Transpacific Exceptionalism: The Making of Japan-US Militarist Interimperiality

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Abstract

This essay shows how Japan and the United States, the two competing imperial powers during the Asia Pacific War, preserved, modified, and reinforced both empires' exceptionalist ideologies, building a new interimperial hegemony across the Asia Pacific. The American occupation forces' "demilitarize and democratize" policy soon morphed into an effort to sanction Japan to refashion and redefine its militarism, racism, and (neo)colonialism to enable these imperialist apparatuses to persist in the decolonizing Cold War world. American exceptionalism and Japanese exceptionalism, I argue, have mutually constituted and dialectically reproduced one another throughout the long Cold War era. I term this interimperial complicity "transpacific exceptionalism," which enables us to address how such nationalistic myths can converge and operate complicitly in the international political arena.

The Making of Japan-US Militarist Interimperiality

"Japan-U.S. ties are now closer and deeper than ever in our history," Japanese prime minister Koizumi Junichirō observed in New York City on September 10, 2002. "Our history" began when US Commodore Matthew Perry landed on Japan one hundred fifty years ago, he added, and this friendship was reaching its culmination during the Bush-Koizumi era. Indeed, Koizumi strove to build a personal relationship with this Republican president, and he deemed their friendship as representing "the larger relationship between our two countries." He went on to dramatize the culmination during his own cabinet as a historical inevitability:

> My home town of Yokosuka, where Commodore Perry landed, has the largest U.S. naval installation in Asia, and is in my electoral district. At times, some of Yokosuka's citizens have protested the presence of the base. I have consistently stressed to the Japanese people that our relationship with the United States is important to Japan's national interests and to those of the international community. Our two countries, which fought a war only half a century ago, have built an exemplary alliance, based on the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty. The alliance today is the cornerstone for the peace and prosperity of not only the Asia Pacific region but the entire world.[1]

When Perry forced the East Asian archipelago that had been secluded for two hundred years to open for trade in 1853, he did so by means of four "black ships"—two frigates and two sloops-of-war—floating on Edo Bay with their cannons ready to fire. "Our history" thus began with "gunboat diplomacy" and, after the total war in the twentieth century, has persisted in the form of military bases and the upholding of the spirit of the Security Treaty.[2] The day Koizumi gave his speech in New York City, September 10, was the day before the one-year anniversary of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, and it was against this background that he referred to the "peace and prosperity" of the "entire world." His cabinet "enacted legislation that allowed us to dispatch Japanese self-defense planes for airlift support and self-defense ships to refuel U.S. and U.K. vessels," Koizumi boasted; he wanted to highlight how Japan was playing an important role in Bush's global War on Terror. Since the American military forces defeated and demilitarized the Japanese Empire during and after the Asia Pacific War,[3] Japan, often under US political pressure, has constantly rearmed itself to the point of ranking among the greatest military forces in the world, and Koizumi took further significant steps toward Japan's potential warmaking in coordination with the belligerent US president's global security state. "Our history" has always been a history of militarism and warfare, and this transpacific connection, since the end of the Asia Pacific War at least, has established an interimperial hegemony across "not only the Asia Pacific region but the entire world" in the name of "peace and prosperity."

This essay traces the origins of how Japan and the United States, the two dominant competing imperial powers during the Asia Pacific War, quickly reconciled with each other during the early postwar period—or during and even before the war—and how they preserved, modified, and reinforced their respective empires' exceptionalist ideologies, building a new interimperial hegemony across Asia and the Pacific. The "demilitarize and democratize" policy of the American occupation forces soon transformed into an effort to "sanction" Japan to refashion and redefine its militarism, feudalism, racism, and (neo)colonialism in a way as to enable these imperialist appara-

tuses to persist in the decolonizing Cold War world and beyond. American exceptionalism and Japanese exceptionalism, I argue, have mutually constituted and dialectically reproduced one another throughout the long Cold War era. I term this interimperial complicity "transpacific exceptionalism." Exceptionalism, a mythic belief in the exceptional status of one's own country in the world, is often deployed to justify violence against others under the banner of, for instance, "Manifest Destiny" or the creation of a "Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere."

Origins of Japan-US Transpacific Interimperiality

When Imperial Japan accepted unconditional surrender on August 14, 1945, the Truman administration appointed US General Douglas MacArthur as Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers (SCAP), thereby leaving the occupation policy almost entirely to the soldier. MacArthur's task was to "democratize and demilitarize" a totalitarian empire that, throughout what Imperial Japan called the Great East Asian War (*daitōa sensō*), invaded and ravaged major parts of East Asia, Southeast Asia, and the Pacific Islands. Defeating fascism both in the European and Pacific theaters, the United States was able to proudly declare that it had fought a "good" and "just" war, and the remaking of Japan had a performative significance for a victorious country that was beginning to proclaim itself the leader of a peaceful, liberal postwar world. The United States, in rebuilding an archipelago that it had just obliterated with firebombs and two atomic bombs, sought to demonstrate to the world that American military power had a democratizing, demilitarizing, and peacemaking effect—they had to tell a compelling story. On September 27, Hirohito paid his first visit to MacArthur at the general's personal residence in Akasaka, Tokyo, the site of the US Ambassador's official residence. Though MacArthur's advisors urged him to summon Hirohito "as a show of power," as MacArthur reminisces in his memoir, he "brushed the suggestions aside" because that would "outrage the feelings of the Japanese people and make a martyr of the emperor in their eyes."[4] Hirohito had indeed requested an interview long before, and he inaugurated the historical meeting as follows:

> "I come to you, General MacArthur, to offer myself to the judgment of the powers you represent as the one to bear sole responsibility for every political and military decision made and action taken by my people in the conduct of war." A tremendous impression swept me. This courageous assumption of a responsibility implicit with death, a responsibility clearly belied by facts of which I was fully aware, moved me to the very marrow of my bones. He was an Emperor by inherent birth, but in that instant I knew I faced the First Gentleman of Japan in his own right.[5]

