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# FORGETTING TRAUMATIC WAR MEMORY: A CASE STUDY OF THE JAPANESE ANIME SERIES "THE BIG O"

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*THE BIG O*

A Thesis Presented by

By

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ABSTRACT

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*THE BIG O*


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This thesis addresses the issues of traumatic war memory concerning remembering and forgetting as presented in popular culture by closely examining the Japanese television anime series *The Big O*. The thesis proposes that the story told in *The Big O* can be seen as a vehicle for understanding why the Japanese wished to forget traumatic war memories related to the defeat of Japan in World War II. *The Big O* is a science fiction story that is set in a postwar defeated society. The protagonist of the story is Roger Smith, who searches for his lost memories. He is a social advocate for the people who want to recall their lost memories and acts as a negotiator in Paradigm City, a city that lost its own memories forty years ago. Drawing upon memory studies, the thesis explores various aspects of Japanese ambition and social concerns that emerged in Japan's postwar society, including the national pride for the 1964 Tokyo Olympics, the rising economic success, and the revision of World War II's history in school textbooks. The thesis examines dialogues by the characters in *The Big O* by paying attention to two major arguments surrounding memories: remembering and forgetting. By doing so, the thesis attempts to elucidate the ways in which war memories are at times remembered and often forgotten by those recovering from the wounds of war.

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INTRODUCTION



World War II is somewhat a thing of the past, but memories of the war still haunt Japan

in the 21st century. When I was a child, I saw war veterans in busy train stations in Tokyo. This

is my memory concerning World War II that often pops up in mind unexpectedly. What

happened to them?

This thesis explores the issues of traumatic war memory concerning remembering and

forgetting as presented in popular culture by closely examining the Japanese television anime

series *The Big O*. This thesis proposes that the story told in *The Big O* can be seen as a vehicle

for understanding why the Japanese wished to forget traumatic war memories related to the

defeat of Japan in World War II. According to Yoshikuni Igarashi, a wish to forget the past is

one of the major Japan's goals to achieve in postwar society.[1] In a sense, postwar economic

success partially provided them with opportunities to do so. In addition, such a wish to forget the

past is also a significant theme in literature and art, including anime. In order to provide a whole

picture of forgetting the past in postwar society, this thesis addresses various aspects of Japanese

society and social, cultural aspects of Japanese society that are important for understanding *The

Big O*. It encompasses Japan's collective memories of World War II, history textbook

revisionism movements, Japan's postwar society in the 1950s and 1960s, and postwar

generations' popular culture movements. These are all related to a wish of forgetting the Japan's

defeat of World War II. By doing so, this thesis attempts to elucidate how *The Big O* mirrors

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[1] Yoshikuni Igarashi, *Bodies of Memory*, (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2000), 143

postwar society and its popular arguments concerning war memories. Specifically, how do they remember the war and how do they forget it ? This thesis focuses on remembering and forgetting of war memories. It presumes that *The Big O* includes many unfinished questions about such a society that postwar Japan produced. These questions are made by The Big O's protagonists. Thus, *The Big O* echoes a collective feeling that postwar society produces.

There are many literatures and anime dealing with postwar memories, but this thesis focuses on *The Big O* for largely two reasons. First, unlike the explicit depictions of World War II from writers like Mizuki Shigeru and more symbolic ones from Oe Kenzaburo whose works have dealt with Japan and more specifically, the Japanese emperor's responsibility for the war, the more contemporary stories are further removed from the war and are more diffuse. Second, the show was made by creators who were born in the 1960s, when Japan had been gaining economic prowess and rapidly developed the nation. For those, memories of the war are stories about the war. They do not have firsthand experiences with the war but have a strong fascination about war, bombing, and explosion in general. The creators of *The Big O* are also influenced by various social events occurred in the 1960s and beyond, including various contradictions regarding historical war memories that fictionally appear in *The Big O*.  Using memory studies to make sense of the trajectory of Japanese history, this thesis will explore how the authors of *The Big O* perceive the vestiges of World War II in Japan today.

*The Big O* was broadcast in 1999 in Japan and in 2001 in the United States, and other countries. Based on the same title manga written by Hitoshi Ariga, the animated television version was directed by Kazuyoshi Katayama. *The Big O* is a mixture of science fiction and mecha-anime, setting in the fictional called Paradigm City, where everyone in the city lost his or her memories forty years ago after an unspecified war. The fact that nobody knows what

happened in the past; hence, some people search their lost memories, but not everybody. The founder of the city, Gordon Rosewater, wishes to construct a utopian world where no memory of the past exists. He rejects remembering the past and is content with the state of amnesia because he believes that there is no meaning about remembering the past. Gordon believes that memories are human creations that often include by fictitious notions about past events. The story simply starts with the postwar chaotic society, Paradigm City, where the city prior forty years ago is not explained well. Thus, the city is called a city of amnesia. Now the founder Gordon has retired from the political sphere and grows tomatoes[2] in the outskirt of Paradigm City. On the other hand, the main protagonist Roger Smith, who is a young adult living in Paradigm City and has lost his memories, is looking for his vanished memories in the city of amnesia, for he believes that memory is precious and serves as a part of his identity. For Roger, searching for his lost memories is a soul-search journey to learn who he is and the meaning of his life. However, while searching, he encounters many difficulties, creating psychologically traumatic moments and contributing to a feeling of fear to learn the truth of the past. Because of this, Roger gradually grows an ambivalent feeling about learning the truth of his lost memories. He repeatedly asks himself, "What is memory?" and "Who am I?" throughout the show because Roger is confused about the meaning of recalling his lost memories. He needs to find out answers to these questions. To do so, he deals with memory issues that Paradigm denizens have; Roger is a negotiator of lost memories for people who have lost their memories and want to recall them. This narrative arc in *The Big O*, searching for lost memories yet fear about learning the truth of them, reminds us of Japan's postwar wishes and memories of World War II. The setting of lost memories in

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[2] Tomatoes are symbolic object in this show. They represent the masses which do not have any critical ideas about what had happened and what is going on in Paradigm City. It ironically suggests the ignorant masses.

Paradigm City vaguely suggests Japan's indelible, repressed memories about the defeat of the Second World War, the Allied occupation, and postwar political situations.

It is often said that such polemical subjects to discuss in the public tend to emerge in literature and art, including anime. For instance, former Toei animation director Hiroshi Ikeda (1934-) addresses the fact that anime creators are very sensitive to politics surrounding us, including world events that harm us and our environments.[3] For anime creators, animation is a medium that expresses unspeakable, indescribable social codes of the time and unspoken culture that society produces. Thus, contents of anime often reflect the reality that society produces in a unique way. In order to understand the significant of anime, Ikeda stresses the importance of rendering historical events that inevitably impact anime artists' sensitivity, which eventually appear in stories they create. For instance, stories like *The Big O* and its dystopian counterpart *Akira* are chapters in the long line of Japanese treatments of war. The creators of these anime are the postwar generation; their imagination creates images of explosions, bombing, and fighting, and at the same time, they include various questions associated with the development of Japan after World War II. In a sense, anime provides the postwar generation's creators with opportunities to address and their feelings and express their emotions and perceptions to society they have lived.

Because of this reason, anime is distinguished from American cartoons in several points. First, anime refer to animation programs that are produced by Japanese studios and companies. Second, audience of anime is not only children but also adults because anime programs cover a wide variety of genres such as thriller, detective, adventure, philosophy, history, horror, comedy

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[3] Ikeda Hiroshi. 'The Production Environment of Flying Phantom Ship.' *Japanese Animation : East Asian perspectives*. Edited by Masao Yokota; Tze-yue G Hu. (Jackson, University Press of Mississippi, 2013), 287-294.

and science fiction.[4] Themes of anime are frequently social, political subjects such as romance, marriage, school life, war, and social class. In the case of *The Big O*, its theme is the lost war memories, protagonist is a young adult.[5] With Roger, each episode unfolds multiple renditions about lost memories. In a sense, anime discusses challenging social issues of the time and then offers opportunities for audiences to think about social and political subjects through viewing anime. In a way, anime is reflective of the society that produces it. It also often serves as an alternative venue to discuss social maladies, frustration, and taboos. Furthermore, anime programs reveal unresolved social issues and then often provide viewers with a chance to think about social reality. Consequently, anime frequently helps viewers understand social issues, cultures, values, and norms that the public rarely discusses.

Similarly, *The Big O* mirrors issues surrounding lost war memories in Japanese culture. The show teases out feelings of uneasiness through the main protagonist Roger, who discusses lost war memories, and learns about the truth of a war that the protagonist does not remember. Hence, the show is a significant exemplar of such a cultural product concerning memories of war and amnesia. By making such shows setting in science fiction postwar society of amnesia, the postwar anime creators of *The Big O* make many questions and comments on society they have lived. In a sense, this anime serves as a significant medium for social commentary.

Japanese television anime is a powerful medium to convey messages and reveal unspoken cultures that society produces. This thesis touches upon a brief trajectory of it from now. Japanese television anime started about the time the creators of *The Big O* were born. The first animated program was broadcast by Tokyo Broadcast System (TBS) in 1961, which was

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[4] Napier, *Anime: from Akira to Howl's Moving Castle.* (New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).
[5] Target audience for this series is young adults.

*Otogi Manga Calendar*, featuring 3-minute educational clips.[7] Produced by Ryuichi Yokoyama, this black and white anime started by a question "what happened on this day in history" and explained about a history of the day, which lasted 312 episodes.[8] In 1963, the first half-hour children anime programs were aired: *Astro Boy*, *Tetsujin 28* or *Gigantor*, and *Eight Man*. The science fiction story of *Astro Boy* was created by Osamu Tezuka known as the god of anime and the Japanese Walt Disney.[9] *Astro Boy* was aired on January 1, 1963 and had lasted for three years, which consisted of 193 episodes.[10] The story is about a scientist, who has lost his child and then creates a robot called Atom as a surrogate child. *Gigantor* is also about a science fiction story featuring giant robots.[11] *Eight Man* is the science fiction story featuring the super hero Eight Man. All programs achieved a great success domestically and then were exported to the United States[12] and Europe, which also became popular.[13] Later, these science fiction stories are evolved into the mecha-anime genre, which is a subgenre of science fiction featuring giant robot fighting. Mecha stands for mechanical mechanism such as robots or more accurately mechanical figures and prostheses that people can operate. According to Schaub, the characteristics of mecha-anime are science fiction narratives of dystopian views, teamwork, and conformity.[14] First, mecha-anime stories frequently employ dystopian, futuristic, chaotic urban cities or space stations in outer space. Decay of humanity, wars, and conflict are common narratives to illustrate

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[7] Clements and McCarthy, *The Anime Encyclopedia*, Berkeley, CA: Stone Bridge Press, 2006; Poitras, 2008; Patten, 2004.

[8] Clement & McCarthy, 302.

[9] Patten, 2004.

[10] Patten, 45-46.

[11] Patten, 46.

[12] The United States TV started to broadcast *Astro Boy* in September 1963, *Eight Man* in 1965, and *Gigantor* in 1966. One hundred and four episodes of *Astro Boy* was viewed by American audience during 1963 – 1964 (Patten, p. 46; Drazen, p. 7). These three anime programs were also successful for American children. Until in the 1970s, American viewers did not know these programs and other popular TV animation programs were created by Japanese studios. Fans were shocked by the fact that characters they loved actually had Japanese names, which were different from names they knew from the programs (Patten, p. 56).

[13] Poitras, 2008, p. 50.

