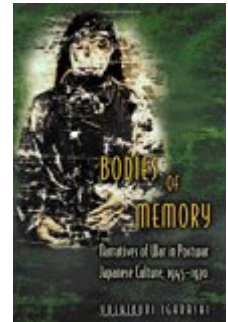


Igarashi Yoshikuni. *Bodies of Memory: Narratives of War in Postwar Japanese Culture, 1945-1970.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000. x + 284 pp. \$49.50, cloth, ISBN 978-0-691-04912-0.



Reviewed by Akiko Fukumoto

Published on H-US-Japan (October, 2001)

Bodies of Memory: Narratives of War in Postwar Japanese Culture, 1945-1970

This is an excellent book that illustrates the processes of struggles in the post-war Japanese society over the memories of loss and trauma of war. The purpose of the book is not to indulge in the struggles and suffering of Japanese during and after the Asia Pacific War, but to address the wars disruptive effects and trauma reflected on popular culture. Rather than denying, Igarashi supports that embracing the traumatic memories and the past is necessary to face the nations aggression during the war. Accordingly, he examines popular culture considering political and economical climates at that time and explores what necessitated the process of forgetting the past in Japan.

Igarashi starts the introductory chapter by explaining the painting of a young Japanese pilot on the cover of the book and the museum, *Mugonkan*, that exhibits the painting. Kuboshima Seiichi owns the museum privately and opened it 1997 in Nagano. The museum collects and exhibits the works by young Japanese artists who

died during or shortly after the Asia Pacific War. Introducing the stories behind the painting and the museum, Igarashi leads readers to question what and how a particular segment of cultural expression had been suppressed and left out from collective memories of the war in the Japanese society.

In the first chapter, "The Bomb, Hirohito, and History: The Foundation Narrative of Postwar Relations between Japan and the United States", Igarashi explains the foundation narrative in the postwar Japanese society. Both Japan and the United States created and supported it and its main themes were rescue and conversion. According to the foundational narratives, the United States rescued and converted the enemy Japan into a representative of U.S. value in East Asia. Truman and Hirohito, the Showa emperor, were the two protagonists in the narrative. The foundation narrative dominated the narrative discourse in the postwar Japanese society, so that both the Japanese and the U.S. governments suppressed the narratives that contradicted the foundational one.

The second chapter, "The Age of the Body", is about the body as the site of ideological struggle before and after the end of the war in 1945. Before the end of the war, the Japanese bodies were under the strict control by the Japanese government and military, so as to support the national war efforts. The bodies were not allowed to enjoy sensory stimuli. The defeat of Japan liberated the bodies and they became symbols of liberation. The U.S. occupation, however, brought other struggles over the bodies. One of them was the celebration and commodification of female bodies and sexuality. The other was the production of clean, democratic bodies through the extensive use of vaccination and insecticides. The Japanese bodies had to become clean to symbolize the rescue and conversion theme in the foundation narrative. The cleansing process was that of liberation as well as of humiliation for many Japanese.

The third chapter, "A Nation That Never Is: Cultural Discourse on Japanese Uniqueness", explores the influences of the foundation narrative on Japanese and *Nihonjinron*, a discussion of Japanese uniqueness in 1950s. Under the political and economic framework defined by the United States, Japan experienced the economic prosperity due to the procurement of the U.S. military for the Korean War and the exchange rate that undervalued the yen. Japan framed itself as the homogeneous East that stands as a pair with the United States and Europe as the West. Igarashi examines Kojima Nobuo and Oe Kenzaburo who challenged the Japanese framing of self at that time. In their works, Kojima addressed the hybridity of Japanese identities and Oe challenged the power dynamics between Japan and the United States.

The fourth chapter, "Naming the Unnameable", is about the popular culture from the 1950s to the mid-1960s. The chapter is about the struggles of identities and the memory of loss when markers of loss due to the war were disappearing from the Japanese society. Examining the drama and film, *Kimino na wa*, the film *Gojira* (Godzilla),

and the professional wrestler *Rikidozan*, Igarashi identifies liminal spaces and figures reflected on the popular culture.

