Cultural Cold War in Japan:
An Impact of William A. Williams' *Tragedy of American Diplomacy* on American Studies

Takeshi MATSUDA

In an attempt to describe how cultural Cold War was waged in Japan, this article reviews how *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy*, William Appleman Williams' classic book was received in this country. The article not only aims to illuminate the impact that Williams made on Japanese scholars of American studies, but also attempts to assess his contributions to deepening an understanding of American history. It also seeks to understand the reasons why the impact of his scholarship was limited only to a small group of Japanese scholars. Recently American diplomatic historian Thomas J. McCormick called upon his colleagues "to focus ... on some concerted and constructive thought about what kind of alternative to offer in its place." This article intends to be a part of a response to his call.

Changing Intellectual Climate in Postwar Japan

From 1945 to 1960, the period that coincides with and extends several years beyond the U.S. occupation of Japan, Japanese intellectuals tackled three related and outstanding issues — the de-
militarization, modernization, and democratization of their country. To democratize the nation by abolishing the remaining vestiges of feudalism, they attached great importance not only to the liquidation of the semi-feudal mode of production, but also to the humanistic aspects of modernization which included the liberation of the people from authoritarianism, the patriarchal family system, and the establishment of civil and political freedom for the people. The word modernization was a neutral concept that connoted social and cultural changes that took place during a transition from pre-modernity to modernity. But immediately after the war, scholars often used modernization and democratization interchangeably.

At the same time, Marxism was enormously influential among Japanese intellectuals in the early years of the U.S. occupation. It had a great ideological appeal to many of them, not only because the pre-war doctrine of unquestioned allegiance, the religion of acquiescence, and the ideology of the power state were all discredited, but also Marxism seemed to be the only extant comprehensive body of thought that could help the Japanese find answers to all the problems they faced at that time. Moreover, the Japan Communist Party (hereafter JCP), many of whose members had maintained an anti-war position consistently and steadfastly and had refused ideological conversion even when they were jailed during the war, seemed to be the only political party worthy of respect. Therefore, orthodox Marxists commanded authority and great respect from a large segment of the Japanese population.³

Postwar intellectuals consisted of two distinct groups. One group was made up of historians and social scientists. They were sometimes called liberal modernists. They pursued their studies with a Weberian approach. The other group consisting of orthodox Marxists and leftists carried on studies from a Marxian perspective.⁴ The latter outnumbered the former during the Occupation.

Meanwhile, liberal modernists were anxious to democratize the country. Their ultimate goal was to establish a modern civil society in a non-revolutionary way. They regarded a citizen with a sense of responsibility and a strong moral fiber as an agent for social change. They attached a special importance to non-material factors, notably the cultural and psychological aspects of modernization, such as ethos, social consciousness, and individualism, which they found deplorably lacking in the Japanese. While they employed a comparative approach that set Japanese history against European history, they used the dichotomy of feudalism and modernism as an analytical framework.⁵

Orthodox Marxists shared the liberal modernists’ view that Japan needed to be democratized, but they believed that democratization was only a half-way step to achieve their ultimate goal which was to bring about a socialist revolution in their country.⁶ Marxists regarded the working class as an agent for social change, and they made natural allies of the JCP. They were primarily preoccupied with the structural reform of Japanese society. Leftwing intellectuals used the approach of class
analysis and holistically addressed the structural problems of Japanese capitalism. Like liberal modernists, leftist scholars stressed the backwardness of Japan’s capitalist development.

Scholars, be they liberals or Marxists, had a goal in common, although their ultimate goal and approach to achieve it differed significantly. They emphasized the importance of obtaining state power as the indispensable intermediate achievement on the road to their ultimate goals. Given the situation, they shared a strong sense of mission and a great interest in democratization in terms of man and society.

