

Editors' Preface

It is our pleasure to launch the AJI Books series with this symposium record. Asia-Japan Research Institute (AJI) at Ritsumeikan University was established in December 2015 in order to promote “Asia-Japan Research” in Ritsumeikan University. The University identifies itself proudly as an Asia Pacific university which aims at realizing multi-cultural co-living through international mutual understanding, as clearly stated in the Ritsumeikan Charter of 2006.

The University has been pursuing the values of peace and democracy for many decades and is striving to promote these goals in the Asia-Pacific as well as in the world through education and research.

The 21st century is often described as the “Asian century”. With all its positive connotations, we would like to deepen our understanding and studies on and in Asia. The naming of our research field, “Asia-Japan Research”, is an attempt to indicate what we aspire to. It is not Asian and Japanese Studies or Research on Asia and Japan. By connecting Asia and Japan with (-) we avoid expressing Asia and Japan as different entities, since Japan is part of Asia. So, it indicates Asian Studies or research on Asia, while Japan is firmly situated in Asia and can also be a subject of such studies. However, basing our educational and academic activities in Japan, we would like to highlight the role of Japan in this research, without losing the sense of Asia as a whole.

The Institute has conducted interdisciplinary and international joint research projects with the ideas of “symbiosis”, “reconciliation” and “co-creation” under the

concepts of “understanding Asia deeply and profoundly” and creating a “Gateway to Asia” in our campus.

The international symposium recorded in this volume seeks to examine the achievements and the issues of historical perceptions of Japan and Asia, and tries to explore a new broader perspective of history.

Turning to the issue of “Asia and Japan”, we are immediately reminded of the complexity and historicity of this region since the arrival of modernity.

In recent years, we have been observing structural changes to Asia, or what we may call the “Asian World”, influenced by such phenomena as globalization, the rise of China, and the conflicts between Japan and South Korea over perceptions of history. At this juncture, we are once again faced with the question, “What does Asia mean to Japan?”

Presenting “Asia and Japan” itself suggests the problems inherent in the history of this region after the arrival of modernity. As the Japanese word “Datsua”, that is, Going out of Asia [toward the West] symbolizes, in the process of forming the modern Japanese nation, Asia was discriminatively defined as “barbaric” from the viewpoint of both modern civilization based on the Western model and the recreation of Japan’s own tradition. As suggested by the presentation of Professor Alexis Dudden, Japan’s non-Asian nature remained unchanged during the period of the war of aggression, when the “Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere” and “Five Races Under One Union” were emphasized.

The disastrous experience of World War II could have served as an opportunity for Japan to rethink its past and to be reborn as a member of Asia. However, despite the shock of

Japan's defeat in World War II, Japan's critical self-recognition as an "aggressor and perpetrator" in Asia, has not been widely shared in Japanese society. Japan actually rehabilitated itself after the end of World War II in the framework of the Cold War between the East and the West, and has come a long way away from the trend of the Asian world toward decolonization.

However, in the 1970s, when the Japanese economy expanded widely to East Asia, the relationship between Japan and Asia, including its history, had to be reexamined. Japan was confronted with the issue of its "wrongdoing" in the past such as in the "Japan-China Joint Statement" (1972), which expressed remorse for the war of aggression; the "Fukuda Doctrine" (1974), which renounced Japan's ever becoming a military power again and advocated "heart-to-heart contact"; and the "textbook issue" also occurred in the 1980s.

The changes in Japan's international status in the post-Cold War era and globalization have accelerated this problem of the recognition of history. In a foreign policy speech in Singapore in 1991, then Prime Minister Kaifu Toshiki vowed to "reflect harshly" on Japan's invasion of Asia. The review of history included the "Kono Statement (Statement by Chief Cabinet Secretary Yohei Kono)" (1993), which officially confirmed the "military involvement" of women who were forced into prostitution for Japanese soldiers during World War II in the former colonies and occupied territories, and the "Murayama Statement (Statement by the Prime Minister of Japan)" (1995), in which "colonial rule and aggression" was recollected critically in a blunt tone. However, it was not until half a century after the end of World War II that the Japanese people began to reflect on their colonial rule and to realize that they had been the perpetrators.

On the other hand, these changes have caused a backlash in the perception of history, which confronted them with a sense of crisis. “Reflection on the past” is seen as a denial of the very “modernity” of Japan, and a sense of crisis that could shake the identity of the Japanese is beginning to stir the undercurrents of Japanese society. The acceptance of others rooted in globalization is always intertwined with the opposition to others and produces a tangled current. In the prolonged economic slump, which has been described as the “Lost 20 Years”, Japanese people have been tormented by a sense of impasse, and the old-fashioned nationalism of nation, tradition and patriotism is reviving. In this world of online distribution where the number of plays is the basis of profits, “pleasing” discourses are more widely accepted as historical truth than the actual facts of history. As Professor Norihisa Yamashita proposes, such post-truth politics has penetrated the offline world, and so-called historical revisionism has become the mainstream of Japanese historical understanding.

In this way, Japan in the post-Cold War era, where globalization has progressed, is increasingly seen as an arena in which the tide toward settlement of the past and the backflow regarding the historical image of “Asia and Japan” are conflicting with each other over the perceptions of history. Japan’s relations with other Asian countries, including South Korea and China, are also affected by the wide gap between such contradictory perceptions.

The COVID-19 crisis which has spread the sense of emergency in 2020, and is still on-going at the time of the publication of this volume, has also had enormous effects on human lives on all continents. Asia and Japan are also

experiencing unforeseen critical conditions. However, when we are facing a crisis, it is important to pause and reflect on the past, so that we can form clearer visions for the future.

The international symposium recorded in this volume certainly offers food for thought. The entire discussion on what the new perspective of history can be is intended to provide a way beyond the conflict of historical perceptions.

We are also very grateful to Prof. Anthony Brewer for his participation in the symposium and dedicated editorial support for the record.

It is our sincere hope that this concise volume will contribute in a small way toward a better perception of history and the future of Asia.

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