



---

Volume 3

Article 114

---

2022

# **Morality and Memory in Post-War Japan: Exploring the Nuances of Intertextuality in *JIN-ROH: The Wolf Brigade***

Jasmine Keyes

*Agnes Scott College*

## Recommended Citation

Keyes, Jasmine (2022). "Morality and Memory in Post-War Japan: Exploring the Nuances of Intertextuality in *JIN-ROH: The Wolf Brigade*." *The Macksey Journal*: Volume 3, Article 114.

This article is brought to you for free an open access by the Johns Hopkins University Macksey Journal. It has been accepted for inclusion in the Macksey Journal by an authorized editor of the Johns Hopkins University Macksey Journal.

# Morality and Memory in Post-War Japan: Exploring the Nuances of Intertextuality in *JIN-ROH: The Wolf Brigade*

Jasmine Keyes  
Agnes Scott College

---

## Abstract

*JIN-ROH: The Wolf Brigade* (1999), directed by Hiroyuki Okiura, is an animated film that explores the mantle of the aggressor and victim in the context of a dystopian German-occupied Japan in the 1950s. New Historicism will provide the framework for understanding *JIN-ROH*'s existence as a cultural entity tied to the historical processes and consciousness of Japanese social memory of World War II. This framework will also reveal Japan's configurations of power and ideology in the World War II era that are replicated in *JIN-ROH*. This paper explores how *JIN-ROH* subverts the classification of aggressor and victim through the use of intertextual elements from the German folktale "Little Red Riding Hood," and how these depictions are archetypal mantles that are disputed, fluid, and non-stagnant in their bearers. Intertextuality will be examined as a narrative strategy that enables the audience to make connections between "Little Red Riding Hood" and *JIN-ROH*, and conveys how the symbolism of the archetypal victim and aggressor that is perpetuated in war propaganda is reminiscent of the characters Little Red Riding Hood and the Wolf in the folktale. The film's context as a contribution to the reinforcement and conceptualization of social memory in post-war Japan significantly influences the thematic content of the movie. *JIN-ROH* exists as an artistic entity of post-war Japan that questions the demarcated positions of the victim and aggressor within war, and considers the liminal space most inhabit between these two positions.

**Keywords:** Japanese Cultural Studies, Collective Memory, Film Studies

---

*JIN-ROH*, produced in 1999, is a cultural film that urges a reconciliation with the distorted recollections of World War II because of the Japanese government's effort to sanitize and suppress Japan's collective memory. The film explores these demarcations of the victim and perpetrator through protagonists Kei Amemiya and Kazuki Fuse, by imitating the characterizations of Little Red Riding Hood and the Wolf from the titular folktale. In the original folktale, these archetypes remain stagnant and unchallenged throughout the story. *JIN-ROH*, however, redefines these archetypes as dynamic stances that alternate between the two protagonists throughout the film. This ongoing exchange and blurring of these two positions metaphorically depict the liminal space that nations have occupied throughout history, displacing the one-dimensional notion that a nation or individual may only be of virtue or commit aggression. Reconciliation and acceptance of all of history enables nations and their people to engage meaningfully in the broader context of their past, rather than a sanitized version shaped by limited historical accounts and propaganda.

Throughout Japan's involvement in World War II, the cultural and historical trajectories reflect the government's influence over the nation's cultural and creative productions. These creations in cinema and literature reinforced the government-led narrative of Japan's historical trajectory towards a pacifistic nation (Shimazu). The Japanese government's monopoly on truth influences their citizens' capacity to adequately recall and connect with their history and its implications. The gradual decline in the number of people who experienced World War II underscores the crucial importance of the recollection and engagement with historical narratives. Post-war Japan and its artistic creations are currently confronting the historical one-dimensionality of World War II, which omits the accountability necessary for a nation to progress. *JIN-ROH*, a 1999 film directed by Hiroyuki Okiura, employs the intertextuality of "Little Red Riding Hood" and its archetypes to challenge the linear, uncontested, and one-dimensional historical accounts of World War II. A comprehensive exploration of the World War II experiences is necessary to fully comprehend Japan's multifaceted role in the war and to create space for diverse and contested narratives that will aid the nation in progressing forward.

