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Tattoo gisei: the aesthetics of “noble sacrifice”
as discourse of re-masculinized national identity
in postwar Japan

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Abstract

Japan's defeat in the Asia-Pacific War grievously undermined the prewar Imperial Japanese variant of what George Mosse identifies as “the official linkage of the cult of the fallen to manliness and national glory”. Evidence of popular rejection of this “cult” and its symbolic equating of masculinity with war-making capability is clear in the fact that since the promulgation of Japan's present Constitution in 1947, opinion surveys have consistently shown that a majority of the Japanese population has always regarded their nation's formal renunciation in that document of the right to wage war as a centerpiece of cultural pride and identity. However, a significant segment of Japanese society has never been comfortable with this basis of postwar national identity and its prerequisite pride-swallowing historical interpretation of Japan's war as having been unjust, irrational or otherwise ill-advised and morally flawed. Moreover, influential politicians and public intellectuals have even likened Japan's “foreign-imposed” postwar pacifist stance and its dependence on American assistance for its strategic defense to a form of cultural or even spiritual emasculation. This paper will examine increasingly successful attempts by “memory activists” to rehabilitate Japan's war legacy as part of their proposals for a renaissance of “healthy” Japanese nationalism, and as one facet of multigenerational and overarching Japanese conservative/revisionist efforts – identified by Maruyama Masao and Ivan Morris as early as the 1950s – to undo ideological, social, political and cultural changes experienced by Japan as a result of its defeat in the Asia-Pacific War.

Key words/phrases: *postwar Japanese nationalism; war memorialization; memory activists*

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I Introduction/Prologue: The Ghost Dance

*'I did this', says Memory; 'I cannot have done this,' says Pride...Memory yields.*²

In the 1890s, an ecstatic millenarian movement known as the “Ghost Dance” swept through Native American communities in government-administered reservations in the western plains and Rocky Mountain foothills.³ The phenomenon’s eponymous main event typically entailed group dances and chants that were in equal parts impassioned entreaty to ancestral ghosts for supernatural assistance and jeremiad spurring the community to defensive action against encroaching “modernization”. The Ghost Dancers believed that if their ceremonies were performed with sufficient ardor and sincerity, the unwelcome intrusions of a changing world could be turned away, and the taint of its cultural contamination cleansed. With this cultural exorcism thus successfully concluded, the community would return apace to the normality of its “good old days”, and all would be right with the world and the Great Spirit once again.

II Turning back the clock: the eternal reactionary dream

Two seminal mid-20th century anthropological studies examined the Ghost Dance phenomenon and used it to model the cross-culturality of ceremonial and/or ideological responses of societies coping with the perceived ontological threat of unwelcome external cultural influences. The first of these introduced Ralph Linton’s (1943) theory of “revivalistic nativistic movements”, which he defined as being “associated with frustrating situations (that) are primarily attempts to compensate for the frustrations of the society’s members. The elements revived become symbols of a period when the society was...in retrospect, happy or great.”⁴ Thirteen years later, Anthony F.C. Wallace – building on Linton’s theory – examined the Ghost Dance as a “revitalization movement”, which he saw as a

² This Nietzsche paraphrase is from the translators’ note introduction to Barbara Heimannsberg and Christoph J. Schmidt (eds.) *Collective Silence: German Identity and the Legacy of Shame* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1993) (translated by Cynthia Oudejans Harris and Gordon Wheeler), p.xvii.

³ See James Mooney, *The Ghost Dance Religion and Wounded Knee* (New York: Dover Publications, 1991). See also http://www.historynet.com/wars_conflicts/19_century/3036491.html

⁴ Ralph Linton, “Nativistic Movements”, *American Anthropologist* 45 (April-June 1943), pp.230-40, quotation from p.233.

“conscious, deliberate, organized effort on the part of some members of society to create a more satisfying culture”, returning to “a golden age...a previous condition of social virtue”.⁵

Cross-referencing against Linton’s and Wallace’s respective analytical models, there are intriguing similarities in motive and circumstance between the Native Americans’ Ghost Dance of the late 19th century and the distinct turn towards cultural re-enchantment and martial re-valorization taken in recent years by conservative/revisionist (hereafter J-Right) Japanese remembrance discourse of the Asia-Pacific War of 1931-45.⁶ “Cultural distortion”⁷ caused by vanishing ways of life and values and a collective sense of insecurity over declining communal power vis-à-vis strategic rivals are certainly factors common to both cases. Where the 19th century Native Americans were faced with depleted buffalo herds, shrinking tribal lands and smoke-belching Iron Horses bearing seemingly endless streams of invasive white settlers, the J-Right at the beginning of the 21st century sees Japan languishing in fifteen-plus years of economic slump and the ethical character of the nation’s public servants and young people in a tailspin. It sees the population (and thus future national power base) shrinking due to a plummeting birthrate, while rapidly burgeoning numbers of foreign laborers take up residence in the country, bringing with them culturally alien customs and value systems and showing few signs of desiring to assimilate (or, for that matter, being asked to assimilate) into Japanese society. It sees the Internet and other global developments in borderless information technology flooding the country with ideas and imagery that threaten the traditional foundations of national identity. And all the while, of course, nervous glances are cast across the East China Sea at the first serious rival to Japan’s East Asian economic hegemony in over a century.

Like their predecessors in the American West over a hundred years ago – and reactionary “traditionalists” in any culture or era – the J-Right’s Ghost Dancers see the best solution to their community’s current woes as turning back the clock to

⁵ Anthony F.C. Wallace, “Revitalization Movements”, *American Anthropologist* 58 (1956), pp.264-81.

⁶ A comprehensive catalogue of “Japanese Ghost Dance” genre monographs would run literally into the thousands of entries and is thus beyond the scope of this paper, but one of the more striking recent examples of the genre the researcher has encountered is the work of Nihon University professor Nishi Toshio, especially his *Kuni Yaburete Makkāsā* (“MacArthur destroyed our nation”) (Tokyo: Chūō Kōronsha, 2005).

⁷ The phrase is from Wallace (1956), p.269.

what they regard as the happier, simpler times and culturally-reaffirming ways of the past. Identifying Japan's defeat in the Asia-Pacific War and subsequent seven-year-long occupation by American armed forces as the "originary events" in Japanese socio-cultural space/time from whence all of the nation's current troubles have emanated, the postwar J-Right seeks to reverse these effects and return Japan to a putatively more "natural" state, with a "natural" or, in Prime Minister Abe Shinzō's pet phrase, "beautiful"⁸ Japan restored to some pristine (and mythical) "golden age condition of social virtue" of the nation before it had experienced the humiliation of defeat and the taint of the boots of a foreign army of occupation on its soil.⁹ What is sought, in short, is a more compelling narrative of postwar (and just as crucially, "post-economic miracle") national identity, which the J-Right believes can only be achieved with the complete extirpation from the very body and soul of Japan of any and all social, political, institutional, psychological and spiritual legacies of its 1945 defeat.¹⁰ Such legacies include (but are not limited to):

- 1) the 1947 Constitution's prohibition of the use of military force as an instrument of state policy (which prevents Japan from receiving the proper "respect" it deserves from other countries, and in a supremely bitter irony, leaves it dependent for its strategic protection on its former foe, the United States);
- 2) the 1947 Constitution itself (which of course makes (1) possible, but moreover, is also a lingering symbolic legacy of national shame in and of itself as it was drafted by American Occupation authorities after Japan's defeat);

⁸ Prime Minister Abe's grand manifesto for the restoration of a "beautiful Japan" is outlined in his *Utsukushii Kuni E* ("(Working) towards a beautiful country") (Tokyo: Bungeishunju, 2006).

⁹ Re: "boot taint": Etō Jun, Kodama Yoshio (1951), and other commentators – plus many war survivors interviewed as part of this study – reported the threat of this "foreign boot taint" as a media image prevalent during the wartime period, employed to exhort soldiers and the populace to fight to the bitter end. It is interesting to consider whether the considerable stir created in Japan in 2002 by Donald Rumsfeld's exhortation to the Japanese government to "put boots on the ground" as part of Global War on Terror efforts was in part due to unpleasant old memories of this imagery, or whether both its 21st and 20th century versions both draw their negative emotional power from some autochthonous Japanese cultural aversion to "dirty footwear" imagery (rendered all the dirtier, of course, when the footwear is "foreign") in general.

