

Memories of Japanese Military Horses of World War II

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Introduction

On August 10, 1977, the chief of a small rural railroad station near Honbetsu in central Hokkaido, the northernmost and second largest of Japan's four main islands, discovered a wooden plank in a nearby field that triggered memories from over three decades earlier. As a railway employee during the war, Mori Hiroshi (1917-2003) moved hundreds of horses from an adjacent military horse ranch up the ramp and into boxcars, which carried them towards the front in China and elsewhere. When he found the plank – marked by countless horseshoe prints – Mori, as he recalled years later, felt like the spirits of the horses entered his body. The discovery led him to build a memorial for the horses a decade later near the by then abandoned station. Several local Honbetsu businessmen supported Mori with this project, including the manager of a draft horse-pulling (*ban'ei keiba*) competition course who provided land for the monument next to the track, which now too has disappeared. As the monument neared completion in 1988, Mori publically announced his plan in a letter to the daily *Hokkaidō Shinbun* (the prefectural broadsheet), which led people to send hundreds of letters, photographs, and items related to war horses from throughout Hokkaido and the country. The Honbetsu Town Historical Museum now displays some of those materials as part of a permanent exhibit.

Over the last two decades, Mori's experience and the outpouring of memories it elicited have led to a proliferation of war horse narratives in various cultural forms – newspaper and magazine articles, television specials, memoirs and book chapters, and a grade-school textbook story – and inspired the construction of other monuments, including one in Okinawa (an island chain south of Japan's four main islands) built by veterans from Hokkaido of the Battle of Okinawa in 1990. In short, events in Honbetsu contributed to an unprecedented process of memory-making about military horses.

The processes of memory-making outlined in this essay provide numerous insights into the dynamics of war memories at the local level. First, the history of the mobilization of horses by the Japanese government during the Second World War provides an example of a regime of biopower that fostered certain breeds of equine life with the aim of deploying those lives and power for war and death. Second, as the Honbetsu case illustrates, individual initiative can exert a tremendous influence on local war memory. As Mori's campaigns to commemorate war horses gained momentum, it attracted first local and then national attention. As such it is a compact example of collective memory in the making – from individual to local to national. Third, the different ways in which war horses feature in the local narratives of the three main horse-producing subprefectural regions of Hokkaido under examination in the chapter (Tokachi, Hidaka and Kushiro) illustrate the internal contestations within the region/prefecture of Hokkaido (which promotes equine culture as a distinctive prefectural characteristic). Fourth, the case studies reveal how local and regional identity and economic conditions in the horse breeding business today (mainly for racehorse breeding) contribute to the formation of war memories. Finally, through linking the local narratives of war horses to the familiar and perennial ones about war responsibility, the essay considers how such locally-rooted memories have the potential to shape – and complicate – familiar local, regional, and national narratives of the war.

War and Horses

Historians estimate that about a half million horses were mobilized in the Japanese empire from 1931 to 1945. During the First Sino-Japanese (1894-1895) and Russo-

Japanese (1904-1905) wars, the Japanese army deployed approximately 130,000 and 223,000, respectively.¹ The vast majority of horses used by the Imperial military during this half century came from equine-producing regions in Hokkaido, Tohoku and Kanto on the main island of Honshu, and the southern main island of Kyushu. The government imported many horses from foreign countries and increasingly from Japan's expanding empire because the quality and number of domestically bred horses was insufficient to meet military demands. The government strongly encouraged breeders to mix Western horse strains into indigenous varieties and to produce equines at the greatest numbers possible. As a result, the bodies of horses were drastically transformed. Between 1905 and 1935, the domestic percentage of horses of Western or mixed breed rose from 12.2% to 96.6%.² Military horses performed a wide variety of duties, from serving as mounts for officers and cavalry units to carrying supplies and pulling weapons. This work required different kinds of horses, who often came from different areas. In Hokkaido, for example, the areas of Tokachi and Kushiro mainly provided draft animals while Hidaka supplied thoroughbreds. Even as the Japanese army sought to mechanize its forces in the late 1930s, it remained heavily reliant on horses to move men and equipment. In 1944, Operation Ichigo, the last major campaign against the Nationalist Chinese, for example, mustered some 500,000 men and 100,000 horses, most whom were draft animals, and just 15,000 vehicles.³

The army acquired horses either through purchase or requisition. During peacetime, its buyers purchased horses at markets, usually paying slightly more than the going price. Sellers, often large stock operations during peacetime, were happy to sell at a higher price and relished the status of selling to the military. During wartime, the army was unable to acquire enough horses on the market, so it conscripted horses, issuing requisitions to local administrative areas, such as towns and villages, requiring them to supply it with a designated number of animals. After inspecting the animals, the army selected the best mounts and draft horses, and paid their owners, though often below market value, for the horses. Owners of conscripted horses, who were often small farmers and deliverymen, usually sent the animals off in a celebratory manner, but because their livelihood depended on equines, requisition represented a serious hardship.⁴