[14] Schaub, Kusanagi's body: Gender and technology in mecha-anime. *Asian Journal of Communication*, 11 (2), 79 - 100, 80.

redemptive violence, patriotism, and self-sacrifice. Second, mecha-anime emphasizes situations in which teamwork[15]between a giant robot and a human pilot are important. They team up to fight against their enemies. In many stories, the relationship is one-on-one communication with a human and a machine, which closely develops a psychological bond where audiences tend to identify themselves with the pilots who are fighting. By doing so, viewers vicariously feel power from the protagonist pilots' performance while watching. Finally, as a result of teamwork narratives, mecha-anime tends to stress a group-oriented spirit and patriotism. Like this, the collaboration between humans and machines is a central narrative in mecha-anime such as helping each other in order to cope with chaotic situations surrounding their lives. At the end of series, stories of mecha-anime usually find a solution to make a society better. Subsequently, these common story lines underline a culture of conformity. Although contents of science fiction change over time, *The Big O* has all of these characteristics in the story. Since the 1963's broadcast, science fiction remains a popular genre and becomes more featuring apocalyptic fighting and violence. For instance, Susan Napier argues that apocalyptic images are "a staple of Japanese animation since the 1970's to the present."[16] In her essay "World War II as Trauma, Memory and Fantasy in Japanese Animation," she examines the Japanese anime TV series *The Space Battleship Yamato*, and its film serialization. *The Space Battleship Yamato* (hereafter *Yamato*), science fiction, was broadcast in 1974 and ran for 26 weeks. Set in outer space, the 17-year-old-orphanage protagonist Susumu Kodai is learning about operation of the space battleship Yamato under supervision of his senior, Jyūzō Okita. Most of the story features intense spaceship fighting and detailed mechanism of the operation rooms, but the primary story is about a human drama, exploring fighters' inner world by questioning about the space war they fight

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[15] Ibid.

[16] Napier, S. 'World War II as Trauma, Memory and Fantasy in Japanese Animation.' *Japan Focus*. Issued 2005, 115.

and by searching for the meaning of the war and responsibility for their missions to operate. Although they are engaging with aggressive fighting, this story also emphasizes humanity and self-sacrifice, which require them to struggle while completing missions they assigned. Among many space fighters, Susumu is the youngest and struggles with the purpose of war, questioning why we need to have the war and what is the meaning of peace. Napier considers that Susumu's questions echo a glimpse of youth soldiers during World War II, particularly kamikaze pilots and other participants in suicide missions.[17] In addition, the series includes a strong ideological subtext about coming to terms with past events of the fighting for a losing battle by referring to the fictional spaceship named "Yamato," which is the same name of Japan's most formidable imperial battleship during World War II. It has been sunk in the deep sea. Napier continues:

> The Yamato series can also be seen as a product of its time [the 1970s] when Japan was one generation away from the war, an era in which technology and economic success seemed to promise a bright future, but also one in which many expressed anxiety over loss of basic Japanese traditions, including notions of community, sacrifice, and respect for the past.[18]

Napier's article is a close textual analysis of the serialization of *Yamato* in order to understand memory of war in anime. She makes a parallel between *Yamato* and postwar public sentiments, and then discusses memories of war, the history of the Japan's defeat, the loss of autonomy, desire to redo the past, and hope for humanity. In her interpretation, *Yamato* gave a way to express how the public felt and thought about their own past to come to term with the past in the 1970s. In other words, it would be possible to say that Japanese collective sentiments emerged in the story of *Yamato*, which was one of the reasons the series was so successful. Napier's analysis clarifies that Japanese popular culture can offer an opportunity for the Japanese to reconcile with war memories. Specifically, Japanese science fiction anime tends to echo

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[17] Ibid.
[18] Ibid., 116.

unresolved war memory, social maladies of repressed war memories, and frustrations about postwar uncertainty within the context of chaos. Hence, descriptions of space battlefields stimulate public imagination about sentiments of war. Like this, anime is a device to show some aspects of unspoken Japanese culture, and it takes the liberty of history by romanticize the past. Hence, anime is a viable medium to examine as a way to understand an undercurrent of Japanese culture and society.

In addition, anime also offer a self-reflexive understanding of war memories. Anime creators often use science fiction as a framework to bring up political subjects and social taboos. *The Big O* is one of such stories, which makes it iconic for four reasons: the year of release, taboo subject, lost war memory, and Western characters. First, the show was released in 1999, seemingly suggesting that it is a summary of twentieth century's footprints about war memories in postwar Japan. *The Big O* familiarizes viewers with the themes, which are war memory and amnesia, by exploring the city of amnesia, Paradigm City, and then provides viewers with opportunities to ponder the meanings of lost war memories on their own terms. Second, the series challenges a social taboo about lost war memory. In current society, debating over the responsibility for the defeat of World War II is taboo after Japan's defeat of the war. All memories of atrocity are unwelcomed topics in the postwar process whereby Japan became a pacifist nation. Moreover, the series clarifies the problematic and ambiguous nature of memory through dialogues between characters such as Roger and Gordon. These characters represent extreme renditions about lost war memories; Roger reveals his anxiety due to a lack of his memory but Gordon is happy with forgetting the past. Through their dialogues, the show uniquely unfolds various arguments about war memories. Finally, *The Big O* employs Anglo American characters to investigate controversial topics associated with war memories. The show takes the liberty of using Western

appearances and names as a way to avoid political attention from authorities. Relatively free from political pressure due to their Western appearances, The Big O's characters offer enticing opinions about lost memories, which provide audience with various renditions about memories. Like this, science fiction anime particularly serves as an avenue to explore vexed issues that society produces.

This thesis considers anime as a viable source for understanding Japan's war memories. It examines Japanese history textbook issues and social issues of the 1960s and beyond as well as Japanese subculture. This thesis investigates the following questions. How are memories of war discussed by characters? How does the postwar generation understand war memories? How do social issues emerge in contents? How do we people forget the past? What does the theme signify? In order to investigate these questions, I will use some arguments from memory studies as a framework. Memory studies has become a very important academic subject today because various interpretations about past conflicts and wars coexist in society, which attract political tensions on a global scale. In general, research subjects on memory studies focus on how memories are told in various media and recording materials, including history textbooks and entertainment programs. Its foci include politics of remembering and forgetting; what is stated and unstated in media?

Toward the twenty-first century, many scholars paid attention to collective memory as a way to capture the transitional phase of society, politics, and people.[19] Collective memory is collectively remembered historical events, which are not only historical knowledge but largely agreed upon by and shared among certain members of a society. Collective memory is self-

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[19] Tessa Morris-Suzuki. *The Past Within Us: Media, Memory, History* (New York, Verso, 2005); Misztal, Barbara A. "Collective Memory in a Global Age: Learning How and What to Remember," *Current Sociology* 58, no. 1 (2010): 24-44.

consciously created in order for people of today to preserve certain memories about historical facts.[20] In other words, each social group creates their own collective memory to be remembered by the generations to come. Such memory is socially constructed for present audiences as representations of the past. For that reason, collective memory appears in various cultural artifacts such as books, films, pictures, cartoons, newspaper articles, and commodities for today's consumers.[21] In a sense, collective memory is not natural but artificial.[22]

Within memory studies, two major arguments about collective memory are particularly useful in understanding *The Big O*: remembrance and forgetting. First, arguments in favor of remembrance emphasize that memory should be remembered by present people as the foundation of identity.[24] Remembering the past fosters a sense of self, providing the idea about who we were in the past and who we are in the present.[25] For instance, remembering shared memories within a community can cultivate a collective identity by sharing common joys and sorrows that strengthen emotional connections. For instance, National holidays, Veteran's Day, and V-Day symbolize moments of celebrations and honors within the particular context of the United States. By celebrating these holidays, Americans recall those historical events that can provide a sense of solidarity among them. In a way, it is important to have collective memories in order to unify each individual as one within society.[26]

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[20] Halbwachs, Marius. *On Collective Memory*. trans. L. Coser. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1992.
[21] Schudson, Michael. 'Dynamics of Distortion in Collective Memory.' In *Memory Distortion: How Minds, Brains, and Societies Reconstruct the Past.* Daniel L. Schacter ed. (Cambridge, M.A., Harvard University Press, 1997), 346-364.
[22] Nora, Pierre. 1996. *Realms of Memory.* Vols 1-3, Translation by A. Goldhammer. New York: Columbia University Press.
[24] Misztal, Collective Memory, 2010; Andreas Huyssen. *Twilight memories : marking time in a culture of amnesia.* (New York, Routledge, 1995).
[25] Andreas Huyssen. *Twilight memories: Marking time in a Culture of Amnesia* (New York, Routledge, 1995), 6.
[26] Shils, Edward. *Tradition.* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1981).

On the contrary, arguments in favor of forgetting claim benefits of forgetfulness as if some amount of historical amnesia is unavoidable to preserve collective memory.[27] The arguments state that it is better to forget negative memories if those memories undermine their identity and self-esteem. Particularly in postwar society, it is better to forget those memories if they create resentful feelings against former enemies. Remembering such memories hinders the development of democratic relationships with former enemies in the process of reconciliation.[28] In a sense, forgetting is a way to negotiate with each social group's contentious past in order to reconstruct a better relationship; hence, "forgetting is essential for the construction and maintenance of national solidarity and identity."[29] For these reasons, obliteration of war memory might be the best strategy to cope with difficult histories in particular contexts as a way to avoid controversy in the present.[30]

In sum, these opposing arguments surrounding memory are intertwined with the construction of collective memory, which is all about a selection of what we desire to remember and what we want to forget. Indeed, collective memory reflects social interest and desires of people of today, particularly people who have ability to decide what memories should be remembered in order to shape political landscape over history. In the process, memories of the past are frequently redacted. In many occasions, memory brings up intensely polemical moments in the present. For instance, a narrative of World War II in American textbooks is different from one in Japanese textbooks because a different analysis of WWII can be possible. Therefore, we should be aware of that these two modes of memory influence collective memory that we learn.

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[27] Misztal, Collective, 25; Connerton, Paul. "Seven Types of forgetting." *Journal of Memory Studies* 1, no. 1 (2008), 59.
[28] Elster, Jon. "Coming to Terms with the Past." *European Journal of Sociology* XXXIX no. 1(1998): 7-48.

[29] Misztal, Collective, 30.
[30] Connerton, 'Seven'; Elster, 'Coming.'

Along this line, sociologist Akiko Hashimoto examines postwar Japanese collective memories and also argues that that there is not just one collective memory in Japan, "rather, multiple memories of war and defeat with different moral frames coexist and vie for legitimacy."[31] Hashimoto's research focuses on memories of World War II on a personal level and on a social level. She analyzes education systems and political decision-making that Japan made in the latter half of the twentieth century as well as everyday conversations with family members about wartime. She considers that memory being told by family members are especially powerful reminders for people who never have experienced with war. For instance, stories about evacuations from air raids that destroyed the area they lived in stimulate postwar generations' or listeners' imagination, and then stories they heard are unforgettable memories. This chain of actions creates memories of war for the next generations to come. Hence, Hashimoto reminds us that collective memory is a social act of remembering that is always selective.[32] This notion is also applicable to history textbooks.

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[31] Akiko, Hashimoto, *Long Defeat*, 4.
[32] Ibid.

