
AHR Forum
Early-Twentieth-Century Japan in a Global Context

Introduction: Japan's New International History

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THE THREE ESSAYS IN THIS *AHR* FORUM cover a century of Japanese history whose drama played out on the international stage. In the 1840s and 1850s, European-American gunboat diplomacy disrupted the Sino-centric regional order and triggered a political revolution in Japan. In 1918, Japan entered the ranks of big league diplomacy as one of the “Big Five” and the single non-white power at the Paris Peace Conference. In late 1941, Japan launched a series of devastating military attacks that drove Euro-American power from the Asia-Pacific and established a Japan-centric regional order, triggering political revolutions throughout Asia. From the Western invasion of Japan in the mid-nineteenth century to the Japanese invasion of Asia a century later, the story of Japan in the world and the world in Japan is replete with cliffhangers and reversals of fortune, and not a small measure of cruelty, irony, tragedy, and hubris.

The essays here pull us into and across this century of high drama. Together they demonstrate a truism about Japanese history that is often missed: foreign affairs and domestic affairs occupy a single frame, what Jon Halliday once called “the dialectic of the internal and the external.”¹ The three authors each highlight connections at particular moments. Sho Konishi traces the genealogy of the humanitarian movement that supported the phenomenal growth of the Japanese Red Cross in the late nineteenth century. Examining indigenous humanitarian ideas and practices in the decades before the forced opening of Japan's treaty ports in 1858, he shows how profoundly the goals of the movement shifted in the wake of European encroachment in Asia. Frederick R. Dickinson's essay deals with the transforming impact of World War I in Asia, illustrating how the flowering of democratic reform movements at home linked up with progressive internationalism in the 1920s, from Wilsonian ideals of world government to Comintern visions of the transnational political mobilization of the working class. Ethan Mark looks at the occupation of Indonesia in the 1940s and the ideology of Asianism that underwrote the Japanese war effort. As he argues, total war and total empire were also cultural projects, and he explores this

My thanks to Kim Brandt and Crawford Young for their helpful and encouraging comments on a first draft of this essay.

¹ Jon Halliday, *A Political History of Japanese Capitalism* (New York, 1975), 14.

dimension of the wartime empire by examining the mobilization of the intelligentsia to produce propaganda for the New Order in Asia. Konishi, Dickinson, and Mark explicitly frame their analyses to shrink the boundary between national, transnational, and international history.

Such an approach builds on recent trends in the study of Japan's international history.² Much like other national-historical fields, over the past two decades scholarship on Japanese foreign relations has taken the cultural turn. This move represented a radical departure from a long tradition favoring the study of politics, the economy, and officialdom. Newer scholarship began to distinguish national actors—such as political leaders, national economic interests, and government ministries—from other agents of “Japan abroad.” The turn to culture also served to break down the barrier between “domestic” and “international” history. Moreover, Japan's new cultural history tracked a second notable trend line in the field of foreign relations: the reorientation from diplomacy to empire. During its earlier incarnation in the 1960s and 1970s, the study of the international fell under the purview of diplomatic history and research centered on foreign alliance structures, the diplomacy of war and peace, and bilateral relations.³ By the 1980s, a focus on colonialism and imperialism supplanted the study of diplomacy, and this is where the field has largely remained. As a cursory look at recent titles shows, the term “empire” is pervasive, even ubiquitous: Japan in the world between 1868 and 1945 signifies the study of empire.⁴

Perhaps empire maintains its hold on our imaginations because so much has changed in the ways we study it. The first wave of scholarship evinced a preoccupation with colonialism and the state: policymakers and the official mind, bureaucratic structures and their factional politics, and the forms and methods of colonial rule and administration.⁵ Over the past two decades, a new imperial history has

² This discussion has been informed by seminars with my graduate students at the University of Wisconsin–Madison and their bibliographic research. I would like to acknowledge Anne Giblin, James Homsey, Danny Kim, Jason Morgan, and Evan Wells.

³ Some representative titles include Akira Iriye, *Pacific Estrangement: Japanese and American Expansion, 1897–1911* (Cambridge, Mass., 1972); Ian Nish, *The Anglo-Japanese Alliance: The Diplomacy of Two Island Empires, 1894–1907* (London, 1966); Roger Dingman, *Power in the Pacific: The Origins of Naval Arms Limitation, 1914–1922* (Chicago, 1976); James B. Crowley, *Japan's Quest for Autonomy: National Security and Foreign Policy, 1930–1938* (Princeton, N.J., 1966); Mark R. Peattie, *Ishihara Kanji and Japan's Confrontation with the West* (Princeton, N.J., 1975); Dorothy Borg and Shumpei Okamoto, eds., *Pearl Harbor as History: Japanese-American Relations, 1931–1941* (New York, 1973); John Hunter Boyle, *China and Japan at War, 1937–1945: The Politics of Collaboration* (Stanford, Calif., 1972).

