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Memories of Pilots and Planes: World War II in Japanese *Manga*, 1957–1967

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Abstract

The rapidity with which Japan transformed her political and social institutions to conform with Western democratic standards after her defeat

in World War II was and remains a hotly discussed issue among historians and social commentators. Many have argued that the Japanese deliberately forgot this tragic chapter in their recent history, or chose to remember only their role as victims. This paper seeks to problematize that view by analyzing the boom in wartime stories that swept through the world of children's comics (*manga*) from the late 1950s to the late 1960s.

Interestingly, these tremendously popular works of juvenile fiction sought neither to forget the war nor to dwell on Japan's victimhood. Instead, by a variety of narrative devices, they created *triumphant* memories, telling of victory rather than defeat. I describe the plots, themes and artwork of the genre, treating them as historical documents testifying to the perceptions of World War II that were prevalent in Japan at the time. I also suggest reasons for the emergence of this distinctive narrative at this particular historical juncture, and try to shed light on the more general issue of how collective memories are formed within a complex industrial society.

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