Historical Perceptions and the Consciousness of War Responsibility: Scholarly Interpretations of Modern (Japanese) History in Postwar Japan

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Introduction

The consciousness of Japanese people today about their history has recently received a great deal of attention domestically and internationally, with a particular focus on perceptions of Japan’s aggression in the pre-war Showa decades of the 1930s and 40s. Broadly speaking, the increased interest may also be attributed to factors occurring outside as well as within the country.

First, through the period of high-speed economic growth of the 1960s and thereafter, Japan strengthened her global links and, in particular, deepened her economic relations with Asia. This led in turn to a heightened awareness of Japan’s “presence” in Asia, and, alongside this, to a reawakening of interest in Japan’s past deeds in the region. These developments obliged Japan to face up to her wartime history.

The self-confidence and re-emergent nationalism which the pride in becoming an economic superpower ignited in Japan, especially from the 1980s, is a second contributory factor. Both allowed Japan to give a positive gloss to pronouncements concerning her past, precipitating friction with various other countries.

Third, economic development and democratization steadily advanced after the 1980s; South Korea and China, in particular, entered new stages of evolution as nation states. At the same time, more nationalistic interpretations of history overall emerged with the collapse of the Cold War structure, since its division of the world into East and West had significantly determined the interpretation of history up until then. Furthermore, historical issues became enmeshed with politics as they began to be used as pawns in the game of diplomacy.

Against this background, how did Japan’s history establishment, charged with informing historical education, choose to interpret the fundamentals of the history of the country’s recent past? In this essay, I will set out the analyses of the post-war academic establishment and historians specializing in modern Japanese history, of the period which
has come to be called "The Road to the Pacific War", that is of the late Taishō to early Shōwa periods of the 1920s to the 1940s. An examination of the history of the Meiji Period, and the epoch-making transition which took place during it to a modern nation state, is, of course, a prerequisite for this task, since it helps us to understand modern Japan. I will explore the following schools of scholarly interpretation:

1. Joint Conspiracy Theory (This is the historical approach taken by the Tokyo War Crimes Trial). This view was presented by the prosecutorial team at the International Military Tribunal for the Far East (IMTFE, also known as the Tokyo Trial) which sat in judgement of Japan’s war crimes. It was not propounded by Japan’s academic establishment and researchers, but it is nevertheless significant as a starting point for modern historical studies of Japan.

2. The Fascist Emperor System Theory (the Marxist Kōza school). This historical view was constructed as an extension of the pre-war Comintern analysis of Japan. It had a major impact on the post-war history establishment, research on modern Japanese history, and history education.

3. Fifteen-Year War Theory. Arising from dissatisfaction with the IMTFE’s approach, which placed the U.S.-Japan war at its core, this theory sought to make clear the extent of Japan’s aggression on the Asian continent, especially in China, and its responsibility for it. It particularly emphasized the necessity of incorporating all the acts of aggression, from the Manchurian Incident to the Pacific War, into one whole. The central tenets of this theory are now commonly accepted.

4. Revisionist Theory. This theory emerged as the antithesis to the Fascist Emperor System Theory and is in line with traditional Japanese academic theory, adopted from the Meiji Period. Its foundation is historical documentation, which was unearthed in huge quantities, with the aim of adding factual underpinning to the challenge to the post-1945 emphasis on theory which previously had been at the heart of the understanding and writing of history. In fact, the Revisionist Theory contributed to a decline of the Fascist Emperor System Theory.

Through an examination of these main four academic theories I intend to try and assess the issue of the historical awareness and wartime responsibilities of the Japanese people.
I. Joint Conspiracy Theory (The historical view taken by the Tokyo War Crimes Trial)

The pre-war Japanese history establishment took the view that while parties involved were still alive, and to ensure historical objectivity, at least fifty years should elapse before any topic could be considered for scholarly research. Therefore, as far as possible, it had limited itself to the study of the initial period of the Meiji Restoration, and at the very most to an examination of the Sino-Japanese War (1894–95). Yet another factor stayed the hands of the scholars, and this was the scrutiny of the government. Shinobu Seizaburō, who pioneered studies of the Sino-Japanese War, published his university dissertation under the title of Nisshin Sensō in 1934, the year of his graduation. However, this text, written and published a mere forty years after the end of the conflict, was deemed to touch too closely on state secrets and was immediately banned by the government.¹

As a consequence, interpretations and analyses, both of the nature of pre-war Shōwa Japan and of Japan’s "Road to the Pacific War", which were presented by the prosecution at the International Military Tribunal for the Far East,² (hereafter called the Tokyo Trial) were not shared by Japanese scholars and researchers. Nevertheless, without this trial it is unlikely that the vast amount of historical material (official and private papers, personal diaries, testimonies and the like) which was used in the evidence would have been revealed to the public and, on this point alone, it can be said to have been of enormous importance as a starting point for substantive modern Japanese historical research. This was pointed out by the Canadian diplomat, the then influential historian, EH Norman (who was deputy Canadian representative to the Far Eastern Commission and the first Canadian representative to Japan) who said that the revelation of these historical sources made ‘a major contribution to history’.³

