Journal of Contemporary History Copyright © 2003 SAGE Publications, London, Thousand Oaks, CA and New Delhi, Vol 38(1), 101–116.
[0022–0094(200301)38:1;101–116;029966]

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Popular Representations of the Past: The Case of Postwar Japan

Japan experienced a political and social transformation when it was defeated in August 1945. The postwar development of Japan was greatly influenced by the change in the postwar international system, namely the onset of the Cold War in East Asia, as Japan developed into an economically strong yet politically conservative state. In a sense, the onset of political conservatism came too early for the Japanese to have had a proper process of dealing squarely with pre-1945 militarism and the resultant war that had ravaged Japan. In this article, an attempt will be made to understand how that past came to be represented in popular culture. In the process, it should shed light on how postwar Japanese society attempted to cope with the war. Not surprisingly, popular representations of the past were highly sensitive to politics. We will need to bear in mind why certain portrayals of the past are more important than others. Not only are we interested in how the past is portrayed by the present, but how that portrayal helps us to live in the present and form the basis for a new cultural consensus in society.

For the Japanese, it was important to construct a clear demarcation between the pre-1945 and post-1945 Japan because it needed to separate the 'polluted' past from the new present, as a springboard to construct a new narrative of postwar Japan. As we shall discover, the postwar Japanese liked to portray themselves as victims of pre-1945 militarism. This victim mentality is pervasive in the three categories of popular representations — literature, films and television — examined here. After the 'chaos' of the initial decade, there gradually emerged an implicit political, social and cultural consensus in postwar Japan that supported this perspective. Moreover, the intensely myopic preoccupation of the Japanese with the 'self' came at the cost of ignoring the 'other', namely the victims of Japanese aggression, especially in Asia. This was symptomatic of the incapability of the Japanese to come to terms with their own past.

This article will discuss the popular representations of the past in postwar Japan, with the focus on the war, in the categories of literature, films and television. These three categories are analysed together and discussed in seven

I am most grateful to the Japan Foundation for allowing me to take the time to conduct research, write this article, and present it at King's College, University of Cambridge in January 2002, during the tenure of a research fellowship from the Foundation in 2001–2. In line with Japanese custom, last names precede given names for Japanese names in this article.

different thematic sections — namely, war responsibility, purification, the sanitized memory, women and pacifism, the atomic bomb, mass consumerism and neo-nationalism (I–VII respectively). This article does not claim to be a comprehensive study but an impressionistic one. The main purpose is to derive a general overview of how popular culture is affected by the politics of the present and of the immediate past.

I

Post-dictatorship society often needs to name former collaborators as the new enemy. Among the few die-hard left-wing cultural élites that survived the continued political oppression of 1930s Japan, the question of war responsibility became urgent as a means of making a complete break with the past. So, the climate of retribution emerged, albeit briefly, in the years immediately after defeat in American-occupied Japan. This phenomenon was most strikingly evident in the literary world, possibly because there the sense of betrayal felt by the survivors was the greatest.

Japanese literature in the 1930s experienced the darkest moment in its recent history. Political oppression of left-wing political and cultural movements, which began as early as 1910, came to bear down with enormous pressure on the proletarian literary movement, the most important literary movement by the 1930s.[1] In 1933, the death resulting from police torture of one of the writers of the movement, Kobayashi Takeji, sent a shock wave throughout the literary world and triggered a mass 'reorientation' (*tenkō*) of writers who made public statements that they were politically converted to pursuing the nationalist cause. An estimated 95 per cent of writers eventually succumbed to police pressure, for social, political and economic reasons. In May 1942, these 'reorientated' writers took part in the establishment of a national policy body for literature called the Association of Patriotic Writers (*Nippon Bungaku Hōkokukai*).

Not surprisingly, therefore, the remaining 5 per cent of committed communist writers who refused resolutely to be pressured into 'reorientating' were highly critical of those who did.[2] The Association for New Japanese Literature (*Shin nihon bungaku kai*) in particular called angrily to resolve the issue of war responsibility by naming well-known authors who had collaborated with the Association of Patriotic Writers.[3] Ironically, however, since most of the writers who had 'reorientated' in the pre-war and wartime era had done so not out of political conviction but out of social and economic expediency, they were all too happy to perform the second 'reorientation' in the postwar period by renouncing their pre-1945 conversion.[4] Moreover, the new grouping of the

1 Donald Keene, *Dawn to the West: Japanese Literature of the Modern Era Fiction* (New York 1984), 623.
2 Satō Shizuo, *Sengo bungaku no hōhō* (Tokyo 1966), 18.
3 Usui Yoshimi, *Sengo bungaku ronsō* (Tokyo 1972), 115–16.
4 Keene, op. cit., 884.

communist writers into two main movements caused rivalry, leading to the accusation that one movement was using the cause as a way of promoting its own literary agenda.[5]

How did the film industry deal with the question of war responsibility? With the arrival of the Supreme Commander of Allied Powers (SCAP) a major restructuring of the film industry ensued. The SCAP issued guidelines on films designed to develop and promote the new democratic Japan. For instance, it encouraged films which portrayed Japanese people with creative and progressive ways of dealing with postwar reconstruction, as well as those that showed the peaceful and constructive formation of labour unions.[6] Unlike in the highly divided literary world, the film industry was more united in terms of how it dealt with the governmental collaboration of the 1930s. Like the majority of Japanese people, those in the film industry felt that they, too, were the victims of pre-1945 militarism, having to make propaganda films for the state in order to survive economically and commercially.[7] This meant that the industry was not at all keen to point fingers and, as a result, only a handful of companies were convicted and had to leave the industry for a three-year period. The denial or rejection of the film industry as a supporter of militarism implied that its sense of responsibility towards the victims in Asia was very weak. Moreover, it may be more accurate to say that although the reforms undertaken by SCAP were intended to democratize the industry, from the latter's point of view they had the effect of purifying the past in order to have a new beginning.

