

# Collecting Bones: Japanese Missions for the Repatriation of War Remains and the Unfinished Business of the Asia-Pacific War

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**D**ESPITE THE TEMPORAL DISTANCE FROM THE END OF THE ASIA-PACIFIC WAR MARKED by the 70th anniversary of Japan's defeat, the war remains 'unfinished business' in the region and in Japan's domestic social and cultural sphere.<sup>1</sup> This article focuses on the recovery of war remains in post-war Japan as a window onto the repercussions of trauma and conflict. In particular, it examines the process of collecting the bones of the dead as an ongoing attempt at reconciliation. Quests to find and repatriate war remains attempt to mark an end to the long-term impact of war, and to finish, once and for all, the 'unfinished business' of grief and loss. These quests engage with, reflect and transform social and cultural economies of memory: the discovery of bones offers proof of the violent death of another human being decades ago. Those who search for and find them want to prevent forgetting, but also to promote reconciliation with the past by demanding acknowledgment of the death of others. As I will show here, in the case of Japanese bone-collecting missions, these processes are conditioned by the specific nature of Japan's defeat in Asia and the Pacific, as well as the particularities of Japan's own post-war transformation and the transformation of its regional relationships. But while Japanese searchers might hope for a sense of

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<sup>1</sup> I thank my colleagues in the 'Unfinished business' research group at Monash University for their comments on an earlier version of this paper, as well as two anonymous referees for their suggestions. I also wish to thank Rosa Lee and Tessa Morris-Suzuki for information on bone-collecting in Hokkaido.

resolution from the recovery of bones from former battlefields, this resolution is unattainable. Digging up the ground is to confront the presence of their soldier ancestors at the site of previous aggression, and it disturbs, again, the lives of those living there. The ground's layers are not only the sites of contemporary commercial exploitation, but the repositories of other, earlier pasts. In that sense, the recovery of remains is a process that, instead of offering reconciliation, both emphasises existing rifts and creates new ones.

This article begins with a history in broad strokes of Japanese collection of World War II remains, putting in context the compulsion for the collection of war remains by veterans and survivors, their families and descendants, and the population at large. I then examine the controversial aftermaths of two instances of 'bone-collecting' in the last decade, one on Saipan in the Marianas, and the other in the Philippines. I examine how the identification of remains, their disinterment, re-interment, celebration and repatriation, attempts to effect reconciliation. In the case of Japan, I argue, the collection of war remains speaks more clearly to the reconciliation of cross-generational rifts than cross-national ones, though both are attempted. I acknowledge that reconciliation is a charged term: its definitions are contested and its nature is the realm of much rhetorical, religious and philosophical debate (Doxtader). Those engaged in tangible bone-collecting projects discussed in this article do not address the nature of reconciliation itself, though they speak in broad terms about their need to contribute to it, as we will see. Nevertheless, their actions highlight the ambiguity of tangible reconciliation processes: the need for reconciliation, as Paul Muldoon has suggested, 'simultaneously drives the restorative project, and compromises its capacity to deliver on its promise' (Muldoon, n.p.).

While it might be tempting to view Japanese bone-collecting efforts as reflecting specific relationships with the countries that suffered its invasions, that is not the case for two reasons. First, there is little basis on which to compare Saipan and the Philippines, either through the wartime experiences of their populations, or through their post-war relationship with Japan. In the case of the Philippines, despite the extent of popular resentment of Japanese wartime occupation and atrocities, the government of the Philippines has looked to Japan not only as a key member of the anti-communist world, but as an important trading partner since the return of Japan to sovereignty in 1952. In the case of the Northern Marianas, the islands (excepting Guam) had been mandated to Japan after the First World War, and Japanese inhabitants vastly outnumbered Chamorro and Carolinian indigenous populations from the 1920s onwards, especially on the island of Saipan, one of the largest in the group, and the one which also was the site of a calamitous battle in June-July 1944. After the war these islands became part of United States territory; Japanese inhabitants were deported and sent back to Japan. After the war, the island was used as a CIA training base until the early

1960s and out of bounds for most visitors, but by the early 1970s its emerging tourism industry was fed to a great degree by increasingly wealthy Japanese visitors.