⁴ I offer one example: Mark Metzler's wonderful book on the history of the gold standard, Japanese bankers, and monetary policy is titled *Lever of Empire: The International Gold Standard and the Crisis of Liberalism in Prewar Japan* (Berkeley, Calif., 2006). *Lever of Empire* is a snappy title, and it certainly induced me to open the book, but for my reading, questions of imperial finance and the Japanese (or British) Empire as such represent a minor theme in a narrative concerned primarily with the global/local politics of money. I am not necessarily taking issue with the centrality of empire for the study of modern Japan, especially since I myself have made this argument elsewhere. Nevertheless, while empire needs to be in the frame, it need not be the frame. At some point we reach the point of empire fatigue, where the generative insights of this sort of analysis attenuate, and empire saturation, where the term becomes so broad as to mean everything and nothing.

⁵ Apart from some early scholarship on Japanese imperialism in China and Korea by Marius B. Jansen, *The Japanese and Sun Yat-Sen* (Cambridge, Mass., 1954); Hillary Conroy, *The Japanese Seizure of Korea, 1868–1910: A Study of Realism and Idealism in International Relations* (Philadelphia, 1960); and a handful of others, the foundational texts in the English-language study of Japanese colonialism and what constituted this as a “field” are a three-volume set edited by Peter Duus, Ramon H. Myers, and

turned sharply in other directions, focusing attention on social and cultural spheres.⁶ Construing the conceptual terrain of “culture” broadly and working in an interdisciplinary register, studies of Japanese imperialism borrow from anthropology, literary studies, and sociology, and take theoretical inspiration from Michel Foucault, Raymond Williams, and Edward Said, among others.⁷ Japanese studies has become more transnational, and this term is defined in increasingly diverse and sophisticated ways. It signifies informal social interactions between Japanese and others; the circulation of ideas across national borders; the transculturation of literary, linguistic, and architectural forms; and hybridity as a product of cultural interactions in the crucible of empire. Transnational projects look at Japanese in China, Koreans in Japan, Chinese and Koreans in Manchuria.⁸ Despite the cultural and transnational turns, and a new set of concerns generated by the problems of public memory and postcoloniality, the big questions have remained largely the same: What is the relationship between nation and empire? How did Japan escape the seeming universalism of European domination in the late nineteenth century to emerge as the single non-white power? What did this mean for culture, politics, and the economy? How did it shape Japan's subject position in a world divided between “East” and “West”? And was World War II a war for empire?

Mark R. Peattie; Myers and Peattie, eds., *The Japanese Colonial Empire, 1895–1945* (Princeton, N.J., 1984); Duus, Myers, and Peattie, eds., *The Japanese Informal Empire in China, 1895–1937* (Princeton, N.J., 1989); and Duus, Myers, and Peattie, eds., *The Japanese Wartime Empire, 1931–1945* (Princeton, N.J., 1996). The editors made a conceptual distinction between “formal empire” (the annexed and directly administered territories of Taiwan, Korea, Sakhalin, and Pacific Micronesia) and “informal empire” (the Japanese sphere of influence in China, buttressed by long-term leaseholds and the unequal treaty structure); and they focused heavily on political and economic factors. Scholars who followed critiqued the Princeton series for setting up a firewall between formal and informal empire as well as for an excessive preoccupation with state actors.

⁶ The “new imperial history” is a term popularized in British historiography, where it refers to a similar turn away from political economy to cultural history and stresses the importance of looking at domestic society as the home front of the empire. There is a prodigious literature on the new imperial history; for an easy access point, see the excellent essay collection edited by Stephen Howe, *The New Imperial Histories Reader* (London, 2009). Japan's “new imperial history” is only marginally engaged with this work, which might be imagined as a parallel historiographic universe where postcolonialism and post-imperialism, history and memory, come together in ways both familiar and alien.

⁷ Japan's new imperial history encompasses an extensive literature, as well. A partial list of recent titles includes Daqing Yang, *Technologies of Empire: Telecommunications and Japanese Expansion in Asia, 1883–1945* (Cambridge, Mass., 2010); E. Taylor Atkins, *Primitive Selves: Koreana in the Japanese Colonial Gaze, 1910–1945* (Berkeley, Calif., 2010); Todd A. Henry, *Assimilating Seoul: Japanese Rule and the Politics of Public Space in Colonial Korea, 1910–1945* (Berkeley, Calif., 2014); Aaron Herald Skabelund, *Empire of Dogs: Canines, Japan, and the Making of the Modern Imperial World* (Ithaca, N.Y., 2011); Kenneth J. Ruoff, *Imperial Japan at Its Zenith: The Wartime Celebration of the Empire's 2,600th Anniversary* (Ithaca, N.Y., 2010); Annika A. Culver, *Glorify the Empire: Japanese Avant-garde Propaganda in Manchukuo* (Vancouver, 2013).