II

In the initial postwar period from 1945 to 1958, an element of catharsis pervaded war literature. By catharsis, I mean the outpouring of autobiographical writings motivated by the desire to expose the evils of militarism. The most powerful classics in war literature emerged in this period, such as Noma Hiroshi's *Shinkū chitai* (The Zone of Emptiness) in 1947, Ōoka Shōhei's *Furyoki* (A Prisoner's Record) in 1948, followed by Takagi Toshirō's *Imupāru* (Imphal) in 1949. These books convey powerful messages even half a century after their publication because they were based on the very rawness of personal experiences, and motivated by anger towards the militarist regime. No doubt the American occupation of Japan had fostered an environment generally conducive to outbursts of anger and criticism of militarism. However, it can also be regarded as a popular reflection of the general sentiment of the contemporary Japanese who wanted to place the burden of war responsibility on the shoulders of the former regime.[8]

5 Usui, op. cit., 151, 158–9.

6 Satō Tadao, 'Kokka ni kanri sareta eiga' in Imamura Shōhei et al. (eds), *Kōza nihon eiga 4: Sensō to eiga* (Tokyo 1986), 50.

7 Ibid., 64.

8 Takahashi Saburō, *'Senki mono' o yomu: Sensō taiken to sengo nihon shakai* (Kyoto 1988), 36.

Noma's book was sensational because it exposed 'what it was really like in the army', with all its violence, repression and bullying, which had not been publicly exposed before. In fact, the official English translation of the title misses the nuance of the original Japanese title, which is meant to convey the sense of an 'airless vacuum' where soldiers lived claustrophobically. On the other hand, Ōoka's *A Prisoner's Record* was about his personal experience as a prisoner of war of the Americans in the Philippines. Controversially, Ōoka wrote: 'I never felt that the position of a prisoner was as shameful as the military had taught him . . .'.[9] Not only that, he was one of the very few writers to hold the silent majority responsible for the rise of militarism:

> I felt strong hatred towards the military that had drawn my home country into such a desperate war; but I also felt that I did not have any right to complain about the regime since I myself had not done anything to prevent it from coming into being in the first place.[10]

On the other hand, Takagi's *Imupāru* characterizes the Imphal campaign as a 'battle between civilization and madness'.[11] His work is an indictment of the disastrous mismanagement by the military leadership in undertaking the self-destructive campaign.

The period of purification ended in 1958 with the publication of Gomikawa Junpei's *Ningen no jōken* (Conditions of Humans) that became a bestseller and broke the record by selling 2.4 million copies in less than three years.[12] Gomikawa's work still stands out today as unique in its depiction of the Japanese as aggressors, and in the process, victimizing not only their compatriots but also the Chinese and Koreans as second-class citizens of Japan's very costly Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere. These works had an important social and political function which was to purify the Japanese from their polluted past, by expressing their deeply-held anger.

A similar cathartic process was occurring in the world of cinema under the American occupation. Not surprisingly, the SCAP attempted to use the film industry for propaganda purposes. In 1947, it ordered the making of a film called 'War and Peace' directed jointly by a well-known left-wing director, Yamamoto Satsuo, and Kamei Fumio.[13] This film was unusual in that it portrayed the Chinese as victims and also placed the Japanese protagonist at the mercy of the kindness of the Chinese people. The literary success of the war writings mentioned previously meant that they were almost immediately turned into films. In particular, Yamamoto Satsuo was kept busy, directing 'The Zone of Emptiness' in 1952 and another hugely popular work critical of the war called '*Sensō to ningen*' (War and Man) made in three parts in

9 Ōoka Shōhei, 'Furyoki' in Shōwa sensō bungaku zenshū henshū inkai (ed.), *Shōwa sensō bungaku zenshū vol. 12 Ryūri no hibi* (Tokyo 1965), 112.

10 Ibid., 67.

11 Takagi Toshirō, 'Imupāru' in Shōwa sensō bungaku zenshū henshū inkai (ed.), *Shōwa sensō bungaku zenshū vol. 6 Nankai no shitō* (Tokyo 1965), 39.

12 Takahashi, op.cit., 52.

13 Satō Tadao, *Nihon eiga shi*, vol. 2 (Tokyo 1995), 179–80.

1970–73, based on Gomikawa Junpei's novel of the same title. On the other hand, Gomikawa's masterpiece, 'Conditions of Humans', was filmed in six parts by Kobayashi Masaki and produced by Shōchiku Productions in 1959–60. Albeit to a lesser extent, the film industry was also affected by the ideological divide that had tormented the literary industry. In the early 1950s, the McCarthyite purge of 'Reds' in the film industry resulted in the sudden increase of independent film production companies to accommodate left-wing film-makers against the backdrop of the Korean War in the early 1950s. Most of the left-wing directors wanted to convey political messages of an anti-war and pacific nature through their works.[14] Many of these films tended to unify the Japanese through the common experience of suffering caused by war. Another common element was the tendency to ignore the effect of that war on Asia.

