WAR, SOLDIER AND NATION IN 1950s JAPAN

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The 1950s in Japan are usually considered to be marked by pacifism or a “victim consciousness” related to World War II, together with a rejection of war and of the military. Yet attention to the popular press and other sources designed to reflect and appeal to a mass audience, rather than magazines carrying debates among intellectuals, shows that throughout the 1950s the recent war was a much more dynamic issue than typically has been recognized, and that former soldiers were far from universally reviled. Connections with the war, in turn, remained an integral part of the evolving sense of nation in Japan. This article examines the vitality of the war as a major and direct theme in political, social and cultural discourse in the 1950s, focusing on soldiers’ involvement in politics, issues relating to Class B and C war criminals, films about the war, and the emergence of a new cultural hero in the form of Kaji, the soldier who is the central figure in the novel and film The Human Condition.

INTRODUCTION

Scholarly research on 1950s Japan is not plentiful, and as a result, our images of Japanese society in that decade tend to centre on a few key themes. Political and industrial unrest and the re-entrenchment of conservative politics in the era of the Cold War may loom large; at a social level, however, headings like “transformation”, “revival”, “recovery” and “growth” dominate the textbooks. Specialist studies, for their part, have often dealt with pacifism and with the ideas of key intellectuals, usually left-leaning intellectuals, who naturally repudiated the wars of 1937–1945, seeking a new national identity based on peace, culture and ethics. The story of the 1950s accordingly appears to be all about new beginnings. As for more recent observers, Carol Gluck pointed out nearly twenty years ago that at the time, 15 August 1945 seemed “to end the war and the past in a single
calendrical stroke", establishing a "myth of a new beginning" that was to prove very long-lasting.4 Undoubtedly, the perspective that emphasizes "transformation" is a valid and important one. The experience of war and defeat was traumatic for the great majority of the Japanese people, as it was for the victims of Japan's aggression in other countries. So overwhelming was the trauma, and so dramatic the political and social changes of the post-war period, that the ensuing years in Japan seem to have little in common with what came before, at least in terms of ordinary people's lives.

Thus, there is a sense of a radical disjuncture in social life and attitudes in 1950s Japan, compared to the previous two decades. That said, it must be admitted that the general scholarly image of the 1950s is nowhere explicitly elaborated as a whole but rather is more or less assumed, and is expressed as much by what is missing from analyses as by what is included. Nevertheless there seems to be a kind of composite or default view, in which poverty continued but most other aspects of society appear to have changed; and above all, the war and all things associated with it were rejected. This seems to be a decade when people had turned their back on war; when the former military was nowhere to be seen and, in retrospect, was despised. It is usually assumed that in formal politics new candidates presented themselves, and in political discourse, themes relevant to the past war were largely ignored — except in disputes about military bases and the US-Japan Mutual Security Treaty. Nationalism, insofar as it existed, appears to have been based on pacifism and, in the latter part of the decade, on the beginnings of prosperity and a return to the international arena.

In works on the 1950s, cultural vitality is usually illustrated either in pacifist movements or in the private sphere: as the economy started to recover in the second half of the decade, people began to aspire to owning consumer goods, television gained ground and youth culture was much discussed. As one marker of the change in Japan's circumstances, historians and contemporary observers alike point to the 1956 pronouncement in a government White Paper that "it is no longer the post-war period". Most crucially for our purposes here, this decade apparently is one with no Japanese soldiers, apart from the seemingly emasculated versions in the new "self-defence" forces. War memory, to be sure, is one form of continuity with the past that several researchers have addressed. As we will see, however, the issue tends to be presented as something that either is hidden beneath other concerns, or is expressed only within very narrow bounds.5

"Transformation", "revival", "growth" and a change in intellectual currents certainly are crucial aspects of 1950s society. Japan shared with post-war Germany a strong practical and discursive emphasis on going forward rather than looking back, a "will to reconstruction", in W. G. Sebald's terms.6 Yet, an emphasis on this tendency masks other highly significant trends of the decade. Scholarly studies of intellectual movements, for example, can tell us little about the decade's major social trends and preoccupations. Books about the war published from the late 1940s onwards may well have been "full of pacifist

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5 Igarashi 2000; Orr 2001; Trefalt 2003 takes a different approach to war memory in her treatment of the return to Japan of army "stragglers" up to the 1970s.
6 Sebald 2003, p. 81. See also pp. 5-7.
sentiment and disdain for militarism", as Ienaga Saburō has said. It must be recognized, however, that those who wrote books, and intellectuals from whatever part of the political spectrum, were far removed from the daily lives of most people, especially in the first half of the 1950s, when living standards for the majority were so poor, and mass media had not yet expanded to the point of creating a truly "national" culture. “Transformation”, moreover, is only part of the story.

Quite simply, there is another and altogether different 1950s Japan out there as well, one that so far has been ignored by most scholars, or, more accurately, forgotten for the past forty-five years or so. It was well recognized in pioneering work produced up to 1960, and is only just beginning to reappear in some very recent new research. This “other” 1950s Japan displays much more continuity with the past, and, crucially, is a society that is full of former soldiers, who in day-to-day life are by no means invisible. It is that dimension of 1950s Japan that I examine in this article. I do not reject the view that crucial transformations of Japanese society were taking place. I also recognize that the great majority of Japanese people embraced peace. However, I do reject the assumption that Japan in that period had turned its back on the wars of 1937–1945. Nor did the soldiers all disappear; nor was it a time when the population succumbed – willingly or unwillingly – to amnesia. In fact, quite the opposite was occurring: people craved information about the war. Not only did they reflect on the events of the previous twenty years, but they also engaged actively with a range of tangible issues left over from the past conflicts, including the question of repatriation, an issue dealt with by Beatrice Trefalt. When people did talk about the war, moreover, it was not just the “pacificism” of the highbrow leftist intellectuals. And, as is suggested by the early work of Guillain, Kinoshita and Morris, and more recently by Seraphim, former soldiers were everywhere to be seen. Furthermore, military men, far from being despised, could be under certain circumstances very politically and culturally attractive in 1950s Japan.

Undoubtedly, Japan in the 1950s was a nation in the process of rapidly remodelling. I argue, however, that ongoing legacies of the war cannot be separated from that process of remodelling. War remained a much more dynamic issue in 1950s Japan than has previously been recognized, not only because of the new Cold War and the hostilities in Korea, but also because the earlier conflicts were far from forgotten. In Britain, the “remarkable shared experience” of war, according to Peter Hennessy, was a crucial part of the 1950s political and social climate. It was no less important in Japan, even if, for the Japanese, there could be no “august glow of victory” as there was for the British. Moreover, for 1950s Japan the wars of 1937–1945 were more than just a memory. Japanese society was still connected with the war in profound, complex and sometimes

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7 Ienaga 1978, p. 251.
10 Trefalt 2007.
13 Connelly 2004, p. 11.
contradictory ways. It is easy to forget that in this period people were still learning basic information about the events of 1937–1945: in fact, much about the war was being processed for the first time. Even the fashionable expression “it is no longer the post-war period” (mohaya senso de wa nai), coined by the critic Nakano Yoshio before it was picked up in the government’s White Paper, originally was meant as a call for Japan to move on from a preoccupation with the war. In other words, it sprang from a conviction that the Japanese people were still highly conscious – indeed too conscious – of the war. According to Nakano, they needed to move on. More specifically, they needed to change their thinking to suit Japan’s new status in the world as a small country with no empire, and to abandon outdated attitudes toward Japan and other countries that were based on their wartime roles.14

During the military occupation that lasted until 1952, reminders of war and defeat were never far from the press or from the streets, at least in the major cities, where Occupation soldiers were plainly visible. Significant war-related issues that occupied the press for the rest of the decade included the lack of Japanese sovereignty over Okinawa, the presence of American troops on military bases in Japan, and the failure to re-establish diplomatic and political relations with China or the Soviet Union. Also helping to fill the newspapers were the continuing suffering of atom bomb victims and the irradiation of a Japanese fishing crew in 1954 at Bikini Atoll. On a day-to-day level, many Japanese were still waiting for news of their loved ones, or hoping for their return. Many, too, were still connected in one way or another with the Japanese military, even though it technically was defunct. War pensions in particular remained a hot political issue during the 1950s, especially in the latter part of the decade.

Continuing connections with the war, in turn, were an integral part of the evolving sense of nation in Japan, and help to explain why the idea of “nation” itself survived so strongly in the post-war period despite a high level of distrust of the state. Japan’s war had been very much a national project, and reminders of that war functioned to keep the category of the nation at the forefront of public discussion and of people’s consciousness. Reminders of the war raised issues of national pride and of interpretation of the national past, recalled a time of apparent unity, and raised new questions about loyalty, patriotism and the nature of national heroes. Moreover, military issues and some military values, far from being eliminated, remained prominent in mainstream conceptions of the nation. In 1950s Japan, nationalism – in the sense of discourses and behaviour that emphasized the primacy of nation above any other form of collective identity – could still be associated with the military. Men of both the old and the new military made their presence felt in no uncertain terms: politically, culturally and socially they were conspicuously active. To an extent, they were still considered to embody laudable virtues that were necessary for national well-being.

