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## Yasukuni Shrine

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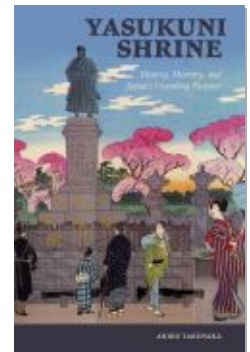
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## MOBILIZING MEMORIES

*Postmemorial Conservatism at Yasukuni Today*

It is  
 a way of life that constitutes the core of  
 the existence of Yasukuni.  
 The numerous *eirei*, who,  
 since the upheaval that marked the end of the Edo period,  
 sacrificed their own lives  
 in order to protect  
 the independence and dignity of Japan.  
 Why are the *eirei* noble?  
 Why is it necessary  
 for all Japanese  
 who live today  
 to understand and respond to  
 the noble spirit of the *eirei*?

MITAMA O TSUGU MONO (FILM)

The film *Mitama o tsugu mono* (To Carry On the Spirit of the War Dead, 2008), the source of this chapter's epigraph, is screened four times a day at the Yūshūkan Museum.<sup>1</sup> As the epigraph's final question suggests, the film emphasizes *eirei* (heroic spirit), a concept invented in the early twentieth century to confer nobility on Japanese military dead (see chapter 3). However, the film's treatment of *eirei* attempts to update the concept for the generations born after 1945, whose connections with the Asia-Pacific War are different from those of the preceding generations. Thus, the film is an important tool for familiarizing postwar generations with the brand of nationalism propagated through Yasukuni Shrine until 1945 and for garnering ideological and financial support for the shrine. The film, however, includes little material from the war years. Instead, it features a seemingly irrelevant item, coffee, which is introduced to forge a positive connection between

Japanese wartime presence in the South Pacific, the sacrifices the *eirei* made during that war, and coffee that Japanese youth (like those presumably in the audience) can enjoy today. By extension, many other contemporary commodities available in Japan today and, moreover, the peace and prosperity that Japanese currently enjoy, are made possible by *eirei*'s wartime sacrifices. I discuss the film in more detail later, but this chapter as a whole examines the ways that beliefs associated with Yasukuni Shrine, exemplified by the term *eirei*, have been repackaged and re-presented in recent years. The film *Mitama o tsugu mono* is one such example. I am interested in the ways that these recent representations attempt to influence the way in which the Asia-Pacific War is remembered today.<sup>2</sup>

Yasukuni Shrine is not alone in the effort to preserve memories of the war. The passage of time since 1945 motivates various groups to engage in activities to preserve and communicate wartime memories, from recording oral history narratives and mounting museum exhibits, to hosting websites and mailing lists.<sup>3</sup> Many of these efforts had begun as early as the 1970s, and the venues offer a range of positions vis-à-vis Japan's role in the Asia-Pacific War—from a revisionist narrative that presents Japan as the savior of East Asia from Western imperialism, to a narrative of victimhood in which Japanese wartime leaders are war criminals and civilians their victims. But, as I argue later, many of the latest repackaging efforts are motivated by concerns other than the preservation of memories.

The concept of postmemory is useful in thinking through the recent representations of war in cultural productions. In recent decades, bearers of Asia-Pacific War memories have shifted from the generation that comprised soldiers and civilians during the war to "postmemory generations," that is, those born after the event (after 1945 in this case) and who have therefore never directly experienced the trauma of an all-out war. However, the postmemory generations are deeply affected by the original event (the Asia-Pacific War). According to Holocaust scholar Marianne Hirsch, who coined the term "postmemory" in her examination of Holocaust memories, members of these generations have grown up "dominated by narratives that preceded their birth, whose own belated stories are evacuated by the stories of the previous generation, [which were] shaped by traumatic events that can be neither understood nor recreated."<sup>4</sup> They inherited the trauma of the previous generation through the environment in which they grew up, via everyday conversations, mass media, visual culture, and education. Mediated by representations, the transmission of memories is neither fully accurate nor complete (as is the case with any relaying of memories). Furthermore,

inherited memories of trauma are not comparable to the immediate experience of trauma. But this legacy is significant for certain communities such as the children of Holocaust survivors, whom Hirsch discusses, and children of Asia-Pacific War survivors, whom I discuss in this chapter, since, as I will argue, the inherited trauma can be much more complex and thus sometimes more difficult to negotiate.<sup>5</sup>

In considering memories of the Asia-Pacific War today, it is important to take into account the specificity of time and place, that is, changes that occur with the generational shift, as well as the particularities of the Japanese case. A useful and rich area of inquiry on themes associated with the war experience is the increasingly active production and promotion of cultural works in fields such as literature and visual media. Scholarship on the preservation and representation of Holocaust memories, with its abundance of sophisticated analyses of relevant themes, is useful for analyzing postmemory cultural productions in Japan.<sup>6</sup> While I draw on ideas from Holocaust scholars, I am mindful of the enormous differences between the two situations, which make a direct comparison of Japanese and Jewish experiences both impossible and irresponsible. Nevertheless, theoretical ideas on memory transmission developed by Holocaust scholars are relevant for thinking through the Japanese case.

Much of the more recent cultural production in Japan demonstrates a trend distinct from production associated with Holocaust memories. In Japan one focus is on the creation of a revisionist narrative—the kind that we encounter on the Yasukuni Shrine grounds. Instead of engaging with issues of war responsibility or investigating the reasons for Japan's engagement in an extended military conflict that lasted nearly fifteen years, many of these narratives attempt to reimagine an idealized past, which is eerily reminiscent of the state's propaganda during the war years. According to these narratives, the Japanese war against the Allied powers was for the protection of the homeland. Some go as far as to argue that Japan did not invade East and Southeast Asia as part of an imperialistic war of aggression but rather was attempting to liberate Asian nations from Western imperialism. Furthermore, the peace and prosperity enjoyed not only by Japan but also by other East and Southeast Asian nations would not have been possible without the tremendous suffering and sacrifice of the Japanese during the war years. Such revisionist history, with its roots in wartime state propaganda, has existed since 1945, particularly at Yasukuni Shrine. But I have seen an audience that is increasingly receptive to such narratives in recent decades. For some time now, the intended audience of these narratives has been the

postmemory generations; more recently, the authors of these narratives increasingly belong to the postmemory generations.

Not surprisingly, events hosted at Yasukuni Shrine and the exhibits mounted at the recently renovated Yūshūkan Museum now cater to an audience distinctly different from that during wartime and the immediate postwar years. Yūshūkan, in particular, has been completely reinvented as a site to educate postmemory generations in revisionist history. The key actor in these new creations is the Yasukuni Jinja Sūkei Hōsankai (Association for the Support and Reverence of Yasukuni Shrine; hereafter Hōsankai), established in 1998 on the occasion of Yasukuni Shrine's 130th anniversary.<sup>7</sup> A brainchild of then head priest Yuzawa Tadashi and former Imperial Army lieutenant colonel Yamauchi Toyoasa, Hōsankai was to function as a formal support system for the shrine, which, by then, was struggling financially with a decrease in the number of war-bereaved families. Hōsankai has played a key role in the recent initiatives at the shrine to encourage the postwar generation to learn and participate in revisionist history, from the 2002 renovation of Yūshūkan Museum to the creation of associations and events targeting the young. These initiatives are examined in this chapter.

