

Article

'A Continuous Retrial': Trans/national Memory in Chinese and Japanese Tribunal Films

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Abstract: On the 60th anniversary of the end of WWII, three prominent East Asian films on the International Military Tribunal for the Far East (IMTFE) appeared in China and Japan. The Chinese film *Tokyo Trial* (Dongjing shenban, 2006) was heavily promoted in the Chinese mainland, screened extensively at universities in Beijing and Shanghai, and broke opening weekend box office records at that time. In Japan, there were two high-profile films on both the Tokyo (A-class war criminals) and Yokohama (B/C-class) trials: *I Want to Be a Shellfish* (Watashi wa kai ni naritai, 2008) and *Best Wishes for Tomorrow* (Ashita e no yuigon, 2007). All three tribunal films deal with the question of who gets to write the official “history,” or master narrative of the past, with the national narratives of other nations looming large. Produced at the height of the mid-2000s East Asia history conflict, the three films constitute a major layer in the discourse on national memory in China and Japan. Focusing on representations of race and memory and drawing from theories of the film as a site of memory, this paper will reveal how these films attempt to redefine the official history established at the IMTFE (International Military Tribunal for the Far East) and establish a national narrative of perpetrators, heroes, and victims of WWII.

Keywords: China; Japan; film studies; World War 2; memory; Tokyo Trial

History is a continuous retrial.

—Ueno (1999)

1. Introduction

Discourse on remembrance of the Second Sino-Japanese War has emerged forcefully over the past three decades in China and Japan, reflecting a shift in the politics of memory domestically, regionally, and globally. The 1990s saw tensions rise in East Asia around three central conflicts: The downplaying of the Nanjing Massacre in revisionist Japanese textbooks, the movement to redress the suffering of survivors of Japan’s wartime sexual slavery system (the “comfort woman” system), and disputes over the commemoration of Japanese war criminals at Tokyo’s Yasukuni Shrine.¹ These conflicts reached a fever pitch around 2006 in response to Prime Minister Koizumi’s visits to Yasukuni Shrine, resulting in widespread anti-Japanese protests in 2005. As such, it comes as no surprise that several prominent films on WWII emerged in both nations around the same time.²

¹ Yasukuni is a Shinto shrine considered contentious for interring the souls of Japanese war criminals and connections to a nationalistic form of Shintoism.

² In the late 1980s and early 1990s, survivors and their families from across Asia sued the Japanese government for compensation and apology. In 2000, The Hague convened a meeting to present testimonies from survivors of the “comfort woman” system. In the mid-2000s, American politician Mike Honda had resolutions calling on Japan to unequivocally recognize the comfort woman recognized at both the state and national levels. See (Soh 2001; Tokudome 2007).

However, these films were not only produced in response to regional tensions, but also domestic change. In China, the 1989 Tiananmen protests exposed the ideology vacuum created by the open-door policy and led the government to promote patriotic education in the “Never Forget National Humiliation/100 Years of National Humiliation” (*wuwang guochi/bainian guochi*) campaign. This was accompanied by the construction of numerous memorials, museums, and “main melody films” (*zhuxuanliu*) after 1991 in order to create a more unified national identity.³ In Japan, the end of the Cold War and death of Hirohito marked a new stage in US-Japan relations and a change in Japanese identity. The Gulf War and Japan’s financial involvement further prompted the reassessment of Japan’s lack of military and “unnatural” political situation (Fukuyama and Oh 1993). As Igarashi Yoshikuni argues, “With the disappearance of Hirohito’s body—the key element in the foundational narrative—war memories returned to the Japanese media, both as nostalgia and as critical reflection” (Igarashi 2000, p. 204). This is reflected in the numerous war films that emerged in increasing numbers from the late 1990s.

Thus, around the 60th anniversary of the end of WWII, three prominent films on postwar tribunals held in Japan emerged in Chinese and Japanese cinema. The Chinese film *Tokyo Trial* (Dongjing shenban, 2006) was heavily promoted in the Chinese mainland, screened extensively at universities in Beijing and Shanghai, and broke opening weekend box office records at that time (*People’s Daily* 2006). Japanese theaters, meanwhile, premiered two high-profile films on both the Tokyo (A-class war criminals) and Yokohama (B/C-class) trials: *I Want to Be a Shellfish* (Watashi wa kai ni naritai, 2008) and *Best Wishes for Tomorrow* (Ashita e no yuigon, 2007). All three tribunal films deal with the question of who gets to write the official “history,” or master narrative of the past, with the narrative of the Other (usually China, Japan, or America) looming large. Indeed, these tribunals are inherently global—through their international casts, global visibility, and attempts at creating a master narrative on a global stage, they suggest what Wimal Dissanayake describes as a “chiasmus” with the national: The local and the transnational are always intertwined (Dissanayake 2012). Thus, focusing on representations of national memory, this paper will reveal how these films attempt to redefine the official history established at the IMTFE (International Military Tribunal for the Far East), thus, establishing a new narrative of WWII in both China and Japan.

2. The IMTFE in History

To begin, a brief history of the narratives established at the International Military Tribunal for the Far East, also referred to as the Tokyo Trial or IMTFE, will establish both the historical background upon which these films are based, as well as how recent Chinese and Japanese films attempt to depart from what is seen as the “Other’s” narrative.

Following the 1945–1946 Nuremberg trials, the Allied forces began legal proceedings against Japan. A large part of the prosecution at these trials rested on the then relatively new concept of war crimes, mentioned briefly in the 1942 St. James Declaration and 1943 Moscow Declaration and outlined in the Nuremberg (also called “London”) Charter of August 1945.⁴ The Nuremberg Charter defined three legal categories of wartime crimes: Crimes against peace, war crimes, and crimes against humanity.⁵ In the Japanese postwar tribunals, these conformed to the A (crimes against peace), B (conventional war crimes), and C (crimes against humanity) trials, respectively, though B and C crimes were difficult to differentiate, and thus, referred to jointly as B/C crimes (Dower 2000, p. 443). The most famous of the war crime trials in Asia was the International Military Tribunal for the Far East, also referred

³ For information on national humiliation, see (Zheng 2008).

⁴ In stark contrast to uncritical acceptance of war crimes in recent popular discourse, the 1961 film *Trial at Nuremberg* revolved around an American judge’s struggle with this concept.

⁵ Crimes against peace were defined as planning or participating in a ‘war of aggression’ or a war that violates international treaties. War crimes were defined as murdering or enslaving civilians/prisoners of war and destroying land and property. Crimes against humanity were defined as genocide, persecution, and enslavement (Meron 2006).

to as the Tokyo Trial or IMTFE, which was held in Tokyo from April 29, 1946, to November 12, 1948. Although there were another 50 war crimes tribunals conducted in other cities across Asia, including Nanjing, Singapore, and Manila, in academic and popular discourse only the Japanese trials have remained significant.⁶ In large part, this is because the Tokyo and Yokohama trials established a master narrative of the war that positioned the Allies as heroes, the invaded nations as victims, and Japan as the perpetrator, a historical narrative which has been scrutinized and debated since its inception.