CHAPTER 2

SOCIAL, HISTORICAL CONTEXT

History Textbooks

As I have discussed in the previous section, memory studies is important for exploring

how societies choose to remember or forget their own history. What makes the Japanese case of

not remembering their own history so difficult is that it is rooted in the postwar desire to forget

what occurred during the war. In particular, one of the biggest reasons that the Japanese have a

hard time understanding their own history is that they are not given a full view of history in

school. The reason for this problem lies in the textbooks that students use in school.  In Japan,

education is centralized with students in public schools all using the same textbooks that were

subject to approval by the Japanese government. Hence, making textbooks is an important

government project because the textbooks' contents potentially shape the foundation of national

knowledge. In 1953, after the seven-year Allied Occupation period (1945-1952) was over, the

nation recovered its political autonomy. During the following years, the Ministry of Education

directed its efforts to creating new textbooks for public education in order to recreate a postwar

Japan that was completely different from the wartime educational system that had been driven by

imperial ideology. In order to incorporate democratic teachings, the Ministry created the system

of textbook screening, which allowed the Ministry to control textbook contents that Japanese

schoolchildren studied. Subsequent postwar Prime Ministers Shigeru Yoshida and Ichiro

Hatoyama wished to diminish negative narratives about Japan's wartime history.[33] For the

government, the screening system was the most effective means to control textbooks' contents.

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[33] Yi, Ilcheong. "History in Action: the Japanese Textbook Controversy in Northeast Asia," *Japan Studies Association Journal*, 7 (2009):79-96.

Along with these prime ministers, the conservative Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) also pressured textbook publishers to modify negative descriptions about Japan if they had any.[34]

On the other hand, the left-wing, such as the Teachers Union, reacted to such revisions. For instance, in 1953, Professor Ienaga Saburo of Tokyo University of Education contributed his analysis on World War II to a history textbook, but the textbook was censored by the Japanese Ministry of Education, which claimed that the contents of textbook Ienaga had contributed included a number of factual errors. It was the fact that the factual errors indicated critical analyses of the war he wrote. In addition, descriptions of Japan's invasion of China in 1937 became the topic of heated debates. The screening forced publishers to use terminology "advance" to describe Japan's invasion in China, and not to use words like "aggression." [35] In the 1960s, Professor Ienaga filed a lawsuit against this strict governmental control over educational contents, claiming that the screening was the violation of freedom of expression and education. In the 1980s, the Japanese government was concerned with the descriptions of the Nanjing massacre, seeking a revision of textbooks in order to avoid using the term "war of aggression."[36] Like these revisions, since the postwar educational reform in 1947, Japan has been wrestling over official descriptions of Japan's war history.

However, in the 1990s, the Cold War ended ensuing global political climates changed, which impact movements surrounding historical issues or ways of remembering the past on a global scale. The end of the Cold War provided former severely oppressed authoritarian states, such as Taiwan, South Korea, and China, with more freedom to demand political concessions

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[34] Ibid.
[35] Ibid.
[36] Ibid.

associated with World War II to Japan than before.[37] These nations showed discontent about the way Japan described about the history of modern war. Consequently, Japanese officials received countless international criticisms from former colonized countries about the history textbooks that were distributed in Japanese public schools.[38]

Despite those criticisms, the government allowed a new publisher, the Japanese Society for History Textbook Reform, to distribute extensively revised history textbooks during this period. In 1997, the Japanese Society for History Textbook Reform (hereafter the Society) published the first history textbook from the conservative media conglomerate Fuso Publications after receiving official permission from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology.[39] The textbook aggressively eliminated negative descriptions about the Japanese experience in World War II and added new analyses of Japanese history that glorified the nation with a patriotic narrative.[40] The textbook and other publication made by the Fuso Publications are written by members of the Society.

The Society was established in 1996 by Fujioka Nobukatsu who was a professor at the University of Tokyo. Conservative intellectual Nishio Kanji, professor emeritus at The University of Electro-Communications (国立電気通信大学), also joined the Society, whose chief concern was to make the Japanese proud of their nation. In order to do so, the Society has been writing new analyses of history textbooks, which is a Japan-centered history. They also

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[37] Laura Elizabeth Hein and Mark Selden, Censoring history : citizenship and memory in Japan, Germany, and the United States. (Armonk, N.Y., M.E. Sharpe, 2000), 14-15.
[38] Laura Elizabeth Hein and Mark Selden, Censoring History : Citizenship and Memory in Japan, Germany, and the United States. (Armonk, N.Y., M.E. Sharpe, 2000), 3-44.

[39] Hironori Sasada, "Youth and Nationalism in Japan," *SAIS Review* 26, no. 2(2006): 109-22.
[40] Morris-Suzuki, T. (2000) 'the View Through the Skylight: Nishio Kanji, Textbook Reform and the History of the World', *Japanese Studies*. 20(2): 135.

have criticized other government-approved textbooks that contain critical examinations about

Japanese wars in the modern era, arguing that these descriptions of Japan are masochistic.[41]

The Society is one of the significant organizations, which promotes a patriotic view by

revising critical contents of the Second World War. Its activity is largely known as history

revisionism. Historical revisionism refers to rewriting the conventional history by changing

interpretations and offering new analyses about historical facts. For example, controversial

historical facts such as the Nanking Massacre and comfort women were omitted (Morris-Suzuki).

In 1999, the Society published a 774-page of *Kokumin no rekishi* (National History), whose

eclectic book chapters contained explanations about the origins of the Japanese language,

Japan's myth, the development of the nation state, and contemporary diplomatic relations to East

Asia nations.[42] The Society's revised textbooks not only eliminate the inconvenient facts but also

form a perspective into the national history in a patriotic way.

Patriotic narrative in textbooks is key to understanding how the government wishes the

public to remember their own nation. Keeping this idea in mind, many scholars research

Japanese history textbooks. James Orr researched the conflicting terminology associate with

Japanese war responsibility,[43] arguing that major narrative of the textbooks tends to disavow war

aggression. Such textbooks often also accompany with descriptions of Japan's victimhood during

wartime and postwar by referring to the atomic bomb experience, the declaration of Emperor's

humanity. In a way, Japanese textbooks legitimize Japan's victimhood associated with World

War II, evoking a sense of defeat by drawing from selected historical facts, including the

Japanese constitution written by Washington and the Allied Occupation to make the case that

Japan was the victim. Descriptions of these historical events can be strengthened a sense of

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[41]Ibid., 133.

[42] Ibid., 135.

[43] Orr, James J. *The Victim as Hero.* (Hawaii, University of Hawaii Press, 2001), 72–73.

victimhood, which eventually contributes to an overall portrait of Japan being innocent within

the context of postwar pacifist Japan. In other words, a sense of the victimhood enables Japan to

erase Japan's atrocities. With these narratives of innocence, the historical perspective shifted

from Japan's belligerence to Japan's victimhood by emphasizing Japan's unconditional surrender.

Moreover, Alexander Bukh and Julian Dierkes also examined the narrative structures of history

textbooks. They concluded that narratives in history textbooks remained uncritical and presented

a monolithic view toward Japan's history, especially its war history.[44] Overall, Japanese

textbooks would be fostered a nationalist sentiment through its education systems. Indeed,

inconvenient historical facts tended to be deemphasized and were often not mentioned in

textbooks.

Contrary to these many scholarly analyses about Japanese history textbooks, there was a

counter-fact. Tokyo Shoseki has the largest adoption rate for history textbooks in junior-high

school public education.[45] Its history textbooks have included critical analyses about Japanese

modern history and wars that the nation conducted.[46] They describe the Japan-Sino War as a

situation where "an aggressor . . . invaded the peaceful country of China."[48] With these textbooks,

the demonized images of Japan and critical views of the war have been widely studied by

Japanese students. In effect, the first and second largest shares of Japanese history textbooks

published by Tokyo Shoseki were not ethnocentric.[49] However, the "fragmentary nature" of

Japanese historical narratives generated a sense of "Japan as the receiver of aggression, rather

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[44] Buhk, Alexander. "Japan's History Textbooks Debate: National Identity in Narratives of Victimhood and Victimization." *Journal of Asian Survey* 47, no. 5 (September/October 2007), 683-704; Julian Dierkes, "The Stability of Postwar Japanese History Education amid Global Changes," in Edward Vickers and Alisa Jones, eds., *History Education and National Identity in East Asia* (London, Routledge, 2005), 255–74.

[45] Hamada, Tomoko. "Constructing a National Memory: Comparative Analysis of Middle-School History Textbook From Japan and The PRC." *Journal of American Asian Review*, Winter, 21, no. 4(2003): 109-144.

[46] Hein and Selden, *Censoring history,* (Armonk, N.Y., M.E. Sharpe, 2000).

[48] Ibid., 116.

[49] Ibid.

than the perpetrator of aggression."[50] Tokyo Shoseki seemed to advocate critical views toward the wartime military and wars, but its textbooks avoided explicating wartime responsibility.[51] Thus, various views toward Japanese history textbooks have coexisted in the educational field and such opposing views toward national history compete each other. Whichever textbooks school uses, the knowledge students learned from assigned textbooks contributes to the foundation of collective memory.

In addition to these opposing views to Japan's history of World War II, the most significant characteristic of Japanese educational system would be the power dynamic in the relationship between teacher and student in school.[52] In *The Big O*, the hierarchical relationship between an adult and schoolchildren represented by characters Roger and Gordon signifies Japanese school education. The hierarchical relationship is a part of a Japanese educational culture. Teachers have the ultimate authority over the students. This fact is significant for the analysis of the anime *The Big O* because Roger's nightmares show that a shadowy adult figure who manipulate his memories when he was a child. His nightmares include some scenes about the unequal power relationship between the adult leader and schoolchildren. To understand the significance of this fictional relationship in his nightmares, this thesis will briefly touch upon Japanese education system and how it has changed over the years, largely in response to historical conditions.

In 1890, the Imperial Rescript on Education was enacted, stating that the purpose of education was to nurture students' devotion to the Emperor. To do so, the Meiji Emperor's portrait was displayed in every school, in front of which all teachers and students were required

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[50] Hamada, 'Constructing,' 2003, 141; Hein and Selden, *Censoring*, 2000, 11-13.
[51] Hein and Selden, *Censoring*, 2000, 11.
[52] Hashimoto, Akiko. *The Long Defeat: Cultural Trauma, Memory and Identity in Japan*. New York: Oxford University Press. 2015; Ako Inuzuka. Remembering Japanese Militarism Through the Fusosha Textbook: The Collective Memory of the Asia-Pacific War in Japan. *Communication Quarterly*. Volume 61, issue 2, 2013. 131-150.

to bow every day to the portray.[53] It was an emperor-centered education that emphasized loyalty

to the Emperor, for the Emperor was the father of the whole nation, and the people were

considered to be his subjects. After Japan lost World War II, this educational law was abandoned,

which meant that the emperor was no longer worshiped in school. The old law was replaced with

the Fundamental Law of Education in 1947, which emphasized democratic policy in education,

focusing on gender and social equality as examples of fairness working together boys and girls.[54]

In addition, Japanese compulsory education has been shifted to various school activities in order

for students to foster a sense of equality between gender. For instance, all students were required

to wear the same caps when travelling to and from school and doing physical education. In class,

not to the Emperor, but students bow to the teacher at the beginning and end of each class to

show respect to the teacher. All of these routine activities became daily routines to cultivate filial

piety among the relationship between adults and children or teachers and students in school.

Overall, in Japanese educational institutions, teachers are considered as authorities and more

absolute than U.S. educational settings.

      In *The Big O*, imagery of such power relationship appearing in Roger's nightmares

represents the erasure of memory from schoolchildren. Before moving on to the story, this thesis

will provide one more piece of the historical context of the 1960s, around which authors of *The*

*Big O* were born.

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[53] Paul Bailey, *Postwar Japan*, (New York, Penguin Books, 1996), 49.
[54] Ibid.