The revisionist trend demonstrated in the Yūshūkan narrative is not part of Japan's mainstream today, but undoubtedly it is finding an ever more receptive audience. The contingency groups associated with the institution, most of whom have experienced the war in some capacity (Izokukai is one important group), have become a key factor in the curatorial decisions made in these exhibition halls. But the trend among the younger audience warrants further examination. One explanation is curatorial strategies that cater to the younger audience, but the relationship between postmemory and trauma is also useful for better understanding this shift. This trend among postmemorial generations is characterized by a need for conservative and redemptive discourse not only to overcome their inherited past but also to evade the issue of war responsibility, which is intertwined with traumatic memories. My aim in analyzing the narratives presented at these institutions is not to critique the narratives for their historical inaccuracies but rather to explore the reasons for their appeal—for both the producers and the audiences.

#### TRAUMA AND RECOVERY

Before presenting my analysis of the spaces and representations of war, I first address the desire of the postmemory generations to reconstruct,

through museum exhibits and other cultural productions, the past that they have not experienced. Theories on trauma are useful here, given that the postmemory generations inherit their previous generation's trauma. Studies and analyses of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and the process of recovery offer insights into the kind of memory work the younger generation encounters.<sup>8</sup>

Psychotherapist Judith Herman has explained the path to recovery from trauma as a process for victim/survivor to reconstruct the self. This process typically includes working through, or remastering of the traumatized memory. The survivor must transform the traumatized memory—which consists of disjointed fragments—into a coherent narrative that can be told to, and be understood by, others. The production of a coherent narrative allows the survivor to objectify the event and create a sense of distance—a distance that is both temporal and spatial—from the experience. Establishing the event as separate from the current self enables the survivor to mourn the losses experienced in the trauma and, ultimately, to work through the event. This is not an easy process, in part because of the difficulty associated with piecing together fragmented memories of the event and the impossibility of representing and communicating the experience of trauma through language or other means.<sup>9</sup>

The application of trauma theory to postmemory generations raises an interesting problem: What happens in the process of recovery when the trauma is not one's own but is inherited? How does one overcome a trauma that has no well-defined origin, structure, or clear end? This is where attempts to rebuild the past can be useful: that is, rebuilding a tangible past with finite temporal and spatial boundaries that can be acknowledged and eventually overcome. Historian Dominick LaCapra offers insights into this process of rebuilding an unexperienced past. In addressing the process of overcoming significant historical trauma, LaCapra points out the importance of distinguishing between two kinds of conditions in which the object of desire is not present: absence and loss.<sup>10</sup> "Absence" refers to the condition where the object of desire was never present, whereas "loss" indicates the object was present at some point in time. The distinction between the two is important in understanding trauma and recovery since the process of working through a traumatic experience involves reestablishing the self in spite of the loss. In the case of war, the loss may be either concrete (anything from people and objects) or abstract (a sense of security or happiness, for example). Working through and overcoming the trauma of war enables survivors to reestablish their lives without what was lost. For postmemory

generations, however, the loss experienced by the parents and grandparents was never a part of their own concrete past. Although it is possible and necessary for the overcoming process to work through, come to terms with, and help one restructure oneself around loss, it is never possible to overcome the nonpresence of something that never existed. In other words, it is never possible to overcome an absence. To me, such an act of rebuilding one's past using inherited memory and recreating the loss is an attempt by postmemory generations to overcome their trauma.

Some members of the Holocaust postmemory generations developed original ways of rebuilding. For artist Shimon Attie, for example, efforts at rebuilding resulted in a series of projections in a Jewish quarter of Berlin. Attie collected local archival photographs taken prior to the Holocaust, identified the exact location at which they were taken, and projected them onto the spot, allowing the images to fill in the void.<sup>11</sup> Another photographer, David Levinthal, created Nazi pageantry using collected vintage German figurines and photographed them to make representations that were his "only historical reality."<sup>12</sup> A number of artists toured and photographed concentration camps, which have virtually no trace of the tragedies that occurred there; others captured images of their own Holocaust-themed interventions in their daily "lifescapes."<sup>13</sup> The creation of an imagined past in ways that can be visualized can function as the first step in the process of coming to terms with a postmemorial trauma.

In discussing postmemorial responses to the Holocaust, James Young explains the creator's motive as a desire to incorporate into the work the "truth of how [the postmemory generations] came to know the Holocaust."<sup>14</sup> Young points out an important component of the postmemorial attempt to come to terms with unexperienced past. But from the perspective of trauma and recovery, that is only part of the motive. More important, it seems to me, is their need to recreate and take ownership of this inherited past that was never a part of their own experience. The graphic novel *Maus* by Art Spiegelman, a child of Holocaust survivors, is useful for understanding this need.<sup>15</sup> A key plot of *Maus* is Spiegelman's relationship to the haunting presence of his older brother, Richieu, whom he never met; Richieu died in the Holocaust, and his parents have never ceased mourning him. Spiegelman's trauma, then, does not involve his own experience of the Holocaust but his having grown up with survivor parents, who remain traumatized by their Holocaust experiences. In order to overcome this postmemorial trauma, Spiegelman first needs to understand the original trauma (that of his parents) and then to deconstruct the inherited one so that he

can retell it as his own narrative. The latter process might involve reconstructing the vicarious postmemorial experience in order to contextualize it within the parents' trauma. The development and creation of *Maus* involved Spiegelman interviewing his father about his Holocaust experience as a way for Art, the son, to rebuild the traumatized past—not just his parents' trauma, which he had never experienced, but also his own.<sup>16</sup>

Ideas and findings from Holocaust studies are useful in helping us think through ways in which Japanese postmemory generations have had to grapple with their heritage. But it is unsettling that theories related to Holocaust victims can be useful for our consideration of the Japanese war experience. Like the children of Holocaust survivors, many Japanese born to parents who experienced the Asia-Pacific War in some capacity grew up in an environment similar to what Marianne Hirsch describes: one that is shaped by memories of their parents' experience as well as by cultural productions aimed at preserving memories of Japan at war. And whereas the children of people who experienced the war (whom I call the first postmemory generation) were often surrounded by the traumatic memories, the succeeding generations (second postmemory generation) in Japan were exposed not so much to the memories themselves but to debates about Japan's war responsibilities. Their inherited memories are thus not uniform. Nevertheless, victim consciousness often dominates both kinds of memories. Since the carriers of the memories are, in their mind, victims, theories of Holocaust memories ironically become useful for analysis of the Japanese case.