⁸ Examples of the transnational turn are numerous, and I include only a small fraction here. Mark Driscoll, *Absolute Erotic, Absolute Grotesque: The Living, Dead, and Undead in Japan's Imperialism, 1895–1945* (Durham, N.C., 2010); Ken C. Kawashima, *The Proletarian Gamble: Korean Workers in Interwar Japan* (Durham, N.C., 2009); Jeffrey Paul Bayliss, *On the Margins of Empire: Buraku and Korean Identity in Prewar and Wartime Japan* (Cambridge, Mass., 2013); Hyun Ok Park, *Two Dreams in One Bed: Empire, Social Life, and the Origins of the North Korean Revolution in Manchuria* (Durham, N.C., 2005); Jun Uchida, *Brokers of Empire: Japanese Settler Colonialism in Korea, 1876–1945* (Cambridge, Mass., 2011); Prasenjit Duara, *Sovereignty and Authenticity: Manchukuo and the East Asian Modern* (Lanham, Md., 2003); Takashi Fujitani, *Race for Empire: Koreans as Japanese and Japanese as Americans during World War II* (Berkeley, Calif., 2011).

IN THE FIRST ESSAY, “The Emergence of an International Humanitarian Organization in Japan: The Tokugawa Origins of the Japanese Red Cross,” Sho Konishi examines the local history of an extremely powerful and influential international organization. The Red Cross in many ways is the “ur-international NGO”: one of the earliest of the proliferating numbers of international organizations of the nineteenth century and a symbol of global progress in humanitarianism, human rights, and the law of war. Konishi notes the extraordinary “success” of the Japanese branch of the International Red Cross Society, membership numbers that stand out sharply in comparative terms: 900,000 by 1903 and nearly 2 million by 1916, compared to the 55,000 members of the French Red Cross in 1907 and 31,000 American members in 1916. In tracing the story behind this striking disparity in numbers, Konishi seeks to counter the Euro-American image of the Red Cross and to push back against the argument that the Red Cross movement represented the diffusion of European Christian values and a Western civilizational order. Centering his analysis on Japan, he shows how the international humanitarian movement tracks an intellectual history outside the West. He tells a local/global story in which the local is determinative, correcting, in his words, the “larger historical narrative of Western modernity that, from its very design, leads to the interpretation of local difference as an immature understanding and mistranslation of the global.”⁹

Konishi traces the origins of this movement across the 1868 divide, a fateful moment when the overthrow of the feudal regime and the restoration of imperial power ushered in a wave of reforms establishing the foundations of industrial capitalism and a modern nation-state. The Japanese Red Cross Society (JRCS) belongs to the “after” of the Meiji Restoration, but Konishi’s point is that its foundations belong to the “before.” While history-writing on modern Japan has softened its reading of the 1868 divide as a “light bulb” that turned on modernity and banished the darkness of feudalism, the understandings of the opening of the treaty ports and of the Meiji Restoration as a moment of rupture for international relations remain as a striking holdover from the older historiographic tradition.¹⁰ Recent scholarship has yet to complicate the picture of a sudden transformation from a closed to an open country, a change inaugurated at that moment in 1853 when American gunboats sailed into Tokyo Bay and forced the Tokugawa Bakufu to yield to their demands for diplomatic and commercial exchange.

For Konishi, however, the continuities in the Japanese humanitarian movement are as important as the changes. In particular, he questions the idea that the Japanese Red Cross represented a reaction to the flood of European Enlightenment thought

⁹ Konishi further develops his interest in Japan as a site for an “alternative modernity” in *Anarchist Modernity: Cooperatism and Japanese-Russian Intellectual Relations in Modern Japan* (Cambridge, Mass., 2013), which deals with non-state networks linking Japanese and Russian intellectuals, as well as the native movements for volunteerism and mutual aid that became the basis for anarchism.