The Tokyo Trial attempted to deliver its judgement through ex post facto laws such as ‘crimes against peace’ and ‘crimes against humanity’, and to trace responsibility for national acts back to individuals amongst the national leadership. There continue today to be those who challenge this approach, claiming that it simply represented ‘victors’ justice’. Moreover, the attempt to impose upon Japan alone all responsibility for the war, as was made at the Trial to explain historically Japan’s path to the Pacific War, rendered this explanation unacceptable to conservatives, and the object of their deep-rooted criticism.
Especially in terms of historical understanding, the so-called Tokyo Trial view of history and the Comintern interpretation, which will be explored later, both had an enormous impact on historical education about Japan's past. The former is an American historical view and the latter belongs to the Soviet Union. Both share ‘dark’, ‘masochistic’ and ‘anti-Japan’ attitudes to pre-war Japan. Since then, it is possible to discern the rise to prominence of theorists of a liberal historical persuasion.\(^4\) Consequently, an understanding of the Tokyo Trial version of history is essential for post-war modern Japanese historical research.

The period covered by the Trial is 1 January 1928 (the Tanaka Giichi Cabinet) to 2 September 1945 (when the documents of Japan's surrender were signed). 28 men, starting with former Prime Minister Tōjō Hideki, were accused of serious war crimes (the Class-A war criminals). Emperor Hirohito, however, was not among them.

The fundamental argument advanced by the prosecution was that there had been a ‘joint conspiracy’. They argued that, from 1928–1945, the period on which the Trial focused, there had been a joint conspiracy to wage an aggressive war with the objective of acquiring military, political, and economic domination over specified territories. All 28 defendants were accused of planning and implementing this conspiracy.

In their analysis of Japan’s road to the Pacific War the prosecution furthermore made a distinction between Japan’s ruling elite of military extremists (military men and right-wing politicians) and the moderate political elite (diplomats, economic officials, business figures and senior statesmen). They argued that rivalry between the two groups, and the eventual eclipse of the latter, was consequential in the path to war. So, the Pacific War in essence was depicted in the Trial as an aggressive war launched by extreme militarists conspiring together.

This historical view was based on the following premises. First, extreme militarists conducted acts of continuous aggression stretching from the Manchurian Incident to the Pacific War; second, the Pacific War was a war between the US and Japan—this was an understanding that lay at the heart of the Trial; and third, the extreme militarists should be made to carry the bulk of responsibility for the war.

To this day, these three key arguments have greatly influenced post-war Japanese people's view of their own history. However, there are a number of problems inherent in them.

First, and I shall consider this point further in the context of the Fascist Emperor
System Theory and the Fifteen-Year War analysis, we do need to question, before proceeding, whether it is possible to understand the period from the Manchurian Incident through the Pacific War simply as one continuous aggressive process? In reality, war was not waged relentlessly since active combat following the Manchurian Incident ceased with the 1933 Tanku Accord. Moreover, are there not qualitative differences between the Sino-Japanese War, a conflict between two nations, and the Pacific War which was part of the greater global conflict of the Second World War, since the Sino-Japanese War did not simply expand to become the Pacific War? Finally, little regard has been paid to the question of whether forces in Japan advocated alternatives to war, opposed it or criticized it.

The following two points are important here. As can be understood explicitly from the very name given to the conflict, 'The Pacific War', the essential definition of it is of a post-1941 war. The focus of it was the US-Japanese military struggle. The image of it which has been bequeathed thereby to many post-war Japanese is of Japan’s defeat by America and of Japan’s having been overwhelmed by American material strength. These perceptions are based on the undeniable shock both the military and the civilian population experienced at the extent of America’s material strength during the war, as well as on a sense of not having lost the war with China. From the perspective of Asian countries, this US-centred consciousness of the war has resulted in comparatively limited awareness in Japan of Japanese aggression against Asia and an understanding of the realities of its aggressions against China and other Asian countries has, in turn, been neglected.

In addition to the above, focusing responsibility for the war on military extremists, and depicting the military as the only villains of the piece, has allowed the moderate political elite to evade blame. Symbolic of this was a failure to consider the war responsibility of the Showa Emperor (Hirohito). It also cultivated a sense in ordinary Japanese people that they had been silenced by the military, and gave rise to the notion that they also were victims. This in its turn lessened their own sense of responsibility.