While MacArthur's memoir is notorious for brimming with hyperboles, this oft-quoted passage does encapsulate well what transpired in the aftermath of the war: The United States denied the emperor's responsibility for war crimes. Hirohito was supposedly ready to take "sole responsibility for every political and military decision," yet such a responsibility "clearly belied" what MacArthur knew. The "First Gentleman of Japan" was so "courageous" that he dared to shoulder all responsibility for what he himself had not done. SCAP did not *absolve* the emperor of culpability or reduce punishment; they *denied* it outright. In so doing, "the Americans came close to turning the entire issue of 'war responsibility' into a joke," John Dower writes in *Embracing Defeat*.[6] "If the man in whose name imperial Japan had conducted foreign and military policy for twenty years was not held accountable for the initiation or conduct of the war, why should anyone expect ordinary people to dwell on such matters, or to think seriously about their own personal responsibility?"[7] In disavowing Hirohiro's war responsibility, the United States denied Japan's war responsibility. "Much that lies at the heart of contemporary Japanese society … derives from the complexity of the interplay between the victors and the vanquished."[8]

What MacArthur dramatized as an electric historical moment ("A tremendous impression swept me") had in fact already been arranged prior to Hirohito's visit. Japanese policymakers, including Hirohito, knew that the imperial throne would remain intact, albeit with some alterations. Upon accepting the Potsdam Declaration and "unconditional surrender" on August 15, 1945, they strove to protect what Imperial Japan called *kokutai* (a phrase composed of two Chinese characters: nation国 and body体), or the "national polity" of Japan, that is, the emperor system (*tennōsei*). On the following day, Hirohito announced to his subjects on radio (*Gyokuon hōsō*, or the "Jewel Voice" broadcast) that Japan had accepted the Allied forces' demands yet managed to "preserve the national polity" (*kokutai o goji shiete*). If Japan succeeded to "protect" its kokutai, however, it did not do so from the American occupation forces; SCAP and Japan together defended it from other Allied powers and some policymakers in Washington.[9] Americans had few human resources who understood the Japanese language or were well-versed in Japanese history and culture. With a view to learning how to defeat and effectively govern "exotic" regions like Japan, the US government established such institutions as the Office of Strategic Services—a forerunner of the Central Intelligence Agency and an origin of the Cold War "area studies" enterprise—with the anthropologist Ruth Benedict's *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword: Patterns of Japanese Culture* (1946)[10] as one of its most well-known products. As early as 1942, the prominent Japanologist and ambassador to Japan Edwin O. Reischauer wrote a memorandum, under the title of "Faculty Instructor in Far Eastern Languages" at Harvard University, recommending maintaining the emperor for the sake of the United States. "Japan itself has created the best possible puppet for our purposes," Reischauer states, "a puppet who not only could be won over to our side but who would carry with him a tremendous weight of authority."[11] He characterized Hirohito as a puppet of a puppet state. To this end, American policymakers should not

"allow him [Hirohito] to be portrayed to the American people as the counterpart of Hitler and Mussolini."[12] When MacArthur observed that Hirohito was "the First Gentleman of Japan in his own right," he was already following Reischauer's proposed script.

Yet the Hirohito-MacArthur connection was no more than a renewal of what Koizumi called "our history," or Japan-US militarist friendship. Though Koizumi referred to Perry's landing at Yokosuka as the origin of the friendship, it was Theodore Roosevelt who first explicitly embodied and laid the groundwork for postwar Japan-US transpacific relationality in the early nineteenth century. During and after the Russo-Japanese War, he served as an exceptionally talented negotiator between Russia and Japan. Through the US ambassador in St. Petersburg, George von Lengerke Meyer, Roosevelt successfully convinced the tsar to seek peace, thereby approving Japan's dominion over Manchuria, Korea, and the southern part of Sakhalin island.[13] With the Portsmouth Treaty of 1905, the United States won the war together in tandem with Japan; the former established its position as a self-proclaimed neutral negotiator in the world, while the latter emerged as a new hegemon throughout East Asia. As Kathleen Dalton documents in *Teddy Roosevelt*, as an admirer of medieval Europe and its legends of chivalry, Roosevelt was "drawn to the intertwined Japanese traditions of service, honor, and high principle, and admired the classic Japanese samurai story," and wanted Japan, not China, to take over Manchuria.[14] While persuading Roosevelt, the Japanese diplomat Kaneko Kentarō played a crucial role; he characterized the cause of the Russo-Japanese War as a sublimation of Perry's spirit (*monko kaihō*), far from a manifestation of imperialistic ambition.[15] When bidding farewell to the president after the Portsmouth Treaty, Kaneko demonstrated Japan's gratitude to the United States by presenting a samurai sword for the president while Roosevelt in turn offered a bearskin for Emperor Hirohito.[16] Despite the stark contrast between MacArthur, who refused to learn the Japanese language, and Roosevelt, who was perhaps one of the earliest and first conspicuous examples of Japanophilia, they both enthusiastically supported the Japanese masculinist, militarist culture and history that empowered and sustained prewar, wartime, and postwar Japanese imperialist ideologies.

In the wake of the Asia Pacific War, most Japanese were infatuated with the United States and the charismatic figure of MacArthur. Indeed, American troops were surprised to find themselves welcomed as if they were the liberators of Japan.[17] Japanese people knew that the presence of the Americans signaled the end of the war, devastation, and starvation. Furthermore, the American supergovernment, in subordinating yet preserving the emperor system and the Japanese conservative government operated by conservative policymakers (and military personnel), reincarnated the Japanese wartime kokutai as a part of the new Japan-US interimperial hegemony. In theorizing the idea of interimperiality, Laura Doyle highlights the fact that "each empire's powers of control arise and develop in relation to other empires and polities."[18] The theory of interimperiality begins, she writes, "from the fact that

different empires, of different sizes and means, centered in different yet linked geographical locations, form in dialectical relations: their differences and divergent histories as well as their linkages, alliances, and similarities shape their coformations."[19] The United States did defeat and occupy Japan, and the resulting interimperial relationality was and has always been an asymmetric one; yet this asymmetricity does not suggest a simple neocolonial domination in which the United States and Japan serve as a colonizing victimizer and a colonized victim, respectively. To borrow Kuan-hsing Chen's apt expression, Japan became a "subimperial" hegemony.[20] Japan needed the United States, and vice versa; the Japan-US interimperial connection has been a win-win partnership. Japanese kokutai became more powerful and durable not *despite of* but *because of* its subordination. In the words of Shirai Satoshi, the kokutai was resurrected as the "convergence of the Chrysanthemum [imperial family's symbol] and Stars and Stripes."[21] When it confronted a crisis at the end of the Cold War, and even when Prime Minister Abe Shinzō declared his cabinet's agenda to be a "departure from the post-war regimes"[22] in 2007, postwar Japanese policymakers from Yoshida Shigeru to Koizumi have desperately clung to this interimperiality well into the twenty-first century.