As early as 1945, liberals and Marxists formed a united front in order to make a new Japan genuinely democratic. In early 1948, the representatives of the two groups gathered together and had a roundtable discussion to find ways to establish a close rapport with each other and cooperate for the common cause. Soon, however, it turned out that forming a united front was easier said than done. Notwithstanding their rhetoric, most orthodox Marxists stood haughtily aloof from the depressed multitudes who were struggling to survive. Because of the elitism and self-righteousness of the Marxists, on the one hand, and liberals’ deep-seated suspicions of Marxists’ ulterior motives, on the other, both liberals and Marxists discovered how difficult it was to split the difference between them. The relations between them deteriorated as the Cold War confrontation loomed larger and became more serious. The situation became much worse in 1948–1949, when the US government adopted the policy of the so-called “reverse course” and shifted the priority of Occupation objectives to the economic recovery of Japan. As a result, a cultural Cold War set in. As enthusiasm for keeping a united front afloat waned, so did the prospect of scholars to bring Karl Marx, Max Weber, and even Sigmund Freud all into one single analytical framework. By 1950, those scholars discontinued their dialogue and chose to go in separate directions. The short-lived mirage of a united front dissipated into thin air. It was in this cultural context that Japanese scholars pursued American studies after the war.

Late 1940’s — 1950’s

From the late 1940’s through the 1950’s, liberal scholars studied the American Revolution, positing that America would serve Japan as a model democracy. They aimed to utilize the knowledge of American history gleaned from their research in hope to develop a full-fledged modern personality, as well as to establish a modern, democratic, civil society in postwar Japan. Liberal scholars assiduously read Alexis de Tocqueville’s Democracy in America and Louis Hartz’s Liberal Tradition in America. They were impressed with the strength of Americanism that unified a nation of diverse ethnicities. Japanese liberals were annoyed by McCarthyism and were embarrassed by the discrepancy between American ideals and realities, but they placed a special emphasis on the bright and forward-looking aspects of the United States.
On the other hand, scholars on the left pursued American studies from a Marxian perspective.\textsuperscript{12} Orthodox Marxists drew on the Marxist-Leninist theory of historical materialism as a guiding frame of reference. While some economic historians analyzed the structure of American capitalism, others focused on American imperialism of the late nineteenth and the early twentieth century. They studied their subjects on the basis of the Hobson-Lenin paradigm that defined imperialism as “the highest stage of capitalism.”\textsuperscript{13} Japanese leftists industriously read the works of their American counterparts, such as those of Paul Baran, Paul Sweezy, and Leo Huberman.\textsuperscript{14} Leftist scholars emphasized the seamy side of American society. They believed that their negative image of America was vindicated by America’s anti-communist campaign at home and abroad, particularly McCarthyism, which ran amuck in the United States during the early 1950’s.

But the internal struggles within the JCP leadership and its subsequent abrupt change in policy in 1955 caused great confusion among leftwing scholars, contributing to a relative decline in the authority and influence of Marxism. The decline was accelerated further by de-Stalinization in Moscow in the following year. Since then, nothing seemed to be able to halt or reverse the steady decline of Marxism.

Thus, the Japanese had a split image of the United States during those years. One was a forward-looking image of America — a nation of liberal democracy that was symbolized by a frontier line moving westward constantly until the end of the nineteenth century. The other was a horrible image of America — an aggressive imperialist nation into which the United States transmogrified itself after the Spanish-American War of 1898. The Japanese historians depicted the first half of American history as the history of democracy, while describing the second half as the history of imperialism. They continued to hold such a divided image of America, positive and negative, sitting side by side in the minds of Japanese historians.

Late 1950’s — First Half of the 1960’s

American studies in Japan became polarized sharply from the late 1950’s through the first half of the 1960’s. This period coincided with the beginning of Japan’s spectacular economic growth through rapid industrialization. This economic growth transformed Japan into an affluent and technocratic society and brought with it a corrosive effect on people’s consciousness, particularly the consciousness of the working people. Moreover, social contradictions which accompanied the high rate of economic growth presented themselves in such forms as human alienation and environmental destruction.

On the other hand, the new U.S.-Japan Security Treaty of 1960 served as a catalyst to intensify the cultural Cold War in Japan. Japanese nationalism and anti-American sentiment ran highest in 1960 when the conservative Kishi government rammed the new security treaty through the Diet in
Tokyo. People, young and old, rose up in protest against the government and staged mass demonstrations day after day.

Against the background of this meteoric rise of a popular protest movement and a presumed Communist influence over it, liberal modernists launched an offensive against Marxism. Namely, they imported new social sciences from the United States and turned on the offensive against their rivals, the Marxists. The ideological weapon that liberals employed was modernization theory. This theory was invented primarily with the intention of replacing the previous concept of modernization with the notion of industrialization.\textsuperscript{15} Liberal scholars, influenced by modernization theory, reexamined the general concepts and categories that Marxists had used and rejected the previous definition of modernization as too ideologically oriented.