New Historicism theoretically frames the historical implications of *JIN-ROH*, by providing a lens when evaluating the film's thematic material as a response to configurations of power, history, and memory in Japan. Artistic creations actively engage with historical processes and are manifestations of social energy, which is defined as the creation of "verbal, aural, and visual traces to produce, shape, and organize collective physical and mental experiences" (Greenblatt 557-58). As the collective memory of nations transcends beyond an individual's physical lifespan, remembering and engaging with history through symbolic artifacts, such as film, includes the voices of the living and their predecessors. New Historicism considers the voices and experiences of the nation within culturally produced artifacts, "for the dead had contrived to leave textual traces of themselves, and those traces make themselves heard in the voices of the living" (Greenblatt 554). *JIN-ROH's* thematic content continuously questions the constructions of Japanese history and its consequences on remembrance over time, therefore analyses of this film must consider the historical contexts that precede and follow the film's creation. The film itself transcends beyond its creator and embeds itself into the temporal and memorial frameworks of Japanese history and culture. This inevitable process is the "historical consequence, however transformed and refashioned, of the social energy initially encoded in those works" (Greenblatt 557). Examining the thematic content and intertextuality in the film

will inevitably reveal the historical implications of Japanese history, as well as how the film challenges the conventions of Japanese history that distort the social and collective memory of post-war Japan.

### **World War II and The Fragmented Recollections of Aggression and Victimization**

History produces and interacts with culturally tangible manifestations of social energy. The collective experiences of communities are reflected within the textual and artistic creations of that society. All man-made constructs — literature, films, speeches, artwork — are all social artifacts that signify the social energy of communities that have and will continue to exist throughout time. These external symbols allow for collective memory to be “re-embodied and transmitted from one generation to another” (Assmann 56). Therefore, social artifacts have an important role in reinforcing and reflecting the recordings and accounts of history, exhibited through museums, commemorative practices, archives, monuments, and more. Even social artifacts that are perceived as representing the unified history of a nation and its “monolithic power could be shown to be the sites of institutional and ideological contestation” (Greenblatt 555). History is inherently complex and contested, and the attempts to inhibit the variance in narrative and experiences only prevents nations and communities from actively engaging in their pasts. The role many social artifacts and its creators have participated in can reveal how artistic productions not only reinforce power but subvert it as well.

The propaganda present during World War II reduces the roles of participating nations into victims or aggressors, rather than existing in the liminal space between both boundaries. Wartime propaganda in both the U.S. and Japan was used “to present their participation in the war as a defensive act” (671). Therefore, Japan inhabited its position in the war as defensive, and positioned America in the role of the aggressor. The propaganda also emphasized “purity” and portrayed the Japanese as morally superior and purer than its adversaries. One visual piece titled “Purging Oneself of Anglo-Americanism” (see in Fig. 1) depicts Japan as a woman brushing lice from her hair in order to “[purify] herself of Western influence and corruption” (Brack and Pavia 678). The words depicted in the lice are self-centeredness, materialism, individualism, and individual freedom to give a few. Japanese propaganda denouncing individualism as a western concept directly relates to the emphasis on collectiveness. Cook argues that “the idea of an individual interpretation of the war experience was itself a violation of the overriding principle of the wartime myth - that Japan was a ‘nation united,’ working against individualism and selfishness, sacrificing for the collective and unconcerned about individual fate” (31). This wartime myth was reinforced and mobilized through artistic creations, since many artists contributed to this ideology (Cook). The space for people to actively engage and share their experiences was destroyed, since the dimensions of Japanese history and experiences during the war have been diminished under the nationalist and collectivist ideologies.