Such trajectories do not offer any points of comparison to, for example, the Japanese-Korean relations after the war, outside of some similarities in bone-collection as a process of reconciliation: groups of Japanese volunteers have been engaged for the past few years in disinterring and repatriating the remains of Koreans in Hokkaido, where they had been brought as forced labour to work in Japanese mines, and where they died in their thousands (Sasanobohyō n.p.). Bone-collecting in Hokkaido has clear trans-national reconciliation aims: participants in the search for remains there confront both the exploitation of Korean imperial subjects during the war, and post-war failure by the Japanese state to address this injustice. Bone-collecting in the Pacific and in Southeast Asia, in contrast, is an inward-looking reconciliation process: it aims to reconcile younger generations of Japanese with the deaths in overseas battlefields of an earlier generation.

Second, rather than being conditioned by differences in post-war relationships with formerly occupied territories, the Japanese recovery of war remains is shaped by the nature of the war in Southeast Asia and the Pacific, and therefore, the number, location and nature of Japanese war deaths in those regions. A dearth of reliable information on war deaths resulted from the savagery of the battles and the small number of battlefield survivors in places like the Philippines and the Marianas; the loss of lines of communication to the mainland; the disintegration of military hierarchy during and in the wake of battle; and the destruction of military records during the aerial bombing of Japan in the last year of the war. As the tide of war turned against Japan, Japanese troops had become increasingly isolated, especially in the islands of the Pacific, and many died of illness and malnutrition in inaccessible areas, or were killed during transport. In addition, the ferocity of battles was such that there were relatively few survivors (and at times none) who could help identify the dead or the place of their death. The sheer numbers of dead also meant individual identification was unlikely: for example, after Japanese troops on Saipan attacked American troops in last-ditch charges at Tanapag on 6 July 1944, bulldozers were used to push their bodies into mass graves ('Saipan. D+22' n.p.).

As a result, many of Japan's war-bereaved families never found out exactly where or how sons, husbands, brothers, fathers or grandfathers died. The Japanese government was unable then and since to provide reliable information on individual deaths. A dearth of detail on individuals' deaths became common during the last years preceding defeat; then, after the war, after the Imperial Army and Navy were dismantled and abolished as part of the Occupation

reforms, the role of providing information about war deaths fell to the Ministry of Welfare, which has attempted with limited success to provide relevant information for bereaved families (Engokyoku; Trefalt, 'Endless'). However, even 70 years after the war, some 1.13 million individuals' remains were never recovered, that is, nearly half of those who died overseas (2.4 million soldiers in all).

The collection of war remains (遺骨収集 *ikotsu shūshū*—literally 'bone collecting') is inextricably tied into a complex and ideologically aligned set of debates about mourning, national sacrifice, the meaning of defeat and the ability to commemorate the actions and the deaths of fallen soldiers. For many bereaved families in Japan, the lack of information about the death of individual soldiers has compounded the trauma of their loss. Customarily, cremated remains of fallen soldiers were repatriated and returned to their families: the image of demobilised soldiers disembarking from repatriation ships carrying the ashes of their comrades was a familiar symbol of the early years of the Occupation. The return home of even a small part of the former physical incarnation of the person allowed some form of consolation for the family, a sense that the person's spirit would be at peace. However, as the war wore on, fewer of those who died could be recovered, and increasingly families became aware that the white box they had received, supposedly containing the remains of a loved one, contained nothing, or at most some bits of wood meant to rattle like bones. Such callousness on the part of the government regarding the sacrifice of their family member angered many (Anzai).<sup>2</sup>

