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MEDIATING MEMORY

Shōjo and war memory in classical narrative Japanese cinema

Considering the impact of the trope of the *shōjo, or girl trope* in postwar Japanese cinema, this paper argues for the repeated motif as a key factor in the creation of a particular affective economy around the memorialization of war in Japan. I trace the development of the *shōjo* motif from the post-defeat era through the anti-nuclear films and activist movements of the early 1950s to show how the affect generated by the repeated trope drew real life events into a persuasive cycle of repetition. The tone of this repeated trope thereby came to dominate the practice of public memorialization of war in Japan. *Today's post*-pacifist Japan is informed by these past moments in the memorializing process, which impact on contemporary anti-war and anti-nuclear protests.

Keywords war, memory, media, Japan, *shōjo*, affect

With its dramatic potential and affective intensity, war has been a popular topic in the history of cinema, from blockbusters to independent productions, and during war and peacetime alike. In Japan, as in the many nations that were early adopters of film technologies, the first feature films presented epic tales of battle such as the *Chūshingura* (Forty Seven Loyal Retainers), re-made frequently from the earliest days of cinema into the present. Even after defeat in the Asia Pacific Fifteen Years War (1930-1945) and World War II, Japanese filmmakers and studios remained keen to bring the recent experiences of war to cinema audiences, who turned out in record numbers to view narratives of defeat and loss that ranged from the heroic to the traumatic. This paper addresses the impact of cinematic war imagery on the memorialization of war in Japan, focusing on a character trope common to the postwar Japanese cinema: the *shōjo*.

Shōjo (少女) refers to a young girl generally between the ages of seven and eighteen, and carries some connotation of education or bourgeois background. Under occupation censorship (1945-1952), filmmakers were prohibited from creating celebratory narratives around Japanese adult male soldier characters, and so early attempts to memorialize the recent war in film regularly featured young female characters of *shōjo* age. This paper considers the emotions generated and repeated by the circulation of the *shōjo* image throughout postwar Japanese cinema, and questions the impact of the affective atmospheres these repetitions create on the popular memorialization of war. As Sara Ahmed observes, 'emotions circulate through objects' and repetitively 'generate their objects, and repeat past associations' in turn (2004, p. 194). The *shōjo* trope stands in for more direct representations of loss and defeat in war, near un-imaginable to many and un-representable under occupation censorship. In this sense, the trope is a mode of visual displacement, a means to relocate the depiction of postwar suffering onto a body often read as innocent or pure. The *shōjo* body becomes a sign of the pain and suffering of war, an object through which emotions of sadness and regret circulate. At the same time, the popular reception of film narratives featuring *shōjo* characters ensured that studio executives were keen to produce more of the same, and so the emotion that circulated around the *shōjo* icon generated more *shōjo* characters and repeated their associations with loss and suffering.

I am prompted to read the postwar *shōjo* trope as a stand-in or representative of postwar suffering by the many critics and film fans who recorded this association in the film magazines and gossip journals published in the early postwar era (Coates 2016, p. 130). Reading the *shōjo* as a sign of suffering is a 'mediation' in Ahmed's sense of the term, in which 'affective responses are readings that not only create the

borders between selves and others, but also 'give' others meaning' (2005, p. 28). Reading the fictional cinematic *shōjo* as a sign separates her from the everyday Japanese war survivor, and at the same time assigns the icon a wider meaning as an abstract representative of the suffering of all the Japanese people after 1945. In this way, the *shōjo* icon becomes both familiar and distant, a visual displacement of everyday suffering in the wake of defeat and occupation.

The 'mediation' of the title of this paper therefore refers both to the affective sense in which the enjoyable aspects of the cinematic *shōjo* icon may address and even reconcile difficult emotions related to Japan's recent war, and to the technical sense in which the cinema as media is one agent in bringing about certain emotional effects in audiences. Following Sarah Kember and Joanna Zylinska however, I do not imagine the connection between cinema and audience as a simple one.

> Mediation does not serve as a translational or transparent layer or intermediary between independently existing entities (say, between the producer and consumer of a film or TV programme. It is a complex and hybrid process that is simultaneously economic, social, cultural, psychological, and technical. Mediation, we suggest, is all-encompassing and indivisible.
>
> (Kember and Zylinska 2012, p. xv)

In postwar Japan, the 'complex and hybrid' process of mediation situated the film viewer not only in relation to the cinema, but also to a rapidly expanding popular mediascape as pulp media and urban advertising swamped the public sphere. I therefore approach the question of the social impact of cinema from an interdisciplinary perspective. Combining an iconographic style of visual analysis of selected popular film texts with discourse analysis of the print media of the era, including newspapers, film journals, and entertainment magazines, I aim to contribute

a holistic account of how film engaged with Japan's mass public on the question of war memorialization.

The field of Japanese Film Studies often ignores the affect of the human contact afforded by the close-packed film theatre, the aspirational glamor of stars, and the socio-historically informed desires of audiences, in favour of a focus on directorial intention. In analysing the affective economies around postwar Japanese cinema, I aim to demonstrate that taking this factor seriously can help us to understand how cinema impacts on social attitudes. In early postwar Japan, the view of the world presented by the cinema was repeated by surrounding print media that re-presented and discussed the themes, stars, and tropes of popular film. Film content itself was often repetitive, in part due to competitive overproduction among the leading film studios and audience demand for an increasing number of films (Coates 2016). Following Ahmed's claim that 'emotions work as a form of capital' producing affect through circulation, I want to suggest that this environment contributed to the affective economies produced by the cinema by circulating and repeating the emotional qualities of the *shōjo* trope across a wide variety of media, and hence through the 'social as well as psychic field' (Ahmed 2004, p.45). The 'accumulated effect of the repetition of narrative' can posit a particular emotional response as almost compulsory (Ahmed 2004, p.145). Tracing the repetitive re-incarnation of the *shōjo* trope suggests that the image came to posit a passive sadness as the 'almost compulsory' response to war memory.

