to create an uninterrupted celebratory history of the Japanese military from the establishment of the imperial armed forces in the late nineteenth century through today. The most popular SDF facilities include “Sail Tower” at the Sasebo base in Nagasaki and the newest: the PR Center in Asaka City, Saitama, that opened in 2002, which offers virtual experiences of war to its visitors in the forms of flight and firing simulators, a “battle dress uniform” corner where visitors can try on military attire, and helicopters, tanks and other vehicles on which visitors selected by lotteries are invited to
These museums are comparable to such institutions as “the world’s largest and oldest military aviation museum,” the United States Air Force Museum at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base in Ohio, the 1991 California State Military Museum in Sacramento, and the National Museum of the Pacific War in Fredericksburg Texas, established by the Admiral Nimitz Foundation. Founded by military units or veterans’ groups, these museums emphasize military strategy, the heroism of the nation’s commanders and soldiers, and the ingenuity and sheer force of its military technology.

Display at the Japan Army Self Defense Force, Asaka PR Center

“Battle Dress Uniform” corner Asaka

Other museums reject the legitimacy of war altogether and condemn World War II in particular. The oldest and best-attended of these, the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum, established in
1955 by Hiroshima City, spreads anti-nuclear messages internationally. The organizers of that museum were motivated by a desire to commemorate the victims of the atomic bomb, provide evidence of their suffering, and work towards the abolition of nuclear weapons. Impelled by the knowledge that the generations who experienced the war will soon be gone, a number of so-called “peace museums” opened in Japanese cities in the 1990s to record and preserve the experiences of local fire-bombing victims and to pass on the message that war is a disastrous way to solve disputes. These include the private Oka Masaharu Memorial Nagasaki Museum (Oka Masaharu Kinen Nagasaki Heiwa Shiryokan), notable for focusing primarily on Japan’s war crimes in Korea and China and the travails of forced laborers from those areas. While there is nothing dedicated to the cause of peace on the scale of the Hiroshima Museum in the United States, smaller institutions such as the Peace Museum in Chicago proclaim a similar message. This kind of museum has endured the most controversy in Japan.

The Hiroshima Bridge that was the target of *Enola Gay*, August 8, 1945

The Atomic Dome in the Hiroshima Peace Park
Peace Osaka

The publicly funded Japanese municipal museum with perhaps the most profoundly self-critical analysis of the Asia-Pacific War is the Osaka International Peace Center, or Peace Osaka, which opened in a corner of the Osaka Castle Park in September 1991. The museum evolved out of long-term efforts by local citizens’ groups and news media to remember the impact of the war on Osaka, efforts that included collecting, recording and exhibiting the air-raid experiences of local residents. [3]

Peace Osaka Exterior

The main objective of Peace Osaka was to educate contemporary local residents about the approximately fifty American air-raid attacks that the city suffered during the last years of the war. In order to explain why the city was attacked so many times, the planners agreed on an exhibit that portrayed Japan as not only the victim but also the aggressor: it showed that while the air-raids and the atomic bombs caused tremendous suffering, the war was the result of Japan’s assaults in Asia. The exhibit also explained that Osaka Castle Park, in the heart of the city, was used as a munitions factory during the war. While this information was absolutely accurate, mention of it acknowledged that Osaka had been a military as well as a civilian target, potentially justifying the American bombardment. In other words, the museum was established by local residents, many of whom had contributed to smaller exhibits since the 1970s, in order to institutionalize “collective remembrance,” built around testimony of local suffering due to the policies of both the U.S. and Japanese governments. These Osaka residents also wanted to incorporate remembrance of Asian suffering inflicted by the wartime Japanese into the museum’s narrative. The fundamental message was that war should always be avoided.
When the museum opened, the same message was reflected in curatorial decisions. The first wall panel sets the tone with its assertion that “Japanese people (nihon no kokumin) caused great hardship to Asian and Pacific people. Japanese also suffered….We must work for global peace.” The first of three sections, Exhibit Room A, shows the Osaka air raids and how they affected people’s daily lives through artifacts, replicas (including life-sized models of 1-ton bombs and incendiary bombs, which are the first objects to greet the visitor entering the room), film footage, photographs, and artwork. Exhibit Room B examines the fifteen year war as experienced by Japanese civilians and Asians who lived in the colonies and occupied territories. The exhibit discusses such Japanese actions as the bombing of Chongqing and the Nanjing Massacre, for which Japanese commanders were later convicted of war crimes at the Tokyo Tribunal, and also other atrocities for which they were not prosecuted, such as the activities of the biowarfare Unit 731. The final exhibit expands the message that peace everywhere is the paramount goal by addressing contemporary conflicts throughout the world, the ongoing danger of nuclear weapons, and environmental degradation. Business Manager Otsuki Kazuko explained that curators believed that no visitor could attain full understanding of the Osaka war experience without viewing both Exhibit Rooms A and B, emphasizing the extent to which Osaka was economically, politically, and socially part of the Japanese Empire during the war years. [4]
There was no outspoken opposition to this portrayal of the war until 1996, when conservative groups, after their success in Nagasaki, turned their attention to Peace Osaka. Just as with the Nagasaki case, conservative media outlets including the Sankei newspaper and journals Shokun and Shukan shincho published numerous articles penned by members of right-leaning groups with such innocuous names as the Japan Policy Institute (Nihon seisaku kenkyu sentaa) and the Japan Conference (Nippon kaigi), as well as by members of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), which had dominated postwar politics since its creation in 1955 but had recently been forced to accept a coalition government. On October 18, the LDP caucus of the Upper House published a “Research report on Japanese war museums (Zenkoku no senso hakubutsukan ni kansuru chosa hokokusho),” in which they criticized Peace Osaka as a “center for propaganda activities based on a politically biased ideology Stepping up the campaign, in March 1997, Osaka-based members of several of these neo-nationalist groups formed the Group to Correct the Biased Exhibits of War-Related Material (Senso shiryo no henko tenji o tadasu kai or Tadasu kai for short), whose exclusive focus seems to be attacking Peace Osaka. [5]
Although the planners of Peace Osaka had done an excellent job of addressing difficult issues honestly, involving knowledgeable experts in creating the exhibits, and mobilizing public opinion when creating the museum, for reasons explained below, the staff later failed to draw on any of these resources in response to the attacks. Their other major mistakes have been to avoid direct discussion of the issues at the heart of the conflict and to try to avoid controversies—especially criticism from the right—at any cost. For example, unlike other peace museums where volunteers discuss the exhibits with visitors, Peace Osaka has prohibited their own oral history narrators from talking about subjects other than their personal experiences. It has also withdrawn educational worksheets that it had created for school children after receiving criticism that they were “too biased.” The museum staff, buffeted between competing views has adopted a defensive posture to maintain the status quo as their main strategy for brokering among them.

**Strategies for Managing Controversy**

Other museums have handled competing pressures in different ways. One common, albeit unsatisfying, strategy is to limit war-related exhibits to uncontroversial aspects of any given subject, with only tiny hints of larger interpretive contexts and minimal reference to hot-button issues. This often means focusing on the experience of civilians and emphasizing daily life on the home front or front lines rather than battle strategy. One American example is the 1995 exhibit at the National Museum of American history on “World War II: Sharing Memories” which opened immediately after the Enola Gay fracas. Much of that exhibit focused on the home front, particularly the contributions women made to the war by planting vegetable gardens, buying government bonds, and working at jobs previously held by men.
Even the sections on the military focused on foot-soldiers rather than generals and made the point that soldiers’ chief concerns were often unconnected to national policy. The section on “The Things They Carried” showed the contents of individual soldiers’ pockets.[6] In another example of minimal analysis on a controversial topic, the National D-Day Museum, which opened in 2000 in New Orleans, limited its discussion of the use of the atomic bomb to a photo of the mushroom cloud and the bland observation that its use “changed the world forever[7]

In Japan, everyone can agree that life was very difficult for both civilians and soldiers during the war. There is far less agreement on four related issues, however. First, some Japanese wish to blame wartime suffering on the policies of the government, which started a bloody war it could not win with little concern for the well-being of its own national subjects, while others focus only on the enemy airplanes, warships, and guns that were the direct cause of most Japanese casualties. Secondly, Japanese differ on how to think about the responsibilities of ordinary citizens for the war. Third, some Japanese have long argued that all Japanese should recognize the suffering they caused others as well as themselves, while others find that topic inappropriate for history education directed at school children, because it interferes with the task of cultivating “a healthy nationalism.” Finally, some Japanese believe that postwar peace and prosperity was only possible because the wartime leadership was defeated and discredited, while others argue for a more positive legacy from the war years. The solution to bridging these differences is often an exhibit focused only on daily life of ordinary citizens with little reference to these difficult issues.

Two museums in Tokyo, both funded by the state for the consolation of groups that were adversely affected by the war, employ this tight focus: the Showakan in Kudanshita and the Peace Memorial Prayer and Exhibit Hall (Heiwa Kinen Tenji Shiryokan), located on the 31st floor of the Sumitomo Building in Shinjuku, Tokyo. The mandate to “console” survivors has sharply limited the scope of both museums. Initially named “Memorial Hall for the Children of the War Dead” (Senbotsusha Iji Kinenkan), and later “Peace Prayer Hall in Commemoration of the War Dead” (Senbotsusha Tsuito Heiwa Kinenkan), the Showakan was intended as a memorial to comfort senso iji, or children who lost their fathers during the war. The project was initiated in 1979 as the state’s indirect response to requests for monetary reparations from the then-grown children whose fathers had died as soldiers. These “war orphans” who pushed for
reparations are members of the politically powerful Japan Association of Bereaved Families (Nihon Izokukai), which propagates a very positive view of the war. Former Prime Minister Hashimoto Ryutaro, who also served as president of the Japan Association of Bereaved Families, fought for this project out of his belief that “the current prosperity of Japan was built upon the pain and suffering of its people during and immediately after the war,” endorsing the view that the war was beneficial and justified the willing and valued sacrifice of its soldiers. Yet the Showakan concentrates entirely on civilians.

This is because one of the museum’s initial regulations had stipulated that the exhibits show as little war as possible – a decision reached by the planning committee after contemplating the request by the Association of Bereaved Families that the exhibit avoid giving the slightest impression that the fathers of the senso iji had died unnecessary deaths or behaved less than honorably.[8]

The Shinjuku museum is based on a clashing premise: that war is never worth the suffering. Ironically, however, it sends the same message as does the Showakan because both institutions were designed to console survivors by publicizing the story of their suffering. The Shinjuku Peace Hall was established in 2000 to “console three groups of people by educating the general public about the difficulties they faced”: soldiers who are not eligible for pensions since they did not fulfill their service requirements (mostly because they were drafted near the end of the war); Japanese detained in Siberia after the war; and civilian repatriates from Manchuria and other parts of East Asia. The Exhibit Hall is meant to teach visitors about the hardships these groups experienced through its display of artifacts and visual aids. While the Fund was established in response to complaints by the three groups, each of whom felt they were not receiving the reparations they deserved, it is oriented more toward publicity than monetary reparation. The exhibit has a rather peculiar format, of three sections, each with precisely the same layout, organization, and numbers of items displayed; a result of the effort the organizers took to be absolutely fair.
Curator Furudate Yutaka has defined the most important goal of the Exhibit Hall as pleasing all visitors, by which he means all Japanese visitors. He believes that the displays must not have a narrative or present a particular viewpoint that might offend anyone. His strategy is to drastically limit contextual explanations of the chosen topics—including such questions as why so many Japanese civilians were living in Manchuria in 1945. Furudate believes that if he strips away all interpretive framing of the exhibit, which is likely to provoke controversy, and reduces it to only the materials directly relating to the daily lives of foot-soldiers, Siberian prisoners, and civilians trapped in China, the enormity of their suffering will convey the anti-war message he hopes to send. While some context is provided in the brief timeline presented at the entrance of the hall, the exhibits themselves focus on artifacts and personal narratives in order to convey the typical experience of each group. The one strong perspective that does emerge—precisely because it is not controversial—is that war causes great suffering. The result is that his museum in many ways closely resembles the Showakan exhibit, even though the Exhibit Hall’s planners and core constituencies are far less vocally supportive of the war than is the Association of Bereaved Families. Neither museum feels politically free to state its philosophical position boldly, and both concentrate on the same limited subjects, hoping that the public will draw likeminded conclusions or at least will refrain from attacking the museum staff down the road.

A second common strategy for avoiding controversy in both countries has been to present a pastiche of individual experiences rather than one overarching narrative. Many curators of history exhibits now evoke a variety of personal memories and images among museum goers without trying to integrate them completely—collecting memories rather than collectivizing them. This approach, which tries to extend the range of individual perspectives as much as
possible without losing a sense of the representativeness of each interviewee, was pioneered in literary form for World War II by Studs Terkel in The “Good War”, and his vision is now reproduced in many other artistic forms, museum exhibits among them. Such a collection of individually distinct memories is often a conscious political act that asserts the humanity and individuality of people who were persecuted as an undifferentiated group, as with the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum’s videotapes of the recollections of survivors.

This strategy has been particularly useful for acknowledging the sensitive history of race relations in the United States. Even curators who fervently wish to avoid any controversy can no longer choose one white soldier to stand in for everyone; the simple act of organizing an exhibit as a collection of varied stories immediately highlights the specific experiences of non-whites. Yet often exhibits go farther because many curators, like many other Americans, now see the struggle for racial equality as central to the American story. American museum exhibits on World War II now routinely discuss what the D-Day Museum calls the “lamentable American irony of World War II,” that the armed forces were racially segregated throughout the war. This is a huge development fueled by African-American insistence that their struggle for equal treatment not be forgotten. Similarly, new attitudes about race made possible long-term exhibits such as “A More Perfect Union” at the National Museum of American History which opened in 1987 and treated wartime internment of Japanese Americans as a violation of civil rights that diminished constitutional protections for all Americans, not just for those of Japanese descent.[10]

![Image of soldiers](image.jpg)

The Army censored this photo because it showed African American Soldiers on burial detail, as usual, and the Army was sensitive to criticism that this assignment was race-based.

Like their American counterparts, many Japanese museums, including the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum, Peace Osaka, the Okinawa Prefectural Museum, and the two Tokyo museums, provide written or videotaped personal testimony for visitors’ perusal. Some of these
museums, including Peace Osaka and Showakan, also encourage elderly volunteers to talk to visitors about their experiences within the walls of the museums. The Hiroshima Museum has space for temporary exhibits, which typically focus on individual life stories and testimony, including a 2004 show about school children mobilized for war work. Yet these museums generally present personal narratives as illustrations of a typical experience rather than using them to sketch out the full range of individual experiences. The Nagasaki Atomic Bomb Museum is a significant exception, in that it has incorporated into its video collection the oral narratives of non-Japanese survivors, including forced laborers from Korea.

Curators and Their Audiences

In the United States, the controversy over the Enola Gay exhibit spurred museum professionals to intensify a process already underway: reexamining their practices in order to more effectively interact with the public they served. Museum professionals inside and outside the Smithsonian learned from the mistakes made at the Air and Space Museum. As one curator put it, “The Enola Gay controversy moved the Smithsonian from being a 19th century organization to a 20th century one. It became more professional and sophisticated about meeting public and scholarly expectations.” Another Smithsonian curator concurred, “In the post Enola Gay world of history museums, curators must think increasingly carefully about the tone of exhibitions. Once we did not much worry about what the public brought with them to exhibits, but that is not the case anymore. The public is demanding to be considered a partner in the creating of meaning. This is good, but the trick is how to share authority with your public while not simply abandoning the job of the curator and the historian.”[11] The essential point is that museum professionals rethought their relationship with their audiences as one in which curators and visitors collaborate in creating the narratives they use to understand the world around them.

Many of the most articulate and thoughtful museum professionals have concluded that if museums wish to continue be places where people can create meaning for themselves, curators must give up the idea that there is a single correct interpretation of an event as major and complex as World War II. They now believe that museum exhibits should be open-ended and also should reflect a multiplicity of views. As Lonnie Bunch, now Director of the National Museum of African American History and Culture, who has written extensively on strategies for handling political controversy over exhibits, explained, “Museums must not look to educate visitors to a singular point of view. Rather the goal is to create an informed public.” Leslie Bedford argues that “the public has the right to participate” and the “days of an authoritative curatorial voice are gone.” Museums, in this view, “are in the business of creating environments that facilitate the construction of appropriate meanings that engage people in the stuff of science, art, and history.”[12]

Another way to describe this approach is that curators, after recognizing that people have a right to challenge curators’ claims to determine how to interpret the past, have reconceived the exhibition as something that develops out of interaction with the audience. As Lisa Roberts argues, “Interpretation is in part an act of negotiation—between the values and knowledges upheld by museums and those that are brought in by visitors.” Conceptually, the goal is to “share the job of interpretation, of creating meaning, with our visitors” while at the same time, challenging them to think in fresh ways about their past. But most of all, as Leslie Bedford
argues, it is “important to realize how profoundly people want to participate and leave their mark, and make sense of things in their own way.” Rather than giving up all control, sharing the job of interpretation with the public requires explaining far more explicitly than in the past how curators choose topics, themes, and objects for display.[12]

This attitude is less prevalent in Japan, in part because most peace museum staff members are not professional museologists, especially those at institutions that are funded and operated by cities and prefectures. Rather, most are career civil servants, who just happened to be appointed to the curatorial division of a peace museum as part of their regular rotation through local government. These people, whose other appointments typically include such jobs as issuing vehicle licenses and managing national health insurance, usually have little prior knowledge of operating a museum or curating exhibits, let alone professional post-graduate training. Civil servants’ appointments typically last three to five years, after which they move to completely different positions. Moreover, these local officials lack expertise in the history of the war, making it difficult for them to articulate an effective defense of their institutions.

One way that new attitudes about the relationship between museums and their audiences has changed exhibit practice in the United States is that American museums now typically provide materials for visitors to both add their own comments and read those of earlier visitors. This has worked well in exhibits related to WWII. Indeed, this was the most popular aspect of World War II: Sharing Memories. Space for public debate was also a major feature of a 2004 on-line exhibit at the Exploratorium in San Francisco, based on Yamahata Yosuke’s photographs of Nagasaki taken just after the atomic bombing there.

While Japanese museums also typically give visitors opportunities to provide feedback, usually in the form of questionnaires and/or notebooks located at the end of exhibits, most museums do little with the accumulated information. Nor do visitors have the opportunity to read the comments by other visitors. In the case of Peace Osaka, the staff is reluctant to incorporate comments for fear of generating controversy requiring changing the exhibits, and currently use the questionnaire sheets only to catch simple mistakes, such as incorrect dates, names, or English translations.

Hiroshima, by contrast, uses feedback from visitors to create a controlled dialog among curators. The museum staff gathers questionnaire sheets, notebooks, and exit interviews of visitors to the museum, and circulates the collected information internally. Employees also shadow selected visitors to understand their movement patterns and conversations as they go through the museum. Their findings are then used to modify the exhibits. These are standard methodologies used by museums all around the world and it is not surprising that Hiroshima, one of the few museums to have professionally trained staff, has most fully adopted them.[12]

Confronting Irreconcilable Differences

Yet, while essential, reshaping the museum-audience relationship into a more collaborative endeavor between museums and the public will never be enough because there is no undifferentiated “public” in either America or Japan. The challenge is not just to articulate multiple viewpoints or extend the right to participate in exhibit-making. The more difficult and
important task is developing strategies by which curators can negotiate between irreconcilable
groups within the public—something that many museum professionals have yet to fully
acknowledge. Moreover, whenever one group demands sole control over interpretation, it is
impossible to satisfy everyone. If, as increasing numbers of museum professionals believe, the
entire public has a right to participate in ascribing meaning, groups demanding monopoly control
cannot be accommodated without invalidating the entire project. This is a dilemma difficult to
resolve.

More precisely, in both nations, the ugliest fights have occurred when the audience in question
was young people. Rather than allowing them to reach their own conclusions about the war, both
American critics of the *Enola Gay* exhibit and Japanese ones of Peace Osaka demanded sole
interpretive authority in order to shape the attitudes of young people about the war. American
veterans who opposed the original Enola Gay exhibit were so insistent because they feared that
introducing questions about the moral or strategic value of using the atomic bombs and even
simply recognizing Japanese suffering would lead younger American viewers to think of the
Allies and Axis as morally equivalent combatants. The central issue was whether displaying
civilians in Hiroshima and Nagasaki in a sympathetic manner—people who indisputably had
been harmed by American state action—was dangerous for American children. Tom Crouch
recalls that one of the key moments in the negotiation process with the American Legion
occurred over precisely this point. A Vietnam-era vet told Crouch that he had given the first
script of the exhibit to his 13-year-old daughter to r


In Japan, too, most controversies about war memory focus on shaping the attitudes of young
people, as evidenced by the perennially thorny issue of textbook representations of the war.
Initially World War II museums were peripheral to this issue because so many of them were
originally conceived of as a religious memorial to the dead and/or a service to survivors. Indeed,
many of the war-related museums in Japan combine the function of a religious or secular
memorial (or both—the line is usually blurred) with the educational mission of a museum. This
combination is not unknown in the United States, where prominent examples include the United
States Holocaust Memorial Museum and the USS Arizona Memorial at Pearl Harbor, but is more
common in Japan.

Japan’s oldest war museum, the Yushukan Museum, is the most famous of these memorials and
the most fully situated within Shinto ritual. This museum is annexed to Yasukuni Shrine, the
controversial “war shrine” that memorializes all Japanese who died in uniform since the Meiji
Restoration, including war criminals from the Asia-Pacific War. Those war criminals, convicted
at the Tokyo Trials, were belatedly enshrined in 1978, in an earlier postwar attempt to control the
museum’s representation of the war. Like many other Shinto shrines, the museum exhibits the
belongings of the people memorialized there as a religious practice.[14]
Yushukan Atrium exhibits a Zero Fighter

Yet many of the state-sponsored and private peace museums also have an ambiguous memorial function, signified by the term “kinenkan” or “prayer hall” in their names. As indicated in their founding statements, these museums originated out of a project to “memorialize and honor (irei kensho)” the deceased. Peace Osaka, for example, is a “site to memorialize the war victims of Osaka” The museum fulfills that memorial function in part by collecting the names of all the local war dead in order to set their souls at rest, like the explicitly religious Yasukuni shrine. The Okinawa Prefectural Peace Memorial Museum similarly states that one of its goals is to “mourn for those who perished during the war,” while the Himeyuri Peace Memorial Museum was built because the survivors of the Himeyuri corps (female students mobilized as nurses during the Battle of Okinawa) believe that working toward peace is the best way to console the souls of their colleagues who lost their lives in 1945. This responsibility to the souls of the dead intensifies the problem created by defeat and helps explain why many museum officials and visitors feel uneasy about exploring the proposition that the dead gave—or were forced to give—their lives for a useless cause. The Okinawa Peace Museum addressed this issue in a unique and politically powerful way: by naming everyone who died in the Battle of Okinawa, regardless of nationality, and so separating the issue of commemorating the dead from nationalist celebration.
Interestingly, both the 1995 exhibit World War II: Sharing Memories, and the Showakan were originally designed primarily for the sake of elderly visitors who remembered the war. “The Things they Carried” section of “Sharing Memories,” in particular, was designed to encourage older American visitors to reflect on their own lives by presenting collages that conveyed individual differences within a common experience. The curators hoped that the objects themselves would lead veterans to recall their own lucky talismans and wartime gear. Similarly, the Showakan’s Curatorial Division manager, Watanabe Kazuhiko, explains that the initial objective of the hall was not peace education, but a display of everyday artifacts from the war and occupation years, in order to provide a “therapeutic effect” for the now-mature senso iji visitors by reminding them of benign aspects of their past. Most people agreed that older people already understand the context of the artifacts and assumed that they had the right to draw their own conclusions about the exhibit, a generosity not extended to young people.

Yet, as it turns out, an increasingly large share of Japanese history museum-goers are kids on school trips. For example, 65 percent of Peace Osaka’s visitors are elementary and junior high school children on field trips. Echoing the anxieties of their American counterparts, Japanese critics of peace museums fear young Japanese will accept what they think of as a “Tokyo Trials view of history,” one that indicted Japan’s war without recognizing either Japan’s legitimate complaints in the 1930s or acknowledging the fact that the United States, Britain, Germany, indeed most major combatants, engaged in such behavior as aerial bombardment of civilians, although only Japan and Germany were prosecuted for it after the war. They worry that young Japanese will believe that Japan still carries a moral taint, and that this belief will keep them from asserting Japan’s global interests in the future.
These exhibit designers are searching for a single unified narrative of the war that will convey to children an unambiguous message: that the war was a disaster for all involved, in the case of Peace Osaka, and that Japanese fought for a noble cause, in the cases of the Showakan and Yushukan. At the Air and Space Museum, the victorious critics forced the curators to acquiesce to the message that the use of the atomic bombs in 1945 was both righteous and necessary. In each example, the sharpest conflicts occurred when one group (sometimes inside the museum, sometimes outside) insisted that teaching patriotism required refusing to engage criticisms of one’s own government. In this view, the state has the right—sometimes framed as the obligation—to present its own actions in the best possible light to its own younger citizens. Frequently this means withholding information that has been common knowledge for decades. More fundamentally, in both nations these celebrants of state power deprive young people of the opportunity to engage exhibits through their own ethical and historical questions, leaving them ill-equipped to face a complex and morally ambiguous world.

Museum exhibits on World War II have another largely neglected audience—international visitors. Even though most debate assumes the primary audience is domestic, many museum visitors come from overseas, particularly in major tourist locations such as Honolulu and Hiroshima. Moreover, cities such as Washington and Osaka have substantial populations of permanent residents who hold foreign passports. Neither American nor Japanese museums have fully grappled with this fact, although Japanese museums try harder to accommodate foreign visitors than do American ones. In general, Japanese must accommodate international opinion on the topic of World War II far more than do Americans, reflecting greater American power in the world. This imbalance, of course, is one important source of rightwing Japanese anxiety about the attitudes of their younger compatriots.

One way museums accommodate foreigners is bilingual or multilingual signage and recorded material. Both the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum and the Yushukan have translated all their captions into English, and visitors can listen to the survivor testimony on computer monitors in the Hiroshima museum in five languages. Other museums, such as Peace Osaka and the Okinawa Peace Museum have translated key sections of their exhibits into English. The Okinawan museum also posts a smaller portion of their exhibit in Korean and Chinese.

The Hiroshima Museum demonstrates its concern for international visitors in other ways. For example, it offers no opinion on whether the United States committed a war crime by using the atomic bombs on civilians. The museum’s silence is almost certainly out of sensitivity to American attitudes, because there is no controversy among Japanese on this point. In contrast to the United States, few Japanese today view the use of the atomic bomb as an ambiguous moral issue. The near-universal opinion there is that the attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki were clearly war crimes under the definitions incorporated into law and applied retroactively in the postwar Nuremberg and Tokyo War Crimes Trials.

By contrast, American exhibits on World War II have not expanded their focus to encompass foreigners in the same way that they have included the perspectives of American women, African Americans, and Japanese Americans. Nor is it likely they could do so without sparking criticism, since this sharp distinction between citizens and foreigners is obvious in many other aspects of contemporary American life, including American history textbooks and American
responses to the 9/11 terrorist attacks

The *Enola Gay* exhibit controversy suggests that Americans are not yet willing to take Japanese opinions into consideration when designing exhibits about the war despite widespread American demands that Japanese modify their war memories. Although many Americans think the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum should include information about the attack on Pearl Harbor to help explain why the atomic bombs were used almost four years later, they see no need for the Arizona Memorial in Pearl Harbor to include mention of the later devastation at Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Yet, according to Yujin Yaguchi, many Japanese visitors would like just that, not to diminish the losses in Hawai’i, but “to complete their sense of the narrative framework of the war.” They do not visit Pearl Harbor out of nationalist pride. Rather, to them, the key message is that war is a tragedy for everyone, and recognition that neither side emerged unscathed best conveys that message[15]

Yet the well-established trends in museum practice described above can become equally powerful tools for expanding American imaginations beyond their compatriots. First, the focus on individual experience is easily extendable to include foreigners. In fact, the simple act of shifting one’s imaginative focus to individuals rather than nation-sized protagonists makes the nationality of those individuals seem far less important than their participation in common humanity. John Hersey pioneered this mental shift in his account of six individuals in his 1946 book, Hiroshima, which has had an enormous impact on American readers ever since. In a similar spirit, the National D-Day Museum in New Orleans, while unabashedly nationalist, collects reminiscences of the war from all participants—including Japanese, Filipino, and Chinese— not just Americans.
Moreover, recognition of the humanity of Japanese-Americans automatically calls attention to Japanese nationals, since immigrants were barred from becoming U.S. citizens because they were not white. Most of them retained Japanese citizenship not because of loyalty to Japan but because of racist discrimination. Moreover, some American citizens of Japanese descent were trapped in Japan during the war, many of them in Hiroshima. They were treated as enemies by both the American and Japanese governments. These issues all are reflected in the permanent exhibit and collection of personal memories of the war at the Japanese American National Museum in Los Angeles.

And, if racism is a problem when it occurs at home then surely it is a problem internationally. Building on the pioneering work of John W. Dower in War Without Mercy, many Americans now recognize that racism was a significant factor in both American and Japanese conduct during the war. The National D-Day Museum devotes a section of its permanent exhibit to “racial stereotyping, demonization, and warfare in the Pacific Theater of World War II,” acknowledging that racism played a large role in intensifying the violence on both sides of that conflict.
Further, simply documenting the troubling history of global genocide, war crimes, state terrorism, and systematic cruelty itself encourages comparative thinking, particularly about instruments of mass death such as the atomic bombs. The process of defining and explaining subjects necessarily involves abstraction and therefore a template for comparison. If bombing civilians at Guernica or Shanghai was wrong, how exactly were Nagasaki and Hiroshima different? One may conclude that they were, but simply going through the mental exercise establishes criteria for comparison and judgment. Evidence that many Americans have already taken such an imaginative journey for various aspects of state terrorism or war crimes is visible in debates such as over whether genocide is taking place in the Darfur region of the Sudan, including a discussion of “genocide emergency Darfur” on the U.S. Holocaust Museum’s website, or over the propriety of reparations to African Americans for slavery. The concept of “holocaust” has been borrowed to describe actions as diverse as the Nanjing Massacre of Chinese by Japanese soldiers in 1937, the AIDS crisis among gay men in the 1980s, and legal abortion in the United States since 1973, spurring much debate over principles of comparison. The International Coalition of Historic Site Museums of Conscience, a “world-wide network of organizations and individuals dedicated to teaching and learning how historic sites and museums can inspire social consciousness and action,” explicitly presents the subjects of children as victims of war, state terrorism, human trafficking and slavery, and racism, among others, as equivalent across national boundaries. This website links thirteen museums, including the Terezin Memorial in the Czech Republic, the Gulag Museum at Perm-6 in Russia, the District Six Museum in South Africa, the Japanese American National Museum in Los Angeles, and the Martin Luther King, Jr. National Historic Site in Atlanta. While each of these museums focuses on a specific history of persecution, by linking them as equivalent “sites of conscience,” the international coalition effectively uses the global technology of the world wide web to pose the question of comparability of experience across national borders.[16]

Finally, to return to the history of American use of the atomic bomb on Japanese civilians in 1945, many Americans have never been comfortable with the official A-bomb narrative because it never fit well within the story of a nation that fights only for the right reasons when it must—
or within a framework of proportionate retribution. Indeed, people come to look at the *Enola Gay* airplane at the National Air and Space Museum because they already see it as a complex symbol of many things. Robert R. Archibald, a former curator at the museum who spent several hours eavesdropping on visitors at the eviscerated 1995 exhibit, reports that an American woman struck up a conversation with a Japanese tourist, asking her, “How does it make you feel when you look at this?” Soon a dozen people had joined them. As Archibald explains, “The ensuing discussion was precisely the one that politicians and representatives of veterans’ organizations worked so furiously to prevent. There was no demeaning of the sacrifices made by veterans nor was there any question of their jubilation at the war’s end. Yet standing there in the shadows of the *Enola Gay*, there was profound acknowledgment that this airplane had ushered in the atomic age and the threat of unparalleled destruction.”[17]

Precisely because the *Enola Gay* never has been a simple symbol of the end of the war, it never can become only that. If, as museum professionals now emphasize, visitors brings their own meaning to exhibits, display of the *Enola Gay* will forever provide an invitation to debate the moral and strategic legitimacy of the use of the bomb in August 1945 even though the exhibit itself attempts to assert only one point of view. As museum professionals now understand, precisely because those concerns are invoked but not addressed by the presenters of the airplane, visitors will feel their absence and raise them over and over again.

**Notes**


[3] The Asahi newspaper started an annual exhibition in August 1975, as did the Yomiuri newspaper. In 1977, groups such as “The Group to Record War Experiences (Senso taiken o kiroku suru kai),” the Osaka branch of the “Japan China Friendship Association (Nitchu uko kyokai),” and the “Osaka History Educators’ Association (Osaka Rekishi Kyoikusha Kyogikai),” collaborated to mount the exhibition series “War and ourselves (Watashitachi to senso).”


[10] Accessed June 3, 2005. This exhibit is now only on line.


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manuscript on the history and politics of Yasukuni Shrine (tentatively titled Yasukuni: Nationalism, Violence, Memory).
“Nanjing’s Massacre Memorial: Renovating War Memory in Nanjing and Tokyo”
Jeff Kingston
August 22, 2008
http://www.japanfocus.org/-Jeff-Kingston/2859

The Nanjing Massacre (also called the Nanjing Atrocity or Incident) is a much-contested historical event that has generated heated debates among historians and the general public on questions ranging from the validity of the reported number of victims to criticism of some documents as having been fabricated. (For a discussion of these issues, see Joshua A. Fogel, “Response to Herbert P. Bix, ‘Remembering the Nanking Massacre,’” Japan Focus). The Nanjing Massacre has become a site of “competing narratives” between China and Japan, since it was mobilized to legitimize an “official” history of each nation, and this is the underlying issue at stake. The Nanjing Massacre Memorial’s (hereafter NMM) presentation of the victimization of Chinese people by Japanese militaries has been challenged by the Japanese government. By re-examining historical debates on the incident in the context of recent China-Japan relations, the author shows how the memory of war is constructed in the newly renovated NMM and how the memorial has further encouraged antagonistic attitudes between Japanese and Chinese citizens.

The current conflict between China and Japan over the NMM, however, is not entirely shaped by a state invoking patriotism from its own citizens. It has also been influenced by small yet powerful interest groups who mobilize media to generate blatant nationalist sentiments among the public, sometimes more vigorously than the government wishes. By looking at the museum’s display of artifacts, documents, and statistical data, this essay inquires into the way state patriotism and popular nationalism are entwined to produce monolithic views of history.
Nanjing’s Massacre Memorial: Renovating War Memory in Nanjing and Tokyo

Jeff Kingston

On a scorching July 7, 2008, officers of the Japanese Self-Defense Forces visited Nanjing for an artillery demonstration, a visit barely mentioned in the Chinese media even though it was the first time Japanese soldiers had returned to the scene of the crime since Japan surrendered in 1945. Unlike in recent years, there were no special commemoration rites on this anniversary of the 1937 Marco Polo Bridge incident. This reflected the Chinese leadership’s decision to turn down the heat on history in the wake of President Hu Jintao’s spring 2008 visit to Japan and the subsequent inking of an agreement on gas field development in disputed maritime territory near the contested Senkaku/Diaoyutai Islands. [1]

Indeed, since Prime Minister Koizumi left office in 2005, the Chinese government has made improvement of bilateral ties a priority. Prime Minister Wen Jiabao visited Japan in April 2007 and made a conciliatory speech lavishing praise on Japan’s post-WWII peaceful development, expressing gratitude for Japan’s generous assistance to China and acknowledging Japan’s apologies for wartime aggression. Televising this speech in China indicates that the state is trying to calm widespread anti-Japanese animosity among the people. Leaders in both nations reckon that too much is at stake to hold the bilateral state relationship hostage to the past, but the political context in which war memory is contested remains fluid. Whether the Chinese leadership can insulate contemporary relations from popular anger over the shared past remains uncertain and depends on factors beyond its control.

In the recent past, survivors gathered at Nanjing’s Massacre Memorial (NMM) to bear witness to the suffering of victims, tapping into and elaborating on the narrative of national humiliation that is central to national identity in modern China, a nation that keenly recalls its bainian guochi, “one hundred years of humiliation” at the hands of foreign powers. [2] Now, as China celebrates its debut as a major power with the staging of the Olympics and as it works to repair relations with Japan, the state seeks to shift the national humiliation narrative to the backburner. Many people, however, remain vigilant supporters of this narrative, constraining the leadership’s diplomatic and reconciliation initiatives. Outbursts in 2004 at the Asia Cup soccer tournament hosted by China and on the streets of Shanghai in 2005 suggest that anti-Japanese sentiments are a potent factor keeping the state’s reconciliation initiatives on a short leash and subject to public scrutiny and criticism. Patriotic education in China focusing on Japan’s wartime misdeeds and the CCP’s crucial role in defeating the Japanese ensures that younger Chinese are aroused over this history. The combination of this patriotic education and the actions and words of Japan’s conservative elite convince many Chinese that Japan remains unrepentant and evasive about its war responsibility, thus limiting the ability of the state to maneuver and compromise over history.

