

Kamikaze: A Mirror of Post-Cold War U.S.-Japan Relations

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The Images of the Kamikaze

The kamikaze is one of the most prominent historical icons from the Asia Pacific War. The number of Japanese pilots who lost their lives was relatively small in relation to the total loss of the lives in the war, and the actual damage that they caused was almost inconsequential in the larger scheme of Japan's war operations.¹⁾ Divine wind—the literal translation of kamikaze—did not blow across the Pacific to rescue Imperial Japan from the Allied Forces' methodical advancement. Yet the young men's determination to sacrifice their lives for the nation still captures the popular imagination not only in Japan but also in the United States. The name kamikaze has gained wide circulation, connoting fanatic behavior.²⁾ Most recently, the terrorist attacks on the Pentagon and the World Trade Center towers on September 11, 2001, immediately conjured up images of the kamikaze attacks of more than a half-century ago.

However, the ubiquity of kamikaze images has not assured a uniformity in the interpretation of those images within the two national cultural spaces. The historical figures of the kamikaze has been displaced by one set of images in the United States, and by another in Japan, in order to configure the symbolic meaning of the two countries' nationhood in relation to the war that they fought against each other more than six decades ago. The contrary images of the kamikaze that circulate in the two nations' media attest to the United States' and Japan's contrasting strategies in transforming the memories of their violent conflict. Although they managed to overcome their mutual animosity, they still stand a distance away from each other in signifying their shared past.

The problematic images of the kamikaze illustrate the two nations' postwar relation, central to which has been the memory of their past conflict. The kamikaze images have functioned as a device to keep the other at a safe distance, while fulfilling a narcissistic desire for self-assurance. The mirror of the kamikaze is double-sided, so to speak, and stands between Japan and the United States. The two nations gaze at the images of themselves reflected on its surface rather than looking at what lies behind the mirror. The purpose of the present inquiry is not to shatter this mirror but to demonstrate the degree to which images of the kamikaze have been an integral part of the two nations' self-images. In other words, there are no "real" kamikaze figures waiting to be rescued from these ideological configurations. Their self-deaths were always discursively signified: facing their rejection of the conventional war ethics, the two societies anxiously responded by filling the symbolic void with trite images. What follows is

an attempt to document the structure of these images with a broad stroke within the two separate national cultural spheres. In so doing, the essay focuses on the years since the end of the Cold War when the ideological foundation of U.S.-Japan relations has been seriously challenged. This is an effort to historicize the persistent presence of the kamikaze in today's popular imagination.

In the United States

Memories of their violent past are at the foundation of postwar U.S.-Japan relations. The war that the two countries fought and the way they ended the belligerency had decisive effects on the two countries' relations as well as on their self-definitions in the postwar period. By complicitly creating and accepting the narrative that the United States rescued Japan from the menace of its own militarism and converted it into a democratic nation, the two countries managed to transform themselves from hated enemies during the Asia Pacific War to close allies within a few years of the war's conclusion. Japan transformed itself into a good enemy by accepting the U.S. hegemony in East Asia, but the good enemy is still an enemy not to be completely trusted. The narrative of rescue and conversion remains anchored in memories of the past conflict.³⁾ This narrative, which still largely defines popular perceptions of U.S.-Japan relations, requires paradoxical thinking: in order for this narrative of rescue and conversion to be convincing, Japan must always be at the moment of conversion from an evil "other" to a democratic, Americanized country.

In the 1990s, the decade following the end of the Cold War, the two nations' relations went through turbulent changes despite their close economic ties. With the Soviet Union gone from the political map, the U.S. media rediscovered Japan as a favored target of criticisms. It initially cast Japan as an economic threat and later (when Japan plunged into a recession) denounced it for its war crimes during the Asia Pacific War. Although the narrative of rescue and conversion still remained intact, the fall of the "evil empire" lessened the need to characterize Japan as "one of us," among the good. The images of the kamikaze pilots that had marked the problematic past between the two countries were also transformed, reflecting the changing perceptions of Japan in the American media.

Tom Clancy's 1994 novel, *Debt of Honor*, combines the images of a Japan that is an economic giant that has become too powerful for its own good and of a Japan that still struggles under the weight of its war legacies.⁴⁾ Clancy's 990-page book attests to the persistent anxiety about Japan in the American popular consciousness: Is Japan a friend or foe? Having the former enemy as a closest ally produces an anxiety-ridden attitude in the American popular media, which often settles this anxiety by portraying Japan as an enemy despite the two countries' seemingly friendly relations. This U.S. anxiety is also projected onto the Japanese. American distrust of Japan is displaced by Japanese hostility toward the United States in popular expressions. The question of whether Japan is a friend or foe is therefore answered by a historical determinism: the Japanese are not to be trusted because they are still acting hostilely toward us (they must still be resentful for losing that war). Clancy's book faithfully replicates this logic in *Debt of Honor*.

Raizo Yamata is Japan's most powerful industrialist, whose parents were killed in

Saipan during the war. Fifty years later, having become powerful enough to manipulate the Japanese government and the world financial market, Yamata launches a full-scale assault on the United States in order to seek revenge for his parents' death. Japan's Self-Defense Forces occupy Guam and Saipan, while Yamata's men assault the U.S. financial market with a computer virus and large-scale market manipulations. Japan has also developed nuclear missiles, which become an enormous threat in the post-Cold War world where the United States and Russia bilaterally destroy their nuclear stockpiles. In the end, as easily expected, the U.S. political and military leaders outmaneuver their Japanese counterparts and the crisis is averted. Yamata is arrested, while the good Japanese (the former Prime Minister, who was ousted from his office because he refused to go along with the Yamata's plan) is rescued by American intelligence agents. However, while the plot, crammed with technical details, announces the U.S.'s victory, it ends with a big surprise: the JAL pilot, Torajiro Sato plunges his 747 into the Capitol building killing the President of the United States as well as a number of congressmen.

