Book Section:
Rayner, J.R. orcid.org/0000-0002-9422-3453 (2019) Forever Being Yamato : Alternate Pacific War Histories in Japanese Film and Anime. In: Morgan, G. and Palmer-Patel, C., (eds.) Sideways in Time : Critical Essays on Alternate History Fiction. Liverpool University Press , pp. 62-77. ISBN 9781789620139

“Forever Being Yamato”: Alternate Pacific War Histories in Japanese Film and Anime

Jonathan Rayner, University of Sheffield

> The constructed identity of the postwar Japanese is inherently unbalanced, reflecting the yet unresolved nature of their past. It would not be an exaggeration to say that the single most important problem of ‘postwar’ Japan is this inability to come to terms, once and for all, with the pre-1945 past. (Shimazu 116)

Since 2000, a series of mainstream Japanese feature films have addressed the subject of the Pacific War, and lavished long running times and high production values on the representation of this destructive and controversial conflict. These films can be seen within a wider international context in which the Second World War has re-emerged as a spectacular and popular cinematic preoccupation, but while these Japanese examples are comparable to and often visually resemble Hollywood precedents such as *Saving Private Ryan* (Steven Spielberg, 1998) or *Pearl Harbor* (Michael Bay 2001), their national context makes their specific depictions of history divisive and problematic. Films such as *Men of the Yamato* (Sato Junya, 2005), *Sea Without Exit* (Kiyoshi Sasabe, 2006), *For Those We Love* (Taku Shinjo, 2007), *Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto* (Izuru Narushima, 2011) and *The Eternal Zero* (Takashi Yamazaki, 2013) evince an uneasy balance between lamentation for the destruction of the war, denial or evasion of Japanese responsibility for the conflict, and a celebration of self-sacrifice in the past in the creation of Japan’s future peace and prosperity. The vexed status of Japan’s war history, in political debate and in education, renders the recent past a contestable and re-interpretable space. The problematic and ambiguous treatment of war history in contemporary Japan (by turns pacifist and ruminative, conservative and deterministic, and inconsistent and paradoxical) which these films exhibit and exemplify is also found in films and animated series which carry their reinterpretation of the past further into active rewriting, creating divergent, alternative histories of the conflict.

Surveying these recent films foregrounds one of the most stereotypical and controversial aspects of Japan's conduct of the war in the Pacific: knowing and willing self-sacrifice by Japanese soldiers, sailors and airmen to the imperial cause. In portraying the readiness of Japan's young men to die for the nation, the films express and encourage admiration for their heroism and selflessness, while treating the military authorities commanding them, the nation for which they died, and the post-war Japan their deaths delivered in equivocal or out-rightly ambiguous terms. For example, *Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto* was released to coincide with the seventieth anniversary of the Japanese Navy's raid on Pearl Harbour, where Michael Bay's *Pearl Harbor* marked the sixtieth anniversary of this event from the American side. This film biography of Yamamoto cements rather than questions the admiral's continuing iconic status as the mastermind of the attack, as a patriot reluctant to go to war, as a moderate within an aggressive Army-led Japanese establishment, and as a martyr and prophetic hero killed in the service of his country. This stands in contrast to the reappraisals of Western commentators such as Robert Lowe which repudiate Yamamoto's hallowed status. (Lowe 83). *Sea without Exit*, *For Those We Love* and *The Eternal Zero* offer even more sympathetic portrayals of self-sacrifice in the cause of the war, and even more strident assertions of the unyielding national necessity of such actions. The fact that the screenwriter and executive producer of *For Those We Love* was the controversial author and right-wing politician Ishihara Shintaro underlines the provocative appropriation, rather than simple evocation, of national history in which such films indulge (see Aoki). Thus these films straddle and complicate the categories of war history, war cinema and alternate history.

These highly popular, yet problematic film texts stand as marked re-interpretations or revisions of history redolent of the divisive, ongoing debates inside Japan on the facts as much as the significance of the past. The contestable nature of history is indicative of political polarisation in the ways in which the conflict in the Pacific in particular is interpreted. Post-war generations and governments have struggled to reconcile awareness of Japanese wartime suffering (for example under allied blockade and bombing attacks, including the nuclear raids on Hiroshima and Nagasaki) with acknowledgement of Japanese militarism and imperial expansion as the causes of the war in the first place:

