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VISUALITY AND FICTIONALITY OF JAPAN AND
EUROPE IN CROSS-CULTURAL FRAMEWORK

EDITED BY

MARCO PELLITTERI & MATTEO FABBRETTI

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A TRANSCULTURAL RESEARCH JOURNAL

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Alternative narratives of Japan in contemporary media: Kobayashi Yoshinori's *Sensōron*

ODA Tomoko | Kōbe University, Japan

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ABSTRACT

In the best-selling comic book Sensōron (1998), Kobayashi Yoshinori (b. 1953) develops his own "discourse on war" through the medium of manga, using a provocative discourse that has since been widely criticised for its potential to incite attitudes of exclusionary nationalism. Kobayashi's discourse on the Nanjing Massacre in Sensōron criticises the illiberal tendency of Japanese media, newspaper-publishing companies in particular, to select information they prefer and distort the past by using suspicious photos and captions. It is thus of value to reconsider this war-related debate from the perspective of Ien Ang's concept of "emotional realism," which refers to the tendency of viewers to be moved emotionally and empathise with the human events presented by TV dramas, regardless of whether or not they are accurately grounded in historical facts. Through close readings of Sensōron and related critiques of the volume, I will examine how Kobayashi Yoshinori challenges the dominant World War II narratives in Japan, which tend to overlook the actual wartime period and instead focus on the prewar and postwar periods. Then I will argue that, although Sensōron might lack meticulous research when compared to general academic scholarship, it functions to a certain extent as an alternative voice that critically points out contemporary Japan's neglect to reflect on World War II and apply the lessons of the past to the present.

KEYWORDS

Kobayashi Yoshinori; *Sensōron*; Manga; Emotional Realism; World War II; Postwar Democracy; Japanese Media.

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Introduction

Kobayashi Yoshinori (b. 1953) is one of several *manga* artists who have been actively involved in debate on the topic of postwar Japan.¹ He has been mostly successful both commercially and critically since his debut in 1976 as a cartoonist of gag *manga*, which mainly targeted young readers. Since the first publication of serial-form *Gōmanizumu sengen* (Haughtiness/Insolence Manifesto) in 1992, he has continued to share with his

¹ For a recent example, Kobayashi was invited to the Lower House Judicial Affairs Committee on 25 May 2017 by the Democratic Party to insist on the importance of free speech and democracy, arguing that Japanese democracy would be rendered unviable by incorporation of an anti-conspiracy clause to the ongoing amendment of the Act for Punishment of Organised Crimes, Control of Crime Proceeds and Other Matters (The Asahi Shimbun 2017, n.p.).

readers his own opinions principally concerning politics, economics and morals in contemporary Japan. His works seem to contain more verbal texts than other *manga* because he tends to include his own philological research on issues that he deals with and, in the case of his best-selling *manga Sensōron* (1998), quotations from the writings of deceased soldiers. Despite receiving harsh criticisms from international scholars and reviewers, examples of which will be considered in the following section, his unique style of representing historical and social issues in gag cartoons has resulted in a sensational hit.

His *Sensōron* in particular created considerable discussion both domestically and internationally.² The primary target audience of this *manga* is younger readers who have little idea what it was like in wartime Japan, partly attributable to the history curriculum in schools and general apathy. Nevertheless, the work was read widely by not only youths but also older readers, which led to a social phenomenon.³ The contents range from wartime episodes told by the war generation and the author's own childhood memories, to his interpretations of war-related issues and Japan's current situation. Specifically, a large portion of the work proclaims the high spirits of Japanese troops who were conscripted and engaged in warfare. It concentrates on positive depictions of the image of Japan at the time, when public opinion in Japan tended to view the Japanese capture of other Asian countries positively as the termination of Western powers' occupation in the region and, according to Yorimitsu Hashimoto, approved of the idea that the supposedly "racially-inferior" Japanese had begun to threaten Western nations (Hashimoto 2009, 203). Combining a comical drawing style with academic historical research, Kobayashi develops his own provocative "discourse on war" through *manga*, which has since been widely criticised for its potential to incite militaristic attitudes in the public.