Figure 1. Yukio Sugiura. "Purging Oneself of Anglo-Americanism." 1942, *Manga*

When World War II ended and American occupation began in Japan, the emphasis of Japan being a democratic nation only worsened the sanitization of its past. Shimazu recounts that with the arrival of allied occupation and the Supreme Commander of Allied Powers (SCAP), they developed guidelines on film production to "promote the new democratic Japan" (103). These guidelines enforced artistic productions to create a persona of Japan that focused on the victimization of individuals rather than the responsibility the nation and government had as an aggressor towards other nations.<sup>1</sup> The creation of a demarcated pre- and post-war Japan was done due to the necessity "to separate the 'polluted' past from the new present, [and] as a springboard to construct a new narrative of postwar Japan" (Shimazu 101). Consequently, the representations of Japan's past are inherently unbalanced due to the erasure of narratives that do not coincide with the government's presentation of Japan as a pacifistic, collective country.

*JIN-ROH* is a post-war film that directly challenges this notion and dismantles these singular accounts of history to rather focus on the culpability and hardships Japan has experienced during the war. The lack of initiative from the government to promote and collect different recollections and experiences during the war causes the nation's history to be distorted and unresolved. As each generation furthers itself from the war, it becomes even more imperative that records of Japanese history are produced and reinforced by those who have been historically marginalized and neglected from the canonized accounts of World War II.

### **The Intertextuality of "Little Red Riding Hood" and *JIN-ROH***

The folktale of "Little Red Riding Hood" was interwoven throughout the film's narrative to help the viewer perceive the parallels between the folktale and the film. The audience can pinpoint how the film's characters do not conform to the "Little Red Riding Hood" archetypes through these visual cues. Rather, the aural and visual elements work in tandem to present Kazuki Fuse and Kei Amemiya shifting their positions between the Wolf and Little Red Riding Hood based on the visual frames, dialogue, and storyline. This paper will examine three pivotal

---

<sup>1</sup> To give a historical example, the Nanjing Massacre during the Second Sino-Japanese war in 1945 was a period of mass murder and sexual assault of Nanjing citizens by Imperial Japanese soldiers.

moments in the film, focusing on how the film's dynamic characters, narrative structure, and political context convey the ambiguity of who is the predator and who is the victim.

To grasp how the folktale has changed in the film, it's necessary to grasp the functions folktales have served throughout history in many societies. In a variety of cultural and historical contexts, folktales have been used as a proxy for experience to communicate and exchange critical knowledge to preserve a community's survival (Sugiyama). The folktale's themes and symbols often convey critical lessons for survival and a grasp of how to avoid or defend against enemies. For "Little Red Riding Hood," this folktale taught children to avoid predators, and was prevalent in communities that were vulnerable to assaults by animals and men. "Little Red Riding Hood" falls under the tale-type AT 123, which is a collection of tales that "commonly contains the motif of disguise on the part of the predator and suspicion on the part of the victim(s)" (Sugiyama 120). This classification of tale-types is due to the fact tales such as "Little Red Riding Hood" and its motifs are found throughout different continents with little variance in its archetypes. This motif of disguise and "anthropomorphizing the wolf character gives him a dual nature: he is not a metaphor for a menacing human male; he is both a wolf and a human" (Sugiyama 121). As a result, the original story teaches children to recognize an enemy and the dangers inherent in failing to flee precarious circumstances common in this culture's environment.

In postwar Japan, the historical backdrop completely alters the teachings included in the original folktale. Rather than concentrating on physical danger, Okiura adapted the folktale to warn the film's audience about the repercussions of failing to recognize political repression and propaganda. This shows how folktales emerge in response to the cultural and historical circumstances distinctive to each society. The lessons in "Little Red Riding Hood" were adapted for postwar Japan to ensure the historical survival of past accounts of the War that did not coincide with the government propaganda. Additionally, the folktale was altered to protect Japan from continuing to construct a sanitized, selective history that distorts Japanese citizens' perception of World War II. The folktale is a foreshadowing of the consequences of condemning others and the avoidance of acknowledging one's own past.

