Resource Notes

On Miyazaki's *Wind Rises*

Miyazaki Hayao's *Wind Rises* [風立ちぬ] is a 2013 animation film by Studio Ghibli. It was commercially successful -- according to Wikipedia, it was the highest-grossing Japanese film in Japan in 2013"[1] – and remains to be popular. My students at University of Minnesota love the film too. They think it is a moving film with a strong pacifist message. They are not alone. Professor Daisuke Akimoto at Ritsumeikan University also calls the film pacifist. This is not surprising, as Miyazaki's anti-war stance is well known.[2] However, I have a big problem with the film. I think its pacifism is misplaced and dangerously misrepresented. This short essay discusses how I use Miyazaki's film to generate discussion about pacifism and politics of post-Showa Japan.

The film is a strange, fictionalized drama about Horikoshi Jirō 堀越二郎, an aeronautical engineer, and his creation of Mitsubishi Zero. Let me emphasize FICTIONALIZED here. Horikoshi (1903-1982) was the chief designer of the famed fighter plane. He graduated at the top of his class from Tokyo Imperial University's Engineering Department (the Aviation Laboratory) and got a job in the Mitsubishi Heavy Industry. His struggle with numerous high demands by the Imperial Navy—in particular, the unprecedented maneuverability and light weight—to create Mitsubishi Zero is well known, and it also constitutes the basic storyline of the film.

The film, however, transforms Horikoshi into a romantic hero with tragic love. In real life, Horikoshi had an arranged marriage in 1932, and his wife, Sasaki Sumako, bore him six children and lived long. In the film, however, he falls in love with a beautiful woman, Satomi Naoko, and marries her as tuberculosis claims her life. For this, Director Miyazaki made an interesting decision to use the love story of Hori Tatsuo (1904-1953), a novelist and poet most famous for a short story, *The Wind Has Risen* [風立ちぬ, 1936-8]. Hori the novelist fell in love with a young woman artist, Yano Ayako, at a sanatorium in Karuizawa. After their engagement, the couple entered another sanatorium in Nagano Prefecture to treat their tuberculosis together. Ayako died only after several months, however. Shortly after, Hori published *The Wind Has Risen*. Adorned with an epigraph, "Le vent se lève, il faut tenter de vivre" [the wind rises, you must still live] by French poet Paul Valély, it is a beautiful and sad novel about his time with Ayako and their determination to embrace life together. The English translation is available in *Colombia Anthology of Modern Japanese Literature,* and it is worth assigning this short novel when you show the Miyazaki film in class.[3] Hori too died young, and tuberculosis made him too weak to produce any works during the last ten years of his life. In contrast, Horikoshi the engineer lived to be 78. After the war, he continued to work at Mitsubishi Heavy Industry (Shin Mitsubishi Jūkō) and helped develop the YS-11, Japan's first (and only) domestically produced aircraft that catered to Japan Airline and the Self Defense Force. After retirement he taught at Tokyo University, National Defense Academy, and

[1] *The Wind Rises,* Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Wind_Rises (last viewed April 2, 2022)
[2] Daisuke Akimoto, "Commentary: Miyazai's new animated film and its antiwar pacifism: The Wind Rises (Kaze Tachinu)," *Ritsumeikan Journal of Asia Pacific Studies,* 32 (2013).
[3] Hori Tatsuo (translated by Francis B. Tenny), "The Wind Has Risen," in *Columbia Anthology of Modern Japanese Literature,* v. 1, eds. J Thomas Rimer and Van C Gessel (New York: Columbia University Press), 201-239. *Naoko* is the title of another novel by Hori, published in 1941.

Nihon University and authored a book that detailed the development of Mitsubishi Zero, 零戦：その誕生と栄光の記録 [Zero Fighter: Record of Its Birth and Glory]. He was widely recognized at home and internationally: He was awarded the Order of the Rising Sun, Japan's national decoration, and a long obituary appeared in *The New York Times.* There, he is heralded as "a true engineer" who "did not allow errors either by others or by himself."[4] His son describes him to be a very detailed person (posting numerous instructions in the house such as "Roll up the toothpaste tube from the bottom").[5] Horikoshi the perfectionist engineer and Hori the romanticist artist were two very different personalities with two very different life trajectories. Yet, Miyazaki's film merges them into one persona.

Why? What is the effect of this awkward merger? By transplanting Hori's tragic romance onto Hirokoshi's wartime days with the military, the film succeeds in portraying Hirokoshi as a loveable hero. It also accentuates the purity of his love, both for his dying wife and his profession. Hirokoshi's childhood dream to create beautiful planes turns into his professional devotion to perfect Mitsubishi Zero despite unreasonable expectation by the military and Japan's lack of expertise and resources, but his engineering success is presented as sacrifices as he faces his wife's imminent death. The end of the film shows fictional Hirokoshi feeling conflicted about his Zero being used for the *kamikaze* mission. The emotional conflict between his deep disappointment and unflinching love for planes are further dramatized in the film through the figure of Giovanni Caproni, famed Italian aeronautical engineer (the Caproni aircraft-manufacturing company produced bombers during WWII for Italy, though the film does not mention it). Their dialogue ultimately sends a message that it is better to let your creativity serve for a better world, even though innovations may be used for destructive purposes, as life needs to go on. Overall, the film makes the viewers such as my students and Professor Akimoto sympathetic to the fictionalized Hirokoshi whose ingenuity, hard work, and sacrifice was (supposedly) misused by war. It was war that made "beautiful planes" a killing machine. It was war that abused the pure devotion of engineers. The film is silent about what led Japan to war.

