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Japan Disarmed: The Symbolism and Rejection of the Defeated Soldier in Japanese Social Media

Ian Ghows

On August 28 1945, the Empire of Japan formally surrendered to the Allied nations. The signing marked the end of an era and the death knell of the militaristic Empire. It also left millions of Japanese servicemen and colonists stranded abroad. With Japan's economy crippled and its navy shattered, it was up to the Allies to repatriate the colonists and surrendered Japanese servicemen. Many of these servicemen would not see their homeland for years; others, especially those in Soviet captivity, would never return. Much has been written about American soldiers' homecoming and the widespread euphoria in the United Kingdom following the end of World War II, but less has been written on the perspective of the vanquished. This may be due to the age-old adage that "History is written by the victors." Clichés aside, the topic of the Japanese homecoming is a singular one that deserves as much attention as the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941. Where Pearl Harbor shocked the American public, the official surrender did the same and much more to the Japanese populace. To hear the emperor, a man whom many believed to be descended from a goddess, outline his intention to surrender, and then to have the Japanese islands occupied, provoked a deep soul-searching within the Japanese. The focus of this soul-searching was directed at the politicians and, especially, the military who had led them to believe they

were winning the war. The cold, often hostile, reception of defeated Imperial Japanese servicemen, portrayed as invincible heroes by Japanese wartime propaganda, and the attitudes of the Japanese people as reflected in the social media of the time are indicative of a natural Japanese shift towards pacifism and a rejection of militarism.

The pre-modern Japanese social structure had placed the warrior class of society, the samurai, at the top for hundreds of years. They were the bureaucratic social elite, but were also romanticized in classical tales and songs extolling valor and virtues. After the Meiji Restoration in 1868, the samurai class was abolished and replaced with a new Western-style military elite in 1872.¹ The birth of the Empire of Japan also signaled the birth of Asia's first modern military, whose objective was to protect Japan from any would-be imperial colonizer.

As a means of avoiding predation, Japan linked its modernization with joining the ranks of the imperialists following the military defeat of China in 1895 and of Russia in 1905.² Propaganda and militarism in Japan increased with each success. Decades later, Japan's encroachment in Asia increased with post-World War I colonies and the expansion into Manchuria in 1931. On the heels of these military successes, the Japanese war machine seemed invincible. When Japan entered into military conflict with China in 1937 and the Allies in 1941, more successes followed as

¹ James L. Huffman, Modern Japan: An Encyclopedia of History, Culture and Nationalism (New York: Garland Publishing, 1998), 215, 241-42.

² Ibid..

they conquered the Philippines, Malaya and Britain's "Fortress" Singapore in 1942.³ As Japan went from victory to victory, the propaganda machine at home continued to pump up the virtues of a strong military. When the war began to turn against Japan, Allied bombers began their terrible fire-bombing raids and Japanese defeats were reported by newspapers as victories. Then, the United States dropped two atomic bombs and instantly killed hundreds of thousands of Japanese soldiers and civilians in the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Thus, when on 15 August 1945, Emperor Hirohito informed his people that he intended to surrender to prevent further loss of life, the lies about inevitable military victory were exposed and the trust between people and government shattered. Returning Japanese servicemen became a hated symbol of the war and suffering to the Japanese public, unnecessary in the postwar era, and this is reflected heavily in the social media of the time.

Many scholars have recently taken up the subject of the Japanese Empire. Few, however, have gone into as much depth as John W. Dower whose book, *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II*, provides overviews, primary accounts and analysis of the situation in postwar Japan.⁴ Dower's work is critical to this paper, especially his examination of the all-important social, political, and economic factors that shaped the defeated nation after the war. Furthermore, Dower stresses the important role of the

³ Major General S. Woodburn Kirby, CB, CMG, CIE, OBE, MC, Singapore: The Chain of Disaster (London: Cassell, 1971), 138-39.

⁴ John Dower, Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II (New York: WW Norton, 1999), 1.

Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers (SCAP), General Douglas MacArthur, and his staff in the formation of a new Japan. This was to result in a democratic Japan without the means to return to its imperialistic ways.