*JIN-ROH* begins by introducing the background of the alternative history the film is set in. After the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japan began its process to join the democratic world by pursuing economic growth. The consequences of this were severe social unrest because of massive unemployment and urban migration, which gave rise to an anti-government resistance named The Sect. Due to Japan having restrictions under the 1947 Postwar Constitution, the creation of a paramilitary self-defense force was created to bring security to the nation. The Wolf Brigade is "the guardian of public order" (*JIN-ROH* 0:02:17), even though the film depicted them using brute force and weapons against civilians.

The opening scene depicts civil turmoil on the streets of Japan, with citizens and police officers clashing. Nanami Agawa is introduced, who serves as a direct counterpart to Little Red Riding Hood. The folktale's narrative framework is established when Nanami receives her basket to bring to her grandmother. However, the film dispels the archetype's innocence when she gets a bag filled with Molotov cocktails, with the donor explaining that it is "a gift for your granny" (0:06:08). Rather than foreboding woodland pathways, Agawa's route is paved with underground tunnels, sewer systems, and crowds of people. After passing the explosives to a stranger, he hurled the bombs at the cops, where they ignited. While the audience could have

presumed innocence prematurely based on the archetype, Agawa already embodies the perpetrator or the Wolf as a bomb courier for an anti-government movement. Innocence is exploited instead as a means of deception and concealment, as younger females are unlikely to be accused of illegal activity. Agawa and the anti-government militia fled into hiding, where she received additional explosives. The Wolf Brigade was employed to quell public unrest and eliminate the militia. Pursuing them underground, one of the Wolf Brigade members confronts Agawa. Kazuki Fuse is introduced completely equipped in his armor, which, while resembling a human form, lacked any indication of his humanity. This encounter between the Wolf and Little Red Riding Hood began, but it deviated significantly from the folktale's narrative framework. Rather than assaulting her as the Wolf would, Fuse paused and said, "Why?" (00:15:15). The camera is focused on the two characters at eye level and vacillates between them, presenting the audience with each character's perspective at the moment (see Fig. 2). Along with the eye-level focal point, Fuse's broader question allows the audience to embody his perspective in that time and also asks why Agawa was participating in civil violence, which opposes the archetype that she is intended to conform to.



*Figure 2. Still from Okiura, JIN-ROH (00:15:15)*

Fuse tells Agawa not to pull the rope that would ignite the device she is clutching, despite his comrades' questions as to why he has not shot her yet. However, as more of the Wolf Brigade approaches, she ignited the bomb. Both characters in this interaction deviate from the archetypes they emulate from the original folktale. This causes the audience to question which characters will inhabit the spaces of the protagonist and antagonist of this story. As the story progresses, these paradigms shift from character to character, giving room for the ambiguity present in having the role of committing wrongdoing as opposed to being harmed by it.

The film now continues to follow another Red Riding Hood, Kei Amemiya, who claims to be Agawa's sister but truthfully is another bomb courier of The Sect. Fuse and Amemiya develop a friendship, however, the unraveling of their relationship happens inevitably. Throughout the film's several sequences, a museum served as a consistent setting that illustrated the folktale's dynamics through animal symbolism. Kazuki is typically depicted among the wolf exhibits in the museum due to his archetype (see Fig. 3), however when Kei Amemiya lured Fuse into a trap, she is also depicted among them.



Figure 3. Still from Okiura *JIN-ROH* (00:27:09)

This symbolism illustrates how the aggressor's role shifts often during the film, in contrast to how it remains static throughout the narrative framework of the original folktale. The first time they meet at the museum, Amemiya recites lines from "Little Red Riding Hood" as a narrator while the two view the wolf exhibit. She reads, "Mother, what big ears you have, she said. All the better to hear you with, my dear. Mother, what big eyes you have. All the better to see you with, my dear. Mother, what big claws you have. All the better to hold you with, my dear. Mother, what big teeth you have" (01:01:10). Throughout this narrative, the camera pans around the museum, focusing on the glass that separates the animal displays from the protagonists (see Fig. 4), symbolizing the thin boundary that separates one's dual identity as a human and beast. One of the film's central topics is the concept of dehumanization and predation, as exemplified by the Wolf Brigade. The museum, on the other hand, serves as a bridge between this dual nature and the vacillation between them.