Sato witnesses his brother killed in action when he happens to fly his jetliner over the Mariana waters while the battle takes place. In order to punish the United States for killing his brother, he seeks to paralyze the United States political system. Like so many Japanese characters in the book, Sato's character is grossly underdeveloped: he is an automaton driven simply by his anger. His final thought before crashing into the U.S. Capitol building was: "if they [the U.S. president and congress] could kill his family and disgrace his country, then they would pay a very special price for that."⁵ Just as the anthropologist Ruth Benedict sought the key to decode enigmatic Japanese behavior in the concept of guilt five decades earlier, Tom Clancy finds an answer to his own characters' vengeful acts in a rigid cultural code of honor. A chain of events, from Yamata's parents' death in Saipan to Sato's brother's death in the Mariana waters, directly link Sato's final act to the Asia Pacific War. The Japanese finally pay back the "debt of honor" that they accumulated half a century earlier.

Although Clancy does not use the term "kamikaze" to describe Sato's suicide attack, Sato's final act serves in Clancy's fiction, like the kamikaze in American popular representation more generally, as a tool to mark the inscrutable nature of "Japanese" thinking. The indeterminacy of Japan's status—as friend or as foe—in the American popular consciousness is expressed as the U.S.'s fear toward Japan. Clancy invokes the fanaticism of the kamikaze attacks in order to demonstrate that the U.S.'s present fear of Japan is not entirely groundless. The feasibility of the attack, combined with the historical precedence of the kamikaze, brings the contemporary Japanese back to the war that the two countries once fought so fiercely.

The book's ending shows an eerie resemblance with an historical event in more recent time—9/11. Indeed, in the frenzied media coverage of the event in 2001, numerous references were made to the kamikaze. In 1994, Japan was still a menace to U.S. security in the popular fiction, while the attacks on the World Trade Center towers and Pentagon seven years later presented the United States with the new enemies: Middle Eastern terrorists. Yet, in this resonance between fiction and history, Japan's image as an evildoer was quietly invoked to anchor the unprecedented attack on the U.S. into a familiar historical narrative. Memories of the two nations' conflict and its resolution

pointed to a reassuring trajectory for the post-9/11 United States: The unprecedented attack on the United States will inevitably lead to its triumph.

With the Soviet political system subverted and the Japanese economy safely contained, the U.S. seemed to have attained a great degree of security. Yet there was still nostalgia in the United States for the time when America's enemies were clearly identifiable, as well as a need to explain how America became the final winner of historical progress (i.e. Francis Fukuyama's *The End of History and the Last Man*). Released ostensibly to commemorate the sixtieth anniversary of the Pearl Harbor attack by Japanese forces, the film *Pearl Harbor* (2001) offers a narrative that satisfies both the nostalgic desire for enemy figures and the rationale for the U.S.'s present success.⁶ By not only identifying with but also outmaneuvering the aggressors in their own games, Americans defeated their enemies. The film portrays Americans as the underdog and praises their willingness to sacrifice their lives for their nation. In the end, it turns out that American Army pilots embody the kamikaze spirit better than their Japanese counterparts. The episode of the first U.S. air raid on Japanese cities led by Colonel James Doolittle (Alec Baldwin) on April 18, 1942, is grafted onto the plot in order to end with a story of American heroism.

A domestic conflict—the love rivalry between Rafe McCawley (Ben Affleck) and Danny Walker (Josh Hartnett)—is suspended in the face of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. The Mitsubishi Zero fighters that fly over their heads instantaneously reunite the two men who have jeopardized their long-standing friendship in their fight over a common love interest. Both Rafe and Danny are subsequently recruited to participate in the raid. Doolittle's pronouncement to his men describes the nature and the purpose of the mission they are about to engage in. Facing the airmen recruited for the mission, Doolittle announces and then asks: "The mission I'm asking you to volunteer for is exceptionally dangerous. Take a look at the man beside you. It's a good bet that in the next six weeks, you or he will be dead. Everyone brave enough to accept this, step forward." A close-up shot of their feet captures their forward movement in unison. Cut to the next scene, the heroic figures of Doolittle and his men walk out of the hangar in a low-angle shot. Through the patchwork of these short segments, the film hastily portrays Doolittle's men as free-willing individuals who participate in the dangerous mission out of their own volition. The underlying subtext is that their decision based on free will differentiates the American combatants from their Japanese counterparts. The film intimates that, mired in "traditional" ethics, the Japanese possess merely a collective self, devoid of individuality.

Aboard on aircraft carrier *Hornet* en route to Japan carrying Doolittle's crew and their B-25s, Doolittle assures Rafe and Danny of the meaning of their mission. As if to repress his own anxiety, Doolittle preaches the mission's meaning to the two young men:

Doolittle: What's going on?

McCawley: We only have sixteen planes.

Doolittle: So?

McCawley: When the Japs hit us, they have more than 300. I mean, how much difference are we really gonna make?

Walker: Not that we are afraid, sir. We might die doing this. We want to know what it's for.

Doolittle: You know at Pearl, they hit us with a sledge hammer. This raid, even if we make it through, it will only be a pinprick. But it will be straight through their hearts. Victory belongs to those who believe in it the most, believe in it the longest. We're gonna believe. We're gonna make America believe.

It is hard not to respond to Doolittle's assertion with rhetorical questions. Did many in Japan not believe in their victory just as long? In desperation, did the kamikaze pilots not resort to rhetoric similar to Doolittle's to find meaning in their seemingly pointless mission?

