

## **Book Review: *War Guilt Information Program and History Wars***

In 2015, hundreds of American professors signed an “open letter” attacking the government of Japan for allegedly being against freedom of expression. In 2017, another American professor, David Kaye, released a UN report also accusing Japan of being against free expression.

The Americans might have been better off reading their own country’s history first.

A new book by renowned historian Shiro Takahashi shows that the American government, and in particular the General Headquarters under the control of Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers, Gen. Douglas MacArthur, carried out a massive campaign of censorship, disinformation, and brainwashing against the Japanese public in the years following the end of World War II.

The name of this psychological warfare operation is the “War Guilt Information Program,” or WGIP. It was designed to spread false information and instill in the Japanese people a view of history and politics in alignment with the needs of Washington, DC. And it succeeded brilliantly.

In other words, the country that now leads the way in criticizing Japan over freedom of expression is also the country that has been without peer in restricting the same.

Ruth Benedict, for example—who, like David Kaye, had no experience in researching Japan—wrote the enormously influential 1946 book *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword* as a psychological “map” of the Japanese. Benedict’s portrait of Japanese people as constitutionally schizoid was a keystone of postwar American policy, and, as Takahashi shows, helped create the culture of censorship that the Americans stridently cultivated following Japan’s defeat. Benedict was also as much a product of her time as an opinion leader—the notion of the Japanese as wily and duplicitous was a common racist trope in the United States and crucial to fomenting American anger against Japan sufficient to carry out Roosevelt’s bellicose designs.

To be sure, Benedict was hardly the only American academic working for the American propaganda machine. Benedict’s colleague, Margaret Mead, was also an enthusiastic anti-Japan propagandist for the OWI (Office of War Information), the American espionage and political destabilization unit which was later absorbed into the Office of Strategic Services and, eventually, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA).

Like Benedict, Mead was a famous and wildly inaccurate anthropologist. Mead is perhaps best known today for her orientalist portrayal of Samoans as primitive and hyper-sexualized—a racist and condescending characterization largely refuted by later, more conscientious scholars. But it was precisely because of her willingness to believe such things that Mead was the kind of “academic” the US government needed to craft and disseminate a false narrative about Japan.

Takahashi’s book shows in great detail how Benedict, Mead, and a host of other American scholars enthusiastically cooperated with Washington to paint the portrait of the Japanese

needful to the American military and war-minded politicians: a fanatic race hell-bent on world domination, but also with a docile side that could, with stern and patient instruction, eventually yield to the “re-education” efforts of American missionaries for democracy. Thus the pre-war, wartime, and postwar threads of American involvement in East Asia come together in the WGIP.

What is perhaps most striking about Takahashi’s book is that the War Guilt Information Program that the American government and their willing collaborators in American universities produced is still the foundation of American engagement with Japan. Every time an American academic or government official takes a high-handed attitude against Tokyo, they are simply regurgitating the line laid down by other collaborationist scholars two generations before.

Unfortunately, this is not the extent of the damage. The psychological warfare that the Americans waged against Japan was quickly taken up by communists in Japanese society who, infiltrating educational institutions, needed no prodding to rehearse Washington’s anti-Japan propaganda for subsequent generations of Japanese students. Even today, the Japanese view of their own history remains virtually a facsimile of the propaganda program force-fed to the Japanese public in the late 1940s and afterward under the auspices of the War Guilt Information Program.

This program was so successful, in fact, that its very existence was almost unknown until very recently. Japanese scholar and former leftist Jun Eto (Atsuo Egashira) published an influential book late in his life, *Closed Linguistic Space*, which criticized the American Occupation for its censorship program. In recent years, amateur historian Michio Sekino has released a couple of thin monographs on the WGIP. Other researchers and public intellectuals in Japan are also taking up interest in the subject, with essays and articles on the WGIP appearing in newspapers and magazines with much more frequency than just a few years before. Still, though, almost no one in Japan or anywhere else has any idea that the “Japanese history” they learned in school was largely made-in-America fake news.

This is sure to change with the publication of Takahashi’s *War Guilt Information Program*. Veteran historian Takahashi has been researching this subject at archives in the U.S., Japan, and elsewhere for decades—his entire career—and *War Guilt Information Program* joins other Takahashi publications showcasing his meticulous scholarship grounded almost entirely in primary sources which he has directly examined. Takahashi’s 2014 book on the American Occupation, for example, is the product of his having reviewed some 2.5 million pages of archived documents in both Japanese and American collections. This is history-writing of the absolutely highest caliber, a model of empirical inquiry that one can only hope every historian will emulate.

One wonders, though, how many in the American academy will seek to replicate Takahashi’s model of fairness over careerism. Then, as now, there are powerful, and lucrative, reasons and interests at work persuading American professors—such as former Institute of Pacific Relations research director, deputy director of OWI Pacific Relations, and top Soviet agent Owen

Lattimore—to join the U.S. government in its periodic pogroms against Japan. The rise of China in the past twenty years has only added to the incentives for American scholars to recycle the Rooseveltian myths.

Indeed, Takahashi's book contains a detailed section on the "history wars" which have embroiled the Japanese and American academies over the years, most recently in 2015. It should hardly be surprising that that attack was essentially a recapitulation of the War Guilt Information Program's talking points. One of the most revealing aspects of Takahashi's work is thus the perspective it affords on present academic ideology in the United States. Without an understanding of extensive and long-running American anti-Japan propaganda, it is impossible properly to contextualize the politically-driven attacks by American professors on the entire culture of Japan. In the age of WikiLeaks and the silencing by Beltway-connected tech giants of all opinions inconvenient to the American academic/political class, it is vital that we revisit the War Guilt Information Program to see how our current "closed linguistic space" came to be.

Takahashi's books and essays are in Japanese, but it is urgently recommended that his work be translated into English and other languages at all deliberate speed. Those of good will around the world who wish to understand the real history of Japan in the twentieth century must read Takahashi's work—beginning with this brilliant volume, the explosive *War Guilt Information Program*.

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