The popular Japanese media after the end of the American Occupation also offers insight into the shifting discourse on the role of the military. This may be seen, for example, in the original Japanese release of the film, *Gojira*, in 1954.⁵ Since it was released soon after the end of American-imposed censorship, the film presents criticism of many facets of the conduct of the war and is reflective of the postwar attitude towards anti-militarism which would not have been in the film had censorship continued. It cannot be doubted that the film's single greatest condemnation was directed at the Americans for unleashing atomic and nuclear weaponry, which cinematically created the well-known, nigh-unstoppable fire-breathing green monster. The importance of this source is in its lasting popularity, which is indicative of its warm reception by a sympathetic audience. *Godzilla* became a national icon for Japan due to the popularity of the 1954 film.

Other works that examine Japanese attitudes towards the military include Murakami Hyōe's *Japan: The Years of Trial 1945-1952*, written by a Japanese veteran-turned-reporter who makes great use of Japanese sources unavailable in English; *Bushido*, by Nitobe Inazo, written in 1905 and reflective of the militaristic attitude in pre-war Japan; and *The Atomic*

⁵ Ishiro Honda, *Gojira: The Original Japanese Masterpiece, Including the U.S. theatrical release Godzilla, King of the Monsters*, 2 Disc DVD & Booklet (Tokyo: Toho, 1954, 1956).

Bomb Suppressed: American Censorship in Occupied Japan, by Monica Braw, which addresses the inconsistencies of American policies in Japan regarding censorship and the atomic bombings.⁶

Defeat in 1945 prompted a rejection of the militaristic symbols and traditions that had led Japan to humiliation, and this strongly-felt sentiment is made clear in the postwar period media. The collective Japanese psyche shifted dramatically, and few scholars have examined the central issue of Japanese demilitarization. This paper attempts to illuminate the societal perspective of the vanquished Japanese soldier after the war and show how that experience was subsequently manifested in public opinion via social media.

Japan, like Germany, has come a long way since 1945 but, unlike Germany, it has not been as active in global politics. As Dower says in the introduction to *Embracing Defeat*, “What matters is what the Japanese themselves made of their experience of defeat, then and thereafter; and for a half century now, most have consistently made it the touchstone for affirming a commitment to ‘peace and democracy.’”⁷ But in the early days of the Occupation, everything was uncertain. Millions of Japanese servicemen deployed overseas, from Manchuria and China to Burma and

⁶ Murakami Hyōe, Japan: The Years of Trial 1945-1952 (Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1982); Nitobe Inazo, Bushido: The Classic Portrait of Samurai Martial Culture (Tokyo: Tuttle Publishing, 1969); Monica Braw, The Atomic Bomb Suppressed: American Censorship in Occupied Japan (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1991);

⁷ Dower, 30.

the Dutch East Indies, had been left stranded.⁸ So too were millions of Japanese civilians who had emigrated as colonists.⁹ Despite hopes of a quick repatriation, many were to die outside Japan after the war's end while others would take years to return. Allied forces, including the Americans, British and Dutch, employed Japanese men taken prisoner after the surrender as unpaid physical laborers up until 1947, often to rebuild and reassert the Westerners' colonial rule in Asia.

American Influence on Japanese Opinion

The topic of Japanese attitudes as reflected by popular social media is an extremely complex one given that it is a matter of perspective and how these varied perspectives influenced the course of events. In addition to the Japanese people's malaise (*kyōdatsu*) in the early years of the Occupation, the presence of American forces themselves conditioned Japanese attitudes towards the military.¹⁰ Despite MacArthur's attempts to present the image of a functional Japanese government, SCAP remade Japan in the way it saw fit. For example, when the Japanese government in 1946 made minimal changes in the wording of the new Constitution demanded by SCAP, MacArthur ordered SCAP's Government Section to create a draft of the new Constitution "to show the Japanese how it was done."¹¹ Murakami describes then-Prime Minister Shidehara Kijūrō's reaction to the new Constitution

⁸ Ibid., 48.

⁹ Ibid..

¹⁰ Dower, 88-89.

¹¹ Ibid, 360.

which banned any and all armed forces as “unthinkable, but, on learning that this was one of MacArthur’s idealistic obsessions, [Shidehara] gave up any idea of opposition.”¹² Japanese newspapers printed the full, complete draft of the Constitution for the Japanese public to examine on March 6.¹³ At the time, it was publicly known that there was no consensus in the government and the draft itself was dotted with “expressions and ideas that were quaintly alien.”¹⁴ However, both MacArthur and Hirohito publicly endorsed this draft, thereby ending any possibility of revision.

