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From Weapon to Work of Art : “Sword Hunts” in Modern Japan

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From Weapon to Work of Art: “Sword Hunts” in Modern Japan

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1. Introduction
2. The Confiscation of Weapons by the Occupation Forces
3. Swords as Art
4. New Directions in Research on Weapons
5. How have Weapons been Displayed?
6. War Museums and Peace Prayer Museums

1. INTRODUCTION

Let me begin with a magazine. *Front* was a large-format illustrated magazine, intended for overseas propaganda and first published in 1942. It was modeled on *USSR*, a propaganda magazine aimed at the Soviet Union, and was produced by a group in the Tōhō Company centered on designer Hara Hiroshi and photographer Kimura Ihei. This was an organization under the direct control of the General Staff Headquarters; the list of names includes Hayashi Tatsuo as director, and Oka Masao and Iwamura Shinobu as ethnologists. The first two issues, which appeared in 1942, had editions in 15 different languages besides Japanese, including English, German, French, Dutch, Spanish, Portuguese, Russian, Mongolian, Chinese, Vietnamese, Indonesian (in both Dutch and English versions), Thai, Burmese, and Balinese. The substantial amount of capital needed to produce this speaks to the fact that this publication was an important national undertaking. High quality paper was used, with a single issue weighing as much as 500 grams. We have the testimony of those concerned with the project to the fact that the worsening war situation created obstacles to distribution [TAGAWA 1988]. *Nippon*, first published in 1934, preceded *Front* as a large-format illustrated magazine intended for overseas propaganda. The latter continued until 1945, the former until 1944, and thus they coexisted for the last three years. The photographer Natori Yōnosuke and designers Yamana Ayao, Kawano Takashi, and Kamekura Yūsaku participated in the production of *Nippon*, all of them in the first rank of graphic design and art direction at the time.

To think that Japan changed radically after its defeat in 1945 is merely an illusion, albeit one which has held sway since the war. For example, according to the testimony of the designers at the time, substantial progress had been made on the



Figure 1. The cover of the combined issues of 3 and 4 of the French edition of *Front*, 1943

graphic design for the Tokyo Olympics and Japan International Exposition, planned for 1940. Thus one can understand the holding of the Tokyo Olympics and the Japan International Exposition (Expo '70), 24 and 30 years later respectively, as the eventual realization of events which had already been planned but interrupted by the war. Therefore we should look back over the Cold War and ask what changed on August 15, 1945, and what did not change. This is the perspective from which I will consider weapons in this paper.

Figure 1 is the cover of the combined issues 3 and 4 (also known as the army issue) of the French edition of *Front*, which came out in 1943. I noticed this magazine when I was visiting “Shikaku no Shōwa—1930–40 nendai” (Showa Envisioned: The 1930s and 40s), an exhibition held at the Matsudo City Museum from January 15 to March 1, 1998, and organized by the Matsudo City Education Committee and the Matsudo City Cultural Promotion Foundation. A soldier opens a small door, as if he wants to climb down to the runway. From his goggles he would seem to be a pilot. What I noticed was the sword he has in his hand. Surely this would be a hindrance, not just when wriggling out of the aircraft, but also in the pilot seat. Given that this is the cover of a magazine intended for overseas propaganda,

there is little doubt that this photograph was chosen as a suitable image for introducing Japanese culture. Together with the pilot's gallant face, the Japanese sword in his hand is placed in the center of the photograph. In any case, with this puzzle in mind—namely, what on earth a Japanese sword is doing on a fighter plane—I would now like to ask how weapons, beginning with Japanese swords, have been dealt with in modern Japan.

2. THE CONFISCATION OF WEAPONS BY THE OCCUPATION FORCES

Three years after the magazine was published with this photograph on its cover, Japan was defeated in the war. On September 2, 1945, the instrument of surrender was signed by representatives of the nine allies and of the Japanese government and Imperial Headquarters. The occupation of the Japanese mainland by U.S. forces had begun five days earlier, on August 28. General Douglas MacArthur, commander of the U.S. forces in the Pacific and Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers (hereafter SCAP), landed at Atsugi airfield on August 30.

On September 2, at the same time as the signing of the instrument of surrender, SCAP issued General Order No. 1, ordering that the military be dismantled and munitions production halted; as one element of disarmament, it also ordered that preparations be made to “collect and deliver all arms in the possession of the Japanese Civilian populations.” On September 10, a Signal Corps message was issued from SCAP concerning the collection of small arms and swords (SCAPIN no. 12), ordering the collection and delivery of privately-owned “revolvers and rifles” and swords. Strictly speaking, this order was issued on the 7th and revoked on the 11th, but it seems that the interpretation issued on the 10th by the GHQ of the U.S. forces in the Pacific continued to hold. Next, on September 24, a Signal Corps message from SCAP concerning “the surrender of arms by the civilian population” (SCAPIN no. 50) indicated that privately-owned weapons should be collected promptly, but also provided an exception for swords “only in case the swords are actually objects of art and are in the hands of bona-fide civilians, as contrasted with demobilized members of the military services.” The original text had only specified “swords considered to be objects of art.” It is impossible to confirm whether it was only the Japanese side which from the first had understood this exception to be limited to “Japanese swords,” or whether both the Americans and Japanese had thought this way.