During the period of the second stage, the state of American studies in Japan changed little except that it became polarized further as years elapsed into the latter part of the 1960's. Most Japanese experts of America continued to hold a split image of the United States, as described earlier. It is worth noting that the present-day Japanese Association for American Studies was established in January 1966 with a membership of approximately 200.\textsuperscript{16} It was primarily because a need was keenly felt to deepen a Japanese understanding of the United States and to keep the bilateral relations cordial at a critical moment in the history of US-Japan relations. This academic organization became genuinely nation-wide, as compared with its predecessor formed in March 1947.\textsuperscript{17}  

**Second Half of the 1960's — the 1970's**

As Japan entered the second half of the 1960's and the 1970's, the country found itself increasingly incorporated deeper and deeper into the intricate web of America's global strategy. Japan's so-called “subordinate independence” \textit{vis-à-vis} the United States became so apparent in the eyes of many Japanese; it became a constant pain in their necks. Particularly, they grew uneasy about being involved indirectly in an America-made war as the United States was drawn deeper and deeper into the Vietnam War. Popular discontent with the lopsided US-Japan relationship and anxieties about military involvement in the Vietnam War grew and spread throughout the nation. The general sense of crisis exploded in the late 1960's and the early 1970's in such forms as campus riots and an anti-Vietnam War and pro-peace movement.

At the same time, Marxists became ideologically confounded by the split between the Soviet Union and China within the Communist world and the subsequent military skirmishes along the border between the two Communist giants. The Sino-Soviet exchange of scathing criticism confused the rank and file of the JCP and scholars leaning toward Marxism, and contributed to the JCP's internal split into two schools of thought. This division led to the rise of New Left radicalism in Japan.\textsuperscript{18} Of course, those events accelerated the further decline of Marxism in terms of authority
and influence, generating a general sense of crisis especially among a younger generation of scholars.

By the 1970’s, Japanese intellectuals, both Marxist and non-Marxist, deepened their sense of crisis as the Vietnam War appeared to be being fought with no exit in sight. This critical situation seemed to keep asking every Japanese scholar the question of why he/she was studying American history.\(^{19}\) Liberals were doubtless perplexed by the chain of events at home and abroad, in particular, the rapid increase in the American military engagement in Vietnam. Notwithstanding the turn of events, liberals kept portraying an essentially positive picture of liberal democracy in America with a special emphasis on the progressive tradition of the United States.\(^{20}\) By that time, however, it was obvious that their image of liberal America was no longer able to explain adequately why the United States was fighting fiercely in Vietnam.\(^ {21}\)

It was in this social context that young historian Shimizu Tomohisa, one of the valued disciples of Williams’ introduced *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy* and other works to his country.\(^ {22}\) Subsequently, American New Left revisionism came to be known to Japanese scholars.

**Williams’ Way of Interpreting American History**

How did Japanese scholars receive Williams’ work? What part of Williams’ philosophy and methodology of history appealed to them? Before answering these questions, let us take a quick look at what Williams had to say in his classic book.

First, Williams insisted that American history should be understood as a history of expansion and an empire. For most Japanese who had long been used to a liberal image of America, it must have been quite a shocking and eye-opening experience to them that Williams, who had weathered a storm of McCarthyism, put forth such radical views of American history.\(^ {23}\)

Williams used *Weltanschauung*, the idea of sociology of knowledge as a key concept in his study of history. *Weltanschauung* means the view of how the world works. According to this view, the world is organized in such a way that political, religious or cultural values (including economic criteria) are held to be crucial factors in decision-making.\(^ {24}\)

Williams stressed the importance of a frontier-expansionist worldview of American policy makers when he interpreted American history. He explained that they believed that the health of American liberal democracy and the general welfare depended on a continuously expanding frontier. In other words, America continued to solve social problems by means of expansion. Williams argued that this expansionist philosophy of history guided American leaders to build an American empire. The Americans developed another ideology which asserted that such expansion was, in fact, the agent of extending morality and well-being to the less fortunate of the world,
according to Williams.

