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Jipangu: Re-imagining Defeat in 21st-century Japan

Trent Maxey

Precis: Using Kawaguchi Kaiji's graphic novel *Jipangu* (2001-2009) as an example, this essay explores a horizon of historical consciousness revealed by alternative histories of the Asia-Pacific War. Alternative histories of the war attempt to remove the stigma of defeat but also betray the extent to which contemporary Japan is unimaginable without the experience of defeat. *Jipangu* suggests a limit to the alternative pasts imaginable in early-twenty-first-century Japan.

Introduction

Alternative histories that envision a Japan avoiding defeat and unconditional surrender in 1945 have become a familiar feature of the media landscape during the last three decades.¹ These mass-marketed works, including graphic novels, short stories, anime and films, which invite consumers to imagine counterfactual histories that most often elide or simply undo the traumatic, the criminal, and the humiliating knowledge of the past, indicate a horizon of historical consciousness in contemporary Japan. In choosing what to alter, alternative histories betray a "range of vision" that includes the desirable or excludes what is undesirable to the historical imagination in contemporary Japan.² Observing that historical imagination is shaped by a "multiplicity of media," Tessa Morris-Suzuki, proposes that we look beyond the textbook wars and contentious debates over commemorative sites and official statements when considering how attitudes toward the past are actually shaped. School textbooks and sites like Tokyo's Yasukuni Shrine undoubtedly provide focal points for debate and contestation, but they are not necessarily the only, or even the most influential, realms that "shape our imaginative landscape of the past."³ Precisely because the history and commemoration of Japan's wartime experience are so charged, both politically and diplomatically, alternative histories deserve attention as products of commercial media that sidestep explicit debate by cutting across multiple media formats and offering entertainment rather than overt didacticism.

Alternative histories that rely on some conceit of time travel are, of course, not new to late-twentieth century fiction (Mark Twain's Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court comes to mind). Examples in Japanese fiction, mostly in the science fiction sub-genre, can be found from the 1960s and 1970s, but the Asia-Pacific War was initially not the dominant topical focus.⁴ Alternative histories increasingly turned to the war through the 1980s, but it was the commercial success of such alternative histories during the 1990s that resulted in an identifiable sub-genre called "imaginary war chronicles" (*kaku senki*).⁵ Concerned less with the genre conventions of science fiction, these novels, graphic novels, and animated series grew out of the Japanese experience of the post-Cold War geopolitics. Criticism, primarily from the United States, stemming from Japan's inability to send military forces to the First Gulf War resulted in conversations concerning the pacifist constitution, conversations tinged with humiliation and frustration. At the same time, the end of the Cold War and the 1989 death of the Showa Emperor thawed memories of victimization throughout Asia, resulting in demands for apologies and reparations associated with Japanese colonialism and war crimes. In this context, imaginary war chronicles offered their audiences an escape from both, providing a fictional past free of pacifist constraints and the recriminations of victims.

Aramaki Yoshio's multiple "fleet" series have been by far the most successful of the imaginary war chronicles and provide a benchmark in terms of both content and media. The series builds on the premise that after his death over Bougainville in 1943, Yamamoto Isoroku, the Imperial Japanese Navy admiral frequently credited with operational genius and geopolitical wisdom thanks to the success of the Pearl Harbor attacks, was reincarnated 38 years earlier in 1905. Assuming another name, Yamamoto recruits other reincarnated individuals and attempts to prevent war with the United States. Failing that, he and his "Azure Fleet" intervene in history and pursue a different outcome to the war. Relying on fictional weapon systems, including jet fighters and submarine aircraft carriers, and exaggerated depictions of historical persons (Hitler is presented as a reincarnated individual with Rasputin-like spiritual powers), Aramaki entertains his audience with dramatic changes to world history.⁶ By radically altering history, Aramaki allows his readers to imagine Japan on the opposite side of history—not a defeated Axis power, but an ally of the United States and Great Britain against Hitler's European empire.⁷

Aramaki promotes his brand of "speculative history" as a means to create new possibilities in fiction through a website that brings together a large collective of authors associated with "imaginary war chronicles."⁸ He does not, however, openly confess a historiographical or ideological agenda. Rather, the principal function of Aramaki's brand of "imaginary war chronicles" appears to be providing an apolitical framework within which a "realist" interest in weapons systems and strategic warfare can be consumed as entertainment. Alternative histories such as Aramaki's thus occupy a relatively narrow space within commercial publishing, typically displayed in its own corner of the bookstore and distinct from revisionists such as Kobayashi Yoshinori who seek to challenge the contemporary relevance of historical knowledge itself.⁹ Nonetheless, we can learn something new by looking at this less polemical middle ground, where revisionism is less overtly promoted as an act of political contestation and is more honestly concerned with wish fulfillment and seemingly "pure" escapist fantasy.

In general, historians have not taken alternative history seriously and E.H. Carr famously dismissed counterfactual history as an "idle parlor game."¹⁰ Some have, however, argued for the analytical utility of counterfactual or alternative histories.¹¹ For these scholars, the value of counterfactual history comes in testing entrenched assumptions of historical causality and the essential role of certain events, individuals, or even processes. In his edited volume, *Virtual History: Alternatives and Counterfactuals*, historian Niall Ferguson tests the turning points of modern history by asking, for example, "What if Britain had 'stood aside' in 1914?"¹² Even for its defenders, though, not all alternative histories are created equal. Plausibility is the key currency in this scholarly trade.¹³ This criterion of plausibility quickly exposes the limits of counterfactual history as an exercise in analyzing the past. As Geoffrey Hawthorn puts it, "we cannot see any possibility, including the possibilities of this world seen differently, with any light but our own (This is the limit of the counterfactuals)."¹⁴ Alexander Demandt goes further, suggesting that any alternative history we can conjure "shows us what ignes fatui can lure us from the path of the real: these are our hopes and fears. Most designs for alternatives are rooted in wishes and anxieties."¹⁵ Here, I suggest, we may begin to see the value of alternative histories, even commercial ones, and the need to analyze them: they trace the desires and fears that limit horizons of historical consciousness.