Then, on October 23, a SCAP memorandum “concerning the surrender of arms by the civilian population” (SCAPIN no. 181) specified precisely which objects were to be collected and delivered, how this was to be done, and exceptions, namely “firearms and knives required for hunting purposes, and swords considered to be works of art,” and “explosives required by legitimate business or industrial organizations.” The following January 10, a SCAP memorandum concerning the “retention of swords classified as objects of art in civilian hands” (SCAPIN no. 574) again specified the conditions for private retention. Finally, on May 29, a memo was

issued “concerning the order for the surrender of arms by the civilian population” (SCAPIN no. 2099), rescinding the previous memos and substituting for them a single, unified memo.

Ara Takashi has already published detailed research on this series of SCAP orders, through which Japan was disarmed [ARA 1994]. When the first orders for disarmament were issued, the Japanese Army (in the form of the Imperial Headquarters’ Yokohama Liaison Committee, headed by Lieutenant General Arisue Seizō) had tried to protect military swords in the negotiations, on the grounds that they were “household treasures”; however even such household treasures were limited to those that could be considered “heirlooms.” On September 13, the Imperial Headquarters was abolished, and the Central Liaison Office of the Japanese government took over for the military in the negotiations, arguing that Japanese swords should be protected as “objects of art.”

The numbers show that 81,000 firearms, 91,000 kg of gunpowder, 172,000 swords, and 14,000 spears were confiscated during the first six months. The breakdown for swords is 24,000 military swords, 58,000 bayonets, and 90,000 “Japanese swords.” According to another estimate, swords alone amounted to no fewer than 300,000. One has to acknowledge the rapid progress in the disarmament of the Japanese people. Conversely, the fact that private citizens had this many weapons is itself worthy of note. The historian Fujiki Hisashi has pointed out that this was the most thorough-going disarmament in Japanese history, and that the current demilitarization of the Japanese people is a direct result of these Occupation orders and subsequent control by the police. Fujiki, a specialist in the history of the Sengoku period during the 15th and 16th centuries, has called this the third “sword hunt” [FUJIKI 1993]. Toyotomi Hideyoshi’s “sword hunt” during the 1580s and the Meiji government’s order abolishing the wearing of swords in 1876 both placed great importance on controlling society by linking weapons and status; it is hard to call either of them a disarmament, pure and simple. Ara Takashi, mentioned above, has adopted this position, introducing the idea of the “sword hunt” into research on the history of the Occupation.

What needs noting here is that possessing weapons is not necessarily equivalent to being armed, for example, when weapons are a signifier of status. There is no doubt that the thorough-going confiscation of weapons by the Occupation was an attempt to eradicate the existence of weapons such as the sword which decorated the front cover of the magazine *Front*. An order of November 11, 1945 specified that “all swords, including privately-owned swords, shall be treated as symbols of militarism, and destroyed.”

Incidentally, military swords such as the one in this photograph, “were basically private property, whether it was initially an individually-owned Japanese sword, reclassified as a military sword, or a military sword, purchased as government property” [ARA, 1994]. Thus if one was trying to confiscate military swords, it was not enough merely to disarm the military; the control of “privately-owned swords” necessarily became an issue.

3. SWORDS AS ART

Disarmament proceeded rapidly, and although there were no military clashes, trouble did break out around the confiscation of weapons. From an early stage, in September 1945, exceptions were established to the regulations so that swords, as works of art, might avoid being seized; however, it was unclear who was to decide on this, and on what grounds.

On December 15, 150 swords were confiscated from a certain collector who had evacuated to Habu, Ōkuno village, Nishitama district, Tokyo. These included about 20 pieces which had been designated as Important Cultural Properties; the collector demanded that these be returned, and so the problem came to the surface. It became clear that the other party in the negotiations would be the military police headquarters of the U.S. 8th Army. Satō Kan'ichi reminisced that the memo of January 1, 1946, mentioned above, concerning the "retention of swords classified as objects of art in civilian hands," was issued on the basis of this incident [Satō 1955].

At the same time, the Japanese government made the following requests: first, that Japanese should inspect the swords, to see whether or not they had any artistic value; and second, that the Japanese government should issue ownership permits, and that the Occupation should guarantee these. A memorandum agreeing to this was issued on May 16, 1946, to the effect that the Japanese government had the right to inspect swords, and would organize an inspection committee, and that an ownership permit would be issued to swords which passed the inspection. The criteria for the permit were decided as follows.

- (i) Swords which had been designated as National Treasures or Important Cultural Properties, or which were acknowledged by experts to be of the same quality.
- (ii) Swords made by the outstanding swordsmiths of each era, or which, though unrecorded, were recognized by experts as being of artistic value.
- (iii) Heirlooms or keepsakes of artistic value.

On June 3, the government enacted a law banning the possession of firearms (Imperial Ordinance no. 300), and on the 17th established the regulations for enforcing it (Home Ministry order no. 28). On the basis of this it organized a sword inspection committee, to begin its work by October 10, 1946. Honma Junji was appointed as committee chair. He subsequently became head of the Research Division at the National Museum, and then head of the Art and Craft Section of the Cultural Properties Preservation Committee. There were 59 members on the committee, and as a result of its work, ownership permits were issued for nearly 80,000 swords nationwide. Supplementary inspections were carried out in 1948 and 1949.