By dint of “the inner logic of all expansionist thought,” Williams insisted, “both opportunity and difficulty, good and evil, are externalized.”25 While holding others responsible for American development, wealth, and welfare, the Americans blamed other countries for America’s troubles and demonized them. In other words, the Americans evaded the problems and shifted the responsibility for their troubles to others abroad. Consequently, they failed to create a genuinely humane community based on Christianity and socialism. Williams called on the American people to summon enough courage to accept “limits upon America’s freedom of action” and make new history by embarking on “an open door at home.”26 He was convinced that “realism goes nowhere unless it starts at home.”27 Williams attached great importance to people’s perceptions of the world as an agent for social change. Unless Americans could break the chain of this traditional worldview of an aggressive and confrontational nature, he forewarned, this American expansionist ideology would ultimately bring the United States and the world the tragedy of total human annihilation. That is to say, the United States and the Soviet Union, the two super powers, might engage in nuclear exchanges.

Second, while rejecting the Hobson-Lenin definition of imperialism, Williams came up with a new concept of “open door imperialism” or “informal empire” to explain the dynamics of American expansionism abroad. Drawing on British historians John Gallagher and Ronald Robinson, he broadened the meaning of imperialism which had been construed as being synonymous with colonialism. This is one of the significant contributions that Williams made to deepening our understanding of expansionism and imperialism in American history.28

The third point may perhaps be most important. Williams characterized modern America as “the age of corporation capitalism,” insisting that it started from 1882 and continues to the present day.29 Previous generations of historians had pursued studies in economic, political, and diplomatic histories discretely and dealt with the subject from a narrow, America-centric perspective divorced from the rest of the world. Williams, however, introduced a concept of corporate liberalism by which he urged historians to think of history as a whole by connecting domestic politics and foreign policy together. He also observed that corporate liberalism emphasized such values as productivity, rationalization, efficiency, cooperation, and coordination. This ideology, he insisted, served American leaders as a guide to sustain democracy, prosperity, and social harmony at home, with the state playing the role of a “neutral” arbiter of conflicting interests between capital and labor.30 In this way, he paved the way for making better sense of the history of modern America. According to Williams, corporate liberalism and the American open door policy worked hand in hand. These two together constitute social imperialism. The objective of social imperialism is to bring about industrial peace and reform at home, on the one hand, and prosperity, general welfare, and peace, on the
other, by vigorously pursuing an open door policy abroad. Corporate liberalism, Williams conclud-
ed, is not as liberal as it may appear but, in fact, is essentially conservative and authoritarian.

Responses of Scholars in Japan

Regardless of the differences in ideological persuasion, many Japanese scholars were attracted
by Williams’ insightful historical writings. But it is also true that not all scholars necessarily accept-
ed Williams’ methodology and his views of American history without reservations or qualifications.

(1) Liberal Historians

The Japanese responses to Williams ranged from a total disregard and/or a flat rejection to
harsh criticism.

First, most liberals in Japan found Williams’ views of American history embarrassing and even
annoying. They either chose not to take up Williams’ challenge directly, or simply ignored his schol-
arship altogether. It was perhaps because liberals wished to think that the Americans had an ability
to redress social injustices, which was America’s reformist tradition. Most liberals flatly rejected the
New Left revisionists’ view that new forms of inequality and discrimination were bound to appear
one after another, as long as America remained in the capitalist world-system. They were not totally
convinced by Williams’ argument. Instead, they continued to be attracted by the progressive aspects
of American democracy. In addition, they found new interest in studies in race relations and ethnic
minorities, as social movements of protest and redress, such as those of civil rights and women’s
liberation arose in the United States during the 1960’s and the early 1970’s.

Secondly, other liberals responded equally critically. They harshly criticized Williams’ Tragedy
of American Diplomacy for a simplistic explanation of American foreign policy. They dismissed his
work as economic determinism tainted by Marxism. In fact, however, Williams was neither a
Marxist nor an economic determinist, even though Williams owed much to the writings of Karl
Marx. A more careful perusal of Williams’ work might have made it possible for those critics to see
that Williams was not so. In an ironic way, those liberal scholars showed their superficial reading of
Williams’ work and perhaps their deep-rooted biases against Marxism.