One must also be aware that the opinions expressed in the censored social media were picked and chosen and that the general Japanese public cannot be fully represented in such a limited scope. Newspapers, magazines, books, films, and a host of other forms of communications had to be translated prior to publication, and certain topics such as anything related to the atomic bombings, were taboo with unwritten but very real consequences if they were discussed.¹⁵ When the newspapers released the draft Constitution, American censors “suppressed all but laudatory comments.”¹⁶ As a result, rumors spread by word of mouth that SCAP had browbeaten Prime Minister Shidehara and his cabinet into accepting the Constitution without objections.¹⁷ So why was MacAr-

¹² Murakami, 202.

¹³ Kazuo Kawai, Japan’s American Interlude (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), 52.

¹⁴ Ibid..

¹⁵ Braw, 82-3.

¹⁶ Kawai, 52.

¹⁷ Ibid, 53.

thur, presented as a man so keen on establishing democracy in Japan, engaging in undemocratic activity?

The answer is probably that MacArthur did not trust the Japanese not to return to militarism. To ensure that Japan became a democracy and never returned its old habits, those who supported militarism had to be stripped of their political foundation as well as their ability to spread their ideas. MacArthur, as a military man, was more likely to respond with a typically military order than he was to actually let the Japanese government make a decision. By imposing a Constitution endorsed by the Emperor, MacArthur ensured that there was no legitimate reason to militarize. Article 9 reads, "...the Japanese people forever renounce war as a sovereign right of the nation and the threat or use of force as means of settling international disputes ... Land, sea, and air forces, as well as other war potential, will never be maintained. The right of belligerency of the state will not be recognized."¹⁸

Censorship ensured that any attempt to coordinate a large-scale rebellion against the government would be discovered. Susan Braw also asserts that censorship was used to steer the Japanese public away from criticizing the government and the Americans as well as to promote democratization.¹⁹ The use of censorship during the Occupation meant that the Americans' filtered social media to fit American political agendas. This means that the social media of the time deliber-

¹⁸ "Article 9 of Japan's Constitution, The No-War Clause," Japan-101.com, http://www.japan-101.com/government/article_9_of_japan.htm, (accessed 1 Mar. 2012).

¹⁹ Braw, 28-29.

ately expressed anti-militaristic themes so as to conform to SCAP's Press Code. As a result, it is not an entirely accurate means of assessing the Japanese public's attitude.

Similarly, the International Military Tribune for the Far East, also known as the Tokyo War Crimes Trials, played a role in placing blame entirely upon the Japanese. The entire nation was culpable, guilty of association with and support for the militaristic regime. Of the twenty-eight Class A defendants, seven were sentenced to death by hanging, thirteen were imprisoned for life, five were imprisoned for varying lengths of time, two died during the trial and one was deemed unfit to stand trial because of mental derangement.²⁰

Censorship thus limited the use of government publications and statements to gain an accurate assessment of the Japanese public's shifting opinions. To gain a better understanding of the Japanese mindset of the pre-war era, one must examine the literature of the period. One such work, Nitobe Inazo's 1905 book, *Bushido*, offers an interpretation of the samurai code: "Chivalry is no less indigenous to the soil of Japan than its emblem, the cherry blossom," he says; "It is a living object of power and beauty among us."²¹ Despite the abolition of the samurai class in 1873, Nitobe holds that samurai values were not only pertinent but present in 1905 Japan. This is not the aggressive, nationalistic militarism that arose in Japan during the 1930s but, Nitobe's work nevertheless shows that there was a pre-existing martial pride that

²⁰ Murakami, 212.

²¹ Nitobe, 1.

served as a foundation for the militarism of the 1930s. “As among flowers, the cherry is queen, so among men the samurai is lord,” Nitobe asserts.²² The samurai can act as a metaphor for the Imperial Japanese military, who were the new warrior-heroes of Japanese modernity in the pre-war era. Nitobe notes in the chapter regarding the training of samurai, “A samurai was essentially a man of action. Science was without the pale of his activity. He took advantage of it in so far as it concerned his profession of arms.”²³ This disdain of non-military sciences had not disappeared when the samurai were abolished in the 19th century. In fact, it was arguably accelerated by the need to develop modern weapons to protect Japan from colonial annexation by a western power. A strong and modern military was the only preventive measure that the Japanese believed could preserve their country from the western imperial powers. One must note, however, that Nitobe’s publication in 1905 is a foreshadowing of, but not the same as, the militarism that would grow in Japan during the 1930s, which took thoughts like Nitobe’s to an even greater extreme.