¹⁰Other than its economic benefits, it could probably be safely assumed!

- 3) formal de-apotheosis of the Emperor and demystification of the Imperial institution (*kōshitsu*) (which denies the state a critically important icon upon which to foreground a quasi-religious/mystical subsumption of individual identity into an overarching communal identity for which individual sacrifice – up to and including death in combat – could otherwise be more readily facilitated);
- 4) emphasis on the dignity of the individual in public education policy, to the detriment of “traditional” Japanese senses of civic obedience/deferential individual subject roles vis-à-vis the community (the restoration of which, similar to the sense of (3), is seen as crucial if Japan is to once again field soldiers capable of dying for their country);
- 5) de-emphasis of patriotism/nationalism in public education policy (seen as exacerbating (3) and (4));
- 6) inroads into public policy made by the concept of fundamental gender equality (seen as damaging the institutions of the “traditional” Japanese family structure, and perhaps more worryingly in terms of national power potential, being the major cause in the declining Japanese birthrate).

The aforementioned “distinct turn towards cultural re-enchantment and martial re-valorization taken in recent years by Japanese war remembrance discourse” that is the subject of this study should be understood as merely one facet – although an increasingly salient and symbolically important facet – in the context of this overarching long-term agenda of J-Right goals.

III Who are the “J-Right”, what motivates them, and what are they trying to accomplish?

Foregrounded on Kenneth Burke’s pentadic model of motive,¹¹ the main questions to be addressed in this paper are as follows:

¹¹ See Kenneth Burke, *A Grammar of Motives* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1969).

- 1) (**Agent**) Who – or what – is behind
- 2) (**Act**) the redirection of Japanese war remembrance from its traditional postwar milieu of war responsibility discourse and spurring its gradual transformation into a culturally rejuvenating revitalization movement?
- 3) (**Scene**) What are the boundaries of this discourse, who are its participants, and who comprises its primary target audience?
- 4) (**Agency**) What elements and factors are facilitating the discourse?
- 5) (**Purpose**) Towards what end is this discursive shift being promoted?

The aim of this study is not necessarily to provide lengthy and empirically detailed answers to the above questions¹², but rather, and primarily, to impress upon the reader an appreciation that this relatively underexamined J-Right discourse of martial or even masculine re-enchantment in the context of war remembrance¹³ is of critical importance to an understanding of the dynamics of current Japanese politics, Japan's diplomatic relations (particularly with Asian neighbors), and possible short- and long-term evolutionary directions Japanese national identity will take in the future.

Moreover, it is hoped that the reader will also appreciate that the actors driving this discourse are not the “usual suspects” who go careering around Tokyo in blaring sound trucks and whom one might expect to dominate a charismatic Japanese reactionary movement of this sort. These particular “agents of memory”¹⁴ (if they are even deserving of this label) of course support the discourse wholeheartedly, and they may be adept at unnecessarily adding to the decibel level

¹² My upcoming on-topic monograph, on the other hand, will hopefully provide as much or more empirical detail on the subject as any reader will need or desire.

¹³ Yoshida Yutaka of Hitotsubashi University can perhaps be considered the “dean” of this somewhat lonely but nevertheless critical area of studies, and he has been of great personal assistance – both academic and moral – towards the researcher being able to make this paper and an upcoming monograph on the topic possible. Sven Saaler of the University of Tokyo, Nakamura Hideyuki of Rikkyō University, Aaron Gerow of Yale, and both Eric Johnston and Roger Pulvers of the *Japan Times* also deserve special mention here as individuals making worthy and important contributions to the field.

¹⁴ In *The Great War in History: Debates and Controversies, 1914 to the Present* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005), Jay Winter applies this term to public intellectuals, media figures and others in the public sphere in support of a partisan interpretation of a given historical narrative.

of Tokyo street corners, but they are not given airtime for televised stump speeches, their tracts are not sold in bookstores nationwide, their editorials are not carried in major daily newspapers such as the *Sankei* and *Yomiuri*, and they cannot finance major studio release war movies. Rather, the agents of memory that *do* possess and use such media clout are the socially respected, supremely well-connected and politically powerful individuals, groups and institutions lending their energies, status and contact networks to what the researcher terms a Japanese “Lost Cause” (hereafter JLC) tradition, the immediate goal of which is to valorize in the popular historical consciousness Japan’s war aims and conduct in the Asia-Pacific War.

The main ideological platform of JLC can be outlined as follows:

- the war was unavoidable;
- paradoxically, the war was also unwinnable by the Japanese (although it should be noted that an opinion well represented in J-Right revisionism holds that the war might have been won with better leadership and/or better luck at critical junctures in the progress of the war),¹⁵
- the war was fought for the liberation of Asia (and the protection of Japan) from Western imperialism;
- the war was fought in consideration of Japan’s legitimate national security interests (as opposed to the satisfaction of its imperialistic rapacity);
- Japan’s fighting men – inclusive of the nation in its entirety, as mobilized for total war effort – were spiritually superior to the enemy (i.e., the Allied forces and their supporting populations), and were only defeated by the enemy’s overwhelming material strength and greater numbers;
- the Tokyo Tribunal was a kangaroo court administering “victor’s justice” (*shōrishā no sabaki*), and all Japanese should reject not only its verdict(s), but its very institutional and legal legitimacy;
- the sacrifice of human lives in Japan’s cause – most dramatically exemplified

¹⁵ There are entire genres and sub-genres not only in Japanese popular literature (including, importantly, *manga* comic books) and film, but even in video games aimed at young audiences that are devoted exclusively to this “How Japan Could Have Won” fantasy theme. Pop author and TV personality Shimoda Kageki and cult hero writer Aramaki Yoshio built lucrative careers around this genre in the late 1980s and early 1990s. For an authoritative exploration of this topic, see Morio Watanabe, “Imagery and War in Japan,” in *Perilous Memories: The Asia-Pacific War(s)*, T. Fujitani, Geoffrey M. White and Lisa Yoneyama, eds. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), pp. 129-51.

by the kamikaze “suicide attack” tactics (hereafter *tokkō*)¹⁶ – was not an inhumane and meaningless waste, but rather, salvaged the honor of the “Japanese race” (*Nippon minzoku*), even as it was going down to defeat;

- Japan’s present day peace and (relative post-Bubble) prosperity is entirely due to the sacrifices of the war dead, who are now joined with the pantheon of other traditional “nation-protecting divinities” and are thus deserving of proper veneration (if not actual worship at appointed Shinto facilities such as Yasukuni Shrine and its prefectural Gokoku Shrine affiliates); and
- Yasukuni Shrine is the only acceptable venue of centralized national war memorialization.

Key actors in JLC include:¹⁷

- Yasukuni Shrine (including its prefectural Gokoku Shrine affiliates);
- Nippon Izoku Kai (Japan Association of War Bereaved);
- elements within Japan’s ruling Liberal Democratic Party and the various Diet member patriotic clubs/“study groups” with which these elements are associated;
- elements within the national bureaucracy, acting both in “official” and “private individual” capacities;¹⁸
- Japan Self Defense Force;¹⁹

¹⁶ *Tokkō* is an abbreviation for the Japanese wartime euphemism *Tokubetsu Kōgeki(tai)*, directly translatable as “Special Attack (Corps)”.

¹⁷ The degree of “cross-pollination” among these actors and their various contact networks cannot be overemphasized; there is striking overlap and interconnectedness in the membership of their various institutions and groups, most significantly in the organizing and administrative roles played by alumni of the former Imperial Military Academy.

¹⁸ E.g., textbook screening by Ministry of Education and Science; also, Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare (MHLW) bureaucrats have considerable organizational overlap with Izoku Kai, and coordinate record-keeping activity with Yasukuni Shrine, etc.