Still, another group of liberals, though small in number, handled Williams’ writings seriously by
taking the bull by the horns, so to speak. A notable example was historian Aruga Tadashi. He
viewed the history of the United States as the history of national integration and liberal democracy.
He regretted that those scholars, who were influenced by Williams, tended to present unbalanced
views of the United States, focusing attention mainly on the shady side of American history. It was
regrettable, Aruga complained, that such “unsound” state of American studies in Japan would not
serve to improve the Japanese image of America, much less to help promote cordial relations between the two countries.

Secondly, the ambiguities of the terms that Williams used, such as “empire” and “open door imperialism” troubled historian Aruga. Touching the heart of the problem, Aruga criticized Williams for overstressing economic factors in decision-making processes of American foreign policy. He was equally perturbed by the fact that Williams equated any kind of trade expansion with imperialism. Aruga insisted that “for a country with an advanced economy, trade expansion is not (Emphasis is the present author’s) necessarily imperialistic or empire-building.” He went on to state that “two expanding economies can often develop interdependence by increasing their mutual trade. Such a relationship cannot be considered as empire-building.” In short, Aruga queried what alternative for trade expansion there was, if it was as bad as something called imperialism.

It must be noted that what Williams addressed was the problem of the nature of a trade relationship between predominant America and weak countries — a power relationship that was one-sided or asymmetrical. Williams once said, “That is the rub of the modern capitalist world economy, isn’t it? Imperialism means ‘the loss of sovereign control over essential issues and decisions by less developed nations to an industrial metropolis.”

Historian Aruga addressed another penetrating problem of Williams’ thesis regarding “the continuity of U.S. expansionism and imperialism” in American history. He was troubled by the fact that Williams equated both Jeffersonian expansionism and that of McKinley’s with imperialism. Even though he conceded that the difference did exist between Jeffersonian expansionism and that of McKinley, Aruga insisted that that difference was nothing but a “quantitative” difference in terms of space and commerce. He questioned what “qualitative” difference there was, if any, between the expansionisms of the two different periods in question, if both types of expansionism should be understood as imperialism. If Williams was correct, Aruga queried, “we do not have to call the turn of the nineteenth century ‘the age of imperialism,’ the name that historians usually attach to that particular period in world history, do we?” He regretted that Williams’ indiscriminating use of the term expansionism took away historical significance from the period in question. To put it differently, he wondered if Williams thought that U.S. expansionism was/is dictated by the structural imperatives of the American capitalist economy, or whether it was simply a reflection of a traditional expansionist worldview of American policy makers.

**The Historians of Orthodox Marxism**

Orthodox Marxist historians welcomed the publication of The Tragedy of American Diplomacy which reconfirmed their views of America as a reactionary, imperialist nation. However, they found Williams’ methodology of history either problematical or not particularly useful to them.
First, Japanese scholars on the left were puzzled by Williams’ silence about the problems of “class” and “class struggle” in his description of American history. They were also perplexed by the fact that ordinary people, i.e., the working people, hardly appeared in Williams’ book.

Williams, on the other hand, believed that it was no longer very realistic to expect that the working class would play the role as a sole agent for social change, particularly in such an affluent, mass society as the United States, the most advanced capitalist nation on earth. Japanese Marxists disagreed, however. Moreover, they were unconvinced by Williams’ “unclear” theory of the state that was presented in his *Contours of American History*. It was because those Japanese critics employed the instrumentalist theory of the state in a monopoly capitalism that the JCP officially endorsed. Such criticism leveled at Williams revealed that they belonged to the school of the old left in Japan.

Secondly, they were equally troubled by the fact that Williams placed too much emphasis on the role that policy-makers’ ideas and worldviews played in the shaping of American history. Japanese scholars on the left criticized such an approach of history as Williams’ for being too elitist and ill-suited to their political taste. In this connection, they were annoyed by the fact that Williams slighted the importance of structural analysis.

Thirdly, Japanese Marxists discovered that Williams’ argument regarding the continuity of expansionism in American history was neither unique nor very refreshing. Instead, it appeared too nationalistic and myopic to them. It was because they saw a certain similarity between American expansionism and that of Japan. They believed that any capitalist nation must expand in one way or another in order to survive in this cut-throat competitive world-system.