Needless to say, those hopes and fears are particularly intense when mediated by the experience of defeat. Elaborating on his summary rejection of counterfactual histories, E.H. Carr compares them to sports. To him, asking "what if?" in history was no different from asking how a defeated sports team would fare had it won a championship.¹⁶ The metaphor of defeat in sports pales in comparison to the reality of defeat in war, yet it is easy to see how defeat amplifies the hopes and fears of the present invested in imagining an alternative past. Imaginary war chronicles, less than shaping historical imagination in contemporary Japan, more likely refract the ambivalent relationship that binds the postwar to the wartime. This ambivalence between hope and fear is most manifest in the tension between the desire for a past freed of defeat and a prosperous, liberated present that grew out of that very defeat.

Kawaguchi Kaiji's *Jipangu*, a graphic novel serialized between 2000 and 2009, embodies most clearly this crucial dynamic between the hopes and fears that are provoked by the history of defeat in Japan. Kawaguchi, had already achieved commercial success in the 1990s with *Chinmoku no kantai* (*The Silent Fleet*) by exploring an alternative present in which a renegade Maritime Self-Defense Force nuclear submarine challenges the geopolitical hegemony of the United States. A prolific manga artist with over twenty titles to his credit, Kawaguchi dramatizes conflicting value systems with a realistic backdrop. With



Jipangu

Jipangu, he combined this approach with the imaginary war chronicle genre in the format of a serialized graphic novel, or manga. Serialized in Kodansha's Weekly Morning comic magazine with an average weekly circulation of 400,000 to 450,000 copies, Jipangu reached a large audience consisting predominantly of young urban males in their thirties and forties. Republished in forty-three volumes between 2001 and 2009, the graphic novel sold over 15 million copies and reached a somewhat more varied audience, ranging from the late-teens through people in their sixties, including women.¹⁷ A twenty-six episode animated series was broadcast by TBS from October 2004 to March 2005, concluding prior to the end of the serialized graphic novel.

Kawaguchi begins Jipangu in July 200X (chronological indeterminacy is part of his conceit), when a state-of-the-art Aegis missile cruiser belonging to the Japanese Maritime Self Defense Force (MSDF) sets sail for joint exercises with the U.S. Navy in the Pacific only to be swept 60 years into the past, right into the midst of the Battle of Midway in June 1942.

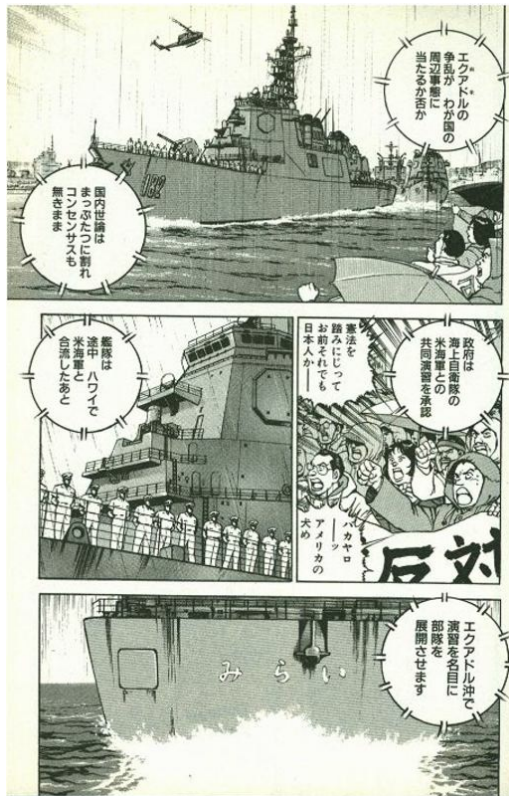


Image no. 1 [The *Mirai* sails from Yokosuka in 200X] *Jipangu* vol. 1, p. 5.

With this implausible premise, Kawaguchi invites readers to re-imagine the Asia-Pacific War and its causal relationship to the present in Japan. By placing a crew of 21st-century Japanese in a position to radically alter the course of the Asia-Pacific War and the character of "postwar" Japanese society, Kawaguchi maximizes the ability of alternative history to expose the hopes and fears that form a horizon of historical consciousness. Kawaguchi explains in an interview that it is "meaningless to depict war as a historical story. Without a situation that facilitates commitment from a contemporary perspective, it will simply become a historical story like those found in history textbooks."¹⁸ In seeking the "commitment" of his readers, Kawaguchi asks them to explore the implications for the past in the present, to ask how the outcome of the Asia-Pacific War produced the postwar Japan familiar to his

audience.¹⁹

I. Empathy and Identity in Jipangu

The plot of Jipangu follows the changes in the course of history brought about by the time travel of a MSDF vessel, aptly named the *Mirai* (the future). The 241 crew members struggle to balance their desire to return to the future they know against the temptation to intervene in history, even as the course of history is radically altered by their very presence. In the course of the graphic novel, the Imperial Japanese Navy (IJN) withdraws from Guadalcanal, Truk, and Rabaul, choosing instead to fortify its defensive perimeter in the Mariana Islands. Puyi, who was installed by the Japanese as the titular Emperor of Manchukuo, is assassinated, providing the Imperial Japanese Army (IJA) a pretext to withdraw from China and consolidate its position within Manchuria. Foreseeing the KMT's defeat in the civil war, the IJA secretly aids Mao Zedong, hastening the victory of the communists in China. The Daqing oilfield is "discovered" in Manchuria, altering the strategic importance of northeast Asia. An IJN task force attacks British forces in India, provoking the independence movement and destabilizing British war efforts. A Japanese agent attempts to assassinate Hitler and when enriched uranium is obtained from Denmark, a rogue IJN officer succeeds in constructing an atomic bomb. All of these alterations to the historical record culminate in a decisive naval battle between the IJN's Combined Fleet and the United States Navy's Fifth Fleet under Admiral Spruance in the central Pacific. The crew of the *Mirai* prevents the detonation of the atomic bomb assembled by a rogue IJN officer and the battle ends indecisively. With the Americans unable to take Saipan and place the Japanese mainland within striking distance of the B-29, the Pacific War ends in a negotiated peace in October of 1944, signed by Franklin Delano Roosevelt and Konoe Fumimaro in Hawaii.²⁰ Japan does not win, but it achieves something very close to a draw.

