INTRODUCTION

Families divided by war and individuals whose lives were torn apart by war are legion. One is tempted to say that such tragedies are always a by-product of war. In the context of Japan’s Pacific war, perhaps the most widely known are the tens of thousands of women and children who were separated from their families and left behind in north-east China immediately after the war. Between 1972 and 1999, more than 6,000 households are said to have repatriated from China.1 Other notable examples, closer to this chapter’s topic, include Japanese-American families divided by the war on each side of the Pacific, as told, for example, by Sodei (1998) in Were We the Enemy? and its more elaborate Japanese version (1995) by Knaefler (1991) in Our House Divided. In fictional form, Yamazaki Toyoko (1986) told the story of brothers who became separated during the war in Futatsu no Sokoku. On 14 August 2006, Nippon Hōsō Kyōkai (NHK) aired a documentary programme titled ‘Nihon to tatakatta Nikkeijin’, in which Harry Kitsuji Fukuhara, who served as a member of the US Military Intelligence Service (MIS) during the war, went to Japan with the Occupation and met his mother and brother who spent the war years in Japan. In a 3 August 2006 article entitled ‘Sensō ga hikisaita shitei,’ Asahi Shinbun (international edition) featured a brother and his older sister who were separated by the war.

The purpose here is not to examine war tragedies as such, but to examine the problems inherent in the relationship of the individual narrative and the master narrative of history. My focus is to examine the relationship between the experience of individuals and families
during the Second World War on the one hand, and the ‘master narrative’ of the war on the other. The paper questions the adequacy of the master narrative as a collective summation of all individual and family narratives, and also questions how well the master narrative informs individual and family narratives which purportedly contribute to the master narrative.

MEMORY

Excavating the individual past depends very much on memory. Thus it is important to clarify my position on what ‘memory’ means. Simply put, memory is a device by which one rationalizes the present self. It is a device with which to render a narrative of the past cogent and persuasive to the present self. It is an attempt to construct a self that is personally meaningful and satisfying.

In too many cases of the burgeoning genre of life history known in Japan as kojinshi or jibunshi, memory is naively accepted as a true reflection of the past. In the process of re-telling the past, however, the past is always ‘edited’, sometimes even ingeniously; some of the past may be intentionally deleted, forgotten, exaggerated or even ‘invented’, all in an effort to create a presentable self in the present.

MASTER NARRATIVE

What constitutes a ‘master narrative’ is admittedly controversial. A common-sensical definition is to consider it to be the commonly understood narrative of history, as is for instance, told in history books. But there are history books and there are history books. Some are alternative histories with views of history quite contrary to received views. For the time being I would like to put aside this issue and temporarily view ‘master narrative’ as the collective view of the overall current events of a country.

In the context of the Second World War and families divided on both sides of the Pacific, ‘the master narrative’ varies depending on which side of the Pacific we have in mind. The master narrative acceptable to Japan and that acceptable to the United States are obviously quite different from each other.

Historical narratives vary also from one historic time to another. The master narrative of Japan during the war is quite different from that of today. The same may be said of the American side. One major reason is that the master narrative is constructed to serve a certain constituency whose ideology changes from time to time. The problematic issue in this paper is how the individual and the family are related to the master narrative of the time in which they lived. How the master narrative is told after the war is not always relevant to understanding the wartime actions of individuals.

Examination of Kike Wadatsumi no Koe (Nihon Senbotsu Gakusei Kinenkai ed. 1996), those quintessentially canonical voices supposedly