

The Legacy and Implications of the Pacific War

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“The Legacy and Implications of the Pacific War” is the theme of this year’s International Forum on War History (hereafter, “the Forum”). The NIDS Center for Military History is currently working to compile the *Pacific War History Series* (provisional title). With the aim of contributing to the Series, the Pacific War has been the focus of the themes of the Forum since 2007.

The titles of past Forums were as follows: in 2007, “New Perspectives on the War in the Pacific: Grand Strategies, Military Governments and POWs”; in 2008, “The Japan Strategies of the Allies during the Road to Pearl Harbor”; in 2009, “Strategy in the Pacific War”; in 2010, “The Strategy of the Axis Powers in the Pacific War: Germany”; and in 2011, “The Pacific War as Total War.” The Forum has invited distinguished scholars from Japan as well as from China, Singapore, the United States, Canada, Australia, the United Kingdom, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, and Russia—a total of ten countries. They have featured keynote addresses, special addresses, and presentations, as well as active discussions in light of the addresses and presentations. The papers and discussions of the Forums have been made available on the NIDS website.

While the Forums have so far addressed a wide variety of themes such as the road to Pearl Harbor, the strategy of the Axis Powers, and total war, the holistic theme of “The Legacy and Implications of the Pacific War” was chosen this year as the theme of the sixth Forum related to the Pacific War. The understanding of the history of the war is very divided in Japan, and this is demonstrated by the naming of the war. A variety of names are utilized in addition to “Pacific War,” including “Greater East Asia War,” “Asia-Pacific War,” and “Fifteen-Year War.” Particularly in recent years, from the viewpoint that “Pacific War” focuses only on the war with the Americans in the Pacific Theater while neglecting the wars in Asia, namely in China and Southeast Asia, the use of “Asia-Pacific War” and a revival of the use of “Greater East Asia War” have been on the rise within academia.¹

As in previous years, this year’s Forum employed the name “Pacific War.” However, as is revealed by the presentations on China, Southeast Asia, and other areas, it goes without saying that the term refers not only to the war between Japan and America but also encapsulates the wars in Asia and the wars in China before the attack on Pearl Harbor.

Regarding the purpose of the Forum, three points should be mentioned. First, the Pacific War had impact, both physically and psychologically, on the countries and regions concerned, including Asia which served as a battleground, in a range of areas—namely, politics, military, economy, society, and culture. This impact caused significant changes. The objective of the Forum was to comparatively examine the impact and historical significance or meaning of

¹ Junichiro Shoji, “Nihon ni okeru Senso Kosho ni kansuru Mondai no Ichikosatsu (A Study of Names of Wars in Japan),” *Boei Kenkyusho Kiyo (NIDS Security Studies)*, Vol. 13, No. 3 (March 2011).

the war from a contemporary perspective, and thereby, to arrive at a comprehensive picture of the war as it is understood today. In any discussion of the “legacy” and “implications” of the Pacific War, ideological influence in Japan tends to drive the discussion to a debate on “self-existence, self-defense,” “Asian liberation,” or “aggression.” This forum, however, objectively discussed the impact on various countries and the implications thereof.

Secondly, this Forum was divided into three sessions covering East Asia, the “South,” and America and Europe, and studied Japan, China, Southeast Asia, Australia, America, and Britain. Few international conferences in the past have taken up the legacy of the Pacific War. One of the exceptions is the Yamanakako Meeting, an international conference held at Lake Yamanaka in Yamanashi Prefecture in 1991, on the fiftieth anniversary of the outbreak of the war between Japan and the U.S.² During the second part of this meeting, entitled “Impact and Legacy of the War,” discussions took place on Asian countries, which were Japan, the Japanese colonies, i.e., the Korean Peninsula and Taiwan, and China, as well as the Southeast Asian countries of Indonesia and the Philippines. The Pacific War, however, not only had major impact on the regions which were the battlefields, but also on the countries that participated in the war but were not directly the site of a ground campaign. It is therefore meaningful that this year’s Forum invited scholars from America, Britain, and Australia for discussions on these countries also.

