The Victim as Hero

The great merit of *The Victim as Hero. Ideologies of Peace and National Identity in Postwar Japan* lies in its synthesis of sources of the peace movement and the light it sheds on the notion of Japanese self-victimization from various political and historical perspectives. Its relevance lies in its comprehensive description of the political role of the victim narrative in Japanese post-war state policies. In short, it is a systematic account of the pacifist movement and its co-optation by state nationalism. The book is of great value to anyone interested in the history of Japanese political attitudes toward the Pacific War and the way it influenced the educational system.
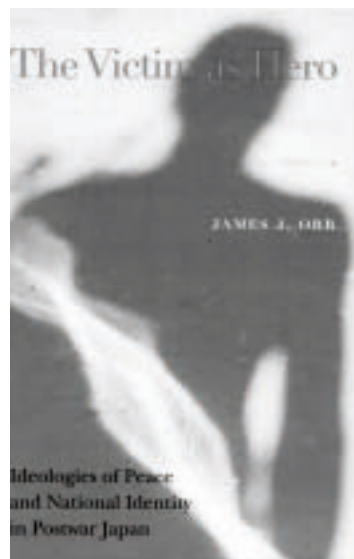
By Margaret Sleeboom

The style of the book is fluent and clear, even to readers without any background knowledge of Japanese history. For specialists, however, the book's many repetitions of the same theme may become tiresome, especially to readers who have studied works that discuss similar themes of post-war memory. The book consists of seven chapters, five of which carry the main body of the argument. It is a historical work in the sense that the five main chapters follow a temporal order, but it is also a thematic work. It begins with a discussion of the American occupation and the Tokyo War Crime Tribunals and continues with a debate on the role of victimization in the Anti-nuclear Peace Movement and the textbook issues. The book follows with a discussion of the theme of victimization in the world of literature and film, and finishes with a critical analysis of the politics of compensating war victims.

The theme of war victimization in Japan is certainly not a new one. It is, therefore, a great shame that the author does not make any mention of two clearly relevant and widely read (at least by modern Japan specialists) works, discussing the same theme of national self-victimization. The first, Interpreting history in Sino-Japanese relations: a case study in political decision-making by Caroline Rose (1998), discusses war victimization from Chinese and Japanese points of view on the textbook issue. She concludes that matters of war memory cannot be understood outside the realm of current foreign policies, while at the same time patterns found in such political behaviour are not unique to the nations involved but are shared with the formulation of international policy in general. The second book, The Wages of War by Ian Buruma (1995), compares war memories from Japanese and German perspectives, charting how the legacy of shame has in various ways shaped political movements and government policies to the present time. I believe that the element of comparison in these books puts into perspective what is, on first sight, the unique contrast of the combination of Japanese pacifism and its inability to face up to the reality of aggressive behaviour in its national history.

The main argument of the book focuses on the notion that the development of victim consciousness (higaisha ishiki), instead of just being a conservative tactic to avoid responsibility, is an essential part of the Japanese pacifist national identity. Orr shows how post-war Japanese elites and American occupying authorities set the stage for a narrative in which the Japanese people - the Emperor and the Japanese civilians - had been victims of the aggression of the military. The state and the ultra-nationalists were blamed for Japanese warmongering, so that the Japanese and the various elements of their culture were spared the painful confrontations with their Asian war memories, which the German people have undergone about their role in the Second World War. This lack of public acknowledgement of the consequences of the past for other Asian victims was also a lack of self-reflection, by the communists and new-born democrats, on the responsibility of the Japanese people for the war. It also explains the post-war mythology of the Japanese as innocent victims, which in time became widely accepted as fact in public discourse.

The main aim of The Victim as Hero is to show how the theme of victimization has been used by groups across the political spectrum. In other words, the notion of victimization has not just led to the avoidance of responsibility, but also to conscientious civic activism. As such it became part and parcel of Japanese nationalist ideologies in different camps. Orr thus shows how defeat in the Pacific war led to pacifism among various layers of the Japanese population. By describing how this pacifism was incorporated as a collective sense of victimization in a newly constructed form of national identity, Orr succeeds in illuminating the link between pacifist victimization and post-war nationalism.

Orr did not give much consideration for the arguments, put forward by Japanese scholars, which maintain that in a world of colonialism, imperialism, and widespread war, many people did indeed experience fear. Japanese aggression was not expressed in an era of world peace, but in a world in turmoil. Disregarding both the motivation of ultra-nationalist politicians and warmongers, and the aggression in China, Korea, and Taiwan, many people thought that through fighting one could avoid becoming a victim. The fact that philosophical and Marxist debates on 'subjectivity' ideologically depict the Japanese as being too passive, and criticized them for being irresponsible in maintaining an ideological distance from the state, does not take away the historical reality that many Japanese indeed became victims. The question is of what.

