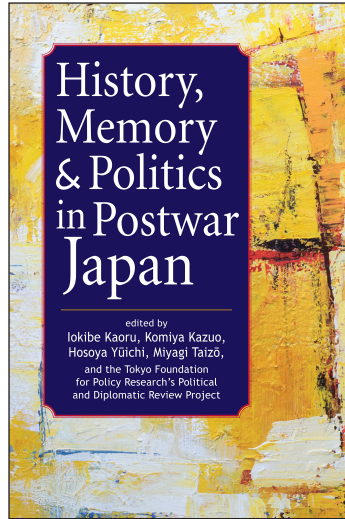


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# History, Memory, and Politics in Postwar Japan

edited by  
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# Introduction

*Iokibe Kaoru*

**This book is about the historical narratives we tell ourselves.** In Japan's case, the postwar narrative has been one depicting Japan as aggressor, victim, and loser. The only thing missing is that Japan has never depicted itself as having won that war. Thus we explore in the book how the three historical self-identifications have coexisted, interacted, and played out over the years.

Historical narratives are obviously not unique to the postwar period, including the narratives constructed since the war about the prewar period, and there were also prewar narratives of how Japanese saw themselves in the flow of history. Because war has always been a primary mover shaping historical memory, it is instructive to look back at the wars prior to World War II. Even a cursory listing of the wars that were pivotal events in Japanese history would have to include the late-Tokugawa and early-Meiji strife and discord leading up to and including the Boshin War, the Sino-Japanese wars, the Russo-Japanese War, and, in a more limited way, World War I. Given this, Japan's historical memories prior to World War II were of Japan winning glorious victories. This was then followed by disastrous implosion, and one of the few privileges left to Japan after the war was that of rummaging through the many historical narrative possibilities and ruminating on its historical experience, an option that has yet to be fully exploited. I would thus like to briefly, and admittedly inadequately, review Japan's historical memory as it existed in the years before defeat, and then

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build upon that to look at Japan's postwar historical narratives—this by way of grounding the subsequent discussion.

The early Meiji history was made by the forces that had won the Boshin War. This included, quite obviously, the people who had wanted to oust the Tokugawa shogunate and install the young emperor not just as titular but as *de facto* head of state and who, once victorious, appropriated daimyo powers and assets, even from those daimyo who had supported their cause, in the name of national unification. It also included the disgruntled members of the elite class, primary among them the charismatic warriors and returning heroes who wanted a greater share of the spoils and ultimately ended up in opposition to the new government. And finally it included the freedom-and-people's-rights movement members, many drawn from the other two groups. The Boshin War—having employed new weaponry deployed in new ways using new people drawn from the nonwarrior classes—not only marked a decisive victory but also liberated its participants from the old class structures and can hence be counted as one factor accounting for their radicalism. The fact that these people were recorded, and saw themselves, as victorious in this great struggle then directly tied in to their later progressive activism on the political stage.

Those opinion leaders who were wary of this progressivism expressed their recollections of the turmoil that accompanied the shogunate's fall and the Meiji Restoration in very measured or even negative terms. Fukuchi Gen'ichirō (writing under the pen name Fukuchi Ōchi)\* was one of the literati who epitomized this 1870s gradualist school in Japanese commentary, and he later penned such works as *Bakufu Suibōron* (The Fall of the Bakufu) (published by Minyūsha in 1883) and *Bakumatsu Seijika* (Politicians in the Late Bakufu Era) (also Minyūsha, 1900). A former bakufu official, he was critical of the people advocating that the shogunate be overthrown as well as of those advocating that the barbarians be expelled.

This same conservative sensibility permeated the various political novels that inspired the freedom-and-people's-rights movement. *Kajin no Kigū* (Strange Encounters with Beautiful Women) by Aizu-born Shiba Shirō (better known as Tōkai Sanshi) (volumes 1 and 2 published by Hakubundō in 1885) depicted the shogunate's fall and

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\**Note:* Personal names are given in the order they appear in the original language. For Japanese, this means family name first.

the Restoration as a vicious downward spiral of conflict in which the excesses of the “revere the emperor and expel the barbarians” crowd provoked escalating responses by foreign powers and showed the Aizu forces standing heroically alone in trying, albeit unsuccessfully, to mediate between the two sides and keep things from spinning out of control. This same vicious-spiral concern and sense of warning was also a central motif in Yano Fumio’s (pen name Yano Ryūkei) *Keikoku Bidan* (Young Politicians of Thebes) (published by Hōchi Shinbun-sha in 1884) and Suehiro Shigeyasu’s (pen name Suehiro Tetchō) *Setchūbai* (Plum Blossoms in Snow) (Hakubundō, 1886).

