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Abstract

Towards the end of the Pacific War (1941-1945), members of the Japanese Army were engaged in mortal combat with the Allied Forces. For many the outcome was fateful, and for those soldiers serving on the Pacific islands and in Southeast Asia a large number of them would not return home alive. Despite the Japanese military agency receiving orders to retrieve the bodies of those killed, remains were not recovered to send back to their bereaved. Previous studies revealed that the great majority of the funeral urns delivered to bereaved families contained nothing but a small stone or a chunk of wood.[1] Furthermore, the religious explanation given by the heads of the armed forces was unconvincing, claiming that while the soldiers' remains could not be returned home, their souls would. Consequently, it is no surprise that the families and the surviving comrades of the fallen regarded this explanation as unsatisfactory. In view of this, the bereaved began to visit the battlefields to hold memorial services for their relatives, and to re-locate and recover their remains. This article focuses on the pilgrimages made by Japanese people to key sites of former battlegrounds. I will discuss how these pilgrims regard the places and the materials associated with the fallen soldiers as harbouring the souls of the dead. Finally, I will consider the "performative" aspect of their memories. By applying this linguistic term when discussing the material, I aim to illustrate how the active characteristics of memory can instigate the living to perform acts that acknowledge the status of those who have passed away.

Keywords: performative memory, spirits of the dead, fallen soldiers, battlefield pilgrimage, ashes, statue

His spirit is another word for his memory?

In Japan, it is possible to see a number of ceremonies and memorials "to comfort the spirits" of the dead killed in natural disasters and wars. Such forms of memorialisation are not only performed in Yasukuni Shrine in Tokyo, but also in local communities, schools, and even in some private companies throughout the country. Kazuhiko Komatsu, a Japanese folklorist and anthropologist, insists that "the spirit" of the dead person is another word for "the memory" of them.[2] He argues that the act of comforting the spirits of the dead is the means whereby memories of the dead are prevented from fading away. In other words, the notion of the departed soul is a device for remembering, which has been generated by the desire to preserve such memories against the passing of time.

In this argument, the spirit of the dead is regarded not as "substantial" but as "relational". In other words, the existence of the spirit is not an issue here. Rather, the concept of the spirit is considered as an index of the relationship between the living and the dead. Such a concept is certainly very suggestive from the viewpoint of my interest in ideas surrounding "contained memory". However, I am also slightly doubtful about the assumption that memory is only concerned with the past. I would like to point out not only the preservative aspect of memory, but also its other facets related to both the present and the future.

The Battle of Guadalcanal in 1942 is generally said to be one of the decisive turning points of the Pacific War and resulted in an overwhelming number of deaths of Japanese soldiers. The system of repatriating the remains of fallen soldiers to their bereaved families, overseen by the Japanese Army, was severely limited at that time.

A document entitled, "The Memorandum of Sand of the Fallen Soldiers' Spirit", was issued in March 1943 by the colonel of the 29th Foot Regiment. This officer, who had been engaged in the battle of Guadalcanal, was responsible for sending home the sand from the beach where the soldiers had died.[3] According to the memorandum, the survivors tried to recover and repatriate the remains (i.e., dead bodies, ashes, or at least hairs), but were unsuccessful. Instead, they held funeral ceremonies at the exact place of death and gathered "the coral sand on the beautiful beach on the island". The sand, representing the dead soldiers' spirits, could be returned home to Japan, thus enabling the souls to be reunited with the parents through this material. After the ritual, the grains of sand were distributed and divided according to the number of the dead.

Japanese cultural anthropologist, Emiko Namihira, identified the unconventional nature of this practice. Regarded as the remains of the dead, the sand was put into funeral urns or boxes. The surviving comrades and the bereaved had no other choice but to deal with the sand as if it had been no less than the dead bodies.[4] This deceptive practice was later discontinued and replaced by a more systematic response when it was revealed that it was sand contained in the

urns representing the spirits of the deceased rather than the soldiers' actual ashes. The Vice-Minister of the Army discussing "the affair to repatriate the remains of the dead engaged in the Battle of Guadalcanal", said that:

The ashes would not always be sent back due to the particularity of the operation. The dead soul, however, would certainly come back home. We repatriate the spirit to the base and deliver it to the bereaved. Therefore, it is necessary for them not to think the ashes are in the funeral urns but to understand that it is the spirits that are contained there.[5]

It seems unlikely that all bereaved families were persuaded by such rhetoric, as a number of them (as well as surviving comrades) visited former battle sites and recovered remains following the war.

