

# Working Through Weightlessness in Postwar Japanese Tactical Wargames

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## ABSTRACT

The pleasure of wargame relies on faithful embodiment of military history. Scenario-based tactical wargames balance realism against playability. That said, wargame realism claims fidelity only to the form of the war, not its discourse. It is, therefore, significant to interrogate different approaches to realism in order to understand the cultural implications of wargames. This paper examines the embodiments and descriptions of the Pacific War in both U.S. and Japanese wargames. Through close readings of *War in the Pacific* (1978) by Simulations Publications, Inc. and *Battle of Pearl Harbor* (1984) by Epoch, this paper explores how the board wargame medium operates as a space for coping with traumatic past, materialization of history, and sublimation of forbidden colonial desire.

## Keywords

Tactical Wargame, Postwar Japan, Iwabuchi, Baudrillard

## INTRODUCTION

In many ways, Japan is the first Asian nation to rebrand its cultural production from “transnational” to “global.” The difference between the two is the visibility of the cultural origin. Koichi Iwabuchi coined the term “*mukokuseki*,” or without nationality, to describe Japan’s success in creating a likable global identity that is divorced from its imperialist and colonialist past. As a global media producer, Japan has mastered the art of marketing its globally favored traits while masking any underlying nationalist desire.

Iwabuchi dates the success of Japanese media exports to the 1990s by highlighting their auspicious reception in other Asian countries (Iwabuchi 53). The aforementioned likability has transcended Japanese media to a global status whose origin requires no special address nor engenders malaise. That said, the easily overlooked “Japaneseness” is designed to be so. Japanese media feels inclusive despite its complicated history with colonialism and imperialism. Its perceived inclusivity is contributed by Japan’s ability to capture, borrow, and integrate other cultural signifiers. Iwabuchi identifies such strategy as “*Japanese Hybridism*”:

Japanese hybridism aims to discursively construct an image of an organic cultural entity, “Japan,” that absorbs foreign cultures without changing its national/cultural core... Japan’s hybridism strategically attempts to suppress ambivalence generated by the act of cross-fertilization, relentlessly linking the issue of cultural contamination with an exclusivist national identity, so that impurity sustains purity (Iwabuchi 53-54).

Iwabuchi's claim was inspired by Jean Baudrillard when Baudrillard compares Japan to America on the subject of modernity. He proposes that both nations have cultivated a modernity, though he believes Japan was superior at doing so, with no origin nor authenticity (Baudrillard, America 76). Baudrillard maintains that "[I]n the future, the power will belong to those peoples with no origins and no authenticity who know to exploit that situation to the full" (Baudrillard, America 76).

Baudrillard describes this form of modernity as "weightless," whereas Iwabuchi suggests that cultural products under such modernity is "odorless." Iwabuchi maintains that Japan's odor is a postcolonial one, complicated by its roles as both the victimizer and the victim throughout WWII. The postwar Japan cultivated a new global identity under the U.S.'s scrutinizing and fetishizing gaze. It is then productive to question whether Japan's "global" is genuinely global, or is it mostly the U.S.?

Performing to the global gaze without historic baggage, today's Japanese media prioritizes what is pleurably consumable while working through its own difficult history through metaphors. Of course, this is not to say what is assumed to be universally pleasurable is always welcomed. For instance, Paul Martin maintains that *Resident Evil 5*, a Japanese video game featuring a white American protagonist killing black zombies in Africa, employs the U.S.'s black and white racial discourse as a metaphor to perform both "a sanitized and exuberant version of colonialism without guilt" and "a normalized contemporary global Japanese subjectivity" for its assumed Japanese audience (Martin 580). The game received criticism for its portrayal of racialized violence (Brophy-Warren). *Resident Evil 5*'s failure to cater to the global audience, despite its odorless practice, reveals the paradox of Japanese modernity. The odorless practice prefers strategic suppression to direct articulation, which leaves Japan's reflection on its own colonial/imperial past arrested, underexamined, and eventually ambivalent. This is also why, when it comes to colonialism or World War II, Japanese games' odorlessness suddenly becomes pungent.

I identify a historical liminal period where Japan's sanitized global identity is not yet formulated and the interrupted desire for empire is not fully sublimated. What does cultural production look like before the sanitized global identity but after the interventions of the Western, mostly American, gaze? The post occupation Japan was a liminal period where Japan's double consciousness organically engage with each other. As American sanctioned censorship and propaganda ended along with the occupation, Japanese companies regained control over their production and narrative.

One interesting artifact of this period is scenario-based tactical wargame. Initially an American import, Japanese toy-makers began to experiment with wargames since "[A] postwar generation was coming of age in Japan, and for them, war was now fodder for play" (Altice 7). Nathan Altice notes that domestic wargames were received with ambivalence in Japan (Altice 7). One notable cognitive dissonance exist between two generations where, for one, the war was still lived experience and, for the other, the war was learned. The younger generation learned their wartime history, mediated by the U.S., through "narratives of militarists victimizing an oppressed Japanese people" (Orr 78). In this logic, the aforementioned alacrity towards wargame, which focuses on military strategy, seems preposterous. That said, perhaps other aspects of wargames were enticing to the post-occupation Japanese people enough to ignore the morbidity of playing war. One lies with the fidelity wargame claims to have with historic events and the other proposes an alternative history. An imaged alternative where the trauma of Hiroshima and Nagasaki never took place, and the dream for the empire was realized. One locus of such idealized alternative can be located in several fictionalizations of the attack on Pearl Harbor.