> The Japanese are frequently accused of 'failing to address the past' or of 'denial', 'ignorance' and 'amnesia' concerning the war. These conclusions are often based on assertions that 'Japanese children do not learn about the war in school' or the 'state-centred' thinking that because the Japanese government has failed to adequately address war issues in the eyes of most outside Japan, the Japanese people fail to address the past too. The reality, however, is that debate over how to address war responsibility issues has ensured that war history remains highly contested in Japan and Japanese people have been unable to settle on a dominant narrative of the conflict. (Seaton 54)

Compromises in coming to terms with Japan's militaristic past are focused by the circumstances of its explicitly pacifist present. Specifically, Article 9 of the post-war Japanese constitution allows armed forces for defensive purposes only, and outlaws the use of military force for the purposes of aggression. Indeed, hard-line left-wing elements in Japan have asserted that a strict interpretation of Article 9 should prevent Japan from possessing armed forces at all. Debates about Japan's military present almost inevitable provoke highly divisive debate on the interpretation of the country's military past, as epitomised by the controversies surrounding the academic career of historian Ienaga Saburo (Ienaga, Japan's Past, Japan's Future 147). The rapid expansion of Japan's armed forces (especially its navy, now referred to as the 'Maritime Self Defence Force') and calls for the dispatching of Japanese forces overseas (for example in support of their American allies during the 1990s and since 9/11) have been highly controversial (Woolley 30-34). At the same time, Japan's commitment to defence and stated espousal of pacifism have been criticised by an America treaty-bound to guarantee the country's security:

> From its role in Japan's relinquishment of the right to use its forces overseas, to its constant pressure on Japan to rebuild its armed forces during the Korean War, to its mixed signals of cooperation and competition as Japan became an economic world power, America's lack of clarity in its posture toward Japan during the postwar period has been the source of ambiguity and confusion within Japan over its own position in the world. (Fisch 61-62)

Re-interpretation of Japan's imperial, military past has been linked inextricably with the re-appraisal and re-negotiation of Article 9 and its significance for a Japanese post-war national identity (Ienaga, Glorification of War 119-120). Contemporarily, academic disputes over the interpretation of Japan's history have escalated into court cases in which scholarly freedom, the impartiality of history text books in the country's classrooms, and international relations with regional neighbours have been at stake (see Ienaga, Japan's Past, Japan's Future; Jeans 183-193). The significance of this historically- and culturally-specific range of debateable pasts and divisive presents distinguishes the retrospective films produced in Japan since end of the Second World War. These re-readings and re-writings of history encompass representations in war and fantasy genres, and also span (and often conflate) the categorisations of alternate history narratives in their navigation of problematic pasts (Hellekson 5-6). In this nationally-specific context, alternate history has moved from peripheral, hypothetic debate to didactic, institutionalised re-inscription.

The ambivalent current of patriotic celebration and national mourning reaches an apotheosis in the 3-hour epic *Men of the Yamato*. (The title is also translatable as *The Men's Yamato*). This film adopts a flash-back structure to recreate the final mission of the Imperial Japanese Navy in the Second World War, the last sortie of the super-battleship *Yamato* to the island of Okinawa in what was in effect the largest kamikaze mission of the war. There was no hope of return or success, and the *Yamato* was sunk with heavy loss of life. This feature film brings together many problematic threads in the ownership and interpretation of Japan's war history. While it is based on a novel by Henmi Jun, it also draws inspiration from the autobiographical account of Yoshida Mitsuru which was subject to censorship (for its alleged nationalistic and militaristic sentiments) in post-war, American-controlled Japan (Yoshida xxix-xxxi). Footage of the wreck (from an underwater expedition funded by the national newspaper the *Asahi Shimbun*), including images of the prominent Imperial Chrysanthemum crest on its bow, are integrated in the film, as are scenes of exhibits in the Kure Naval Museum dedicated to the ship. This concentration upon the *Yamato* reflects its overwhelming national and cultural significance, as a symbol of the navy and country. The name *Yamato* is a poetic appellation for the country and nation, comparable to terms and ship names like Albion or Britannia or Columbia in the UK or United States (Evans and

Peattie 378) The word is also contained within the phrase 'yamato damashi-i' referring to the national soul or spirit, communal values, and explicitly martial virtues of Japan enshrined in shared tradition and belief (Perry 317).

