

# INTRODUCTION: HISTORICAL CONTROVERSIES

## 1. Capitulating to Chinese and Korean demands

During the postwar era, historical controversies are the most nagging problems confronting Japan. Just as an ex-convict, forever branded, must live out his days as a pariah, Japan has seen its history reviled. Encumbered with the aggressor stigma, our country has yet to resume its rightful status in the international community.

Here are some examples of historical controversies that have plagued Japan:

1. Chinese interference during the Ministry of Education's selection of history textbooks for use in Japan's high schools in 1982 (the First Textbook Controversy).
2. The international uproar that ensued in 1986 when both China and Korea interfered in the same selection process in connection with *New Edition: Japanese History*,<sup>1</sup> another high school textbook.
3. Korean protests against a comment made by Minister of Education Fujio Masayuki in 1986 to the effect that Korea bears as much responsibility as Japan for the annexation of Korea, which was the result of an agreement between the two nations. Fujio was subsequently dismissed by Prime Minister Nakasone.<sup>2</sup>
4. Chinese protests and harassment in connection with comments made by Minister of Education Okuno Seisuke to the effect that Japan did not wage a war of aggression, which led to his resignation, also in 1986.

It is not hard to imagine the distress experienced by Japanese officials in the face of such protests and harassment, distress that perhaps drove them to respond obsequiously.

A similar problem erupted in February 1989 in the wake of a comment Prime Minister Takeshita Noboru made at a Diet session. In response to a question, the prime minister said, "The question of whether (World War II) was a war of aggression should be decided by the historians of the future." This prompted an outcry from the Chinese Foreign Ministry: "Japanese militarism unleashed a war of aggression, which brought great misfortune upon the Chinese and Asian people. We will not tolerate the misrepresentation or denial of this unfortunate chapter in history." The response of the Japanese government to that outburst was to relay its fundamental stance to our diplomats, and then to ask the Chinese "for their understanding." That stance was: "We cannot disavow past aggressive behavior toward China." The message from the Chinese was: "There is no need to wait for the historians of the future. Japan must abide by the position taken by the People's Republic of China."

Here I would like to quote from an article I wrote in 1987:

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<sup>1</sup> (新編日本史) published in 1987 under the title *Saishin Nihonshi*, (最新日本史) (Updated Japanese history) by Meiseisha.

<sup>2</sup> <https://ja.wikipedia.org/wiki/%E8%97%A4%E5%B0%BE%E6%AD%A3%E8%A1%8C> (retrieved 07/2022).

Each time the publication of a textbook or a prime minister's pilgrimage to Yasukuni Shrine sets off a dispute between Japan and China, the Chinese use the same, overworked language: "We object to the juxtaposition of offender and victim." The notion of Japan as the malefactor and China, its victim, forms the basis for China's official historical view. The Chinese employ arrogant, intrusive language to describe Japanese textbooks or pilgrimages to Yasukuni Shrine because they believe that they were victimized by the Japanese. Unfortunately, a great many Japanese have embraced this official Chinese historical view. Every time the Chinese complain that "the Japanese show no remorse for their evil deeds," our immediate reaction is to cower: such is the wretched position that Japan finds itself in now. The "China as victim" claim has become China's way of compelling the Japanese to grovel. Unless we cease acquiescing to Chinese demands, Japan will have no choice but to be the servant, and China the master, for all eternity.<sup>3</sup>

How long must the Japanese people endure servitude to China?

## 2. History: chronicle of a people

The first thing we must remember when we write our own history, the history of Japan, is that there is no need for us to consult China or Korea.

After my series, "The Road to the Greater East Asian War," appeared in *Shokun!*, I engaged in a dialogue with a historian who specializes in the modern era.<sup>4</sup> During our discussion, he countered my every mark with "But China will not accept that." Apparently, in his mind, only accounts that were accepted and sanctioned by the Chinese constituted accurate history. I know for a fact that there are plenty of other Japanese historians who always have China in the back of their minds when they do their research. The history that emerges from such a subservient spirit – never mind, it does not deserve to be called history.

No nation seeks the understanding and approval of another state before recording its own history. Or perhaps some do, but only colonies or protectorates, not independent states. It is common knowledge that Chinese and Korean history textbooks are riddled with anti-Japanese accounts that are an amalgam of truth and lies. However, would the Chinese or Koreans accommodate requests from Japan to revise those accounts? Never! They would hurl vitriol at the Japanese, accusing us of interfering in their domestic affairs.

History is a chronicle of a particular people, or ethnic group. It is natural for every ethnic group, for every nation, to adopt an affectionate view of its past. Consequently, every nation does its best to cast its history in a favorable light. Chinese history textbooks devote dozens of pages to the Opium Wars (1839-42, 1856-60), while it is difficult to find even one line about those conflicts in

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<sup>3</sup> Nakamura Akira, "中国＝被害者説の神話" (Mythology: the China-as-victim argument), *Shokun!*, January 1987.