In light of these contemporary concerns, noncommemoration of the Marco Polo Bridge Incident in 2008 is striking given that the exchange of shots in 1937 served as a pretext for Tokyo to launch the large-scale invasion that ignited the Sino-Japanese War of 1937-45. Later that year, on December 13, 1937, Japanese troops entered Nanjing and unleashed a reign of terror, executing POWs and civilians, raping women by the thousands while burning and looting the city. The rampage extended over the next six weeks, leaving the once grand capital of China a shattered and smoldering husk. [3]
Facade of the new NMM

Bronzes in front of NMM depicting victims caught up in the Japanese maelstrom.
Nationalist narratives of war memory in Japan and China have recently been refurbished. Renovation of the Yūshūkan Museum, on the grounds of Yasukuni Shrine where Japan’s war dead are venerated, was completed at the end of 2006 and renovation of the NMM was completed at the end of 2007. The NMM draws attention to the horrors inflicted in ways that are bound to make Japanese visitors uncomfortable. The rapt crowds gathering around some of the more gruesome displays attest to the allure of gore, and may well tap into and inflame anti-Japanese sentiments. But whether this translates into a nationalism the state can mobilize in support of its agenda is hardly certain. While emphasizing the barbarous actions of the Japanese invaders, the central message the NMM seeks to convey—a plaque near the beginning of the exhibit spells this out—is that China must modernize and grow powerful and rich because it is backward countries that endure such indignities and horrors. To get rich is not only glorious, it is also the basis for security.
Never forget national humiliation. Group photos are a common sight at the NMM.

Based on my conversations with Chinese visitors, it would be mistaken to assume that everyone embraces this message uncritically in its entirety. The presence of the sign signifies the concern that visitors might ‘miss’ this message. Whether visitors take their cue from the state is hardly certain and overlooks ways in which the narrative of war memory is contested in China within the leadership and between the state and the people. The more than 10 million visitors to the NMM since it opened in 1985 attest to its popularity, but it would be a mistake to assume that all visitors come to learn about and reflect on history; there are groups who pass through the facility as casual tourists seeing the famous sights of Nanjing, stopping to pause for group photo sessions outdoors—photos inside are prohibited—sometimes longer than they spend absorbing the displays. It is also possible that many diaspora Chinese, attracted to the “forgotten holocaust” theme in Iris Chang’s book, The Rape of Nanking (1997), share the outrage she felt when she visited the NMM in ways that may overlap, but also differ from those of Chinese residents in China where the politics of identity resonate differently. A Taiwanese professor I met by chance confided that even though he bears no grudges, the NMM is a welcome recognition of the atrocities committed against ‘his’ people by a regime that had long overlooked this dark chapter in favor of trumpeting its own heroic victories against the Japanese.

Central to my argument is that monolithic views of war memory in China and Japan miss the ways that these narratives are contested not only among nations, but also among the citizens of each nation. As Phil Deans points out for China, “...an important distinction must be made between the state-sanctioned discourse on patriotism and the popular mass discourse on nationalism. ‘Patriotism’ (aiguozhuyi) here is an official position, approved of and supported by the CCP, whereas nationalism (minzuzhuyi) may go beyond the state’s approved and preferred boundaries of discourse.” [4]

Tokyo and Nanjing are only three hours distant by plane, but in terms of public history and war memory they are poles apart. Yet there are also forces working toward reconciliation over the
shared history of China and Japan. The 2006 establishment of a bilateral Sino-Japanese history panel to develop a mutually acceptable narrative, sixteen years after a similar Korea-Japan panel was launched, is a state-led gambit to shape public discourse over history. However, this panel seems unlikely to resolve fundamental disputes over what happened and why, or to muzzle discordant voices in either country.

Although the political leadership in both nations has decided that contemporary relations should not be held hostage to history, and are in fence-mending overdrive, several Chinese told me that there is little popular support in their country for such efforts. The emergence of history activists in China from the mid-1980s means that the state is no longer able to turn down the volume on history as effectively as it could in the past. Indeed, popular outbursts about historical controversies undermine and circumscribe state initiatives. As one Nanjing-based scholar explains, reconciliation must be based on recognition of what happened and there are too many troubling signs that such recognition is absent among too many Japanese. Yasukuni Shrine in Tokyo is ground zero for this selective amnesia and a compelling symbol of Japan’s incomplete repentance and inadequate contrition.

The narrative of Nanjing in 1937-38 on display at the renovated Yûshûkan Museum on the grounds of Yasukuni Shrine in Tokyo is a lesson in the politics of war memory. [5] There one can view a video of Japanese troops raising their arms while bellowing a collective “banzai” from atop Nanjing’s city wall that abruptly cuts to a scene of a soldier ladling out soup for the elderly and young while the narrator explains that the Japanese troops entered the city and restored peace and harmony. Throughout the exhibit, Japan’s invasion of China is portrayed as a campaign to quell Chinese terrorism, a post-9/11 narrative that demonstrates just how much the present impinges on the past. At the Yûshûkan, there is no mention of invasion, aggression, massacres or atrocities committed by Japanese troops in China, or, for that matter, of Japan’s defeat in the war. Indeed, Japanese suffering is the only suffering on display.
A family fleeing in hope of reaching safety.

Visitors confront the iconic 300,000—the number of massacre victims claimed by the Chinese government throughout the exhibits.

**Back to the Inferno**

Nanjing’s new Massacre Memorial unveiled at the end of 2007 is a sleek but somber tomb-like structure fronted by a moat and several bronze statues depicting the suffering endured by those caught up in the Japanese maelstrom. As one passes the turnstile—admission became free after local protesters complained the museum was profiting from others’ trauma—eyes are drawn
across an expanse of gravel to a long black marble wall flanked on the left by a towering cement cross decorated with the dates of the massacre and a large bell on the right. On the wall the iconic number 300,000 is emblazoned and incised in several languages. This is a recurrent image throughout the exhibit, one that insists on the number of victims. Inside there is a chamber where visitors can hear the amplified sound of a drop of water every twelve-seconds, said to be the frequency of death during Nanjing’s six-week ordeal. My Chinese companions thought that a bit hokey, but to me it provided a refreshingly subtle contrast to the screams of torture one hears visiting the old Seodaemun jail in Seoul once run by Korea’s colonial masters.

Visitors descend into the museum, a mood-transforming experience as the past is exhumed and the inferno relived. Down the walkway visitors first confront a replica of the city walls with the sounds of bombardment, air raid sirens wailing, anti-aircraft guns blazing and a video of Japan’s attacking bombers. From this sensory assault, one proceeds to a tranquil darkened room with a reflecting pond shimmering with electric “candles” over which projected images of victims’ faces float towards the visitor, beneath a ceiling glowing with the talismanic 300,000, as a bell solemnly tolls.

Projected faces of victims float across a pond shimmering with candles beneath a glowing reminder of the death tally.

A sign explains: “A human holocaust: An Exhibit of the Nanking Massacre Perpetrated by the Japanese Invaders.” Here, Iris Chang’s legacy resonates loudly as the NMM appropriates her central and controversial metaphor; the subtitle of her book is: “The Forgotten Holocaust”. The NMM ensures it is no longer forgotten. Interestingly, the holocaust theme was absent from the original NMM. The displays of photographs, newspaper articles, diary excerpts and artifacts trace the three hundred kilometer trail of sorrow and pillage from Shanghai to Nanjing, with a video of the aerial bombing projected overhead. What happened to the citizens of Nanjing, and to captured and surrendered Chinese soldiers, are richly featured, leaving visitors in no doubt about the scale of the destruction as the Imperial Armed Forces raped, looted and burned their
way from the Shanghai littoral all the way to Nanjing. What happened there then is understood here as a culmination and concentration of the malevolence witnessed all along the invasion route. Perhaps responding to the Yûshûkan’s post-9/11 narrative, and with far greater justification, the NMM portrays Japanese troops as terrorists.

The massacre remembered at the NMM

Bronze attesting to a common crime committed by the Japanese troops in Nanjing and elsewhere.
One unexpected display shows the Kuomintang (KMT) forces that defended and then abruptly abandoned the capital, leaving its remaining denizens to their fate. This display was not in the original NMM, only appearing from the mid-1990s. Nanjing was the Nationalist capital and the massacre was, therefore, a story in which the CCP has no role. War memory during the Mao era featured examples of heroic resistance by the CCP, so Nanjing was pushed to the margins of war memory discourse. Nanjing based scholars recall that a study on the Nanjing Massacre by local researchers was suppressed in the early 1970s. It is only with the emergence of a parallel victim’s narrative in the post-Mao era that Nanjing gained greater prominence in the narrative of war. [6]

It is striking that the newly included KMT display avoids recriminations or schadenfreude about the KMT’s sudden abandonment of the city to the mercy of Japan’s Imperial Armed Forces. The Taiwanese professor I met on a river cruise said he was pleasantly surprised by the impartial inclusion, pointing out that Chinese textbooks tended to dwell almost as much on the misdeeds of the KMT as those of the Japanese. [7] Indeed, visitors learn that the leader of the KMT forces defending Nanjing was General Tang Shengzhi, but the NMM glides over his escape to safety while leaving his troops in the lurch. It is an ignominious story, one featured in abridged form at the Yûshûkan, of top echelon officers abandoning their troops with no notice, leaving many trapped by the encircling Japanese troops. Some tried to flee, many surrendered only to be executed, while others shed their uniforms and tried to blend into the civilian population. Subsequently, Tang enjoyed a distinguished career in the PRC, rising to Governor of Hunan Province. Even in the Chinese translation of Iris Chang’s book, The Rape of Nanking (1997), his reputation is protected as authorities prevailed on the translator to cut a footnote in which she drew attention to his opportunism.
A mass grave site excavated on the site of the NMM.

Among the unremitting gamut of displays, there is also an excavation of a mass burial site with several skeletons piled one upon another, helter-skelter, grisly evidence that was unearthed from beneath the museum. In this gallery of horrors there is a Shooting, Sabering, Burning and Drowning corner that graphically portrays in photographs, confessions, testimony and soldiers’ diaries the means of massacre. We also learn that many of the tens of thousands of raped women were murdered as a standard procedure to eliminate witnesses. On display are some of the victims humiliated as they were forced to pose for pornographic photos by their rapists.

Problematically, the NMM displays include some photographs and representations that have been discredited, providing ammunition for Japanese revisionists who will no doubt seek to discredit the entire enterprise over a few mistaken attributions and misleading displays in the same manner they tried to bamboozle much of the Japanese public about Iris Chang’s book and divert attention away from the mountains of evidence that corroborate her main claims and those of the NMM.

This brings us to the numbers debate. By insisting on the iconic 300,000, the NMM risks playing into the hands of Japan’s revisionists who would like nothing better than a sterile numbers debate diverting attention away from how much is known about the sacking of Nanjing. Moreover, emphasizing the abacus of history diverts scrutiny away from more crucial issues such as why the troops were allowed to run amok for so long and why the cover-up, minimizing and denial persist to this day.
The massacre verdict at the International Military Tribunal for the Far East (Tokyo Trial).

The estimates of victims vary widely and depend a great deal on the time-frame and spatial limits. [9] The higher estimates include victims well beyond the city walls and extend before and beyond the six weeks from Japan’s initial incursion in Nanjing on December 13, 1937. The International Military Tribunal for the Far East sanctioned an estimate of 200,000 victims. In Japan, estimates of Nanjing victims range from zero by those associated with the illusion school who contend that the massacre is a fabrication, to 10,000-50,000 by those who are associated with what is known as the centrist school, a group of scholars who understand that there is no credibility in denial, but some possibility to cloud the debate by minimizing and mitigating the atrocities, to those who accept higher figures. Most Japanese specialists on the Nanjing Massacre accept figures in the range of 80,000 to 110,000 victims, depending on time and place.

The key point is that the atrocities perpetrated in Nanjing and the city environs were the savage standard operating procedure all along the invasion routes from the Shanghai littoral. The invading Japanese troops were forced to live off the land, in practice meaning the routine plundering of villages, rape and murder of women, and a devastating scorched earth policy that enveloped the entire region stretching three hundred km northwest of Shanghai to Nanjing.
This bronze of a beheaded man lies in the courtyard of the Massacre memorial.

Politicizing History

Yang Xiamen, a professor of International Relations at the Jiangsu College of Public Administration in Nanjing, and the translator of Iris Chang’s, *The Rape of Nanking* (1997), says, “Ironically, thanks to the revisionists (in Japan), the government spent lots of money and time to collect all of this evidence and build this museum to display it.” In his view, one shared by five other Chinese scholars I met, Japanese efforts to minimize, downplay or obfuscate the extent of wartime atrocities and Japan’s responsibility since the early 1980s provoked a Chinese official response and public anger about Japan’s lack of contrition. Yang also suggests that the globalization of human rights discourse in the 1990s sharpened bilateral debate over contentious history issues.

The controversy over history was triggered in 1982 by Japanese media reports concerning the role of the Japanese Ministry of Education in instructing high school textbook publishers to alter the word “invasion” to “advance” in describing Japan’s escalation of hostilities in China from July 1937. [10] Yang acknowledges that specialists in China now know that this incident was misreported, but at the time the textbook issue was part of what Chinese perceived as a larger trend of whitewashing history in Japan. This example shows the power of the media in generating ill will and distorting public perceptions and the difficulties in undoing the damage. Even if specialists in China do understand now that the textbook row was in some respects ‘invented’ by the Japanese press, this does not stop them from citing it as the key incident in the deterioration in relations between China and Japan in the early 1980s. [11] This is not to defend Japanese secondary school textbooks as models of accurate and uncompromising war memory any more than their Chinese or US counterparts, but rather to emphasize how public memory is prone to lingering distortions that resist correction or reconsideration. [12] Moreover, as Ienaga Saburo’s lawsuits stretching from 1965-1997 reveal, even if this particular instance of government interference was inaccurate, there were systematic attempts by the Japanese
government and powerful interest groups to downplay Japanese atrocities against a larger backdrop of a conservative-dominated discourse seeking to promote a vindicating and valorizing narrative of war memory that remains offensive to the people and government of China (and many Japanese). [13]

Did the Chinese government whip up a unifying anti-Japanese nationalism in the early 1980s to shore up Deng Xiaoping’s legitimacy and deflect attention away from his adoption of controversial market-oriented reforms? [14] At a luncheon roundtable on July 7, 2008, Chinese specialists on the massacre all rejected this view, arguing that the government was not so savvy or prescient to instrumentalize history in this manner. In their view, Japanese whitewashing of the nation’s shared history forced the Chinese government to abandon its emphasis on building a future oriented relationship as evident in Beijing’s agreement, following normalization of relations in 1972, to renounce compensation. They blame attempts by Japanese revisionists to beautify war memory and shirk responsibility for igniting the ongoing bilateral battle over history that is impeding reconciliation.

Although unmentioned in our discussion, the textbook imbroglio did not occur in a vacuum. The ongoing dispute over the Senkaku/Diaoyutai islands flared up in 1978 when members of the Japan Youth Association erected a lighthouse on the disputed territory and conservatives eager to assert a heroic and noble narrative were prominently weighing in on public discourse concerning war memory in Japan. This territorial dispute heated up following the reversion of Okinawa to Japanese sovereignty in 1972 involving a denial of China’s claims, an assertion that assumed greater importance due to the provisions of the 1968 Law of the Sea. The secret enshrinement of Class “A” war criminals in 1978 at Yasukuni Shrine, first reported in Japan in April 1979 and in China in August 1980, also poisoned the atmosphere and undermined goodwill gestures.

Despite the consensus among the Nanjing-based scholars I met, others argue that Deng realized that the success of his modernization agenda in transforming China from a backward, impoverished nation depended on large-scale infrastructure projects, technology transfer and foreign investment. Given Deng’s pragmatic inclinations, invoking history to help China get what it needed from Japan made sense, although this does not mean raising concerns about the shared past is merely instrumental as Japan’s revisionists contend. Clearly, China does have legitimate grievances over the killing of at least 10 million Chinese in addition to widespread devastation that Japan has failed to assuage by remaining obdurate over war responsibility. [15] Using the past to serve the present meant abandoning what Reilly terms “China’s benevolent amnesia towards Japan” and invoking wartime aggression to help pressure Japan to pay the bills by vastly expanding its bilateral economic assistance programs.

Reilly argues that the victimization narrative that emerged in the 1980s bore a strong resemblance to earlier propaganda campaigns. The Chinese were mobilized by the promotion of patriotic education from the early 1980s, reinforced by government-sponsored films and history museums such as that in Nanjing. However, unlike previous propaganda campaigns, the victimization narrative resonated powerfully among the Chinese people for the very good reason that they had endured tremendous suffering, not only under the Japanese, and suddenly found political space and resources to voice their pain. Reilly describes the state-sanctioned groundswell of popular activism in China in the 1980s on history issues that tapped into deeply ingrained memories of wartime suffering and widespread distrust of Japan. [16] Thus, just as the Chinese were finding a collective identity in their shared wartime experiences, “the Japanese”
(the Japanese image in China tends towards the monolithic with scant recognition of the deep differences that characterize war memory there) appeared to be backtracking on history, minimizing what happened, while failing to accept responsibility and express atonement.

In this increasingly tense atmosphere, even small gestures, omissions or slight changes in expression carried enormous implications. Any signs of downplaying the suffering inflicted and Japan’s responsibility therefore only served to reinforce popular images of ‘perfidious’ Japanese. The textbook and territorial controversies thus came at a critical juncture in China’s evolving war memory while Prime Minister Nakasone Yasuhiro’s official visit to Yasukuni on August 15, 1985, the first official visit on this politically symbolic date since the 1978 enshrinement of Class “A “ war criminals, rubbed salt in the wounds. [17]

The Japanese government may be eager to declare an end to the postwar era and assert an identity free from the baggage of the shared past— indeed this was Prime Minister Koizumi’s aspiration in trying to make Yasukuni visits ‘normal’— but its neighbors show no signs of letting Japan off the hook of history any time soon.

This is precisely because history issues are far too useful at home, because they box Japan diplomatically, and also because the Japanese state has waffled about its war responsibility. The enormously popular NMM keeps the past alive and ensures that it is examined and that Japan’s responsibility for crimes against humanity is remembered.

Currently, as the Chinese state tries to insulate contemporary relations from popular anger over history, it finds that it is not so easy to get the genie back in the bottle. Patriotic education and state sanctioned history activism since the 1980s politicized history at the grassroots, ensuring that the younger generations with no first hand experience of the invasion are keenly aware and aroused about their nation’s shared history with Japan. With the spread of the Internet they have a powerful tool to contest history issues and now have a social basis in China’s growing middle-class. [18]

It is important to emphasize that insisting on Japan assuming responsibility for committing atrocities is not merely playing the history card. China, after all, suffered enormously from Japanese depredations and reactions at the elite and mass level are more than an instrumental tactic in support of a wider foreign policy agenda. Japanese revisionists harp on how China’s leadership instrumentalizes war atrocities such as the Nanjing massacre, but this glosses over the very real suffering inflicted and serves to reinforce Japan’s negative image as a country unable to demonstrate remorse and contrition over horrific acts. The Japanese have handed the Chinese the hammer of history by failing to fully acknowledge and assume responsibility for what happened so it is not surprising that the Chinese use it.
Lessons of History

The NMM is much more than a gallery of horrors and does try to suggest lessons to be learned, but it is not certain that chief among those lessons is patriotic duty. Although Buruma argues that the memorial at the time he visited in 1990 before the recent renovations seemed designed to evoke Chinese patriotism, this seems an inadequate interpretation now, two renovations later, because it fails to distinguish between state patriotism and popular nationalism. [19] The renovated and expanded NMM is a splashy, spacious and well-maintained multi-media affair bearing little resemblance to the ‘sad, ill-maintained’ site he recalls. [20] Similarly, the Yûshûkan Museum, which used to look like a neglected antique warehouse when I first visited in the late 1980s, now is a state of the art museum. None of the Chinese who accompanied me on a tour or others I questioned agreed with Buruma’s assessment. Visitors feel sadness and anger, and seem more likely to emerge from the museum convinced that the Japanese are truly barbaric rather than embrace a patriotism beholden to state directives.

In contrast with the Yasukuni Shrine, which has an ambiguous relationship with the state as a private religious institution that serves as a national memorial for the war dead, the NMM is unambiguously linked with the state and reflects the government’s agenda. It was built in the early 1980s at a time when relations with Japan were frayed over history issues. Then (and now) Chinese believe that Japan is in denial and incompletely contrite about the consequences of its aggression in China. The NMM fits with the state-sanctioned shift in war memory in the 1980s towards emphasizing Chinese victimization, a counter to the noble sacrifice narrative espoused at Yasukuni Shrine.

The most recent NMM renovation took place in 2006-2007, in the wake of Koizumi’s controversial tenure (2001-2005) when bi-lateral relations sank to a postwar nadir due to his six visits to Yasukuni Shrine. The renovation serves as a riposte to the Yûshûkan’s Nanking narrative of denial, official adoption of the hinomaru flag and kimigayo anthem, the 2006
revision of the Fundamental Law on Education emphasizing patriotic education, public discourse about amending Article 9 of the Constitution and the retreat of Japanese textbooks in 2005 from the more forthright representations of the shared past that began to emerge in the 1990s. For example, in 1997 all junior high school textbooks gave high estimates for the number of Nanjing victims while those published in 2005 mostly avoid citing the number of victims and the “massacre” is once again referred to as an ‘incident’. [21]

This sign at the NMM draws attention to the role of revisionists, here referred to as "certain forces," in stirring controversy by distorting history.

The renovated NMM does attempt to challenge monolithic images of Japan by drawing attention to the role of revisionists in provoking contemporary disputes over history, but given the surrounding exhibits and prevailing stereotypes that is expecting a lot from one panel. Perhaps small gestures are as far as the state risks going in modestly toning down the anti-Japanese tenor of the NMM. Chinese government officials, party leaders and intellectuals need to look over their shoulders lest they spark public ire by being seen to be too soft on Japan; the Internet and the socio-political consequences of modernization endow history activists with the means, autonomy and space to pressure the state. Displays about Japanese politicians visiting Yasukuni Shrine and Japanese textbook content update negative images of Japan and ensure that the NMM is not just about the past. Requests in early 2008 by Japanese revisionists for changes in some of the NMM exhibits were studiously ignored. In contrast, the Yûshûkan revised a display blaming
FDR for provoking war with Japan to revive the US economy in response to criticisms by George Will, a conservative columnist in the US. Subsequently, and quietly, revisions were also made sometime in 2007 to a panel describing Nanjing, removing an offensive reference to the Japanese troops restoring order in December, 1937 which used to conclude: “Inside the city, residents were once again able to live their lives in peace.” [22] It is intriguing that there was significant media attention to the changes in the FDR panel while the revisions to the Nanjing panel were not publicized and remain overlooked.

As Reilly points out, the state has lost control of popular discourse over history and the emergence of history activists threatens the state monopoly over shaping and expressing war memory. These activists do not determine policy, but they do constrain public debate about war memory and Japan. As Deans argues, “While the Chinese leadership appears to want to pursue a pragmatic policy towards Japan, the mobilization of the historical legacy in the context of popular Chinese nationalism constantly limits the ability of the Chinese leadership to develop and maintain a rational relationship.” [23] Thus, in assessing the NMM it is crucial to go beyond the monolithic message the state wants to convey and explore how individuals understand the memory and meaning on display.

Cindy Zhang, a twenty-two year old Chinese undergraduate studying in Nanjing, confided that the NMM had not aroused her patriotism at all. In the following passages excerpted from an email, she shares her reactions following her first visit while accompanying me on July 7, 2008:

What disappointed me most about the memorial was that I had expected the exhibition to be condensed and focused, but, as it turned out, things were just the opposite. Although much disappointed, I had to give the memorial the right to be huger than necessary – were it not so huge, it would have been “politically incorrect” in some sense.

Here, Cindy challenges the Nanjing taboo, suggesting that the NMM is influenced by political correctness and is a bit more than it needs to be. Although she does not elaborate on whether this is in terms of state preferences or popular sentiments, it is clear that she is aware of the wider context in which history is being depicted, contested and possibly manipulated. She adds,

After the visit, I often wondered why I was not the least touched or moved by the exhibition. One reason is that I was already familiar with that history so that nothing on display made me feel aghast or strike me as particularly overwhelming. I have watched the movie Schindler’s List for over a dozen times; every time I watched it, I cried my soul out. But I never shed a tear for books or movies related to the Nanjing Massacre. I have been intentionally keeping myself at an emotional distance from the Massacre not only to prevent myself from being crushed by the cruel history but also to keep my mind cool and unaffected so that I can analyze the history in a rational way rather than let my perception be overwhelmed with and misled by too much emotions.

Here, Cindy refers to the contemporary context of war memory and her desire to remain aloof from the fray, resisting the NMM’s grisly but powerful appeal to emotions.

In closing she writes:

As for the relationship between the Chinese and the Japanese, I would like to share some of my thoughts. To begin with, neither side should take the Massacre too personally. When people take things personally, their emotions gain over their reason, giving rise to
unjustified hatred, which often leads to calamity. In about thirty years, all people who once lived to have any kind of personal experience about the Massacre will be dead. The future relationship between the Chinese and the Japanese in regard to the Massacre solely depends on how people who have no personal experience of this matter view and interpret it. I suggest that both the Chinese and the Japanese accept the Massacre as an established historical fact, try to analyze it in an objective manner and draw up schemes to prevent similar calamities from happening. I believe that the national characteristics of the Chinese and those of the Japanese played crucial roles in the Massacre. In the light of this, a thorough and in-depth analysis seems particularly important.

I would also suggest that China, including its government and its people, stop assuming the role of a once scarred victim and stop [emphasizing] its old tragedy too frequently. If one indulges in the past, no matter good or bad it is, one loses hold of the present; the past is to be learned and remembered, not to be a burden that hinders the march into the future. As for the Japanese, their national characteristics contain some particularly dangerous elements that are likely to result in calamities like the Massacre. Hopefully, they can face those elements with a positive attitude.”

Cindy’s detached perspective on history may not be representative, but suggests that monolithic images of the Chinese state manipulating history and stoking patriotism are misleading, overlooking the reality of individuals assessing history on their own terms. Her point about the need for China to turn away from the wailing wall of the past is reassuringly subversive even if again it may not be representative.

Towards the end of a numbing array of multi-media displays, three hours in a fast-paced tour, there is a room with a battery of eighteen video monitors that show films and documentaries about the massacre, although not the recent Japanese film that denies it happened. Alongside, there is a twenty-by-twenty meter archival wall with folders containing what information is known about the documented deaths in Nanjing 1937-38. It is a wall that insists that there is much to answer for and overwhelming evidence that Japanese forces perpetrated extensive crimes against humanity, much of it drawing on the testimony and eyewitness reports of Japanese soldiers and journalists.

It is an imposing edifice that Japanese revisionists have tried to undermine by pointing to small flaws, mistaken attributions and exaggerations. They try to discredit the victims’ “forest” of evidence by grasping at branches on the “trees”. [24] Sadly, the discourse over Nanking has bogged down in endless debates over exactly how many civilians, combatants and POWs were killed by Japanese soldiers. [25]

What is clear is that an inordinate number of civilians and unarmed POWs were executed in cold blood, not in the heat of battle as apologists assert. Moreover, Japanese officers and officials at the time systematically sought to cover up the very crimes that perpetrators, surviving victims, officials and observers have all acknowledged. The 100-man beheading contest attributed to two Japanese officers heading for Nanjing, and featured at the NMM, was a media invention aimed at stirring enthusiasm for the war and selling more newspapers to a hero-hungry public. [26] However, the inclusion of this concocted tale serves a purpose because it highlights what the media thought the Japanese public craved, implicating them in the horrors that ensued.
A copy of a Japanese newspaper article about the 100-man killing contest is on display

The final image as one emerges from the NMM is a towering obelisk inscribed with PEACE (in English and Chinese) that flickers in a reflecting pool. It is a jarring juxtaposition to the violence and mayhem featured inside, an unconvincing accessory that fails to persuade. None of the Chinese who accompanied me on this tour felt the message either masked or matched the museum’s intentions and impact. One young Chinese man bluntly confided that the museum left him angry, reinforcing his already hostile views towards the Japanese. He said, “Yes we like Japanese technology, gadgets and machines, but not the people. At that time they always referred to us Chinese as pigs, but here we see who was really an animal and inhumane.”
The lessons of history at the NMM.

Monolithic Myths, Fragile Relations

In China and Japan, public discourse reproduces and reinforces monolithic images of the other that are broadly negative. The central problem for Japanese revisionists is the impossibility of reconciling their narrative of noble sacrifice with the gruesome evidence of cavalier slaughter and rape as presented at the NMM. Their strategy depends on instigating and instrumentalizing Chinese grievances over the shared past. Revisionist emphasis on denying, minimizing, mitigating and otherwise shifting responsibility for the atrocities committed by Japan’s Imperial Armed Forces 1931-45 may not gain much popular support in Japan, but does cast a long
shadow over relations with China and ignites anti-Japanese sentiments. Provoking the Chinese over history naturally produces anti-Japanese outbursts in China that amplify anti-Chinese nationalism among Japanese in ways that play into the hands of Japan’s revisionists. In short, inflaming the Chinese pays handsome dividends for revisionists, and so they act accordingly.

Thus, while leaders in both countries seek to build mutually beneficial, forward-looking relations, their efforts remain fragile and vulnerable. In Japan, a country with numerous cases of home-grown food-safety problems that affect millions of consumers, tainted frozen gyoza (dumplings) imported from China that affected ten Japanese consumers in the winter of 2008 sparked an anti-Chinese, media-induced hysteria of epic proportions. Positive attitudes toward China imploded in the wake of the gyoza hysteria and the media was still making it an issue during the G8 Summit in July, 2008. The LDP was roundly thrashed in the national press for not immediately disclosing all it knew about ‘gyoza-gate’ in the run-up to the Olympics, essentially found guilty of placating the Chinese at the expense of Japanese consumers. Hu Jintao and Fukuda Yasuo might have grander visions for bilateral relations, but can not ignore or escape such populist brushfires.

This latent grassroots hostility can easily erupt precisely because the media in both countries sensationalizes the present and the past. In 2003, 300 Japanese businessmen were caught up in a raid involving 400 prostitutes at a hotel in Guangdong for holding an alleged ‘orgy’ on September 18, the anniversary of the Mukden Incident of 1931. While not condoning the executives’ conduct, enforcement of laws against prostitution in Guangdong appear to be quite lax in general while the notion that these inebriated salarymen were trying to make a political statement is ludicrous. The Chinese media, however, whipped up popular anger among an incensed population who were led to believe that the timing of the ‘orgy’ was a calculated insult.

Where does the NMM fit into this public discourse on history? Of course there was considerable media attention at the unveiling of the renovated NMM in December 2007 commemorating the 70th anniversary of the massacre, but films, television dramas, textbooks and the Internet reach wider audiences. The NMM is more like the repository of “evidence” that buttresses other representations of the Nanjing Massacre. It is ground-zero of Japanese evil, a site that reinforces the perception that Japanese conduct in Nanjing was emblematic of its fifteen-year war in China, a locus of concentrated Japanese malevolence that exists to honor local suffering and counter Japanese denial. [27] The NMM draws heavily on testimony and diaries of Japanese soldiers, some of whom were shocked by what they experienced. It also includes an exhibit on Azuma Shiro, a veteran of the Nanjing massacre who wrote forthrightly about what he observed and did back in December 1937-January 1938. The court case he lost over whether some points he made in his account were plausible is seen in China to be typical of Japanese attempts to cavil rather than assume an encompassing responsibility with dignity and remorse. Thus, ambivalence in Japan about the gruesome past has burdened Japanese with the appearance of shirking, explaining why Chinese imagine that denial is more widespread than it really is.

Conclusions

Visitors to the NMM, and the Chinese in general, never learn that a majority of Japanese people do not embrace the valorizing and exonerating view of the war cherished and endlessly promoted by Japan’s revisionist conservative elite. [28] As Seraphim elucidates, the memory battles in
Japan are hotly contested, exposing fundamental political cleavages that are central to debates over the past and ensuring that Japan’s ambivalence towards its shared history with Asia draws considerable criticism based on invidious comparisons with Germany.[29]

She correctly asserts that the notion of collective amnesia in Japan regarding war responsibility is, media representations to the contrary, grossly inaccurate, overlooking the vigorous contestations and wide divergence of opinions concerning war memory that abound in post-WWII Japan. Alas, those who espouse narratives of denial and minimization are prominent in the political mainstream and in some influential media in Japan and can not be dismissed as “unsavory crackpots” to borrow Buruma’s felicitous phrase.

Chinese, however, uncritically accept Iris Chang’s monochromatic view of war memory in Japan, endlessly reinforced in the Chinese mass media, suggesting that a majority of the Japanese are in denial about the wretched past and eager to embrace a vindicating narrative. In China there is little recognition of the vibrant scholarship on Nanjing by Japanese researchers who have toiled for decades to present an accurate view of what happened and why. [30] There is also little awareness of the interest groups in Japan that have contested narratives of the wartime past up until the present. There is far greater awareness about conservative politicians’ public denials of the massacre and their extensive involvement in study groups aimed at rebutting the facts of the massacre. The outpouring of Japanese books, films and manga raising doubts about the massacre leads many Chinese to question the sincerity of the joint declaration of November 1998 in which the Japanese government reiterated that, “Japan is keenly aware of its responsibility for the massive suffering and loss inflicted on the people of China resulting from its invasion of China at one time in the past, and expresses its deep regret.”

The revisionists may be a megaphone minority in Japan, but they cast a disproportionately long shadow in China precisely because they are entrenched at the center of state power. The political influence of the revisionists is undeniable even if their views of history are not widely embraced by the Japanese public. Public opinion polls show that a majority of Japanese people reject reactionaries’ insistence on denying and minimizing the atrocities perpetrated by the Imperial Armed Forces, and most think the government should do more to acknowledge war responsibility and atone for the excesses. The textbook written by the Dr. Feelgoods of Japanese history that has garnered so much media attention because it downplays the “bad bits” has been adopted by less than 1% of school boards around the country. Former Prime Minister Abe Shinzo’s egregious attempts to reinterpret the history of comfort women and the battle for Okinawa are part of the reason he is remembered as one of Japan’s most hapless leaders. PM Koizumi’s visits to Yasukuni were criticized by a who’s who of the conservative elite, including five former prime ministers and the conservative Yomiuri Shimbun. It is understandable why the Chinese government refrained from summit meetings between leaders and limited other high level government exchanges during Koizumi’s tenure, but it is also important to recognize that official actions and popular sentiments are often discordant in both countries, especially regarding issues of war memory and responsibility.

Just as Japanese have much to discover about the tensions in China between the state and grassroots history activists over war memory, the Chinese people can learn much from understanding the realities of Japanese public discourse over war memory. Chinese may be surprised to learn that they can find common ground with many Japanese over war responsibility. The media tends to sensationalize this discourse and generates misperceptions that
fan hostility. As a teacher I have noticed how much better informed Japanese students are now than they used to be twenty years ago about this shared past. Thus only one of the more than one hundred research papers on Nanjing submitted in my classes in recent years expressed anything but condemnation and contrition. The only sign of contemporary Japanese contrition at the Massacre Memorial, however, are mute, decorative garlands of origami cranes, looking rather forlorn, piled as they are on a shelf visitors hurry past on their way to the exit. Though it may be scant consolation to Chinese that few Japanese seek a national identity rooted in an airbrushed history, knowing this might be a useful step towards reconciliation.

Over 200 footprints of survivors of the massacre are cast in bronze at the NMM.