Thirdly, it was hoped that the discussions would cover the contemporary implications of the Pacific War.³ The aforementioned Yamanakako Meeting was convened in 1991 on the fiftieth anniversary of the outbreak of the war between Japan and America, and furthermore, many projects were conducted in 1995, on the fiftieth anniversary of the end of the war. However, the situation within Japan as well as the international situation surrounding Japan have changed dramatically since then. For example, the commencement of the war against terrorism prompted by the 9.11 Incident, the rise of China, and the relative decline of Japan have all occurred since the mid-1990s. Moreover, Japan-U.S. relations have accordingly also been undergoing change.

For example, in reference to the attack on Pearl Harbor and 9.11, American President George W. Bush stated in 2007 that “Japan has transformed from America’s enemy in the ideological struggle of the 20th century to one of America’s strongest allies in the ideological struggle of the 21st century.”

² The report was published as Chihiro Hosoya et al., eds., *Taiheiyo Senso (Pacific War)* (Tokyo: Tokyo Daigaku Shuppankai, 1993). An intriguing paper on the legacy of the Pacific War is James W. Morley, trans., Kazuo Motomiya, “Taiheiyo Senso no Geninron oyobi Kiketsuron ni tsuite (The Etiology and Consequences of the Pacific War),” *Gaikoshiryokanpo (Journal of the Diplomatic Record Office)*, No. 3 (March 1990).

³ A leading scholar that discusses the implications is Akira Iriye, and his papers include the following: “Ajia-Taiheiyo Senso no Igi: 20 seikishi ni okeru sono Tamensei (Implications of the Asia-Pacific War: Their Multifaceted Nature in 20th Century History),” *Kokusai Mondai (International Affairs)*, No. 423 (June 1995); “Taiheiyo Senso towa nandattanoka (What was the Pacific War?),” *Boei Kenkyusho Senshibu Nenpo (NIDS Military History Department Annual)*, No. 2 (March 1993); and “20 seiki no Rekishi to Senso (20th Century History and War),” *Sengo Nihon: Senryo to Sengo Kaikaku, dai 1 kan, Sekaishi no nakano 1945 nen (Postwar Japan: Occupation and Postwar Reform, Vol. 1, Year 1945 in the Context of World History)* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1995).

There is sufficient meaning to reexamining today, at this juncture of this tumultuous start to the 21st century, the historical significance or meaning of the Pacific War, which was one of the greatest wars of the 20th century.

A summary of the Forum is as follows:

The Forum began with the keynote address of Dr. Hedley Willmott entitled, “The Influence and Meaning of the Pacific War in Global History.” First, Dr. Willmott presented the concept of viewing the Second World War as a “38-year war” from 1937 to 1975, or as a “44-year war” dating from 1931. The war began with the Manchurian Incident or the Marco Polo Bridge Incident and ended with the independence of Angola, a colony of the first and last empire, by which time nearly all empires had faced their demise.

Dr. Willmott then explained that a striking characteristic of the Pacific War was that it was a “short war” by naval standards. The navy of the fifth-ranked great power vanished in a blink of an eye. For America, it was also a “cheap” war. Industrialization made the war shorter, and as a result, America was able to avoid fighting a major ground campaign (excluding Okinawa).

Meanwhile, the greatest mistake of the Japanese high command was its failure “to correctly understand the nature of the war” as stated by Clausewitz. In particular, the underestimation of American and Chinese nationalism, coupled with the failure to accurately predict shipping losses due to attacks by American submarines, had grave consequences. Nonetheless, such mistakes have been repeated, even by America since 2001. Lastly, Willmott concluded that the defeat of Japan, which aimed to contest Western values and overturn the status quo, signified Lincoln’s victory over Hegel, i.e., the victory of democratic liberalism over determinist absolutism.

In the first session, two historians made presentations, focusing on East Asia (Japan and China), which were followed by comments and questions.

First, Prof. Fumitaka Kurosawa spoke about the “Reconsideration of Post-War Understanding of Modern Japanese History: An Examination of War and Colonial Rule of Imperial Japan.” In his presentation, Prof. Kurosawa stated that the postwar understanding of modern Japanese history has not been uniform. In particular, a key feature of the postwar understanding of modern Japanese history is the existence of different understandings or perceptions of historical facts and interpretations, especially regarding the Pacific War or the pre-war Showa period. This divided understanding of Showa history may in part be attributed to the complexity of the wars of the Showa period. Prof. Kurosawa noted that this is ultimately closely linked to the question of how the “structure of the wars” of the Showa period should be understood as a whole.