¹⁰ It is in the nature of our work as historians that we grapple with questions of change and continuity. There are good reasons for stressing the former in the analysis of foreign affairs in nineteenth-century Japan, since the basic structures of international exchange were so dramatically altered. Yet even here, it is too easy to fall into the modernist conceit that the Meiji reforms sprang forth fully formed after the Meiji Restoration. For an excellent discussion of the “before and after” descriptions of the Meiji Restoration by contemporaneous intellectuals and the appropriations of their narratives by later generations of historians, see Daniel V. Botsman, “Introduction,” in Botsman, *Punishment and Power in the Making of Modern Japan* (Princeton, N.J., 2005), 1–13.

into Japan and an instance of “Western impact–Japanese response.” He sees the JRCS less as a product of the import of Christian volunteerism, pacifism, and international organization-ism, and more as the flowering of a homegrown humanist movement among elite physicians that began long before 1868 or even 1853. As he shows, during the wave of famines, epidemics, and other human disasters of the early nineteenth century, physician-intellectuals of the samurai aristocracy developed practices of medical charity based on the idea of healing the individual to save the world. The Tokugawa-era Juntendō medical academy advocated compassionate care for victims of famine and disease; during the civil wars of the 1860s and 1870s, the “Society for Universal Compassion” (Hakuaisha) adapted these ideas to the creation of field hospitals to treat injured soldiers.

By the turn of the twentieth century, the establishment of a large standing army and navy as well as the beginnings of imperial warfare transformed the goals of the movement. Reincarnated as the Japanese Red Cross Society, the physicians’ organization shed its character as a compassionate medical charity for the poor and injured and served to spread militarism and jingoism at home and to raise Japan’s prestige abroad. In this sense, the phenomenal growth of the JRCS after 1868 should be seen as a kind of Whig history through the looking glass, in which the encounter with the West and induction into the inter-state system foreclosed the humanitarian promise of the precursors to the Red Cross movement. Mobilized for imperialism and warfare, the JRCS became an international success; but for Konishi, this poster child for international NGO-ism represents a tale of Japan’s dark enlightenment.

FRED DICKINSON’S ESSAY, “Toward a Global Perspective of the Great War: Japan and the Foundations of a Twentieth-Century World,” places Japan at the heart of a different global story, looking at World War I and the transformations of the 1920s from an Asian-centered perspective. Although Japan’s role in World War II is part of our understanding of this war as a global event, Asia is mostly a blank space in the histories of the First World War. Dickinson’s article shows that if we view the Great War through a Japanese optic, we can learn something new about both the historical event itself and the impact of Asia on global affairs. Although Asia’s importance in the grand scheme of war and peace did not register for most contemporary observers in America or Europe, to Asian elites Japan’s entry into the war in 1914 under the terms of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance, its military operations against Germany in Micronesia and China, and its participation in the Paris Peace Conference as one of the “Big Five” signaled a sea change in the nature of the global order. As Dickinson points out, in the wake of World War I, Japan’s civic and political leaders saw their country as an agent not just of regional but of world events. For them, Japan’s takeover of Germany’s Asia-Pacific empire, a new rivalry with Great Britain in China, and engagement with Asian reformers in the British and French empires all signaled a shift in the balance of power between West and East. In their eyes, Japanese representation at the Peace Conference and in the League of Nations created a voice for a newly assertive Asia in world affairs; Japan’s rise as a great power meant that Asia, too, had arrived.

In contrast to the view from Japan, Chinese and Korean nationalists read a strikingly different message emanating from Versailles, as they embraced the principle of self-determination and the vision of a new world order to authorize anti-Japanese nationalism. They kicked off the March 1 (Korea) and May 4 (China) movements in 1919 in opposition to Japanese colonialism and as a repudiation of Japan's claims to speak for Asia to the West. World War I in Asia thus marked a critical turning point for nationalism and nationalist movements in China, Korea, and Japan. The accelerations of these multiple nationalisms—both their synergies and their antagonisms—reconfigured the regional order and rewove the fabric connecting East Asia to the world. Japanese attempts over the course of the 1920s to make common cause with nationalists in China and Korea in the interest of promoting Japan's foothold in Asia prefigured not only a more expansive attempt to coopt anticolonial nationalism during World War II, but a precocious experiment in what might be called “imperialism after imperialism.”¹¹

Addressing the narrower community of Japan specialists, Dickinson makes a forceful case for rethinking the significance of the 1920s as a time of progressive political change.¹² The galvanizing impact of World War I touched off the rapid proliferation of international networks connecting domestic political organizations with NGOs and partner organizations in other countries, a process that underpinned the efflorescence of political reform movements among women, workers, Koreans, outcastes, farm tenants, and other subalterns. Activists promoted workers' rights at home and participation in the International Labor Organization. Pacifist organizations opposed military spending and pushed Japan's participation in disarmament conferences. Membership in the League of Nations buoyed up domestic support for a “little Japan” vision of foreign relations and what Akira Iriye termed “peaceful expansionism.”¹³