The Tokyo Trial certainly made a significant contribution to public perceptions of the war since it shed light on many things the Japanese public either did not know or were not made aware of. These revelations were reinforced by a “this is the truth” style campaign rolled out by the American occupying forces through newspapers, the radio, and other forms of mass media. It is also worth remembering that the very term Asia Pacific War was only used after 1945 when GHQ proscribed the use of the expression previously, which
was “The Greater East Asia War”, replacing it with “The Pacific War”.\(^5\)

It is also true to say that the Japanese victim mentality was exacerbated by several tragic wartime experiences in the very final stages of the war; that is, the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki; the sudden Soviet entry into the war and the internment of Japanese soldiers in Siberia.

Whatever else, the Tokyo Trial was an intrinsic part of GHQ's occupation policy for Japan. While of itself it held no meaning as an academic study, nonetheless, it is undeniable that the Tokyo Trial marks the starting point for post-war modern historical research in Japan. Certainly, this view of the 'Road to the Pacific War' can be said to have framed the understanding of post-war Japanese people of their recent history.

II. The Fascist Emperor System Theory (The Marxist Kōza Faction)

This is a Marxist historical view built on an extension of the pre-war analysis of Japan, propounded as a mini-thesis by the Comintern. This view categorizes post-Meiji Japan as absolutist. Marxist historical scholarship in Japan was divided into two groups depending on whether the Meiji Restoration was seen as an absolutist revolution, as the Kōza group saw it, or a bourgeois revolution, albeit incomplete, as understood by the Rōnō Group. It was the Kōza School, with the Comintern’s backing and stamp of approval, which became mainstream. This explains why, from a liberal historical view, the Kōza approach is also known as the Comintern historical view. In other words, Marxist Kōza historicism, embodying the post-war intellectuals’ infatuation with Marxism in the context of the Cold War between the U.S. and the U.S.S.R., saw the U.S.S.R. as a force for peace. This view had considerable influence on post-war Japan’s history establishment, research on modern history, and history education.

As can be seen in the relationship between the Comintern and the Japanese Communist Party, however, it is undeniable that there was also a close link between this historical view and the real world of politics. This theory was therefore both ideologically and politically charged from the outset, in the same way as were perceptions of the Tokyo Trial.

At the heart of the Fascist Emperor System Theory was "its emphasis on the bond between the emperor system and fascism, and the changes in that relationship in which the absolutist emperor system fulfilled the role and the function of fascism characterized by monopolistic capitalism and reactionary absolutism". Further, it emphasised "the
compromises and the alliances between the bourgeoisie and the various political forces within the emperor-system”. Therefore, the conclusions it draws from ‘the Road to the Pacific’ way of thinking are that the mutual antagonisms between the military, the elder statesmen, political parties, the financial and business world, and the bureaucracy since the Manchurian Incident were ‘temporary, segmented, relative and strategic’; and that the ruling class as one had promoted fascism in Japan and aggressive war abroad.

In its view that the period from the 1931 Manchurian Incident to the Pacific War was a continuous process of Japanese aggression, the Fascist Emperor System Theory accords with the stance of the Tokyo Trial. It is also at one with the Tokyo Trial in as far as the matter of pursuing the war responsibility of the pre-war leadership goes.

However, it differs from the Tokyo Trial’s interpretation, which saw the extreme militarists pitted against the moderate political elite, and instead drums home the extent to which the elite stood as one in pursuing aggressive war. In the process, it undercuts the spuriousness of the Tokyo Trial’s assigning all responsibility for aggressive war on the military, and for this it must be greatly valued.

Nonetheless, there are a number of problems with this historical view. First, even if we accept as truth that the leadership elite was united and in agreement with the aggressive direction of the country, solely emphasizing unity and consensus avoids questioning why, up until that time during the 1930s, there was so much factionalism and conflict, such as the 15 May Incident, the 26 February Incident, many acts of terrorism, and attempted coups d’etat. In other words, while this Theory of the Fascist Emperor System describes the elite as being unitary, it still cannot convincingly explain away the fact that those within the elite fought bloody conflicts among themselves or even why they should have been at each other’s throats in the first place.

Especially troublesome for this Theory is that it has never been able to present a proper and convincing analysis of the period from around the Manchurian Incident to the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War; which is surely one of the most “politically turbulent and unstable” times in modern Japanese history, witnessing as it did numerous reorganizations within the country.

The second point is crucially connected to the question of war responsibility. Given that the Fascist Emperor System Theory implicates the elite as a whole, the issue comes to the fore, conversely, of where, precisely, responsibility did lie, which has remained obscure. Because Marxist historiography places great importance on the position and role of the
masses in history, it certainly makes it easier to accept the idea of the people’s infallibility, in the context of the war responsibility of the Japanese people in this interpretation. I will reflect further upon this matter later. Here I merely note that the idea of the infallibility of the people later came to be questioned. This had the consequence of magnifying their responsibility, remodelling their role so that they became aggressors rather than victims.\footnote{9}

Finally, because, as a matter of course, Marxists pay very serious attention to theoretical frameworks, the Fascist Emperor System Theory developed into a debate on the importance of the theoretical framework largely at the expense of the actual evidence. There are naturally gaps between historical events and their theoretical framework in any historical narrative. But this difficulty in determining historical detail relates back to the original point of this section, and has brought this theory under fire from the Revisionist School, which lays great store in empiricism.