After briefly addressing the question of affect theory in the Japanese context, I offer an analysis of the repetitive representation of the *shōjo* trope in the early years of defeat, examining her subsequent impact on the anti-nuclear cinema and activist movements of the early 1950s, before considering her legacy in the present day. From

her pre-cinema beginnings in 'girl culture', the *shōjo* was fashioned as an attractive icon for magazine readers and later for film viewers. I will therefore draw from Japanese Studies scholarship on girl culture to demonstrate how the *shōjo* was an icon charged with hope in the early postwar era, before becoming entangled in an affective atmosphere of sadness and defeat.

The ethics of mediated media affects stand out in the postwar Japanese context as particularly urgent today, as the government reconsiders the nation's pacifist commitment. In mediating war memory in the aftermath of conflict, can popular media sow the seeds of future re-militarization by neglecting to confront the ugly past? Can the creation of an affective economy of passivity and sadness endanger future anti-war movements? In the context of a rapidly re-militarizing Japan, we must address the potential for popular media to over-correct in the mediation of post-conflict trauma, producing new and dangerous affects that resonate beyond the cinema.

Affect and memory in postwar Japanese cinema

In contrast to Anglo-European conceptions of affect and memory, distinction between the two collapses somewhat in the Japanese context. We must therefore be wary of creating a false separation between affect and memory formation. Japanese has many terms we could translate as affect; one of the most widely used, kankaku (感覚), meaning feeling, sensation, or intuition, combines the kanji character for emotion, feeling, or sensation (感) with the character for memory or awakening (覚). Being affected, in Japanese, is therefore already a process of memory. Kankaku, along with *kanjō* (feeling), and *kandō* (to be moved) are the terms used most frequently by early postwar film viewers and critics in reviews, essays, and fan letters (Coates 2016, p.11). As the number of films and picture houses increased yearly, characters, star

performances, narratives, and costuming were recycled from film to film as the vertically-integrated studios sought to guarantee box office returns on expensive investments by re-using tropes which had proved popular with previous audiences. So formative was this reliance on repetitive motifs that whole genres were named after the recurring character types or narrative trends that they contained, from the haha-mono, or 'mother film', featuring the ever-suffering devoted mother trope, to the *hyūmanisuto* or 'humanist' genre, which addressed the positive potentials of Japan's postwar social reforms. The content of much postwar Japanese popular cinema was therefore already becoming memorialized, as common tropes encouraged positive audience response by drawing on memories of past enjoyment.

The film viewers and critics who recorded being 'moved' or 'made to feel' (kankaku o saseru) by repeated tropes in postwar Japanese cinema were experiencing just this kind of memory-dependent affect. Going to the cinema in the postwar era, one would have been prepared (by previous cinema experience as well as by pulp media, reviews, star profiles etc.) not only to 'feel together' with other audience members, but to participate in the formation and maintenance of collective memories. In the popular film magazines of the postwar period, writers regularly refer to the emotional qualities of stars, images, or narratives (Kitagawa 1946, p. 46; Kimura 1949, p. 34), and film's capacity to 'give comfort to the viewer's heart' (kankyaku no *kokoro o sukui ni narō*) (Akiyama 1968, p. 64). The *shōjo* is frequently referenced as an example of this kind of emotive trope.

Shōjo on screen

As a positive image of youthful 'new life' and hope for Japan's future, the *shōjo* fostered a comforting affect (Uehara 1947, p. 41). Writing for the cinema journal *Kinema Junpō* (Cinema Record, a.k.a. The Movie Times) in 1946, film critic Uehara

Ichirō identified films featuring *shōjo* protagonists as 'rebuilding' films (kensetsu) which use 'emotional labour' (*jōrō*) to posit the postwar reconstruction of Japan in a positive light (Uehara 1947, p. 41). This 'emotional labour' is perhaps particularly affecting when performed by a young female character, as teenage protagonists are popularly characterized as sites of excess emotion due to the hormonal changes occurring in the adolescent body. Such characterizations also play on the cultural associations of female sexed bodies and female gendered experience with expressivity and emotion, positioning the youthful female body as a site of performative affect (del Río 2008, p. 31). Uehara observes that the *shōjo* characters of these early postwar films use 'positivity' (sekkyokuteki) and uplifting sentiment to 'move audiences emotionally' (Uehara 1947, p. 41), suggesting the optimistic emotional qualities of this popular trope.

The *shōjo* was repetitively presented across genres and diverse studio productions as an optimistic character with a pure heart and spontaneous nature. The bright acting style of youthful stars such as Kuga Yoshiko (1931-) and Hara Setsuko (1920-2015) positioned the sh*ōjo* as an attractive icon through lively performances that directly engaged with the camera as a stand-in for the viewer. Sparkling glances and flirtatious eyelash fluttering directed into the lens created the impression of direct communication between the protagonist and audience member. The *shōjo*'s consistent costuming in neat, white clothing, her framing in upwardly angled shots that emphasized her physical strength, and her setting in natural spaces alongside animals and younger children visually reinforced a sense of dynamism combined with purity and innocence. Star persona also shaped the *shōjo* trope, as actresses such as Kuga turned out on the front lines of demonstrations against the dismissal of suspected Communist workers from Tōhō film studios in the high profile strikes of 1946-1948,

connecting the passionate humanism of her onscreen characters to her off screen life. Kuga's collaboration with the independent film production company Ninjin Club (Ninjin Kurabu), champion of ethical humanist dramas, further cemented the association of the *shōjo* with the star's own upstanding democratic qualities.