Perhaps because of these changes to recorded history, Kawaguchi admits a fear that his graphic novel may be mistaken for history: "What frightens me is the fact that the youth of today know very little about the concrete reality of the Asia-Pacific War. If people like that read my manga, they may believe it is historically true, even when told it is fiction."²¹ At the same time, Kawaguchi also worries that his youthful audience will replace the "real" with the "virtual," and he seeks to convey the "heavy" historical reality of the Pacific War.²² For that reason, perhaps, Kawaguchi and his editors expend considerable effort to imbue Jipangu with the appearance of historical authority, wrapping the graphic novel in the cloak of empirical history.^[23] The narrative repeatedly references the precise chronology of the Pacific War (down to the minute and seconds at which the four IJN aircraft carriers were struck during the Battle of Midway) and historical figures are incorporated into the story along with details of their biographies. Figures such as Yamamoto Isoroku, Ishihara Kanji, Yonai Mitsumasa, Kido Koichi, Tojo Hideki, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Winston Churchill, Adolf Hitler, and Subhas Chandra Bose are portrayed with sensitivity to their historical particulars. In addition, a large number of appendices are included in the republished volumes of the graphic novel, many written by Goto Kazunobu, a military analyst.²⁴ Detailed timelines comparing historical events with those in Jipangu encourage readers to contextualize the alterations introduced in the graphic novel.²⁵ These appendices also set out to educate the reader in the actual history of the war. Beginning with a general chronology and explanation of the Asia-Pacific War, articles on historical persons, specific theaters of the war, and weapons systems all provide an impression of historical detail and accuracy that feeds into the graphic novel itself.²⁶

This density of historical information surrounding Jipangu is as important as the alterations to history, giving it the attributes of a realist historical novel. The realist historical novel, as it developed in the nineteenth century, constructed individuals as “participants in the shaping of a national history” and invited “empathetic identification” with a national past.²⁷ Jipangu asks its readers to do the same; except that it complicates which individuals and which national past they are supposed to identify with. The very title, Jipangu, points to a defamiliarized Japan with an alien past, and perhaps an equally alien present. Jipangu comes from Marco Polo’s fourteenth-century phoneticization of the Chinese term for Japan, Cipangu, and is the origin of the contemporary English-language name for Japan. The alien quality of the term foregrounds the contest to define Jipangu in the graphic novel, dramatized through the rivalry of two principal protagonists. One is Kusaka Takumi, a lieutenant commander in the IJN, and the other is Kadomatsu Yosuke, a commander in the MSDF and the executive officer of the Mirai. When Kadomatsu rescues Kusaka from a downed airplane in the immediate aftermath of the Battle of Midway, he confronts the historical chasm separating the Mirai and its crew from the young IJN officer they have brought aboard.



Image no. 2. [Kadomatsu dives to rescue Kusaka from a downed plane.] *Jipangu* vol. 1, p. 108.

Kadomatsu decides to bridge that distance by taking Kusaka to the ship’s library and synchronizing him with the history of postwar Japan.²⁸ Instead of synchronizing him with the chronological identity of the Mirai’s crew, however, the archive serves as a “Pandora’s Box” for Kusaka, opening the possibility of altering the outcome of the war and the course of postwar history.²⁹



Image no. 3. [Kadomatsu takes Kusaka to the ship’s library.] *Jipangu* vol. 1, p. 222.

Armed with prescient knowledge, Kusaka sets out to alter history while Kadomatsu attempts to thwart him and preserve the “proper” course of history. This dramatic arc pitting two world views against each other in the form of a personal rivalry is a common feature of Kawaguchi’s work. In the context of *Jipangu*, the arc facilitates a conversation concerning the significance of the defeat and what it bequeathed to the postwar. Kusaka rejects both the Empire of Japan, which is doomed to lose the war, and postwar Japan, which has surrendered its dignity and self-respect in his eyes. Instead, he invites Kadomatsu to join him in creating Jipangu, an alternative Japan that is neither the reckless empire that embarked on an unwinnable war nor a passive country that has lost a proper sense of sovereignty.³⁰ By linking directly the conversation concerning a Jipangu to the cultural, political, and economic realities of 21st-

century Japan, Kawaguchi sustains for his readers a lengthy meditation on the meaning of defeat and the possibilities of alternate outcomes.

From the beginning, Kawaguchi prevents the audience from naively identifying or empathizing with the wartime regime and its institutions. As he travels through occupied Southeast Asia in the company of Kusaka, for example, Kadomatsu declares that “postwar history demonstrates that you cannot occupy peoples’ hearts by force.”³¹ He makes a similar observation in Manchukuo, where the technological sophistication and commercial opulence of the South Manchurian Railway’s Asia Express prompts him to reflect that despite introducing such advanced technologies and grand urban developments, “the Japanese were unable to earn the respect of the people here.”³² The criticism does not end with the failure of Japanese occupation policies. The Imperial Army’s *kempeitai* and the civilian *tokko* are both depicted as oppressive organizations that routinely tortured suspects. Kawaguchi goes so far as to include an episode in which Kadomatsu and a subordinate from the Mirai are arrested and tortured by the Special Higher Police. The subordinate is beaten to death.³³

Kawaguchi also avoids a simplistic contrast between a benighted prewar and a progressive postwar by depicting attractive historical characters. Ishiwara Kanji is redeemed in *Jipangu* as a far-sighted and selfless soldier who works with Kusaka to bring the war in China to an end. Kusaka himself is depicted as a charismatic and rational individual capable of seeing through some of the worst tendencies of the Japanese military. He confronts Colonel Tsuji Masanobu, a prominent advocate of overcoming material disadvantages with “spirit,” by pointing a gun at his head: “If you can avoid this bullet with your conviction of victory, then I will believe in the infinite capacity of the spirit.”³⁴ These levelheaded and sincere individuals give wartime Japan an attractive face by standing in judgment of it. Admiral Yonai Mitsumasa, former Naval Minister and Prime Minister, for example, bemoans “the childishness (amasa) of this country, which expects its self-satisfied sense of justice to be accepted on the diplomatic stage. And when that expectation is betrayed and it discovers the world is too complicated to be handled, it attempts to beat it into submission by force.”³⁵

As Yonai’s line indicates, Kawaguchi, like many, shifts the blame for Japan’s catastrophic war from individuals, such as the military or political leadership or the emperor, onto the shoulders of the “nation” as a whole. In one crucial scene, Kido Koichi, Lord Keeper of the Privy Seal, boards the Mirai and is confronted by the historical record of postwar Japan. Kadomatsu berates Kido for failing to rein in the military, but Kido asks instead whether postwar Japanese, despite the suffering and losses caused by the war, still “love his majesty?”³⁶ Told that the Emperor is respected as the symbol of the Japanese nation, Kido responds that it is the same in 1942. The Emperor, he explains, bears no responsibility for the war: “Public opinion (yoron), swayed by the press and agitation, prodded the military, which could not grasp global trends, [to act].”³⁷

With the repeated invocation of the “nation” as an explanation for what went wrong in going to war and what goes wrong with the postwar, the conversation regarding the significance of defeat and the character of postwar Japan in *Jipangu* comes to revolve around national identity, or what it means to be Japanese. Kawaguchi admits that this is the primary theme that cuts across his works.³⁸ When they first meet aboard the Mirai, Kusaka asks Kadomatsu who and what his purpose is. Kadomatsu responds that he cannot answer those questions but reassures Kusaka that “we are Japanese.”³⁹ This basic

ethnic/racial identification between the 21st century crew of the *Mirai* and their prewar compatriots is depicted as tenuous from the start, however. Walking through the alien vessel from 60 years in the future, Kusaka declares that objects reflect the spirit of those who make them. "This," he concludes, "is not a



Image no. 4. [Kikuchi reflects on the future of a Japan without defeat.]