Figure 4. Still from Okiura, *JIN-ROH* (01:01:29)

The second encounter at the museum reveals that Amemiya was attempting to dismantle the paramilitary group by luring Fuse into a trap set by the anti-government resistance group to which Amemiya belongs. While the camera waits for Fuse to arrive, it focuses on Amemiya amid the wolves (see Fig. 5). Animal symbolism is invoked to convey the acts of aggression that both Fuse and Amemiya have participated in during this era of civil

unrest, as well as the duality of predation and innocence that both exhibit. Using the motif of disguise, Fuse is depicted as disguising his wolf nature when undressed from his armor. Amemiya, although portrayed under the innocent archetype, uses this paradigm as a disguise to lure Fuse into a trap.



Figure 5. Still from Okiura, *JIN-ROH* (01:06:29)

The film's last scene depicts Fuse discovering Amemiya's scheme and then murdering her collaborators in the sewage system. At the climax of the film, Fuse's commander urges him to kill Amemiya. He states, "But you know that even if a wolf takes the guise of a man and lives among them, he can never be truly human. Just as the crimes of that girl who carried the lives of many people cannot be erased" (01:34:22). As he hands Fuse his gun, he states that "This is the moment where you must end the tale of the beast who gets involved with the human. Put an end to it now while you are still a beast" (01:34:44). At his orders, Fuse hesitates. Amemiya embraces him and recites the ending lines of "Little Red Riding Hood." She cries, "Mother, what big ears you have. Mother, what big eyes you have. Mother, what big claws you have! Mother, what big teeth you have!" (1:35:36). After she cries the lines from the folktale, Fuse shoots her (see Fig. 6). The final scene of *JIN-ROH* shows the abandoned tale of "Little Red Riding Hood" submerged in debris, signifying not only the ending to Fuse and Amemiya's story, but the consequences of prohibiting individuals and nations the freedom to abandon these limiting archetypes (see Fig. 7). The camera pans to one of the other troops aiming a rifle at Fuse and then lowers it in the aftermath of his murder of Amemiya.

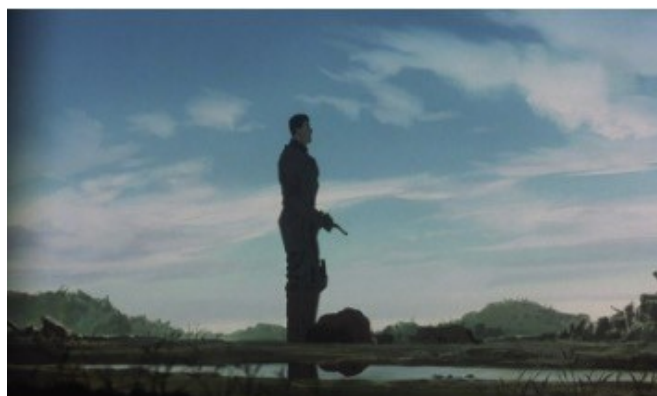


Figure 6. Still from Okiura, *JIN-ROH* (01:36:16)