Numerous legal scholars and historians have pointed out the inadequacies of the Yokohama and Tokyo trials. At the conclusion of the Tokyo tribunal, Justices Radhabinod Pal of India, Bert Röling of the Netherlands, and Henri Bernard of France all issued dissenting opinions which contested the validity of certain legal aspects of the trials. In the early 1970s, historian Richard Minear referred to the trials as “victors’ justice,” citing issues, such as the participation of biased judges and a lack of attention on the crimes of both the emperor and the Allies.⁷ In more recent literature, John R. Pritchard reports the immense legal shortcomings of trials, including hastily drawn up procedures, unequal distribution of power between the prosecution and defense, denial of evidence beneficial to the defense, and incompetence among lawyers and judges (Pritchard 1995). Another problem was the way in which justice was doled out, with subjects of colonized nations like Korea and Taiwan also prosecuted for war crimes (Kushner 2010). Even the concept of war crimes was highly unorthodox: As Theodor Meron states, “the idea of bringing perpetrators of war crimes before a tribunal was so novel, so contrary to ordinary practice, that it almost never happened” (Meron 2006, p. 551).

However, not all academics agree that the trials were totally flawed. Proponents of international tribunals argue that “(b)y superseding national interests, international courts purport to establish a ‘true’ narrative of events and punish those found ‘guilty’ of atrocities. The resulting ‘judgment’ is seen as having the potential to heal ruptured memories, deter future aggressors and guide a restoration of ‘normalcy’” (Sedgwick 2009). According to Bass, the politics of war crimes tribunals do not merely distill into the issue of “victor’s justice,” since enemies could just as easily be punished in more draconian ways (Bass 2000, p. 8). For Totani Yuma, the trials displayed numerous successes; she further argues that claims that prosecutors withheld information or that MacArthur protected Emperor Hirohito from prosecution have been grossly exaggerated or miss-stated (Totani 2008). Awaya Kentarō takes the middle ground, suggesting that the trial was neither victor’s justice, nor was it a resounding success (Totani 2008, p. 249). In sum, the IMTFE narrative has been subject to almost 70 years of debate.

For Japan, America’s role within this discourse is paramount. The Tokyo and Yokohama trials have been perceived in Japan as an American affair, and as such, the image of America is pervasive in the films to be discussed. John Dower states:

Like Nuremberg, the Tokyo Trials was law, politics, and theater all in one. Unlike Nuremberg, it was ‘very much an American performance’ ... The lights dazzled everyone and often were described as almost blinding—not so much perhaps in the manner of a movie premiere as of a film being made. (Dower 2000, p. 461)

Part of this perception was also due to race. The selection of judges at the IMTFE suggested that it was “fundamentally a white man’s tribunal” as the three Asian judges (out of eleven) “exceeded the original intent of the victors,” who had only planned on inviting one Chinese judge to preside.⁸ This perceived Americanization of “history” has continued to today, punctuated in recent East Asia history debates in what Yoneyama terms the “Americanization of Japanese war crimes.” This includes the efforts of American-based interest groups, scholars, and politicians to commemorate and demand

⁶ According to John Dower (2000, pp. 443–44), “With two exceptions ... these local trials established no precedents, attracted no great attention, and left no lasting mark on popular memory outside Japan.”

⁷ Minear (2006) cited American mass bombing and Russian abuse of Japanese POWs.

⁸ Dower (2000, pp. 462–69) argues that the Tokyo Trial was essentially an American trial: “[T]he IMTFE was based on American legal traditions, with the concept of ‘conspiracy’ itself (the American prosecution’s main legal strategy) a ‘strikingly Americanized dimension of the indictment’.”

justice for the Nanjing Massacre and comfort women in American public discourse (Yoneyama 2003).⁹ Therefore, in discussing how people in Japan respond to the trials, we are also discussing how Japanese society perceive America's role in war remembrance from the trials to the present-day.

In China, the "Tokyo Trial view of history" is not as pervasive since the trial was largely ignored due to involvement of Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalist government. Rather, recent changes in the Mainland-Taiwan relationship have prompted a reassessment of the KMT's (Kuomintang) wartime role, and thus, of the trials themselves. Chinese perceptions of the trial tend to focus on the rejection of the Japanese narrative, which is usually represented only in terms of Japan's right-wing revisionist narrative. The Chinese relationship with the American narrative of the war is more complicated. As witnesses during the Nanjing Massacre, Westerners (many Americans among them) offered critical evidence of wartime atrocities. As occupying forces, they condemned and punished Japanese war crimes. Yet this is complicated by the sense that American power in the region should be challenged. Thus, Chinese responses to the trials are less a challenge to the American narrative and more a challenge to American power; a show of Chinese authority and legitimacy that attempts to both appeal to and overcome the humiliation narrative.

Chinese and Japanese perceptions of the IMFTE differ in two ways. In Japan, the specter of the American influence on the trials is paramount: In addition, the Postwar Occupation and the ensuing Security Treaties that allied the two nations to this day also color impressions of the tribunal narrative. In China, the tribunals have a stage to address Japanese revisionist and American power. In the following two sections, this paper will analyze how these narratives are addressed and reformed in Chinese and Japanese films.

3. "Gong'an" Retribution

2006 saw the release of the Chinese film *Tokyo Trial* (Dongjing shenban), a blockbuster historical epic produced by Mainland production companies with the participation of Chinese actors and producers from the PRC, Hong Kong, and Taiwan.¹⁰ The film was shown at universities and schools across the nation, its frequent broadcasting and blockbuster ticket sales a testament to its widespread political and popular support.¹¹ In large part, the film's popularity was due to public concern over controversies around that time: The anti-Japanese demonstrations of 2005 which rose in response to approval of a controversial revisionist Japanese history textbook, the possibility that Japan might gain a permanent seat on the UN Security Council, and numerous visits by Japan's Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi to Yasukuni Shrine.¹² This was also two years before China hosted the Olympics, an important international event that traditionally marks a nation's entry to the global stage, and during the airing of a very popular 12-part documentary series, *Rise of Great Powers* (Daguo Jueqi, 2006), which aired just one month into the release of *Tokyo Trial* (Xi 2007). Thus, there was not only controversies over war memory but also a spirit of rising Chinese power, which impacted the reception of the film.