In addition, in the early years after the defeat, Occupation policies created an atmosphere in which celebration of the sacrifice of fallen soldiers was discouraged: the Occupation Forces abolished the Imperial Army and Navy, focussed attention on the war crimes committed by Japanese soldiers in China and the Philippines, privatised the central commemorative shrine at Yasukuni, and abolished military pensions, further compounding bereaved families' sense of grievance about their inability to mourn their lost ones properly (Nakano 351; Dower 485-508). By the early 1950s, the Bereaved Families' Association had become an influential political entity, closely allied with the conservative government (Seraphim 81-3). This Association is perhaps best known for its push to have Yasukuni function as the national war memorial, but it has also been vocal in its demands for the repatriation of war remains.

The impulse for the collection of remains in the former battlefields of Southeast Asia and the Pacific was closely associated with the Association of Bereaved

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<sup>2</sup> Throughout this article I use Japanese naming conventions, where family name precedes given name.

Families after the war but those who engage in 'bone collecting' have changed over time. The presence of the Japanese government in these efforts has been constant, but the veterans and the members of bereaved families who formed the bulk of the volunteers associated with the bone-collecting efforts of the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s have been replaced over time with younger volunteers whose own connection with the dead is more remote. Not only have volunteers changed, but the passage of time has also eroded the physical trace of the battles, making it increasingly difficult to find wartime remains. Paradoxically, in the 1950s, when battlefield traces were still relatively fresh, Japan's relative poverty hampered individual and government attempts to gather remains: the battlefields were far away and at times local conditions prevented access to them. By the time international travel had become affordable and accessible for most Japanese people, physical remains had largely disappeared, and battlefields had been built over, making it difficult to trace the sites of potential graves. Nevertheless, the issue has remained current in Japan in ways: bone collecting efforts have been in the news throughout the post-war period, especially when another mass grave is uncovered. This was the case recently when remains were found on Iwo Jima in 2011 (Kōseirōdōshō; Nakano; 'Moto sento'; 'Ikotsu motomete'; 'Remain'; 'Japanese PM'). In addition, the lead up to the 70th anniversary has brought to the fore efforts to collect, repatriate and more recently identify (through DNA when possible) the remains of soldiers ('Sengo 70'; Kōseirōdōshō). Current Prime Minister Abe Shinzō reiterated the duty of the Japanese government to repatriate the remains of soldiers in his opening addresses to both houses of parliament in February 2015 (Abe Shinzō, Kokkai).

Just as the circumstances and the actors in bone-collecting missions have changed, so have the motivations of those who participated. In Okinawa in the early 1950s, collecting bones on the site of this former battlefield contributed to local community-building and recovery, as did the planting of trees to reforest the war-devastated island (Figal 88). From the 1950s onwards as well, those who had been part of the fighting and had survived went back to battlefields to collect the bones of their comrades as a matter of atonement: atonement for having survived when others had died, but also atonement, on behalf of society as a whole, for having moved on and having forgotten them and their sacrifice. Funasaka Hiroshi, veteran of the battle of Angaur and prolific author of war stories, was especially famous in the late 1960s for his description of 'piles of bleached bones' on the beaches of former battlefields, and his exhortations to Japanese society as a whole to remember the sacrifices of soldiers (Funasaka 9). Sugano Shizuko, a survivor of the battle of Saipan, who at the age of 18 had worked as a nurse in a field hospital and witnessed battle at close quarters, revisited the island as part of a bone-collecting mission in 1965 and wrote fervently about her need to console the dead on the island, not just to overcome her own pain, but to have others in Japan properly acknowledge the suffering of

fallen soldiers without the use of empty euphemisms (Sugano 84, 155). Both these battlefield survivors wrote to condemn the rift that had opened, in their lifetime, between those who had experienced the war and those who had not, and the failure of the post-war generation to acknowledge properly the sacrifice of wartime Japanese.