The Attitudes of Repatriated Soldiers and Sailors

One such extreme that was promoted during the war by Japan’s military government was the ostracism of the defeated. As a result, Japanese soldiers and sailors taken prisoner overseas were fearful of their postwar homecoming despite their desire for it. Many were plagued by fears of social ostracism by the people

²² Ibid., 111.

²³ Ibid., 65.

they had failed to protect.²⁴ In fact, as Murakami points out, “the majority of Japanese condemned the former Japanese army and navy out of hand...no one was interested in ...whether they had distinguished themselves...or whether they had been prisoners.”²⁵ However, when one considers the soldiers’ fears alongside the deep stigma associated with surrender and being taken prisoner, the reason becomes clearer. Japanese society had been conditioned to hold men who surrendered in contempt to the point where it was considered more honorable to die in battle than to be taken prisoner and escape captivity.²⁶

So to what kind of welcome did Japanese soldiers and sailors return? Cities and homes devastated by American bombers forced many Japanese to live in shantytowns.²⁷ Many veterans who were demobilized, dressed in rags without resemblance to the smart uniforms of wartime propaganda, were shunned by their communities as defeated men stripped of their honor. Returning servicemen from China and other overseas posts were often hit doubly hard. By 1946, many Japanese had heard of stories of the atrocities committed by Imperial Japanese soldiers. As a result, they were often considered to be social pariahs and participants in horrible war crimes. In letters to the press, veterans spoke about how they received scorn from both acquaintances and strangers alike. Some voiced their sincere regret for these crimes whilst

²⁴ Murakami, 226.

²⁵ Ibid., 226-27.

²⁶ Walter Skya, Japan’s Holy War: The Ideology of Radical Shinto Ultrationalism (London: Duke University Press, 2009), 263-64

²⁷ Dower, 48.

others protested their innocence and indignation at being treated as war criminals.²⁸

A sizeable number of repatriated soldiers found that they had been declared dead, with “their funerals conducted and grave markers erected.”²⁹ The return of someone believed dead caused a varied range of emotions, from joy to heartbreak. Stories circulated about returning soldiers finding out that their wife had remarried, often to a brother or close friend.³⁰ The reality of these stories is unknown but their presence is an example of the widespread confusion and tragedies brought on by the end of the war. Many letters to newspapers contained pleas for the public to distinguish between the men who had been simple soldiers in the service of their country with the “military cliques” who had been responsible for the conduct of the war. This suggests that the Japanese public, as a whole, was not making this distinction. The military had led them to war and so, in defeat, the military was, rightly or wrongly, at fault for all of it, though as we shall see, soldiers, individually, may not have been blamed.

During the process of demobilization, Japanese and American soldiers cooperated to ensure that the process went smoothly. In the reports made by General MacArthur and those made by the Japanese government’s ministry tasked with demobilization stated, “No disorders; no opposition; cooperation

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 60.

²⁹ *Ibid.*.

³⁰ *Ibid.*.

continues.”³¹ The lack of disruptions and the ready compliance of the Japanese forces to demobilize immediately show that even the soldiers were tired of fighting. In his reports, MacArthur pointed out the hugely disproportionate ratio of American to Japanese troops. Two and a half American divisions were in charge of “fifty-nine Japanese divisions, thirty-six brigades, and forty-five-odd regiments plus naval and air forces,” totaling roughly 3.5 million Japanese soldiers.³² Had the Japanese men chosen to, they could easily have ousted a relaxed, though cautious invader. Instead, they complied swiftly with orders to disarm and without the least resistance or complaint. MacArthur relates an anecdote in his report that exemplifies the cooperative spirit between the Imperial Japanese forces and their American Occupation counterparts during the process of demobilization. An American jeep encountered a Japanese tank column on the way to a disarmament depot. To let the jeep pass, the Japanese commander ordered his tanks to halt. MacArthur continues,

“As the lead tank stopped to permit passing, the jeep driver cautiously skirted it to the left on the narrow road. The soft shoulder crumbled and the American found himself tilted at a perilous angle with his vehicle mired in the soft muck of

³¹ Douglas MacArthur, “Reports of General MacArthur, MacArthur in Japan: The Occupation: The Military Phase, Volume I Supplement,” Army.mil, [http://www.history.army.mil/books/wwii/MacArthur Reports/MacArthur V1 Sup/ch5.htm](http://www.history.army.mil/books/wwii/MacArthur%20Reports/MacArthur%20V1%20Sup/ch5.htm), (accessed 20 March 2012).

