

# The Contested Meanings of the Postwar Showa in Cinematic Reflections of Tokyo Tower

Senjo Nakai

## Abstract

**T**hrough the examination of two popular Japanese films: *Always the Sunset on the Third Street* and *Tokyo Tower: Mom and Me, and Sometimes Dad*, this study illustrates the multifaceted nature of memory about the postwar period vis-à-vis Tokyo Tower. Faced with the great deal of uncertainty about the future, the Japanese enthusiastically responded to the films. While nostalgic film *Always* idealizes the postwar period, *Tokyo Tower* offers a counter- narrative against the simplification and idealization of the postwar period. By examining the narratives of these films, it becomes clear that an issue of identify is crucial to cultural memory of the postwar period.

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## A Search for Historical Identity in the Postwar Japan

Every city has its own landmark. Paris has the Eiffel Tower while New York has the Statue of Liberty. Not only do these architectures symbolize the cities but also allow people to contact with the past of which they have no firsthand experience. Undoubtedly Tokyo Tower is such an iconic construction for Japanese people. This 333 meter high tower was built as the tallest freestanding tower in the world in 1958 in order to transmit radio and television signals for the Kantō region.<sup>1</sup> (For the location of Tokyo Tower, see Map 1)

Apart from being a communications tower, Tokyo Tower is one of the most prolific tourist spots in Tokyo. Every year around three million visitors visit the tower.<sup>2</sup> Not only has Tokyo Tower been visited by many Japanese but also been talked about in relation to the history of Tokyo, and by extension that of the postwar Japan. In the early 1945, around a half of the capital was reduced to ashes along with more than 100,000 residents due to bombings by American bomber airplanes.

Gone with the prewar prosperity of the capital was Japan's dual quest to catch up with the technologically advanced and militarily powerful West and to promote its own brand of modernism with a nationalistic twist (*wakon yōsai*, or adopting western technology but remaining Japanese in spirit). In the increasingly militarized Japan during the period of the mid-1930s to the end of the war, the imperial historiography (*kōkokushikan*) dominated the field of historical studies whereas other schools of historical studies were restricted or even banned.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, the 1945 defeat was a severe blow to Japanese people's sense of history.

When over 50 years of the indoctrination was abruptly terminated, Japanese people found themselves without historical identity. It is possible to postulate that the postwar period was an extensive search for an alternative history of the nation.

During the first decade of the postwar period, the Japanese society was politically divided due to the international politics of the period. However, once positioning itself as a western capitalist ally, the postwar Japan embarked upon recovery from the devastating war defeat. Under such a circumstance, the construction of Tokyo Tower began in the capital. When Tokyo Tower was finally completed in 1958, it was a visible symbol of recovery of the country from the war. Japanese people's eyes were set for the future because they were not allowed to return the ages of the imperialism.

From the 1960s on, the Japanese economy rapidly grew, and as early as in 1968, Japan became the second largest economic power among capitalist countries. In the early 1970s, both the rightist and leftist movements lost mass appeal as a means of social change. A number of Japanese scholars point out that it was during this period that affluence took the centre stage of the public concern.

Due to the enormous economic success, the postwar period is often narrated in relation to economic issues, such as growth in GDP and economic policies. Thus, the void in the historical identity was quickly filled with positive indicators of the economic development. Until the end of the 1980s, the growing self confidence in Japanese people left very little room for contemplating upon the postwar outside the context of economic development.

However, the end of the economic growth came at the height of Japan's financial prosperity in 1989. The sudden downturn of the economy triggered the collapse of employment system, which gave the Japanese a sense of security. The effect of the economic crisis spilled out to the political and social arenas. Thus, what Ann Allison calls "a time of national anxiety" started:

Unemployment and layoffs, once unheard of, rose dramatically during this period. So did suicides, many committed as I can attest from my own stay in Tokyo by people jumping in front of trains; 228 deaths were reported this way in eastern Japan alone in 1998, when the national suicide rate jumped 26 percent. The premise of an earlier age the guarantee of lifetime security and employment for those who succeed at school (gakureki shakai, literally educational pedigree society") and are loyal and hardworking at their jobs (kigyo shakai) had been swiftly destabilized.....<sup>4</sup>

The euphoria of the 1980s rapidly receded, and in turn, a more somber and introspective mood took over the country. In the popular culture, cartoonist Naoki Yamamoto started penning Red, a graphic novel about the postwar leftist movement in 2007.<sup>5</sup> Yamamoto chronicles a series of events between 1969 and 1972, which eventually led to the self destruction of the Red Army. Satirical animation film Crayon Shinchan The Storm Called: The Adult Empire Strikes Back<sup>6</sup> revolves around the fictional event called the "Twentieth Century Expo", which resembles the Japan World Exposition in 1970.<sup>7</sup> The most popular is NHK's documentary series Project X. This series, aired from 2000 to 2005, recounts the Showa period through narratives of unsung heroes and heroines. Essayist Natsuo

Sekikawa comments that Project X evokes "a deep sense of nostalgia as well as a kind of regret" among the postwar babyboomers because it portrays "what the contemporary Japanese have lost, or what they believe that they have lost".<sup>8</sup>

The upsurge of the public interest in the postwar may simply be dismissed as a form of cultural consumption of the past for entertainment. However, cultural anthropologist Takeo Funebiki observes otherwise. The widespread nostalgia of the postwar period in recent years, he argues, indicates the Japanese society's search for identity:

Right now, the Japanese, coming to the third pivotal point in history, is feeling an increasingly intense sense of anxiety. That is the Meiji Restoration, the defeat of the "Greater East Asia War", and the current one. Facing the previous two events, the state was able to show the ways [to overcome the challenges] under the slogans of Enrich the country, develop the military might [fukoku kyōhē] and economic recovery. The country succeeded [in achieving them] in a relatively short period of time although there were downsides. At this time, the people have a shared view that they are experiencing structural changes, which started with "the bust of the bubble economy/the defeat of the money war [manē haisen]". In the midst of the uncertainty, Japan is in search of a new direction.<sup>9</sup> [my translation]

The growing interest in the postwar period, popularly dubbed as "the Shōwa nostalgia", can be regarded as a collective expression of anxiety about historical identity of the Japanese; from where they come, why they are in the current historical milieu, and more importantly, where they are heading. The