Moreover, today, at a time when the formerly young readers of *Sensōron* have grown up to be adults, Japan confronts the emergence of another young generation that may not know even the name of Kobayashi as a cartoonist. The present Cabinet of Japan has reinterpreted the Constitution to justify use of military (Self-Defense Forces, or SDF) in

² Regarding the reaction to the work, domestically, for example, Kobayashi and a left-wing intellectual Uesugi Satoshi battled in court: Uesugi inserted a number of pictures from Kobayashi's *Sensōron* to his book, to which Kobayashi voiced opposition. Firstly, Uesugi won the case (Tōkyō District Court 1997, n.p.), but later the court ordered him to revise some of his citations from *Sensōron* (Tōkyō Supreme Court 1997, n.p.). This legal incident brought Kobayashi and his *manga* additional fame. Internationally, the second edition of *Sources of Japanese Tradition: 1600 to 2000, Vol. 2.*, a collection of primary publications from the publisher, explores Kobayashi and his *Sensōron* (de Bary et al. 2005, 1290-1296).

³ According to Rumi Sakamoto, the sales were 650,000 copies as of the day she made research on it (Sakamoto 2007, 79).

emergency situations and has generated a national debate on whether or not Japan should change the Constitution to grant greater recognition to the SDF/army. Japanese people are again being pressed to evaluate the master narrative—the historical statements made by authoritative figures and positively broadcast by mainstream media, which is reminiscent of the “grand narrative” as defined by Jean-François Lyotard in *La condition postmoderne* (1979)—regarding World War II and related political issues. Revisiting Kobayashi’s “discourse on war” might be of significance in that the *manga* can create an opportunity for the new generation as well as contemporary readers to confront war-related issues. It is thus imperative, through a reconsideration of Kobayashi’s sensational *manga*, to discuss this topic.

The facticity of the Nanjing Massacre is one of the vital issues Kobayashi deals with in *Sensōron*. The Nanjing Massacre refers to the actions carried out by members of the Japanese Imperial Army during its capture and ensuing occupation of the then capital of China beginning in December 1937. The factual details and interpretation of the atrocity remain a highly contentious issue both domestically and in international relations.⁴ In his chapter on the incident, the main target of Kobayashi’s criticism is journalism in Japan. Above all, he questions a number of renowned newspapers publishing companies, including the Asahi Shimbun, for having an incoherent stance and exerting overwhelming influence.⁵ Writer Motohiko Izawa asserts that the structure of Japanese journalism remains positive about distorting the truth for its benefit (Kobayashi and Izawa 1999, 47). Satō Takahiko’s meticulous research points out that a sense of discrimination towards Japanese people possibly prompted two American journalists—Frank Tillman Durdin, foreign correspondent for *The New York Times*, and Archibald Trojan Steele, pressman for *The Chicago Daily News*—to fabricate

⁴ Although the numbers are contested, the vast majority of historians both in and outside of Japan agree that tens of thousands of unarmed soldiers and civilians were killed by the Japanese Imperial Army during its occupation of Nanjing, in addition to committing other acts of atrocity including rape. For representative views, see Hata (2007), Higashinakano *et al.* (2005), Kasahara (2007), Kennedy (1998), etc.

⁵ For instance, Kobayashi introduces a morning issue of the Asahi (31 October 1984) in which a photo of columns of smoke was published with the caption describing Japanese soldiers proliferating poison gases. Citing Takeshi Inagaki, former Asahi journalist, Kobayashi explains that the Asahi eventually corrected the caption to state that the photo shows smokescreen crossing the river as had been uncovered by the Sankei Shimbun. Kobayashi, however, deplores the Asahi Shimbun for failing to learn from this lesson, and claims that it has continued to publish inaccurate reports regarding World War II, on issues including “comfort women,” without making corrections or apologies (Kobayashi 1998, 160-161). Later in 2014, the Asahi Shimbun Company corrected this particular article based on inaccurate information and apologised for it (The Asahi Shimbun 2014, n.p.).

and broadcast the Japanese atrocity to the world, which contained no documentary proof (Satō 2013, 50-55, 200-207).