American Exceptionalism, Japanese Exceptionalism

In 1993, Amy Kaplan and Donald Pease coedited a landmark volume of American studies, *Cultures of United States Imperialism*.[23] Declaring its aim to reveal and critique the "denial of empire" as not only structuring US politics but also lying at the heart of the discipline of American studies, they inaugurated what came to be called transnational American studies. A critique of American empire, Kaplan writes, must be approached from "two historically different yet interrelated definitions of empire," that is, "as external subjugation of colonies versus internal national consolidation."[24] While it is common to trace the origins of American exceptionalist discourse back to John Winthrop's 1630 sermon "A Model of Christian Charity," transnational American studies focuses on the critique of the Cold War reformation of this ideology.[25] "Throughout the Cold War era," according to Pease, "American studies research, teaching, and publication proved indispensable to the state by constructing a nationalist and, ultimately, an imperialist discourse out of the exceptionalist norms."[26] American exceptionalism is a form of national self-characterization by means of myths. That American exceptionalism is a myth means that it is a form of narrativization of history, and this is why many exceptionalist scholars and the leading critics thereof are trained as literary scholars.[27] Exceptionalist discourses persuade people into believing their version of historiography, and critics describe how to understand and remember histories otherwise—they produce counternarratives and counterhistories. "American exceptionalism operates less like a collection of discrete, potentially falsifiable descriptions of American society," Pease writes, "than as a fantasy through which U.S. citizens bring these contradictory political and cultural descriptions into correlation with one

another through the desires that make them meaningful."[28] It is a protean amalgamation of mythic beliefs, and precisely because of such fluidity that it has always served as a tool to explain away violent historical events—Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japanese internment camps, the Korean War, Operation Wetback, the Vietnam War, the Iraq War, and so on—as "exceptions" to the mythic national self-image.

Japan also had a solid grasp of how crucial cultural narratives were to preserving its prewar and wartime ideologies. Koizumi, in the same 2002 speech, identified his favorite Faubion Bowers as a key figure in establishing the groundwork for the transpacific alliance that emerged during the occupation era. A prominent Japanese theater scholar, Bowers was chosen by MacArthur as an Assistant Military Secretary to the Commander-in-Chief and served as an interpreter at the initial meeting between MacArthur and Hirohito. Going against the Civil Information and Education Section and the Civil Censorship Detachment of SCAP, Bowers, with his "profound understanding of Japanese culture" in Koizumi's words, insisted on not prohibiting Kabuki performances.[29] These occupation authorities initially decided to ban the traditional Japanese theatrical performances because some plays were quite "feudalistic and undemocratic," Koizumi admitted, but "Kabuki is an art rooted in Japanese culture."[30] Upon hearing about this policy, Bowers recounts, he "was determined to get MacArthur to overrule that absurd ruling made arbitrarily by some snot-nosed underlings."[31] Thanks to Bowers, the ban was eventually lifted. His "feat," Koizumi celebrated, "symbolizes the open-mindedness and flexibility of American people to recognize cultural diversity."[32] The United States did temporarily demilitarize and democratize Japanese wartime ideologies on the surface for a brief moment, but some ideologies fundamental to Imperial Japan were preserved and sustained in cultural form. Not only was Japanese wartime ideology preserved *in* culture; the transpacific alliance facilitated their survival *as* culture. International conflicts and political negotiations, as Akira Iriye writes in his *Power and Culture*, should be viewed as not just an interpower but intercultural phenomenon as well.[33] As Fredric Jameson's *The Political Unconscious* has taught us, "cultural artifacts" are always "socially symbolic acts."[34] Even when they seem apolitical, politics is embedded in every cultural production—both Kabuki and Koizumi are telling stories, and telling a story is a political act.

In the case of Imperial Japan, its mythic ideologies, which I propose to term Japanese exceptionalism, were officially created and systematically indoctrinated by the government. *Kokutai no hongi* (*The Fundamentals of National Polity*, 1937) and *Shinmin no michi* (*The Way of Subjects*, 1941),[35] both published by the Bureau of Thought Control of the Ministry of Education, were the two most definitive textbooks that defined and inculcated what the Japanese race (*Yamato minzoku*) was, what the Japanese people must do and believe, and how their kokutai was unique and superior to any other form of government. The government made these texts mandatory readings for teachers and students, and the former sold approximately two million copies (the Japanese population was about 75 million at that time). The first chapter

of *Kokutai* offers close readings of *Kojiki* ("Records of Ancient Matters," 712) and *Nihon-shoki* ("Japanese Chronicles," 720), while taking their biblical and magical myths of Japan's foundation since *Amaterasu Ōmikami* (Heavenly-Shining-Great-August-Deity) as historical facts; "the Emperor is a deity incarnate who rules our country in unison with the august Will of the Imperial Ancestors."[36] At the outset, the kokutai is defined in unmistakably exceptionalist language:

> The unbroken line of Emperors, receiving the Oracle of the Founder of the Nation, reign eternally over the Japanese Empire. This is our eternal and immutable national entity [kokutai]. Thus, founded on this great principle, all the people, united as one great family nation in heart and obeying the Imperial Will, enhance indeed the beautiful virtues of loyalty and filial piety. This is the glory of our national entity.... Our country, having begun with the reality of such an eternal and profound beginning, grows and prospers together with heaven and earth without end, and manifests forth an "imposing ceremony," the like of which is indeed not seen among other nations.[37]