In addition, the popularity of *Tokyo Trial* may be due in part to its mixing of main melody and commercial elements. *Tokyo Trial* exists on the continuum of being both a domestic "main melody" (*zhuxuanliu*) film and a transnational (Chinese diaspora) commercial film. Main melody films emerged as a term in the late 1980s in response to concern over rising student protests. Deng Xiaoping, then the leader of China, called for literature and art to promote the "Main Melody," e.g., entertainment that promoted CCP ideology rather than the perceived excesses of liberalization that occurred after the

⁹ One might even claim that the US has been formative in the construction of WWII memories onscreen. Of the top 22 WWII films at the box office globally, 18 are American films. The remaining four—and in particular the film *Life is Beautiful* (1998)—received a boost from American distribution.

¹⁰ I saw the Guangdong Fei Audio & Video Production Company's DVD version.

¹¹ Notably, *Tokyo Trial* has proven far less contentious than other Chinese films that explore Japanese crimes, specifically the numerous Nanjing Massacre films produced since the 1980s. These films tend to provoke more controversial readings by centering on sexual trauma, national trauma, and national humiliation.

¹² For more on the disputes of 2005, see (Daiki 2005; Lam 2005).

open-door policy (Yau 2019). At the same time, the film is a highly transnational and commercial film that employs popular actors from Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Singapore—in part for commercial reasons (to appeal to a diasporic audience), but also potentially to mask the main melody elements of the film, which younger Chinese audiences have resisted.

The vast majority of Chinese film critics praised the historical and commercial value of *Tokyo Trial*, celebrating its financial success and “deep” historical understanding (Yang 2006).¹³ Numerous academics also extolled the film’s potential for promoting so-called “patriotic education” (*aiguozhuyi jiaoyu*), a term used to refer to the post-Tiananmen history campaign which focuses on “national humiliation” of the past (Zhao and Qian 2008). Depicting the IMTFE from the perspective of the tribunal’s sole Chinese judge, Mei Ru’ao, the film follows Judge Mei’s battle to be heard over revisionist Japanese soldiers, Australian Chief Justice William Webb, and Indian Justice Radhabinod Pal. It also features the parallel narrative of Xiao Nan, a Taiwanese reporter who studied in Japan. Through Mei’s personification of Chinese justice and Xiao Nan’s disappointing reunion with former Japanese “friends,” the film resolutely rejects American and Japanese narratives and announces the Chinese historical perspective.

Tokyo Trial establishes the Chinese position between Japanese and American narratives in an early scene. Upon his arrival in Tokyo, two drunken Japanese soldiers attack Judge Mei’s car. The camera isolates Mei, the two Japanese soldiers, and Mei’s American bodyguard in three separate close-ups, emphasizing the juxtaposition of China, Japan, and the United States. The Japanese soldiers belittle Mei, downplaying his role at the trial and demanding that he leave the country: “We were beaten by America. Everyone else should get out of Japan!” This Japanese challenge to “get out of Japan” is an order to “get out of the historical debate,” an insulting reminder that Japan often ignores China in WWII discourse. Mei does not respond to the insult, instead cautiously analyzing the situation. Despite Mei’s calm motion for the tense guard to lower his gun, the American soldier overreacts, shooting and killing both of the Japanese soldiers. Thus, early on, Mei’s restraint, sense of justice, and ability to assess the situation are sharply contrasted against the aggressive (yet harmless) Japanese and the overtly forceful Americans.

Mei’s first duty is to punish the Japanese and reject the historical narrative of the Japanese right. As McIntyre suggests, *Tokyo Trial* emerges from the courtroom drama or *gong’an* narrative of the judge’s resolute performance of justice (McIntyre 2013, pp. 1–2). Unlike the twists and turns of American courtroom dramas, Chinese *gong’an* narratives focus on the experience of the judge—the term “*gong’an*” refers to the desk of the judge from which they gaze upon the accused. These narratives assume the defendant is guilty, as “Chinese tradition reflects a highly punitive sense of justice, which is not achieved through presumptions of innocence, guarantees of due process, adversarial litigation, or jury verdicts, but through the swift punishment of criminals at the hands of authoritarian judges” (McIntyre 2013, p. 2). Some of the central figures of *gong’an* style fiction include Judge Dee and Judge Bao, whose stories follow an inverted structure: The criminal is introduced at the beginning of the case, guilt never in doubt; the judge finds a way to trick the criminal and convict them of their crimes.¹⁴ Following the logic of the *gong’an* narrative’s assumption of guilt, there is no question of whether or not the Japanese committed war crimes: All-male Japanese characters in the film are depicted as violent, aggressive, duplicitous, or mentally unbalanced. As Mei observes from the judge’s seat, the defense’s elderly Japanese lawyer childishly blusters and raves when confronted by irrefutable testimony from witnesses; Japanese witnesses break under questioning from American prosecutor Joseph B. Keenan;

¹³ *Tokyo Trial* notably departs from accepted histories in several ways. For example, Cheng notes that a scene that inspired a huge response among Chinese audiences—the damning testimony of a traumatized character named Wang Defu—was not historically accurate. Zong Daoyi and Lu Chan also argue that that the fraternization of Judge Mei and reporter Xiao Nan would have been considered inappropriate during the trial. See (Cheng 2007; Zong and Lu 2007).

¹⁴ See Chinese operas, such as “The Case of Executing Chen Shimei”, “The Case of Two Nails”, and “The Case of the Black Basin”.

an unhinged defendant (Ōkawa Shūmei, based on a true story) strikes Tōjō Hideki on the back of the head. Mei catalogues the crimes of these Japanese soldiers, forcefully, but stoically delivering the final, inexorable judgment of “guilty” at the end. This is not only a judgment of actual offenses committed during the war, but also a judgment of the perceived contemporary Japanese narrative of the war. Through these proceedings and the final guilty verdict, Mei declares their narrative invalid.

Trial also significantly furthers the goals of the patriotic education campaign by expanding it to include Hong Kong and Taiwan. Part of this is through an appeal to “Chineseness” by including Chinese actors from Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Mainland China. Fang Qingqing and Yan Jun argue that the film promotes collective national identity by appealing to a collective sense of *minzu* (national and ethnic identity—the Chinese racial majority is called the “*Han minzu*” or Han race) (Fang and Yan 2007). Both Chinese and central “Japanese” characters are played by famous Chinese actors from Hong Kong (Damian Lau and Eric Tsang) and Taiwan (Ken Zhu and Kelly Lin). The trial is thusly performed by a united Chinese diaspora re-enacting collective past traumas together. The film also incorporates the KMT into the Mainland Chinese narrative. Since much of the evidence compiled at the trial was through the cooperation of the American forces and Nationalist government, the trial was mostly suppressed in the CCP narrative. Recently, reflecting new positive overtures towards Taiwan, the KMT has been reimagined as an ally. This shared narrative of the war is, thus, a way for the PRC to strengthen ideological ties with Hong Kong and Taiwan.

