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America's Road to its Asian Dilemma

[Yoneyuki Sugita](#)

Yoichi Miura. *Yoshida Shigeru to San Furanshisuko Kowa* [Yoshida Shigeru and the San Francisco Peace Treaty]. Tokyo: Ohtsuki Shoten, 1996. xiii + 253 pp., vol. 1, and v + 326 pp., vol. 2. Tables, illustrations, notes, and index. 3,090 yen (vol. 1) and 3,296 yen (vol. 2).

Daizaburo Yui. *Nichibei Sensokan no Sokoku* [Japan-U.S. Gap of War Images]. Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1995. viii + 236 pp. Tables, illustrations, and notes. 1,800 yen.

"[H]istory . . . is a continuous process . . . an unending dialogue between the present and the past," E. H. Carr wrote in *What Is History* (1974, p. 30). Yoichi Miura and Daizaburo Yui reexamine the Pacific War, the U.S. occupation of Japan, and war memories in both countries, with a critical view in regard to the current situation in Japan and in Japan-U.S. relations.

Miura casts doubt on the prevailing postwar concept among conservative Japanese that they should accept economic growth and subjugation to the United States as inseparable imperatives. He focuses on the process of establishing the San Francisco Treaty (including both peace and security treaties) from the perspective of Japanese history. Those who approve of the treaty insist that it was the only realistic choice for Japan while those who disapprove believe that the treaty imposed the rearmament program and incorporated Japan into the American militaristic world strategy. With the demise of the Cold War and the Japan Socialist Party, the validity of the treaty is now widely accepted; however, Miura is still critical of it, speculating on an alternative road Japan could have taken. He believes that there was a good chance of concluding a peace treaty in 1947 that would have made Japan a

demilitarized and neutral country. Then, the Korean War would not have happened in the way that it did and the Cold War in Asia would not have escalated as much as it did. He goes so far as to claim that postoccupation security and economic issues had nothing to do with a peace treaty.

In *Empire and Aftermath: Yoshida Shigeru and the Japanese Experience, 1878-1954* (1988), John Dower sheds light on the pivotal importance of Yoshida Shigeru, who "bridged the decades from the turn of the century into the 1950s [End Page 326] as successfully and colorfully as anyone" (p. xii). Dower argues that since the Cold War enhanced Japan's strategic importance, Yoshida used this as a bargaining chip to resist the American demand for swift and large-scale rearmament, successfully concluded a peace treaty, and firmly established the foundation for Japan's postwar development. In contrast to Dower's thesis, Miura regards this positive image as a "Yoshida myth." Miura is convinced that Yoshida was an incompetent negotiator who relied completely on the United States, narrowing his focus only to acquiring independence. Miura criticizes Yoshida for not making much use of the outbreak of the Korean War increasing Japan's strategic significance and John Foster Dulles's concern about whether or not the United States could maintain bases in Japan after the occupation. Miura claims that Washington's aim was not to pressure Japan to implement a prompt large-scale rearmament program but rather to establish a framework that would keep military bases in Japan and continue to channel Japan into a remilitarization course. Miura may have succeeded in destroying the Yoshida Myth; however, by doing so, he holds Yoshida himself responsible for establishing a distorted Japan-U.S. relationship. If Yoshida had been a better negotiator, could Japan have formulated a more equal relationship with the United States? He seems to argue in the rest of his book that the enormous difference in U.S.-Japan power relations and the emergence of the Cold War in Asia left Japan no choice but to wholeheartedly depend on the United States. In short, Miura's challenge leads him to a self-contradiction.

While Miura offers some empirical research with emphasis on security and the peace treaty, Yui tackles the broader issue of why the differences in the memories of the Asia-Pacific War widened over the last half century. Emphasizing images and cultural factors, Akira Iriye claims in *Power and Culture: The Japanese-American War 1941-1945* (1982) that Japan-U.S. relations should be viewed as "interpower and intercultural relations" (p. vii). From this perspective, Iriye concludes that both countries share similar assumptions and world views. At a more general theoretical level, Immanuel Wallerstein analyzes cultural phenomena in the context of a world-system perspective in *Historical Capitalism* (1983) and Edward Said examines relations between empire and culture in *Culture and Imperialism* (1993). Based on these previous studies, Yui explores a new research field--the interaction of American and Japanese nationalism.