The film's flashback construction is crucial to this espousal and inculcation of the values and virtues of the past. In its narrative an old fisherman, a survivor of the *Yamato*, sails out to the site of the wreck at the behest of a young woman on the sixtieth anniversary of its sinking. It is subsequently revealed that she is one of many orphaned children raised by another survivor, a senior enlisted man who saved many young crewmembers and whom the fisherman had believed had perished when the ship sank. The journey to the wreck site precipitates a series of traumatic flashbacks, in which the old fisherman relives the wartime past and relates his story and the fate of the ship to the young woman and his teenage deck hand. During their trip, the old man even seems to see *Yamato* sailing towards them out of the mist, magically restored to her 1945 glory. This CGI-recreation of the *Yamato*, complemented by an enormous 600 million yen set constructed for the film, can be seen to parallel the 70-foot model of the ship which occupies pride of place in the Kure Naval Museum (Takekawa). When they finally reach the wreck site, the three travellers symbolically salute the *Yamato* and her crew, in a scene which combines memory, commemoration and memorialisation in 'the perfect image of three generations coming to respect the sacrifice made by the sailors' (Condry).

The respectful and forcible link to the past made by the film sits uncomfortably alongside some melodramatic scenes set in 1945 of the young sailors bidding farewell to a home to which they are resolved to return, and anachronistic speeches given by the ship's officers in which Japan's defeat, and their sacrifice, are deemed to be inevitable and necessary for the country to survive and progress. Here the film appears to transgress its own flashback logic (and to follow and paraphrase Yoshida's memoir) to ascribe future knowledge to prescient characters placed aboard the doomed ship in the historical past, who conceive of themselves as 'harbingers' of a new nation (Yoshida 40).

Ironically, this implied transporting of the *Yamato*, and the ideology it personifies, into a future its sacrifice has facilitated, had already been accomplished in highly symbolic fashion in manga form, and in a succession of animated films and television series in *Space Battleship Yamato*. Made in the 1970s, and exported to the West in modified form as *Star Blazers*, *Space Battleship Yamato* records the voyages and adventures of a massive

spaceship, built from the remains of the Second World War battleship, which defends Earth from alien invaders in the distant future. With its representation of the planet Earth and its (Japanese) human population suffering devastating nuclear attacks from hostile aliens, *Space Battleship Yamato* has been interpreted as an allegory of Japan's experience of American bombing in the Second World War, which valorises a redeemed Japanese military and propagates 'master narratives of noble failure and national victimhood' (Ashbaugh 345). In order to defeat the superior extra-terrestrial forces, the rejuvenated *Yamato* must be expended as before in a self-sacrificial mission. Heroically (and illogically), in the series *Yamato* is repeatedly resurrected and destroyed in last-ditch suicidal missions in order to safeguard the planet's and humanity's future (Ashbaugh 330). The ship's apparently unending sacrificial duty is indicated by the title of the 1980 entry in this series, *Be Forever Yamato*. The popularity of this franchise and the pervasive recognition of its reincarnation of the *Yamato* can be gauged from the production of a big-budget, live-action version of the narrative in 2010. However, the national icon of the *Yamato* also features widely in other examples of Japanese alternate history fiction exploring the country's war in Asia and the role of this symbolic and ideologically-laden ship (see Penney 48). In addition, the transformational encounter between Japan's revered past (embodied by the national icon of the battleship) and its potential future represented in *Space Battleship Yamato* is also played out in other films and anime series, which foreground, assert and challenge the history, ethos, role and identity of the country's military in science fiction and fantasy narratives.

While it might represent a well-known example in the West, the convergence of science fiction, national history and exploration of enduring notions of martial spirit, sacrifice and military duty in *Space Battleship Yamato* is by no means unique. A recent trilogy of science fiction films from novels by the same author confront aspects of Japanese history and its traditions of militarism in past and present in similar alternate histories of the 'nexus' or 'parallel world' types (Hellekson 5-6). In *Lorelei, the Witch of the Pacific Ocean* (Higuchi Shinji, 2005), a German super-submarine handed over to the Imperial Japanese Navy in the last days of the Second World War is ordered to prevent the dropping of a third atomic bomb on Tokyo. The submarine has a top-secret sonar system which relies on the telepathic abilities of a teenage Japanese girl whose powers are the result of experiments in a Nazi concentration camp. The submarine's mission is compromised when it emerges that

ultra-nationalist elements in the Japanese Navy actually desire and plan for the third bomb to hit Tokyo, to ensure the eradication of the Japan that has lost the war and the creation of a new, pure state. Again, the conflagration and willing sacrifice of the nation in defeat is deemed necessary for a future of progress and an untainted national identity.

