



Homecomings: The Belated Return of Japan's Lost Soldiers by Yoshikuni Igarashi.

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Review by Kristine Dennehy, California State University–Fullerton (kdennehy@fullerton.edu).

Homecomings is, author Yoshikuni Igarashi (Vanderbilt Univ.) states, a microlevel companion to his earlier *Bodies of Memory*,¹ where he argued that “Japanese society rendered its traumatic experiences of the war comprehensible through narrative devices that downplayed their disruptive effects on Japan’s history.... Memories were discursively constructed through bodily tropes [and] bodies became sites for national rehabilitation”² in the aftermath of World War II. *Homecomings*, too, concerns war-time and postwar Japan, but not as consecutive periods that flowed in a natural progression. Rather, the author contrasts the actual experiences of individual Japanese soldiers with media portrayals of them in the first three decades after Japan’s defeat (10, 224).

Igarashi begins his three-part study with an analysis of two postwar films—*Stray Dog* (1949; dir. Akira Kurosawa) and *Yellow Crow* (1957; dir. Heinosuke Gosho)—and Junpei Gomikawa’s six-volume novel, *The Human Condition* (1956–58). He places these fictional works in the context of actual economic, political, and social conditions of the late 1940s and 1950s. He shows that the cinematic portrayals of postwar veterans adopted “the perspective of postwar society, fulfilling the contemporary interest in domesticating the returned former servicemen—and, by extension, their war memories” (49). For example, he highlights the “corporeal basis of social anxiety” in cases like that of the serial rapist and murderer Yoshio Kodaira, who lured destitute women with food and the promise of employment amid the chaos of the bombed-out Tokyo landscape (28). Igarashi evokes Occupation-era austerity measures with the telling details of an exchange between Finance Minister Ki’ichi Miyazawa and Detroit banker and SCAP³ financial advisor Joseph Dodge concerning a case of cash theft in 1949. Citing Miyazawa’s 1991 memoir, Igarashi notes that “Dodge saw that [theft] as a good sign: the fact that the criminal chose the cash meant that inflation was under control and trust in the currency had begun to be restored” (32).

Igarashi’s goal here is to show how characters, narratives, and visual images reflect the ambiguity of Japan’s postwar practice of both embracing and rejecting its wartime past. Describing a scene in *Stray Dog*, he juxtaposes the darkness associated with two former servicemen, Yusa and Murakami, with the “peaceful everyday life” evoked by images of singing children. “Yusa’s animal-like wail reveals the violent past that is still present—albeit no longer comprehensible—in postwar society” (36–37).

Gomikawa’s *The Human Condition* is based on his experiences as a demobilized soldier who survived the Soviet invasion of Japanese occupied Manchuria (8 Aug. 1945). Igarashi focuses on the hero Kaji who “must die in order not to bring home the war’s gruesome memories” (54). Unlike films that “used animal imagery to mark veterans’ marginalized status in postwar society, Gomikawa posited that his protagonist’s struggle to remain human under the inhumane conditions of war was central to

1. Subtitle: *Narratives of War in Postwar Japanese Culture, 1945–1970* (Princeton: Princeton U Pr, 2000).

2. *Ibid.*, 3, 5.

3. I.e., Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers.

postwar society's efforts to work through its troubling memories of the war" (53). In this way, both Kaji and the postwar consumers of Japanese mass media break from the wartime past and become free agents instead of hapless victims of the military elite. Again, Igarashi astutely conveys the political and economic circumstances of the mid-1950s, when Japan was settling issues of reparations and entering the next stage of accelerated growth after immediate postwar rebuilding.

Victimization is also a major theme in the second section of *Homecomings*, which focuses on Japanese POWs in Siberia. These men were neither "pure victims" (107) like the atomic bomb casualties (*hibakusha*), nor ordinary Japanese civilians who believed their nation's military elite had duped them into waging a war of aggression. Igarashi sharply criticizes the marginalization and manipulation of the memories of POWs who, as victims of the Soviet system, "did not fit neatly into the narrative of Japan's postwar national identity that embraced death and destruction as a selfless wartime sacrifice for future generations" (108). He urges his readers to "resist these narratives of victimization in order to engage the stories of the Japanese POWs interned in Siberian prison camps with something more than sentimental pity" (109).