The development of battlefield tourism in post-war Japan

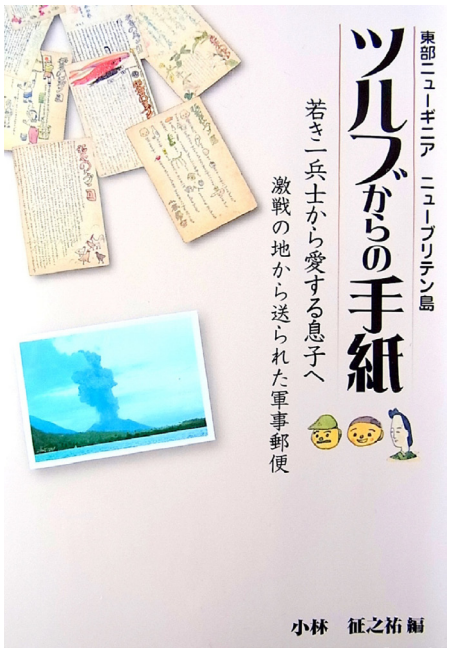
Just before Japan recovered its sovereignty in 1952, the government began preliminary research on the possibility to recover the remains on Okinawa and Iwo Jima Islands sanctioned by the United States. This action was strongly backed by the citizens' movement instigated as a consequence of an airplane crash. The airplane, en route to Hawaii in 1950, made an emergency landing on Wake Island. Its passengers, including a popular Japanese singer, Kasagi Shizuko, and a famous composer, Hattori Ryoichi, happened to see the remains of many Japanese soldiers on the island. Kasagi wrote an article in a magazine to inform the Japanese people about this situation.[6]

As a consequence of the publicity, the government carried out a three-stage plan between 1953 and 1975 to recover the remains from former battlefields. By 1964, overseas travel became popular, and one out of 1,000 Japanese citizens took trips abroad at this time. This phenomenon was enabled by the economic growth in Japan and the regional development in the locations of the former battlefields. In addition, the Japan Confederation of Promoting Recovery of Remains Organizations was established in 1972. This body liaised with individuals and groups representing bereaved families, deceased soldiers' comrades, and youth volunteers whose private activity of recovery was now eligible to receive government subsidies.

Since 1976, however, the main target of the government project has shifted to the support of pilgrimages for memorial services held by the Japan War-Bereaved Association at former battle sites.[7] In addition, there are many other tours hosted by associations of surviving comrades or religious groups. Recently, there has been an increase in individual pilgrimages by the retired children of fallen soldiers. Although it is quite difficult to grasp the overall trend of the pilgrimage phenomena, it is apparent that recovering remains is not always the pilgrim's main purpose. It might be also important for them to travel to the very place where the soldiers met their fate and to hold some personal ritual by themselves.

Pilgrim case studies

Seinosuke Kobayashi was born in 1940. His father died in 1944 in Tuluvu, the most western side of New Britain Island. After retiring from the local government office in 2001, Kobayashi decided to go to Tuluvu for his father's commemoration, taking part in the memorial tour of Eastern New Guinea in 2005. Following this experience, he compiled the postcards which his father sent to him and his family from the battlefields and published them in 2007 in a book titled *Letters from Tuluvu*.[8,9,10,11] Kobayashi overlapped what he saw there with the memory of his father's drawings which confirmed the latter's existence and presence in Tuluvu.



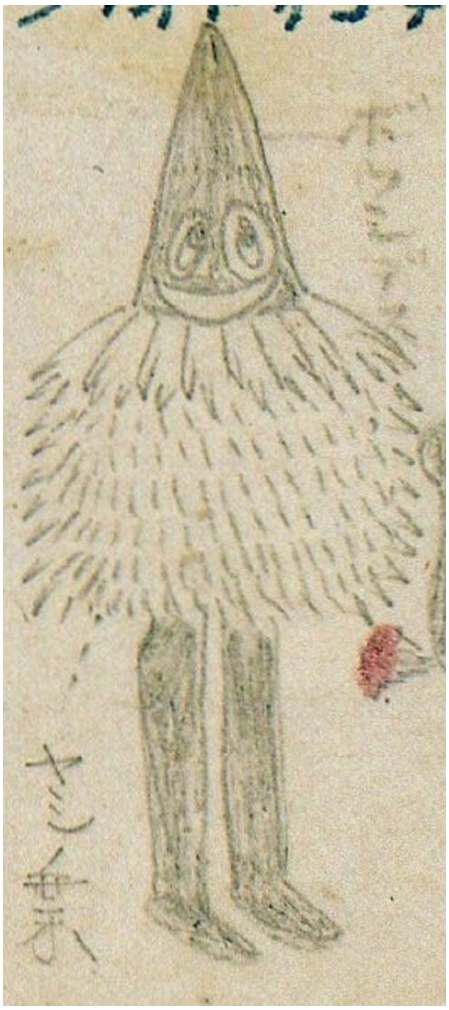


Figure 1. Front cover of Kobayashi's book, Letters from Tuluvu (top left).