III

Another characteristic is the development of a taboo surrounding popular representations of the war. Towards the end of the 1950s, after a decade of highly revelatory and damning writings on the military, there gradually emerged an implicit consensus that it was no longer acceptable to write 'detestable and distasteful' things about the war. Why was this the case? From the point of view of the families of the war dead, this taboo seems to have arisen from the feeling that those who had suffered the death of their loved ones should not have to suffer further at the hands of writers seeking to expose the unsavoury pasts of certain individuals.[15] Powerful political pressure groups such as the Association of the Families of the War Dead (*Nihon izoku kai*) may have had some role in influencing the politicians. More importantly, the continued process of purification became an obstacle to the more urgent national agenda of postwar reconstruction.

In the 'reborn' Japan, many former high-ranking officers and officials of the pre-war and wartime Japanese empire went through a silent metamorphosis and emerged as beacons of the postwar Japanese economic miracle. It became politically inexpedient to condemn, let alone name them, even in literature, because postwar democratic Japan needed to rely on the motors of pre-1945 militarism. In such a climate, the militarists were no longer depicted as real people but came to assume a faceless, monolithic mask. Instead of a thorough catharsis, then, the purification process which started during the American occupation ended prematurely in postwar Japan, leaving many skeletons in the cupboard, as well as many stones unturned. However, such a movement against the liberal atmosphere of the immediate postwar years was not a surprising development after all. It was indirectly affected by the change in the policy of the SCAP towards Japan, known as the 'reverse course debate', as the

14 Satō Tadao, *Nihon eiga shi*, vol. 3 (Tokyo 1995), 144.
15 Takahashi, op. cit., 56–7.

Cold War began to affect American foreign policy priorities in East Asia. Similarly, it was in line with the consolidation of postwar politics around the conservatism of the Liberal Democratic Party.

In this atmosphere of increasing political conservatism, the mainstream popular postwar attitude towards the war — that the Japanese were really the victims of the war — was established. Self-victimization of the Japanese, as a means of coming to terms with the past, implied that the memory of the war needed to be selective and sanitized to emphasize the suffering, as opposed to the aggression. Nowhere was this tendency more evident than in television, which became the most powerful mass medium from the 1960s onwards. In general, television programmes on the war are commemorative in nature and are shown on dates of historical importance, namely the anniversaries of the dropping of the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki on 6 and 9 August 1945 respectively, and the day of unconditional surrender on 15 August 1945. Needless to say, the intention behind concentrating programmes on these particular commemorations is to portray the Japanese as the victims of militarism, rather than the aggressors. Moreover, even the smallest detail can be used to affect the general portrayal of Japan on those days. The best example is the term used to describe 15 August. It is commonly known as the '*shūsenbi*', translated as 'the end of the war', rather than '*haisenbi*', or 'the day of defeat'.

A quick survey of television programmes during the postwar years reveals a number of characteristics.[16] In general, there were more programmes on war during daytime viewing hours in the 1960s and 1970s than in the later decades. Evidently, only housewives and the elderly in the affluent postwar society had enough leisure time to watch these programmes, and even the mid-day talk shows took up 'war' as a subject worthy of a whole hour.[17] Noticeably, more commercial channels showed programmes about the war, such as Tokyo, TBS and Fuji stations, indicating that 'war' must have ranked high in the ratings war.

'War' as a theme began to lose mass appeal in the 1980s. Even on the important commemorative days, war programmes appeared much less frequently, particularly on the commercial television stations, and eventually disappeared totally from the daytime slots. This was caused by demographic change in the 1980s, as the 'war generation' began to dwindle in Japan. In fact, war pro-

16 For the purpose of this brief survey, I have looked at television programmes shown on 6 and 9 August (the dates of the dropping of the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki respectively), and 15 August, the date of the unconditional surrender of Japan, in 1965, 1975, 1985, 1990, 2000, 2001 of *Asahi shinbun*.

17 For instance, on 15 August 1965, the programmes related to the war were as follows: 11.00–11.15 (NET) 'Postwar growth'; 11.15–11.45 (NET) 'American declaration to enter war'; 11.50–12.30 (NHK) National Ceremony for the War Dead; 12.00–12.45 (NET) 'Record of a regiment'; 12.00–12.45 (TBS) a drama with a war theme; 13.15–13.45 (Tokyo) 'Japan's military strength'; 13.45–14.15 (Tokyo) 'We, the children of the end of war'; 14.15–14.45 (Tokyo) 'The end of war after twenty years'; 16.30–17.30 (TBS) 'Upheavals of the Showa History'; 21.30–22.00 (NHK) 'Injuries from the Atomic Bomb'; 21.30–22.30 (TBS) a drama on war guilt; 22.15–22.45 (Fuji) 'The Changing World', *Asahi shinbun*.

grammes have become so unpopular that only the state-owned NHK has managed to retain the top billing slots, showing them in August every year. Hence, there appears to be a direct correlation between the degree of popular interest in the war, and the number of viewers with personal experience of it. Is it inevitable that the memory of the war gradually fades as the war generation disappears? If so, who will continue the task of communicating the war/past to future generations? Or is it unhealthy for society to dwell on the war when the memory of it naturally becomes faint and distant through the process of time? Even the very fact that the memory of the war is problematized today seems to be a novel development, as new technological advances allow for diverse ways of constructing and preserving memory.