I examine the portrayals of the attack on Pearl Harbor in both American and Japanese wargames. It is difficult to examine Japanese wargame without its American counterpart. I will, therefore, offer close readings of *War in the Pacific* (1978) by Simulations Publications, Inc. (SPI), *Battle of Pearl Harbor* (1984) by Epoch, and an Epoch catalog of Japanese wargames. Building on works by Nathan Altice (2019) and Giaime Alonge (2019), I aim to illustrate the onset of today's odorless Japanese modernity from a cultural studies perspective. Furthermore, I identify three elements of Japanese odorless production, where metaphor is the sole vehicle of articulation:

1. A perceived and manufactured dualism, which often situates the U.S. as the other, or the psychoanalytic "father."
2. Ill-sublimated desire for empire, which is complicated by its postwar pacifism.
3. The omission of or indirectly uttered trauma, which is often masked under metaphors. The latter is often employed in contemporary Japan.

I will be working these elements through the materiality of the board wargames and demonstrate the liminal quality of Epoch's board games. By emphasizing materiality, I explore how the board game medium operates as a space for coping for traumatic past, materialization of history, and sublimation of forbidden colonial desire.

## DESIGNING WEIGHTLESSNESS IN WARGAMES

While "wargame" contains the word "game," the "war" part complicates its suggested playfulness. Charles S. Roberts, the first American hobbyist board wargame designer, was motivated to design wargames by his prospect of a tour of duty in the 1950s (Peterson, *A Prelude to Adventure* 34). I will frame Roberts' anxiety, grief, and excitement towards war as psychoanalytic libidos in order to situate wargames, designed for strategizing and mastering, as a form of sublimation. Sigmund Freud describes sublimation as the process of redirecting libido to non-sexual activities. Here, however, it is more generative to view it from Jacques Lacan's intervention, where the element of "social recognition" is the key in sublimation (Lacan 144). The form of sublimation must obey shared social values. For instance, if the non-sexual activity has violent tendencies, then designing a video game with simulated violence is more socially acceptable than actually carrying out a violent attack on people. In other words, the form of sublimation must be socially recognizable. Tactical wargames provide a pleasurable solution to said libido without violating shared social values.

Thinking through wargame designer Charles Grant's distinctions on scenarios-based tactical wargame's player experience, Jon Peterson identifies two types of pleasure of wargame: one is linked to faithful realism and the other to enjoyable manipulation (Peterson, *Systems: The Rules of the Game* 547). While the libidinal energy is exercised in both types of play, temporalities of such libidos are different. Recreating realism is retrospective, its pleasure comes from the close symbolic distance between the recreation and the past. On the other hand, enjoyable manipulation aims to subvert the past, rules, and the opponent, which gives life to an alternative temporality existing outside the player's own lived experience. That said, subversion can only take place if a perceived "realism" is present. The design of wargame, therefore, must be "realistic."

Designing "realism" is, however, a tricky business. *PanzerBlitz*, designed by Jim Dunnigan and published by Avalon Hill in 1970, is a board tactical wargame set in the Eastern Front of the Second World War. In his close reading of the game, Giaime Alonge notes that "... despite all the realistic details, as well as the abundant presence of Nazi lexicon and symbols, the fact that during World War Two military operations were systematically mixed with deportation and massacres of civilians goes almost unnoticed" (Alonge sec. 2, para 7). For instance, Alonge notes that German security

units' ethnic cleansing was stated in neither the rulebook nor the booklet (Alonge sec. 2, para 7). It is, however, mentioned in the designer's notes. Alonge concludes that severe war crimes, such as ethnic cleansing, have no place in play even in wargames (Alonge sec. 2, para 7). It is simply too heavy. While the erasure of certain historical details seems oxymoronic to realism, what makes wargame realistic is only the form of the war. Ideologies held by different factions are tokenized into aesthetics, playable yet without origin. In other words, wargames are realistic but weightless. Baudrillard defines the weightless structure as "... no longer anything but a gigantic simulacrum: not unreal, but a simulacrum, never again exchanging for what is real, but exchanging in itself, in an uninterrupted circuit without reference or circumference" (Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulations* 173).

In scenario-based tactical wargames, such as *PanzerBlitz*, real history is systematized and materialized into game pieces. They are placed on a map board whose physical presence, segmented by geometric shapes, demands mastery from the player. Historic ramifications are suspended, and manipulation is welcomed without guilt. Wargame realism promises "objectivity," which can be interpreted as a "critical" distance between what is playable and what is real. Tactical wargaming, therefore, is not about roleplay. Despite the fact that the goal is to alter or recreate history while assuming the role of a military leader, wargamers are detached from the referent of what they are playing. Wargame realism is a simulacrum in which play is weightless.