I have indicated above various concerns about an acceptance of the Fascist Emperor System Theory which was a view of history located in the political conditions surrounding the international structures of the Cold War. I need not restate these concerns except to highlight the fact that it is a theory which directly reflects the historical consciousness of the history establishment itself, influenced as it was by international realities which arose as a result of the U.S.-U.S.S.R. Cold War. Apart from the self-evident truth that Japan was engaged in a war of aggression, the strength of this Theory is that it questions why Japan became involved in war, in terms of how its power was organized, its historical development and social structures. At the heart of these concerns is the emperor system.

III. Theory of the Fifteen-year War

As described earlier, the thinking behind this approach arose from dissatisfaction with the emphasis given to the US-Japan conflict by the Tokyo Trial. In contrast it sought to ascertain Japan’s responsibility for aggression against China and Asia, more generally. It asserted the need to view the period of history from the Manchurian Incident to the Pacific War as one linked process of Japanese aggression. This notion of a ‘fifteen-year war’ emerged in the mid-1950s, and today it is commonly accepted. The term was believed to have been invented by Tsurumi Shunsuke, a representative intellectual of post-war Japan.\footnote{10}

In his essay, \textit{Nihon chishikijin no Amerikazō}, for example, Tsurumi states that ‘on this last war, the Japanese people have divided into two camps: those who understand the
conflict as a series of wars against China consisting of the Manchurian Incident, the Shanghai Incident and the North China Incident, and those who conceive it as the Pacific War fought against the United States’, and that it was unwise for Japan to have split in this way. Of these viewpoints, it was initially the latter which dominated. This clearly demonstrates the curious ability of Japan’s ruling elite to portray the War as only having been fought with the US and thereby containing its limits and rendering Japan solely accountable to the US.11

Some years later, when commenting on how he coined this phrase ‘fifteen-year war’, Tsurumi explained that ‘it became extremely difficult to understand the nature of the war, which I believe Japan was unwise to have fought, if it was viewed as a Pacific or Greater East Asia War against the U.S, and that this, in turn, would obscure the Japanese people’s responsibility for it’.12

Consequently, the term ‘fifteen-year war’ refers to the fifteen-year war against China and Asia, and Japan’s war responsibility is strongly implicit in it. It is this point which is important; by making the Japanese aware of their war guilt this analysis triggered a new historical consciousness of enormous significance.

Putting aside the question of whether it is appropriate to call it the fifteen-year war, when it actually lasted only 14 years (from 18 September 1931 to 2 September 1945), we must question whether it is right to view Japan’s history from the Manchurian Incident onwards as one of unremitting aggression which the use of this term implies.13 It conjures up an illusion of ceaseless and on-going warfare, and it also makes it all too easy to fall into the trap of historical inevitability.

In fact it has been strongly questioned whether both between the Manchurian Incident and the Sino-Japanese War and the Sino-Japanese War and the Pacific War can be viewed as a continuum. However, the current situation is that, in the process of refuting these questions, new historical facts and perspectives have emerged which have reinforced the essential theory. For example, proponents of the theory argue that the operation to separate North China14 serves as a point of continuity from the Manchurian Incident to the Sino-Japanese War, and that the outbreak of the Russo-German War linked the Sino-Japanese War to the Pacific War.15

It certainly can be said that because Japan’s responsibility for the war in Asia started to be questioned from the 1980s, this Fifteen-year War Theory is now well established in the minds of Japan’s mass media and history establishments.
IV. The Revisionists’ Theory

This academic theory rose to prominence in the 1970s as the antithesis to the then mainstream Fascist Emperor System Theory (and against Marxist historiography as a whole). Itô Takashi, then a professor at Tokyo University, started to advocate a revisionist approach in the latter half of the 1960s, and built his argument on the traditional historiography of Japan’s government universities, which had evolved from the Meiji period onwards. By putting on the record voluminous amounts of historical material (particularly from personal documents and accounts) Itô confronted the then standard view of history (of the Fascist Emperor System). The sheer weight of his documentary evidence placed the proponents of the latter on the defensive.

Itô contended that the term ‘fascism’ itself was ambiguous, that it was originally a political term employed by the Comintern, and that it had now come to have no significance except as a term of slander for attacking one’s ‘most evil of enemies’. Consequently, he held, it is inappropriate to use it as a scholarly and academic tool in defining pre-war Shōwa Japan. In its place Itô advocated the new concept and theoretical framework of ‘revisionism’ (kakushin).