Figure 2. Drawing on the postcard from Kobayashi's father in Tuluvu (right).

Figure 3. Dancers Kobayashi saw on the memorial tour of Eastern New Guinea (bottom left).

The bereaved children participating in the tour held memorial rituals for their fathers at the very places they died, or nearby if the locations were difficult to reach. They placed their fathers' pictures on the altar and in front of them dedicated flowers, fruit, snacks, or something of their favourites such as liquor and cigarettes. Kobayashi read his message as if he was directly appealing to his father. There are many cases where bereaved children say the words, "Otoh-san"

("My Dad"), for the first time in such memorial rituals. At the end of the ritual, they offered flowers to the sea and Kobayashi buried in the sand on the shoreline a piece of paper on which his father's Buddhist holy name was written. After publishing his book, he related that he began voluntary work in some elementary schools to pass on the stories about the war in which both he and his father were involved.

Another case is that of Hajime Shigematsu, born in 1923. He said to me, "I was originally born in Ethiopia and I am also good at French. I used to be a footman of His Majesty Haile Selassie."[12]

This story is not true, but an example of how he injected some lightness into the serious narrative of his war experience. Shigematsu was dispatched to Myanmar as a foot soldier during World War II. He barely managed to survive while most of his comrades died there. In the last two decades he has visited Myanmar every year. Just after his first visits he began to study carving under a professional sculptor of Buddha statues. He has already dedicated 15 self-made Burmese sandalwood Buddha statues to the temples in the former bloodiest battlefields from the sub-Himalayan Hukawng Valley in the north to Sittang River near the Malay Peninsula in the south.[13,14]

These statues are made and dedicated to the temples by Shigematsu as a memorial to his fallen comrades in the manner of Mahayana Buddhism, which is practised in East Asia, including Japan. The recipient temples, however, are of Theravada Buddhism and the people in Myanmar regard his dedication, in the context of Theravada teachings, not as a memorial but as respect for Buddha and as proof of his goodwill. Shigematsu maintains a friendship with the local people in Myanmar whenever he visits the sites, presenting them with school supplies and electronic appliances.

Figure 4. Shigematsu carving a statue.

Figure 5. Shigematsu's Buddha statues.

Although making Buddha statues seems to be very rare, there are other cases. For example, in a narrative record of the National Museum for Japanese History, a former soldier from Hokkaido went to Waleai Atoll in Yap to recover remains in 1979 and he cut a red sandalwood tree for making a Buddha statue. There he asked a sculptor to make it and dedicated it to a temple in Hokkaido.[15] The

narrative record also reveals cases of some veteran groups building schools for the local children or providing other means of support.

The performative aspect of memory

This article has addressed some memorial acts associated with battlefield pilgrimage and now I would like to reconsider the hypothesis of "the departed spirit as a device of memory" with reference to the early framework of John Austin's Speech Act Theory.[16] Austin introduced two kinds of utterances: a "constative utterance" and a "performative utterance". The first only describes some situations, like "he died in the war". On the other hand, the second contains acts in themselves (oaths, promises, or orders) such as "I pledge a sincere search for peace".

In Komatsu's argument, "Spirits as the device of memory" seems to have only the constative aspect of memory. He underscored that the spirit is the preservation of the memory of the dead; the memory here is only past-oriented. However, I propose that it also has a performative aspect to it. As we have seen, the battlefield pilgrims not only remember the memory of the dead but also perform other kinds of actions. Kobayashi and other bereaved children held the commemorative rituals on the former battlefield while Shigematsu carved Buddha statues with sandalwood found nearby and dedicated them to local temples. These acts seem to be "materialising" the memory with religious customs as well as "preserving" the memory. Such performative memory is also expressed in a second action, such as voluntary works in the cases of Kobayashi and Shigematsu.

Performative memory is therefore active memorising which is held as performance itself.[17] Memory does not relate only to the past, nor is it static. Rather, it is a dynamic phenomenon relating to present and future.