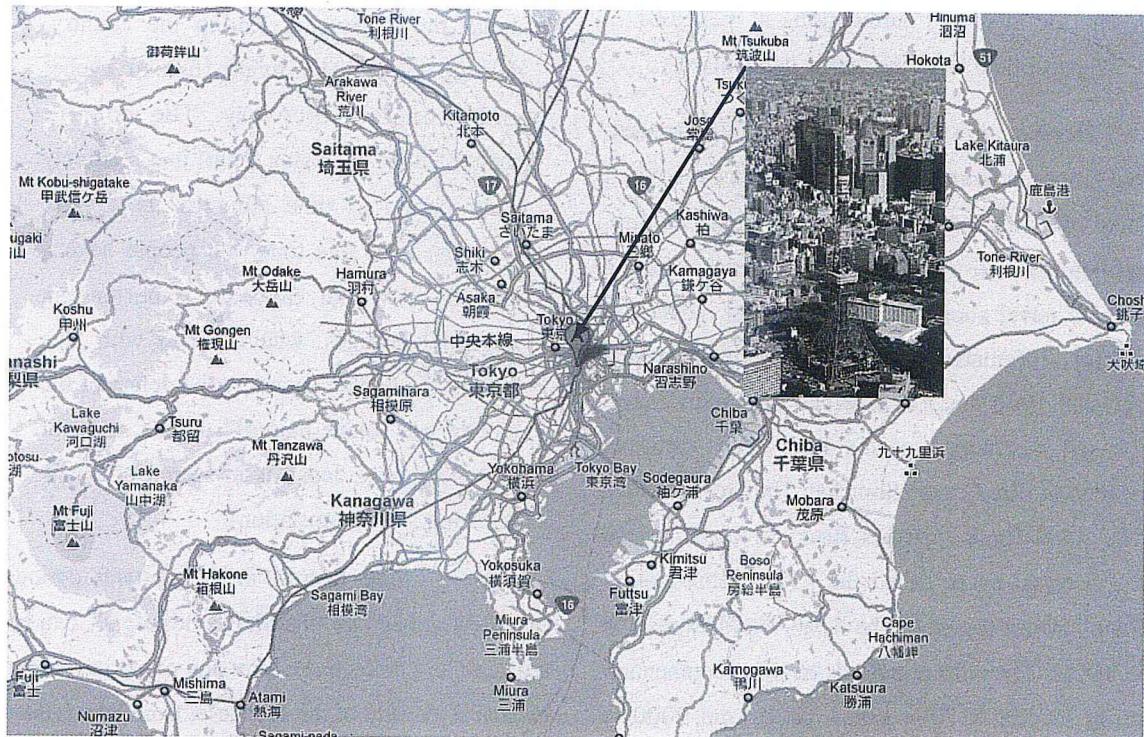
Japanese are now trying to reflect upon the past in relation with the present.

This article examines the popular representations of Tokyo Tower in two recent films: Always the Sunset on the Third Street<sup>10</sup> [hereafter referred to as Always] and Tokyo Tower: Mom and Me, and Sometimes Dad<sup>11</sup> [hereafter referred to as Tokyo Tower] Both films, released in the midst of enormous uncertainty about the future of the Japanese society, feature Tokyo Tower as a symbol of the postwar era. This study is aimed at elucidating how the postwar period is remembered.

Today, we can see the new tower in Tokyo. The new Tokyo Tower or Sky Tree has reached a

soaring height of 634 meters, and replaced the old tower from the tallest architecture in Japan. The old tower is not tall enough to launch full digital broadcasting services, which started in 2011.<sup>12</sup> Sky Tree, effectively making the 53 year old tower redundant, overshadows the future of the older tower.

There are a considerable number of popular works that feature Tokyo Tower, such as essays, dramas and popular songs. However, few academic works examined the significance of Tokyo Tower in the modern history. It is timely to examine how the crucial part of the Japanese history is remembered through the media representations of Tokyo Tower, which are in fact sites of ongoing contestation of what the postwar period was like.



Map 1: The location of Tokyo Tower (Reproduced from Google Map)

## Cultural Memory

In the studies of cultural memory, history is on a par with other modes of referring to the past, such as myth, fantasies and personal trauma stories. In the eyes of cultural historians, such as Maurice Halbwachs and Pierre Nora, history is regarded as “abstract, totalizing, and “dead” while memory is “particular, meaningful, and lived”. Other scholars go even further to claim that history is just “another mode of cultural memory, and historiography its specific medium”.<sup>13</sup>

Cultural memory can be divided into two types according to function. The first type is called “the working memory”, which presents “a narrow selection of...historic key events in a timeless framework”.<sup>14</sup> It is closely scrutinized by experts, circulated through education and mass media, and across the generations, and eventually adopted by a great number of people. The working memory can sometimes be canonized as a dominant way of understanding the past, e.g. national history. Therefore, it may serve to reinforce the current social order as Aleida Assmann elucidates as follows:

Nation-states produce narrative versions of their past which are taught, embraced, and referred to as their collective autobiography. National history is taught via history textbooks, which have been appropriately termed “weapons of mass instruction” (Charles Ingrao). National history is also presented in the public arena in the form of monuments and commemoration dates. To participate in a national memory is to know the key events of the nation’s history, to embrace its symbols, and connect to its festive dates.<sup>15</sup>

While the working memory serves to legitimize a certain memory as more authentic than others, “the reference memory” is “de-contextualized and disconnected from their former frames which had authorized them or determined their meaning”.<sup>16</sup> Nonetheless, the reference memory is deemed “the basis of what can be said in the future about the present when it will have become the past.”<sup>17</sup> Because the reference memory is open to new contexts and new interpretations, it can be used to counterbalance the effect of the working memory.

Through interplays of the two forms of cultural memory, the past can be understood, shared, examined, and even modified. Cultural memory differs from orthodox views of history in that it emphasizes transience and diversity in the act of remembering:

This approach proceeds from the basic insight that the past is not given, but must instead continually be re-constructed and re-presented. Thus, our memories (individual and collective) of past events can vary to a great degree. This holds true not only for what is remembered (facts, data), but also for how it is remembered, that is, for the quality and meaning the past assumes.<sup>18</sup>

Take for example the repeated dramatization of the battle of the Alamo. This battle has been repeatedly dramatized in the American media, such as Disney’s television drama series Davy Crockett (1954-1955), The Alamo<sup>19</sup> and the 2004 remake of the Alamo.<sup>20</sup> In these works, the battle is depicted as an act of defending freedom. However, for the Mexican, it is considered as the precursor to a loss of the Mexican American War, and the

following loss of more than a half of their territory to America. The amorphous meanings of the Alamo are reduced to a cohesive tale of honorable sacrifice, which occupies a crucial part in the national history of America. In addition, the mediated memory of the Alamo serves to nurture a sense of cultural belonging among contemporary Americans.