¹⁹ The involvement of this institution in JLC is clearly evident in its use of this tradition for recruit education and “professional development”, and in the maintenance of museum exhibits and/or memorials on JSDF base grounds at taxpayer expense, as well as performance and/or sponsoring of memorial ceremonies both on and off JSDF base grounds. Of the sixty-one formal public or semi-public works of monumental statuary honoring the *tokkō* in Japan proper (an additional five monuments are located overseas, mostly in the Philippines), six are located on the grounds of JSDF facilities (Nakae Hitoshi, ed., *Shōwashi no Shōgen [II]: Tokkō Sange* (Tokyo: Kaikō Shōgai Gakushūjuku [Imperial Military Academy Alumni Association Institute of Lifetime Learning], 1998). In the course of on-topic fieldwork, the researcher has observed JSDF personnel participating in war remembrance activities of clear JLC ideological slant, in both “on” and “off duty” modes on many

- war veterans' associations;
- Imperial Military Academy and Imperial Naval Academy alumni associations (i.e., the Kaikōsha and Suikōsha,²⁰ respectively);
- corporate elite patriotic clubs/associations (e.g., the Dōdai Keizai Konwa Kai [Dōdai Economic Club]²¹);
- other similar special interest memorial organizations with MHLW-approved *zaidan hōjin* status as NPOs; and
- individual, group or other institutional actors in media, literature/arts, and academia lending creative, pedagogical, logistic or ideological support to JLC.²²

IV How modern societies pursue “defeat closure”

War remembrance is never a simple matter for a society recovering from the trauma of armed conflict, but it is never as potentially fractious and problematic as in the commemoration of a defeat. Greatly complicating matters is the severity of the defeat,²³ not only in terms of human loss, squandered treasure or forfeited territory,

occasions.

²⁰ Both the Kaikōsha and Suikōsha have recently changed their respective membership qualifications to allow for the entry of recently retired JSDF personnel with no direct personal connections to the prewar/wartime service academies. This critical decision has significant positive ramifications for the future multigenerational sustainability of JLC.

²¹ The Dōdai group's membership consists of alumni of the former Imperial Military Academy, other prewar and wartime Imperial Japanese Army officer training programs affiliated with the academy, and also of graduates of the postwar JSDF National Defense Academy who have reached top executive levels in their respective careers in the Japanese corporate world. Many of its members also hold key leadership roles in other JLC institutions/groups, an arrangement with self-evident benefits from the standpoint of networking and coordinating movement-wide JLC activities. This association maintains a website at <http://www.decaa.org/> (last accessed February 26, 2007) with a link to an English mirror site. It was the main sponsor of the twin “memorials” for dissenting Tokyo Tribunal jurist Rhabhabinod Pal found at Yasukuni Shrine in Tokyo and Ryōzen Gokoku Shrine in Kyoto, respectively. Featured prominently on the monuments is an inscription quoting from Pal's dissenting opinion at the conclusion of the Tribunal: "When time shall have softened passion and prejudice, when Reason shall have stripped the mask from misrepresentation, then justice, holding evenly her scales, will require much of past censure and praise to change places."

²² Representative of this variety of “memory agent” is the Jiyū Shugi Shikan (Association for Advancement of Unbiased View of History), established by Tokyo University professor Fujioka Nobukatsu. This organization maintains an English website at <http://www.jiyuu-shikan.org/e/> (last accessed February 26, 2007). This group – and Professor Fujioka – are of course also associated with the considerably more vociferous Atarashii Rekishi Kyōkasho wo Tsukuru Kai (Society for the Making of New History Textbooks), whose original membership included *manga* artist and revisionist extraordinaire Kobayashi Yoshinori.

²³ Of course, as the case may be, the community may try to forget its defeat – although willfully

but perhaps even more lastingly and critically, in terms of the collective psychological damage – the shock, humiliation, demoralization and disillusionment – incurred by the defeated society as a result of its calamity. One formulation of the non-physical damage thus involved might be that the trauma resulting from a military defeat is directly proportional to the cultural prestige the society originally staked on the conflict.

In cases of truly ruinous defeat, as when a community experiences a lengthy foreign occupation and the loss or forced transformation of culturally important institutions and traditions, the damage may reach beyond the realm of emotions, economics or politics to approach a meta-level threat of ontological catastrophe. Such a defeat can be defined as one that, from the standpoint of the vanquished society, poses significant danger of causing:

- 1) loss of prestige and legitimacy of traditional social and/or political hierarchies;
- 2) the undermining of cultural foundation myths;²⁴
- 3) theological trauma, in the sense of a perceived or imagined drop (or abandonment) in collective standing vis-à-vis Divine Providence (or the culturally relevant theological equivalent),²⁵ and
- 4) as a cumulative effect of the above three factors, profound damage to the individual and collective “mazeway” of the community’s

amnesiac policies tend to create more problems than they solve, especially when neighbors and/or former foes have long memories.

²⁴ Most, if not all, of these list items apply to the case of defeated Imperial Japan. John Dower’s *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1999) is the yardstick for English language treatments of this era in Japanese history. The literary works of Abe Kobo, especially *Woman in the Dunes* (1962) and *The Face of Another* (1964), and Yukio, particularly his *Sea of Fertility* tetralogy (1964-70), all available in English translation, provide a useful Japanese perspective on Japan’s post-ontological catastrophe disillusionment (although in Mishima’s case it might be said that the artist’s own life evoked this disillusionment – and the pathology it caused – more dramatically than anything he ever wrote).

²⁵The respective experiences of the post-Civil War American South and the post-Ottoman Empire *umma* provide the most illustrative cases of this phenomenon in modern history. See Wilson (1980) for a theological analysis of the former; and Bernard Lewis, *What Went Wrong?: The Clash between Islam and Modernity in the Middle East* (New York: Oxford University Press USA, 2001) for an analysis of Islamic ontological trauma in the modern era.

members.²⁶

Journalist Tom Gross, in a recent *Japan Times* article, succinctly frames the thematic boundaries of a defeat remembrance discourse, providing a useful idea of the emotions – and the stakes – involved:

Making sense of the horror of war is arguably much easier for the victor; the sacrifices, though tragic, can be rationalized in the context of battles won, enemies bested and freedoms defended. The defeated meanwhile is left to ask how it all happened and what it was worth, questions that can haunt a nation and guide its future for a generation or more.²⁷

It is axiomatic that if a society that has suffered such an “ontologically catastrophic” defeat wishes to maintain recognizable continuity with its pre-defeat identity and not simply atomize into a mass of stateless refugees, it must take measures to attenuate the various collective and individual traumas the community and its members will experience as aftershocks of the calamity. This claim is well-supported by numerous cases in the modern era of societies recovering from defeat in “total” wars fueled and sustained by populist nationalism²⁸ (which lay the onus of shame and humiliation for the defeat directly on the populace as a whole, rather than limiting it to threat to the prestige and authority of the communal rulers, as was generally the case in pre-modern times).

That said, however (and as will be discussed in more detail below), political considerations may on occasion discourage insistence on continuity with the recent communal wartime past as something that will do the society more harm than good if sustained or revived. In such a case, the war and defeat episodes will be treated

²⁶ The concept of “mazeway” is explained in Wallace (1956). This concept could be somewhat clumsily defined for our purposes here as an individual’s culturally determined “perception of reality”.

²⁷ “A checkup on war wounds 60 years on”, *The Japan Times*, February 14, 2007.

²⁸ A by no means comprehensive list of such societies would include: France in 1814 (and after a brief flash of false hope, once again in 1815); the American South in 1865; France in 1871; Germany and the former Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman empires in 1918; and the vanquished Axis powers (with the possible exception of Italy) in 1945, et al. There has not been a “total war” between industrialized states since 1945, and given the current proliferation of nuclear weapons around the globe, the world may never see another of these conflicts again.

as historical “bumps in the road” and the desired comforting “continuity” with the past will, of necessity, be sought farther back in communal memory.