In the mid-1990s, the change in the political climate was partly responsible for a renewed spate of war-related television documentaries after a dearth of them in the 1980s. The more progressive attitude towards Japan's war responsibility taken by Prime Minister Hosokawa (August 1993 to April 1994) and later by the Socialist Prime Minister Murayama (June 1994 to January 1996), partly accounted for renewed public interest in the war. Coupled with that was a sense of urgency that Japanese society needed to come to terms with the war, as the war generation was fast dying. In 1993, a six-part NHK documentary series called '*Documento Taiheiyō sensō*' (The Documentary: The Pacific War) was produced, whose main purpose was to teach some useful lessons from history.[18] In spite of its seemingly challenging objective, the programme concluded on a disappointing note, as it regurgitated the same old dictum that the Pacific War was caused by egotism and the self-conceit of the military. Possibly, the only new 'thesis' was that Japan needed to take into consideration criticisms from neighbouring Asian countries that in making this programme 'Japan has not changed.'[19] Nineteen ninety-four was another good year for documentary television programmes featuring the war.[20]

In the politically conducive climate fostered by Socialist Prime Minister Murayama, the fiftieth anniversary of the defeat in 1995 produced a large number of television programmes — documentaries, dramas and films — on the war. In August alone, there were 26 documentaries and 6 dramas.[21]

18 Satsuma Kōta, 'Kakkyoku no shūsen tokuban ni miru shinryaku sensō no sekinin to shinjitsu', *Zen'ei*, 638 (October 1993), 229.

19 Ibid., 230.

20 NHK did a special, 'Japan's longest day' (*Nihon no ichiban nagai hi*) on 12 August, then another on the 15th, 'The Showa 20: My Voice'(*Showa 20nen: watashi no koe*) a collection of interviews with Japanese housed at the National Archives in Washington DC. Then another two-part series on 'How the prisoners in Siberia were used' (*Shiberia no horyo wa kōshite okonawareta*) and 'New: The age of nuclear' (*Shin: kaku no jidai*). The Asahi Television (Telebi Asahi) ran a special on 14 August '400,000 child evacuees' (*40 man jin no gakudō sokai*), and the Nihon Television (Nihon telebi) showed a documentary on 'Daughters of . . . the Fiftieth memorial of Hiroshima' (*Musume wa . . . Hiroshima 50 kaiki*) on 31 July. Nihon Telebi also showed three further programmes related to the war on 24 July, 7 August and 14 August. Satsuma Kōta, 'Sensō wa owatteinai: Shūsen yonjūkyūnen me no tokushū', *Zen'ei*, 652 (October 1994), 185–7.

21 Satsuma Kōta, 'Genbakukan, sensōkan ni miru kūzen no shūsen kokuban rasshu', *Zen'ei*, 664 (October 1995), 182.

Among the commercial stations, Asahi Television splashed out on a major series entitled, 'Special Event for the Fiftieth Anniversary of the End of the War', which included a number of programmes on the atomic bombs, some of them multi-national collaborative ventures. Hitherto, commemorative programmes on the war tended to emphasize the enormity of suffering inflicted on the Japanese, concluding consensually that wars should never be fought again. Finally, things began to change in the mid-1990s as more programmes questioning Japan's role as the aggressor began to appear. In 1995, NHK took up the issue of 'comfort women', and also of the biological unit 731 in China. Moreover, a war drama by the NHK portrayed the Japanese as aggressors in Korea.[22] However, the problem remains that commercial stations are hesitant about showing 'war', and even on the rare occasions when they do, they do so after midnight.[23] By default, therefore, the state-owned NHK has a monopoly of popular representations of the war in the most powerful and effective mass medium.

Because the majority of programmes focus on the personal experiences of ordinary Japanese people, they shift the focus of memory away from the state to the individual. In popular representations of the war, the state represented as the militarists and the people as victims remain completely separate. As a result of this naturally preferred bias, these representations remain one-dimensional, introspective and stagnant. Most of the programmes contain the underlying message of pacifism — of a kind that does not question the responsibility of the Japanese.

IV

Women's literature continues to have a major influence on popular representations of the war in postwar Japan. As is widely known, women's literature has a long historical tradition in Japan, and the 'women's literary establishment' (*joryū bundan*) of contemporary Japan boasts some of Japan's best-known and influential writers. The year 1945 liberated not only Japan from the militarists but also women writers from the social constraints of the pre-war and wartime era. As a result, many of them published their best works after 1945.[24] Unlike many of the male authors who made an impact on war literature through writing about their personal experiences as combatants, women's writings tended to focus on society including the effect of the war on those behind the lines, and also on the meaning of life. Most significantly, their writings were pacifist in nature, partly because many of the important female writers of the immediate postwar Japan were left-wing sympathizers.