Prior to this, from the end of February to the end of March 1946, several thousand swords were collected from throughout the country in the Tokyo Imperial Household Museum, as a kind of emergency shelter. Then, between May and December 1947, there was an inspection of confiscated swords at the 8th Army's

Akabane supply depot, and nearly 5,000 were returned. They were brought to the National Museum, the successor to the Tokyo Imperial Household Museum, their former owners were confirmed, and they were gradually returned. They are called “Akabane swords,” after the name of the place where they were kept in custody.

It was the Society for the Preservation of Japanese Art Swords (Nihon Bijutsu Tōken Hozon Kyōkai), established as a foundation in February 1948, which took on the task of organizing and supervising the “Akabane swords”; it set up its office in the National Museum. In 1955, article 3 of its “deed of endowment” specified the association’s aims as follows. “This Association is dedicated to the preservation of Japanese swords which have been registered as having artistic value, beginning with those that have been designated as National Treasures and Important Cultural Properties or recognized as Important Works of Art. It aims to guide and further artistic research and appreciation of Japanese swords.” The fact that this was written in 1955 alerts us to the fact that the language of this article reflects the Law for the Preservation of Cultural Properties, enacted in 1950 (the phrases National Treasures and Important Cultural Properties are drawn from this law), and that the language of the article when the association was founded may have been different. Incidentally, the language in the current article is different. The current article 3 reads, “This Association is dedicated to the preservation and public display of swords valued as works of art or craft; to the preservation of the techniques of forging and polishing Japanese swords and of crafting their scabbards, hilts, and guards, as Intangible Cultural Properties; and to ensuring the supply of materials necessary in the manufacture of Japanese swords. In addition, it aims to play a leading role in the research and appreciation of these and to contribute to the dissemination of our country’s culture and to the preservation of its cultural assets.” There is a clear shift in emphasis from the preservation of objects to that of techniques. Nowadays, the association office is in Yoyogi, Shibuya ward, Tokyo, where it runs a sword museum. Right next to the entrance is a plaque commemorating the “Akabane swords.”

The Society for the Preservation of Japanese Art Swords has continued to publish a magazine *Tōken Bijutsu* (Sword Art). More than anything else, the mere fact that the name of the association treats swords as works of art speaks to the fact that there was no way of avoiding confiscation by the Occupation authorities. “Sword Art” (the art of the sword) and “Art Sword” (the sword as art) are both anxious christenings, insistently emphasizing that swords are works of art. It would of course be a mistake to imagine that the association was thereby deceiving the Occupation authorities. Shortly after the memorandum of October 23, 1945, “concerning the surrender of arms by the civilian population of Japan,” on November 12, the Occupation authorities issued a memorandum from the General Headquarters of SCAP, “concerning “policies and procedures relating to the protection of arts, monuments, and cultural and religious sites and installations.” A consensus was quickly established on protecting National Treasures — including swords — as designated in the Law on the Preservation of National Treasures. Thus, “sword art,” or “art sword,” may have been the product of a compromise on both sides — the sole

point on which they were able to reach agreement. That is, this designation can be understood as the product of a suggestion by the Occupation authorities, emphasizing artistic value alone among the various values which had been previously attributed to swords in Japanese society. When a pilot got into his plane carrying a sword it may well have been physically awkward, but it served to bolster his fighting spirit. Naturally, this kind of value was not recognized.

I would like to consider a little further the significance of the Society for the preservation of Japanese Art Swords having set up its first office in the National Museum. The Tokyo National Museum takes 1872 as its founding date. It was in this year that the Ministry of Education opened an exposition, calling it a “museum” (*hakubutsukan*); after it closed, the Ministry maintained a permanent exhibition on the site, at Yushima Seidō. One can therefore think of the museum as having a history of 126 years, from the opening of the exposition until the present day. However, jurisdiction over the museum was transferred from the Ministry of Education to the Council of the Ministry of State, the Home Ministry, the Ministry of Agriculture and Commerce, and the Imperial Household Ministry, before being returned again to the Ministry of Education after the war. I consider the transfers in 1886, from the Ministry of Agriculture and Commerce to the Imperial Household Ministry, and in 1947, from the Imperial Household Ministry to the Ministry of Education, to have been the key turning points.

I will discuss the former transfer in detail below; briefly, it changed the character of the museum, from one intended to promote industry to an art museum. The latter transfer, on the other hand, was effected on May 3, 1947, that is the day when the Japanese Constitution was promulgated. The Tokyo Imperial Household Museum became the National Museum, and its collections, having been the property of the Imperial Household, now became the property of the nation. Perhaps this is where we should look for the birth of the Tokyo National Museum. (Incidentally, it is currently being planned to make all the national museums into independent government agencies; one needs to understand this development from a historically-informed point of view.) Scarcely three weeks later, on May 25, the National Museum’s first special exhibition opened, “An Exhibition of the Art of the Sword.” It was just at this point, when the inspection of the “Akabane swords” had begun, that Honma Junji, who had served as chair of the Sword Inspection Committee, was appointed as the first head of the Collection Division at the National Museum. Here too, “Sword Art” was used in the title of the exhibition; one can infer that it was intended to promote a recognition of swords as works of art, just as they were on the verge of being confiscated by the Occupation authorities. The exhibition subsequently went on tour, somewhat reduced in scale, to Kurume and Beppu in Kyushu; Honma gave lectures on “The Significance of an Exhibition of Sword Art.” The Society for the Preservation of Japanese Swords also published a catalogue, “Meitō Shūbi” (Famous Swords: A Collection of Beauty), including 152 pieces chosen from the exhibits.