The simple determination of Doolittle makes his mission a precursor of the kamikaze, appropriating the Japanese dedication for the cause as his own. In the meeting on *Hornet* right before their takeoff, after announcing that he is also participating in the raid, Doolittle answers the anxious airmen's questions:

An airman: What do we do if our planes are damaged and we have to bail out over Japan?

Doolittle: Well, in that situation, I can't tell you what you should do.

Capt. McCawley: What would you do, Colonel?

Doolittle: I wasn't built to be a prisoner. So I would have my crew bail out. I would find the sweetest military target I could and drive my plane right smack into the middle of it and kill as many those bastards as I possibly could. But that's just me. I'm forty-five years old. I'm an old man. You guys have a whole life ahead of you. So what you should do is up to you.

Doolittle's heroism is exemplified in his willingness to sacrifice his life. He intends to set an example to be followed: he would not object, if any of his men and others would follow in his footsteps (granted they make their decisions voluntarily) by sacrificing their lives for the nation.⁷⁾

It is easy enough to see the resemblance between these American pilots in the film and the kamikaze. A number of Japanese men "volunteered" for their suicide missions with just as little, vague information about them:⁸⁾ at least in the initial stage of the kamikaze missions, the participants were in principle recruited on voluntary bases.⁹⁾ The kamikaze missions were desperate appeals to the nation that "victory belongs to those that believe in it the most, believe in it the longest." The Japanese pilots were trying to destroy, as the Alec Baldwin character puts it, "the sweetest military target" they could find in exchange for their lives. In case the audience may miss the point of Doolittle's explanations, Captain McCawley later utters to himself that "this really was a suicide mission" as he and his crew desperately try to make it to China after the raid. The film thus transforms Doolittle and his men into the American version of the kamikaze in 2001.

The film was also designed to be the final homage to memories of the last systemat-

ic attack on the United States at that point. During and in the lingering heat of the dotcom boom, it appeared that external threats to United States security had all but vanished: the Cold War was long over, the recessionary Japanese economy was safely contained by U.S. monetary policy, and Y2K turned out to be a complete dud. Military conflicts in which the U.S. intervened during the 1990s and the first months of new millennium seem to have lacked a serious impact on the U.S. mainland. In Rwanda, Kosovo, or elsewhere, the locals were killing themselves, not U.S. citizens: the U.S. was not the primary target of their attacks. Bill Clinton's sex scandal garnered at least as much coverage in the American media as any international conflict. The Asian financial crisis, though serious, never threatened the euphoric mood of the U.S.'s newly found prosperity. In other words, at the turn of the millennium, the United States seemed to be celebrating the end of history, where no serious dialogic relation with the other is required.

Yet the receding outside threats simultaneously unmasked the underlying fear of the internal threats. The media images from the 1993 F.B.I. siege of the Branch Davidians religious sect in Waco, Texas, and the 1995 Oklahoma City Bombing vividly demonstrated grave fissures in American society. The enemies were among "us." There is a great comfort in reminiscing about the days when it was clear who the enemies were, particularly when these enemies would in the end succumb to U.S. hegemony. In such an era, Americans could set aside their differences, as in the case of Rafe and Danny, and unite in the battle against the common enemy.

In all, *Pearl Harbor* is an effort to explain the position of the United States in early 2001—how it has gotten to where it is as the winner of all historical struggles. Although Japan manages to threaten the U.S.'s national security, its surprise attack merely awakens Americans to their values and their determination to defend them. By becoming and thus appropriating the kamikaze—what is widely regarded as most Japanese—the American characters deny their enemies their privileged place in history. Americans are just as brave and fearless as the kamikazes; and they are destined to win the competition because their bravery is based on their free will. Lacking any serious intent to engage with the aggressor, the film comfortably portrays Japan as a nation of automatons. The Japanese are deprived of their historical agency (there is only one free person in Japan—the emperor—just as Hegel says of Asian despotism), while the Americans defend their nation out of their own volition. The historical agents of the democratic nation are destined to defeat the country without history; this dialectics is the sine qua non for the United States to reach the end of history: the conditions of the United States in the late 1990s. *Pearl Harbor* evokes the United States' victory over Japan to validate this historical trajectory.

The 9/11 attacks literally shook the United States out of its sense of security with easily identifiable enemy actions. As a jetliner repeatedly rammed into the World Trade Center on television screens, the images of the menacing other returned to the American popular consciousness. With ease, the American media compared the attacks to the kamikaze (as well as to the Pearl Harbor attack). Japan and its history were invoked in the media's strong emotional responses to the events. Of course there were more levelheaded commentaries that emphasized the differences between the two attacks (the military targets versus the civilian targets; military attacks verses

hijacks, etc.). Inscrutable Arab men moved into the position of the menacing other from which Japan had been removed. The fanatic images of the kamikaze briefly returned only to be displaced by those of Middle Eastern terrorists. The images of the inscrutable Japanese who are perpetually plotting against American interests, preserved by the American media, immediately served to describe the newly found enemies of the United States.