Their writings had the effect of bringing to the fore the tragedy of the defeat caused by militarism and contributed to the sense of suffering that permeated women's literature in modern Japan. Hayashi Fumiko (1903–51) who was a

22 The programme was called, 'Saredo waga ai'.
23 Nakamura Tokio, 'Telebi media no rekishi ninshiki', *Galac* (December 1997), 33.
24 Keene, op. cit., 1114.

well-known enthusiast for the war, wrote *Drifiting Clouds* (*Ukigumo*) in 1949–50 which was praised for its evocation of the defeated Japan, 'the collapsed morale of a vanquished Japan'.[25] Other writers such as Nogami Yaeko and Miyamoto Yuriko wrote fiction more directly critical of the militarist regime.[26] Without a doubt, the most famous novel of this genre was written in 1952 by Tsuboi Sakae, a communist, called *The Twenty-four Eyes* (*Nijūshi no hitomi*) which came to symbolize the anti-war, pacifist sentiment of the postwar era. It is a moving story about the effects of the war on twelve pupils (and hence the 'twenty-four eyes'), written from the perspective of a female schoolteacher, set on a small island in the inland sea. Tsuboi's writings are known as 'maternal literature' and 'literature of mercy'.[27] She questions not only the futility of life under militarism, but also the futility of giving birth to children knowing that they will be killed in war.[28] It was made into a hugely popular film in 1954 directed by Kinoshita Keisuke.[29]

From the 1970s, women writers contributed to mainstream representations of the war in influential non-fiction writing. Yamazaki Tomoko, for one, has long been interested in understanding the plight of the lower-class Japanese women who were sold as overseas prostitutes in the pre-war period. In her trilogy of *'karayuki-san'* (a generic name given to Japanese prostitutes overseas), *Sandakan hachiban shōkan* (*Sandakan Brothel No. 8)* won the prestigious Ōya Sōichi Prize for Non-Fiction in 1972 and was made into a film the following year. Her study of the *'karayuki-san'* provided the historical context for understanding the importance of 'comfort women' during the war as 'the vanguard' of Japanese military expansion in Asia.[30] In this sense, her work paved the way for understanding the relationship between gender and class discrimination, exacerbated by war. Similarly, Sawachi Hisae has written a number of books on the subject of the war. Her best-known work may be *Tsuma tachi no ni ni roku jiken* (The 26 February Incident and the Wives), portraying the lives of the wives of the officers executed for having masterminded the large-scale revolt against the government in 1936. It is a history of a tragic incident from the wives' perspectives. Sawachi claimed that they were victims twice over; first, by the fact that their husbands had decided to place 'obligation' above 'family' in participating in this incident; and second, when they had to live after the death of their disgraced husbands.[31] The accessibility of these writings has meant that their overall effect on the formation of popular images of the war among female readers has been enormous. In particular,

25 Ibid., 1143, 1146.

26 For instance, Miyamoto's *Banshū Heiya* (The Plains of Banshū) in 1946 and Nogami's *Meiro* (The Labyrinth) in 1956.

27 Komatsu Shinroku, 'Kaisetsu' in Tsuboi Sakae, *Nijūshi no hitomi* (Tokyo 1998), 227.

28 Tsuboi, op. cit., 170.

29 Komatsu, op. cit., 234.

30 Yamazaki Tomoko, trans. Karen Colligan-Taylor, *Sandakan Brothel No. 8: An Episode in the History of Lower-class Japanese Women* (New York 1999), xxv.

31 Kusayanagi Daizō, 'Kaisetsu' in Sawachi Hisae, *Tsuma tachi no ni ni roku jiken* (Tokyo 1995), 252.

Yamazaki's works are noteworthy as she managed to break out of the mainstream perspective of seeing only the Japanese themselves as victims, to seeing Asian women generally as victims of Japanese expansionism.

V

The most powerful symbols of Japan's defeat were the atomic bombs. It was the sheer scale of the destructiveness of these bombs that anointed the Japanese for ever as victims of the war. Significantly, the first commemorative 'war' event every August is the memorial ceremony for the victims of the Hiroshima bombs on 6 August. The experience of the bombs initiated the growth of a pacifist movement in postwar Japan, and justified the mass conversion of the Japanese to pacifism. After the passing of the heyday of the 'purification' literature, writings around the theme of the atomic bombs, known as the 'atomic bomb stories' (*genbaku mono*), grew steadily and produced some influential works. Due to the highly politicized nature of the atomic bombs as the symbol of extremities — both peace and war — memories of Hiroshima and Nagasaki have become an internationalized memory of the war.

However, during the American occupation of Japan, any information on the effects of the A-bombs was highly sensitive and treated as a military secret. As a result, large film production firms shied away from making films about them. Only those which were considered to be 'safe' from the standpoint of the occupation forces were shown, such as '*Nagasaki no uta wa wasureji*' (We shall not forget the song of Nagasaki) directed by Tasaka Tomotaka in 1952 and '*Nagasaki no kane*' (Bells of Nagasaki) directed by Ōba Hideo in 1950.[32] With the help of grass-root anti-nuclear lobby groups, Shindō Kaneto wrote and directed a film in 1952 called '*Genbaku no ko*' (Children of the Atomic Bomb), a story about children in Hiroshima whose lives were changed dramatically for the worse by the atomic bombs.[33] It was the first film to depict the horrifying slow death from radiation sickness. Diplomatic controversy surrounded the well-known case of a 19-reel documentary made by a Japanese team in the immediate aftermath of the atomic bombs called 'Hiroshima and Nagasaki' which was confiscated by the US military. It was returned to Japan in 1967 on condition that it would only be used for research purposes. Defiantly, the Japanese government showed it all on television, apart from the most gruesome section on the effects on humans.[34] It was Japan's way of sending the political message to the Americans that the Japanese as victims had the sole right and duty to disclose the real effects of the bombs. Not surprisingly, most Japanese learned of the extent of damage caused by the bombs for the first time through this documentary.

