

From War to Cold War: The Asian World Order in the Middle of the Twentieth-Century

Veranstalter: Harald Fuess, Heidelberg Centre for Transcultural Studies

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On 6 December 2019, a workshop on the Asian world order in the mid-20th century took place at the Centre for Asian and Transcultural Studies at Heidelberg University. The presentations were organized chronologically, covering a period from the 1920s to the 1960s. The workshop's organizer HARALD FUESS (Heidelberg) opened the workshop acknowledging that though the theme of the day aimed to cover a daunting forty-year period in modern history, he hoped that the presenters and other participants would delve into topics that have been under-researched or look at well-researched topics from a different perspective. As the workshop aimed to discuss the „Asian world order,“ it was appropriate that two specialists from Asia, specifically Japan, were invited in order to add diverse voices to the discussion. There was also disciplinary diversity; in addition to having academics from a variety of fields within the humanities/social sciences, one of the speakers was a medical professional presenting on human experimentation during WWII.

The workshop's first panel was opened by AARON MOORE (Edinburgh) with a presentation of his most recent research topic, „Fantastic Empire: Depictions of Future Warfare in Early Twentieth Century Japanese Magazines.“ Moore introduced what he has dubbed the „visionary class,“ a diverse group of writers, scientists, and military officers who heavily interacted with one another to envision and construct a future that guaranteed Japan's continued national sovereignty and even a subversion of Western hegemony through technological progress. This class reached its zenith in the interwar years, and in the 1920s in particular, when faith in science and progress were also at a high point in Japan. Though contemporary science fic-

tion in Japan has been largely relegated to youth fiction, Moore stressed that it was taken very seriously in early twentieth century Japan, evidenced by the inclusion of science fiction sections in scientific journals such as *Science Illustrated* and *Scientific Knowledge*. Such magazines show a heavy preoccupation with mechanization, especially propulsion and robotics, and energy production, anticipating an imminent end to fossil fuels as an energy source. In contrast, there was an aversion to chemical and biological warfare. While literature and science are now considered to be at opposite ends of an art-science spectrum, in interwar Japan, they were understood as partners who could work together to make this imagined future a reality.

The following presenter, ADACHI HIROAKI (Tohoku), continued where Moore left off, i.e. when war was no longer mere imagination, with a presentation on the economic aspects of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere (GEACPS) in the 1940s. The GEACPS envisioned a new political order based on the hierarchical structuring of different groups under the Japanese. There was also a two-step approach to the establishment of an economic bloc. The first priority was the acquisition of raw materials, particularly those used for energy production, to aid the war effort. At the same time, there were promises to cultivate long-term policies to support an economically self-sufficient Asia. The move to implement the GEACPS was an opportunistic decision made on the heels of the destabilization in Southeast Asia caused by the outbreak of war in Europe. However, as a nation at war itself, Japan soon abandoned any long-term goals of cooperation and self-sufficiency. The occupied regions rejected the imposed hierarchical order and, even within the Japanese government, ministries disagreed on how certain aspects of economic bloc would function. Adachi concluded that Japan was both ill-prepared and self-righteous in its attempted establishment of an economic bloc in Asia, which ultimately led to its failure to establish a new order in Asia.

The second panel started with a presentation by DANIEL HEDINGER (Munich), who opened by outlining his base argument as 1) the Axis existed and 2) it was a fascist, i.e.

ideological, alliance. He argued that imperialism was one of the ideological threads that connected them; however, this aspect of their relationship has largely been forgotten. Fascist imperialism was distinct from the colonial endeavors that preceded it. Hedinger defined it as a proletarian and post-colonial imperialism. Though the latter term seems to be oxymoronic, the imperialism of the establishment of the Axis empires were motivated by anti-colonial sentiment. Germany, Italy, and Japan viewed themselves as „have-not“ nations that sought to expand their empire around its center in order to protect themselves from the subjugation under the „have“ nations. He also highlighted certain „global moments“ that connected the members of the Axis and demonstrated the imperialist bent of their alliance, such as the invasion of Manchuria (1932) and the German invasion of the Soviet Union, „Operation Barbarossa“ (1941). At the same time, the Axis relationship was further supported and realized by „imperial peripheries“ outside of the central governments of the Axis powers, such as popular publications and youth groups. Previous focus on the „imperial centers“ have contributed to the process of how imperialism during World War II has been remembered and forgotten, even by the victors, such as Great Britain, who viewed themselves as „alone“ following the fall of France, in spite of their vast empire at the time.