When he makes the appeal for a reevaluation of the politics of the 1920s, Dickinson is calling out the tyranny of the teleology in modern Japanese history. As is largely true of Germany as well, the history of twentieth-century Japan has been hijacked by World War II: all roads seem to lead into and out of this cataclysmic event. A move toward “trans-war history” has begun to curb the tendency to break the century at 1945, but the political history of the 1920s—in particular the explosion of social protest movements and the groundswell of support for an expansion of political rights known as “the movement for Taishō democracy”—remains stuck in the shadow of the military expansionism of the 1930s.¹⁴ Because of what followed,

¹¹ Akira Iriye provocatively titled his book on the new regional order in East Asia that took shape in the twenties *After Imperialism: The Search for a New Order in the Far East, 1921–1931* (Cambridge, Mass., 1965). He used this phrase to make a somewhat different point, that the decade of the 1920s constituted a time when the collapse of the old imperial alliances was replaced by an ineffectual re-balancing of power in East Asia, whose own collapse triggered Japan's turn to military expansionism after 1931. Thus, for Iriye the 1920s represent a pause in the diplomacy of imperialism, whereas I would argue that it reemerged in a new form.

¹² Dickinson develops this argument more fully in *World War I and the Triumph of a New Japan, 1919–1930* (Cambridge, 2013).

¹³ Akira Iriye, “The Failure of Economic Expansionism, 1918–1931,” in Bernard S. Silberman and H. D. Harootunian, eds., *Japan in Crisis: Essays on Taishō Democracy* (Princeton, N.J., 1974), 237–269, here 238.

¹⁴ “Taishō” is the name for the reign of Emperor Yoshihito from 1912 to 1926, though it more loosely refers to the period from World War I through the 1920s. Like British reign names, Japanese peri-

the efforts at reform in monetary and social policy, the initiatives to expand the franchise and to reform the party system, and the moves toward disarmament and concessions to Chinese and Korean nationalism have all been viewed through the lens of failure. Dickinson's work pushes back against the characterization of the 1920s as a "failure of democracy," an image etched in place during the flourishing of political history in the 1970s. He rejects the dismissal of the Taishō democracy movement as little more than "the pre-stage for Japanese militarism" and instead calls on us to read this important decade on its own terms and as elites at the time saw it.¹⁵

Although the field subsequently moved away from politics and the economy, the decade of the 1920s has become a magnet for new scholarship on social and cultural history, with a parade of recent books on the modern girl, the mass media, urban life, the new middle class, and the like.¹⁶ In this sense, Dickinson brings together an earlier political-diplomatic with a more recent social-cultural historiography. He builds his analysis of political trends on the foundation of the dramatic social transformations of these years, arguing that the push for universal suffrage arose from the social ferment of multiple intersecting developments: rapid urban in-migration, the expansion of women's higher education and employment, and the rise of a white-collar middle class, among them. He writes that, "backed by a rapidly industrializing economy, an urban middle class, and a mass consumer culture, Japan underwent a political transformation equivalent to the revolution of 1868." This is a bold, and some will argue overreaching, claim. But it does suggest possibilities for updating the dog-eared chronologies of modern Japanese history. The time has surely come to reinvent political-diplomatic history by bringing culture into politics and politics into culture.

odization follows imperial reigns: Meiji, 1868–1912; Taishō, 1912–1926; Shōwa, 1926–1989; and Heisei, 1989–present.

¹⁵ These emblematic phrases come from Robert A. Scalapino, *Democracy and the Party Movement in Prewar Japan: The Failure of the First Attempt* (Berkeley, Calif., 1953); and Shūichi Kato, "Taishō Democracy as the Pre-Stage for Japanese Militarism," in Silberman and Harootunian, eds., *Japan in Crisis*, 217–236. Ironically, Kato's essay appears in an edited volume that prefigures precisely the kind of cultural and political overlap that Dickinson is calling for. *Japan in Crisis* was recently reissued and is well worth reading. Andrew Gordon's influential study of how working-class activism transformed politics in the 1910s and 1920s, *Labor and Imperial Democracy in Prewar Japan* (Berkeley, Calif., 1992), offers another model for integrating social and political history. Nevertheless, these are notable exceptions to a historiography in which political analysis is striking for its absence.