Imperial Japan glorified the idea of the "family state" (*kazoku kokka kan*) as an alternative to Western individualism that, in their view, had now confronted its limit as seen in the devastation in the wake of the First World War. "The Emperor differs from the sovereigns of foreign countries, is not a ruler set up by reason of necessity for the administration of a country, nor is he a sovereign chosen and settled upon by the subjects on grounds of intelligence or virtues," according to *Kokutai*; "a country such as ours which, since its founding, has seen a Way [michi] 'naturally' one in essence with nature and man united as one, and which thereby has prospered all the more, cannot find its counterpart among foreign countries."[38] The land of gods, the divine emperor, and its subjects have always been "one" since, according to *Nihon Shoki*, the first emperor Jimmu—a name meaning "war god"—ascended on February 11, 660 BC and founded the nation of Japan. In the name of "family," *Kokutai* justifies Japan's feudalistic and totalitarian governance of its subjects as well as the endless expansion of the realm of "family"—the conceptualization of the whole Asia with Japan as "leading race (*shidō minzoku*)" and patriarch.[39] At the time of publication, in 1937, Japan had already invaded Taiwan, Korea, and northeast China (Manchuria) one by one, expanding its colonies.

Shinmin no michi, published half a year before the Pearl Harbor attack, expresses Japan's imperial ambitions in a much more belligerent and grandiose language. The scale of the family nation has expanded far beyond Asia (*hakkō ichiu*: all eight corners of the world under a single roof), and "world reformation" (*sekai ishin*) is now at the heart of Japan's divine mission. In the introduction, what the Japanese still call the Manuchurian "Incident" of 1931, by all means a war of aggression in

northeastern China, is characterized as the "creation of a moral world, the first step of new world order." It was the "manifestation of grand and sublime spirit of our empire and the compelling activation of our national vitality based on world-historical destiny (*sekaishi teki shimei*)."[40] Though Euro-Americans claimed their imperialism to be standing for humanitarianism, *Shinmin* argues, it was "nothing other than a means to justify their selfish positions" that culminated in World War I; now Japan is said to be obligated to liberate and represent—i.e., invade and colonize—the whole of Asia against the greed of Western imperialism.[41] Thus Japan's historical "obligation" is to actualize "eternal peace" in the world, which, its logic goes, necessitates total war: "As the leader of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere and, fundamentally, in view of rebuilding the world in a moral manner, our Empire must complete the total war regime as soon as possible, thereby striving to accomplish our national policies."[42] Japanese subjects—including Koreans, Taiwanese, Chinese, and many others—were expected to devote themselves to this total war regime, which was none other than the way of subjects. Japan was waging holy wars in order to make peace, according to its story, and this was Japan's sacred obligation as a leader of the world. Japanese rhetoric and narrative in justifying Japan's violence thus displayed an uncanny resemblance to those of Cold War America. From the Meiji Restoration of 1868 through the mid-twentieth century, Japan invented and propagated its own exceptionalist narratives and ideologies as a national project. Japan believed in its exceptionality and it successfully established Japanese exceptionalism.

Just as Pease described the fantasy of American exceptionalism as not "a mystification but the dominant structure of desire out of which U.S. citizens imagined their national identity,"[43] Japanese political scientist Maruyama Masao, in his acclaimed 1946 essay, "The Logic and Psychology of Ultranationalism," diagnosed Japanese wartime ideology as follows: "It is not merely the external system of coercion that determined the low level of political consciousness we find today in Japan. Rather, the key factor is the all-pervasive psychological coercion, which has forced the behavior of our people into a particular channel."[44] Japanese exceptionalism was not a problem of willful political affiliation; it represented a nonpolitical, given precondition to Japanese subjects, as well as structurally determined the ways in which people were to think, feel, and behave. In other words, it regulated Japanese subjects' unconscious. In 1946, Maruyama observed that Japanese "ultra-nationalism succeeded in spreading a many-layered, though invisible, net over the Japanese people, and even today they have not really freed themselves from its hold."[45] In her 1985 work, Carol Gluck also wrote that "[n]ot only did ideological orthodoxy help ultranationalism and militarism to prevail, but, like the war itself, it represents a blight on Japan's modern experience from which the nation has not fully recovered, even today."[46] Ideology, as Gluck repeatedly emphasizes in her *Japan's Modern Myths*, would never exhibit a "cohesive, purposive, and effective form" since it is "less thing than process."[47] Just as American exceptionalism has persisted precisely because of its contradictory and flexible nature—"When one version of

American exceptionalism no longer suited extant geopolitical demands, policymakers reconfigured its elements to address the change in geopolitical circumstances"[48]—Japanese exceptionalism survived the end of the war by transforming itself, a transformation that postwar Japan and the United States together designed and accomplished. Aligning itself with Cold War America's ideologies, Japanese exceptionalism not only survived; it evolved and thrived.

The postwar remaking of Japanese exceptionalism began with Hirohito's *Gyokuon hōsō* broadcast on August 15, 1945. In explaining *shūsen*—the "end of the war" and not defeat or surrender[49]—to its subjects, who had never even imagined hearing the emperor's august voice and were barely able to understand his esoteric language and anyways were often unable to catch it emanating from shoddy radios anyway, Hirohito referred to "a new and most cruel bomb" that took "the toll of many innocent lives."[50] It was the enemy's cruelty that compelled him to resort to an "extraordinary measure,"[51] meaning unconditional surrender, and he decided to do so not only for the sake of his subjects but for the cause of what *Shinmin* described as world-historical obligation. "Should we continue to fight," he went on, "it would not only result in an ultimate collapse and obliteration of the Japanese nation, but it would also lead to the total extinction of human civilization."[52] By means of ending the war, he was protecting the entire world from evil powers—much as the United States justified (and continues to do) its usage of atomic bombs as necessary for world peace. Not only did Hirohito characterize Japan as a victim rather than a perpetrator of the Asia Pacific War, his phrase "my vital organs are torn asunder" (*gonai tame ni saku*), as Dower observes, also portrays "himself as the embodiment of the nation's suffering, its ultimate victim, transforming the sacrifices of his people into his own agony with a classical turn of phrase."[53] His human (or divine) *body* (身体) and the Japanese national body *kokutai* (国体) were the one and the same. It had suffered a fatal wound but could rebuild itself soon—he was thus able to close his speech as follows: "Let the entire nation continue as one family from generation to generation, ever firm in its faith of the imperishableness of its divine land."[54] Japan underwent significant shifts at the end of the war, but Hirohito's story served to bridge the division and preserve the essence of Imperial Japan that he embodied: Japan's exceptional kokutai.