## **KAMIKAZE AND THE ATOMIC BOMB**

Though wargame realism aims to be weightless, certain events are too heavy given their political, cultural, and societal implications. This is true, especially for nations that are modeled in tactical wargames. One example of this is the U.S. and Japan in the Pacific War. From the perspectives of these two nations, the Pacific War was a series of battles that begins with the attack on Pearl Harbor and ends with the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. In popular culture, Pearl Harbor and the atomic bombings are often situated as the beginning and the end of the war. Indeed, Japan has taken on the roles of colonizer and victimizer in East and Southeast Asian nations before 1941. The popular discourse of the Pacific War, however, situates the U.S. and Japan in a binary opposition and places Pearl Harbor and the atomic bombings into an an-eye-for-an-eye dichotomy. That said, Japan did not surrender solely because of the atomic bombings, it was ultimately motivated by the fear of Soviet Union invasion (Ueno 152).

*Tora! Tora! Tora!* is a 1970 Japanese-American biopic of the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941. Co-directed by American director, Richard Fleischer, and two Japanese directors, Toshio Masuda and Kinji Fukasaku, the film famously featured a fictional quote from Isoroku Yamamoto, Commander-in-Chief of the Combined Fleet, "I fear that all we have done is to awaken a sleeping giant and fill him with a terrible resolve" (Fleischer, Masuda and Fukasaku). While there is no evidence to suggest Yamamoto actually said those words, what is implied in this fictional line is the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Despite its fictional nature, similar versions of the same line appeared in the 2001 film *Pearl Harbor* and the 2019 film *Midway*, both featuring the attack on Pearl Harbor. These theatrical representations of the attack offer a clear moral lesson by putting retrospective postwar reflection into Yamamoto's mouth and disguising it as an ominous premonition.

The early onset of this moral lesson can be traced to the beginning of the Occupation in Japan when "Prime Minister Higashikuni suggested... the Japanese might forget Hiroshima provided the American people forgot Pearl Harbor" (Orr 41). This moral lesson has become the only globally acceptable explanation since it provided Japan a path to move forward.

...it was also emblematic of the preferred conservative government approach to Hiroshima— with its recognition that both sides injured each other in fighting the Pacific War, its silence about Asian victims of Japanese aggression, and its pragmatic willingness to let the past rest in the interest of working together to rehabilitate Japan as a contributing member of the international community (Orr 41).

Furthermore, this moral lesson also ties suicide aircraft units, known as Kamikaze, and the atomic bombs in a causal relationship. The first documented, perhaps the most notorious, strategic suicide crashing was carried out by Japanese First Lieutenant Iida Fusata as a last resort during the attack on Pearl Harbor. Fusata was not a Kamikaze pilot, though he was said to have stated to his men that if he was badly damaged, he would crash into a “worthy enemy target” (Axell and Kase 44). Fusata’s last resort was weaponized and idealized through the forming of Kamikaze units in 1943, which resulted in thousands of casualties for both sides.

On the other side of this moral lesson is the bombings of the two cities, which killed over 100,000 people, leaving collective trauma in the Japanese psyche. Though Pearl Harbor and the atomic bombings are tied into a causal relationship, they are not symmetrical. Yet Japan’s postwar pacifism rationalizes trauma in a causal relationship despite the said trauma resists rationalization. Yoshikuni Igarashi maintains that the rationalization of the atomic bombings is Japan’s postwar “foundational narrative” (Igarashi 37). Anger, confusion, guilt, and shame are suppressed and stored as libidinal energy in accepting such narrative, waiting to be acted on or sublimated.

### Heaviness of War

Tactical wargame, on the other hand, does not operate on the aforementioned moral lesson. Wargames rely on fantasizing history but are more systemized than theatrical. That said, sometimes, the heaviness of wartime trauma spills over, especially in the paratexts—slippages between *what is relevant* and *what feels relevant* lead to different embodiments.

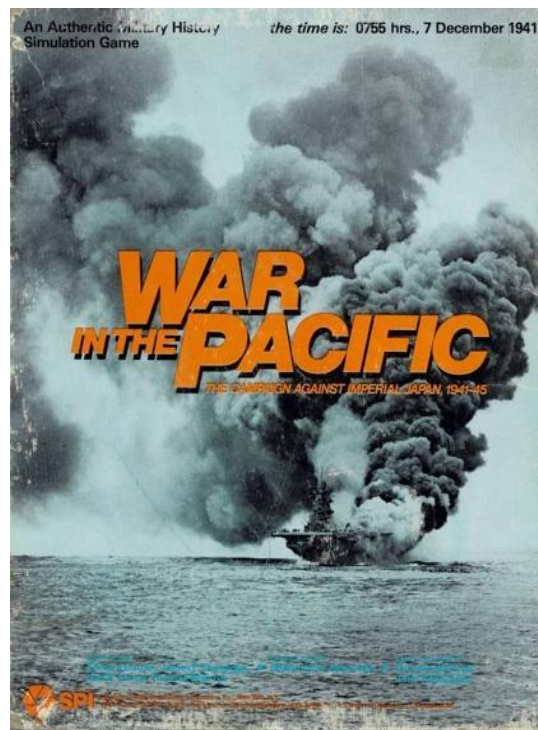
The first U.S. wargame about Pearl Harbor is *USN: The War in the Pacific, 1941-43*. It was published in 1971 by SPI and designed by Jim Dunnigan, who would later co-design SPI’s *War in the Pacific* in 1978. While *USN*’s rulebook does not mention Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto by name, 1941 is the year that he issued the attack, and 1943 is when he died. Touchy subjects such as the Kamikaze suicide bomber are described in terms of its functionality: “[K]amikaze units don’t return to base unless aborted; they are expended during combat and/or eliminated after combat results are taken.” Since 1945 is left out of the modeling, so is the atomic bomb. The second wargame on the same subject is *Pearl Harbor: The War Against Japan, 1941-1945*. Published by Game Designers’ Workshop (GDW) and designed by Rich Banner and Rodger B. MacGowan in 1977, *Pearl Harbor* also does not mention Yamamoto by name. Unlike *USN*, *Pearl Harbor* contains atomic bombs. Kamikaze and atomic bombs are described in a neutral and mechanic manner. They are treated as special rules or conditions to align with history. For instance, Kamikaze attacks can be carried out starting winter 1943 whereas atom bombs can be dropped starting summer 1945. There are no game pieces representing atom bombs nor Kamikaze units. They are not materialized but simply implied through rules.