While a comparison of the structural similarities between the Japanese case studies that I cover and the Holocaust examples that I have outlined is useful in reflecting on ways that trauma is experienced, remembered, and passed on, the Japanese examples of recent war-related cultural productions are distinctly different from the Holocaust case studies in two ways. First, the Japanese examples are typically not on the level of personal trauma and recovery (as was the case with Attie and Spiegelman) but strive for acceptance as a collective memory and are presented through media with possibilities for a wide audience (e.g., textbooks, museum exhibits) and a variety of visual media, including films and comic books. Second, they have increasingly shifted toward rebuilding an idealized past (what I refer to as revisionist history) than maintaining memories of their past. Representative examples here are Fujioka Nobukatsu's Association for Advancement of Unbiased View of History and graphic novels, such as those by Kobayashi Yoshinori.<sup>17</sup> These two differences result from the gap between the victim



consciousness that Japanese feel in general and the perpetrator role that Japan played during the war.

The current management regards Yasukuni Shrine as a cornerstone of peace since the peace and prosperity that are enjoyed by Japan today are the result of sacrifices endured by the previous generations (those enshrined at Yasukuni). Accordingly, to offer tribute to Yasukuni Shrine is to show gratitude for their sacrifices.<sup>18</sup> What we see here are attempts to reconceptualize “Yasukuni the site” and construct a new “Yasukuni the belief” that is tailored to the generations born decades after 1945. The goal is the dissolution of “Yasukuni the issue,” which can occur only if enough people embrace the new belief.

In the previous chapter I discussed the postwar termination of state support for Yasukuni Shrine and its effects on the enshrinement process. The shrine’s identity shift from a national war memorial to a shrine for peace is another consequence of its privatization. Yasukuni Shrine’s main source of postwar funding is donations from members of Izokukai.<sup>19</sup> With those generations diminishing in numbers in recent decades, Yasukuni Shrine needs a conceptual makeover to cultivate a new following that will support the institution financially. The shrine administration has put forth a variety of initiatives to engage the postmemory generations in its activities in recent decades. Its motivation is to increase the number of younger supporters and to seize a moment when the conservative faction of Japanese society is gaining ground.

#### YŪSHŪKAN AS A MUSEUM FOR PEACE

Here I turn to Yūshūkan to examine attempts by the shrine management to popularize its revisionist history through the museum exhibit. Nowhere is the Yasukuni brand of modern Japanese history more apparent than in the post-2002 Yūshūkan. The museum’s current exhibit narrates the imperialist history of modern Japan as the story of Japan protecting and liberating the rest of Asia from Western imperialism. In addition to its original postwar role as the repository of mementos that belonged to those enshrined at Yasukuni, Yūshūkan today prides itself on being an educational facility that teaches the younger generation the “true history” of modern Japan.<sup>20</sup> At the same time, the fact that the presentation of a revisionist narrative resulted in an increase in visitors suggests the presence of an audience that is already somewhat receptive.<sup>21</sup>

Hōsankai managed the Yūshūkan renovation project along with other “peace education” initiatives with a view to solidifying a new generation of supporters, particularly from the second postmemory generation. In today’s Japanese society, which has long renounced war, the highlighting of virtues associated with war death demands creativity. Hōsankai’s message, imparted through the museum, also subscribes to the cornerstone-of-peace concept with a focus on the *eirei* as those who worked to establish this. For example, the message featured on their official website in June 2013 by their president, Ōgi Chikage, urges visitors to contemplate the *eirei*, their experiences and the reason they fought, since otherwise the Japanese “will not be able to reflect upon the progress of Japan—a nation that has developed into one of the key global economic powers—or to appreciate the tranquility and peace we are able to enjoy today.”<sup>22</sup> The appreciation for the work of one’s predecessors harkens back to the ethical values represented by the *eirei* in wartime Japan. Previously, the Japanese people were to appreciate the sacrifices of the *eirei* for protecting Japan in wartime. Today, they are to be grateful for the peace and prosperity the war brought to Japan. By forging a connection between the war and today, the Hōsankai narrative seeks to renew the value of *eirei* for contemporary society.

The group’s founding objectives lament the contemporary situation, in which Japanese society does not demonstrate the proper measure of gratitude to *eirei*: “Propagating such knowledge as the spirit of *eirei* and the vestige of their sacrifice and dedication will contribute to the improvement of the spiritual decline observed today, as it will nurture a sense of gratitude toward the previous generations. It will also function as an educational role in the reacknowledgment of the traditions and the ethical spirit of our country.”<sup>23</sup> The group considers its mission to be the ethical education of current and future generations—one that emphasizes reverence for the war dead and equates reverence with spirituality, a doctrine that is very similar to what was propagated nationally during wartime. Since its inception, Hōsankai has hosted symposia and a lecture series, with speakers ranging from university professors and lawyers, to conservative journalist-celebrities such as Sakurai Yoshiko, as well as other figures of nationalist interest, including the parents of Yokota Megumi (victim of much-publicized North Korean abductions in 1964). In addition to the Friends of the Yūshūkan Museum and initiatives for elementary schoolchildren—two programs that target the younger generation, which I briefly discuss later—the Hōsankai has also opened a youth branch (Asanagi) for those between eighteen and

forty years of age.<sup>24</sup> Through its two branches (eastern and western Japan), the group coordinates its own lecture series and other activities (such as the cleaning of the shrine grounds, including Yasukuni and prefectural *gokoku jinja*, as well as the Imperial Palace Plaza), which are typically categorized as “voluntary service work (*hōshi katsudō*).” The Yūshūkan renovation, with a focus on education, fits squarely into the Hōsankai’s objectives, along with its other activities.

The new Yūshūkan, planned with the blessings and support of the Hōsankai, is markedly different from its former presence both before and after 1945. As I discussed in chapters 2 and 4, Yūshūkan Museum was an integral part of Yasukuni Shrine from its inception in 1882 to September 1945, when the SCAP ordered its closure. The building was then leased to the Fukoku Life Insurance Company between 1946 and 1980. Its rental provided income for Yasukuni Shrine after it became a private religious corporation on February 1, 1946.<sup>25</sup> In April 1961 Yasukuni reopened an abridged display, “Treasures and Articles of the Deceased (Hōbutsu Ihin-kan),” using the second floor of the former National Defense Hall (renamed Yasukuni Hall after the war), the experiential museum I introduced in chapter 4.<sup>26</sup> When Yūshūkan finally reopened to the public as a museum in July 1986, however, the display bore little resemblance to its predecessor.<sup>27</sup> Although utilizing the same space in the main museum building, which at the time of its closure in 1945 so prominently promoted a Japan that was both modern and grounded in tradition, cosmopolitan and ultranationalist, the newly opened museum was but a shadow of its glorious past. The first postwar museum offered a chronological display of objects associated with Japan’s modern wars, but without a coherent narrative.<sup>28</sup> The highlight of the exhibit shifted from representations of Japan’s military might, such as spoils of war and weapons featuring the latest technology, to mementos that belonged to the war dead. The museum boasted an average of more than ten thousand visitors per month in the initial years, but by the time I first visited in the summer of 1998, visitors were few and far between.<sup>29</sup> Inside an ill-lit and rather dusty series of rooms, uniforms, small-scale weapons, and other mementos occupied old-fashioned display cases.