In addition, Mei fights for a larger voice in the global debate on history by debating the other judges at the trial. He disagrees with the seating arrangement suggested by the Western members of the tribunal, a setup which that would place Western nations in the center. He insistently requests a middle seat from the chairman of the trial, William Webb, an Australian who is implied to be American¹⁵ in the film:

The whole world’s photographers and reporters are now out there in the courtroom. They’re going to take photos and write news reports on this seating arrangement. When these photos and reports reach China, do you know what is going to happen? The entire Chinese people will reproach me for my cowardice and incompetence. If I agreed to this arrangement, I would be insulting my country. I’d be insulting all my countrymen’s suffering, sacrifice, and perseverance in resisting Japanese aggression . . . Sir William, can you understand?

Mei’s issue is the photograph itself, the moment in which “who gets to judge” is defined forever in the annals of history. Representing China at the center of that photograph is a demand to be placed centrally in the global master narrative. When calm negotiation does not work, Judge Webb threatens Mei by arguing that such a stance will irreparably harm the relationship between China and America. The diminutive, but proud Mei stands firm to the taller Webb’s “American” bullying. He rationally points out the cowardice and hypocrisy of the Allies, criticizes England’s actions during the war, and powerfully concludes, “In this war against Japanese aggression, China has suffered the most, for the longest, and hardest!” His perseverance pays off. Framed against a background of international flags, flanked on both sides by the larger Western judges, Judge Mei resolutely takes a seat at the center and represents his country. While short and outnumbered by the bullying Allies (a height difference he proudly acknowledges and uses to his advantage in an early meeting with the other judges), Judge Mei stands up to American pressure and declares the Chinese position at the center of war remembrance. This image of a “small China” standing up to bullying foreign powers ties into the powerful “national humiliation” narrative so prominent today.¹⁶

¹⁵ Webb is played by US actor Dan Ziskie with an American accent; in the film, Webb also threatens Mei by suggesting that America will not be happy with the seating arrangement. To those viewers unfamiliar with the history, it would appear that Webb is American.

¹⁶ In reality, the Chinese judge and prosecution faced numerous embarrassments and setbacks during the trial, which they felt had been monopolized by the Americans (Zhao 2009).

Even as American characters are depicted as aggressive, the film also appeals to American support for the Chinese narrative. After the first major conflict between the Chinese and American judges, Judge Webb warmly congratulates Judge Mei, “Dr. Mei, you win. Your country should be proud to have a fighter like you.” Although this American affirmation could be read as a desire to gloat over “beating America,” its warmth and the happiness with which Judge Mei receives the acknowledgment suggests Chinese desire for American recognition and validation. American men are also enlisted in the emasculation of the Japanese, with the American prosecutor towering over the cowering Japanese lawyer in an image reminiscent of the MacArthur/Hirohito photograph. This is juxtaposed against the earlier stand of the proud, but diminutive Mei, whose overcoming of his size is a sign of challenge and not emasculation. Finally, Westerners both establish the historical truth of Nanjing and deliver the final judgment in a long, impassioned closing argument. While the film rejects American hegemonic masculinity, it also desires American confirmation of the Chinese narrative.

Part of this reason for this depiction of the United States is due to the difficult US-China relationship. American and Chinese concerns are somewhat aligned in the recent Nanjing debate, yet American discourse on Nanjing also concurrently feminizes China as a passive mass of faceless victims. This is in sharp contrast to how Americans are typically depicted within these same narratives—as heroic Western saviors of the Nanjing Safety Zone and righteous wielders of justice at the Tokyo Trial. Chinese narratives, meanwhile, tend to emphasize heroics over victimization. According to Rana Mitter, of late the term “Antifacist War” is beginning to replace “War of Resistance Against Japan,” the common Chinese term for WWII “... as writers seek to portray Chinese resistance not simply as a solo act of opposition to Japan, but rather as part of an act of collective resistance to the Axis powers” (Mitter 2013, p. 375). In Mitter’s reading, “The implication is clear: [A]t an earlier time when its contribution was needed, China delivered, and it should now be trusted as it seeks, once again, to enter international society playing a wider role” (ibid.). In films like *Tokyo Trial*, there is a demand for wider global—and particularly American—recognition of Chinese heroics during the war.¹⁷

Notably, Chinese audiences had diverse reactions to the film. Although it was widely promoted by the government and played in schools, on the Chinese film review site Douban, the film has an average rating of 7.3/10 with 54,613 reviews. The majority (42%) are four stars, followed by three stars (35.9%), a somewhat mixed result (for comparison, the famous 1957 American courtroom drama *12 Angry Men* has 9.3/10 and 106,014 reviews). The top voted commentary by “Jiang Shenzou” (2009) criticizes the lack of historical depth and highly political nature of the film. Jiang notes that the film has only emerged lately because of the Party’s changing attitude towards the KMT, and also brings up the film’s lack of discussion of the Japanese emperor and of Unit 731, questioning whether these were ignored to avoid problematizing contemporary Sino-American relations. Such analysis illustrates the awareness Chinese audiences have of the US-Japan relationship, as well as a savvy critique of internal Party politics. The second highest rated review by user “Wang Xinxi” (2007) lambastes the film on both narrative and historical fronts. First, they suggest that the Chinese director has not mastered the courtroom drama—citing American films, they complain that *Trial* lacks the tension of Hollywood courtroom dramas. Secondly, Wang criticizes the film for its historical inaccuracies and even compares it unfavorably to the 1983 Japanese NHK drama *Tokyo Trial* (Tokyo saiban) as similarly emotional and superficial. In sum, Chinese audiences, while generally receptive to critiques levied at the Japanese, desired a more sophisticated film in terms of both historical realism and narrative tension.

As a “gong’an” style film focused on the judge’s inexorable march towards truth and justice, *Tokyo Trial* both establishes an irrevocable truth (Japanese guilt and Chinese victimhood) and performs

¹⁷ It should also be noted that the courtroom drama itself is essentially an American genre that looms large over many trial films produced internationally. As McIntyre notes, “Studying courtroom drama in Chinese cinema is akin to studying Peking opera in Hollywood cinema: just as Peking opera emerged from the unique milieu of nineteenth-century Beijing, the archetypal courtroom drama originated in the United States’ notoriously legalistic culture.” Indeed, Chinese audiences often compare Chinese courtroom dramas to the numerous trial films produced in the United States (McIntyre 2013).

cathartic justice for Chinese audiences. By standing up to Western bullies and Japanese criminals, Mei both invokes and overcomes China's "century of humiliation." The film also makes an attempt to appeal to a global narrative. As Fang and Yan argue, Mei might be seen not only a symbol of national sentiment, but also a humanistic spokesman for the traumatic experience of war itself (Fang and Yan 2007, pp. 41–42). Many Chinese scholars have discussed the potential globalization of the Chinese national message in this film (Ma 2012; Zhao and Qian 2008). *Tokyo Trial*, thus, imagines a united Chinese diaspora challenging the Japanese and American narratives of WWII on a global stage through the gong'an style of justice upheld. Disputing Western domination of the global narrative and the revisionist Japanese narrative, it places Judge Mei at the center of the seating arrangement and declares his position at the center of the memory debate. However, increasingly sophisticated Chinese audiences are aware of political discourses, which allow the wider distribution of "main melody" films, and are demanding higher production values and more refined storytelling.