For veterans like Sugano and Funasaka, therefore, the function of collecting remains was to provide the means to reconcile past and present: to reconcile the sacrifice of wartime soldiers, somehow, with a relatively wealthy middle-class Japanese society that was increasingly distant from the war. Theirs, in addition, was a haunting personal experience: not only had they barely survived, but they could not forget seeing others die in front of their eyes. Nishimura Kokichi, who spent his later years attempting to find Japanese war remains in New Guinea, was the sole survivor of an entire unit. Unable to forget his comrades, he started searching for their remains and those of other fallen soldiers in New Guinea in 1979, ending his quest only when he became too old and too ill to continue in 2005 (Happell). Though Nishimura's story is extraordinary in many ways, in others it is quite typical of the personal relationship many in Japan's wartime generation have with the war dead. There are endless examples of other bereft individuals who, like Nishimura, spent years looking for the remains of comrades or family in former battlefields.

For other individuals engaged in bone-collecting, the relationship is less personal. The non-profit organisation *Nihon seinen ikotsu shūshū dan* [Japan youth group for the collection of remains] (acronym JYMA) was inaugurated in 1967 and initially sent small groups of students to Peleliu and the mid-Pacific to erect memorials to the war dead, but also to promote friendship and knowledge of Japan in areas still scarred by the war. Importantly, the aim of the students, who funded their travel through savings from part-time work, was also 'to gain real experience of what the war is' (*sensō to iu mono wo hada de taiken suru*: literally, to experience the war through one's skin) ('Nihon seinen' n.p.). The organisation suffered from a dearth of volunteers and was cash-strapped in the late 1980s and early 1990s, a time when, with the death of the wartime Shōwa Emperor, young people in Japan turned away from a surfeit of media reminiscences about the war (Gluck 21). Since the late 1990s the organisation has seen a revival and it is currently continuing its expeditions to find wartime remains, both in the Pacific and Southeast Asia, and also in Northeast China and Siberia. Its website suggests that many young Japanese people continue to volunteer for trips overseas, combining bone-collecting with other volunteer work, including helping with sanitation works in part of the Philippines, planting trees in area of land degradation in Okinawa, and other environmental or welfare works. The JYMA connects such duties with building international networks of youth friendship for a peaceful future ('Nihon seinen' n.p.).

Another prominent not-for-profit organisation, Kūentai (whose name signifies roughly 'sky rescue unit') also recruits volunteers to scour former battlefields in the Philippines, New Guinea, the Marianas, the Belau archipelago, as well as Siberia and Mongolia, for the remains of war dead ('Naze ima ikotsu'). Its website explains that its members feel a duty to their forebears to have everyone who died accounted for and to return the remains of soldiers back to the homeland, but like the students, it explains that theirs is a pacific, transnational concern. Kūentai wants to repatriate any WWII soldier home, without reference to nationality, ideology or religion, and claims responsibility for the identification and return of several American soldiers in the Marianas, as well as 16,000 Japanese soldiers from the Philippines ('Welcome to Kūentai-USA'). In September 2014, Kūentai, and its sister organisation Kūentai-USA, formed in order to facilitate liaison with the US government, organised the first joint American and Japanese volunteers-conducted search for remains at a site on Saipan ('Saipan ikotsu').

The notion that bone-collecting is for those who take part a way to 'feel' the experience of the war is an important one in a country where there has been a stark awareness of a generation gap between those who experienced the war and those who were born after ('Sengo 70'). This gap emerged especially in the 1970s (Ivy 29-65; Igarashi 166-7; Trefalt, *Japanese* 111-35). In that sense, the encounter with the physical remains of another—especially, perhaps, such recognisably human parts as a skull or a tooth—provides a tactile experience: an experience 'through one's own skin' of a past that is otherwise both too distant, and too impersonal, to truly understand. Furthermore, the idea that the business of the war will remain unfinished until everyone has been returned home, which supports the NPO Kūentai's efforts to find and repatriate everyone regardless of nationality, imbues the bones not just with nationality that transcends the death of the individual, but with an ongoing role in managing the past. To finish the 'unfinished business' of the past, everybody must be buried in the right place and with the right acknowledgment. The collection of bones is thus akin to what religious studies scholar Nishimura Akira has, in the context of other personal rites of reconnection with the war dead overseas, called 'performative memory', an act that has implications for the present and the future (1-16).