The slippages between what is relevant and what feels relevant become pronounced in the 1978 *War in the Pacific* (WITP). Designed by Edward Curran, Jim Dunnigan, Irad B. Hardy, and Tom Walczyk, WITP is a monster wargame. The name “monster” signifies large scale and/or complex rules. On the design team of WITP, Dunnigan designed *War in the East* (1974) and *War in Europe* (1976); Hardy was part of the

design team for *Highway to the Reich* (1976); and all WITP designers worked on *War in the West* (1976). In some ways, SPI's WITP can be treated as a response to GDW's success on monster games and World War II wargames. Thinking through the competitions between SPI and GWD, Nicholas Palmer maintains that,

They (GWD) are above all famous for their gigantic Second World War game, *Drang Nach Osten*. This divisional level simulation of the entire Soviet front is immensely admired by “hard-core” players for its fascinating breadth and complexity. Like its rival on the same subject. SPI's *War in the East*, it is hard to finish unless you settle down on a desert island with an equally dedicated opponent and no tiresome distractions like work, sleep or social life (Palmer 20).

While it is safe to say that the assumed audience for wargames, let alone monster wargames, is military history buffs in the U.S., a Japanese company, Hobby Japan, published several SPI wargames, including WITP, in Japan. WITP is made by Americans for Americans, it is then productive to examine how certain elements are portrayed in WITP. The cover art of WITP shows an archival image of an aircraft carriers engulfed in smoke (see figure 1).



**Figure 1:** The cover of War in the Pacific.

The tagline on top of the image writes “An Authentic Military History Simulation Game” and to its right “the time is: 0755 hrs., 7 December 1941.” Reading the text against the black and white archival image, it is safe to assume that this photo was taken on the day of the Pearl Harbor attack. The carrier in the photo is actually U.S. Navy’s *Bunker Hill CV17*. This photo captured the moment right after *Bunker Hill* was struck by two Kamikaze units (see figure 2).



**Figure 2:** Archival Image of *Bunker Hill* struck by two Kamikaze aircraft on 11 May 1945.

It was the morning of 11 May 1945, *Bunker Hill* was severely damaged by two Japanese kamikaze units. While the photo was taken in 1945 and on a different attack, what the image conveys does not betray the “realism” it wishes to convey. It is an image of suffering, sacrifice, and trauma. Susan Sontag has famously stated that,

To suffer is one thing; another thing is living with the photographed images of suffering, which does not necessarily strengthen conscience and the ability to be compassionate. It can also corrupt them. Once one has seen such images, one has started down the road of seeing more—and more. Images transfix. Images anesthetize (Sontag 15).

The slippage between the victim and the victimizer is a shared property between the U.S. and Japan. Attacks carried out on both nations had become symbolic moments, grounded in history yet suspended in a vacuum. Nevertheless, this image is a paratext surrounding the otherwise “objective” tactical wargame. The majority of WITP’s rules and descriptions echo other tactical wargames on the Pacific War, sensitive subjects such as the atomic bomb are worded in a mechanical and procedural manner:

Beginning with the 8,245 Cycle the Allied player receives a certain number of Atomic Bombs. Each bomb may be used to attack an individual hex containing Industrial or Resource Centers. The procedure for such attacks is the same for normal Strategic Strikes, except that if at least one B-29 Air Point survives the Japanese CAP and Anti-Aircraft fire, then the attack is successful (an atomic bomb has been dropped in the hex). All Centers in the affected hex are considered to be permanently destroyed (they may never be Repaired)... (Curran, Dunnigan and Hardy 49).

Note that year is recalculated into cycles. The detailed description of the bomb focuses on its function and stresses how permanent the damage would be. There is no mention of the discourse around atomic bomb nor mention of civilian death since they are not modeled in the game. Given wargame prioritizes systems and rules, such a mechanical description is not surprising. Atomic bomb is, after all, a special attack in the game. Similar “objectivity” is applied to Kamikaze units:

Kamikaze Strikes are Plotted and carried out in the same manner as Naval Strikes, except that the Kamikaze Strength and Kamikaze Range of the affected Air Points are used in place of the normal values. Additionally, since Kamikaze tactics depend on actually crashing the attacking aircraft into the defending Allied ship, all Kamikaze Air Points are immediately eliminated following the completion of

their attack, regardless of the results of that attack (Curran, Dunnigan and Hardy 53).

