

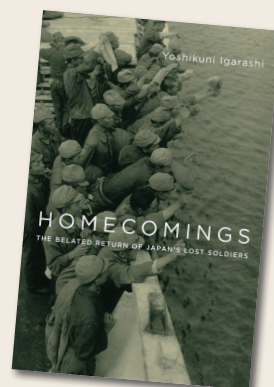
## BOOK REVIEW

### *Homecomings: The Belated Return of Japan's Lost Soldiers*

By Yoshikuni Igarashi

Columbia University Press, 2016  
302 pages.

Reviewed by Ryota NISHINO



In his introduction, Yoshikuni Igarashi, historian of postwar Japan, states that *Homecomings: The Belated Return of Japan's Lost Soldiers* complements his earlier work, *Bodies of Memory*.<sup>1</sup> Whereas *Bodies of Memory* explores collective memories of the Pacific War, *Homecomings* zooms in on micro-level history (pp. 6–7). Igarashi embeds individual experiences in sociocultural and economic contexts, and examines how individual cases have affirmed or disrupted the mainstream narratives of Japan's defeat: that heroic sacrifice laid the foundation for postwar peace and prosperity. *Homecomings* speaks mostly to the postwar generation with little or limited exposure to wartime memories passed on by returned soldiers. Today, the majority of the Japanese population learn about the war from such diverse representations as films, literature, poetry, and media coverage. Igarashi traces cultural and media histories of those representations as his object of enquiry (p. 10). He fulfills his promise and presents a masterful and innovative interdisciplinary history. His prose is jargon-free, lucid, and, above all, eloquent. Igarashi traverses several intellectual terrains with apparent ease, and always remembers to anchor his analysis to historical currents.

As Igarashi stresses throughout the book, the figure of returning soldiers disrupted the popular narrative of heroic sacrifice for postwar prosperity. Initially heralded as brave, some 3.67 million returned soldiers suffered opprobrium from the public, not only for bringing Japan the shame of defeat but also for failing to make the necessary sacrifice for the nation. Igarashi deals with the ways returned servicemen articulated their struggle to adapt and adjust to a postwar Japan stripped of its militaristic ethos and jingoistic nationalist pride. In example after example, Igarashi demonstrates that many soldiers struggled with transwar memories of the humiliation of defeat: some fared well, some less so. Chapter 1 analyzes two films, Kurosawa Akira's *Stray Dog* (1949) and Goshō Heinosuke's *Yellow Crow* (1957). The psychodrama on film, Igarashi finds, became the motif for Japanese reconstruction and prosperity while leaving unaddressed profound issues of trauma. Igarashi points out that commercialism and war fatigue thwarted the films from addressing those issues. Yet, it was the psychodramatic effects that conveyed immediacy to the audience, and made

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1 Igarashi 2000.

these films popular. Chapter 2 analyzes Gomikawa Junpei's pseudo-autobiographical *The Human Condition* (1956–1958). Gomikawa depicts the protagonist's paradox as he has to obey his duty to the state even though his conscience runs counter to this state. Igarashi's comparison of the novel and its cinematic adaptation shows significant dissonance between these two media. The fissures remind us, and reiterate his earlier point about, the constraint of the media and the time of production. Chapters 3 and 4 juxtapose politically attuned PoWs with the poet Ishihara Yoshirō. Igarashi explores how Japanese PoWs struggled with humiliation and anxiety amid harsh winters and their treatment at the hands of Soviet officers. The prison experience severely undermined PoWs' faith in Communism. For politically attuned PoWs, it was the latter that brought the greatest humiliation. The camp experience tested their faith in Communism and brought them to disillusionment. By comparison, Igarashi contends Ishihara's chasm was more personal: Ishihara confronted his own humiliating memories, and chose poetry as a means of reconstructing his body and mind, which the camp had destroyed (p. 132).

While these chapters lean towards the cultural representation of transwar experience, chapters 5, 6, and 7 turn to cultural histories about the mass media's engineering of Southern Pacific stragglers to accommodate, reject, or ignore the inconvenient reminders of the past. Yokoi Shōichi, who returned from Guam in 1972, capitalized on his fame, but it soon inhibited him from openly discussing his own trauma (pp. 169–70). Onoda Hiro'ō, who was in the Philippines until 1974, rejected the media limelight and contemporary Japan, and fled to Brazil. Chapter 7 shows the Japanese media's indifference to Nakamura Teruo's return from Indonesia to his homeland, Taiwan. Nakamura's identities as an indigenous Taiwanese man with his Ami "tribal" name, Chinese name, and Japanese name, underline the complex undercurrent of Japan's imperialism. To this reviewer, chapter 7, the shortest of all, offers the most fertile ground for future research into the transwar experience of servicemen from the Japanese colonies as demonstrated by Takashi Fujitani's pioneering work.<sup>2</sup> In the epilogue, Igarashi introduces Kurosawa Akira's *Dreams* (1990) as a springboard to the elusive nature of home (p. 229). Those soldiers' efforts to negotiate and recreate their homecoming bring out the irony of the present becoming a foreign country and the past the home that no longer was.

*Homecomings* will serve many current and future scholars rather well, especially those working in the emerging field of the psychological effects of war on returned soldiers.<sup>3</sup> Last, but not least, another vital scholarly value of *Homecomings* lies in its bilingual publication. The English publication postdates the original Japanese by four years. My comparison of both editions reveals minor modification between the two editions. The English edition has trimmed some of the prose, but its endnotes are generous and helpful for curious readers. Together with the earlier Japanese edition, *Homecomings* will bridge the gap between scholars working on Japanese history in English and in Japanese.<sup>4</sup>

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2 Fujitani 2011.

3 Grossman 1995; Nakamura 2016; Shepard 2002.

4 Igarashi 2012.

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