Though I read the book with great pleasure, I did not think Orr's reference to cultural practices of 'indulging' (p. 11-13) was very helpful in explaining the ease with which a war victim consciousness could thrive in Japan. The political and ideological factors Orr describes are far more convincing than the half-hearted attempt at cultural generalization. Anyway, any such attempt should be accompanied by careful intercultural comparison. More suitable would have been a more careful weighing of the relative importance of factors that shaped the Japanese war victim consciousness at two levels. At a temporal level, Orr could have compared the way in which the war was remembered by those who had actually lived through it with the victimization consciousness of those born after the war. At a synchronic level, Orr could have added a differential analysis of the various factors (political and educational factors, social movements, or the Japanese national psychology) he found relevant to understanding the formation of post-war notions of victimization. ◄

- Orr, James J., *The Victim as Hero. Ideologies of Peace and National Identity in Postwar Japan*, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press (2001), 221 pp., ISBN 0-8248-2435-0, Endnotes, Bibliography, Index

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The Online Burma-Myanmar Library
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The Online Burma/Myanmar Library is actually a database which functions as an annotated, classified, and hyperlinked index to full texts of individual Burma documents on the Internet. It also houses a growing collection of articles, conference papers, theses, books, reports, archives, and directories on-site (e.g. the 17MB archive of the Burma Press Summary). Its librarian presently requests help from specialists to refine the structure and add to the content.

By David Arnott

The Internet currently holds in excess of 100,000 Burma-related documents, from short news items to complete books, scattered over more than 400 websites (not all of which have internal search functions) run by the UN, state governments, academic institutions, media, listserv archives, human rights organizations and other NGOs, activist groups, and so forth. The volume of information is growing rapidly as more and more organizations choose to publish on the Internet. Even using modern search engines, it is difficult and time-consuming to research this widely scattered material.

There is clearly a need for a central index, which is exactly what the Online Burma Library seeks to provide. Launched in October 2001, it is organized on a database (using MySQL software, in combination with PHP) into fifty top-level categories based on traditional library classifications, with a hierarchy of some 350 subcategories. These hold approximately 2,300 links (mostly annotated with keywords and descriptions) to individual documents, and links to the approximate 400 websites, giving access to roughly another 100,000 documents. The database allows rapid searching in all or specific fields – description or keyword, date, language, title, author, source or publisher, and so on. It is also possible to browse through the subject hierarchies or to use the simple alphabetical list of all categories and subcategories to find specific material. We are using the Greenstone digital library software to build the collection of documents housed on-site. This software allows full-text searching, though at present only the Burma Press Summary fully uses this feature (we would like to hear from people who have experience with this software).

Building the Library

Historically, the Library's starting point was the Burma Peace Foundation's documentation of the human rights situation in Burma, and this material still comprises about half of the total number of items. This ratio is falling as the other sections are built up: Bibliographies/research, Economy, Geography, Health, History, Military, Politics and Government, Society and Culture, and so forth. Specialists in such areas are invited to provide various levels of input, from giving the librarian comments on the structure, sending him the web addresses (URLs) of online items that should be added, e-mailing documents to be placed directly on the site, to editing whole sections or subsections. Editing can be done online from any computer with web access. Several scholars have already agreed to work on particular sections. We trust that more will offer their assistance and that these will include people from Burma so that the Library can develop sections in the different languages of Burma.

With regard to Burma-related documents in electronic form which are not on the Internet, the Library encourages owners (individuals, organizations, or academic institutions) to place them on their own websites and send the URLs to the librarian, or send them to be placed directly on the Library site. Important documents which do not exist in electronic form, and which are not listed for digitization by any library, will eventually be typed or scanned in and housed on the Library.

We would like to hear from librarians who are digitizing collections which contain texts relating to Burma, especially if these will be on open access. Not only do we hope to hear which documents have been digitized, with URLs, but also which are in line for digitizing. If necessary, the Library could maintain a page listing the latter, as a means of reducing duplication, and providing suggestions for setting priorities. We urge digital librarians and the producers of online periodicals with mixed content to give each document an individual URL wherever possible, for direct access, as a public resource is enhanced if users can link directly to individual documents without having to go through the process of searching or browsing.

Since its launch in the beginning of October 2001, the Online Burma/Myanmar Library has received an enthusiastic welcome from a wide range of users, from senior Burma experts to student activists. The Asian Studies WWW Monitor gave the Library the highest possible rating (five stars and 'Scholarly usefulness: Essential'). The librarian hopes that those involved in Burma research will welcome and use this new resource and help to develop its structure and content. ◄

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