Two factors help to explain why the dynamism of war as a social, political and cultural issue in the 1950s has not been adequately recognized in analyses of the period. Both of them stem from a failure to grasp the swiftly shifting circumstances of the decade, especially its early years. Firstly, understandings of the 1950s tend to be based too much on an image of members of the former military as embittered, rejected and socially isolated.

14 Nakano 1956. See also “Sengo’ e no ketsubetsu” 1956 and “Henshū kōki” 1956.
Such an image is broadly accurate for the immediate post-war years, but fails to take account of the rapid changes that took place in Japan from at least 1950 onwards, thanks to, first, the “reverse course” evident by then in both the Occupation forces and the Japanese government; second, the onset of the Korean War; third, the beginnings of rearmament in Japan; fourth, the depurging of members of the former military; and fifth, the Communist victory in China’s civil war. As Robert Guillain, Hanji Kinoshita and Ivan Morris all pointed out decades ago, such developments contributed greatly to the steady rehabilitation of ex-soldiers, raising their political and social profile significantly.15

Secondly, in constructing their interpretations of the post-war period, researchers have tended to rely to a considerable extent on debates among intellectuals, and on the monthly magazines to which they contributed. One important cultural trend in the 1950s, however, was precisely the rapid rise of more populist large-circulation weekly news magazines (shūkanshū). Along with television, these magazines played their own part in reducing the social and cultural gap between city and country, and, from the second half of the 1950s onwards, in creating a much more unified national culture.16 As for their content, the world according to Shukan asahi (Asahi Weekly) is very different from the world according to Sekai (The World) and Chūō kōron (Central Review). In the latter, intellectuals frequently debate the meaning of pacifism as the basis of Japanese identity; in the former, by contrast, there appears an abundance of straightforward stories relating to war criminals, former soldiers and other matters associated with the military and the war. The difference between the two groups of sources is stark, and at first quite shocking for a researcher conditioned by more standard views of the 1950s.

Partly because of the focus on debates among intellectuals, it is the peace and anti-nuclear movements that are often thought to sum up Japanese attitudes to war in the 1950s, along with a supposed rush towards war “amnesia”. Because scholars in Japan and the West have usually privileged the “left intellectual” perspective over that of the ordinary Japanese, we are much more familiar with 1950s debates about pacifism than with the activities of the large associations representing former soldiers, or those of the lobby groups advocating the release of convicted war criminals. Undeniably, the desire for peace was a prominent strand of all the major discourses in Japanese society in the 1950s. It took some time before the anti-nuclear movement grew into a mass campaign;17 also slow to emerge was the truth about damage caused by the atomic bombings;18 but undoubtedly the desire to end wars was very strong. In the 1950s, even Yasukuni Shrine professed pacifism.19

Often overlooked is the fact that rather than merely directing society towards a more peaceful future, pacifism inevitably recalled the war, keeping it at the forefront of people’s consciousness. The war was the necessary “negative backdrop” to discussions of pacifism.20 Even in highbrow monthly journals, the emphasis on peace was often

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16 Yamamoto Akira, quoted in Oguma 2002, p. 293.
19 Akazawa 2005, pp. 60–90.
20 The term is used in connection with anti-fascism in West Germany, in Knischewski and Spittler 1997, p. 248.
inseparable from recollections of wartime life, as shown in regular issues marking the anniversary of Japan's defeat in August each year, in which readers detailed their own wartime experiences. The pacifism espoused by Yasukuni Shrine, too, was grounded firmly in mourning for fallen soldiers and civilians and in concern for the surviving victims of war. Thus, pacifist discourses recalled the recent war very directly. The more important point, however, is that involvement in pacifist projects of any kind was simply not the only, nor even the primary, way in which ordinary people engaged with the war in the 1950s, and scholarly emphasis on such projects may give a distorted view of what was happening in that decade. As we have seen, a diverse array of issues continued to connect people with the war, with its constant reminder of the "national" unit, and throughout the 1950s, war-related stories were rarely, if ever, absent from the news. In both political discourse and in daily life, many other reminders of war were much more prominent than the peace and anti-nuclear movements. At the very least, we can say that pacifist discourses were not the whole story of people's attitudes toward World War II during the 1950s.

Several authors have illuminated the ways in which the wars of 1937–1945 were remembered and commemorated in 1950s Japan. Often, however, their works imply a society looking back on a series of completed events. Thus, these scholars tend to emphasize themes such as loss, remembering and forgetting – all of which assume that the events in question are considered to be over. According to Yoshikuni Igarashi, memories of the war were suppressed in political discourse; popular culture, on the other hand, provided at least some opportunities for its audiences to "return" to and "exorcise" what Igarashi calls "the monstrous past". While acknowledging that certain "narrative devices" in Japanese society in the 1950s did attempt to address the impact of the war directly, Igarashi is mostly concerned with indirect cultural representations of the losses suffered by Japanese people in the war. Igarashi’s examination of the retrospective reflections on the war embedded in a variety of cultural forms is astute. On the other hand, traces of the war were not as elusive in Japanese society in the 1950s as his analysis implies. Reminders of the war, in fact, were everywhere.

For James J. Orr, the dominant trend in Japanese war memory has been to claim the status of war victims, while downplaying the "consciousness of self as victimizer". According to Orr, the discourses of war victimhood "reached a critical period of common acceptance" in Japan in the decade from 1955 to 1965, and were accordingly reflected in a wide variety of cultural forms, including school textbooks, films and novels. Similarly, Naoko Shimazu suggests that for a long period, prevailing notions of victimhood were not questioned in Japan, with the exception of "the initial decade of intense self-criticism and soul-searching by left-wing intellectuals". "Victim consciousness" is undoubtedly a significant strand in Japanese war memory, in the 1950s and beyond. On the other hand, however, as Trefalt has noted in her book on the return of army "stragglers" to Japan, no single discourse about the war or the military in the post-war period ever went

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21 Akazawa 2005, pp. 60–90.
22 Igarashi 2000, pp. 4–5, 105.
24 Shimazu 2003, p. 115.
uncontested. The decade was a dynamic one, and multiple views jostled for prominence. Understandings of the past based on Japanese victimhood, like other versions of the past, were constantly subject to renegotiation. This article will show that Japan's war effort in some circumstances could even inspire pride; certainly, not all military values were dismissed in the 1950s.

Moreover, close attention to the social, political and cultural conditions of the 1950s reveals that war issues spilled well beyond any division between victimhood and acknowledgment of responsibility: the legacies of war were still a great deal messier than that. In actuality, soldiers and military issues were inescapable in the 1950s, politically, culturally and emotionally — and not just in the well-known case of intellectual debates about war responsibility. The continuing focus on war-related issues was not primarily a matter of navel-gazing, of nostalgia or a preoccupation with the past. Most people in the 1950s were grappling with the present, not ruminating on the past, and private concerns were what took centre stage most of the time. Many issues relating to war, however, were private and contemporary concerns, or at least affected significant numbers of people in their daily lives. This is not to say that there was any necessary agreement on basic issues, or even on the question of which war it was that mattered. The academic Hidaka Rokurō remarked in 1956, for example, that for university students, who by then barely remembered the war anyway, the "war" referred only to the conflict in the Pacific, against the United States and its allies. To them the war with China meant nothing. At precisely this time, the intellectual Tsurumi Shunsuke invented the term "fifteen-year war" to describe the period from 1931 to 1945, in an effort to highlight the war with China, which he, too, considered to be already forgotten. During the 1950s, then, war meant a dynamic and unstable set of issues, but it certainly was not invisible.

The vitality of the war as a major theme in political, social and cultural discourse in 1950s Japan can be examined in a variety of ways. Here, I deal with four central topics, drawing a substantial part of my material from weekly magazines and other contemporary writings. First, I examine the involvement of military veterans in formal politics. High politics do matter, and consciousness of the war in the 1950s was by no means confined to some non-political realm of Japanese society. Former soldiers were conspicuous in politics, both in the sense of active participation in movements in civil society agitating for political goals, and in direct electoral politics. Second, I analyse issues relating to Class B and C war criminals, because those who remained imprisoned constituted a very direct and tangible link with the war, and because the popular press during the 1950s was full of reports about them. Third, I discuss the war as a cultural theme in an examination of the cinema. Films were tremendously popular in 1950s Japan. In this period before television had reduced the size of cinema audiences, films attracted a truly national audience. Because a great many war movies were shown, films must be considered an important influence on and reflection of the reconstructed war experience. Fourth, I point to the most important evidence indicating that a soldier could become a cultural hero in 1950s

25 Trefalt 2003, pp. 9, 179.
26 Hidaka 1956, pp. 50–51.
Japan – the enormous public success of Kaji, the star of the war novel and film *Ningen no jō ken* (The Human Condition).