The trope also presented a useful means to contextualize the rapid social change of postwar Japan within an imagined historical continuity, as it borrows from the prewar and wartime incarnations of the *shōjo* character. The young female icon was historically presented as ambivalent, liminal, and transient, often described using an onomatopoetic word for fluttering (hirahira) (Honda 1982, p. 135–202). Descriptions of hirahira encapsulated 'not only the aestheticized ephemerality of the girl and her culture in wide-ranging forms and genres from late Meiji [1868-1912] to the present day, but also her subversiveness against the patriarchal norms' (Aoyama 2008, p. 208). The girl characters of postwar Japanese cinema similarly challenged the patriarchal norms of wartime and prewar Japanese society, applying the lightness of the *shōjo*'s hirahira qualities to the weighty topic of postwar social change. The *shōjo*'s light-hearted positivity rendered the subject of social change cinematic and entertaining rather than painful or threatening. Light-hearted images of female youth had long been understood as a major attraction in Japanese cinema; Shōchiku studio head Kido Shirō (1893-1977) had instigated a search for 'sprightly, brave, optimistic and forward-looking' girl stars (High 2003, p. 13) as early as the 1930s. These qualities were re-invoked in the postwar *shōjo* image, and developed to espouse the American-style capitalist democracy mandated by the headquarters of the Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers (hereafter SCAP) during the occupation of Japan (1945-1952) (Fujiki 2013, p. 23).

Shōjo as SCAP propaganda

The *shōjo* trope was central to the propagandistic aims of the occupation authorities'

engagement with popular film. SCAP identified the cinema as a means to 'educate'

and 'reorient' the Japanese populace in American-style capitalist democracy, and

censors regularly instructed Japanese filmmakers in the kind of content desired by the

occupation administration (Kitamura 2010, p. 42). Censors would request changes

and deletions in synopses and screenplays, before editing or completely supressing

final film prints. Newspapers and magazines were similarly restricted in their

reporting on the film industry and its stars. Both occupiers and audiences understood

the cinema as a model for everyday life, and as a means by which to make meaning

from the traumatic legacies of war and the rapid social change of the occupation era.

In this sense the postwar Japanese cinema exercised a social influence similar to

Hollywood film productions, in that the screen became a 'reflexive horizon' upon

which social change in the everyday worlds of viewers could be 'reflected, rejected or

disavowed, transmuted or negotiated' (Hansen 2000, p. 342).

Among the most pressing aims of SCAP's re-education policies were the de-

militarization of Japanese society and the emancipation of women. Dismantling the ie

domestic system, in which three generations of a family had lived together under the

senior patriarch, served by the most junior married woman, was seen as key to

democratizing Japan and eradicating the 'feudal' value system blamed for the

Imperial nation's militaristic expansion efforts. Gender equality was therefore high on

SCAP's list of proposed reforms, and was included in Articles 14 and 24 of the 1947

Constitution of Japan. The *shōjo* characters of postwar cinema played out a newly

imagined role for young women as the equal of their male peers; eligible to continue

their education to tertiary levels, inherit property, and choose their own romantic

partners for the first time. In the postwar melodramas and progressive 'humanist'

films promoted by the occupation censorship offices, young actresses such as Kuga

Yoshiko portrayed *shōjo* characters embracing new postwar democratic and humanist

ethics, often serving as examples to elder characters. In Kurosawa Akira's Drunken

Angel (Yoidore tenshi, 1948), for example, Kuga's *shōjo* bravely fights tuberculosis

while the adult men around her succumb to disease and alcoholism. The 'drunken

angel' of the title, a slum doctor, explicitly advocates Kuga's character as an example

to his adult male patient. His words echo the policy of SCAP HQ, which targeted

younger citizens in propaganda directed at the classroom, the film theatre, and the

readership of mass print media, with the aim of spreading social change from the

younger generations upwards throughout Japanese society. Kuga's previous leading

role in Naruse Mikio's Spring Awakens (Haru no mezame, 1947) demonstrates the

utility of such *shōjo* roles; in the course of the narrative, her character educates her

parents and the males and adults around her on the new social order of postwar Japan

while coming to terms with her budding sexuality in the context of changing gender

relations. Positioning the *shōjo* as an aspirational figure furthered SCAP propaganda

by attaching viewers emotionally to the reforms and developments of the occupation.

The lightness and purity associated with the *shōjo* trope alleviates the

pressures of rapid social change, positing the reforms demanded by the occupiers as

opportunity rather than punishment. The motif's nostalgic affect invoking the prewar

shōjo draws focus away from the trauma of wartime and defeat, returning the viewer

to the imagined 'better times' of 1920s and early 1930s Japan. My analysis of a wide

range of *shōjo* characters across more than 600 films made between 1945 and 1964

suggests that the character's optimistic outlook even transforms suffering into

opportunity: in both Drunken Angel and Spring Awakens, the *shōjo* overcomes illness,

alienation, or public censure to demonstrate the benefits of the new social order of

post-defeat Japan (Coates 2016, p. 143). In her visual associations with nature, purity, and strength, the *shōjo* trope of the late 1940s put a positive spin on the new order of postwar life. Film critics explicitly positioned this trope as both highly affective and instrumental to Japan's recovery after defeat; the 'emotional labour' of the *shōjo* trope was imagined as fundamental to the 'rebuilding' of Japan (Uehara 1947).