During the Asia-Pacific War, the government, in concert with private organizations, glorified the service of horses as never before to encourage people to willingly send off their horses to the military. Because the army had difficulties in obtaining enough horses during the First Sino-Japanese and Russo-Japanese wars, celebrating and memorializing war horses bolstered more practical efforts for the improvement and propagation of equines. The wartime years witnessed the production of newspaper and magazine articles, songs, textbook stories, juvenile literature, films such as *Uma* (Horse, 1940), monuments, parades and other public ceremonies, and the annual nationwide "Aiba no hi" (Love Horses Day, begun in 1930), all of which were designed to encourage a "love for horses" and celebrate the "valorous feats" of military horses.⁵ Perhaps most spectacularly, soldiers on horses traveled in two processions from Hokkaido to Kashihara Shrine in Nara and from Kyushu to Meiji Shrine in Tokyo in celebration of the empire's 2,600 year anniversary in 1940.⁶ As government, military, and private officials celebrated the lives of horses, they endeavored to "administer, optimize, and multiply" them,⁷ so that they could exploit that living power to both symbolic and military advantage.

Defeat brought an immediate end to such celebratory media and public spectacles, and the following decades witnessed a drop in horse ownership as agriculture and transportation became more mechanized and a decline in horseback riding, which was associated with discredited military values. Moreover, the war had devastated Japan's equine population, which perhaps has still never fully recovered to its prewar levels. Yet some memorializing of military horses continued. As historian

Morita Toshihiko has meticulously documented, monuments honoring military horses continued to be constructed in the years and decades after the war, though the number paled in comparison to those built before 1945.⁸ In Hokkaido, two memorials were constructed soon after the war, both at Shinto shrines near Kushiro in 1947 and Sapporo in 1954. In 1958, Yasukuni Shrine in Tokyo, a prominent and controversial Shinto shrine dedicated to the spirits of Japan's military war dead, placed a statue of a military horse, donated by the sculptor Itō Kunio, on a pedestal on its premises, and held yearly commemorative rituals thereafter.

Despite such remembrances, military horses do not seem to have had a prominent place in national, regional, and local war memory, including in Hokkaido, for many decades. Mori, for example, was unaware that a monument existed at Yasukuni until after he had completed his memorial. For a variety of factors, including Mori's own actions, the end of the twentieth century witnessed a greater attention to horses and more memories of military horses in Hokkaido and throughout Japan.

Horses and Hokkaido

Horses had long been identified with armed fighting on the Japanese archipelago. Before the mid-nineteenth century, horses were associated with the mounted elite figure of the samurai. Armed with a bow, as well as a spear or sword, samurai came to dominate much of the archipelago by the twelfth century. During the Tokugawa period (1600-1868) as many warriors came to be heavily indebted to merchants and rich peasants, horse-ownership gradually increased among other status groups, but like the sword, horses were still strongly identified with the military. These trends continued during the Meiji period (1868-1912) as well. Even as more farmers and others came to rely more on horses, equines remained associated with the Imperial army and socioeconomic elites.

More people relied on horses in Hokkaido (or Ezo as it was known as until 1869), which remained a frontier for longer and where agriculture was even less dependent on rice, than elsewhere on the archipelago. Indeed, horses played a vital role in the settlement, colonization, and development of the island.⁹ Residents of Hokkaido continued to use horses extensively for farming, industry, and transportation until the 1960s, much later than in most other areas. Perhaps because of these factors, horses became more closely connected in both actual and metaphorical terms with the island.

The historical importance of horses and their widespread and intimate interaction with people gave rise to a relatively strong identification with horses in Hokkaido. This association is aptly represented by the term *dosanko* (道産子), which is used to refer both an indigenous breed of small, sturdy horses descended from animals brought from Honshu during the Tokugawa period and to people who are born and raised in Hokkaido. Though its former use predated and led to its use to refer to people, the latter usage is now much more frequent than its use as a reference for a breed whose numbers have dwindled since the early twentieth century.

Japanese often imagine Hokkaido as a frontier, pastoral and natural region and identify it with many animals, both wild and domesticated, including the bear, fox, sheep and cow, as well as the horse. Equines are readily visible in the prefectural capital of Sapporo, a metropolis with a population of 1.8 million people. There are horse-drawn carriages for tourists in the center of Sapporo itself, at the Satoland agricultural amusement park, the Historical Village of Hokkaido and Maruyama Zoo. Horses graze in fields at Hokkaido University, right in the city center. Many imaginary horses, such as two playground figures of a mother horse and its colt at North Pony Park, pervade the city.