As for research on the relationship between the modern media and cultural memory in the Japanese society, Tessa Morris-Suzuki's study focuses on the totalizing effects of the popular media on collective memories, i.e. novels, photography, movies, comics, and multimedia.<sup>21</sup> She argues that Japanese popular media, particularly comics, which is to a varying extent under corporate and governmental control, is an apparatus of promoting a national history.<sup>22</sup> In turn, she calls for "an open-ended and evolving relationship with past events and people", which she calls "historical truthfulness".

It is also noteworthy that cultural memory can be transmitted via architecture from generation to generation. One of most prolific examples is the Eiffel Tower. Built in 1889 as the monument of the Exposition Universelle de Paris, it was designed to show the artistic and technological supremacy of the 19<sup>th</sup> century France. Although the initial public reception was negative, this steel tower later came to symbolize the history of French civilization, that is, "a broad, undifferentiated history, or the History of France, which spans from the Monarchy to the Empire, from the Invalides to the Arc de Triomphe."<sup>23</sup>

According to the official plan, Tokyo Tower, unlike the French twin, was initially designed to be a communications tower. However, it has

gradually been incorporated into collective memories about the postwar period. Whenever people are "recalling, iterating, reading, commenting, criticizing, discussing what was deposited in the remote or recent past" through mediated and unmediated communication, they in fact participate in meaning production of the past.<sup>24</sup> The mere sight of Tokyo Tower enables future generations to experience the by-gone past, which had been taken place long before they were born.<sup>25</sup> In this sense, Tokyo Tower offers a fertile field of historical inquiry:

### **Debates on the Definitions of the Postwar Period**

There is still no agreement on when and how the postwar period ended. The earliest possible point of the end of the postwar is when the Allied Power's occupation was officially over, and Japan regained its sovereignty in 1952. In the middle of the 1950s, the Japanese economy returned to the prewar level. Two years earlier than the completion of Tokyo Tower, the Japanese government had declared that "It is no longer postwar".<sup>26</sup> This official statement signaled the end of the postwar recovery, as well as the beginning of a new era, which was heralded by the rapid pace of economic growth and the accompanying optimism in the future. As for the political indicators, the new political formation "1955 year system" was established in 1955 under the hegemony of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), which continued until 1993. In 1956, the final group of Japanese POWs returned from Siberia.<sup>27</sup> If the term "postwar" is defined purely by political and economic indicators, many would agree that it ended by the late 1950s.

However, Japanese sociologist Munesuke Mita points out at the multifaceted meanings of the term

postwar, emphasizing the importance of understanding the postwar period beyond the economic and political terms.<sup>28</sup> He divides the postwar period into three phases: the period of “the ideal” (1945-1960), that of “dreams” (1960-the early 1970s), and that of “fiction” (the late 1970s-). These phases roughly correspond to the postwar economic development: the pre-rapid economic growth period, the rapid economic growth period, and the post rapid economic growth period.

During the period of the ideal, Mita argues that the people could imagine the ideal future. The people could imagine an ideal state, such as material prosperity as portrayed in Hollywood films and social equity which Marxism promised to achieve. Although there was a wide gap between the ideal and the lived realities, the healthy tension existed in the society.

During the period of dreams, the people were able to fulfill their dreams. From the 1960 to the early 1970s, Japan experienced a period of rapid economic development. From the late 1950s on, the manufacturing and construction industries boomed in Tokyo and the surrounding areas. Young laborers migrated from rural areas to Tokyo, especially from the northeastern region.<sup>29</sup> Their aim was to fulfill their dreams in the capital. This trend of labor migration continued until the mid-1960s. Upon arrival, migrant workers could not have missed the giant steel tower.

Under the hegemony of the LDP, the Japanese society went through a radical economic and social transformation. However, there were people who could not enjoy the fruits of the prosperity. Norio Nagayama was one of such migrant workers, who came to Tokyo to flee rock bottom poverty in

northern town Morioka, Aomori Prefecture. However, he was soon disillusioned with life in the capital. His struggle eventually drove him to a failed attempt to sneak in a U.S. navy base with hope of smuggling himself out of the country. In 1968, after visiting Tokyo Tower, Nagayama sneaked into the garden of an attractive hotel, which is located right beside the tower. Stopped by a security, Nagayama fatally shot him, and fled. He went on to kill three more while fleeing around the country. This incident shocked the country not only because of his brutality but also because of his harsh life in the middle of prosperity. Even in Nagayama’s brutal crimes, Mita recognizes the trace of the ideal, which Nagayama failed to achieve, and eventually drove him to crimes.

A number of Japanese scholars argue that not until this period did affluence take the centre stage of the public concern. The leftist movement became diversified after the 1960s: Leftist students were radicalized due to their frustration with the Japanese Communist Party whereas civil society movements emerged to pursue various issues, such as the Vietnam War, the construction of Narita Airport, health problems caused by pollution, and U.S. military bases in the country. Despite frequent occurrences of street demonstrations, the Japanese came to embrace an increasingly suburbanized lifestyle from the late 1960s on rather than drastic social changes through political actions.<sup>30</sup> Shunya Yoshimi describes as follows:

The central concern of the majority of the people was affluence, and the world, which was presented in variety shows and home dramas, and symbolized as new

consumer goods and television sets. The average Japanese took political conflicts and revolutions in other Asian countries as anything but increasingly distant events. After the 60s, no “revolution” could be taken place in Japan.....<sup>31</sup>

In 1973, Japan faced the global oil crisis. Although the economic development temporarily came to halt, the country managed to minimize the impact of the oil shocks by technological development. Even faced with the second oil crisis in 1979, Japan continued to grow at a slower but steady pace. By then, Japan was no longer a middle income country. Symbols of progress, such as technology, consumer goods, and socialism, were completely consumed. As a result, the Japanese people lost a healthy tension between the ideal and the lived realities, which used to orient the people to future. The period of “fiction” in Mita’s term began with the disappearance of the collective goals.