However, the point of departure of this understanding of the war is the view that “the Pacific War was a war between Japan and the U.S.” and the understanding of the history as “a series of wars of aggression during the Showa period which led to the Pacific War.” Prof. Kurosawa stated that this is fogging our vision of Showa history today, making it difficult to have an overall grasp of the “structure of the wars.” Therefore, he suggested that it may be good to re-examine the documents now and reconsider from a fresh perspective the theory of

“series of successive wars” and the theory that “the Pacific War was a Japan-U.S. war.”

Next, Prof. Liu Jie reported on “The Pacific War in Modern Chinese History: An Examination of Conflicting Modern Historical Images.” In his presentation, Prof. Liu noted that the view of the Pacific War in China is changing significantly today in the 21st century. One of the reasons is the change in the academic environment in China. Although it is true that, unlike the case in Japan, there is little or no diversity of understandings of history in China, the field of vision of Chinese historians has expanded over the past thirty years. One of the ways this is evident is the presentation of a national view of history, as opposed to a revolutionary view. These two views are strongly contesting each other, and this has had a major impact also on the assessment of the Pacific War.

The other concerns the rise of China as a major power. Namely, the question of when China started to embark on the path to become a major power is of interest among scholars. In this context, there is an emerging group of scholars which contends that during the Pacific War, i.e., the period of the Nationalist Government of China, in particular, China increasingly became a major power both politically and diplomatically while building close cooperative ties with the Allies. In other words, the group asserts that the starting point of China’s rise as a major power was China’s entry onto the world stage during the Pacific War. If that position is taken, any discussion of the Pacific War may be based on an entirely new image rather than in the traditional context of the Sino-Japanese War. Prof. Liu stated that in China today, a variety of points of discussion and perspectives are being raised with regard to the Pacific War and that how the Pacific War is viewed is also being directly linked to the various issues of contemporary China.

Based on the two presentations, Prof. Haruo Tohmatsu commented as follows. He said that the Chinese front or theater in the Pacific War was extremely complex both politically and militarily, and its aspects differed depending on the area. Furthermore, when the Sino-Japanese War became a part of the Pacific War or part of the world war, including the Second World War, China was at least able to be assured that they would not lose. In addition, assuming responsibility, fully or shared, for the Chinese front as part of the world war prompted the rise of China’s international standing. Prof. Tohmatsu pointed out that this was a breakthrough event for modern Chinese history.

On the other hand, Prof. Tohmatsu explained that for Japan, when the Sino-Japanese War became a part of the Pacific War, China’s position receded in relative terms and the postwar memory regarding China became trivial. He noted that the question of why, in the period of merely twenty years between 1931 and 1951, the structure of the relationships in the region transformed from America and China versus Japan to Japan and America aligned against China is worthy of discussion.

Prof. Shoji then asked the following questions to the two presenters. First, he asked Prof. Kurosawa how the avoidance of ground warfare on Japanese soil impacted the postwar Japanese view of the Pacific War. Prof. Kurosawa responded that while there was no ground warfare on Japanese soil, excluding Okinawa and Sakhalin, the postwar understanding of history by the Japanese is dominated by the sense that they were victims, as represented by the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and the air raids in various areas, among others,

and these events are often passed on as wartime experiences. On the other hand, he stated that the Japanese military in mainland China believes that they lost to the U.S. but did not lose to China, and this is one of the striking characteristics of the understanding of history by the Japanese.

Next, Prof. Shoji asked Prof. Liu how the Japanese military's occupation of China affected the subsequent modernization of China. Prof. Liu replied that the areas occupied by the Japanese military varied in form and had different policies, and therefore, it is difficult to make a general evaluation based on a single criterion. Also, when considering Japan-China relations, it is necessary to think also about Japan's mainland policies after the First World War and other factors. In China, the understanding is that it won against Japan despite the extensive devastation it sustained. Prof. Liu stated that in any case, China made use of the various relationships between Japan and China during modern times as a resource for unifying the country.

