

Symposium | Trauma : [Symposium 59] Cultural Responses to WW2 in Japan: Interdisciplinary Reflections and Intercultural Dialogue

📅 Sat. Sep 27, 2025 9:00 AM - 10:30 AM JST | Sat. Sep 27, 2025 12:00 AM - 1:30 AM UTC 🏛️ Session  
Room 6 (Conference Room B)

## **[Symposium 59] Cultural Responses to WW2 in Japan: Interdisciplinary Reflections and Intercultural Dialogue**

Moderator: Yuki Imoto (Keio University), Kai Ogimoto (Sagami Women's University) Discussant: Koh Eugen (University of Melbourne)

Discussant: Eugen Koh (University of Melbourne)

[SY-59]

Cultural Responses to WW2 in Japan: Interdisciplinary Reflections and Intercultural Dialogue

Ritsu Yonekura<sup>1</sup>, Chizuko Tezuka<sup>2</sup>, Kai Ogimoto<sup>3</sup>, Eugen Koh<sup>4</sup> (1. Nihon University (Japan), 2. Independent (Japan), 3. Sagami Women's University (Japan), 4. Australian National University (Australia))

[SY-59-01]

Bias toward "Narratives of Sacrifice" in Japanese "August Journalism" and Collective Memory of War in Postwar Japan

\*Ritsu Yonekura<sup>1</sup> (1. Nihon University Department of Law (Japan))

[SY-59-02]

Japanese Narrative of World War 2 through the Cultural Lens of Japanese Tanka: Tragic Acceptance of War Realities and Its Implications

\*Chizuko Tezuka<sup>1</sup> (1. formerly Keio University (Japan))

[SY-59-03]

On the Myth of "Izanaki and Izanami": Mythological Thinking and Inability to Mourn after WW2 in Japan

\*Kai Ogimoto<sup>1</sup> (1. Sagami Women's University (Japan))

[SY-59-04]

Cultural work in the healing of cultural trauma from the Second World War

Discussant: Eugen Koh<sup>1</sup> (1. University of Melbourne (Australia))

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Global conflicts and regional tensions evoke cultural responses from the past, particularly WW2. Our panel aims to illuminate these historical cultural reactions and their implications in contemporary contexts, fostering a dialogue.

Cultural responses to collective experiences like war can often be biased and distorted. Japanese narratives focus on the tragedies of innocent victims while they leave out the victims of Japanese colonialism and aggression abroad (Hein & Selden, 1997). It is essential to explore both victimization and perpetration aspects of the Japanese wartime experiences and to discuss the responsibilities of Japanese citizens regarding WW2.

1. Prof. Ritsu Yonekura, a journalist from Nihon University will explore public narratives in TV Journalism, focusing on programs aired on and around August 15, the Japanese Commemoration Day of the End of the War.
2. Chizuko Tezuka, a former professor at Keio University, will analyze narratives expressed in Tanka, a form of uniquely Japanese short poetry consisting of just 31 syllables. These poems were composed both on battlefields abroad and Japanese islands during the war and postwar period.
3. Kai Ogimoto, an associate professor at Sagami Women's University and an psychoanalyst in training, will investigate the deeply personal narrative of war-related trauma and guilt experienced in psychotherapy, analyzing through lens of the Japanese mythology of Izanaki and Izanami.

To enrich our reflections and broaden our discussion to include perspectives from beyond Japan, we invite Dr. Eugen Koh, a Chinese Australian psychiatrist renowned for his concepts of "cultural trauma" and its associated "cultural work," to be our discussant. We sincerely hope that open dialogues across cultural borders will be fostered through the active participation of everyone in the audience. Yuki Imoto, an anthropologist associate professor of Keio University and Kai Okimoto will moderate the session.

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### **[SY-59-01] Bias toward "Narratives of Sacrifice" in Japanese "August Journalism" and Collective Memory of War in Postwar Japan**

\*Ritsu Yonekura<sup>1</sup> (1. Nihon University Department of Law (Japan))

Keywords : August Journalism、 Collective Memory、 responsibility for the war

In Japan, it has become customary for television and newspapers to concentrate on war-related topics every August, a practice known as "August journalism. The results of several surveys indicate "August journalism" is deeply related to the formation of Japanese people's views and images of war. After a long time has passed since the war, people are now learning more and more about the war indirectly through the media, and August journalism is playing an increasingly important role.

August journalism has focused on themes related to the "damage" and "sacrifice" of the Japanese people in the war, such as the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, air raids in Tokyo and other cities. On the other hand, "August Journalism" has only slightly focused on themes related to "harm" such as Japan's invasion of Asia, colonial rule, forced labor, and comfort women. This tendency of "August journalism" to emphasize the 'damage' and to put the "harm" in the background has caused a serious bias in the Japanese people's view of war and their perception of history.

Understanding themselves as "victims" of the war, the Japanese have avoided clarifying why and who started the war or thinking deeply about the responsibility for the war. This has often been the cause of sharp tensions between Japan and China, Korea, and other Asian countries during the long postwar period. I would like to reconsider the merits and demerits of "August journalism," taking into account the content of the "August Journalism" in 2025, the major milestone year of the "80-year postwar period.