The NMM serves as a barometer of the evolving discourse over history. Since opening in 1985 there have been at least three significant renovations, the last in 2006-2007 vastly expanding and modernizing the space. Certainly the curator has an eye to drawing visitors and the new multi-media exhibits and tranquil spaces for contemplation have considerable visual and sensory appeal. The NMM grew into a political space created by the shift towards a victims’ narrative in the 1980s and the timing of its construction ties it with the 1982 textbook row. According to some observers, it is also linked with Deng’s desire to raise the ante over history as a means of opening the spigots of quasi-reparations from Japan in the form of economic and technological assistance. In the mid-1990s the NMM brought the KMT into the story line, perhaps reflecting shifting attitudes towards Taiwan and growing confidence. The holocaust theme now on display
owes much to Iris Chang’s legacy; German holocaust memorials were not part of the original design or inspiration in the early 1980s. The recent renovation also appears to be a riposte to the renovation of the Yûshûkan Museum the previous year in which the revisionist narrative vindicating and valorizing Japan’s ‘noble quest’ prevails. Indeed, the NMM appropriates the post-9/11 theme of the Yûshûkan that justifies Japan’s actions in China in terms of quelling terrorist threats, by referring to the Japanese invaders as terrorists. In addition, the NMM renovation took place at a time when bilateral relations were in a deep freeze caused by PM Koizumi’s six provocative visits to Yasukuni Shrine between 2001 and 2005. Since Koizumi’s departure, leaders in both countries have emphasized thawing relations and nurturing the habits and inclinations of cooperation, consultation and expanded exchanges, but there is no denying a hostile environment. Japan’s official adoption of the hinomaru flag and kimigayo anthem, legislation compelling patriotic education and efforts to revise the Peace Constitution are provocations that link the current state with the wartime regime. The impact on Chinese perceptions, both official and popular, should not be underestimated and help explain why the NMM remains relevant and why the renovations are linked to an anticipated bid for World Heritage status. Most of the survivors will be gone by the 80th anniversary in 2017, but the NMM will remain as a poignant reminder of the nation’s ordeal and the perils of nationalism, then and now.

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Notes

[1] It is striking that on July 7, 2004, Denton writes, “... special ceremonies were held, including personal oral narrations by living witnesses.” This of course occurred during Prime Minister Koizumi Junichiro’s term in office (2001-2005) when he heated up the bilateral history war and froze diplomatic exchanges by repeatedly visiting Yasukuni Shrine, six times in total. Four years and two Japanese prime ministers later, the frenzied Chinese response to Koizumi’s provocations has abated, and key dates in the two nations’ shared history are no longer natural opportunities to poke the wounds of history and engage in recrimination. See Kirk Denton, “Heroic Resistance and Victims of Atrocity: Negotiating the Memory of Japanese Imperialism in Chinese Museums”, Japan Focus, Oct. 17, 2007.


[3] The documentary by Bill Guttentag and Dan Sturman, Nanking, (Thinkfilm, 2007) evokes the horrors and devastation of the Japanese invasion and ensuing onslaught. This documentary focuses on the role of western residents of Nanjing in establishing an International Safety Zone for noncombatants with readings from their letters and diaries spliced with archival footage and interviews with survivors.


Denton, op.cit., elucidates the evolution of war memory in China from heroic resistance to victims of atrocity. In Nanjing, for obvious reasons, it could only be about victimization. In interviews with six Chinese scholars specializing in the Nanjing massacres, there was no support for this analysis of evolving war memory. They see no clear dichotomy between narratives of heroic resistance and victimization in public history as described by Denton, arguing instead that both perspectives are inextricably intertwined, along the lines that Gries argues.


The old museum also displayed excavated skeletons, but they had been laid out to make them more easily recognizable. The new excavations left the skeletons undisturbed to better convey the chaos of the mass burials and make the evidence more compelling precisely because it does not appear “constructed”. This “hot” evidence also is aimed at creating a sense of immediacy to convince skeptics that the museum site is indeed a mass graveyard where Japanese hoped to bury their crimes. Interview, Yang Xiamen, July 7, 2008.


For an intriguing discussion of atrocities and how they are remembered (or not) see Mark Selden, “Japanese and American War Atrocities, Historical Memory and Reconciliation: WWII to Today,” *Japan Focus*, Apr. 15, 2008.


For details and analysis of Ienaga Saburo’s pioneering lawsuits challenging state censorship of textbooks, see Yoshiko Nozaki and Hiromitsu Inokuchi, “Japanese Education, Nationalism, and


[12] There was a trend in the mid-1990s towards a more forthright reckoning in Japanese secondary school textbooks, but this provoked a backlash among the “Dr. Feelgoods” of Japanese history and the establishment of the Society for History Textbook Reform (Atarashi Rekishi Kyokasho o Tsukurukai, hereafter referred to as Tsukurukai). This group favors an exculpatory and valorous historical narrative. As part of Tsukurukai’s efforts to shape public history and war memory, it published a textbook in 2001 (revised in 2005) for junior high schools. Extensive media coverage both in Japan and internationally conveys an impression that this textbook reflects the public mood and that Japanese are seeking an identity grounded in a more assertive nationalism based on an unapologetic view of Japan’s shared history with Asia. Moreover, as Sven Saaler concludes, the Tsukurukai text has significantly shaped public discourse over this past to the extent that other publishers have revised their textbooks by retreating from the somewhat more critical mid-1990s narratives and have moved closer towards the Tsukurukai narrative. The media hype translated into unusually high sales of the textbook, including large volume sales to conservative organizations, reinforcing and amplifying its influence over public discourse. Bestowing best-seller status on this text then feeds the media frenzy and stimulates more curiosity. Sven Saaler, *Politics Memory and Public Opinion: The History Textbook Controversy and Japanese Society*. Deutsches Institut fur Japanstudien: Munich, 2005. Also see David McNeill and Mark Selden, “Asia battles over war history: The legacy of the Pacific War looms over Tokyo’s plans for the future,” *Japan Focus*, April 12, 2005.


[15] Reilly, Seraphim and Deans, op.cit., all argue that China has played the history card to extract quasi-reparations.

[16] According to Reilly, the genie of history activism unleashed by the state morphed into an autonomous grassroots movement the state could no longer control and more recently into what he terms oppositional activism. op.cit.
[17] The Treaty of Peace and Friendship with China was ratified in Japan on October 18, 1978, a
day after the 14 Class-A war criminals were secretly enshrined at Yasukuni Shrine.
Conservatives opposed to normalization of relations with China were also mollified by the
passage of the Gengo Law in 1978 that gave legal status to the practice of linking official dates
to the year of an Emperor’s reign, i.e. 2008 is Heisei 20. Deans, op.cit., 282.

[18] Zhu, argues that successful modernization has created a large middle class that demands,
“…respect from other nations. Nationalism thus acquired a social basis.” Zhu, op.cit., p.184.

1-9.


[22] I am indebted to Sven Saaler regarding this point. Personal communication, 8/15/2008).


Inquiry”, in Joshua Fogel, ed., The Nanjing Massacre in History and Historiography, Berkeley,

in Japan, China and the US”, Japan Focus, December 19, 2006. Also see Yoshida’s , The
Making of the “Rape of Nanking”: History and Memory in Japan, China, and the United States.

[26] For analysis of the alleged contest see Bob Tadashi Wakabayashi, “The Nanking 100-Man

[27] For related discussion see Selden, op.cit.

[28] For a more accurate and nuanced assessment of Japanese attitudes and public opinion
regarding history see Philip Seaton, Japan’s Contested War Memories: The ‘Memory Rifts’ in

[29] Seraphim, op.cit.

[30] For example see Bob Wakabayashi, ed., The Nanking Atrocity 1937-38: Complicating the
“Against Forgetting: Three Generations of Artists in Japan in Dialogue about the Legacies of World War II”
Rebecca Jennison and Laura Hein
July 25, 2011
http://www.japanfocus.org/-Laura-Hein/3573

This essay introduces three different generations of artists whose works deal with experience, memory, and trauma derived from World War II. The first generation refers to artists who experienced the war: they are harsh critics of the wartime government for the victimization of both Japanese and non-Japanese citizens, such as Koreans. The second generation of artists were born in the 1940s and 50s. These artists do not have direct memories of the war, yet they challenge less-explored issues in relation to the time period, such as women’s participation in the war effort. The third generation can be characterized by their desire to participate intergenerational and transnational dialogues with the older generations and with other artists and social-justice activists. The authors explain how these artists engage with viewers about the importance of remembering the war. Some older artists incorporate their direct war experience as a way to redress the atrocities imposed on their people while others reflect on family histories that were largely shaped by Japanese imperialism and war. Although they use different media and explore various issues, what binds them together is a message to the younger generation “not to forget” the brutality of war, and to critically reflect on their identity in relation to history. The essay also provides a number of images of relevant artworks with informative descriptions.
Against Forgetting: Three Generations of Artists in Japan in Dialogue about the Legacies of World War II

Rebecca Jennison and Laura Hein

Although international consensus has it that the Japanese people are unusually reluctant to face their own wartime past, this generalization has never been entirely true, as regular readers of The Asia Pacific Journal already know. Like human beings everywhere, since 1945 Japanese have debated the lessons of war and disagreed about its meaning among themselves. And, also like people everywhere, many Japanese regret both official policies and widespread individual behaviors of the past. They not only desire reconciliation with Koreans, Chinese, and other Asians, but also recognize that, as Japanese, they cannot dictate its terms. Some have already entered into cross-national dialogue about the war and the colonial violence that reached its crescendo during the war years. Moreover, precisely because reflection on such issues is uncomfortable, they struggle over how to do so, often turning to oblique or refracted approaches, what Dora Apel calls “the sideways glance,” such as through literary or artistic expression. Both this ambivalence and these strategies are human rather than Japanese traits.

Visual artists, filmmakers, and fiction writers have far more experience expressing complex and contradictory emotions than do historians, so their prominent role in memory studies globally is not surprising. They show us how to convey the complex and sometimes messy individuality of actors. When we appreciate the ways that people are simultaneously well-meaning, bigoted, intelligent, obtuse, flawed, internally contradictory, and/or troubled human beings, it is easier to recognize the individuality of perpetrators, victims, and bystanders, while still acknowledging the actions that divided them as groups. Artistic work also directs our attention to the processes of imagination and to affective linking, explaining why some acts of historical imagination feel so much more satisfying than do others. Finally, identifying these contradictory qualities helps indicate a standpoint that can make reconciliation possible.

Of course, the style in which people imagine the past is not the same for everyone. One obvious difference is generational. While debates over war remembrance have reverberated through Japanese society at regular intervals ever since 1945, their nature is shifting as the generations of people who experienced the 1940s “join the great majority” that will one day claim us all. In many ways, 2010 served as a powerful symbolic reminder of that generational shift in Japan because so many significant twentieth-century events were commemorated—including the 100th anniversary of the annexation and colonization of the Korean Peninsula by Japan, the 55th year since World War II ended, the 60th anniversary of the beginning of the Korean War and the 10th anniversary of the 2000 International Women’s War Crimes Tribunal. In East Asia as elsewhere, the grey-haired individuals who testified to their direct personal experiences of war and colonial domination have had their say and now are yielding to people who have no choice but to make a larger imaginative leap in order to understand the wartime past.

Dialogue Across Generations: Individual memories, Postremembrance, and Imaginative Reconstruction

People who lived through the war in Japan need little prompting to remember how that era smelled, sounded, and felt, as one of us realized last year when an older friend casually mentioned that she would instantly recognize the sound of a B-29 plane overhead even though it had been decades since she heard one. These individuals also carry in their heads the internal
logic of Japanese society in the 1940s. By contrast, the social ethos and institutional environment of the wartime era are so distant now that it is extremely hard to imagine twenty-somethings of today’s Japan conforming to its outmoded expectations. Young Japanese today—like young Americans—can barely fathom many elements of the wartime cognitive universe, such as its rigid class and gender hierarchies or the casual daily violence meted out within military ranks. They have no choice but to piece together isolated fragments of the past, using a variety of strategies to shape their images of the war years. And, while all generations interpret the historical events of the decades before their birth through assumptions that differ from those of their parents, such shifts are especially pronounced when social change is as momentous and as abrupt as it was for mid-twentieth century Japanese.

And what of the generation in between, particularly individuals born in the 1940s and 1950s? Although they do not remember the war, they still experienced it in a profound and distinctive—although indirect—manner as numerous memoirs and commentaries attest. Marianne Hirsch has written about the differences between acts of remembrance by people with first-generation experience of the war versus those of their children. She calls this second-generation experience "postmemory," and also differentiates it from the preoccupations of historians or others interested in more far-flung outposts of the past. Difficult experiences—as World War II was for nearly everyone in East Asia—mark people in ways that profoundly affect their child-rearing practices. Her primary example, Art Spiegelman’s Maus: A Survivor’s Tale, brilliantly evokes the ways that Art’s parents’ harrowing experiences in occupied Poland and Auschwitz shaped his identity despite his far more comfortable childhood in New York City. In the opening pages of that memoir, young Art expects sympathy when some other kids roller-skate off without him. Instead, his father stops sawing a board: “Friends? Your friends? If you lock them together in a room with no food for a week then you could see what it is, friends!” Small wonder that Art feels compelled to understand the forces that shaped his father’s world view, or to express that quest artistically.

Hirsch’s work has been very influential because it builds on Freudian theory about how individuals respond to trauma—through unconscious processes of repression and displacement. Properly speaking, “postmemory” refers only to a single generation: the people who pursue remembrance in order to make the baffling conditions of their own upbringing more comprehensible. Their personal histories include elements that are completely irreconcilable with the rest of their lives. The lives of postrememberers are indelibly marked “by traumatic events that can be neither understood nor recreated.” In her formulation, their response to that dilemma is “postmemory,” which is “a powerful and very particular form of memory precisely because its connection to its object or source is mediated not through recollection but through an imaginative investment and creation.” Hirsch actually waffles on whether “postmemory” can extend to a third generation, both in her book and a recent essay, but, either way, her contention is that family stories and photographs are the mechanisms by which people reframe the years before their birth as essential to their identities. Some of these effects may stretch beyond a single generation but they are surely most powerful for the children of the people directly traumatized. As she explains, “postmemorial work …strives to reactivate and reembody more distant social/national and archival/cultural memorial structures by reinvesting them with resonant individual and familial forms of mediation and aesthetic expression.” Most valuably, she calls attention to the profound emotional investment in the past by people too young to remember it and explains why this occurs. Postrememberers feel an intense desire to make their own sense
out of that past to address the profound cognitive dissonance created by growing up in the homes of people still responding to already-vanished events.

Hirsch, like other memory studies scholars, has struggled with how to expand this analysis to include remembrance by larger communities. It is particularly vexing when applied to people who did not personally experience the terrible event in question. While Freudian theory provides an elegant explanation for individuals’ engagement with the traumatic past, it is far less useful in showing how larger groups arrive at a common understanding of that past or how a second generation does. One way to handle that problem is to move to a more generic understanding of trauma, the strategy employed by Dora Apel, writing on “the art of secondary witnessing” of the holocaust, her term for second-generation remembrance through artistic expression. And perhaps doing so better captures the processes by which individuals as well as communities make sense of their world. Yet the work of scholars such as Hirsch and Cathy Caruth remains highly influential precisely because they ground it in Freudian theory.

One way to retain their rigorous explanation for individual behavior while opening it out to become a social phenomenon is to treat postmemory, like memory itself, as a strategy that incorporates intergenerational dialogue—which functions as a kind of talk-therapy—as well as an internal psychological process. Depictions of the past frequently develop out of intergenerational dialogue, particularly as the event in question recedes in time. This is one reason why people so often only begin talking about the past openly and frequently a decade or more after an important event. Hirsch identifies family photographs and family stories as key to postremembrance but this misdirects attention to the talismanic object when the emotional power comes from the process of conveying historical knowledge, something that artists integrate into the making of new and intensely personal talismanic objects in the form of paintings, prints, collages, videos, and other art media. The members of the generation that remembers World War II across the globe have embarked on remembrance in large part to sway younger people out of a desire to make the war emotionally comprehensible to them. Often these older individuals were only moved to begin because earlier interactions revealed the cluelessness of young people. This is why, for example, the National World War II Memorial in Washington D.C. was only planned in the 1990s and completed in 2004.

Intergenerational dialogue is central to the remembrance of the next two generations as well, although in differing ways. Moreover, such dialogue is the precise point at which the fundamentally psychological familial relationship intersects with understandings of the past for a larger community, such as a nation. Indeed, while Apel’s main concern is with the problem of finding a way to represent the holocaust that does not “risk either a falsely manipulative and moralizing political instrumentalization or a depressing sense of obsession and despair,” the strategy she charts as a more successful form of representation actually incorporates intergenerational dialogue as a central aspect of the art work itself. As she points out, Art Spiegelman solved the problem of how to tell his parents’ story without being consumed by it by explicitly framing it as a dialogue with his father.

Nearly all people under fifty years old today who engage the events of the 1940s are rather arbitrarily choosing to do so rather than seeking to manage powerful emotions that psychically cannot be ignored, the behavior Hirsch labels “postmemory” and identifies as crucial for Art Spiegelman. To be precise, individuals so far removed from the war may identify some stubbornly incompatible shards of the wartime past that linger in the present, and may also
incorporate them into their creative expression, but these projects are indirect and idiosyncratic imaginative reconstructions of the past. Such individuals often are deliberately selecting specific elements of their heritage as important statements of identity while equally deliberately ignoring other elements. By definition, such a thoughtful and conscious process cannot be a Freudian response to trauma. Older people too, are contributing to a fundamentally public social process when they shape their message for younger generations, rather than “just” giving voice to a profound psychological trauma. But, as the strategies of artists described here suggest, their engagements with their audiences, often much younger than themselves, function simultaneously to bring their concerns onto the larger social stage and to partially resolve the internal conflict. And, while the art object itself may be arresting, it is the human engagement surrounding its production, dissemination, and display that operates as therapeutic treatment.

**Artists who experienced the war**

How then have artists and writers contributed to reimagining the war in Japan and how important is the intergenerational process? Quite a few, including most whose World War II remembrance are internationally famous, have not only challenged wartime priorities, but also have specifically sought to reach younger people. This group includes both the creator of the autobiographical manga (and film) *Barefoot Gen*, Nakazawa Keiji, (b. 1939) and Nosaka Akiyuki, (b. 1930) whose novel *Grave of the Fireflies* was made into a prize-winning animated film in 1988 by director Takahata Isao (b. 1935). These works shine a harsh light on the cruelty of both the wartime government and of many individual Japanese toward young children. Nakazawa also addressed the distinctive suffering of Korean colonial subjects in Japan, beginning in the early 1970s. Because these works are about the experience of children and are in visual form, both were immediately accessible to youngsters. Nakazawa began depicting the atomic bombing in manga form the day after attending his mother’s funeral, where he was shocked to discover that her bones had become so brittle due to her exposure to radiation a quarter-century earlier that nothing but ash remained after her cremation. Nakazawa’s wife was expecting their first child when his mother died, and both were troubled by the thought that she would never meet her grandchild. Sleepless over these personal sorrows, Nakazawa then moved beyond his own family story: “I thought and thought, and it always came to this: ‘Have the Japanese pursued and settled responsibility for the war?’ ‘Have the Japanese pursued and settled the issue of the atomic bomb?’ I realized that both issues had been rendered ambiguous, that neither had been settled….I resolved to fight a one-man battle.”

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Internationally recognized painters Maruki Iri (1901-1995) and Maruki Toshi (1912-2000) were impelled by the same impulse to convey the horrors they personally experienced in Hiroshima in 1945 and they too squarely addressed Japanese oppression of other Asians from the 1970s. Their work includes, for example, a large 1972 painting of crows flying past a Korean woman’s chima chogori dress, symbolizing the Koreans who were brought to Hiroshima to work in the local armaments factories and who perished in 1945.\(^{15}\) They chose the subjects of their later paintings by talking to visitors of all ages at their first exhibitions and responding to their comments and criticisms.\(^{16}\)

This and other work is visible here.

Similarly, in 2006, contemporary artist Tomiyama Taeko expressed her frustration at failing to fully convey the savagery of Japan’s imperial policies to her compatriots. “I feel so sad and angry. What did we do? What did I do? It is difficult to create art that expresses any perspective other than ‘Japan is the victim.’ When I try to show how many Korean people suffered, it is seen as a Korean issue. Perhaps it is easier to express this through artwork than through literature because the visual medium can communicate directly. But it is hard to find places to show such work here in Japan.”\(^{17}\) Tomiyama, who is still painting at age 89, is one of the last artists of her generation to retain significant control over the ways that her expression is interpreted in public. She is keenly aware that few in her audiences today share her experiences and struggles to overcome this chasm, for example by avoiding interaction with professional art dealers and art critics and exhibiting where students congregate instead. Yet Tomiyama has enjoyed far more publicity in the last fifteen years than at any earlier time, suggesting that she has successfully connected to younger Japanese who approach the war only through “postmemory” or in even less intimate ways. Her first major exhibit in Tokyo was not until 1995, when Tama University Art Museum showed *Silenced by History*.\(^{18}\) Tomiyama’s signature theme is the moral obligation to remember the unnamed victims of war. She is currently hard at work, finishing a series of paintings about today’s war in Afghanistan, drawing on her own travels there in 1967 as well as more recent images of Afghanistan taken by photojournalists.\(^{19}\) She has also begun three large oil paintings in response to the March 2011 earthquake, tsunami, and ongoing nuclear disaster in Fukushima, connecting the past to the present in new ways.
The work of artists of Tomiyama’s generation is now nearly all mediated by younger museum curators, gallery owners, and art historians, who are making such art more visible, both in Japan and abroad. This group includes such “postrememberers” as museum curators Kobayashi Hiromichi at the Tama Art University Museum and Mizusawa Tamotsu at the Kamakura Museum of Modern Art. Kobayashi has also played a central role as photographer and collaborator in the production of Tomiyama Taeko’s slide and DVD works; in effect he is transmitting the artist’s ideas through new media, while developing his own “postrememberer’s” representational strategies in innovative sites of expression, further illustrating our point that these two generations work in dialogue with each other in many kinds of ways.

Both Kobayashi and Mizusawa also have recently displayed works by Miyazaki Shin, another artist whose work is infused with his wartime memories. Like Tomiyama, Miyazaki is far better known in the 21st than he was in the 20th century. Miyazaki, born in 1922, is no longer an active artist. He grew up in Yamaguchi prefecture, graduated from art school in 1942 and was drafted a few months later. His unit was dispatched to northeast Manchuria and, when the Kwantung army disintegrated in August 1945, Miyazaki at first was stranded there without food, and then was taken prisoner and transported to Siberia, returning home only in 1949. He resumed painting but did not then depict his wartime experiences. In 1965, Miyazaki not only enjoyed his first exhibition but also won the Nitten Exhibition Prize for one of his paintings, “Night of the Festival” (Matsuri no Yoru). Two years later, Miyazaki’s canvas “Sideshow Performers” (Misemono Geinin) won the prestigious Yasui Sōtarō Memorial Prize. Miyazaki began teaching painting at Tama University in 1981, at age 59, and his career really only took off when he was in his sixties, after his personal experiences of the 1940s became the main topic of his work. He won a prize in 1984 for “Winter Light” (Fuyu no Hikari), and had a major exhibit of his work at Tama Art University Museum in 1992. In 1999 the Yamaguchi prefectoral art museum displayed the first of his monumental paintings about Siberia, some of which were also shown at the Kamakura museum in 2001. Mizusawa, the curator in Kamakura, also commissioned two canvasses from Miyazaki for the Sao Paulo Bienalle of 2004, and Miyazaki chose to depict in abstract form the miserable weeks just after Japan’s surrender. His work is visible on his official website here.

Miyazaki’s large, dark, densely textured canvasses have a potent impact for viewers but reproduce poorly. Like Tomiyama, Miyazaki is primarily concerned with giving expression to the feelings of powerless people, whose suffering is of no concern to others. He includes his former self in that group more than does Tomiyama, but never frames his experience as a national Japanese one. Nor does his work convey bitterness at his captors. Rather, it emphasizes loss, abandonment, the fragility and value of human life, and, most importantly, the intensity of his own feelings about the past. Miyazaki explains that, like Tomiyama, he is motivated in part by his horror that younger people have not yet learned to avoid war. While he struggles to
articulate his tangled emotions about his personal experiences, Miyazaki is crystal-clear that he embarked upon that struggle “because we have once again entered a period of warfare.” His insistent demand for our attention helps explain why sustained direct interaction with survivors is such a powerful phenomenon.

Indeed, postrememberers not only receive these messages, they actively solicit and help shape them through their interactions with the older artists. Mizusawa describes Miyazaki’s work as follows: “When we experience a work by Shin Miyazaki, we are first of all overwhelmed by the silent voices that emanate from the physical object that is the artwork, regardless of its size or medium…..We hear, too, intermixed, the voices of others, for in his works the artist has committed his prayers for the eternal repose of their souls.” Mizusawa explains that he said this to Miyazaki in 2003 and that the artist, then 82 years old, responded to his comments by producing five huge canvases in six months rather than just the two Mizusawa had requested. One of these was “Mud,” a work that Mizusawa describes as at first seeming to signal “bottomless despair,” but, after more extended viewing, reveals “a place of surging energy that is not entirely negative.” Mizusawa, the “postrememberer,” expresses his own stance to wartime society as well as to the artwork when he explains that “these paintings present unstable, incomplete situations and fail to provide a port of refuge for the viewer’s emotions.” That emotional state, in turn, “arouses numerous memories and cannot be compressed within individual experience.”

Postrememberer Shimada Yoshiko

The postmemory generation includes not only curators and art historians but also artists such as Shimada Yoshiko. Shimada, born in 1959, was raised in the shadows of the U.S. Air Force Base in Tachikawa near Tokyo, formerly used by the Imperial Japanese Army. After attending university in the United States, she spent time in Berlin, where she viewed the work of artists engaging directly with the question of German war responsibility. Later, she lived in New York at the time of the first Gulf War, and saw artists dissent through their art. Comfortable in English and German, Shimada has built a transnational platform for herself, meaning that her reflections on her country of birth are informed by deep knowledge about war experience and war remembrance elsewhere. On visits to Japan in the early 1990s she was angered by the nostalgic portrayals of Japan’s war and the Shōwa Emperor, who had passed away in 1989, and so began her artistic reflection on the wartime past. In her series “Past Imperfect,” she both challenged the simplistic view that the war was an unavoidable tragedy and tied that theme to her longstanding interest in gender.

Shimada Yoshiko, “White Aprons” from the series “Past Imperfect” 1992

“Past Imperfect” explored the extent to which Japanese women had participated in and strengthened the war effort—and the costs of that collaboration to themselves, to other Japanese women, and most of all to Asian women. She chose as her symbol for
their enthusiasm the white aprons, or kappogi, that wartime Japanese patriotic women’s organizations had adopted. Using old photographs of these mothers holding smiling babies, waving flags, and lighting the cigarettes of soldiers, she created collages that commented on their choices. Her critique was made sharper by the border around one of these collages, which incorporated photos of young “military comfort women.” As she explained, “I realized that Japanese women were not entirely the voiceless victims of male-dominant militarism. Many were enthusiastic fascists and willing to sacrifice themselves and to victimize others in the name of the emperor.” This project emphasized the ways that wartime Japanese women were drawn into the conflict as mothers of soldiers, a form of recognition that simultaneously celebrated them and severely limited their life choices, while also noting that Asian women were assigned far harsher tasks.

In this early work, Shimada seems to be distancing herself from the wartime generation’s self-serving romanticized remembrance but as time went on, she challenged herself and other postrememberers to acknowledge their own responsibility for the past, despite being born after the war. Indeed, the impetus for “Past Imperfect” came from Shimada’s recognition that she shared some of the qualities that had led so many wartime Japanese to accept the need for millions of pointless deaths. As Shimada put it, “Personally, I basically like absolute discipline, and tend to be swayed by emotion rather than logic and so I suppose it would be quite simple for me to become a fascist.” And, even more fundamentally, she doubts that anyone ever can be completely confident of the morality of their own behavior within a repressive society. As she put it, “When I talk about art and activism, I do not make art from the viewpoint of the oppressed or the victimized. I make art to make the oppressors think of what they do from where they are. But there is no clear borderline between the oppressors and the oppressed anymore.” Shimada feels a responsibility to revisit the war precisely because she did not herself experience it and so cannot be confident that she would have behaved ethically.

Shimada’s 1995 work, “Comfort Women/Women of Conformity,” expanded on the images of military comfort women that had first appeared in “Past Imperfect” by including photographs of the aged survivors and snippets of their testimonies in installation works. She juxtaposed them with startlingly racist eugenicist comments by famous presurrender feminists such as Hiratsuka Raichō, pointing out the racial boundaries of Hiratsuka’s imagination. If earlier feminists had combined acute gender analysis with such an absence of empathy for Asian women, how can feminists today be sure they are not replicating that pattern?
Shimada’s willingness to ask herself “would I have behaved differently?” became more evident in a major exhibit at the Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Photography in 1996. Shimada’s installation piece, “Black Boxes + Voice Recorder,” featured photographs of former “military comfort women” exhibited in chained black wooden boxes. Placed on the floor of the gallery with “lids off,” the boxes contained the portraits of the women submerged under several inches of water. Meanwhile, recordings of the women’s voices giving testimony about their wartime experiences played continuously. Shimada’s aim was to create a space in the museum for these testimonies, as well as to encourage visitors to investigate the “internal conditions” of wartime Japanese society that allowed such callous exploitation of poor Asian women. As she saw it, fully appreciating the harm inflicted on them required looking critically at the actions of Japanese women during the war and also acknowledging the ways in which Japanese men’s “humanity had been violated” under the military regime. Shimada encouraged viewers to feel empathy for the people most victimized but also to acknowledge that the worst perpetrators were trapped in a fascist system that did not protect their best interests either. Curator Kasahara Michiko wrote that Shimada’s work “represents a resistance to forgetfulness, an active will to remember. She is not an outsider, producing her work in some safe place; rather, as a Japanese woman she is placed in the ambiguous place of being one of the assailants.” And, Kasahara continues, Shimada’s labor is necessary, “or we will never be free of the nightmare of war.”

It seems that Shimada could only fully express her discomfort with the values of wartime Japan when she imaginatively entered that past society rather than merely viewing it from a distance, suggesting that successful remembrance—as opposed to postremembrance—may require a kind of double vision that includes empathy for all involved. In other words, rather than unconscious displacement to manage trauma, it requires not only conscious acknowledgement of the pain felt by others but also an imaginative acceptance of responsibility for that pain. In other exhibitions in the early 1990s, Shimada included a live-art performance in which she herself appeared wearing the symbolic white apron, which also became the screen for projected images of the former “military comfort” women. Her work is effective because it encompasses both a sympathetic understanding of the weaknesses of wartime actors and a firm rejection of the values on which their actions were based, achieving a genuine dialogue with the past. As Kasahara explained, Shimada and the other artists in the 1996 exhibit “have the will to question the very basis of their way of thinking… to look at things from a view opposite to that of their own perspective and reconstruct the way they think.” Kasahara argues that feminism provided Shimada with the sense that “we Japanese, alive today, have a duty not to erase, but to preserve and pass on to future generations,…the numerous crimes that were committed by the Japanese during the Second World War.” In the same volume, Ogoshi Aiko draws an even stronger connection between feminism and an anti-war stance, arguing that “the threat of war lies at the root of the genderization of authority, that this is what led to the acceptance of the structure of
sexual prejudice and violence, even in peacetime.” The question to the older generation in this implied dialogue is less about “what happened” than it is about “how did you let it happen?”

We note that here too we see intergenerational dialogue. Shimada’s choice of the military comfort women as her theme was triggered by the testimonies of Kim Haksun and other former “comfort women.” Shimada was also familiar with Tomiyama’s series of 1988 on the same subject, while Tomiyama incorporated the white apron (stylishly worn by lady foxes in her rendition) into her 1995 series “Harbin: Requiem for the 20th Century” and “The Fox Story” of 1999. The DVD version of “The Fox Story” also featured photographs of the young comfort women, suggesting an intertextuality that moved in both directions. Both artists evoke the lost world of the past in order to warn viewers against the self-deluding character of nostalgia, and both rely on feminism as a moral guide through the past. Shimada’s critique also was powerful enough to impress “Resident Korean” artist and activist Hwangbo Kangja (b. 1957), who had already spent several years giving lectures and producing documentaries about the military comfort women. Hwangbo met Shimada through this show and invited her to collaborate on a joint exhibit based on family photographs, which was displayed in Vancouver and Gwangju. That project became an opportunity to work out more fully Shimada’s own relationship to war remembrance.

In this exhibit and in a later project, Shimada focused on the personal experiences of her own relatives, adopting the strategy identified by Hirsch as characteristic of postrememberers. Like Art Spiegelman, Shimada suggests that the secrets of the past resemble a locked box that retains its power as long as she carries it forward unopened, also explaining her chained black boxes of 1996. But, unlike Spiegelman, she is less interested in the inter-generational effects of traumatic war experience on herself than in the ways that keeping secrets has protected her from understanding the harm she and her family may have done to others. Indeed, while researching her family history for this project, Shimada uncovered part of her own family’s past: her grandfather, who had worked as a policeman before the war, was ordered by his superior to “dispose of dangerous criminals” in the aftermath of the Great Kanto Earthquake of 1923. This was not an isolated case. Vigilante groups and police responded to rumors that Koreans were causing mayhem by murdering as many as 6,000 individuals in the wake of the earthquake. Shimada herself recalled that her grandfather never allowed them to make a “snapping” sound with wet towels because it reminded him of the sound of Korean victims’ skulls being struck with wooden bats. (Later, Shimada’s grandfather quit the police force to become a farmer. According to her mother, he also helped Korean conscripted laborers escape during the war.) This is precisely the kind of childhood experience that makes the case for retaining the psychological concept of “postmemory,” now expanded to include coping with the memories of perpetrators as well as victims, while examining how it becomes a broader socially relevant experience. For Shimada working through “postmemory” necessarily means refusing to evade responsibility and making amends by openly acknowledging her own connections to this past.
That disturbing discovery led to Shimada’s next project, *Bones in Tansu: Family Secrets*, an ‘interactive’ installation piece that was first exhibited at A.R.T in Tokyo in 2004 and then in seven other locations internationally. Shimada began by exploring the boundary markers between her own private memories and public remembrance, and over the next three years solicited the anonymous personal memories of gallery viewers, which she incorporated into the exhibit. Once again, she began with family histories, although this time with memories generated by strangers, to make visible the emotions evoked by the past. This ever-expanding dialogue revealed much trauma, sometimes linked to war histories, but most often to an unexpectedly high incidence of domestic violence, including incest and sexual abuse. These traumatic stories crossed national lines. For example, participants in Manila wrote about the experience of being abused as children in response to a similar “secret” revealed by a Korean participant at the previous site. Some of the Manila children were vulnerable to predatory adults because their parents had been forced by poverty to become global migrant workers, revealing another way in which “private” family trauma is part of transnational history.

Shimada is facilitating an open-ended dialogue among visitors that makes no assumptions in advance about who may be a victim or a perpetrator, while unequivocally condemning transgressions by making visible the pain they caused.

The Next Generation

What aspects of the wartime past matter most to younger people in Japan who wish to take a stance “against forgetting” World War II? Their engagement with the war seems to begin with their recognition that they know little about the lives of the older individuals who peopled their childhood and grow into a nagging feeling that such ignorance is a debt that requires redress, meaning that a desire for more intergenerational dialogue is at the heart of their quests. It seems likely that, as with the older artists, their interactions with historians, art historians and curators—as well as larger audiences—will continue to shape their inquiries into the past, as will transnational dialogues with other artists and social-justice activists. Eventually, so will their interactions with people younger than themselves.

One recent collaborative project arrayed “against forgetting,” *Asia, Politics, and Art*, is itself a transnational venture that brought together artists, musicians, scholars, and curators of various ages to explore the legacies in East Asia of World War II, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, and the current American-led wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Lee Chongwha of Seikei University organized this project on the “lingering wounds” of past wars in order to develop new kinds of dialogue for the future. Their efforts between 2006 and 2008 led to a unique collaborative publication, *Zanshō no Oto* (Sounds of lingering wounds). Their work is also in dialogue with deceased artists, as is symbolized by the fact that the inaugural conference for *Asia, Politics and Art*
Art was held in the Sakima Art Museum in Ginowan, Okinawa in March 2007, in a room whose walls are covered with the enormous panels of the “Battle of Okinawa,” by Maruki Iri and Toshi.39 (Link)

Oh/Okamura Haji (b. 1976, hereafter Oh Haji) and Yamashiro Chikako (b. 1976), both of whom participated in this project, are two generations removed from direct experience of the war but explore its meaning today in their work. Not only are they far younger than Tomiyama and Miyazaki, their respective positions as a “Resident Korean” and an Okinawan complicate their status in relation to Japan. Both artists, still at formative stages in their careers, evoke the wartime era in their work, in ways that emphasize their temporal distance from the 1940s and underline their postwar identities. Interestingly, they also use some of the “postmemory” techniques discussed by Hirsch and explored artistically by Shimada, such as creating an imaginative world from the fragmentary images provided by old photographs and objects used by their relatives, and building out from the testimony of older family members and neighbors about past experiences.