Two historians made presentations in the second session, focusing on Southeast Asia and Australia, which were followed by comments and questions.

First, Dr. Kyoichi Tachikawa gave a presentation on the "Significance of the Pacific War for Southeast Asia." In his report, Dr. Tachikawa, looking at Southeast Asia as a single unified region from a macro-level perspective, first discussed the "emergence" of Southeast Asia, including the use of the name of "Southeast Asia" and the perception of the same region as one entity. Next, regarding the impact of the Pacific War on the politics, military affairs, economy, society, culture, and other aspects of Southeast Asia, Dr. Tachikawa identified and presented the traits common to all areas and also pointed out the differences by area.

He stated that although some people in Southeast Asia have a positive perception of the Pacific War period, most have a negative perception. In particular, in areas which were under Japanese occupation during the war, resentment against Japan stemming from the harsh Japanese rule remain deep-seated, and the possibility cannot be ruled out that anti-Japanese feelings will someday be triggered and rise to the surface. Dr. Tachikawa noted that despite the prevalence of this perception, relations between Southeast Asia and Japan are stronger in various fields after the war than before. On the other hand, after the war, Southeast Asian countries that were previously placed under colonial rule have come to give greater weight to their relations with ASEAN and neighboring Asia-Pacific countries than to the former suzerains.

Next, Prof. Peter Dennis reported on "Old Enemies, New Friends: Australia and the Impact of the Pacific War." In his presentation, Prof. Dennis noted that the Second World War, and especially the Pacific War, had a profound impact on Australia. The first was the establishment of an alliance with America, a country that became a "great and powerful friend," which led to the ANZUS Treaty and the South-East Asia Treaty Organisation (SEATO).

Secondly, the Second World War demonstrated that the military model which Australia had relied on since the establishment of the Commonwealth in 1901, i.e. the small professional army, was no longer viable, in which led to the establishment in 1947 of the Australian Regular Army.

Thirdly, the Second World War proved that a sizable population was important in terms of both direct defense needs and the overall resilience of the economy. As a result, Australia adopted a large-scale immigration policy. Although there has been some resistance to multiculturalism, it has become widely accepted that Australia in the 21st century is more prosperous, safer, and more interesting than in the 1940s. Prof. Dennis stated that while Australia did not formerly have political, economic, and cultural exchanges with other countries, it has become more regionally and globally conscious and engaged with other countries.

Based on the two presentations, Associate Prof. Hiroshi Noguchi commented as follows. Historically, Japan during the Pacific War is the only country that has “unified” Southeast Asia. However, Japan did not clearly discover or create the uniqueness of Southeast Asia. He also said that while Japan had a degree of influence on the creation of the national militaries of Myanmar, Indonesia, and other countries, Japan did not create new political bodies or systems.

Prof. Noguchi further pointed out that postwar Australia chose to form a military alliance with America, drawing on the lesson of the Pacific War. However, the lessons learned in Southeast Asia went only so far as to recognize that internal political order should be maintained through the capabilities of strong political parties and militaries which are integrated with the bureaucracy. Prof. Noguchi noted that this is connected to the current situation in which the search continues for the collective identity of Southeast Asia or East Asia.

Prof. Noguchi then asked the following questions to the two presenters. He first asked Dr. Tachikawa what legacies Japan should and should not have left in Southeast Asia. Dr. Tachikawa responded that, from interviewing people who were involved in the work leading up to independence, a conclusion could be drawn that the Japanese, in the process of working towards the goal of independence, left spiritual things rather than physical or institutional things and tried to make this known. Furthermore, he said it would have been better if Japan had been able to develop industries and distribution systems so countries could achieve economic independence and improve their education systems. On this point, Prof. Shoji added that it was realistically difficult for Japan to leave anything in Southeast Asia in any case, because, compared to the colonial rule by the Western powers, Japan’s period of occupation was short, and, furthermore, was during wartime.