¹⁶ The following list is suggestive of popular themes: Barbara Sato, *The New Japanese Woman: Modernity, Media, and Women in Interwar Japan* (Durham, N.C., 2003); Michiko Suzuki, *Becoming Modern Women: Love and Female Identity in Prewar Japanese Literature and Culture* (Stanford, Calif., 2009); Elyssa Faison, *Managing Women: Disciplining Labor in Modern Japan* (Berkeley, Calif., 2007); Sarah Frederick, *Turning Pages: Reading and Writing Women's Magazines in Interwar Japan* (Honolulu, 2006); Gregory Clancey, *Earthquake Nation: The Cultural Politics of Japanese Seismicity, 1868–1930* (Berkeley, Calif., 2006); Jonathan E. Abel, *Redacted: The Archives of Censorship in Transwar Japan* (Berkeley, Calif., 2012); David R. Ambaras, *Bad Youth: Juvenile Delinquency and the Politics of Everyday Life in Modern Japan* (Berkeley, Calif., 2006); Mark A. Jones, *Children as Treasures: Childhood and the Middle Class in Early Twentieth Century Japan* (Cambridge, Mass., 2010); Alisa Freedman, *Tokyo in Transit: Japanese Culture on the Rails and Road* (Stanford, Calif., 2010); Louise Young, *Beyond the Metropolis: Second Cities and Modern Life in Interwar Japan* (Berkeley, Calif., 2013).

IN THE THIRD ESSAY, “The Perils of Co-Prosperity: Takeda Rintarō, Occupied Southeast Asia, and the Seductions of Postcolonial Empire,” Ethan Mark examines Japan’s military expansionism and the construction of a “new order in East Asia” in the 1930s and 1940s. The multi-front social crisis of the early 1930s—agrarian stagnation and even famine in Japan’s Northeast, unprecedented urban unemployment in cities large and small, plummeting exports to all of Japan’s critical markets—fed an atmosphere of desperation and panic. The demonstrable failure of existing political, economic, and social institutions to “overcome the deadlock” encouraged calls for state renovation and radical solutions, ennobling the seductions of fascism. Attention turned to the Asian continent, where Japan’s position appeared embattled by a rising Chinese nationalist movement. Against the backdrop of global trade friction and tariff wars, the China market became Japan’s “imperial lifeline” and the justification for an army-led invasion of Manchuria in 1931. An army ascendant in China empowered military ambitions at home; the success of conspirators in Manchuria licensed a wave of coup attempts and political assassinations in the imperial capital. Establishment elites joined army officers in the fascization of the state from above, with the creation of the “thought police,” the “controlled economy,” and a single mass political party (the Imperial Rule Assistance Association) as instruments of the national defense state and total war.

Just as the 1920s are observed through the rearview mirror of the 1930s, the teleology of a catastrophic defeat in 1945 frames the interpretation of Japan’s New Order in Asia. In hindsight, the decision to launch a multi-front war against China, Russia, the United States, Great Britain, and the Netherlands seems both reckless and quixotic, and the slogan “Co-Prosperity in Greater East Asia” cruel and mendacious. Such retrospective judgments shape the scholarship on World War II in Asia. Much of this work focuses on bilateral relations and the four distinct war fronts: Japanese-American estrangement and the road to Pearl Harbor; the yen bloc, puppet states, and the battle against Nationalist and Communist China; “red peril” and the undeclared war with the USSR; and pan-Asianism and the “strike south” into Southeast Asia. Within this voluminous literature and its multiple and cross-cutting points of debate, the overarching questions often circle back to war aims and the ideology of the wartime empire.

Mark enters this historiographic terrain by way of the debate over pan-Asianism. A complex body of thought that traced its roots to the late nineteenth century, Asianism represented a marginal strain in Japanese imperial discourse until the 1930s, when it was appropriated by the state to become a pillar of wartime ideology. In its official version, Asianism was expressed through a series of increasingly expansive locutions, from the declaration of a Monroe Doctrine for Asia in 1934, to a New Order for East Asia in 1938, and finally to the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere in 1942. Official Asianism embraced a vision of regional autarky among an Asian family of nations headed by Japan, as well as the notion of a Japanese mission to lead Asia in a war of liberation from Western domination. Over the years, scholars have debated a number of issues surrounding the history of pan-Asianism in the wartime empire, among them the impact of the Japanese occupation on Southeast Asian nationalist movements as well as the thorny question of collaboration; the motivations and sincerity of Japanese proponents of Asian union, from the politi-

cians and intellectuals who were architects of the policy in Tokyo to the military administrators and propagandists who put Asianism into practice in the occupied territories; and whether the project of an autarkic regional order represented a realistic and legitimate response to the trends in global geopolitics or an irrational and foolhardy pursuit of a mirage.¹⁷ To one degree or another, Mark wades into all these debates, though his principal interest lies in the second set of questions: How did Japanese understand Asianism?