But the collection and the return of bones can also be highly problematic. In a discussion about the return of Australian indigenous remains to La Perouse in Sydney in 2002, Katherine Lambert-Pennington has highlighted the ambivalence many Kooris felt about the reburial of the remains: they raised questions about the origins of the bones, the appropriateness of the ceremonies and the re-colonisation of their history through these rites (313-36). Across time, space and culture similar debates about appropriate rites of reburial, the identity of the

bones, and cynical commercialisation have taken place in the Japanese context of bone-collecting. At a broad level, the identification, repatriation and reburial of remains is a way for one group to say sorry to the other. But who is saying sorry, what for, and with what right? Whose ground is being dug up? And what other layers are being disturbed in the process? To reach into one layer is always, possibly, to damage the other: a well-known incident on Saipan had Japanese volunteers digging for remains damage a valuable historical site, one of the rare remnants of Chamorro culture on the island. Archaeologists hoping to find traces of early inhabitation of the islands of the Belau archipelago first have to sift through a layer of remnants of the 1944 battles.<sup>3</sup> As the remainder of this article suggests, the collecting of bones, rather than finishing 'unfinished business', reveals the ways in which the practice highlights old tensions, and creates new ones.

A *leitmotiv* in the disputes about bone-collecting in the post-war period has been the tension between individuals and the state in the process of memorialising the war dead. As I suggested at the beginning of this article, the Japanese context of unconditional defeat, and the subsequent Occupation propaganda about the iniquity of the Japanese imperial military, complicated the commemoration of soldiers, leading to resentment among veterans and bereaved families about appropriate state recognition of their sacrifice and loss (Trefalt, 'War'). For these groups, the failures of their government were what compelled individuals to supplement the efforts of the state in bone-collecting. State-led and funded missions began in late 1952 with an initial trip to the Marianas, Iwo Jima and other Pacific islands, where memorials were built and religious ceremonies conducted for the dead.<sup>4</sup> Veterans, however, saw these efforts as perfunctory. The veteran of the battle of Angaur (in Belau) Funasaka Hiroshi, who visited the Belau archipelago regularly from the mid-1960s onwards and wrote about his experiences for the public, was horrified that so many remains were still visibly abandoned on the islands, and angered that people like him had to function as 'their own personal Ministry of Welfare', collecting bones, constructing memorials, and finding information about the dead for their families (Funasaka 9). Nishimura Kokichi (the 'bone man of Kokoda') was also angered by the way in which his government handled the repatriation of the bones he collected in New Guinea: whereas he was hoping for individual identification and return to a family grave, the government instead mass-cremated the remains and interred them, unidentified, at the official, state-sponsored war cemetery at Chidorigafuchi in Tokyo (McNeil).

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<sup>3</sup> Anecdotally recounted during a visit on Saipan in 2007 and in conversation with an archaeologist of Belau in 2009.

<sup>4</sup> For a description of the earliest mission, see Bureau of Repatriate Welfare, *Engo gojūnen shi* [50 years of welfare], 134.