The violent creation of an alternate future out of an altered past is also seen in another film in the trilogy *Samurai Commando Mission 1549* (Tezuka Masaki, 2005). In this story, a group of modern-day soldiers from Japan's Self-Defence Force are transported back in time to the Middle Ages. As might be expected in a time travel story, an army officer from the present gets left behind in the past, assumes the identity of a samurai warlord, and hatches a plan to alter Japan's history so that militarism and samurai values predominate. The film's defining image is a meeting between different generations of the Japanese military: one bent on conquest and aggression and wedded to notions of loyal self-sacrifice, the other tasked only with defence, but inevitably sharing principles of sacrifice in their loyalty and duty to present-day Japan.

The manga and fantasy television series *Gate* (2015) provides a similarly redemptive depiction of the Japanese Ground Self Defence Force. In this science fiction/fantasy narrative, Japanese soldiers repel an attack upon Tokyo launched through an inter-dimensional portal. In a highly problematic amalgam of allegorised imperial expansion and defensive military operations in the present day, Japan's armed forces then travel through the gateway in order to demand reparations for this aggressive action, but eventually colonise and bring order to the fantasy realm (replete with dragons and magical beings) which they discover. Notably, within *Gate*'s portrayal of the twenty-first century world confronting an unknown, adversarial but resource-rich culture, Japan's powerful but paternalistic intervention in the resulting global crisis is favourably compared to the acquisitive, destructive, neo-imperialist machinations of the United States and Russia.

The third film in the trilogy *Aegis* (Sakamoto Junji, 2005) portrays a terrorist threat to modern Japan which tests the country's international allegiances and requires the intervention of the Maritime Self Defence Force, specifically the newest Japanese warships equipped with the American-supplied Aegis defence system. While this film is more concerned with contemporary, rather than historical militaristic sentiments inside Japan, its connection of threats to national security to American military co-operation and American technology evokes comparison with the manga and adapted science fiction animated series

Zipang (2004-05), set aboard a similar, albeit fictional ship of the Maritime Self Defence Force.

The narrative of *Zipang* (a combination of the familiar 'nexus' and 'battle story' alternate history models) centres on a twenty-first century Japanese warship, the destroyer *Mirai*, which gets caught in a storm while en route to Pearl Harbour to join in naval exercises with the US Navy (Hellekson 7). Emerging from the squall, the crew finds the ship has been transported back through time to the Second World War. This *Twilight Zone*-like scenario closely resembles the plot of the American science fiction film *The Final Countdown* (Don Taylor, 1980) in which a modern US Navy ship time-travels to the eve of the attack on Pearl Harbour. While in that example the American sailors debate their responsibility to defend America in the past and the present, in *Zipang* the Japanese sailors are presented with the dilemma of aiding their historical countrymen, by attacking their allies of the present day. Again, this paradox invokes the relevance of the post-war Japanese constitution, and Article 9's prohibition of war for aggressive purposes: *Mirai* pointedly belongs to the Maritime Self Defence Force, not the Imperial Navy. The sailors of the *Mirai* possess a superiority of knowledge granted by their historical understanding of the Pacific conflict, and a moral superiority in their dedication to defending Japan and saving lives rather than taking them, but they also possess immeasurably superior firepower for the 1940s, and must decide how, and if, the capabilities of their ship should be used. Since they know the coming events, they could try to end the war and avoid Japan's destruction. Yet they also suspect that they should avoid involvement in the conflict, in order to ensure that their stream of history remains unchanged. However, an acute awareness of their duty also demands that if they and their country are in danger they must fight, and perhaps protect and serve Japan best by winning the war.

Mirai is introduced in the television series as a potent symbol of modern Japan (her name means 'Future'), a powerful and technologically advanced warship. With a degree inevitability, when she is transported through time, *Mirai* encounters a parallel national symbol from the past: the battleship *Yamato*. As in *Men of the Yamato*, the battleship and the past she represents appear to emerge from the dark and the fog. Indeed, it is the very sight of the *Yamato* surrounded by the Japanese fleet heading for the Battle of Midway, which convinces the sailors of the *Mirai* that they have actually arrived in mid-1942. In the manga version of this meeting, the Chrysanthemum Imperial crest on *Yamato*'s bow is

especially prominent. Thereafter, while events rapidly overtake the *Mirai* and the modern sailors are forced to fight to defend themselves in the middle of the Pacific War's decisive battles, the *Yamato* takes a leading role in the unfolding narrative. In a moment marked by reverential awe, when a member of *Mirai*'s crew visits the *Yamato*, he meets the commander-in-chief, Admiral Yamamoto himself.