Thus, what Kobayashi's discourse on the Nanjing Massacre in *Sensōron* does is that it attempts to indicate the illiberal tendency of Japanese media, newspaper publishing companies in particular, which selected information they preferred and distorted the past by using suspicious photos and captions. Roland Barthes asserts that a photograph conveys a message due to the multilayered process from the moment the photo is taken to its development. With a caption, a photograph can even "change its meaning" (Barthes 1977, 15). Susan Sontag also argues that a photo gradually needs an explanation to show its origin as time passes. A person's memory, however, is vulnerable to the passing of time, and it is possible for a caption to express a certain ideology that is not intended by the photo-taker (Sontag 2003, 25-27). Thus, it is arguably common knowledge that a photo does not necessarily reflect the truth. The problem of captions is a common issue related to photography, and is relevant regarding the presentation of the Nanjing Massacre in *Sensōron*.

In light of this, I will adopt Ien Ang's concept of "emotional realism" in discussing this topic. Her meticulous analysis of the American television series *Dallas* (1978-1991) shows that viewers tend to be affected by television soap operas not as a result of the factual aspects of their settings but due to the emotional ups and downs they incite (Ang 1985, 44-45). Through analysis of photos and captions exhibited in Ōsaka International Peace Center (Peace Ōsaka) and published in mainstream media, *Sensōron* claims the falsity of the Nanjing Massacre. Kobayashi's own interpretation and description of war history in *Sensōron* corresponds to Ang's notion of "emotional realism," in the way he displays his information so that readers are moved emotionally to empathise with the human events that his *manga* portrays.

Through close readings of *Sensōron* and related critiques of the volume, I will examine how Kobayashi Yoshinori challenges the dominant narratives regarding World War II in Japan. Then I will argue that, although *Sensōron* might lack meticulous research when compared to general academic scholarship, it functions to a certain extent as an alternative voice that critically points out contemporary Japan's neglect to reconsider World War II and to apply the lessons of the past to the present.

Circumstances and Discussions Surrounding *Sensōron*

The responses of critics generally show unfavourable views towards *Sensōron*. Sakamoto Rumi, for example, indicates that the volume overemphasises glorious aspects of the war, such as *kamikaze* pilots' high degree of loyalty to Japan and the patriotic feelings that ordinary citizens expressed during the wartime period, rather than aggressions carried out by the Japanese Army (Sakamoto 2007, 79-81). Eric Johnston assertively calls Kobayashi the "acknowledged king of right-wing manga artists" and *Sensōron* a "historical revisionist manga" (Johnston 2007, 115). Rebecca Clifford articulates that *Sensōron* propagandises the concept of moral purification just as wartime Japan did (Clifford 2004, 7). Shimazu Naoko criticises Kobayashi's myopic sense of history and his positivistic narrative development (Shimazu 2003, 114). Furthermore, most of them point out his selective use of reference material and the lack of credibility of his arguments. Kobayashi's oversimplified style of *manga* drawing is also targeted often.⁶ Kobayashi himself recalls a large number of objections from intellectuals against this volume (Kobayashi 2000, 14).⁷

Sensōron, however, has played a certain role as a trigger for Japanese readers to think more about Japan's past and present through its appeal to the emotions of contemporary readers. Kobayashi, as a cartoonist who is intensely interested in Japanese historical issues, chooses the medium of *manga* to represent his stance on such topics. As these historical issues remain highly contentious, it is necessary to reconsider objectively the nature of Kobayashi's strategy, despite the fact that a remarkable number of intellectuals have denounced *Sensōron* in a reactionary manner, as discussed below, insisting that it is merely a reproduction of popular culture which does not contribute to academic research on war history. The ideology expressed in Kobayashi's *manga*, as James Shields contends, "looks to reconstruct a (national) identity via individual conversion" by "a visual and emotive process as a cognitive one" (Shields 2013, n.p.). That is part of the reason why Kobayashi appears as "intimate, frank, ironic, wry, puzzled, judgmental, even self-mocking—qualities

⁶ Examples of the criticism include: the pictures might convey some provocative messages (Shimazu 2004, 114); the work reinforces gender norms through the heavy use of submissive, sexy women (Clifford 2004, 12); oversimplification of the history and previous research might be at work (Sakamoto 2007, 80).