The rulebook does not provide a lot of historical context on different factions or special military units. On the subject of Kamikaze, right above the main body of the description, there is one line of historical context: “Toward the end of the war, the Japanese desperately sought to halt the Allied advance through the use of suicide aircraft known as Kamikaze (Divine Wind)” (Curran, Dunnigan and Hardy 53). Of course, this can simply be treated as an explanation for the American audience since “Kamikaze” is a foreign word. That said, one sentence in the main body of the explanation, “since Kamikaze tactics depend on actually crashing the attacking aircraft into the defending Allied ship,” seems to be sufficient enough without the historical background. This spillover echoes the slippage of the cover image where wargame realism claims fidelity only to the form of the war, not its discourse.

Despite these slippages, U.S. tactical wargames about the Pacific War seem to be relatively systematic in terms of embodiment of history. They are weightless because of their rationalized and systematized historical referents.

### **LIMINAL JAPAN AND POSTWAR ODOR**

Weightlessness, in many ways, was a salvation for the postwar Japan. Much of Japan’s weight is entangled with its involvement in the Second World War as both the victimizer and the victim. Japan’s global identity was marked by the Axis powers and, under the global gaze, tragedies in Hiroshima and Nagasaki were treated as justified punishment. Given the censorship and regulation imposed during the postwar occupation, mostly led by the U.S., Japan was unable to process its collective trauma in a productive or cohesive manner.

Suppression was the popular means of coping mechanisms. Contemplating why wargames were received with ambivalence in Japan, Hiroshi Tamura, a Japanese wargame expert, maintains that,

... (the Japanese people) came to avoid taking an interest in anything about war and military affairs—as if talk of the ~~devil~~ war, and it will appear; therefore every work which includes a military element was considered to be vulgar. For example, many pictures and songs for whipping up fighting spirit were created during the war, but they were erased from not only public spaces but also histories of pictures and songs after the war. And then, teachers and mass media reporters who had instigated “holy war” during the war, especially did not like children taking an interest in anything about military affairs—as if they concealed their own former deed... The fact was that the mass media sent reporters when Hobby-Japan held the first open wargaming mentioned above, and discussed whether wargames were right or wrong after the reporting (Tamura sec. 3).

Suppressing direct articulation of trauma, Japan turned to the global market to establish a new identity that does not require them to constantly address their wartime identity. Altice maintains that Japan’s postwar toy boom was contributed by “... the Occupation’s concerted efforts to revitalize Japan’s economy by rebuilding its industrial infrastructure” (Altice 3). It can be argued that postwar Japan has taken a neoliberal solution to their national identity crisis. Of course, suppressed trauma always finds its way into consciousness. Such suppression builds up libidinal energy without a proper form of sublimation. Since the Lacanian sublimation requires social recognition and “social” here is synonymous to “global,” it was almost impossible for Japan to articulate its modernity due to the cognitive dissonance between its wartime



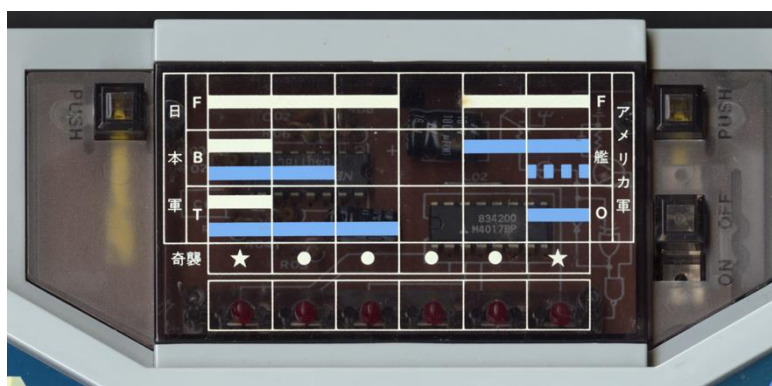
and postwar conditions. One acceptable form, fortunately, and unfortunately, is economy.

Building on Anne Allison's work on Japanese toy companies manufacturing toys from the refuse of war, Nathan Altice pointed out "an odd symbiosis between occupier and occupied" (Altice 3). An oedipal relationship is situated here. Though the occupied relies on the occupier, the desire of the occupied is to be independent and then having its independence recognized by the symbolic father. Such an opportunity came as the Japanese economy became more independent. Given the Japanese yen was plummeting in the 1970s, Hobby Japan, the company imported SPI's WITP, along with other toymakers, such as Takara, Epoch, Bandai, Tsukuda, began to produce wargames domestically (Altice 8).

These domestic wargames became a fertile ground for indirect reflections of wartime trauma.

### Manufactured Dualism

One instance of this era is the 10<sup>th</sup> installment in the *Epoch Wargame Electronics* (EWE) series, *Battle of Pearl Harbor* (BOPH), published by Epoch in 1984. What makes this wargame unique is its violations of U.S. wargame's rule as well as its embodiment of wargame realism. Thinking through the board game's materiality and temporality, I attempt to locate the onset of Japan's modernity and global identity. I aim to demonstrate Epoch's BOPH as a product of ill-sublimated desire for empire and a melancholic manifestation of its wartime trauma.