Vicious spirals spread cancer-like, and it is typically very difficult to halt or reverse them. Yet there were also political novels that sought to engender a *virtuous* spiral in the hope it would have the same metastatic qualities and that the vicious and virtuous spirals would cancel each other out. Both *Keikoku Bidan* and *Setchūbai* are political novels in which youths who follow the doctrine of the mean (*zhongyong*) win over the skeptical masses with quiet fervor and persuasive speeches.

In *Kakan’ō* (Warbler Among the Flowers) (Kinkōdō, 1887), Suehiro’s sequel to *Setchūbai*, he postulated trust and friendship between the public and private sectors, between radicals and moderates, at the individual level as prerequisite to this virtuous spiral. The compartmentalization of the personal and the public so that political differences do not mar personal relations was a constant theme in much of the writing at the time, and not just in the political novels. Fukuzawa Yukichi repeatedly preached the need for harmony between officialdom and the public, which he did expecting reconciliation to be possible, since he himself had longtime friends among senior court officials and opposition politicians.

This sense that the vicious spiral must not be allowed to reappear was shared by both the freedom-and-people’s-rights advocates and the more conservative commentators, and they competed—in speeches, magazine articles, and more—to do those little things that would spark the start of a virtuous spiral. Indeed, such campaigns were part of the climate facilitating the promulgation of the Constitution of the Empire of Japan (the Meiji Constitution) in 1889. Even so, as the demands for democratic government grew stronger, the rift in views on how the constitution should be interpreted grew wider and it was feared that this could spark a vicious round of escalating antagonism. One of the many people to address this issue was Yoshino Sakuzō.

The *minpon-shugi* democracy that Yoshino advocated should be understood as a philosophy that would work to contain the vicious spiral by linking the opposing concepts of form and content in line with Hegelian dialectical thinking. As Yoshino famously wrote in his “Kensei no Hongi wo Toite sono Yūshū no Bi wo Nasu no Michi wo Ronzu” (An Elucidation of the Essence of Constitutional Government and a Discussion of How to Achieve Its Elegance) in the January 1916 issue of *Chūō Kōron*, the all-important spirit that it embodies, the constitution’s wording aside, is the spirit of formulating national policy grounded in the will of the people at large. In this, the majority thus stands as the formal primary, yet within that form is the need for a spiritual leader. As Yoshino himself explained this in terms of Hegelian dialectical thinking (see “Hēgeru no Hōritsu Tetsugaku no Kiso” [The Foundations of Hegel’s Philosophy of Law], 1905, in vol. 1, *Seiji to Kokka*, of the sixteen-volume *Yoshino Sakuzō Senshū* [Collected Works of Yoshino Sakuzō], Iwanami Shoten, 1995), the vacuous form is fulfilled by the content, yet because this content itself cannot but become form-like, it is in turn fulfilled by new content in an endless evolutionary process: Yoshino’s *minpon-shugi*’s wording (form) constantly fulfilled by new spirit (content) in a constant process of renewal, making it possible for the constitution, the titular majority, and the de facto ruling minority to coexist. A political historian by training, Yoshino was well aware that Europe’s socialist campaigns had at times engendered vicious spirals of confrontation with the authorities and at times engendered virtuous spirals of dialogue and compromise, and it was this awareness of history that informed his *minpon-shugi*.