But the remaking of Japanese exceptionalism was not only accomplished through black-and-white victimology with Japan as *the* innocent victim and the United States as *the* "cruel" victimizer. As Japanese historians such as Ienaga Saburō and Yoshida Yutaka document, postwar Japan and the United States were able to cooperate in quickly forming reconciliation thanks to the ideology of anticommunism. Under the protection of US Major General Charles Andrew Willoughby, also known as "Little Hitler," as Yoshida Yutaka writes, the General Headquarters intelligence section (G-2) earnestly promoted the release of war criminals from Sugamo Prison.[55] Persuading MacArthur and Joseph Berry Keenan, the Chief Prosecutor of the International Military Tribunal for the Far East, Willoughby played the central role in accomplishing the rearmament of Japan under the Yoshida Shigeru cabinet.[56] For the sake of *kokutai*

goji, as Ienaga Saburō writes, the Minister of State Konoe Fumimaro trumpeted the so-called *gunbu sekika ron* or comintern conspiracy theory, a revisionist historical account that the war was caused by the communists in the Japanese military.[57] By setting up communism as a new common enemy, Japan and the United States were able to co-forget their own historical violence and begin to build the postwar transpacific hegemony.

As seen in Reischauer's recommendation, American policymakers joined forces in disassociating the Japanese emperor from the war, even recasting him as a symbol of peace. In July 1944, the Office of Strategic Services noted in an internal report that "the desirability of eliminating the present Emperor is questionable; it is probable that he inclines personally toward the more moderate faction and might prove a useful influence later."[58] Ironically, it was the "cruel bombs" that offered some of the most powerful leverages in this postwar mythmaking process. Both Japan and the United States considered the bombs, as Yoshikuni Igarashi argues, to offer an effective story in recasting Japan and the United States "in terms of a melodrama of rescue and conversion," in which "the United States rescues a good enemy, Hirohito, from the deleterious elements in the enemy country, and the good enemy becomes converted into a representative of U.S. values."[59] MacArthur's dramatization of his first encounter with Hirohito is a salient instance of this recasting process. MacArthur's autobiography, *Reminiscences*, "emphasizes the sense of humiliation born by the emperor, which only enhances the heroic quality of Hirohito's total conversion," Igarashi observes, and this narrative framework was useful and profitable for both Japan and the United States, which was why "the emperor's affinity with American values had to be highlighted."[60] By means of the atomic blasts, the United States not only "saved" Japan and the world but also awoke the pacifist, democratic, and "American" way of thinking long asleep in the depths of Hirohito's mind.[61] With the atomic bombs as its core, Japan and the United States together coconstructed a narrative that obscured Japan's war responsibility by characterizing Japan as a victim, on the one hand, and the United States's cruelty by characterizing the United States as a liberator, on the other. "It was not the destructive power per se but rather the narrative that 'the bomb ended the war' that brought the war to its denouement."[62] Japanese exceptionalism was able to survive thanks to this narrative, which was the beginning of the making of Japan-US transpacific exceptionalism.

Transpacific Exceptionalism

Transpacific studies as an ongoing academic conversation has various origins and historical contexts, and scholars have been trying to define and develop this emerging field since the early 2000s. First, transpacific studies commits itself to overcoming the disciplinary limits inherent in Asian studies, American studies, and Asian American studies. As Janet Hoskins and Viet Thanh Nguyen observe in the introduction to *Transpacific Studies* (2014), "Area studies and American studies are traditionally defined by region,

nation, and people, … and often take those geographical and ethnic boundaries as parameters limiting intellectual inquiry."[63] In the age of the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), which imagines the Asia Pacific region as a space of economic cooperation, Hoskins and Nguyen invite us to envision "the rise of transpacific studies as a different kind of transpacific partnership."[64] To the extent that it aims at crossing disciplinary borders of area studies and ethnic studies, transpacific studies aligns its critical effort with other transborder fields such as transatlantic, diasporic, and global feminism studies,[65] while focusing on the geopolitics in and around the Pacific Ocean. This field is at the same time a critique of the traditional, tacit assumption of American studies that the United States cannot be categorized as an area. According to this view, the state is instead a transcendent entity exempt from being targeted by the political, strategic, and academic gaze, an idea complicit with American exceptionalism ("nation of nations").[66] While aspiring to not simply reproduce another practice of area studies, transpacific studies aims at highlighting how the political, economic, and cultural activities of the United States have been historically entangled with those of Asia and the Pacific. Transpacific studies *transpacificizes* the previous compartmentalized academic assumptions of Asian, American, and Asian American studies that have served to blind us from seeing what is going on before our very eyes.

As Japan had long enjoyed the most hegemonic geopolitical positionality in the Asia Pacific region, scholars with Japanese heritage, including Naoki Sakai, Lisa Yoneyama, Takashi Fujitani, Yuichiro Onishi, and Eiji Oguma, among many others, have produced the most compelling works of transpacific critique.[67] "After the Asia Pacific War," Sakai writes in the introduction to *The Trans-Pacific Imagination*, "the United States inherited Japan's Greater East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere, and East Asia was reorganized in the transition from one imperial nationalism to another." [68] Yet Japan was not "deprived" of its empire, of course: "Occupying the position of satellite state within the configuration outlined by the US policy initiatives, Japan could maintain its neoimperial positioning in relation to its Asian neighbors despite the loss of its empire." [69] Japan and the United States built a mutually profitable and productive alliance in the postwar period. Naming this postwar era the "transwar period," Yoneyama proposes to deploy the transpacific "as an alternative to the Cold War geography, which emerged out of transwar, interimperial, and transnational entanglements."[70] For Yoneyama, transpacific studies is a framework that enables us to "reckon with the myriad instances of violence that the two empires have occluded or made invisible, and hence unredressable."[71]

