

Book Review

by Tadashi Hama

The U.S.A. Is Responsible for the Pacific War

by Toshiaki Suzuki

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It has been said that those who do not learn from history are condemned to repeat it. Given the current times, in which domestic disputes are inevitably followed by foreign intervention and escalating violence, one can say that modern history textbooks do not promote any degree of learning. History is usually presented as a series of unrelated events without regard to the times. Furthermore, in western textbooks in particular, events are portrayed as the west overcoming evil and the victory of “democracy”. The American narrative of the Japan-U.S. War, the so-called Pacific War, runs like a Hollywood movie. “Aggressive” Japan attacked an unsuspecting U.S. and the U.S. fought back, defeating Japan, punishing her leaders for “aggression” and planted democracy, thereby bringing peace to Japan and the rest of Asia. There is not a lot that can be concluded from this version of history other than “might makes right”. Unfortunately, American and the west are using this conclusion to “solve” the problems in the Middle East—with the inevitable result of even more violence, which has arrived at the West’s doorstep. Nothing is more crucial for mankind, in the age of mass migration and weapons of mass destruction than the curtailment of conflict. Learning the full story behind historical conflicts is a crucial step in this process. A broader understanding of the source of conflict entails examining and understanding history from all perspectives.

The current book, *The U.S.A. Is Responsible for the Pacific War*, written by Mr. Tosiaki Suzuki, surveys the events that led up to the war between Japan and America. While not an academic historian by training, Mr. Suzuki frankly raises historical facts and issues that academics, either American or Japanese, loath to discuss in the context of the Greater East Asia War (or the “Pacific War”). There are a number of fascinating points raised from the Japanese perspective in the current book and a few of these points will be mentioned.

First, Mr. Suzuki points out that the Greater East Asia War (or the “Pacific War”) should be considered completely separate from what is vaguely termed the “Second World War”. While global in scale, the wars in Asia and Europe were not conjoined parts of an ultimate conflict of good against evil as history textbooks never fail to characterize so-called Second World War. The Tripartite Pact signed between Japan, Germany and Italy aimed for “cooperation” with “all political, economic and military means” between the signatories, but there was in fact little cooperation between the three nations. The book points out that there was a fundamental lack of common interests between the European Axis and Imperial Japan. German leader Adolph Hitler sought territorial expansion into eastern Europe. To keep the western German border clear of attack, prior

to the invasion of Poland, Hitler sought an alliance with the British Empire. To appease the British, Hitler opined that the British Empire should remain intact, which meant maintaining British colonies in Asia.¹ By contrast, a Japanese war aim was to end western colonialism in Asia. On the news that Singapore fell to Japanese troops in 1942, Hitler tore up a “gloating announcement” drafted by the German Foreign Ministry, and stated that the “Yellow Peril” may be the “biggest [problem] for us.”² Certainly, Hitler had no regard for his Asian “ally”.

As the book points out, Japan entered into the Tripartite Pact as a means of negotiating with the Soviet Union and United States and as a means to obtain German help in negotiating with China. Furthermore, the Japanese were more than willing to annul the treaty if this meant improved relations with the U.S. Thus, Japan entered into a treaty for the sake of her own interests, and not those of Germany or Italy.

While both Japan and Germany were signatories to the Anti-Comintern Pact, which sought to combat international communism, Japan resisted requests from Germany to attack the Soviet Union so as to relieve Germany’s eastern front. Furthermore, while the Anti-Comintern Pact insisted on not entering into an agreement with the Soviet Union that was not consistent with the spirit of the Pact and without agreement of both parties, Germany unilaterally signed a nonaggression treaty with the Soviets in 1939. Japan signed a treaty of neutrality with the Soviets in 1941, which held until the Soviets declared war on Japan in August 1945.

Following the capitulation of The Netherlands and France in 1940, the Japanese had no idea what Hitler’s plans were for the Dutch and French Asian colonies. Would he allow them to remain as is or would he “free” them? Given Hitler’s thinking in terms of Britain’s colonies, it was unlikely that he would support any changing of the status quo in Asia. In fact, in the case of French Indochina, the pro-German Vichy Government cancelled previous agreements with Japan concerning stationing of troops in Indochina to close infiltration routes that were supplying the Chinese nationalists—Japan was forced to re-negotiate. Japan promised to respect the territorial integrity of Indochina and the stationing of Japanese troops in northern Indochina was to be for a defined period of time. This episode shows that not only was there no strategic coordination between the Japanese and the Germans, but there was no Japanese “invasion” of Indochina and Japan never “controlled” Indochina. Indeed, after Japan’s defeat, the French Republic reasserted colonial control over Indochina.