His new analytical framework aimed to determine how the self-images of two sets of actors, based upon their respective views of history and agenda, had been established. To clarify his analytical framework, he drew a vertical line running from “renovation (destruction)” to “gradualism (maintain the status quo)” that intersects with a horizontal line going from “progress (westernization)” to “restoration (of the past) (reaction)”. “renovation”, “gradualism”, “progress”, and “restoration” are images ascribed to one’s own set of actors; while “destruction”, “maintaining the status quo”, “westernization” and “reaction” describe the other set of actors. I will explain Itô’s analytical framework as
simply as possible.¹⁸

First, when “progress” is used in the horizontal axis, it is used as the self-image of these who believed that the steps taken from the beginning of the Meiji period led away from the “barbaric” Tokugawa feudal society to an “enlightened” Japan which included a constitutional government; those who advocated “enlightenment” were the “progressives”.

This set of actors’ historical perspective and self-image define those who oppose them as being obstinate “reactionaries” who simply did not understand the direction that the progress of history was taking.

The self-image of those in the “restoration (of the past)” group in the “restoration to westernization” axis were convinced that, as the consequence of introducing western civilization, which began at the time of the Meiji restoration, Japan had lost its essential Japanese character and was becoming corrupted and depraved; so that they were duty bound to put a stop to this intoxication with the West and to restore Japan’s age-old spirit. The self-image of those in the “renovation” group in the vertical axis believed that the First World War exposed the bankruptcy of Western democracy and led to its collapse, thus ushering in a new age of “nationalism”. Therefore, they argued that the establishment of a ‘renovationist’ Japan, building upon the destruction of the old order, must now be on history’s agenda. In international relations, they also maintained, a new Japan must be created as the upholder of the new nationalism to counter the imperialistic hegemony of Western powers.

The position of those who favored “gradualism”, in their self-image, in the same axis discussed above, ascribed the highest value to preservation and conservation and, gradually, to building upon Japan’s achievements since the beginning of the Meiji Restoration. They usually decried those who disagreed with them for being “Red” or Communist.

This is Itō’s basic schematic proposition. Further examination of it reveals that those whose image of themselves is as members of the “progress” and “renovation” groups see themselves as helping move along a ‘correct’ path of historical development. Diagonally opposite stand those in the “restoration” and “gradualism” groups. Their self-image is of guardians and defenders of Japan’s good traditions. Those in the “progress” and “gradualism” subsets tend to regard the maintenance of the “status quo” as positive, in and of itself, whereas those in the “restoration” and “gradualism” subsets view the status
quo in a negative light. The sub-sets located in the A section of the quadrant, formed by the axis linking those with self-images of “progress (westernization)” and “renovation (destruction)” are communist, socialists, liberal sympathizers, and right-wing national socialists.

Juxtaposing these are the subsets located in the D section of the quadrant linked by the axis running from “restoration (reaction)” to “gradualism (maintaining the status quo)”, that is, most of the conservative ruling elite. The B section of the quadrant is formed by the axis linking those with the self-images “progress (westernization)” and “gradualism (maintaining the status quo)”. Here we find constitutionalists and progressive conservatives. Against them are arrayed those in the C section of the quadrant formed by the axis going from those whose self-images are “restoration (reaction)” to “renovation (destruction)”. Here we find right wingers in the broad sense of the term (those who aim for as pure a Japanese style renovation as possible).

On the basis of such a framework, Itô proposes the following historical analysis. First, the enormous social, economic, ideological, and political transformations which occurred around the time of the First World War gave rise to numerous problems within and outside Japan. This situation allowed for the rise of “renovationists” intent upon fundamental “reconstruction”, “renovation”, “reform”, and “revolution” of the pre-existing political system of control. The political history of the 1930s, therefore, on a fundamental level, may be understood as the process by which the “renovation” set of actors defeated the “maintaining the status quo” adherents.

Itô’s theory, above all, attempts to shine a light on the historical processes within the domestic political domain which have tended to be neglected because of the overwhelming weight of, and belief in, the Fascist Emperor System Theory. Because he uncovered large volumes of documents, an evidentiary base for the study of modern Japanese history was rapidly established. (In this sense, Itô may be called a positivist). This development reveals perhaps the greatest merit of the “revisionist theory”. This theory is also of value in not taking the Manchurian Incident as the starting point for the study of the “Road to Pearl Harbour”, working rather on a much longer time line that takes us back to the beginning of the First World War.19

There was a fierce antipathetic reaction to the questioning of the appropriateness of using the term “fascism”, since it had, up until that point, appeared self evident that it was applicable. Advocates of the Fascist Emperor System Theory were at the forefront of the
attack on Itō, whom they regarded as denying the concept of "fascism". They accused "revisionist" historians of ignoring the reality of Japan’s aggression and the responsibility of the emperor system for it, and criticized them for becoming bogged down by their pursuit of trivial historical facts. Itō came under savage personal attack for being a reactionary historian.20

Reflecting on Itō’s Theory today, it is possible also to ascribe to Itō’s challengers political motivations behind their strongly ideological view of history. Setting this point aside for the moment, it certainly can be said that, in questioning mainstream historical theories, Itō’s own thesis was tremendously shocking and had an enormous impact not only on believers in the Fascist Emperor System Theory, but on all Japan’s modern history fraternity.