With the enactment of the Law for the Protection of Cultural Properties in 1950,

this activity evolved toward seeking designation as a cultural property. Honma Junji had moved from Head of the Collections Division at the National Museum to head of the Art and Craft Division in the Committee for the Preservation of Cultural Properties; it goes without saying that he played a large role. The work of designating cultural properties began in 1951, and by 1955 ninety three swords had emerged as National Treasures. Roughly the same number of swords were designated as Important Cultural Properties. In fact, the Society for the Preservation of Japanese Art Swords created an independent designation system, connected to the government system. It created two categories, Especially Valuable Sword and Valuable Sword, which it placed under National Treasure, Important Cultural Property, and Important Work of Art. In doing this it was, so to speak, orchestrating a cultural property reserve corps. In 1973, the Society created a new category of Superior Specially Valuable Sword, but it was abolished in 1982. Also, in 1958, it created categories for Important Sword, Important Scabbard, Hilt, and Guard, Important Sword Fittings, Important Documents, and Important Materials, and in 1971 established a Special category for each of these. Today, together with the preservation of sword making techniques, this work of recognition, designation, and judgment is central to the work of the Society.

One might say that over the 50 years since the war, the Society has striven to preserve swords by linking this pseudo-designation system to the state's system for designating cultural properties, by expanding and strengthening it, and by making swords adapt to it. There is perhaps no other genre of art protected by such a firm designation system. Let me indicate how large a proportion swords comprise of those cultural properties designated as National Treasures. As of 1985, these included 124 paintings, 115 sculptures, 250 craft works, 274 books and manuscripts, 207 buildings, and 36 archeological materials. Swords are included in the category of crafts. In this category, there were 122 swords, in contrast to 145 pieces of metalwork, 32 of lacquerwork, 14 ceramics, 9 dyed or woven textiles, 11 miscellaneous ancient religious treasures, and 17 pieces of armor. Swords thus comprised half of all crafts, matching the number of paintings, and exceeding sculpture.

The status of swords as works of art was guaranteed by domestic laws enacted by order of the Occupation authorities. The Law Banning the Possession of Firearms in 1946, the Law Controlling Swords and Firearms of 1950, and the Law Controlling the Possession of Firearms and Swords of 1958 all made it possible to possess swords or firearms as works of art. The existing law, the third of these, allows exceptions to the regulations in Article 3, whereby it is possible to "possess firearms or swords," and in Article 14 emphasizes that "the director of the Agency for Cultural Affairs shall register old-style firearms which have value as works of art or antiques such as matchlock rifles, as well as swords which have value as works of art." It is interesting, albeit a small point, that this recognizes firearms as having "value as antiques," but not swords. How can one judge this "value as works of art" which allows swords to be owned? Clause 2, Article 4 of the Regulations for

Registering Firearms and Swords (Regulation No. 1 of the Cultural Properties Protection Committee) establishes the criteria as follows: swords “whose beauty in point of shape, forging, the name of the blade, or engraving are recognized, as well as those which manifest the traditional characteristics of a notable school.”

Last fall, a special exhibition on “The Japanese Sword” (Nihon no Katana) was held at the Tokyo National Museum, exactly fifty years after “An Exhibition of the Art of the Sword.” In the introduction to the catalogue, the organizers explained that the exhibition was also intended to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the system for designating cultural properties. The 100th anniversary they referred to was not that of the enactment of the Cultural Properties Protection Law, but rather that of the 1897 enactment of the Ancient Shrines and Temples Preservation Law. In other words, the postwar system for designating cultural properties is the successor of this Ancient Shrines and Temples Preservation Law, and the National Treasures Preservation Law, enacted in 1929. (After the war, the prewar National Treasures were all redesignated as Important Cultural Properties.) Thus the fact that swords have been carefully protected by this designation system must be understood not as something specific to the immediate aftermath of defeat, but rather, more broadly, as a problem of modernity. In relation to this, below I will again discuss the second “sword hunt,” that is, the 1876 order prohibiting the wearing of swords.

Already, for last year’s special exhibition on “The Japanese Sword,” there was perhaps no longer any need to mention in the title the fact that swords are works of art. One can also sense a change of era in the softening use of hiragana (the Japanese syllabary), rather than Chinese characters, for “katana.” It may be that it has become impossible for us to look at a weapon without seeing it as a work of art.

4. NEW DIRECTIONS IN RESEARCH ON WEAPONS

Kondō Yoshikazu has just published the results of ten years of research since completing graduate school, on, in his own words, “the Society for the Preservation of Japanese Art Swords, which takes as its main task the appraisal and inspection of swords, and the issuing of written statements of its opinions” [KONDŌ 1997]. In the afterword of his book he writes interestingly about this experience and about his dissatisfaction with the current state of affairs wherein swords are treated as works of art — that is, to borrow his own words, his dissatisfaction with “art-ism” or “masterpiece-ism.” Instead, he advocates the importance of research which treats weapons as weapons. He seems to share this sense of the problem with other young researchers in Japanese history, such as Kawai Yasushi [KAWAI 1996].