History is said to be written by the winners, but in Japan’s case, it would better be said that, given the Meiji-Taisho milieu, the winners defined the trappings of the state while the losers, through the concept of karma, defined political manners, thereby creating a complex ground of historical awareness. The fact of a functioning constitutional government facilitated mobilization during the Sino-Japanese (1894–1895) and Russo-Japanese (1904–1905) wars. As a consequence of winning these wars, however, Japan seemed to have forgotten the spiral concept, in foreign affairs even more so than in domestic politics. Having won the wars, the imperative that developed was to consolidate the gains, yet this mentality worked against generating a virtuous spiral in Japan’s relations with its vanquished opponents. The effort to consolidate the spoils set foreign policy adrift from its moorings and opened the way for the emergence of

another vicious spiral. In the wake of the war with China, for example, both private and public sectors rushed to develop alliances and to support their friends on the continent. While this frenzy was intended to put the bilateral ties on a stronger, more stable basis, it also entailed risks in that different Japanese found themselves on different sides when civil strife broke out in China. In the 1911 Xinhai Revolution, for example, plans were advanced by Japanese throughout China to assist this or that faction, the end result being that Japan was accused of intervening all over the map in line with what was at best a haphazard China policy.

With the outbreak of World War I, Japan put forth its infamous “21 Demands,” including recognition that it was replacing Germany on the continent, but Foreign Minister Katō Takaaki wanted Qingdao not so much to hold them long-term but more to use them to bargain with in extending the term of Japan’s hold on those parts of Manchuria that it had won from Russia in the Russo-Japanese War. The foreign policy establishment that followed Katō advocated better relations with China and, albeit at different times, supported both the Kuomintang government in the south and the Duan Qirui government in the north. Yet both prongs of this policy invited denunciation, in Japan and internationally, as interventionist, and it proved impossible to achieve Japan’s aims on the continent.

Turning to Russia, Japan signed agreements with Russia in 1907 and again in 1910, delineating their spheres of influence in Manchuria and pledging to respect each other’s interests. A new agreement was signed in 1912 extending their spheres to Inner Mongolia. This was followed in 1916 by a fourth agreement in which they pledged to cooperate militarily in beating back any third-country challenges to their positions in China. Despite this, all of these efforts to stabilize the bilateral relationship turned to dust in the Russian revolution of 1917, and Japan dispatched troops to Siberia (1918–1922).

These events alarmed the United States and put Japan at a disadvantage in the Washington Naval Conference that President Harding convened following World War I and in the resultant Five-Power Treaty, calling for the five powers (Britain, France, Italy, Japan, and the United States) to scale back their navies, as well as the Nine-Power Treaty calling on the parties to respect Chinese territorial integrity and sovereignty on the continent. Yet this latter treaty was not entirely to Japan’s disadvantage, as it also recognized Japanese interests in Manchuria-Mongolia and recognized some Japanese interests on the Shandong Peninsula, in effect consolidating some of



the gains Japan had won in the Russo-Japanese War and World War I. Having signed the Nine-Power Treaty, Japan refrained from intervening in China for the next decade, and the potential for a vicious spiral was largely muted. Yet the rights that Japan had acquired by war and by treaty were the target of ferocious criticism by Chinese nationalists, and the danger of slipping into a vicious spiral of conflict was heightened when both Chinese nationalists and Chinese revolutionaries sought to have Japan surrender the rights it had earlier acquired. It is very possible this could have been averted with conciliatory policies; this then marks another critical juncture in Japanese history.

Japanese domestic politics was also very unsettled at this time. Starting in 1924, there was a run of cabinets dominated by political parties, first the Kenseikai (which later became the Rikken Minseitō) and then the Rikken Seiyūkai. Under Foreign Minister Shidehara Kijūrō's leadership, the Kenseikai pursued a foreign policy of cooperation with its neighbors. While this policy stance had broad support from the emperor, elder statesman Saionji Kinmochi, and the public at large, the constant infighting between the two parties for control of the government apparatus meant they were forever digging up dirt on each other; they spent more time on political battles than on policy issues; and the public developed politics fatigue in the face of scandal after scandal and other unsightly behavior by the politicians. Shidehara's policies were further undermined by the Seiyūkai's constant carping that he was weak-kneed and irresolute in defending Japan's interests. Things were not helped when the two leading parties failed to follow in the footsteps of Fukuchi, Fukuzawa, the political novelists, and others who had earlier moved to keep politics from being captured by the vicious spiral of power-game campaigns and failed to speak out in ways that would have held this vicious spiral at bay. With this, much of the intelligentsia became disillusioned with the Seiyūkai and the Rikken Minshutō, seeing them as more-of-the-same establishment parties, and turned their attention to the more progressive movements, be they the proletarian parties or the nationalists.