In consequence of his revealing so many detailed historical facts, from vast volumes of historical documents which he unearthed, Itō revealed the Fascist Emperor System Theory to be fundamentally untenable. (What was, incidentally, also revealed was the ‘pack animal’ theory, that is of people, like pack animals in the wild, turning on each other in their hordes.)

V. Conclusion

I have discussed in detail above the representative post-war schools of history, mostly from the 1970s, in the context of modern Japanese historical thinking.

By way of conclusion, I would like briefly to consider developments since that time and how they are connected.

First of all, it can be said that two changes occurred during the 1970s as a result of the emergence of the Revisionist Theory, which has just been examined, because of its emphasis on documentary evidence. One is the collapse of the Fascist Emperor System Theory; and the other is the spread of documents-based research. That there were philosophical flaws in the Fascist Emperor System Theory, had, in fact, become evident by the mid-1970s.21 By that time there were already signs of its decline and these were spurred on by the advances in evidence-based research of those in the “revisionist” camp. In fact, it became hard to find advocates of the Fascist Emperor System Theory after the 1980s. Furthermore, the collapse at the end of the 1980s of the Cold War structure, between the U.S. and the Soviet Union, still fresh in our memories, caused a questioning of the very validity of Marxism. Nevertheless, from a bird’s eye view of the subsequent state
of Japan’s modern historical studies, it is important to note that the majority of academics who adhered to the Fascist Emperor System Theory did not make a complete theoretical shift in their thinking. Although there was certainly a reduction in the number of vocal adherents of Marxism, they were now plotting a new direction. Because of the achievements of the research-based revisionist theory practitioners, they had come to realise that the academic world itself had changed in that historical research had to be based on documentary evidence. In other words, while the study of modern Japanese history from the 1980s placed even greater importance on the use of documentary sources than earlier had been the case, an examination of changes in subjects and trends reveals two distinct developments. The one is an emphasis on clarifying pre-war Japan’s political history; the other is being clear about the nature of pre-war Japan’s aggression against Asia by looking closely at concrete examples. Most of the adherents of both the Fascist Emperor System Theory and of Marxist ideology may now be found in the latter camp. This explains why research dealing with the “Rape of Nanking”, Unit 731, germ and gas warfare, and comfort women has enjoyed the focus of these scholars from the 1980s.22

An example is in 1982 when Japan was strongly criticized by other Asian nations over the issues of textbook authorisation, a former representative of the group advocating the “Fascist Emperor System” Theory highlighted the problem that existed up to that point in the research on modern Japanese history, in the following way:

The Sino-Japanese War, from beginning to end was a ‘ground war’ engulfing the lives even of non-combatants. How much of this tragic truth—the concrete reality of aggression and violence—did our research make clear? Although it appeared that we had made it clear, in truth, we had not. Is this not why the people of China are denouncing us in their criticism of the textbook authorization system?23

He argues that, in the most basic question we should ask about the war, which is what the Japanese military were doing in China, there has been surprisingly little interest and basic facts have barely been grasped.24

The new approach, therefore, is to try and address issues which have not previously been given much attention by Japanese academics. It is an extremely significant development because it attempts to rethink the whole business of the war responsibility of the Japanese (to demonstrate, for example, the Japanese were not only victims but also
aggressors in the war).\textsuperscript{25} It also brought to the fore the question of the Japanese people’s "post-war responsibility" by spelling out what the aggression had involved; this had been comparatively ignored up until then.

I should now like to look at the way in which many other positivists in the revisionist camp view issues of war responsibility and post-war responsibility. Professor Itô provides us with a guide for thinking about these issues, when he responded to critics of his position.\textsuperscript{26}

I do not intend to "apologize" for the label "justification history" [that I am accused of writing]; that is, [I am charged with] asserting that we must look at the issue of [war responsibility] in a ‘relative’ light. I do not apologize since I write with exactly that principle in mind. I am convinced that you must not bring to historical research the notions of absolute good and absolute evil.

Of course not all anti-Marxist positivist scholars think exactly as Itô does, but it seems that the unifying thread through most of their work is that it does not go beyond the level of bringing to light historical facts. We are justified in appreciating this approach as a manifestation of scholarly restraint over the insertion of value judgments; and also because of its major contribution in raising the bar in terms of the evidential level of research on modern Japanese history.