In sum, orthodox Marxists argued that Williams added little to the knowledge that they had already acquired from the prevailing version of Marxism in Japan. They thought that his methodology was neither helpful nor congenial to their approach to history and their political agenda to bring about a socialist revolution. That led them to pay scant attention to Williams and his works thereafter, perhaps because they were more disposed for historical materialism and also because they did not share such a cultural tradition as Christian values and morality. It was unfortunate that they put on a blindfold to Williams’ important message, which was idealistic but warm-hearted and humanitarian in nature. Consequently, it seemed that Japanese Marxists missed a rare opportunity to learn from Williams so that they might be able to write history that has a human face with a warm heart.

Curiously enough, however, Williams and Japanese orthodox Marxists had one approach to history in common. Both Williams and orthodox Marxists studied history from the perspective of national development (*ikkoku hattenshugi shikan*). It was perhaps because both of them were overly anxious to bring about social change at home. Historian Aruga pointed out that the narrowness of Williams’ frame of reference was one of the serious shortcomings from which *The Tragedy of
American Diplomacy suffered. He remarked that Williams’ perspective excluded from consideration
the structure of the international system as an important determinant of American foreign policy. Aruga regretted that such a narrow perspective as Williams’ made it difficult to adequately explain
the complexity of the origins of the Cold War and the reasons for its prolongation. Besides, he noted
that Williams overemphasized American power and its freedom of action in the world arena and
portrayed the United States as an almighty player projecting its preponderant prowess unilaterally
onto the rest of the world. Such a portrayal distorted the reality of American diplomacy and gave
readers a false image on omnipotent America, Aruga complained. Moreover, Aruga charged that
Williams failed to examine a variety of oppositional forces at work abroad which worked not only to
constrain America’s freedom of action, but also may have affected American society at home signifi-
cantly. It was argued that those problems primarily derived from Williams’ narrow perspective.

(2) Japanese New Left Historians

As noted earlier, historian Shimizu Tomohisa introduced Williams to his Japanese colleagues
immediately after he returned from study at the University of Wisconsin in 1960–1961. He took the
view that American aggression in Vietnam was nothing but an inevitable consequence of the
American past. He was opposed to the Vietnam War and his government that supported U.S. war
efforts in Southeast Asia. Shimizu was actively involved in an anti-war, pro-peace movement in
Japan, while at the same time he pursued American studies. He was determined not to become an
“armchair scholar,” cloistering himself in an ivory tower. He chose to distance himself from both
mainstream liberals and orthodox Marxists in Japan.

Obviously Shimizu respected his mentor deeply whom he regarded as a historian of great intellec-
tual insight as he acknowledged his intellectual debt to Williams. Shimizu published his
Amerika teikoku (The American Empire) in 1968.

In this thought-provoking book, he insisted that the history of the United States should be un-
derstood as the history of an empire. First, Shimizu posited that modernity had two faces — one
was radiant and forward-looking, while the other was dark and seamy. The former, he argued, re-
presented positive values such as liberty, freedom, and individualism, while the latter, negative ones,
such as exclusivity, discrimination, and exploitation. He also posited that modern society of any
nation established itself, grew, and came to maturity by exploiting other societies and nations.
Based on these premises, he described the shady aspects of U.S. history, such as racism, discrimi-
nation against minorities, and disparities based on an unequal distribution of wealth. It is notewor-
thy that Shimizu hardly employed Marxian concepts like class and class struggle in his historical
analysis, nor did he necessarily regard the working class as a sole agent for social change. He chal-
 lenged his Japanese peers to reexamine the American past by looking at it from the bottom-up.
Secondly, Shimizu put forth the continuity thesis of expansionism in American history. He argued that U.S. expansionism had started since the days of the Founding Fathers, such as George Washington and Thomas Jefferson and that it still continues to the present day. It is important to note that the difference that Shimizu did see in expansionism between the pre-imperialist years and the post-imperialist days was its “quantity” aspect. In other words, when he analyzed U.S. expansionism, he hardly discussed the subject matter in the context of neither the changing economic structure, nor of the growing power of the state in American history.49

Takahashi Akira, another Japanese historian on the left shared Shimizu’s continuity thesis of U.S. expansionism, while he also took the view that the history of the United States was the history of an empire. In 1968 and 1969, he published two articles that illuminated the characteristics of American imperialism of the turn of the nineteenth century.50 Drawing on the Hobson-Lenin paradigm of imperialism and Williams’ concepts of “open door imperialism” and “informal empire,” Takahashi argued that U.S. economic expansionism was dictated by the structural imperatives of American monopoly capitalism that matured at the turn of the nineteenth century. He recognized a “qualitative” difference between territorial expansionism on the North American continent and economic expansionism abroad in the twentieth century.