In critiquing postwar Japan-US interimperiality and its multilateral ramifications throughout the Asia Pacific region, this essay employs the new concept of *transpacific exceptionalism.* The combination of transpacific and exceptionalism might seem oxymoronic because exceptionalism, in general, is a form of nationalism. In the case of postwar Japan, however, nationalism can no longer be understood as a domestic phenomenon; it has been reworked, cogoverned, and sustained by the United States. Sakai theorizes this neocolonial interdependency as *transpacific complicity*. "Japanese

uniqueness or particularism is continually reproduced cofiguratively in its transferential relation to U.S. universalism."[72] He continues:

> The most ironic and interesting aspect of the postwar relationship between the United States and Japan can perhaps be found in the fact that the United States effectively continued to dominate Japan by endowing the Japanese with the grounds for their nationalism. It is through the apparent sense of national uniqueness and cultural distinctiveness that people in Japan were subordinated to U.S. hegemony in East Asia.[73]

It is not simply that Japanese nationalism today is dependent on the United States; Japanese nationalism is *a part* of Japanese people's belief in the exceptional status of the United States, which welcomes the American neocolonial subordination of East Asia, including Japan itself. And it is *only* within this somewhat paradoxical "nationalist" belief system that Japan can sustain its postwar exceptional status within the Asia Pacific—or so Japanese people are taught to believe. "They perversely welcome United States' domination and tend to find their own desires within the scenario of Pax Americana."[74] And this is why, as Sakai argues, Japanese conservative policymakers will never stop visiting the Yasukuni Shrine; for them, it is a political gesture signaling their willingness to prioritize the United States over (South) Korea or China.[75] Every time they worship the war dead enshrined in Yasukuni, they are confirming transpacific exceptionalism to be alive and well enough to negate Japanese and American historical and ongoing violence.

Though the Japan-US relationship is far from symmetrical, transpacific exceptionalism was not made and has not been maintained solely through the American unilateral influence over and suppression of Japan. MacArthur described the Japanese as having been made "abject slaves" to a "mythological fiction,"[76] or what I call Japanese exceptionalism. I agree, but the same could be said of Americans. And both Japanese and Americans began to refashion each other's "mythological fiction" together before, during, and after the Asia Pacific War. Since then, Koizumi's "our history" has always been a comythmaking process aimed at making and remaking the Japan-US militarist interimperiality. What I seek to highlight in terms of transpacific exceptionalism is not Japanese and American peoples' identification with the transpacific; this is an analytical framework through which to disentangle the postwar transpacification of the legacies of the Asia Pacific War and to critique the historical, geopolitical, and discursive conditions that have rendered those violent legacies nonaddressable and nonredressable.

The so-called comfort women issue, for instance, can no longer be understood within the exclusive bilateral scope of Japan and South Korea because, throughout the Cold War era, the United States has consistently been complicit in absolving Japan of

its war crimes and silencing Asian female victims.[77] In the case of the comfort women issue, moreover, the binary between Korean victims versus Japan-US perpetrators is no longer viable. We must also acknowledge the patriarchal value system of Korea, which has characterized comfort women in terms of national shame, and the current weaponization of the comfort women issue (and former comfort women themselves) in South Korea as an instrument of nationalism. While Park Yuha rightly argues in her *Teikoku no ianfu* (*Comfort Women of the Empire*) that the comfort women issue must be framed not as national but as imperial violence,[78] the title would be better translated as "Comfort Women of the Empires" because the issue has always been an interimperial, transpacific phenomenon. Ethnonational perspectives, often based on ethnonationalized binaries of victimology between *the* victim and *the* victimizer, simplify and obscure a larger structure that is producing and normalizing violence; in this case, interimperial and neocolonial violence against (Asian) women sustained by transpacific exceptionalism. A transpacific perspective is necessary to adequately comprehend the historicity and ongoing impact of this harrowing legacy of the Asia Pacific War.

When it inherited (or neocolonized) the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere, the United States also took over wartime Japan's strategy regarding racial politics, which became a basis for the postwar American racemaking enterprise. "As white supremacy gradually became residual after World War II," Jodi Melamed writes, "it was replaced by a formally antiracist, liberal capitalist modernity" and "it extended racialization procedures beyond color lines."[79] In the postwar era, racism was rendered colorblind and gradually integrated into the logic of ethnonational multiculturalism. This shift from exclusive to inclusive, or from "vulgar" to "polite," racism, as Takashi Fujitani argues, was something that the logic of Imperial Japan's total war regime demanded and the United States then sought to learn from its soon-to-be transpacific partner.[80] When Japan mobilized its colonial subjects in Korea, Taiwan, and elsewhere for the war while at the same time criticizing Western imperialism, it sought to prohibit intra-Asian racism, castigated Euro-American colonialism as racial violence, and promoted "the government of self-government."[81] Even in *Shinmin*, Japanese policymakers declared their support for "causing all the nations to occupy their respective positions" (*banpō o shite ono ono sono tokoro o eshimeru*), yet of course vis-à-vis "the suzerain of all the nations," Japan.[82] After the war, this hierarchy was modified and preserved with the United States on top: "Japan and its people were to be for the United States what the nominally independent Manchukuo and its multiethnic people had earlier been for Japan."[83] Transpacific exceptionalism is a colorblind racial structure that both subsumes American white global supremacism and Japanese intra-Asian supremacism.

What the framework of transpacific exceptionalism tells us goes beyond the postwar Japan-US relationship. Exceptionalism, according to a traditional understanding, is a form of nationalism, which presupposes the idea of the nation-state. Within this modern paradigm, when two exceptionalisms meet, they are destined to collide,

as did Imperial Japan and American Empire. But two or more exceptionalisms or nationalisms can converge and coprosper, and this is why we need a transnational perspective in addressing and redressing violence that has long been analyzed through nationalized frameworks (e.g., the comfort women issue). Interimperiality emerges from the interwoven histories and mythmaking projects that reshape and repurpose nationalist narratives. Far from an isolated historical artifact, these structures continue to govern how militarism, empire, and racial politics intersect across the Pacific and elsewhere, underscoring the importance of a transnational lens in unmasking and challenging the ongoing elements of warmaking, racemaking, and empiremaking.