Japan-China relations became increasingly confrontational in the wake of the 1931 Mukden Incident, albeit with occasional lulls. The May 15 coup attempt, in which Seiyūkai president and prime minister Inukai Tsuyoshi was assassinated, took place the following year, 1932, marking the end of party government and ushering in a new government format amenable to military control.

The prewar historical narrative played a direct role in the formulation of Japanese government and foreign policy, and the fact that this was a historical narrative depicting Japan as a “winner” contributed to Japan’s escalating confrontations and boxed in the nation’s policy options. By contrast, Japan’s postwar historical narrative is that of having lost the war, and this historical narrative’s impact has been both more indirect and much more complex. Such indirection and complexity does not, however, imply insignificance. Looking just at the Japan–United States Mutual Security Treaty and the concurrent antiwar pacifism, both of which have been foci of contention between the conservative and the progressive forces, the structure here is clearly one of three factors working in complex interaction: the desire to rebuild following defeat, revulsion at the horrors war exacts of its victims, and remorse at the horrors Japan inflicted. All three figured importantly, but they were not, unlike the “winner” historical narrative and the policies it spawned, the direct determining factors.

Thus the inclination is to deal with the separate components of the postwar historical narrative separately, and dealing with them separately has yielded a number of outstanding analyses. Even so, looking at them cross-sectionally as integral components of a whole and how they operated era by era can also yield some interesting analyses and vivid explications of their features. That is what this book strives to do. Whether our efforts are successful or not I leave to the reader’s judgment, but I would like to say a few words about the intent behind and the significance of each chapter by way of brief introduction.

Yoshida Shigeru was the leading figure in the early postwar era when Japan’s foreign policy foundations were being laid, and it is only fitting that Takeda Tomoki should lead off with “The Yoshida Shigeru Years: Coming to Terms with the Issue of Historical Memory” (Chapter 1). While the old liberalists who were on record as having opposed the war constituted the immediate postwar foreign policy establishment, there were sharp differences of opinion within this group on, for example, China policy and Japanese interests in China, as well as on the Soviet Union and communism. (I suspect that these differences stemmed from their different mindsets and interests as former victors, as well as their different anxiety levels about the possibility of further defeat and ruin.) It was Yoshida who freed himself of these differences and analyzed the situation most cogently—perhaps because he was most aware and accepting of

Japan's defeat. In this, Yoshida accepted the Far Eastern Tribunal's verdict of history as well as the San Francisco Peace Treaty, and was successful in managing Japan's return to the community of nations.

Even though he achieved this at little cost to Japan, there was still a strong sense of victimhood and injustice in Japan, and the return to international society took place with no decision on how to make due amends to China and Korea, neither of which was party to the San Francisco Peace Treaty. Indeed, the issue of reparations to China and Korea had to wait until diplomatic relations were normalized with these two nations—with Korea in the 1960s and with China in the 1970s.

The 1960s and 1970s were an era of rapid growth, as laid out in Murai Ryōta's "The Satō Eisaku Years: Historical Memory in a Time of Rapid Economic Growth" (Chapter 2). Buoyed by America's Cold War strategy, Japan moved to bring legal closure to its postwar issues. This was a time of ardent introspection about the war, much of it finding outlet in such constitutional issues as state patronage of Yasukuni Shrine, the addition of Far Eastern Tribunal war criminals to the Yasukuni honor roll, and the legality of government officials' paying their respects to the mixed bag of war-dead there. The bulk of this introspection and morality debate was premised upon the idea of Japan as victim, but there was also a deep-flowing undercurrent acknowledging Japan's role in perpetrating so much horror. While this may be seen as indicative of maturity, it was not necessarily cognizant of or in agreement with how other nations saw the wartime experience. The 1978 enshrinement of the war criminals and other actions and pronouncements were seen in Japan and overseas as expressions of dissatisfaction with the legalities accompanying the war's end and were direct harbingers of today's historical memory issues.

