H-Net Reviews
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

James J. Orr. *The Victim as Hero.* Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2001. viii + 271 pp. $22.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8248-2435-8; $47.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8248-2355-9.

Reviewed by Chizuru Saeki (History Department, Bowling Green State University)

Published on H-US-Japan (July, 2001)

Exceptionality as the Victim

Exceptionality as the Victim

In this book James J. Orr analyzes the increasing consciousness of victimhood among the Japanese after 1945 and through the 1960s. According to Orr, several elements such as Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers (SCAP) occupation policy, the Lucky Dragon Incident of 1954, the publication of literature and film, and education (in particular the rewriting of school textbooks), contributed to the shaping of Japan's image as victim. Orr also describes the movement for the compensation of dispossessed landlords, repatriates, and atomic bomb victims.

Orr discusses the influence of SCAP's policy. He especially focuses on the International Military Tribunal for the Far East (IMTFE), which exempted the Emperor from prosecution and gave death sentences to A-class criminals, including General Tojo. According to Orr, the IMTFE made Tojo and other wartime Japanese military government leaders responsible for leading the nation to war. At the same time, the image of Emperor Hirohito was converted into an innocent and sanctified figure, who was deceived by military leaders during the war. By discussing SCAP's policy to avoid the possibility of guerrilla warfare and pursue peaceful unification, Orr introduces an episode in which MacArthur himself engaged in spreading a purified image of Hirohito. For the Japanese, the government and the Emperor's advisors also promoted the propaganda that the Emperor knew nothing in advance about the attack on Pearl Harbor.

Nevertheless, Orr's argument about the transformation the of Japanese people's image seems oversimplified without assessing U.S. public opinion polls and newspapers. As John Dower mentions in his book *War without Mercy*, this transformation is comparable in Germany where Hitler was regarded as the only "vice" which misled the nation and Germans. On the other hand, Japanese people as an entity was regarded as racially hostile and subhuman during World War II. General Tojo was not portrayed as a prominent figure such as Hitler or Mussolini. Just after the war, the U.S. mass media still continued to portray the Japanese as brutal subhuman beings. Furthermore, it is hardly agreeable that the Japanese people could accept the sense of defeat so soon after the arrival of SCAP. For instance, the Japanese newspapers of-

ten preferred expressions such as "Japan's unavoidable war's end", instead of using the word defeat. Before arguing the rise of victimhood, Orr's analysis first needs to discuss Japan's struggle to accept the defeat. Furthermore, the wartime ideology of the Yamoto race (which situated the Japanese as first among the other Asian races and as the sacred nation), was not so easily eradicated by SCAP's intervention in postwar Japanese politics.

Another important factor presented by Orr, which transformed the Japanese image as a war victim, emphasizes Japans experience of the Hiroshima and Nagaski bombings, which created Japananese exceptionalism as the only country to have experienced the nuclear bomb in the Cold War context. Moreover, as Orr argues, it is certain that the Lucky Dragon Incident of 1954 escalated Japan's image as the victim of the hydrogen bomb experiments. In addition, we cannot ignore the Japanese people's growing nuclear paranoia in the 1960s when the gigantic American nuclear aircraft carrier *Enterprise* entered Sasebo in 1967. Until the *Enterprise* sailed for Vietnam on January 23, 1968, it brought huge protestS from radical students, labor leaders, and anti-Vietnam War protest groups.

Orr repeatedly discusses how the Japanese people came to be conscious of their victimhood by the Japanese military government through SCAP's occupation policy in the postwar. Then, he describes how they started asking the Japanese government to take the responsibility for its conduct during the war. The grass roots movement, demanding the compensation for atomic bomb victims and the pension for dispossessed landlords and repatriates, enhanced the Japanese people's sense of being victimized. Nevertheless, progressing into the 1960s, the Japanese anti-Vietnam movement and student riots, which led to the cancellation of Eisenhower's visit to Japan were caused not only by Japanese people's resentment against the Japanese government but also by their criticism of the U.S. government's contradictory liberal democratization foreign policy in Asia. Here, the concept of victimhood among Japanese people had clearly shifted from the victim of wartime military government to the victim of the U.S. foreign policy, which would bring Japan's unwanted involvement in the Vietnam War.

Orr did an excellent job of taking on the challenge of examining the controversial topic of the emergence of the concept of victimhood in Japan. It could be the first historiographical work of this topic. In particular, his research about the Japanese school textbooks during the mid 1940s through the 1970s explains the shift of Japanese government policy toward other parts of Asia and the United States. Moreover, his comparison of the text among high school, junior high, and elementary schools is very intriguing. Furthermore, his analysis about the sense of victim among different generations shows us the clear shift of US-Japan foreign relations up to today. Orr's great contribution in this field will surely stimulate a hot debate among historians, veterans, politicians, grass roots nuclear protest groups, and ordinary citizens from both the Japanese and American sides.