⁷ Other criticisms include the concern that the graphic deformation of the enemy characters and the protagonist narrator, Kobayashi himself, who advocates his views intensely, might influence unduly the understanding of young readers. Kobayashi disagrees with this idea and says it looks down on the readers' comprehensive abilities. He also points out that many objections to *Sensōron* exhibit a plethora of illogical reasoning and cites Susumu Nishibe's remark, "excreta bombs of words," as a metaphor for the intellectuals' irrelevant complaints against him (Kobayashi 2000, 22).

academics and daily news reporters dutifully avoid as unprofessional and unobjective,” which explains characteristics of a “narrator of literary journalism” as defined by Paul Many (Strecher 2014, 168). Although Kobayashi’s *manga* has been criticised for its biased use of sources and propagandistic tones, an exploration of *Sensōron* and Kobayashi’s strategies can nevertheless shed light upon the reasons why his work has had such a great impact in postwar Japan, which could be said to rival well-documented historical sources in size.

Kobayashi’s approach has clearly created a stir in media-dominated Japan. Mainstream war-related representations, such as photos exhibited in war museums, TV dramas and textbooks of history, tend to focus on Japanese victimhood as those representations have politically neutral nature (Seaton 2007, 34). As Sakamoto has argued, *Sensōron* opposes that hegemonic narrative by highlighting hidden, small voices of the wartime generation. Sakamoto has maintained that Kobayashi questions the ignorant stance of the Japanese towards the concepts of individuality and nationalism/patriotism. Sakamoto also claims that Kobayashi utilises historical resources to demonstrate how the young wartime generation thought about these concepts in order to test contemporary readers’ sense of self within the context of history and community (Sakamoto 2007, 82). James Wertsch, in addition, has written that the accuracy of a war-related memory can be secondary to the possible functions it may serve (Wertsch 2009, 123). Thus, it is possible to consider alternatively Kobayashi’s “discourse on war” as a catalyst; his depictions of war history, regardless of their accuracy, have the potential to prompt empathic responses among his readers.

This evokes research on “emotional realism,” a conceptual term coined by Ien Ang. Her study asserts the expanding range of the definition of realism: namely, that the audience can also respond to the realism of TV dramas “at a connotative level” rather than just at a denotative level (1985, 43). As Julia Halam and Margaret Marshment add, viewers treat their emotional response to the text “as a catalyst . . . because it enables a release of emotion comparable to that experienced in real life situations” (Halam and Marshment 2000, 124). In this point, “emotional realism” in Ang’s terms can be applied to Kobayashi’s challenge in *Sensōron*. In a similar way to *Dallas*, Kobayashi’s *manga* seems to rely on common aspects that contemporary readers can find in the specific case of the mainstream media’s treatment of the Nanjing Massacre and the individual experiences of the war era he portrays.

Kobayashi's re-presentation of the Nanjing Massacre

The Nanjing Massacre is one of the most controversial historical and political issues related to World War II. The main dispute regards whether such a massacre actually occurred and the number of victims, the interpretation of which varies among researchers. For example, Higashinakano Shūdō concludes that no official historical record supports the interpretation of mass slaughter (Higashinakano 1998, 78). Many critics and historians, however, maintain that the Japanese army committed many acts of atrocity during the period of Japanese occupation of Asian nations. Barbara Hartley, for example, shows “irrefutable evidence of widespread abuses of power at the time by Japanese civil and military authorities” to demonstrate specific instances of mass murder and rape (Hartley 2007, 95).

Kobayashi's stance towards the Nanjing Massacre is simple and consistent. He argues that left-wing activists have used fake photos to fabricate the atrocity, going so far as to suggest that the entire fabrication was engineered by the Chinese. He also asserts that such extreme efforts to fabricate the past are almost cult-like (Kobayashi 1998, 152). His analyses of famous photos related to this incident support his argument. In this section, I will scrutinise the difference between Kobayashi's argument in *Sensōron* and some common views about the Nanjing Massacre. I will then demonstrate that, in spite of Kobayashi's selective examination, the work can still be appraised for the way it attempts to reveal the mechanism of propaganda, which can affect the set of public opinion unconsciously but greatly.

