

PREFACE

“Japan in Asia” is the title of a new research project launched by the German Institute for Japanese Studies (DIJ) in 1997. Even though questions of Japan’s relationship to the rest of Asia may at first glance appear to be timeless, they have taken on particular relevance since at least the beginning of the 1990s, where we observe in many spheres, in politics and economics as well as in culture and society in general, a new orientation in Japan towards Asia. Japanese attempts at redefining its relationship to what it perceives to be Asia, that is, East and Southeast Asia, are part and parcel of a global re-mapping since the end of the Cold War, and this process, which is still in the making and which also implies a re-definition of Japan’s relationship with “the West” will definitely affect the rest of the world as well.

At the DIJ with its multi-disciplinary set-up and its agenda of conducting research on modern Japan in the fields of the humanities, the social sciences, and economics, we try to tackle some of the numerous possible questions within this framework which we find are of particular relevance from our European perspective. The majority of our twelve research associates is presently involved in one way or another in this project. Needless to say, though, this research profits greatly from cooperation with other research institutions and specialists in the field. “Japan in Asia” is undoubtedly a much-studied topic already, and what is more, at the DIJ with its Japan-directed research, there is a constant need of tapping research on other Asian areas in order to place our findings in an adequate perspective. In its tenth year since its foundation in 1988, the anniversary edition of the DIJ yearbook *Japanstudien* is devoted to “Japan’s New Role in Asia.” By organizing workshops and conferences, as well as inviting specialists to contribute to our publications, we not only hope to create an environment conducive to better insight into our topic, but also to contribute to networking in the scholarly community beyond the borders of academic tradition and epistemological domains. The theme of “Japan in Asia” seems particularly suited to such an approach.

In the sphere of cultural studies, our research presently focuses on tendencies among Japanese intellectuals toward claiming a particular “Asian spirituality.” Analyses of literary texts, essays, and writings by scholars with a wide readership reveal that claim, attached to such keywords as animism, shamanism, and *reisei* (spirituality), to be rooted in an attempt to formulate a counter-culture against what has been experienced as a he-

gemony of “Western” thinking throughout much of Japan’s modern history.

Another focus of concern within the framework of “Japan in Asia” is Japan’s role in the process of integration in Asia. Political and economic aspects are so closely interwoven that an interdisciplinary approach appears to be the only feasible option, and is the one chosen by the DIJ. Whether it is the analysis of the domestic debate concerning Japan’s future role in Asia, or the influence of business and interest groups on Japanese foreign-policy decision making, or the economic relations between Japan and Asia in general and current changes regarding Japanese production networks within the Asian region in particular—all these findings have to be scrutinized under a grid of interrelated paradigms, one of these being the history of Japanese-Asian relations in the twentieth century. And this is where the present volume’s topic comes to the fore, because it provides an indispensable backdrop to our current study of “Japan in Asia.”

“The Japanese Empire in East Asia and its Postwar Legacy” is the title of a conference that was funded and organized by the DIJ in Tōkyō on 17 October 1997. Its purpose was to provide a historical background to the “Japan in Asia” project, especially in regard to the political, economic, social, and cultural dimensions of the interactions of Japan and the Japanese with Asia and Asians. The present volume includes most of the papers presented on this occasion.

The conference participants and authors come from different countries of Asia and Europe, and also the United States, the majority of them being in an early stage of their academic career, having recently completed or just finishing their doctoral dissertations. The present book could thus also be read as an indicator of what themes and subjects attract the imagination of today’s young historians of Asia.

Our thanks go to Prasenjit Duara, Professor of History at Chicago University, who gave the keynote speech at the conference and in the discussions provided invaluable feedback to the presenters. Without the keen eye of Nina Raj, the copy editor, numerous errors would have been overlooked. Special credit, moreover, is due to Harald Fuess, research associate at the DIJ, who, with relentless energy and enthusiasm, planned and organized the conference, and saw to the speedy publication of its results.

It is hoped that this volume will contribute to a better understanding of the domestic foundations of Japanese imperialism, its workings in Asia, and the empire’s postwar legacy as it manifests itself especially in Sino-Japanese relations.

Tōkyō, August 1998

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