Igarashi next turns to the poet Yoshiro Ishihara, a graduate of the Japanese Army Russian Education Unit in Osaka, whom the Soviets sentenced to hard labor in 1949 following his intelligence work with the Kwantung Army Special Communication and Information Unit in Harbin. The author explores Ishihara's use of poetry to reconstitute himself in the aftermath of his horrific experiences in Siberian POW camps. He stresses the poet's strategic stance of "no denunciation ..., a conscious refusal to 'stand on the side of victimhood and justice.' Ishihara rejected a categorical critique of the external force at work—whether Stalinism, Japan's militarism, or a combination of both ..., a denunciation that would turn him into a victim with no agency" (143).

The final section of *Homecomings* concerns three wartime stragglers who emerged from the island-jungles of Japan's former Pacific empire. One of them, Shōichi Yokoi, became a celebrity in a frenzy of media attention that emphasized his story of rehabilitation rather than the trauma he endured hiding in a cave on Guam for some twenty-eight years. By the time Yokoi returned in 1972, "Japan was at the height of its optimism [and] the image of an emaciated Imperial Army soldier shocked Japanese society, recalling images that had long since been sanitized or forgotten" (162). Aggressive reporters and Yokoi himself had tailored a story of survival and reintegration into society that rendered his long years on Guam "meaningless because he had missed the opportunity to enjoy Japan's postwar peace and prosperity" (166).

Igarashi contrasts Yokoi's story with that of the more assertive Hiro'o Onoda, who acted out a surrender ritual (in uniform) with Pres. Ferdinand Marcos in the Philippines in 1974, after living on Lubang Island for twenty-nine years. He stresses the problematic nature of such theatrics, which served to "control the public image of the new Philippines-Japan friendship" (179), as favorable trade relations erased inconvenient memories of Japanese military aggression. Onoda himself had perpetuated this violence long after the war by murdering dozens of Filipino civilians he accidentally encountered during his years in hiding.

Particularly intriguing is the case of Teruo Nakamura,⁴ an indigenous Ami Taiwanese soldier who left Morotai Island in Indonesia in 1974. Unlike most belated returnees, Nakamura returned to his village in Taiwan to find that his wife had remarried and that he could not communicate with the local Mandarin-speaking press or even his own grandchildren. Igarashi identifies various factors that excluded Nakamura from the media attention given to other returnees, including the Cold War geopolitics that

4. Also known by his Taiwanese name, Li Guanghui, and his ethnic name, Shiniyuwu.

kept most Japanese news outlets from operating on Taiwan. Moreover, Nakamura's account of friction on Morotai between him and other indigenous Taiwanese soldiers of the Atayal tribe clashed with Japanese notions of "easygoing" natives (207).

Some of Igarashi's arguments about wartime Japan and the repatriation of its soldiers after the war have precedents in the existing scholarly literature. The question whether 1945 marked a breaking point in a transwar continuum was addressed twenty-four years ago.⁵ More recently, James Orr's study of postwar victim consciousness⁶ includes a perceptive discussion of Gomikawa's *The Human Condition*. Igarashi has elsewhere acknowledged Orr's insights,⁷ but here situates POWs within "the highly charged politics of postwar society [that] did not allow them to identify themselves merely as victims" (101).

The great strength of *Homecomings* is its discerning analysis of how antiwar memories have been mediated in the postwar period. It is best suited for advanced undergraduates and graduate students with some grounding in the historiography of imperial Japan and postcolonial topics like repatriation. However, the book's footnotes offer general readers helpful suggestions for further reading.⁸

5. In Andrew Gordon, ed., *Postwar Japan as History* (Berkeley: U Calif Pr, 1993). J. Victor Koschmann's essay on postwar subjectivity—"Intellectuals and Politics"—in that volume (395–423) anticipates Igarashi's discussion of the Siberian struggle that "crushed the subjectivity [Yoshiro Ishihara] needed to process those experiences intellectually and emotionally" (113).

6. *The Victim as Hero: Ideologies of Peace and National Identity in Postwar Japan* (Honolulu: U Hawai'i Pr, 2001).

7. *Journal of Asian Studies* 61 (2002) 729–30.

8. E.g., Lori Watt, *When Empire Comes Home: Repatriation and Reintegration in Postwar Japan* (Cambridge: Harvard U Asia Ctr, 2009).