<sup>4</sup> *Shokun!*, March-April 1990.

British history textbooks. But I have yet to hear of any protests lodged by the Chinese about these particular omissions. Even if such had been lodged, the UK would probably not entertain them.

History is intimately linked with national sentiments and interests. No common understanding of history between or among nations is possible. For instance, if Japan and the USSR had a common understanding of history, then the Northern Territories would have already been returned to Japan. But they have not, and the reason why can probably be explained by the difference between the two nations' understanding of history.

Every nation's history has a nationalistic tinge, and Japanese history is no exception. To define history as a "science" is to adopt the specious reasoning of Marxism (specious reasoning that will cease to be taken seriously when the 20<sup>th</sup> century ends). History that is written after being accepted, understood, and approved by another nation or nations may endure as the epitaph of a defunct ethnicity, but will not endure as genuine history, as the soul and the memory of a nation and its people.

### **3. Interpretation of the Greater East Asian War**

There are other controversies in addition to those concerning textbooks and official pilgrimages to Yasukuni Shrine. I speak of the annual controversy over the raising of the Japanese flag and the singing of our national anthem at graduation ceremonies.

We also have the "war responsibility" controversy, which surfaced at about the time when Emperor Showa's health began to fail. To begin with, the word *responsibility* is intended for use in connection with unfair and unlawful actions. If we are speaking of *war responsibility*, we must begin by pronouncing the Greater East Asian War an unfair war (a war of aggression), or at least a war initiated for no good reason. Therefore, if we arrive at the conclusion that the Greater East Asian War was not a war of aggression, but a defensive war, the debate over responsibility becomes meaningless. Then, at the basis of the debate over war responsibility lurks a battle between historical perceptions. Regardless of whether we are talking about legal responsibility or moral responsibility, we end up with an empty argument.

Then how do we characterize the Greater East Asian War? Are we truly unable to explain the conflict except in terms of the conspiracy theories and the war-of-aggression historical view imposed by the IMTFE?

Wars are conflicts between nations, but ultimately, they are no more than conflicts between societies. It should be possible to arrive at a convincing interpretation and evaluation of that war by comparing each side's past claims and positions, and the evolution of their relationships over the years, just as we might when disputes among individuals are involved. This process does not require a historical perception where a war of aggression is a political ideology that forces facts to be dependent upon theories.

By performing a structural analysis of the Greater East Asian War, and retracing its progress, I was able to discover two main themes, i.e., negotiations between Japan and the US in connection with the Open Door Policy, and the battle against communism. That discovery enabled me to position the Greater East Asian War at the climactic point where those two themes met and

expanded. This book is my attempt to validate my interpretation of the Greater East Asian War with the aid of a great many historical facts. Unlike the theoretical historical perception that seeks to explain all historical phenomena, which is similar to the historical perception rooted in Marxism-Leninism (the collapse and fallacies of Marxism-Leninism, as we are well aware, will soon be exposed by history), my interpretation has been obtained by analyzing history leading up to the Greater East Asian War, and only that particular aspect of history. Allow me to add that there is nothing ambiguous about my historical perception.

#### **4. Defying postwar taboos**

Human relationships are complex, and so are the history and events that lead up to wars, which are disputes among nations. To make simple, precise pronouncements designating one side the malefactor and the other, the victim, is to distort the truth.

A formula that designates Japan and only Japan the malefactor, and China and Korea the victims, has become the official historical view in both countries. Japanese academics, educators, and fourth estate consider objections to that perception taboo. However, in this book I fully intend to address this taboo. After all, in every dispute there is usually some degree of responsibility on both sides.

This is especially true in wars that have a complex historical background. There is more than one way to seek responsibility in history. Not only the exercise of military force, but also negligence, conservatism, obstinacy, domestic conflict, corruption, xenophobia, violations of covenants, betrayal, territorial ambition, and lack of willingness to compromise are major causative factors that exacerbate international relations, invite historical chaos, and bear a reasonable amount of responsibility to history. If, in a war, there is a responsible party (nation), the word *responsibility* must be used in its broad sense. In other words, it must include any of the aforementioned factors that are relevant to the situation at hand. A writer who fails to do that is burying the truth. It is absolutely imperative to determine where responsibility lies. That is what I attempt to accomplish in this book, and taboos will not deter me.

Now I shall proceed to tell the story behind the Greater East Asian War. This is my attempt to reexamine modern history, which is premised on doubts about the perception that Japan waged a war of aggression. This may seem like a roundabout way of doing things, but since my position is to emphasize the historical background of the war, I must follow the standard format, meaning that I shall begin with the relationship between Meiji Japan and China and Korea, both of which were on the verge of modernization.