In recent years, the prefectural government has made a concerted effort to preserve, or reinvigorate, this identity in Hokkaido. In 2004, it declared “Hokkaido’s horse culture” to be a “cultural heritage asset” and the following year the prefectural Historical Museum of Hokkaido (in Sapporo) opened a special exhibit about the horse in Hokkaido. Curators declared the purpose of the exhibit was to “share with the next generation ‘Hokkaido’s horse culture.’”¹⁰ Through a variety of documents and objects, the exhibit chronicled the history of the *dosanko* breed, the role of horses in island’s settlement and agricultural development, the use of horses for war (told through many items from Honbetsu), and horse-related festivals in Hokkaido. It is almost impossible to gauge the response of museum visitors – which surely included many school groups – to the exhibit, but clearly prefectural officials were interested in fostering a continuing regional identification with horses.

Ironically, this desire to (re)instill a connection with horses is prompted in part by the separation of horses from people. Because of greater urbanization and the disappearance of practical uses for horses in daily life, far fewer Hokkaido residents, both in urban and rural areas, have much firsthand interaction with horses. Despite – and perhaps sometimes because of – this increased separation, horses in general and military horses specifically have not been forgotten, particularly in some local areas, in the last few decades. This increased attention to military horses, as illustrated by the exhibits in Sapporo and Honbetsu, appears to have been motivated in part by a desire to restore regional and local identities connected to horses. Discussion of the war by the aging wartime generation and attempts to boost the economy through horse-related entertainment and tourism, as well as lingering anti-war sentiment, have also contributed to the preservation, dissemination, and creation of memories of military horses.

Producers of such memories are varied and diverse in their motivations. They include individuals like Mori who worked with military horses at home or on the front, local and prefectural officials and museum curators, school teachers, and even horses, whose ongoing presence and economic value, helps to sustain an interest in horses generally and to revive memories of military horses. This paper will focus on the formation of war-horse memories in three areas or subprefectures, Tokachi, Hidaka, and Kushiro, which were the main sources of horses for the military during the Asia-Pacific War.

Tokachi

Tokachi, where the town of Honbetsu is located, has become the inspiration – thanks primarily to Mori but also due to other factors – of many military horse-related memories in the last few decades. Tokachi lies in south central Hokkaido. Its heart is the broad Tokachi Plain east of the north-south running Hidaka Mountain Range, which bisects the island as a sort of backbone. Agriculture – specifically the growing of wheat, potatoes, beans, and beets – has been Tokachi’s main industry since ethnic Japanese settlers began to settle in the area in the late nineteenth century. From then until the 1960s, horses were valued partners for farming and transportation. By the 1970s, the mechanization of farming had led to steep decline of the equine population in the region.

Tokachi’s central location and its large population of horses led the Imperial Army to establish the Tokachi Military Horse Replenishment Ranch in Honbetsu, northeast of the city of Obihiro, in 1925. Ranch employees, who numbered around 200, managed an average of 1200 heavy and light draft horses who were acquired either through purchase or conscription when they were two to three years old. As noted in Honbetsu’s official town history, published in 1977, by the time they were five years old if not sooner, the horses were shipped off from nearby Senbiri station to overseas army units.¹¹

As its inclusion in the town history indicates, military horses were an acknowledged element of war memory in Honbetsu and in Tokachi generally, but Mori's efforts helped make them a prominent strand. As elsewhere in Japan, war memories often emphasized mobilization and deprivation. And in Honbetsu memories of the war highlighted the town being bombed by American aircraft on July 15, 1945; in fact, the city's annual war memorial ceremony is conducted on that anniversary each year. This emphasis was in part because it was rare for a small town like Honbetsu to have been bombed. Local historians, after investigation of U.S. military records, have come to the conclusion that Honbetsu was not the intended target of the raid.

Mori's efforts to build the monument drastically raised the profile of military horses. When Mori had nearly completed the memorial, he announced his plans in a letter to the editor in the *Hokkaidō Shinbun* on September 7, 1988. Why, he asked, did human soldiers return from the front but not military horses, and why were the spirits of dead soldiers honored but not horses?¹² Less than two months later on October 31, Mori unveiled the seven foot tall monument, which he had paid almost entirely with his own money. The memorial is built from a large polished reddish rock that sits on a large concrete pedestal. On the rock is a white plaque inscribed with the word "repose of souls" (*chinkon*) and on the base a black plaque briefly explains that the monument comforts the spirits of horses who did not return from the continent.