After the war, the main objective of Yūshūkan became education. According to the first postwar curator, Itō Yoshiyuki, the museum was conceived as an educational facility to promote the idea that Yasukuni Shrine is directly associated with the foundation of peace and prosperity in postwar Japan, where visitors could acquire adequate information for a “correct

understanding (*tadashii ninshiki*) of the gods honored at Yasukuni.”<sup>30</sup> When the newly renovated and expanded Yūshūkan opened its doors in 2002, the museum had nearly doubled its exhibit space; the number of rooms had increased from fourteen to twenty. A marked change was the exhibit style, which featured methodologies that reflect the newest trend in history museum exhibits. Colorful, large-scale panels present narrative accounts of modern Japanese foreign relations complete with charts, maps, and photographs. The panels also provide summaries in English.<sup>31</sup> The renovation utilized the services of academics and a professional production company. Researchers of military history at the National Institute for Defense Studies (Bōeishō Bōei Kenkyūjo) compiled the information for the historical narrative printed on exhibit panels. Planning and design company Nomura Kōgei planned the exhibit space, following the general direction of the shrine priests.<sup>32</sup> The two focal points for developing the exhibit were educating the public on Japanese military history during the modern period and memorializing and honoring the spirits enshrined. Yasukuni supporters contend that since all of the political controversies surrounding the shrine stem from a lack of understanding of Japan’s modern wars, education of the visitors through its museum is an important mission for the shrine.<sup>33</sup>

#### THE “TRUE HISTORY” OF JAPAN AT YŪSHŪKAN MUSEUM

The presentation of the narrative in a history museum setting—complete with photographs, objects, and panels filled with information—lends legitimacy and authenticity to the Yasukuni version of history.<sup>34</sup> A visitor to the museum enters through a new two-story glass atrium attached to the eastern end of the symmetrical 1931 building. Immediately inside is a large airy entrance hall that features a refurbished Zero fighter plane, a locomotive, and a tank, among other large items. The text describing these objects is telling. For example, the label for the locomotive simply reads “Model C56-31 locomotive.” Further information follows in smaller text: “This is a locomotive that was produced in our nation and actively utilized in the ‘Thai-Burma Railway,’ which connected Thailand and Burma during the Great East Asian War. In the postwar period, it played an active role in regional development as a part of the Thailand National Railway.”<sup>35</sup> The text gives no indication either of why Japan was building a railway in the area or of the brutal violence the Japanese military inflicted on the local people

and Allied prisoners during its construction. This revisionist tone is consistent throughout the museum. As writer Zushi Minoru summarizes in his unofficial guidebook to the museum, the text in the exhibit is consistent in its message: All wars conducted in the name of the emperor are just wars.<sup>36</sup>

The exhibit proper begins on the second floor, where the visitor arrives via an escalator that overlooks the large-scale exhibits in the entrance hall. The escalator experience is that of ascending, with visitors literally lifted into the airy space toward light that filters through a large window at the top.<sup>37</sup> The light creates a halo around a small statue that stands in front of a glass panel. The statue is simply titled “Statue of a soldier (*Heishi no zō*).”<sup>38</sup> Etched on the glass panel behind it is a poem by the third-century-BC Chinese philosopher Xunzi, which is offered as the description of the museum’s namesake: “Travel far and learn from noble people in order to become a man of virtue.” Next to the exhibit entrance are two theaters, in which films produced by Yasukuni, including *Mitama o tsugu mono*, referred to at the beginning of this chapter, are screened daily.

The first two exhibit rooms situate the origin of the Yasukuni narrative in the spirit of the warrior. Room 1, “The spirit of the warrior,” is dimly lit and features a glass case containing a replica of the marshal’s sword (*gensuitō*) in the center, said to have been used by the emperor’s guards in the Heian era. Scrolls with calligraphy of classical poems on the theme of noble war deaths hang from the ceiling. Particularly of note is a composition by Nara-period (710–794) poet Ōtomo no Yakamochi, titled “Umi yuka ba,” which became the lyrics for one of the most popular military songs during the Asia-Pacific War.<sup>39</sup> The presentation suggests that the spirit of the warrior is the true Japanese spirit. If Room 1 is a philosophical representation of the warrior spirit, Room 2 presents it with objects and narratives from Japan’s premodern wars. Featured here are mythical figures such as Emperor Jimmu and Yamato Takeru, as well as historical individuals, including Kusunoki Masashige and Oda Nobunaga. Almost all of the objects on display are military related, as the objective here is to establish the importance of warfare (a civilized and noble war) to nation building as a concept that has been an integral part of Japan’s history since ancient times.

In Room 3, the narrative jumps to the modern period, beginning with the encroaching of Western powers on Asia in the mid-eighteenth century. The first wall text depicts the whole of Asia in danger and frames all of Japan’s modern wars as resistance to Western imperialism for the sake of Asia rather than the reality of Japan’s efforts to also establish itself as an imperial power in Asia. The theme of Asia’s resistance to the West is consistent throughout

the exhibits. In the following rooms, for example, visitors learn that Japan's earlier wars against China (1894–1895) and Russia (1904–1905) were conducted for the sake of Korea rather than to pursue Japan's imperial ambitions. The start of Japan's military aggression against China in 1931, for example, is portrayed as an attempt to support the Chinese Nationalist government in its civil war against the Communist Party, led at the time by Chiang Kai-shek, and not because Japan wanted to control territory in northern China because of its abundant natural resources. The innocuous name China Incident (Shina Jihen) is used for the undeclared, all-out war against China that was triggered by a skirmish between Japanese and Chinese troops at the Marco Polo Bridge outside Beijing on July 7, 1937. The invasion and occupation of cities such as Nanjing “resulted in peace and happiness in the city,” and the atrocities in the city, in which hundreds of thousands of people were brutally murdered, are described as the “identification of the Chinese troops in civilian disguise.”<sup>40</sup>

The narrative on the second floor extends to the end of the 1930s so that the entire first floor can be dedicated to the five-year period that Imperial Japan used to call (and conservatives still refer to as) the Greater East Asia War (Daitōa Sensō: December 8, 1941–August 15, 1945). Most of the rooms are composed of a combination of colorful, freestanding explanatory panels; glass display cases that feature uniforms, tools, and weapons that belonged to the deceased; newspaper clippings; and archival documents. The curatorial style of two rooms, however, differs from that of the others. Room 7, “Panorama Hall of the Russo-Japanese War (Nichiro Sensō Panoramakan),” and Room 9, “Shōkon ceremony grounds (Shōkon Saitei),” offer audiovisual experiences complete with background music and special lighting effects. Room 7 (Panorama Hall) is loosely modeled after the panorama building, a popular war-themed entertainment venue at the beginning of the twentieth century (see chapter 2). Inside the room, the blasting music of “Battleship March (Gunkan Māchi)” is augmented by intermittent cannon blasts and a rousing narrative that starts with “And [thus] Japan stood up (*Nihon wa tachi agatta!*)” On entering the room through a miniature replica of a triumphal arch—a popular commemorative feature of the Russo-Japanese War period—the visitor encounters sixteen minipillars of translucent glass, on which photographs of major military figures are etched along with their rank and accomplishments. Projected on the wall behind the pillars are grainy, monochrome film clips of battle scenes. Although curated along the same principle that features reproductions, the quiet of Room 9 (Shōkon ceremony grounds) contrasts with Panorama Hall. In the

center of the dimmed room is a lit-up replica of the palanquin used for the *shōkon* ceremony. To one side of the palanquin is a miniature reproduction of the *shōkon* procession: Priests carry the palanquin toward the shrine building. Recordings of live radio broadcasts of the ceremony play in the background. In a glass case along one wall are items that visiting bereaved family members would have received, such as the invitation card, schedule of events, and tickets. Enlarged photographs of families waiting for the procession cover other walls.<sup>41</sup> While these two rooms offer a contrasting impression to the visitor, the presentation style is similar, as are the visitors' reactions. These two rooms lack the aura of authenticity provided by the actual objects, photographs, and documents associated with those memorialized at the shrine, which are the strength of the Yūshūkan exhibit.<sup>42</sup> Visitors show markedly less interest in the displays in these two rooms than in those in the other rooms, which prominently feature objects that record the scars of war.