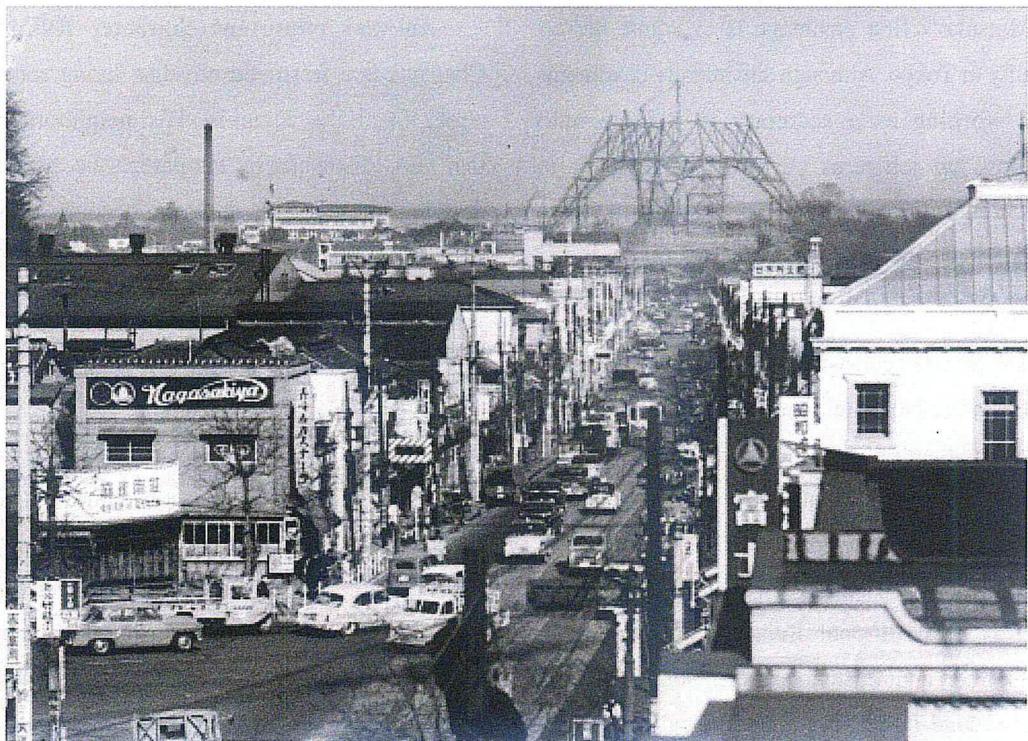
Novelist Ryu Murakami, in his review of a shortlisted novel for the 128<sup>th</sup> Akutagawa Award, describes the inherent condition of the contemporary society:

However, Yellow does not even have [as a theme] the modern notion of identity

at all. When they [the author and her contemporaries] were born, modernization had been completed; they have no recollection of the previous times, and the powerful force of “seken [intersubjectivity]” was long gone. In such a society where the people are having difficulties in maintaining a sense of life, their identity and social role are diminishing to the level which they become uncertain whether there really are alive or they even exist.<sup>32</sup> [my translation]

Even with the hands of novelists, describing the current society is a challenging task. Murakami’s account certainly reflects a sense of fictionality. At present, there are few shared goals, nor moral authorities.

When the 1990s began with the end of the “bubble economy”, the Japanese people started examining the past in a more self reflexive manner. The following 2000s corresponded to massive retirement of postwar baby boomers. They amounted to 5.21 million or 8 percent of the entire labor force in 2004.<sup>33</sup> The massive retirement is expected to have a far reaching impact on not only the economy, but also how the postwar period is remembered. The recent surge of the Shōwa nostalgia is not a coincidence.



A picture of Tokyo Tower in the making, taken from the Mita Street in January, 1958.

The Mainichi Shimbun. <http://showa.mainichi.jp/photo/2008/12/post-1b55-8.html>

### A Nostalgic Look at the Postwar Period: Always the Sunset on the Third Street

The cinematic version of *Always*, based on Ryōhē Saigan's comic series *The Sunset on the Third Street*,<sup>34</sup> revolves around two families: the Suzukis and the Chagawas, on the imaginary alley in the 1958 Tokyo. From the clamped street in the downtown, the residents look up the construction of Tokyo Tower. In 1958, Japan was just one of many middle income countries. Most families in the film are depicted as far from being affluent. They have very little but a hope of a better future.

Overall, the film assembles familiar images from the late 1950s into a narrative of hope and progress. The opening scene shows a group of young students in uniform on a train to Tokyo. The

students, excited about whatever they see through the windows, are talking about their dreams. This scene depicts "shūdan shūshoku" or mass labor migration from rural areas to major cities where the booming industry guaranteed better cash income than farming. During the late 1950s and the 1960s, young migrant workers, dubbed as "golden eggs", were valued by employers for being cheap and durable labor.

Mutsuko Hoshino is one of such school graduates from the poverty stricken Northern village. In order to reduce economic burden at home, Mutsuko's parents have to let her go alone for work in the capital city. Gradually, it becomes clear that Mutsuko secretly feels abandoned by her family, and that is why she refuses to return home even for the New Year holidays.

Mutsuko's first challenge is to adjust herself to reality in Tokyo. Although she initially daydreams about working as a secretary in a large auto company, her job turns out to be a mechanic in family run auto repair shop Suzuki Auto. Despite her initial disappointment, Mutsuko starts living in Tokyo with support of the Suzukis.

The Suzukis consists of hot tempered but good hearted father Norifumi, caring house wife mother Tomoe and their only son Ippei. They live a modest life just as other residents on the third street do. The family's tiny auto repair shop has the traditional entrance (doma) used as a workshop, an adjunct chanoma or traditional living/dinning room on the first floor, and Mutsuko and their son's bedrooms on the second floor. This is the typical house plan of Japanese homes in major cities during that period. There was little physical and psychological separation between work and life among family members. This was a typical life style in Tokyo before the urban population moved out of the overcrowded city to newly built suburban "bed towns", where families interact much less often.

