

German Institute for Japanese Studies (DIJ)

DIJ History and Humanities Study Group



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History-writing and the Public Sphere in Japan: 1945-1955

History-writing in Japan after World War II was more than just documenting the past; it was also about how to reconstruct the present and future. Japan was occupied by the United States and Allied powers and this occupation quickly turned to a new form of repression for many intellectuals, students, women, and others, even after it formally ended in 1952. In this climate, history-writing became part of social activism and the desire to change Japan in fundamental ways. Radical forms of history-writing became prominent and these sought to incorporate ordinary people in everyday life. They also sought engagement with the public sphere on a number of different levels and in ways that continued to have an impact on the writing of history after 1955.

This presentation will argue that history-writing during the first decade after World War II brought a kind of “plebian public sphere” into focus in ways that had not been seen in Japan during the prewar period. On one level, those engaged in radical history writing were part of a mass action against the Japanese government and the American presence in Japan. On another level, the very idea of writing history as a kind of social movement was designed to specifically include those being left out of the mainstream public sphere: those who were on the margins of Japanese society. Within this scenario lay the crucial idea that everyday life was a virtual space in which private voices and personal issues could become part of the public domain, in effect making the private something public.

Curtis Anderson Gayle holds a Ph.D. from the Australian National University and has taught at the University of Leiden, Japan Women’s University, and is presently a professor at Waseda University. He has published *Marxist History and Postwar Japanese Nationalism* (Routledge 2002) and *Women’s History and Local Community in Postwar Japan* (Routledge 2011).

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 Torsten Weber. All are welcome to attend, but prior registration via <https://dij.tokyo/hihusg> or email (weber@dijtokyo.org) is greatly appreciated.

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