The light, energetic, and hopeful emotional qualities of the *shōjo* calls to mind Ahmed's discourse on 'wonder', where an emotion which seems at first like a motivation to move forward in fact reveals itself as 'the radicalisation of our relation to the past, which is transformed into that which lives and breathes in the present' (2004, p. 180). Though the *shōjo* trope may have seemed like the ideal symbol of SCAP's new Japan, her debt to the pre-war and wartime *shōjo* invested her image with backward-looking nostalgia as well as forward-looking hope. This forward-looking aspect of the optimistic *shōjo* character was particularly useful to the occupation authorities, which suppressed any mention of the presence of Allied forces in Japan or of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Excepting the occasional illness related to post-defeat disease and poverty, postwar *shōjo* characters tended not to engage with the recent history of war. The *shōjo* icon was always a little out of the present time, whether projecting forwards into the future or backwards into the past. After the occupation, this backward-looking aspect was easily adapted to draw out the more conflicted legacies of Japan's defeat in a new genre that connected themes of suffering to wartime loss and trauma.

The post-occupation *shōjo* as suffering icon

After the signing of the San Francisco Treaty which re-instated Japanese sovereignty, filmmakers turned to the topic of the atomic bombings for the first time since the end

of the war, repurposing the *shōjo* trope for a new genre of testimony cinema. The 'emotional labour' (Uehara 1947) of the *shōjo* character became increasingly politicized in the early 1950s as the motif was incorporated into anti-nuclear narratives. Shindō Kaneto's Children of the Bomb (Genbaku no ko, 1952) and Kinoshita Keisuke's Twenty Four Eyes (*Nijūshi no hitome*, 1954) both focus on *shōjo* victims of the atomic bombings; the *shōjo* icon, already invested with connotations of purity and innocence, was used to add pathos to political critiques of war and nuclear attack.

Flashback scenes scattered throughout Children of the Bomb depict teacher Miss Ishikawa's memory of the day of the bombing in a narrative structure reminiscent of the disruptions common to traumatic memory. Shindō's flashback scenes mirror 'the repetitive intrusion of nightmares and reliving' which Cathy Caruth has understood as 'the absolute inability of the mind to avoid an unpleasurable event that has not been given psychic meaning in any way' (1995, p. 59). In Caruth's reading of Freud's work on trauma, the repetitive re-living of a traumatic experience in the imaginative or dream lives of the trauma sufferer constructs a space in which to understand the event and the sufferer's own survival (1996, p. 59). Caruth extrapolates from Freud's suggestion that traumatic repetition 'defines the shape of individual lives' (Caruth 1996: 59) to argue that repetitive references to trauma in literary productions likewise define the shape of the final product. I suggest that similar repetitive structures in film not only reflect the repetitive patterns experienced by the trauma sufferer but also posit the film text as an imaginative space within which some organizational meaning can be made of the trauma of defeat and occupation.

In Shindō's post-occupation testimony film, these flashback scenes are intercut with documentary-style footage of groups soon to be injured by the atom bomb as multiple clocks tick down to the event. The longest sequence in this montage depicts girls standing in rows in a school playground just as the bomb strikes; they reappear nude and bleeding in a later shot. The first shot of this sequence is angled downwards in a wide framing of the rows of schoolgirls (figure 1). The wide camera angle indicates their large number, while its positioning is close enough to depict the individual expressions on the faces of the girls in the foreground. The downward angle diminishes their stature, reminding the viewer that these girls are still children, as does their costuming in Japan's iconic school uniform. These components in the shots leading up to the bombing encourage the viewer to reflect on the number of individual lives affected, and the innocence and vulnerability of the young victims.

This style of filming encourages the viewer to see the *shōjo* characters as close and similar to the viewer, enhancing our sympathy for their suffering. We are invited to extrapolate the imminent suffering onscreen to our own experience, or potential experience; as the *shōjo* is such a familiar trope, positioned in such an intimate way, we consider her vulnerability and future suffering as an event we could experience ourselves, or that someone close to us could experience. As Ahmed argues, responding to the call to be moved by the image of a child's suffering also allows the viewer to distance oneself from undesirable elements such as the causes, or causers, of such suffering.

> To be moved by the suffering of some others (the 'deserving' poor, the innocent child, the injured hero), is also to be elevated into a place that remains untouched by other others (whose suffering cannot be converted into my sympathy or admiration).

(Ahmed 2004, p. 192)

In defeated Japan, those whose suffering could not be converted into sympathy or admiration included 'the injured hero' who could not be hailed as heroic in the face of Japan's total defeat. As the economy collapsed and the peerage was dismantled, the poor (deserving or otherwise) made up almost the whole population of Japan. As a result, the child, and particularly the female child, became the suffering other which moved viewers. In being moved, viewers could also become distanced from the 'other others' – the war criminals on trial at the War Crimes Tribunals and the American soldiers who caused the child's suffering by dropping the atomic bomb.

Ahmed also notes that being moved by the image of a suffering child transforms 'the threat of difference into the promise or hope of likeness. That child could be mine; his pain is universalized through the imagined loss of any child as a loss that could be my loss' (2004, p. 192). This kind of rhetoric, playing on the idea that the victim of a future atomic attack could be you or someone close to you, was a central aspect of early anti-nuclear discourse in Japan, and often focused on gendered concepts of kinship. Mothers' activist groups in particular articulated anti-nuclear sentiment in relation to the potential for harm to their daughters and young children. In this way, the repetitive trope of the *shōjo* on film generated an affective resonance that came to inform the slogans and sentiments of anti-nuclear protest.