Oh Haji uses a variety of spinning, weaving and dyeing techniques to create original garments, objects, and installations that give material expression to the layering of time and memory.40 The death of her Korean-born grandmother prompted the artist to explore themes of personal history and memory in greater depth. Although she had shared a home with her grandmother all her life, since Oh spoke only Japanese and her grandmother was only comfortable in Korean, they had never communicated easily. Her regret at not having worked harder to overcome the painful silences between them prompted Oh to imaginatively recall her grandmother’s life in a large, mixed-media installation piece, “Memory” (2006). “Memory” recalls Oh’s grandmother’s forced prewar move from her original home on Cheju Island in Korea to Osaka. Oh painstakingly covered a semi-sheer white cloth with a flower pattern like those on skirts worn by her grandmother. For Oh, clothing, like family photographs, provides a physical object that can bear the weight of the tasks of creating an imaginative investment and framing identity, and so—at least partially—replace the emotional satisfaction derived from communication through language.

Oh had previously used thread that she had carefully unraveled from her grandmother’s Korean dresses in other projects, and later decided to photograph her Korean chima blouse, which she had hung on the wall of her room. Oh said that interacting in such ways with her grandmother’s clothing helped her “feel as if she were really there, as if she was ‘physically present.’ That was the inspiration for this work.” Knowing little of her grandmother’s thoughts and feelings, Oh hoped to gain an imaginative understanding of her life experience by making art from the clothing she left behind after her death. While they shared the label of being Korean in Japan, they shared little else until Oh decided to learn more about the older woman’s life.
Oh acknowledges in her art that she moves through Japanese society with far more linguistic and cultural ease than did her grandmother and was offering redress—literally re-clothing—for her own youthful obliviousness to her grandmother’s linguistic isolation. Her forthright acknowledgement of her own complicity in that isolation and her feelings of regret give her work its power, as does the intensity of her desire to capture as much meaning as she can from the threadbare swatches of her grandmother’s garments.

Yamashiro Chikako, an Okinawan video and performance artist, has also begun exploring remembrance of the war in recent highly innovative video works that, like Oh, imaginatively place her in an ambiguous ethical relationship with elderly victims of war and colonial violence. Yamashiro became interested in this topic after June 2007 when the Japanese government eliminated passages from history textbooks that made reference to the “mass suicides” in the Battle of Okinawa. In the last weeks of the war the Japanese military had encouraged and sometimes ordered Okinawan civilians to kill their families and themselves in order to avoid capture by the advancing American forces. The subsequent protests against the textbook changes prompted Yamashiro to interview senior residents in a nearby care center in Okinawa on video, which she then transformed into works she exhibited at two Tokyo museums, the National Museum of Modern Art and the Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Photography in 2009 and 2010. In a statement describing “Your Voice Came Out Through My Throat” (2009), the artist explains that many of the elderly people had never spoken of their wartime experiences. Like Yamashiro, however, they were so offended by the government’s move to revise textbooks that they told their stories to her. She extended this theme in a 2010 series, “Sinking Voices, Red Breath.”

They also passed on their feelings of responsibility for remembering the past, telling Yamashiro, someone of their grandchildren’s generation, “because we survived you were born into this world. And now 65 years have passed since the war ended, we have to tell what really happened.” Yamashiro said she could feel the exact moment when each speaker transferred the burden of remembering the past to her in an interview with Kum Soni, another participant in the Asia, Politics, and Art project.

When talking about the war there was a moment when the elderly people would stop speaking. Perhaps, it was the instant that brought back what was most painful, most devastating in the minds of the speakers. At those moments, when they were about to speak about the most painful things, they fell silent, and began to shake or weep. …so then I just asked them to touch me and express what they were feeling in some other way.”

In January and February 2011, Yamashiro participated in an artists’ exchange and festival in the Philippines, and began doing research for new work based on oral histories and memories of
Okinawan migrants and war-brides who moved there during and after the war. She wanted to showcase Okinawan responses to the ongoing presence of US military bases in Okinawa, and also make a connection between that situation today and Okinawan participation in the Japanese military occupation of the Philippines in the 1940s. This experience will add greater moral ambiguity to her already-arresting photographs and video works. It will also add a transnational dimension to her intergenerational commentary.

These young artists are gathering fragments of the war experience and are connecting them to their own postwar stories in ways that both require intergenerational dialogue and encourage it in others. While they are clearly motivated by their sense of shared identity with specific groups of people who were systematically wronged during the war, they are not drawing a stark distinction between the descendents of victims and of perpetrators or bystanders, nor absolving themselves of responsibility. Finding a stance that expresses recognition of their own distance from the wartime victims while sympathetically acknowledging the injustice of their victimization is crucial to powerful imaginative reconstruction. This distance can be as little as the passage of time in an individual life, as with Miyazaki Shin, or it can involve soliciting the views of people who previously seemed of little interest, as with Yamashiro Chikako. What is being bridged here is the gap between postremembrance as displaced attempts at psychological healing by traumatized individuals and conscious social acts based on interaction with older or younger people.

Why do these acts matter? Acknowledgement by young people and bystanders as well as by perpetrators that victims’ suffering was not only very real but also unjustly imposed is a form of redress. This is why people feel such deep satisfaction when their own experiences are belatedly acknowledged to be of public importance, i.e., part of history. In the end, providing that sense of satisfaction to their elders is a major way that young people make the experiences of earlier generations part of their own lives. Much of the time these transactions happen invisibly around holiday dinner tables or in everyday public settings, such as classrooms. These artists are finding ways to initiate dialogue, which, rather than the art work itself, becomes a talk-therapy for themselves and frequently for others as well. The Marukis, Nakazawa, and Miyazaki all report that they were unable to express themselves on other topics until they painted or drew the war, while Shimada visited the past because she wondered how she would have behaved then—and was honest enough to admit doubts that her choices would have been ethical ones. Oh and Yamashiro both stumbled into their projects for reasons that they could only articulate after paying close attention to the older generation for the first time. Sometimes the impetus is the emotional desperation at the heart of Hirsch’s remembrance/postremembrance while others begin to care about unacknowledged war-related traumas through more cerebral processes. Both paths lead to the same result: they remind us with admirable clarity and poetic subtlety that all of us today bear responsibility for redressing the injustices of the war. And without such redress, it is very difficult to create a future that truly moves beyond the injustices of the past.

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*Laura Hein is a professor of Japanese history at Northwestern University in Chicago and an Asia Pacific Journal coordinator. Her most recent publications, in addition to the book edited with Rebecca Jennison mentioned above and its companion website, include “Reckoning with War in the Museum: Hijikata Teiichi at the Kamakura Museum of Modern Art,” Critical Asian Studies, 43.1 Winter 2011, pp. 93-110 and “Japan, the Vulnerable, and All of Us” foreword to Dreams of Repair, Eleanor Rubin, *Milan: Charta, 2010.*

**Notes**


10 Apel, p. 6, 20-22.

12 Apel, p. 6


14 Minear, Hiroshima, p. 152.


18 ‘Asia eno Shiza to Hyōgen’ Organizing Committee, Silenced by History: Tomiyama Taeko’s Work, Tokyo: Gendai Kikakushitsu, 1995. Images of Tomiyama’s most recent exhibit, “Looking at Asia—On the 100th Anniversary of Japan’s Annexation of Korea” can be viewed here.

19 For a photograph of part of this series in progress, see Laura Hein and Nobuko TANAKA, “Brushing With Authority: The Life and Art of Tomiyama Taeko,” The Asia-Pacific Journal, 13-3-10, March 29, 2010.


21 The Kamakura exhibit was a retrospective of fifty years of prizewinning art by local painters. Miyazaki also published a memoir about his years as a POW in 1998.『宮崎進画集 私のシベリア 森と大地の記憶』 文藝春秋 1998.11. Miyazaki Shin, Gaka watashi no shiberiamori to taichi no kioku, Tokyo: Bungei Shunjū Press, 1998.


23 Mizusawa, “Voices of Siberia,” p.16.


25 While our focus here is artists, this generalization holds true for others who have shaped the postwar history of the war years as well. See, for example, Yoshiko Nozaki, War Memory, Nationalism and Education in Postwar Japan, 1945-2007, London and New York: Routledge Contemporary Japan Series, 2008.


31 Shimada was thus part of a broader trend in public art that foregrounded audience participation in enacting social memories. See Joan Gibbons, Contemporary Art and Memory, London: I. B. Tauris, 2009, chapter 5.

32 Kasahara, pp. 167 and 163.


35 For an on-line site with photographs and information about the earthquake, see this link.

36 This work was first shown in, “Borderline Cases: Co-responses on the Borderlines” (2004), an exhibition that brought together artists, curators and scholars working in Korea and Japan. It was also shown in Korea, the Philippines, Indonesia, Thailand, Denmark, Great Britain, and Shanghai. See Rebecca Jennison, “Borderline Cases—Co-responses on the Borderlines,” n.paradoxa, (2004)


38 See Zanshō no Oto (Sounds of Lingering Wounds), ed. by Lee Chongwha, Iwanami Shoten, 2009. This volume includes 12 essays by participants in the project and a DVD of interviews and works of seven artists produced by another participating artist, Soni Kum. Selected articles in the volume are now being translated into English.
Another transnational project concerning Asian war art and remembrance that involves young scholars and curators is led by Ming Tiempo, a Chinese-Canadian art historian based in Tokyo, Asato Ikeda, a Japanese scholar based in Canada, and American professor Louisa MacDonald. Louisa MacDonald, Asato Ikeda, and Ming Tiempo, eds., provisionally titled *The Dark Valley: Japanese Art and World War II*, Leiden: Brill, in press.


Yamashiro Chikako, “Anata no koe wa watashi no nodo wo tōta” (Your voice came out through my throat), Video work, Artist’s Statement, Exhibit at Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Photography, 2009.

“Freedom Next Time: Japanese Neonationalists Seek to Silence Yasukuni Film”
David McNeill; John Junkerman interviews Li Ying
April 1, 2008; updated May 1, 2008
http://www.japanfocus.org/-John-Junkerman/2712

The documentary *Yasukuni*, directed by Li Ying, problematizes the enshrinement of war dead (including both Chinese and Koreans) in the Yasukuni shrine, formally a State Shinto shrine that became a private religious institution during the U.S. occupation period. It was screened in two dozen theatres in Tokyo in May 2008 but was soon removed due to enormous pressures from Japanese right-wing groups and a member of the Japanese legislature, the Diet. Li states that he did not intend to evoke anti-Japanese sentiment but was trying to explore conflicting feelings towards the shrine from ordinary people including families and relatives of dead soldiers as well as a 90-year-old sword-maker whose thousands of swords were used during the war. Nonetheless, the attacks from right-wing groups on the director as well as the theatres screening the film were threatening enough to prevent Li from producing any more films in Japan. Despite having spent nineteen years in Japan, after this controversy Li decided to move back to China where he continues his filmmaking to this day.

In this article, David McNeill introduces the documentary, *Yasukuni*, and its controversies, followed by an interview with Li Ying conducted by John Junkerman a few weeks before the film’s cancellation from theatres. In the interview, Li presents the ideas that he used in the film and shares his experience of filming it in Japan.
Freedom Next Time: Japanese Neonationalists Seek to Silence Yasukuni Film

David McNeill

John Junkerman interviews Li Ying

Neo-nationalists forced the cancellation of the theatrical launch of a Chinese-directed movie about Japan’s controversial war memorial Yasukuni in early April, 2008. In the weeks that followed, the incident became a cause célèbre, with some 30 film, media, and civil liberties organizations issuing declarations of protest. A number of theaters throughout Japan signed on to screen the film, and its Tokyo premiere was scheduled for May 3.

Its name translates as “peaceful country,” millions have silently prayed there for an end to wars, and for much of the year the loudest sound is the buzzing of insects and the shuffle of old footsteps to the hushed main hall. Yet Yasukuni Shrine, which occupies a single square kilometer of central Tokyo, is one of the most controversial pieces of real estate in Asia, resented by millions who consider it a monument to war, empire, and Japan’s unrepentant and undigested militarism.

A decade ago when Chinese director Li Ying began filming there he didn’t know what to make of his mysterious subject either. Today, as he watches the official Tokyo launch of his two-hour movie “Yasukuni” go down in flames amid death threats and cancelled screenings, he says the shrine symbolizes a “disease of the spirit” in Japan. “That I haven’t been able to leave this issue alone for the last ten years means that I too am suffering,” explained the 44-year-old Guangdong native.

“I didn’t really want to make such a difficult film…so I must be sick to do it. The point is to look directly at the disease.”

Li’s point appears to have been lost by Japanese conservatives, who have branded the movie
“Chinese propaganda,” and condemned a decision by the Agency for Cultural Affairs of Japan to award Li a 7.5 million yen (approx. $75,000) grant. In March, the film’s distributors were forced to give a private preview to 80 lawmakers after a weekly tabloid launched a campaign against the decision to fund it. With criticism growing along with the threat of ultra-right-wing violence, four Tokyo cinemas pulled out of an official launch on April 12. But it appears the squelching of the film may only be temporary. As of May 1, nearly two dozen theaters around the country had announced plans to screen the film.

The campaign against the movie is led by powerful Liberal Democrat (LDP) lawmaker Inada Tomomi, who says it is guilty of “political propaganda.” “I felt the movie’s ideological message was that “Yasukuni was a device to drive people into an aggressive war,” she told the Asahi newspaper after the screening, but denied she wanted it banned. “I have no interest in limiting freedom of expression or restricting the showing of the movie. My doubt is about the movie’s political intentions.” Inada can be seen in Li’s documentary speaking at the shrine on the 60th anniversary of Japan’s surrender, Aug. 15, 2005. “We are committed to rebuilding a proud Japan, where the prime minister can openly worship at Yasukuni,” she tells the crowd. “We will devote ourselves to speeding the day when the Emperor too can worship here.”

Inada is a leading historical revisionist. Right-wing webcaster Sakura Channel lists her as a supporter of its movie “The Truth of Nanjing”, which argues that the 1937 rape of the old Chinese capital by Japanese Imperial troops is a lie. She helped lead a lawsuit against novelist Oe Kenzaburo, who angered neo-nationalists by writing about the military’s role in forcing civilians to kill themselves during the 1945 Battle of Okinawa. Osaka District Court exonerated Oe in March, but the plaintiffs have promised to appeal. Inada is a signatory to a now famous 2007 Washington Post advertisement claiming that the sexual enslavement of thousands of Asian women had no basis in fact, and a member of a parliamentary group fighting against what it sees as “masochistic” teaching of history in the nation’s high schools.

“...In a now familiar pattern, ultra-nationalists who follow in the shadow of establishment politicians, threatened retribution against anyone who handled the movie. Anonymous bloggers posted contact details for the distribution company, the Japan Arts Council and every theatre showing it. Anonymous death threats have been issued against Dragon Films, the company that produced “Yasukuni.”
Former soldiers at Yasukuni on August 15, the anniversary of Japan's surrender in 1945.

The attempt to bury Li’s film follows a string of similar incidents. In February, Tokyo’s Grand Prince Hotel New Takanawa cancelled a conference by the Japan Teacher’s Union – a popular ultra-right target -- after learning that 100 right-wing sound trucks turned up to last year’s conference venue. The hotel’s decision has been bitterly attacked by union officials.

Scholars have also lined up to criticize a government decision that they say effectively refused to allow the Italian scholar Antonio Negri to enter the country last month. Mr. Negri, an anti-globalization activist and philosopher who served a prison sentence in Italy on controversial charges of “insurrection against the state,” had been scheduled to give a series of lectures at the Universities of Tokyo and Kyoto. He was forced to abruptly cancel his trip after being told he would need a permit to entry the country.

“My sense is that we have entered a very dangerous period for freedom of expression and press freedom in this country,” says Tajima Yasuhiko, a professor of journalism in Tokyo’s Sophia University. “That is the background to these cases. The idea that people are entitled to express different opinions and views is withering. That should be common sense, whether one is on the left or the right.”

Why was the movie canned? The cinemas say they were disturbed by right-wing threats and the possibility of “trouble,” particularly during the first days of screening. “We very much regret canceling the documentary but we felt we had no choice after considering the safety of our customers,” explains Murayama Yaseyuki, a spokesman for Q-AX Cinema in Shibuya. But Director Li rejects these claims and says only political pressure explains the sudden decision by all four Tokyo cinemas to pull the plug.

“Before the movie was released I visited the theatres and talked to the managers,” he says on the phone from China. “Some magazines had already started discussing the movie, so we knew that there would be some protests. There was a very strong sense among everyone then of wanting to put this movie out and challenge the protesters. So why have they all suddenly changed their
mind? I can only conclude that pressure was exerted behind the scenes.” For the English subtitled video of a more recent statement by the director, see here and here.

Japan has been here many times before. Because of neonationalist protests, few Japanese have seen Paul Schrader's 1985 art-house cinematic tribute to Mishima Yukio. How many people here will see the dozen or so movies made to commemorate the 1937 Nanjing Massacre over the last two years in Europe, North America and China? The pattern is often the same: The movies pick at the scabs of Japan's war history, conservative politicians express "concern" and the ultra-right go into battle.

“Politicians know that when they make pronouncements about these issues that we will take action,” says Takahashi Yoshisada, who heads a Tokyo-based ultra-nationalist group. Like most other ultra-nationalists, including the group that first spooked the Ginza Cinepathos movie theatre with a visit in March, Takahashi has not seen “Yasukuni,” only heard about it from people like Inada. “They talk, we protest. They know this because it has happened many times in the past. In that sense, I think the politicians are using us.”

In a recent press conference to foreign reporters in Tokyo, Councilor Inada defended her criticism of Li’s movie. “Wouldn’t China have a problem if a Japanese company [funded by tax money] in China created a film conveying the message of the Dalai Lama?” But the comparison is rejected by Professor Tajima. “Liberal democratic nations are not afraid of some criticism. Expecting everyone to just cheer on the country and cooperate with the government is more like North Korea or the situation in Tibet.”

Speaking at the Foreign Press Club, veteran Japan commentator and Keizai University professor Andrew Horvat said the debate about Li’s movie worried Japan’s friends as much as its enemies. “I’m afraid that Japan’s reputation as a democratic country will come under scrutiny.” But conservatives have cheered the cancellation of the screenings. “Our tax money should be not spent to support a film that expresses an anti-Japan ideology,” wrote one right-wing blogger. “This is just common sense.”

The controversy over Yasukuni is not difficult to understand. Among the 2.46 million war dead enshrined there are over 1,000 war criminals, including the men who led Japan’s brutal pillage of Asia. A museum on the shrine’s grounds audaciously rewrites history: teenage suicide bombers (Kamikaze) are heroes, America is the enemy and the Emperor, supposedly reduced to mortal status after Second World War, is still a deity. The Shinto officials who run the shrine believe they are protecting the “soul of Japan.”

Li’s cinematic gaze is unflinching, and sometimes disturbing. In one scene, filmed on the 60th anniversary of Japan’s World War 2 surrender, August 15, 2005, two young anti-Yasukuni protestors are beaten and chased from the shrine’s grounds by right-wingers who yell at them to “go back to China.” The protestors, who are Japanese, are later hauled off by the police. Archive shots show Japanese soldiers using Yasukuni swords, forged in the grounds from 1933-1945, to decapitate Chinese victims.

But much of the movie, which is narration free, unobtrusively explores the conflicting sentiments provoked by the memorial among ordinary Japanese: from the two older women who recall the
battlefield deaths of relatives and who want the prime minister to pay his respects, to the Buddhist priest who resents the fact that his father’s soul has been enshrined there against his will. The movie is hinged around the work of the shrine’s last remaining sword-maker, Kariya Naoji, a gentle craftsman who offers few insights into how he helped forge the 8,100 swords that ended up on the battlefield.

Many have been quick to blame the cinemas for the “Yasukuni” debacle. The Asahi and Sankei newspapers, representing the left and right of mainstream public opinion in Japan, have both urged the theater managers to rethink their decision. One newspaper called the collapse under threat “pitiful.” But you can hardly blame the theaters for running scared, says Japan-based film director John Junkerman, who wrote the subtitles for “Yasukuni.”

“There have been a sufficient number of violent attacks for alleged ‘anti-Japanese’ thought crimes that the threat of violence is very intimidating,” he says, citing several cases including the murder of Asahi journalist Kojiri Tomohiro in 1987, the shooting of Nagasaki mayor Motoshima Hitoshi in 1990 and the most recent fire-bomb attack on the home of LDP politician Kato Koichi, after he criticized prime ministerial visits to Yasukuni. “Couple this with the apparent reluctance of the police to intervene to prevent intimidation, and the threat that the theaters perceive is not actually unreasonable.”

Junkerman acknowledges that Japan has “a very high level of respect for and exercise of freedom of expression.” But the branding of a movie as “mondai-saku” — or a “problem” — in the press is a potent way for politicians to raise questions about its political slant, and “the right wing take over from there.” Ultra-nationalists are like the mad dogs kept in bad neighborhoods: not nice to be around but useful in an emergency.

One of the more interesting developments, then, in the continuing saga over Li’s movie, is how little support Inada appears to have among neonationalists, who believe she has betrayed them. “That woman is the worst,” says prominent new-right figure Kimura Mitsuhiro. “First she criticizes the movie, then refuses to back the protests against it. She did a complete about-face.”

At a Shinjuku meeting about the “Yasukuni” movie in April, another senior new-right activist, Suzuki Kunio, argued that ordinary Japanese should have a chance to judge for themselves what all the fuss is about. “I think it is a mistake for politicians to decide what is best for the public to see,” he said.

There are signs that Suzuki may get his wish as the smear campaign against the movie runs out of steam. As of May 1st, as many as 20 theaters around the country plan to screen the film, which has now become a sort of free-speech cause célèbre. Chief Cabinet Secretary Machimura Nobutaka and even Prime Minister Fukuda Yasuo have gone on the record to call the harassment of the movie “inappropriate.”

For his part, director Li Ying, who moved to Tokyo in 1989 and speaks fluent Japanese, rejects claims that he is anti-Japanese and describes his movie as a “love-letter” to the Japanese people. “I live in Japan. How could something that is anti-Japanese be good for me, personally? This love letter may be hard to watch, but that’s the form my love takes.” He says he was motivated to
start making the movie a decade ago by the shock of listening to Japanese revisionists at a conference on the Nanjing Massacre. “When it comes to history, there’s a gap that’s so large.”

John Junkerman interviews Li Ying

[Note: This interview was conducted on March 10, several weeks before the theaters in Tokyo decided to cancel their screening of the film.]

Q: Who is the diet member who has raised objections to the film?

Li: Inada Tomomi is a very famous lawyer. She was involved in the court case over the “Hyakunin-giri” affair [the 1937 contest between two Japanese officers to be the first to behead 100 Chinese] and in the suit against Oe Kenzaburo, regarding mass suicides in Okinawa. She’s got very powerful backers. An ordinary diet member would not be able to get the Agency for Cultural Affairs to take action. So it’s intimidating. And now she’s influencing people around her. It’s a month until the film opens, and she can make things difficult for us. We don’t really care if she threatens us personally, we’re prepared for that, but it’s the theaters we’re worried about. The theaters are taking out insurance, increasing security. And the other concern is that people who appear in the film might be threatened. The other day I met with Kariya Naoji [the Yasukuni swordsmith featured in the film] and he mentioned that he’d seen reports that it was an anti-Japanese film. He doesn’t think so himself, but it could be a problem if he hears that from other people.

Q: What motivated you to breach the taboo and make a film about Yasukuni?

Li: It was Nanking. Some years ago, I was thinking about making a film on Nanking. In speaking with Japanese, of course there is always a gap in the perception of history. And the gap surrounding Nanking is the widest. So I was interested in Nanking and in 1997 I attended a symposium at Kudan Kaikan in Tokyo on the 60th anniversary of Nanking. The first event of the symposium was the screening of a documentary about Nanking. It was a propaganda film produced by the Japanese military, and of course it didn’t touch on the massacre at all. There was a scene of the formal ceremony of the Japanese military entering the city. And something happened that I couldn’t believe. The audience applauded, very loudly. It was a shock. It left me shaking. I couldn’t believe it. I felt like I was standing on a battlefield. It was a shock to
experience such a scene, here in Japan so many years after the war. It’s unthinkable, that people still feel a sense of honor and pride toward such a scene. This is not simply a typical right-wing problem. It far surpassed what I understood to be the right wing. Kudan Kaikan is a fancy venue, and there were more than a thousand people, all wearing suits and ties. University of Tokyo professors, members of the Atarashii Kyokasho o Tsukuru Kai [Japanese Society for History Textbook Reform]. There are those in Japan who have documented the massacre, and there are those who deny it. It was the deniers who were participating in this symposium. And what is their position? They dismiss the testimony of those who were in Nanking, and argue instead that the massacre never happened. There’s no possibility of discussing it with them.

At the symposium, the daughter of one of the officers who engaged in the beheading contest appealed for the restoration of her father’s honor, that he be treated not as a war criminal but as a heroic soul in Yasukuni. So that made me wonder what Yasukuni symbolized, this sacred space that granted heroic status. This was an issue that had a greater sense of reality. Nanking is a historical problem, but to take up an issue that carries reality, you need to film in Japan, and that meant filming Yasukuni, to bring the issue into present reality. Yasukuni feels very real to me. So I began filming then and continued for ten years. I didn’t know what kind of film it would turn out to be. I decided I would just film every time I went to Yasukuni. As I filmed I would study and learn more, and figure it out. That’s a very time-consuming process, to start filming without knowing what kind of film it will turn out to be. But I had a sense that it raised very real issues.

Q: Did people try to prevent you from filming?

Preventing the Filming of Yasukuni

Li: My camera was taken away, videotape was taken, I was told to erase the tapes. It was right-wingers who did this. You could never make this film, shooting in the standard way. I think that’s why no Japanese has ever made a film like this. They would follow the ordinary process of applying for press passes and permission, but it doesn’t work to take that approach. All you can do is shoot a bit at a time. When it was possible, I applied for permission. But there are places where permission wouldn’t be granted, and you either have to go ahead and film there, or give up.

Q: This is one of the issues that is being raised in criticism of the film.

Li: I did get permission to film on August 15th. I gave my name card to the people in charge at Yasukuni, and I had permission to film then. In the beginning, I had no idea of what kind of film I would make, so I shot like a tourist. There are a lot of tourists who shoot video at Yasukuni. But when I understood there were things I needed to shoot, I got permission. The people in charge knew who I was. I never shot with a concealed camera. I didn’t use a long lens.

Q: Was making a film about Yasukuni something of a provocation?

Li: It was more like a conditioned response than a provocation. I was provoked, and I responded. I often say, this is a sequela, the psychological aftereffect of the war. Not just World War II, not
just the war with China, but it’s a disorder caused by all the wars Japan fought since the Meiji period. Yasukuni Shrine is intricately tied to Japan’s modern history. It was built by the Meiji emperor, it’s the emperor’s shrine. So it is these contradictions, this disorder caused by war that can be seen on the stage of Yasukuni. When I go inside there, I feel like I too am suffering from a disease. I contracted the disease at the Nanking symposium, and I’ve been suffering from it ever since. I’m not a doctor, who can diagnose someone’s disease. I’m suffering from the disease as well. So it’s not a provocation, but a conditioned response, I’m responding by instinct.

Tojo Hideki and "Pride"

I had a dialogue once with Ito Shunya, the director of “Pride.” We’re both members of the Directors Guild of Japan, and Ito has always been very cordial and friendly toward me, a Japanese gentleman. But around that same time, 1997, he made the film called “Pride.” That too was a shock. When it comes to history, there’s a gap that’s so large. It’s a film about the “pride” of Tojo Hideki, his defiance of the Tokyo war crimes trial, arguing that the war was fought in Japan’s self-defense. We had a special meeting of the international committee of the Guild and I engaged in a three-hour discussion with Ito. And I thought at the time that it was pointless to debate, that what I needed to do was respond with a film of my own. So, it’s matter of conditioned response. The other side is provocative, I’m just responding by instinct.

Q: So you don’t consider this film to be anti-Japanese.

Curing the disorder caused by war

Li: Of course not. What’s wrong with curing an illness, the disorder caused by war? The point is to live together in a healthy atmosphere, and that would work in Japan’s favor as well. People don’t want to recognize their illness, they don’t want to think about it, look at it. They say, “Japan is beautiful. How can you say it is sick?” But if you watch the film, you’ll see that diseased cells are living within the space of Yasukuni. And that’s dangerous. It could lead to heart disease, or to brain disease. But what’s really serious about this disease is that it comes not from internal organs but from the soul. So it is a psychological disorder, a disease of the spirit. That I haven’t been able to leave this issue alone for the last ten years means that I too am suffering from this psychological disorder. I didn’t really want to make such a difficult film, it’s only going to cause problems, so I must be sick to do it. The point is to look directly at the disease.

What is the meaning of Yasukuni?

I’ve been observing for ten years, and this is the result. The film asks the question: What is the meaning of the spirit of Yasukuni? That’s all. Each viewer can come up with his or her own answer. This has to be good for Japan. It’s an opportunity, an opportunity to get well. That’s good for Japan, not anti-Japanese. To suggest that the film is anti-Japanese suggests that Yasukuni symbolizes all of Japan. That’s a mistake to begin with. It’s one face of Japan, the face of Japan when it’s suffering from disease. That’s not all of Japan. Japan has many beautiful faces. But this face must not be ignored. It must be confronted. Many Japanese don’t know about Yasukuni, they feel it has nothing to do with them. But that’s wrong. It needs to be recognized,
looked at, and thought about, and the film provides that opportunity. So it’s not anti-Japanese. It’s my love letter to Japan, in that sense. I live in Japan. How could something that is anti-Japanese be good for me, personally? This love letter may be hard to watch, but that’s the form my love takes. There are many forms of love. There’s one that declares that everything is wonderful, but that’s not my way. This is my expression of love.

Q: But there are those who consider it a taboo to address this.

Li: That’s because it is questioning the spirit, and so the spiritual pain comes out, and there is resistance. I’m not stating a conclusion. We don’t use any narration. The space itself raises the questions, the atmosphere of the place. My theme is the space that is Yasukuni. The space and the spirit. It’s the spirit of Yasukuni that I’m trying to capture. So you need a variety of perspectives to see the space. It’s not one-sided. But no one has looked at that space, so seeing it may be a shock, it may be unpleasant, but it’s reality.

Q: What is the spirit of Yasukuni?

**The spirit of Yasukuni: the sword**

Li: In the shrine’s own doctrine, the spirit is the sword. It is the object of worship. All of the spirits of the dead are embodied in that sword. So that’s the symbol of Yasukuni. The film depicts symbolic meaning. Everyone who appears in the film, every scene, and the sword itself, all are symbols. I am using the doctrine of Yasukuni to make a film: the world of symbols. The sword is the spirit, but what meaning does that spirit have? That’s the question the film raises. Is it the samurai spirit? The Yamato spirit? An entirely beautiful spirit?

Q: But it is a spirit that doesn’t allow for reflection.

Li: They are all tools. The sword is a tool. Yasukuni itself is no more than a building. It’s a tool. What meaning do people invest in those tools? How they are used changes their effect entirely. So it always returns to people. How do people use these tools, how do they see them? How do
they interact with the tools? People are weak, so the government uses the tools to manipulate people.

Q: There are many war memorials in the world, and everyone who visits them brings their own meaning to them. But Yasukuni does not allow that freedom. The compulsory nature of Yasukuni is the key problem, it seems to me.

Yasukuni and State Shinto

Li: It began as a symbol of the state. Under the emperor, it was part of a political religion. It was a military facility. The head priest was a general in the army, for example. It was run by the military. During the war, it had a status that surpassed all religions, it represented the morality of the Japanese people. That was the nature of state Shinto. State Shinto conveyed the power of the state as the image of the nation. The problem comes after the war, when state Shinto was disestablished, and separation of religion and the state was adopted. Yasukuni became an independent religious institution. But is it really independent? Is it really simply a religious shrine? There are many contradictions there. For example, in the film, there’s the story of the Buddhist priest, Sugawara Ryuken. The question he asks is this: if Yasukuni is an independent religious institution, how did it obtain the information needed to enshrine his father? He was enshrined, as a heroic spirit, after the war. How could they accomplish that? His father was a Buddhist. Why does a Buddhist have to be enshrined in a Shinto shrine? That’s a contradiction. Even after the war, there is no separation between Yasukuni and the government. The enshrinement rolls are all prepared on the basis of information that comes from the Ministry of Health, Labor, and Welfare. That’s true of the Class-A war criminals too. All of that information came from the government. So the government is still using Yasukuni.

The Japanese government employs a double standard. With regard to international society, it recognizes the verdicts of the war crimes trials, it acknowledges the existence of war criminals. But domestically, it uses Yasukuni to honor them, and give them the status of heroic souls, to express gratitude and respect. This is very Japanese, a different face at home and abroad. And this double standard has created the contradictory nature of Yasukuni over these decades. So there are people with different stances and the confrontations among them are repeated. It also makes Yasukuni very indefinite. To young people, it’s perplexing, and they don’t want to have anything to do with it. And this connects, of course, to the larger question of Japanese war responsibility throughout the postwar period. It is the matter of collective memory, and that’s where coercion comes into play. In the film, everyone is part of a collective, it has nothing to do with the individual. They have collective memory, they are in a collective context, collective currents and relationships. Yasukuni is a powerful collective symbol, a powerful symbol of collective memory. It is a symbol of Japan as a kyōdōtai, a communal society. To live collectively, with gratitude to the dead. It’s that kind of symbol. Yasukuni is not a simple symbol of militarism, it’s not simply a matter of whether the prime minister will worship there or not. It is connected to the collective memories that stretch back to the beginning of the Meiji period, when Japan began to walk the path of a modern state, with pride and honor.

Q: How do you think the film will be seen in China?
Li: This film is a Japanese-Chinese coproduction, with producers from the Beijing Film Academy and a Chinese film company. So it will be released in China. And that’s important, because it depicts sides of Yasukuni that have never been shown before.

Q: But there is a chance it will lead to increased anti-Japanese sentiment.

Li: That’s possible, but until now Yasukuni has been used for political purposes, with a nationalist spirit on both sides. But this film shows many aspects of Yasukuni, so it may have the effect of dampening the nationalist response. It provides the opportunity to engage the subject calmly, to watch, feel, study, and relate to it. An opportunity to communicate not in a political, nationalistic way, but in a cultural way.

Q: There are many appealing characters in the film, starting with Kariya-san, the swordsmith, and some of the ordinary people who worship at the shrine.

Swordsmith Kariya

Li: The spirit of the artisan is a central aspect of the Japanese character. There’s a concentration on the work in front of one. But there is also a tendency to not think about what is done with the product of one’s labor, and that’s problematic. That can be used by the state again, as it was during the war. Soldiers went to war doing a job, they didn’t go to war as “devils.” They were all ordinary people, and it was their job. Then they were changed. They may have engaged in atrocities, but it was war, so it’s forgivable. Is that kind of thinking acceptable? The film poses that question to the Japanese people.

Germany, Japan and the war dead

The desire to remember the war dead is the same throughout the world. When I showed the film at the Berlin Film Festival, the response was interesting. There are many war dead in Germany, and they had families who have their grief and want to commemorate the dead. But the Germans first built a memorial to the Jews. There is no facility in Germany commemorating the German war dead. Why is that? The founder of the International Forum of New Cinema at the Berlin
festival, Ulrich Gregor, has an interesting take on this. He argues that the difference between Germany and Japan is that Germany was lucky to have gotten rid of its emperor after World War I. For Japan, the symbol of the state has remained the same, before, during, and after the war. The emperor has lost his authority, he made a declaration of his humanity, but he remains the symbol of the state. That’s the source of the difficulty and complexity of the problem. Yasukuni Shrine is the emperor’s shrine. The film calls that into question. And that’s the reason it has generated an intense response.

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_Article and interview were prepared for Japan Focus. Posted on April 1, 2008 and updated May 1, 2008. This is a substantially expanded and updated version of an article that was published in the South China Morning Post._
“World War II as Trauma, Memory and Fantasy in Japanese Animation”

Susan J. Napier
May 31, 2005

Japanese popular culture has engaged with experiences and memories of WWII since the 1950s, starting with manga (comic books) and moving on to some of the most widely known and memorable animated war films that have been produced since the 1960s, such as Barefoot Gen (1983) and Grave of the Fireflies (1988). A number of animation artists have expressed loss and hope in their works on this subject. As Napier argues, Japanese animation has explored history and memory beyond simple entertainment and has presented important issues still relevant to the audience today. This essay analyzes two futuristic science fictions, one TV and one film series, made over two decades apart: Space Battleship Yamato (produced in the 1970s) and Silent Service (in the 1990s). Both explicitly refer to WWII: in Space Battleship Yamato, after having been sunk to the bottom of the ocean off Okinawa towards the very end of the war, the battleship Yamato is revived by the Japanese government in order to save humanity from an alien attack, whereas a constant battle between Japan and international communities over the ownership of a nuclear submarine occurs in Silent Service. After a brief introduction of the narratives of the two animation series, the author examines their reception at the time of their production, and discusses the ways in which they rework the memory of loss and vision of hope in response to contemporary national and international politics.
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.” 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.” 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.”