Despite the ubiquity of simple and modest lifestyle on the street, Always captures the subtle but steady expansion of consumerism, which is symbolized in introduction of new consumer goods to the households, such as a black and white television, an electronic refrigerator, and Coca Cola.

One of the most memorable scenes in the film is that the people on the street gather at the Suzukis to watch a professional wrestling match on a newly purchased television set. The audience, dressed in their Sunday clothes, enjoyed every move of wrestlers on television. This scene indicates that the people's memories are progressively mediated by the mass media.

Another important character Ryūnosuke Chagawa is a frustrated novelist, living across the street from the Suzukis. His neighbors rumor that he is disowned by his parents because of his decision to pursue his dream to become a novelist after graduating from prestigious University of Tokyo. While he grudgingly runs a candy store to make ends meet, he contributes stories to a children's magazine, and dreams about someday winning a prestigious literary award.

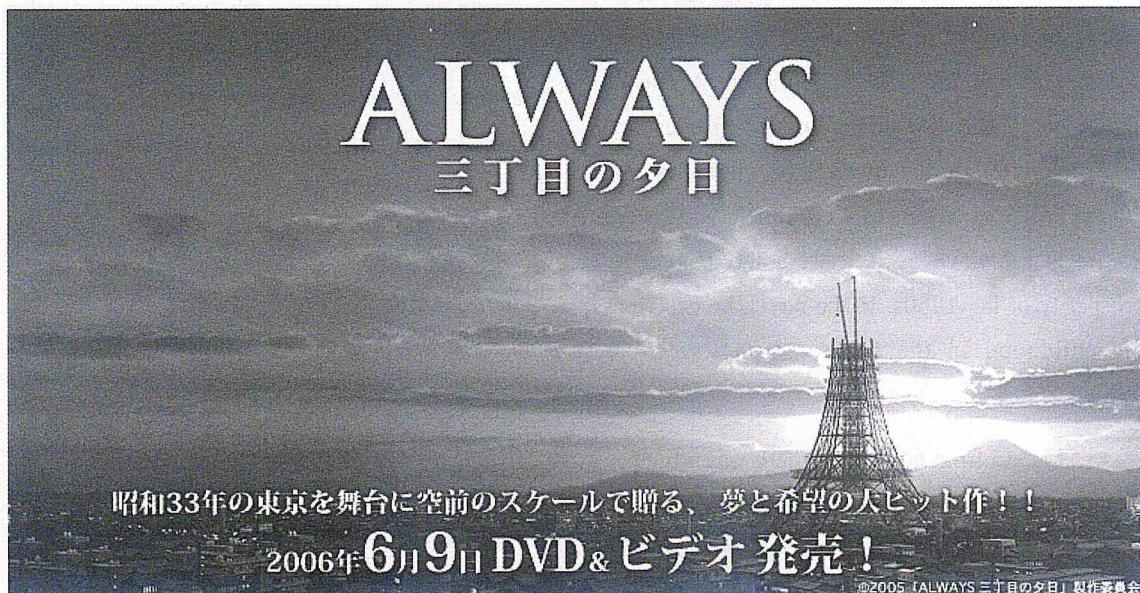
One day, Ryūnosuke meet beautiful bar hostess Hiromi. She successfully persuades him to look after orphan boy Junnosuke. Despite his initial reluctance, Ryūnosuke comes to love the boy after learning that he is an avid fan of Ryūnosuke's novels. Ryūnosuke secretly starts dreaming about making a family with Hiromi and Junnosuke. However, indebted Hiromi has to leave Ryūnosuke to work as a dancer. Left alone with Junnosuke, Ryūnosuke has nothing but the boy.

To add insult to injury, Junnosuke's biological father Yasunari Kawabuchi, who is a successful entrepreneur, comes forward to take him under his custody. When wealthy but haughty Yasunari promises Ryūnosuke to give the boy "a respectable life", Ryūnosuke has to accept Yasunari's offer. But the boy eventually comes back to him at his own will.

The final scene of the film is designed to crystallize the idealized images of the period and accompanying emotions shared by the people. Each character looks up Tokyo Tower against the beautiful sunset. Despite mounting hardship in life, the people cannot be helped but to dream about a better future. This film successfully emulated "dreams and hopes" of the people by skillfully combining the construction of the tower with the rapid development of Tokyo.<sup>35</sup>

Between 1990 and 1991, the animated version of Always was on air as a television series. However, the program was cancelled after less than six months. However, the film version, released in 2007, achieved a success in Japan. Not to

mention winning most of the 31<sup>st</sup> Japanese Academy Awards, then Prime Minister Shinzō Abe referred to the film in his book *Toward a Beautiful Nation*.



Always The Sunset on the Third Street's poster.

### **Mourning the Postwar Showa: Tokyo Tower: Mom and Me, and Sometimes Dad**

In 2005, illustrator Masaya Nakagawa (1963-) or better known in his pseudonym Lily Franky published autobiographical novel *Tokyo Tower*. Although this best selling novel<sup>36</sup> gave rise to a number of adaptations; television dramas, a stage play and later a film in 2007<sup>37</sup>, this study examines the film, along with the novel for additional information, in order to identify another type of memory of the postwar period.

Tokyo Tower depicts the chronicle of Masaya's family, which spans from the 1960s to the present. In the film, Tokyo is not portrayed as an ideal

place for anybody. He describes that many of new comers, including himself, feel consumed, rejected and yet stranded in the capital. The film starts with his last memory of his parents being together: After a violent fight with the drunken father, she moves back with Masaya to her home town Chikuhō in the southern island of Kyūshū.

For Masaya, the mother is a sole provider of comfort and security while his father is depicted as a loving but erratic figure. After his parents' separation, Masaya only occasionally visits his father in another regional town. Meanwhile, his mother works ceaselessly at a small diner for her son's education.