Objects, photographs, and documents are key to the narrative presented on the first floor, where the first five rooms introduce the historical context (Greater East Asia War 1–5), and the last four are dedicated to the “Gods of Yasukuni.” The narrative portraying Asia as the victim of Western imperialism continues here. For example, Japan attacked Pearl Harbor because it was facing an unreasonable encroachment by the ABCD (America, Britain, China, and the Dutch) forces, not because it did not want to accept Allied demands to pull its troops out of China and Southeast Asia. The narrative presented in this section is consistent with that for the previous wars: Japan is fighting for Asia; Japan is a peace-loving nation whose people were willing to sacrifice not just for their own sake but also for the well-being of the rest of Asia. *Sen-nin bari*<sup>43</sup> and other similar objects demonstrating home-front support, blood-stained flags, and documents featuring wartime slogans and newspaper headlines serve as material evidence to support the narrative presented in the rooms.

One distinct characteristic of the Greater East Asia War section is the focus on individuals. The first example is the “Nine Gods” from Pearl Harbor: the young men who charged to their deaths in the midget submarine mission that preceded the attack from the air.<sup>44</sup> Nine photographs are displayed along with telegrams reporting the success of the mission and newspaper pages with headlines such as “Declaration of War against Tyrants America and Britain.”<sup>45</sup> Photographs of the fallen are arranged throughout the display cases along with mementos such as pieces of clothing, weapons, and other items used at the battlefield, as well as handwritten letters sent

home. Objects such as caps, notebooks, or flags may have little significance if displayed independently. However, clustered together with a photograph of their deceased owner, along with a short description of his achievements or of how his young life abruptly ended, and an item that records a personal trace of the dead (handwritten letter, diary, last note, etc.), the objects create a powerful and emotional narrative that invites the viewer to identify with the deceased. The practice of viewing these items together encourages the viewer to identify, empathize with, and feel gratitude for these young men and their sacrifices.

The final rooms, named “Gods of Yasukuni,” provide a moving experience that make the last and possibly a lasting impression on visitors. Entire walls of each room are completely covered with hundreds of monochrome photographs depicting uniformed faces of the fallen. Each photograph is supplemented with basic and telling information: rank and name (with the suffix *mikoto* to signify their god status), date of birth, location of death, and their home prefecture. Although the date of death is not provided, their birth years suggest how young they were when their lives ended. Freestanding in the middle of the rooms are glass cases containing belongings of the deceased, which encourage viewers to identify with the “gods.” Among the objects are several dolls of women in kimonos. The dolls were donated by family members of these young men, who never had a chance to marry. These miniature brides are believed to become wives of the unmarried military dead in the afterlife.<sup>46</sup> In the last “Gods of Yasukuni” room, several areas of the wall panels remain open—as if to encourage those not already mounted to find their way to their final resting place on the walls of Yūshūkan among their fellow *eirei*.<sup>47</sup> Inconspicuously interspersed among the rows of portraits are three photographs of Class-A war criminals, including Tōjō Hideki.

The central atrium, situated between rooms 18 and 19 of the original museum building, showcases large weapons. (Room 19 is a part of the “Gods of Yasukuni” series, but the atmosphere here is markedly different: Although photographs and mementos are on display, the room’s distinct feature is the row of high-backed chairs lined up in front of a desk along one wall, where visitors are invited to write down their thoughts in the notebooks provided by the museum.) Notable large-scale weapons include Ōka, a glider plane equipped with an armor-piercing bomb, and Kaiten, a manned torpedo that was used to attack enemy ships underwater. These weapons were a product of desperation in the final years of the war, when little material was available to manufacture legitimate weapons and when human life was



considered to be the only viable replacement for the heavy metals required to build fighter planes and battleships, of which Japan no longer had enough. While accompanying panels provide only the technical specifications of these weapons, the way the viewing experience is framed firmly situates these missions within the Yasukuni ideology: that the men who operated these weapons willingly and proudly performed their duty. The thoughts of the more educated *tokkō* pilots—their doubts about the war in general, their knowledge that it was impossible for Japan as a nation to have a meaningful outcome from this war, their resolve to go on the mission for their family—find no place in this exhibit.<sup>48</sup>

The “Gods of Yasukuni” rooms and the central atrium displaying the *tokkō* weapons provide an emotional climax to the museum experience set up by the first fifteen rooms. By the time visitors arrive at these last rooms, they will have seen that Japan has, at least in the modern period, always fought heroically against Western imperialism, not just for the sake of Japan but also, or perhaps more importantly, for the well-being of East and Southeast Asia. In the process, Japan always followed the path dictated by the spirit of the warrior, as presented in the first two exhibit rooms. Early efforts at technological development yielded a series of “successful interventions” geared toward Asian safety and stability, including the “independence” of Korea and the establishment of a multiethnic paradise (i.e., Manchukuo, the Japanese puppet state in Manchuria). A turning of the tide in the 1940s produced an increasing number of young deaths, representative examples of which were showcased in the “Greater East Asia War” rooms and conform to the narrative of a nation proudly sacrificing for the good of East Asia. In the final rooms visitors are surrounded by visual testimony of the history they witnessed in the previous rooms in the form of countless photographic portraits. In the central atrium, visitors encounter the weaponry that aided these soldiers in their courageous final moments.

The last stop in the museum visit is the gift shop, at the corner of the entrance hall. Merchandise available ranges from plastic model kits of fighter planes and battleships, replicas of items from the Japanese military, including hats, flags, and prepackaged food consumed during war by military personnel, CDs of battle hymns and other patriotic songs, and other merchandise and toys from the 1930s and '40s that are not directly related to the war. The selection of books is extensive, ranging from writings by Fujioka Nobukatsu and his cohorts, Kobayashi Yoshinori’s graphic novels, collections of the last words of the *eirei* (*Eirei no kotonoha* series), and a wide variety of revisionist history books. Also available are reprints of wartime

elementary-school textbooks. The war-themed products here are firmly situated in an atmosphere of nostalgia. Taken in the context of contemporaneous objects such as dolls and tops, the replicas and reprints take on an innocuous quality that evokes nostalgia for the wartime generation and the younger generation's fascination with things retro.<sup>49</sup> I return to this theme of nostalgia later on.