Next, Prof. Noguchi asked Prof. Dennis whether Britain’s loss of colonies in Asia due to the Pacific War and Australia’s distancing from Britain had a larger impact on Australia than the Pacific War itself. Prof. Dennis replied that the question of where Australia belongs in the world has always existed. Australia is geographically far away from America but close to Asia, and today is a member of Asia economically while having a different history and culture from other Asian countries. He stated that Australia is a middle power, both economically and militarily, and that the continuation of this kind of situation into the future was perhaps a legacy of the Pacific War.

In the third session, two historians made presentations, focusing on Britain and America, which were followed by questions.

First, Prof. Philip Towle presented on “Churchill’s War; Attlee’s Peace.” In his speech, Prof. Towle stated with regard to the legacy and implications of the Pacific War that, first,

the Soviet Union would have reached the English Channel had America not entered the war, destroying the economy in Western Europe just as the communist system actually did in East Europe, albeit acknowledging that it is difficult to ask what would have happened if something did not occur. Second, the Pacific War accelerated the anti-colonialism movement. Third, as a result of the second point, the Middle East became a region full of conflicts over the long-term, the India-Pakistan confrontation arose, and three nuclear weapon states emerged. Accordingly, the decolonization which was brought about rapidly by the shock of the war did not entail only advantages. And as the fourth legacy and implication, Prof. Towle noted the dissolution of the British Empire.

In concluding, with respect to the question of whether the Pacific War was advantageous or disadvantageous for Britain, he stated that the war led to stagnation after the war, which has been described as the “English disease,” and to the most proper decision to join the EU. He discussed that the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 shows that Britain’s national security policy at that time to maintain American engagement was more successful than the appeasement of the Soviet Union or reliance on the United Nations.

Next, Prof. Roger Dingman presented on “Unexpected Gifts: The Impact and Legacy of the Pacific War in America.” Prof. Dingman first noted that the attack on Pearl Harbor was the most decisive event of the 20th century for the U.S. and discussed the impact on his birthplace, the state of California. He noted the development of industries involved in the production of munitions, such as the Douglas Aircraft Company. In addition, through women’s advancement in society, population growth, the creation of new industries, and other changes, California achieved the highest economic growth in all of the U.S. and became a racially, ethnically, and culturally diverse area. He discussed that the greatest unexpected gift was that Americans were able to acquire a “can-do spirit” through the Pacific War and the country became prosperous, full of confidence, and open to change.

Planners of postwar American strategy concluded that, based on the lesson of the attack on Pearl Harbor, America must have hegemony in the Asia-Pacific region. The line from the Japanese archipelago to the Philippines became the first line of defense, and Japan became America’s most important partner. Prof. Dingman explained that this change in strategy occurred as a result of the experience of the occupation forces and the fact that this was shared with Americans through the media, and that it would not have occurred without a change in the attitudes of ordinary citizens. The legacy of the Pacific War for America became a stimulus for postwar prosperity. On the other hand, it contributed to excessive faith in American capabilities and the downplaying of alliances, inviting the difficulties experienced since the Iraq war. Also, he pointed out that while those who fought in the Pacific War are among those called “the greatest generation,” there is currently a lack of analysis on the causes of the outbreak of the war and knowledge regarding actual combat.

Dr. Ken Kotani posed the following questions to the two presenters. First, he asked Prof. Towle why the war in the Asia-Pacific is hardly discussed in postwar Britain and how he evaluates Churchill’s conduct of the war in the Far East. Prof. Towle responded that ordinary citizens are more interested in the war with Germany and that the details of the war in the Far East do not arouse much interest. Regarding Churchill, Prof. Towle remarked that Churchill

cannot be said to have been a very skilled war leader. He believed that Churchill was skilled only in public speaking and that perhaps it would have been better if he was confined to a radio station.

Next, Dr. Kotani asked Prof. Dingman whether he believes now, nearly seventy years after the war, it is possible for Japan and America to share a common transnational historical perception, and assuming such a historical perception may be established, if it could not be shared with East Asian countries. Prof. Dingman answered that while he can understand the desire for such ideals, he believed this would seem difficult in reality and that historical perception cannot be unified.

During the panel discussion, the following deliberations took place.