Memories of the war against the Japanese empire also returned to the site of destruction through another powerful icon: “ground zero.” The destruction of the World Trade Center buildings created a strong association with nuclear devastation. Yet few references were made to the actual experiences of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945. It appears that the dubious argument about the relationship between the kamikaze and the atomic bombs (to counter the fanaticism of the kamikaze, the bombs’ unprecedented power was used) short-circuited in the American media, squeezing out the history of Japan all together. Distant memories of Hiroshima and Nagasaki return to the U.S. media not as the effects of the U.S. retaliations on the Japanese attacks but as the condition that requires such retaliations.¹⁰⁾ The designation of “ground zero” posits the tragedy of 9/11 as the beginning of a new phase of human history, while being silent about the destruction of the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki rendered by the American hands.¹¹⁾

Another image at the site of terrorist attacks similarly makes clear the de-historicizing effect of the association between World War II images and 9/11. The widely circulated image of the firefighters in New York (**Figure 1**), through its graphic reference to the Marines’ flag-raising on Iwo Jima in 1945 (**Figure 2**), warps the progression of historical time. The Iwo Jima photo marked the capture of the island after a long, difficult battle against determined Japanese defense forces, while the appeal of the 2001 image hinges on its promise of an eventual American triumph over terrorists. To put it simply, much as the designation of “ground zero” does, the association between the two images empties out the historical actuality of the battle that the Americans



Figure 1

Photo by Thomas E. Franklin/The Bergen Record



Figure 2

Photo by Joe Rosenthal/The Associated Press

waged against the enemy forces. The United States is destined to prevail, while the process through which Americans will reach that victory does not receive serious considerations. These American references to World War II events hence connote that the destruction in New York City was the beginning of a history that will end with U.S. triumph.¹²⁾

In this new phase of history, the United States desperately seeks to comprehend the figure of the other in order to carry out its campaign and subsequent occupation. The past dealings with Japan, as problematic as they have been, still supply the American popular media with guidelines on how to handle the other. For example, On July 19, 2003, *The New York Times* carried an article by Alexander Stille, which claimed there was an urgent need for an anthropological study on defeated Iraq, citing the work of Ruth Benedict, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword* (1946).¹³⁾ Stille's demand for a cultural knowledge of Iraq treats the situations in the two defeated nations as interchangeable, while reducing their cultures to sets of rudimentary customs and beliefs.¹⁴⁾ Japan has become a safe place (it has been tamed) where Americans go in and appropriate a piece of the other (or culture) as their own. The film *Pearl Harbor* already tried out this strategy of identification with the other.

A more recent example, *The Last Samurai* (2003), deploys it in a more blatant form: Captain Nathan Algren (Tom Cruise) turns out to be the last embodiment of the genuine samurai (read kamikaze) spirit. It is perhaps possible to read the story of *The Last Samurai* as an answer to the popular American desire to fully understand and contain the inscrutable other: the exotic treatment of the Japanese in the film makes most sense when the viewer replaces in his or her imagination the Japanese samurai with the Taliban.

As Japan remains low on the terrorist nation list (also excluded from George Bush's axis of evil) at the moment, there is little practical need to grapple with fanatic images of the Japanese today. Nonetheless, *The Last Samurai* insists on representing the story of how Japan was transformed into a democratic country through the help of an American character. Although corrupt bureaucrats manipulate the imperial institution for personal gain in the early years of Meiji, the emperor eventually awakes to the traditional values of Japan, which happen to be compatible with democracy, thanks to the intervention of American officer Nathan Algren (the Tom Cruise character). Algren earns the right to represent the dying breed of traditional samurai by fighting with them in the battle against the new government forces. Faced with forces equipped with modern Western weapon, their act is simply suicidal. Yet the samurai fight to the last man in order to maintain their honor and integrity. As the sole survivor of the rebellious force, Algren appears in the imperial court and urges the Meiji emperor to stand up for the people against the control of an evil bureaucrat.¹⁵⁾ Predictably, the emperor wakes to his real mission of caring for the Japanese and dismisses the most powerful bureaucrat, Ômura. Japan returns to the right historical trajectory through the sacrifice that the samurai make. Like their predecessors who killed themselves to admonish their feudal lords, the samurai in the film make the final statement through their deaths. Yet the American character alone successfully delivers their desperate message to the Meiji emperor.

It is obvious that there is no place for the anachronistic samurai in the new society

and they make an honorable exit through a final battle against the Meiji government's conscripted army. Through their deaths, they transform themselves into the ideal enemies of the new regime: the newly purchased machine guns easily overcome the determined samurai on the battlefield in traditional armor. The samurai's determination to die in the film is merely a reflection of the popular desire to tame and contain the enemy figures: the only good enemy is dead enemy, and the samurai find their *raison d'être* in honorable death. In the name of resistance, the samurai willingly succumb to the weapons of the new regime. It would be so much easier for the American forces if only Taliban and al-Qaeda members were willing to die for their honor like the samurai. The awe that the conscript soldiers demonstrate toward the dead samurai at the end of the battle is mixed with appreciation that they have died so easily. The audience can in the end appreciate a piece of the other at a safe distance through the figure of Nathan Algren.

The various reincarnations of the kamikaze in the U.S. media attest to the fascination with their willingness to sacrifice themselves for a larger cause. Although the kamikaze may embody the radical otherness that defies comprehension—the paragon of the inscrutable other—in the American popular imagination, its circulation in the American imagination ironically has transformed the kamikaze into a “familiar” sign of the “unfamiliar.” Accordingly Japan, the country from which the operation originated, has turned into a safe territory where the menacing other can be tamed and consumed by and for the American audience. Some representational strategies are more successful than others (for example, *The Last Samurai* did much better in ticket sales than *Pearl Harbor*). Yet these popular works collectively outline the structure of desire that kept the image of Japan in circulation. The figure of the kamikaze in the post-Cold War United States ultimately reveals the nation's underlying cultural anxiety over its ever-shifting relation with the exterior world. The historical icon invites the audience back to the good old days when the boundaries were clear and secure.