According to Kondō, for a long time the main weapon in war in Japan was the bow and arrow. Armour as protection, the horse as a weapon, and the saddlery with which to ride it were all premised on the use of the bow and arrow. The heavy armor of the medieval period, developed as protection against the bow and arrow, alone weighed 30 kilogrammes, making it impossible to fight unless one was mounted on a horse. The long sword (tachi), sword (katana), halberd (hoko or naginata), and lance

(yari) are all swords, and are generally referred to as *uchimono* (lit. “striking thing”). This name came from the fact that they are weapons with which one strikes one’s enemy; between the medieval and early modern periods a “striking sword” (*uchigatana*) was developed, so that one might strike one’s enemy from above. Striking one’s enemy while mounted on horseback was called *uchimonosen* (lit. “to battle with a striking thing”), but since this occurred mainly after *kishasen* (lit. “to battle by firing arrows on horseback”), here too one can not claim that swords were the main weapon in the battle.

From the 16th century, guns appeared on the scene. Both bows and arrows and guns were suited to a battlefield logic whereby one sought to vanquish one’s enemy as far as possible without getting close to him. Having spread among the Sengoku daimyo, guns subsequently continued to be an important weapon throughout the Edo period; the Boshin War, which heralded the Meiji Restoration, was fought mainly as a gun battle. Suzuki Masaya emphasizes that the warrior class in the Edo period did not, in fact, despise and so reject guns [SUZUKI 1997], as Noel Perrin suggests [PERRIN 1979]. The only exception that comes to mind in the modern period is the Jinpuren rebellion of 1876 in Kumamoto, when the rebels fought only with swords. This was a direct rejection of the order banning the wearing of swords, which the government had issued that year. Tsukamoto Manabu had already pointed out that it was a mistake to think that Tokugawa rule was established on the basis of people having been deprived of their weapons during Toyotomi Hideyoshi’s “sword hunt” [TSUKAMOTO 1983]. In fact, there were large numbers of firearms in private hands, both for hunting birds and animals and for self defense. The recent research on weapons — which insists on treating weapons as weapons — also asserts the need to reevaluate firearms. However, regardless of whether bows and arrows, or guns, were the critical weapon in deciding the outcome of battles, the fact that the sword, alone, has been portrayed as representing Japanese arms, from ancient times until the modern era, is because it bears a separate significance.

The three sacred treasures — the possessions which guarantee that the emperor is in fact the emperor — are the mirror, the jewel, and the sword. Since the sword has thus been treated from ancient times as a symbol of authority, it is natural that in order to transfer authority, one transfers a sword. The Muromachi bakufu actively made use of this, using swords as the object of political exchanges of presents. The emperor would grant a sword and, in exchange, a sword would also be presented to the emperor. Swords were also inherited. Inevitably, a system of appraising swords, or rather the swords’ blades, was established in order to ascribe them a rank. The Hon’ami family were in charge of this. We should take note of this attribute of swords, as objects to be exchanged, as distinct from their actual use. Having been exchanged, it was common for the sword to be kept as a treasure. One of the reasons why swords were regarded as special may be the Japanese practice of taking one’s enemy’s head in battle; it may be that swords were the critical weapon in deciding the battle, or rather, dealing death.

The various approaches by and eventual arrival of foreign ships in the 19th

century, together with the sense of danger which this produced, may have caused the bureaucratized samurai class to return to their traditional military arts. Since, as I have already mentioned, the sword had become the symbol of samurai status, the social significance of the sword was connected to the ideal image of the samurai. During the bakumatsu period, the flourishing of Nativism or “National Learning” (Kokugaku) and the popularity of the idea that Japan was the land of the gods both connected the sword to “Yamato spirit.” This continued into the modern period, and is reflected on the cover of the magazine, *Front*, introduced at the beginning of this paper. The organizers’ greeting, in the catalogue for the “Japanese Sword” exhibition, demonstrates clearly that it still persists today. “Through the sword, which the Japanese people have come to treasure, we hope that you will appreciate both history and the ‘warrior spirit’ which is the pride of the Japanese people.” Without even going back to the 19th century, one can hear echoes of the discussions with the Occupation authorities of 1945 and 1946.

5. HOW HAVE WEAPONS BEEN DISPLAYED?

This essay is an attempt to elucidate how weapons have been dealt with in modern Japan. Of the various dimensions of this problem, I want to focus on how weapons have been displayed to and appreciated by the public; leaving aside private appreciation, it is only in the modern period that sites for such public appreciation have been established.