Notes

[1] Koizumi Junichiro, "Japan-U.S. Alliance in the 21st Century: Three Challenges," *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan*, September 10, 2002, https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/n-america/us/alliance.html

[2] See Walter LaFeber, *The Clash: U.S. Japanese Relations throughout History* (W. W. Norton, 1997); Perry and President Millard Filmore had sent letters to Japan since July 14, 1853. See "President Fillmore's Letter to the Emperor of Japan, Delivered July 14, 1853," *Visualizing Cultures*, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2010, https://visualizingcultures.mit.edu/black_ships_and_samurai/presletter.html

[3] There are several denominations for the war. The wartime Japanese version was The Great East Asian War, which was banned by the US occupation forces because of its imperialist framing. The US alternative was the Pacific War, as Americans have long been calling it. This is an Americanized denomination that divides World War II into the European and the Pacific theaters. The problem of the nomenclature Pacific War is that it disregards Asia as a battlefield, which is complicit with American disavowal of Asian victimhood under Japanese colonialism. Thus, scholars now tend to use the term Asia Pacific War. See Takashi Fujitani, Geoffrey M. White, and Lisa Yoneyama, eds., *Perilous Memories: The Asia-Pacific War(s)* (Duke University Press, 2001).

[4] Douglas MacArthur, *Reminiscences* (1964; Bluejacket Books, 2001), 287.

[5] MacArthur, *Reminiscences*, 288.

[6] John Dower, *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II* (W. W. Norton and Company, 1999), 28.

[7] Dower, *Embracing Defeat*, 28.

[8] Dower, *Embracing Defeat*, 28.

[9] See Naoki Sakai, "Trans-Pacific Studies and the US-Japan Complicity," in *The Trans-Pacific Imagination: Rethinking Boundary, Culture and Society*, ed. Naoki Sakai and Hyon Joo Yoo (World Scientific, 2012), 279–315.

[10] Ruth Benedict, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword: Patterns of Japanese Culture,* new foreword by Ian Buruma (1946. Mariner, 2005).

[11] Quoted in Takashi Fujitani, "The Reischauer Memo: Mr. Moto, Hirohito, and Japanese American Soldiers," *Critical Asian Studies* 33, no. 3 (2001): 379, https://doi.org/10.1080/14672710122556

[12] Quoted in Fujitani, "The Reischauer Memo," 379. See also Edwin O. Reischauer, *The Japanese* (Harvard University Press, 1977).

[13] See Tosh Minohara, "The Russo-Japanese War and the Transformation of US-Japan Relations: Examining the Geopolitical Ramifications," *Japanese Journal of American Studies* 27 (2016): 50–52, https://www.jaas.gr.jp/jjas/pdf/2016/03_MINOHARA.pdf

[14] Kathleen Dalton, *Theodore Roosevelt: A Strenuous Life* (Vintage, 2004), 285–86.

[15] See Matsumura Masayoshi, *Nichiro sensō to Kaneko Kentarō: Kōhōgaikō no kenkyū* (Shinyūdō, 1987).

[16] Dalton, *Theodore Roosevelt*, 285–86.

[17] "The Americans arrived anticipating, many of them, a traumatic confrontation with fanatical emperor worshippers. They were accosted instead by women who called 'yoo hoo' to the first troops landing on the beaches in full battle gear, and men who bowed and asked what it was the conquerors wished" (Dower, *Embracing Defeat*, 23–24).

[18] Laura Doyle, *Inter-Imperiality: Vying Empires, Gendered Labor, and the Literary Arts of Alliance* (Duke University Press, 2020), 6.

[19] Doyle, *Inter-Imperiality*, 6.

[20] See Kuan-hsing Chen, *Asia as Method: Toward Deimperialization* (Duke University Press, 2010), Chapter 1, "The Imperialist Eye: The Discourse of the Southward Advance and the Subimperial Imaginary." For Chen, Asian subimperial hegemonies also include South Korea and Taiwan.

[21] Shirai Satoshi, *Kokutai ron* (Shūeisha, 2018), 5.

[22] See "Keizai zaisei kaikaku no kihon hōshin," *Cabinet Office*, https://www.soumu.go.jp/menu_seisaku/hakusyo/chihou/20data/20czs3-2.html

[23] Amy Kaplan and Donald E. Pease, eds., *Cultures of United States Imperialism* (Duke University Press, 1993).

[24] Amy Kaplan, "'Left Alone with America': The Absence of Empire in the Study of American Culture," in *Cultures of United States Imperialism*, ed. Amy Kaplan and Donald E. Pease (Duke University Press, 1993), 18.

[25] John Winthrop, *A Model of Christian Charity* (1630. Cosimo Classics, 2020).

[26] Donald E. Pease, "Exceptionalism," in *Keywords for American Cultural Studies*, ed. Bruce Burgett and Glenn Hendler (3rd ed., New York University Press, 2020), https://keywords.nyupress.org/american-cultural-studies/essay/exceptionalism/

[27] See Joseph Darda, "Narratives of Exception in the Warfare State," *LIT: Literature Interpretation Theory* 25, no. 2 (2014): 80, https://doi.org/10.1080/10436928.2014.904708

[28] Donald E. Pease, *The New American Exceptionalism* (University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 8.

[29] Koizumi, "Japan-U.S. Alliance in the 21st Century."

[30] Koizumi, "Japan-U.S. Alliance in the 21st Century."

[31] Faubion Bowers, "Intoxicated by MacArthur," in "Daily Archives: 9 June 2004," *Far Outliers*, https://faroutliers.com/2004/06/09/

[32] Koizumi, "Japan-U.S. Alliance in the 21st Century."

[33] See Akira Iriye, *Power and Culture: The Japanese-American War, 1941–1945* (Harvard University Press, 1981).

[34] Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Cornell University Press, 1981), 5.

[35] *Kokutai no Hongi: Cardinal Principles of the National Entity of Japan*, trans. John Owen Gauntlett, ed. Robert King Hall (Harvard University Press, 1949); and *Shinmin no michi* (Monbu-shō, 1941), https://dl.ndl.go.jp/info:ndljp/pid/1039435

[36] *Kokutai no Hongi*, 71.