In Japan

When we turn our attention to the symbolic meaning of the kamikaze in Japan, the picture looks radically different. Kamikaze images serve less as a symbol of Japan's relation with the outside than as an icon that assures Japan's self-identity. The stories of kamikaze have been produced and circulated exclusively as Japanese dramas, in which the figures of others—the enemy combatants who were injured or killed by the kamikaze—are distinctively absent. Sheltered from the outside world, the tenet of the kamikaze narratives has remained constant in postwar Japan, reflecting little of the changes in the international conditions surrounding Japan. The end of the Cold War and September 11 caused only minor modifications in the Japanese narratives of the kamikaze.¹⁶⁾

In contrast to the hyper-aggressive images that remain largely intact outside Japan, the Japanese images of the kamikaze have been feminized in the postwar period. They have been portrayed in the popular media not as violent figures but as contemplative youths who struggled to accept their fates. The militarists mercilessly sacrificed their young lives for the sake of the nation. That many of them were either students or graduates of higher educational institutions has helped to promote the images of

the kamikaze as victims of the war. Their image as liberal intellectuals places them at a distance from the fanatic nationalism of the time, while the numerous writings (diaries and letters) that they left offer a glimpse into their struggle with their fates. Furthermore, through quietly accepting their destiny as their own, they died as “true” patriots who exercised their historical agency (they chose to die for their country). The kamikaze pilots were victims yet were able to remain historical agents through their decision to die as patriots.¹⁷⁾ By casting a sympathetic gaze on the plight of the young pilots, postwar Japanese society has appropriated their status as victim-cum-agent.

We see the emotional contents of this discourse at display most vividly at the Peace Museum for Kamikaze Pilots in Chiran, Kyūshū. The facility is dedicated to the 1,036 pilots who departed from the southern Kyūshū airbases, including the Chiran Army Airbase, for their final missions over Okinawan waters in 1945. Each year, the museum that stands at the site of the former Chiran Army Airbase receives about 700,000 visitors. The 2001 film, *Hotaru*, which takes as its theme the postwar lives of the former kamikaze pilots, has provided publicity to the small town that operates the facility. The main focus of the museum’s display is to trace the lives of individual pilots at their final moment through their photos, writings, and personal belongings. In their own personal struggles to reconcile themselves to their imminent death, the young pilots appear less as fearless warriors than as tragic, yet courageous, figures inside the display cases of the museum. The Peace Museum is a space where one is invited to encounter death contained in slick glass cases (and appreciate one’s life).

By shedding tears over the emotional displays at the museum, visitors momentarily identify with the suffering of the pilots (thus they affirm the pilots’ position as victims). On February 9, 2001, two and a half months before becoming Prime Minister of Japan, Koizumi Junichirō visited the Peace Museum in Chiran. Surrounded by the photographs, diaries, and letters of young pilots, Koizumi was literally moved to tears. Three years later, a man who had also visited Chiran and shed tears over the plight of the kamikaze wrote a letter to *Asahi shinbun*, protesting Koizumi’s commitment to sending Japanese troops to Iraq. To the author of the letter, Koizumi’s political decision was unacceptable because it violated the hermeneutics of suffering—the assumption that all the Japanese, living or dead, unite in the sentiment that they all suffered the war’s terrible consequence. The prime minister’s decision to send Japanese troops to Iraq would be incompatible with this sentiment for it would cast Japan as an agent of a war act. While claiming his sympathy with the deceased pilots, Koizumi was then following the footsteps of the militarists who had driven the young men to their premature deaths. Furthermore, by acting as a defender of the United States’ interests in Middle East, Koizumi forcefully reminded the letter’s author of the U.S. presence, which had been completely dissociated from the operations in which the kamikaze engaged. The letter questions if Koizumi’s tears were genuine while intimating that its writer’s were unquestionably so.¹⁸⁾ Genuine tears are required to speak through the voice of the kamikaze.

Whether they belong to Koizumi or his detractor, the tears shed over the kamikaze serve an ideological function of annihilating the figure of the other. The history of the kamikaze has been transformed into a drama produced exclusively for domestic consumption, in which the figure of the enemy completely disappears. Japanese confirm

their national identity through shedding tears over the plight of their fellow Japanese. Tears shed over the sorrowful fate of the kamikaze pilots mask the fact that the kamikaze missions were designed to maximize the damage to enemy ships and personnel. The effects of the attacks were construed largely as psychological in most of the post-war Japanese representations. To put it more bluntly, how many Japanese have shed tears over the Americans killed by the kamikaze? Sympathy for the kamikaze has helped to produce an image of the war where the figures of American soldiers are peculiarly missing.¹⁹⁾

Also absent is the possibility of understanding the kamikaze missions in relation to the contemporary practice of suicide bombings in other regions. For example, there have been a number of emotional responses to the suggestion that the kamikaze were analogous to the 9/11 hijackers in their willingness to use themselves as weapons. The writer Susaki Katsuya vehemently refutes the journalist Tachibana Takashi, who finds affinities between the kamikaze's almost religious dedication to their nation and the hijackers' extreme conviction.²⁰⁾ Although directed to Tachibana, Susaki's argument generally targets the outside (Western) gaze that has reduced the kamikaze to a gang of fanatics (Tachibana is guilty for accepting this outside view). His rebuttal hinges on the point that the kamikaze pilots were not fanatics like the modern-day terrorists.²¹⁾ In the body of his book, he attempts to instantiate that, unlike the brainwashed suicide bombers, the kamikaze pilots fully lived their lives under the extremely difficult condition of the Asia Pacific War and accepted their mission as their own. Susaki urges his readers to humanize the image of the kamikaze through understanding their individual experiences. However, his concern does not extend beyond the national boundaries: the Japanese are part of the civilized world where individuals exercise their free will, while the Middle Easterners are categorically denied entry there. Susaki's effort replicates the outside gaze and casts it on the hijackers.²²⁾ By locating the figure of the inscrutable other outside of the national boundaries, he safely rescues the kamikaze from the stereotype.