Fifteen years later in June 2003 and several months before his death at the age of eighty-six, Mori placed another plaque on the back of the concrete base. After noting the deaths of some 700,000 military horses during the Asia-Pacific War and that 10 million people were opposed to the on-going Iraq War, Mori declared that peace was the "shared hope of people and horses."¹³ Mori did not leave any other writings other than the letter to the editor and these two plaques, but his actions led a member of the committee that organized an annual ceremony honoring military horses in Honbetsu to state that "Mori's efforts served to revive memories of horses."¹⁴

Though Mori seems to have been primarily motivated by a desire to pacify the spirits of military horses, the support he initially received and the retelling of his story in the years since seems to be in part motivated by a desire to stimulate local and regional economic development and identity. The president of the local agricultural cooperative, which managed the *ban'ei* (alternatively *banba*) horse-pulling track, a sport in which massive draft horses compete in pulling heavy sleds 200 meters including over two small hills while being urged on by a jockey, provided land next to the arena for the monument. His reasons for doing so probably had more to do with bolstering local or regional identity than providing an economic boost for the arena. Regardless, the track closed within a few years and its remains are barely visible today.

Today, some visitors make the trip to out-of-the-way Honbetsu specifically to see Mori's monument and the small museum exhibit, but they are few and far between and have a minimal economic impact. Currently the town does little to promote the museum and monument in tourism materials – its significance probably lies most as a site for educational trips by local school children. The monument can be found thanks to a small sign that makes the erroneous claim to be "Japan's only monument for the repose of military horse spirits" (*Nihon de yuitsu no gunba chinkon hi*).

Horse-pulling is, however, distinctive to Hokkaido, and increasingly to Tokachi. The competitions were once quite popular throughout the prefecture; as many five major arenas operated as recently as the 1980s but now a track in nearby Obihiro is the only one open and it too is struggling to survive. Perhaps not surprisingly, Obihiro horse-pulling promoters have used memories of military horses to try to reinvigorate what they call the "equine culture" in Tokachi and boost interest in the sport. The Horse Museum next to the Obihiro Racecourse displays a number of photographs and artifacts related to military horses and the *Uma Bunka Shinbun* (Horse culture

newspaper), published quarterly by a non-profit group dedicated to promoting “equine culture” in Tokachi, dedicated several issues to military horses and Mori’s monument in 2009 and 2010.¹⁵

The cooperation of the local government in Honbetsu, especially the town’s historical museum, has played a significant role in disseminating memories of military horses. After the *Hokkaidō Shinbun* printed Mori’s letter, the newspaper as well as national newspapers such as the *Asahi Shinbun* published stories about Mori and the response it had generated even as they and Mori began to receive more letters from people expressing moral support for him, financial donations, and stories of their own experiences with military horses.¹⁶ By the time of Mori’s death fifteen years later, he had received over four hundred letters and over a thousand photographs and artifacts. The donated items included the mane that possibly belonged to Uranus, the horse who with his rider, Baron Nishi Takeichi, won the equestrian gold medal at the Los Angeles Olympic Games in 1932. Nishi apparently clipped off part of Uranus’ mane before he left for Iwo Jima, where he died during the defense of the island in March 1945. Another fascinating item that was donated was the photograph of Honbetsu-go, a military horse who came from Honbetsu who museum curators were able to verify was one of probably only a handful of horses who returned from military service on the continent. In 2003 just days after Mori attached the second plaque to the monument, the museum opened a display of some forty of these items.¹⁷ Because of tremendous and ongoing interest, the exhibit has become a permanent feature in the museum’s limited display space, and is located prominently just inside the entrance to the museum.

Mori’s efforts truly transcended Honbetsu and Hokkaido and reverberated across the country. Since 1988, the *Hokkaidō Shinbun*, the prefecture’s major newspaper, has published hundreds of articles and letters-to-the-editor related to military horses. The newspaper included a chapter entitled “The Tears of Military Horses” (*Gunba no namida*), which mentioned Mori and had appeared as two articles in the paper, in a collection of stories about war memory that it published on the sixtieth anniversary of the end of the war in 2005.¹⁸ National newspapers picked up the story within weeks of Mori’s published letter and helped elicit responses from across the country.¹⁹ Uranus’s purported mane, for example, was donated by a museum director in Kyushu in 1990, who had read about Mori. He had received the mane from an American military veteran of Iwo Jima, who purportedly took it off of Nishi’s corpse and contacted the director about returning it to his family. When they were unable to verify whether or not it was actually Uranus’s mane, they agreed to have it donated to the Honbetsu museum because all the attention the museum was receiving and because Nishi had served at the horse ranch in Honbetsu from 1939 to 1940. In 2006, the museum capitalized on the release of *Letters from Iwo Jima* (2006) and interest in Nishi, who is portrayed very sympathetically by the film, to launch a special exhibit about him and Uranus.²⁰

The museum contributed to national memory about military horses in other ways as well. Museum curator Seto Noriko published articles in national publications such as the monthly magazine of the Japan Equine Affairs Association, and provided material for a television programs such as one by national broadcaster NHK on August 18, 1997.²¹ The museum has also loaned numerous items to other museums throughout Japan. As a result, generations who never experienced the war “remembered” memories of military horses.