³² Ibid..

a rice paddy. Climbing out, the officer scratched his head and pointed to a cable attached to the side of one tank. Meanwhile a Japanese officer had come running up and asked in passable English if the tank driver had been at fault. Assured to the contrary, he barked orders to his men and the tank driver jockeyed his tank into position, hooked the cable on the jeep and pulled it back on the road. The Japanese captain bowed his apologies, accepted an American cigarette with thanks, ordered his tank column to continue and, waving amiably to the American, disappeared in a cloud of dust.

A month earlier these men would have shot one another on sight. Significantly, the Japanese armored unit was travelling without guard to be demobilized; the Americans and the Japanese alike were integrated in a demobilization program which was evidently successful.”³³

If incidents such as this tank column roaming the country unguarded were common, it implies that the American occupiers had achieved a rapport with their Japanese colleagues that eliminated the need for armed American guards to accompany the Japanese on the way to their depots for disarmament.

For those who did not return, efforts were made by relatives of missing servicemen to petition Gen. MacArthur. In April 1950, he received a “remarkable appeal from some 120,000 individuals ... all of them relatives of still-missing soldiers,” accompanied by an embroi-

³³ Ibid..

dered portrait of MacArthur.³⁴ This is, as Dower points out, an imitation of the wartime practice of sending handmade *sennin-bari haramaki*, or “thousand-stitch belly bands,” as an affirmation of the close bonds between the people at home and the soldiers abroad.³⁵ This appeal points out that family members had no desire to blame their loved ones in uniform. To them, there was no shame in acknowledging that their husbands, brothers, sons were soldiers who lost the war. They expressed only an innate human desire to reunite the family with their missing relatives. This suggests that the public’s contempt of veterans was not always directed against the soldiers themselves but rather at the militarism and humiliation that they represented.

The sad truth is that many who returned to their native Japan returned as ashes. Many Japanese orphans were repatriated with their families’ remains tied around their neck in white boxes. Servicemen returning from abroad performed the same duty for their deceased comrades, endeavoring to find their friends’ relatives to give them some closure.³⁶ Terrific efforts were made by these soldiers to see to their responsibility to their deceased comrades before attempting to reconnect with their own loved ones.

Many of the former servicemen were “cynical and contemptuous of the officers who had led them in battle.”³⁷ In a letter to the *Asahi* newspaper one former enlisted soldier wrote about how enlisted men died of

³⁴ Dower, 50-52.

³⁵ *Ibid*, 52.

³⁶ *Ibid*, 57.

³⁷ *Ibid*, 58.

starvation more often than officers and asked, "How he could give comfort to the souls of his dead comrades."³⁸ Tominaga Shōzō, and over a thousand of his comrades captured in Manchuria did not return to Japan until 1956. They had been handed over by Soviet troops to Communist Chinese troops, and kept in captivity for trial. Most were acquitted on the basis that they had shown sincere repentance during their captivity and were then repatriated to Japan. "I didn't even feel that I had returned to my motherland... I got off the ship and walked past the welcoming crowd until I encountered my wife's face," Tominaga says. Even worse, in the sixteen years since Tominaga had left for China, his daughter had grown up entirely without him: "the girl standing there like a stranger was my daughter."³⁹

The Tokyo War Crimes Trial and the Japanese Reaction

Another factor that had huge impact on the post-war Japanese public was the International Military Tribunal for the Far East, also known as the Tokyo War Crimes Trial. The types and numbers of convicts in the Tokyo War Crimes Trials offer insight into the public's acceptance of war responsibility. For "crimes against peace" twenty five "Class A" criminals were accused and found guilty.⁴⁰ Seven were hanged, thirteen imprisoned for life and two were imprisoned for lesser terms.⁴¹ No acquittals were made for these

³⁸ Ibid, 59.

³⁹ Haruko Taya Cook, Japan at War: An Oral History (New York: New Press, 1992), 468.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 22.