One of the *Mirai*'s first humanitarian acts, and the one with the far-reaching consequences, is the rescue of a downed Imperial Navy pilot. This officer, Lieutenant Commander Kusaka, is taken aboard the ship and given medical treatment. Kusaka quickly learns that the *Mirai* is from the future and while the twenty-first century sailors wonder how they should intervene in the imminent battle for the island of Guadalcanal, he accesses the ship's databases and comes to understand his country's fate in the current war. In comparison with the indecisiveness of the *Mirai*'s crewmembers, Kusaka knows at once where his duty lies and what he must do to save Japan. Kusaka flies to the Japanese Navy base at Truk, for meetings with Japanese naval commanders. He reveals the facts behind the sudden appearance of the *Mirai* amidst the Midway task force, shares the knowledge he has gained about Japan's inevitable and crushing defeat, and proposes a new strategy, with which Japan can win.

As the *Mirai* gains the attention of the American military and is herself attacked by US Navy submarines and aircraft, Kusaka sets his plans in motion, organising the departure of a massive Japanese naval force to Guadalcanal which, armed with the knowledge of *Mirai*'s history files, will be able to decisively defeat the Americans on the island and compel the United States to make peace. A small group of *Mirai*'s sailors land on the island and use a display of the destroyer's high technology weapons to try to persuade the Americans to withdraw without loss of life. However, Kusaka radios their leader (from the *Yamato*) to explain his vision for a new Japan: not the defeated and transformed country which *Mirai* represents, nor the militaristic and short-sighted country which launched the Pacific War against the Western Powers, but a new 'ideal' country and empire based on conquest of the Asian mainland which he describes in terms redolent of national divinity and destiny:

> It is not the Great Japanese Empire, which thoughtlessly threw and trapped herself into a state of war. Nor is it the post-war Japan, who yielded to an

> unconditional surrender and is burdened with shame. It is a country which spans these two eras… An independent island nation, full of power … a new country that no Japanese has ever experienced: Zipang.

This is explicitly an oceanic empire, deriving its identity as well as its resources from the conquest of China. Although this rhetoric obviously coincides with Japanese expansionist policies of the 1930s and 1940s, its proclamation is remarkable in a twenty-first century text, in a context of troubled regional relationships rooted in perceptions of historical conflict, and economic transformation in the form of Japan's post-1990s decline and China's emergence as an industrial and military superpower. Most significantly perhaps, Kusaka is proposing (and it seems, creating) an alternate history, as events in 1942 since *Mirai*'s arrival do appear to diverge from the historical record. This is made clear at this moment as the *Yamato*, in reality kept away from the fighting at Guadalcanal, approaches the island to deliver a shattering bombardment on the US marines ashore. This marks a moment of historiographic revisionism, as key historical readings of the Pacific War have noted the inactivity of the super-battleship at critical moments in the conflict and hypothesised the potential effects of its intervention in the crucial Guadalcanal campaign (see Peattie and Evans 379). However, *Mirai* herself intercedes to overturn the *Yamato*'s intervention, using its advanced missile system to shoot down the battleship's shells in flight and so save the American soldiers on the island. The complex associations of this plot twist are worth careful consideration: the *Mirai* uses a missile defence system, the Aegis radar, to defend America and circumvent the objectives of one or more incarnations of Imperial Japan. Aegis itself is an American system, shared with the Maritime Self Defence Force for its newest vessels for interoperability between the allies, and specifically as part of the ongoing development of ballistic missile defences for Europe and Asia. Japan's Aegis-equipped ships are tasked explicitly with defending the Home Islands from anticipated ballistic missile attacks, from North Korea and possibly China. Consequently *Mirai*'s intervention in shooting down *Yamato*'s shells may be read as a trumping of Japan's offensive imperial militarism with the defensive technologies and allegiances of the present day: a benediction of the modern form which Japan's armed forces take in distinction from their manifestations in the past. However, after the events around Guadalcanal, while accepted history seems to

continue to play out in some of *Zipang*'s plotlines, it is noticeable that the *Yamato*, and Kusaka's vision, remain intact and it is the *Mirai* herself who becomes an inactive, controversial symbol of the Navy when she 'returns' to her home port in Yokosuka. The series and the manga on which it was based end inconclusively, with the *Mirai* in danger as elements within the Imperial Navy consider the warship and crew from the future to be unreliable and insubordinate. While the *Mirai*'s sailors are reluctant to participate in the war and instead commit themselves to aiding their country after its inevitable defeat, it becomes obvious from the divergences from documented history they have observed since their arrival in 1942 that this, in any case, is not, or no longer, 'their' past after all, but a vexed parallel world. Without a pure and pre-existent historical script to follow, the *Mirai*'s crewmembers must respond individually and conscientiously to their duty-driven dilemma.

