



# Homecomings: The Belated Return of Japan's Lost Soldiers (Studies of the Weatherhead East Asian Institute, Columbia University)

*Yoshikuni Igarashi*

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Soon after the end of World War II, a majority of the nearly seven million Japanese civilians and servicemen posted overseas returned home. Heeding the call to rebuild, these soldiers helped remake Japan and enjoyed popularized accounts of their service. For those who took longer to return, such as the POWs detained in Siberian labor camps and the fighters who spent years hiding in the jungles of the South Pacific, coming home was more difficult. Their nation had moved on without them and resented the reminder of a humiliating, traumatizing defeat.

*Homecomings* tells the story of these late-returning Japanese soldiers and their struggle to succeed in a newly peaceful and prosperous society. Some were more successful than others, but they all charted a common cultural terrain, one profoundly shaped by media representations of the earlier returnees. Japan had come to redefine its nationhood through these popular images. *Homecomings* explores what Japanese society accepted and rejected, complicating the definition of a postwar consensus and prolonging the experience of war for both Japanese soldiers and the nation. The book throws the postwar narrative of Japan's recovery into question, exposing the deeper, subtler damage done to a country that only belatedly faced the implications of its loss.

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