I find such romanticization of technology problematic. It depoliticizes not only the very technology (in this case, Mitsubishi Zero) but also efforts that go into developing the technology. There is nothing inherently wrong about appreciating technology or celebrating human ingenuity. However, as a historian, I insist that we care about both the historical context of technological development in the past and the present in which we live and give meanings to that historical past. Romanticization of technology is problematic because it is how wartime technology have come to be celebrated in Japan. Take the Battleship Yamato, displayed at the Kure Maritime Museum that opened in 2005. Nicknamed the Yamato Museum, this city history museum boasts the huge 1/10 scale model of the battleship as the main attraction. The placard next to the ship reads, in Japanese:

> The construction of Battleship Yamato was the crystallization of shipbuilding technology in prewar Japan and laid the foundation of postwar reconstruction. This 1/10 model of Battleship Yamato was built to symbolize the feelings [*omoi*]

[4] 堀越二郎、『零戦：その誕生と栄光の記録』was initially published in 1970 by Kappa Books and then reprinted in 1984 by Kōdansha and in 2012 by Kadokawa Bunko. "Jiro Hirokoshi, 78, Dies in Tokyo; Designer of Zero Fighter," *The New York Times,* Jan 12, 1982, D00023. Quotes are from this obituary. Photos and information about YS-11 is available in many websites such as this: https://flyteam.jp/news/article/133907

[5] https://shuchi.php.co.jp/article/1579

> of all of those who made and boarded Yamato and their families, as well as the important message of peace for the coming generations. (the author's translation)

While letters and memorabilia show "the feelings" of the perished sailors and their families and are quite moving, the museum proudly displays the ingenuity of Yamato engineers—"crystallization of shipbuilding technology in prewar Japan"—who overcame all sorts of technological hurdles to build the largest battleship ever in the world and contributions to postwar Japan's successful shipbuilding these men and the City of Kure made. Like the Miyazaki film, the museum is silent about the context of the war and war responsibility. It is a commercially successful museum. By the time the Miyazaki film was released, it had attracted more than 850,000 visitors, and the film's release in fact brought more visitors to the museum that year.[6] Miyazaki's *Wind Rises* was released when right-wing novelist Hyakuta Naoki's *Eternal Zero* had reached the ranking of a million seller. Hyakuta's novel is not a blatant militaristic story but revolves around the young postwar generation siblings who initially knew little about *kamikaze* pilots but, as they learn more about their grandfather's death as a *kamikaze* pilot, come to deeply appreciate the sincerity and sacrifice of Japanese soldiers. Its live-action film was released in December 2013, five months after Miyazaki's *Wind Rises.* The film *Eternal Zero* won the Japanese Academy award and was a tremendous commercial success. In this climate, the romanticization of wartime sacrifice the Japanese people made, wither an engineer or fighter pilot, can function to romanticize war, even if Miyazaki did not intend it.

Your students, like my students, may say, "if only the war had not happened, he would have been able to make his dream planes. Poor Horikoshi, and how terrible war is. See, this is why the film is pacifist." I recommend assigning Allen and Sakamoto's short article to put this in a wider context. The article examines various war-related museums in contemporary Japan, and their sensible analysis brings out this precise issue of overlaying war and peace. They argue that war and peace do not constitute a dichotomy in these memory-making sites. They, including Yūshūkan that arguably most strongly devoted to heroizing the war dead in Japan, in fact pose themselves to be peace museums. Just like the full-size Mitsubishi Zero in Yūshūkan, revered *kamikaze* pilots at the Chiran Peace Museum, and the Battleship Yamato replica at the Kure Museum, Miyazaki's *The Wind Rises* focuses on the sacrifice and struggles of the engineer while the context of war is blurred under the substory of his romance. To be clear, Miyazaki's anime does not share any of Yūshūkan's patriotic narrative or Chiran Museum's heroization of *kamikaze* pilots. However, just like these museums, the anime does not portray any violence. We never see anyone actually dying or killing or being killed in this film. The pain and suffering we see in the film is all about the engineer's devotion, while the violence and destruction that his creation inflicted is absent. This effectively allows romanticization of technology and aestheticization of the sacrifice of the engineer. The war just happens in this story. It makes the viewer sympathetic to him but does not lead the viewer to ponder about what individuals can and should do to prevent war.[7]

[6] Hiromi Mizuno, "Pacifying Wartime Technology: The Yamato Museum and Scientific Nationalism in Japan," unpublished talk at UCLA, January 25, 2020. For the visitor number, see Chugoku Shinbun, https://www.hiroshimapeacemedia.jp/?p=31090

[7] Matthew Allen and Rumi Sakamoto, "War and Peace: War Memories and Museums in Japan," *History Compass* 11/12 (2013): 1047-1058.

My students also argue that technology itself is not inherently good or bad; it is people who abuse technology that are to be blamed. Then what about the atomic bomb? If engineers and scientists pursuing their professional call justifies the end product, the atomic bomb would be justified in the same way. That, to me, is a problematic logic. Moreover, the assumption that a peaceful time leads to peaceful technology is wrong and naïve. Many contrary examples exist, of course. If you are teaching a Science and Technology Studies course or interested in incorporating the topic of science and technology into your history class, this is a great discussion point.

But I hope Miyazaki's *The Wind Rises* generates more specific discussion about post-Showa memory politics in Japan than this kind of universal and abstract pondering. The rise of political conservatism and nationalism, together with shifting geopolitics after the Cold War, reshaped the terrain of memory politics in Asia, and popular culture reflects and participates in such politics. The pure-hearted engineer and the peaceful life he wanted to have with his wife were all fiction that Miyazaki created. What motivated Horikoshi the engineer in real life is irrelevant here. What matters is that the creator of Mitsubishi Zero is presented to be a hero and victim and that the film is received as a pacifist film. I hope this essay provides one example of how to use this beautiful yet problematic film as a critical tool in our classroom and research.

By

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