**Politics and Soldiers**

In the 1950s, former members of both the army and the navy were conspicuous and active in politics at local, regional and national levels. They formed groups for mutual support that agitated in their members' interests and in some cases had wider political goals. After 1952 they published numerous military magazines. Far from being universally reviled, some of them were elected to the national parliament with record numbers of votes. Thus, former soldiers were still very much part of the "imagined community" of Japanese people, as well as being deeply involved in day-to-day community life. So, to an extent, were members of the new military. Though enlistment in the *Jieitai*, or Self-Defence Force, was not high in the 1950s, it was acknowledged by some to be an important source of employment for second and third sons from rural areas, just as the old military had been. Many of the first graduating class of the Self-Defence University (*Bōei daigaku*) in 1957, on the other hand, were the sons of the war dead and of former soldiers; of these, nearly half were said to be eldest sons.

After the massive depurge of former military officers in October 1951, many local groups of ex-officers were either established or revived, despite continuing splits among the former military. In June 1956, the national-level *Sen'yū dantai rengōkai* (Federation of War Comrades' Associations) was formed in Tokyo, though with substantial rural membership. Its inauguration ceremony began with a requiem service for the war dead. Two thousand representatives of its constituent organizations attended, from forty-two out of Japan's forty-six prefectures. Initial membership was stated to be 800,000. Later the same year, the Federation was reorganized as the *Nihon gōyū renmei* (Japan Community Friends' League). Some members wore military uniform to the inauguration ceremony of this body.

This was no small, isolated or quiet group. According to *Shikan asahi*, the new association's membership was over a million, making it the largest incorporated body in Japan, larger than the Socialist Party. The magazine matter-of-factly identified the League as the latest incarnation of the pre-1945 Imperial Reservists' Association. The League's president was ex-general Ueda Kenkichi, former Commander-in-Chief of the Kwantung Army. It boasted members in every social class and every prefecture, and was well supported by business interests and by government. Its goals included revision of the 1946 constitution – the League's managing director, at least, wanted an autonomous constitution under which the position of the emperor would be strengthened so that he would be more than a mere "symbol". His preferred version of the constitution would

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28 See, for example, Ōe 1969, pp. 389, 390, 417.
29 "Bōei daigaku dai ichi go" 1957, pp. 7–8.
32 "Ikiteiru rōhei" 1956, p. 4.
33 Ibid.
also emphasize patriotism and confirm Japan's right of self-defence. Meanwhile, numerous smaller, private groups of ex-servicemen and civilians also continued to exist, often aiming to restore nationalist feeling among the Japanese people and enhance Japan's defence capacity.34

In 1958, ex-servicemen's groups also successfully lobbied for an increase in the rate of pensions for ex-servicemen and their families. They were hardly discreet in their efforts. Big rallies and parades were held in Tokyo and elsewhere during the parliamentary debate on the 1958 budget, and petitions in blood were submitted to the Prime Minister.35 At one point, groups of ex-soldiers dressed in their old uniforms and equipped with a megaphone noisily camped out at Yasukuni Shrine.36 Shukan asahi suggested that the campaigners for higher pensions constituted the quintessential political pressure group of 1958, providing a model for other groups to follow.37

Perhaps most surprisingly of all, in terms of standard views of the 1950s, prominent former military men were very successful in national politics. In the first election after the mass depurge, former colonel Tsuji Masanobu was elected to the Lower House in 1952. Tsuji, a noted military strategist associated particularly with the Japanese conquest of Singapore, had been listed by the British as a war criminal, but had avoided arrest by disguising himself as a Buddhist monk and travelling around South-East Asia and China for three years after August 1945. In 1953 he was again elected to the Diet as an independent with the impressive number of 50,000 votes. He succeeded again in 1955 with 84,000 votes and in 1958 with 46,000 votes. Tsuji's electoral victories, and the support of the various ex-servicemen's associations, encouraged other former military officers to stand for election. A number of them were notably successful from 1953 onwards, including former general Ugaki Kazushige, who had been Army Minister as well as Governor-General of Korea, and former admiral Nomura Kichisaburō. In April 1953, Ugaki was elected to the Upper House with over 500,000 votes, the greatest number received by any candidate in the entire election, while Nomura was also elected to the Upper House in a by-election in 1954 with over 254,000 votes.38

The apparent electoral appeal of candidates who were former military officers does not mean that the public was militarist. Indeed, the ex-soldier candidates usually took care to distance themselves from pre-war jingoism, concentrating instead on "restoring traditional national virtues, pride in one's country, and respect for established social patterns".39 Many emphasized democracy and people's rights for good measure. Trefalt has pointed out that in the middle of the 1950s, many people in Japan did have a fairly positive attitude to the former military and the values it promoted.40 What attracted voters seems to have been the former military officers' continuity with the past, and their perceived embodiment of

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34 Ibid., pp. 6-7; Morris 1960, pp. 240, 243.
35 Morris 1960, p. 267, n. 2.
36 "Zadankai: sayonara 1958 nen" 1958, p. 34.
37 Ibid.
39 Ibid., p. 230.
40 Trefalt 2003, pp. 71-72.
laudable personal qualities: as Ivan Morris commented, by 1952, in the context of the "reverse course", once-despised former military leaders often appeared to be "the trustworthy repositories of the solid national virtues". In particular, on the evidence of election results, having been a general or admiral "was ceasing to be a stigma, except in the eyes of left-wing voters, and often it was a distinct political advantage". Though jingoism associated with earlier periods may have been eschewed, there were nevertheless resonances with the past. In an eerie echo of the 1930s, for example, prominent former military men once again argued explicitly or implicitly that Japan was facing a military and spiritual crisis, this time originating in the threat of Communism, and that it was military men who would play the key role in resolving the crisis.

Military men, then, had gravitated back to politics – that is, to the new, democratic politics, not to some version of the old, oligarchic politics. They were winning elections on local and national levels. In many ways this is not so surprising after all. If military men had not been involved in politics, their absence would have left a considerable void, in terms of people with experience of politics and of leadership. Moreover, although voters may have despised the actions of the old military as a whole, they trusted some former soldiers as individuals. Certain military men still appeared to embody qualities such as sacrifice, loyalty and bravery, and these remained important values in the 1950s. People were still concerned about apparent social weakness and spiritual decay, and saw a need for national renovation, even if the context was radically different after 1945 and after the end of the Occupation. Military men still represented leadership and service as few others did, and such perceptions did not vanish overnight.

Class B and C War Criminals

Another group of soldiers to attract considerable attention in the 1950s were those who were in prison after being convicted of war crimes. Though this might seem to be the hardest group to reassimilate into some kind of imagined national community, in fact in 1950s Japan that is exactly what was happening. A very large number of reports appeared in the popular press about these former soldiers, and in some cases their letters and diaries were published. Such publicity not only kept the war in the news, but also helped to soften public attitudes towards those in prison, and to introduce them to the public not as war criminals, but as humans; as subordinate soldiers caught in circumstances not of their own making; as soldiers who, however misguided, had been fighting sincerely for the nation; and in some cases as soldiers who in the past had committed unquestionably reprehensible acts, but had sincerely repented of their mistakes.

A comparison with West Germany in the 1950s is instructive. Just as in West Germany, lobby groups working on behalf of the Japanese prisoners exerted considerable political pressure to secure leniency for convicted war criminals, showing that in both countries, the initiative in this period in keeping war-related issues before the public rested at least as much

42 Ibid., pp. 245–46.
with private individuals and associations as it did with political elites. At the time, the Cold War environment was weakening US opposition, at least, to those pressing for the release of war criminals in both countries, especially as official American attention turned more to present enemies than to past crimes. The remaining Japanese prisoners were indeed released by the end of the decade, as were German prisoners in US captivity.

Class B and C war criminals are much less well known than the prominent leaders tried from 1946 to 1948 in Tokyo as Class A criminals. Trials for “ordinary war crimes” were staged by seven Allied countries in forty-nine courtrooms in South-East Asia, China, Australia and Japan between October 1945 and April 1951. Of the 5,700 defendants, 984 were sentenced to death, 475 to life imprisonment and 2,944 to other prison terms. Some remained in prison in the places where they had been tried, while others were held in Sugamo Prison in Tokyo, first under the jurisdiction of the Occupation forces and then, after 1952, of the Japanese government. Even after administrative control of Sugamo Prison shifted to the Japanese government, however, Article II of the San Francisco Peace Treaty stipulated that the countries that had conducted the trials retained the power to grant clemency, reduce sentences and grant parole.