#### CULTIVATING YOUNGER GENERATIONS OF SUPPORTERS

The renovation initially succeeded in increasing the number of visitors, but museum attendance soon leveled off at around a quarter million visitors a year. The generational composition shifted, however, fulfilling the shrine's key objective in renovating the museum. Prior to the renovation the majority of visitors were war-bereaved families and veterans, who traveled from faraway prefectures on organized tours for official worship at the shrine.<sup>50</sup> Visitors to the renovated museum appear to be mostly of the postwar generation. According to Iki Hiroshi, a curatorial staff member at Yūshūkan, whom I interviewed in 2005, the museum also often receives formal and informal visits from groups of schoolchildren. Iki emphasized the importance of teaching the history of modern warfare, which is not adequately covered in schools except to relay the message that "Japan did bad things at war."<sup>51</sup>

The desire of the shrine authorities to cultivate a larger number of supporters from the postwar generation is also apparent in the architectural design of the 2002 addition to the museum. Unlike the quasi-traditional design of the original structure, the glass and steel addition creates a distinctly modern atmosphere. Three designs were considered for the new wing.<sup>52</sup> The first featured an addition in the same style as Itō Chūta's design; the second a warehouselike design with a brick finish; and the third, the glass and steel structure that was ultimately selected. The design, which bears no resemblance to any of the existing structures in the Yasukuni compound, was not popular with some of the Hōsankai constituencies. One member, for example, engaged in a lengthy, written exchange with the shrine representatives protesting the selected design. The shrine management responded by emphasizing the importance of appealing to the younger generation. Yasukuni's chief of general affairs (*sōmu buchō*), who drafted the response, also noted that the design's openness allowed glimpses of the exhibits and activities within the museum building to serve as an invitation to passersby.<sup>53</sup> The more compelling reason, however, seems to have been the design's

potential to showcase the Zero fighter plane and make it visible from the outside to entice young men to enter the building.<sup>54</sup>

The museum also attempts to attract the younger generation by producing and screening feature films. These, too, have narratives in line with the Yasukuni discourse and portray present-day accounts rather than storylines from the 1930s and '40s so that they will better resonate with visitors in their teens and early twenties—the second postmemory generation. On September 1, 2008, Yūshūkan's main theater began screening Yasukuni's most recent film production, *Mitama o tsugu mono*. It is a romantic drama that features protagonist Ishibashi Takanobu, an unemployed twenty-five-year-old college graduate with no particular goal in life: a situation that resonates with many Japanese of his generation. Depicted as an angry and unmotivated young man at the beginning of the film, Takanobu is particularly irritated at his father, a *kigyō senshi* (corporate warrior) whose life revolves around a successful career that sometimes advances at the expense of others. Living in the same household is his paternal grandmother, who is at once a war widow (she lost both her husband and her brother in Papua New Guinea in the last years of the Asia-Pacific War) and a military affiliate survivor (she served as a military nurse). The film thus attempts to represent stereotypes of the three generations that make up the visitor profile of the museum, with hopes of appealing to viewers of all ages and to encourage dialogue among them.<sup>55</sup>

The film follows Takanobu as he encounters Yasukuni and the concept of *eirei* through his girlfriend, Manami. War enters the narrative very slowly, gradually familiarizing the viewer with the concept along with the protagonist. Early segments of the film deal more with issues that might interest Takanobu's generation, such as friendship, romance, family relations, and job prospects or the lack thereof. About a third of the way into the narrative, Takanobu begins to apprentice under Manami's uncle Yasaki Masato, a manual roaster of coffee beans. In conversations with Yasaki, Takanobu learns about the source of the beans in Papua New Guinea, and both Takanobu and viewers are alerted to the relationship between coffee beans and the Asia-Pacific War. Here, coffee symbolizes the fruits of Japan's engagement in the fifteen-year war. According to the film's narrative, coffee production is possible today in Papua New Guinea because Japan liberated the island from Western imperialism during the Asia-Pacific War. Through his interactions with Yasaki, who sternly trains him to become a qualified coffee roaster, and Manami, who works at an institution for people with disabilities, Takanobu begins to respect his grandparents' generation for the

sacrifices they made in the war. The film connects the lifestyles of Manami (working to help those who are weak) and Yasaki (continuing to work for the sake of the people of Papua New Guinea, whom Japan had liberated) to the principle of the *eirei*, those young men who sacrificed their own lives for the good of Japan. In short, the two are living a lifestyle of *eirei* in today's context. Takanobu ultimately vows to live selflessly and to follow, in concept, the way of the *eirei*.

In an interview on Channel Sakura, a conservative satellite television network founded in 2004, director Matsuda Takeyuki discussed his goal for the film: stressing the importance of a selfless relationship with others, as that would allow the Japanese to become the kind of people who would be supported by the spirit of the *eirei*.<sup>56</sup> The presence of three generations in the film (grandmother, father, and son) was a way not only to appeal to audiences of all generations but also to create a link between Yasukuni and future generations.<sup>57</sup> The film instructs viewers not only to appreciate the sacrifices made by the *eirei* but also to strive to become selfless human beings willing to make sacrifices (like the *eirei* enshrined at Yasukuni). The film thus evangelizes the belief system that centers on a concept that can be called the way of the *eirei*.

Networks of Yasukuni supporters also look to the younger generation. To mark the grand opening of the renovated exhibit, Hōsankai established the Association for the Friends of the Yūshūkan (Yūshūkan Tomo no Kai), which provides incentives and privileges similar to the Hōsankai at a more affordable membership fee for people twenty-five years of age or younger.<sup>58</sup> For an annual fee of one thousand yen (Hōsankai's annual fee is three thousand yen), members have free entry to the museum (typically eight hundred yen per visit for an adult) and are invited to attend symposia, study groups, and nature camps geared to themes associated with Yasukuni. In 2004, as a part of the association, Yasukuni initiated programs for elementary schoolchildren and their parents, who are also members of the postmemory generation, to participate in. Events for the younger cohort include gatherings for Girls' Festival (Hina Matsuri, March 3), Children's Day (May 5), and Tanabata Festival (July 7).<sup>59</sup> In 2010, for example, approximately four hundred parents and children gathered at Yasukuni for the Tanabata Festival on July 11, the first Sunday after July 7. The children wrote down their wishes on pieces of paper, which they carried to the main shrine, where they received purification and participated in offering a prayer for good health and academic success. After attaching their prayer papers to large bamboo branches on the shrine grounds in accordance with the Tanabata Festival

tradition, the group viewed “Family Concert of Singing Pirates (Utau Kai-zokudan Famirii Konsāto)” and competed in a “quiz rally” in the museum.<sup>60</sup> The newsletter of the Hōsankai concludes its report on the event with the wish that, by participating in such events associated with traditional Japanese culture, “the children will learn about the honorable spirits of the *eirei* and the correct modern history of Japan.”<sup>61</sup> The relationship between the singing pirates and the honorable spirits of the *eirei* was not apparent from the newsletter.