Sensōron dedicates twenty-one pages to scrutinising photos related to the Nanjing Massacre. First of all, it introduces a horrific picture of many chopped heads that was exhibited at Ōsaka International Peace Center (Peace Ōsaka), a public peace museum that is visited by a large number of schoolchildren as part of their extra-curricular studies. The exhibition panel explained that the photo was taken when the Japanese army murdered Koreans who were operating an independence movement in 1920. Nevertheless, as this chapter demonstrates, the same photo was also used as a depiction of the Nanjing Massacre in the *Asahi Shimbun*. The explanation of this photo depends on the time and space where it is employed. Then, Kobayashi introduces research by Tanaka Masaaki, a critic of modern history and current events, who contends that the original photo had an imprint stating, “The heads of the mounted bandits shot and killed in Tieling, Manchuria” (Kobayashi 1998, 154; Tanaka 1987,

128). *Sensōron* thus claims that this photo does not evidence the occurrence of the Nanjing Massacre.

The next photo in this chapter shows several dead bodies around a flight of stairs. Peace Ōsaka explained that the victims of the Japanese army's bombings in Chongqing appeared in this photo. However, it was published as evidence of the Nanjing Massacre on *Bungei Shunjū*, a traditional-conservative political magazine, in 1956 and had since been cited by multiple Japanese media sources for nearly thirty years. In 1984, *Asahi Journal*, the weekly magazine of Asahi Shimbun, introduced the same photo as "Chongqing bombing" and had since been known as such. Masaaki Tanaka revealed the falsity of both explanations and discovered the true background of the photo: the victims were actually suffocated to death in an underground vault in Chongqing. The original photo was taken by Carl Mydans, a photo journalist, who dedicated it to *LIFE History of World War II: China-Burma-India* (1979) (Tanaka 1987, 121). Kobayashi argues that this photo of dead bodies shows neither the victims of bombing committed by the Japanese army nor the Nanjing Massacre, which demonstrates a neglect for doing research before exhibiting and publishing on the part of both Peace Ōsaka and other sources (Kobayashi 1998, 156).

The same chapter introduces another photo displayed in a peace museum in Ōsaka with a caption of "Dead Bodies Abandoned in the Yangtze River," which was used as evidence of the Nanjing Massacre. One can see an Asian trooper standing on the right side of the photo looking down at a number of abandoned bodies. Kobayashi explains how this photo appears to be a fake. Where the bodies are abandoned, according to the cartoonist, appears too narrow to be the third longest river in the world by a considerable width. In addition, he points out that the trooper's helmet and military uniform has nothing in common with Japanese ones used at that time. Although it is evidently hard even for a layman to say that this photo shows the Nanjing Massacre, as Kobayashi deplores, an authorised Japanese professor, Tomio Hora, adopts this photo for the background picture of his book named *The Nanjing Massacre: the Definite Edition* published in 1982 (Kobayashi 1998, 164). Among the target of Kobayashi's criticism is a photo captioned as "Chinese women abducted by the Japanese army." He disagrees with the caption, saying that this photo shows Japanese troops guarding Chinese women against being robbed by the Chinese army. According to Hata Ikuhiko, the photo was originally taken by photographer Kumazaki Tamaki and published in *Asahi Graph 10*

November 1937, with the caption noting “a bundle of women going back to their home quarter after farm labour, protected by Japanese soldiers” (Hata 1998, 43-45).

Through these examples, Kobayashi exposes the significant and often deceiving influence exerted by captions, a topic that has been discussed theoretically in scholarship by Roland Barthes (1977) and Susan Sontag (2003), as noted earlier. Kobayashi criticises certain quarters of the Japanese media, peace museums, and the academic arena for dismissing the danger of photos with inaccurate captions, and repeating critical misreadings and misunderstandings of what those photos actually convey (Kobayashi 1998, 160-165).

Throughout the chapter, Kobayashi consistently insists on the use of inscrutable accuracy by the Japanese press. Above all, he harshly criticises Asahi Shimbun Company’s simplistic adoptions of Chinese testimonies of the Nanjing Massacre gathered in interviews by journalist Katsuichi Honda, the contents of which were serialised without corroborating coverage as “Travels to China” (*Chūgoku no tabi*, 1971) in the company’s various print media (Kobayashi 2000, 162). In this way, *Sensōron* provides many examples of what aspects of media broadcasting Kobayashi considers to be hindering readers’ impartial historical recognition.