Around the time the peace treaty took effect, a campaign for the release of war criminals began in Japan. In addition to press articles, memoirs of imprisoned war criminals, written under pseudonyms so as not to endanger any prospects of release, played their part, while also contributing to the boom from the late 1940s onwards in the publication of memoirs and fictional works dealing with the war. In the immediate post-war period, in the context of an initial general reaction against all military men and their families, the Japanese public apparently tended not to distinguish Class B and C war criminals from those convicted of Class A crimes in terms of war culpability. Prisoners’ memoirs, as well as reporting in weekly magazines, seem to have helped foster a growing feeling amongst the Japanese public that a distinction should be made.

Katō Tetsutarō, for example, began writing in Sugamo Prison in secret in 1951, though he was not identified as the author of those writings until some years later. The son of a scholar, Katō had graduated from Keiō University and worked for the North China Development Corporation before being conscripted into the army and becoming a second lieutenant. He first fought in China, and then served as director of several prison camps in Japan. At the end of the war he went into hiding, but was arrested in 1948, tried and sentenced to death. On MacArthur’s orders, however, he was retried and given a prison sentence instead. He was released in 1958.
In October 1952, Katō contributed an article to the monthly magazine *Sekai*, under a pseudonym.51 He also contributed two more essays, each under a different name, to a collection of war criminals' writings published in 1953 entitled *Are kara shichi nen* (Seven Years Later), a book in fact edited by his own father, who also worked under cover of a pseudonym.52 There were further ruses, designed perhaps to make it harder for the authorities to discover who had written the essays, or perhaps to make it appear that a larger number of convicted criminals was writing. In one of the essays in *Seven Years Later*, for example, Katō (writing under the pseudonym “Shimura Ikuo”) posed as a former war criminal who had been released from prison. He noted at the beginning of the essay that he was writing in semi-fictionalized vein, without giving any clue as to where the boundary between “truth” and “fiction” lay, so that it is impossible to tell how much, if any, of what follows is factual. In this essay, “Shimura Ikuo” claimed that while he was still in prison, he had accidentally discovered the last, secret written testimony of an executed prisoner, to whom he gave yet another pseudonym - Sergeant Akagi.53 The condemned prisoner’s testimony is then reproduced. In Katō’s other essay in *Seven Years Later*, he posed as a war criminal recently released from Sugamo Prison under the terms of an amnesty granted by Chiang Kai-shek to war criminals from the China front.54 Katō’s writings eventually formed the basis of a two-part television drama shown in 1958, entitled *Watashi wa kai ni naritai* (I Want to Be a Limpet), and then of a film by the same name.55 The television series and film, however, departed significantly from Katō’s own circumstances in centring on a former barber who was executed for war crimes. Other prominent works on war criminals include the book and film *Kabe atsuki heya* (The Thick-Walled Room).56

Certain themes were common in the writings of the convicted war criminals. Many of them expressed anger that lesser figures like themselves were being made to pay for the crimes of national political leaders or, indeed, the emperor.57 This attitude emerges forcefully in the passage of Katō Tetsutarō’s writing from which the title *I Want to Be a Limpet* eventually was drawn. In one of his two essays published in *Seven Years Later*, originally dated 20 October 1952, “Sergeant Akagi” rages against the emperor. Believing he was fighting the war for the sake of the emperor, he had faithfully obeyed the emperor’s orders, no matter how distasteful they might have been, and never once neglected his military duty. Yet the emperor did not save him from his current fate. He wanted to believe it was because the emperor remained unaware of the suffering of the convicted

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51 Katō Tetsutarō 1994a.
52 Iizuka 1953.
53 Katō Tetsutarō 1994b.
54 Katō Tetsutarō 1994c.
55 The screenplay of the television drama appears in Hashimoto 1959. A major copyright dispute erupted, as Katō Tetsutarō was credited only for the “title” and the document known as the “testament” (*isho*), which is the part containing the passage about becoming a limpet, discussed below. The film was directed by Hashimoto Shinobu and released in 1959. The title is often translated as “I Want to Be a Shellfish”.
war criminals, but had eventually abandoned this belief. Addressing the emperor directly, he said that he knew he would be executed; in fact, he had obeyed the emperor's orders unto death. Yet the only things he had ever received from the emperor were seven or eight cigarettes on the China front, and some cakes in the field hospital. The cigarettes proved to be very costly: he would eventually pay for them with his life, and in the meantime with prolonged suffering. He refused to be silenced any longer, and considered his debt to the emperor to be cancelled. If he should be reborn as a Japanese after his execution, "Akagi" insisted, he would never again be a soldier. In fact, he did not want to be a Japanese at all, or even a human being. Nor did he want to be a cow or a horse, as such animals were harassed by humans too. If he had to be reborn, he wanted to come back as a limpet. A limpet clings to a rock deep in the ocean, without having to worry about anything. Because it knows nothing, it is neither happy nor sad. It feels neither pain nor itchiness, never gets a headache, is never taken as a soldier, never experiences war, and has no anxieties about wife or children. So, it is best to be a limpet.58

Senior Japanese officers were perhaps an even more common target of blame than political leaders or the emperor. Takahashi Saburō and Yoshida Yutaka have both observed that criticism and distrust of higher-ranking officers was a common theme in the large number of memoirs and other works about the war that were published in this period,59 and works by convicted war criminals are no exception. Katō's "Sergeant Akagi" complained that there were hardly any decent people among senior Japanese officers. They treated ordinary soldiers with contempt, and did not hesitate to deceive them. At war crimes trials, they sacrificed their subordinates without a qualm.60 Writing this time as the released war criminal from the China front, Katō repeated that subordinates had been forced to take responsibility for their superiors' wartime actions in Asia, while the real perpetrators had returned safely to Japan. By and large, the big fish escaped early, realizing they were at risk, while the small fish were trapped. In China, he claimed, it was very rare for anyone with money to be tried as a war criminal. They paid their bribes and escaped.61

Such claims were not frivolous. There were indeed cases in which lower-ranking personnel took responsibility for actions ordered by their superiors.62 This was perhaps especially likely for those who were arrested for crimes against prisoners of war. Of all crimes allegedly committed by the Japanese military, the Allies focused very strongly on these. As Utsumi Aiko notes, treatment of prisoners of war was a major point of dispute in all three classes of war crimes trials. In Classes B and C, according to official figures, 17 per cent of those prosecuted, 27 per cent of those found guilty and 11 per cent of those given the death sentence were connected with prisoner-of-war camps.63 Japanese leaders had reason to expect that the Allies would zealously pursue issues relating to prisoners of war; apart from anything else, the Potsdam Declaration of 26 July 1945 had warned that after

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58 Katō Tetsutarō 1994b, pp. 26–27.
61 Katō Tetsutarō 1994c, pp. 56–58. On B and C criminals as "scapegoats" see also Hanayama 1955, pp. 73–75.
Japan's surrender, “stern justice shall be meted out to all war criminals, including those who have visited cruelties upon our prisoners”. On 20 August 1945, a Japanese order was issued to prisoner-of-war camps to transfer people likely to be held responsible for the operation of the camps to other duties, and to destroy incriminating documents. In these circumstances, it is likely that senior figures did try to escape, and that their subordinates may have been left to take responsibility for the operation of the camps.

In their writings, convicted war criminals also alleged ill-treatment by their captors, whether in Sugamo or elsewhere. While imprisoned Class A war crimes suspects appear to have been treated well, “Sergeant Akagi”, for one, refers to American soldiers as “white devils” and claims that B and C criminals were mistreated in Sugamo. They were desperately hungry, he wrote, being allowed less food than other prisoners in the same gaol. “Akagi” also described torture allegedly practised by the Americans, and stated further that the gaolers routinely performed autopsies on executed prisoners, probably without permission and for dubious purposes. Writing under his own name in 1959, Katō again alleged that he had been treated cruelly in an American military hospital and was given inadequate food and water. In his first published essay he had also claimed that up until 1952, war criminals in Sugamo who were eligible to apply for parole would not be granted it unless they bribed the American chairman of the parole board. Regardless of the truth or otherwise of these assertions, they undoubtedly served to increase public sympathy with the imprisoned war criminals, and further to entrench the sense that whatever they may have done, the other side was also to blame, and had not been called to account.

Press reports and writings by war criminals also stressed the errors, misunderstandings and injustices that were associated with some trials. People were said to have been arrested because their surnames were the same or similar to those of the real criminals. They were also said to have been arrested for acting on orders from their superiors, and disadvantaged in court because of the lack of skill of Allied military personnel acting as interpreters. Again, such claims were not without merit. People occasionally were wrongly identified, and in the trials themselves there were many instances where insufficient interpreters or defence lawyers were available, possibly leading to unjust results.