The visions or versions of the Pacific War past which these examples of film, manga and animation propagate are challenges to ready interpretations and simple syntheses, and are redolent of passionate political and historical disagreements within contemporary Japan:

> It is careless to write about 'the Japanese' view of the war, when the struggle over museums, textbooks, the flag, the national anthem, the emperor, and whether Japanese government officials should visit the Yasukuni Shrine reveal, above all, a divided Japan. (Jeans 194)

Commentators on contemporary Japan such as Shimazu Naoko and Mizuno Hiromi have drawn stark contrasts between the deliberate or disingenuous amnesia displayed in official circles and establishment statements on the Pacific War, and the frequent and repeated revisionist representations of the conflict, evincing both left and right wing, pacifist and militarist biases, and proposing parallel or alternate histories, broadcast within Japanese popular culture (see Shimazu; Mizuno). This phenomenon has been labelled a genre of 'war fantasy', a term which belies the diversity and seriousness of historical and cultural debate within such uniquely Japanese texts, but which also acknowledges their peculiar propensity to create a 'discursive space open enough' to represent sundry and dissonant views, where 'the clichés of established genres can easily become the foundation for parody and criticism' (Penney 44). In this respect, the continuing and apparently accelerating production of war

films and war fantasy narratives in contemporary Japan appears to speak to a concentrated re-engagement with the Second World War as a subject, with a concomitant reappraisal as much as reiteration of what that conflict was and is assumed to mean:

> War fantasy has presented a diverse array of images of war […] In contrast to government silence and ambiguity and the oft cited 'victim's view', Japanese popular works have taken a 'victimizer's view' as well, utilizing it to present anti-war messages to readers. These patterns of expression have shaped some of the most important works of the war fantasy genre, presenting a critical view of organized violence, not simply 'war as entertainment', to Japanese audiences. (Penney 51)

Despite Penney's assertion of the oppositional potential of these texts, their resemblance to conservative Western war genre precedents and their inclusions of spectacles of combat and military hardware makes their ideological positioning difficult. Since the appearance of *Zipang*, several more recent manga sequences, derived animated series and spin-off films have extended and further complicated the fantasy rewriting of the Second World War. *Strike Witches* (2008-15) posits an alternate history of the Second World War and follows the adventures of magically-empowered teenage girls who assume the guises and names of fighter aces in battles against alien invaders. Notably, the war against the extra-terrestrials means that in this parallel universe the European phase of the conflict is either curtailed or never takes place. Nonetheless, battleship *Yamato* still makes an appearance in this narrative. In *Girls Und Panzer* (2012), members of girls' academies engage in a sporting competition based on Second World War armoured combat. Teams use vintage tanks of various nationalities in games imparting leadership skills and inculcating team spirit. In both of these series, the personalities, uniforms, insignia and equipment of Allied and Axis nations are appropriated and re-used, either in alliances against common alien adversaries or in friendly rivalry. More recently, *Kantai Collection* a.k.a. *Fleet Girls* (2015) merges some of these concepts with the awareness of naval tradition displayed by *Zipang*, in a plot-line in which an alien invasion is opposed by an all-female academy of students endowed with the names, weapons and personalities of Imperial Navy warships. This series' narrative is difficult to situate within the categories of alternate history, yet its assertive invocation of

parallels between its fantasy and documented history (for example when the girl named after the destroyer *Kisaragi* lost in 1942 off Wake Island, is 'sunk' in a battle at 'W Island') mean that its allusions to the past are inclusive and affirmative for informed viewers, and intentionally alerting and educational for uninformed ones. In appearing to restage and refight the Second World War against uncontroversial enemies, or even to reuse the fetishized hardware of the conflict in entirely harmless and edifying contests, these fantasy narratives emphasize the history of the war as much as they appear to obfuscate its underlying, abhorrent realities. Perhaps even more troublingly, the popularity and pervasiveness of manga-derived militaristic imagery has prompted its incorporation into public relations and recruitment material for the Self Defence Forces (see Brummer). However, these most recent manga and animations can also be seen to be recapitulating representations of the Second World War provided by earlier post-war Japanese popular texts. In emphasizing the youthfulness of pilots and portraying their under-dog, defensive missions rather than any offensive action, manga of the 1950s and 1960s similarly obscured and sanitised aspects of Japan's war history (see Nakar 64, 68). In this transmutation of the still recognisable history of the war, and the substantive repositioning and revaluation of Japan's part within it, Thomas Schnellbächer describes these recent fantasies as serving as 'purification rituals' as much as popular entertainments, for a youthful (Japanese) audience widely considered to lack a full spectrum of national, historical knowledge (Schnellbächer 393; Condry).