CHAPTER 3

HISTORICAL CONTEXT IN THE 1960S

For this thesis, a discussion on the 1960s and beyond is important because both authors of *The Big O* Kazuyoshi Katayama  and Chiaki J. Konaka, a supervisor of the series, were born in and around the 1960s. They make themselves part of a generation of authors who carry many questions about untold memories of World War II and spent their childhood during Japan became an affluent society as a pacifist nation. Katayama's and Konaka's works significantly express uneasiness and anxiety about the trajectory of Japanese war memories and society they have lived in. This section will explore how these authors' perceptions of war memory and amnesia associated with war memories are impacted by society they grew up. I believe that their creative works were shaped by the historical and cultural conditions of the eras in which they were raised. This thesis considers that these writers of *The Big O* is the generation who came of age in the 1980s and lived through Japan's period of unprecedented economic growth and rise in global stature. Their work could be influenced by both positive and negative changes that took place in Japan. It is not difficult to understand that, during the high-growth economy period, Japanese society attempted to forget war memories; however, these creators of anime or the generation of the 1960s did not forget about a feeling of uneasiness regarding World War II. Because of the feeling of uneasiness, they use anime, subculture, to express their emotions, ideas, and opinions. They raise general questions about Japanese war memories by explosions and bombs through anime.

Economic change can have a large impact on a society as well as can erase memories of war misery. By the late 1950s, Japan's economy was starting to show positive signs. It was mainly export dependent, which brought great profit to the nation. A 1959 economic white paper

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reported that Japan was no longer in the postwar era, which indicated that Japan's economic

recovery was a great success. People started having more disposable income, which allowed

them to consume material goods rather than barely eking out a living day by day.[55] They desired

new consumer goods and were able to purchase black-and-white television sets, washers, and

refrigerators that were symbols of a new better life for them.

The 1960s was continuously a distinct period when Japanese economy started expanding

rapidly, and the Japanese envisioned the American lifestyle as their goal. In fact, Japan was on

the cusp of catching-up to an American lifestyle. The Hayato Ikeda administration enacted the

income doubling plan, which was an economic policy to aim at increasing wages in order for the

Japanese to catch up a standard of living that Americans enjoyed.[56] To introduce this kind of

American lifestyle, popular culture was employed to disseminate the pleasures of consumption,

which led to convenient, comfortable life. For instance, popular American television programs "I

Love Lucy" and "Father Knows Best" were broadcast in Japan, which offered pleasant images of

an American average middle-class family who owned a nice house and various luxurious home

appliances such as refrigerators, washers, and televisions.[57] Many Japanese admired such

lifestyle and wanted to have something similar.

Such materialism and consumerism became widespread among the public in Japan.

Following a culture of American materialism, the Japanese attempted to improve their life by

purchasing cars, air conditioners, and color television sets in the 1960s. Although many people

were not well off, these products were affordable if they had enough money. For example,

television sets started to be sold in 1953 in Japan, but only 1% of consumers could afford to buy

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[55]Harootunian, "America's Japan/ Japan's Japan." In *Japan in the World*. 1993.
[56]Miyoshi and Harootunian, *Japan in the World*. 1993: 7
[57] Marilyn Ivy, 'Formations of Mass Culture' in *Postwar Japan as History* (California: University of California Press, 1993), 249.

them. By the year of 1960, however, television ownerships increased to almost 50%.[58] Japan's

booming economy provided them with the purchasing power to possess more commodities than

before. With the economic empowerment, they became obsessed with purchasing new products.

According to Marilyn Ivy, electric appliances were most desired commodity, which were signs

of middle-class to show off their wealth.[59] As a result, conspicuous consumption became a social

status, and then society turned into a society where money talks.

One of the crowning achievements of Japan's postwar recovery was hosting the 1964

Olympic games. Japan was in line to host the 1940 games, the first Asia country to do so, but the

outbreak of World War II put an end of those dreams.[61] When Japan was awarded the 1964

games, they were determined to show how the nation had recovered from the ashes of war to the

rest of the world. Tokyo Olympic Games were great success and this accomplishment would

contribute to change an image of Japan as a defeated nation.

Intriguingly, the passion for Olympic games would contribute to the erasure of memories

of the Second World War. According to Igarashi, Tokyo Olympics was designed to reveal many

hidden messages associated with Japan's wartime memories. First, the main site of Tokyo

Olympics stadium in 1964 was Jingū Stadium, which was used to hold a ceremony of imperial

student soldiers who were ready to go to the front in 1943. Japanese female writer Sonoko

Sugimoto, who participated in the ceremony when she was a girl, recalled the day of the

ceremony that occurred in 1943. She wrote "twenty years ago, also [the ceremony was] in

October, I was at the same stadium. . . We stood there on the ground in the autumn rain to see

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[58]Tatsuro Uchino, *Japan's Postwar Economy: An Insider's View of Its History and Its Future*, (New York, Kodansha International, 1983), 105, cited in Ivy 'Formation,' 248.
[59] Ivy, 'Formation,' 249.
[61] Yoshikuni Igarashi, *Bodies of Memory*, (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2000), 143

the student soldiers off to the front"[62] Having observed both ceremonies in 1943 and 1964,

Sugimoto had a strange feeling about the connection between the devastated war and the hopeful

Olympic games. She said that the "Olympics is connected to that day, and that day is connected

to today. I am fearful of this connection."[63] For many of the wartime generations, the Olympic

games was not only a sport event but also a metaphor of war, which is the relentless sacrifice to

recreate the nation. By sacrificing the public's effort, the nation renewed memories of the past at

the ceremonial site. At the exactly same site, the old war memory was gone and new memories

was created, which made the wartime generation felt uncanny and puzzled.[64]

Igarashi also claims that the Olympics veiled negative memories of Japan's postwar

conflict and politics, including the 1960 of U.S.-Japan Security Treaty (AMPO).[65] The treaty

determined that Japan became a "subordinate client state" of the United States,[66] which meant

that the treaty allowed the United States military to stay in all over Japan in order to establish the

relationship of mutual defense against a communist power. However, the enactment of the

Security Treaty was not smooth. It brought up anti-Treaty movements among the Japanese public

and thousands of activists who fought against not only the treaty but also the Nobusuke Kishi

administration, which accepted the treaty. This treaty was one of the most pivotal moments in

Japan's political history because it brought up millions of Japanese civilians who are skeptical

and distrustful of the Kishi administration and the purpose of treaty, culminating in collisions

between protestors and the police. Those protesters consisted of the teachers' union and pacifists

in the 1960s. [68] When the treaty was renewed in the 1970s, again, Japanese civilians who were

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[62] Igarashi, *Bodies*, 144.
[63] Ibid.
[64] Ibid.
[65] Ibid.
[66] Igarashi, *Bodies*, 138.
[68] Hashimoto, *Defeat*, 17.

oppose to nuclear tests and the Vietnam War were against it.

Based on his analysis of these events, Igarashi considers that the Olympics seemed to cleanse and renew such negative memories surrounding political incidents in Tokyo in the past, where protesters for the AMPO used to fight in the vicinity of the stadium. He states that "the Olympics served as a powerful antidote to the U.S. Security Treaty movement of 1960." [69] In a sense, Tokyo Olympics erased those negative memories that the volatile postwar society produced. Subsequently, the success of Olympic games concealed negative memories of war and then transformed them into new positive memories for the nation.

However, the rapid economic growth was not without its downsides. While economy and a standard of living improved, the nation also suffered from environmental problems. Many factories used harmful chemicals such as mercury in order to increase their efficiency without taking adequate measures to dispose such harmful chemicals to nearby waterways. As a result, contamination of water and soil caused serious health issues for people who lived near those factories. For instance, severe symptoms and diseases due to industrial wastes emerged in the seacoast city of Minamata, Kumamoto prefecture.[70] People who lived in Minamata became sickened with an unknown illness, causing them to lose control their bodies; they could not walk, eat, and think. This illness was spotlighted by investigative journalists and covered the fact. Investigative journalists who found out the source of the disease educated victims who were affected by contaminated environments to file a complaint against the government.

The environmental damage was not the only shadow hovering over the Japan's economic miracle. Traces of World War II remained on street corners of many populated cities, as a constant reminder of Japan's wartime past from the 1950s to 1960s. Sociologist Akiko

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[69] Igarashi, *Bodies*, 145.
[70] Walker, Brett*, Toxic Archipelago: A History of Industrial Disease In Japan*, (London, University of Washington Press, 2010), 138-175.

Hashimoto writes about her life experience in the 1960s in Tokyo; "Sometime in the early 1960s, this [Shinjuku] walkway came to be lined everyday with amputated middle-aged men wearing tattered cotton military uniforms that revealed conspicuously their missing arms, artificial legs, glass eyes, and other disfigurements."[71] The panhandling veterans were standing in the premise of various stations where many commuters come and go. This vision of abandoned war veterans has a personal note. I myself also saw these uniformed veterans playing the accordion in front of Ikebukuro train station as a child in the 1970s. I was scared of seeing them and did not know why they were there and what had happened to them. Glimpses of war have been haunting me for a long time. This kind of experience might be shared by people who grew up in the period.

Furthermore, the people who were born in this period lived through an age of fear about a series of atomic bomb tests and the Cold War. Although they were small, they sensed various political upheavals and economical changes through media.[73] As former anime creator Ikeda mentioned, such political contents emerged in subculture, especially schoolchildren's magazines, manga, and anime. They were exposed to images of war, explosion, and demolition. For instance, unspeakable fears about nuclear was clearly crystalized in stories about *kaijū* (monsters), which is a redolent of an outcome of nuclear and environmental contamination that make a creature deformed. Among many *kaijū* films, one of the significant films is Inoshiro Honda's 1954 movie *Godzilla*, which is one of the popular *kaiju* products that has ever made. Honda participated in World War II and was an actual witness of Tokyo air raids. According to him, scenes of Godzilla's rampages in the center of Tokyo to destroy the heart of Japanese political areas, such as Kasumigaseki, were reminiscent of wartime destruction, particularly "the Tokyo air raid of

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[71] Akiko Hashimoto, *The Long Defeat*, 1.
[73] Noi Sawaragi. "On the Battlefield of "Superflat." *Little Boy*. translated by Linda Hoaglund. (New Haven, Yale University Press, 2005), 203-4.

March 1945."[74] Honda also mentioned that Godzilla was a metaphor for "the souls of the Japanese soldiers, who died in the Pacific Ocean during the war."[75] Honda created chaotic images of Tokyo that Godzilla destroys with fires spurted out from the monster's mouth as a reenactment of World War II he had remembered. Indeed, the film *Godzilla* was the strongest case for the negative memories of war, dealing concretely with his memories of war. In addition, the film also represented nuclear war during the Cold War. The monster Godzilla was born in the sea as a result of nuclear explosion. This connotation of nuclear explosion is an inkling of not only the fact of the atomic bombs of Hiroshima and Nagasaki but also of a series of atomic bomb tests conducted by the United States in the Pacific Ocean, culminating in the Lucky Dragon incident on Bikini Atoll. In short, many Japanese subculture products that were produced in the 1950s and 1960s like *Godzilla* mirror war memories of the nation's devastating war and their trauma. Therefore, art critic Sawaragi Noi observes that Japanese subculture should be understood within the context of the ambivalent political, economical situations that society and global politics produced.[76] Finally, it is important to note that these *kaijū* subculture became memories of childhood, especially boys like the author of *The Big O*. This popularity created another subcultural phenomena later.

