

Asian Studies Seminar, School of Foreign Studies, Osaka University, Osaka,
Japan, 6 October 2016 (Thursday)

An Imperial Vision and New World Order Imperial Japan's Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere

Ooi Keat Gin

School of Humanities
Universiti Sains Malaysia

Center for Southeast Asian Studies
Kyoto University

The fruition of Imperial Japan's Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere would usher in a new world order whereby East and Southeast Asia would come under the fold and political leadership of a military-dominated authoritarian government at Tokyo. At the helm of this Sphere stood His Imperial Highness Emperor Hirohito (1901-1989), whose reign period *Shōwa* meaning "enlightened peace", shall oversee a *Pax Japonica* over a vast part of Asia comprising several hundred million inhabitants and seemingly limitless natural resources. It was indeed an imperial vision of grandiose proportions, implications, and consequences. Imperial Japan would be the centre and pivot of this grand vision where all under its sway shall embrace all things Japanese, from cultural traditions and practices to values, language, social norms, and religious beliefs. Tokyo would oversee an economic powerhouse with abundant natural resources drawn from across the Sphere fuelling the dual engines of industrialization and modernization together moving forward with unimpeded progress. Japanese leadership, entrepreneurship, ingenuity, creativity, and resourcefulness shall make the Sphere an unenviable superpower – political, economic and military. It was then that Imperial Japan could face eye-to-eye with Great Britain and its vast empire, or any of the European imperialist powers on an equal basis. Imperial Japan would then be a significant Asia Pacific power in direct challenge to its erstwhile Pacific rival, the United States. Washington then need to treat Tokyo with respect, caution and delicately. The irony of the Sphere, however, lies in itself: its realization is its destruction. Between 1931 – the creation of Manchukuo – and 1942 – the zenith of Imperial Japan's empire – marked the high point of Tokyo's ascension. Thereafter the tide turned against the imperial realm and the Sphere came crumbling down ultimately to the devastating and horrific disasters of Hiroshima and Nagasaki being the first victims of the atomic age, and the unconditional surrender of facing the reality of defeat and national humiliation, to "endure the unendurable and suffer what is not sufferable". This present paper traces the genesis of the Sphere, its realization, progress and development, the contributory factors for its failure and subsequent destruction. It shall be argued that the Sphere was doomed from the beginning owing to its inherent conceptualization and realization.

Biodata: OOI Keat Gin is an award-winning author, professor of history and coordinator of the Asia Pacific Research Unit (APRU) in the School of Humanities, Universiti Sains Malaysia, Penang, Malaysia. His book-

length works relating to the Pacific War (1941-1945) includes **Post-war Borneo, 1945-1950: Nationalism, Empire, and State-building** (Routledge, 2013), **The Japanese Occupation of Borneo** (Routledge, 2011), **Traumas and Heroism** (Opus, 2007), **Rising Sun over Borneo: The Japanese Occupation of Sarawak, 1941-1945** (Macmillan, 1999), and **Japanese Empire in the Tropics**, 2 vols. (Ohio, 1998). Elected as a Fellow of the Royal Historical Society (London), he is founder-editor-in-chief of **International Journal of Asia-Pacific Studies** (IJAPS) (www.usm.my/ijaps/), and series editor of the Asia-Pacific Studies Publication Series (AAPSPS) under the auspices of APRU and Universiti Sains Malaysia Press. Currently he is working on a manuscript titled "The Cold War in Borneo, 1950-1990" (Routledge).