This is not to ignore the *kaichō* (“unveilings”) at temples and shrines — opportunities for the public display of treasures — in which weapons were treated as treasures. First let me mention a Hōryūji *degaichō* (travelling exhibition), held at Ekōin in Edo in 1842. It was held over two months, from 6/11 to 8/21 of Tempō 13, with the aim of raising funds for temple repairs. It was the second *degaichō* the temple had held in Edo, 148 years since the first one, held in 1694. Advertised as “Shōtoku Taishi Go-Kaichō,” various treasures connected to Shōtoku Taishi were put on display, centered around the portrait held at Shoryoin. There is a catalogue, “On-Hōmotsu Zue,” which Hōryūji published to coincide with the exhibition. It was only published in a limited edition of 300, but recently I managed to acquire one at a second-hand book fair. According to this, swords, bows and arrows, and armor (albeit toy armor) were among the exhibits. At the same time, each object’s history is recounted — “the venerable sword with which the prince defended himself,” “the venerable arrow with which the prince subjugated his sworn enemy,” “the arrow which shot Moriya Ōomi,” “the venerable belongings of the prince,” the prince’s venerable playthings when he was a child”; it is clear that this history formed the basis of the exhibition. These grandiloquent explanations must also have been recounted on site. Given that the toy armor with which Shōtoku Taishi is meant to have played in his childhood is in fact in a style from a much later century, the histories as written are clearly nonsense. The majority of these treasures were subsequently donated to the Imperial Household in 1878, and from 1882 to the

present the Tokyo National Museum has administered them as the “Treasures donated by Hōryūji.” In 1949 they switched from being Imperial Household to national property, and in 1996, a special exhibition of the “Treasures donated by Hōryūji” was held at the museum.

By the 19th century, although there were no longer special opportunities such as *kaichō*, it was possible to visit temples and shrines and see the treasures by paying a small sum of money. With the publication of successive “Meisho Zue” (Illustrations of Famous Places), beginning in the latter half of the 18th century, information about what kind of treasures were where circulated throughout the country. This implies that there were readers who required such information; by the bakumatsu period, routes, various means of transport, and a tourist industry had been provided so that these readers might become tourists and sightseers. Let me introduce the observations of one of these tourists. In 1855, the Confucian scholar Kiyokawa Hachirō set out with his mother on a tour of western Japan. In his travel diary, “Saiyūsō” (Notes on visiting the West), he records how eager he was to see the treasures of the temples and shrines in the places that they visited [KIYOKAWA 1993]. At Byōdōin in Uji, he paid a hundred coppers to see “the armor of Yorimasa, as well as the clothes of Sasaki Takatsuna and various treasures,” and at Ikuta Shrine in Kobe he was able to see “a long sword donated by Hideyoshi, and calligraphy by Benkei, Yoshitsune, Tomomori, and Hideyori.”

Official surveys of such treasures were also beginning. For example, the bakufu ordered a record of the treasures at the Hōryūji *degaichō* mentioned above from the official painter Kanō Seisen'in, which survives as *Hōryūji Jūmotsu zu* (A painting of the Hōryūji treasures), in the collection of the Tokyo National Museum. Going back still further, one finds the compilation of the 85-volume *Shūko Jisshu* (A collection of ten kinds of old things) by Matsudaira Sadanobu, with a preface dating from 1800. Sadanobu sent the Confucian scholar Shibano Ritsuzan, the historian Yashiro Hirokata, and the painters Sumiyoshi Hiroyuki and Tani Bunchō to investigate the temple and shrine treasures of the Kinai region around Kyoto and Osaka, and collected the results. The “ten kinds” of the title are bell inscriptions, tomb inscriptions, weapons, copperware, musical instruments, framed pictures, writing materials, seals, books, and paintings. Weapons are subdivided into armor, banners, bows and arrows, swords, and saddlery. It is a comprehensive classification, rather than one which gives any particular prominence to swords. At the time, *hōmotsu* (“treasures”) and *kobutsu* (“old things”) were general terms for objects which had a history and were worth appreciating. It would be interesting to know how far into the modern period this understanding persisted, of “treasures” or “old things” which incorporated weapons as designated by these five categories.

Honzōkai and *bussankai* — what one would call today natural history exhibitions — flourished from the late 18th century to the early 19th century, but most of these were private affairs put on by fellow enthusiasts or entrepreneurs. However, just as a collection of stones can include stone tools, so not everything on display was a natural object; there was room for man-made objects as well.



Figure 2. *Chinbutsu Shūran* (A survey of curious objects)
Kuniteru II, 1872 Wood-block print Private Collection

Frequently, these were assigned to the “miscellaneous” category. There were also societies to which people brought objects considered as antiques or curios. An example of this is perhaps the Tankikai (Association of Addicts of the Strange), centered on Yamazaki Yoshishige, which met once a month between 1824 and 1825.

The first *bussankai* held by the Meiji government, in 1871, was an extension of these private *bussankai*, as well as being a product of the experience of having participated in the 1867 Paris Exposition Universelle. The classification of exhibits was composed of three sections—minerals (*kōbutsu*), plants (*shokubutsu*), and animals (*dōbutsu*)—which were designated as *mon* (official classes), as well as instruments, ceramics, and antiques, which did not bear this designation. Clearly this event belongs in the tradition of the *bussankai*, comprised as it was mainly of natural objects—*tenzōbutsu* (lit. “heaven created things”), in the language of the time. Some lances and saddlery were exhibited in the “antique” section. Things changed, however, in the exposition the following year. Man-made objects were put on an equal par with natural objects. In a picture published at the time, “*Chinbutsu Shūran*” (A Survey of Curious Objects), two-thirds of the objects are man-made, outnumbering the natural objects (Fig. 2). This 2-to-1 ratio was perhaps not the exact ratio in the exhibit, but may convey quite nicely the impression which the exposition provided. After the close of the exposition, the exhibits were left on site at Yushima Seido, and opened to the general public on days ending in 1 or 6 of every month. The government called this facility a *hakubutsukan* (museum). In the classification of the exhibits at the time, man-made objects comprised 44 sections, one of which was weapons.