The intimate and hopeful affect of the occupation-era *shōjo* trope was subverted in the early 1950s to communicate anti-nuclear sentiments which emphasised the danger nuclear weaponry posed to the young and vulnerable, to people like us, and to future generations. Returning to Ahmed's description of affective economies as spaces or moments in which emotions are exchanged and recycled, we can see the *shōjo* trope as symbolic of a particular affective economy

growing around Japan's war memories. Conflicting emotions related to the recent war circulated through the *shōjo* image on film and in popular media, and continued to generate the *shōjo* icon and repeat her association with youth, hope, and suffering.

These early post-occupation films were explicitly created to convince audiences of the folly of future wars; Children of the Bomb was shown in school classrooms, and elderly film fans today often cite these anti-nuclear films as among their first memories of being taken to the cinema by teachers or family members. The larger argument about the futility of war in which these anti-nuclear films participated was aimed at the next generation of Japanese citizens. The rapid popularization of Article nine of the 1947 constitution, which renounced war and the state's right to 'belligerence' had resulted in a grass-roots drive to educate the young in pacifist ideology. Left-leaning filmmakers cooperated with this movement, in part as a form of resistance to the US-led 'reverse course' policy, which had strongly advocated that Japan re-arm from as early as 1947. The entangled relations of film production, political economy, and audience reception recycled the *shōjo* trope across public and private spaces. As producers attempted to harness her affective intensity for greater box office success, political figures for political ends, and audiences for enjoyable cinema experiences, the *shōjo*'s emotional value continued to grow and change.

The next shot in Shindō's atomic bombing sequence conveys how the same *shōjo* image could be re-constructed iconographically to generate a varied range of emotions. The camera is positioned at a low angle (figure 2), contrasting the wide shot of the group of girls described above. The viewer is thereby encouraged to look up at a single nude and injured girl as opposed to down. In contrast to the earlier shot of a group of potential victims, the camera now focuses on one representative girl; the foreshortening of the shot obscures her face, rendering her a kind of every-girl, or

every-victim. Her arms are thrown above her head, forming a triangular composition from the narrow base of her waist to the wide spread of her arms and hair flying in the wind. This pose positions the figure as heroic, even slightly devotional, echoing the poses of religious or political idols with outstretched arms signifying power or the capacity for care for the masses. In this way, the *shōjo* image could be iconographically re-adjusted to focus viewer affect alternately on the tragic waste of young vulnerable individual lives, or on the sublime beauty of the mass heroic sufferers whose experience is beyond the viewers' understanding. The same image is framed in different ways to alternately humanize or idolize the suffering *shōjo*.

These sublime sufferers were cast as oracles for peace, speaking almost from beyond the grave to a new generation of Japanese viewers. Their message was consistent; all war is folly, and their sacrifice was displayed in an effort to ensure that the Japanese never went to war again. A scene in which Miss Ishikawa visits a girl dying of radiation sickness further develops this canonization of the suffering *shōjo* to saintly proportions. Soft focus medium close-up shots of the dying girl lit with a single soft spotlight and dressed in white kimono under a smoothly wrapped white blanket emphasize both her purity and her blank-slate quality. Her closed eyes at the beginning of the scene underscore her function as iconic symbol rather than clearly defined character, as does the vague dialogue centring on her selfless hopes for a war-free future. We are explicitly invited to compare this *shōjo* to a saintly icon by the cut away shot to a Christian crucifix on the wall; the implication is clearly that *shōjo* victims of the atomic bombing have died for the sins of others, and so the general public might come to understand the futility of war. Shots of imploring expressions and praying hands align the suffering *shōjo* trope with elegiac expressions of loss and resignation; in literature, film, and even news coverage, young female victims of the

atomic bombs repeatedly claimed that their suffering was worth it if only the weapon is never used again.

Filmmakers and activists aimed to impress the younger generations with the unimaginable horror of war, and at the same time position this horror as close and easily understandable. The everyday quality of the occupation-era *shōjo* trope intimates closeness, while channelling her optimism and forward-looking spirit into a dying wish for peace creates pathos. The weak bodies of the suffering *shōjo* of atomic cinema contrasted with the strong physicality of their occupation-era counterparts, producing a sense of waste and regret. However their brave spirits remained unwavering, substituting the goal of a non-nuclear future for the occupation-era's focus on gender equality. In this characterization, the unimaginable aspects of the horror of war become subsumed by the intimate affect of the beautifully suffering *shōjo*.

Given Japan's current re-armament and participation in global and domestic nuclear activities, the high aims of early postwar anti-war and anti-nuclear activism can reasonably be said to have suffered some setbacks, and cinema's role here seems significant. In relation to the televised mediation of recent attacks including the 2001 attack on the US World Trade Center, Allen Feldman argues that 'this screen experience was also a screening off of the actuality, by which I mean the visual displacement of the complex social suffering and unreconciled history expressed, mobilized, and created by the attack' (2005, p. 212). Can we say the same of cinematic representations of Japan's war, and of the nuclear attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki? And if so, what was the role of the *shōjo* trope in 'screening off' the complexities of suffering generated by the war and atomic bombings? In the second part of this paper, I argue that the impact of the continued repetition of the *shōjo* trope

in the mediated memorialization of nuclear threat and suffering was fourfold;

encouraging passivity; situating the suffering of nuclear victims as static or past;

collapsing wider Japanese war memories into the memorialization of the atomic

bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki; and distancing the spectator from the *shōjo*

icon by idealizing her suffering to the point of non- or post-human experience. First

however, I will indicate how the persuasiveness of this trope drew even real life

events into its circle of meaning-making, in the process eliding key details and

individual aspects which damaged the anti-war and anti-nuclear movements.

Real life suffering *shōjo*

> This relationship between image and narration gives rise to iconic meaning,
>
> meaning that is related to its referent not through some direct or 'physical'
>
> connection but through similarity or family resemblance. Iconicity, then, does
>
> not attach itself to a concrete reality, but, rather, represents an abstract reality by
>
> using image as the key signifier of whichever generic condition it seeks to
>
> capture.