Despite obvious differences in Japanese and German goals and a fundamental lack of strategic coordination, history textbooks carelessly conflate the Greater East Asia War with the European war. Nonetheless, the Justices of the Tokyo Trials in their judgment wrote a history that accused the Japanese, Germans and Italians of attempting

¹ Buchanan, P.J. 2008. *Churchill, Hitler, and the Unnecessary War*. NY, NY: Three Rivers Press.

² Buchanan, *ibid*.

to secure the “domination of the whole world”.³ When the Greater East Asia War is treated in this manner, the war’s context and true meaning is entirely lost.

As the title of the book states, responsibility for the war rests squarely on the shoulders of the U.S. The book suggests that it is America’s fundamental need for territorial expansion that led to inevitable war against Japan. In the early 19th century, the vast American continent had yet to be conquered and Americans took it upon themselves to conquer this “emptiness”. America’s “Manifest Destiny,” the God-given mission to spread Christianity and American civilization to the “heathen, non-white races,” did not stop with the complete subjugation of the American Indians and the occupation of the American West. A group of wealthy Americans and Europeans overthrew the Hawaiian monarchy in 1893. America annexed the “Republic of Hawaii” in 1898. Without consultation with the Samoan people, America and Europe dismembered Samoa. In 1899, one group of islands was turned into a U.S. colony, so as to serve the U.S. Navy as a fueling station. America annexed the Philippines in 1899, a prize acquired from Spain at the end of the Spanish-American War, over the objection of the Philippine people. A three-year long, bloody insurgency ensued.

The biggest prize however was China. American missionaries were absolutely determined to save the souls of the “poor, helpless” Chinese⁴ and American businesses absolutely desired access to China’s 400 million consumers. During this period, Japan began to compete in the global economy while maintaining her political integrity and cultural integrity, which meant rejecting Christianity. America saw this as resistance to the will of God and to white civilization. Thus, Japan needed to be put down. In fact, Japan was forced to cancel her alliance with Great Britain in exchange for vague assertions of security and severe limitations were placed on the number of warships she could possess—this was done to a nation that depended on the seas for her livelihood. In addition, America made plans to go to war against Japan soon after the end of the Russo-Japanese War, and the plans were frequently updated. Perhaps to seal the final triumph of the Manifest Destiny, early in the American occupation, General Douglas MacArthur considered ordering millions of copies of *The Bible*, so as to Christianize and “civilize” the Japanese.

Anti-Japanese racism was a key element that triggered America’s war against Japan, and the book details the extent of American anti-Asian and anti-Japanese racism. In the late 19th century and early 20th century, Asian migration to Australia, Canada and the U.S., was tightly regulated, then, as insisted by white citizens, halted. In the U.S., white loathing of Asians evolved in part from the fact that Asians would perform the same amount of work as whites but for less pay. Whites also saw Asians as entirely

³ Minear, R.H. 1972. *Victor’s Justice: The Tokyo War Crimes Trial*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

⁴ The Chinese viewed missionaries as sources of free meals, lodging and jobs and virtually ignored the westerner’s religion, which was entirely alien to Chinese culture (Townsend, R. 1999. *Ways that are Dark*). The Japanese rejected Christianity as early European missionaries to Japan attempted to subvert the Tokugawa government.

“unassimilable”.⁵ Ironically, the restriction of Asian rights demanded by whites, such as property ownership, indeed ensured that Asians would not assimilate. Interestingly, labor unions at the time favored restricting Asian immigration, indicating that their interest lay not in the well-being of all workers but in keeping America white.⁶ In fact, Mr. Suzuki points out that, prior to restriction of Asian immigration, whites lynched Asians without fear of retribution. While white colonization of Asian countries was perfectly acceptable, Asians were unwelcome in white nations. American history textbooks point out the Chinese contribution to the building of the transcontinental railroad in the late 19th century and the internment of Japanese-Americans at the beginning of the Second World War, but there is no mentioning of the long history of violence committed against Asians, Japanese as well as Chinese, by whites. Despite a clear record of anti-Asian hostility, no western history textbook suggests that America’s desire to eliminate the Japanese, as a competitor and as an undesirable race, was a key factor that fueled America’s war against Japan. At the same time, no history textbook suggests that the basis of the Greater East Asia War is the expulsion of westerners and their anti-Asian racism from Asia.