The priorities of those wishing to memorialise the sacrifice of fallen soldiers by disinterring remains also clash with the more prosaic wishes of those who live on the island, or aim to profit from its tourist economy. During the cremation of remains of soldiers in Saipan in 2011, some living nearby complained about the environmental pollution created by the open cremation (Bagnol). Currently, Kūentai-USA is asking for urgent funds to disinter remains from a site near the beach at Tanapag earmarked for development by a Singapore builder: the flyer asking for donations has a prominent shot of a skeleton being uncovered by searchers ('Rescue 16'). The commercial value, for one group, of the surface of the land, and its potential benefit to the living as a housing and holiday complex, clashes with another group's memorial value of what is beneath the ground: but what is required by the second group is more time to dig out and repatriate bones, rather than the consecration of the ground itself. Another example of such as clash between the commercial impulse of the living and the values of those close to the dead is found in Papua New Guinea, where Nishimura Kokichi was horrified to find remains for sale at a tourist market. According to his biographer Happell,

The only time he cried was when he talked about the bones of his comrades becoming part of these tourist attractions. He hates the fact that the bones that have been recovered are sitting on trestle tables, and that the government knows that they're there and doesn't go get them. (McNeil n.p.)

Furthermore, the identity of the remains is also problematic. While digging in the Philippines on the island of Luzon, in the region of Ifugao and Mindoro Oriental, Kūentai dug up the remains, and had them repatriated to Japan, of people who were later claimed to be ancestors of the local people. Kūentai was by then supposed to be under the supervision of the Japanese government's Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare and had received substantial government funding for its efforts in the Philippines (¥47 million in 2010) ('Questions surface'). At the crux of the issue is whether Kūentai sub-contracted the job of finding remains to local Filipinos. The case has led to new regulations about proper surveillance of any further searches by the Philippines' National Commission on Indigenous People, the National Museum of the Philippines as well as Japanese Ministry officials ('Firipin ikotsu'). A clear rule has also been established that no payment should ever be made for human remains ('New Rules'). The scandal highlighted rifts within Filipino society: the leader the Mangyan tribe whose ancestors' bones were disinterred and sold to the Kūentai suggested in a press conference that it was non-Mangyan Filipino grave robbers who had passed the bones off as those of Japanese soldiers ('Philippine tribe'). This incident also highlighted tensions between organisations like Kūentai and Japanese veterans' organisations, which raised questions about Kūentai's success

rate in locating remains in the Philippines, complained about the commercial nature of the process, and also resented the misrepresentation of these remains as being those of Japanese soldiers ('War remains').

In Japan, the debacle raised difficult decisions around where to inter the bones repatriated from the Philippines by Kūentai, underlining again the symbolic nationality of remains. Like other bones recovered from overseas battlefields, those transported from the Philippines were initially interred at Chidorigafuchi, but when the origins of the bones were questioned, representatives of the Japanese Association of Bereaved Families complained about their presence in a tomb meant to contain the remains of Japanese victims of the war. The government then removed the remains from Chidorigafuchi, placed them in a mortuary nearby, and remained unwilling to move them until their identity can be established clearly (Kodera).

Since the passage of time has made it so difficult to identify individual remains without recourse to expensive DNA testing, which may not be conclusive in any case, questions about the nationality of remains are likely to surface regularly. When in 2011, members of the Kūentai held a mass cremation of the remains of 575 Japanese soldiers found around Marpi on Saipan, US veterans queried the identity of the remains, concerned that amongst the 575 sets there may have been the remains of American soldiers. This claim was denied by Kūentai, which claimed that research commissioned from an archaeological consulting firm proved that these were in all likelihood Japanese soldiers (Bagnol). The Kūentai is not the only organisation whose methods for the location and identification of remains has been questioned. In January 2015, the POW/MIA commission in the United States, charged with the location and repatriation of remains of US soldiers, was shut down after numerous allegations of fraud, mishandling of bodies, and the planting of skeletons in likely places as a method to claim success in recovery (Burns; 'Accuracy').