(Chouliaraki 2006, p. 163)

The scenes of *shōjo* suffering described above predate the true story of Sasaki Sadako

(1943-1955), who died of leukaemia after exposure to radiation in Hiroshima.

Sadako's story captured the imagination of the nation, particularly her determination

to fold one thousand origami paper cranes in accordance with the popular myth that

this would grant a wish, in Sadako's case, the wish to live. Though Sadako died on

October 25, 1955, after the release of both Children of the Bomb and Twenty Four

Eyes, I suggest that the extensive media coverage and rapid immortalisation of

Sadako's story in Japan's postwar anti-nuclear mythology was in part due to the

association of *shōjo* purity with victimhood, cemented by popular texts such as Shindō and Kinoshita's films. The similarity of the images of Sadako circulated in the popular press to those of the suffering *shōjo* trope onscreen, and the narrative similarities of her story to those of popular cinema and literature created a kind of 'iconic meaning' as described by Chouliaraki above, in which Sadako's story blurred with the cinematic suffering *shōjo* trope to create a kind of uber-sign of nuclear and war-related suffering.

The iconic status of the repeated trope of the suffering *shōjo* not only allows for the motif to narrativize and help viewers make sense of events that have already occurred, but also draws future events into its persuasive format. Following Kember and Zylinska's understanding of the mediating quality of media as deeply complex and entrenched in everyday living, we can see Sadako's media popularity as a mode of absorption into the affective economy of the suffering *shōjo*. Discourse on Sadako's death has been noticeably purged of references to physical suffering which verge on the unpalatable, though her mother's published letters recount the extreme physical pain of symptoms of radiation poisoning, including swollen limbs and damaged skin (Sasaki 1958). Instead, the dominant image of Sadako today looks more like the saintly suffering *shōjo* of Shindō and Kinoshita's films, quietly expiring while praying for peace.

This aestheticization of real life suffering was common to the media treatment of hibakusha, or victims of exposure to nuclear radiation. The extremes of this tendency toward beautification are perhaps best exemplified by the 'Hiroshima maidens' or Hiroshima otome, twenty-five young women scarred by the atom bombing of the city and subsequently sponsored to travel to New York in 1955 to receive extensive plastic surgery. Accounts of the Hiroshima maidens' experiences

emphasize their youth (most were schoolgirls at the time of the bombing), as well as the obstacles their scarred appearances created in terms of making marriage impossible, and even appearing in public traumatic (Jacobs 2010). This aspect of the Hiroshima maidens' suffering highlights the centrality of a certain type of physical appearance to the *shōjo* trope, as the purity and lightness associated with youth and femininity are visually indicated by exterior beauty ideals such as clear skin and symmetrical features. The desire to disguise the scars of war on the part of Japanese and American political agents alike indicates a desire to hide the consequences of wartime actions beneath a veneer of youth and hope. However, the very covering over of the scars of wartime suffering left its own marks on bodies and histories alike. Altered bodies bore the scars of such politically motivated interventions, and in the same way altered histories, both national and personal, sat awkwardly in the public sphere (Igarashi 2000, p. 14).

Sasaki Sadako and Japanese war memory

From the mid 1950s, Sasaki Sadako became the poster girl for anti-war and anti-nuclear movements both at home and overseas. I have suggested that this is in part due to the convenient similarities between Sadako's short life story and the suffering *shōjo* trope of postwar film and literature. Like the *shōjo* characters of Shindō and Kinoshita's films, Sadako is associated with the childish purity of the traditional school uniform and with nature, in her association with birds. Public depictions of her messy death were similarly sanitized, and Sadako came to be iconographically represented as a clean, pure saint of the anti-nuclear movement. Sadako's real-life suffering has been conscripted as a form of 'emotional labour' (Uehara 1947) to persuade a global public of the dangers of atomic warfare, however the extreme

aestheticization of her experience distances her from the realities of war and posits her instead as a saintly victim of larger forces.

The iconographic and narrative conflation of the real life Sadako with her onscreen predecessors was productive for the anti-nuclear movement, to the extent that building on popular cultural representations to create an icon that appealed to a sense of elegiac sadness and loss served the movement's emotive rhetoric. Just as the repetition of religious icons opens up an 'enunciative territory for the faithful' (Guattari 1996, p. 165), the repetitive *shōjo* motif opened up a space for emotional testimony against nuclear war, first in the imaginative space of the cinema, and later through real life examples. The repeated trope becomes a 'shifter' or 'scene changer' in Felix Guattari's account of the encounter between religious icon and worshipper (1996, p. 165); here, the intense repetition of the *shōjo* trope shifted the scene of nuclear protest from the cinema to the public space of the Hiroshima city war monument, where Sadako is memorialized.

However, there were losses as well as gains in this process. As Steven Shaviro argues, popular cinema, particularly the 'cinemas of excess' of which the anti-nuclear melodrama is a prime example, rarely encourages direct action. The cinema 'should rather be praised as a technology for intensifying and renewing experiences of passivity and abjection' (Shaviro 1993, p. 64). Aligning Sadako with the suffering *shōjo* of early 1950s cinema certainly underlined the abjection of the effects of atomic bomb radiation, but it also opened up space for a growing sense of passivity detrimental to the activist anti-nuclear agenda. In its passive affect, the sanitized and distant pathos of Sadako's representation undercut not only activist anti-nuclear momentum, but also the urgency of the anti-war sentiment enshrined in Japan's pacifist Constitution.