Another example of Mori’s local war memories creating new nationalized memories was the inclusion of a story in a Japanese language textbook for second-year elementary school students in 1992. It fictionalized Mori’s experience to boost its emotional impact. The story described a chief of a small railway station in the “north” after the war, who read in the station records about how nearly a thousand horses were

sent into military service from the station. He remembers that when he was a youngster his favorite horse was conscripted, never to return. His reading of the station log and childhood trauma prompt him to raise money to construct a monument to honor military horses.²² This thinly veiled retelling of Mori's experience was just one of many newly fashioned memories inspired by him that contributed to a nationalized memory of military horses where they had never existed before.

Hidaka

To the west of Tokachi lies Hidaka, a subprefecture with an identity and an economy now much more closely connected to horses than Tokachi. Hidaka is situated between the ocean and the Hidaka Mountains and this narrow coastal zone with its relatively temperate maritime climate and verdant hills has been favored by horse stock ranchers since the late nineteenth century. The Kaitakushi, or Colonization Agency, which for a time oversaw settlement on Hokkaido, established large stud farm and ranch at Niikappu and Shizunai in the 1870s.²³ By the early twentieth century, Hidaka ranches, which crossbred Nanbu stallions from northern Honshu with imported animals, were producing many thoroughbreds for the military, as well as for an emerging horseracing industry. The army purchased many horses for its cavalry units and officers from such ranches, and because Hidaka's population was rather sparse and farming relatively limited, the conscription of horses was infrequent. After the war, when selling horses to the military was no longer an option, the ranches entirely turned their focus to breeding and raising racehorses. By the end of the twentieth century Hidaka was supplying eighty percent of the country's track animals and had become a tourist destination as horse racing achieved popularity in the late 1980s with the emergence of an extremely successful Hidaka-bred horse named Oguricap. These historical circumstances have shaped how military horses have been remembered – and forgotten – in Hidaka.

Unlike in Tokachi, the exhibit space of and literature produced by the stock ranches for visiting tourists is nearly complete silent about the war. Perhaps this is not surprising. Maybe the last thing racehorse lovers who visit these ranches want to encounter while on vacation are unpleasant memories of the increasingly distant history. Yet this absence reflects a broader trend of how the racing industry has depicted the past. In official histories of horseracing and exhibit space in museums sponsored by the Japan Racing Association, such as Equine Museum of Japan in Yokohama and the JRA Museum in Tokyo, the industry is usually portrayed either as a casualty of the wartime era or the war years go largely unmentioned.²⁴ The active cooperation of most horse ranchers, the handsome profits they garnered for years, and the many transwar continuities between the postwar racing industry and the military do not appear. These tendencies are evident at the local level in Hidaka in the discussion – or the lack of discussion – about the war.

Histories produced by local municipalities in Hidaka discuss the war more often. A history of Urakawa, sponsored by the town in 1991, for example, devotes a chapter to military horses.²⁵ A permanent exhibit dedicated to the “history and culture of horses and people” and curated by town employees of Shin-Hidaka achieves a balance in highlighting aspects of that history and culture that appeal to the typical tourist interested in horseracing while placing horses – if not horseracing – in the history of Hidaka, including a section on war horses. In 2010, which marked the sixty-fifth anniversary of the end of the war, curators staged a special exhibit for four months during the summer and fall devoted specifically to military horses.²⁶ Again, many of the items on display were on loan from Honbetsu.

In the last decade, a contest of sorts has developed in Hidaka schoolrooms of how to remember military horses that reflects this tension between remembering and forgetting. In 2002, the prefectural economic development agency published 2000 copies of a thirty page comic book, *Hidaka uma monogatari* (The story of Hidaka

horses), for distribution in local grade schools describing the history of horses in the area. Reissued in 2010, the *manga* seeks to, as an agency official put it to “make up for a lack of educational materials about the history of horses in an area known for its production of horses,” and nourish a sense of local identity among youngsters.²⁷ As is the case for the horseracing industry, the booklet barely mentions the wartime years.²⁸

In contrast was the emphasis of a study group of fifteen progressive social studies school junior high and elementary school teachers in Hidaka who focused on military horses to supplement what little there was in textbooks about the war and about Hidaka’s role in it.²⁹ The group had previously prepared materials about Korean forced laborers in wartime Hokkaido. As one teacher explained, they turned their attention to horses because they thought the actual existence of horses in Hidaka and use of “materials that were closely related to local history” would help students “understand the reality of war” and how Hidaka, especially its “local [equine] industry,” was intimately connected to the prosecution of the war.³⁰ The teachers gathered historical documents, visited Honbetsu in neighboring Tokachi, conducted interviews with local elderly residents who had worked with military horses, and prepared materials to share with other instructors. In 2007 and 2008, they presented this material at several schools and to some fifty other teachers. However, pressure from national and prefectural educational bureaucrats soon ended the group’s activities. For many years, the Ministry of Education and school teachers, many who were members of the left-leaning teachers’ unions, had argued over the content of ministry-approved history textbooks, especially their lack of coverage of the war, and how teachers could, as education scholar Peter Cave has aptly put it, “go ... beyond the textbook,” by supplementing the curriculum with materials of their own.³¹ In 2007, a scandal over the inaccurate reporting of team-teaching hours at a few schools in Hidaka ultimately enabled national and prefectural bureaucrats to break up study groups like the one focused on military horses.³² The group’s dissolution contributed to it not publishing a planned booklet, which would have enabled the dissemination of the curricular materials and encouraged among more school children a different way of remembering horses and the **war**.