**Figure 3:** Electronic Judgment Device

Epoch is a Japanese toy and computer games company founded in 1958. Witnessing their competitor's, Hobby Japan, success in the late 1970s and the early 1980s, Epoch joined in on the wargame craze (Altice 8). Epoch's *Epoch Wargame Electronics* (EWE) series features an electronic device that essentially functions as a six-sided die (see figure 3). The device itself is rather straightforward. Players would press the "PUSH" button on their respective side to let the LED light determine the outcome. Above the LED light, there is a chart indicating the strength of each faction's combat units. While the series covers complex battles and wars throughout history, such as D-Day and the Battle of Nagashino, it always situates an oppositional binary. In contrast, all aforementioned U.S. wargames, such as GDW's *Pearl Harbor*, feature multiple factions, often separating the Allied forces into the U.S., the Soviet Union, and China.

Of course, it is not fair to compare EWE to a full-scale wargame since it only aims to recreate battles not wars. EWE's BOPH focuses on the surprise attack, which lasted 1

hour and 50 minutes. In this logic, it is natural to see why the game operates within a U.S./Japan binary. Though the scale is much smaller compared to its U.S. counterpart, BOPH's rulebook takes a similar approach to that of the American wargame where elements of the war are systematized and condensed into tokens. That said, BOPH, like other installments in the series, features a historical background to explain the binary opposition (see figure 4). This is where the duality between the U.S. and Japan comes to life.



Figure 4: Brief History on the Attack on Pearl Harbor

The passage first acknowledges Imperial Japan's colonialism in East and Southeast Asia as a military strategy. Then it describes how such strategy angered the U.S. president Franklin D. Roosevelt, which lead to the freezing of Japanese assets, including oil. The passage mentions Admiral Yamamoto, who was never named in any U.S. tactical wargames, and his decision to issue the attack. The passages note that Yamamoto's decision was challenged by his strategists. Despite the warnings, Yamamoto believed that doing nothing would cost Japan greatly. A sense of fatality shines through the passage in which the attack feels inevitable. Moreover, thanks to the voices of protest, the passage conveys regret and sensibility. This brief background history violates the "objective" practices of U.S. wargames in which historic battles are systematized without the discourse around them. Philip Sabin identifies scenario-based wargames as "interactive history books" (Sabin 102). So, when the assumed Japanese audience play the 1 hour and 50 minutes segment of the Pacific War against this background history, what is the anticipated outcome of their player experience? By situating a binary between the U.S. and Japan, the game sets up an oedipal entanglement where Japan's attack was validated since it came out of a place of oppression. Such binary also leaves Japan's colonial endeavors in East and South East Asia unexamined since it is framed as a "military strategy."

### III-sublimated Desire for Empire

That said, Epoch's EWE series is designed to be short and simple to appeal to a wider audience, including their already established younger audience. A catalog that features Epoch's more traditional wargames, however, reveals that Epoch seems to identify the interrupted desire for empire as the motivation for playing wargames. This catalog features the more traditional but domestically made tactical wargame series titled "*Simulation War Games for Adults*" (see figure 5).