32 Satō Tadao, op. cit., vol. 2, 246.
33 Ibid., 246.
34 Satō Tadao, op. cit., vol. 3, 97–8.

In 1965, the twentieth anniversary of the defeat launched a huge number of works on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The most famous to come out in this period was *Hiroshima Notes* by the Nobel Prize winner, Ōe Kenzaburō. Ōe's work did not escape criticism, however, as some critics pointed out that his emphasis on the moralistic perspective had shifted the focus away from the political.[35] His focus had the tendency to over-emphasize the victims of the bomb as symbolic and even sacred. Even before then, Ibuse Masuji's *Black Rain* had caused a literary sensation with its depiction of social discrimination towards the '*hibakusha*' (radiation victims) in postwar Japan. In 1989, it was turned into a film by the director, Imamura Shōhei.

Unlike mainstream war literature based on battle experience, the genre of 'atomic bomb stories' has had a more enduring popular appeal, especially for the younger postwar generations with no experience of war. In a survey of war-related literature studied in high schools, five works out of nine belonged to this genre, including both *Black Rain* and *Hiroshima Notes*.[36] The tendency to prefer using 'atomic bomb stories' in education underlines the strength of pacifist and left-wing leanings amongst teachers. More importantly, it has had an enormous influence on the younger generation in terms of their seeing the experience of the war mostly from the standpoint of the Japanese as victims. The tragedy of the atomic bombs was also conveyed to children through the popular media of *manga* (Japanese-style comics) and animated cartoons. One of the most representative works is Nakazawa Keiji's 1977 *manga* called '*Hadashi no Gen*' (The Barefoot Gen), a story of a young boy who had to survive in the tough social and economic circumstances of post-bomb Hiroshima. It was made into an animated cartoon in 1986.

All in all, the appeal of these 'atomic bomb stories' is quite evident. The tragic experience of Hiroshima and Nagasaki allowed the Japanese to adopt the role of victim and, in the process, to forget their primary role as perpetrators of the war. Hiroshima became the symbol of peace, thereby providing the uncontested narrative for the rebirth of postwar Japanese as pacifists. Moreover, the influence of this genre is most deeply felt in the education of the younger generation.

VI

Popularization of the war as a theme in the culture of mass consumption was another important development in popular representations of the war. Noticeably in the field of cinema, 'war' began to be treated as a theme for popular entertainment towards the end of the 1950s. Most famously, '*Meiji tennō to nichiro sensō*' (The Emperor Meiji and the Russo-Japanese War,

35 Satō Shizuo, op. cit., 173.

36 They were: *Natsu no hana* (nominated twice), *Kuroi Ame* (The Black Rain) again nominated twice, and *Hiroshima nōto* (Hiroshima Notes). Suzuki Kunikaku, 'Kyōzai to shiteno sensō bungaku', in Yasuda Takeshi and Ariyama Taigo (eds), *Shin hihyō kindai Nippon bungaku no kōzō vol. 6 kindai sensō bungaku* (Tokyo 1981), 195–6.

1957) became the all-time blockbuster for Shin Tōhō Productions, grossing 542 million yen in the first seven months.[37] It was directed by Watanabe Kunio, an apologist of emperor-centred nationalism, who excelled in large-scale populist entertainment films.[38] One of the highlights of the film was a scene of the emperor shedding a few tears over the news of the deaths of his soldiers.[39] The film was also intended to give a 'feel-good factor' by reminiscing about Japan's 'good war', though not everyone in the audience was taken in by the simplistic portrayal it offered.[40] According to a survey of the viewers, roughly 40 per cent said that they liked the film because it brought out great things about the old Japan.[41] However, 24 per cent responded negatively to the film, stating that it was a simplistic glorification of the war and the emperor.

It was not until the late 1960s and early 1970s that the signs of mass consumerism of war-related themes in both the publishing and film industries became truly evident. Previously, even films with popular appeal embodied some political or moral message. For instance, one of these 'messages' conveyed in The Emperor Meiji and the Russo-Japanese War was that the emperor was a good, decent human being — a very potent message for the audience who had spent most of their lives believing that the emperor was divine. Moreover, nearly all fiction and films dealing with the war started from the assumption that the war was bad.[42] Now, the war could be enjoyed purely for fun, for its adventure and thrill. Principally, 'war' now functioned as a setting for exciting stories. As one critic noted, the object was to turn the war into the equivalent of a spaghetti western or gangster film.[43] Stripping away the normative elements resulted in a major shift in how the war came to be portrayed. In other words, the war was de-historicized and de-politicized. This change was also evident in the war literature as new writings began to lose the 'threatening' or critical voice, which made the reader reflect not only on the war but also on the human condition.[44] Some of the books which belong to this new genre of 'war' as a consumable product are Agawa Hiroyuki's *Yamamoto Isoroku* and Koizumi Shinzō's *Kaigun shukei daii Koizumi Nobukichi*, published by major publishing houses. The appeal of these writings comes from the fact that one can simply enjoy the swashbuckling narrative without having to worry about the heavy moral questions that surround war.