⁴¹ Ibid..

men. Judge Radhabinod B. Pal led the dissenting votes by reasoning that victory did not grant the right to try the defeated and that the Allies were in no position to pass fair judgment on the Japanese crimes.⁴² He even argued that if Japan were to be tried for the “indiscriminate slaughter of civilians, then America too should be arraigned for dropping the atomic bomb.”⁴³ Pal felt that the “retroactive application of new law... was tantamount to the victors’ arbitrary exercise of power.”⁴⁴ The Tokyo War Crimes Trial was a show trial meant to publicly pin the responsibility of the war on the Japanese and to publicly punish the wartime leadership for their actions.

Murakami Hyōe examines the data and differentiates the various convicts. Murakami’s first point deals with Tōjō Hideki, the military prime minister from 1941-44 who was labeled as a “Class A” criminal. Tōjō had intended to argue every accusation placed against him and attempt to justify Japan’s actions. Marquis Kido Kōichi, a fellow “Class A” criminal and one of the Emperor’s closest advisors, stopped Tōjō by pointing out that such arguments would involve the Emperor and resurrect the issue of his culpability.⁴⁵ Tōjō changed his approach to ensure that he would assume sole responsibility to allow the emperor to remain blameless. In his own way, Tōjō guaranteed the preservation of the Imperial dynasty and helped Japan recover from the humiliation by shouldering the em-

⁴² Murakami, 213.

⁴³ Ibid..

⁴⁴ Yuma Totani, The Tokyo War Crimes Trials (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), 219.

⁴⁵ Murakami, 210.

peror's guilt himself.⁴⁶

Godzilla and His Symbolism

The media during the Occupation, as has been previously mentioned, was strictly controlled. Therefore, to get a view of Japanese public sentiment, one should turn to movies. An excellent example is *Gojira*, directed by Honda Ishiro in 1954. *Gojira* is full of subtle anti-war and anti-nuclear metaphors. The name, "Godzilla," is an Americanization of the Japanese name *Gojira* and the two are relatively interchangeable.⁴⁷ The movie was produced after the end of the American Occupation and its censorship. The premise of the movie is that due to nuclear bomb testing, a dinosaur living at the bottom of the ocean was exposed to a huge amount of radiation which mutated and angered the beast. The protagonist lovers are Ogata, a Japanese Coast Guard sailor, and Emiko, a nurse and daughter of Japan's leading paleontologist, Dr. Yamane. As Godzilla's mysterious attacks at sea turn into invasions of Tokyo, Ogata and the rest of Japan's defense forces prove incapable of stopping the monster from destroying Tokyo and killing its inhabitants. It is only when the enigmatic Dr. Serizawa reluctantly reveals and uses his Oxygen Destroyer that Godzilla is killed, much to the sadness of Dr. Yamane. In its original release version, the movie contained messages that would not have been permitted by American censors. In fact, the 1955 American release cut most of the scenes referencing the atomic bomb or Japan's experiences in the war to

⁴⁶ Dower, 460-61.

⁴⁷ Honda, *Gojira*, (DVD).

give the movie a more light-hearted ending. The popularity of the franchise, combined with Godzilla's status as a symbol of Japanese monster movies, make it an excellent example of post-censorship material, unimpeded by strict foreign censorship.⁴⁸

The anti-war theme is reflected in multiple instances. First, Ogata is a member of the Coast Guard tasked with rescuing Godzilla's earliest victims: fishermen attacked at sea. Ogata's occupation is not necessarily a military job but it is still a martial job with similarities to a military force. Its title and mission, however, are purely separated from the military so that Ogata possesses the same martial bearing as a military man but with a more benevolent purpose, consistent with Japan's postwar prohibition of war. The first attack against Godzilla is conducted by Coast Guard frigates that launched depth charges in the area where they thought Godzilla resided. In disgust, Dr. Yamane comments that, "All they [the government] think about is killing Godzilla."⁴⁹ It is a thinly-veiled critique of violence as a solution when other alternatives remain unexplored.

To prepare for an invasion by Godzilla after the failed naval attack, the Coast Guard and the Army set up an elaborate defensive plan around Tokyo Bay. The use of the term "Army" by the English-language subtitling may refer to the newly created Japan Self Defense Forces or it may refer to a generic army

⁴⁸ One necessary disclaimer is needed. This author is not fluent in Japanese and viewed the 1954 film in Japanese with English subtitles. As a result, all quotes from the movie are subtitles taken from the movie and the author cannot verify the accuracy of the translations.