There is one other point that the current book raises that no history textbook ever discusses with complete candor. The claim is that the Second Sino-Japanese War was due to Japan’s “aggression” in northeast China, or “Manchuria,” and the subsequent formation of a Japanese Manchurian “puppet state”. First and foremost, Manchuria was never a “part” of China. (Indeed, the Great Wall was built to keep “barbarians,” including those from Manchuria, out of China.) Manchuria is the “ancestral heartland” of the Manchu people and during the Manchu rule of China (during the Qing Dynasty, 1644-1911) the Manchus even forbid the migration of Han Chinese into Manchuria.⁷ The Manchu are a distinct ethnic group from that of the majority “Han” Chinese and during the Qing Dynasty, the Manchus made plain their ethnic distinctiveness, reflected in their “language, dress and food,” and made it a point to transmit their culture “from generation to generation, articulated, regulated, displayed and protected.”⁸ Furthermore, the current book points out that the Manchu considered their Han subjects with contempt: “Beijing people steal or tell lies and are merciless, quite different from the Manchu.” Thus, the current book pointedly notes that Manchuria was never an integral part of China.

In fact, the first president of the Chinese republic Sun Yat-Sen did not believe that Manchuria was a part of China. Sun denounced the Manchu rulers as “foreigners” and hope for the day that China would be run by “native Chinese”.⁹ While in exile in Japan following a power struggle, he offered this area to the Japanese in exchange for cash and weapons with which to fight his rivals.

⁵ President Franklin D. Roosevelt held the view that the Japanese were lower on the evolutionary scale than whites and expressed his desire to hybridize the Japanese such that they could no longer be “aggressive” (p. 97-98). President Roosevelt had unkind words about Jews as well—Roosevelt’s racial views were standard for the times. Roosevelt is nonetheless regarded by many Americans today as a saint.

⁶ While American businesses today still favor importation of immigrants as cheap labor, labor unions today have completely reversed themselves and absolutely favor non-white immigration.

⁷ Bickers, R. 2012. *The Scramble for China*. London: Penguin Books.

⁸ Bickers, *ibid.*

⁹ Bickers, *ibid.*

Furthermore, the current book also points out that Japanese rights and interests concerning Manchuria were obtained from Russia, following the conclusion of the Russo-Japanese War, and not from China. There was no aggression on the part of Japan in terms of Manchuria. Thus, if the Chinese had an issue concerning Manchuria, then they should have been taken up with the Russians and not with Japan.

If Manchuria was never an integral part of China, then the March 1, 1932 declaration of Manchukuo statehood should not have been made an international issue and sent to the League of Nations for deliberation. In response to the establishment of Manchukuo, U.S. Ambassador to Japan Joseph Grew at the time stated: “Japan will in all probability eventually guarantee to Manchuria an administration of peace, safety and prosperity which that unfortunate country has never experienced before...” What Ambassador Grew alluded to is usually never mentioned in history textbooks: the underdeveloped state of Manchuria before statehood, the numerous violations of treaties signed between foreign countries and China, the endemic Chinese-instigated riots and massacres during the 1920s and 1930s, the threat of Soviet and Chinese communism and political instability in China (at the time, there were at least two groups claiming to represent the government of China). For example, with respect to treaty violations, the current book quotes the MacMurray Memorandum, written by American diplomat John Van Antwerp MacMurray: “...In the summer of 1928, however, Nanking authorities rather abruptly declared that since the revision had not been affected within the time specified, the treaties [Sino-Japanese Commerce and Navigation Treaties] were to be considered as having terminated.” While the Chinese were militarily and politically weak, they could take this approach with Japan since America and Great Britain “were most accommodating to China” and “each seemed zealous to show themselves being more supple than the other”. The core reason for this attitude was trade—China was seen as huge market of 400 million consumers, whereas Japan was seen as an obstacle to the China market. This attitude persisted despite pious western pronouncements of “international cooperation” and, “equal access” to Chinese markets. Japan gave up all of her rights and privileges in Manchukuo following the Manchukuo declaration of statehood while the western colonial countries insisted on maintaining special rights and privileges in Manchukuo. This alone should give an idea of what westerners thought about “territorial integrity” and “independence” of nonwhite countries.

The robust economic development of Manchukuo is depicted in the current book, citing, for example, an article from the *Times* of London and a report from the Federation of British Industries. The growth of industries, a railway that keeps to a schedule and the educational development of the people is in sharp contrast to that of China. Equally important is the founding principle of Manchukuo, which explicitly stressed racial cooperation and equality. The Proclamation of March 1, 1932 stated that “there shall be no discrimination among those people who now reside in the territory with respect to race and creed...” At the time, no other western colonial nation, with nonwhite colonial subjects and nonwhite citizens at home, could support such a claim and the author of the current book suggests that outright rejection of Manchukuo by western colonial countries was centered on Manchukuo’s proclamation of racial nondiscrimination. Given the serf-

like status of the indigenous people in western-ruled Asian colonies, the prohibition of nonwhite immigration and systematic discrimination of nonwhites in western nations, including America, western nations had no other choice but to reject Manchukuo because of her stances on racial equality. Whether Manchukuo was an independent state or a “puppet state,” no western history textbook has ever bothered describing Manchukuo in any detail. Perhaps if they did, then Japan would be seen in a positive light, which would upset current dogma.