Although we accept that we must base our historical work on factual evidence, it is nevertheless incumbent upon us to consider the question of how fact-based historiography became entangled with the problem of the Japanese people’s war responsibility. This goes beyond the scope of this paper, but I should still like to call attention to the fact that, though the positivists may not loudly be proclaiming pre-war Japan’s war responsibility, nevertheless this does not equate with denying pre-war Japan’s aggressive nature.

Be that as it may, we can say that, beginning from the 1980s, a decade that also witnessed the collapse of the Cold War structure, the ideological era had passed. The current state of Japan’s academic world is one in which all the scholars on modern Japan’s history share the same goal of undertaking fact-based historical research in order to reveal the past. Given that research on modern Japan is focused on questions that are closely connected with the present, it cannot avoid being political to some extent. Research in the field of modern Japan following the surrender of Japan is no exception. We recognise that
it has taken over fifty years, after the end of the war, to reach this stage of fact-based study.

Itô, the leader of this fact-based research school, had this to say about the shift in research methodology:

A great transformation in the character of research on modern Japan has been underway over the past decade. One impetus for this is the continuous and eye-catching changes in the amount and nature of documents now available, be they be on modern Japan, or the pre-war Shōwa era, and certainly on the post-surrender years. So much is this so that it may be said to be epoch-making, in terms of the richness and variety of documentary sources. Fully assimilating and utilizing these sources can, moreover, now be held to be indispensable prerequisites for research. In this way, important historical issues that up to now could not be explained merely by theory, can now be clarified. Another impetus for the transformation is the liberation of many scholars from the bonds of "Grand Theory", so that they may conduct research from their individual perspectives. This development is leading to attempts to approach modern Japan from a variety of new angles. The variety itself is worthy of attention. It may be that a certain segment of academia may deplore all of this as "the absence of historical theory" or "the segmentation [into miniscule] history". Still, I believe that for the foreseeable future, the continuation of this trend is desirable. The reason for this is, as I see it, that this diversity will give rise to many different attempts to grasp the whole; and from this mutual give-and-take of argumentation will be fashioned a new image of modern Japan.27

Yet, I must reiterate that the research methodology that seeks to explain historical reality will not inevitably lose political flavour or value judgements. The very act of choosing the research subject itself, whether one is a Marxist or not, involves, naturally enough, political ideas or value judgements. Still, it must be pointed out that given that this fact-based positivist approach is conflated with a presumption of scholarly self-restraint, it has the positive feature of minimizing the impact of political tinge and value judgement inherent in all research.

The attempts, themselves, to seek to confirm historical facts, as witnessed by the differences between the Japanese and Chinese scholars over the actual number of victims
of the Rape of Nanking, are extraordinarily difficult. Even granting the difficulty, it is not the least but the most important thing for us to continue our efforts to unearth historical documents and to share them with scholars everywhere. This is because, although a common interpretation of historical events may be difficult, it is possible to share documentation.

If an acceptable historical consciousness should, at the very least, be based upon solid historical fact, how do we authenticate and make clear these historical facts about Japan’s role during the war? Given this minimum requirement, how do we construct a historical consciousness? Furthermore, based upon this kind of historical consciousness and historical facts, how then do we propose to ensure that we share an understanding of our historical construction not only with Japanese, but with others, especially other Asians? The issues that confront the scholars of Japan’s modern history, as before, weigh heavily on them.\(^{28}\)

Given the present state of disagreements among Chinese, Korean, and Japanese scholars on historical interpretations of Japan’s modern history, is it not incumbent upon all, in the first instance, to admit to the existence of these disagreements, and then to engage in scholarly inquiries based on historical documentation?

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un-hoped for by this author to work with him in co-editing *History and Reconciliation*, a publication which came out of that seminar, building on the presentations at it, driven by the desire of both Professor Kosuge Nobuko, of Yamanashi Gakuin, and this author, that the impact of Professor Nishi’s paper should not be limited to that occasion. Furthermore, the undeservedly complimentary comments which he was kind enough to share with the author, after the seminar, fuelled and encouraged subsequent research effort, and I should like to record sincere gratitude to him for this. He too is an academic, in his 80s, who is full of thoughtfulness and kindness towards those following after him. I sincerely wish success to his further activities and good health to both him and his wife for the future.

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**Notes**


5. In recent years instead of Taihei'yō sensō (the Pacific War), some have begun to use Ajia Taihei'yō sensō (the Asia Pacific War) or Ajia · Taihei'yō sensō (the Asia · Pacific War). There is also the argument that to convey the historical essence and scope of the war, Daitōa sensō (the Greater East Asia War) might be appropriate. See: Kisaka Jun’ichiō, Ryūkoku hōgaku, vol. 25, no. 4, March 1993.