Some possible measures of defeat recovery in this vein will involve a considerable but unavoidable amount of political and psychological sacrifice. One such measure that can be quite effective (but also quite traumatic – especially in its early stages) is to embark on a “crash course” of collective contrition and self-excoriation by which the community will reject *in toto* the recent defeat experience as an aberration to be expunged from the memorial canon of communal identity. The most bitter pills to swallow as part of this course of recovery will be the acceptance that:

- 1) the entire society must shoulder responsibility not so much for having *lost* the war, but rather for having been “duped” into supporting the war in the first place;
- 2) sincere, unconditional contrition for 1) must be displayed in order for the society to achieve “closure” over the defeat;
- 3) in order for the sincerity of 2) to be beyond suspicion both within the community and in the eyes of Out-group victims aggrieved (or otherwise offended) by the war, the defeated society’s interpretational war remembrance narrative for domestic consumption must be entirely bereft of any lionization or otherwise vindicating rationalization of the conflict and any publicly expressed nostalgia/pride for feats of arms conducted in its pursuit (i.e., there must be no “stab in the back” narratives explaining the defeat, no public monuments to military glory, no valorizing episodic accounts of wartime events in school textbooks/popular entertainment, etc.);
- 4) those who have died either in pursuit of the war effort or as innocent victims have, for all intents and purposes, died in vain, outside of a very narrow interpretation that these sacrifices were made so that the surviving community could awake from its “folly” and change its misguided ways.

Such a “crash course” recovery can be significantly expedited when blame for the calamitous defeat can be assigned to a small, well-defined political or military

leadership clique or to a failed ideology readily identifiable as being of recent and artificial origin (therefore minimalizing threat to the society/culture's "traditional" identity and values). With the society's "official history" thus framed "for the record", such a recovery, as best demonstrated by the post-Second World War experience of Germany,²⁹ can be a fairly straightforward matter: the community collectively acknowledges its "error" in having allowed itself to be misled into following the flawed ideology/leadership; scholarly and pedagogical efforts isolate and vilify the recent regrettable past as an aberration in the society's otherwise proud history; and of crucial importance, regret and contrition over the damage and human loss incurred by said aberration or mistake is publicly and convincingly expressed in both domestic and international venues. Once these unpleasant but necessary tasks have been attended to, the community may proceed apace toward hermetically sealing the war away in a safely quarantined past.

V "Lost Cause" traditions

But what about cases of defeated societies that are, for whatever reason, unwilling to accept a harsh regimen of recovery – let alone a "judgment of history" that the cause for which they fought and sacrificed so much was misguided and tragically flawed, if not actually criminal?

Gaines Foster's *Ghosts of the Confederacy* (1986) is an important study of a society that found itself in just such a post-defeat scenario. His analysis of the "Lost Cause tradition"³⁰ that arose in post-Civil War American South during the period of 1865-1913 as a reaction to such circumstances is the first to apply Linton's and Wallace's respective frameworks of revitalization and revivalistic movements – including significant allegorical reference to the Ghost Dance phenomenon – to an examination of a modern era society dealing with the aftermath of ontologically catastrophic defeat.

Foster argues very convincingly that one way in which the postbellum American South resisted and overcame the "cultural distortion" resulting from its

²⁹ It may very well be that Germany is the only polity in modern history – if not in the entirety of recorded history – to have followed a "bitter pill" course of defeat recovery to a relatively successful conclusion.

³⁰ The phrase "Lost Cause" as applied to Confederate remembrance in the postbellum South first appeared in Edward Pollard's *The Lost Cause: A New Southern History of the War of the Confederates* (New York: E.B. Treat & Co., 1866).

ontological catastrophe was to salvage and secure culturally defining customs, characteristics and institutions (including an institutionalized racism that went on to survive another hundred years, largely thanks to these efforts) from the ashes of its ordeal through the creation of a vigorous Lost Cause tradition. The parallels with the Japanese postwar experience are striking.

A “Lost Cause” tradition is primarily a discourse created and sustained by rhetorical strategies of apologia³¹ employed to valorize, vindicate and/or otherwise rationalize a defeat narrative to ease the collective trauma of a vanquished society. At the micro-level of individuals, this discourse can help to assuage the grief of the war-bereaved by assigning “meaning” to the deaths of loved ones (or with the passage of time, ancestors). At the macro-level of the community, it can be employed to restore the damaged authority of surviving political institutions and stabilize society by maintaining a notion of continuity with prewar times.

A successful Lost Cause discourse can be said to follow an evolutionary course that roughly parallels the biological lifespan of the war veterans who typically form its driving force. Its immediate postwar function – which generally commences as the first surviving veterans make their way home from their respective battlefield debacles – is to reassure the defeated society that the losses it has incurred in its military struggle have not been in vain.

These earliest efforts tend to be carried out at the interpersonal level, but as the catastrophe recedes in time and societal conditions begin to return to a semblance of normalcy, the veterans begin to overcome the shame of their defeat to the point where they can function in public venues as “agents of memory” qualified (if not expected) to interpret the collective defeat experience rhetorically and ceremonially. Once this shift has transpired, acts of organized group bereavement and formal commemoration such as the erection of monumental statuary, the holding of public memorial ceremonies and the formation of fraternal veterans’ associations will begin to take place.

As the “lifespan” of the discourse passes into “middle age” and the Lost Cause tradition’s most immediate “crisis recovery” tasks have been performed, its primary function typically morphs from memorialization into political and/or

³¹ By my working definition of “apologia”, the rhetoric involved therein is not limited to speech or written text; I hold that filmic, ceremonial, artistic and architectural “text” can also be submitted to genre analysis as apologia.

pedagogical activism. One of the goals of this activism is to insure that a “proper history” of the defeat narrative is recorded before the war’s first-hand witnesses have passed from the scene. This is typically rationalized as being carried out for the pedagogical benefit of current or future generations of the society without personal memories of the war (although it could be said that in some cases this putative “benefit” will be highly dubious, depending on the pedagogues’ working definition of “proper history”). Worries on the part of the veterans about posthumous representation in historical posterity of their cause and conduct clearly comprise an additional (if not sometimes overriding) motivational factor behind such efforts.³²

Finally, if the Lost Cause tradition has functioned as intended, when the first-hand war bereaved and the old soldiers begin to “fade away” (to use the metaphor of a famously understated American general), the defeat narrative will undergo a metamorphosis from living history to immortal myth and legend.³³

Obviously, there are post-defeat scenarios – such as the aforementioned experience of post-1945 Germany, or perhaps also that of the former Republic of (South) Vietnam after 1975 – in which the notion (or illusion) of cultural/political/institutional continuity with the immediate pre-defeat society has decidedly limited appeal, and in such instances the appearance of a Lost Cause tradition is unlikely. Such cases aside, however, any defeated society desiring to

³² Due to its considerably delayed postwar start, Japan’s Lost Cause can probably be said to have at long last reached this developmental stage in earnest only about ten or fifteen years ago, when the great majority of its war veterans were already well into their seventies. There are many factors in this delay, and they are not limited to the political effects of the American postwar occupation and its policies, or to the deep-rooted pacifism/anti-militarism that characterizes the politics of many Japanese of the wartime and immediate postwar generations. It is the opinion of the researcher, based on fieldwork interviewing numerous Japanese war veterans, that culturally specific concepts of shame and expectations regarding contrition displays for failure responsibility vis-à-vis society “gagged” the vast majority of these veterans for several decades after the war. Most did not begin to participate wholeheartedly in veteran activities until they had reached retirement age. For informative analyses of this dynamic and of the culture of Japanese war veterans’ associations in general, see Takahashi Saburō et al., *Kyōdō Kenkyū: Senyūkai* (“Group research: war veterans’ associations”) (Tokyo: Inpakuto Shuppan Kai, 2005).

³³ For an excellent comprehensive analysis of this process, see Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Culture of Defeat* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2002). For specific treatment of the immediate postwar Japanese case, John Dower’s *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1999) is the one of best studies to date. Howard Schonberger’s *Aftermath of War: Americans and the Remaking of Japan, 1945-1952* (Kent, OH: The Kent State University Press, 1989) provides a very detailed analysis of the immediate postwar economic and political factors – as well as American Cold War strategic exigencies – that facilitated later JLC.

legitimize its continued existence and minimize the perceived effect of unwanted post-defeat influences on its identity will give rise to a Lost Cause tradition of one form or another and to more or less of a degree. Following this premise, it can be said that a particularly robust Lost Cause tradition can be expected to crystallize in a defeated society which:

- 1) is unwilling (or otherwise unable) to make remedial changes and/or adaptations in its fundamental structure or “traditional” values despite strong evidence that these factors share culpability for the catastrophe the society has suffered;
- 2) adheres to a concept of collective identity based on romantic, semi-mythical, essentialist notions of immutable communal character, thus denying the possibility that this character or “essence” has been irreversibly altered/damaged by the defeat; and
- 3) succumbs to collective *ressentiment* as a strategy for deflecting and/or obfuscating threatening inquiries into the contradictions inherent in 1) and 2).