These new initiatives build on existing narratives that target the young generation. “Poppo,” a white pigeon, is one such example. During a child-parent gathering on February 27, 2011, to celebrate Girls’ Festival, participants viewed “Poppo-Chan Visits Yasukuni (Poppo-chan no Yasukuni Mairi),” a film designed for a young audience. In the film, Poppo the pigeon introduces the shrine and its associated beliefs using simple yet persuasive language.<sup>62</sup> Poppo represents the approximately three hundred white pigeons that are bred on the grounds of Yasukuni. According to the shrine’s website, only one out of every ten thousand pigeons is pure white in color—representing peace—suggesting that these symbols of peace naturally chose Yasukuni grounds as their home.<sup>63</sup> While the Poppo video was introduced in recent years, a cartoon version of the white pigeon has long been a staple of Yasukuni Shrine. Pamphlets available at the shrine feature Poppo explaining, in simple language and with phonetic guidance for kanji characters, the significance of Yasukuni and the gods enshrined there. The material is presented in comic-book style with a question-and-answer format, and the knowledgeable Poppo answers the children’s questions about the history of the shrine, the meaning of the word “Yasukuni,” and the god of Yasukuni.<sup>64</sup> Poppo encourages the young readers to visit Yasukuni in order to demonstrate their gratitude for the god that has protected the peace and independence of Japan and also to pledge to become upstanding human beings (*rippa na hito*).<sup>65</sup> Here again, a good person is someone who shows appreciation for the *eirei*.

The Poppo pamphlet is also available in English, Chinese, and Hangul translations. These versions do not always accurately reflect the Japanese version, however. For example, the Japanese pamphlet refers to the war criminals as “one thousand and several hundred people whose lives were mercilessly taken when they were unilaterally accused as war criminals in the perfunctory trial conducted by the Allied forces that fought against Japan” and whom Yasukuni Shrine refers to as “Showa martyrs (Shōwa *jūnan-sha*).”<sup>66</sup> The English version, however, merely refers to them as “people

who were labeled war criminals and executed after having been tried by the Allies.” Such differences are also evident in the translations of the Yūshūkan exhibit’s text.

MITAMA MATSURI: CONFLATING THE TRADITION  
AND IDEOLOGY

The grand opening of the newly renovated Yūshūkan took place on July 13, 2002, to coincide with the opening day of Mitama Matsuri, the four-day festival that is a major annual event at Yasukuni Shrine.<sup>67</sup> Here again, narratives of the past are revised to seamlessly connect with the present and the future. At first glance, Mitama Matsuri is a typical summer shrine festival. More than two hundred vendor stalls selling snacks and trinkets line the approach to the shrine, barkers stand in front of old-fashioned freak shows inviting visitors to enter, and people clad in summer kimonos participate in the traditional *bon* dance around the temporary wooden stage that encloses the Ōmura statue. Some three hundred thousand people, mostly high school and college students, visit the shrine for the festival each year.<sup>68</sup> The festivities take place in an atmosphere that is markedly different from the politically charged mood only a month later on August 15, the day when Japan observes the anniversary of its defeat in the Asia-Pacific War. At night, the shrine is packed with young couples who stroll up and down the approach, which is brightly lit by rows of thirty thousand yellow votive lanterns,<sup>69</sup> stopping now and then to check out the vendor stalls (see figure 10). Approximately fifty kinds of shows, both traditional and contemporary, take place on the Noh stage on the shrine grounds during the festival days. Little indication of militarism is present, save for some elderly men (presumably veterans) in military uniforms and the occasional singing of war-themed songs.

Mitama Matsuri is a postwar invention. It began in 1947 at the initiative of a young priest, Sakamoto Sadao, who approached the renowned ethnologist Yanagita Kunio with the idea of honoring the spirits memorialized at Yasukuni by reviving certain aspects of the semiannual festival of prewar days. According to an official shrine publication, Yanagita wholeheartedly agreed, noting that “the memorialization of the *mitama* is an extremely important activity that would contribute to world peace.”<sup>70</sup> The festival should be joyful and refined (*hanayaka de fūryū*).” The publication continues: “With the support of bereaved family members and veterans’ associations, the first Mitama Matsuri, which took place for four days from July 13 in



FIGURE 10. Visitors to Yasukuni Shrine grounds during Mitama Matsuri, July 2014 (author photograph).

the 22nd year of Showa (1947), was a huge success. The festival, which takes place under bright lantern lights, increased in scale every year and is now reminiscent of the *shōkon* festivals from the earlier years, which boasted horse races and fireworks.<sup>71</sup> Just as the festivities succeeded in attracting Tokyoites to the newly established Tokyo Shōkonsha in 1869, so Mitama Matsuri contributed to the postwar reinvention of Yasukuni as a military memorial to an institution promoting peace.

The use of space here is notable. Unlike earlier festivals but similar to the wartime celebrations, Mitama Matsuri maintains the spatial practices of a Shinto shrine. Regardless of the attractions situated along the approach and throughout the shrine grounds, the intended flow of traffic is linear. A typical visit to the festival involves a stroll through the main *torii* and up the approach with the worship hall as the destination—a pattern of traffic identical to that followed by shrine visitors at nonfestival times, where the main objective is to offer a prayer to the gods. After paying tribute at the worship hall the festival-goer might wander deeper into the shrine grounds to take in the entertainment at the Noh stage or visit the Yūshūkan Museum but

most likely will return via the main approach and through the *torii*—just like a visitor on a day without special events. This spatial practice, which reinforces the festival-goer's acknowledgment of the space as a Shinto shrine, emphasizes perception of the site as a religious institution for peace, where one's participatory role involves offering a prayer to the gods that protect the nation. Through their own spatial practice, the festival-goers become participants in the postwar version of Yasukuni discourse by creating a spectacle in which they, at least on the surface, comply with shrine conventions that involve a prayer for peace at the worship hall, preferably in the Shinto style of bowing twice, clapping one's hands twice, and bowing once more. By observing and being observed by others acting in a similar manner in this space, visitors reinforce, through a kind of mutual surveillance, the innocuous presence of the site as a shrine dedicated to peace, which Yasukuni supporters wish to endorse.<sup>72</sup> In this context of mutual surveillance, the objective of the visit does not matter since all visitors ostensibly conform to the formal practices expected at a Shinto shrine (linear traffic pattern and properly offering prayer at the worship hall).<sup>73</sup> Just as wartime Yasukuni festivals transformed Tokyoites into practitioners of the kind of nationalism the Japanese state endorsed through the shrine, current festivals incorporate visitors into Yasukuni's presentation of itself as a typical Shinto shrine.

Festival entertainments obscure the politicized nature of the space by highlighting the qualities of a typical Shinto shrine. Present here, too, is an evocation of nostalgia. This invented festival maintains an impression of being a tradition by offering the attractions associated with summer festivals at typical Shinto shrines. Some of the seemingly traditional venues also harken back to the earlier days of Yasukuni Shrine. For example, Mitama Matsuri is well known for its freak shows (*misemono goya*), which are reminiscent of the vulgar entertainment that attracted many Tokyoites in its early history.<sup>74</sup> The central location of the shrine also attracts many visitors. Thus Yasukuni's presence on these four summer nights has little in common with what occurs less than a month later and fuels tension between Japan and the rest of East Asia, as well as among the various political constituencies in Japan.