Jipangu vol. 43, p. 139.

ship built by the Imperial Japanese Navy," and "you are not the same Japanese as I am."⁴⁰ The chasm separating the postwar Japanese from the prewar Japanese is not merely time but the foundational experience of defeat: "They are Japanese born of defeat and raised by America."⁴¹ The officers of the *Mirai* do not contradict this premise of a radical rupture between the prewar and the postwar. When the crew clamors to return to Yokosuka of 1942 regardless of the consequences, they insist that there is a fundamental unity among Japanese: "Even if we are captured and interrogated by the military, they are Japanese, the same as us. They will understand." To this Kadomatsu responds, "This *Mirai* is the 'country' left to us."⁴² Umezu, the captain of the *Mirai*, emphasizes to his IJN counterparts that postwar Japan (*nihonkoku*) and prewar Japan (*nihonteikoku*) are legally "different countries" (*takoku*).⁴³ These recurring emphases placed on the chasm separating wartime Japanese and postwar Japanese in *Jipangu* invite readers to confuse the unavoidable socio-cultural chasm created by capitalist modernity for a specific pathology of defeat. The distance in sensibilities and political attitudes separating the crew of the *Mirai* from their wartime compatriots is attributed almost exclusively to the experience of defeat. Empathy and identity, in other words, revolve only around a conversation concerning the significance of defeat for 21st-century Japan. There would be no chasm were it not for Japan's total defeat.

II. The Significance of Defeat

Kusaka and Kadomatsu, as protagonists, are the principal interlocutors to debate the meaning of defeat for Japan. Initially, Kusaka claims that all he wants to do is "end this unwinnable war and save as many Japanese lives as possible" and secure "peace with honor."⁴⁴ Kadomatsu has no answer to this and must admit that he does not believe it is simply acceptable for Japan to lose. Yet, he insists that what Kusaka pursues in the name of *Jipangu* is not victory but something far more corrupting and sinister.⁴⁵ For Kadomatsu, defeat bequeathed a universal humanitarianism and pacifist constitution, both of which the Self Defense Forces stand for. The postwar settlements that produced democratic peace and prosperity required the experience of defeat to permanently discredit militarism at home and expansionism abroad. For Kusaka, defeat robbed Japan not only of lives and property, but more intangible qualities. He declares to Kadomatsu at one point that, "unlike the physical nation (*kokudo*), it is extremely difficult to 'rebuild' the spirit (*seishin*)."⁴⁶ Calling him a "pitiful loser (*makeinu*) who is unaware that he is chained and robbed of his will and freedom," Kusaka rejects Kadomatsu and "his postwar."⁴⁷ By playing these two men off of each other and creating the possibility of altering the course of the war, Kawaguchi renders the relationship between the war, defeat and the postwar society and politics vexed.

The relationship between the peace and prosperity of postwar Japan and the war and defeat, while frequently invoked in postwar Japan, has remained ambiguous, often deliberately so. The notion of a "good defeat" recurs in oral histories of those who lived through the war and struggle to integrate the trauma of suffering and loss with the experience of prosperity in the postwar period. In statements such as, "Today's peace, I feel, is founded on those sacrifices then," and "I believe that because Japan lost today's prosperity exists," the emotional utility of the good defeat narrative relies on its imprecision.⁴⁸ Whose sacrifices and how they relate to peace and prosperity often remain unarticulated. Kawaguchi plays on this when he creates a scene in which an officer from *Mirai* is asked by IJN personnel whether Japan lost the war.

The SDF officer responds that postwar Japan is prosperous and "this is all thanks to you. All postwar Japanese are grateful."⁴⁹ Leaving unexplored how the likely deaths of the IJN personnel result in the prosperity of postwar Japan allows the officer to sidestep an uncomfortable conversation. *Jipangu* does not afford its readers the same comfort. The very ambiguity of the causal relationship between war, defeat, and postwar success strikes at the core of Japanese ambivalences between remembering and forgetting, trauma and pride, responsibility and evasion. By structuring *Jipangu* around the palpable chasm separating the 21st century crew of the *Mirai* and their wartime compatriots and translating that distance into a contest to either preserve the fruits of defeat or risk them in pursuit of something more abstract, Kawaguchi challenges his readers to resolve the ambiguity built into the repeated mantra that Japan exists "thanks to" the sacrifices of the wartime generation.

Although Kawaguchi disavows any desire to relate his work to contemporary political conversations, by using the SDF as the primary means to create a connection between his 21st century audience and the history of wartime Japan, he is forced to grapple with the SDF and its contemporary context.⁵⁰ Put differently, *Jipangu* asks its audience to answer the question of who the Japanese are in the 21st century through the SDF and what it represents. In the nine years and three months during which Kawaguchi serialized *Jipangu*, the domestic and international context for the Japanese SDF changed dramatically compared to the early-1990s. With the groundwork laid by the 1997 Guidelines for U.S.-Japanese Defense Cooperation and the 1999 law that permitted the government to militarily respond to "situations in areas surrounding Japan," the LDP government under Koizumi Junichiro responded to the 9/11 terrorist attacks by quickly passing a special terror response law in October 2001. That law allowed the deployment of MSDF vessels to the Indian Ocean in support of the US-led "Operation Enduring Freedom" in Afghanistan from 2001 until 2010. Another special law passed in 2003 permitted the deployment of a Ground Self-Defense Force (GSDF) unit to Iraq.⁵¹ These laws and deployments dramatically expanded the scope of operations undertaken by the SDF far from Japan's shores, and the elevation of the Defense Agency to a full-fledged Ministry of Defense in 2007 underscored the heightened profile of Japan's military forces.