Yui discusses the impact of World War II on the modern world-system and Asian affairs, primarily focusing on images, nationalism, and modernity. He claims that the prewar world was hierarchical, with a strong ethnocentrism; it consisted of rival nation states that sought external expansion and contained

ethnic and racially discriminatory structures at home. World War II was a watershed that drastically transformed it in the direction of a postmodern [End Page 327] world that would find a more egalitarian relationship among nation states and ethnic/racial groups. Yui asserts that the United States employs patriotic Americanism abroad with the tendency of adding moral justification to its entry into wars. Hence, the Americans are convinced without doubt that the Pacific War was a just war. On the other hand, Yui points out that the emergence of a Cold War in Asia resulted in a generous peace treaty that brought about Japan's total dependence on the United States. The United States also allowed the same leaders to continue holding power in Japan before and after World War II. Consequently, America's overwhelming power caused Japan to lose the opportunity to formulate a postmodern relationship with other Asian nations, to separate itself from them, and to permit the postwar Japanese leaders to evade assuming responsibility for the Pacific War. In their mind, the Japanese have recreated a hierarchical structure in which Japan is subordinated to the U.S. while it disdains other Asian nations. This is another demonstration of ethnocentrism, and both the United States and Japan have a tendency to behave in ethnocentric ways that widen the gap between them of the memories concerning the Asia-Pacific War. Yui predicts that atoning for past wrongdoings and demonstrating itself to be a trustworthy partner with other Asian nations would enable Japan to establish a more equal relationship with the United States. He concludes that shifting to postmodern thinking is an unending process and unless both the United States and Japan overcome their own ethnocentrism, it would be difficult to close the image gap. Yui's approach and arguments are both original and thought-provoking.

Both books constitute precious additions to the existing literature on Japan-U.S. relations. They make many controversial arguments, but I will limit my focus on two of their significant common assumptions. Both of them assume that the United States had a preponderance of power to shape Japan's course of development after the Pacific War. This assumption is questionable. The U.S. officials' psychological fear (referred to as the Cold War mentality) created an image of limitless expansion of communism in their imagination that grew regardless of developments in the real world. Ironically, it was America's overwhelming power, coupled with hegemonic responsibility and the Cold War mentality, that caused Washington to get bogged down in an Asian quagmire. Both books also emphasize the epoch-making impact of the Korean War on Japan-U.S. relations. According to Miura, it was a turning point of the occupation, which led the American officials to reach a consensus that the United States would push forward a peace treaty, implement a rearmament program, and retain military bases in Japan after the occupation. Yui insists that the Korean War precipitated the U.S. roll-back policy by [End Page 328] solidifying the military ties among the Western powers, which tacitly allowed Japan to abandon the war responsibility.

Japan had been insulated from the world-system between the summer of 1945 and early 1949. Since the Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers (SCAP) controlled Japanese foreign trade, Japan was exempted from the heavy

burden of a huge trade deficit. Japan was also relieved from security costs since it was under military occupation. In short, Japan was in an economic greenhouse, which facilitated radical reforms. Using their dominant authority, the United States promptly accomplished demilitarization and democratization, but it soon realized that economic recovery was a formidable task. It feared that economic deterioration might erode the basis of democracy and turn Japan's orientation toward the Communist bloc, which would certainly deteriorate U.S. prestige in Asia.

Initiatives of the occupation policies gradually shifted from SCAP to Washington around 1947. The Cold War mentality began to prevail in Washington and set the tone of global commitment; consequently, American officials considered the policies toward Japan in the context of the ongoing U.S.-Soviet conflict. Since the occupation entered "on a period of diminishing returns," an early peace treaty was necessary; however, economic and political instability in Japan prevented the United States from starting negotiations (Policy Planning Staff, PPS 10). In addition, securing prestige and powerful guidance was particularly important among Asian nations because, according to the U.S. perception, they would admire power, authority, and strong leadership. Once the United States deployed military forces in Japan, it was difficult to withdraw them since it might give the impression that the U.S. had lost the Cold War. The Cold War enhanced Japan's strategic value; however, since Japan itself was a fragile country, the United States would have to make a major involvement in bringing stability to Japan. This was the beginning of the Asian quagmire: the more commitment the United States made to Japan, the more difficult it became to terminate it.