In the 1980s, these historical memory issues developed into diplomatic flashpoints, albeit with the qualification that it was still relatively easy to finesse them politically. This is the era Satō Susumu treats in his "The Nakasone Yasuhiro Years: Historical Memory in Foreign Policy" (Chapter 3). The two points of contention that came to the fore in this era were how the war was recounted in Japanese textbooks and the propriety of paying homage at Yasukuni Shrine. On the textbook issue, Japan had the option of claiming that this was an internal matter for Japan alone to decide; on Yasukuni, Japan was able to cite earlier precedent that had gone largely unremarked. Japan did not avail itself of either option. Instead, Nakasone changed the subject and sought US, Chinese, and

Korean cooperation in constructing a great wall against the Soviet Union. Together with this, Nakasone, Miyazawa Kiichi, and others, perhaps in anticipation of China's rise, adopted conciliatory positions on history issues for public consumption that may or may not have reflected their personal opinions. As Japan then had by far the strongest East Asian economy, and both China and Korea were prepared to compromise, this approach was generally successful.

Yet Japan's historical memory issues were not restricted to its diplomatic relations with other countries. There were also major perceptual issues with Okinawa, and Taira Yoshitoshi lays out the Okinawan historical narrative and how it ties to the changes in the political structure over the years there in his "The Rift Between Okinawa and the Japanese Mainland: Historical Memory and Political Space" (Chapter 4). Okinawa under US occupation had developed its own political parties independent of those elsewhere in Japan prior to the 1971 reversion, but the mainland's conservative/progressive battle lines spread to Okinawa, albeit in a somewhat different context, about the same time that talk of reversion became real. In this, the progressive view of Okinawan history—that Tokyo had regarded Okinawa as expendable in the final stages of the war, that Okinawa was disregarded in the San Francisco Peace Treaty process, and that the Okinawan people's wishes counted for nothing in the reversion arrangements—was widespread because the conservative camp shared this historical experience and popular narrative. Indeed, it may be said that dialogue between Okinawa and Tokyo was possible only because there were central government figures who understood this Okinawan perspective and thought it deserved some accommodation.

That shared awareness was seriously weakened, however, with the end of the Cold War, the enervation of the progressive forces, and Japan's generally conservative drift outside of Okinawa even as Okinawa itself moved further to the left in opposition to the continuing presence of so many US military facilities minus their Cold War justification. This pattern persists even today, with each new base-linked grievance recharging Okinawa's shared historical narrative and feeding the sense of alienation from and frustration with the mainland. Returning us to the realm of international relations, Satō Susumu reminds us that establishing good personal relations between national leaders is not sufficient to heal today's rifts.

In seeking to address the broad sweep and implications of contemporary historical memory issues, we have opted not for issue-specific chapters but rather for a panel-discussion format with Hosoya Yūichi

moderating and panelists expert in the prime areas of concern: Kawashima Shin (China), Nishino Jun'ya (Korea), and Watanabe Tsuneo (the United States). The record of the first discussion, held shortly before Prime Minister Abe Shinzō released his statement on the seventieth anniversary of the war's end, is in Chapter 5, "Is Reconciliation Possible? The Outlook for Japan-China, Japan-Korea, and Japan–United States Relations." Among the many topics discussed are why China and Korea, which had previously played down the history issue, have recently become more aggressive on it, and where the potential flashpoints are in the seemingly placid Japan-US relationship.

These same experts gathered again a little over half a year after the Abe Statement; the record of this discussion is in Chapter 6, "Historical Memory and International Relations in East Asia: The Abe Statement in Retrospect." The discussants start by outlining the process leading to the Abe Statement and then look at the Chinese, Korean, and US reactions to it. A specialist in British history, Hosoya supplements this with an extensive commentary on historical memory issues as they have played out in Europe. Drawing all of this together, they explore the outlook for Japan's relations with the different countries involved. One takeaway from this discussion is that values politics (including history), which used to be largely a distant second to jockeying over power and interests, is becoming a significant independent variable in its own right.

For readers who want to delve deeper into these issues, we offer Chapters 7 (Hosoya's "Historical Memory and International History: A Guide for Further Reading") and 8 (Komiya Kazuo's "Key Sources on the Postwar Era"), both of which briefly review the academic literature. All in all, this is an extravagantly ambitious book.