4. "A Continuous Retrial"

While Chinese films have only recently turned to the subject of the trials, the postwar tribunals have inspired a variety of responses in Japanese academic and popular culture since their inception. As Futamura Madoka argues, "[t]he Japanese view of the Tokyo Trial consists of a complex mixture of lack of interest, cynicism, sense of 'collective guilt' or 'collective humiliation' and frustration" (Madoka 2007, p. 145). During the trials, the Japanese side questioned the lack of legal precedent, the hypocrisy of former ally Russia judging Japanese war crimes, issues with translation, and the contradiction of being defined as the sole perpetrator of war crimes despite American use of fire and atomic bombs on Japanese civilians.¹⁸ These concerns have colored perceptions of Japan's wartime legacy.

There have been three ways that the postwar trials have been described among those who dispute their validity: "[V]ictor's justice" (*shōsha no sabaki*), "the Tokyo Trial view of history" (*Tokyo saiban shikan*), and the "masochistic view of history" (*jigyaku shikan*). Justice Pal's rejection of the trials as a form of victor's justice was popularized among the right in the 1960s and 1970s.¹⁹ Thus, before 1982, critics used the phrase "victor's justice" or "revenge trial" to argue that the trials were hypocritical punishment meted out by the war's winners. The term "Tokyo Trial view of history" entered Japanese public consciousness during the first major textbook dispute in 1982, again emphasizing the constructed nature of the history established at the trials. Another reason for the shift in the 1980s was that more information on the trials was made available, and as a result, the postwar generation of researchers was able to access previously classified trial records. In the 1990s, there was a shift to "masochistic view of history" as a response to a 1991 trial in which former "comfort women" filed a lawsuit against the Japanese government. This view of the trials suggests that remembering Japan as the perpetrator is harmful to the formation of Japanese national identity.²⁰

The most significant of the trial films, *I Want to Be a Shellfish*, has been remade a staggering five times for film and television (1958, 1959, 1994, 2007 and 2008).²¹ Based on a novel by Katō Tetsutarō, the 2008 version focuses on Shimizu Toyomatsu, a haircutter living in a small Japanese town (Katō 1995). Drafted by the Imperial Army, Shimizu is a low-level soldier who is forced to bayonet an American soldier to death during wartime. After the war, he is tried in the Yokohama B/C class war crime trials and sentenced to death. Although his release seems imminent, Shimizu's execution is

¹⁸ See (Dower 2000, pp. 443–84; Maga 2001). For more on the trial in Japanese discourse, see (Wilson 2011).

¹⁹ These same groups tend to ignore Pal's criticisms of Japanese atrocities.

²⁰ See (Totani 2008, p. 218; Utsumi et al. 2007; Soh 2001).

²¹ I saw the Japanese DVD version offered for rental by Universal. There are only a few other Japanese films that explore war crimes (such as labor camps, sexual violence, murder, etc.). These are either 1960s films produced in response to anti-US Security Treaty (The Human Condition and Red Angel) and left-wing films produced by left-wing directors, such as 1987 documentary *The Emperor's Naked Army Marches On*, and the film *Caterpillar*.

ultimately carried out. As he walks to the gallows, he laments the cruelty of humanity and prays to be reincarnated as a shellfish in his next life. The film represents one of the more complex depictions of Japanese guilt in these trial films, with Shimizu embodying the postwar narrative of a victimized Japan.

Previous literature on *Shellfish* and similar films has focused on the question of how they deal with Japanese guilt.²² Sandra Wilson argues that trial films of the 1950s established widespread sympathy among regular Japanese for lower-ranking soldiers.²³ She notes that an essay by Katō Tetsutarō:

... create[d] a sort of rough equivalence between Japanese war crimes, which are admitted and regretted, and allegedly cruel Allied treatment of war crimes suspects, which by contrast had not been acknowledged by those responsible. By the end of this essay, everybody—or nobody—is guilty. (Wilson 2008)

Similarly, Toba Kōji compares the film to *The Thick-Walled Room* (produced 1953, released 1956) to explore why *Shellfish* became prominent as *Room* faded into obscurity (Toba 2007). *Room* was suppressed when first made in October 1953, a time when war criminals were still a controversial subject, and American political pressure still held sway, whereas, *Shellfish* was broadcast on television after all of the prisoners from Sugamo were released on May 30, 1958.²⁴ Thus, emerging at a time when tension over the image of the prisoners was abating, *Shellfish* became immensely popular. Through the narrative of its “negative hero” (*fu no hīrō*), or heroic victim, it emphasizes the hero’s innocence and suffering, thereby releasing Japanese viewers from a sense of responsibility (Toba 2007).

Certainly, the 2008 version avoids discussing the issue of responsibility by presenting Shimizu as a victim. A hardworking family man living in an idealized microcosm of the Japanese hometown, Shimizu is a wronged “Everyman” who symbolizes Japanese innocence and postwar antimilitarism. Crippled by a limp, his physical limitation is a symbol of his inherent peaceful nature. This limp is a notable new addition, as in the other four versions, Shimizu does not have any physical deformities. Played by SMAP singer Nakai Masahiro, in his late thirties, but still associated with boy bands, Shimizu appears youthful and unthreatening.²⁵ The camera lingers on the shaving of Nakai’s head as he is unwillingly transformed into a soldier. This scene suggests both a pacifist message, both the loss of Shimizu’s innocence and of his hair, and also firmly establishes Shimizu’s victimhood in keeping with the postwar narrative of a peaceful, nonviolent Japan. Further, Nakai’s star image as a member of a boy band is an integral component of the new version’s representation. As Lukács describes in her study of fellow SMAP member and idol Kimura Takuya, part of the drama of the haircut scene occurs through the “strategic collapsing of the *tarento*’s public and private personas” (Lukács 2010, p. 140). Shimizu’s haircut—his forced transformation into a soldier—is a striking experience for the viewer familiar with Nakai’s stylish boy band image. His “soft” image as an idol serves to further moderate the image of the soldier Everyman, a softening that is reproduced in Nakai’s reappearances in magazines and variety shows. Therefore, operating on both the narrative and meta-narrative level, the film emphasizes Shimizu’s pacifism and victimhood through Nakai’s transformation.