One of the most famous subcultural phenomena in the latter 20th century is the emergence of otaku culture in the 1980s. The most representative of this cultural phenomenon can be the artistic movement of Superflat. The leading member is Murakami Takashi, who is one of the most famous artists born in the 1960s. Otaku culture is created by repressed social groups who obsessively love anime and manga in their adult ages in the 1980s and beyond.

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[74] Honda Inoshiro, *Bodies*, quote in Igarashi, 2000, 116.
[75] Honda, *Bodies*, quote in Igarashi, 2000, 116.
[76] Noi Sawaragi. "On the Battlefield of "Superflat." *Little Boy*. translated by Linda Hoaglund. (New Haven, Yale University Press, 2005), 203-4.

Murakami is one of such otaku artists. His art[77] expresses various oppressed war memories, including militarism and nuclear explosion. For instance, Murakami, born in 1962, exhibited uncovering traces of the war and Japanese modern militarization when Japan started importing Western culture in the Meiji era. One of his early works known as the *Randoseru* Project (1991) featured Japanese schoolchildren's *randseru*. The *randoseru* represents innocence of schoolchildren but their history is far darker; "the leather *randoseru* originated in the Dutch army's fabric backpack, called *ransel*, adopted by the Japanese military in the late 19th century as part of the Westernization of the armed forces, one of the efforts made by the new Japanese government to shed the samurai tradition and modernize the nation."[78] In this piece of his work, Murakami ironically featured untold militarism surrounding war memory by showing how the militaristic meaning of *randoseru* was transformed into the cuteness of schoolchildren, which covers up the trace of Japan's militarization during the process of modernization.

In addition, Murakami's partner Katsushige Nakahata also exhibited a piece of war memory in a cynical way. Nakahata featured a plastic model of a zero-fighter aircraft made by 15,000 photographs and scotch tape at The Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles (MOCA).[79] Nakahata's intention of making the light model of the famous Japan's fighting jet hanging on the wall was to express distortion of war memories, which was associated with Japan's impossibility to deal with their own war history. Indeed, this generation of the 1960s expresses a frustration about the national history of modern war through their art works.

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[77] Murakami studied Japanese art at the Tokyo National University of Fine Arts and Music. He holds a Ph.D. in Japanese painting. He owns studios called Hiropon Factory in Japan and Brooklyn and hired assistants such as color specialists, graphic designers, painters, and computer savvy. Hiropon Factory manages Murakami's art products or character goods and sales as products of Kaikai Kiki Co. Ltd. It is a window of recruiting stuff and selling his art. The meaning of Kaikai kiki is a state of weird but enchanting that stems from Kanou Eitoku's phrase in his book *History of Painting in Japan (Honchou gashi)* in the 16th century. Takashi Murakami, *Little Boy*. (New York, Japan Society and New Haven, CT, Yale University Press, 2005).
[78] Murakami, *Little*, 14.
[79] Darling, Michael. 'Plumbing the Depths of Superflatness.' (*Art Journal*, Fall, 2001.), 77-89.

Generally, they have been feeling that something has been hidden underneath the all economic success that postwar Japan achieved in the latter half of the 20th century. Such a feeling of doubt and uneasiness is their key motivation to create the art.[80] For artists and creators of popular culture who were born around the 1960s, such unclear war history becomes a psychological motive to pursue an answer to wartime and postwar through subculture. Sawaragi comments "This may explain why Japanese subculture has often reveled in an obsessive fondness for military weaponry, engaging contently with this subject as fantasy while making no connection to its importance in the real-life issues of history and politics."[89] By recreating memories about war without any firsthand experience, they reconstruct the past and then show their criticism against Japan's inability to reconcile with their own war history. Sawaragi considers that "the generation of otaku and Japanese Neo Pop [Takashi Murakami and members of Superflat] has re-imagined Japan's gravely distorted history, which the nation chose to embrace at the very beginning of its postwar life by repressing memories of violence and averting its eyes from reality."[90]

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[80] Darling, Michael. 'Plumbing.' (*Art Journal*, Fall, 2001.), 77-89.
[89] Sawaragi, 'On the Battlefield,' *Little Boy*, 204.
[90] Ibid.

CHAPTER 4

WAR MEMORIES IN *THE BIG O*

Losing Memories in Anime

In Japanese society, debates about the defeat of the Second World War is taboo. However, anime creators reimagine the war and then recreate imagery of the war as a way to tell a story of the past. Such stories inevitably create a myth and ideology about it. This section addresses how memories of atomic bombs and consequences of the defeated World War II impact several anime works that were created by the 1960s' generation artists. One of the most popular anime creators can be Katsuhiro Ōtomo,[91] whose major works regarding war and memory are *Akira*. In *Akira*, the late boy called Akira has a superpower that is able to destroy a whole city. This personalized character represents, in fact, a power of atomic bomb. Thus, the story of *Akira* is an imaginary memory of atomic bomb that Ōtomo's exceptional imagination created. It is the fact that memories of 1945 atomic bomb is a thing of the past for the 1960s generation artists. Hence, they often play with nuclear memories in their anime works. Another work that Ōtomo created regarding memories is *Memory: Magnetic Rose*, which particularly focuses on lost memory and identity crisis as a result of a loss of memories.

While Ōtomo revealed an unspoken fear of nuclear power being held by general public in Japan in the 1980s and forgetting memories of the past in the 1990s by making the two separate works, *The Big O* is a more direct approach to atomic bomb and lost war memories, stressing social, collective memories as well as personal memories within the fictional context of amnesia. By comparing two of Ōtomo's work and *The Big O*, this thesis addresses an analysis of

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[91] Ōtomo was born in 1954.

imaginative memories surrounding war and nuclear bombs in *Memory: Magnetic Rose* and *Akira*

in order to refer to how Ōtomo's postwar generation's sensitivity constructs imagery of chaos to

express a feeling of lost, untold memories in postwar society.

First, Ōtomo's *Memory: Magnetic Rose*, which was released in 1995, is set in outer

space, where the protagonist former diva Eva emits a signal of rescue to space station staff. They

nail down the source of signal and start searching her in a huge mysterious mansion, which turns

out to be a labyrinth where they are eventually entrapped. Actually, Eva is not a real person but a

ghostly image of beautiful diva who has been abandoned by her lover. The reason for the signal

is her attempts to restore her lost memories about her loved one.[92] Napier examines this anime

and argues that Eva's moaning represents unfulfilled love she experienced and the

incompleteness of her life. Eva exemplifies how loss of her memories is miserable, painful, and

eventually harms one's identity and life. If we expand this interpretation further, it would be

possible to think about Eva as a representation of postwar Japanese people who were looking for

a master to serve. In addition, this film shows a personal memory, but her desire to be

remembered by people who live in the present also reminds us of a representation of war

memories if we take the timing of release and the social context of historical revisionism

movements in the 1990s into consideration. Consequently, we can understand that *Memory*

echoes general social concerns of the time, which is that losing memories.

Ōtomo's another animated work *Akira* (1988) is also a way in which anime incorporates

Japan's unforgettable memory of war in an exceptional way. Its story is about young victim

Tetsuo Shima, but more importantly it suggests the fictional military government's misuse of

nuclear power. With representations of huge explosions, killing, and deformation of bodies, the

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[92] Susan Napier, *Cinema Anime: Critical Engagements with Japanese Animation*. (New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2006). 23-42. Editors: Brown, Steven T. (Ed.)

film is shockingly violent and casts a significantly important question to Japan, which is how they should handle nuclear power that has ability to destroy human existence on earth.

Based on the same title of manga, the film version of *Akira* silently starts with an enormous explosion in Tokyo in 1988, followed by an image of tremendous white cloud moving from far to forward and then an illustration of a black giant dent on ground. Now the setting is in neo-Tokyo in 2019,[93] which still has scars from the bombing here and there in the city. The main protagonist Tetsuo Shima has a psychic power, and the military government wants to control his power. Hence, Tetsuo is captured and being confined in a government facility, then being watched by scientists because his psychic power is too powerful for him to handle, which is akin to the late boy Akira. It is the fact that the 1988's massive explosion was made by the late boy Akira, whose power was equivalent to a nuclear power that can destroy cities and livings. The government knew Akira's dangerous power but could not control it. Akira also could not handle his exceptional power, bringing up the tragedy in Tokyo. Similar to Akira, Tetsuo can also barely handle his tremendous power, and all he can do is demolish his surroundings, including his friends and girlfriend Kaori. At the end of the story, ghost Akira appears in Jingū Stadium in the midst of Tetsuo's uncontrollable destruction. At the end of the film, Akira's friends who also have psychic power and have been confined in the same government facility show concerns about the use of his energy in the future because Akira is a destructive power. They warn us "future does not necessarily proceed alone a single course."[94] It means that we have an opportunity to stop using nuclear power because "There are to be a future we can choose. It's up to us to find it."[95] The fact that Japan's economic development has been relying on nuclear

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[93] Brown, Steven T., *Tokyo Cyberpunk: Posthumanism in Japanese Visual Culture*. (New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).
[94] Anime, *Akira*. (Geneon, Tokyo, 1988).
[95] Anime, *Akira*. (Geneon, Tokyo, 1988).

power plants as a considerable source of energy that make the national progress since postwar, however, it is not necessary to keep relying on it. Through images of battles, dialogue, and questions being made by these characters, *Akira* shows social concerns that Japan needs to pay attention to based on past experiences with the atomic bomb.

Aforementioned, scenes of explosions are staple in anime. Both Ōtomo's works and *The Big O* use scenes of denotation and demolition. Ōtomo's works are somewhat enigmatic, and not easy to draw a conclusion at the end; on the other hand, his works give us something to ponder regarding the past. Similarly, the twenty-six episodes of *The Big O* bring up similar moments. Each episode slightly refers to Japan's postwar contexts and general questions surrounding why the Japanese are reluctant to talk about their war memories. Such contexts and questions must be related not only to the director Kazuyoshi Katayama's and scriptwriter Chiaki John Konaka's sensitivity but also to the general questions in which many people who were born in the 1960s as witnesses of volatile postwar Japan.

Katayama was born in 1959 in Kyoto. He worked for Telecom: Animation Film. In 1988, he released original video animation (OVA) *Appleseed*, which was originally created as science fiction manga by Shirō Masamune. Masamune is famous for his work *Ghost in the Shell*, and *Appleseed* has a similar context. It is the mecha-anime genre, featuring giant fighting robots and combats against social injustice and inequality in order to pursue fairness and justice to make a better world. Katayama mainly created animated television science fiction series, including *Teito Monogatari*.

On the other hand, each of *The Big O's* episodes are supervised by the chief scriptwriter Chiaki Konaka. He was born in 1961 in Tokyo. He is a scriptwriter, director, and writer. His career started in 1988 with his younger brother Kazuya Konaka, who is the producer of remake

of the television anime series *Astro Boy* (2003-04). Konaka has contributed more than seventy of

his writings to anime, manga, film, and theatre, such as *Digimon* (1997), *Serial Experiments Lain*

(1998), *Astro Boy* (2003), *Ultraman Tiga* (2008) to name but a few. Many of his works are

viewed internationally. Among these programs, Konaka focuses on memory as his leitmotif.[99]

For instance, *Serial Experiments Lain* employs what can be called a technology of memory,

which is defined as memories in photos and other recording devices. The young teen protagonist

Lain is interested in using a personal computer, indicating a new way of storing our memories in

the era. In *Serial Experiments Lain*, the advent of personal computers can be seen as a tool to

change not only the ways we store our memories but also the way we differently represent

ourselves in person and on the Internet. In a sense, personal computers create ambivalent areas

that we have to deal with in everyday life. Like this, various types of memories are Konaka's

leitmotif.