Furthermore, the passage of time has also led to repatriation of remains from unlikely places, including the mantelpiece of the occasional American household. During the war, there were instances of American soldiers cleaning and sending home the skulls of Japanese soldiers. The picture of the week in *Life Magazine* on 22 May 1944, portraying a young woman writing at her desk, gazing at the skull sent to her by her boyfriend, ignited controversy about a practice that was not uncommon, though it was prohibited by military legislation. Over time, some of those who possessed such skulls came to decide that they should be returned to Japan as a gesture to finalise the conflict; others attempted to get rid of skulls not for reasons of reconciliation but because the skull's presence in their house was increasingly uncomfortable. However, the process of repatriation was complex: both US and Japanese government representatives demanded proof that the skull

was that of a Japanese person, and in some instances no official institution was willing to gain possession of the remains (Harrison 829-30).

Japanese efforts to gather the remains of the war dead have been an enduring feature of the post-war period. Such 'bone collection' efforts illustrate how the legacies of the Asia-Pacific war continue to impact on Japan and its neighbours. As I have shown, efforts to gather the remains of the war dead reflect practical efforts at reconciliation, but rather than illustrating reconciliation across ethnic or national boundaries, these efforts seem to highlight a need for cross-generational reconciliation. The nature of Japan's aggression, the brutality of its military occupations and the nature of its defeat and Occupation rendered problematic the celebration of its fallen soldiers. For veterans and bereaved families, the collection of war remains channelled discontent and resentment, but also demanded atonement: individual atonement and consolation, and national penitence, a way to reconcile one's safe post-war life with the massacres of the battlefields, and to bridge by tangible means the distance between the experience of the war and the post-war recovery. Even though later generations of bone collectors claim transnational friendship-building as a central aim of their missions, the context in which the bones are repatriated, and the disputes about their nationality and the appropriate place in which to house them, suggests an overwhelmingly inward-looking attempt to finish the 'unfinished business' of the war. In contrast, the efforts of groups of volunteers in Hokkaido, who disinter and repatriate the remains of Korean forced labourers who perished in Japanese wartime mines, demonstrate more clearly a reflection on the transnational impact of war and aggression. Unlike those of fallen soldiers of the Imperial Army, these deaths are unquestionably those of war victims, and their repatriation demands more critical reflection on the impact of war on neighbouring countries (Morris-Suzuki).

In addition, the bones of the dead must be understood for their specific affective impact. While visits to former battlefields, museum and tourist sites may well be engaging at a number of levels, the actual physical remains of the war dead engage later generations specifically at the level of emotion. Human bones are recognisable, for other humans, as someone who once lived: they demand confrontation with death and decay in emotional, rather than intellectual ways. In addition, confrontation with the violence of the war death—shattered teeth, pierced and broken skulls—is unavoidable. The emotional nature of digging for remains of the war dead is captured also in the descriptions, mentioned above, of students 'feeling' the war, or understanding it 'with their skin': underlying such descriptions is an understanding of the affective impact of the bones. The exploitation of emotional circuitry is crucial in engaging any individual with the trauma of the past: Rumi Sakamoto has explored how the Yūshūkan (war museum) in Tokyo deploys images of Kamikaze as 'somatic markers', as objects

that are ‘both bodily experienced and culturally inflected’: a somatic marker ‘has the ability to bypass cognitive function and critical reflection’, engaging instead a ‘strong emotional conviction’ (174). The bones of the war dead are, in that sense, imbued with affect: a universal human reaction to the remnants and the death of another human, and a more specific ‘culturally inflected’ reaction to those Japanese soldiers who, forgotten by their own country, were ‘abandoned’ in the soil of a former battlefield.

It is also the culturally inflected nature of the bones, as somatic markers, that contributes to the debates about their nationality. As we have seen in this article, the identity of the bones, or rather, of the people whose existence they document, is never quite certain: in many cases the identification of individuals is not possible even with the latest scientific identification methods. Yet, the feeling that the right bones need to be in the right place is what drives the collection of the remains and their repatriation. Repatriating remains is a way to attempt the reordering of what was disordered during the war, and to finish, once and for all, the ‘unfinished business’ of the war.

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