Perhaps most significantly, the 2008 version demonstrates a subtle attempt to resuscitate the image of the Japanese military. The 1950s versions are highly critical of *both* the Japanese military and the American occupiers, reflecting the betrayal many lower-level soldiers felt during the B/C trials. While the 1958 and 1959 versions reject militarism by depicting the Japanese leadership as cold and uncaring,

²² Shin Hakyung considers the themes of responsibility and reconciliation by comparing the 1959 and 2008 versions of *Shellfish*, ultimately concluding that while the 1959 version focuses on the theme of compassion, the 2008 version ignores other Asian countries and does not adequately consider Japanese wartime responsibility. Standish views *Shellfish* as a tale of victimization that deploys the “tragic hero” myth to release Japanese society from wartime guilt (Shin 2010; Standish 2000).

²³ She prefers the translation “I Want to be a Limpet.”

²⁴ Release of prisoners was attained through a complex negotiation process in which the Japanese government had to obtain the approval of the countries in which the soldiers had been convicted. This was in accordance with the San Francisco Peace Treaty and the Taipei Treaty (Wilson 2011, p. 144).

²⁵ Other popular recent war films, such as *Yamato* (Otokotachi no yamato, 2005) and *Eternal Zero* (Eien no zero, 2013) similarly show a preference for a “feminized” and “pacifist” military composed of idols and reluctant, boyish soldiers.

the 2008 version oscillates between blaming and justifying the actions of the military leadership. On the one hand, Shimizu is beaten by a cartoonishly evil superior and forced to murder an American soldier; on the other hand, the military leaders attempt to honorably take the blame. In the 1959 version, when Shimizu tells the American judges that he executed the pilots according to the order of the emperor, his compatriots stare back at him apathetically in a scene that could be read as either criticism or nihilism. In the 2008 version, the other Japanese soldiers straighten up in deference at the mention of “his majesty the emperor” (*tennō heika*). Finally, the 1959 Yano emphatically rejects militarism by stating that a democratic army is not possible. This dialogue is completely excised from the 2008 film (Shin 2010, p. 190).

In addition, the murder of the American pilots is justified more forcefully in the 2008 version by shifting focus to the compassion of the military leadership. The 1959 version criticizes both American bombing and the actions of the Japanese military. First, the film shows stock footage of Japanese cities on fire, followed by a scene with foreboding military leaders discussing the American advance. Finally, there is a much longer scene of Shimizu being bullied by his superior, followed by the execution of the pilots. The 2008 version downplays the negative imagery of the military by focusing on their emotional response to the bombings and by emphasizing the victimization of the Japanese more dramatically. The dry stock footage is replaced by a burning Tokyo juxtaposed against the compassionate gaze of a group of watching soldiers. The next shot focuses in on the commander, whose eyes fill with tears at the sight of the burning city. This image is followed by dawn the next morning and a child’s body being placed on a mountain of smoking corpses. The execution of the pilots follows this scene. The 2008 version, thus, downplays the original intention of *Shellfish* by humanizing the military leaders at the top and justifying the later murder of the American pilots. Although Shimizu’s death in the 1950s versions was meant to indict both the Americans and the upper echelons of the Japanese military, in this film only the American judges are to blame. Hashimoto Shinobu, the original screenwriter of *Shellfish*, argues that he revised the drama to emphasize Yano, the general, in order to “make another layer of drama” (Katō and Hashimoto 2009). Yet the revision comes across not as an artistic choice, but as a weakening of the original political critique and a softening of the image of the military.

Like all versions of the film, *Shellfish* attempts to question the American “Tokyo Trial view of history.” Because the focus of the film is on the victor’s justice at the trial, the film attempts to downplay or ignore Americans as victims or enemy combatants. In the climactic murder scene, the two American pilots are unconscious and hidden in shadows, faces bandaged and turned downwards. There is no reverse shot to Shimizu’s charge, and when he stabs forward, the camera cuts to black. Such imagery obfuscates the victims of Japanese wartime violence, placing Shimizu’s violent action in isolation. Through this framing device, the scene also erases evidence of the crime and shifts victimhood to Shimizu. Moreover, in bombing sequences, only the bombs and suffering of the Japanese are shown, with the American planes and pilots either shrouded in fog or offscreen. It is only at the Yokohama trial that the American subject first appears clearly. The three male judges are filmed by a camera placed below, their intimidating and distant forms sitting above and flanked by American flags. A Japanese-American and a blond female American secretary sit below, as secondary figures who also gaze at Shimizu accusingly. While the white, male American victors hold power over the Japanese losers, they do not understand Japanese culture, thereby suggesting that the trial, itself, is unjust. The Japanese-American translator speaks poorly worded, heavily accented Japanese that Shimizu finds difficult to understand; the lawyers and judges laugh when Shimizu announces that “his majesty the emperor” ordered the war; most of the soldier guards are cruel and forceful. Dismissive and ignorant, these Americans control the narrative of history by virtue of power only.

At the same time, the film also aches for American understanding and protection. Even though the majority of the male judges, prosecutors and guards in the film sneer at Japanese culture, the film also emphasizes the affective ties of the US-Japan bond. When Shimizu is led to his death, roughly pushed forward by the rest of the unfeeling American guards, a large American soldier catches him. Moved by his charge’s plight, the soldier embraces the terrified Shimizu, his chin quivering, emotionally, as

Shimizu is pushed forward to his unhappy fate. This shot of a large American man holding the smaller Shimizu echoes the male US/female Japan narrative of the postwar (in particular, the image of General MacArthur towering over the diminutive emperor Hirohito) and also unites the two characters through American compassion for Japanese suffering. This is evocative of both the power of the American hegemony and the Japanese desire for American support of their wartime narrative and position in the Pacific.

Though *Shellfish* did respectably at the box office, audience ratings tended towards the extraordinarily high or extraordinarily low. On the Japanese website Yahoo! Film, the film has a rating of 3.48/5. The top-rated review (548 votes) gives the film five stars, with user “Ted” (2008) applauding the film’s acting and humanistic qualities, particularly its focus on family. The second and third highest rated reviews praise the performance of Nakai Masahiro for transcending his SMAP persona. The top-rated negative review by user “Mai” (2008) (264 votes) gives the film one star for its overreliance on “corporate packaging.” The second-highest rated critical review by user “Lem” (2008) notes that the filmmakers scoured Japan to find the most beautiful scenery for the nostalgic hometown scenes—a choice that they argue has absolutely nothing to do with the original anti-war intent of the work. “Lem” also criticizes the choice of an idol—“Nakai is Nakai. Even if you shave him, he is still Nakai. Even if you put him in an old costume, he is still Nakai . . . ” Such responses overall, reveal that audience attention was divided. Overall, positive reviews emphasized Nakai’s star image or the sentimental pull of the narrative; negative reviews criticized the film’s narrative quality and historical representation.