Susaki's insistence on humanizing the kamikaze is consistent with the ways in which they have been constructed as a national symbol in Japan. As a metonymy of the nationhood, the figures of the kamikaze demand sympathy from latter-day commentators, and Susaki is simply complying with this demand. In the majority of recent popular expressions, the war against the Allied Powers looms in the background merely as a broad, undefineable fear. In the absence of an enemy figure, the kamikaze struggle with the rather abstract question of how one should behave when confronted with an insurmountable challenge. For example, two kamikaze films from the 1990s well exemplify this absence through the ways in which they forcefully bring their cinematic narratives to conclusion. *Gekkō no natsu* (1993) ends with a scene in which the protagonist is shot down to complete his image as an innocent music student incapable of harming others. In the closing scene of *Kimi o wasurenai: Fly boys, fly* (1995), the young pilots happily fly away on their one-way mission to Okinawan waters.

Recent writings on the kamikaze continue to operate on the same discursive plane as previous works, though they may introduce a few new elements. For example, the 2001 account of two navy kamikaze pilots by the writer Shiroyama Saburō is noteworthy for its effort to reconcile two conflicting desires in portraying the kamikaze. Post-

war liberal discourse, which has denounced Japan's wartime legacies, tends to minimize the strategic contribution of the kamikaze: unskilled pilots hardly ever reached the enemy targets. On the other hand, conservatives find solace in the kamikaze missions' psychological effects on the enemy.²³⁾ Shiroyama finds a way to satisfy both ways of representation by finding the value in their ineffectiveness as weapons. Shiroyama infers that Nakatsuru Tatsuo intentionally missed the target of his kamikaze mission on August 15, 1945, after the emperor announced Japan's acceptance of the Potsdam Declaration, and insists that, through his sabotage, Nakatsuru made a great contribution to postwar Japanese society.

Taking creative license, Shiroyama describes a scene in which Nakatsu learns about the end of the war and begins to question the wisdom of the mission that Navy Vice Admiral Ugaki Matome had designed while he is flying the admiral's plane. Although Ugaki ordered him to crash the plane into the U.S. base in Okinawa, Nakatsuru turns left and avoids the target at the last minute. Based on this guesswork with little evidential support (the only support that he provides is the fact that he visited the site), Shiroyama concludes that Nakatsuru's last-minute decision saved Japan from a potential disaster. The war that started with Japan's surprise attack on Pearl Harbor would have ended with another surprise attack. The author is thankful to Nakatsuru for avoiding the situation in which "Japan would have received world-wide criticism, and ... the imperial institution would have been shattered."²⁴⁾ Nakatsuru's decision had much the same effect as former prime minister Hirota Kōki's testimony in the International Military Tribunal for the Far East, in which he accepted all political responsibility for the war to protect the emperor.

It is highly unlikely that, even after the acceptance of the peace terms, an isolated attack without official sanction would have had the universal effects of the Pearl Harbor attack. Through his fictional account, Shiroyama attempts to evacuate the kamikaze from the war, while recasting them as the foundation of postwar Japan. By granting the subjectivity to defy the unreasonable order (and thereby refusing to harm the enemy), the author resurrects Nakatsuru (and other kamikaze pilots by extension) as a hero who sacrificed his life for the well-being of his country. Shiroyama's maneuver is also an effort to reconfirm the kamikaze's heroism as a Japanese drama. This point is illustrated by his reference to a postwar incident, in which a Self-Defense Forces pilot died in a crash. He managed to crash his F-104J away from residential areas, while missing the opportunity for bailout.²⁵⁾ In Shiroyama's strange equation, avoiding an enemy target acquires the same meaning as sparing the lives of Japanese residents. What matters in the end is not so much the fate of Allied personnel per se as the pilots' willingness to save Japanese lives (and Japan) at the expense of their own lives.

The media images of September 11 that portrayed Americans as victims of violence perhaps afforded a new perspective on the kamikaze in Japan. Ogiwara Hiroshi's *Bokutachi no sensō*, written in the wake of the event, is not insensitive to the pain and suffering caused by the kamikaze attacks. Yet, despite the author's efforts to break out of the conventional style of the kamikaze tales, the story ultimately conforms to the desire to tell a domestic story of a heroic kamikaze. To make his historical drama appealing to his contemporary readers, Ogiwara premises it on a fantastic trans-temporal identity switch between two young Japanese males. On September 11, 2001, nineteen-

year-old Ojima Kenta is swept by a large wave while surfing in the waters of Ibaraki. On the same day of 1944, a 19-year-old navy aviation trainee, Ishiba Goichi, accidentally crashes his plane into Kasumigaura also in Ibaraki. Although they both survive their mishaps, they eventually realize they traded their places in history. Ogiwara effectively uses the narrative device of time-slip in describing how the two worlds—the Japans in 1944 and 2001—are different places. Goichi struggles to survive the sensory overload in 2001 Japan, while Kenta experiences beating as the way of the Japanese military in 1944.

The time warp alienates the Ogiwara's readers from contemporary Japan, while making Japan of six decades ago seem familiar. However, despite the surface changes, the essential quality of Japan remains constant. This continuity of Japanese identity is assured not merely by the two interchangeable characters—they are physically identical—separated by fifty-seven years but also by a female character, Kamoshida Minami, with whom both men have a relationship. Goichi takes the place of Kenta as Minami's boyfriend without ever letting her know of the switch. (Meanwhile, Kenta ends up meeting both Minami's grandmother and grandfather, as well as his grandfather, in 1944.)