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 remembrances 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 manicheanism 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 are 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 metatrope 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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This article, prepared for Japan Focus, expands on a presentation on the sixtieth anniversary of the end of World War II at the Annual Meeting of the Association for Asian Studies, Chicago, March 31-April 2, 2005. Posted at Japan Focus on May 31, 2005.

[2] Ibid, 27
[4] I am indebted to two former students for my initial interest in the Yamato series. Karline 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.
[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.


[12] Ibid., 86.
TEZUKA Osamu (1928-1989) was one of the most important manga writers in Japan; his contribution to the popularization of manga and anime cannot be overstated. Tezuka’s handling of the confrontation and reconciliation between human and machine, and his vision of humanity with a global perspective, for example, have fascinated many readers both domestically and internationally. Following his creation of a human robot character, Astro Boy (1951), Tezuka frequently wrote about the various impacts of science and technology on humanity. As Tanaka explains, Tezuka witnessed the destructive consequences brought about by the particular use of science and technology during the U.S. bombings of Japan during WWII, which in turn motivated him to explore themes such as war, peace, and humanity in his works. This essay introduces Tezuka’s family background and his upbringing, and discusses how his history and personal experience of the war influenced him in the creation of manga heroes and narratives that are closely connected to real-world problems, such as the Vietnam War and nuclear issues. Focusing on Tezuka’s early works, the author analyzes some of the most representative manga expressing the artist’s observations and ideas about war and peace, as well as his imagination of the future.
War and Peace in the Art of Tezuka Osamu: The humanism of his epic manga
Yuki Tanaka

Introduction
From late November 1944, the U.S. Air Force began aerial bombing of Japan’s main islands. By the time the war ended on 15 August 1945, the United States had dropped a total of 160,800 tons of conventional and incendiary bombs, as well as two atomic bombs. More than ninety percent of these bombs were dropped by B-29 bombers during the last five months of the Asia-Pacific War. In the end, almost 100 cities and more than 300 towns and villages throughout Japan were targeted, causing more than 1 million casualties including 560,000 deaths. It is said that seventy percent of those killed were women and children. The great destruction and carnage from this intense indiscriminate bombing campaign imposed severe physical as well as psychological damage on Japan’s society and people.

Ironically, the U.S. bombing campaign provided the vital life experience for remarkably creative expressions by some young survivors, who later became writers, artists, musicians or anti-war and peace activists. The US destruction thus contributed to creating some of the most important expressions of post-war Japanese culture. One of the most outstanding examples of this is Tezuka Osamu, a manga writer, who is now known worldwide as the creator of Astro Boy.

Tezuka Osamu was born in November 1928 in Osaka and died at the age of 60, in February 1989. In his relatively short life he produced more than 700 manga, both long and short, which in total amount to some 150,000 pages. I suggest that four major features underlie this large body of work: respect for the natural environment, respect for the life of every living creature, a deep scepticism towards science and civilization, and a strong commitment to anti-war and peace causes.

Here I focus on some of his early work from the 1950s, while briefly introducing his later work. I also compare heroes in Tezuka’s epic manga with superheroes in American comics.

Personal Background
Tezuka’s family history had a strong influence on his ideology, which formed the basis for much of his work. Both his great-great-grandfather, Tezuka Ryosen, and great-grand father Tezuka Ryoan were “rangakui” (medical doctors who studied Dutch medical science) in the late Edo period, and belonged to a small group of progressive doctors who set up the anti-smallpox vaccination clinic in Kanda, Edo in 1858. They and their colleagues strove to introduce modern Western medical technologies into Japanese feudal society, overcoming the widespread and deep mistrust of “alien operations” among the general population as well as traditional doctors. (Between 1981 and 1986, Tezuka produced an 11 volume long epic entitled Hidamari no Ki, The Tree Under Sunlight, a semi biographical manga on Tezuka Ryoan and Ryosen.) Tezuka’s grandfather, Tezuka Taro, was a lawyer who served as chief public prosecutor of the Osaka District Court and as the director of the Public Prosecutor’s Office in Nagoya and Nagasaki. He was also one of the founders of the Kansai Law School (the present Law School of Kansai University). Tezuka’s father, Tezuka Yutaka, an office worker for Sumitomo Metalwork Industry, was deeply interested in photography and film. In the 1930s, at a time when going to the cinema was still a rare recreational activity for many Japanese, he had a film projector called “Patty Baby,” which he used to screen Charlie Chaplin films and Disney animations at home.
Tanaka: War and Peace in the Art of Tezuka Osamu

Tezuka’s mother, Fumiko, was the daughter of a senior officer of the Japanese Imperial Army, Lieutenant General Hattori Hideo, who had remarkably liberated ways of thinking for someone of her background (she bought many manga as well as other literature including Japanese translations of foreign novels and adventure stories for her children). It is obvious that Osamu inherited many characteristic elements from his parents and forebears. These elements are reflected in his work and contributed to the unique style of his manga.

In 1933, when Tezuka was five years old, his family moved from Osaka to Takarazuka.

Even though it was a newly established small town in a rural district, surrounded by rice fields and mountains, it was a cultural centre: the Takarazuka Grand Theatre, where the extremely popular all-female Takarazuka Revue constantly performed and still runs spectacular shows, was built in 1924, and other amusement facilities such as Takarazuka Luna Park soon followed. In his boyhood, Tezuka developed an acute interest in insects and astronomy, finding these aspects of rural life fascinating after having moved from an urban area of Osaka city. From his early years at elementary school, he spent hours collecting insects and meticulously recording them with detailed drawings.

Through such activities, he came to embrace a profound respect for the natural environment and for the life of every living creature. At the same time, he became fascinated by musical and theatrical performances, as his mother often took him to the Takarazuka Revue. His fascination for Takarazuka musicals must also have stimulated his fondness for creating stories, and while at school he often produced manga with interesting plot lines, which circulated not only amongst his classmates but also his teachers.
The Sino-Japanese War started in 1931 when Tezuka was 3 years old and the Pacific War started in 1941 when he entered junior high school at the age of 13. In summer 1944, he was sent to a special training school set up for physically weak junior high school boys, to do intensive military drills. However he became seriously ill, having contracted a severe skin disease. From September that year, junior high school classes were cancelled, and he was mobilized with his fellow students to work at an army arsenal in Osaka.

From the end of 1944, U.S. forces began bombing Japanese cities, and from the following March fire-bombing intensified, targeting every major city and town throughout Japan. Osaka city was attacked several times. The first bombing raid continued for three hours from midnight on 13 March 1945, when 70,000 incendiary bombs were dropped on the city, and 3,000 civilians were killed. From 1 June, Osaka, the largest city in the Kansai area, was repeatedly attacked - on 7, 15 and 26 June, 10 and 24 July and 14 August. In the last bombing raid, on 14 August (the day before Japan’s official surrender), 700 one-ton bombs were dropped from 150 B-29 bombers. The main target was the army arsenal near Osaka Castle, but some bombs fell on Kyobashi railway station, where two rows of passenger trains had just arrived, approaching from opposite directions. Many civilians were killed by direct hits from these bombs. Overall, in total, more than 10,000 civilians of Osaka city were believed to have been killed in this series of U.S. bombing raids.

Tezuka experienced the fire-bombings of Osaka while working at the arsenal. He was often reprimanded for drawing comics rather than concentrating on his work and as punishment he was ordered to climb the watchtower in the factory yard to look out for B-29 bombers and give the warning if he saw them. He later described one air raid:

‘As the air raid warning siren began, I saw that as usual, a formation of U.S. bombers was heading towards us along the Yodogawa River. As soon as I thought “here they come,” incendiary bombs showered down on us, making a loud noise like a heavy rain. Bombs streamed down one after another onto the factory. Just when I thought that this would be the end of my life, exposed on the top of the watchtower, a bomb hit the roof just two meters directly below me. Later I heard that this bomb killed all the people who had rushed into the air raid shelter underneath this building. I tumbled down the watchtower, screaming as if I had gone mad. All around me, the ground was a sea of fire … and houses in every direction were burning with leaping flames making a rumbling sound. Then rain with black soot came down. I walked to the top of the riverbank of the Yodogawa. From there, I saw many big craters hollowed by bombs, where numerous objects which resembled human bodies were lying on top of one another (The bodies were so fractured that they did not look like human beings.)

In 1974, Tezuka produced the autobiographical manga entitled *The Paper Fortress (Kami no Toride)*, describing this unforgettable experience. His miraculous survival during this fire-bombing episode had a profound impact on his ideas of war and peace, and also imbuing him
with a deep mistrust of military leaders and politicians. He also feared the abuse of scientific knowledge which could create destructive weapons such as firebombs and atomic bombs.

NOTE: This article originally included several examples of Manga here and throughout the article, 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

In July 1945, shortly before the end of the Pacific War, Tezuka entered the special medical college of the Osaka Imperial University. Due to the shortage of medical doctors at the time, the special medical college system was established, by which some students entered the college straight from junior high school. Tezuka completed this medical course in 1951, but chose to work as a professional manga writer rather than as a doctor. However, his study of medical science reinforced his respect for the life of every living creature that he had been nurturing from his early boyhood. Indeed, he maintained his interest in medical science throughout his lifetime, and in 1961, despite his extremely busy work schedule, he submitted his dissertation on “heteromorphic spermatid,” and gained a doctoral degree in medicine.

The observation of death in war and the revival of life from the devastation of war infused Tezuka with a life-long motivation to create manga. In a discussion of his work with the well-known modern Japanese artist, Yokoo Tadanori, Tezuka explained that he always felt a strong vitality in the movement of the shapes in manga and animation, and he felt that to some extent this was due to the fact that his own life during the war had been completely lacking in vitality – he felt almost as if he were dead. When the war ended, he said, the feeling of revival in his own life was indescribable. Since then, he always found tremendous energy in drawing manga.

An avid reader of novels, adventure stories, and theater scripts, Tezuka was influenced by many world-renowned writers, in particular works by Karel Čapek such as *R.U.R, War with Newts* and *Power and Glory*, H.G. Wells’ *First Men in the Moon, Goethe’s Faust*, and Dostoevsky’s *Crime and Punishment*. Tezuka drew on the profound humanity of these writers’ works to create his own stories.

**Astro Boy: A Humane Robot**

Many of Tezuka’s early works strongly reflect his ideas about war, peace, and humanity, drawing on his life and death experience during the fire bombing. For example, Astro Boy was not originally a superhero robot, and never became a superhero, but was a lonely and timid boy who was abandoned by the scientist who created him, Professor Tenma. Astro Boy was created as a substitute for the scientist’s real son who had died in a car accident. Yet, the scientist disposed of Astro Boy when he realized that a robot cannot replace a real person.

It seems that the orphan Astro Boy evoked the numerous war orphans marginalized by post-war Japanese society. When the manga of Astro Boy was published in 1951, six years after the war, there were many war orphans throughout Japan. Like them, Astro Boy had to gain his own identity, striving to be accepted by society through his contribution to the community. Astro Boy succeeded by acting as a peace mediator. This is why the title of the first episode of Astro Boy was *Astro Boy Plays the Role of Ambassador (Atomu Taishi)*.

This manga tells of aliens living on another planet who are forced to migrate to Earth following the explosion of their planet. These space refugees are identical to the human beings on Earth,
except that the aliens have bigger ears. The people of Earth initially welcome their alien doubles, but soon, faced with a food crisis, they begin fighting. Here we find Tezuka’s criticism of war and conflict through his simple but profound question: how can identical human beings fight and kill each other. Through this manga we see that Tezuka’s concept of a “united Earth” is already taking shape, a concept which he elaborated more comprehensively in later works. Tezuka learnt first-hand the absurdity of fighting between different races not only through the terrifying fire-bombings of World War II but also through his encounter with violence during the Allied occupation immediately after the war. He was bashed by an American soldier when he tried to stop the soldier from tearing up a picture he had drawn to sell to the GIs.

Astro Boy does not have a double among the aliens as he was artificially created, and therefore can act as a mediator as he does not belong either with the human beings or with the aliens. Eventually he succeeds in making peace between the two races by arranging that half the humans together with half the alien migrants will leave Earth to find another planet to live peacefully. It is interesting to note that, while many post-war monster-invasion stories, most notably represented by the film Godzilla, are constructed on the theme of the ultimate survival of the Japanese in confrontation with bizarre and threatening “others,” the main theme of this first episode of Astro Boy is “reconciliation” between the two different species. Indeed, in the following seventeen year-long series of Astro Boy episodes, reconciliation remained the core theme of these humane robot stories, although the original theme of confrontation and reconciliation between two different races developed into the conflict between humans and robots.

It is also interesting to emphasize that Astro Boy has the ability to think for himself and acts to fulfill human happiness. By contrast, other popular robot manga heroes that appeared in the 1950s, for example Gigantor (Tetsujin 28-go) by Yokoyama Mitsuteru, simply obey their controllers who ultimately decide what is right or wrong for their robots. Therefore, these robots can easily switch from battling for justice to being a villain and vice versa, depending on who controls them. Unlike these robots which are simply mechanical constructions, time and again Astro Boy is put in a quandary when other robots rebel against humans, as he often cannot rationally decide whose side he should take. Yet inevitably, he eventually accomplishes his mission to fulfill human happiness, often by his own self-sacrifice through injury or destruction. Thus, in many episodes, Astro Boy goes through cycles of death and rebirth, being repeatedly repaired or rebuilt. Indeed, the last episode of the Astro Boy series, which concluded in March 1966, ended with Astro Boy’s ultimate self-sacrifice. In this story, Astro Boy is completely destroyed and cannot be repaired, after he tries to protect Dr. Rosso who is attacked by the robot Blue Knight (Ao-kishi), the leader of the rebellious robots against humans. These robots are products of Dr. Rosso himself. Thus, unlike superheroes in American comics, Astro Boy is neither immortal nor invincible. It is not possible for Astro Boy to become a superhero as he always suffers from the dilemma between self-consciousness as a robot and that as a human being. Although he remains forever young and
physically never ages, Astro Boy is just like an ordinary human boy, who is always imperfect and keeps learning from his own experiences and encounters with life’s difficulties.

The crucial difference between Astro Boy and Gigantor is the universal nature of Astro Boy. Astro Boy moves around the world, seeking peace and justice. He transcends nationality and ethnicity and freely crosses national borders. He eventually allies with anyone who stands for justice and fights against villainy, although he often finds it difficult to determine what is really just. On the other hand, in the manga stories of Gigantor, the good guys always look Japanese, and they ride in planes or vehicles decorated with the Japanese flag, while the bad guys always look Caucasian. In the world of Astro Boy, conflicts usually do not occur between different nations or different races, but between immoral adults and innocent children. In this sense, this manga for children contains a profound criticism of adult activities, most of which are closely intertwined with such factors as politics, nationality, ethnicity, religion and racial and cultural differences. This universal aspect to Astro Boy’s character is undoubtedly the key reason for his immense, world-wide popularity.

It seems that Tezuka was clearly conscious of the famous SF story, R.U.R, written by Karel Čapek in 1920, in which Čapek invented the word “robot” from the Czech word “robota” (meaning slave work), a word that quickly spread all over the world through the English translation of this imaginative story. R.U.R. ends with the total annihilation of humankind as a result of the increased population of robots produced by humans themselves. One of the important questions that Čapek explored throughout his life was whether the development of science and technology would ultimately bring happiness to human beings. Always sceptical about the benefit that science can provide, he wondered if the abuse of technology would ultimately lead to the extinction of the human race. This question also haunted Tezuka, but unlike Čapek, he never gave up hope that humans are basically wise enough to utilize the knowledge of science and technology for their own happiness. However, through his manga, he constantly warned of the harm that abuse of such knowledge could bring not only to humans, but also to the environment and the many other creatures on this planet.
One question that remains is why Tezuka used the Japanese word “Atomu” (i.e. “Atom) for the name of this robot. The English name “Astro Boy” was adopted in 1963 when the first few episodes of the Japanese animation version of “Tetsuwan Atomu” (Atomu with Iron Arms) were televised in the United States. The first episode of Astro Boy, *Astro Boy Plays the Role of Ambassador (Atomu Taishi)* never suggests that the energy source of the robot is nuclear power, despite the name “Atom.” In later episodes, there are often references suggesting that the energy source of the robot is nuclear power, but it is never clearly explained how nuclear power is used to generate energy for the robot. Some people suggest that Astro Boy carries a small nuclear reactor inside the body, but Tezuka himself never adopted this story. In one of his autobiographies, he explains that he stumbled on the idea of using the word “Atom” for the name of the robot as the deadline for the manuscript was coming closer and the publisher was pressing him to urgently decide on the title for this manga. The early 1950s was a time when “peaceful uses of nuclear energy” began to be promoted in various nations. It seems that, even unconsciously, Tezuka was influenced by this over-optimistic idea for the use of nuclear energy, despite his deep fear of the abuse of scientific knowledge. In 1960, he used the word “Uran” (Uranium) for the newly created sister robot of Astro Boy, which implies that in the early 1960s, Tezuka was still influenced by the idea of “peaceful uses of nuclear energy”.

**The Future World: A Warning about the Abuse of Science and Technology**

In 1951, Tezuka published an epic manga entitled *The Future World (Kitarubeki Sekai)*, which sharply criticizes the nuclear arms race between the United States and the Soviet Union. In this manga, two hostile nations, the Star Nation and the Uranium Union have been conducting nuclear tests over many years. As a result many animals and plants have been affected by radiation causing mutations. One such mutation produces a breed of creatures with superior intellect called the “Mufun,” who sense that the Earth will soon be covered in poisonous gases and hence that all living creatures will be annihilated. Therefore the Mufuns decide to leave the Earth in a large satellite, taking a pair of every creature on Earth, as Noah did in his Ark. Meanwhile, the people of the Star Nation and the Uranium Union are still busy developing nuclear weapons and eventually go to war. When both nations are almost completely destroyed, their leaders agree to restore peace. However, by then the Earth is clouded with dark, poisonous gases. The leaders of the two nations embrace and joyfully proclaim “Peace, Peace has come, No
more war on Earth,” “Long Live Human beings! Long Live World Culture!” as gases begin to shower down on them. The message of this manga is still relevant today as we fight wars all over the world, and globally spend more than US$1.4 trillion annually on the military, at a time when our planet suffers a serious climate crisis due to global warming.

*The Future World* presents many other elements of the problems it raises. In this manga, the main characters are three children, a Mufun, a private detective called Hige Oyaji (meaning mustached old man), a biologist by the name of Dr. Yamadano Kakashi, and the respective state leaders of the Star Nation and the Uranium Union. The story of the conflict of the two nations unfolds as the relationships between these characters evolve. These characters watch as a vicious cycle is created, wherein critical events occur one after another, each commencing before the previous case is solved. As Japanese manga writer and critic Natsume Fusanosuke points out, this tale of international conflict between two powerful nations is complexly comprised of many stories of personal relationships among the main characters. Furthermore, international conflict is constructed as an important element of the story of cultural and intellectual differences between humans and Mufuns. Eventually, readers find that all these stories are presented only as small parts of the grand tale of the cosmos. We find that the conflict between the two nations is meaningless in the context of the conflict between humans and Mufuns, and similarly that the antagonism between the humans and Mufuns is futile at a time when Earth and everything on it is under threat.

*The Future World* is based on the logic of relativity and shows that there is no such thing as “absolute justice” in this world, in particular from a universal viewpoint. In fact, through his entertaining and imaginative manga, Tezuka tried to convey that everything is conditioned by its relationship with other things, so there is no simple and straightforward answer to anything. In other words, every existence, including that of human beings, is conditioned by its relationship with other existences, and nothing exists without this relationship of relativity. Hence, unlike many other children’s manga stories, no superhero fighting for justice and peace appears. The story never ends with the absolute victory of a superhero. However, Tezuka did not want to end this manga with a tragedy of mankind. Thus, he let the poisonous gases undergo a drastic chemical reaction and turn into harmless oxygen, just as they were showering down on the Earth, allowing humanity to survive. Even so, he warns readers through Dr. Yamadano’s last statement – ‘Someday, superior creatures may conquer humans in a similar way to which, once upon a time, we humans conquered the apes. This is the law of nature. If we wish to live under the law of nature and survive, we must stop fighting each other.’ Tezuka inserted similar warnings at the end of other such epic manga that he produced in the late 1940s and early 1950s such as *Metropolis* and *Zero-Man*: for example, ‘Some day, human beings may destroy themselves because of the science that they over-develop.’

In comparing Karel Čapek’s novel *War with Newts* and *The Future World*, we find a strikingly similar logic of relativity. In both stories, a species superior to humans – salamanders in *War with Newts* and Mufuns in *The Future World* – appear and eventually everything on Earth is faced with the danger of total destruction. In both stories, humans are treated as one of many living species on Earth, and fighting among humans themselves seriously endangers the planet. Then again, the ending of Tezuka’s story still gives hope for ultimate human survival, while Čapek’s story ends with a prediction of fatal tragedy for human beings. Despite this difference, there is no doubt that Tezuka’s early work was heavily influenced by Čapek’s scepticism towards science and human behavior.
Epic Manga on Nuclear Issues

In 1953, Tezuka published an epic manga entitled *Point X in the Pacific* (*Taiheiyo X Pointo*), another critique of the nuclear arms race. Two hostile nuclear powers, Cosmopolitan and Eurasia, are frantically developing more and more powerful weapons. Eventually Cosmopolitan produces a new bomb called the “Oxygen Bomb,” which is far more powerful than a nuclear bomb. Despite world-wide protest against the test of this new weapon, the government of Cosmopolitan decides to carry out the test at “Point X” in the Pacific, removing all local inhabitants of islands near the test site to more remote locations. When an old man called Hige Oyaji (meaning mustached old man), an ex-thief who now lives as an ordinary citizen, hears this news, he decides to destroy the weapon before it is tested. With his son’s assistance he succeeds. In this manga, too, it is not a superhero but an old man with a criminal record and his son, who fight against the madness of politicians and militarists.

Remarkably, Tezuka wrote this manga a year before the United States tested the Hydrogen Bomb on Bikini Atoll in the Southwest Pacific. Although the U.S. government started nuclear tests on Bikini in July 1946, less than a year after the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the nuclear test issue did not become a major political issue in Japan or internationally until a Japanese fishing boat called *Lucky Dragon # 5* was covered by radioactive fallout and its crew irradiated as a result of the first U.S. Hydrogen Bomb test, Operation Bravo, near Bikini in March 1954. Aside from Tezuka, hardly any writers in the manga world took up the nuclear issue as the main theme of their work at this time.

One of the first to do so was Shirato Sampei, whose *A Disappearing Girl* (*Kieyuku Shojo*) was published in 1959, five years after the *Lucky Dragon* incident, when the Japanese anti-nuclear movement was already strong and widespread. This is a story about a young girl in Hiroshima who loses her entire family due to radiation caused by the atomic bombing. She herself becomes sick from exposure to radiation, and as a result of deep-rooted social discrimination against hibakusha (A-bomb survivors) she becomes homeless. In the forest where she wanders about, she meets a Korean man who was brought to Japan during the war and forced to work at a

Irradiated fishermen are having their contaminated hair shaved

Irradiated Japanese fisherman from the 1954 Hydrogen Bomb test at Bikini having contaminated hair shaved
Japanese coal mine. They live happily together for a while until the Korean man is arrested by the police and put on a ship back to Korea. Escaping from the ship, he returns to the forest only to find that the girl is already dead. The main theme of this moving manga is social and racial discrimination rather than nuclear issues. It focuses on the problems of Japanese society, and, unlike Tezuka’s manga, does not offer a global perspective on nuclear issues.

It is well known that the film Godzilla, produced at the end of 1954, was inspired by the Lucky Dragon incident. The following year, Kurosawa Akira, who was also influenced by the H-bomb test, produced the film I Live in Fear (Ikimono no Kiroku). Both films present the Japanese as victims of nuclear weapons.

In fact, many films featuring atomic bombings or nuclear tests were produced following the end of the US occupation in 1952, such as Children of the Atomic Bomb (Genbaku no Ko) directed by Shindo Kaneto. Without exception, these films depict Japan and the Japanese as victims. In the 1970s, Nakazawa Keiji published Barefoot Gen (Hadashi no Gen), an epic manga about the difficult life of a boy and his family, some of whom survived the atomic bombing of Hiroshima. The translation of this manga has been widely circulated in the English-speaking world and remains popular both within and outside of Japan. However, as Tezuka once commented, the main weight of Nakazawa’s manga is the deep love and strong bonds of a family who experienced an unimaginable calamity, rather than the issue of nuclear weapons as such. In this manga, too, the Japanese are presented as victims of the war, although rather than being portrayed as passive victims, they strenuously act to overcome the difficulties of life in post-war Japan.
In 1955, Tezuka produced one other epic manga dealing with nuclear issues, *The Age of the Deluge (Daikozui Jidai)*, in which he presented Japan as a nuclear power. This manga tells of a disaster in which Japan’s secret nuclear arsenal built near the North Pole suddenly explodes, causing a deluge of seawater to descend on Japan. As a result, one third of Japan sinks under water. We see through this manga that while most Japanese people were concerned only with their own victimization through the use of nuclear weapons, Tezuka did not hesitate to imply that Japan too could become a nuclear nation and consequently bring disaster on the natural environment as well as on human beings, even without engaging in warfare. Tezuka obviously produced this manga to voice his concern that with the U.S. military using Japanese bases to fight the Korean War, Japan too might become aggressors. In this manga, again, it is a boy who tries to fight against the madness of adults who plan to produce weapons of mass destruction.

**Gekiga Manga and Heroes**

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, at the height of the Vietnam War, Tezuka produced several excellent *gekiga manga* (manga for adults) featuring the Asia Pacific War, such as *The Paper Fortress (Kami no Toride), Zephyrus, Canon, A Crashed Fighter Plane (Tsuirakuki), and The Grand General Goes to the Forest (Dai Shogun Mori e Iku)*. There is no doubt that Tezuka wrote these manga imagining what the Vietnamese were suffering under heavy U.S. aerial bombing. In 1987, many years after the Vietnam War and two years before his death, Tezuka continued to use Astro Boy to make readers of his manga think about the effects of bombing civilians in Vietnam. In *Astro Boy, Past and Present Stories (Atomu Konjyaku Monogatari)* published in 1987, Astro Boy travels back almost 50 years from 2017 to Vietnam in 1969, and stops the bombing by B-52 bombers, saving the lives of a newly born baby and his mother in the jungle.

In the 1970s, he also produced other *gekiga manga*, in particular the series *Black Jack*, featuring the psychological trauma and serious physical injuries experienced by American soldiers in Vietnam. *Black Jack* is a series of medical dramas that Tezuka started in November 1973 and ended in October 1983, producing a total of 230 short manga stories which fully utilize his wide medical knowledge. The main character Black Jack is an unlicensed but superbly gifted surgeon. Again and again Black Jack miraculously saves seriously ill patients and those on the verge of death, utilizing his surgical technique - but he always demands an outrageous price for his operation to rich clients.

In the *Black Jack* series, Tezuka included several stories focusing on the Vietnam War. For example in *Anaphylaxis*, published in December 1973, Black Jack is asked to save the life of George, son of a U.S. officer, Colonel Mason. George has been struck in the heart by shrapnel on a battlefield in Vietnam and brought to the hospital at Yokota Base. He is anaphylactic, and develops a severe cramp in reaction to the anesthesia. Therefore Black Jack tries electric
anesthesia, and the operation succeeds. Nevertheless, George commits suicide when his father forces him to go back to Vietnam and show his bravery as a U.S. soldier.

Another Black Jack story entitled Captain Devil, published in October 1975, is a kind of analogy of the March 1968 My Lai Massacre committed in Vietnam by a unit of US Army, Charlie Company. In this story, Lieutenant Kenneth is a captain of the Army unit who burned innocent civilian villagers to death in Vietnam. He shows not the slightest acknowledgement or repentance for what he had done, even boasting that killing civilians is simply unavoidable during wartime. He visits Black Jack and asks him to remove the bullets lodged in his brain. Black Jack accepts the request, on condition that Vietnamese child refugees from the village where Lieutenant Kenneth’s unit committed the massacre are present at the operation. While he is on the operation table, he is struck with terror. The operation is successful, but he becomes insane and kills himself accidentally.

From the latter half of the 1970s until the end of his life, many of Tezuka’s stories addressed the question of the duality of human nature – the co-existence of good and evil – and how to solve various problems arising from this innate contradiction, the most serious of which is war. Two of the finest of these works are MW, published in 1976, and Adolf, published in 1983. While MW depicts the madness of people who deal with weapons of mass destruction such as chemical weapons, Adolf is a long and comprehensive war story about three men, each named “Adolf”: Adolf Hitler, a Jewish boy living in Kobe, and a boy born to a German father and Japanese mother. This story addresses many important issues such as racial purity, ethnicity, personal identity, nationalism, state ideology, military violence, dehumanization, and political corruption. The father of the Jewish boy is killed by the Japanese-German boy, who becomes a Nazi officer during World War II. Yet after the war, the Jewish boy migrates to Israel and becomes a brutal oppressor of Palestinians.

In the early 1980s, at a time when few Japanese were paying attention to the Palestinian problem, Tezuka was already introducing this issue to manga readers, clearly pointing out that war can make the same person a victim as well as an assailant. The story is cleverly woven into actual historical events, so that readers learn much about World War II while being enthralled by a fascinating plot. The final message that readers learn from this captivating epic manga is that every nation claims to be acting justly in order to justify its conduct, yet the result often turns out to be gross “injustice” for many people, including citizens of that nation-state itself – an irony of politics.

As already mentioned, hardly any superheroes appear in Tezuka’s manga. Even the saint-like Buddha is described as a person who struggles to painfully overcome various human weaknesses and defects in order to achieve his goal. In the 14 volume long epic manga entitled Buddha, Buddha has personal flaws, unlike an innately perfect figure such as Jesus Christ. Tezuka’s manga contain no superheroes like Superman, Spiderman and Batman, the most popular
characters in American comics. These American superheroes never make mistakes of judgment concerning justice, morality and ethics. They always fight for the noble causes of justice and peace, and invariably accomplish their grand missions to defeat villains and evil, eliminating one danger after another with their incredible powers.

Yet, these superheroes suddenly become utterly powerless when a real catastrophic event occurs, like the September 11 terrorist attack. This is because the world of the imagination in which these superheroes live is completely detached from the real world, whilst the imaginative world of Tezuka’s manga is closely and firmly connected with the vital and complex problems of the real world. Thus, Superman is at a loss for words and simply holds his head in his hands, looking down at the ground in front of the debris of the Twin Towers. A cartoon published in late 2001 shows a tiny figure of Superman standing and saying ‘wow’ in front of the oversized figures of the September 11 rescue volunteers – a fire fighter, policeman, nurse and doctor – clearly indicating that the real heroes are these workers and volunteers, not Superman. Similarly, after the September 11 attack, the only thing that Spiderman could do immediately was to hopelessly stand at “ground zero” site and mutter that we can never comprehend the world of terrorists. In fact, the first Hollywood movie of Spiderman was being filmed shortly before the September 11 attack, in which Spiderman makes a huge web between the Twin Towers. Before the movie was released, all images of the World Trade Centre buildings were erased using computer technology. How could Spiderman jump around the Twin Towers, despite the fact that he could not save even a single person trapped under the debris after these buildings collapsed?

I wonder, were he still alive at the time, how Tezuka would have reacted through his manga to this astonishing terrorist attack, in which almost three thousand civilians were killed indiscriminately. In Tezuka’s manga there is no space for superheroes, simply because his manga world is a complex one, in which there is no absolute justice or absolute righteousness. In his imaginative manga world, if any of his characters yearn for justice and peace, they have to face the complexities of human society, in particular the various forms of “confrontation.”
Conclusion

Tezuka’s epic manga are dynamic as the storylines always revolve around confrontation: powerful nations versus powerful nations, humans versus machines, the primitive versus the modern, organizations versus individuals, idealism versus realism, science versus ethics, and so on. These confrontations take the form of universal problems such as imperialism, dictatorship, colonization, war, genocide, and bureaucracy. Yet, these adult themes are always clearly presented and simplified so as to be readily understood by children. Indeed, the vast volume of his manga work can be called “a ceremony of innocence,” an expression that the Irish poet, William Butler Yeats, used to describe children in 1920.

In this way, from the very beginning of his career as a manga writer immediately after the war, until the end of his life, Tezuka’s fascinating vision and powerful imagination allowed him to maintain a profound humanism with a global perspective, which was largely unaffected by the narrow-minded Japanese view of war victimhood. It is apparent that his work stands at the opposite end of the spectrum from recent works of nationalistic Japanese war manga like those of Kobayashi Yoshinori. How did Tezuka gain such humanism? How can we acquire humanism and disseminate it as a moral foundation for society? These questions should be taken up by anyone, regardless of race or nationality, who reads Tezuka’s vivid manga.

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“War, Memory, the Artist and the Politics of Language”
Hong-An TRUONG and Elin O'Hara Slavick
August 2, 2010
http://www.japanfocus.org/-Hong_An-Truong/3393

In this essay, two U.S.-based visual artists discuss a selection of their works that represents history, memory and the trauma of war. They use different artistic media, aims, and methodologies in dealing with these subjects. However, their conversation converges on common ground as they discuss the role of art and artists in remembering war atrocities such as the Nanjing Massacre, the Hiroshima bombings, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War, among others. The conversation shows how artists express their interests in history by incorporating empirical and theoretical elements into their artwork, and looks at the way they explore physical, emotional, individual, and collective perspectives of war and trauma through art.

Though these two artists do not have firsthand experiences of war, they are motivated by historical events and historical figures, both distant and recent, that are pertinent to their works. Truong is interested in the way history is produced by individuals. In her video installation, *A Measure of Remorse*, Truong features an American-born Chinese historian, Iris Chang, and presents the ambiguity of individuals’ acts of speaking about and against the past. Slavick’s cartographic drawings, *Protesting Cartography*, on the other hand, feature images of the U.S. testing ground for weapons and provide both well-known and lesser-known facts about U.S. bombings since Hiroshima. By presenting informative texts alongside images, Slavick aims to educate others about the U.S. military interventions that have taken place since 1945 in 60 different parts of the world. The essay includes a number of Slavick’s drawings and a link to an audio clip used in Truong’s work – a conversation among Iris Chang; the Ambassador of Japan, Kunihiko Saito; and a journalist, Elizabeth Farnsworth. The conversation was held by the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) in 1998.
War, Memory, the Artist and The Politics of Language

Artists Hong-An Truong and Elin O'Hara Slavick

This conversation between two artists draws on, presents, and discusses visual representations including video, drawings and maps pertaining to the Nanjing Massacre and the US history of bombing. Discussion offers reflection on war, memory, history, biography, the relationship between language and visual representation, protest, the possibility of reconciliation, and the role of the artist in response to war.

Slavick - We are both artists who utilize history, memory and the archive to explore specific historical events. While we both focus on Japan here, we have chosen different aspects of history and utilize different methodologies and visual strategies in dealing with the subject. Initially, I was invited to contribute the drawings of Asia, including those of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, from my series Protesting Cartography for the Hiroshima Anniversary issue. Having been inspired by your work over the years, I invited you to discuss our related yet very different projects in terms of ethics, politics, history, memory and language.

Truong - When you first asked me to participate in this conversation with you, I was excited but a bit hesitant. First off, I was worried because my project has an uneasy relationship to “history.” Rather than being about history, or trying to re-tell history, or suggesting an alternative to history-telling, it is more interested in calling into question how we produce history by engaging the individual players within a bigger history. While your project provides a lot of information to the viewer, important information that most viewers might not know about (where and how much the U.S. has bombed around the globe), my work isn’t necessarily trying to give a history lesson.

A Measure of Remorse is a single channel video installation that is part of a larger project provoked by the life of writer Iris Chang, author of The Rape of Nanking (1998), which brought intense and overdue attention in the English-speaking world to Japanese military atrocities committed against the Chinese in WWII. Exploring historical violence and the nature of apology through language, the body, desire, and trauma, the video re-imagines a confrontation on PBS in 1998 between Chang, the Japanese ambassador to the U.S., Kunihiko Saito, and journalist Elizabeth Farnsworth. The video is not a re-enactment of the past, but rather a kind of future made dark and deeply sensual, almost as an effect of Chang’s suicide in 2004. It raises questions about the effect of performative utterances - like apologies - when it comes to historical violence. The three figures acknowledge hurt, even death, and ask us about the claims our memories and voices can make against the past.
So in some ways, the project makes abstract the specifics of the history as a way to crystallize broader questions about trauma, memory, and language.