Kawaguchi is clearly aware of this context and he incorporates the ambivalent position of the SDF into the plot and debates of *Jipangu*. The serial opens with protestors haranguing the departing MSDF vessels and crews at Yokosuka and the narration mentions a public divided over the new parameters of the 1997 Guidelines for U.S.-Japanese Defense Cooperation. Kawaguchi also creates side stories to *Jipangu* that flash back to the formative experiences of the SDF officers aboard the *Mirai*. On the eve of graduating from the National Defense Academy, for example, one of the officers is depicted seriously considering declining his commission because he does not want to "kill people."⁵² Another episode depicts a cadet at the Etajima 1st Service School who is taken on a visit to the Peace Park in Hiroshima where he is beaten up for wearing his uniform. The episode concludes with the message that this lesson in non-violence was one that many at the school were expected to learn.⁵³ Another side story highlights the humanitarian role of the SDF following the 1995 Great Hanshin Earthquake.⁵⁴ Kawaguchi does not merely celebrate the ideals of the Japanese SDF with these side stories. He uses them to illustrate the ambivalences of the SDF and also to depict Kadomatsu and his fellow officers as masculine, square-jawed individuals whose pacifist ideals are not necessarily emasculating.

Kawaguchi inserts into the main plot of *Jipangu* references to the marginalization of the SDF and its personnel in contemporary Japan. One crewmember of the *Mirai*, for example, describes his experience of being bullied as a child because his father was a member of the GSDF.⁵⁵ As Sabine Fröhstück indicates in her anthropological study of the GSDF in contemporary Japan, experiences like this are common for SDF members. Uniforms are rarely, if ever, worn off base, and logos and insignia are carefully designed to appear friendly and non-aggressive to counter negative associations linking the SDF with war and

destruction.⁵⁶ Placing SDF personnel and one of their most potent weapon systems in the context of the Asia-Pacific War, therefore, creates the potential for cheap catharsis common to commercial alternative histories. Instead, Kawaguchi retains the inherent contradictions built into the SDF to further emphasize the gap separating the prewar and the postwar. On the one hand, the SDF embodies the ideals of pacifism and humanitarianism; on the other, it is a military institution possessing potent and state-of-the-art weapons systems.

The dilemmas of the *Mirai* and its crew revolve around that ambivalence. Interviewed by an embedded journalist as the *Mirai* sets sail from Yokosuka in the 21st century, Kadomatsu is asked if the SDF can actually “fight.” He replies that the uniform he wears separates members of the SDF from civilians—“if ordered, we can kill.”⁵⁷ Once thrust into the improbable context of the Pacific in 1942, however, the crew of the *Mirai* fall back on the “nonaggressive defense policy (senshu boei)” imposed by the postwar constitution. Even though this results in the death of a pilot at the hands of an IJN fighter plane, Captain Umezu insists that the principle of non-aggression is not a hollow ideal: “It is our light house.”⁵⁸ Japan’s decision to intervene in Guadalcanal is explained as a humanitarian mission to save lives, not to “participate in the combat between Japan and the United States. This is a rescue operation [conducted by] the SDF, which does not possess weapons in order to kill.”⁵⁹ This principle, valorized in the character of Kadomatsu, is challenged throughout by the plain reality that the *Mirai* is capable of killing and dramatically altering the course of the Pacific War.

While the humanitarian and pacifist ideals of the SDF allow Kadomatsu to hold firm in resisting Kusaka, the essentially military character of the organization and its capabilities prove seductive to the majority of the crew. It was the conviction that “those who possess the means to take life are allowed to exist only to save lives” which prompted Kadomatsu to save Kusaka’s life in the first place.⁶⁰ That conviction alone, however, proves insufficient to provide a sense of purpose to the crew of the warship.⁶¹ Interventions into the history of the war in the name of saving lives very quickly result in taking lives and making increasingly significant changes to a familiar history and Japan’s unavoidable defeat. With that slide, Kawaguchi depicts the crew being seduced by Kusaka’s project to create “a new postwar.”⁶² Led by lieutenant commander Kikuchi, a majority of the crew of the *Mirai* mutiny in order to use the military capacities at their disposal to seek victory in the war against the United States.

The mutiny sets up the final philosophical exchange of the *Jipangu* series concerning the relationship between the defeat, the postwar and the character of the SDF. Confronted by Kadomatsu, Kikuchi echoes Kusaka’s characterization of the SDF: “As SDF officers we have abandoned making decisions and acting on our own. All Japanese have abandoned the true meaning of deciding and acting.” Why? “Because we lost.”⁶³ Kadomatsu asks his friend in response whether he dislikes democracy. The response is ambiguous: “I am also a postwar Japanese; I believe I understand the significance of defeat. Still I want to correct the errors of the postwar by winning.” Kadomatsu declares he “will never cease being an SDF officer” and chooses to leave the ship.⁶⁴ As the mutinous crew of the *Mirai* ally themselves with the IJN and conduct offensive operations in the Indian Ocean, Kikuchi reflects that, “We are not as strong [as Kadomatsu.] Rather than be tormented and struggle through this era as human beings, we would rather abandon ourselves to the logic of soldiers.”⁶⁵ The ideals of pacifism and humanitarianism lose to the seduction of sincerity and purpose that Kusaka offers, but the character of Kadomatsu ensures that the ideals have a masculine champion.

By eventually resolving the mutiny and reuniting the crew of the *Mirai* under a common purpose, Kawaguchi indicates a limit to abandoning the lessons and values postwar Japan gleaned from defeat. It is Kusaka’s pursuit of an atomic bomb that ultimately reunites the crew of the *Mirai* behind a common purpose, a purpose that provides the graphic novel’s clearest resolution to the question of “who we are” as Japanese.⁶⁶ As he resumes command of the *Mirai*, Kadomatsu explains to his crew that they belong to a Japan that transcends historical time and political systems, they belong to a “separate *Jipangu*.”⁶⁷ By basing that timeless core of Japanese identity in the struggle to prevent the use of the atomic bomb, Kawaguchi appears to validate postwar Japan. With this resolution and affirmation of Kadomatsu’s deliberate pursuit of the postwar, the final seventeen volumes of *Jipangu* descend into a blow-by-blow action sequence that depicts the attempts of Kusaka to detonate the atomic bomb, hidden aboard the battleship *Yamato*, in the middle of the American fleet, and of Kadomatsu and the *Mirai* to prevent it.