Further, it was claimed that Japanese arrested in the prison camps had been held responsible for things that in truth had been beyond their control, either because goods were in very short supply, or because they were acting in accordance with decisions taken at a much higher level. Katō's “Sergeant Akagi”, for example, had been sentenced to death

64 Article 10, Potsdam Declaration, in Maki 1961, p. 122.
66 See Hanayama 1955.
69 Katō Tetsutarō 1994a, pp. 79-80.
70 Katō Tetsutarō 1994c, p. 57.
71 "Sense saiban o sabaku" 1958, pp. 4-7.
for withholding medicine from prisoners of war. Yet medicine for virtually everyone was
in short supply. According to this essay, there was none in Japan — especially not the
expensive medicines allegedly demanded by the prisoners — so there was no way "Akagi"
could have supplied it.73 In 1959, Katō claimed that prisoners at the camp he directed in
Niigata had insisted on receiving the same treatment that they would have received in the
US military, including the same number of cigarettes: thirty per day. Only six could be
provided, which in any case was more than the Japanese soldiers got. He did his best for
the prisoners, Katō maintained, but heating fuel and food were in short supply for all, and
there were not enough cigarettes. It is the unfounded complaints of such prisoners, it is
implied, that led to the arrests of Japanese soldiers after the war.74 Ordinary soldiers, the
essay argues, were also being held responsible for the decisions of much more powerful
people. It was not "Sergeant Akagi" who had brought prisoners of war to Japan, or decided
that those not gravely ill should work: at fault, according to Akagi's supposed testimony,
were the owners of munitions factories who sought to make a profit, and the government
bureau administering the prisoners, which did exactly what the factory-owners wanted it
to do. The head of the bureau, however, had received a light sentence, clearly because of a
deal with the prosecutor, while people like Akagi were executed.75 The message of the
weekly magazines and of the prisoners' writings, in sum, was clear: readers should not
assume that those convicted were the real criminals, as the Allies were unfair and the rich
and powerful used their influence to escape justice.

One further message was that at least some of the criminals convicted in Classes B and
C had since repented of their actions and acknowledged their guilt. The collections Seven
Years Later and The Thick-Walled Room included trenchant criticism of the war, and
reflection on the writers' own actions. In Utsumi's view, this was one reason for the
marked public response they generated.76 On the other hand, sometimes it was the war as
a whole or war in general that the writers rejected, a stance that tended to diffuse
responsibility to the entire world or to humanity, and thus to downplay any specific
responsibility of Japan's or the individual's. Katō Tetsutarō was in the "peace group" in
Sugamo Prison identified by Utsumi.77 His fictional war criminal from the China front, for
example, wrote that wars of invasion were themselves a crime, and that in a war, war
crimes were thus impossible to avoid. Future conflicts would be averted only if people on
all sides freely admitted all of their own misdeeds.78 The effect of the essay, however, is to
create a sort of rough equivalence between Japanese war crimes, which are admitted and
regretted, and allegedly cruel Allied treatment of war crimes suspects, which by contrast
had not been acknowledged by those responsible. By the end of this essay, everybody — or
nobody — is guilty.

74 Katō Tetsutarō 1994d, p. 111.
75 Katō Tetsutarō 1994b, p. 32.
76 Utsumi 1994, p. 265.
77 Ibid., pp. 264–65.
In *Shukan asahi*, there was considerable sympathy for Class B and C war criminals, though not much for those convicted of Class A crimes. The magazine played its part in establishing the difference. A subtle emphasis on social class, or military hierarchy, was evident. A former chaplain from Sugamo Prison, for example, was quoted as saying that people assumed that Class B and C war criminals were like those in Class A — that they, too, had led the people into a useless war. This was not the case, however. Those in Classes B and C were there because they were conscripted, and many had just been following orders. The public, then, should be more sympathetic to them. 79 It is probably no accident that Katō Tetsutarō, himself a university graduate and son of a translator of the works of Tolstoi, created “Sergeant Akagi” as a person of presumably much humbler origins than himself. The inference to be drawn from the writings of Katō and others was that the plight of the convicted criminals was one that could have befallen any ordinary soldier simply doing his duty.

Such writings by convicted war criminals appear to have had an impact on the authorities and the public. The essay published by Katō in *Sekai* in October 1952 80 caused a considerable stir in the prison, and authorities conducted an unsuccessful search for the author. Katō’s essay also encouraged other prisoners to write. 81 Films, too, played their part in encouraging sympathy for convicted war criminals. The film version of *I Want to Be a Limpet* appeared in 1959, but *Sugamo no haha* (Mother/s of Sugamo), a film about war criminals transferred from other countries to Sugamo, had been produced as early as 1952, 82 and *The Thick-Walled Room*, with its central idea that the real criminals escaped, while most of those in prison were innocent, was completed in 1953, though not released until 1956. Even Tsurumi Shunsuke, well known as a left-wing intellectual, seems to have sympathized with the war criminals on viewing *The Thick-Walled Room*, despite his disapproval of the war and of patriotism. The film, he felt, showed that those convicted as Class B and C criminals had been following the orders of their superiors. They had been forced by the state to commit terrible deeds, and now the state had turned its back on those deeds and sought to rewrite the past. The prisoners, in short, were victims. 83

In the early 1950s, a public campaign for the release of the prisoners had begun. A national petition movement, entitled “ai no undo” (campaign of love), was launched in June 1952, with the support of a wide range of institutions and organizations, including prefectural and city authorities, the Red Cross, various religious groups and the Association of the Families of the Missing (Rusu kazoko dantai). Behind the scenes were a number of former soldiers, as well as lawyers who had worked at the war crimes trials. In the same month each house of parliament passed a resolution about the war criminals. Though the resolutions stopped short of calling for pardons for all prisoners, they did make a commitment to begin negotiations with other countries over such issues as the return of prisoners held overseas. 84

79 “Sensa saiban o sabaku” 1958, p. 9.
80 Katō Tetsutarō 1994a.
82 On *Sugamo no haha* see Miyagi 1991, pp. 144–47.
83 Tsurumi 1970a, p. 53.
84 Katō Tetsutarō 1994a, pp. 72–78.
Prominent among those campaigning on behalf of the war criminals were many politicians, some of whom were apparently conducting group interviews with prisoners from their own prefectures. It is evident that even at this early point, politicians expected clear electoral advantage from their support of Class B and C war criminals, indicating a significant degree of public awareness of and sympathy for the prisoners. Katō Tetsutarō wrote in his first published essay that one politician promised to free everyone if elected, apparently in ignorance of the clause of the San Francisco Peace Treaty that would have made such an act impossible. He wrote further that the Jiyūtō political party had formed an association to support war criminals (Senpan giin renmei, or Association of Parliamentary Members for War Criminals), which, in an attempt to retain an electoral advantage for itself, prevented members of other parties from joining. Other campaigners included journalists, who, according to Katō, were beginning to change their formerly negative attitude to the war criminals for fear of missing the boat on the question of their release.

A support association for the prisoners had also been formed in May 1952. Headed by the prominent businessman and politician Fujiwara Ginjirō, it listed among its members many powerful figures, including Ogata Taketora, Ugaki Kazunari, Gotō Fumio, Abe Nobuyuki, Arita Hachirō and Kishi Nobusuke. A declaration by the association stated that the imprisoned war criminals had fought for the nation (kokka), and that they were essentially victims created by the circumstances of defeat. The association called for pardons, sentence reductions, the return of prisoners overseas, and relief for prisoners and their families. Katō Tetsutarō concluded in his 1952 essay from prison that the association was in reality run by former military men, who were the driving force of the whole campaign on behalf of the imprisoned war criminals. In Katō's view, these men were actually the real criminals. Because of their power and influence they had easily been able to avoid trial themselves, and were now using the convicted criminals to restore their own political and social influence. It is hardly any wonder that the prison authorities began a thorough search for the author of this essay.

Though there seems to have been considerable expectation, on the part of both politicians and prisoners, that the prisoners might be released by the end of 1952, the last of them in fact were not freed until six years later. Katō walked free on 29 December 1958, just a week after the screening of the second and final part of the television version of I Want to Be a Limpet, which won the Education Minister's Prize, and some months before the release of the film. Issues surrounding Class B and C war criminals, then, had been before the public for almost the entire decade of the 1950s. Numerous members of the public had supported campaigns to free the prisoners, voted for politicians who promised to do so, and followed the stories of the prisoners in magazines and books, at the movies or on television. Politicians believed that supporting the prisoners won votes, and

85 Ibid., p. 68.
86 Ibid., pp. 68-72, 78.
87 Ibid., pp. 75-76.
88 Ibid., pp. 81-90.
89 Katō Tetsutarō 1994d, p. 105.
90 Hashimoto 1959.
film-makers believed people wanted to watch movies about them. This was hardly a society that had turned its back on the war, or that hated military men.