After such a broad perspective, TILL BÄRNIGHAUSEN (Heidelberg) provided a detailed look at one specific aspect of one of the Axis Powers: the Japanese Unit 731, which was a unit that was dedicated to chemical and biological warfare research and engaged in human experimentation. As a medical researcher, Bärnighausen was able to offer a different perspective on human experimentation than is typically given by experts in history and other social sciences, focusing on the scientific rigor of the experiments and the repercussions these experiments still have in discussions of modern medical ethics. Even aside from the discussion of ethics, he argued that the vast majority of data resulting from the barbaric research conducted on human test subjects are either irrelevant or lack enough academic rigor to be useful. From an

ethical perspective, strict non-use of such information is primarily symbolic and sends a clear message that one cannot base a career on unethical experimentation. However, an exclusion of the use of this data should not result in the acts that produced them being forgotten. Compared to the German cases of human experimentation during WWII, the Japanese case remains under-researched in Western scholarship; however, the Japanese colleagues in attendance, Adachi and Akita, indicated that Unit 731 has become a topic of great interest in Japan leading to both an increase in research and political movements regarding its remembrance.

Closing the workshop were moderator HANS MARTIN KRÄMER (Heidelberg) and presenter AKITA SHIGERU (Osaka). Akita provided an Asian perspective on economic development in post-WWII Asia, with an emphasis on India. Akita divided the economic development that took place in Asia into three types: Import Substitution Industrialization (ISI) and Export Oriented Industrialization Types I (government-led) and II (privately induced). India falls under the first classification. In addition to becoming a center for heavy textile production, India was able to take advantage of Great Britain's accumulated sterling balance to propel its economic development forward. Akita argued that the typical narrative of the Cold War East-West divide that dominates academic discourse in the US and Europe is not appropriate in the case of Asia, especially India. India was able to use the new political world order of the Cold War Era to its advantage, receiving aid from both Communist, Western countries, and ostensibly independent organizations such as the World Bank to further its own goals.

The workshop presentations started on a note of whimsy and hope with Japanese science fiction, transitioned through the dark realities of war in which we see that pre-war visions and fantasies failed to materialize and ended with radical changes to the Asian world order in the wake of the end of the Second World War. The common denominator in these diverse presentations and reoccurring theme of discussion was how colonialism defined the world order in Asia throughout the 20th century. Though the seemingly

ever-present role of imperialism during this time period has been well-researched over the past several decades, the presenters in this workshop demonstrated that there are still aspects of the topic that need to be explored. In addition, it further illustrated the need for an increase in exchange and cooperation among academics from diverse backgrounds and specializations.

Conference overview:

Harald Fuess (Heidelberg): Welcome to the speakers and participants

Session One

Moderated by Takuma Melber (Heidelberg)

Aaron Moore (Edinburgh): Fantastic Empire: Depictions of Future Warfare in Early Twentieth Century Japanese Magazines

Hiroaki Adachi (Tohoku): Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere in the 1940s

Session Two

Moderated by Takahiro Yamamoto (Heidelberg)

Daniel Hedinger (Munich): The End of the Axis Empires and Decolonization

Till Bärnighausen (Heidelberg): Medical Experimentations on Humans by the Japanese Army for Biological Warfare in China, 1932-1945

Session Three

Moderated by Hans Martin Krämer (Heidelberg)

Shigeru Akita (Osaka): From Empires to Developmental Aid-A Global Historical Perspective on the Asian International Economic Order in the 1950s and 1960s

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