Turning to the second major Japanese trial film of the mid-2000s, the film *Best Wishes for Tomorrow* (*Ashita e no yuigon*, 2007) similarly approaches the trials from the perspective of the Japanese defendants, but with extreme emphasis on Japanese heroism. Produced by a less prominent studio and starring lesser-known actors, the film came in at #82 to *Shellfish*’s #19 at the Japanese box office in 2008 (*Box Office Mojo* 2008). *Best Wishes* centers on the trial of Lieutenant General Okada Tasuku and the Tokai army’s execution of eleven American pilots who participated in the bombing of Nagoya. Departing from the mainstream critical or ambiguous depictions of the Japanese imperial leadership, *Best Wishes* is a far more straightforward indictment of American hegemony and idealization of Japanese nationalism. To be sure, the film’s rose-colored view of Japanese history extends to the lighting. Compared to the dark and dour cinematography of the other two trial films, *Best Wishes* is relatively brightly lit, matching Okada’s—at times—inconceivably bright mood. Throughout, the film represents the accused Okada as neither perpetrator nor victim: He is a national hero.

Best Wishes must be analyzed not only in contrast to the more mainstream narrative of *Shellfish*, but also in relation to a preceding film with a similarly idealized hero figure, the 1998 film *Pride* (*Puraido: Unmei no toki*).²⁶ *Pride* took the Japanese box office by storm, also inspiring intensive domestic protests and critical responses. Emerging in the midst of a renewed international gaze on Japanese history (after the 1991 comfort women trials, the 1997 release of Iris Chang’s bestselling *The Rape of Nanking*, and the 1998 demand for an apology from Chinese leader Jiang Zemin), the film is a mixture of prewar “East Asia Co-Prosperty Sphere” justification and 1990s “masochistic history” arguments.²⁷ Re-imagining the role of Tōjō Hideki, *Pride* lionizes Tōjō by focusing on his family’s postwar suffering and criticizing American hypocrisy. Actor Tsugawa Masahiko, who played Tōjō, appeared with medals and a military uniform to promote the film.²⁸ He stated:

I am so sad that Japanese people are not allowed to have the pride of their national anthem and flag. War and murder are different. At least in terms of international law, war is legal.

²⁶ I saw the Toei rental DVD version offered at Tsutaya.

²⁷ This is an argument that emerged in the ‘90s particularly among the Atarashii Kyōkasho o Tsukuru-kai, a revisionist movement that aims to ‘save’ Japanese history by fostering a more positive, patriotic view of history”. See (Ivy 2000; Morris-Suzuki and Rimmer 2002).

²⁸ Tsugawa is a well-known supporter of nationalist causes in Japan.

There is a difference between Auschwitz, which was ordered by the state, and Nanjing. It is America that dropped the atomic bomb, it is the United States who are the same as Nazis. I want to declare the Tokyo Trial invalid. (Nagaoka 1998)

Building on a prewar argument which suggested that the Japanese nation could lead Asia through a Co-Prosperity Sphere and escape from Western power, *Pride* uses images of race and colonialism to displace the narrative of Japanese guilt. The film juxtaposes the Indian independence movement and the aggression of British soldiers in India with the entry of the American forces and beginning of the Occupation, using Indian Justice Pal and Japanese defendant Tōjō as its two heroes.

In an early scene, a weakened Tōjō—who has just attempted suicide—is arrested by screaming white American guards in postwar Tokyo; the next shot shows screaming white English soldiers harassing Indian people on a train in 1941 as an Indian narrator mentions that in that year, Japan declared war against both England and the United States. Through such manipulation of time and context—the postwar American Occupation and prewar British Imperialism—the film is able to force the narratives together to imply united Indian and Japanese victimhood at the hands of Western colonialism. In another scene, Indian and Japanese characters bond over August 15th, which marks the end of the war and the date of Indian independence. Although the film's focus on the Indian and Japanese perspective is fascinating and its emphasis on the racial hypocrisy of the trials justified, it is very disingenuous to compare the experience of Indian colonialism to the Japanese experience after the war. Similar to the Japanese war film *Merdeka 17805* (Murudeka 17805, 2001), which highlights Japanese support of the Indonesian National Revolution, it compares Japan to colonized nations with no reference to Japanese imperialism or its victims. Notably, although Justice Pal's critiques of the trial are movingly read in the film, his critiques of Japanese atrocities committed during the war are excised. In this way, the film appeals to colonial Japan's justification for invading its neighboring nations—the so-called “Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere” (*Daitōa Kyōeiken*)—and displays an alarming continuity of thought harkening back to the nationalism of prewar Japan.

Best Wishes emerges from a similar framework, emphasizing American war crimes and the idealized masculinity of its main character.²⁹ Like *Pride*, the film romanticizes General Okada by depicting him as an icon of nativist notions of Japanese masculinity. Okada is always dignified and in control of his emotions. He displays loyalty and leadership towards his men by taking responsibility for the war, singing nostalgic songs about Japanese *furusato* (hometown), practicing *shiatsu* on injured subordinates, and leading Buddhist prayers. Okada is also an exemplary patriarchal figure often supported at court by his doting wife and respectful children. Even before his execution, Okada marches forward proud and unafraid, pausing only to slowly appreciate the moon. To the moment of death, Okada is an icon of Japanese masculinity and nationalism, a perfect soldier who stoically accepts his fate on behalf of his nation. Through these idealized notions of Japanese identity and of masculinity, Okada resuscitates the Japanese military leadership and stands up to American power.

Okada's main mission is to expose the hypocrisy of the American “victor's justice,” turning the “Japan as the perpetrator” narrative on its head. The narrator (also very “manly” with a booming deep voice) announces that Okada views the trial as a “legal battle” where his purpose would be to prove America's criminality in the indiscriminate bombing of Japan. Okada asks, “Why should the losing side be held solely responsible for crimes committed?” While Shindō Junko argues that the film represents two crimes—both the Japanese killing of prisoners of war and American indiscriminate bombing—the film focuses more on the latter (Shindō 2008). In the opening montage, there are numerous images of violence across the world that whittle down to those of Japanese suffering. Indiscriminate bombing as a global phenomenon is forgotten, submerged in a narrative of Japanese victimhood. In another scene, Okada's lawyer argues that the American pilots, as indiscriminate bombers, violated the Geneva conventions and could not be counted as prisoners of war. This is juxtaposed against the actions of

²⁹ I saw the Kadokawa Entertainment DVD.