Endnotes

[1]Fujii, Tadatoshi, *Hei-tachi no Sensoh (Wars for Soldiers)*, (Tokyo: Asahi Shinbun-sha, 2000), 208. See also Yokoyama, Atsuo, "Rikugun-bochi to Ippan-bochi nai no Gunjin-bo (Tombs of Soldiers in the Army Graveyards and General Ones)," in *Tama no Ayumi (The History of Tama)*, (Tokyo: Tamashin Chi'iki Bunka-zaidan, 2005), 63-69.

[2]Komatsu, Kazuhiko, "Tamashii toiu Na no Kioku Souchi (The Memory Device Named Spirit)," in *Kami naki Jidai no Minzokugaku (Folklore in the Era without Deities)*, (Tokyo: Serika Shobo, 2002), 110-14.

[3]Shirai, Shijo, *Gatoh ni Shisu Made (Until the Last Breath on Guadalcanal Island)*, (Tokyo: Kindai Bungei-sha, 1996).

[4]Namihira, Emiko, *Nihonjin no Shi no Katachi: Dentou Girei Kara Yasukuni Made (The Japanese Forms of Death: Between Traditional Rituals and Yasukuni Shrine)*, (Tokyo: Asahi Shinbun-sha, 2004).

[5]Yokoyama, "Rikugun-bochi to Ippan-bochi nai no Gunjin-bo (Tombs of Soldiers in the Army Graveyards and General Ones)," 62.
[6]Koseisho (Japanese Ministry of Health & Welfare) ed., *Hikiage-Engo no Kiroku, Zoku (Records of Reverse Migration Relief, Sequel),* (Tokyo: Kuresu Shuppan, 2000). See also Nishimura, Akira, "Ikotsu eno Omoi, Senchi eno Omoi: Senshi-sha to Seizon-sha no Sengo (Feelings for Remains, Feelings for Battle Sites: Postwar Era for Fallen Soldiers and Survivors)," in *Kokuritsu Rekishi Minzoku Hakubutsukan Kenkyu Hokoku (Bulletin of National History of Japanese History)*, (Chiba: Kokuritsu Rekishi Minzoku Hakubutsu-kan, 2008), 147.
[7]Koseisho Shakai-Engo-kyoku Engo Gojisshunen-shi Henshu-i'in-kai (Editorial Committee of Fifty Years' History of Relief in Social Relief Office, Japanese Ministry of Health & Welfare), *Engo Gojisshunen-shi (Fifty Years' History of Relief)*, (Tokyo: Gyosei, 1997).
[8]Kobayashi, Seinosuke, *Tuluvu Kara no Tegami (Letters from Tuluvu),* (Yamaguchi: Shin-Nihon Kyoiku Tosho, 2007).
[9]Kobayashi, *Tuluvu Kara no Tegami*, front cover.
[10]Kobayashi, *Tuluvu Kara no Tegami*, 23.
[11]Captured from the movie that Kobayashi tracked by video camera (2005).
[12]Fukuoka-shi-shi Henshu-i'in-kai (Editorial Committee of Fukuoka Municipal Historiography), *Fuku no Tami (People of Happiness),* (Fukuoka: Fukuoka-shi, 2010), 133.
[13]Fukuoka-shi-shi Henshu-i'in-kai ed., *Fuku no Tami*, 133.
[14]Fukuoka-shi-shi Henshu-i'in-kai ed., *Fuku no Tami*, 133.
[15]Kokuritsu Rekishi Minzoku Hakubutsu-kan (National Museum of Japanese History), *Senso-Taiken no Kiroku to Katari ni kansuru Siryo Shusei (Collaborative Research of Personal Experiences of War, 1931-1945: A Survey of Japanese Written and Oral Records)*, (Chiba: Kokuritsu Rekishi Minzoku Hakubutsu-kan, 2004-2005), 1-4.
[16]Austin, John L, *How to Do Things with Words* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1962).
[17]In fact, performative memory also has another aspect that makes memorising people act as a historical subject toward future. I dealt with such an aspect of performative memory in another paper on the commemoration for the atomic bomb dead in Nagasaki. Nishimura, Akira, "La Performativité de la Mémoire: Quand le Future est Fondé sur la Mort de Victims (Traduit par Takizawa Meiko)," in eds. Anne Bouchy and Ikezawa Masaru, *La Mort Collective et le Politique: Constructions Mémorielles et Ritualisations* (Tokyo: Graduate School of Humanities and Sociology, The University of Tokyo, 2011).

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