Furthermore, no western textbook has placed the establishment of Manchukuo within the context of a lawless and violent time. A number of anti-Japanese riots were egged on and facilitated by either Chinese authorities or communists. A particularly gruesome Nationalist-backed riot occurred in Nanjing in March, 1927, resulting in the looting of Japanese and British Consulates and massacre and mass rape of Japanese citizens. Amazingly, no Japanese troops were sent to defend Japanese citizens and property in response. The following year, Nationalist troops in Jinan, again, massacred and raped Japanese civilians.

Because of the lack of Chinese government authority and restrictions on Japanese military personnel, Chinese brigands attacked Manchurian Japanese citizens and property with impunity. Communists instigated rioting in Jiandao, in southeast Manchuria in 1930. Manchurian warlord Zhang Zuolin hated Koreans and made it a point to discriminate and persecute them. Knowing that Chinese officials would do nothing to stop them, Chinese farmers attacked Korean farmers when Japanese police or military personnel were absent. The last straw was Chinese attacks on Korean farmers in Wanbaoshan. While no one was injured, news of the attacks led to rioting in Korea—“109 Chinese were killed and more than 160 were injured.” In 1931, Japanese army Captain Nakamura and his team, on a surveying mission, were captured and killed by Chinese warlord soldiers. When the Japanese military in Manchuria were mobilizing to investigate Captain Nakamura’s abduction, the Japanese Foreign Ministry ordered the military to stand down. The Chinese called the murder a “fabrication” and denied the incident ever occurred until three months later when they “admitted to the facts of the murder”.

Even with Chinese slaughtering of Japanese civilians and ambushing of military personnel, the Japanese made no move to punish the guilty or even address their grievances in an international forum such as the League of Nations, much less wage war against China. Instead, Japan did almost nothing. Indeed, Mr. Suzuki writes his dismay of the lack of Japanese government response during this period. The Japanese government consoled “patience” and hoped that the Chinese would respond with “fairness” if the Japanese showed “restraint”. Indeed, Chinese anti-Japanese attacks became more brazen when the Japanese government showed no response. Mr. Suzuki criticizes the lack of realism and blind idealism of the foreign minister at the time, Kijuro Shidehara, and further wonders how such a person, whose only skill was command of the English language, ever became foreign minister.

Mr. Suzuki chastises a number of times Japanese thinking then—and he points out that not much has changed since—that Japanese people tend to be “naïve, foolish and

good-natured to a fault” and lack self-assertion. Indeed, Mr. Suzuki states that Japanese people, while “empathetic” and “harmonious,” are poor in self-assertion, which is a crucial skill in international affairs. To the Japanese, “to avoid [severe dispute]... vague compromises are made and discussion ends.” While this Japanese tactic leads to “easy compromise,” “disadvantageous concessions” are another inevitable result. Mr. Suzuki suggests that having empathy at the expense of self-assertion was a weakness that doomed Japanese foreign policy then. A carry over of such thinking can be seen in the recent “agreement” between Japan and South Korea over the so-called comfort women issue. Rather than Japan assert that she is in the historical right, and do nothing else, Japan will pay South Korea about \$1 million for the removal of a “comfort women” statute placed in front of the Japanese Embassy in Seoul by Korean anti-Japan activists several years ago. How much more money will be spent by Japan to remove “comfort women memorials” in the U.S. also placed there by Korean anti-Japan activists? In this case, Mr. Suzuki would probably state that the Japanese government sought an “easy compromise,” which led to absolutely no benefit for Japan at all. Japan probably is expecting gratitude from the Korean people, but Japan will be once again sorely disappointed. Japan has previously given away the equivalent of billions of dollars in aid to South Korea—without any show of gratitude from the Korean government. It is now time for Japan to wake up and learn the lessons of history.

* *The U.S. A. is responsible for the Pacific War* by Suzuki Toshiaki (translation of Japanese language book [Daitoa Senso wa Amerikaga Warui, Bensei Shuppan, Tokyo, 2015] (Bensey Publishing, Tokyo, 2015).

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