Values politics may have come to be an independent variable because victor narratives have come to define international politics in East Asia. Yet what kind of victor allows values politics to run rampant or subjects policy freedom to historical memory considerations? Most likely a victor dissatisfied with the results of the victory. A victor who has won a complete victory can afford to be magnanimous. Prewar Japan was a victor dissatisfied with the outcomes and hence felt it necessary to constantly stress its victor's status. This was particularly acute after Japan lost its position on the Liaodong Peninsula, which it had won in the Sino-Japanese war, to the Triple Intervention of 1895. Not having received reparations from Russia, Japan was unhappy with the limitations on the leaseholds it had wrested from Russia and turned increasingly assertive—which did not end well.

China, Korea, and Russia won their wars against Japan, but they do not have the same claim to winner status that the United States has. Russia, for example, won its battles in Asia Pacific but then went on to lose the Cold War. Korea feels it did not receive adequate reparations because it concluded its peace treaty with Japan in the midst of the Cold War and under a discredited regime. China's situation has the added kicker that its economic development came thirty years later than Japan's and is even now tapering off. Another factor in the Korean case, of course, is that Korea was a Japanese colony and thus could not take part in the war against Japan as an independent nation. Overlaying all of this is the fact that China and Korea were major victims in the war.

By contrast, Japan won the postwar when it achieved rapid economic growth and its democracy took root. And if one delves into the root factors accounting for these achievements, it is very possible the prewar self-identification as a winner carried over across the war's divide and figured as a factor here. Even though I wrote at the outset that Japan has never depicted itself as having won World War II, only a minority of historians today would dispute the notion that there are some aspects in which prewar Japan was successful. This may make it all the more difficult for Japan's neighbors to be magnanimous "good winners." Even though crisis management has averted the worst for now, the historical memory issue is today a complex mix of many issues leading easily to bickering and brawling. What hints does this all-too-inadequate history of the problem hold for us?

First is the need to be accurately cognizant of the immediate power relationships and interests before us. While values politics is emerging as an independent variable, relations are still largely defined by the balance of power among Japan, China, Korea, and the United States. Once that is understood, it is easy to escape the bewilderment and unease that comes of asking why "the other side" is so unreceptive to your own historical narrative. In the discussion sessions, Watanabe quite rightly stresses the absolute importance of being fully aware of the other person's circumstances, to which I would simply add that these "circumstances" are both objective and subjective.

Second, Japan should not just explain and defend its postwar historical narratives but also learn and share the lessons of its prewar historical narratives. As part of this, we should revive the idea of karma. Having itself been an unsated winner, Japan killed the virtuous spiral before it could get traction by being overly focused on the

“spoils of war” idea. Japan is thus ideally positioned to provide advice, if it will, should other countries be at risk of repeating this sad history. The true victor is not the victor who nurses grievances and dissatisfaction but the victor who sets a virtuous spiral in motion.

Karma is self-propagating in that it both goes out and comes back. If a virtuous cycle can be initiated, everyone can come out a winner. Conversely, if it is a vicious cycle that is initiated, everyone is a loser. While this is not that difficult to understand in theory, people are somehow reluctant to follow through unless it ties to specific and detailed remembrances and visions.

Japan is looking ahead to commemorating the 150th anniversary of the Meiji Restoration, and this anniversary will very likely trigger an outpouring of broad-brush and succinct summations of the past century and a half of Japanese history. Indeed, this present work may be considered an effort to summarize Japan’s postwar history. The important thing is not whether or not these histories are published but whether or not the right lessons are learned from them.

One more lesson that should be revived and shared from the prewar years is that of delineating and distinguishing between the public and the private selves. In the immediate context, this means not cutting corners in the rush to structure a politically virtuous cycle but spending the time necessary to lay the groundwork for this virtuous cycle by promoting greater interaction, exchanges, and cooperation in the economic, cultural, academic, and other realms.

Academia—arguably the furthest thing from politics—must strive to win politics’ awed respect. It is essential that scholars continue to build a record of meticulous research into what happened when, where, and why. The 150th anniversary, the 200th anniversary, or even the 250th anniversary is no excuse for slipshod summations. Having tried to live up to this high standard, we would appreciate reader comments, criticisms, and corrections on where we have fallen short.