7. Eguchi, 'Manshū jihenki’, p. 3.

8. Ibid., p. 314.


15. Locating the Russo-German War in the 'Road to the Pacific War’ narrative has mostly come about through the efforts of researchers working on modern Western history. For example, see: Yoshi Hiroshi, Nichidōkai sangoku domē to nichibei kankei, Nansōsha, 1977.


17. Ito Takashi, 'Shōwa seijishi kenkyū e no ichishikaku' in Shisō, no. 624, June 1976. In this piece Ito for the first time articulated his position that, 'in order to advance historical research on the Shōwa period, it is necessary to liberate ourselves from notions of winning or losing World War II and the associated ideological baggage' (p. 958), and by so stating he cast doubt on the utility of terms such as 'fascism' and 'emperor system'. This provoked quite a storm in academic circles.

18. Ito, Shōwa shoki & 'Shōwa seijishi', passim.

19. Considering pre-war Shōwa history in the context of the longer historical view that includes World War I had previously been done by Maruyama Masao, Zōhōban gendai seiji no shisō to kōdō, Miraisha, 1964.

20. For example, see: Abe Hirozumi, ‘Nihon fuashizumu no kenkyū shikaku’ in Rekishigaku kenkyū, no. 451, December 1977; and Mibu Shirō, ‘Nihon fuashizumu kenkyū ni yosete—benmei shikan hihan—’, in Rekishigaku kenkyū, no. 451, December 1977. In later years, Ito looked back over some of the criticisms of his Theory and published: "Fuashizumu ronsō' sono go', in Kindai

21. For doubts that the Fascist Emperor System Theory ‘was immutable as the standard view’ and was the ‘dominant theory’ in the 1970s, see Abe, *Nihon fuashizumu*, p. 617.

22. In recent years, research on the failure of the Tokyo War Crimes Trial to prosecute the Shôwa emperor has flourished. This may, in part, be because the release of documents and the elapse of fifty years has made possible objectivity on the issue; and also because of the vital documents-based research conducted by Marxist-leaning scholars.

23. Eguchi, *Jûgonen sensôshi*, p. 8. In his piece ‘Manshû jihenki kenkyû no saikentô’, Eguchi incidentally ‘discusses the course’ of his ‘change of view’, according to which until 1976 his work had ‘analysed and depicted events from the position of the Fascist Emperor System Theory’. However, from 1977 we see a different view through pieces such as: *Rekishi kagaku taikei (12) “Nihon fuashizumu”* ron: ‘Tennôsei fuashizumuron kara hanare’, 1978; and 1979’s ‘Nimenteki teikoku shugiron ni yotta’, p. 10.

24. Eguchi, *Jûgonen sensôshi*, p. 8. Eguchi’s position on the Marco Pole Bridge Incident is, "I am not denying the importance of getting at the truth of the shooting, or the question of why the shooting could or could not have broadened into the Incident. Still, the primary issue in the history of the shooting, is to make clear what the Japanese troops did to Chinese soldiers and civilians at the time of the shooting.”


26. Itô, *“Fuashizumu-ronsô sonogo”*, p. 312. Another of Itô’s stances on research is clear from his statement, “it is important to have a comparative view”, op.cit. 320-321.


28. As we draw to the close of this paper, I raise two more points. The first is one which I have not referred to in this paper, which is the heritage of the so-called “Affirmation of the Great East Asia War School”. This is because the members of this school are not professional historians but those outside history academia. I have also touched briefly on the liberal history position, and here, too, the prominent advocate of this position is not a historian but a specialist on education. Therefore, it is necessary to understand the heritage of the “Affirmation of the Great East Asia War School” by means of a different route. In addition, I have also decided not to discuss the "Modernization Theory" proposed in the 1960s by U. S. Ambassador to Japan Edwin O. Reischauer and others, despite its great impact on Japan’s history establishment.

From 1910 when Japan annexed Korea, the Korean peninsula became a Japanese possession and Koreans, "Subjects of Imperial Japan.” In other words, issues related to the Korean peninsula also became domestic problems. My second point is that, on the subject of war in the Shôwa period, we therefore cannot talk about Japan and Korea having fought each other in a war. When examining the modern history of Japan, the Korean problem therefore, at the end of the day, is rather one of colonial domination than of war. We must be prepared to consider Shôwa history from the dual aspects of colonial domination and war, if we are to understand the whole picture. Consequently, going forward, I believe we must expect historians of modern Japanese history to incorporate structurally a pre- and post-war Korea perspective within a wider understanding of
the history of Shôwa Japan. "Asia" of course is not limited to "Korea" and "China" but it will be extremely difficult for us if we do not, at the very least, consider the history of both colonial and post-colonial Korea.

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