[37] *Kokutai no Hongi*, 59–63.

[38] *Kokutai no Hongi*, 71, 79–80.

[39] See Jeremy A. Yellen, *The Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere: When Total Empire Met Total War* (Cornell University Press, 2019); and Sidney Xu Lu, *The Making of*

Japanese Settler Colonialism: Malthusianism and Trans-Pacific Migration, 1868–1961 (Cambridge University Press, 2019).

40 *Shinmin no michi*, 8.

41 *Shinmin no michi*, 6.

42 *Shinmin no michi*, 14, 26.

43 Pease, *The New American Exceptionalism*, 1.

44 Masao Maruyama, *Thought and Behaviour in Modern Japanese Politics*, ed. Ivan Morris (Oxford University Press, 1969), 2.

45 Maruyama, *Thought and Behaviour in Modern Japanese Politics*, 1.

46 Carol Gluck, *Japan's Modern Myths: Ideology in the Late Meiji Period* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 6.

47 Gluck, *Japan's Modern Myths*, 6.

48 Pease, "Exceptionalism."

49 For the discussion of "defeat" (haisen) of Japan, see Katō Norihiro, *Haisen go ron* (Chikuma Shobō, 2015); and Sakai Naoki, *Nihon, eizō, beikoku: Kyōkan no kyōdōtai to teikoku teki kokuminshugi* (Seidosha, 2007).

50 "The Jewel Voice Broadcast," August 15, 1945, *Atomic Heritage Foundation*, 2022, https://www.atomicheritage.org/key-documents/jewel-voice-broadcast

51 "The Jewel Voice Broadcast."

52 "The Jewel Voice Broadcast."

53 Dower, *Embracing Defeat*, 36.

54 "The Jewel Voice Broadcast."

55 Yoshida Yutaka, *Nihonjin no sensō kan: Sengoshi no naka no henyō* (Iwanami Shoten, 2005), 68–69

56 Yoshida, *Nihonjin no sensō kan*, 68–69.

57 Ienaga Saburō, *Taiheiyō sensō* (Iwanami Shoten, 2002), 396. See also Hata Ikuhiko, *Shōwa shi no nazo o ou* (Bungei Shunju, 1999). For a conservative view about the *sekika ron*, see Fujioka Nobukatsu, *Ojoku no kingendaishi: Ima, kokufuku no toki* (Tokuma Shoten, 1996).

58 Quoted in Dower, *Embracing Defeat,* 281.

[59] Yoshikuni Igarashi, *Bodies of Memory: Narratives of War in Postwar Japanese Culture, 1945–70* (Princeton University Press, 2000), 29.

[60] Igarashi, *Bodies of Memory*, 30.

[61] Hirohito narrativized Japan's surrender as caused by the atomic bombs. See "The Jewel Voice Broadcast."

[62] Igarashi, *Bodies of Memory*, 24.

[63] Viet Thanh Nguyen and Janet Hoskins, "Introduction: Transpacific Studies: Critical Perspectives on an Emerging Field," in *Transpacific Studies: Framing an Emerging Field*, ed. Janet Hoskins and Viet Thanh Nguyen (University of Hawai'i Press, 2014), 24.

[64] Nguyen and Hoskins, "Introduction: Transpacific Studies," 3.

[65] For a salient example of transpacific feminist studies, see Denise Cruz, *Transpacific Femininities: The Making of the Modern Filipina* (Duke University Press, 2012).

[66] See Rey Chow, *The Age of World Target: Self-Referentiality in War, Theory, and Comparative Work* (Duke University Press, 2006).

[67] See also Yukiko Koshiro, *Trans-Pacific Racisms and The U.S. Occupation of Japan* (Columbia University Press, 1999); Tessa Morris-Suzuki, *Borderline Japan: Foreigners and Frontier Controls in the Postwar Era* (Cambridge University Press, 2012); Naoko Wake, *American Survivors: Trans-Pacific Memories of Hiroshima and Nagasaki* (Cambridge University Press, 2021).

[68] Naoki Sakai and Hyon Joo Yoo, "Introduction: The Trans-Pacific Imagination—Rethinking Boundary, Culture and Society," *The Trans-Pacific Imagination: Rethinking Boundary, Culture and Society*, ed. Naoki Sakai and Hyon Joo Yoo (World Scientific, 2012), 1.

[69] Sakai and Yoo, "Introduction: The Trans-Pacific Imagination," 8.

[70] Lisa Yoneyama, *Cold War Ruins: Transpacific Critique of American Justice and Japanese War Crimes* (Duke University Press, 2016), x.

[71] Yoneyama, *Cold War Ruins*, ix.

[72] Naoki Sakai, "Transpacific Complicity and Comparatist Strategy: Failure in Decolonization and the Rise of Japanese Nationalism," *Globalizing American Studies*, ed. Brian T. Edwards and Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar (University of Chicago Press, 2020), 260.

[73] Sakai, "Transpacific Complicity," 255.

[74] Sakai, "Transpacific Complicity," 244.

[75] Sakai, "Transpacific Complicity," 261.

[76] Quoted in Gluck, *Japan's Modern Myths*, 4.

[77] For the reframing of the comfort women issue as a symptom of gendered and sexualized imperialism, see Ueno Chizuko, *Nashonarizumu to jendā* (Iwanami Shoten, 2012); and Yoshimi Yoshiaki, *Jūgun ianfu* (Iwanami Shoten, 1995).

[78] Park Yuha, *Teikoku no ianfu: Shokuminchi shihai to kioku no tatakai* (Asahi Shimbun Shuppan, 2014).

[79] Jodi Melamed, *Represent and Destroy: Rationalizing Violence in the New Racial Capitalism* (University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 1, 3.

[80] Takashi Fujitani, *Race for Empire: Koreans as Japanese and Japanese as Americans during World War II* (University of California Press, 2011), 25. See also: John W. Dower, *War without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War* (Pantheon Books, 1986).

[81] Fujitani, *Race for Empire*, 31.

[82] *Shinmin*, 13–14.

[83] Fujitani, *Race for Empire*, 28.

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