The 1960s is often dubbed as the “Golden Age” of Japan. Japan’s GDP grew at around 10 percent per year. However, Masaya’s early life in Chikuhō presents a stark contrast with the uplifting mood depicted in *Always*. Chikuhō once had been the leading coal mining area. However, due to the shift in energy source from coal to oil resulted in a decline of the coal mining industry during the 1950s. Although Masaya’s childhood is filled with humorous episodes and fond memories of his mother, he confesses that “everything in sight looked dull”.<sup>38</sup> Masaya portrayed the town as if it were left behind by prosperity of the 1960s. In the novel, he describes his childhood in the smoke stained town as follows:

I heard from adults that there was a time when things were full of life and spirit; when home was once filled with voices of children and the fresh scent of cooked rice. It might really have been there, but as a teenager I could not imagine such sights.<sup>39</sup>

Just as his friends move out of the town, he moves to another town Beppu to enroll in a high school. After graduation, he managed to enter an art college in Tokyo. He was hoping that “something [in his life] will change if he goes to Tokyo”.<sup>40</sup> In his eyes, Tokyo Tower “stands at the centers of Tokyo, Japan and our longings”.<sup>41</sup> Again, Tokyo Tower appears to symbolize what the Japanese of that time dream of.

Masaya manages to settle down in Tokyo thanks to his mother’s selfless effort. However, he soon becomes disillusioned with life in Tokyo. He goes to a Mahjong parlor instead of the college,

and becomes indebted. Now he compares the capital city to “a vacuum cleaner” and “a garbage pit”.<sup>42</sup> Nonetheless, he has no choice but to live on in Tokyo.

Finally, the turning point comes in Masaya’s life when he learns that his mother has cancer. Learning that she lost a job because of regular treatment, he invites her to live with him in Tokyo. The very first thing after the mother’s arrival is to stop by at Tokyo Tower, and promise going up the tower sometime soon.

For seven years after that, his mother has a relapse of cancer. She is admitted to a hospital near Tokyo Tower. After fighting with severe side effects of chemotherapy, she passes away without fulfilling her dream of going up Tokyo Tower.

At the final scene, Masaya for the first time goes up to the observatory of Tokyo Tower with his mother’s ashes in his arms. Looking at numerous buildings below, he describes Tokyo as “a giant graveyard” for those who came to the city with excitement and dreams.<sup>43</sup>

Tokyo Tower’s overall tone is comical as is the case with Masaya’s other works. However, this story deals with much more somber issues than any of his previous works, such as familial problems, the declining coal mining town, disillusion, and most of all, the death of his loved mother. Tokyo Tower offers an insight into the memory of people who were geographically and economically marginalized even at the height of postwar prosperity. Therefore, Tokyo Tower is not depicted as a straightforward symbol of postwar prosperity; It is a site for mourning and remembering the losers as well.



A hospital scene from Tokyo Tower: Mom and Me, and Sometimes Dad

### Representing the Postwar Period through Tokyo Tower

The recovery from the war started in Tokyo much ahead of other parts of Japan. For more than a half century, Tokyo attracted people from all over the country as the center of business, education, culture and politics while the Tower, standing silently in the smog stained sky, overlooked the rapid transformation of the capital. Tokyo Tower is supposed to be a symbol of hope in the future as eloquently described in Always. However, it can also be a symbol of loss for others as it is compared in Tokyo Tower to a giant tombstone for those who lost their dreams. Although both films associate the tower with the postwar period, each of them assigns a different meaning to the tower.

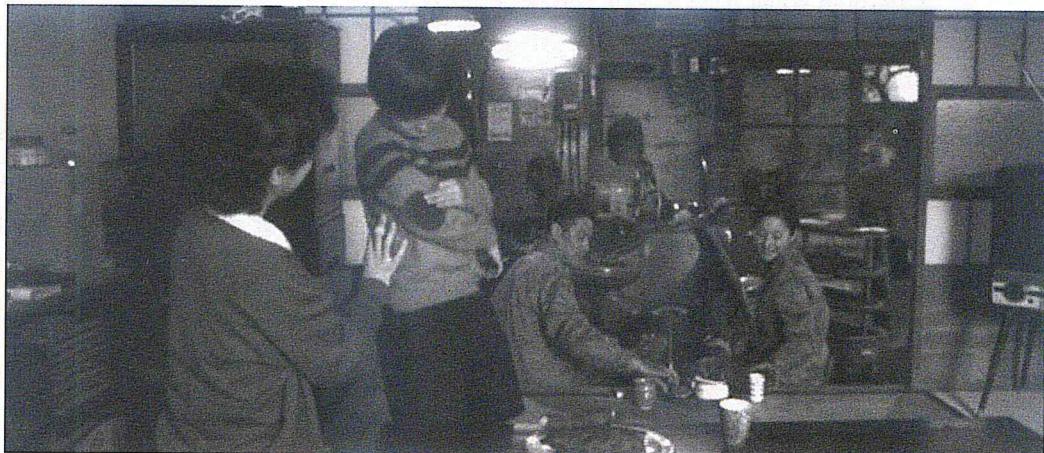
Always portrays the Third Street as the microcosm of the postwar Japan in an idealistic fashion. The street is portrayed as a site of

meaningful communication where individuals are mutually recognized as someone significant. In particular, home is portrayed as the heart of social cohesion.

Take the Suzukis' home for example. Because there is no barrier between the workshop and the living/dining room, the family constantly moves back and forth between work and private life, and constantly interacts with others. In addition, visibility of labor, both domestic and occupational, provides a necessary context where each individual plays a social role in a more consistent way than today. For example, Norifumi is often portrayed as working in jumpsuit in the workshop, or handling crucial familial matters as the head of the family. Little separation of work from life enables Norifumi to act as the patriarch of the Suzukis in many occasions. It is popularly believed that households were the basic economic and social unit of the society at that time.

Always' portrayals of what is believed to have lost from Japan gives rise to a sense of nostalgia; corner shops, playing children on the street, the elderly sitting in front of the house for evening breeze, having dinner with family, and most of all, meaningful communication with family and neighbors. It is a stark contrast with today's convenience stores where the clerks are supposed to act in an impersonal manner. To the dankai generation, who lived through this period, such representations of the period must be appealing.

However, after the construction of Tokyo Tower, such social environment started disappearing from the society. Instead, the mass media, such as radio, films and television started playing a crucial role in forming cultural memory. In 1958, the number of television sets exceeded one million although they were still luxury to the majority of the Japanese.<sup>44</sup> Attractive images of the postwar recovery in Tokyo were disseminated on radio and television throughout the country. Tokyo Tower, which was supposed to enhance human communication, ironically replaced intimate interactions with mediated and impersonal ones.



A view from the Suzukis' chanoma (living/dinning room) toward the workshop

### An Alternative Memory of the Postwar Period

As any forms of memory, including cinematic representations, are by no means neutral and value free. Remembering the past entails active efforts of choosing which event counts, and whose memory matters. Therefore, the past remains partial and biased no matter how thorough investigation may be.