**Slavick** - Who are the 3 protagonists in your video *A Measure of Remorse*? Are they countries?

**Truong** - In one sense they are, but on a basic level, they are three people. Part of what was compelling to me about this interview (you can read the full transcript [here](#)) was the way in which the two individuals interviewed oscillated between speaking for themselves and speaking for their countries / their people. Their positions are not simple, of course, and even an attempt to speak for a group of people is problematic. In the case of Iris Chang, she is a second generation Chinese American who is advocating for the Chinese victims (and their families) of these atrocities. I am interested in the way that political violence operates on the individual and on the nation, and in the slippery spaces in between these sites of trauma. Thinking about larger questions of nationhood, nationalism, and the State, people have very strong feelings about whether and how governments should do the work of reparation. What is the role of memory in dealing with the history of political violence? My project does not re-hash national positions on this particular issue, but asks, how war and violence affect us as individuals transnationally.

**Slavick** - It is interesting that these people are individuals; yet in the video they do not speak – neither for themselves nor for their countries. The soundtrack is from PBS, a mass-media source. Do you see any contradiction there? It is as if they are slow-moving, embracing and beautiful pawns. Are we pawns in history, in the present?

**Truong** - Absolutely not –we are not pawns in history or in the present. The silence of the characters goes back to the question of language. How do we make ourselves heard? How effective is language in dealing with sorrow and pain and regret? How can we perform differently with our bodies than with our words? I follow Judith Butler's thinking through performativity, both in words and with our bodies. In the PBS interview, the language that is used is a regulated discourse – the language of political debate, where one speaks for the institution that he or she represents. This is what Iris Chang is getting at in her frustration about the lack of an apology. Can the Ambassador speak for himself and not the nation? No. He speaks for the nation because he is constrained by the norms of political speech—and he does so because of his specific job, not just the general framework of political speech, which regulates the other two participants. We are also disciplined in our bodies. The three characters would never have an opportunity to engage each other’s bodies in the way that they do in the film. I
bring these actions of tenderness, of embrace, of a stillness and slowness with the three characters – in and against language – as a way to challenge our performativity, and how we are disciplined in both language and body, as it relates to questions of history, violence, and remorse.

**Slavick** - Do you think that a government or history has a heart?

**Truong** - I don't think so, but I do think that they know time. They know how to use time. There are differences in the way that we experience, measure and think about time. Time is an abstract notion that becomes concretized through art, science, and social structures, but also through history – history as it relates to what we know, how we write and talk about it, what knowledge gets proliferated. So no, government does not have a heart; history does not have a heart, but they are bound up with time, bound up with consciousness.

**Slavick** - But memories, unlike history, come all mixed up together time-wise. They are rarely chronological. I don't quite know how to separate consciousness from emotion (the heart) and am fearful of a government that does not act with compassion (again, from the heart).

Does the chatter, noise, impossibility to comprehend much of the soundtrack symbolize the impossibility of communication and of changing history? Does it symbolize the difficulty of a true apology, of understanding and accepting an apology, and the fact that an apology does not undo the action? Also the suppression / denial of information? What was your strategy in making so much of the soundtrack incomprehensible?

**Truong** - I wanted to create a kind of trance-like soundtrack, where the words become abstract sound and only some comprehensible sentences emerge, to draw attention to the problem of language. I had in mind J. L. Austin's concept of language and performative speech acts -- the idea that to say something is to do something -- and what he calls 'misfires' when performative speech acts fail; they become 'unhappy.' In this project, I am not championing the spoken over the written word or vice versa. I was thinking about Derrida's concepts of difference — that the spoken word is always in reference to the written word; it demands the written word so it renders what is spoken as suspect. The lack of clarity in the soundtrack is about my suspicion of spoken language and how we perform with language. It wasn't about making clear who was in the right and who was in the wrong (in terms of the actual apology from Japan to China) but rather, about the fallibility of language and our struggle to articulate our sorrow, remorse and pain.

I think Derrida’s concept of *différance* is useful in conceptualizing the trauma of war violence through temporal and spatial terms. *Différance* is a play on words – it means both to defer and to differ, a deferral in time and space. Words are never adequate because they merely refer to more words. Words are fundamentally different than what they signify, and meaning is always deferred through language. Thus, this present, rather than assert itself as *presence* itself, splits that moment in a gesture of *différance* – a split that marks the trace of the future and the trace of the past in the present.
Slavick - Do you identify with one of the women in the video?

Truong - I identify with Iris Chang, but not without reservation or critique. Her life was the impetus for this piece and I hope to make a longer work about her soon.

Slavick - Could you speak more about Iris Chang here? I am particularly interested in your identification with her. How do you identify yourself? (I identify myself as a reluctant but privileged American citizen with roots planted firmly in Germany and France - for better or worse - wanting to be a citizen of the world.)

Truong - Iris Chang was born in the U.S., second generation like me. Her parents were Chinese academics, and she grew up in the suburbs. Her story is very different from mine (my family were refugees who fled Viet Nam after the end of the U.S. War; I was born soon after they arrived in the U.S. and I grew up in various parts of the country, refugee-poor). But there is a similarity in how we approach our family histories and shape our identities. She grew up hearing stories of the atrocities and genocide at Nanking, and these memories, while not from her own experience, functioned as her own. This parallels my own engagement with the U.S. War in Viet Nam, which has compelled me to make the work that I do. It’s what Marianne Hirsch has called post memory to describe the relationship between people of the second generation to the traumatic experiences that occurred before they were born, and the ways that these memories get transferred. Post memory is an in-between space where memory (which includes second-hand memory, memory through stories or archives, memories through the media) splits one’s sense of self, between here and there, between now and before.

Slavick - We are all second generation to traumatic experiences that occurred before we were born, processing the ways these memories get transferred: physically through lingering contagions and landmines; emotionally through countless absences, lacks, losses, denials, truths and lies. Of course, being second generation to the perpetrators or to the victims are very different positions, but ultimately, we all suffer the consequences of history.

Pierre Peju writes in Clara's Tale, "War was everywhere. It had gone on for so long that people had forgotten what caused it…. In Germany, memories of the disaster that occurred still hang heavily, but nobody speaks about them. Their shadows lurk in the artificial post-war serenity, among the still visible traces of violence and ruin. A veil of unspoken words shades people's kindly actions and disturbs the apparent innocence of things…Will my own life run its entire course in a similar kind of peace? A heavy, dense peace. An amnesic peace."
Truong - For Chang, the stories she heard growing up were the impetus for her research into the history of atrocity and ultimately the writing of *The Rape of Nanking* (1998), and she committed her short life to seeking justice and reparations for its survivors. While her book was a best-seller, and she was highly praised for it in the Chinese-American community and beyond, she also received a lot of criticism for that book, in the U.S. and, especially, of course, in Japan, where the book still causes a lot of controversy. She also received death threats and personal attacks, leading to periods of mental instability. In 2004 she was researching her fourth book, on the Bataan Death March (an atrocity which also occurred during WWII, when the Japanese military moved American POWs many miles without rest or adequate food) when she was hospitalized for mental health reasons. She committed suicide soon after that. I am interested in how she struggled with this history that she could not claim as her own experience but which drove her commitment to political and social justice. But her life's research and writing about war and violence also fueled her psychological instability. I am interested too, in how her own identity as a strong, outspoken, Asian American woman affected the way that her work was read and the criticism she received. In terms of her writing style, she had an ardent belief in the first person narrative and used emotional language in what is ostensibly considered history writing.

One of the reasons I chose to approach this topic the way I did is that I did not want to make a film about Iris Chang; I did not want to pathologize her, nor did I want to glorify her life and her work. On the contrary, I am using her story and this history critically as an attempt to get at wider questions about the role of memory in our understanding and relationship to war violence. Political violence is happening every day and quickly becomes the past. I was interested in this history in particular because of the ways that it can remind us how past political violence is also very much now.

I think the relevance of this story is made clear in the persistence of fraught relations between Japan and China, and the ways that this history – this historical memory – rears its ugly head in unexpected moments. There are Chinese activists who stage protests every time Japanese revise their school textbooks because of the way that this history is treated. Simply, the Chinese believe that the history is not being told truthfully – and this of course, has huge implications in the way that the Japanese see themselves and understand their history in relation to China and the rest of the world.

For me, though, my project does not take a humanist approach to violence. I am critical of a humanism that is founded upon a perceived universal moral order. To have empathy can be powerful – but it cannot work towards justice all by itself because I think it also problematically relies on the idea that there is an essential “goodness” of the individual and also doesn’t account for relations of power. I think this is what is weak about liberal democracy. It assumes that you have power without having to seize power. Humans don’t have an ahistorical essence – it’s important to remember that we are desiring subjects, operating within a set of power relations. We have to be critical of this and self-reflexive so that we can be active in our resistance.

In the video I wanted to create a tension between the words and the bodies of the three characters. The language that the characters used in the conversation fit within established codes that are based on a perceived moral order. The contrast between the language and the bodies was about proposing a kind of individualizing ideal, an experience of ethics that might question what and who we are. I think the framework for political action is not based on empathy within a set of moral rules, nor is it based on some notion of an essential sameness (our humanism), but
rather a reflexive notion of the self where one can be something other, where difference and alterity are taken up.

Slavick - How do you see the difference in reception of a video vs. a series of drawings? We are both dealing with specific violent histories but utilize different media. I know my choice of drawing was deliberate, even though I am trained as a photographer. And I am sure video was a deliberate choice for you. Could you talk about why and how you make those formal decisions?

Truong - Since I started making videos, I have been dying to make a purely photographic project, and it just hasn't happened. I just think in moving images, I am thinking in time-based images. I think electronically! In both sound and image -- I am always thinking of movement. Part of it is because I am drawn to the archive, the digital archive, the photographic and filmic archive, and so I am just working in the medium in which I find my source material. In this case, it was the PBS broadcast of this argument between Iris Chang and the Japanese ambassador. I love video because of the way that it can be so evocative. It is a language that so many are familiar with.

Slavick - You make me want to make videos and films.

Truong - And you make me want to work on paper!

The images that follow are from Protesting Cartography: Places the United States has Bombed. All drawings are mixed media on Arches papers, 30 x 22 inches, unframed.

World Map, Protesting Cartography: Places the United States has Bombed
1854 – Ongoing
Flag pins mark bombsites for which there are corresponding drawings.

Dugway is a “massive firing range that for 50 years was the U.S. Army testing ground for some of the most lethal chemical, biological and nuclear weapons ever made. A slope of mountains to the east is pockmarked with hundreds of fortified bunkers storing enough toxins to eradicate mankind. Ground water is fouled with carcinogens. This was where the cold war was waged, not in battlefields in foreign lands, but in factories, laboratories and testing ranges.” - Tony Freemantle, Houston Chronicle

The drawing takes as its reference a photograph from Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory of a Project Schooner (part of Project Plowshare) crater and a football field (for scale), which was made by a 35-kiloton nuclear bomb.

“From 1957 to 1973, scientists and engineers working under the direction of the U.S. Atomic Energy Commission and its Livermore laboratory investigated, experimented with, and promoted the idea of “peaceful” uses of nuclear explosives through a program called Project Plowshare. Proponents confidently argue that the “geographical engineering” of harbors, canals, dams, and mountain passes could be accomplished safely, economically, and scientifically by means of nuclear-blasted excavation. But the nuclear earthmoving explosions produced large amounts of radioactive fallout, and with it, significant challenges to the program on scientific grounds. The Project Schooner cratering explosion produced the highest levels of fallout in Utah recorded since 1962, and sent radioactive debris across the Canadian border.” - Scott Kirsch, Peaceful Nuclear Explosions and the Geography of Scientific Authority

Slavick - Protesting Cartography – Places the U.S. has Bombed (1998 – 2005) is a series of 60 drawings of places the U.S. has bombed. They include Dresden, the Bikini Atoll, Guatemala, Nicaragua, the Congo and France, among many other places. Pictured in this essay are the World Map, several of Asia, and two domestic ones of atomic test sites. (Order the book: Bomb After Bomb: A Violent Cartography) The drawings are manifestations of self-education on the subjects of U.S. military interventions, geography, politics, history, cartography, and the language of war. The drawings are also a means to educate others. The drawings are “beautiful” so that the viewer will take a closer look, slow down, and contemplate the accompanying information that may implicate her. As a photographer aware of the military’s use of the aerial view that flight and
photography provide, using the aerial view seems like a logical choice to me. I utilize surveillance imagery, military sources and battle plans, photography and maps, much of which is from an aerial perspective. Maps are preeminently a language of power, not protest, yet I offer these maps as protests against each and every bombing.

Truong - I want to think about the relation between image and text -- how do they work together and / or against each other? For your work, the accompanying titles are important for a kind of pivot in the reading and reception of the work. I wonder about the language that you use and how it works. Can you talk a little about your choice of language?

Slavick - It is important that people see and experience the drawings first as drawings, that is, as visual things, because I think the subsequent and accompanying texts, (usually hung beside each drawing as a title and published in my book at the end as "List of Annotated Plates"), if they choose to read them, shock them out of their initial enjoyment of the drawings as cartographic, abstract and semi-modernist compositions and into a more politicized, active and historical field. Mostly, the titles come from other sources – historians, writers and activists like Howard Zinn, Sven Lindqvist, James Bradley, William Blum, Terry Tempest Williams and Jeffrey St. Clair, and media sources like the New York Times and the Washington Post. I probably spent as much time finding these texts as I did on the drawings. During my research, I discovered previously unknown places the U.S. had bombed, including its own territories (Atomic tests in Nevada, Alaska, Utah, Mississippi and New Mexico; the fire bombing of a neighborhood in Philadelphia; bomb tests in Puerto Rico and North Carolina) and realized that I was giving myself a history lesson. I felt compelled to share this information with others. Perhaps this comes more from my position as an educator than it does from me as an artist, but I am a big fan of art that is described, often disparagingly, as didactic, pedagogical, propagandistic and political.

The drawings do not show any people. As Howard Zinn writes in the foreword to my book, I do not show "bloody corpses, amputated limbs, skin shredded by napalm." Somehow though, the drawings compel the viewer to envision those things. The text does not show any people either, but it literally describes the historical events that took place - the number of the dead, the tonnage of bombs dropped. The text also compels you to imagine, to empathize. While some of the text is from an overtly political position, most of the titles are factual. While the drawings consistently work against the authority of maps as sources for specific information produced by those in power, the texts provide lots of specific information. I hope this provides a dynamic tension between the images and the text. The drawings seem to compel viewers to "figure them out" and once they start reading, they usually do not stop.

The atomic bomb called Little Boy “dropped on Hiroshima on August 6, 1945 turned into powder and ash, in a few moments, the flesh and bones of 140,000 men, women, and children. Three days later, a second atomic bomb dropped on Nagasaki killed perhaps 70,000 instantly. In the next five years, another 130,000 inhabitants of those two cities died of radiation poisoning. Those figures do not include countless other people who were left alive, but maimed, poisoned, disfigured, blinded.
A Japanese schoolgirl recalled years later that it was a beautiful morning. She saw a B-29 fly by, then a flash. She put her hands up and 'my hands went right through my face.' She saw a 'man without feet, walking on his ankles.’” - Howard Zinn, Hiroshima: Breaking the Silence

On the morning of August 9, 1945, the U.S. B-29 Superfortress dropped the nuclear bomb code-named Fat Man over the city. The explosion generated heat estimated at 7000 degrees Fahrenheit and winds estimated at 624 miles per hour. About 70,000 of Nagasaki’s 240,000 residents were killed instantly and up to 60,000 were injured.

Truong - It’s interesting that the text is what anchors the work politically – it is the pivot on which the meaning of the work is understood. So the text is incredibly necessary, and I see it as completely part of the work. We are both trying to challenge the negative perception of didactic political approaches to art practice. Considerable recent work takes up the language of political protest and uses it to both critique and engage (Sharon Hayes, Emily Roysdon, or even The YES! Men). In particular, a lot of work that takes up the language of the news media is about critiquing it. But you are taking that language, and lots of other languages, to simply inform. It’s interesting that these texts must be taken as facts. Do you see these annotations as really doing the work? Would the work function the way that you would want without them, and does that mean the texts then are the authority?

Slavick - I do not believe in one meaning of the work (or of any work). There have been pro-bombing people in the audience who appreciate this project too and that is fine with me. I strive for a multiplicity of experiences and understandings of my projects. I think the text is critical to the piece for you and me and many others, but not for everyone.

The language of political protest has always been utilized in art and has consistently gotten lots of attention – from Goya and Kathe Kollwitz to Hans Haacke and Alfredo Jaar, to name a few. I do think the text "does the work" in some sense, but not all of it. The drawings and titles, are co-dependent. I think the drawings, while working against authority and within subversive cartography, still do provide facts, information, and subsequently "authority" - this really is a representation of a real place where a bombing occurred. Ultimately, I am not sure that we need to distinguish between text and image in terms of language. Visual information functions and is understood in a very similar way as written text. Both function as language, even if they appear very differently.

I did feel a bit unqualified to make such a historical project, doubting my position and knowledge. Expertise makes us all insecure when we move outside our prescribed fields. Utilizing the texts from other sources did provide me with a sense of confidence and a community of support, even if I had to create it.

I think about A Measure of Remorse here. The "facts" are the PBS story that you use as a soundtrack, even though much of it is inaudible, we comprehend enough of it to know that this
conversation really took place. The soundtrack is paired with a completely fictional reenactment or staging of the real event that happened years ago. Which form carries more authority — the soundtrack or the imagery? One reason you make me want to make videos and film is how these two elements are seamlessly contained within one piece, rather than placed side by side as autonomous elements.

We are both challenging the way history is told and represented, the way things are remembered, along with challenging traditional perceptions of art practice as a purely formal exercise. They are all inherently dependent on each other — the sidelining of conceptual, political, ethical practices for the privileging of mainstream history and sanitized memory.

On the night of March 9-10 American B-29 bombers attack Tokyo, a city of 6 million people. 600 bombers drop 1,665 tons of napalm-filled firebombs, destroying 16 square miles. “In one horrific night, the firebombing of Tokyo — then a city largely of wooden buildings — killed an estimated 100,000 people.” - Howard French, The New York Times, March 14, 2002

“B-29 Superforts and B-24 Liberators pummeled the island mercilessly. Iwo Jima was bombed for 72 consecutive days, setting the record as the most heavily bombed target and the longest sustained bombardment in the Pacific War. Every square inch of the island was bombed. The 7th Air Force dropped 5,800 tons in 2,700 sorties. In one square mile of Iwo Jima, a photograph showed 5,000 bomb craters - all this on an island 5.5. miles long and 2 miles wide.” - James Bradley, Flags of our Fathers

Truong - This also has to do with our choices of medium. We're both deliberate about how we approach the topic -- we are researching and turning to archives. I am curious about your decision to work with maps. How do you think about the relationship between the abstract (shapes / color) and the concrete (place / violence)?

Slavick - I had never worked with maps before but it was the logical form for this project for several reasons. First, as an American, it is crucial that I identify myself as a citizen of the bombing nation. Utilizing the cartographic perspective that is inherently photographic (I am a photographer) provides a bomber pilot's view. I would never drop bombs and am opposed to each and every bombing, but it seemed critical to put myself in that position. Second, there is a long history of maps. They are usually used as instruments of power, determining borders and lines of private property, providing the source from which governments decide where to bomb. They are also considered to be true, factual representations of a place. I wanted to undermine that
power. Bombs do not stay within their intended borders - chemicals and toxic agents flow freely across borders. Ideologically, bombings create more "terrorists," (What is the difference between a terrorist and a soldier?), not just in the country under attack but in neighboring countries as well. I chose not to include geographic or cartographic symbols or information (other than the demarcation of a country or locality's shape in many cases) as a means to open up the possibilities for reading a map, to disengage maps from the clenched fist of authority.

Some of the color choices were very deliberate, based on the source material from which I was working. For example, the Congo is the same ochre yellow color that it was in the old atlas and it is the one drawing in which I turned the orientation of the country on it's side because the history of that country's borders and name is so complicated and constantly changing. The World Map, that has flag pins at each place for which there is corresponding drawing, is fairly red, white and blue - patriotic colors in the name of professed democracy and freedom. But for an artist who usually has a reason for everything and a purpose for each formal decision, I was surprised by the lack of correlation between colors and specific countries and events. Sometimes, it makes sense: The Firebombing of Tokyo is full of flame red and burning yellow, ash black and the bay is bluish, the landscape green; The Nevada Test Site II is dessert sand beige, even the sky is striped white and brown, the bomb crater black and injured red. But more often, the colors do not make sense: Vienna is pink and Poland and Iwo Jima are both white with dark blotches. I tried to make each drawing different to avoid redundancy and so that people would stay interested in them.

And I also enjoyed making them - watching the ink bleed, experimenting with acrylic resist, intuitively choosing colors and patterns. This felt wrong to me because I was so troubled by the content, by the events, but again, the process kept me working on a very depressing topic and it became clear to me that to keep people going with it, I had to make them beautiful. There is a lot of red for blood, black for death, blue and bleeds for water, concentric circles for targets and the spiraling aftermath, grids and lines to represent the map, the grid of power. Each one is also different because each place has a very specific history. I did not want to collapse each place into one big target or try to equalize the traumatic violence.

"From 1962 through 1973 the United States struck Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia with eight million tons of bombs, more than three times the amount it dropped in World War II. U.S. Policy in Cambodia from 1969 to 1973 played a crucial, if unintended, role in building support for the Cambodian Communists (the Khmer Rouge). A once insignificant rebel group, the Khmer Rouge did not gain strength until the United States began secretly bombing Cambodia.” - Christian Appy, Patriots: The Vietnam War Remembered from All Sides

"Between 1965 and 1973 more than 2 million tons of bombs rained down upon the people of Laos, more than the U.S. had dropped on both Germany and Japan in WWII." - William Blum, Killing Hope: U.S. Military and CIA Interventions since World War II

"Fred Branfman was one of the first Westerners to expose the fact that the United States had been secretly bombing northern Laos since 1964. Many of the attacks focused on the Plain of Jars, a high plateau controlled by the Laotian Communists, the Pathet Lao. It had been populated by some fifty thousand Laotian peasants who lived among six-foot-tall vessels believed to be ancient funeral urns – the famous jars of the plain. Branfman writes, ‘Every single one of the refugees told the same basic story. The bombing started in May 1964, slowly accelerated, and got really bad in 1968.’ I later found out that when Johnson declared the bombing halt over North Vietnam just prior to the November 1968 election, they simply diverted all the planes into northern Laos. Then Nixon and Kissinger came in and leveled the entire Plain of Jars.

Many of the air strikes dropped 'pineapple bombs' – antipersonnel bombs. They couldn’t destroy trucks or antiaircraft emplacements. They were only meant to kill people. They’d shoot two hundred and fifty pellets across an area the size of a football field. Then they refined them with these little fleschettes so they’d enter your body and were almost impossible to remove.’” – Christian Appy, Patriots: The Vietnam War Remembered from All Sides


Truong - The way that you talk about this makes me think of them as memorials – maps that, unlike their typical function of telling you where you are, memorialize what was once there, what once existed. And because it doesn’t have the function of what we want a map to typically do, it pushes us to want to know more, to seek out information.

Slavick - Exactly. My work has been about memorials for a long time. I just came back from 6 months in Lyon, France where I was making work inspired by the French Resistance during World War II. I wrote about and photographed memorials. (My photographic essay comparing memorials in France to those in Hiroshima, Japan, is forthcoming in the Canadian journal Public.) Memorials mark history and provide a constant reminder of what once happened. Many memorials are monumental. When all 60 bomb drawings are exhibited together, they do verge on the monumental, but as autonomous drawings, they are fragile paper documents offered as witness, testimony and in memory of all those who perished beneath our bombs.
“American airpower in Korea was fearsome to behold. As was the case in Vietnam, its use was celebrated in the wholesale dropping of napalm, destruction of villages, bombing cities so as to leave no useful facilities standing, demolishing dams and dikes to cripple the irrigation system, wiping out rice crops, saturation bombing, and a scorched earth policy. It is worse than useless to destroy to liberate.” – William Blum, Killing Hope: U.S. Military and CIA Interventions since World War II

"Three years after the beginning of the war, a cease-fire was finally signed. Everything was back to where it had been in the beginning, with almost the same borders as before the war and the same unfulfilled dream of reunification. No one had won. Everyone had lost. The war is calculated to have cost the lives of 5,000,000 people, by far the majority of them civilians." - Sven Lindqvist, The History of Bombing

Truong - Can you talk about your influences and references?

Slavick - I love Sue Coe and Kathe Kollwitz and their insistence on the hand being present in the work; the hand marking resistance, scratching alternative histories and slowing us down; making work against war. I am probably most inspired and challenged by Felix Gonzalez-Torres, how he addressed deeply personal and political issues with surprising and seemingly banal forms - heaps of candy as bodies, side-by-side clocks as gay lovers. I grew up loving the modernists and loved echoing some of their formal choices of abstraction, automatic writing, subconscious and childlike expressions, but for a different reason and in a completely different time, although war is ever present. I also grew up in an activist family where I was taught that our every gesture can change the world.

Truong – Can you talk about your deliberate choice of materials? Why drawing?

Slavick - I chose drawing because of my ongoing struggle with the problematic nature of photography. While the drawings are not photographs, they are photographic. Many of them are drawn from photographic sources and most of them are from an aerial perspective that is inherently photographic. But I can not make photographs of these damaged places. I did not survive the bombings as a victim but as a war-tax-paying citizen of the bombing nation. Even if I could make photographs, I would not because there are already too many photographs – too immediate and too brief - countries and lives reduced to singular images. I hope that if I labor on a series of drawings in which the artist’s hand is visible, that people will work to understand them on a deeper and more complicated level than they might when seeing a photograph.
"North Vietnam had been the target of secret U.S. military operations since 1961. In early 1965, just months after his landslide victory over Goldwater, Lyndon Johnson launched Operation Rolling Thunder, the sustained bombing of North Vietnam. In June, huge American B-52 stratofortresses began bombing targets in South Vietnam, each plane dropping up to twenty-seven tons of explosives per mission... Of the 53,193 American military fatalities in Vietnam, more than ten thousand were classified as 'noncombat deaths'. U.S forces also suffered more than three hundred thousand wounded. In 1995 the Vietnamese government announced that 1.1 million Communist troops were killed and six hundred thousand were wounded during the American War. The hardest figures to find reliable estimates for are the number of Vietnamese civilians killed during the war. Most estimates indicate that civilian deaths exceed combat deaths. The Vietnamese government estimates that two million Vietnamese civilians died during the American war. In total, the war extinguished some three million lives." – Christian Appy, Patriots: The Vietnam War Remembered from All Sides

Truong - I am interested in how you think about mapping in the context of experimental geography and radical cartographies. Do you think of your work as a spatial practice? You talk about the specificity of history, but do you also think about what you are doing as re-production of space?

Slavick –Yes, these drawings must be considered as re-productions of space because that is what they are and I was aware of that as I made them. I wanted to re-present not only each place that the U.S. has bombed, but also the space between the airplane and the land, between the bomb and the people under the bomb. I also wanted to image the enormous space that these bombs have destroyed. We, the U.S., have practically bombed everywhere on earth, or at least a place close by.

Truong - I ask this question because cartography is having such a renaissance in the contemporary art world right now, fueled by the prevalence, proliferation and access to the way that we can map things nowadays (think Google Earth, MapQuest and the like).

Slavick - Many of the sources for my bomb drawings came from the web – interactive military battle maps, surveillance and aerial views from the Department of Defense and activist sites for example. It felt like swimming upstream to then translate these globally accessible maps into hand-drawn images, but also critical to the process, both in production and reception. I wish I thought electronically like you do. I am too worried that the plug will be pulled, my hard drive will crash, or that I will inadvertently delete a thought or emotion.

Truong - It's a means of production that has been taken up by artists practicing a kind of critical geography whose works overlap with other disciplines like urban planning and architecture and are supported by fantastic organizations like the Center for Urban Pedagogy in New York. But I’m thinking through the way they function as maps, how they might create another space for a
viewer (ostensibly an American viewer) to imagine the place of war, to imagine the U.S.’s history of violence. I think it’s important that you keep reminding us that the U.S. is also you – it’s also the viewer and it’s also me – to remind us of our complicity as Americans. But I am thinking about the role of map-making and space-making within that, and the ethical responsibility of re-presenting our orientation of the world that adequately addresses the imbalances of power and violence. The artist and geographer Trevor Paglen has written about this – the idea that experimental geography is a way of taking up a position within the politics of lived experience. The production of space is indeed a political act. Can you talk about how you see map-making as a kind of political act, and do you related it to a concept of ethics? What is your concept of ethics in this regard?

Slavick - I am familiar with the cartographic trend in the contemporary art world. Two of my bomb drawings are included in Katherine Harmon’s recent book, The Map as Art: Contemporary Artists Explore Cartography. There has been much written about it but I can't help but think that much of it comes from our sense of placelessness. We can be anywhere and everywhere (via the screen), yet we are nowhere (always in front of our screens). Making maps gives us a sense of place, even if that place is war-torn or imaginary. I can't imagine making anything as an artist without "taking up a position within the politics of lived experience." Experimental geography is just one tool among many that you can use. I would argue that the production of art in itself is a political act, that the production of art is the production of space.

Ethics are intertwined with empathy. I believe in an ethic of reciprocity - do unto others, as you would have them do unto you. I believe in trying to cause no harm. I try to identify and stand in solidarity with those who suffer, especially due to my country's policies. I am not interested in art for art's sake. I believe we all have an ethical obligation to make our work serve a greater good. Art is no exception.

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Hong-An Truong is an artist and writer based in New York and North Carolina. Her photographs and videos have been shown across the U.S. and in Seoul, South Korea. Her work was screened at the PDX Documentary and Experimental Film Festival in 2009. Recent shows include Art in General, Gallery 456 at the Chinese American Arts Council, both in New York, a screening at DeSoto Gallery in Los Angeles, and a solo show at the New Media Gallery at the John Hope Franklin Center at Duke University. Currently her work can be seen in a group show at the International Center for Photography in New York. Truong received her MFA at the University of California, Irvine, and was a studio fellow in the Whitney Independent Study Program. She is the current recipient of a BRIC Media Fellowship from the Brooklyn Arts Council and will begin teaching at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill this fall, 2010.
Brian Yecies and Ae-Gyung Shim
November 1, 2010
http://www.japanfocus.org/-Ae_Gyung-Shim/3437

This essay analyzes the impact of film policy enacted by the U.S. Army Military Government in Korea (hereafter USAMGIK) between 1945 and 1948, a period when Korea was divided into North and South due to the ideological confrontation between the U.S and USSR. Rarely has the USAMGIK’s cultural policies in the southern half of the peninsula been discussed to this date, yet the USAMGIK’s screening of Hollywood films during the time bears significance for its utilization of cultural products as a tool to propagate American democracy and capitalism. The essay begins with a brief and informative history of Korean film and the country’s film industry during the colonial period, linking this with the importing of Hollywood films by the USAMGIK to identify some ideological parallels between the two eras.

The film policy that was enacted in this period, according to Yecies and Shim, was intended to project a sense of political liberty. In order to create a “liberal mood,” the USAMGIK screened numerous Hollywood films that would meet their goals. This essay examines the USAMGIK’s film policy in Korea, which aimed to stabilize political “disorder” using the motif of the “American way of life.” It provides rich empirical data and further analyzes the reception of this policy and the Hollywood films by two groups: Koreans and the USAMGIK, both of which were quite “distracted” by the complex political situations in the nascent stage of the enactment of the policy. However, the authors argue that the Hollywood films eventually left a strong impression about American democracy and capitalism in Korean people’s minds.

Brian Yecies and Ae-Gyung Shim

Abstract

Reorienting the southern half of the Korean Peninsula away from the former Japanese colonial government’s anti-democratic, anti-American and militaristic ideology while establishing orderly government was among the goals of the U.S. Army Military Government in Korea (USAMGIK, 1945-1948). To help achieve this aim on a wide front and as quickly as possible, USAMGIK’s Motion Picture Section in the Department of Public Information arranged the exhibition of hundreds of Hollywood films to promote themes of democracy, capitalism, gender equality and popular American culture and values. While U.S. troops in the field enjoyed the increased availability and calibre of American feature films, the Korean government-in-waiting was affronted by their perceived immorality. Standard Korean film histories focus on the hardships endured by Korean filmmakers, and the conflicts among them, and on Hollywood’s monopoly of the screen in the era, a situation which USAMGIK film policy – strikingly similar to the ordinances previously set in place by the Japanese – assisted. This study demonstrates how many of these ‘spectacle’ films, which have hitherto largely gone unlisted, were designed to inculcate Western notions of liberty among Koreans, while distracting them from a tumultuous political scene. However, the films exhibited did not always live up to this lofty purpose. Along with positive portrayals of the ‘American way of life’, representations of violent, anti-social and misogynistic behavior were foreign to Korean cultural and aesthetic traditions, and often provoked negative responses from local audiences.

In July 1950, within days of the start of the Korean War, hundreds of 16mm prints of Hollywood feature and short films and more than fifty film projectors were rushed from Japan to US Army and United Nations troops in the field. With many thousands of movies and over one thousand new projectors eventually sent from the United States, the Motion Picture Division of the Army’s General Headquarters, Far Eastern Command, went to great lengths to entertain the troops with some of the latest commercial releases – such as Sunset Boulevard (1950), The Next Voice You Hear (1950), The Black Rose (1950) and Father of the Bride (1950) – as well as Disney animations and current newsreels of the war (Pacific Stars and Stripes, 28 October 1950).

Onscreen entertainment was available to soldiers in the field almost every night throughout the three-year conflict. Troops swapped foxhole assignments and huddled inside abandoned railroad tunnels, burned-out houses and half-bombed buildings, enduring rain and freezing weather to catch a glimpse of films that were often simply projected onto walls or hanging bedsheets. In the words of one anonymous soldier, “When you go the movies over here, you get out of Korea for a couple of hours” (Pacific Stars and Stripes, 28 Aug 1951, p. 10). These daily Hollywood film screenings were a critical catalyst for raising the morale and national spirit of the troops on the front lines in Korea – an intriguing military strategy for bolstering the fight for democracy.

This was not the first time that Hollywood films played a vital role in military affairs in Korea. Within seven months of Korea’s liberation from Japanese colonial rule (1910-1945), and after the United States and Russia had carved the country in half, US film distributors rushed their most popular films to the southern half of the Korean peninsula. They were simply following the adage ‘trade follows the flag’ (Self, 1944, p. 6), even as Lt. General John R. Hodge and his US
Occupation forces were disarming the Japanese military. Amid chaotic social, political and cultural change, local cinemas were inundated with a range of genre films from Hollywood. These were productions that the US Army Military Government in Korea (hereafter USAMGIK, 1945-1948) – under advisement from the Central Motion Picture Exchange, the U.S. film industry’s East Asian outpost – believed would assist them to reverse four decades of Japanese influence – in particular, to inculcate a sense of ‘liberty’ among Koreans. Instead of thinking and acting similarly to Japanese, Koreans were now expected to think about what ‘America’ and democracy had to offer them.

Despite the monumental size of this undertaking, most histories of the USAMGIK period such as Cumings (1997), McCune (1947), Meade (1951), and Oh (2002) lack a sustained discussion of this significant cultural aspect of the USAMGIK’s occupation strategy and its impact on local culture. These previous studies mostly focus on politics and the economy – not culture, and especially not film policy. Standard Korean film histories such as Lee and Choe (1998), Lee (2000), Kim (2002), Min, Joo and Kwak (2003), Yi (2003) and Cho (2005) are important, but they focus narrowly on the hardships and conflicts of Korean filmmakers in this era, and see Hollywood’s domination of Korean screens as a threat to local culture.

Until now, little has been published in either Korean or English about the hundreds of American films – made with ‘Hollywood’s cameras’, in contradiction to Japan’s now silenced ‘cannons’ (see Figure 1) – that were targeted explicitly at Korean audiences through advertisements in Korean-language newspapers. Indeed, this plethora of films was consumed by thousands upon thousands of local cinemagoers, including, of course, U.S. Army personnel.

Soon after liberation, local filmmakers and entertainment entrepreneurs became frustrated at the ‘undemocratic’ ways in which US occupation policy was restricting their activities. A wave of young and experienced filmmakers, many of whom who had grown up on a heavy diet of Hollywood films between 1926 and 1936, and who had gained valuable training making propaganda films for the Korean Colonial Government, were ready to explore realist aesthetics, film as art, and narratives that resisted Japanese power. Yet, USAMGIK film policy, which was a close copy of laws promulgated by the former colonial government, kept Korean filmmakers subservient, albeit temporarily, to an authoritative agenda that aimed at restoring democratic order to the region.

