



*Sensōno Nihon kin'gendaishi – Tōdaishiki ressun!  
Seikanron kara Taiheiyo sensō made*

戦争の日本近現代史—東大式レッスン! 征韓論から太平洋戦争まで

By Yōkō Katō. Tokyo: Kōdansha, Japan, 2002. 293 pages. ¥798 (paperback)

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Yu Jia, Chungang University, Korea

An upsurge of interest in modern history heightens the theoretical need for a new definition of modernization and a better understanding of how modern history relates to pre-modern history in terms of continuity and discontinuity. In the East Asian historiography these concerns lead to research that elucidates the modernization of each country in relation to others. Attempts to perceive the modern history of each country in a broader context have become the major feature of contemporary scholarly works.

Although somewhat out of date, Yōkō Katō's *The Logics of Wars in Modern Japan* comes to mind in this connection. One fallacy to avoid in the course of historical study is the notion that history is something that occurred in the past with causes and consequences which subsequently come to light. With regards to the Pacific War, one may be tempted to ask such questions as "What made Japan trigger the war whose result was a foregone conclusion?" Or, "Was it not foolhardy for Japan to fight an invincible opponent?" Such questions are based on the premise that the winner of the war was in sight, no matter what

strategical maneuver adopted by the defeated. The point is that history is not something past. It means the present and nothing else. From the view point of the present, the future is full of alternative paths, each holding out the promise of breakthroughs in response to problems. No one is sure of which alternative might serve a better interest. Any effort short of attempting to fully grasp the perceptions of the people current in the past will fail in objective terms to clarify the causes and consequences of the Pacific War.

Following the Meiji Restoration, modern Japan pursued a winning streak in a series of wars against seemingly invincible foes, notably China and the Russian Empire. A string of victories that modern Japan achieved in diplomatic and military maneuvers saturated the Japanese with a sense of pride and confidence in new challenges. The Japanese government and populace by no means considered it foolhardy to fight the United States. All Japanese united in a consensus that in order to try their hand at another victory, the war was worth fighting. By putting the clock back, “the Logics of Wars in Modern Japan” attempts to focus on the situational factors which favored Japan in opting for war. This book covered Japan’s expeditions of Korea and the Pacific War. A product of compiling materials used for a syllabus to lectures on these topics, the author focused on the historical background which made “resort to the war” a viable alternative to other policy options. He looked upon the Pacific War as a necessary evil, which paved the way to further development of Japan.

The logic of history represented nothing less than the foresight of Japanese leaders and the Japanese people. Historiography often shows a strong tendency to explicate an event in terms of causes and consequences at the expense of understanding the situational factors which led to the event. In other words, the presentation of materials failed to substantiate the assumption that a problematic situation led to a historical event. Since the Sino-Japanese War broke out in 1894, the war took place at the interval of ten years. A lesson to be drawn from this

history was that the war followed fundamental changes in the current thought of diplomacy and war perceptions. It does not mean that a war lost its visibility in the shadow of a treaty and that a new one arose from ground zero (pp.19-20). Rather, a war is linked to another in various forms. The author correctly argues that the war owes its origin to marked changes in popular perception and social structure. The question, therefore, is not so much “why did Japan trigger the war against an invincible foe?” But rather: “What caused the war?” Addressing this question will provide clues to the structural background of the war.

Conventional wisdom argues that Japanese leaders conceived the so-called “*seikanron*” (military expedition of Korea) as a policy to keep the rising complaints of *shizoku* (dissident warriors) from hitting the ceiling and to convert them into a military prowess to strike its neighboring country. Taking an alternative view, the author places the “*seikanron*” in the context of a policy alternative, a product of the tension between democratic ferment at home and an implacable slide into imperialistic struggle under external pressure. This description in a way points to the dilemma of leadership divided between reform and war. The author thought of the policy choice as the manifestation of a self-directed motive to deliver the country from wandering off the path of reason (p. 48). Meiji Restoration, popularly known as the acceptance of foreign mores, stirred the nation to a greater effort to seek the inherent value of Japan and to activate the search for the spiritual legacy of the Japanese. *Seikanron* appeared as a timely response to the nationalistic backlash of the Japanese in this particular timeframe. Answering the afore-going questions has the elements of logic. Saigo Takamori is described as far from inflaming the warriors’ complaints into the military campaign of Korea. He was too sensible, the author says, to drive Japan into the troubled water from which the Western powers fish to their advantage.