37 Till then 180 million yen from 'Himeyuri no tou' in 1953 was the highest record. Hamada Yoshihisa, *Nihon eiga to sensō to heiwa* (Tokyo 1996), 233; Niimura Hiroo, 'Arashi Kanjūro ron (jō): Arakan zettai ron', *Eigashi kenkyū*, 7 (1975), 68.

38 Kishi Matsuo, 'Watanabe Kunio shōden', *Kinema junpō*, 180 (July 1957), 71.

39 Iida Shinbi, 'Watanabe Kunio ron', *Kinema junpō*, 180 (July 1957), 68.

40 Kitagawa Fuyuhiko, 'Meiji tennō to nichiro dai sensō', *Kinema junpō*, 176 (May 1957), 41–2.

41 '"Meiji tennō to nichiro dai sensō" ni okeru kankyaku hannō', *Kinema junpō*, 177 (June 1957), 114–15.

42 Ibid., 23.

43 Satō Shizuo, op. cit., 41.

44 Takahashi, op. cit., 76.

In the world of cinema, there was a revival of war films called the '8.15' series, released on the day of surrender on 15 August. It was spearheaded by Okamoto Kihachi's 'Japan's Longest Day' in 1967, followed by a hugely popular 'Yamamoto Isoroku' in 1968, directed by Maruyama Seiji, 'The Battle of the Sea of Japan' (*Nihon kai dai taisen*) in 1969, Horikawa Hiromichi's 'The Military Clique' (*Gunkaku*) in 1970, and Okamoto's 'The Decisive Battle of Okinawa' (*Okinawa Kessen*) in 1971. These films were popular precisely because they were good entertainment, focusing on famous battles for maximum visual effect. Their popularity was no doubt reflective of the buoyant Japanese economy, as the Japanese were enjoying reaping the rewards of their economic miracle, and began to regain national confidence. Of course, not everyone enjoyed these films: the Chinese government perceived them as a sign of a revival of militarism in Japan.[45] In spite of these concerns, the trend in producing multi-million dollar war films, depicting war as a major spectacle, continued well into the mid-1980s until the audiences lost interest.[46] By not taking any moral or political position, these films had the overall effect of portraying the Japanese as good, sincere people who were forced to go to war, and suffered greatly as a result.[47] Moreover, the highly dramatic nature of selected historical moments such as the attack on Pearl Harbor, the kamikaze pilots, the atomic bombs and the unconditional surrender meant that they tended either to 'beautify' or 'glorify' Japanese participation in the war.[48]

VII

Popularization of the war as a consumable product provided the public with little sense of the moral criteria for judging the war. The younger generation, not surprisingly, became increasingly uninterested in the war, as the generational distance between those with war experience and those without continued to widen in the 1990s. Suddenly, however, the rise of neo-nationalism became the all-engrossing issue in public debate in the late 1990s, with the publication of Kobayashi Yoshinori's influential *manga*, *Shin Gōmanizumu sengen special: Sensōron* (The New Special Statement 'Gōmanizumu': The War Debate). It quickly became a bestseller, selling 650,000 copies.[49] Kobayashi had already written a series of political *manga* around controversial issues in contemporary Japan such as the 'comfort women', the *burakumin*, and the Aum, of which this was his latest attempt.

Briefly, Kobayashi promotes the nationalist school of history that justifies Japanese expansion into Asia as a war of national liberation from western

45 Satō Tadao, op. cit., vol. 3, 32.
46 For instance, 'Aa kessen kōkutai' (1974), 'Nihyaku san kōchi' (1980), 'Rengō kantai' (1981), 'Dai nippon teikoku' (1982).
47 Satō Tadao, op. cit., vol. 3, 147.
48 Ibid., 32–3.
49 Kobayashi Yoshinori, *ShinGōmanizumu sengen special: Sensōron* (Tokyo 1998).

imperialism.[50] He dared to express forcefully and openly what was hitherto considered to be a politically unfashionable, right-wing nationalist perspective on history.[51] His work presents an uncomfortable read as he makes sweeping propagandist generalizations based on very weak and tenuous grounds. At the root, Kobayashi is very anti-western, and Japan-centric. For instance, he goes so far as to say that the whole idea of war guilt was a way of brain-washing the Japanese so that the status of the SCAP as the occupational force would be secured.[52] He denies the Rape of Nanking as demagogic propaganda, arguing that the Chinese army was even more violent towards its own people as well as towards the Japanese.[53] Kobayashi personalizes all these historical events by comparing them to incidents in his own life, and then expounds moralistic statements by packaging them with neat, bite-sized messages through the popular medium of *manga*.