It is true, as Sakamoto indicates, that the mere revelation of the fake photos is not enough to deny the occurrence of the Nanjing Massacre as *Sensōron* does (Sakamoto 2007, 86). Nevertheless, what Kobayashi’s discourse on the Nanjing Massacre in *Sensōron* does is that it attempts to indicate the illiberal tendency of the Japanese media, newspaper publishing companies in particular, which select information they prefer and distort the past by using suspicious photos and captions. In order to warn readers of the danger of being unconsciously influenced by such biased accounts, Kobayashi even uses provocative words like “brainwashing.” Although critics have said Kobayashi himself attempts propaganda by means of such offensive words, his desperate stance could also be interpreted as a reaction to what he considers to be the critical state of contemporary public opinion regarding Japanese historical consciousness. It could be said that Kobayashi is being courageous in voicing his opinion, knowing that he will be treated as a villain by the press.

This is how *Sensōron* utilises what Ang calls “emotional realism.” As Glen Creeber explains, taking the globally-renowned drama *Roots* (1977) as an example, “emotional realism” “translate[s] and humanise[s] historical facts for a contemporary audience”

into more recognisable, digestible narrative (Creeber 2004, 29). Kobayashi's challenge is to be seen not as a quality academic text but as a *manga* of "emotional realism." Regardless of the "side effects" of Kobayashi's provocative narrative as indicated by his critics, the emotional characteristic might help to explain the work's massive sales.

The elaborate depiction of wartime memories

Kobayashi devotes many pages of *Sensōron* to portray the wartime generation's episodes based on their memories. He aims to describe the experiences of "his grandfathers," which he argues has been oppressed by the postwar "war-phobic" mood (Kobayashi 2000, 26). Most of these episodes abound in renowned figures of the Imperial Army and show the Japanese troops' allegiance to the nation. Although this aspect of the *manga* is the main object of condemnation due to its "revisionist" mood, Kobayashi is defiant in his preaching of the value of such storytelling as a means to break through what he sees as the long-term stagnation of post-war democracy. This section analyses the significance of these wartime memories pictured in *Sensōron*. It will consider the possibility of such depictions to question the master narrative, providing readers with alternative perspectives with which to view the past.

Sensōron depicts a wide range of war experiences that veterans and ex-troops had in the war. It details their ranks, the locations of the battlefields they were stationed at, the period of their detachments, and their personalities (Kobayashi 1998, 273). For example, Kobayashi shows a long letter from an elderly woman named Ms Ito, one of his readers, who recalls the memory of Mr Ogawa, a company employee who was drafted for the second Sino-Japanese war. A three-page section of her letter conveys the heartwarming nature of Mr Ogawa, who she says was witty and gentle enough to call a grasshopper on his shoulder "Mr Grasshopper (*batta-kun*)," in spite of his brave actions as a commander in the capture of Nanjing (1998, 46-48).

Another chapter of *Sensōron* introduces Kobayashi's super-optimistic relative, who went to the Mainland China to join the army. He cheerfully describes his war experience as something like travelling abroad. He remembers various kinds of tasty food that he had in China both on duty and after the war. When he came back home, he was chubby, carrying a lot of excellent blankets, which he got from Chinese people by barter trade, on his back (Kobayashi 1998, 273-275).

The longest episode of the war veterans in *Sensōron* is based on a diary kept by Takamura Takehito during his period on duty. Kobayashi dedicates as many as sixty-four pages to the retelling of his war memory. Takamura was a company commander of division artillery, who took the field seven times and survived intact. Kobayashi's detailed depiction of Takamura's autobiographical episode includes his desire to be a soldier in his childhood, his skilful tactics in battle as an excellent commander, the brave troops of his division, his compassion towards the Japanese hostages that he rescued, his extraordinary sense of responsibility, and his unswerving loyalty to his country. Kobayashi focuses on the glorious aspect of Takamura's war experience and emphasises uplifting feelings and a sense of fulfilment that he encountered in the front of the army (Kobayashi 1998, 209-272). Thus, it could be said that *Sensōron* contains a large volume of positive representations of war experiences.

Criticism of such positive portrayals of the war experience tends to focus on Kobayashi's victimisation of the war generation. Sakamoto analyses that Kobayashi's representation of ex-soldiers' positive experiences just repeats the familiar logic of victimisation: as some activists insist on the war victims' rights to speak out, Kobayashi also victimises the war generation and privileges their right to speak out (Sakamoto 2007, 82-83). Clifford also argues that Kobayashi's scenario is worn out and classic in its concentration on the victimisation of the war generation as a group unjustifiably accused, and in the way he tries to outline how the master narrative colludes to keep the counterargument secret (Clifford 2004, 14-15). Shimazu considers Kobayashi's glorified depiction of war episodes as a personalisation of these histories, made manageable through the medium of *manga* (Shimazu 2003, 114).