A model of position or agenda options for framers of Lost Cause traditions can be categorized with one, or combinations, of the following four general orientations, represented here in descending order of specific resonance with a J-Right “preferred reading” of Japan’s defeat narrative:³⁴

- Apologia Type A (*transcendence*)³⁵: “Our experience in the war does

³⁴ The term “preferred reading” is from Stuart Hall’s ‘Culture, the media and the “ideological effect”’, in James Curran, Michael Gurevitch and Janet Woolcott (eds) *Mass Communication and Society* (London: Edward Arnold, 1977), pp.315-48. It is used here in Hall’s “Birmingham School”/post-Gramscian sense of the term as a parameter of discursive hegemony. However, as clear hegemony over the defeat interpretive discourse at a societal has yet to be won, the phrase as used in the context of this study refers to self-contained discourses within the boundaries of memory agent communities (e.g. the J-Right). Indeed, one of the theses of this paper is that the separate (though considerably overlapping) preferred readings (e.g. the four apologia types presented here) possessing currency within the war remembrance community are showing signs of a gradual merging towards a grand preferred reading closer in meaning to Hall’s original concept.

³⁵ Parenthesized and *italicized* terms in this list are from William L. Benoit’s *Accounts, Excuses, and Apologies : a Theory of Image Restoration Strategies* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1995). The primary analytical framework of the dissertation monograph from which this paper is excerpted is based on the researcher’s theory that defeat remembrance is fundamentally a discourse

not have to be defined as a ‘defeat’ at all, but rather, can be regarded as a “moral” victory if cultural, social, political and historical continuity with the pre-defeat community can be demonstrated, and if it can be shown that our efforts resulted in some benefits (e.g., “liberation” of Asia from Western colonialism/imperialism, preservation of the Imperial throne, etc.).”

- Apologia Type B (*scapegoating*): “The defeat happened, but it was due to extenuating circumstances of the overwhelming material superiority of the enemy and not to any inherent flaws in our cause/conduct/character; if we had possessed material parity, our side would – and should – have won.”
- Apologia Type C (*bolstering*): “The defeat happened, but at least we can say that we fought valiantly, and our efforts and sacrifices should be honored accordingly.”
- Apologia Type D (*compensation*): “The defeat happened, but we can snatch victory from the jaws of defeat by ensuring that our community never fights another war. We owe this much, at least, to honor those who made the ultimate sacrifice; failure to do so would be tantamount to rendering those sacrifices as having been for naught.”

Each of the above four apologetic types (often in some combination with one or more of the others) have broad appeal in popular Japanese consciousness of the experience of defeat in the Asia-Pacific War.³⁶ Moreover, Type D could be said to

of apologia, or to use Benoit’s phrase, “image restoration”. The structure of a bona fide Lost Cause tradition has a complex architecture of various apologia strategies supporting a “grand narrative” that exonerates a society from blame for a defeat and legitimizes the continuity of institutions, belief systems, and power and social hierarchies that have survived the debacle. An excellent study of image restoration apologia with direct cultural relevance to the Japanese case is Jane Yamazaki’s *Japanese Apologies for World War II* (London: Routledge, 2005).

³⁶ The researcher – based on his general observations during on-topic field work and long residence in Japan – speculates that there is considerable variance of favored (if any) apologia type preference according to age, social background, gender, educational level, and area of residence. According to Yoshida Yutaka’s *Nihonjin no Sensōkan* (Tokyo: Iwanami Gendai Bunko, 2005), the last research attempts to collect opinion poll data sorted to this level of demographically sorted detail were conducted in the 1950s – obviously too long ago to be of practical use for the present study. But one nevertheless wonders how far off the fifty-year-old data would be from the demographic picture today, and if there has been any overwhelming shift in the interim from the J-Right’s traditionally staunchest general population support base of working class males engaged in non-professional, industrial or

be the very ideological cornerstone of the postwar concept of “war-renouncing Japan”, and as such, likely remains the Lost Cause interpretation adhered to by the largest number of Japanese. However, it is interesting – and politically and ideologically revealing – that of these four Lost Cause subtypes, the (as of yet still) most popular version, for reasons that will be explained below, is also the one least favored by the JLC’s most ardent hagiographers.

VI The limits of “victimization” as defeat-exonerating iconography

In the closing months of the Asia-Pacific War, scores of Japanese cities and hundreds of thousands of Japanese civilians were incinerated by American B-29 bombers. A dispassionate observer of the Japanese Lost Cause (JLC) discourse familiar with this history might point out the ready utility of this miserable experience (and the issue of American accountability for same) in crafting an interpretation of Japan’s defeat narrative that could deflect (if not altogether exonerate) Japanese culpability for the war. If emphasis on Japanese victimization, then, is a potential framework for a viable and guilt-free Japanese war remembrance discourse, what better poster child for the same, one might argue, than the American firebombing of Japanese urban areas in 1944-45, climaxing with mushroom clouds over Hiroshima and Nagasaki? Not surprisingly, at least three postwar generations of Japanese politicians, public intellectuals and educators have come up with the very same idea, and have made extensive and quite effective historiographical, ideological and pedagogical efforts accordingly.³⁷

However, the expediency of this victimization iconography can come with a price many Japanese are unwilling to accept. For while historical interpretive attention paid to victimization has utility in emphasizing the monstrosity/inhumanity/criminality of the victimizers, there is also a reverse side to that coin: given its intrinsic nature, emphasizing “victimization” can also put under unflattering scrutiny the impotence of the victim vis-à-vis the victimizers, with all the unwelcome attendant intimations of weakness, incompetence and

agricultural occupations, living away from major urban centers.

³⁷ For an informative and parsimoniously focused study of this phenomenon, see James J Orr, *The Victim as Hero: Ideologies of Peace and National Identity in Postwar Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2001). See also Ian Buruma, *The Wages of Guilt: Memories of War in Germany and Japan* (London: Phoenix, 1994); and Bruce Stronach’s *Beyond the Rising Sun: Nationalism in Contemporary Japan* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1995), especially pp.52-4.

submissiveness that status may entail. If victimization is degrading from the perspective of the victimizer, then it is also degrading from the perspective of the victim. For Japanese cherishing memories (or media-generated simulations of same) of an undefeated Japan sure of its cultural superiority and divinely ordained invincibility, it is difficult to imagine a more ego-threatening train of thought.

Moreover, emphasis on victimization can pose threats more immediate and uncomfortably close to the political bone than melancholy despair over a noble Japan long gone with the divine wind: namely, the indignation of “How could our enemies have done this to us?” can all too easily lead to the self-excoriation of “How could we have allowed this to happen to ourselves?” And while Japanese of every political stripe regularly engage in impassioned breast-beating for the benefit of both domestic and international audiences in addressing the first question, Japanese whose alchemy of defeat remembrance requires a modern mythology of unsullied national honor may not want the latter question even to be asked at all.

It is clearly in reaction to the ideological and political danger posed by inquiry into Japan’s primary culpability for its own misfortune that historical revisionist³⁸ groups such as the Atarashii Rekishi Kyōkasho wo Tsukuru Kai (Society for the Making of New History Textbooks) and Nippon Kaigi (Japan Council) label as “masochistic history” (*jigyaku shikan*) efforts to critically examine imperialist era Japan’s war responsibility and to incorporate discussion of the issues raised therein into the nation’s educational curricula.³⁹ A visit to the Yūshūkan Museum of Yasukuni Shrine – that Valhalla of Japanese martial pride, where scarcely a mention of Japanese cities in ashes (or, for that matter, of Japanese civilian wartime suffering of any kind) is to be found – can reveal this dynamic far more eloquently

³⁸ “**Revisionists**” can be defined, for purposes of this paper, as J-Right advocates of a more positive interpretation of Japan’s cause and conduct in the Asia-Pacific War. Examples of such advocacy abound in modern day Japanese politics and “pop” scholarship for mass audience consumption on TV talk shows, in weekly magazines, etc. For an examination of this phenomenon at the grass-roots level, see Oguma Eiji and Ueno Yōko, *Iyashi no Nashonarizumu: Kusa no Ne Hoshu Undō no Jisshō Kenkyū* (Tokyo: Keiō Gijuku Daigaku Shuppan Kai, 2003).