Several consistencies yoke together the examples examined here, not least of which is the heightened emphases upon military and naval iconography, artefacts and fetishized hardware, which contribute to the perception of warfare and war film as uncritical entertainment. In this respect, the submarine *Lorelei*, the destroyer *Mirai* and above all the battleship *Yamato* are naval symbols which embody and articulate national ideals, and which are enmeshed in discourses desiring the re-examination and re-writing of Japan's military history. These discourses are not simply left- or right wing, traditionalist or progressive, militarist or pacifist, but represent a 'fusing' of numerous threads and versions of nationalism (see Takekawa). Augmenting their alternate-ness, ambiguity and evasion characterise these texts' stances on Japan's imperial history and naval traditions: for example, in their lamenting of loss of life in war while simultaneously championing suicide

and martyrdom, and in condemning the militaristic wartime Japan which squandered a youthful generation while celebrating the peaceful and progressive Japan created by its creeds of self-sacrifice. *Mirai*'s community of sailors incarnates modern Japan, and yet it sails under the same flag, and in essence belongs to the same country, as the Imperial Navy men of 1942. Their principled sacrifice, in continuing to fight for Japan (or an idea of or an ideal Japan) links them ideologically as well as imagistically to their forebears. In episodes of *Zipang*, the frequent and ultimately intractable debates about the proper course of action for Japan's two navies and their men, and the meanings and consequences of past and future deeds, are inevitably paralleled textually and comparable ideologically. That they suffer doubts, express ambivalence, and search for the correct response to history, in fact underlines their striking representativeness of the wider, contemporary Japan at personal, societal and cultural levels, where 'debates about national identity are intimately connected with a transnational imaginary, and not simply a national ambivalence' (Condry).

The three symbolic names which permeate *Zipang* – *Mirai*, the mature future, *Yamato* the past of naval and national tradition, and Zipang, the imagined regional, imperial destiny – are at once contradictory and complimentary principles, communal values and dissensions in ultimately insoluble dilemmas within the national imaginary. Together they form a type of politico-military double-think, a specific form of culturally determined cognitive dissonance which ranges across the national and wartime history, and which gives rise to fertile and illustrative alternatives to that history: 'alternative history, then, does not change the past as we know it, but changes our understanding about the past we know' (Easterbrook 489). In the struggle to redeem the nation's armed services, condemned for past aggression, through assumption of a uniquely defensive role, in the difficulty of military characters incarnating a high principle of pacifism, and in the unfeasibility of crafting a historical representation palatable to all political constituencies, the *Yamato* and its alternate histories provide a recurrent, if not consistent iconography and narrativisation for the projection of Japan's past, as Mizuno Hiromi observes:

> As the battleship *Yamato*'s enduring presence in the postwar anime illustrates, the historical context is not simply 'the background' of the text but is a crucial aspect of the text. Analyzing desires, their ambiguity, and complexity that

> variously configure this intertwined text-context relation helps us read these anime works not as a history of anime but as a history of Japan, and not as an embodiment or a representation of some unchanging 'authentic' Japanese culture […] but as a site of a constant construction of national identity. (Mizuno 121).

The apparently accelerating production of alternate histories in contemporary Japan appears to reflect on ongoing and obsessive engagement with and renegotiation of the significance of the past, and to contribute to and modify a conflicted present. This is not simply what Ian Burama has labelled 'seeing history through the eyes of identity', but an emphatic re-inscription of identity via the rewriting of history (Burama 122).

Filmography

Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto (Izuru Narushima, 2011)

Aegis (Sakamoto Junji, 2005)

Be Forever Yamato (Masuda Toshio, 1980)

The Eternal Zero (Takashi Yamazaki, 2013)

The Final Countdown (Don Taylor, 1980)

For Those We Love (Taku Shinjo, 2007)

Lorelei, the Witch of the Pacific Ocean (Higuchi Shinji, 2005)

Men of the Yamato (Sato Junya, 2005)

Pearl Harbor (Michael Bay 2001)

Samurai Commando Mission 1549 (Tezuka Masaki, 2005)

Saving Private Ryan (Steven Spielberg, 1998)

Sea Without Exit (Kiyoshi Sasabe, 2006)

Space Battleship Yamato (Yamazaki Takashi, 2010)

Anime Television Series

Gate (Kyogoku Takahiko, 2015)