This new classification was a reflection of a proclamation issued by the Ministry of State in 1871 “concerning the Preservation of Antiquities.” However, this had

only had 31 sections; the addition of objects which were not antiques, such as instruments and products, had increased this to 44 sections in the 1872 exposition. The “Proclamation concerning the Preservation of Antiquities” was further specified in the edict as the “historical investigation of the changing times, ancient and modern, and of the development of institutions and customs”; put simply, it was a product of a historical awareness and as such belongs to the lineage of Sadanobu’s *Shūko Jisshu*. On the other hand, the exposition also reflected the experience of the 1867 Paris Exposition Universelle. It is no exaggeration to say that of Japanese products at the time, almost every object with export potential was sent to Paris. These included a large number of weapons, as well as many objects of everyday use. Most of them were sent in response to French requests. Those involved (including Machida Hisanari and Tanaka Yoshio, who were also involved with the 1872 exposition) must have realized that exhibits which were not valued at *bussankai* within Japan had exhibit potential abroad, in that they could convey a sense of Japanese culture.

The museum soon created a system for ordering the historical and contemporary exhibits, including man-made objects. For example, in 1873, it classified exhibits into three broad categories—“natural objects, objects of historical investigation, and manufactured objects”—deciding to display history through “objects of historical investigation” and current Japanese industry through “manufactured objects.” Weapons were considered an “object of historical investigation,” under the designation “military defense.” In Hattori Bushō’s *Tokyo Shin Hanjōki* (A Record of Tokyo’s New Prosperity) (1874), there is a passage which expresses the sense of incompatibility produced by weapons being put on display in a museum: in the galleries at the dead of night the arms and armor themselves lament their “current misfortune” in having lost any practical purpose. The swords, seeing that only the sword blades are being displayed, lament the “breaking up of the family” [quoted in KINOSHITA 1993].

The 1876 order forbidding the wearing of swords was perhaps the final blow in depriving arms of their usefulness, or rather, of a utility which also incorporated a symbolic function; it was as a protest against this that the Jinpūren rebellion broke out in Kumamoto. It is quite likely that Takahashi Yuichi’s painting of *Katchū zu* (Painting of Armor, 1877, now in the collection of Yasukuni Shrine) was also produced in response to having come into contact with this movement (Fig. 3). Naitō Chisō, who commissioned the work from Takahashi and donated the completed painting to Yasukuni Shrine, subsequently came to advocate the wearing of swords during the Sino-Japanese war.

Naturally, a museum’s classification of its exhibits directly reflects the character of the museum. And the character of a museum changes depending on the government ministry under whose supervision it finds itself. While under the Home Ministry and the Ministry of Agriculture and Commerce, the museum was expected to be an institution for the promotion of industry. In the classification of exhibits in 1882—natural products, agriculture and forestry, horticulture, industrial arts, arts,

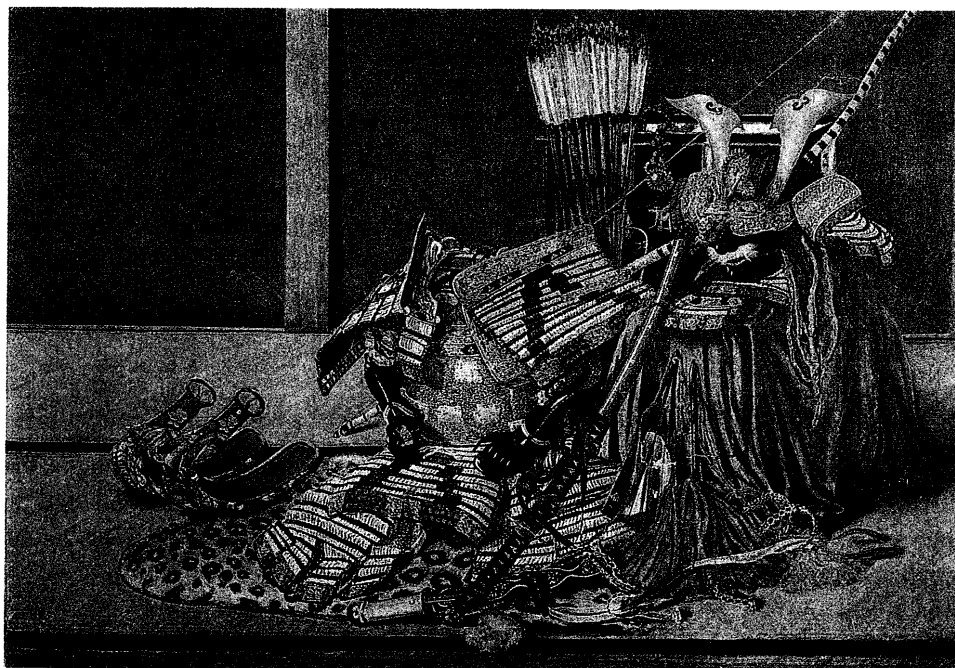


Figure 3. *Katchū zu* (Painting of Amour)
Takahashi Yuichi, 1877 Yasukuni Shrine

historical materials, weapons, education, books — natural history is only one out of nine sections, and history, if one combines historical materials and books, only two out of nine. The whole gives the impression of a trade fair of industrial products. Incidentally, the eighth section, historical materials, “include[d] military equipment up until the Meiji period”; the weapons section dealt with the new military industry. However, the 1889 classification, prepared soon after the transfer to the Imperial Household Ministry, was quite different, with sections for history, art, arts and crafts, industrial arts, and natural products. History was put at the head, and natural products moved to last. I believe weapons were incorporated in the history section, rather than in the art section.