## An Analysis of *The Big O*


Now this thesis will turn to back to *The Big O*. This section analyzes the way in which

protagonists address lost memories and how they perceived memory. This thesis examines

protagonists' dialogues and visual representations in several episodes as a way to introduce

major arguments surrounding war memories in the real world. This thesis refers to some aspects

of the real world and then argues that the fictional Paradigm City is a representation of Japan.

Especially, episode 7 called 'Call from the Past' visually elaborates the linkage between

Paradigm City and fictional Japan. Based on this assumption, this thesis explores several

episodes.

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[99] My personal interview, 2009, Tokyo.

First of all, in *The Big O*, forgetting the past is an overarching theme. Episode 1 starts with the negotiator Roger Smith's monologue:

> My name is Roger Smith. I perform a much-needed job here the city of amnesia. This town, Paradigm City, is a town of forgetfulness. One day forty years ago, everyone here lost their memory of everything before that day. But humans are adaptable creatures. They manage to make do and go on with life. If they figure out how to operate machines and get electricity, they can have something like a civilization even without a history. They can live their lives just fine without knowing what did and didn't happen. No, they try their hardest to do it. The only ones who regret their lost memories are the city's elderly. But memories...are like nightmares. They sometime appear when you least expected.[100]

From the first episode, Roger shows his contradicted thoughts about lost memories; he looks for them, but at the same time he does not care about it. He believes that memory is not much important in living in this world.

Within the context of postwar defeated city, Roger's statement clearly conveys two things that we can live without memory and that memory is a kind of an onerous thing. Throughout the show, the notions about memories are connected to a wish to forget the past. Moreover, in episode 2, Roger's informant, known as Big Ear, in Paradigm City also mentions "memory is like a nightmare. They come back to you when you least expect them." Big Ear also perceives that memory is something negative in the city of amnesia.

Within the narrative of ambivalent feelings to lost memories in *The Big O*, the setting of Paradigm City is crucial to understand the significance of this series. Paradigm City is a small modern urban dilapidated city surrounded by two rivers and a body of water that separates from neighboring areas. It seems to be an image of Manhattan; however, the shape of the city is also redolent of ground zero of Hiroshima. If we interpret the body of water surrounding Paradigm City, we can further interpret that these rivers in the setting indicate representations of the Aoi

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[100] *The Big O*. Episode 1.

River and the Ōta River, where, in 1945, many dead bodies floated after the atomic bomb dropped. Based on this assumption, it is important to consider the fictional Paradigm City as an exaggerated model of what happened in postwar Japan, particularly in Hiroshima. How did postwar Japan reconcile with war memories? How did postwar Hiroshima negotiate with war memories? *The Big O* is fiction but allegorically represents the ways in which postwar society deals with difficult memories.

As *The Big O* is a mecha-anime program, the show features full of battles. Giant robots are called megadeus, which means a giant god that has a power to control this world. Megadeus in the story require a memory to be activated. Each owner, who has contributed their memory to megadeus, is the only pilot of a megadeus. Roger is the one who has donated his memories to a megadeus called Big O, which functions a defender of Paradigm City. Thus, Roger teams up with Big O to fight against other monstrous megadeuses attacking Paradigm City. Among many megadeus, four of them are significantly important for the story: Big O, Big Venus, Big Duo, and Big Fau.

First, Big O plays a role to protect Paradigm City from other monsters and megadeus. His enemy is entity or person who misuse memory.[101] Big O appears in all episodes. Big Venus is piloted by Angel Rosewater, who has multiple identities to serve many masters. A significant feature of Big Venus is an editing room where Angel can edit memories of the past. Big Venus appears in only the last episode. Third, Big Duo is operated by former Paradigm Press journalist Michael Seabach, who advocates people's right to know. Big Duo appears several episodes. Finally, Big Fau is owned by Alex Rosewater. Alex Rosewater is the son of the founder Gordon Rosewater and the CEO of Paradigm Corporation that controls all sorts of life, including major social institutions associated with law, media, finance, and energy, are governed. The

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[101] *The Big O*, episode 8.

representation of the Paradigm Corporation reminds us of the *zaibatsu* system because Paradigm City's political system is a typical oligarchy. The CEO Alex can dominate the city but one thing he is lack, which is memory. In Paradigm City, memory is the most powerful resource to activate fighting robots knows as megadeus. Alex's megadeus Big Fau is still dormant because of a lack of memory. Big Fau is waiting for a memory to activate. Alex is looking for memories everywhere in Paradigm City in order for him to start another war. He wishes to create his own world order in order for him to establish a new world order in the city that is favor for him. He also wishes to create a different version of memories that he feels comfortable with. In short, he wants to be a king of Paradigm City. However, he has not successfully found a memory to activate Big Fau. He uses money and status to obtain a memory; it is not until the last episode that he can find memory for the robot Big Fau. Big Fau appears in the penultimate and last episodes. Each megadeus shows different intentions and desires to acquire memory because they believe that people who control memories can control the world. The storyline of *The Big O* stresses that memory attracts conflicts and is the crucial element of starting a war.

With these megadeus that offer exciting fighting scenes to accent each episode, *The Big O* also unfolds general perceptions about Japanese war memories. Several episodes focus on people's fears of relearning the truth about their lost memories after they had already lost them. This sentiment surrounding fear of learning the truth of lost memories is a recurrent motif that propels the action of the story. In episode 4 called 'Underground Terror,' Roger investigates the underground of Paradigm City to find memories of the past. There used to be a subway system in the deep ground. When Roger climbs down the stairs to reach the bottom of underground, he says "the more I go down, the newer walls come up."[103] Before reaching the ground floor, he is terrified to move lower, loses consciousness, and falls to the ground. His response to find a piece

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[103] *The Big O*, episode 4.

of unknown memory that has been buried in the underground signifies negative memory that has been concealed when Paradigm City lost a war in the past. Roger's trepidation expresses a sense of his fear to learn the truth of the past. In addition, after he becomes conscious, what he finds there is a deformed megadeus Big Duo, which threats and attacks Roger. Roger's investigation into the underground unwittingly activates the monstrous robot Big Duo to break a silence on the city of amnesia, Paradigm City. Big Duo can be interpreted as a metaphor of hidden and forgotten memory that the people of Paradigm City have buried.

Former Paradigm Press journalist Michael Seabach has a strong passion for unveiling the past. He says:

> I have lived my life as a newspaper reporter. I uncover the truth and write my articles. But I learned all too well that a mere reporter cannot get to the truth in this city. And no one here is even interested in learning the truth that must be known. But I want to know! I want to learn what must be known![104]

Seabach wants to change a culture of forgetting in Paradigm City because he believes that a journalist's mission is to investigate the past and report back to the public because he thinks that learning the truth is the right thing to do for Paradigm's citizens. But his passion is unwelcome in Paradigm City because the city has already deleted memories in order to create a utopian world in Paradigm City. Seebach has been expunged from the city because of his desire to know the past. In the city of amnesia, Seebach's journalistic ambition is dangerous. He has been excluded from the city by the authority.

Episode 4 begins with Seebach's monologue delivered off-screen, "Even without what happened forty years ago, man would still be a creature that fears the dark, I think. He averts his eyes from that fear, from the memory of his history, and acts as if he never had those memories

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[104] Ibid.

in the first place."[105] His monologue explains the reason why people avoid learning unknown

memories and how fear pertains to learning the truth of lost memories. Seabach knows how

people are reluctant to learn traumatic memories, but he does not change his mind.

After being expunged, he changes his name to Schwarzwald, meaning "black forest" in

German, and starts writing an underground investigative journal. He intends to offer a critical

investigation into the history of Paradigm City because he believes that learning the truth of the

past is important. His policy to publish the journal is that "There is but one truth." [107] He

continues that "It you avert your eyes from it [fear of learning the truth of the past], you will

always remain nothing more than a puppet."[108] He goes on to claim that memory is imagination;

"imagination and memory are but one thing, which for diverse considerations hath divers names."

[109] These critical views to the history of Paradigm City are written by Shwarzwald with his

favorite typewriter called Another Light.

Schwarzwald's ideas are also elaborated in episode 17 'Leviathan,' which describes how

postwar people respond to lost war memories. Basically, Schwarzwald complains people in the

city about a lack of courage to learn the truth of lost memories. He says, "When you subdued that

fear [of learning the past], you will be able to get closer to the truth," hence, you never learn

from the past. Generally, people who had difficult life experiences, especially war experiences,

do not want to recall such traumatic memories. Many scholars agree with this notion. Jon

Elster's and Paul Connerton understand that people tend to forget negative memories in order to

move on to a new life after war and conflict.[110]

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[105] *The Big O*, episode 4.
[107] *The Big O*, episode 17.
[108] *The Big O*, episode 17.
[109] Ibid.
[110] Connerton, Paul. "Seven Types of forgetting." *Journal of Memory Studies* 1, no. 1 (2008): 59 72.; Elster, Jon. "Coming to Terms with the Past." *European Journal of Sociology* XXXIX no. 1 (1998): 7-48.

At the end of the story, Schwarzwald understands the mechanism of memory, which means that somebody has created memories and then people are led to believe certain interpretations of them. Because understandings of memories often help people make sense to the world, people love to listen to them. Thus, memories are stories that people create. What Schwarzwald finds at the last episode is that all the memories that he has tried to find in Paradigm City are a series of lies.[112] Schwarzwald also learns what he has believed is wrong and not worthwhile searching for because memories that are shared by others and the public are not sacrosanct but only attract politics over the meaning of the past.[113] Later, he believes that there is no truth about memory because memory is merely interpretations of the past. Thus, memory is changing the definition of and meaning of memory all the time because memories have many definitions depending on place and time when memories are told to whom. People of today collect pieces of evidence from past events and make up a story based on material they access to. Those stories are called a truth of a memory. He argues that "Paradigm City is a grand, ostentatious stage (大いなる虚飾の町)."[114] Schwarzwald shows his discontent and states that "I was searching for the true memories, they were…"[115] not true and holy. In the case of Paradigm City, the authorities leading by Gordon Rosewater simply deleted its memories about forty years ago. Hence, such drastic elision triggers Schwarzwald's journalistic curiosity.

Many scholars would agree with Schwarzwald's notion. That is, that memories that are shared with members of society are constructed by people who have particular interests to create a certain story about the past. Those often cater to social demands of the time to be accepted by present people. Indeed, memory is an ongoing process to find out a possibly believable true story

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[112] *The Big O*, episode 26
[113] Ibid.
[114] *The Big O*, episode 25.
[115] Ibid.

that occurred in the past.  These types of memories are known as politics of memory, which is a strategy of elimination a certain part of a past event in telling a memory people create. Politics of memory is to political selection of memories, which means that inconvenient memories are not mentioned in speech and writing. Politics of memory is a politically manipulated version of memory of the past. Such memories are created by certain interest groups in order for themselves to influence existing notions surrounding social issues and public opinions. In general, journalism is one of the occupations can be creating social, public memories for the readers and public by focusing on certain aspects of incidents because readers and the public are more or less influenced by such media.[116] We tend to remember things covered media repeatedly.

In the reality of Japan's postwar, some contexts of this episode can be referred to social memory about Japanese postwar collective experience. For Schwarzwald, his attitude toward investigating the truth reminds us of postwar Japan's investigative journalists who worked on the cause of Minamata disease in the 1950 and beyond to help victims file a case to the government.