³⁹ See http://www.ne.jp/asahi/kyokasho/net21/siryō_jiukyokutusin9910.htm; John W. Nelson, ‘Signs of Recovery for Japanese Nationalism? The Citizen’s Committee for Reclaiming Cultural Identity through Textbook Reform’, *Pacific Rim Report*, No. 15, January 2001, <http://www.pacificrim.usfca.edu/research/pacrimreport/pacrimreport15.html>; See also McCormack, Aaron Gerow, ‘Consuming Asia, Consuming Japan: The New Neonationalist Revisionism in Japan’, and Nozaki Yoshiko and Inokuchi Hiromitsu, ‘Japanese Education, Nationalism and Ienaga Saburō’s Textbook Lawsuits’ in *Censoring History*, pp. 53-73, 74-95, and 96-126, respectively.

than either space or the author's ability allow it to be explained here. In this sense, and certainly from a JLC standpoint, the utility of victimization imagery for facilitating a viable alchemy of Asia-Pacific War remembrance is clearly limited, if not actually counterproductive.

JLC approaches tend instead to emphasize Japanese wartime heroism and sacrifice, with the ultimate aim of achieving a popular consensus on interpretation of the war from which all legacies of shame and humiliation have been expunged. This goal has of course been a top-slot item in one form or another on the J-Right agenda since the ink on the Treaty of San Francisco was still drying, and it could be argued that former Prime Minister Koizumi's Yasukuni visits, aside from their political utility in pandering to the traditional LDP support base of its largely elderly and rural conservative constituency, also in part comprised a sincere – if ham-handed – attempt to kickstart a process that will serve just this long term goal.⁴⁰

But the J-Right's traditional Yasukuni-centric tack and concomitant central thesis that the "Great East Asian War" was a war of Asian liberation has proved, at least so far, to be its greatest weakness.⁴¹ Either due to having contradictory (i.e., decidedly inglorious or otherwise horrific) first-hand experiences in the war, or to having been schooled under the more stridently pacifist education policies of the early postwar decades, there are still too many Japanese who have too much difficulty accepting the traditional "hardcore" JLC canon for its lionizing interpretation of the legacy of Japan's war to secure a decisive consensus among the general population. But this demographic reality is not permanent, and the generation(s) of Japanese intellectually equipped to be skeptical towards the JLC line are aging and gradually withdrawing from the classroom, workplace and political podium (and with increasing rapidity, from this mortal coil as well).

⁴⁰ Koizumi's personal emotional investment in this issue should not be overlooked. His first cousin, Iryo Tetsugoro, died as a *tokkō* pilot at the age of twenty in 1945. <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/article/0,,3-1773883,00.html>; http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Junichiro_Koizumi

⁴¹Yasukuni Shrine's recent attempts to "clean up" the infamously JLC-slanted tone of its Yūshūkan Museum with third party assistance from the likes of former professional diplomat (and current chairman of the "pragmatic conservative" think tank Okazaki Institute) Okazaki Hisahiko ("Yasukuni Shrine museum finally coming to grips with history?" *International Herald Tribune/Asahi Shimbun*, October 20, 2006) can certainly be viewed as begrudging admittance of this reality, and a subsequent subtle tactic change to accommodate same.

Younger generations stepping up to take their leadership spots in Japanese society have received next to no formal classroom education about the war, and the resultant pedagogical gap in their historical knowledge has been filled with JLC (or JLC-leaning) popular entertainment media interpretations of the war instead.

In the meantime, a toned-down JLC approach more likely to win broader public support might be found in intimate, humanistic treatments of the Asia-Pacific War dead – especially of those who died in combat in the Pacific and Japan proper against American and other Western allied forces (i.e. Nanking pillagers need not apply). Such an approach would be more in the tragic hero mode traditionally favored in Japanese lore⁴² than the JLC’s imagery of Japan’s wartime soldiers as benevolent, continent-liberating supermen. Towards this end, the historical figure of the wartime *tokkō* suicide attack pilot has excellent potential for being recruited as just such a symbol, and it is the belief of this researcher that exactly such a “recruitment process” is currently at work in recent JLC efforts.⁴³

VII The utility of *tokkō* imagery in a JLC context

While the wartime exploits of the *tokkō* tinged Western and especially American stereotypes of Japanese Other-ness with an aspect of exotic fanaticism still lingering since the events of 1944-45⁴⁴ – a cross-cultural (mis)perception not helped by the newest suicide attack threat the West now faces vis-à-vis Al Qaeda and its ilk – the *tokkō* legacy has developed quite differently in Japan’s postwar collective memory. Sixty-one years after the last sortie was flown, the *tokkō* campaign remains a complicated and controversial topic in Japan, associated as it is with debate over the nation’s militarist past and the risks of future re-militarization, State Shinto and Yasukuni Shrine, and the perennially

⁴² For a critical examination of this genre, see Ivan Morris, *The Nobility of Failure: Tragic Heroes in the History of Japan* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1975).

⁴³ There has been a veritable explosion of tokko-themed major studio release films and television dramas since the mid-1990s, and the rate of the appearance of new media treatments has only accelerated since the early 2000s.

⁴⁴ The Henshū Techō column of the 23 March 2006 edition of *Yomiuri Shimbun* comments – and not without a palpable measure of pride – on foreign news media references to Japan’s triumph in the 2006 World Baseball Classic as a ‘kamikaze’ victory. While *Yomiuri*’s editors parse the quote in the context of the original ‘kamikaze’ – the storms that destroyed Kublai Khan’s invasion fleets menacing Japan in 1274 and 1281, respectively – it seems more than likely that the foreign journalists in question were evoking memories of the Asia-Pacific War suicide tactic.

hypersensitive *inujini* question.⁴⁵ Rare lines of bolder discourse even occasionally dare to venture into soul-searching over the possible existence of deep-level causes in the sociopolitical infrastructure of Japanese culture itself that created the circumstances under which such an organized, systematic and not only state-sanctioned but also popularly supported tragedy could occur in the first place.⁴⁶

But from the perspectives of both its lionizers and its critics – as well as of the relatively voiceless majority of Japanese whose views fall somewhere between these extremes – *tokkō* is a historical theme saturated with heartrending pathos and heady iconic potency with utility for portraying Japan’s war as a doomed-yet-valiant defensive struggle by a spiritual/traditional Asian society against a rapaciously acquisitive, spiritually barren but materially overwhelming West – a depiction helped to no end by the ready historical imagery of Westerners in armadas of gleaming, high tech airplanes firebombing wooden cities full of Asian civilians in the end game phase of that struggle.⁴⁷ Moreover, *tokkō* can also be seen in pride-saving counterpoint to the pathetic imagery of the bombed cities (and in the overarching context of Japan’s defeat as a whole) as a bold rejection of the passive victim role, therein reifying a libidinally cathected, idealized primal

⁴⁵ Namely: “Did Japan’s Asia-Pacific War dead perish in vain?” Used in a 1931-45 historical context, the term *inujini* – literally “dying a dog’s death” – is generally taken to infer that Japan’s war dead died for nothing, as their sacrifice was made for a defeated or even unjust cause. Rarely seen in print in recent years outside of ultra-conservative commentary putting words into the mouths of left wing critics of Japan’s war legacy, the term was more common in the early postwar writings of Japanese veterans and/or bereaved family members who held a critical view of Japan’s wartime efforts and of the consequences therein for lost comrades and/or loved ones – voices that receive comparatively little attention from mainstream Japanese media today. The work of scholar and activist Ienaga Saburō – particularly his *Taiheiyō Sensō* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1968), as well as the 1960s-1970s work of journalist and non-fiction author (and former wartime Army cameraman) Takagi Tokurō was exemplary of a genre of postwar commentary that could be said to comprise an “*inujini* school” of interpretations of Japan’s war aims and the consequences of same. Needless to say, this position has not struck a particularly positive responsive chord among the majority of Japan’s war bereaved.