III. Limited Alternatives

Kawaguchi concludes *Jipangu* with an epilogue that follows Kadomatsu Yosuke’s fate as the sole survivor of the *Mirai*, which sinks in the conclusive battle of 1944. In 1957, thirteen years after the imagined peace treaty between Japan and the United States was signed and ten years after a “Round Pacific Treaty Organization (RPTO)” was formed, the Japanese Prime Minister visits President Eisenhower in Washington, D.C. Kadomatsu watches this from his home in Nantucket, where he lives as Denny Matsuoka, a wealthy Japanese-American businessman with powerful connections with the American military and government. In exchange for peace with the United States, Japan had abrogated the Axis alliance, declared war on Hitler, and accepted the terms of the Hull note. The Cold War commenced and Japan shrank and modernized its military forces into a National Defense Military (*kokobogun*) and joined the RPTO.⁶⁸ In essence, absent the devastating loss of life caused by conventional and atomic bombings and an occupation by Allied forces, the postwar position of Japan is depicted in terms very similar to actual history: a junior partner in a US-led security arrangement.

Kawaguchi depicts those similar outcomes as the deliberate product of the efforts of Kadomatsu and his fellow crewmembers. Kikuchi, for example, is depicted providing Yonai Mitsumasa with a “blueprint” for democratic reforms in the fictional postwar Japan that mirror those imposed under the U.S.-led occupation. The Emperor declares his humanity and surrenders constitutional sovereignty as the price for remaining on the throne, land reform reduces rural poverty, and women receive the vote in a postwar democracy. Still, the absence of defeat does alter the character of postwar Japan. In the eyes of Kikuchi, “Japan avoided an occupation, but on the other hand its democratization is incomplete and class distinctions remain semi-fixed.”

Without experiencing the suffering and deprivation caused by the bombings, the Japanese public resents the terms of peace. Japan, Kikuchi concludes, will not likely achieve the same level of economic prosperity that his postwar experienced, but several million lives were spared by the altered past.⁶⁹ This is the one significant alteration of history that *Jipangu* allows: the prevention of mass military and civilian casualties and devastation in Okinawa and the main islands. The implications of losing the “victim” narrative in postwar Japan are left unexplored.

Yet, aside from Kikuchi’s caveat, the “postwar” *Jipangu* ends with little different from the postwar that it began with, complete with ties to a dominant United States represented by Kadomatsu’s postwar persona as an influential Japanese-American. In the final scenes of the lengthy series, Kadomatsu ascertains that all other crewmembers of the *Mirai* died shortly after the war and he was the only survivor. He uses his considerable wealth to track the births of these crewmembers and confirms that they are born into the alternate postwar according to their actual birth dates and that they all join the crew of a new *Mirai*. Kawaguchi concludes *Jipangu* with Kadomatsu seeing a newly commissioned *Mirai* setting sail from Yokosuka in 200X. All 240 original crewmembers, reborn into an alternate postwar Japan, are present, except for him.⁷⁰

Conclusion

Discussing realist historical novels, Morris-Suzuki suggests that by gauging “which frontiers can and which cannot readily be crossed, we can gain a sense of the imaginative limits of historical fiction.”⁷¹ What are the imaginative limits of *Jipangu* and what might they suggest about a horizon of historical consciousness in 21st century Japan? To begin with, there are conspicuous frontiers or limits to the historical geography of *Jipangu*. Controversial atrocities, including the Nanjing Massacre, comfort women, and Unit 731, are never mentioned or alluded to. The “old” colonies of Taiwan and Korea are conspicuously absent from the narrative and scene of action, as are scenes of combat in China. The emphasis on the naval war in the Pacific is partially a reflection of Kawaguchi’s own biography. Raised on the inland sea by a father who captained a small tanker, Kawaguchi grew up enamored of naval vessels; the focus on a submarine in *The Silent Fleet* and a missile-cruiser in *Jipangu* are natural outgrowths of this childhood interest. At the same time, the IJN and the Pacific theater have long provided a more comfortable “face” to Japan’s war years. Represented by the urbane Yamamoto Isoroku, the IJN has been depicted as a reluctant initiator of war, forced to attack in defense of Japanese interests. Kawaguchi’s alternative history reinforces this view of the IJN and the war in the Pacific.

The graphic novel is also gendered in a way that places action entirely in the hands of men. Women are present as sexual and sentimental partners for the male protagonists and the sole female crewmember of the *Mirai* exists primarily to convey a sense of a world bifurcated in masculine and feminine terms. Kawaguchi himself offers a gendered dualism to explain Japanese attitudes towards the war and its aftermath in an interview. In his view, a maternal attitude expresses itself in the dogged pursuit of survival even at the cost of acquiescence (*shikatanagai*), while a paternal attitude expresses itself in the desire to maintain a sense of pride even at the cost of one's life. He offers that a balance is required.⁷²

But these are not the only limits to the historical imagination of *Jipangu*. Gavriel Rosenfeld's meditation on alternative histories is suggestive:

At the personal level, when we speculate about what might have happened if certain events had or had not occurred in the past, we are really expressing our feelings about the present. We are either grateful that things worked out as they did, or we regret that they did not occur differently. Those same concerns are involved in the broader realm of alternate history. Alternate history is inherently presentist. It explores the past less for its own sake than to utilize it instrumentally to comment upon the present. Based as it is upon conjecture, alternate history necessarily reflects its author's hopes and fears.⁷³

Rosenfeld has in mind examples of alternative histories that ponder different outcomes in Europe during and after World War II. Whether the final solution is thwarted or Hitler succeeds in securing the eastern front, the hopes and fears are palpably tied to contemporary historical awareness. In the case of *Jipangu*, we see a hope and desire for a past free from defeat and mass death, a past that avoids the humiliation of surrender and the horrors of fire and atomic bombings. War crimes are absent, and in their stead we have the piercing gaze of sincere men such as Ishiwara Kanji and Yamamoto Isoroku. We also see a fear of creating a past that could annul the peace and prosperity experienced in the present, a past that is politically and socially constricted in ways unpalatable to contemporary Japanese audiences. Between these two poles, so dramatically illustrated by Kawaguchi Kaiji's epic graphic novel, I would suggest we glimpse one horizon of historical consciousness in contemporary Japan. The desire for a satisfying, if fantastic, past is counterbalanced by a fear of losing the comforts and freedoms of the familiar. In the particular example of *Jipangu*, the balance between the two is struck by affirming the masculinity of the 21st century SDF members, represented by Kadomatsu. The postwar settlements are not annulled by altering the outcome of the Asia-Pacific War; they are in fact affirmed by the active struggle of Kadomatsu and his crew to preserve them. In the process, the SDF is valorized as a military institution capable of intervening in a war and still retaining its pacifist and humanitarian ideals.