The fifth chapter, "From the Anti-Security Treaty Movement to the Tokyo Olympics: Transforming the Body, the Metropolis, and Memory", addresses the resurfaced memories of the past on the popular culture. This time, the memories surfaced to be transformed and cleansed. The 1964 Tokyo Olympic and the accompanying construction transformed Tokyo into a proud bright clean city. The final torch runner for the Olympics, who was born on August 15, 1945 symbolized the transformation of Japan from its defeat to reconstruction. Winning the volleyball game against the former Soviet team, the 1964 Olympics female volleyball team symbolized the path of Japan's progress and recovery.

In the sixth chapter, "Re-presenting Trauma In Late-1960s Japan", Igarashi illustrates the struggles by two writers, Nosaka Akiyuki and Mishima Yukio, against the Japanese society which was forgetting the past and pursuing material wealth. Both of them attempted to articulate war memories, but differently. Nosaka attempted to repeat the memories of the war, hunger, humiliation, and trauma through writing, whereas Mishima attempted to repeat and represent the past in its original intensity by committing a dramatic suicide. Both of them failed to raise discussion in the society.

In conclusion, Igarashi discusses his intention of using bodily metaphors to historicize the events and popular culture in the post-war Japanese society. Suppressed memories and trauma haunt people as the popular culture he examined demonstrated. The aversion of the memories and trauma caused Japan to experience a schizophrenic condition, holding contradicted inner self and outer self. Igarashi suggests the need to recognize and embrace the memories, trauma, and impacts of the war and then, to cultivate the capabil-

ity to face and address the Japanese war responsibilities.

This book by Igarashi contributes to the literature of war memory and popular culture significantly. Those who are interested in cultural studies, the post-war Japanese society, and Japan's war responsibility issues will benefit from this book. Igarashi addresses post-colonial issues such as colonizer-colonized relationship, and ambivalence and hybridity of identities, without using those technical terms. Using bodily metaphors, Igarashi examines popular culture chronologically in the postwar Japanese society. With published documents and his interpretation, Igarashi demonstrates the influences of political, psychological, and economical factors on the process of remembering and forgetting the past. His application of psychological analysis to history and nation is interesting. His proposed alternative approach to address Japan's wartime aggression is insightful. Several controversies over history and its representation appeared in the 1990s not only in Japan, but also in other parts of the world such as the United States and Germany. Merely blaming and regretting might cause resistance. As Rogan and Hammer [1] propose, we have to address emotion and identity issues in addition to substance issues for reaching an agreement. In order to address the identity issues, the works such as Igarashi's are necessary to historicize the trajectory of identity development and history.

Further, Igarashi's connection of war memory in Japan and *Nihonjinron* bridges the two fields. Although Igarashi did not elaborate *Nihonjinron* in the third chapter extensively and his description of the Showa emperor contradicts some of the literature (cf. Asada [2]), they are minor issues compared with the contribution of this book as a whole.

Notes

[1]. R. G. Rogan and M. R. Hammer. "Crisis/hostage negotiations: Conceptualization of a communication-based approach." In H. Giles, ed., *Law*

enforcement, communication, and community (Amsterdam, Netherlands: John Benjamins, in press).

[2]. S. Asada, "The shock of the atomic bomb and Japans decision to surrender: A reconsideration" *Pacific Historical Review* 67 (1998)(4), 477-512.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at
<https://networks.h-net.org/h-us-japan>

Citation: Akiko Fukumoto. Review of Yoshikuni, Igarashi. *Bodies of Memory: Narratives of War in Postwar Japanese Culture, 1945-1970*. H-US-Japan, H-Net Reviews. October, 2001.

URL: <https://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=5570>



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License.