While Goichi begins to enjoy his life with Minami, Kenta is forced to be a Kaiten pilot and receives training for his suicide mission. Each man tries to find his way back to his world and eventually succeeds in returning to his proper place in history. On August 16, 1945, Kenta volunteers to man a Kaiten in order to save the submarine he is aboard and its crewmembers, facing the threat of an American destroyer. On the same day of 2002, Goichi searches for a passage back to 1945 in the Okinawan sea. Throughout the story, Kenta refuses to embrace the war and his Kaiten mission until the last minute when he realizes that he is saving not just a ship and its crew but also the future of Japan. Among the men on board are his grandfather and the man who is destined to marry Minami's grandmother. Kenta loses consciousness as his Kaiten crashes into the American ship. On the other hand, Goichi is stuck on the bottom of the sea as his wetsuit is caught in a coral reef. The story's end intimates that Goichi dies in the Kaiten mission while Kenta returns to 2002 to resume his original life. However, Kenta's life has changed forever: Minami is pregnant with Goichi's child. Kenta returns home to raise Goichi's legacy.²⁶⁾

At this point in the book, the reader may notice interesting structural affinities between Ogiwara's story and the Hollywood film, *Pearl Harbor*, in which the love rivalry of Danny and Rafe is resolved in a very similar fashion. Although killed by Japanese soldiers in China after a crash landing, Danny leaves his legacy through a child with Evelyn. In the final scene, Rafe happily lives with her and the child in Tennessee, where the story had begun. Perhaps as a symbol of the innocence that the United States has allegedly lost in the war, Danny has to be killed in action. Yet his legacy is fostered and passed onto the next generation by his closest friend. The final scene of *Pearl Harbor* concludes the story of loss and recovery, rendering its war story as a purely American drama. The female character as a procreator in the end reassures the continuity of the masculine drama of the nation. Similarly, in Ogiwara's story, Goichi dies as a metonym of the old Japan to secure the tie between the two Japans separated by six decades. However, through Kenta, Minami, and Goichi's own child, his legacy

will live on among the later generation of Japanese. The vastly different experiences from 1944 are deemed comprehensible to Japanese today on the ground that they laid the foundation of the present. The rather opportunistic link found between 1944 and 2001 presupposes a shared identity of being Japanese that transcends history.

Although Ogiwara's fiction extends its descriptions to the enemy figures, the references to them are made only in passing. The book offers a more detailed and convincing picture when Kenta critically reflects on his own role in perpetuating the cycle of violence in his unit. After initiating the beating of his superior, he soon regrets the use of violence as he discovers his own dark impulse.²⁷⁾ As long as the story is enclosed in the narrative that focuses on the resonance between the two Japans, it is hardly possible to confront the enemy in a serious manner. Kenta sees the enemies through the Kaiten's periscope right before the crash. Their figures are just as mediated and ephemeral as images on a TV screen: the story does not describe what happens to them when and after he rams his torpedo into the ship. In the end, the story is best read as a moral tale of *Sturm und Drang* for today's Japanese youths. The book's ending, where Minami waits for Kenta to share the news of her pregnancy intimates that Kenta, who begins the story as an unemployed 19-year old with no realistic vision of his future, returns to 2002 as a "man" who can take responsibility for his life.

Muticultural Kamikaze

Although the popular imaginations of the United States and Japan produced separate sets of kamikaze images, these images complement each other while fulfilling ideological functions in each nation. In the United States, the kamikaze as one of the most visible icons of Japan has served to trap its people under an essentialist notion of culture. Japan as a cultural form has been reduced to a set of crude cultural traits from World War II. As crude as it is, this essentialist construction of Japan has provided a degree of comfort to many of its residents; it secures a place in the (multi-)cultural framework. Although Japan has happily accepted the United States' diagnosis for its cultural symptoms (the kamikaze), it has claimed unique relations with those symptoms (through complaining of the lack of true knowledge in the United States and elsewhere).

Given how entangled images of kamikaze have become in U.S.-Japan relations over the past sixty years, there is no easy way to escape the ideological effects of those images. Even a sincere effort to humanize the young men who participated in the kamikaze missions merely reinforces the framework in which each image ideologically operates. One can perhaps begin to undo their effects by imagining what these images have concealed in the postwar history of the two countries, with the understanding that this will not merely be a work to augment the existing kamikaze images but also an exercise to grapple with the forces that have created and maintained these impoverished images.

Notes

- 1) The Japanese military's "special attacks," the execution of which hinged on the participants' deaths, included air, land, and sea operations during the final phase of the Asia Pacific War. According to one of the most recent estimates, about 5,800 army and navy men died in the "special" attacks, in-