It would be more accurate to say, however, that *Sensōron* is less concerned with victimisation and personalisation than in striving to achieve a balancing act for the public opinion. Here the master narrative can be also called the collective memory of Japan. As Saito Hiro notes, changes of historical circumstances urge the members of a group to reconstruct their collective memory (Saito 2006, 353). In general, however, collective memory is tragic, and it easily becomes the "eternal truth" and "eternal identity" of a group (Wertsch 2009, 126). Once the collective memory is fixed, it is chiefly invulnerable to any other memories, which are typically expelled from public discourse. This is partly because, as Jan Assmann notes, the discourse of politics readily draws from the contents of collective memory, thereby strengthening it (Assmann

2006, 7). It could be possible to read *Sensōron* as an attempt to prevent Japan's collective memory from becoming too one-sided and to adjust the public opinion for a fairer discussion about historical consciousness.

Sakamoto and Clifford also challenge Kobayashi's overemphasised representation of the war's honourable aspects and neglect of the negative dimensions the war that people were forced to experience, such as post-war poverty, misery, and their sense of relief at the end of the hopeless war (Sakamoto 2007, 80; Clifford 2004, 17). This critique can be attributed to the emphasis *Sensōron* places on the public rather than the private. As Kobayashi himself argues, postwar Japan has suppressed any positive discourses of those who went to the war as part of the military (Kobayashi 2000, 132). Moreover, he considers that such negative aspects, such as some troops not wanting to go to the war and ordinary people's postwar hardship, do not need to be included in his *manga* because they are already well-documented elsewhere.⁸ This choice made by Kobayashi tests the power of imagination to look at the past while thinking about a set of values at that time, which is different from the contemporary one. Kobayashi criticises the existing condition of postwar Japan for lacking these patterns of thinking (1998, 99).

Therefore, through the representation of the war veterans and ex-troops, who are easily regarded as "aggressors" and the "shame of Japan" in the atmosphere of postwar democracy, *Sensōron* attempts to provide readers with another viewpoint and the opportunity to contemplate the difference between postwar and prewar values. Although the great portion of the glorious depiction may look personalised or revisionist, this sense of discomfort could be said to demonstrate the absolute dominance of a master narrative in Japan that actually victimises the Japanese military.⁹ As Elizabeth Lozano and Arvind Singhal argue, in order to change the current of society, not merely information but also flexibility is demanded (1993, 124). *Sensōron* might exemplify this action of reading a wide variety of (so-called) "left" and "right" media to look at the past multilaterally and think about it flexibly.

⁸ Here, other *manga* volumes on war should also be taken into account, which depict different ideas and situations of war (e.g. *Hadashi no Gen* by Keiji Nakazawa, the war stories by Shigeru Mizuki). Further research will explore in more detail how these works deal with postwar hardship experienced by ordinary people.

⁹ This process may well be at work in other areas of debate in Japanese society as well (e.g. survivors of the Eastern Japan Great Earthquake Disaster in 2011, who are struggling for their own dignified survival/life in a society that apparently is not so willing to reintegrate them), which I will explore further in another time and place.

Once again, the significant role of “emotional realism” lies in the wartime memories portrayed by Kobayashi. Whether or not these episodes told by the elderly people are true is not a relevant question within the discussion of the concept. Leigh H. Edwards, explaining Ang’s terms, notes that, while the readers of an “emotional-realistic” medium are in the midst of such uncertainty, they still find a certain realism in the fiction (Edwards 2013, 171). Anna McCarthy also accounts for Ang’s concept, saying that the viewers of *Dallas* “derived a sense of realism from the show’s apparently true-to-life depiction of psychological situations” (Creeber 2015, 76). Similarly, Kobayashi’s elaborate representation of wartime episodes in *Sensōron* can persuade contemporary readers to think about what they have in common with the older generation who survived the war era. After being emotionally enjoyed first, *Sensōron* can introduce the readers to the higher level of discussion on how they can take the lesson of the war generation and apply it in the debate of their time.