Kushiro

The third major source of military horses in Hokkaido was Kushiro, a subprefecture that lies on the other, or east, side of Tokachi. Like Tokachi, Kushiro – home of a breed of the same name known for its heartiness in frigid conditions – provided the military with many draft horses. Unlike in Hidaka and even more so than in Tokachi, Kushiro’s equine-related once thriving industry has largely disappeared. As in Tokachi, the mechanization of agriculture and transportation made horses unnecessary by the late 1960s. The popular writer and television personality Hata Masanori (known best as Mutsugoro) recalls many farming families in Kushiro selling their unneeded animals to be slaughtered for horsemeat in the mid-1970s.³³ Horse-pulling competitions are no longer common. War memory in Kushiro has never been much concerned with horses, despite some attention to the equine-industry in municipal-sponsored histories, public statuary, and museum exhibits in the city of Kushiro and the neighboring town of Shibechea.

The topic has received the most attention in Shibechea, a town just north of the port city of Kushiro. After the Russo-Japanese War, the army established a horse ranch there but closed it and consolidated its operations in Honbetsu in 1938. As a result, few historical materials survived. One relic of the ranch is now the building that houses the town’s small historical museum, which includes a small section about the ranch in its display. In recent years, its curators have conducted and published research about the ranch, organized roundtables of elderly residents sharing their memories, and conducted outreach to the town’s schoolchildren.³⁴ In contrast with Honbetsu, these

retellings of history are less focused on horses and more on the economic impact of the ranch and its social history within the broader story of the area.

Similar trends are evident in Kushiro. A city-sponsored book, *Basan ōkoku: Kushiro* (Kushiro: a horse-producing kingdom), a statue of a Kushiro horse outside of Otanoshike Station, and exhibits in the official city museum place horses in their context as partners in the settlement and development of the region.³⁵ Some mention is made of military horses, but it is done so with less emphasis and in a more detached tone.

Conclusion

Though varied in the way that they represent the past, often memories of military horses portray them as passive victims, who were unwillingly conscripted, dispatched far from home, and silently suffered at war. In short, they often serve as an analogue for how people wish to remember the war as victims of a reckless war. Yet some memories of military horses, such as Mori's, offer in at least several ways the possibility for a critique to this standard narrative. Remembering horses and others deployed for war challenges the traditional anthropocentric tendency of much war memory that focuses almost exclusively on people. Indeed, inspired by Mori's efforts, an army veteran, who cared for hundreds of Japanese military horses while a prisoner of the Soviets for four years after the war in Siberia and survived by eating some of the horses, repeatedly asked the Ministry of Health to honor military horses as part of the annual government-sponsored ceremony memorializing human war dead at the Nihon Budōkan each August 15, but with no success.³⁶ In addition, Mori's memorializing appears to overcome regional and national chauvinisms that focus solely on Japanese wartime losses – whether or equine. This may have not been the case in 1988, but in 2003 when Mori attached the second plaque on the back of the monument it noted that 700,000 horses died – an estimate that includes horses from all sides of the fighting in Asia.

Finally, Mori's monument raises interesting questions about agency. Unlike almost all humans involved in the war, horses did indeed have much less agency about whether or not to be involved in the conflict, and their mobilization required human intervention. Mori seemed to be driven by guilt about his own actions and his personal contribution to the war. Based on the very limited writings Mori left, we can surmise that he did not view his role in a passive way or as having been forced to send off the horses to the war. Rather Mori exhibited recognition that he and other average people on the home front contributed to the war effort and manipulated beings who had no control over their fate.

This sentiment is perhaps most evident in a disagreement that emerged in response to Mori's letter to the editor in 1988. As recounted by an article in the *Hokkaidō Shinbun*, all of the letters sent to the newspaper about Mori's effort were positive except one. Shōnai Sadao, a former army veterinarian and president of a Sapporo equestrian group, took issue with Mori's planned words on the monument about spirits of horses whose "sorrowful neighs that bore a grudge." The word "grudge" (*onnen*) was too harsh, he objected, and should be replaced with "sadness." According the newspaper, Mori responded that to use the "word sadness to characterize military horses who were shot, and used and discarded is wanting." Shonai was apparently not convinced by Mori's argument and even appealed to the Honbetsu's mayor to alter the wording. The disagreement, the paper observed, may have originated from the perspective of two parties – Mori as a railway employee was dispatching horses to the front while Shonai was tending to horses there. But it seems the paper may have been daintily tip-toeing around the issue of responsibility. Neither party, of course, was ultimately responsible for the fate of military horses, but Mori seemed more willing to face whatever responsibility he had as a cog in this biopolitical system that bred, raised, deployed, used, and discarded horses. In the end, Shonai gave up

exclaiming that “hopefully people in the future will not misunderstand and think that military horses were treated in terrible ways.”³⁷