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### **[SY-59-02] Japanese Narrative of World War 2 through the Cultural Lens of Japanese Tanka: Tragic Acceptance of War Realities and Its Implications**

\*Chizuko Tezuka<sup>1</sup> (1. formerly Keio University (Japan))

As the fierce resistance and eventual cancellation of the planned Enola Gay exhibition, which attempted to incorporate human suffering in Hiroshima after the atomic bombing around the 50th anniversary of the end of World War 2, starkly illuminates, the American collective narrative of the war tends to justify that bombing without taking the perspective of the victims. Similarly unbalanced yet in the opposite direction, the Japanese public narrative of the war with a focus on victimization still exists in Japan as the 80th anniversary is approaching.

This study is a small but sincere effort to reflect on Japanese narratives in a self-introspective manner by exploring tanka, a uniquely Japanese short poetry form consisting of just 31 syllables, composed on the battlefields abroad and the home front in Japan during and after the war by tanka poets. They either fought to kill or be killed as officers/soldiers or survived the bombing while witnessing painful death all around them as civilians. I also include tanka by other poets who did not participate in battlefield killing or experience the atomic bombing yet continued to ponder the grave implications of the war for themselves and Japan long after it ended.

Major themes from these tanka are first, an absence of anger towards the U.S.A.; second, empathic sadness for the atomic bombing victims and their last shining moments; third, an outcry against war's cruelty coupled with repentance; and lastly, lingering sorrowful helplessness and emptiness in the peaceful postwar period. By using Japanese cultural concepts/attitudes of *shikata ga nai* (it cannot be helped), *mono no aware* (sorrowful appreciation of the impermanence of life/beauty), and non-confrontational conflict resolution style, I will try to elucidate these themes.

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### **[SY-59-03] On the Myth of "Izanaki and Izanami": Mythological Thinking and Inability to Mourn after WW2 in Japan**

\*Kai Ogimoto<sup>1</sup> (1. Sagami Women's University (Japan))

Keywords : inability to mourn、 Japanese mythology、 social unconscious、 war responsibility、 psychoanalysis

The German psychoanalysts Mitscherlich and Mitscherlich applied S. Freud's theory of the process of mourning to their analysis of postwar German society. The Mitscherlichs pointed out that the German people had not begun to mourn the loss of Adolf Hitler, their highest authority. In their manic rush to economic activity, they considered that by not even beginning the work of mourning, people had failed to confront the crimes of genocide, such as the invasions and holocausts (Mitscherlich & Mitscherlich, 1967). The author believes that this structure also occurred in Japan, where "Inability to mourn" the loss of the Emperor as a living god after WW2 may explain the collective mode of reaction postwar Japan, including the country's inability to accept the atrocities it has committed (Ogimoto & Plaenkers, 2024).

Mythology is one way to explore the social unconscious: "Society behaves as a cohesive entity under the influence of myths and stories, and iteratively repeats the themes described in the myths and stories" (Hopper & Weinberg, 2011). Psychoanalyst Osamu Kitayama analyzes Japanese mythology "Izanaki-Izanami-story" in Kojiki (Kitayama & Hashimoto, 2009). The myth is a tragedy in which two couple gods cannot mourn the other's loss and blame each other. The male god never reflects his commitment to humiliation towards the female god. He does not take responsibility.

What the author has learned from experience of training and practice in psychoanalysis and psychotherapy is that when emotionally loaded persons come face to face, the guilt or shame of perpetration is easily projected onto the other person. Facing one's own evil or sadism requires a safe space where one is allowed to take the time to explore it and not be shamed or asked for formalistic redemption.

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### **[SY-59-04] Cultural work in the healing of cultural trauma from the Second World War**

Discussant: Eugen Koh<sup>1</sup> (1. University of Melbourne (Australia))

Keywords : trauma、 culture、 war

The generation of Japanese that experienced the direct impact of the Second World War, suffered a massive collective trauma, that decades later, becomes embedded in their shared consciousness, which is their culture. If we use *trauma* in its original Greek meaning - injury or wound, we might say the culture has been injured or wounded. Working from psychodynamic perspectives, which emphasises people's experiences, I define trauma as *experiences that cannot be processed*. I have, over the past decade, proposed the concept of cultural trauma - defined as '*as the distortion or destruction to a culture resulting from widely shared experiences that cannot or have not been processed*'.

These changes to culture affect the behaviour of individuals and large groups, including social institutions and processes, and government policies and operations. The impact of cultural trauma on a society continue for generations if it remains unexamined and unaddressed.

These presentations examine the impact of Japan's traumatic experience of the war on its culture - a process that I have called *cultural work*. Chizuko Tezuka's exploration of the use of a form of Japanese poetry called *tanka* to deeply "self-introspect" on the war demonstrate how such cultural devices might be utilised to explore experiences that are difficult to describe as a narrative. The critical examination of Japanese media's bias of war narratives by Ritsu Yonekura is courageous, and desperately needed, because the shame and humiliation from the war has created a conspiracy of silence around what really happened. Kai Ogimoto explored the pain of Japan's experience even more deeply through a psychoanalytic consideration of an ancient Japanese mythology. These are important contributions to the healing of Japan's cultural trauma from the War.

I hope the countries that Japan invaded will undertake similar cultural work to address their cultural trauma