

German Institute for Japanese Studies (DIJ)

DIJ History and Humanities Study Group



Thursday, 8 December 2016, 18.30 h

Noriko Kawamura
(Washington State University)

Emperor Hirohito from the Pacific War to the Cold War

Emperor Showa, better known in the English-speaking world as Emperor Hirohito, has been one of the most controversial figures in the history of the Pacific War. He was both sovereign of the state and commander in chief of the Japanese imperial forces; but above all, he was the manifestation of divinity and a symbol of the national and cultural identity of Japan. Yet under the Allied occupation the emperor was spared from the Tokyo war crimes trial and continued to reign in postwar Japan until his death in 1989 as “the symbol of the state and of the unity of the people” under the new democratic constitution written by the U.S. occupiers.

This talk will examine the extraordinary transformation of Emperor Hirohito from a divine monarch during the Pacific War to a humanized symbolic monarch supposedly with no political power during the occupation years (1945-1952). The talk will focus on the paradoxical role Emperor Hirohito played at home and abroad as tension between the United States and the Soviet Union escalated into the Cold War in East Asia.

Kawamura suggests that underneath the stereotypical portrayal of Emperor Hirohito as a passive but shrewd survivor/collaborator of the U.S. occupiers, he acted as a major player in U.S.-Japanese diplomatic negotiations behind closed doors and participated in the shaping of Japan’s domestic and national security policies. The talk will explore possible reasons behind the emperor’s actions.

Noriko Kawamura is Associate Professor of History at Washington State University where she teaches the history of U.S. foreign relations, U.S.-East Asian relations, U.S. military history, and modern Japanese history. Kawamura’s research focuses on the history of war, peace, and diplomacy in the Pacific World. Kawamura is the author of *Emperor Hirohito and the Pacific War* (University of Washington Press, 2015), and *Turbulence in the Pacific: Japanese–U.S. Relations during World War I* (Praeger, 2000). She also coedited *Building New Pathways to Peace* (University of Washington Press, 2011) and *Toward a Peaceable Future: Redefining Peace, Security and Kyosei from a Multidisciplinary Perspective* (The Thomas S. Foley Institute of Public Policy and Public Service, Washington State University Press, 2005). She is currently working on a new book project on Emperor Hirohito’s Cold War. She is also the President of the Asian Studies on the Pacific Coast (ASPAC).

The DIJ History and Humanities Study Group is a forum open to scholars working on Japan in any field of the humanities. It is organized by Ronald Saladin and Torsten Weber. All are welcome to attend, but prior registration (weber@dijtokyo.org) is greatly appreciated.

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