Although Mori’s effort shows the potential of complicating war memory, it also has limitations. In his letter to the editor, Mori criticized the absence of a monument for military horses at Yasukuni Shrine, and he had earlier even petitioned the government and the shrine to build a memorial on its premises, but never received a reply from either.³⁸ Subsequent letter writers soon corrected his mistake by pointing out that a monument had in fact been erected at Yasukuni many years earlier in 1958. It is significant that Mori did not question the authority of the shrine to memorialize military dead, equine or human. In this respect, he bolstered rather than undermined a powerful conservative strain of national war memory that mourns the dead while glorifying the war rather than mourning the dead while taking a more critical view of the war as the progressive teachers in Hidaka attempted to do.

Needless to say, because horses cannot “speak” (or at least we cannot understand them), they cannot contest how their stories are told. There is no way to know whether they begrudge how they were dispatched to the front or simply feel sad about it. This makes memories of them extremely malleable, both on a local and national level. Memories of war horses can be used to celebrate and justify the “Greater East Asia War” – the name revisionist conservatives prefer to call the conflict – or they can be used for anti-war, pacifist aims. Only with their presence can horses contribute to how they are represented and remembered.

A consideration of those on the periphery of war – both geographically in the remote locales of Hokkaido and biologically as non-human combatants – sheds new perspectives on the war in history and memory and raises many fascinating questions. Attention to local history and subaltern actors, no matter how far they may be from the levers of geopolitical and biopolitical power, illustrate that in total war every place and every being was subjected to, or perhaps more aptly, participated in the all-encompassing conflict. This essay reveals how an individual actively remembering the history of military horses can help form local collective narratives and in turn these may inform national war memory. Particularly at the local level, this process is internally configured by regional identity and economic interests and shaped by the involvement – even if it by their mere ongoing presence – of a variety of actors, including equines.

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* This paper was first presented at the British Association of Japanese Studies Conference held at Hokkaido University in May 2011. The author would like to thank the conference participants, and especially conference organizer Philip Seaton for “commissioning” this project and for initially providing some materials and extensive feedback over the course of several years. The generous research assistance of Konno Yōji is sincerely appreciated. Throughout this chapter, Japanese personal names appear surname (family name) first followed by personal name.

¹ Morita Toshihiko, *Sensō ni itta umatachi: gunba hi kara mita Nihon no sensō* (Osaka: Seifūdō shoten, 2011), 14.

² Ōtaki Masatoshi, *Gunba to nōmin* (Kyoto: Kyōto Daigaku gakujutsu shuppankai, 2013), 4.

³ James Boyd, “Horse Power: The Japanese Army, Mongolia and the Horse, 1927-43,” *Japan Forum* 22 (2010): 23-42.

⁴ Morita Toshihiko, *Sensō ni itta umatachi*, 35-88.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 90-114.

⁶ NHK Sensō Shōgen, Nihon Nyūsu (30 October 1940), http://cgi2.nhk.or.jp/shogenarchives/jpnews/movie.cgi?das_id=D0001300406_00000&seg_number=003, accessed on 6 February 2012. For more about similar celebrations in 1940, see Kenneth Ruoff, *Imperial Japan at its Zenith: The Wartime Celebration of the Empire's 2600th Anniversary* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010).

⁷ Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality, Volume I: An Introduction* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 137.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 130. E-mail message from Morita, 19 January 2012.

⁹ *Kita no reinen* (Year one in the north), a popular motion picture released by Toei in 2005, highlights the prominent role horses performed in the settlement of Hokkaido.

¹⁰ Hokkaidō kaitaku ki'nenkan, ed., *HORSE: Hokkaidō no uma bunka* (Sapporo: Hokkaidō kaitaku ki'nenkan, 2005), 1.

¹¹ Honbetsu-chō shi hensan iinkai, ed., *Honbetsu-chō shi* (Honbetsu: Honbetsu-chō yakuba, 1977), 184-85.

¹² Mori Hiroshi, “Dokusha no koe: Gunba no irei hi mo sengo shori no kadai,” *Hokkaidō shinbun* (7 September 1988), 5.

¹³ “Honbetsu no Mori-san, gunba no gisei,” *Hokkaidō shinbun* (6 July 2003), 26.

¹⁴ “Senka ni satta gunba irei,” *Hokkaidō shinbun* (29 December 2001), 20.

