

2016

H-Diplo

H-Diplo Article Reviews

No. 582

Published on 15 January 2016

H-Diplo Article Review Editors: Thomas Maddux
and Diane Labrosse

Web and Production Editor: George Fujii

Commissioned for H-Diplo by Thomas Maddux

Masami Kimura. "American Asia Experts, Liberal Internationalism, and the Occupation of Japan: Transcending Cold War Politics and Historiography." *Journal of American-East Asian Relations* 21:3 (2014). DOI: 10.1163/18765610-02103002.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/18765610-02103002>

URL: <http://tiny.cc/AR582>

Review by **Yoneyuki Sugita**, Osaka University

Reexamining the thought of American Asia experts of the 1940s and the early 1950s, Masami Kimura, of the Sophia Initiative for Education and Discovery, presents two important arguments. First, she emphasizes the fundamental agreement among these experts, whereas revisionist scholars of the late 1960s and early 1970s divided them into separate camps: conservatives and progressives; Japan and China specialists; cold warriors and critics (246). Challenging such dichotomies as biased and subjective, Kimura argues instead that "American specialists on Asia, despite differences in political associations and disagreements over specific policies, were essentially modernization theorists and liberal internationalists of various kinds." She maintains that they "were in basic agreement over the desirability of democratization reform for postwar Japan and the need for the United States to build and protect a liberal order in Asia serving its interests" (248). By focusing on the shared assumptions—the common ideology—of American Asia experts in the postwar period, Kimura makes a significant contribution to scholarship on the Allied occupation of Japan.

This first argument leads Kimura to a second important assertion. The continuous criticism of the Allied occupation policies leveled by the American Asia experts was, she writes, "an attempt to force the kind of democracy that they wanted upon the Japanese" (277). In other words, "they held on to liberal internationalist ideology and unintentionally endorsed U.S. intervention in a foreign nation" (246). These American Asia experts unknowingly supported American imperialism. Kimura's argument is provocative; however, it is neither new nor original. Instead she adapts one of the main theses of *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy* by William Appleman Williams (1959).¹ Americans are not evil, Williams suggests, but genuinely believe that if foreign countries were to imitate America, they would be more prosperous. American

¹ William Appleman Williams, *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy* (Wenatchee, WA: World Pub. Co., 1959).

intervention was thus an expression of good will, an attempt to help these ‘backward’ people see the light, so to speak.

Yet questions arise. Although Kimura claims that she “presents a study of discourse and not policy history,” she also argues that “these Asia experts in the United States ... shaped, directly or indirectly, U.S. postwar policy for Japan during World War II and the early Cold War years” (247). Discourse is, in fact, impossible to separate from policy. Kimura focuses on the discourse because she presumes that these American Asia experts were critically important, and that their expertise and analyses actually affected and shaped U.S. policies toward Japan during the occupation. But this assertion goes undocumented and so remains unproven. Indeed, Washington made crucial decisions without the input of American Asia experts. For example, the Joint Staff Planners, a principal planning agency serving the Joint Chiefs of Staff, began considering Japan’s rearmament as early as 1946 in preparation for a presumed Soviet attack against Japan.² The Policy Planning Staff in the State Department and the War Department made a critical contribution to formulating NSC13/2, an important document that marked a turning point in U.S. thoughts about the Allied occupation of Japan. The National Advisory Council on International Monetary Affairs, a council to coordinate the policy making of U.S. government agencies involved in foreign lending, foreign exchange, or foreign monetary policy,³ pushed the Truman administration to implement the Dodge Line, a balanced-budget policy that halted Japanese inflation and set a single foreign exchange rate that linked the Japanese economy with the world economy. American Asia experts provided expertise, information, analyses, and recommendations, but it remains unclear just how much influence they had in formulating important policy decisions at critical junctures. Their opinions were sometimes heeded, but just as often were ignored or rejected.

In addition, despite emphasizing the basic terms of agreement among American Asia experts, Kimura argues that they differed in their opinions concerning “the strategic value of Japan and China as useful U.S. partners in the management of the postwar Asia-Pacific region” (263). Here the split seen long ago by scholars in the 1960s and 1970s seems to hold true: The Japan specialists considered Japan to be a stabilizing force; the China specialists regarded China as the central power in the region. Yet what the United States learned from the Asia-Pacific War was that it should not tolerate a situation in which any single nation could dominate the region. Hence Washington developed what I call a “divided-core strategy,” in which a balance of power was maintained by dividing the influence of China and Japan in order to avoid either power becoming preeminent.⁴ Each country had its own role: China was to be the political and military core of Asia, while Japan was to be its economic center. Consequently, the United States attempted to transform the

² Futoshi Shibayama, *Nihon Saigunbi eno Michi-1945-1954nen* [Toward Japan’s Rearmament, 1945-1954] (Kyoto: Minerva Shobo, 2010), 7.

³ The NAC consisted of representatives from the State, Army, Commerce, and Treasury Departments, as well as from the Federal Reserve Board. The NAC had the authority to examine and approve all foreign aid budget requests after the implementation of the Marshall Plan.

⁴ See Yoneyuki Sugita, *Pitfall or Panacea The Irony of US Power in Occupied Japan, 1945-1952* (New York & London: Routledge, 2003), 3.

H-Diplo Article Review

Kuomintang-led one-party dictatorship in China into a participatory coalition government and to restore Japan as a multilateral, liberal capitalist world economy.

These reservations aside, “American Asia Experts, Liberal Internationalism, and the Occupation of Japan Transcending Cold War Politics and Historiography” is a thought-provoking and compelling article. That it prompts nearly as many questions as it purports to answer reveals how much more there remains to discover and debate about U.S.-Japan relations and the Allied occupation of Japan.

Yoneyuki Sugita is Professor of History at Osaka University. He received his Ph.D. at University of Wisconsin-Madison in 1999. He is the editor and contributor of *Japan Viewed from Interdisciplinary Perspectives: History and Prospects* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, forthcoming) and *Toward a More Amicable Asia-Pacific Region* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, forthcoming). He is also a contributor of *Demilitarization in the Contemporary World* edited by Peter N. Stearns (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2013) and the author of *Pitfall or Panacea: The Irony of U.S. Power in Occupied Japan, 1945-1952* (New York & London: Routledge, 2003).

© 2016 The Authors

[Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 3.0 United States License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/)