⁴⁶ Fukabori Michiyoshi’s *Tokkō no Shinjutsu* (Hara Shobō, 2001) and Hosaka Masayasu’s *Tokkō to Nihonjin* (Kōdansha Shinsho, 2005) are notable recent books in this genre. Fukabori is the son of wartime *tokkō* Sixth Air Army commander Lieutenant General Sugawara Michiō, and journalist Hosaka is a widely published commentator on Japanese military, political and social issues. Also noteworthy is the autobiographical memoir of *tokkō* pilot survivor Kuwahara Kei’ichi, *Katararezaru Tokkō Kichi Kushira* (Tokyo: Bunshun Bunko, 2006).

⁴⁷ As noted in the previous section, the J-Right hagiographer must be prudent in his or her use of this victimization imagery, so as not to besmirch the honor of the Japanese fighting man by implying (or at least overemphasizing) the relative impotence of Japanese arms in the closing phase of the war.

essence of Japanese masculinity.⁴⁸

Such emotionally laden and idealized iconography has potentially paradigm-shifting utility in forming a crystallization point around which an alchemy for ego-protecting and emotionally gratifying Asia-Pacific War defeat remembrance can coalesce. Used to such ends, *tokkō* imagery can:

- emphasize Japanese martial prowess, but in a defensive rather than a more morally questionable offensive context;
- repair damage to Japanese (and perhaps particularly male) pride suffered from the defeat and subsequent Allied occupation;
- emphasize Japan's war with the West – specifically with superpower America – as opposed to its victimization of other Asians;
- cast the war in a populist ‘by the people, for the people’ light by showcasing the deeds of the Japanese rank-and-file citizen-soldier rather than the activities of high level policymakers (imagery that can lay blame on a political elite for Japan's calamity – payment for which is symbolized by the sacrifice of the *tokkō* – while simultaneously alleviating the state's burden of responsibility by spreading duplicity for the *tokkō* concept as widely and evenly as possible in referring to the pilots as “volunteers”);
- arouse sympathy in generations of Japanese unfamiliar with the war, but more in a sense of gratitude and admiration for the sacrifices of its fighting men than of pity over their fate; and
- be portrayed as embodying the finest aspects of an idealized national character (*kokuminsei*), particularly loyalty, bravery, purity of spirit and commitment to selfless sacrifice (*messhi hōkō*), implying a comforting sense of spiritual continuity with a halcyon Japanese past.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ The concept of libidinal cathexis in the context of idealized self-imagery (in this case, an ethnocentric identity-reinforcing palimpsest of idealized masculinity) is cited here in the sense described in Mitscherlich, pp.25-31, 35.

⁴⁹ See Kobayashi Yoshinori, *Sensōron* (Tokyo: Gentōsha, 1998), et al. For a more “politically correct” treatment of what is basically the same concept of “multigenerational cultural continuity” vis-à-vis “*tokkō* spirit” (i.e. “the leaders” and “the war” were bad, but *messhi hōkō* – and therefore the value system enabling *tokkō* – is identifiable in an essentialist sense as a temporally/historically transcendent *sui generis* Japanese character trait), see Ogiwara Hiroshi, *Bokutachi no Sensō* (Tokyo: Futabasha, 2004).

Although aggrandizing the legacy of the *tokkō* for such purposes would appear to run the risk of also highlighting the horror and waste of human life entailed in the tactic, the J-Right agent of memory (savvy or not) rejects out of hand this potential ideological hazard, confident – and probably not without reason – that his or her countrymen – or at least any a revisionist would consider worthy of that distinction – would never dare to subscribe (at least publicly) to a disparaging view of the sacrifices of the brave but innocent young *tokkō*.

The historical figure of the *tokkō* pilot thus offers the tantalizing potential of being simultaneously dashing hero, sterling role model, and victim of historical forces beyond his control (a qualification conveniently obfuscating the causality implications of Japan's decision to wage the war in the first place). He is both lamb and lion, a figure upon whom – if the fate of the human beings whose bodies he exploded and whose flesh he sprayed with flaming aviation fuel can be dismissed as insignificant – little or no moral censure can be levied. As recent Japanese filmic and literary treatments of his exploits demonstrate so emphatically, he is the perfect icon within the context and requirements of a JLC narrative of defeat remembrance from which shame and guilt over the Asia-Pacific War are to be expunged.

VIII The *tokkō* as cultural role model

As strongly evidenced by the runaway popularity of sympathetic treatments of the theme in popular literature and other media (and again, this is a momentum increasing in recent years), *tokkō* is seen by many Japanese today as proof of the existence, in a culturally essentialist sense, of some primal, sacrosanct, immortal quality of Japanese identity (particularly its masculine aspects) – comforting reassurance that the “Japanese spirit” or *yamato damashii* has survived intact into the modern era. Parsing this agenda in a simple semiotic and logical framework, JLC's agents of *tokkō* hagiography seek to “naturalize” the *tokkō* “signifier” to the point where “patriotic” Japanese will be beholden to the following syllogistic loop:

- The *tokkō* concept and (its concomitant) *tokkō seishin* (*tokkō* spirit) are proud and beautiful *sui generis* qualities of Japaneseness.
- To reject proud and beautiful such *sui generis* qualities of Japaneseness as evil or misguided is to deny one's own identity as a

Japanese.

- To reject the *tokkō* concept and *tokkō seishin* as evil or misguided is to deny one's own identity as a Japanese.

Once horrific and/or unappealingly fanatic aspects can be expunged from the *tokkō* legacy, this agenda will proceed apace, with only *tokkō*'s positive aspects of bravery, patriotism and “noble sacrifice” (*tattoi gisei*) left within the field of vision. The JLC's adherents believe this historiographical flanking movement will be of immeasurable benefit to the self-esteem of current and future generations of Japanese.⁵⁰

In addition to this adept use of intensely socialized *uchi/soto* (In-group/Out-group) patterns of exclusivist Japanese group identity in promoting adherence to the JLC *tokkō* canon (a tactic clearly identifiable in Durkheimian terms as a utilization of the coercive power of a conscience collective⁵¹), the presentation of preferred readings of the *tokkō* historical narrative sweetened with self-Orientalizing trappings is another effective tack taken by *tokkō* hagiographers. Such practice, of course, is in keeping with time-honored tropes of Japanese identification/portrayal of the Self vis-à-vis a non-Japanese Other dating at least from the Meiji Period⁵², and as *tokkō* hagiography produced for popular consumption has increasingly demonstrated from the wartime era to the present day, this tradition is clearly evoked in efforts to naturalize *tokkō* referents towards making this imagery and concept all the more accessible – and thus psychologically digestible – for the Japanese public. Moreover, time would appear to be on the side of the hagiographers, for as raw and traumatic images of the war

50 Representative of this interpretation of the *tokkō* narrative is the ideological stance of the Tokkōtai Senbotsusha Irei Heiwa Kinen Kyōkai (Special Attack Corps Memorial Association), Japan's premier *tokkō* memorial association. The association maintains a Japanese language website at <http://www.tokkotai.or.jp/index.htm>. The Association's entire catalogue of newsletters published since 1984 can be downloaded at <http://www.tokkotai.or.jp/kikanshi/bach-number-syoukai-1.htm>.

⁵¹ This interpretation of Durkheim's terminology is from Tony Bilton, ed., *Introductory Sociology* (London: Macmillan, 1996), p.656.

⁵² The researcher refers here to the reactionary response from Japanese traditionalists to the Meiji regime's immediate post-Restoration “housecleaning” of “outdated” Japanese customs, and the regime's subsequent accommodation of this reaction in the Westernized/Orientalized pastiche that later came to define Meiji and, arguably, modern day ideological framings of Japanese identity. The modern genealogy of this essentialism could arguably be traced half a century earlier to late Tokugawa *kokugaku*/Mito School thought. See Eiji Oguma, *A Genealogy of 'Japanese' Self-images* (Melbourne: Trans Pacific Press, 2002).

in living Japanese memory gradually recede and disappear, space in the popular consciousness is vacated to be replaced by more aesthetically and patriotically appealing myth and legend.