There is naturally a limit to what we can safely infer from one serialized graphic novel. Graphic novels exploring the history and memory of the Asia-Pacific War cover a wide ideological spectrum. Responses to the Asia-Pacific War are indirectly discernible in the humanism of Tezuka Osamu's work, while others have adopted more explicitly political approaches in their work.^[74] Mizuki Shigeru, Nakazawa Keiji, and Ishinomori Shotaru have all produced prominent graphic novels that are explicitly critical of Japan's role in the Asia-Pacific War and which underscore the extent to which the Japanese themselves suffered from the war.^[75] At the opposite end of the political spectrum, Kobayashi Yoshinori has attracted attention for using the graphic novel format to challenge the anti-war posture which has dominated and guided the development of the manga form in postwar Japan.⁷⁶ Clearly, popular culture, especially the graphical novel format of manga, has provided a crucial site for contesting visions of the past in postwar Japan.

The vast majority of graphic novels dealing with the Asia-Pacific War, however, take Japan's defeat for granted. Few tackle the past in the form of an alternative history, and *Jipangu* stands out as a mass-circulation serial that explicitly questions the relationship between Japan's twenty-first century present and the experience of defeat. Its serial run between 2001 and 2009 coincided with significant shifts in Japan's geopolitical position and it is not too much of a stretch to suggest that *Jipangu* offers us an opportunity to assess the hopes and fears that shape horizons of the historical imagination in early-twentieth-century Japan. Those hopes and fears may be rooted fundamentally in the idiosyncrasies of Kawaguchi Kaiji as a manga artist. Many of his works rely on the clash of worldviews and *Jipangu* is of a piece with his larger body of work. Additionally, we cannot leave out the influence, however difficult to pin down, of commercial calculations. The highly collaborative model of producing serialized graphic novels in Japan, one that involves multiple assistants as well as research and direction by publishing house editors, combined with a long serial run in this case of nine years, suggests that *Jipangu* constructed a horizon of historical consciousness that the author and publisher calculated to be marketable to a mass audience. The contentious questions of Japanese aggression and, even, the experience of victimization, are left out of the series precisely because it was not advertised as a didactic or political text, in contrast to the works of Mizuki Shigeru, Ishinomori Shotaro, and even Kobayashi Yoshinori. An alternative history that radically altered the past by erasing any semblance of the defeat would have been too controversial, perhaps threatening its commercial viability. Erasing the defeat would not only have offended progressive sensibilities, it would confront a general readership with the uncomfortable possibility of an unreformed Japanese state and society. Yet, any affirmation of defeat must be left within the boundaries of the benefits it bequeathed to Japan—the victims of the Asia-Pacific War are conspicuously absent.

Commercial calculation, opaque to begin with, cannot alone adequately account for the limited horizon of historical consciousness apparent in *Jipangu*. Approaching the past, even an alternative past, in light of the present creates an inherent constraint in the name of plausibility. To this inherent constraint we can add political and commercial limits to re-imagining a past that radically challenges the present. Whatever the contributing factors, there is something both hopeful and disturbing about the limited alternatives conjured by *Jipangu*. On the one hand, the series suggests that contemporary audiences cannot imagine themselves and their society without reference to a defeat that discredits significant elements of prewar and wartime Japan, most notably a chauvinistic military, an undemocratic society, and a discredited empire. On the other hand, the seductive character of the alternative history reminds us how heroic, masculine narratives of the war crowd out narratives that would include perpetrators and victims, Japanese and non-Japanese in the same frame. *Jipangu* is, in the end, just another name for Japan and a national historical imagination. There is as yet no apparent alternative to that.

Trent Maxey is Associate Professor in the Departments of History and Asian Languages & Civilizations at Amherst College.

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Articles on related subjects

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•[Rumi Sakamoto](#), 'Will you go to war? Or will you stop being Japanese?' Nationalism and History in Kobayashi Yoshinori's *Sensoron*, *The Asia-Pacific Journal* January 14, 2008.

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Image number 1. *Jipangu* vol. 1, p. 5.

Image number 2. *Jipangu* vol. 1, p. 108.

Image number 3. *Jipangu* vol. 1, p. 222.

Image number 4. *Jipangu* vol. 43, p. 139.

Notes

¹ I would like to thank Ian Miller, Tim Van Compernelle, Mark Selden, and many others for their comments and criticisms.

² I am drawing on Gadamer's discussion of the horizon as something that is limiting, except that I want to emphasize how the horizon can be self-limited, censored, or constrained by commercial calculations as well as epistemic constraints. Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* 2nd rev. ed. (New York: Continuum, 1998), 302.

³ Tessa Morris-Suzuki, *The Past Within Us*, 16, 17.

⁴ Early examples include Komatsu Sakyo's *Chi ni wa heiwa wo* (1963), Toyoda Aritsune's *Mongoru no zanko* (1967), and Hanmura Ryo's *Sengoku jieitai* (1971).

⁵ See, for example, Hiyama Yoshiaki's *Nihon hondo kessen* (1981), *America hondo kessen* (1982), *Soren hondo kessen* (1983), *Daigyakuten! Leyte kaisen* (1988), and *Daigyakuten! Senkan Yamato gekitosu* (1988).

⁶ This is the plot of Aramaki's first series of novels, *Konpeki no kantai*.

⁷ Aramaki's second (*Kyokujitsu no kantai*) and third series follow this plot (*Shin kyokujitsu no kantai*). To be fair, not all imaginary war chronicles are as outlandish as Aramaki's. Tani Koshu's series, *Hasha no senjin* follows an alternative history that begins with the discovery of the Daqing oilfield in Manchukuo and stays within the technological parameters of the Second World War. Kawamata Chiaki does not deviate dramatically from history in his fictional account of a fighter pilot in the south Pacific; idem, *Rabaul reppu kusenki*. Finally, Sato Daisuke's three volume series, *Seito*, imagines a Japan divided into a Soviet-dominated north and a pro-American south.

⁸ <http://speculativejapan.net/> Accessed 6/24/2011.