Like Dickinson, Mark asks his readers to suspend the judgment of hindsight, and suggests that we look at the wartime empire on its own terms. His essay situates the occupation of Indonesia in real historical time, viewing the war, the ideology of the “Greater East Asia Co-Prosperty Sphere,” and the project of inducing Indonesian subjects to support the Japanese mission from the vantage point of the men on the spot—those who literally embodied the project of “greater Asia.”¹⁸ Specifically, he uses the left-wing writer Takeda Rintarō as a case study, focusing on this one Japanese intellectual who was mobilized to join a propaganda team in occupied Java in 1942. In many respects, Takeda is the most unlikely of cheerleaders for Japanese militarism. His writing championed the lives of the urban lower class at home, and he was drawn to their counterparts in Java—as Mark notes, “mixing with the locals and adopting their ways.” He was sharply critical of the tendency among his fellow Japanese to embrace “Western-style” imperialism by derogating other Asians and treating them with racist contempt. And yet he took a Japanist position on language policy, promoting the project of linguistic assimilation, which suppressed and devalued local languages. In effect, Takeda’s pan-Asianism eschewed multiethnic empire, with its respect for national identity, in favor of cultural imperialism, with its acknowledgment of Japanese superiority.

The perils of preaching co-prosperity found many progressive artists and writers beguiled by the heady ideals of Asian liberation from the West. In the process, they became tools of a military strategy that ruthlessly sacrificed Asia for Japan’s war effort and coerced nationalist leaders to abet their efforts. Of all the places Japan occupied, Indonesia suffered some of the most horrendous casualties—an estimated 4 million dead, a sizable fraction through forced labor for the notorious Burma-Siam “railway of death.”¹⁹ Mark explains Takeda’s Japanist turn and complicity in this

¹⁷ On Southeast Asian nationalist movements, see Harry J. Benda, “The Japanese Interregnum in Southeast Asia,” in Grant K. Goodman, comp., *Imperial Japan and Asia: A Reassessment* (New York, 1967), 65–79; Alfred W. McCoy, ed., *Southeast Asia under Japanese Occupation* (New Haven, Conn., 1980); Ken’ichi Goto, *Tensions of Empire: Japan and Southeast Asia in the Colonial and Postcolonial World* (Athens, Ohio, 2003). On intellectuals as visionaries for the new order, see Chalmers Johnson’s biography of one of Japan’s leading sinologists, *An Instance of Treason: Ozaki Hotsumi and the Sorrow Spy Ring*, expanded ed. (Stanford, Calif., 1990); as well as William Miles Fletcher III, *The Search for a New Order: Intellectuals and Fascism in Prewar Japan* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1982). On the debate over the rationality of Japanese foreign policy in the 1930s, see Crowley, *Japan’s Quest for Autonomy*; Michael A. Barnhart, *Japan Prepares for Total War: The Search for Economic Security, 1919–1941* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1987); and Janice Mimura, *Planning for Empire: Reform Bureaucrats and the Japanese Wartime State* (Ithaca, N.Y., 2011).

¹⁸ Like Konishi and Dickinson, Mark develops his argument more fully in his book manuscript in progress, to be titled *The Limits of Liberation*.

¹⁹ According to John W. Dower, between 300,000 and 1 million Indonesians were mobilized to work on the Burma-Siam Railway, not including Chinese residents of Indonesia. The United Nations Working Group for Asia and the Far East gives an estimate of 300,000 fatalities among Indonesian forced laborers. Dower, *War without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War* (New York, 1986), 296.

monstrosity through the seductions of military triumphalism and his faith in Japan's unique capacity to drive the West from Asia, his belief that "only Japan had the cultural (as well as political and economic) capital to resist Americanization and restore Asia's rightful nobility."

Why is this more than the story of one man's self-delusion? Our judgment of Takeda's actions bears directly on postwar debates about the question of war responsibility, in which the role of intellectuals is particularly fraught.²⁰ In prewar Japan, intellectuals held high social status and commanded a wide audience both inside and outside the government. After World War I, the imperial universities became the intellectual home of the radical left and incubated a vigorous Marxian social science. The rightist turn of the 1930s and the growth of a national defense state drove left-wing intellectuals from their university posts or forced them to recant radical beliefs. Some were jailed or sat out the war under self-imposed house arrest, but many more supported "greater Asia" through their intellectual labor. For Japanese historians (intellectuals themselves), the question of complicity is often a personal one. The case of Takeda Rintarō serves as proxy for the larger issue of war responsibility among progressive and leftist intellectuals who espoused anti-imperialist views and yet promoted imperialism. How could they do this? In answer, Mark asks us to see the world as they saw it. From their perches within the Japanese war for a "greater Asia," Takeda and others imagined that they were harnessing "the irresistible power of mass nationalism as a global trend of the times." They convinced themselves that they had found a way "to somehow reach a resolution that might transcend this confrontation between the imperial and the national." While it is easy, in the wake of defeat, to dismiss Japanese pan-Asianism as a monstrous hypocrisy, its seductions serve as an uncanny harbinger of the ideology of "imperialism after imperialism" in the Cold War era, when support for national liberation movements and developmental economics inspired a generation of progressive Euro-American intellectuals to support their governments' neocolonial projects and proxy wars in Asia and Africa.