This climactic sequence captures Fuse conforming to his archetype as a Wolf, risking banishment from his collective group and death if he does not do so. Rather than prioritizing his own desire to be with Amemiya, he was forced to relinquish it in order to remain within the mantle he was classified in. While this scenario parallels the conclusion of the original folktale, the prominent distinction to be made is that Fuse is forced to conform to his mantle as an aggressor, rather than desiring to murder Amemiya himself. Both Amemiya and Fuse, while shifting between both archetypes, were both victims of following their collective factions rather than their individual freedom. The audience can sympathize with Fuse, who was classified as the Wolf and aggressor, while acknowledging that Agawa and Amemiya contribute to the violence and deaths of many civilians while classified as Little Red Riding Hood. When viewed as a metaphor for postwar Japan, *JIN-ROH* opposes government propaganda and does not dismiss the acts of aggression by or suffering of opposing parties. By reducing individuals and historical accounts into contending, demarcated mantles, the possibility of pursuing individual freedom and having the space to exist beyond these boundaries becomes non-existent. Both protagonists of the film were unable to escape these mantles in the finale, which demonstrates how political oppression and the suppression of discussing entire accounts of the past impacts all constituents of a nation.



Figure 7. Still from Okiura, *JIN-ROH* (01:36:16)

The creation, exchange, and reinforcement of collective memory relies on the active participation of nations and their citizens in the material production of cultural artifacts and their dissemination. Rather than memory being linear and uncomplicated, it is rather fragmented and disputed, bridging the past, present, and future of nations and groups. Explorations of history and memory that acknowledge the entirety of war experiences ensure the history is not diluted by notions of dominance, distortion, and erasure to portray itself as virtuous. Okiura's film was not only an examination of the liminal space of aggression and victimization that many nations fall within, but was an act of empowering the voices of those that have been nearly forgotten. History and its formation are no longer only ruled by powerful institutions, but rather by artists and innovators who materialize cultural works that connect with the voices of people who have been silenced. *JIN-ROH*'s thematic content subverts Japan's institutions of power that selectively chose a historical narrative that neglects the diverse narratives of many during World War II and the present. Representing the voices lost to this

monopolized narrative of Japanese history, *JIN-ROH* is an artistic entity that consciously questioned conceptions of history, truth, and power, and abandoned the notion of positional totality to emphasize the liminal, disputed spaces of perpetuation and victimization.

Becoming an engaged reader and analyzing the social artifacts and text around us critically illuminates the structural and cultural configurations of society that have been shaped by history. *JIN-ROH* adapts the original folktale in order to emphasize the importance of critically reading our nation's history, which protects against the indoctrination of a sanitized, fragmented history that marginalizes and disposes of opposing narratives. Shimazu argues that "representations of the past directly reflect the concerns of the present. How we conceive the 'difficult' past can never really be politically neutral, since the very act of wanting to give shape to that past is in itself a political act" (115). The actions of remembering and memorizing the unbounded history beyond our lifespans should include the narratives and stories of those constantly marginalized in historical accounts. The world and its constituents are a text to be read and evaluated in connection with the social energy history embeds within these texts. Committing to the deliberate analysis of these texts ensures the beginning of actively engaging with history and the world.

## Works Cited

- Assmann, Aleida. "Transformations between History and Memory." *Social Research*, vol. 75, no. 1, The New School, 2008, pp. 49–72.
- Brcak, Nancy, and John R. Pavia. "Racism in Japanese and U.S. Wartime Propaganda." *The Historian*, vol. 56, no. 4, Wiley, 1994, pp. 671–84.
- Cook, Haruko Taya. "Memories of Japan's Lost War." *The Journal of American-East Asian Relations*, vol. 11, no. 1/4, Brill, 2002, pp. 25–40.
- Greenblatt, Stephen. "The Circulation of Social Energy." *Critical Theory: A Reader for Literary and Cultural Studies*, Oxford University Press, 2012, pp. 533–68.
- JIN-ROH: The Wolf Brigade [人狼]. Directed by Hiroyuki Okiura, written by Mamoru Oshii, Bandai Visual, 1999.
- Shimazu, Naoko. "Popular Representations of the Past: The Case of Postwar Japan." *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 38, no. 1, Sage Publications, Ltd., 2003, pp. 101–16.
- Sugiyama, Michelle Scalise. "Predation, Narration, and Adaptation: 'Little Red Riding Hood' Revisited." *Interdisciplinary Literary Studies*, vol. 5, no. 2, Penn State University Press, 2004, pp. 110–29.