⁴⁹ Ibid..

organization that is not the Imperial Japanese Army. Regardless, the army in the movie is a well-stocked defense force with machine guns, heavy artillery, tanks and electric wire towers. None of these modern weapons, however, impede Godzilla's rampage in Tokyo. As Godzilla is heading back to sea, the Air Force appears in modern jets, firing rockets at the monster. The rockets seem to do little more than annoy Godzilla, who subsequently submerges beneath the water. From the ruins, survivors cheer the Air Force jets as they attack Godzilla. But the monster's departure raises the question of whether he would have left even without the Air Force's attack and whether the cheering survivors echo the survivors of Allied bombings who continued to support the Japanese war effort in the last days of World War II. The clear conclusion is that the military solution failed to kill, deter or even shorten Godzilla's attack on Tokyo. The movie steers the audience to see how useless the military is when, despite its best efforts, Tokyo is in ruins.

The protagonist couple, Emiko and Ogata, is a metaphor as well, representing the future of Japan that hopes for a brighter tomorrow. Oppositely, Dr. Serizawa is introduced as a veteran of the war who is trying to better the world but cannot because he is unable to find a beneficial use for his invention, the Oxygen Destroyer. Serizawa is only persuaded to use the Oxygen Destroyer against Godzilla after watching schoolchildren sing a song named "Oh Peace, Oh Light, Return," whose lyrics (according to the subtitles) go, "May we live without destruction/May we look to tomorrow with hope/May Peace and Light return to

us.”⁵⁰ Serizawa agrees to use the weapon, on the condition that he would be allowed to destroy all of his notes and work first to prevent anyone else from replicating the Oxygen Destroyer. Later in the movie, he and Ogata descend into the sea in diving suits, and before activating the Oxygen Destroyer, Serizawa yanks on Ogata’s line to signal to the people on the boat to haul him up. The scientist then activates the Oxygen Destroyer and says to Ogata that he hopes he and Emiko are happy together before cutting his oxygen and rope line to the boat. Both Ogata and Emiko are devastated that the man killed himself to give them a better future and that they had caused him to take his own life to prevent the knowledge of his dangerous invention from being copied.

It is made clear in the movie that the military was unable to do anything about Godzilla, that their weapons and attacks did nothing more than invite further retaliation. The answer could only be found in a terrifically powerful and terrifying weapon named the Oxygen Destroyer. This implies a message of the end of the military’s usefulness and the growing importance of science to shape the world. The movie is a rejection of militaristic solutions and a message that nuclear weapons cannot lead to anything but more death and sorrow. Nevertheless, it adds a cautionary message that science is also a double edged tool. It was the pursuit of science that created the atomic bombs and could lead to weapons far more lethal. If one were to view Godzilla as a metaphor for the Americans during World War II, the criticism of the military and their response becomes even more scathing

⁵⁰ Ibid..

because it highlights their inability to defend the country. When viewed in such a light, one cannot help but notice a cruel irony. The whole point of modernizing Japan's military, from the Meiji period in the 1880s up to 1945, was to defend Japan from foreign occupation.⁵¹ Instead, the military's actions had provoked the very conflict the Japanese had sought to avoid and, in turn, invited the Occupation they had wished to prevent.

The anti-nuclear theme that is predominant in the movie cannot be downplayed. Geiger counters are used frequently in the movie to show radiation levels. Many of these anti-nuclear messages are embedded in scenes that reference World War II. The first report of Godzilla's attack was that there was a "sudden explosion," reminiscent of the atomic bombs' detonation.⁵² Godzilla's first landfall on Odo Island leaves large, deep impressions that are radioactive and dangerous to the public. Dr. Yamane presents his findings to the Japanese Diet: "Recent nuclear experimental detonations may have drastically altered its natural habitats. I would even speculate that a hydrogen bomb explosion may have removed it from its surroundings."⁵³ To support this, he quotes how sand found where Godzilla had trod contained Strontium-90, a radioactive element only found in atomic bomb detonations, which led him to believe that Godzilla must have absorbed a massive amount of radiation and still survived.⁵⁴

⁵¹ Theodore F. Cook Jr., Barbara Molony, ed., "Making 'Soldiers,'" Gendering Modern Japanese History (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), 263-65.

⁵² *Ibid.*.

⁵³ *Ibid.*.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*.