Historian Takahashi took Aruga’s scathing criticism of Williams’ continuity thesis of expansionism seriously. He attempted to incorporate Williams’ idea of open-door imperialism into the Hobson-Lenin paradigm of imperialism in a coherent way, but he was not very successful. He found the conceptual shortcomings of Hobson-Lenin and Williams inherent in their narrow historical perspectives of national development. In particular, he realized that the Hobson-Lenin definition of imperialism was too constraining in terms of a time-frame and too economically deterministic. Takahashi started looking for a new frame of reference, the one that was entirely different from the old Hobson-Lenin and Williams’ paradigm.

Interestingly enough, Takahashi’s gradual change in his conceptualization of imperialism coincided with the publication of Thomas McCormick’s essay on “a corporatist synthesis for American diplomatic history” and his subsequent ‘think piece’ on “world systems.”51 Apparently both Takahashi and McCormick were stimulated by the works of social scientists, such as Andre Gunder Frank, Samir Amin, Immanuel Wallerstein, and others.52

To make better sense of American overseas expansionism, Takahashi came to realize that it was important to analyze the subject matter by placing it in the context of world capitalism. In his subsequent studies, he employed a world-systems perspective that had been developed by scholars, such as Fernand Braudel, French historian, and Wallerstein, American historical sociologist.

Wallerstein challenged the Hobson-Lenin paradigm of imperialism frontally. He maintained that imperialism was NOT (Capital letters are the present author’s.) the historical phenomenon that
could be found only at the highest stage of capitalism, as Hobson and Lenin had insisted. Instead, he argued that it was the phenomenon that came to surface periodically and that it reflected the business cycles in the capitalist world-economy. He maintained that imperialism recurred cyclically since the sixteenth century during which the age of “modern world-system” had dawned.\(^\text{(53)}\) Standing on that premise, the American historical sociologist defined imperialism as nothing but “activities of a stronger nation toward weaker states.”\(^\text{(54)}\) In Wallerstein’s view, imperialism was synonymous with such terms as “capitalism and development.” Historian Takahashi seemed to be persuaded by him.\(^\text{(55)}\)

Historian Takahashi analyzed American foreign relations by employing the concept of hegemony and the ideas of “cyclical rhythms” and “secular trends” that Wallerstein had developed. Positing that “the age of imperialism” was “the B-phase of stagnation” of the capitalist world-economy, Takahashi insisted that U.S. imperialism of the 1890’s could better be understood as being the American version of a neo-mercantilist, state-interventionist policy. He contended that American imperialism of the turn of the nineteenth century was the early manifestation of U.S. hegemonic aspiration to replace Great Britain. Finally, Takahashi came to firm grips with the issue of American imperialism. He gave new life to his studies of American diplomatic history.

As noted earlier, while Shimizu was a non-Marxist radical modernist, Takahashi started his career as an orthodox Marxist and became a world-systems analyst in the second half of his career. Shimizu explored a possibility of establishing an egalitarian, more humane community in Japan by remolding people’s social consciousness through the democratic process of a representative government. On the other hand, Takahashi regarded social inequality and injustice as the manifestation of the contradictions inherent in a capitalist system. He fought against imperialism so as to bring about a socialist revolution at home.\(^\text{(56)}\) Notwithstanding the differences in their ideological and historical orientation, Shimizu and Takahashi contributed much to an understanding of Williams’ works during the 1970’s and beyond.\(^\text{(57)}\)

Conclusion

The foregoing discussion made it clear that the impact of Williams’ scholarship on Japanese scholars of American studies was dramatic but limited. But his methodology of American history was not the only factor that was responsible for the limited effect.

First, Williams faced tough competition in spreading influence in Japan. Japanese scholars who leaned toward Marxism found attraction in the works of Joyce and Gabriel Kolko, in particular. They discovered that Kolko’s work corresponded well with their version of Marxism, because Gabriel Kolko employed not only a structural but also systemic approach to the study of American
foreign policy and American capitalism. In addition, Williams competed with other American scholars, such as those who were associated with the Committee of Concerned Asian Scholars (CCAS) throughout the 1960’s and the 1970’s.