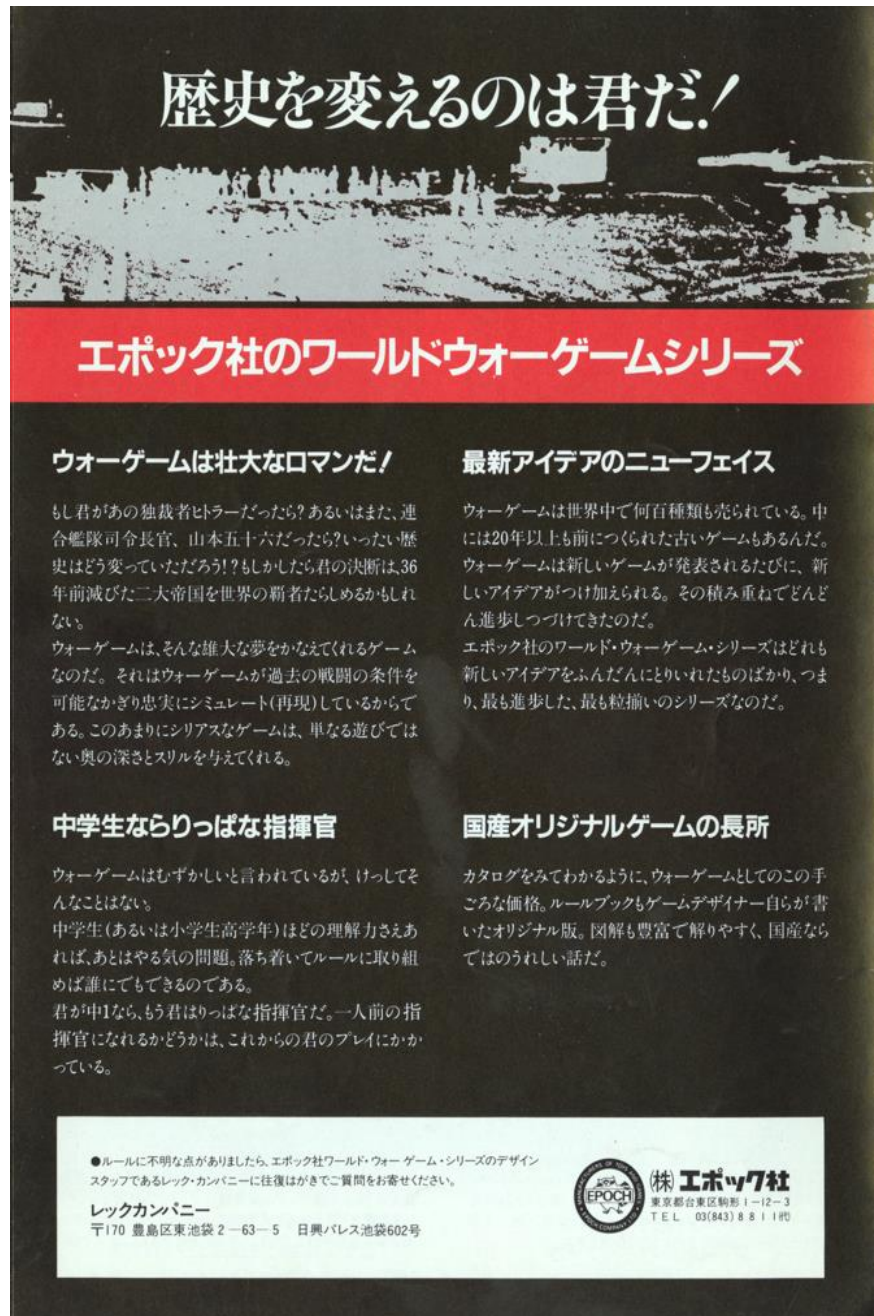


Figure 5: Centerfold of Epoch's World War Games Catalog

The center of the catalog writes, “*You can change history!*” Four sections are divided to illustrate the importance of wargames. One section celebrates Epoch’s domestic manufacturing by noting its beautiful illustrations and easy-to-understand rules. It also functions as a critique to the American imports, where rules are often complicated with little illustrations. What stands out is another section titled “Wargames Are Grand Romance!”

What if you were that dictator Hitler? Or Isoroku Yamamoto, the Commander-in-Chief of the Combined Fleet? How different history might’ve been?! Perhaps your decisions could turn the two lost great empires, destroyed 36 years ago, into conquerors of the world. Wargames are games that realize the dreams of a leader. That is because wargames faithfully simulate (recreate) the conditions of past



battles. Beyond mere play, this highly serious game provides depth along with thrills (Epoch Co.).

It is not unusual to entice potential players with the chance to “roleplay” a military leader. Yet mentioning Hitler and Yamamoto and framing the Axis powers’ defeats as losses of “great empires,” the passages seem to suggest an unresolved desire for empire. A desire that can be acted out, or sublimated, via a weightless structure. This catalog provides a different kind of pleasure for its assumed Japanese audience, one that is cathartic and full of agency. In a tactical wargame, one can overcome defeat by altering history without guilt. U.S. wargames understand their audience and tend not to appeal to those who do not share their enthusiasm. On the other hand, Epoch, as a toy company, aims to appeal to their younger audience as they believe the history-altering pleasure is universal, and the only blockage is the wargame’s learning curve. In another section of the centerfold, Epoch assures their younger audience that,

As long as you have the comprehensive faculties of a junior high student (or the upper grades of elementary school), understanding the game is a matter of motivation. Anyone can do it if they settle in and work hard on the rules. If you are in your first year of middle school, you are already a worthy commander. It is up to you to become a great one (Epoch Co.).

Positioning the game as rite of passage to maturity as well as a faithful historic interactive object, Epoch seems to capitalize on postwar Japan’s interrupted and suppressed desire for empire. The weightlessness of tactical wargame helps Epoch’s wargame to become a form of sublimation. Historical defeat becomes playable and digestible. Though it might present itself as objective, Japan’s own discourse around WWII spills over in the paratexts. This can be seen as an early onset of the Japanese modernity where the postcolonial odor is pungent even when it is masked under a weightless frame borrowed from the U.S..

### Indirectly Uttered Trauma

Japan’s postcolonial odor is characterized by its double positionalities. Unlike its interrupted colonial/imperial desire, Japan’s trauma rejects direct articulation. Given the globally accepted rationale behind the tragedies of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the mere mention of the bombings would lead to the conclusion that most Japanese people would not want to arrive. Since it cannot be worked through directly, it manifests itself as slippages.



Figure 6: BOPH’s box art

Going back to EWE’s BOPH. Its box art shows Japanese aircrafts bombing a U.S. hangar while American armies running for their lives. Two Japanese aircraft are fully

colored while the rest of the artwork is shaded in a uniformed blue hue (see figure 6). This artwork serves several functions. First, it denotes horror. Unlike other artworks in the series, this one is particularly harrowing, especially through the soldier's facial expression. Echoing Japan's postwar pacifism, this illustration affirms the idea that war causes harm on an individual level and military strategy often ignores that. Secondly, what is not explicitly addressed here is the victims of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The American soldier with the harrowing facial expression seems racially ambiguous and almost Japanese looking. Lastly, the image of the airstrike links two events, atomic bombings of the two cities and the attack on Pearl Harbor, together to resonate the causal relationship between the two.