¹⁵ *Uma bunka shinbun*, 6-8 (October 2009, January 2010, March 2010) umabunka.com/bunka.html. Seto Noriko, the curator of the Honbetsu Town History Museum, authored an article in the newspaper that focused on Mori.

¹⁶ “Aiba o shinobu tayori ga zokuzoku to,” *Hokkaidō shinbun* (16 October 1988), 21. To his credit, Mori in his letter to the editor did not ask for donations and told the newspaper in its first story that the monument was nearly finished and he did not need any donations.

¹⁷ “Honbetsu-chō rekishi minzoku shiryō kan 15 nichi kara gunba shiryō ten,” *Hokkaidō shinbun* (9 July 2003), 29.

¹⁸ Hokkaidō Shinbun sha, ed., *Senka no kioku: Sengo rokuju nen hyakunin no shōgen* (Sapporo: Hokkaidō Shinbun sha, 2005), 190-96.

¹⁹ See for example, “Gunba no chinkon hi,” *Asahi shinbun* (18 November 1988, evening edition), 1.

²⁰ Clint Eastwood's critically acclaimed and popular film (especially in Japan) also unleashed a mini publishing boom related to the Battle of Iwo Jima, which included considerable attention to Nishi. See, for example, Taiheiyō sensō kenkyūkai, ed., *Iōjima to Baron Nishi* (Tokyo: Bijinesu-sha, 2006).

²¹ Seto Noriko, “Senba no umatachi ni sasagu: Waga chō no shichigatsu jugonichi ten – gunba no kioku to tomo ni,” *Horse Mate*, 40 (December 2003): 25-28.

²² Yonekure Masao, “Furusato no sora ni kaetta uma,” *Shinpan kokugo: Kyōshi yo shidōsho betsusatsu*, vol. 2 (Tokyo: Kyōiku shuppan, 1992), 4-16. The publisher, Kyōiku shuppan, held an estimated 20 percent share of the primary school textbook market at the time. E-mail message from Baba Testuya, Public Relations Division, Kyōiku shuppan, 24 February 2012.

- ²³ For background about the development of horse ranches in Hidaka, see Brett L. Walker, *The Lost Wolves of Japan* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2005), 129-57.
- ²⁴ See, for example, Nihon chūō keiba kai, *Nihon keiba shi* (Tokyo: Nihon chūō keiba kai, 1972).
- ²⁵ Guruppe 21 Urakawa, ed., *Urakawa hyakuwa: ai shiki kono daichi yo!* (Sapporo: Kyōdō bunka sha, 1991), 448-52.
- ²⁶ “Gunba no higeki shōkai,” *Hokkaidō shinbun* (28 July 2010), 20.
- ²⁷ “Shiryō sukunai basan no rekishi,” *Hokkaidō shinbun* (10 July 2010), 26.
- ²⁸ Hokkaidō Hidaka shinkō-kyoku, ed., *Hidaka uma monogatari* (2010).
- ²⁹ Hidaka kannai shakaika kyōiku kenkyūkai, ed., *Kenkyū kiyō* 30 (March 2009).
- ³⁰ “Uma to senso” tēma ni jugyō,” *Hokkaidō shinbun*, 16 August 2007. See also “Gunba no rekishi in odoriki,” *Hokkaidō shinbun* (1 September 2007).
- ³¹ Peter Cave, “Learning to Live with the Imperial Past? History Teaching, Empire, and War in Japan and England,” in *History Education and National Identity in East Asia*, eds. Edward Vickers and Alicia Jones (New York: Routledge, 2005), 319.
- ³² Konno Yoji interview with Iwai Shingo, 1 August 2010; “Kyōin tsuka, TT okonawazu,” *Hokkaido shinbun* (3 August 2007).
- ³³ Hata Masanori, *Mutsugorō no dōbutsu ōkoku, zoku* (Tokyo: Bungei shunjū, 1979), 129-35.
- ³⁴ See, for example, Tsubooka Hajime, “Gunba hojbu Kawakami shibu to Shibechea, sono 1,” *Shibechea-chō kyōdokan hōkoku* 18 (2006): 15-48; Tsubooka, “Gunba hojōbu Kawakami shibu to Shibechea, sono 2,” *Shibechea-chō kyōdokan hōkoku* (2007): 17-41.
- ³⁵ Terashima Toshiharu, *Basan ōkoku* (Kushiro: Kushiro-shi, 1993).
- ³⁶ “Mado: Gunba,” *Hokkaidō shinbun* (14 August 1995, evening), 14.
- ³⁷ “Mado: Chinkon he no wakai,” *Hokkaidō shinbun* (7 November 1988), 8.
- ³⁸ “Gunba no chinkon hi,” *Asahi shinbun* (18 November 1988, evening edition), 1; “Gunba hi sono ato,” *Asahi shinbun* (7 December 1988, evening edition), 2.