**War Films**

On the cultural front, war featured strongly in 1950s Japanese cinema. Film was tremendously important in Japan in that decade. Television was still new and extremely expensive; according to a government White Paper of 1956, on the other hand, every person in Japan went to the movies on average an astonishing ten times per year. Just as in Britain and the USA, World War II was a very popular cinematic theme. According to one critic, the war was the greatest topic in post-war Japanese film, especially in the first ten years after 1945. During the 1950s, the British and US publics wanted to see war films. So did the Japanese, and probably for much the same reasons, including “nostalgia for the unity of wartime, or a therapeutic pride in the glories of the past and a temporary escape from today’s doldrums... [or] the elementary entertainment value of conflict that finds its expression in action.” Arguably, in Japan as elsewhere, another reason was that “the public goes for the military man.” Once again, in film, the bravery, sacrifice and loyalty of the former military were on display, and audiences, especially men, responded enthusiastically.

From the point of view of 1950s Japan, much of the cinematic portrayal of war, of course, was deeply negative. Criticism and denunciation of war were expressed through a focus on a wide range of wartime experiences, including the oppression of wartime daily existence, the inhumanity of military life, events on the battlefield, the pilots’ lives in “special attack forces” (tokkōtai), and the atomic bombings. It is also true, as Orr has shown, that many war films portrayed the Japanese as victims. On the other hand, however, war films were much more complex than such straightforward interpretations suggest. Not all 1950s war films did centre on the Japanese as victims. Even those that did concentrate on the misery of war and the suffering of Japanese victims had other functions. Very few who had lived through the war, let alone those born too late, knew much about the basics of the conflict, especially about crucial battles in remote places. Films helped to establish the record of what had happened; and however much misery they recorded, they could also be read as accounts of Japanese stoicism and heroism, promoting, paradoxically, a kind of nostalgia for the past even while reinforcing a hatred of war.

Two vignettes may help to make the point. In 1953, a Tokyo cinema is screening *Task Force*, a US film made in 1949 starring Gary Cooper. *Task Force* had been intended as...
“both a dramatized history of naval aviation and an account of World War II carrier warfare” and incorporates actual battle footage. At this point, in the Tokyo cinema in 1953, footage of the mid-1942 Battle of Midway is showing. Applause breaks out from some quarters at the sight of the Japanese fleet, and again later, when the “special attack forces” appear. At another cinema in 1956, where *Nihon kaku tatakaeri* (*Japan Fought Like This*) is showing, people again reportedly sit mesmerized, holding their breaths in the scenes showing the *tokkōtai*, hoping the Japanese planes will hit the American ships. One member of the audience, a self-described opponent of war, admits later that he had been leaning forward in his seat, silently urging “Get them! Get them!” (*atare, atare*). To another, the film demonstrated the inaccuracy of the statement that “this is no longer the post-war period” (*mohaya sengo de wa nai*): watching the film made him conscious of the war’s continuing legacies. Specifically, it made him want to pursue the war responsibility of those who had prolonged the war, and it helped to explain why the low level of military pensions was so unfair.

A great many war films were shown, whether imported or locally made. According to one reckoning, 175 were produced in Japan between the day of defeat and 1963, counting only dramatic films (*geki eiga*). Moreover, they attracted sizeable audiences. *Task Force* (shown in Japan in 1953) and *Japan Fought Like This* (1956), both of which used actual newsreel footage of the war that had been supplied from American sources, played to full houses. *Japan Fought Like This*, which reportedly cost five million yen to make, grossed four million yen at a single cinema in Asakusa in Tokyo over the course of a week. At a showing attended by the reporter from *Shukan asahi*, people were sitting in the aisles. In 1953, the film *Taiheiyō no washi* (*Eagle of the Pacific*), which was about Admiral Yamamoto Isoroku, the architect of the Pearl Harbor attack, grossed 163 million yen to become the third-highest-ranking film of the year, beaten only by parts one and two of *Kimi no na wa* (*And Your Name Is*?), a romantic drama about two people who had been separated by the war.

Many films simply portrayed the misery of war. Amongst the best known is the 1950 *Kike wadatsumi no koe* (*Listen to the Voices of the Sea*), a tale of unrelieved misery, squalor, suffering and defeat in Imphal concentrating on a small unit of student conscripts and graduates and one youthful academic. The script was criticized as a caricature by one writer, who claimed that the characters represented ideological positions rather than real people, with all the officers egotistical and cruel, and all the former students humanistic and good. Even the bleakest films, however, could have double meanings. *Himeyuri no tō* (*A Tower of Lilies*) was a grim film about a nurse corps in the Battle of Okinawa that took a

100 “Sensō eiga to taishū” 1953.
102 Ibid., p. 10.
103 Miyagi 1991, p. 4.
104 “Eiga ‘Nihon kaku tatakaeri’ o mite” 1956, pp. 6, 9.
107 Mashita 1971.
One critic worried that what the film actually did, rather than arousing opposition to war among the audience as he would have liked, was to reveal the loyalty and solidarity of young Okinawan women, and thus to portray the war, probably unintentionally, as essentially an ethical undertaking. For the wartime generation, it would have been difficult to accept even cinematic versions of war as a “great game”, as British audiences apparently could; but already, it was different for the young. The youthful novelist Ishihara Shintarō, acknowledging in 1956 that he only knew the war at second hand, wrote that what war films conveyed to him was a sense of heroism, and he likened war to a professional wrestling match.

Audiences for the films dealing most directly with the war seem to have been disproportionately male, with young men as well as older men attending. According to one estimate, film audiences in this period were commonly 56 per cent male and 44 per cent female. Eighty per cent of the audience for Task Force, by contrast, was male on the day the Shukan asahin's observer went, and he remarked that the same had been true of an earlier war film, Senkan Yamato (Battleship Yamato). Tsurumi Shunsuke likewise reported in 1957 that he had seen the film Gunshin Yamamoto gensui to rengō kantai (The War Hero Admiral Yamamoto and the Combined Fleet) in a full house that was all male.

Commentators were nervous about the reactions of the audiences, worrying about whether the popularity of the films meant that militarism and fascism were staging a comeback. The media thus did not just report on the content of the films, but also gave extensive coverage to audience reactions. Trefalt has noted the anxiety manifested in the 1970s about public reactions to military figures and whether they should be interpreted as pro-war; evidently, in the 1950s war memory was already a topic that prompted anxiety. In the event, reactions to the films varied. Some people were just horrified, and comments on the misery of the soldier's lot and the huge and untenable cost of the war to Japan were common. Again, one definite factor in the different reactions was age: an observer in 1953 was already commenting on the gulf between those who had been to the battlefield and those who had not. Like survivors of a tragic mountaineering expedition, he said, those who had come back from the war wanted to revisit the scene of the disaster, if only by sitting in front of a screen.

In Japan Fought Like This (1956), some younger people who had not experienced the war directly were heard to laugh at a scene in the jungle in Guadalcanal, presumably because they considered the actions of Japanese soldiers to be merely ridiculous rather than commendably patriotic. A broader gap, between wartime

110 Ramsden 1998, p. 36.
111 Ishihara Shintarō, writing in Bungei shunju, July 1956, discussed in Hidaka 1956, pp. 50-51.
112 Minami 1957, p. 76.
114 Tsurumi 1970a, p. 49.
115 Trefalt 2003, pp. 154-56.
116 "Eiga 'Nihon kaku tatakaeri' o mitte" 1956, p. 5.
117 "Sensō eiga to taishū" 1953.
Japan and the Japan of the mid-1950s, was also evident to one observer, the novelist Nagai Tatsuo, who commented:

When the film was finished, I went outside. People were pouring out from the matinee session of the Kabukiza. In Ginza, you find a lively wave of humanity. Those people are connected with what was going on in the film. But where and how they are connected – that is an important thing to grasp.  

Such comments were linked with a rapidly emerging consciousness in the 1950s of a “generation gap” and the existence of a “post-war generation”. According to the sociologist Hidaka Rokurō, in 1956 the “generation gap” was already a common topic of conversation among schoolteachers, now that children born after the war were in the fourth and fifth grade, and even university students had only hazy memories of the war. By this time, a staple of the popular press was the survey or questionnaire displaying differing social and political attitudes among different age groups. There was a particular anxiety about sensitive issues such as patriotism and the war, as well as a keen interest in consumerism and youth culture.  

When Ishihara Shintarō won the Akutagawa Prize in 1956 for his short novel, Taiyō no kisetsu (Season of the Sun), describing a generation of hedonistic, irresponsible young people, many press articles and debates picked up the theme of the apparent arrival of a new generation with alien values – the “sun tribe” (taiyōzoku). In 1959, the novelist Ōe Kenzaburō, born in 1935 and a primary-school student at the war’s end, expressed a strong sense of the unique position of his generation: he and his peers, he asserted, were a special sort of Japanese, the children of the post-war period who had no country other than “post-war Japan”. Inevitably, the reactions of the newer generations to war issues and war films differed from those of their elders.  