⁹ Kobayashi's work is explicitly "presentist" in its political orientation—the history of the war is relevant to him because of its effects on contemporary masculinity and national cohesion, for example, and he is part of a revisionist discourse concerned with "what happened" in the past. See, for example: Kobayashi Yoshinori, *Shin-gomanizumu sengen Special Sensoron vol. 1* (Tokyo: Gentosha, 1998).

¹⁰ E.H. Carr, *What is History?* 91. I want to thank Kevin Vega for bringing this discussion of alternative and counterfactual history to my attention.

¹¹ The terms counterfactual and alternative are used somewhat interchangeably in the literature, but the former refers to the rigorous application of a counterfactual conditional, while the latter is applied more broadly to multimedia alterations to familiar historical chronologies and narratives.

¹² Niall Ferguson, "British Ireland: What if Britain had 'stood aside' in 1914," in *Virtual history: Alternatives and Counterfactuals* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), 175-227.

¹³ Ferguson, 83-87. Hawthorn, *Plausible Worlds: Possibility and Understanding in History and the Social Sciences* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 18.

¹⁴ Hawthorn, 157-158.

¹⁵ Alexander Demandt, *History that never happened: a treatise on the question, what would have happened if...?* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1993), 121.

¹⁶ Carr, 120-121.

¹⁷ Personal e-mail correspondence with Kodansha editors, 9/9/2010.

¹⁸ *Jipangu* vol. 22, 183.

¹⁹ While I use the term Asia-Pacific War, the dominant term used in *Jipangu* and other imaginary war chronicles is the Pacific War. Worthwhile explaining. This favored Japanese term elides the fifteen-year China War and is able to ascribe defeat to the superpower alone.

²⁰ Despite the fanciful attempt on Hitler's life, the plot is striking for leaving the course of events in Europe entirely unaffected by the altered history in the Pacific and Asia. Italy, for example, surrenders at the same time as recorded history and Hitler essentially loses the war in the east.

²¹ *Jipangu* vol. 22, 185.

²² *Jipangu* vol. 25, 149-152, vol. 22, 187.

²³ We should not discount the fact that the hyper-realism of the series is calculated to appeal to military hardware fans who form a core audience for "imaginary war chronicles." In his interviews, however, Kawaguchi addresses a more general, youthful audience.

²⁴ For examples of his work, see: Goto Kazunobu, *Jieitai kanzen dokuhon* (Tokyo: Kawade shobo, 2008) and idem, *Jieitai ura monogatari* (Tokyo: Gentosha, 2009).

²⁵ *Jipangu* vol. 12, 241-242, vol. 18, 185-189.

²⁶ See, for example, *Jipangu* vols. 2, 6, 13, 14, 20.

²⁷ Morris-Suzuki, 36-39.

²⁸ *Jipangu* vol. 1, 221.

²⁹ *Jipangu* vol. 2, 15-16, 24.

³⁰ *Jipangu* vol. 3, 5.

³¹ *Jipangu* vol. 7, 111.

- ³² Jipangu vol. 7, 146.
- ³³ Jipangu vol. 16, 79-80, 86-90.
- ³⁴ Jipangu vol. 5, 53.
- ³⁵ Jipangu vol. 7, 111.
- ³⁶ Jipangu vol. 8, 195.
- ³⁷ Jipangu vol. 8, 197.
- ³⁸ Jipangu vol. 22, 181-193.
- ³⁹ Jipangu vol. 1, 150.
- ⁴⁰ Jipangu vol. 1, 157.
- ⁴¹ Jipangu vol. 3, 164.
- ⁴² Jipangu vol. 2, 43.
- ⁴³ Jipangu vol. 8, 116.
- ⁴⁴ Jipangu vol. 3, 4, vol. 4, 90.
- ⁴⁵ Jipangu vol. 23 21.
- ⁴⁶ Jipangu vol. 7, 189.
- ⁴⁷ Jipangu vol. 12, 119, vol. 8, 43-44.
- ⁴⁸ Cook & Cook, Japan at War: An Oral History, 6, 16.
- ⁴⁹ Jipangu vol. 3, 96.
- ⁵⁰ Jipangu vol. 22, 184.
- ⁵¹ www.mofa.go.jp ; www.shugiin.go.jp; www.kantei.go.jp; law.e-gov.go.jp
- ⁵² Jipangu vol. 6, 108.
- ⁵³ Jipangu vol. 8, 220.
- ⁵⁴ Jipangu vol. 14, 209-250.
- ⁵⁵ Jipangu vol. 16, 59-60.
- ⁵⁶ Sabine Frühstück, Uneasy Warriors: Gender, Memory and Popular Culture in the Japanese Army (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 62-63, 126-138.
- ⁵⁷ Jipangu vol. 1, 20.
- ⁵⁸ Jipangu vol. 2, 58, 96, 101.
- ⁵⁹ Jipangu vol. 3, 82.
- ⁶⁰ Jipangu vol. 1, 109.
- ⁶¹ Jipangu vol. 24, 185-192.
- ⁶² Jipangu vol. 2, 190-181, vol. 3, 134, vol. 13, 100.
- ⁶³ Jipangu vol. 15, 137-138.
- ⁶⁴ Jipangu vol. 15, 174, 176, 179.
- ⁶⁵ Jipangu vol. 19, 10.
- ⁶⁶ Jipangu vol. 22, 92.
- ⁶⁷ Jipangu vol. 25, 71-73, 74.
- ⁶⁸ Jipangu vol. 43, 109-113.
- ⁶⁹ Jipangu vol. 43, 126-30, 139-141.

⁷⁰ Jipangu vol. 43, 177.

⁷¹ Morris-Suzuki, 52.

⁷² Jipangu vol. 24, 185-192.

⁷³ Gavriel Rosenfeld, Why do we ask 'What if'? 92-93

⁷⁴ Yuki Tanaka, "[War and Peace in the Art of Tezuka Osamu: The humanism of his epic manga](#)," *The Asia-Pacific Journal*, 38-1-10, September 20, 2010.

⁷⁵ Matthew Penney, "[War and Japan: The Non-Fiction Manga of Mizuki Shigeru](#)," *The Asia-Pacific Journal*, September 21, 2008. .

⁷⁶ Rumi Sakamoto, "[Will you go to war? Or will you stop being Japanese?](#)" Nationalism and History in Kobayashi Yoshinori's *Sensoron*," *The Asia-Pacific Journal* January 14, 2008.