Always serves to disseminate far beyond the capital such a local memory of the postwar period that is limited geographically and demographically. There are criticisms that Always oversimplifies the complexity of the period. In fact, the transition of the Japanese society from a war torn country to a highly industrialized country was far from being smooth and uniform as animator Hayao Miyazaki attested in a press conference with the Foreign Correspondents' Club of Japan:

...there are people who feel nostalgic about the 30s of the Showa Period that's the period between 1955 and 1965. People have the delusion that things were good in those days, yet actually, it was a very unhappy period... I've come to realize now that, for us, paradise is memories of our childhood. In those days, we were protected by our parents and were innocently unaware of the many problems around us.... (cited in Hadfield 2008)<sup>45</sup>

In fact, Miyazaki's critique is supported by statistical date, ranging from average incomes to crime rates, that clearly indicates that the Japanese society today is far more improved than in the 1950s and the 1960s. Therefore, a sense of loss, which is a vital feature of the Showa nostalgia, cannot be explained by the recent economic downfall or the political instability alone.

Tokyo Tower is based upon the protagonist's personal memory of the postwar period, narrated from the margin of the Japanese society. It shows that there were people who were alienated from the postwar prosperity. Tokyo Tower gives a historical space to those who are erased from Always, or are used as the mere backdrop of the prosperity. Their lived experiences are not easily incorporated into a cohesive narrative of the idealized past.

## Conclusion

The current study suggests that both Always and Tokyo Tower portray Tokyo Tower as a potent symbol of the postwar transformation of the Japanese society. However, the same tower signifies considerably different meanings in these

films. In Always, Tokyo Tower is portrayed as a symbol of hope and progress. Such a representation of the tower serves to reinforce the idealized view of the postwar Japan, which is believed better than the present. On the other hand, Tokyo Tower provides a rather different view of the postwar period. Its assessment of the period is much more ambiguous.

Always recreates the imagined moment of shared hope, as clearly depicted in the final scene. The people on the Third Street are still struggling with hardship, which is represented as war trauma or poverty. However, hardship is not portrayed as something negative in this film; it is narrated as a vital source of hope that enables the people to imagine a better future. Always assembles a number of clichéd images of the late 1950s, including Tokyo Tower, into a cohesive narrative of hope and progress. Unquestionably Always is a very entertaining film with which many can personally connect with themselves.

However, such portrayal is possible only if scrutiny into conflicts and sacrifices for the rapid development is suspended. The costs of the postwar must be downplayed as the background of the prosperity. In addition, a subtle political message is apparent in the film. It is articulated in the final scene by the voiceover "The sunset always will be beautiful tomorrow, the day after tomorrow and even 50 years later". Such a political message attracted then Prime Minister Shinzō Abe, who tried to incorporate the film into his political manifesto.<sup>46</sup>

Another film Tokyo Tower, in contrast, recounts the past from the eyes of a geographically and economically marginalized family. They failed to

become a part of the postwar prosperity which the tower eloquently symbolizes. Inevitably the tone of the film is more poignant than nostalgic. It is a telling comparison that this film makes a telling comparison of the tower to a giant tombstone for the bygone period and the people. The film thus serves to counterbalance the totalizing effect of *Always*.

Although the two films offer remarkably different views of Tokyo Tower, and by extension those of the postwar period, they still share a sense of urgency about reflecting upon the past. Although the Japanese society still maintains a considerable level of social cohesion, political stability and economic resilience, a sense of loss is widespread in the society. The recent surge of the Showa nostalgia may be a sign of collective efforts to reassess their historical identities.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The construction of Tokyo Tower was initiated by entrepreneur Hisakichi Maeda (the founder of the Sankei Shimbun), and Tachū Naitō, a renowned architect and engineer, designed the tower.

<sup>2</sup> “Tokyo Tower Have Had 160 Million Visitors [Tokyo tawā raikyakusha ichiman rokusenmannin tassei].” Sankei Shimbun Online. 16 October 2009. Web. <http://sankei.jp.msn.com/region/kanto/tokyo/091016/tky0910161811019-n1.htm>. 20 September, 2010.

<sup>3</sup> After the Mēji Restoration, the Ministry of Education was established in 1871, and the compulsory education system was imposed in 1879. In 1880, the Imperial Rescript on Education (kyōikuchokugo) was issued to ensure the supreme position of the emperors. Since then on, national history was taught to cultivate a sense of belonging or collective identity in the society. During the Mēji period, the empirical study of history, first introduced by western scholars, such as Rudwig Riess (1861-1928) and Edward S. Morse (1838-1925) stressed the importance of documents and archaeological evidence. In response to the rapid modernization of the society under the Mēji government, Marx’s historical materialism was introduced to Japan. It had a profound impact onto the social movements, and academia. However, after a brief period of academic freedom between the Taisho period and the first two decades of the Showa period, the government’s interference in historical studies intensified. Sōkichi Tsuda’s critical analysis of ancient historiographies, for example, was banned in 1940.

<sup>4</sup> **Millennial Monsters: Japanese Toys and the Global Imagination.** Barkley and Los Angels, CA: University of California Press. 2006. 74-5.

<sup>5</sup> The comic has been serialized in bi-weekly comic magazine *Evening*.

<sup>6</sup> Dir. Hara, Kēchi. Tōhō, 2001. Film. This story pokes fun at the Shōwa nostalgia by depicting the adults preoccupied by the past.

<sup>7</sup> This expo, held under the motto “Progress and Harmony for Mankind”, attracted more than 64.2 million visitors. “Expo’70”. Commemorative Organization for the Japan World Exposition (’70). Web. [http://www.expo70.or.jp/e/contents/cts\\_007.html](http://www.expo70.or.jp/e/contents/cts_007.html). 20 September, 2010.

<sup>8</sup> The world such a displeasing place: Trips to Modern East Asian History [“Sekai” towa iyanamonodear: higashi ajia gendaishi no tabi]. Tokyo: Shueisha. 2006. 50.

<sup>9</sup> Funabiki, Takeo. Rethinking “Nipponologies” [“nihonjinron” saikō]. Tokyo: Kodansha, 2010. 198.