Some viewers felt that watching the film Japan Fought Like This had only made them more anti-American and would increase the consciousness of the audience as Japanese (minzoku no ishiki). The film may have been intended as a contribution to peace, said one, echoing a statement by the film-maker, but what it actually did was to hammer home the theme of American material superiority to the point that it looked more like American propaganda. Angered by the film, the young conservative politician Nakasone Yasuhiro declared, as others did, that it was completely one-sided, and that the Japanese associated with making it had no pride in themselves as members of an independent nation. Their attitude, he complained, was that of the defeated nation under MacArthur.  

Other reactions were much simpler. Both curiosity and nostalgia are quite evident. As noted earlier, to some extent the Japanese people spent much of the 1950s simply learning about World War II. Atrocities committed by Japanese soldiers had been quickly made

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118 “Eiga Nihon kaku tatakaeri’ o mite” 1956, pp. 4, 8.
119 Hidaka 1956, pp. 50-51.
120 Examples include “Oya no kangae, ko no kangae” 1956; “Putatsu no sedai, sono 2” 1956.
121 On the impact of Ishihara’s novels in this period, see Sherif 2005. On the taiyōzoku phenomenon in films and weekly magazines, see Raine 2001, pp. 204-11.
122 Ōe 1959.
123 “Eiga ‘Nihon kaku tatakaeri’ o mite” 1956, pp. 6, 10-11, 13.
known after August 1945, with many more details emerging during the Tokyo War Crimes Trials,\textsuperscript{124} and accounts of the suffering of Japanese soldiers and civilians were also numerous. In 1945 and afterwards, however, many Japanese had only a sketchy understanding of what had actually happened in battles and normal military operations. Japanese propaganda during wartime had severely limited knowledge of Japanese losses and the actual conditions of fighting. Those on the ground knew a great deal, of course, but usually little more than what they themselves experienced. Those on the home front knew considerably less.\textsuperscript{125} The Battle of Midway, portrayed in \textit{Task Force}, is a good example: the truth of this naval debacle from Japan’s point of view had been comprehensively hidden from the Japanese public.\textsuperscript{126} In Japanese films made during the war itself, very little combat footage had been shown,\textsuperscript{127} a point that helps to explain the attraction of films like \textit{Task Force} and \textit{Japan Fought Like This}. Up to 1952, Occupation censorship had also played its part in restricting knowledge of wartime events, partly out of fear of reigniting Japanese militarism.\textsuperscript{128}

One critic attributed the great success of \textit{A Tower of Lilies}, the 1953 film about the nurse corps, to the desire to explore the history of the war without fear of the Americans, now that the Occupation and its censorship had ended.\textsuperscript{129} A commentator on \textit{Task Force} observed in 1953 that members of the audience who had been to the war were seeking to relive the experience through American eyes, given that the film was based on American footage, while those who had not been to the war, in a mostly male audience, were aware of the danger that they might be sent off to a future conflict, and were seeking on the screen an experience so far unknown to them.\textsuperscript{130} There was also a sense of nostalgia for the powerful shared experiences of wartime, and for the feeling of unity that many people believed war had engendered, even if in the wrong sort of cause. One of the things that drew audience applause in the 1953 film, apparently, was the very sound of certain words familiar from wartime and not heard much since then: words like “kamikaze” and “Zerosen” (the Zero fighter), for example.\textsuperscript{131} Even Tsurumi Shunsuke thought that \textit{The War Hero Admiral Yamamoto and the Combined Fleet} portrayed the good cheer and light-heartedness of the young fliers of the war, and the beauty of courageous youth.\textsuperscript{132} He later observed that though the war was a mistake from the beginning, for the Japanese people at least it had its brighter side. Wartime songs made him feel good because they recalled the emotion of self-sacrifice; the shared experience of the past, he noted, could not simply be jettisoned and rewritten from a post-war point of view.\textsuperscript{133}

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{124} Dower 1999, pp. 505–8.
\bibitem{125} For a comment by the film-maker, Nakano Gorō, to this effect, see “\textit{Eiga 'Nihon kaku tatakaeri' o mitte}” 1956, p. 6.
\bibitem{126} Dower 1993, p. 39.
\bibitem{127} Dower 1999, pp. 412–19.
\bibitem{128} Kiyomizu 1971, p. 360.
\bibitem{129} “\textit{Sensō eiga to taishū}” 1953, p. 14.
\bibitem{130} \textit{Ibid}.
\bibitem{131} Tsurumi 1970a, pp. 49–57.
\bibitem{132} Tsurumi 1970b.
\end{thebibliography}
Contemporary observers tended to comment that the large audiences for these films did not actually indicate a desire to return to militarism or fascism. But there was certainly surprise at Japan's prowess, perhaps a sense of relief that Japan's war had not been completely hopeless after all, and even national pride. Japanese audiences were hardly able to interpret the recent war as "the nation's last glory", as British audiences could; but I suspect that war films were popular in part because in a small way, they helped to rehabilitate masculinity in 1950s Japan after the disaster of a military defeat that, on a basic level, was attributable to male failure. One critic watching Japan Fought Like This, himself a former soldier, remarked that during the war, Japanese had heard only about how many ships had supposedly been sunk by the Japanese fleet, the number of direct hits against enemy targets, and so on. After the war, he continued, the population was informed that this was all wrong, and that Japanese forces had had no such success; in fact, everyone had died like a dog. Movie scenes showing the "special attack forces", however, revealed that it had not always been like that, and this partly explains the applause when American ships were hit. As a commentator on Task Force also remarked, Japanese people were accustomed to think of their military as small and weak, as it was at war's end, and as they had been encouraged to think of it since. Task Force, however, showed newsreel footage from an earlier stage of the war, making it clear, according to this observer, that the Japanese military had once been strong, that the US side had acknowledged this strength, and that Japanese forces had in fact fought well. To Japanese viewers, he continued, such a portrayal was certainly pleasing. One thirty-eight-year-old housewife said that though Japan had lost the war, the film made her proud of what her country had been.

Even for American audiences, it seems, Task Force, which included footage of a kamikaze attack, "created an emotional impact unequaled by most war films" because of the "sense of the horror of combat" it imparted. Clearly, American audiences were left with a real impression of Japanese power, though that power may have been suicidal. It is certainly not difficult to imagine the attraction for Japanese audiences of films suggesting Japanese military strength and valour in comparison to the misery, hopelessness and squalor of productions like Listen to the Voice of the Sea, or to see such films as balancing the general trend of presenting Japanese as victims of the war.

Film-makers' interest in war extended to earlier conflicts as well. Meiji tennō to Nichiro sensō (The Meiji Emperor and the Russo-Japanese War), made in 1957, was a blockbuster that grossed 542 million yen in its first seven months. Once again, the great majority of the viewers were male. The young social researcher Minami Hiroshi and his team spent four days interviewing patrons who had just seen the film, concluding that its biggest single attraction was the opportunity to admire the Meiji period as "the good old days" (jūruki

134 Connelly 2004, p. 11.
135 "Eiga 'Nihon kaku tatakaeri' o mite" 1956, pp. 4-5.
137 Ibid.
So, Minami noted with relief, the popularity of the film did not signify a revival of nationalism. In fact, according to Minami it was not the battle scenes that people most liked; rather, it was the more domestic scenes featuring the emperor, General Nogi Maresuke and other characters, which produced a nostalgia for the Meiji family system—a point that in itself worried Minami. The strongest audience reaction was to the scenes in which members of the Konoe regiment were taking leave of their families. Beyond that, older people tended to recommend the film on the grounds that it displayed a time of social unity rather than individualism, while younger people thought that it showed the misery of war. Such a finding suggests that for older people at least, the connotations of war in the 1950s were in some respects not far removed from what they had been in the 1930s, when some people could remember the conflicts with China in 1894–1895 and Russia in 1904–1905.

People might have gone to see war films in the 1950s for any number of reasons: because they always went to films, or for entertainment, or in search of historical understanding. Their reasons are not as important as the point that considerable numbers of people saw these movies, which in turn played a key role in constructing the war as past experience. The fact that people wanted to see such films also challenges several common assumptions about the 1950s. It is evident that many people did not just want to forget, nor just want to move on; in fact, the war loomed large in post-war consciousness.

**The Soldier as Hero: The Human Condition**

In 1956, arguably the most prominent popular hero of the 1950s made his fictional debut, to enormous acclaim. Schoolgirls appeared to be in love with him, men admired him and his creator was inundated with fan letters. That hero was a wartime soldier, namely Kaji, the central figure of Gomikawa Junpei’s monumental six-volume novel, *Ningen no joken* (The Human Condition), a work destined to become a radio serial and then a nine-hour film.