However, that said, it should be kept in mind that in the postwar period the *tokkō* legacy has not always been regarded – even by those who initially sought to memorialize it publicly – as viable symbolism around which a recovered Japanese national pride might crystallize. Rather, in the immediate postwar Occupation period – partly as a result of a media campaign no doubt carefully watched, if not actually assisted, by SCAP⁵³ – many, if not most, Japanese specifically targeted and vilified the *tokkō* as having embodied the worst excesses of prewar and wartime Japanese militarism and ultranationalist education.⁵⁴ Even more tellingly (and poignantly), the great majority of the thousands of *tokkō* veterans who survived the war, fearing rebuke and ostracism, carefully hid their former identities as members of suicide attack units, even neglecting in many cases to tell their own families about their wartime experiences.⁵⁵ It would not be untoward to hypothesize that an early postwar prediction that Japanese movies, comic books, novels, television programs, memorials and museum exhibits would (or more provocatively, *should*) someday make not only tenderly sympathetic but also glowingly laudatory references to *tokkō* would have met with utter incredulity – if not outright rage – from a Japanese audience fifty or sixty years ago.

But nevertheless, half a century later, the evidence points increasingly to the successful, if gradual, naturalization of the *tokkō* signifier: the hypothetically prophesied literary and cinematic encomia exist, consumed with cathartic ardor by millions of Japanese readers and moviegoers; the memorial statuary and museum exhibits stand from the southern tip of Okinawa to the northern tip of Hokkaido;

⁵³ American military authorities released Japanese wartime “military secrets” regarding *tokkō* operations, replete with extensive technological detail, to the Japanese press in the early months after the war, likely in culturally subjective expectation that the Japanese populace would be shocked by these revelations of the “inhumanity” to *tokkō* to the same extent the Americans were. An example of an article written with obvious “informational assistance” by the authorities appeared in the *Asahi Shimbun* of October 6, 1945 under the headline “Jinrai (‘Divine Thunder’ Ōka rocket bomb unit): actual configuration was a missile/mother ship unit; the ‘V-1 rockets with human eyes’ shared the tragic fate of their slow, unwieldy mother ships.”

⁵⁴ Particularly noteworthy in this genre of immediate postwar *tokkō* opprobrium is a December 16, 1945 submission to the *Asahi Shimbun* editorial column *Koe* (“Voice”) by novelist Shiga Naoya.

⁵⁵ See M.G. Sheftall, *Blossoms in the Wind: Human Legacies of the Kamikaze* (New York: NAL Caliber, 2005).

even Japanese fans attending recent Winter Olympics games to cheer on their national team's ski jumpers have been conspicuous in television coverage beamed around the globe, sporting "kamikaze" headbands identical in design (神〇風) to those worn by *tokkō* pilots of sixty-some years ago. These same headbands are available for reasonable prices in souvenir shops at Narita Airport and Tokyo Tower. Judging from this evidence, it must be acknowledged that the J-Right's efforts to validate and valorize the historical legacy of the *tokkō* (and by association, the legacy of Japan's war with the West as a whole) comprise one of the most patient, determined and ultimately successful "image restoration" campaigns in the history of defeated societies.

IX Conclusion

It should be stressed that the J-Right's dogmatic JLC interpretation of the Asia-Pacific War and its scathing appraisal of the consequences of this defeat have never reached anything approaching overwhelming popular consensus in postwar Japan. On the contrary, the nation's defeat in the war brought about changes of which many – if not most – Japanese now approve. One of the earliest and most significant of these changes was the grievous undermining in the national psyche of the very thing that the J-Right most earnestly seeks to revive, i.e., the prewar Imperial Japanese variant of what George Mosse identifies as "the official linkage of the cult of the fallen to manliness and national glory".⁵⁶ And as any self-respecting advocate of the J-Right cause would be only too quick to concur, it would be no exaggeration to claim that the Japanese state has never been the same since the demise of this "cult".

Widespread popular rejection of the "cult of martial glory" and its hyper-gendered symbolic equating of war-making capability with ideal masculine qualities is evident in the fact that since the promulgation of Japan's present Constitution in 1947, opinion surveys have consistently shown that a majority of the Japanese population (with a slight gender variation favoring women) has regarded the nation's formal renunciation in that document of the right to wage war as a centerpiece of cultural pride and identity.⁵⁷ However, a demographically

⁵⁶ George L. Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars* (London: Oxford University Press, 1990), p.223.

⁵⁷ See Yoshida (2005), and Saaler (2004).

smaller but (as present conditions clearly demonstrate) no less politically significant segment of Japanese society – i.e., the J-Right’s main popular support base – has never been comfortable with this basis of postwar national identity, its prerequisite pride-swallowing historical interpretation of Japan’s war as having been unjust, irrational or otherwise ill-advised and morally flawed, and the state’s perennial subservient role in the postwar U.S./Japan defense relationship. As evidenced by the sheer emotionality of long-simmering controversies over such issues as Yasukuni Shrine, school textbook treatments of the war, the uproar over official recognition of the “Comfort Women” in the early 1990s, and Article 9 debates, these J-Right sympathies form a strong undercurrent of sentiment in Japanese politics.⁵⁸

Most conspicuous in recent years has been the appeal of J-Right thought among younger Japanese with no direct experience of (and, as noted earlier, little or no formal education about) the war, who see the postwar changes forced on their country as being little more than arbitrarily and disrespectfully applied legacies of Allied “victor’s justice” and multigenerational sources of national humiliation. As long as the J-Right has the ability to reach audiences in this demographic slot with its *ressentiment*-fueled “Who Moved My Warrior Mojo?” jeremiad – either through direct appeal via editorialization in news media, or perhaps much more effectively, through the emotion-stimulating image machine of popular entertainment – the JLC’s Ghost Dance will continue, its energy available on tap for shrewd politicians and perennially frustrating Japan’s hopes of achieving resolution on war issues with Asian neighbors and former foes.

Despite their dramatic progress of recent decades, even the most optimistic J-Right politicians and pundits are likely resigned to the idea that they will not live to see the most rewarding fruits from the ideological seedlings and tree branches that have been planted and pruned with such devotion and care since the return of Japanese sovereignty in 1952. And this would hold as true for relative “youngsters” like Abe Shinzō as it traditionally has for the J-Right’s ideological fathers and

⁵⁸ See Buruma (1994); Gavan McCormack, ‘The Japanese Movement to “Correct” History’, in *Censoring History: Citizenship and Memory in Japan, Germany and the United States*, Mark Selden and Laura Hein, eds. (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2000); John Nathan, *Japan Unbound: A Volatile Nation’s Quest for Pride and Purpose* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2004); Franziska Seraphim, *War Memory and Social Politics in Japan, 1945-2005* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2006).

grandfathers (literally, in Abe's case). But if the movement has demonstrated any consistent characteristics during its sixty-year-long and continuing campaign, it is that it possesses patience and determination that are decidedly lacking in the efforts of its ideological foes of the long hopelessly moribund and now effectively gagged (at least in terms of the ability to reach mass audiences) J-Left.

As a result, the dominant narrative in the public historical consciousness of the Asia-Pacific War is being effectively transformed from "cautionary tale"⁵⁹ to feel-good heroic myth, particularly in the context of that conflict being viewed as the culmination of Japan's rapid post-Meiji modernization as a necessary measure to confront Western "imperialism". And as this transformation takes place, so will the Japanese move that much closer to once again tolerating the thought of their sons (and likely, in future conflict, daughters) participating – and dying – in combat.

It is the hope of the researcher that readers will have gleaned from this paper an appreciation that this transformation is not a theoretical possibility but a real process that is not only already long underway, but probably by now unstoppable. The J-Right has not yet won its war, but in sparking and sustaining this transformation in popular Japanese historical consciousness it has won a critically important battle. Regardless of whether historians far in the future will praise or damn this victory, none will be able to deny that it was a turning point in the evolutionary course of postwar Japanese national identity.

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⁵⁹ This phrase – and its contextual usage – is from Carol Gluck's "The Past in the Present", in *Postwar Japan as History* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993), pp.64-98, 79.