Girls Und Panzer (Mizushima Tsutomu, 2012)

Kantai Collection a.k.a. *Fleet Girls* (Kusakawa Keizo, 2015)

Space Battleship Yamato (Matsumoto Leiji, 1974-5)

Strike Witches (Takamura Kazuhiro, 2008)

Zipang (Furuhashi Kasuhiro, 2004-5)

References

Aoki, Mizuho. "Controversial to the End, Shintaro Ishihara Bows out of Politics." *The Japan Times* 16 December 2014. Web. 22 May 2016. <http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2014/12/16/national/politics-diplomacy/ishihara-bows-wants-war-china-compares-hashimoto-young-hitler/#.V0GnIulFCP9>

Ashbaugh, William. "Contesting Traumatic War Narratives: *Space Battleship Yamato* and *Mobile Suit Gundam*," in: Stahl, D. and Williams, M. eds. *Imag(in)ing the War in Japan: Representing and Responding to Trauma in Postwar Literature and Film*. Boston: Brill, 2010. 327-353. Print.

Brummer, Matthew. "Japan – The Manga Military: How Japan's 'Creative Industry Complex' is using manga to shape public perceptions." *The Diplomat* 19 January 2016. Web. 23 March 2016. <http://thediplomat.com/2016/01/japans-creative-industrial-complex/>

Burama, Ian. *The Wages of Guilt*. London: Jonathan Cape, 1994.

Condry, Ian. "Youth, Intimacy and Blood: Media and Nationalism in Contemporary Japan." *Japan Focus* 8 April 2007. Web. 1 June 2010. <http://japanfocus.org/-Ian-Condry/2403>

Evans, David C. and Mark R. Peattie. *Kaigun: Strategy, Tactics and Technology of the Imperial Japanese Navy 1887-1941*. Annapolis: USNI Press, 1997. Print.

Easterbrook, Neil. "Alternate Presents: The Ambivalent Historicism of Pattern Recognition." *Science Fiction Studies* 33.3 (2006): 483-504. Print.

Fisch, Michael. "Nation, War, and Japan's Future in the Science Fiction Anime Film *Patlabor II*." Science Fiction Studies 27.1 (2000): 49-68. Print.

Hellekson, Karen. *The Alternate History: Refiguring Historical Time*. London: Kent State University Press, 2001. Print.

Ienaga, Saburo. *Japan's Past, Japan's Future: One Historian's Odyssey*. Trans. Richard H. Minear. Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield, 2001. Print.

Ienaga, Saburo. “The Glorification of War in Japanese Education.” *International Security* 18.3 (1993-94): 113-133. Print.

Jeans, Roger B. “Victims or Victimizers? Museums, Textbooks and the War Debate in Contemporary Japan.” *Journal of Military History* 69.1 (2005): 149-195. Print.

Lowe, Robert. “The Height of Folly: The battles of the Coral Sea and Midway.” *The Pacific War Companion*. Ed. Daniel Marston. Oxford: Osprey, 2005. 79-97. Print.

Mizuno, Hiromi. “When Pacifist Japan Fights: Historicizing Desires in Anime.” *Mechademia* 2 (2007): 103-123. Print.

Nakar, Eldad. ‘Memories of Pilots and Planes: World War II in Japanese “Manga” 1957-1967.’ *Social Science Japan Journal* 6.1 (2003): 57-76. Print.

Penney, Matthew. “War Fantasy and Reality — War as Entertainment and Counter-narratives in Japanese Popular Culture.” *Japanese Studies* 27.1 (2007): 35-52. Print.

Perry, John Curtis. “Great Britain and the Emergence of Japan as a Naval Power.” *Monumenta Nipponica* 21.3/4 (1966): 305-321. Print.

Schnellbächer, Thomas. “Has the Empire Sunk Yet? The Pacific in Japanese Science Fiction.” *Science Fiction Studies* 29.3 (2002): 382-396. Print.

Shimazu, Naoko. “Popular Representations of the Past: The Case of Postwar Japan.” *Journal of Contemporary History* 38.1 (2003): 101-116. Print.

Takekawa, Shunichi. “Fusing Nationalisms in Post-war Japan: the Battleship *Yamato* and Popular Culture.” *Electronic Journal of Contemporary Japanese Studies* 3.12 (2012). Print.

Woolley, Peter J. *Japan’s Navy: Politics and Paradox 1971-2000*. London: Lynne Reinner, 2000. Print.

Yoshida, Mitsuru. *Requiem for Battleship Yamato*. Annapolis: USNI Press, 1985. Print.