On the one hand, the figure of Kaji offers a sort of case study of the ways in which soldiers, including war criminals, had become humanized by the late 1950s; on the other, Gomikawa’s huge work continued to educate the Japanese public about the war and the personal dilemmas it prompted for some. At the same time, the book and film introduced a soldier who, although certainly caught in circumstances beyond his control, was much more of a hero than a victim. As such, Kaji represents both a synthesis and an extension of cultural understandings of the war in late-1950s Japan. As a military character, however, he was somewhat different from the stock soldiers of wartime propaganda, and thus Kaji also reveals something of the distance between idealized conceptions of soldiers in the late 1950s and those of the war period. Most of all, Kaji shows that fifteen years after the end of the war, the military man, suitably groomed, could still be a deeply attractive figure for many Japanese people.

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140 Minami 1957.
141 See Wilson 2000, pp. 176–78.
142 Gomikawa 1979.
The Human Condition tells the story of a liberal-minded, idealistic university graduate who at various stages works for a large Japanese mining company in Manchuria, is conscripted into the army, becomes a prisoner of war of the Soviet military, escapes, and dies while trying to walk an enormous distance to safety. It was a landmark work in that it addressed not only individual resistance to war, but also Japanese atrocities, committed by other characters and witnessed by Kaji, and the individual's complicity in military aggression. The first volume of the novel appeared in August 1956 and the sixth and final volume in January 1958. By March 1958 the book was a runaway best-seller, with sales of over half a million copies; by early 1959, the first volume had sold nearly two and a half million copies. The film version, directed by Kobayashi Masaki, appeared in six parts between 1959 and 1961.

Shukan asahi paid particular attention to the book, and doubtless was partly responsible for its success. The weekly commented that Gomikawa's novel had not been widely advertised or much noticed by critics. It had not been serialized in a newspaper or magazine, nor had it (yet) been broadcast on the radio or television, and author was an unknown new face. Nevertheless, the magazine continued, the book was being avidly read on farms and in towns; in labour unions, at government offices and in private companies as well as in homes. Often it was being passed around reading groups. As Shukan asahi informed its readers, a film had been decided upon before publication of the books was even complete, and a radio drama would be broadcast over several stations so that people all over the country could hear it.

People found many different things in The Human Condition, which must go a long way to explaining the book's popularity. I seriously doubt that the work was popular because "its evocation of the atrocities that ordinary young men, turned soldiers, were forced to commit resonated with the passive resistance of many ordinary workers to the mechanization of Japanese society brought on by American capitalism." A great deal, however, must be attributed to the personal qualities of the central character, Kaji. Heroic figures who capture a significant amount of national-level attention can be seen as embodying a perceived national identity, or a set of national aspirations; as such, Kaji is very revealing. Ultimately, I would argue, he shows both the distance that Japanese people had travelled from World War II by the end of the 1950s, and yet, paradoxically, also the strong connection they still felt to that war. Moreover, Kaji, too, was part of the rehabilitation of Japanese masculinity that was ongoing in the 1950s. Ann Sherif has pointed to the "renewed masculinity" offered in the latter part of the decade by images of virile young men associated with mass culture and consumerism, and divorced from the wartime past and its discredited, emasculated men, specifically in Ishihara Shintaro's novel

143 For a detailed plot synopsis and commentary see Orr 2001, pp. 116-29.
144 "Gomikawaka 'hon-nichi tabō'" 1958.
145 Ward 2006, p. 179.
146 "Kakureta besuto sera" 1958, p. 4; "Gomikawaka 'hon-nichi tabō'" 1958, p. 113.
The case of Kaji, as well as the war films discussed above, shows that it was not only wealthy, idle young men with new values who represented renewed masculinity; soldiers and older men could still exert a powerful attraction, though they might need some refashioning to suit the altered circumstances of the 1950s.

Kaji is a very different soldier from previous models of manhood celebrated during wartime and the decades before. It is illuminating to compare him, for example, with the heroes of wartime propaganda. Such men believed implicitly in Japan's mission in the region and the world. They went to war cheerfully, suppressing thoughts of family and home, and sought to achieve glory for the emperor or the nation on the battlefield. Kaji, by contrast, opposes war and joins the army because he has no choice. He is devoted to his wife and thinks constantly of her, always trying to get back to her side. Yet he is by no means a coward. He is a superb fighter and survivor, and in particular an expert marksman. He can be ruthless when necessary. He is extremely brave, but never loses his humanity despite the terrible stresses of life as a soldier in Manchuria. As Orr has observed, Kaji is "a strong but loving, handsome, and moral hero". He appeared admirable to almost everyone — progressives because of his humanism and anti-war stance, conservatives because of his bravery, military skill and leadership — though some critics complained that he was a cardboard cut-out, a caricature of a human being.

One critic of Kaji's film persona, Iijima Kōichi, found Kaji to be so pure and one-dimensional that he was unconvincing as a character. The audience with whom Iijima saw parts three and four of the film laughed in surprise at every point; Iijima concluded that this was because, in the safe and rational world of 1959, the irrationality of the army, together with the inability of young members of the audience to identify with a hero of such unremittingly high ethical standards, made them laugh. After seeing the last two parts of the film a year or more later, Iijima concluded that the characters were truly fanciful and that Kaji was frankly superhuman, completely devoid of self-doubt or irony. These qualities, in Iijima's view, explained how Kaji had come to be idolized. On the other hand, the noted literary critic Usui Yoshimi wrote that Kaji in the print version was a hero for the times, while a female high-school student reading the novel said she was inspired by the way that Kaji lived his life, adding that at her school, Kaji was regarded as the ideal man. In particular, Kaji boosted the image of so-called "intellectuals" in a way that must have been very gratifying to them. Gomikawa told an interviewer that Kaji had the things that were missing in real members of the Japanese left, meaning, presumably, such qualities as decisiveness, strength and bravery; he also said that real intellectuals are not as weak as people think. Kaji, then, was a soldier as a great many men had been;

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153 Usui 1958, p. 9.
154 "Kakureta besuto sera" 1958, p. 4.
155 Ibid., pp. 8–9.
unlike the earlier propaganda heroes, he was also human at least to the extent that he was aware of moral dilemmas, and he managed to be thoroughly admirable.

Orr has similarly concluded that "Kaji's story is a parable for defining a new kind of masculinity" in post-war Japan. He also believes, however, that Kaji fits the "victim" typology, since the ultimate message of the book and film is that the individual is helpless in the face of war and the power of the military. Yet, Kaji's assertiveness surely outweighs his portrayal as a victim; he is a character with a great deal of agency. More importantly, his cultural significance goes well beyond such considerations. Certainly, he was a remodelled hero for a remodelled nation. His distance from earlier prototypes of soldiers marks the great changes that had happened in Japan since 1945, and the new needs of a new age. Yet the tremendous popular welcome given to a figure so clearly associated with the conflicts of 1937-1945 is also a strong indication that Japanese society in the 1950s had by no means turned its back on the war, or suppressed it; nor were people ready to see themselves exclusively as victims of that war. There was, in fact, a great appetite for complex renderings of the war that allowed for pride and positive interpretations as well as acknowledging suffering, loss and defeat.

CONCLUSION

Attention to the debates in the serious monthly magazines in Japan in the 1950s tends to suggest, primarily, an earnest rejection of war, debate about the meaning of pacifism, and grave concern for Japan's international position in the midst of the Cold War. On the other hand, shifting attention to sources designed to represent and appeal to a more popular level of society – weekly magazines, popular films and other sources – suggests a much less unified picture. Instead, we glimpse a society in which the complex and dynamic legacies of the conflicts of 1937-1945 were still occupying people's attention, and in some cases were central to their lives. Pacifist discourses and "victim consciousness", though present, were certainly not the whole story, and the war was neither forgotten nor suppressed. Not only were people still piecing together what had actually happened; many also were dealing with tangible and personal legacies of the war, such as missing family members, the low level of military pensions and the fate of convicted war criminals. Members of the former military were still in evidence everywhere, and military men could still figure prominently in politics or in culture.

The "nation" reflected here was a complex one. Its members were bound together by the shared experience of war, the recent memory of the power of the national unit, and the continuing need to come to terms with the war and its after-effects. War was still very much an issue in the present, but nostalgia also was beginning to play its part: at least for some of those who could clearly remember it, the war was emerging as a lost time of unity and sacrifice. In this context, former members of the military could be brought back into the national fold, either as exemplars of the supposed national virtues who could function as political leaders or cultural heroes, or, at a humbler level, as good soldiers who might have been unjustly held to account for the crimes of others. The real gulf, then, was not

156 Orr 2001, p. 126.
between perpetrators and victims, but between those who knew about the war in all its messiness, and those who had little knowledge of it, or could not remember it in any meaningful way. This gap would only widen with the passing years, as the proportion of those with no experience of war continued to grow, while increased prosperity enhanced the psychological distance from the wartime years. Perceptions of national identity were destined to change accordingly.

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