#### VICTIMS, PERPETRATORS, RESPONSIBILITY

The significance of the transmission and transformation of war memory in the Japanese case is manifold. Japan's defeat in 1945 was a conclusion to a



military conflict that lasted a total of fifteen years and resulted in approximately 2.5 million military and civilian deaths. The massive loss of life and resources was compounded by Japan's defeat as well as difficulties associated with the allocation of accountability. Ongoing debates in the postwar decades have not yet reached a consensus in the social realm on who was the responsible party—the emperor, the Japanese government, or the people at large—or on how to address the issues of reparation (who were the victims? The Japanese state, the Japanese people, the East Asian nations that Japan invaded, or the Allied troops that the Japanese military killed or injured?). The debates associated with Yasukuni Shrine focus largely on whether the Japanese state and/or the Class-A war criminals are responsible for war crimes. In conjunction with this debate it is important to consider the problem of those who need to shoulder the burden of (post)war responsibility, namely, the generations born after 1945, who hold the majority of key positions in society. These generations for the most part are reluctant to accept responsibility for the Asia-Pacific War even when many do accept the notion that the Japanese government and military committed war crimes. As a whole, then, the prevailing voice is the narrative of victimhood: Although wartime Japan was responsible, the individuals alive today are not. In the rest of this chapter, I use the concept of postmemory to briefly explore the possibility that the dominance of this narrative of victimhood should not be attributed only to political explanations and that the unwillingness of the younger generations to assume responsibility for Japan's wartime past can also be understood by employing a theoretical interpretation of trauma and memory.

The postmemory generations in Japan inherited two types of “past” to overcome. The first past is similar to the Holocaust postmemory experience: the suffering and losses of their parents' generation, which have become ingrained in the younger generations through their upbringing and environment. This is the absent trauma that postmemory generations need to rebuild in order to work through it. But the rebuilding process is complicated in Japan due to the presence of another kind of past that needs to be worked through: that of war responsibility. Many members of the generation that lived through the war attempted to evade this issue by allocating blame to the wartime government and the military. This is the “narrative of victimhood” that I presented in the Introduction—a narrative that sharply distinguishes between victim and perpetrator; a narrative that argues that the Japanese people were the victims of their own government and thus bear no responsibility for the crimes committed during war.

Yet the crimes have remained unresolved for nearly seven decades. Inadequate war reparations to the rest of Asia and the resulting international tension make the postwar generations feel that they are unfairly being held responsible for the crimes committed by the previous generation. As a general trend, this feeling of unfairness intensifies the further removed one is generationally from the war experience. The primary trauma for second postmemory generations in particular, then, is not the experience of the war itself or even of growing up surrounded by the experiences of the previous generation but is that of living in the never-ending postwar of Japan's defeat and of being burdened with the task of making reparations for past injustices.

One response to this inherited responsibility is the argument against the need to be accountable for something that happened before one was born. An example of this school of thought is the public comment in 1995 by Takaichi Sanae, at the time a member of the Lower House. Born in 1961, Takaichi argued that she was under no obligation to contemplate (*hansei suru*) Japan's war responsibility since she was not alive at the time of the war.<sup>75</sup> Takaichi's statement drew a variety of responses. Liberal media outlets, including *Asahi* newspaper, condemned her point of view as deplorable (*totemo kanashii*).<sup>76</sup> At the same time, many Japanese people of her generation, including those who acknowledge Japan's wartime crimes, admitted to having similar sentiments.<sup>77</sup> This latter response suggests a trend more complex than that of a generation refusing responsibility for something that happened before they were born. Those who acknowledge Japan's war crimes feel that the Japanese state has an obligation to pay for its wartime injustices but feel no individual responsibility for the war crimes.

The concept of "postwar responsibility" offers some possibilities for addressing the reactionary trend.<sup>78</sup> This concept is concerned not so much with accepting responsibility for the war and its associated crimes as it is with the postwar responses. The "responsibility" in this approach is therefore not for the acts committed during the war but for ending the international discord resulting from unresolved issues of the war, which can be achieved only through reconciliation. The issue remains of who is responsible and why, and scholars differ on this point. Renowned historian and activist Ienaga Saburō argues for collective responsibility that transcends experience or generational group: Given that the postwar generations have benefited from the peace and prosperity built on the Japanese war experience, it is necessary for all Japanese to bear responsibility.<sup>79</sup> Others argue that responsibility is not based on nationality but should be founded on a critical

assessment and understanding of Japan's imperial past. That is, the postwar generations should not be forced to inherit war responsibility without rational reasoning or acceptable explanation.<sup>80</sup> The implication here is that if one responsibly learns and thinks about the past, the need for inheriting war responsibility will become obvious. Many scholars have actively and often transnationally contributed to the discourse on Japan's war responsibility in recent years. However, the concept of the people's responsibility has yet to take hold among the general public in Japan.<sup>81</sup>

The revisionist history that I present through Yasukuni Shrine and Yūshūkan are attractive because it absolves the postmemory generation of war responsibility (since there were no crimes or wrongdoings to account for in the first place). Following LaCapra, I argue that the postmemory generations in Japan have been attempting to recreate versions of the past in order to convert their absences into losses. But in the case of such Japanese revisionist narrative, the past that has been recreated is structured in a way that absolves Japan of any kind of responsibility for its actions in the 1930s and '40s. In this revisionist narrative, the past does not require the second kind of overcoming in the form of reparations. In this scenario, Japan has no obligation to address the issue because it never existed. Such revisionist scenarios simultaneously satisfy the need to convert absence to loss by rebuilding something lost and, at the same time, allow a political reinterpretation of the past to fill the void left by the absence of the past, thus absolving the postwar Japanese of responsibility for deeds committed by their nation before they were born.

In the representations offered by Yasukuni Shrine and other mnemonic sites, memories of the Asia-Pacific War continue to be caught between competing interpretations of the past. The generation that experienced the war often seeks a redemptive interpretation of its losses (i.e., those lives were not lost in vain). Some align with the revisionist narrative offered at Yasukuni; others cater to the narrative of victimhood presented at venues such as the Shōwakan Museum.<sup>82</sup> Yūshūkan Museum seeks to attract those who were born decades after the war and who struggle with the idea of war responsibility. Regardless of the narrative, through the physicality of the spaces and the objects displayed within them, these sites of memory have a tendency to solidify a particular kind of war memory.

History tends to be distorted to varying degrees in these spaces, most often through omission. At the same time, what is presented in these spaces and through other forms of media can offer useful lessons for postmemory generations who desire a better grasp of the controversial past. Rather than

criticizing versions of the past that do not align with what the viewer considers to be true, exploring the reasons that institutions portray the past in specific ways can offer productive lessons. Multiplicity in representations of the past provides future generations with an important record of the ways that different interest groups interpret the past. A constructive analysis explores the reasons for the existence of competing narratives. A productive approach to Yasukuni Shrine is one that attempts to understand why its versions of history were constructed in the first place.