Conclusion

I have considered, with mention of on the concept of “emotional realism,” why the *manga Sensōron* has generated great publicity and significant commercial success, in spite of Kobayashi’s controversial stance. I have specified the difference of outlook between Kobayashi and the mainstream media through the examination of his depiction of the Nanjing Massacre and his representation of war veterans’ memories. Then, I have demonstrated how *Sensōron* sets out to offer resistance against what Kobayashi perceives to be a self-tormenting sense of guilt and victimising way of thinking, nurtured by the mood of postwar democracy. Through the adoption of “emotional realism,” the *manga* provides a minor discourse of the war through which certain lessons can be handed down to future readers. It can be said that this method aims not to lead Japan back towards militarism but to reconsider current society by learning from individual experience and memory and by relying upon the emotional aspects of readers’ perceptions. This beneficial quality of the work can be attributed to Kobayashi’s storytelling and drawing, in relation to the notion of “emotional realism.”

While Kobayashi’s interpretation entails some risk of being regarded as right-wing, his stance should be understood as being more nuanced; he disagrees with Tōjō Hideki’s *Senjinkun* military code (Kobayashi 1998, 280) and rejects militarism and fascism (Kobayashi 2000, 30). He regards both the Great Tōkyō Air Raid and the atomic

bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki as merciless “demons” (Kobayashi 1998, 318-339). He admits that the principle of preferring honourable death of *kamikaze* corps radically caused useless deaths (1998, 279). He denies having a close relationship with the Liberal Historiography Study Group (Kobayashi 2000, 46, 240).¹⁰ He clearly denies that he desires Japan to start another war (Kobayashi 1998, 271, 374). Despite these vindications, Kobayashi has been easily labelled an extreme nationalist agitator for the provocative appearance of his *manga*, which seems partly to show the influence of the opposition political class of postwar Japanese democracy.

More importantly, what Kobayashi emphasises most is the importance of distinguishing credible sources from fakes (1998, 171). As Murakami Hatsuichi, the curator of the Ōkunoshima Toxic Gas Museum,¹¹ notes, simply looking at the wartime history from the victim’s perspective raises nothing productive for the future (Buruma 1995, 111). *Sensōron* strives to outline the necessity for the present generation to appreciate the magnitude of this controversial dispute by enabling them to exert imagination properly.

After the publication of *Sensōron*, the prolific *manga* artist published several *manga* volumes related to Japanese historical consciousness. Among them is *Yasukuniron* (2005), which outlines the misperception of the origin and concept of Yasukuni Shrine in the political and public arena. Also, the *manga* laments how postwar Japan lacks a consciousness of Shinto ethos. Kobayashi writes that although Shintoism unifies the nation, because people do not appreciate it consciously many politicians have even disregarded the concept entirely and proposed creating another public cemetery with no religious conception in order to appease criticism from neighbouring countries (Kobayashi 2005, 38-47). Kobayashi’s stance towards the nation and its traditions seems to be similar to that expressed by war veteran Onoda Hiroo,¹² who was appalled by the Japanese public’s blind submission to commercialism and reluctance to respect

¹⁰ The Liberal Historiography Study Group (*Jiyū-shugi Shikan Kenkyūkai*) is an intellectual organization that views the Japanese wartime history from positive and nationalistic perspectives (Clifford 2004, 1, 3). Although Clifford repeatedly asserts Kobayashi’s connection to Fujioka Nobukatsu, a central member of this group, it is, at the same time, repeatedly denied by Kobayashi himself as noted above.

¹¹ Ōkunoshima Toxic Gas Museum was inaugurated in 1988 in the hope of remembering the history that, during World War II, the Imperial Japanese Army produced toxic gas for the warfare secretly in Ōkunoshima island, Hiroshima.

¹² Onoda Hiroo (1922-2014) was a soldier of the Imperial Japanese Army, sent to the Lubang Islands, Philippines, as an intelligence officer in 1944. Even after the World War II was terminated, he believed in the continuity of the war and stayed there, conducting espionage. He returned to Japan in 1974 on orders from his previous supervisor.

the war dead and the Yasukuni Shrine (Trefalt 2003, 158-159). This volume, like *Sensōron*, consistently conveys Kobayashi's argument: he encourages individual readers of the *manga* to doubt what is said to be true and meet the problems related to history and the past head-on.

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