After 1945, members of the Korean film industry, in common with other cultural critics, expressed concern that Korea was simply being opened up to American goods and services, and Korean entrepreneurs were being sidelined. In fact, as this article shows, US film distributors (like the mining industry, for instance) were simply seeking to restore the level of business that they had enjoyed in Korea before the Colonial Government began suppressing American film culture and commerce with America more generally.

By analysing the impact of USAMGIK film policy, and the major themes of a cross-section of Hollywood films exhibited in Korea, we seek to explain the circumstances in which the project both failed and succeeded. Many of the spectacle films discussed here were used to evoke a sense of personal and political liberty, while distracting local audiences from the political turmoil of the period. With these themes in mind, this exploratory study provides new and important information about South Korea’s post-liberation film industry, which was desperate to break free from the legacy of 35 years of Japanese colonial rule.
First, however, a brief history of Hollywood’s dominance in the region is presented to help account for the influence of American film and American culture on Koreans.

**Korea Awakening**

Between 1926 and 1936, Hollywood experienced its first golden age in Korea (Yecies 2005). During this period, American films overwhelmingly dominated the Korean market. In 1932, films from the U.S. (calculated by length) amounted to 63 per cent of all film prints exhibited (Yecies 2008, p. 163). Hollywood had a much smaller market share in Japan, where about 70 per cent of all films screened were Japanese (Langdon 1934). During this decade, all major US film companies had direct distribution offices in Seoul, submitting around 5,700 prints to the Government-General of Korea’s film censorship office through local Japanese, Korean, American and Chinese representatives. An additional 640 Argentinian, British, Chinese, French, German, Italian and Russian films were divided evenly between Japanese and Korean representatives, both individuals and companies.

Among the most popular American film genres from the mid-colonial era were musicals, mysteries, action adventures, historical dramas, and gangster films. These were the genres described by Hollywood mogul Joseph M. Schenck, chairman of 20th Century-Fox, as making the big screen an ‘effective salesman of American products and the American way of life’ (Benham 1939, p. 410). Asia was not immune to this cultural allure.³

Perhaps surprisingly, colonial censorship restrictions posed little threat to this influx from Hollywood. From the evidence of film censorship statistics for the period between August 1926 and March 1935 – presented to the 69th Imperial Diet by the Library Section of the Bureau of Police Affairs of the Korean Colonial Government – censorship in Korea was strict and careful. Korean customs and cultural norms were seen as differing from those in Japan, and all films entering the country for public exhibition were assessed in light of this.⁴ Generally speaking, censorship laws restricted freedom of expression throughout the empire and suppressed films that critiqued Korean society under Japanese rule or glorified revolution.⁵ With these considerations in mind, the vast majority of Hollywood films submitted were approved with minor, if any, censorship changes, suggesting that the Government-General of Korea and Hollywood representatives maintained good relationships at this period.⁶ In terms of the total footage of all foreign films submitted, less than one-tenth of 1 percent was censored on the basis of being a threat to public morals.⁷

With access to an increasing number of foreign films, Koreans had the opportunity to escape from their colonial realities. In 1934, screenings of Hollywood films approved by the censor included *I Am a Fugitive from a Chain Gang* (1932), *Frisco Jenny* (1932), *Tiger Shark* (1932), *Winner Take All* (1932), *Footlight Parade* (1933), *Gold Diggers of 1933* (1933), *Captured* (1933), *42nd Street* (1933) and *Little Giant* (1933).⁸ These exciting and entertaining films appealed to people of all ages and literacy skills, as their narratives relied little on knowledge of English. Common themes found in these and other films mentioned in this article – too numerous to discuss in detail – included modernity, capitalism, justice and urban lifestyles, among a host of ‘American’ themes.⁹

Hollywood’s fortunes began to take a dive in 1935 when Governor-General Ugaki mandated that one-third of all screenings had to be of domestic films (defined as Japanese or Korean), thus increasing the barriers for foreign movies and precipitating a temporary boom in locally
produced talkie films (Yecies 2008). Then, from the late 1930s, every scrap of film and every filmmaker in Korea was harnessed for Japan’s war-time film production project, which created a small number of feature-length propaganda films to coalesce public support for Japan’s war-time agenda, largely aimed at cultural assimilation. Representative Korean-Japanese co-produced films include Military Train (1938), Volunteer (1941), You and I (1941) and The Straits of Chosun (1943).^10

After the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941, strict censorship guidelines prevented Korea’s 120 cinemas from screening films from the U.S. and other Allied countries. Naturally, Hollywood distributors looked forward to the time when they could regain the market dominance in Korea that they had enjoyed during the middle years of the Japanese colonial period. The U.S. occupation of Korea was the solution – particularly with the re-opening of Hollywood distribution offices throughout the country from 1945.

**Hollywood Rejuvenation**

Following the end of the Pacific War, the United States and the Soviet Union divided Korea at the 38th Parallel: the southern and northern parts of Korea to be temporarily governed by the US and USSR respectively in order to facilitate the establishment of orderly government. The US interim government proclaimed its intention to transform the southern part of the Korean Peninsula into a ‘self-governing’, ‘independent’ and ‘democratic’ nation.^11

During this time, four pivotal US players contributed to the re-invigoration of cinema culture in Korea: the Office of War Information (hereafter OWI),^12 the Motion Picture Export Association of America (hereafter MPEA),^13 the Central Motion Picture Exchange (hereafter CMPE)^14 and the USAMGiK’s Motion Picture Section in the Department of Public Information (hereafter DPI). The chief role of the DPI was to monitor and improve public opinion towards the US and to democracy in general in Korea.

Before the end of the war, and before the OWI was incorporated into the US Department of State (hereafter US-DOS) in September 1945, the OWI’s Bureau of Motion Pictures had devised plans to continue ‘fighting with information’ in the post-war period (Barnes, 1943, p. 34). It established key CMPE outposts in Japan and the southern part of Korea, through which the U.S. government attempted to facilitate democracy and stability in the region. In addition to generating profits by distributing American feature entertainment films, the CMPE also distributed cultural and educational documentaries and newsreels, while the USAMGiK’s DPI promulgated film policy and initially oversaw film censorship during the US occupation.^15 In US-controlled Korea, the Motion Picture Section was established in 1945 under the Public Information Bureau of the DPI. It had the clear objective of “disseminating information concerning American aims and policies, the nature and extent of American aid to Korea, and concerning American history, institutions, culture, and way of life.”^16 OWI government information manuals make it clear that movies were viewed as ammunition for winning the war for democracy.
Hollywood films became a key vehicle for indoctrinating Koreans along these lines. In Germany, the US launched a similar project of transforming its former enemy into a democratic country through motion pictures. In short, Hollywood films were seen as quintessential vehicles for disseminating ‘American’ ideology as ‘democratic products’ (Fay, 2008, p. xix).

During the immediate post-war period, the USAMGIK’s propaganda operation in Korea was anchored by the dissemination of a flood of glamorous Hollywood ‘spectacle’ films across a range of genres, filling a noticeable void hitherto left empty by American, Korean, Japanese and other European films. As local film critics noted at the time, the sheer spectacle and extreme ‘foreignness’ of the Hollywood films on show enabled audiences to forget about the political turmoil going on around them (Lee, 1946, p. 4). The portrayal and promotion of modern Western city life in the films discussed in this article was an important facet of this process.

While the criteria used to select the American films distributed and exhibited in southern Korea appear somewhat random, many were Academy Award-winning (or nominated) films such as *In Old Chicago* (1937), *Boy’s Town* (1938), *You Can’t Take it With You* (1938), *Suspicion* (1941), *The Sea Wolf* (1941), *Random Harvest* (1942), *Casablanca* (1942) and *Rhapsody in Blue* (1945). In addition to having achieved popularity in the United States, these films presented well-dressed people scurrying along the skyscraper-lined, car-filled streets of Manhattan, Paris and other modern cities. Heterosexual coupling was depicted as a moral norm: lovers embraced openly on larger-than-life studio sets and natural locations alike. While many films contained strong moral themes affirming the final victory of justice and the importance of hope, others affirmed women’s (equal) rights, Christianity (religion) and patriotism. However, these themes were often expressed using less lofty motifs such as violence, vigilantism, public disorder, deception, desperation, suicide, theft, murder, killings, adultery and corruption.

Through the importation of Hollywood films from the mid-1940s, Korean audiences were exposed to large-scale, continuous visual and thematic representations that were totally foreign to their own cultural traditions. And, if the advertisements published in Korean in local newspapers are any indication, Korean audiences were the primary targets of these films. Generally speaking, Koreans had had long-standing Confucian traditions that required physical separation between noblemen and commoners on the one hand, and men and women on the other hand. Confucianism provided the foundational social, moral and legal guidelines and customs between people of all ages. Not only did cinema-going in this era enable all walks of life to mingle together in ways that were different from traditional Korean moral values, but the images, themes and motifs presented in the onslaught of spectacle Hollywood films, which was not a new
phenomenon, did continually present ‘American’ situations that shook the roots of traditions and worried traditionalists.

Films such as Frank Capra’s *You Can’t Take it With You*, exhibited in April 1947, offered Korean audiences the opportunity to consider new ideas and social relations. In fact, Americans at home were told that the newly liberated countries of East Asia were ‘seeing, with awe and envy, the homes and clothes and motor cars of the world’s most prosperous and least-suffering people’ (*Missoulian*, 13 March 1945). In *You Can’t Take it With You*, an inter-class couple is presented as free to pursue an intimate relationship, resulting in a ‘happy ending’ that portrays wealthy people sacrificing their personal gains and championing community and family values. This was one Hollywood film among many that embraced themes of social mobility and change through marriage in the face of seemingly incompatible class relations, pitting ambition and wealth against happiness and social acceptance. Heterosexual coupling and marrying without parental or family consent was linked to the desire for social mobility through acquiring material wealth in a modern society.

However, seeing is a culturally constructed process, and Korean audiences saw more than they were perhaps intending to. In about half of all the American feature films exhibited at this time (and foreign films generally), what was seen on the screen was often at odds with the wholesome values ostensibly being promoted – these movies offered Koreans a mixed view of Western culture where open expressions of immoral behavior sat alongside purported democratic ideals. Property theft, fraudulent activities, malicious intent, crimes against individuals and authority figures and sexual contact of a kind eschewed in Confucian tradition filled local screens.

Fox’s *In Old Chicago*, produced by studio mogul Darryl F. Zanuck for almost $2 million and released in Korea in April 1946, exemplified the mixed messages received by Korean audiences from Hollywood. This film showcased major stars Tyrone Power, Alice Faye and Don Ameche, who deliver a dramatic message about overcoming poverty and fighting corruption. The film was inspired by the Great Chicago Fire of 1871, and showed how the city was rebuilt through determination and perseverance. *In Old Chicago* portrays an Irish family in the second half of the 19th century struggling to survive in a ‘modern’ society at a time when rough frontier towns were full of opportunity and the wealthy kept African-American house-servants. In the first 5 minutes of the film, as the family is travelling from the country to Chicago in their horse-drawn covered wagon, the father is killed while chasing a passing steam train – a sleek symbol of modernity. In the next scene, the following text appears onscreen: “Chicago – 1854. A City of easy money, easy ways, ugly, dirty, open night and day to newcomers from all parts of the world… a fighting, laughing, aggressive American city.”

The film is jam-packed with a wide range of positive and negative behaviors, including chivalrous men helping well-dressed women across muddy streets, unmarried couples kissing and hugging, fist fights and police raids in saloons, dancing girls in revealing clothes, and breaking and entering into private homes. Yet, as an overriding coda, *In Old Chicago* ends with the optimistic sentiment: ‘Out of the fire will be coming steel’—underlining the film’s projection of themes of righteousness, corruption and manifest destiny in the context of industrialization and American expansion. While the physical setting of the story perhaps shares some of the gritty feel of post-liberation Korean society, Asian audiences must have had difficulty finding the democratic message in a story where ‘moral turpitude’ is so openly and abundantly on display.
Ironically, although it was a hit on Korean screens, *In Old Chicago* was suppressed by the US Occupation authority’s Civil Censorship Detachment in Japan – not because of flagrant immorality, but because of its overt portrayal of political corruption. Hence, not all films bound for Korea via US distribution offices in Japan enjoyed public screenings, demonstrating differences in U.S. strategy in Korea and Japan. The difference reflects divergent objectives of the interim US governments in Korea and Japan. In Japan, the US had spent seven years creating and maintaining political stability in its former enemy. The process of ‘democratizing’ Korea was seen as a simpler task, achievable in just three short years and requiring less political vigilance.

In fact, USAMGIK was well aware of the criticism directed at the undesirable nature of many of these films. According to one report from mid-1947 submitted to the US-DOS, a committee of American educators that had conducted a formal survey of local attitudes in Korea was disappointed at the CMPE’s failure to offer appropriate films to Korean audiences.

**Hollywood Rollout**

In February 1946, MPEA representatives, along with a local liaison officer who had previously worked for Paramount, one of the most active American distributors in colonial Korea, opened CMPE’s Korean branch in Seoul. From the outset, CMPE collected film rental fees from all exhibitors and documented daily box-office receipts and monthly attendance figures; it also monitored audience reactions to US films as well as those from other countries. Exhibitors were required to pay CMPE at least 50 percent of all box office revenues as part of the distribution deal, an arrangement which Korean exhibitors severely criticised.

Despite sophisticated market analysis, USAMGIK did not immediately gain the upper hand in Korean cinemas. After liberation, and before cinemas could be renamed from Japanese to Korean names, a ‘black market’ emerged for the unofficial distribution and exhibition of Hollywood and Soviet films and those of other countries. Entrepreneurs and others interested in intellectual social debate, including communism, began exhibiting *soi-disant* illegal films. To assert their independence, and to make a quick profit during the exhibition vacuum left behind by the colonial regime, these entrepreneurs screened films such as Buster Keaton’s *Steamboat Bill, Jr.* (1928), *The New Adventures of Tarzan* (1935), and B-grade science fiction, gangster and action-adventure films such as *Undersea Kingdom* (1936), *What Price Crime?* (1935), *Sea Devils* (1937), and *The Ware Case* (1938). Political films such as Leni Riefenstahl’s *Olympia* (1936) and the Italian fascist propaganda film *Lo Squadrone Bianco* (1936) and the romantic drama *Eravamo sette sorelle* (1939) were also screened for the general public. Movies from France, such as Julien Duvivier’s monster film *Le Golem* (1936) and his gangster film *Pépé le Moko* (1937), and films from Argentina and China, were also exhibited.
Leftist entrepreneurs also stepped in to fill the gap in control of the film scene. Before USAMGIK had begun in earnest to assist the US film industry to spread ‘American’ views of so-called democracy and modernity via the exhibition of Hollywood films, other organizations such as the left-wing Chosun Film Federation (hereafter CFU) began holding screenings of Soviet feature films. In the early post-war period, CFU had stimulated debate in southern Korea about Korea’s political and social future by screenings films, such as Sergei Eisenstein’s *Ivan the Terrible* (1944), as well as Soviet newsreels (Armstrong 2003). They too were interested in developing new cultural ideas and attitudes that could help Korea move away from the militaristic ideology of the former Japanese colonial government. Yet, their activities were strongly opposed by the USAMGIK authorities – particularly given the proximity of Soviet forces in the northern part of Korea.

USAMGIK eventually purged the marketplace of these ‘unwanted’ films under Ordinance No. 68, ‘Regulation of the Motion Pictures,’ promulgated in mid-April 1946. In October 1946, US Occupation forces also enacted Ordinance No. 115, which regulated the licensing of all commercial as well as educational and cultural films. On paper, these ordinances abolished most colonial film laws, such as the Peace Preservation Law of 1925, which has been referred to as Japan’s ‘domination over the soul’ (Lee 1999, p. 42). The Peace Preservation Law was a social policy instrument that rigorously detailed the cultural values and submissive behavior that imperial subjects were expected to show. Yet, in actuality, the two USAMGIK ordinances maintained the spirit of Japanese colonial censorship edicts, thus restricting Korean autonomy in the film industry.

In April 1946, the month the first USAMGIK ordinance came into force, the first batch of authorized Hollywood films arrived in Seoul. Ironically, and seemingly haphazardly, they arrived with Japanese subtitles via CMPE-Japan (*Christian Science Monitor* 12 April 1946, p.19). A rueful prologue produced by the DPI’s Motion Picture Section appeared at the start of each of film, explaining the presence of these subtitles. In order to connect with local audiences, well-known Korean *byeonsa* (live narrators) were recruited to introduce each film and to explain how subsequent officially distributed films would contain either Korean subtitles or part-Korean dialogue.

Almost immediately, these first Hollywood films made a splash in the marketplace as audiences lapped them up with enthusiasm, whether of not they understood them or appreciated the cultural values they contained (U.S. Embassy, Seoul 1950). According to the Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers (hereafter SCAP) reports on USAMGIK activities in Korea, between 15 April and 31 May 1946, nearly 400,000 tickets to US feature films were sold, generating a turnover of Y4,000,000 (the equivalent of about $266,666). Subsequently, DPI’s Motion Picture Section stimulated a burst of censorship activity by approving 328 applications to screen American and
other countries' films, including a few from Korea.\(^{30}\) By June 1946 about 100 feature, short, documentary and newsreel films had been shown in southern Korean cinemas under the new regulations, leveling off thereafter to a monthly total of about 50 films, a flow that enabled CMPE to harmonize its activities with the politics of the occupation.

Police confiscated at least a dozen unapproved films from Korea, Germany, France and Italy in May 1946, and 9 cinemas across Seoul were shut down pending the arrival of approved films to exhibit (Donga Daily 5 May 1946, p. 2). The confiscation of unauthorized films removed competition and restored the kind of market dominance that Hollywood distributors had enjoyed in the colonial period between 1926 and 1936 (Yecies 2005). It also solidified MPEA’s growing footprint in post-war Asia. Prints that had not been approved by DPI were treated as black-market goods, and confiscated by USAMGIK police. Not only were pro-colonial and communist-oriented films, which violated the ideological spirit of the US Occupation, confiscated, but also any other films that might interfere with the monopoly that CMPE was attempting to build on behalf of the American film industry. Thus the decision to confiscate such films was based on both economic and cultural factors.

**Dawn of Re-orientation**

The documentaries and newsreels distributed by CMPE arrived in Korea along with a large number of US feature films which, like the former, were intended to serve the USAMGIK’s reorientation program. The larger list of films screened in April 1946 included *Queen Christina* (1933), *Barbary Coast* (1935), *The Devil Doll* (1936), *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town* (1936), *Romeo and Juliet* (1936), *San Francisco* (1936), *The Great Ziegfeld* (1936), *The Buccaneer* (1938), *The Rains Came* (1939), *Golden Boy* (1939), *Honolulu* (1939), *The Under Pup* (1939) and *Abe Lincoln in Illinois* (1940). These were ‘prestige pictures’ in the sense that they were ‘injected with plenty of star power, glamorous and elegant trappings, and elaborate special effects’ (Balio 1995, p. 180) – attractive packaging for presenting some of the core democratic reform values that the US government wanted for Korea.\(^{31}\)
Based on advertisements in Korean that appeared regularly in major local newspapers, a majority of the films screened at this time were talkies produced between the mid-1930s and early 1940s. Action-adventure and historical bio-pics were prevalent, followed by melodramas, screwball comedies, musicals, westerns, crime/detective thrillers, science-fiction and animated cartoons. These advertisements attempted to lure audiences with arousing drawings and silhouettes of film stars, action scenes and exotic locations, promoting all the glamour of American culture. They depicted dashing portraits of leading Hollywood stars including Robert Montgomery, Judy Garland, Bing Crosby, George Raft, Eleanor Powell, Richard Dix, Clark Gable (about to kiss Claudette Colbert in Figure 4 below) and Jean Arthur as a feisty cowgirl in Arizona (1940).

Often, the images in these advertisements revealed little about the themes treated in the film concerned. In contrast to the happy romantic image featured in the advertisement for MGM’s Boom Town reproduced below (Figure 5), the film portrays themes of frontier exploration and desire for material wealth, as well as jealousy and rivalry over women, and social mobility. These are all themes that would have appeared in striking contrast to the colonial ideology of the Japanese occupation, let alone the pre-colonial values to which Korean audiences were accustomed. At the same time, the graphic imagery of the advertisements attracted non-Korean-speaking US troops as well – a welcome secondary audience.
As these advertisements show, many of these films carried the ‘heavy scent of “Americanism”’ (Yoshimi 2003, p. 434), portraying the United States as an exoticized and ‘glamorous elsewhere’. Ads for Westerns displayed men in ten-gallon hats either embracing a pretty woman or pointing a gun at the reader. Those for romantic dramas and musicals, such as Romeo and Juliet (1936, exhibited in July, September and December 1946 and in October 1947), I Wanted Wings and Honolulu showed scantily-dressed women and couples in passionate embraces. These and other films portraying ‘modern life’ showcased ‘film stars, dance crazes, general oddities and glamorous strangeness’ (Vieth 2002, pp. 23-24), and the newspaper ads faithfully reflected this. Although exhibitors promoted programs that mixed features with shorts and live musical and/or theatrical performances, a surplus of Hollywood films left little room for the exhibition of films from Korea and elsewhere: movies which might have offered alternative views of ‘America’ – and modernity, for that matter.

**The USAMGIK Legacy**

The question remains how successfully American films distributed and exhibited in the southern half of the Korean Peninsula meshed with USAMGIK’s occupation strategy. The films selected originated from a variety of sources, including film distributors in Shanghai and U.S. film distributors' vaults in colonial Korea that were impounded by the Japanese authorities after Pearl Harbor. Yet, regardless of the origins of these prints, the US film industry was able to profit from the exhibition of older and recycled films while at the same time exploiting them for their cultural contents. In fact, before appearing in Korea, most if not all these feature films would have undergone the self-censorship process implicit in Hollywood’s Motion Picture Production Code. This industry initiative attempted to ensure that stories and scenes contained appropriate content for domestic viewers. USAMGIK would no doubt have been confident that these star-driven films – often in the running for Oscars – upheld the kind of moral values and accurate portrayals of (American) society that would not offend Korean audiences.

However, as we have seen, while many CMPE films approximated this model, an equal number offered a different view of America: one that depicted opulence, feisty and independent female characters, unrestrained love-making, violent themes and an exotic cultural milieu that was both thrilling and dangerous – as newspaper advertisements containing guns attest. This suggests that CMPE was keen to select sensational films that would bring both locals and Occupation troops to the cinemas in droves, without carefully distinguishing between these two audiences.
The portrayal of gender themes especially was potentially problematic. Otto Preminger’s film-noir mystery-romance *Laura* portrays the female protagonist as a successful and savvy advertising executive. Her traits and abilities are continually questioned in the context of the ‘proper’ conduct of women and class boundaries.³³

We have no way of knowing whether the popularity of the films discussed in this article equated with their success in implanting American ideologies of democracy and gender equality in Korean audiences. DPI officials may have been preoccupied with larger issues or lacked sufficient motivation to gain a deeper understanding of Korean culture and the aspects of American movies that would appeal to Korean audiences. On the face of it, it should not have been too difficult for the US authorities to select for general release films with a predominantly positive message while winnowing out their less edifying counterparts. Films such as *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (1939), *The Life of Emile Zola* (1937), *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town*, *Penny Serenade* (1941), *The Rains Came* and *Random Harvest* were better vehicles for showcasing democratic and other ‘wholesome’ ideals and values that represented the best of what ‘America’ had to offer. However, an equal number of films evidently catered to US troops rather than Koreans.

Clearly, however, there was a limit to what the USAMGIK and CMPE could achieve in the short time at their disposal. Nor were CMPE and the US film industry the only parties at fault. Other foreign films such as the French gangster film *Pépé le Moko* (1937) and the musical comedy *Avec Le Sourire* (1936), *Monte Carlo Madness* (1932), *Burgtheater* (1936) and the sex and horror film *Alraune* (1928) from Germany, as well as *Puerta Cerrada* (1939) from Argentina, titillated audiences with provocative images both onscreen and in newspaper advertisements. DPI failed to censor objectionable or obscene content from these foreign films as it was more concerned with blocking films with communist sympathies and any Hollywood films obtained through unofficial – that is, non-CMPE/MPEA – channels. As a result, audiences were freely exposed to films like *Pépé le Moko*, set in Algiers’ seedy casbah underworld where gunfights are common, and a melting pot of gypsies, Slavs, blacks, Arabs, homeless people, Sicilians, Spaniards, prostitutes and corrupt officials stands in stark contrast with the (apparently civilized) French colonial authorities. The film’s negative ending depicts the protagonist’s suicide after losing the chance to develop love and trust with his girlfriend (who betrays him), and thus, to redeem himself.

Hence, as we have already suggested, US involvement in developing a new age of cinema culture in liberated Korea was more complex than previous studies have indicated. Whereas American films received a warm reception in Japan into the early 1960s (MPEAA 1961), in Korea they experienced tougher market restrictions after President Rhee took office in 1948. Although the general public was enthusiastic about Hollywood ‘spectacle films’, intellectuals and the Korean government saw American films (and USAMGIK film policy) as a threat to Korean culture and tradition, and a hindrance to developing a local industry. Despite their entertainment value, American films that promoted themes of violent and anti-social behavior, and frequently portrayed Western notions of ‘gender equality’, had unintended consequences in Korea.

Political turmoil on the ground posed difficult challenges for US occupation forces and for USAMGIK’s attempts to execute a highly organized cultural re-orientation campaign. As a result, US occupation authorities likely misunderstood local concerns and underestimated the
impact that thirty-five years of Japanese colonialism had had on Korea. Nevertheless, USAMGIK’s aim of reorienting Koreans away from the legacies of the former Japanese colonial regime was achieved with surprising ease by allowing hundreds of Hollywood spectacle films back into the region. Their contents could not have differed more from the propaganda and cultural films that the Korean Colonial Government had obliged audiences to watch (and Korean filmmakers to make) between 1937 and 1945. In pursuing this course, USAMGIK had indeed disarmed Japan’s ‘cannons’ with Hollywood’s cameras.

However, both domestic audiences and US Occupation forces were too distracted by the political situation for a comprehensive Hollywood re-orientation project – combined with other US-controlled media such as radio and print propaganda – to generate new cultural ideas and ideals. Ultimately, the procession of glamorous images and stirring stories in films and other media kept the post-liberation euphoria flowing until USAMGIK could stabilize the southern half of the Korean Peninsula. While CMPE’s films may not have had the immediate and solid effect on Koreans for which USAMGIK had hoped, the entertainment and exoticism associated with ‘America’ certainly lingered in the minds of Korean audiences.

At the same time, although USAMGIK saw all its activities as contributing to the growth of democracy, it hardly needed to work as diligently as it did to generate ‘American’ attitudes among Koreans because Hollywood films (and therefore, American culture) had only been suppressed for 7 or 8 years before 1945. In addition, traditional Korean culture had never been completely suppressed, despite the colonial authority’s efforts to implement Japanese language into everyday learning and communication.

Eventually, a steady diet of Hollywood productions – regardless of whether their narrative styles fell outside the Motion Picture Production Code guidelines – proved too much for Korean audiences including president-in-waiting Syngman Rhee. According to an anonymous article in the right-wing newspaper Chung Ang Shinmoon (31 March 1948), American pictures seduced Koreans with the ‘thrill of murder and gangsterism, with fickle and promiscuous love, with frenzied jazz, and with the pleasures of life in foreign countries’, thus seriously affronting Korean cultural norms. Other critics were concerned that Koreans were mindlessly consuming the eroticism, glamour and fantasy depicted in American films without considering the massive gulf between everyday life and culture in the US and in Korea (Lee, Kyunghyang Daily 30 October 1946, p. 4). The open expressions of sexuality and boisterous behavior portrayed in these films were seen by American education specialists (on a formal fact-finding visit to Korea) as culturally insensitive and potentially injurious to Korea’s Confucian traditions and national pride (USAMGIK 1947).

By March 1949, only six months after the end of the USAMGIK period and establishment of the Republic of Korea, Hollywood’s economic stronghold in the southern part of Korea was already slipping. President Syngman Rhee was developing regulations to limit the number of imported American films – partly to assist the rebirth of a domestic film industry and partly to limit the public’s exposure to what was seen as objectionable content (US Embassy, Seoul 1949).

The proponents of such views were more interested in seeing and producing films with more appropriate and edifying themes to counter those embedded in the military propaganda films produced during the last few years of the Japanese colonial period and the perceived vulgarity and objectionable content of Hollywood films. After years of suppression by the Japanese colonial authorities, workers in the Korean film industry were genuinely looking forward to the
stimulation of the domestic industry that USAMGIK was supposed to have offered after liberation. However, the reality of CMPE’s market dominance quickly tarnished these hopes. As one newspaper editor summed up the issue early on: “The CMPE’s coming to Korea was not to fertilize Korean cinema, but to plant a strong tree of the American cinema over the top of the sprouting Korean cinema” (Seoul Newspaper 26 May 1946, p. 4).

Nonetheless, the domestic industry revived as local filmmakers consolidated their production skills and re-used equipment formerly owned by the consolidated Chosun Film Production and Distribution Co. that the Colonial Government created between 1941 and 1942. It was also happy to answer USAMGIK’s call for the production of Liberation News shorts and a small number of ‘Liberation’ feature films. As a result of these and other factors, the foundations of a national film industry were laid.

Although progress was disrupted by the civil war, the Korean film industry blossomed both in terms of its size and of the quality and number of films made in the mid-1950s, starting with the release of Lee Kyu-hwan’s The Tale of Chunhyang (1955) and Kim Ki-young’s Yang san Province (1955). Invitations to international film festivals increased proportionately. The 111 films made in 1959 constituted a dramatic increase over the mere 15 films made in 1955 (KMPPC, 1976, p. 47).

Although the full impact of USAMGIK’s re-orientation film programme on Korea is likely to remain unknown, a deeper understanding of its policy underpinnings, execution and pitfalls provides new insights into how this cultural project contributed, at least in theory, to the ‘Americanizing’ of the region. Ironically, South Korea’s love affair with Hollywood feature films revived during the 1950s and 1960s, a process well-documented in McHugh and Abelmann (2005). The continuing popularity of Hollywood genre conventions, iconography and the star system, conspicuous in many Golden Age classics from Madame Freedom (1956) to Barefoot Youth (1964), suggests that the Hollywood films distributed during the USAMGIK period may have had a longer-term cultural impact than can be gleaned from distribution and exhibition statistics alone.

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Notes

1 The authors acknowledge the generous research support from the Academy of Korean Studies, Asia Research Fund, and Korea Foundation. Invaluable guidance was provided by librarians and archivists at the University of Maryland-College Park (Gordon W. Prange Collection), National Archives (NARAII, College Park), University of Wisconsin-Madison, United Artists Collection State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Special Collections in the University of Iowa Library (Papers of the Victor Animatograph Corp.), Cinema/Television Library, Korean Heritage/East Asian Library and Warner Bros. Archives at USC, Arts Special Collections at UCLA, and the Margaret Herrick Library-Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences in Los Angeles. Special thanks goes to Mark McLelland, Mark Caprio, Mark Morris, and Hiroshi Kitamura for valuable comments on earlier drafts.


4 Censorship statistics cited in this article come from: “Table of Censored Motion Picture Films, 1 August 1926 to 31 March 1935” (Katsudō shashin [firumu] ken’etsu tōkeihyō, Taishō jōgōnen hachigatsu tsuitachi kara Shōwa jūnen sangatsu sanjūichininichi made), Sixty-ninth Imperial Parliament Document (Dairokujūyūkai Teikoku Gikai Setsume-shiryō), Library Section of the Bureau of Police Affairs, Korean Colonial Government (Chōsen Sōtokufu Keimukyoku Toshōkan Teikoku Gikai Setsumei shiryō), Serial# CJA0002448, File# 101-7-1-2, Ministry of Government Administration and Home Affairs, Government Archives and Records Service, Daejon, Korea (hereafter cited as Archives and Records Service); and “Table of Censored Motion Picture Films, 1 April 1935 to 31 March 1936” (Katsudō shashin [firumu] ken’etsu tōkeihyō, Shōwa jūnen shigatsu tsuitachi kara Shōwa jūichinin sangatsu sanjūichininichi made), Sixty-ninth Imperial Parliament Document (Dairokujūyūkai Teikoku Gikai Setsume-shiryō),
One of the primary aims of the Library Section was to suppress material regarded as promoting such subversive themes, in particular Korean independence and communism – rather than block foreign films outright.

Although during this decade minor cuts were made to Universal, Fox and Paramount films (75, 63, and 51 cuts respectively) for allegedly violating public peace and safety, only 10 (out of a total 3599) individual reels from Paramount were completely rejected by the censors, while Universal and Fox suffered no rejected reels.

Between 1926 and 1935, two-thirds of all Universal films submitted for censorship approval to the Library Section of the Bureau of Police Affairs were handled by Korean distributors/importers, and two-thirds of all Fox films were represented by Japanese. Nearly all Paramount films from this decade were represented by Koreans.

In 1932 alone, around one in every three Koreans (of all ages) was watching movies mainly made in America and Japan, but also including films from other countries (Langdon 1934).

During this time, and through the narratives in these films, the Korean Colonial Government intensified its encouragement for Koreans to support Japan’s colonial (and nationalistic) agenda, which was formalized in 1938 under the naiseon ittai (naeseon ilche in Korean), or ‘Japan and Korea as One Body’ assimilationist policy (Eckert, 1991, p. 236).

The OWI had been developed in the United States in mid-1942 to coordinate the mass diffusion of media and information at home and abroad through multiple government departments. To remain as close to the American film industry as possible, OWI operated a branch office in Hollywood. It published government information manuals that advised industry representatives about how ‘the motion picture should be the best medium for bringing to life the democratic idea’ – that is, American notions of ‘freedom’.

MPEA was formed in June 1945 under the Webb-Pomerene Act in order to support the US economy and to promote world peace. The organization developed influential trade strategies that successfully overcame foreign market barriers and increased distribution profits for its member companies.

In early 1946 OWI and MPEA formally coalesced under the name of the Central Motion Picture Exchange. Among other roles, CMPE was charged with controlling the distribution rights for MPEA members’ films throughout Asia.

In its report, the committee stated: “The only American films generally available to Koreans are old feature films distributed by the Korean branch of the Motion Picture Export Association. These are of inferior quality and are completely inappropriate vehicles for presenting American culture in Korea. As in other oriental countries, motion pictures are enthusiastically received by the Korean public.” See Report of the Educational and Informational Survey Mission to Korea, 20 July 1947, pp 35-36. US-DOS, Decimal File 1945-49, RG59, Box 7398. NARA II

Systematic market intelligence was supplied to the Chief Film Officer of DPI, which forwarded it to the OWI Motion Picture Bureau in New York for discussion among film industry executives. The CMPE’s data collection processes helped them cultivate Korean and Japanese markets for future MPEA domination.

It is important to list these titles here because their screenings demonstrate a sense of initiative among Koreans that USAMGIK eventually blocked. Their exhibition also reveals a greater diversity in the national cinema scene in the earliest stages of the US occupation than was the case with Japan, as discussed in Hirano (1992) and Kitamura (2007; 2010).

Caprio (2009) suggests that Japan’s assimilation project failed because there was no real intention on the Japanese side to allow Koreans to be fully assimilated into Japanese culture. Nevertheless, it seems the colonial authorities were at least successful in creating a fantasy world where Koreans could act more like their fellow Japanese as a result of their indoctrination in Japanese language, education, customs and culture.

Before it was silenced, and before restrictive film regulations were enacted, CFU ran articles in the daily press criticizing CMPE for its close ties to USAMGIK and its monopoly of the local exhibition market. Other groups attempted to screen colonial-era films such as Crossroads of Youth (1934) and the propaganda film Military Train (1938). However, USAMGIK forces quickly confiscated these and all other films not approved by DPI in advance of their public exhibition.

The USAMGIK’s new powers soon became apparent. Its censorship process required 3 copies of every screenplay in English to be delivered to it, regardless of the language spoken in the film in question. All films, including those already in Korea, were subject to censorship approval, a rule which attracted immediate complaints from Korean filmmakers and other industry businesspeople that found translation costs prohibitive (Seoul Newspaper 5 May 1946, p. 5; Jayu Newspaper 5 May 1946, p. 3.)

Shipping this first batch of prints to Korea was no doubt seen as efficient and economical, suggesting that the US authorities had sent whatever prints were available – probably stock abandoned by US distributors during the war. This implies a limited effort with limited resources to control the film market in Korea – in contrast to the situation in Japan discussed elsewhere by Kitamura (2007; 2010).