- cluding accidental deaths and suicides stemming from training, enemy raids, and transportation. In the case of air attacks—the most commonly conjured image of the kamikaze—the navy and army combined deployed more than 2,000 aircraft. It has been widely accepted that only a fraction of them—“about 12% in the Battle of the Philippines and half of that in the Battle of Okinawa”—managed to crush into their targets. Shirai Atsushi, “Tokkōtai towa nandattanoka,” in Shirai Atsushi, ed., *Ima tokkōtai no shi o kangaeru*, (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 2002), 21–22.
- 2) The name kamikaze appears in the least expected places. For example, a crazy Japanese dodgeball team is called the “Kamikazes” in the film, *Dodgeball: A True Underdog Story*, (2004).
 - 3) For a more detailed discussion of this narrative, which I named “the foundational narrative,” see my book, *Bodies of Memory: Narratives of War in Postwar Japanese Culture, 1945–1970*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 19–46.
 - 4) Tom Clancy, *Debt of Honor*, (New York: Berkeley Books, 1995).
 - 5) Tom Clancy, 985.
 - 6) The historian, Emily S. Rosenberg offers detailed accounts of Walt Disney Company’s media blitz to promote the film. Emily S. Rosenberg, *A Date Which Will Live: Pearl Harbor in American Memory*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 163–73.
 - 7) In the actual raid, James Doolittle made it to China and safely returned to the United States. Shibata Takehiko and Hara Katsuhiko, *Dōrittoru kūshūhiwa*, (Tokyo: Ariadone kikaku, 2003), 46–53. One of the survivors of the raid, Ted W. Lawson, published his account of the raid, *Thirty Seconds Over Tokyo*, (New York: Random House) in 1943. In the following year, based on the book, a popular film by the same name was produced.
 - 8) According to Kōzu Naoji, a survivor of the Kaiten Corps (the human torpedo corps), the Imperial Navy intentionally refrained from explaining the true nature of the weapon to their prospective Kaiten recruits. Haruko Tayo Cook and Theodore Cook, *Japan at War: An Oral History*, (New York: The New Press, 1992), 315. The secret navy recruiting document that specified not to mention the details of the weapon surfaced in the postwar. Takeda Gorō, *Kaiten tokkō: gakuto taiin no kiroku*, (Tokyo: Kōjinsha, 1997), 56–57.
 - 9) In the final phase of the war, facing the urgent need for enough men to participate in kamikaze missions, the navy assigned its soldiers to the missions by order. Nagasue Senri, *Shiragiku tokkōtai: kaerazaru wakawashitachi eno chinkonka*, (Tokyo: Kōjinsha, 1997), 7–8, 219.
 - 10) Marita Sturken discusses a similar reversal of cause and effect in the popular sentiment at the time of the 1991 Gulf War: “The popular fear of reprisal for the war became quite easily part of the justification for that war.” Marita Sturken, *Tourists of History: Memory, Kitsch, and Consumerism from Oklahoma City to Ground Zero*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 8.
 - 11) There is another peculiar connection between 9/11 and the destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. According to a newspaper report, Saddam Hussein government in Iraq aired a special program on the two Japanese cities every summer as part of the anti-American propaganda effort. It appears that the TV programs’ message helped to form the popular association between Japan and Iraq. At the crash site of a U.S. transport helicopter, the local residents commanded a reporter to be delighted, stating: “We downed the American military helicopter. The Japanese do not forget Hiroshima/Nagasaki. Rejoice.” *Asahi shinbun*, Nov. 26, 2003, 13th ed., 6.
 - 12) The ubiquitous “Support our troops” signs in the post-9/11 United States also have had the similar effect of masking the actuality of the war. The signs intimate that Americans should set aside their differences in opinion in order not to undermine their troops’ safety, precluding all the questions about the legitimacy of their campaigns.
 - 13) Alexander Stille, *The New York Times*, July 19, 2003, section B, 7 and 9.
 - 14) Responding to such a utilitarian view on the U.S. occupation of Japan, John Dower denies the validity of such a claim. He rather finds a more analogous case in the Japanese occupation of Manchuria. John Dower, “The Other Japanese Occupation,” *The Nation*, June 20, 2003.
 - 15) Another important motif of the film is that, by appropriating the native’s identity. Algren is also cleansed of his own and the nation’s guilt (flashbacks establish that he participated in a massacre of Native Americans). In this sense, it is appropriate to nickname the film “Dances with Samurai,” as many have done in internet discussions.

- 16) Fukuma Yoshiaki carefully explores the transformation of kamikaze images in the first three decades of Japan's postwar period. His focus on popular cultural representations resonates with my efforts here, which mainly concern the post-Cold War era. Fukuma Yoshiaki, *Junkoku to hangyaku: tokkō no katari no sengoshi*, (Tokyo: Seikyūsha, 2007).
- 17) For example, Irokawa Daikichi and Ōnuki Emiko fully embrace this sentiment in their published conversation, "Tokkōtaiin, shutsujin gakuto no shiseikan wo mitsumete," *Sekai*, Sept. 2003, 157–65.
- 18) Horie Yūichirō, "Chiran deno namida wa nandattanoka," *Asahi shinbun*, Jan. 15, 2004, 12th ed., 12.
- 19) The figures of Americans were already absent in the mind of some kamikaze pilots. Senri Nagasue, a surviving member of a special attack corps, tried to lessen the sense of guilt he felt in his mission by convincing himself that "I am aiming at an enemy ship, not enemy soldiers." It is of course impossible to separate military targets from combatants. But, by psychologically erasing the latter, he reconciled his mission with the Buddhist teaching of non-killing. Nagasue Senri, *Shiragiku tokkōtai: kaerazaru wakawashitachi eno chinkonka*, (Tokyo: Kōbunsha, 1997), 137.
- 20) Tachibana Takashi, "Jibaku tero no kenkyū," *Bungeishunjū*, Nov., 2001, 107–8.
- 21) Susaki Katsuya, *Kamikaze no shinjitsu: Tokkōtai wa terodewanai*, (Tokyo: Kōbunsha, 2004), 12–15.
- 22) Slavoj Žižek questions the media knowledge about the determination of the Muslim fundamentalists by asking "What if, however, they are terribly unsure about their belief, and they use their suicide act as a means of resolving this deadlock of doubt by asserting this belief: 'I don't know if I really believe—but, by killing myself for the Cause, I will prove *in actu* that I believe ...'?" In fact, Susaki and others are simply affording this paradoxical position to the kamikaze, but not to the suicide bombers in the Middle East. Slavoj Žižek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real*, (London: Verso, 2002), 72.
- 23) Kobayashi Yoshinori's *Sensōron* provides an example of this type of conservative response. Kobayashi Yoshinori, *Sensōron*, (Tokyo: Tōgensha, 1998), 75–87, 363–65.
- 24) Shiroyama Saburō, *Shikikan tachin no tokkō*, (Tokyo: Shinchōsha, 2001), 172.
- 25) Shiroyama Saburō and Kudō Yukie, "Tokkō—shisha no shisende rekishi wo miru," *Shokun*, May special issue, May 2002, 25.
- 26) Ogiwara Hiroshi, *Bokutachi no sensō*, (Tokyo: Futabasha, 2004), 405–28.
- 27) Ogiwara, *Bokutachi no sensō*, 296–300.