

Japanese Americanists' visions of the Asia-Pacific order: From the prewar to the postwar years

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Concentrating on the rivalry between the formal and informal empires of Great Britain, Japan, and the United States, the book examines how regional relations were negotiated in the Asia-Pacific during the interwar years.

A range of international organizations including the League of Nations and the Institute of Pacific Relations (IPR), as well as internationally minded intellectuals in various countries intersected with each other, forming a type of regional governance in the Asia-Pacific. This system transformed itself as post-war decolonization accelerated and the United States entered as a major power in the region. This was further reinforced by big foundations, including Carnegie, Rockefeller and Ford. The book sheds light on the circumstances leading to the collapse of formal empires in the Asia-Pacific alongside hitherto unknown aspects of the region's transnational history.

In this context, John D. Rockefeller participated in the third IPR conference in Kyoto (1929). When Rockefeller visited Japan as cultural consultant for the Dulles Peace Mission in 1951, he reunited with Matsumoto Shigeharu, also a participant at the Kyoto conference. Rockefeller, with the power of Rockefeller Foundation, helped Matsumoto establish and run the International House of Japan (IHJ), the de facto center of intellectual interchange until the late 1960s when the Vietnam War quagmire disrupted it.

On the other hand, the interwar and postwar visions of the Asia-Pacific order held by Japanese Americanists such as Takagi Yasaka, the founder of American studies in Japan, Matsumoto, and others sometimes conflicted with those of the U.S. counterparts. In the prewar years, they advocated a benign Japanese empire in East Asia, a kind of the Asian Monroe Doctrine with the United States taking isolationist stance in the region.

Even after the war, their visions of the regional order were not completely in accordance with that of the U.S. government and its associated intellectuals. In fact, even though the most IHT programs and the related activities were funded by the Rockefeller and Ford Foundations, the concrete idea of those intellectual interchanges, according to Matsumoto, also came from the Japanese side. They opposed U.S. hegemony based on their somewhat shaky belief in Wilsonian internationalism.