General Headquarters, SCAP, Commander in Chief, US Army Forces, Pacific, 1946, ‘Monthly Summation No. 9’, US Army Military Government Activities in Korea, Tokyo, June, p. 79; and 1946, ‘Monthly Summation No. 11’, August, p. 88. Our understanding is that the exchange rate between USD and Japanese Yen (in Japan) was set at Y15 per $1 in the wake of war in September 1945, and the inflation of the early postwar economy led to a rate change to Y50 per $1 in 1947. Eventually, this was capped at Y360 per $1 in 1949.

Whether or not these big-budget spectacle films successfully embodied or transmitted democratic ideology and other ‘American’ ideals to Koreans, they were regularly screened over the course of the USAMGIK period – each about once every six months (for several days at a time).

These and other films distributed by CMPE had little competition in the entertainment field, apart from frequent live theatrical and musical performances and a few screenings of older Korean films such as Ahn Seok-young’s 1937 talkie feature The Story of Shim Cheong, Na Un-gyu’s silent classic Arirang (1926), and Choi In-gyu’s colonial propaganda film Angels on the Streets (1941). The evidence suggests that the exhibition of a small number of Korean films was allowed by USAMGIK to placate domestic criticism of CMPE’s ‘anti-democratic’ practices. Arirang was screened multiple times, including at the Jeil Cinema (Segye Daily 9 April 1947, p. 2) and on 28 July 1948 at the Chosun Geukjang (Jayu Shinmun 28 July 1948).

And on the subject of portrayals of alternative female sexuality, one may ask how a pre-Code film with a lesbian subtext such as Queen Christina could be seen as exemplifying American moral and cultural values.

This quote, an English translation of the original article, is contained in: ‘Dispatch No. 80: Korean Opposition to American Motion Pictures’, 7 April 1948. Records of the US-DOS relating to the internal affairs of Korea, 1945-1949, microfilm reel #7, Decimal File 895. NARAII.

US film industry representatives were anticipating a maximum of only seventeen films allowed into Korea per year.
“Twentieth Century Japanese Art and the Wartime State: Reassessing the Art of Ogawara Shū and Fujita Tsuguharu”
Asato IKEDA
October 25, 2010
http://www.japanfocus.org/-Asato-Ikeda/3432

This essay introduces and compares works and lives of two war painters, Ogawara Shū (1911-2002) and Fujita Tsuguharu (1886-1998). It also provides a critical perspective on the museological discourse about Fujita and reassesses Ogawara by examining recent exhibits of their works in Hokkaido, Japan. Ogawara, a prewar surrealist painter, collaborated with the military and produced war propaganda paintings in the early 1940s. Fujita was an internationally renowned Japanese artist who resided in Paris since 1913, but came back to Japan and produced propaganda paintings in the 1930s and 40s. After the war, they were criticized harshly by the public for their war responsibility, and largely forgotten in the Japanese art scene since then: Ogawara isolated himself in Kuchan, Hokkaido while Fujita left Japan permanently and lived in France until he died.

The author analyzes some of the most representative works produced by each artist including war paintings, and compares their different responses to their wartime activities: Ogawara expressed his war responsibility publicly since the 1970s whereas Fujita never commented on it. Apart from presenting each artist’s attitude towards his past, the author problematizes the way Fujita and his war paintings were interpreted at the Hokkaido Museum of Modern Art in 2008: he was represented as a “Renaissance humanist” who produced “anti-war” paintings. The author argues that the nationalistic impulse of the contemporary Japanese art community was behind the misrepresentation of Fujita as a “tragic hero” and raises critical questions that need to be investigated further such as the way modernism and nationalism was intertwined in Japan during the war years.
Twentieth Century Japanese Art and the Wartime State: Reassessing the Art of Ogawara Shū and Fujita Tsuguharu

Asato IKEDA

In 1973, Ogawara Shū (1911-2002) painted a group of Hokkaido dogs in A Herded Society (Gunka shakai). Barking, crawling over each other, and trying to jump out of the picture plane toward the viewer, these are not tame, docile pet dogs, but rather violent animals. The painting does not have a smooth finish or a focal point. The simultaneously expressive yet unsophisticated faces of the dogs add a childish quality to the work. The artist stated that this painting represented the group mentality that existed among Japanese people, not only during the war when they supported the military government without question, but also after the war when they began uncritically embracing U.S. policies. Yet, distancing oneself from the pack is not easy.

Another painting A Herd (Mure, 1977) creates a sense of loneliness and isolation through the use of contrasting colors and body language. In the painting, a sad-looking dog, placed in the foreground and differentiated from the pack in the indigo background, looks toward the viewers as if to ask for consolation. The dogs in the pack have mean, scary faces and some of them are ready to pounce on the isolated one.

Echoing immediate postwar discussions by political scientist Maruyama Masao and the literary group Kindai Bungaku on wartime responsibility, blind feudalism, and the need to create subjective autonomy, Ogawara not only tackled the issue of the group versus the individual, but also confronted his long-silent past: he himself had belonged to the pack, collaborating with the military and painting war propaganda in the early 1940s. After the war, however, he disassociated himself from major art groups in Tokyo and moved to the small town of Kuchan in Hokkaido where he was raised. The lonely dog in A Herd may be seen as a self-portrait of the artist in the postwar era.

Similar to the United States, Britain, Germany, Canada, and Australia, Japan had its own official war art program during the Second World War. After Japan’s defeat in 1951, however, the United States confiscated one hundred fifty three propaganda battle paintings that had been commissioned by the Japanese Imperial Army, Navy, and Air Force between 1937 and 1945. It
was only after 1967, when photographer Nakagawa Ichirō found this collection of War Campaign Record Paintings (*sensō sakusen kirokuga*) at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base in Ohio, that the public paid attention to the paintings once again. Nakagawa’s “discovery” of the collection spurred a war art repatriation movement in Japan in the late 1960s. The movement was led by nationalist politicians including Nakasone Yasuhiro and Ishihara Shintarō. Also among them were former war painters Miyamoto Saburō and Ihara Usaburō who called for repatriation, claiming that the war paintings were “masterpieces” (*meiga*) and “valuable ethnic monuments” (*kichōna minzokuteki kinenbutsu*). Critical reflections on wartime collaboration that took place in the field of literature initiated by Ara Masato of *Kindai Bungaku* in the 1950s never took place among former war painters. The war art collection was eventually returned to The National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo in 1970 on “indefinite loan.” Although the National Museum curators planned a war art exhibition in 1977, they abruptly cancelled it over fear of political controversy, citing anticipated anger from formerly colonized nations. In fact, the museum has never displayed the collection in its entirety and it has long been considered taboo, or as Sawaragi Noi calls it, Japanese modern art history’s “Pandora’s Box.”

It was during this time when the art remained hidden in the National Museum that Ogawara, the last living former war artist, discussed his paintings in an NHK television program titled “Hovering War Paintings” (*Samayoeru sensō-ga*). The program, which was filmed one year before Ogawara died in 2002, revealed that some artists such as Koiso Ryōhei deliberately destroyed their wartime works and pulled them from their exhibitions in the postwar period. Unlike Miyamoto, Ihara, or Koiso, however, Ogawara publically spoke of his personal responsibility. The ninety year-old artist determinedly stated, “I am responsible for the war paintings. If I do not take responsibility, who does?” He stated he would “not hide what he did” and he would “leave others to make a judgment.”

In the summer of 2008, while the Ogawara Shū Museum located in the small town of Kuchan, Hokkaido, held a modest exhibition of his works titled *The Real Landscape of Myself II*, another former war painter was in the spotlight in Sapporo, the capital and largest city of Hokkaido. From July 12th to September 4th, the Hokkaido Museum of Modern Art held the *Léonard Foujita Exposition*, which was funded by the *Hokkaido Shinbun* newspaper and supported by the General Council of Essonne in France. It featured nearly two hundred works by Fujita Tsuguharu (1868-1968), also known as Léonard Foujita. Fujita was an internationally renowned artist of École de Paris, the school of non-French modernists who resided in Paris, the world art capital of the 1920s. He was arguably the most famous Japanese artist in the world during the prewar era. In Japan, Fujita was also known as a prolific wartime painter of the late 1930s and early 1940s. Due to his wartime activities he was ostracized for many years in postwar art circles, but following a large retrospective organized by The Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo in 2006, there was renewed interest in the man and his work. Although Ogawara and Fujita have never been discussed together, their concurrent exhibitions in Hokkaido in 2008 provide an opportunity to examine these two artists who lived through the twentieth century.
This article introduces and compares the works and lives of Ogawara Shū and Fujita Tsuguharu. By comparing Fujita Tsuguharu with another war artist, I challenge the recent uncritical museological discourse about Fujita and reassess the lesser known artist Ogawara as well. In so doing, I attest to the significance of unraveling the wartime art, an effort only recently begun by academic researchers. I first compare the two artists, focusing on how they started out as modernist artists, produced war propaganda, and reflected on their wartime experiences in the postwar era. I will then examine the national investment in rehabilitating Fujita into the canon of Japanese modern art history, as in the 2006 and the 2008 exhibitions. Finally, I consider what research remains to be done regarding the wartime works of these two artists in particular and Japanese war art in general.

Ogawara Shū and Fujita Tsuguharu

Both Fujita and Ogawara established careers as prewar Japanese modernists who aspired to create art that was new and original. Tokyo-born Fujita Tsuguharu studied at the Tokyo School of Fine Arts, now known as the Tokyo National School of Arts, the most prestigious art school in Japan. Upon graduation in 1913, Fujita moved to Paris to study and became a member of École de Paris. There he made friends with globally acclaimed avant-garde artists including Pablo Picasso, Amedeo Modigliani, and Henri Matisse. He produced numerous works of female nudes, which emphasized thin yet assertive calligraphic black lines and the smooth, sensuous, transparent, and ceramic-like white surface of female skin. These nudes became his “signature style” and made him the most famous Japanese artist in Paris in the 1920s. Though numerous Japanese artists lived in Paris, their success did not compare with Fujita’s. In his Nude with Tapestry (Tapesurii no rafu, 1923) for example, he painted a fully naked woman with curled hair seated on a white silky cloth, stretching her legs out in front, putting her hands around her head, and exposing her underarm hair. The background, which could be a curtain placed behind her, is punctuated with soft pink flowers, and a cat sits beside the woman. A couch or a bed on which the woman sits appears unrealistic, seemingly lacking the appropriate mass in its material. The woman does not recede in space, which creates a slight disjuncture in spatial coordination especially in the lower part of the painting: the woman appears to be floating in space. Locating himself in modernist art practice in Europe, where artists turned to non-European cultures to transcend European artistic traditions, Fujita’s use of line and his attention to the sleek, concealed quality of the canvas was rather strategic. He was fully aware of the potential of Japanese art in early 20th century Europe: “The new artistic tendency recently in Europe is ‘simplicity’. In other words, Western art is becoming Orientalized, Japanized…The reason why I
was able to establish my career in Paris was that my paintings contained elements of Japanese-style painting.10

Ogawara, by contrast, never studied abroad. In 1929 he moved to Tokyo, Japan’s artistic metropole, and after graduating from the Tokyo School of Fine Arts, joined gatherings of young Japanese artists such as École de Tokyo and The Art and Culture Association (Bijutsu bunka kyōkai). Ogawara’s main interest was in surrealism, which developed first as a literary movement in the 1920s and then as a visual art in the 1930s. Ogawara associated closely with Fukuzawa Ichirō, a leading avant-garde artist who studied in France and introduced surrealism to Japan. Adapting surrealism to the Japanese milieu, Ogawara discovered atmospheric mysticism (jyōshoteki shimpisei), which he considered to be the principle of the surreal, in the natural environment of Northern Japan (hoppōteki seikaku).11 As late as 1940, he painted in a surrealist style, exploring the inner subjectivity of humans, the realm of the unknown, the unconscious, and the uncanny.

In *Snow* (*Yuki*, 1940), he combines the dream-like quality of surrealism with Hokkaido’s landscape of snowy mountains, from which a massive human leg appears. Unlike his dog paintings in the 1970s, this painting shows thick application of paint and the artist’s ability to create spatial depth and join foreground and background in a plausible manner. Without an upper body, the leg in the foreground goes into the mountain with its booted sole facing the viewer. The leg is trapped by a craggy tree, the tip of which looks like a ski. The work communicates the menace of nature that could swallow a human, which Ogawara would have been well aware of from his experiences during Hokkaido’s ruthless winters. The dark side of nature, however, is contrasted with the brightness of the white snow and the blue, sunny sky, which gives the painting a mysterious, eerie edge. Like Fujita, Ogawara challenged the European academicism taught in art schools, but unlike Fujita, his goal was to bring “something new” to Japanese art per se.

What brought these seemingly disparate artists together was war. As militarists dominated the government in the 1930s, the social milieu that surrounded art and artists gradually changed. As early as 1935, the state explicitly intervened, consolidating art communities through the reform of the Imperial exhibition (*teiten*).12 With the beginning of the war with China in 1937, the government tightened its control on artists, officially commissioning propaganda works. According to art historian Kawata Akihisa, over three hundred artists participated in official war art production and painted War Record Campaign Paintings.13 Military official Akiyama Kunio defined War Campaign Record Paintings as paintings that “have the significant historical purpose of recording and preserving the military’s war campaign forever.”14 Another official, Yamanouchi Ichirō, advocated the realist style of European neo-classicism of the eighteenth and nineteenth century, especially works by Jacques-Louis David as proper models.15 The artists “served the nation” (*saikan hōkoku*) by exhibiting their works in state-sponsored exhibitions such...
as the Holy War Art Exhibition (Seisen bijutsu tenrankai) and by travelling to war fronts to record battles.

Artistic protest against the state was rare, and those who did not paint propaganda paintings were either sent to jail or the battlefield. Matsumoto Shunsuke, who wrote “The Living Artist” (Ikiteiru gaka) in 1941, was one of the very few artists who publicly protested against the militarist views of art. Referring to the symposium where militarist officials declared that artists should contribute to the war by painting propaganda paintings, Matsumoto wrote, “I regret to say in the symposium entitled ‘National Defense State and the Fine Arts’ I found no value. It is wise to keep silent, but I do not believe keeping silent today is necessarily the correct thing to do.” Meanwhile, the state set out to eradicate art that was deemed undesirable. Authorities and police labeled surrealist works “unhealthy” and linked them to “dangerous” thoughts of communism. In 1941 they arrested the leaders of the Japanese surrealist movement, Fukuzawa and Takiguchi Shūzō. In addition, numerous artists and art students were sent to the battlefield as soldiers.

In the early 1940s, Ogawara and Fujita both produced works on government commission. Ogawara was initially drafted and dispatched to Manchuria as a soldier at the age of thirty in 1941. After succumbing to pneumonia, however, he was sent back to his home in Hokkaido. As for Fujita, in the 1930s he continued to paint and exhibit, and travelled extensively both inside and outside Japan (to Akita, Okinawa, Mexico, Brazil, and the United States). But in 1940, with Europe at war, he returned to Japan where he would stay for the duration of the war. Soon Ogawara and Fujita were on their way to the front, not as tourists or soldiers, but as official war artists. Both received public recognition through their war art: Ogawara received the Army Ministry Award (Rikugun daijin shō) and Fujita was awarded the Asahi Newspaper Culture Award (Asahi bunka shō), to name two. As President of the Army Art Association (Rikugun bijutsu kyōkai), Fujita occupied a higher and more prominent position than Ogawara. He stated in the art magazine Shin bijutsu in 1943: “I feel that I have dedicated my right arm to the nation. How rewarding it is that painters can directly contribute to the nation!”

Interestingly, both artists painted the same battle: the Japan-US battle on Attu Island near Alaska in 1943. Both paintings are currently in the war art collection at The National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo mentioned above. The battle is known as the first incident in which the Japanese military employed the strategy of gyokusai, or collective suicide. As part of the Battle of Midway that started in June 1942, Japan occupied the Kiska and Attu Islands in Alaska. By May 1943 the Japanese troops ran out of food and weapons, and their commander, Colonel Yamazaki Yasuyo, decided to choose “the path of the Japanese warrior,” or death over life. Those who were injured and unable to fight were asked to commit suicide so that they would not be captured by the enemy. On the night of May 29, 1943, after performing banzai to the Emperor, the last forces waged a sudden attack on the Americans, which resulted in brutal, hand-to-hand combat. Except for 28 prisoners, all Japanese on the island (over 2,000 people) died, either killed by the Americans or blown up by their own hand. The following morning, the surviving Americans found piles of Japanese corpses.
Ogawara and Fujita approached this battle differently. Ogawara’s *The Bombing of Attu* (*Attsutō bakugeki*, 1945), one of only three war paintings that he produced, portrays Japanese planes flying over the mountains of Alaska. Just like *Snow*, Ogawara paints mountains covered by snow, but this time he captures them from the aerial perspective. While a man’s leg was trapped in nature in *Snow*, in this painting, the mountains are dominated by the human technology or battle planes that nobly fly over them. Offering viewers a perspective from the cockpit allowed Japanese viewers to visually dictate the American territory of Attu.

Although Attu is known for its gruesome battles, the painting does not depict them. However, since it was produced in 1945 and titled *The Bombing of Attu*, this painting showing the Japanese bombing of the island generates a curiously anachronistic effect, giving the impression that Japan had won the battle.

Fujita’s painting of Attu, which portrays the dramatic moment of the gruesome fight and images of hell, stands in stark contrast to Ogawara’s somewhat disengaged war propaganda. Honorable *Death on Attu Island* (*Attsutō gyokusai*, 1943) is a work that the artist, even after the war, called one of the most satisfying works of his career. In the painting, Fujita paints the collective suicide (the so-called *gyokusai* or “shattered jewels”) for which the battle became so well known. Japanese soldiers advance from the left, screaming and bayoneting Americans. Dark, earth-colored helmets, bayonets, and military uniforms emerge out of the mound in the foreground and form a solid, abstract pattern that echoes the high, rough wave-like pattern of the mountain landscape, creating a dynamic composition. In the mound, we also find bodies and faces of already dead soldiers. The man in the near center of the background, who raises his arm forward and looks directly at the viewers screaming, is Col. Yamazaki, who commanded Japanese force. The two soldiers who are on either side of Yamazaki are cruelly stabbing the body of the enemy with their swords. In Fujita’s work, which focuses on the violent encounter between the two forces, the death of every Japanese soldier is justified as inflicting damage, however small, on the Americans.

The war ended in 1945, but the two artists’ postwar lives and reputations in Japan were long overshadowed by their wartime experiences. In the immediate postwar years, Fujita and Ogawara were questioned about their personal responsibility and expelled from the New Art Association (*Shin bijutsu kai*) and the Art and Culture Association, respectively. It is worth noting, in contrast, that the first President of the Japan Artist Association (*Nihon bijutsuka renmei*), the largest postwar artist community established in 1947, was Ihara Usaburō, who had himself been a prominent war artist. Similarly, Yokoyama Taikan, who dedicated the sales of his paintings to the military and produced battle planes with his name on them, never stopped working in the postwar era. Given this, why were Fujita and Ogawara singled out and ostracized? Perhaps for Fujita, it was because of his high visibility as the President of the Army Art Association (*Rikugun bijutsu kyōkai*), or the fact that the shocking rumors about his sex life in Paris during the 1920s made him an easy target. His enormous success both in 1920s France
and in 1930s Japan might have made other artists envious as well. Ogawara was initially ousted for failure to pay his Association fee, but he did not challenge his expulsion over this seemingly small matter.

Facing criticisms that questioned his wartime responsibility, Fujita defended himself by claiming that artists were always pacifists by nature and thus could not be militarists.24 Putting the war controversy behind him, Fujita left Japan permanently in 1949, arriving in New York and returning to France the following year. In 1955 he became a French citizen and was baptized in 1958. He acquired his Christian name Léonard (after Leonardo da Vinci) and created his own chapel in Reims, which he decorated with stained glass and frescos. While producing art with new themes such as Christianity and children, the artist also returned to painting the female nudes that had been his “signature style” in the 1920s. Fujita never commented on his war responsibility, but shortly before he died, he made an angry statement about how he had been treated immediately following the war.

It was wrong that I was born in Japan. Japanese are so jealous of me that they want to bully me. There are no other people like the Japanese, who conspire against me behind my back. They are all liars and people I cannot trust. How they have tortured me! I always thought to clarify myself at least once before I die. They owe me in that I helped them and have painted for them, but they have forgotten my kindness. They only think about themselves and are always trying to make money. There is no one as unhappy as I am. I am truly unhappy.25

As for Ogawara, he severed his ties with the major Japanese art communities in Tokyo, isolated himself in Kuchan, and kept silent about his war art until he publicly engaged the issue in the 1970s:

I was interested in surrealism but I gradually moved away from it. All the things that surrounded me became huge social pressures that moved in one direction and against my will. Those who resisted the pressure in that society were truly strong individuals who deserve respect. Unfortunately, I chose the path of conformity and I saw many people like myself. I also saw how those who followed the dominant power skillfully changed their opinions and positions after the war. Thinking about these experiences makes me emotional.26

Although the two artists continued to paint, during their lifetimes they never again received as much public attention as they had in the prewar and wartime period.

The Fujita Tsuguharu Resurrection in the 2000s

Fujita’s image has been greatly transformed in recent years in dramatic ways. This is partially due to the scholarship on wartime art that began in the 1990s following the death of the Shōwa Emperor in 1989, but the catalyst for the change in perception of Fujita’s war art in particular was the retrospective organized in 2006 by the National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo, two years before his exhibition in Hokkaido.27 In terms of the number of visitors, scholarly attention, and media support, the retrospective commemorating Fujita’s 120th birthday was a big success.28 With this retrospective, Fujita, who had previously been criticized as a war collaborator, was now “resurrected” as a great modernist artist.29 The retrospective was exceptional in many ways: it gained official support from Fujita’s widow Kimiyo, who had not always encouraged exhibitions of his work in Japan, it was the largest exhibition of his work held in Japan in the postwar period, and it displayed five war paintings by Fujita that the museum had rarely
displayed to the public. What was especially remarkable was how the wartime paintings were represented. Fujita’s war paintings, especially his *Attu* painting, were explained as his effort to expose the “terrible realities of the war,” rather than to support the war effort. Many Japanese art critics echoed this apologist—and utterly implausible—interpretation of the paintings. Natsubori Masahiro argued that Fujita’s propaganda paintings do not display militaristic tones, and Kikuha Mokuma stated, “where can we see propaganda effects in this painting that portrays the death of our comrades?” Nomiyama Gyōji even further vaguely contended, “his works are rather anti-war (*hansen teki*)” This newly constructed narrative of an “anti-war” Fujita transformed the painter into a tragic figure who was misunderstood and made a scapegoat over the issue of artists’ war responsibility.

Crucial to this re-interpretation of Fujita’s life and wartime art was his prewar success in France. Fujita was friends with internationally acclaimed avant-garde artists and his art was recognized in Paris, the artistic capital of the time. The museum, however, did not investigate why such an important artist had been ignored and forgotten by the Japanese public and art historians. Furthermore, instead of highlighting the transnational aspects of international modernism, the exhibition curiously recuperated Fujita as a “Japanese” artist and made his success a story of national glory. Ozaki Masaaki, the curator of the National Museum, wrote in English, “Having taken pride in being Japanese until then, the decision to sever ties with Japan must have been a painful choice for Fujita...He wanted to compete in the world as Japanese. That wish was irrelevant to his new nationality. Even if he resided in France and led life as a Frenchman, at heart, he was Japanese.” Reclaiming him as “Japanese,” the exhibition narrated his life in parallel with Japanese modern history. Ozaki wrote, “The process of Japan succeeding in modernization and being ruined for announcing its hegemony over Asia corresponds with the process of Fujita succeeding in Paris and eventually getting dragged into the storm of Japanese nationalism.” The celebration of Fujita’s fame was not only an art historical reevaluation of an individual artist, it was a historical reevaluation of a nation as well. The museum narrated both Fujita’s life and Japan’s modern history in such a way as to highlight their innocence and passivity in being “dragged” into the war. By focusing on this victimization, the exhibition silenced the questions of both Japan’s national and Fujita’s personal war responsibility.

It was this image of Fujita as a pioneering avant-garde pacifist artist that the 2008 Hokkaido exhibition was built on. This exhibition did not display his war paintings, but instead focused on his large panel paintings produced in the 1920s. The four monumental panels—*Composition with Lions, Composition with Dogs, Battle I, and Battle II* (Raion no iru kōzu, Inu no iru kōzu, Tōsō I, Tōsō II)—were featured as “Fujita’s works that have never been exhibited in Japan before.” They were all painted in 1929 but were missing until discovered in storage outside Paris in 1992. In 2000, the panels were designated as French national heritage items, and the French government and the Hokkaido Museum of Modern Art collaborated on their restoration for this exhibition. The sheer number of curators and institutions involved in the project attests to both countries’ interest in Fujita. Aside from this grand international collaboration, what was notable was the way Fujita’s persona was transformed—yet again.

The exhibition emphasized Fujita’s interest in monumental works and religious themes, explicitly comparing him with Italian Renaissance artists. In the catalogue written in Japanese and French, French museum curator Anne Le Diberder compared his prewar *Battle* panels with Michelangelo’s Sistine Chapel and called Fujita’s artistic exploration, “another story of the Renaissance.” Half of the exhibition space was dedicated to Fujita’s postwar religious works,
including *Crucifixion* (1960), in which the artist painted the lean bodies of Jesus Christ and two others nailed to a wooden cross against the background of an ancient city under blue sky. His chapel, named “Notre Dame de la Paix,” which features stained glass with skeleton motifs, was said to refer to the tragedies of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, therefore symbolizing peace. In this familiar trope of peace and Hiroshima, Fujita himself was represented as standing for peace in a most peculiar way: the catalogue concluded, “‘Notre Dame de la Paix’ reminds us of his Japanese name, Tsuguharu, which means ‘the one who inherits peace.’ His name will forever pass on the message of peace brought to us by a dove.” Overall, by reworking the image of Fujita created by the 2006 exhibition, which had presented him as an avant-gardist, the 2008 exhibition made him into a Renaissance humanist. Step by step, through these two solo exhibitions, the formerly denounced Japanese artist Fujita Tsuguharu acquired the new identity he had wished for decades earlier. He became Léonard Foujita, the Japanese Leonardo da Vinci and—although he never sought this—a man of peace.

**War and Modernism**

While Fujita is over-celebrated as a national hero and Ogawara is marginalized as “Hokkaido’s local artist,” I suggest that their works are equally significant in understanding the relationship between prewar modernism and the war. The key to this investigation is Fujita’s *Battle I and II* (1928), the featured works in the 2008 exhibition. In this peculiar set of panels, the Caucasian men and women depicted are all naked for no apparent reason. The men are massively muscular and the women’s bodies are plump compared to the naked women in *Nude with Tapestry*. One to three individuals act in a group, and there are men and women violently wrestling with dogs, having conversations, and lying down. Fujita produced separate sketches for different parts of the panels and simply put them together on the canvas, which resulted in the “obvious lack of logic in composition,” as Le Diberder put it. According to Le Diberder Fujita drew on his studies of Greek and Renaissance sculptures at the Louvre Museum for the panels. She also suggests that Fujita’s interest in the classics was inspired by the neo-classicism of Andre Derain and Picasso in the late 1920s, whom Fujita knew in person. What Le Diberder does not mention is the possible connection between modernist neo-classicism in the late 1920s and fascist classicism of the 1930s and 1940s in Italy and Germany, which recent scholars of interwar European art have begun most often in the case of Giorgio de Chirico. If scholars including Alan Tansman, Harry Harootunian, Leslie Pincus, and Andrew Gordon point to the possibility of talking about “Japanese fascism,” inquiring into Fujita’s “classical turn” in the late 1920s is crucial, especially because the *Battle* panels seem like a significant segue to his *Attu* painting. The artist’s interests in the physicality of male bodies engaged in combat and the massive group portrait apparent in the *Battle* are pursued further in his *Attu* painting. The “obvious lack of logic in composition” in the *Battle* is successfully resolved in *Attu*, where dozens of soldiers are intricately interwoven and tightly engaged with one another in such a way that the dynamics of composition remain coherent. Is Fujita’s modernist “classical turn” in late 1920s Paris in any way related to fascism? If so, how does it anticipate his later works in wartime Japan that some scholars call fascist?

The works of Ogawara, who started out as a surrealist and was later transformed into a war painter again pose a question about war and modernism. The ambiguous political position of surrealism is expressed in the scholarship of art historian John Clark. On the one hand, he emphasizes the revolutionary spirit and potentially subversive nature of Japanese surrealism. He writes, “surrealists were simply the last recalcitrants in the art world against a tacit or explicit
On the other hand, he acknowledges, “the late-nineteenth-century and early-twentieth-century art world [in Japan] became modern without modernist art forms” (emphasis original), alluding to the fact that Japanese modern artists did not quite challenge the establishment in the political sense. Indeed, Ogawara was not the only surrealist who painted propaganda. Whether “coerced” or not, his mentor Fukuzawa Ichirō produced a war painting in 1945, which is included in the above mentioned war art collection at the National Museum. The problem also arises from the fact that surrealism reached its pinnacle in the late 1930s under supposedly tight militarist control, and as we have seen, Ogawara could present his surrealist work as late as 1940. In fact, art critic Moriguchi Tari in 1943 stated that despite the suspicion of militarists, Japanese surrealists are not anti-nationalists. In other words, the cases of both Fujita and Ogawara bring into question the conventional narrative that modernism disappeared when militarism emerged until after 1945. After all, almost all war artists were prewar modernists. We are now faced with different kinds of questions: why is it that so many modernists could become war artists with little trouble and ideological conflict? What is the relationship between modernism and nationalism in Japan’s case? Further scholarship on Japanese war art needs to elucidate this complex interplay of modernism, nationalism, and the war, as in the works of Fujita and Ogawara.

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Notes

I would like to thank Mr. Yabuki Toshio, the director at the Ogawara Shu Museum of Art, for sharing with me his valuable stories on the artist. This essay is indebted to Joshua S. Mostow, John O’Brien, Sharalyn Orbaugh, Ming Tiampo, Laura Hein, and Mark Selden who gave me valuable comments and encouragement. This essay also benefited from the editorial assistance of N. J. Hall and Ben Whaley. This is an edited version of my paper presented at the 12th Annual Harvard East Asia Society Graduate Student Conference, February 2009.

Please follow the links to other websites in order to view Fujita’s works.


2 For more on the worldwide comparison of war art, see Laura Brandon, Art & War (London: I.B. Tauris, 2006).

3 “Ushinawareta sensō kaiga: nijūnenkan beikoku ni kakusarete ita taiheiyō sensō meiga no zenyō” [Lost War Paintings: The Whole Story of the Pacific War Art Masterpieces That Were Hidden in the United States For Twenty Years], Shūkan Yomiuri, August 18, 1967.


13 See the second chapter of Maki Kaneko’s “Art in the Service of the State: Artistic Production in Japan during the Asia-Pacific War,” Ph.D. diss. (University of East Anglia, 2006). Kaneko points out that the reform was not completely the “imposition” of government control over art; artists also requested protection from the state.


15 Akiyama Kunio, “Hon’nendo kirokuga nit suite” [On This Year’s Record Paintings], *Bijutsu*, May 1944, 2.

16 Yamanouchi Ichirō, “Sakusen kirokuga no ari kata” [How War Paintings Should Be], *Bijutsu*, May 1944, 2-5.

17 Quoted in Sandler, “The Living Artist,” 78.


21. For more on how the American public was confounded by the suicidal act, see *Life*, 3 April 1944, 36.


28. In an email correspondence, curator of the National Museum Ozaki Masaaki informed me that 290,000 people visited the retrospective in Tokyo, 220,000 in Kyoto, and 80,000 in Hiroshima.


From the exhibition website (accessed on December 15, 2008).

The Panels are now owned by the General Council of Essonne.


This Hiroshima connection was a new element added to the Fujita narrative. It was not Fujita but rather the President of the Pen Club Yves Gandon who made the reference to Hiroshima in his speech at the opening of the chapel. Léonard Foujita. exh. cat. (Sapporo: The Hokkaido Museum of Modern Art, 2008), 174; 203.

As far as I researched, Fujita’s Chinese characters 確治 do not refer to peace.


Clark, “Surrealism in Japan,” 204.

Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus Articles Recommended for Further Reading

“Heroic Resistance and Victims of Atrocity: Negotiating the Memory of Japanese Imperialism in Chinese Museums”
Kirk D. Denton
http://www.japanfocus.org/-Kirk_A_-Denton/2547

This essay examines war memorial museums in China beyond the NMM in order to present the country’s official representation of the war. It is highly informative and it provides detailed analyses of the exhibition strategies employed in each museum. We have chosen Kingson's essay over Denton's because it includes a discussion of the role of digital media, an important channel that is able to popularize the nation-focused narrative of war in a globalized environment.

“The Anime Director, the Fantasy Girl and the Very Real Tsunami”
Susan J Napier
March 12, 2012.
http://www.japanfocus.org/-Susan_J_-Napier/3713

This essay approaches war as a disaster and analyzes this through an examination of Miyazaki Hayao’s animations, such as Ponyo. It certainly offers a rich insight into the artist’s apocalyptic treatment of natural disasters, yet the section that deals with war is quite insubstantial.

“Photographer Fukushima Kikujiro - Confronting Images of Atomic Bomb Survivors”
Yuki Tanaka
October 24, 2011.
http://www.japanfocus.org/-Yuki-TANAKA/3623

This article introduces FUKUSHIMA Kikujiro’s life journey as a photographer and a social activist, beginning shortly after he survived the Hiroshima bombing. After starting to photograph A-bomb survivors in 1953, Fukushima devoted his life to increasing public awareness about the suffering of the survivors by recording their lives with his camera, which he did for more than two decades. Fukushima tried to convey the disastrous consequences of the bombing as well as the Japanese government’s inadequate provision of social assistance from the survivors’ viewpoint. As the author states, Fukushima’s photographs convey the individual narratives of the survivors, which enables us to “share memories” of this human disaster. This article includes a number of photographs of A-bomb victims as well as Fukushima’s personal narrative about his long engagement with photo-activism.
“Godzilla and the Bravo Shot: Who Created and Killed the Monster?”
Yuki Tanaka
June 13, 2005
http://www.japanfocus.org/-Yuki-TANAKA/1652

When the original Godzilla film was produced in 1954, its production team tried to convey the anti-nuclear message to the Japanese audience, whose memory of the bombing was still fresh. Following the release of the original Godzilla, a sequence of 22 Godzilla films was produced up until 1995. However, the author of this book argues that the once clearly anti-nuclear message has vanished in the later installments of the of Godzilla series, especially those that were produced in the U.S.A. Through his comparative examination of the original script, the original film, and the series of films produced in the U.S., the author interprets the disappearance of the anti-nuclear message as people’s loss of awareness of the destructive power of new technologies that create injustice and inhumanity.

“Barefoot Gen, the Atomic Bomb and I: The Hiroshima Legacy.”
Nakazawa Keiji interviewed by Asai Motofumi. Translated by Richard H. Minear.
January 20, 2008.
http://www.japanfocus.org/-Nakazawa-Keiji/2638

This is an interview of NAKAZAWA Keiji, a manga artist and the creator of Barefoot Gen, that was conducted by ASAI Motofumi. It introduces Nakazawa and his family’s experience of the atomic bombing when Nakazawa was a first grader, and discusses his parents’ influence on his life and work. His father, an artist and a leftwing activist in the 1940s, was imprisoned and tortured before being killed by the bombing, and his mother suffered the loss of two of her children and her husband on August 6, 1945. This family’s suffering is depicted in Barefoot Gen. Nakazawa has been producing works on the bombing since 1968 and he sees his manga as a “weapon” to criticize those who were responsible for the disaster, including both the American and the Japanese governments, and as tools to bring justice to victims of the Pacific War.

“Nuke York, New York: Nuclear Holocaust in the American Imagination from Hiroshima to 9/11”
Mick Broderick and Robert Jacobs
March 12, 2012.
http://www.japanfocus.org/-Mick-Broderick/3726

An exhibit, “Nuke York, New York,” was staged in New York on the tenth anniversary of the 9/11 attacks; it aimed to show how the public conception of New York City as vulnerable to a nuclear attack has been constructed historically. It exhibited depictions of a nuclear attack on New York City that were drawn from various media such as newspapers, magazines, Civil Defense pamphlets, film, television, books, protest material, comics, computer games, websites, and material cultural objects produced between 1945 and 2011. The authors of this article, who also curated the exhibit, show the cultural spaces in which Americans’ anxieties over a nuclear attack were constructed; and argue that the continuing portrayal of New York City in popular
media as an “American Hiroshima” dilutes the Americans’ sense of guilt as a nuclear perpetrator while reinforcing their sense of themselves as victims, especially after 9/11.