Japanese military leaders, whom Okada argues conscientiously focused solely on military targets. *Best Wishes'* Okada, therefore, rehabilitates the Japanese military leadership by powerfully arguing that the Americans were themselves (more) guilty of war crimes.

Yet like *Tokyo Trial* and *I Want to Be a Shellfish*, *Best Wishes* also appeals to American support. Although Asian victims of Japanese imperial violence are ignored, Japanese characters partially recognize and apologize for American victimhood. A Japanese soldier weeps with guilt, while describing the execution of an American soldier who “cried like a baby.” Much of the film is in English, with the lawyer representing Okada a friendly American who even introduces his family to the affable Okada. The antagonistic prosecuting attorney smiles with pleasure at being bid a good morning by an amiable Okada. The general is even allowed to proudly show his grandchild to the courtroom, his position as (national) patriarch respected by the American judges. Finally, when the judgment is announced, all of the Americans in the court seem saddened by the guilty verdict. Thus, the US-Japanese relationship is reaffirmed, with all of the Americans in the film won over by Okada's inherently manly dignity. His claim to history is, like Judge Mei's, equal to the Americans.

As John Dower states, “[T]he contradictions between judicial idealism and plain victor's justice provided fertile soil for the growth of a postwar neonationalism” (Dower 2000, p. 444). *Best Wishes* was conceived from this nationalist discourse. Okada, as a high-ranking member of the army and an older patriarchal figure, embodies the masculinist notions of Japanese nationalism. He is bound by duty to his soldiers, family and nation; he performs Japanese culture through his songs, shiatsu and dignity; he dies in a “manly” way; and he is unapologetic about the war. Through the trial, he provides a Japanese response to the American hegemony on wartime memory, counteracts their narrative, and creates a Japanese one they learn to respect. As such, *Best Wishes* rescues Japan's previously despised military leaders and argues for equality in the history debate.

Many Japanese reviewers were enthusiastic about the film's challenge of accepted narratives, impressed that “even when Japan was in a humiliating stage, there was a person who refused to bend to this humiliation” (Uesaka 2008). In the right-wing journal *Seiron*, critics Makino Hiromichi and Hongō Yoshinori argue that the film asks for respect and equality by appealing to a sense of “Japaneseness,” with Okada's identity is based on his personification of *bushido* (a code of military behavior and masculinity often associated with Japanese nationalism). Hongō continues, “... in the relationship with the States, we have this relationship—he is him, I am me ... the problem is that contemporary Japan doesn't have this—I am me, he is him—point of view (Makino and Hongō 2008).” Makino responds, “Was the tragedy of that war that Japan was completely wrong? No. Of course the United States has a responsibility. Through this film, I hope that Japanese people can understand this fact.” Through this conversation, the two authors imply that Japan needs to stand up to the United States and take a more proactive approach in declaring their own perspective on history.

As for audience reception, *Best Wishes* holds a 3.81/5 star rating on Yahoo out of 241 reviews. The top-rated reviews all give the film five stars, with user “Moonlight Sonata” (Gekkō no Sonata 2008) applauding the main actor, Fujita Makoto, for his performance as Okada. “Moonlight” writes that the film demonstrates that Japan can remember peace, while also remembering that such Japanese soldiers existed. The third highest rated review by “Yutake Eve” (2008) suggests a concern with American approval, noting the film's warm reception at the Santa Barbara International Film Festival: “Audiences were moved by one man who acted with pride and belief, as well as by the film's anti-war message.” Interestingly, almost all reviewers regarded the film as “anti-war” despite its weakening criticism of the military as an institution, focus on Japanese victimhood, and whitewashing of wartime brutality. Significantly, *Best Wishes'* approach to the “Tokyo Trial view of history” is not (yet) the dominant discourse in Japan.

Ultimately, the difference between the two films is clearest in the execution scenes. *Best Wishes'* Okada marches proudly to his death, pausing only to comment on the beauty of the moon; Shimizu has to be carried part of the way limping and terrified, hugged by an American soldier, denouncing humanity's propensity for war to the bitter end. While both Japanese films reject the American “Tokyo

Trial view of history” through victimhood in the case of Shimizu or heroism in the case of Okada, *Shellfish*’s tragic “negative hero” reveals a far more ambiguous Japanese response to the question of guilt and responsibility.

Thus, the popular narrative in Japanese tribunal films remains the victim narrative—that Japan was victimized by the war, that the imperial army was not heroic, that there are no heroes. The unambiguous heroic narrative (as seen in films like *Pride* and *Best Wishes for Tomorrow*) has not yet become the mainstream narrative as it is seen as far-right and militaristic. The ambiguous *I Want to be a Shellfish* remains far more representative of current Japanese views on militarism and nationalism.

5. Conclusions

As Ian Buruma (1994, p. 166) states, “Political trials produce politicized histories.” Recent Chinese and Japanese films reject the Other’s view of history and present their own images of the war. China’s *Tokyo Trial* is not only directed at Japanese revisionism, but also at America and the question of regional power. The “triumph” of *Tokyo Trial* is not only the punishment of Japanese crimes, but the Chinese judge’s ability to displace American and Japanese narratives through his unfaltering sense of justice. *Trial* also acknowledges the internationalization of war memory and the continued reality of American power. Establishing a narrative of the war has become increasingly important for the Chinese government both to create a cohesive sense of pan-Chinese nationalism and to strengthen strategic political claims, particularly vis-a-vis Japan and America.

Japanese films show the disparate narratives of the mainstream and the right, both of which reject the American narrative in different ways. The crying, crippled soldier victim of *Shellfish* exculpates Japanese guilt by focusing on Shimizu’s victimhood at the hands of the Japanese military, the uneven application of victor’s justice, and the unequal balance of power between Japan and the United States. Analysis of the various versions of *Shellfish* reveals a critical change—the critique of the Japanese military is weakening. Rightist films like *Pride* and *Best Wishes for Tomorrow* more boldly challenge the American narrative by rehabilitating the military leadership. Both argue for equal footing in terms of the US-Japan relationship—a “Japan That Can Say No.” The mainstream discourse continues to be steeped in an image of pacifism that is hesitant to view the military in terms of the nativist ideals of the right.

Though both Chinese and Japanese tribunal films suggest a shift away from the American-dominated narrative, the United States, as a powerful figure in regional power dynamics, is still an important ally in Chinese and Japanese performances of the past. In the wake of the “Americanization of Japanese war crimes,” the American voice is still powerful in the historical debate, and the echoes of the IMTFE and postwar Cold War order are still playing out in Pacific Rim geopolitics. Reactions to the Tokyo Trial in film, thus, demonstrate the complicated interplay of Chinese, Japanese, and American remembrance of WWII. Changing power balances and other political changes in East Asia will undoubtedly inspire future variations in these narratives.

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