Similar to Schwarzwald's ambitions to learn the past, episode 5 "Bring Back My Ghost" illustrates that people who wish to live in a fair society are excluded from Paradigm City. Episode 5 is about police officer Bonny Frasier, who has a strong sense of justice. There is a corruption case by high ranking police officials involving land. Bonny Frasier learns it and advocates to be fair to use land. This is also learned by the public, and then a huge riot occurs involving the people who object the police, culminating in a tremendous crash. During the riot, the police officer Bonny Frasier is shot by officials in order to cover up the corruption. But Frasier actually jumps into the river to escape the bullet. He is saved by an unspecified monster

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[116] Halbwachs, Marius. *On Collective Memory*. trans. L. Coser. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1992; Sturken, Marita. *Tourists of History: Memory, Kitsch, and Consumerism from Oklahoma City to Ground Zero*. Durham and London: Duke University Press. 2007.

and then appears in Paradigm City as a ghost, seeking revenge against the officials. This episode tells that a sense of social justice and goodwill is not welcomed in Paradigm City. When we think about this episode within the context of the 1960s U.S.-Japan Security Treaty, in a way, the episode refers to a clash between the police and the protesters against the U.S. Japan Security Treaty. Like this, *The Big O* implies the 1960s of Japan's political history as contexts of the story and comprises case studies of various unpopular memories occurred in the mid 20th century.

Moreover, another episode called "The Call From the Past"[117] also alludes to Japan's political situation in which the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty put Japan positioned under the U.S. military power. This episode visually shows such a Japan's powerless situation. It takes place a ruined metropolis that has been sunk under a murky dark sea surrounding Paradigm City. The desolated metropolis seems to be a popular shopping and cultural area including fancy restaurants, shops that sell brand name goods, and music halls with chandeliers. It resembles Tokyo's sophisticated Ginza district. Among these, there is a tall building resembling Tokyo Metropolitan Building in Shunjuku. This episode is about Roger's investigation in the seabed, where a sea god is calmly resting. The sea god is precious for everyone in Paradigm City because it has a core memory, which is particularly vital for Alex Rosewater to mobilize his war machine named Big Fau. Knowing this, Rosewater sends divers to the seabed and orders them to capture the sea god, but such action ignites the sea god's wrath. The god turns into a monster and comes up to Paradigm City to destroy the city. At that time, Paradigm City is adorned by numerous Japanese Hinomaru flags hanging on both sides of the street like the areas of Tokyo in the vicinity of the Imperial Palace and Kasumigaseki, where Japanese Diet is located. Initially, the monster keeps crying and roaming streets under the Hinomaru flags, demolishing the city, but it is actually looking for a master to serve. Notably, this scene is reminiscent of Godzilla's rampage

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[117] *The Big O,* episode 7

in the 1954's *Godzilla* in Tokyo. As Honda mentioned that the monster Godzilla is a metaphor of collective war soldiers who are wondering in Tokyo, the sea god in *The Big O* is also a metaphor of negative memories that Paradigm City buried in the past and the city does not want to remember.

If we extensively interpret this scene within the postwar social context, we can understand that the master indicates the emperor, and the sea god represents souls of wartime solders who relied on him, but they could not find him in tumulus postwar, and finally they lost him. The social context that is shown by all of the visual representations, including the sea god, the seabed, and flags is a symbolic representation of Japan's oppressed political situation and its memory that is almost forgotten.

In episode 7, three more implicit representations are recognizable. First, the *Hinomaru* flags are aligned on both sides of the street, suggesting a main road of an emperor's parade. The straight street is similar to Omote-sando, Tokyo, which leads to Meiji Shrine. From these visual representations, we can assume that Paradigm City is a fictional representation of Japan. Moreover, the undersea Metropolis is a mirror image of Tokyo, symbolizing Japan's oppressed political position, alluding to the ultimate results of defeated World War II and the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty's movements in the 1960s.

Another historical reference of postwar is a communist influence. In the postwar, it became taboo to discuss the memories of a communist union. During the Allied Occupation era and beyond, Japanese who participated in the Communist party and/or one of the largest unions the Japan National Railways (*Kokutetsu*) were arrested and excluded from companies they worked for because they were considered to hinder the development of a capitalist society in new

Japan.[118] Japan's Red Purge was conducted in the 1950s. According to Dower and Hirata,

> The Red Purge was a series of arbitrary layoffs by government agencies and corporations aimed at heavy-handedly eliminating from the workplace those workers who had been unilaterally branded 'Red.' Because the target went well beyond communists and the suppression of the Japanese Communist Party to include democrats and labour-union activists, the event directly called into question the foundations of the freedom and democracy guaranteed by the Japanese constitution. The purge occurred during the US occupation of Japan from 1949 to 1951.[119]

This social context fictionally appears in episode 10 "Winter Night Phantom," which is a sad tale about the history of union members in Paradigm City. This episode is set in Paradigm City. Forty years ago, union members were expunged from the city due to political conflicts with Gordon Rosewater, who wanted to delete all memories from the city. When the city was founded, the city's authorities purged people who were against the city's policy of deleting all memories from the city. One of the female members who was opposed to Gordon was Sybil Rowan, who was a Russian actress. In this episode, she reappears in Paradigm City in the present in order to seek revenge on the authorities. She bombs a church when the former authorities are holding a meeting. Rowan has a red balloon as a symbol of union solidarity, showing their rebellion against former Paradigm authority.

Red balloons are something very important to address in relation to the communism and unions. In general, communism and communists are called 'red,' and people who lean toward communism are called 'pink.' In Japan, a red balloon has been also a symbol of the nationwide travel agent known as Red Balloon / 赤い風船 associated with the Japan National Railways (*Kokutetsu*). Intriguingly, the National Railway Workers' Union has been one of the most

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[118] Dower, J. W. and Hirata Tetsuo. 'Japan's Red Purge: Lessons from a Saga of Suppression of Free Speech and Thought.' *The Asia-Pacific Journal | Japan Focus.* Volume 5, Issue 7, Number 0, Jul. 2007. URL: http://apjjf.org/-Hirata-Tetsuo--John-W--Dower/2462/article.pdf
[119] Ibid., 3.

influential union organizations in Japan because they have a strong collective bargaining power to negotiate salary every year. For example, every spring they hold collective bargaining meetings, and if employers and employees do not agree with negotiations, employees make general labor strikes in order to demand their wage increases, called a spring labor dispute. During the dispute, the Japan National Railways and related train companies stop operating trains. Hence, schools, offices, and businesses become dysfunctional because of unable to commute. Like this, the National Railway Workers' Union greatly impacted the society in general.

This social context provides enough information to assume that a red balloon indicates a sign of communism and union, which have been marginalized from society. In *The Big O*, characters holding a red balloon often appear, offering opposing views from a culture of forgetting the past.

<p style="text-align:center">Nightmares of Memory in *The Big O*</p>

Throughout *The Big O*, Roger's hallucinatory nightmares are recurrent motifs, which stress his fear of learning the truth of lost memories. Roger suffers hallucinatory nightmares, which consist of montage about an unspecified war that occurred in the past in Paradigm City. A serial of his nightmare starts with a shot of violent flames that burn down Paradigm City. Each brief image of the war creates a diorama of the war that is followed by marching giant robots in Paradigm City as if the city were being conquered by them. An extreme close-up of Roger's eye looking at the burning Paradigm City abruptly appears. Next, he is looking at inflamed the big thick green book entitled *The History of Paradigm City*. The close-up shot mirrors his fear. A

following shot is of schoolchildren with shaved heads who are being gathered in a dark red room. All of them are wearing the same clothes and seem to be hypnotized, standing in front of a shadowy adult figure, who is wearing a white lab coat. The room has no chairs and only an eerie dim red light is visible. This image is followed by shots of each child's big round eyes, which quickly dissolve in a second into an image of red ripe tomatoes and then the image superimposes onto these children's faces. Next, an image of red barcodes on a child's black iris appears three times. In the end, a hard-covered-thick-red book entitled *Metropolis* appears with its author's name, Gordon Rosewater. This visual montage is accompanied by an ominous, church chorus with solemn low-pitched orchestra music, which instills a sense of fear of the unknown about Roger's past. Images of Roger's nightmares are below.



Figure 1: Nightmare 1



Figure 2: Nightmare 2

These menacing images allow us to make interpretations within the social context of postwar Japan. First, the images of the schoolchildren and the burning book *The History of Paradigm City* seem to indicate a history class that take place in an educational institution, where students are lined up in front of the shadowy authoritarian figure. The schoolchildren who are confined in the red dimly lit room appear to be stupefied, which implies that they are shocked by something he said. The visual representation of their shaved heads further refers to that they are about undergoing the elimination of war memories from their brains during the aftermath of the unspecified war. This authoritarian figure must be Gordon Rosewater because he is the one who wrote *Metropolis*, which becomes the new history of Paradigm City after the war had burned up the old green book knowns as *The History of Paradigm City*. Roger's nightmares reveal an unspecified moment when the knowledge of the schoolchildren was about to be distorted or deleted by a new social policy that was established by the new authority, Gordon. The imagery indicates fragmentary indelible memories that Roger was supposed to be lost forty years ago by Gordon's big project of elimination of war memories from schoolchildren. At that time, Gordon had the ability to exert an extraordinary power over contents of textbooks that were learned by next generations to come.

To analyze Roger's nightmares, this thesis refers to the social context of Japan's educational system. In the larger Japanese postwar context, the nightmare motif reveals Japan's collective experiences and unforgotten collective memories for the wartime generation emanating from the Japan's defeat of World War II. According to Baily, postwar Japanese schoolchildren after 1945 were urged to blacken out some parts of their textbooks that pertain to imperial ideology.[120]

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[120] Bailey, J. Paul. *Postwar Japan: 1945 to the Present*. (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 1996).

With this history in mind, we can interpret the figure of Gordon as three entities. First, in an immediate postwar context, Gordon can be representing a postwar teacher in the immediate postwar era. He can control the schoolchildren's knowledge about what happened in the past by mentioning and ignoring some parts of historical events in class. It is safe to say that the montage of Roger's nightmares alludes to a common collective experience in 70 years ago, where the teacher who was a great authority forcefully deleted particular facts of past events from textbooks. Second, if we extensively interpret the figure of Gordon, he can be also representing authorities of the Allied Occupiers that influenced contents of Japanese education and encouraged postwar schoolchildren to delete descriptions of imperial culture and emperor worship. Finally, after the occupation era was over, we can understand the figure of Gordon as the Japanese Ministry of Education that has screened contents of history textbooks since 1953. In sum, the nightmares show the teacher, Allied Occupiers, and Japanese government. The commonality of these entities is to have an ability to change the knowledge of the past. Thus, nightmares visualize several steps of marginalizing certain knowledge of the past from the public mind and textbooks that Japan has been undergone because these entities have power to decide what the Japanese public should and should not learn about the history of World War II. In other words, these authorities were able to modify the history of the past. By comparing the reality that Japan experienced to the fictional Paradigm City, Gordon plays the role of these entities, which have impacted the public's collective memories that are shared with countless others through history education. Consequently, the nightmares may imply the abiding concern of social oblivion, where new generations do not know about the own nation because their knowledge has been erased and changed for political, ideological purposes.

In addition, the meaning of the nightmares also culminates in history revisionism

movements in the 1980s and 1990s, which advocated for the omission of inconvenient historical facts from history education. Igarashi argues that one of the goals in postwar Japan was to forget about the defeat of Japan in World War II by becoming obsessed with economic growth, forms of entertainment such as sports, and the urban development of cities.