<sup>10</sup> Dir. Takashi Yamazaki. Tōhō, 2005. Film.

<sup>11</sup> Dir. Matsuoka, Jōji. Shōchiku, 2007. Film.

<sup>12</sup> By July 2011, all television signals will become digital. Tokyo Tower is not tall enough to cover the Kantō area.

<sup>13</sup> Erll, Astrid. “Cultural Memory Studies: An Introduction”. **Cultural Memory Studies: an International and Interdisciplinary Handbook**. Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning, eds. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co, 2008. 6-7.

<sup>14</sup> Assmann, Jan. “Communicative and Cultural Memory.” **Cultural Memory Studies: an International and Interdisciplinary Handbook**. Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning, eds. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co, 2008. 101.

<sup>15</sup> Assmann, Aleida. “Canon and Archive”. **Cultural Memory Studies: an International and Interdisciplinary Handbook**. Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning, eds. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co, 2008. 101.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid. 99.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid. 102.

<sup>18</sup> Erll. 7.

<sup>19</sup> Dir. John Wayne. United Artists, 1960. Film.

<sup>20</sup> Dir. John Lee Hancock. Touchstone Pictures. 2004. Film.

<sup>21</sup> **The Past within Us: Media, Memory, History**. London: Verso. 2005. 175-6

<sup>22</sup> Ibid. 203, 243. Although Morris-Suzuki discounts, the politically subversive elements in Japanese comics are well documented by scholars, such as Shunshuke Tsurumi and Inuhiko Yomota. The Japanese popular culture, particularly comics, is far from being politically homogenous, and has a great number of sub genres that are not under the corporate control and government regulations. Even commercial comic Gōmanizumusengen, which she harshly criticizes, exhibits an unusual degree of political subversiveness. His freewheeling treatment of various issues cannot be reduced into a single national history.

<sup>23</sup> Barthes, Roland. **The Eiffel Tower and other mythologies**, trans Richard Howard, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press 1997.12.

<sup>24</sup> Assmann. 97.

<sup>25</sup> Winter, Jay. "Sites of Memory and the Shadow of War in Communicative and Cultural Memory". **Cultural Memory Studies: an International and Interdisciplinary Handbook**. Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning, eds. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co, 2008. 62.

<sup>26</sup> This phrase was used in the 1956 Economic White Paper.

<sup>27</sup> The Japanese government estimates that around 575,000 Japanese in Manchuria were taken by the Soviet Union to forced labor camps in Siberia after the end of the war [Shiberia yokuryūchū shibōsha nikansuru shiryō no chōsa nituite]. 1 November, 2009. Web. <http://www.mhlw.go.jp/seisaku/2009/11/01.html>. 5 October 2010

<sup>28</sup> Mita, Munesuke. **An Introduction to Sociology: the Future of Human Beings and Society** [Shakaigaku nyūmon: ningen to shakai no mirai]. Tokyo: Iwanami, 2006. 71.

<sup>29</sup> With 700,000 migrants arriving in Tokyo in 1965. "Population change in 2009 [Jinkō no ugoki: Heisei 21nenchū]". Tokyo Metropolitan Government Bureau of General Affairs Statistic Division Management and Coordination Section. 10 September, 2010. <http://www.toukei.metro.tokyo.jp/jugoki/2009/ju09qf0001.pdf>.

<sup>30</sup> Tsurumi, Shunsuke. **History of Mass Culture in Postwar Japan** [Sengo nihon no taishū bunkashi]. Tokyo: Iwanami, 2001. 219; Yoshimi, Shunya. **The Postwar Society: Japanese Modern History Series Volume 9** [Posuto sengo shakai: sirizu nihon kingendaishi 9]. Tokyo: Iwanami, 2009. 19.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid. 19-20.

<sup>32</sup> Murakami, Ryū. "Judge's Comment on the 128th Akutagawa Prize Selection [Senpyō]." **Bungeshunjū** March 2003, 2003. 360-1.

<sup>33</sup> Nissay Research Institute. **Research Report: Impacts of Retirement of "the Postwar Baby Boomers" and the Progress of Aging Population Combined with Low Birthrates in Japan, 2005**. [http://www.mof.go.jp/jouhou/kokkin/tyousa/1708dankai\\_8.pdf](http://www.mof.go.jp/jouhou/kokkin/tyousa/1708dankai_8.pdf). 210.

<sup>34</sup> The comic has been serialized in comic magazine Big Comic Original since 1974. The comic version includes far more complexity of the postwar period than the cinematic version.

<sup>35</sup> Always was ranked at 7th among films released in 2005. The box office sale amounts to 3.23 billion yen. "Year 2005 Top Box Office Films [kako kogyōshūnyūjōisakuhin (over one billion yen)]". Motion Picture Producers Association of Japan. Web. 2 September, 2010. <http://www.eiren.org/toukei/2005.html>. 2 September, 2010.

<sup>36</sup> The novel is estimated to be sold 2.1 million copies. Tokyo Tower: O.B.T.O. Production Committee 2007. [http://www.vap.co.jp/tokyotower\\_obto/](http://www.vap.co.jp/tokyotower_obto/) 2 September, 2010.

<sup>37</sup> Among films released in 2007, Tokyo Tower is at the 16th in the box office ranking. “Year 2007 Top Box Office Films [kako kogyōshūnyūjōisakuhin (over one billion yen)]”. Motion Picture Producers Association of Japan. Web. <http://www.eiren.org/toukei/2007.html>. 2 September, 2010.

<sup>38</sup> Lily Franky. **Tokyo Tower: Mom and Me, and Sometimes Dad** [Tokyo tawa: okan to boku to tokidoki oton], Tokyo: Fusosha, 2005. 114.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid. 146.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid. 168.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid. 3.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid. 168.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid. 445.

<sup>44</sup> NHK. **50 years of Broadcasting.** [hōsō gojūnenshi]. Tokyo: NHK Publishing. 1977.

<sup>45</sup> Hadfield. James. The Sensei Speaks: A Press Conference with Hayao Miyazaki, November 20, 2008. Web. Twitch. November 23, 2008. <http://twitchfilm.com/interviews/2008/11/hayao-miyazaki-press-conference.php>.

<sup>46</sup> **Towards a Beautiful Country: My Vision for Japan** [Utsukushii Nihon e]. Tokyo: Bungeishunjū. 2006. 219-220.