The outpouring of sympathy from around the globe directed each August 6 to Sadako's memorial statue emphasises the victimhood of young non-combatant Japanese citizens rather than the history of Imperial Japanese aggression referenced in the Constitution. As Prime Minister Abe Shinzō moved to re-interpret Article nine to allow for future militarized action just one month after the annual 2015 Hiroshima memorial event which promises Sadako's statue 'never again', we have to question the impact of mediated memorialization on collective and popular memories of war trauma in Japan. Analysis of the repetitive *shōjo* trope suggests that the affective atmosphere around the icon encourages a sense of passivity in marking an elegiac and distant historical loss, rather than agitating for a nuclear or war-free future.

While the postwar Constitution was written and approved by Allied occupation personnel rather than Japanese citizens, the 'pacifist' Article nine has proved popular with the general public. In the immediate aftermath of defeat, many Japanese citizens advocated rigorous scrutiny of individual wartime conduct to understand how the nation could avoid the seductions of fascist militarism in future. However just as many were seduced by the affective pull of the 'victim complex' (Burch 1979, p. 326; Dower 1993, p. 276; Gluck 2010; Orr 2001, p. 3; Standish 2005, p. 190; Yoshimoto 1993, p. 108), predicated on the desire to identify with Asian victimhood rather than acknowledge Japan as a perpetrator of violence (Orr 2001, p. 175). This ideological commitment posited Japanese citizens as passive victims of their wartime government, positioned alongside victims of Japanese aggression in Taiwan, Korea, China, and Manchuria rather than as perpetrators of that suffering. In this context, the suffering *shōjo* trope presented an attractive opportunity to re-formulate Japanese collective memories of wartime around themes of innocent suffering. These tropes accumulated heightened affect in their continuous repetition,

at the same time intensifying the passivity experienced by Japanese citizens in the aftermath of defeat, as the nation was remodelled by the occupiers.

We can also see similarities between the impact of the media-influenced canonization of Sadako and those of contemporary media depictions of suffering on our own capacities to act in response to mediated danger or harm. As Lilie Chouliaraki argues, mediated suffering onscreen can distance the viewer from the suffering subject as much as engage our outrage or sympathies (2006). Chouliaraki cautions against the 'illusion that audiences participate in public life when they are simply, in Adorno's words, regressing in listening or watching' (2006, p.155), arguing that 'the very technological form of the medium 'sanitizes' reality, that is to say, it cuts real life off from its raw sensations, depriving mediated suffering of its compelling physicality and shifting the fact of suffering into pixel fiction' (2006, p. 155). In this account, the 'intervention of technology' through editing, soundtrack, repetition or tracking creates a sense of distance between the sufferer onscreen and the viewer (2006, p. 156). As the extremely aestheticized suffering of the *shōjo* characters of Children of the Bomb reached beyond the cinema into schoolrooms, this genre of feminized, aestheticized suffering bled out of the imaginative space of the cinema into the instructive space of the classroom. It is no surprise then that it spread to the instructive-performative space of the memorial site.

Sadako's memorial is therefore both the 'enunciative space' identified by Guattari, and a repressive space in which only one kind of enunciation is possible. While her iconicity harnesses the pre-existing pathos of earlier hibakusha narratives, the sanitizing and sanctifying of her image distances her from the everyday viewer, making it difficult to feel anything but distanced, passive, and 'correct' regret. If 'the agency of the spectator to engage in public speech about the suffering, then, depends

upon the humanization of the sufferer' (Chouliaraki 2006, p. 169), Sadako's sanitized

static image is not human enough to generate the productive outrage on which a

dynamic anti-war or anti-nuclear movement can thrive.

In focusing on the loss and victimhood generated by the atomic bombings, the

static pathos of Sadako's sanitised memorial substitutes for the nuanced and difficult

realities of war guilt and atonement. Hiroshima and Nagasaki's very particular

experiences became the 'presumed shared experiences' of Japan as a whole (Berlant

2008), despite the fact that each geographical area suffered particular traumas, for

example; fire-bombing in Tokyo, guerrilla warfare in Okinawa, and the government-

imposed fire-breaking activities which destroyed the areas inhabited by social

minorities in Kyoto. Made to stand in for an idealized version of the suffering of the

nation as a whole, Sadako's traumatic experience is aestheticized and canonized,

closed off. In this way, the attempt to make sense of atomic war and suffering through

cinematic mediation freezes the suffering *shōjo* trope as a static representation of

collective war memory.

Locating war memory in the idealized representation of one individual both

flattens out the nuances of varying experiences of war trauma, and seals war memory

in the past. Chouliaraki calls attention to the importance of 'space-time' in the

mediation of suffering (2006, p. 168); while the occupation-era *shōjo* was explicitly

situated in the present time of postwar Japan with references to the new Constitution

and the challenges of implementing gender equality, the post-occupation suffering

shōjo is retrospective, already out of time. As public discussion of the atom bombings

of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945 had been banned under occupation, filmmakers

returning to the topic in 1952 were working in the genre of period film, to a certain

extent. The awkward juxtaposition of a pressing timely issue with the time period,

costuming, and settings of almost a decade earlier posed challenges for the production

of the kind of urgent anger for which the anti-nuclear movement called. As many anti-

nuclear and anti-war films based their claim to authenticity on the use of original

source materials such as memoirs, many films were structured around flashback

narratives, often taken from the writings of authors already dead. In this sense, the

suffering of the protagonists of anti-war and anti-nuclear cinema takes place in 'the

time frame of a fait accompli' (Chouliaraki 2006, p. 168). This sense of danger and

suffering already having past is exactly the kind of sentiment which allows Prime

Minister Abe to attend Sadako's memorial one day and raise the question of

remilitarization the next as though these actions are very separate things.