The transfer of the museum to the Imperial Household Ministry was intended to create an Imperial estate. In 1889, the museum was renamed the Imperial Museum, in the expectation that the museum would serve to display the history of the empire (that is, as the realm of the emperor). Then, in 1900, the name was changed again, to the Tokyo Imperial Household Museum. This transformation was of course connected to the Imperial Constitution, promulgated in 1889. What was sought was a museum, and a collection, fit for an empire. This was a profound transformation, which can be compared to the transformations mentioned at the beginning of this essay, which accompanied the enactment of the Constitution of Japan in 1947. A full-scale, nation-wide survey of treasures was also initiated from the time the

museum was transferred to the Imperial Household Ministry. This was the beginning of national supervision of treasures, a step toward the systematization of the 1897 Law Preserving Ancient Shrines and Temples and the 1929 Law for the Preservation of National Treasures. The latter expanded the definition of the treasures which were to be the object of preservation to include those outside temples and shrines. Thus the collections of weapons held by the former daimyo houses also became objects of the law. Since this law remained in force until it was replaced in 1950 by the Law Protecting Cultural Properties, the discussions about “the sword as art” in 1945 and 1946 took place within the framework of this Law for the Preservation of National Treasures.

6. WAR MUSEUMS AND PEACE PRAYER MUSEUMS

The weapons section which had existed in the museum while it was under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Agriculture and Commerce disappeared with the 1886 transfer to the Imperial Household Ministry. With the progressive transformation of weapons into treasures, and treasures into something supervised by the state — this was precisely what gave birth to the idea of the “national treasure” — it was a war museum, namely the Yūshūkan of Yasukuni Shrine, opened in 1882, which displayed weapons both past and present. Since the building began as “a place for exhibiting pictures and weapons” (according to a proposal by the Army Corps of Engineers), it was, from the outset, a facility for displaying weapons as weapons. Moreover, since Yasukuni Shrine itself was under the supervision of the Ministry of the Army, one can regard the Yūshūkan as a national museum. According to the plan of exhibits in 1908, it not only related the historical development of weapons, but displayed new weapons and the booty of the Sino- and Russo-Japanese Wars. I will postpone a consideration of the display of weapons seized from the enemy for another occasion, but one can consider this kind of exhibit, showing weapons as weapons, as a new type of exhibit. On the issue of displaying booty, the Shinten-fu was established in the Imperial Palace after the Sino-Japanese war, and the Ken’an-fu after the Russo-Japanese, but many of the details are unclear.

After the defeat in 1945, it was ordered that the Yūshūkan should become the treasure house of Yasukuni Shrine. The weapons which had been displayed were of course confiscated, and it was intended to convert the Yūshūkan into a members’ facility (for bereaved families). In negotiations with the head of the Religious Section of SCAP, the chief priest of Yasukuni Shrine announced a plan to transform the Yūshūkan into a “recreation center (with roller skating, ping pong, and a merry-go-round),” and on July 7 1946, the Tokyo Shimbun reported that the Yūshūkan would be converted into a cinema and small theatre [YASUKUNI-JINJA 1983-87]. This should not come as a surprise, given the fact that three battleships which had been preserved at the Yokosuka base as monuments of the Russo-Japanese War were converted after the war into a cinema, dance hall, and aquarium.

The greatest disarmament in Japanese history put strict limits on any tendency

to display weapons. Displaying weapons as works of art was the safest course. (Thus it is almost impossible to see military banners in museums. The only one I have noticed recently was being displayed as folkcraft in the Japan Folkcraft Museum.) Perhaps one could also exhibit them as implements of mass destruction, that is, for killing people and preventing peace. (There is a model of the atom bomb which fell on Hiroshima in the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum, but it is hard to claim it refers adequately to the assailant, rather than the victim.)

The planned exhibition which the National Museum of Japanese History was to hold in 1996, “Wakoku midaru — Himiko no tōjō made” (Yamato at War: Until the Appearance of Himiko), aimed for an exhibit which would “put war in a universal perspective, by dealing with the present war between agriculturalists and pastoralists in the Sudan.” But the stipulation that “finally, the exhibition should end with the figure of a dove holding an olive branch” reveals that a reference to peace was not forgotten [KOKURITSU REKISHI MINZOKU HAKUBUTUSKAN 1996]. To an even greater extent, peace education is the guiding principle behind the building of the Peace Prayer Museum to Mourn the War Dead, which is being promoted by the Ministry of Welfare, as its name — “prayer” rather than “memorial” — demonstrates. (For that matter, what was intended by using “memorial” in the official name of the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum?) We need to pay close attention to how weapons were displayed during the shift in modern Japan from war museums to peace museums, and how they are going to be displayed from now on. (Immediately after our symposium, it was announced by the Ministry of Welfare that the official name of the Peace Prayer Museum to Mourn the War Dead is to be the Shōwakan, in order that its name does not connect it to either war or peace. The museum opened on March 28, 1999.)

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