TOGETHER THESE ARTICLES HIGHLIGHT the payoff to thinking global history with Japan and Asia in mind. Examining the impulses behind Japanese expansionism can lead to provocative comparisons and generate a more multidimensional account of the dynamics of the "new imperialism" of the late nineteenth century. Anti-Western self-strengthening movements in Japan, China, and Turkey all espoused territorial expansion as a strategy to resist the imperialist threat. Economic nationalism in Japan, the U.S., and Germany led "late-developing economies" to become "late-comer empires." These were among the forces joining the intensification of European power politics to overdetermine the scramble for territory in the late nineteenth

²⁰ Two books that serve as a useful entry point to the literature on public memory and war responsibility are Yoshikuni Igarashi, *Bodies of Memory: Narratives of War in Postwar Japanese Culture, 1945–1970* (Princeton, N.J., 2000); and T. Fujitani, Geoffrey M. White, and Lisa Yoneyama, eds., *Perilous Memories: The Asia-Pacific War(s)* (Durham, N.C., 2001). For an account by a leading intellectual, see Shunsuke Tsurumi, *An Intellectual History of Wartime Japan, 1931–1945* (London, 1986). For a discussion of intellectuals and the war effort in Japanese-occupied Manchuria, see also Louise Young, *Japan's Total Empire: Manchuria and the Culture of Wartime Imperialism* (Berkeley, Calif., 1998), chap 6.

century. Likewise, thinking with Asia reveals that the relationship between imperialism and nationalism is more complicated than a European-focused theory of imperialism might suggest. This raises questions, for example, about nationalism and the “pan” movements—pan-Africanism, pan-Germanism, and pan-Asianism among them. In the latter case, at least, pan-Asianism absorbed a host of competing nationalist agendas—anticolonial nationalisms, self-determining ethnonationalisms, imperialist ultranationalisms, Occidentalisms, self-Orientalisms, jingoisms, xenophobias—that brought theories of imperialism and theories of nationalism into a tangled web of confusions and contradictions. And yet, pan-Asianism managed to sustain its force as a transcendent idea across the twentieth century and even into the new millennium. This is more than just a “Japan and Asia” story, and one that requires us to bring the globe into Asia and Asia into the globe.

Focusing in more parochial terms on the national-cultural history of Japan itself, the three articles in this forum chart what might be called a new international history, one that reconnects cultural analysis to the study of diplomacy, international organizations, and the projection of national power abroad.²¹ Why is now the time for a new international history? The dramatic shifts in the post–Cold War regional order in East Asia and in Japan’s global position have generated pressure to rethink the history of “Japan in a Global Context.” Part of this means coming to terms with Japan’s eclipse as an economic giant and the rise of Japanese soft power. Indeed, the themes of these essays—the global humanitarian thought of the Japanese Red Cross, Japanese promotion of world government ideals through the League of Nations and its networks of NGOs, and the institutionalizing of Asianism through regional conferences for East Asian writers, athletes, artists, and youth groups—all belong to the prehistory of soft power. This was a history that went underground during the high-growth era of the 1960s and 1970s and Japan’s rise to economic superpower status in the 1980s, when Japan became an object of study as a developmental state. However, the enthusiasm for Japanology in economics and political science departments faded after the collapse of the bubble economy in the 1990s, and the subsequent lost decades of economic stagnation turned Japan from model to anti-model for First World economics. In the meantime, finding themselves eclipsed by the new “Asian giant” in China, Japanese policymakers and diplomats turned to soft power to promote Japan in the world. The nation may have lost its aura as an economic superpower, but “Cool Japan” could make a play as a cultural superpower. In cultural markets throughout the globe, Zen and martial arts; sushi and green tea; karaoke and J pop; anime, manga, and video games; and, not least, Hello Kitty are hugely popular, driving the exponential growth of Japan’s “gross national cool.” At the current juncture, it is no coincidence to find culture staging a comeback in scholarly fashion, with Japan studies anchored in the disciplines of history, literature, and anthropology. Prompted by connections newly visible in the

²¹ For a provocative reframing of postwar history in these terms, see Kim Brandt, *Japan's Cultural Miracle: Rethinking the Rise of a World Power, 1945–1965* (Columbia University Press, forthcoming).

world around them, historians, too, find themselves drawn to the relationship of culture and power on the global stage.

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