More importantly, Roger's nightmares can be understood as representing his subconscious, where his fear resides. To Freud, dreams were realms where oppressed memories resurface. If so, Roger's nightmares can be seen outcomes of his groundswell of anxiety when he faced the reality. His fear of unknown memories intertwines with his fear of remembering that is closely related to needing the face of the truth. This ambivalent feeling perhaps echoes Japan's collective ambivalent feelings about losing own memories and about learning the truth of the past since postwar.

Throughout *The Big O*, this sentiment is embodied by Roger, who feels deep frustration about his lack of knowledge about the past. He agonizes over whether he should learn the truth of the past or not. Subsequently, his sense of self-doubt grows. While searching for his lost memories, Roger suffers from a feeling of insecurity. In episode 20 called 'Stripes,' Gordon's and Roger's dialogues significantly show each character's beliefs regarding lost memories. Drawing upon memory studies, Gordon represents arguments in favor of forgetting; on the other hand, Roger represents arguments in favor of remembering. Episode 20 starts with Roger's nightmare. After that, Roger goes to see Gordon in order to inquire about his lost memories. Roger reveals his anxiety to Gordon and says that the very foundation of who he believes himself to be is being shaken because of the nightmares that show him fragmentary images of the war.[121] But Gordon ignores Roger's concern and advises him not to think about lost memories. Gordon retorts, "Why are you so obsessed with intangibles [memories]? If something isn't here now, it's

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[121] Ibid., episode 20.

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the same as if it had never existed in the first place, wouldn't you say?"[122] Gordon does not

believe that memories are important for Roger and anybody. Nonetheless, Roger disagrees with

Gordon and keeps telling him that he wants to recover his lost memories.[123] In this conversation

with Gordon, Roger's questions remain unanswered. In the end, though, Gordon concedes him

that Roger is the only one who can make sense of his own lost memories.

What does Gordon mean by Roger is the one who need to make sense of his lost

memories? One way of negotiation with his lost memories is to recreate with present narratives

of memories of the past that may be differently from what actually happened in the past. Gordon

believes that memories by their very nature are unreliable because they exist in people's minds.

[124] Because of the elusive nature, memories can even degenerate into something fraudulent.[125]

"People subconsciously create these fables called memories." [126] Indeed, Gordon's belief

emphasizes the notion that memory is malleable because it is a human creation; hence, it is

unreliable.

Roger is opposed to this idea held by Gordon throughout the show, but later he gravitates

Gordon's idea, which is that people try to forget negative memories and then go on to recreate

new memories in order to support their identities to live in the present. Following this narrative,

in the last episode, Roger addresses his negotiation with his lost memories that is influenced by

willful forgetfulness:

> Memories are very precious for people's lives. They let us prove to ourselves that we
> exist. And if we lose them, we have an unrelated feeling of insecurity…The humans
> living here and now in the present are made up of more than their memory of the past. I
> myself don't even know who or what I am. I don't have a single memory about myself.

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122 Ibid.
123 Ibid.
124 Ibid., episode 25.
125 Ibid.
126 Ibid.

But I most likely erased them [memories] of my own free will. I was the one who made that choice. I made it for myself, so I can live in the present and the future.[127]

In this climactic statement, Roger's attitude toward his lost memories shifts from his obsession with remembering traumatic experiences to forgetting traumatic memories. The compelling point in the statement is that he rationalizes his will to forget and justifies his will to forget in order to live in the present, stressing his freedom to make a choice not to recall his lost memories. Roger emphasizes his agency and ability to select his memories by editing his memories. His final reconciliation with his lost memories alludes to Jon Elster's and Paul Connerton's notions of memory, which are that forgetting is the best way to build a new identity, life, and society after a war.[128] In support for this notion, we can see that Roger's decision represents a typical reconciliation with war memories for people who experienced traumatic calamity in a postwar society in order to move on to the future. In contrast, Gordon represents arguments in favor of forgetting and the sentiment of general people who want to forget and move on to the better future by not talking about bitter experiences. In other words, Gordon and others like him believe that talking about calamities they had experienced probably negatively impact the present and the future.

In *The Big O*, Roger's and Gordon's ideas about positive meaning of forgetting memories appear in the last episode. Roger's final speech, "I most likely erased them [memories] of my own free will. I was the one who made that choice. I made it for myself, so I can live in the present and the future[129]" can be interpreted as an act of freeing himself and healing himself from the wounds of a past war. This is a liberal, progressive idea about memory, which emphasizes

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[127] Ibid., episode 26.
[128] Connerton, Paul. "Seven Types of forgetting." *Journal of Memory Studies* 1, no. 1 (2008): 59 72.; Elster, Jon. "Coming to Terms with the Past." *European Journal of Sociology* XXXIX no. 1 (1998): 7-48.
[129] Ibid., episode 26.

rewriting the past. Andreas Huyssen[130] claims that memory is important for us to understand the meaningfulness of life, but finding freedom from the past is a way to recreate oneself and society anew. Roger is a clear embodiment of this notion concerning memory.

In the last episode in *The Big O*, this progressive notion about the construction of memory is also visually expressed, where Paradigm City's war-torn landscape disappears again, and everything turns white like a white slate, signifying that recent memories of Paradigm City vanish again. This blank slate in the city can be read as the state of amnesia in the city again. As a result, the end of this scene connotes the benefits of erasing negative memories in order to move on to a bright new future in which people of today can create their own memories.[131]

Roger's negotiation with his lost memory has several processes. Initially, he thought that memory is something very important to have in order to support his identity; he has courage to confront his negative memories. In the last episode, after ruminating about his painful inner struggles in searching for his lost memories, he changes his mind and believes that forgetting is the best strategy to heal past wounds from the war. Roger considers that "not all memories are pleasant,"[132] "memories appear unexpectedly,"[133] "memory is a ghost from the past,"[134] but "people are not controlled by memory."[135] He refuses to continue to believe that he could support identity if he recovered his lost memories. When his suppressed memories bother him in his nightmares, he later realized that recalling his lost memories bring up painful moments to him. This kind of distrust of his own past seems to mirror a Japan's collective consciousness associated with Japan's war memories.

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[130] Huyssen, Andreas. *Twilight Memories: Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia*. London: Routledge, 1995.
[131] *The Big O*, episode 26.
[132] Ibid., episode 1.
[133] Ibid., episodes 2,16, &25.
[134] Ibid., episode 14.
[135] Ibid., episode 26.

On the other hand, Gordon believes that memory lacks truth. He does not change his mind throughout *The Big O* and points out that "memories exist in people's minds,"[136] "memories are unreliable…fraudulent,"[137] and "there is no memory as long as people create."[138] His dialogues and beliefs concerning lost memories are a full of doubts about memory in general. Gordon is a fictional figure, but his remarks significantly echoes arguments surrounding war memories in real world in Japan; Gordon's beliefs are redolent of arguments that Japan's history of World War II is not accurate because it has full of analyses made by victors' nations. Thus, *The Big O* unfolds controversial views to war memories in postwar society.

Overall, Roger and Gordon have initially different beliefs, but in the end they reconcile with war memories in their own ways. Through dialogues of these characters, *The Big O* shows various ways of negotiations, concerning remembering and forgetting, of which forgetting is the way to move on. This strategy, which focuses on initially remembering the past to finally forgetting the past, is the inkling of Japan's postwar desire to erase war memories. *The Big O* echoes such a dominated opinion about war memories that Japanese society produced in the late 1990s.

Last but not least, what is significant of *The Big O* is that memories are the vital spark to mobilize war machines called megadeus and to start another war. These narratives indicate that memories about war are inevitably controversial. Furthermore, all giant robots require each own memory to start fight with the defenders Roger and Big O, which means that various types of memories are discarded in the past and those emerge in the present and attack the defenders in Paradigm City. Importantly, the primary narrative exaggerates that memories attract various interests and then bring up conflicts in the present. Thus, these giant fighting robots can be read

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[136] Ibid., episode 25.
[137] Ibid., episode 25.
[138] Ibid., episode 26.

as representations of conflicting collective memories surrounding World War II. They can also

create a possibility of another war if we forget it all memories of the past.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

This thesis has examined how memory of war and social, political chaos of postwar Japan emerged in *The Big O*. It particularly focused on the social contexts of war memories in the latter half of 20th century in order to address arguments surrounding war memories and repressed memories of World War II. Throughout *The Big O*, Roger shows his ambivalent feelings about lost memories because he has fear about learning the truth of the lost memories and at the same time he senses that the lost memories are full of negative memories that undermine his personal identity. Moreover, he has been experiencing how lack of memories of himself weakens his identity. Roger suffers self-doubt due to a lack of his memories of himself.

This thesis considers that Roger represents the postwar generations, particularly those who were born in the 1960s. Roger's quest for searching lost memories is the authors of *The Big O* Katayama's and Konaka's negotiations with untold memories of modern Japanese history that often resurface in the present unexpectedly. In addition, it is important to note that Roger's nightmares are observations about postwar society made by Katayama and Konaka. "What happened in the past?" "What is memory?" "Who am I?" These questions is Roger's dialogues concerning lost memories can be questions that are casted by ordinary people who were born in the 1960s and beyond. This thesis also considers that Paradigm City is a representative of Japan, which has been looking for appropriate memories. Roger and Paradigm City subsequently represent avoidance of facing the truth of war memories. This narrative can be a reflection of the time, which is 1999. This was the time when movements of history textbook revisionism surged and attracted attention from media and the public.

In addition, this thesis assumes that such Roger' attitude toward lost memories represents Japan's general attitude toward war memories. Roger changes his mind and settles on the belief in favor of forgetting. Through Roger, the story unfolds how people in general attempt to forget negative memories of conflict. The reason why people wanted to forget is partly because they wanted to move on to a better future and society, and *The Big O* tells us such a motivation of people in postwar society through Roger's and Gordon's dialogues.

The show also reminds us of various social events in the latter 20th century that Japan underwent. By showing parody of social events in Paradigm City, the story retells how people cope with postwar difficulties in order to move on to a new future through characters' dialogues. I have also discussed forgetting traumatic war memories and how fictional characters represent opposing beliefs concerning war memories. The psychological rewards for forgetting traumatic memories are to unload the burden from the past. On the other hand, its punishments for forgetting are suffering from unstable identity because those people who wish to forget the past actually do not forget all about negative memories they experienced but repress them.[139] Such repressed memories resurface unexpected moments like nightmares. Repressed memories are consciously or unconsciously repressed, which is a common way for the people who experienced traumatic memories to get by. These notions surrounding ways to reconciliation with negative memories have repeatedly emerged in the story in order to demonstrate the intricacy of memories.

In the story told in *The Big O*, repressed memories associated with the defeat of war in Paradigm City. Enigmatically, images of the war appear in Roger's nightmares many times. Because of the nightmares, he becomes doubtful about his searching for his lost memories, and

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[139] Ibid.

later he chooses his will to construct his own memories that support his positive identity. This is a positive solution to negative memory.

Because this is anime, the story simplifies the depth of understandings about Japan's memories about World War II but at least we can see a sense that Roger offers various ways of renditions concerning memory that are not passed down to the next generations. He embodies two major memory studies' arguments that are the arguments in favor of remembering the past in order to support one's identity, which was his initial thought, and then later he embodies the arguments in favor of forgetting the past in order to live in the present. As Hashimoto mentions, society is complex and various renditions of memories about war coexist in Japan. Having said that, Roger's psychology echoes an undercurrent of social issues that contemporary Japan faces, which is how to understand memories of the Second World War within the allegedly pacifist nation. Indeed, memories of Japanese war are unresolved social issues in contemporary Japan, and *The Big O* overtly points them out. *The Big O* offers a moment for audience to negotiate with the meaning of the past and ponder polemical issues about war memory in the 1990s.

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