With regard to the Russo-Japanese War, the author ascribed its origin to an enlightened policy of Imperial Japan designed to liberate Manchurians trapped in a de-civilizing process under Russian

barbarianism. Fukuzawa Yukichi, Tokutomi Sohō, Uchimura Kanzō and Yosino Sakuzō supported this point of view, arguing that obtained a position to lead backward Asia from relapsing into barbarianism. Hypercritical of Russian barbarianism, Yosino stressed the role of Japan as the savior of Korea and the liberator of Manchuria from Russian contamination. In 1904, this viewpoint justified the Russo-Japanese War (p.141). Japan's motive to replace the Russian Empire in Korea derived in part from a desire to promote its own imperial interests in the international arena. The Meiji Government in the 19th century tried to attune itself to a new international order, conscious of the need to maintain higher moral standards commensurate with its heightened status. According to the author, Imperial Japan conceived *seikanron* as part of a policy to keep pace with its imperial precursors. The author's view of the military expedition against Korea significantly differs from the conventional notion that views the projection of military power as a way to placate dissident warriors at home. His argument leaves us with an open question of how to define the bound of his argument against the conventional notion.

The author briefly expresses a particular concern for the unfair treatment of Japanese immigrants in California. This issue may be dismissed as insignificant in light of the colossal events which highlighted the relationship between the United States and Japan. After the conclusion of the Russo-Japanese War, Japan eliminated all unfair treaties with the world powers. However, Japan by no means followed a smooth path to becoming a new member of the imperial world. The Paris Peace talk held upon the conclusion of the Second World War dealt a critical blow to Japan's burgeoning pride by vetoing the 'equality treaty' proposed by Japan to apply to all countries. This set the stage for the enactment of the U.S Immigration Law which was biased against the Japanese immigrants. This law reflected U.S policy which treated immigrants according to the recognized strength of their mother country. The policy assumed that any relationship between countries entails a

hierarchical order, and that the unequal treatment of Japanese derived from the recognition of a presumed gap inherent between the two countries (p.192). At the same time as U.S. immigration policy discriminated against Japanese immigrants on this basis, the Monroe Doctrine found ardent supporters among such prominent Japanese figures as Tokutomi Sohō and others. These Japanese leaders applied their own version of the Monroe Doctrine as a strong appeal to nationalism, and stirred the Imperial Government to condemn the United States for its biased policy, fearing that in the process of shaping the image of Japan, it might pose a devastating blow to Japanese national pride, particularly in relation to the Chinese.

These developments raise an appropriate question: “Is nationalism the result of the Western failure to recognize the new status of Japan in the world?” Apparently, the immigration law soured the relationship of Japan with the United States. Despite all the conflicts between the two countries, Japan continued to fulfill its obligations as a member of the International League. By and large, Japan suffered unfair treatment in international society and the unequal treatment of the Japanese immigrants persuaded the extreme liberalist Nitobe Inazō and many others to anti-Americanism. In one way or another, the discriminatory U.S. Immigration policy affected the emerging Chinese image of Japan. The Japanese created their own self image as a member of the international community contributing to the maintenance of world peace. The Japanese described themselves as the faithful performers of obligations stipulated by a series of unequal treaties. By contrast, the Chinese felt little need to perform their obligations as stipulated under the unequal treaties, and they guarded against the Japanese incursion into Manchuria. From the view of Japan, the Chinese flouting of international law could only appear as an open challenge to a law-abiding Japan (pp.254~258). The negative image of Japan among the Chinese developed into a rejection of Japan as a partner to talk with, which the former Japanese Minister of Foreign Affairs Sidehara Kijūrō strongly

criticized. Such a negative image of Japan, the author argues, formed the background which spurred Japan to occupy Manchuria. A band of young, fanatical officers of the Kwangtung (J. Kantō) Army stationed in Manchuria contrived a case which justified a military march into Manchuria. From the lower ranks, the perpetrators defied orders from the Commanding General of the Kwantung Army. A band of Manchurians seeking to liberate themselves from the draconian rule of Zhang Xueliang matched the contrived failure of the young officers to comply with orders from the higher authorities. This line of reasoning has the elements of creative logic, and shows consistency with the logic of wars advocated by Japanese leaders. The earlier part of the author's argument pointed to conflicts between Japanese interests and the international order, showing, in the latter part, consistency with the logic of wars.

This book reflects a broader view of Japan's wars, extended to the social context. Due to its extensive treatment of social background, an inability to treat specific events in greater details flaws this approach. The breadth of treatment loses the in-depth coverage of individual events. Although the significance of the economic situation that surrounded the wars calls for greater detail, this book fails to do justice to such economic factors. Complete annotations for each quotation notably facilitate popular understanding of the cited texts. However, another flaw derives from the materials and data cited, which all come from the specific time in which the author taught the course; little attention to relate the implications of the materials and data to the present leaves much to be desired. The author's presentation of materials defied the traditional relationship between the aggressors and the aggrieved. He treats as open to debate such colossal events as the unconditional surrender of Japan and the conclusion of the war. Still, the question "Why did Japan enter the war and what resulted from it?" becomes one of paramount concern, when broken loose from the traditional frame of explanation. In this sense, I am sure that this book will remain a monumental work, a perpetual reminder of what humans could commit themselves to do.