The young Ogata felt that they should kill Godzilla to prevent him from spreading death and suffering. He bluntly asked, “Isn’t Godzilla a product of the atomic bomb, which still haunts many of us Japanese?” To which, Yamane, who had been arguing for a study of the monster, responded angrily: “Don’t you think we should study this creature which lives regardless of the radiation it absorbs?”⁵⁵

There is a memorable scene that speaks out against nuclear weapons and the horrific aftermath inflicted on humans. It starts by showing the destruction of Tokyo where the landscape is almost entirely flat, with only partial remains of walls, street posts and piles of rubble to give the impression that this was once a city. It is an image that is starkly reminiscent of the aftermath of the bombings in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, where entire city blocks were leveled by the blast. The scene then cuts to the hospital where Emiko is helping a doctor, who is holding a Geiger counter to a child. The doctor shakes his head as he gets the reading and moves on, leaving Emiko to find a way to comfort the mother whose child is doomed to die from radiation exposure, received from Godzilla’s presence.

In the context of the Japanese social rejection of militarism post-World War II, *Gojira* makes a clear distinction about the powerlessness of the most modern military weapons and the growing anti-militarism in Japan. The movie’s intent is to show how detrimental the military solution is to human society and that all wars, whether nuclear or conventional, invite only more death and destruction.

⁵⁵ Ibid..

Conclusions

It is clear that the American Occupation under MacArthur and SCAP intended to remodel Japan into a democracy in the hopes that it would never become a militaristic nation again. For this, they needed scapegoats. The most visible scapegoats were, naturally, the defeated soldiers and their leaders. The International Military Tribunal for the Far East very publicly sentenced most of Japan's wartime leadership to death or lifetime imprisonment. The American censorship program did likewise by allowing criticism of wartime leadership and anti-militaristic opinions to be published while suppressing all views supporting militarism. This makes it impossible to say with any certainty that the social media of the Occupation period accurately reflected the Japanese public's opinions. However, it can be said that there was staunch anti-militarism and criticism of the wartime leadership in the wake of Japan's defeat that came from both the civilian and ex-military sectors of the Japanese population, though in varying forms.

Regardless of the American influence during the Occupation, it is evident that the Japanese public would have leaned towards pacifism. The atomic bombings on Hiroshima and Nagasaki left deep emotional scars on the public psyche. This is evident in the popular 1954 movie, *Gojira*, which does a very good job of highlighting the military's failure to stop Godzilla, a metaphor for the Americans and the danger of nuclear weapons. Japanese post-war pacifism probably differed from what was envisioned by MacArthur and SCAP. Most likely – mirroring – Prime Minister Shidehara's sentiments, it may have involved some form of standing armed forces, reminiscent of the

modern Japan Self Defense Forces, and they would have been limited to deployment on the Japanese home islands. This is, however, a moot point when one considers how former servicemen were extremely critical of the wartime leadership and their conduct.

Most importantly, the Japanese soldier in the aftermath of World War II presents a strange paradox. He is a symbol of the onerous wartime militaristic faction which led Japan to defeat and humiliation, but at the same time, he is a victim of that war. The soldier who had defended the home islands before being demobilized was merely reviled. The soldier who returned from overseas suffered long periods of physical labor at the hands of Allied captors. He received the same rebuke from his community, but at least he was able to reunite with some of his family. Finally, the image of the missing soldier, whose fate is unknown, begs for sympathy for both him and his loved ones on a humanistic level because that is, ultimately, not a form of suffering one could wish upon another. Each of these three categories can be found in the analysis of postwar Japan and the views regarding soldiers.

To one degree or another, following their defeat and the full accounting of facts, most Japanese became opposed to Japan's involvement in World War II. This was helped along, in part, by the American Occupation's policies. However, any kind of drastic social change cannot be accepted by the general populace unless there is a willingness already in place to change. To do so without this willingness would reduce the effectiveness of any change. The fact that the majority of the Japanese readily accepted the anti-militarist limitations of the new Constitution and that

the demobilized soldier came to represent a shameful period of Japanese history at all speaks to the anti-militaristic tendencies already present in the Japanese public. When amplified in social media by censorship, one would think that the sentiments were foisted upon the Japanese but that would not be wholly true. It is only when one examines social media after the end of censorship that any understanding of Japanese sentiment can be formed. With *Gojira* as an example, one comes to the conclusion that the military was rejected by the Japanese social media. One cannot underestimate the amount of soul-searching done by the Japanese immediately after World War II and it is evident that they would have rejected a return of militarism, which had led them to incur such devastating physical and emotional losses.

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