Anti-war and anti-nuclear protest in contemporary Japan

Can we say that affect is ever really sealed off, or a memory ever fixed or frozen? By

way of a coda I'd like to turn to one more familiar Sadako character to indicate how

later re-mediations of the suffering *shōjo* chime with contemporary developments in a

renewed anti-war and anti-nuclear movement in contemporary Japan. The famous

Ring series, first a book, then a movie, and now a series of sequels and prequels

complete with Hollywood remakes (Ringu, Nakata Hideo, 1998; Ringu 2, Nakata

Hideo, 1999; The Ring, Gore Verbinski, 2002; The Ring 2, Nakata Hideo, 2005;

Rings, F. Javier Gutiérrez, 2016), also features a pre-teen Sadako, dressed in white

and associated with nature like the suffering *shōjo* of postwar Japanese cinema. Just

as Sasaki Sadako became a physical testament to the destructive power of the atom

bomb, the Ring's Sadako is also a physical testament to violence, murdered by her

father and buried in a well. But this Sadako doesn't stay buried; she returns in cyclical

patterns to force the next generation to acknowledge the violence that ended her life, and its subsequent cover-up.

This Sadako is re-mediatized, repetitively appearing through television and videotape, re-presenting scenes from her past which eventually urge the main characters to investigate. The cover-up perpetrated by the elder generation, in which we can read a reflection of Japan's buried war memories, is exposed by a new generation using newer and more immediately communicative media technologies; televisions, computer screens, and telephones. Like the suffering *shōjo* trope, the threat of which Sadako warns is always imminent; every screen and telephone threatens to envelop the protagonists in her cycle of endlessly deferred violence, and at another level, the kind of domestic violence to which she was originally victim also seems an ever-present threat behind the closed doors of an increasingly atomized society. Sadako's violence is directed explicitly at the young and vulnerable, in the same way that anti-nuclear mothers' groups articulate nuclear threat as particularly concerning for their children; characters who choose to investigate the circumstances in which Sadako was buried are motivated by the threat her repetitive re-appearances pose to the next generation and younger characters. While Sadako is re-mediatized in the genre of horror rather than melodrama, displacing elegiac sadness with fear and suspense, there is still space at the end of the narrative of the first film for the main character, speaking explicitly as a mother, to express sadness at the waste of Sadako's young life. And at the end of the film, the stone well in which Sadako was buried stubbornly remains standing, with the permanence of Sasaki Sadako's bronze and stone memorial.

In many ways then, the Ring's Sadako echoes her precursors, both in her repetitive white clothed form and in her insistence that threat to life is ever imminent.

This suffering *shōjo* has moved from the cinema screen and the classroom into the homes of a new generation however, menacing young people through the newer technologies of video and mobile telephones. In the internet age, Sadako's cyclical reappearances mirror the cyclical movements of digital technologies themselves, recycling content and imagery in ever-increasing spirals which flatten past and present events into echoes of one another. Sadako's interlocutors are also moving away from the classroom towards digital media, investigating online. In the same way, a growing number of students in Japan are becoming aware of the erasure of Japan's wartime history from the classroom through online information and activist communities. Many of this generation are now challenging Japan's static war memories using new technologies.

Outside the Japanese parliament in 2015 and 2016, a new generation of young people aim to force Prime Minister Abe to reconsider how Japan's heavily mediated wartime past will be memorialized in future, as they protest to protect the pacifist constitution. This is the youngest generation of political protesters Japan has seen since the anti-security treaty protests of the 1960s. Though media representations of Japan's wartime past have relied on the re-presentation of static affective tropes since the canonization of Sasaki Sadako in 1956, new media technologies, from television to the internet and social media, have begun to frame these tropes as a kind of cover-up, displacing accounts of Japanese wartime conduct and beliefs with stories of personal domestic suffering. The 'presumed shared experience' of war trauma is being questioned by a new generation who believe that avoiding the history of Japanese Imperial expansion will increase the likelihood of future conflict.

Recycling activist phrases and imagery from earlier generations online and in their own short films shot on smartphones, Japan's younger generation demonstrate

an awareness that war memory is never fixed when the potential for war remains in the near future. Sasaki Sadako doesn't feature in their campaign visuals, which focus instead on groups of mixed-gender young people wearing high fashion and clutching the latest in mobile technologies. The BBC even covered a protest organized by the Students for Emergency Action for Liberal Democracy (SEALDS) with the headline 'To The Barricades in Designer Gear!' (Sunda 2015). This new generation of activists understand that productive outrage cannot be created by appeals to an aestheticized elegiac past, but that an urgent call for anti-war and anti-nuclear consciousness among the grassroots population is dependent on situating the issue very much in the here and now.

It has not been my intention in this paper to caution against repetitive motifs and their affective atmospheres as counter to the development of protest cultures and active citizenship. Rather, using an analysis of the *shōjo* motif to understand affect and mediation demonstrates that national sentiment can be produced through the repetition of iconic figures. The role of the *shōjo* icon changes as the context changes; she is out of time but invoked in timely issues. Her use value into the present day raises questions about the way that war stories are mediated for mass publics. Small changes or adjustments in the repeated icon, often created by socio-political or historical developments in the wider context, can open new pathways out of static spaces of memorialization, indicating that while placatory narratives of past suffering may dis-incentivize confrontation with the past, the same media can still impact positively on new movements for change. Remaining mindful of the de-escalation of urgency towards threat and suffering which is a potential outcome of a unified, saturated mediatization of war memory and trauma, the containment of a repetitive

motif within a proscriptive cycle also seems impossible where popular media continues to proliferate and vary in form through technological innovation.

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