Regarding the first session, Associate Prof. Noguchi expressed surprise that the reports of Professors Kurosawa and Liu concerned the issues of historical perception and the understanding of history. He pointed out that as the memory of war fades at the individual level, the historical perception of the general public created by history novelists, filmmakers, critics, and others becomes increasingly influential and that its impact on professional scholars is of concern. In response, Prof. Kurosawa noted that popular literature like the works of Ryotaro Shiba or the *Taiga* (period) dramas aired on NHK certainly have a bigger impact than the historical images presented by historians. He added that history textbooks have a significant impact. Prof. Liu stated that the shaping of the understanding of history is largely influenced by the existing political system and other circumstances that a country finds itself in. Moreover, he noted that the influence of history education is significant, and therefore, that the efforts of people from a range of levels in East Asian countries are needed. Regarding the mass media, Prof. Liu stated that more focus has currently been given in China to the lives of individuals than subject matters like the causes of the state or party, and that this is also becoming a social problem.

Prof. Tohmatsu raised a question concerning the day's discussions as a whole, namely, that what is becoming important is "not what happened but what people believe happened," and that this trend gives him a feeling of emptiness as a historian. He then asked Prof. Dingman what the war purpose of the Pacific War ultimately was for America, considering that the loss of China led to American fighting in the Korean War and Vietnam War. Prof. Dingman noted that a strength of historians is that they have received specialized education and that they bear the role of determining fundamental historical facts. He stated that the American cause was to end imperialism, including Japan's.

Prof. Tohmatsu also asked Prof. Towle whether the Pacific War, although it is called the "forgotten war," was not a war from which Britain had nothing to gain. He also asked how Prof. Towle views the elements of racial bias in the Pacific War. Prof. Towle responded that Britain probably had nothing to gain and became poor economically. There were clear signs of racial discrimination, which in some cases worsened the situation. However, he believed that racism and culturalism are hard to distinguish and that there is a tendency of misusing the word "racism."

Next, Prof. Tohmatsu asked Prof. Dennis whether there are direct grounds to believe

that the war against Japan contributed to the revision of the white Australia policy in Australia or to remorse over it. Prof. Dennis noted that the Australian people opposed the harsh anti-Japanese campaign that the Australian Government conducted during the Pacific War, which consequently led to its suspension by the Government. Furthermore, he described the postwar memorial service for Japanese POWs who were killed for attempting to escape (the Cowra incident).

Prof. Tohmatsu, in light of the report presented by Dr. Willmott, raised the issue of why the relations among America, China, and Japan changed rapidly within a decade, from the alignment of America and China against Japan during the Pacific War to the siding of Japan and America against China during the Korean War. Regarding this issue, Prof. Shoji noted that Ernest May indicated at the 1991 Yamanakako Meeting that repeated misunderstandings between different bureaucracies and policy decisionmaking systems played a not insignificant role in the outbreak of the war between Japan and America and that neither Japan nor America had concrete interests in Asia which could justify the degree of the military conflict which actually took place. Prof. Shoji stated that this perhaps can explain the rapid reconciliation between Japan and America.

Lastly, Prof. Shoji compared and contrasted the commonalities of the Second World War and the unique elements of the Pacific War which differ from the commonalities,⁴ and as Prof. Towle also noted in his presentation, asked “what the history of the subsequent 20th century would have been if the Pacific War did not occur.” As was made evident in the Forum, while the Second World War had immense impact, from domestic affairs to diplomacy, including issues concerning national virtues, views of security, and understandings of history, what was the impact of the Pacific War in particular? He said that a further examination of these questions will perhaps become important in the future, and with that, closed the discussions.

⁴ Regarding the commonalities and differences between the war in the European theater and the Pacific War, see, for example, Ryoichi Tobe, “Taiheiyo Sensoshi wo meguru Saikin no Kenkyu Doko (Recent Trends in the Study of Pacific War History),” *Kokusai Mondai (International Affairs)*, No. 381 (December 1991) and Ryoichi Tobe, “Dainiji Sekai Taisen: Ajia no Senso to Yoroppa no Senso (World War II: Wars of Asia and Wars of Europe),” *Senryaku Kenkyu (Strategic Studies)*, No. 6 (February 2009).