**Figure 7:** Soldier on the front of the box

As the illustrated Japanese passing American soldier uncannily gazes into the invisible camera, an indirect utterance of trauma is established without articulation (See figure 7). The locus of such trauma is slippery, the glory of casting fear and the sorrow of bearing fear are jumbled up together.

To reframe Epoch's somewhat sinister-sounding roleplay instructions while emphasizing the dissonance between the paratext and the game mechanic, I suggest to view this EWE's BOPH as a coping mechanism for Japan's melancholic postwar condition. The game offers a language of mourning that was not easily accessible to the Japanese audience of the time. The board wargame functions as an "interactive history book" (Sabin 102) to Epoch's younger audience. To them, neither the wartime trauma nor the humiliation of defeat was experienced. The materiality of the board wargame aids to elucidate a part of their history that was often avoided or censored. Since tactical wargame demands mastery, it provides its Japanese audience with an opportunity to work through Japan's ambivalent attitudes towards its defeat and postwar devastation. The game itself does not direct its players to think in certain ways, it simply provides them with a safe space to think about "what if?" This safe space is a liminal space where wartime trauma can be simultaneously altered and avenged. Of course, to any outsider, the mere mention of Yamamoto would engender a different set of emotions. This safe space, constructed in a weightless tactical wargame, is only for its Japanese audience. BOPH exists in a liminal period where Japan is not yet concerned with the global gaze. As a form of sublimation, it is only legible to its intended audience.

## LIMINAL TO SUBLIME

When this form of sublimation must enter the global market, however, it has to mask its postwar ambivalence using metaphors. The issue with Japan's ambivalent attitude towards its postwar condition stays true in modern days, as explored in Martin's work on *Resident Evil 5*. Japan relies on metaphors to work through its own postwar reflections so as not to contaminate its sanitized and likable global identity. Since wartime libido is sublimated via a globally accepted form by appropriating foreign discourse or constructing a fictional narrative to work through its own history, Japan's reflection of its postwar condition remained in that liminal period. This liminal quality is exemplified by the insistence on the "what ifs?"

Fast-forward a few years from BOPH, SPI announced bankruptcy in 1982. The same year, Avalon Hill created Victory Games (V.G.) as a subsidiary company. Several core SPI members lead V.G. to recreate *Pacific War: The Struggle Against Japan 1941-1945* in 1985. Published by Hobby Japan and Victory Games, *Pacific War* took notes from all past publications. A level of historical sensitivity was present in the rulebook. Unlike his predecessors, Mark Herman decides that,

There is no atom bomb in the game. If, however, an Allied Strategic Bomber marker is within 15 hexes of a Homeland Resource hex, and it has at least 1 Strategic Bombing Point, at the conclusion of July 1945... the game immediately ends in an Allied historical victory (Herman 61).

Furthermore, Herman addresses the reason by stating in designer notes that,

By the time the atom bomb was available, the bombing and submarine campaigns had already won the war. The mushroom clouds over Hiroshima and Nagasaki provided the missing psychological element which ended the war short of an actual invasion (Herman 59).

While an equal amount of historic details was given to sensitive subjects such as the Kamikaze units, Herman is the first to address the discourse around the atom bombs in the rulebook. Ending the game right before the dropping of the atomic bombs, V.G.'s *Pacific War* constructs realism by balancing playability against seriousness. The co-production between SPI and Hobby Japan introduces an interaction between the two gazes across the pacific.

Fast-forward again to August 15<sup>th</sup> 2015, on Victory over Japan Day, Japanese publisher Game Journal (G.J.), first published in 1992, released a wargame titled "*The Great East Asian War*" (GEAW). GEAW reframes the "Pacific" by turning to the "East Asian." In both its design and paratexts, GEAW exhibits the ill-sublimated desire for empire and the trauma of the atomic bombings. First of all, unlike most other wargames, GEAW extends the war to December 1945 instead of the historic August 15<sup>th</sup> 1945 (Nagahama). GEAW invites its players to imagine "what if Japan never attacked Pearl Harbor?" and challenges them with the objective of avoiding the "nightmares of atomic bombs and ground troops" (Game Journal).

The difference between V.G.'s *Pacific War* and G.J.'s GEAW helps to illustrate the narcissistic nature of the latter. While the game moves beyond the binary opposition between the U.S. and Japan, it is still entangled in the causal relation between Pearl Harbor and the atomic bombings. GEAW inhabits the same liminal space shared by Epoch's wargames in the 1980s. It examines Japan's involvement in the war without interrogating its colonial/imperial impulses.

I must note that there are several wargames published between V.G.'s *Pacific War* and G.J.'s GEAW. I provided the two examples here to illustrate the different approaches taken by the U.S. and Japan. Future studies may construct a detailed genealogy in order to document different iterations of wargames about the Pacific War.

If we treat the liminal as a productive space for postwar reflection, it is important to examine the positionality of the game publisher. How is a wargame scenario framed and constructed by those living in the nations after which the scenario is modeled? What is left out in the liminal space since the ambivalence of war still haunts video games produced in Japan today? Furthermore, future studies may contrast what has been raised here to the U.S. media production post 9/11. 9/11 is another collective trauma that rejects reasoning. How is this event framed in popular culture and how does this manifest into other forms of media production?

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