However, Kobayashi, at bottom, is angry with contemporary Japanese society, which he perceives as having lost its direction and *raison d'être*. According to him, the Japanese people are now concerned only about pursuing their own personal rights and happiness, and do not think of the public well-being.[54] For him, the postwar Japanese have become 'a spineless nation', to the extent that they cannot even admit that they believed in what they were fighting for.[55] This, of course, is the result of the long-term indoctrination of the left-wing intellectuals and intelligentsia who dominated postwar Japan.[56] Ironically, although Kobayashi is critical of Japanese consumerism, what he does in this work is precisely to sell his politics as a well-packaged consumer product.[57] Critics ignored his work for a long time until it no longer became possible to do so. Intellectuals deplored his work, especially as he was on the panel of experts of the 'Committee to produce new history textbooks' (*Atarashiii rekishi kyōkasho o tsukurukai*).[58]

Kobayashi, the new guru, in this way continues to wield an overwhelming influence on Japanese youth, whose nebulous sense of history is revamped by the clarity and force of argument presented in his nationalistic framework. Very tellingly, the young are attracted to his work because it empowers them, by giving them self-confidence.[59] Possibly, the damage has already been done, as many of the new university students first gain their knowledge of the war

50 Ibid., 32, 36.
51 Chō Kyondal, 'Yutōpia naki sedai no kokka shugi', *Sekai,* 656 (December 1998), 104.
52 Ibid., 49.
53 Ibid., 151–71.
54 Kobayashi, op. cit., 34.
55 Ibid., 312–13.
56 Ibid., 22–4.
57 Aaron Gerow, 'Zuzō to shiteno "Sensōron"', *Sekai,* 656 (December 1998), 123.
58 Kobayashi Yoshinori, *Shin Gōmanizumu sengen special: Ko to Kō ron* (Tokyo 2000), 14.
59 Nakanishi Shintarō, '"Kobayashi Yoshinori" to iu media', *Sekai,* 656 (December 1998), 109–10.

through Kobayashi's *manga*. Alternatively, perhaps, any debate may be better than no debate.

The Japanese case presented here has shown that the amount of 'redesigning the past' that goes on in a society depends largely on the willingness of its members. Instead of taking 'the proper course of action', a total national self-criticism of the past, the Japanese opted for a less drastic measure, attempting to put a certain selective interpretative gloss on the past. This indicates that the Japanese generally did not necessarily consider a large-scale social catharsis as an essential part of the postwar reconstruction of themselves and their country. On one level, the majority of Japanese clearly did not identify with the objectives of the militarist regime, and, as a result, did not feel responsible for what had happened in 'the past'. In addition, they considered themselves to be the victims of pre-war and wartime militarism, rather in the same way that the Koreans and Chinese considered themselves to be the victims of Japan. Therefore, most Japanese were only too happy to name 'the militarists' collectively as being responsible for wartime Japan and its consequences.

On another level, the constraints of the newly emergent Cold War meant that there was little time left for the Japanese state and the élite to 'cleanse' their past. In this tense international climate, both the Japanese and Americans recognized the need to rely on the motors of the pre-1945 militarist regime if they were to rebuild the country from scratch. Hence, the pre-1945 apparatus had to be reinstated swiftly in the early postwar years under the new banner of liberal democracy. Not surprisingly, both the state and the élite were none too happy to keep mum and let the public blame the faceless and now symbolically necessary 'militarists' for the evils of the past. Apart from the initial decade of intense self-criticism and soul-searching by left-wing intellectuals, postwar Japan settled down to the comfortable middle-of-the-road solution based on the half-baked myth that all Japanese were victims of pre-war and wartime militarists. This myth allowed some Japanese to re-invent themselves as pacifists, as the keepers of the memory of the atomic bombs.

What has become strikingly evident in this study is the close correlation between politics and culture, especially when it concerns politically sensitive themes such as war. This indicates that even when the state, through its public sector, does not take initiatives to promote a particular perspective on the past, the very nature of the politics that it practises affects the societal environment in which cultural products are produced. In other words, representations of the past directly reflect the concerns of the present. How we conceive the 'difficult' past can never really be politically neutral, since the very act of wanting to give shape to that past is in itself a political act. In this study, we have seen that the representations of the past in the literature, films and television of postwar Japan tended to reflect the conservative political environment created by the post-Occupation Japanese polity. An examination of the theme of war reveals that politics and culture are intimately entwined.

This was best illustrated in the mid-1990s when the change in attitude towards the war during the Hosokawa and Murayama administrations triggered immediate changes in popular representations of the war, especially on television. Moreover, this short-lived revisionism in turn produced an immediate backlash in the form of a nationalist response of Kobayashi Yoshinori's *manga*.

An analysis of the postwar representations of the past in this article has left us with a narrative for postwar Japan. Assuming the role of victim allowed the Japanese to shy away from the unpleasant truth that they were also aggressors, whose victims in Asia and elsewhere still demand an apology and compensation. Moreover, there is the added complication that the widely-shared victim mentality and pacifism rest uneasily on the bed of political conservatism. Therefore, the constructed identity of the postwar Japanese is inherently unbalanced, reflecting the yet unresolved nature of their past. It would not be an exaggeration to say that the single most important problem of 'postwar' Japan is this inability to come to terms, once and for all, with the pre-1945 past. However, it has also become evident in the last 50 years that we need to have alternative ways of dealing with the past, other than the mainstream state-centred approach. The Japanese case has shown that popular culture can bring to bear an inordinate amount of influence in creating and moulding representations of the past. Quite clearly, agencies other than the state are just as or even more effective in 'redesigning the past'.

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