Rearming Japan constituted a double-edged sword: on the one hand, the remilitarization program was useful as long as Japan sided with the United States; but it was dangerous if not accompanied by economic recovery, leaving Japan to be dragged into the communist bloc. The United States had to assume responsibility for securing the recovery of the Japanese economy in order to prevent this development. Even though the United States gave lower priority to Asia, and hoped for a minimum commitment in that area, pressure to rearm Japan pulled the United States deeper into Asian affairs.

The United States regarded Japan as just a weak industrial power in a fragile Asia, not expecting Japanese goods to be competitive either in America [End Page 329] or in Europe; consequently, it was only in undeveloped Asian markets that Japan would be able to sell its products. Washington attempted to link the Japanese economy with those of other Asian countries; however, because of the complementary nature of the economies between Japan and other Asian nations, the communist incorporation of any part of Asia, particularly Japan, would have grave consequences. For this reason, establishing the regional economic linkage obliged the United States to become more committed to bringing stability to the entire region.

Washington sent to SCAP a nine-point economic stabilization plan directive in December 1948, and later dispatched Joseph Dodge to Japan in order to

implement the program. The Dodge Line provided a solid basis to get Japan back into the world-system while suppressing effective demand at home. Despite strong demands to ease the austerity program in Japan, Washington used all its force to execute the Dodge Line. Consequently, in order to legitimize this policy, the United States had to assure that Japan would enjoy certain economic benefits. Otherwise, Japan would easily return to a planned economic system or might be lured into the communist bloc. Dodge expected that a significant increase in exports would compensate for the loss of domestic demand. Therefore, constant economic expansion was an indispensable prerequisite for the successful operation of the Dodge Line. The world-wide depression of 1949, however, stalled Japanese export expansion, which pressured the United States to create markets for Japanese goods by whatever means necessary.

Even though the United States did not anticipate any direct military threat against Japan from the People's Republic of China (PRC) or the Soviet Union, it feared that they might take advantage of Japan's economic weakness and persuade Japan to join their bloc. Washington held the image of a weak and fragile Japan pressured by the vigorous drive of communist expansionism in Asia. Fearing Japan's economic dependence on the PRC, the United States restricted Japan-PRC trade. Even though unrestricted Japan-PRC trade would not have been a great benefit to Japan, because the Japanese tended to imagine the limitless benefits that they could have gained from unrestricted trade, the United States had to provide some economic benefits to contain their frustration.

Instead of the Korean War, the two-year period of 1948-1949 constituted a diverging point in Japan-U.S. relations. The regional economic linkage, the Dodge Line, and the successful communist revolution in China stimulated the Cold War mentality and the hegemonic responsibility of the United States to make a continuous commitment in Asia. Washington had to appeal to Japan's self-interest to preserve its pro-West orientation; consequently, it could not force Japan to increase defense capabilities rapidly. At the same time, the [End Page 330] United States had to maintain its prestige in Asia by showing its strong leadership and winning the confidence of other Asian nations. The Korean War just accelerated this process of American engagement in Asia.

After the end of the Pacific War, the United States made a series of commitments to Asia, particularly to Japan. It did so to get Japan back into the world-system and to fulfill its responsibility as the world leader; however, the more actively the United States tried to execute its hegemonic role, the deeper it became bogged down in the Asian quagmire. The United States was not omnipotent in Asia, and its increasing involvement gradually narrowed its flexibility in its policies toward Japan. It was not the Korean War but a series of measures the United States took prior to the war that dragged Washington more deeply into Asian affairs. Ironically, it was American hegemony and the Cold War mentality that led the United States to the Asian dilemma.

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