Secondly, the end of the Vietnam War and the meteoric rise of trans-nationalism and globalization contributed to reducing the attractiveness of Williams’ methodology of history and his writings. The conclusion of the Vietnam War served to deprive leftist historians of a concrete reason to criticize U.S. foreign policy. At the same time, the advancement of trans-nationalism and globalization made Williams’ America-centric perspective of diplomatic history look less useful and much less appealing to many Japanese scholars of international relations.

Thirdly, the introduction of Williams’ philosophy of history to Japan coincided with the rise of nationalism and conservatism that was occasioned by its spectacular economic growth. The Japanese public, particularly liberal intellectuals realized intuitively that Williams’ writing did not provide them with what they were looking for, namely, psychological serenity and tranquility. By the time Williams was introduced to Japan, the Japanese public seemed to have grown weary of the kind of social change that the majority of the 1960’s slogans represented, and they were tired of the stress and alienation that they had gone through since the end of the war. Thus, they turned inward-looking and self-complacent. They spent much time in discussing such topics as “the uniqueness of the Japanese” and celebrated the cultural and economic accomplishments that their ancestors had made as well as those of their own.

Fourthly, and perhaps most importantly, the uninterrupted influx of literature relating to different sub-fields other than diplomatic history was responsible for neutralizing the impact of Williams and American New Left revisionism in Japan. An increasing number of scholars of American studies found attraction in the historical writings of the French Annales School, the new social history, and women’s history that came back into vogue in America during the 1970’s and the 1980’s. For those scholars, Williams’ scholarship appeared elitist, America-centered, and too detached from the women’s movement, (and their plea for liberation) if not entirely sexist. Female scholars and a younger generation of American experts, in particular, found feminist history and the new social history more refreshing and interesting.

In spite of all this, however, Williams was a unique historian of keen insight, critical mind, and a warm heart; he made a significant impact on Japanese scholars of American foreign relations. He and other New Left revisionists, notably Lloyd Gardner, Walter LaFeber, and Thomas McCormick, inspired great interest in American foreign policy and stimulated Japanese scholars to examine empirically some of the hypotheses that Williams formulated in his Tragedy of American Diplomacy — such hypotheses as “empire has limits” and “empire does not pay.”

Under those circumstances, a small study group called Amerikashi Kenkyūkai (The Society of
American Historical Studies) was formed in 1975 with a membership of 20. The critical situation outside Japan, namely, the protest movements that had started in France, the United States, and elsewhere since the 1960’s and the influence of American New Left revisionism prompted them to form this anti-establishmentarian organization. This new group of younger scholars announced that one of the primary purposes of organizing the new study group was to critically reexamine the conventional views of America and seek to rewrite a whole history of the United States from entirely new perspectives. This organization published the first issue of its journal in 1978, featuring the problems of the State in American history. With a rapid increase in membership after more than thirty years since its inception, this study group reorganized itself anew with the new name of Nihon Amerikashi Gakkai (The Japanese Association for American History) in September 2004. The younger organization of American history, which perhaps may be regarded as a living testimony of the influence of New Left revisionism, has been active and thriving up to the present day. It stands side by side with more traditional Nihon Amerika Gakkai (The Japanese Association for American Studies). For this reason alone, it might be properly stated that Williams and American New Left revisionists contributed much to promoting American studies in Japan.

Notes


2) In this article, concerning the way in which Japanese names are written, the Japanese practice is observed as a general rule in which the family name or surname comes first before the given or personal name.


5) For example, Maruyama Masao, a leading political scientist, compared Japanese authoritarianism with European fascism, while Ōtsuka Hisao, an eminent economic historian, sought to determine the historically specific conditions that brought about modernization and democratization by positing British capitalism as its prototype. Maruyama discovered the absence of independence and individualism in the Japanese mental makeup, while Ōtsuka implicitly criticized the Japanese for the failure to reach the British level of social consciousness by portraying the ideal type of “modern man.”
6) Japanese orthodox Marxists give priority to collective needs, such as the need of organizations which hold a Messianic zeal for reforming society. Marxism is a foreign school of thought and has been essentially a monopoly of elite intellectuals in Japan. Therefore, the Marxian philosophy of history has not penetrated very far into the Japanese masses. Marxists regarded the JCP as an organ to achieve their political goal (socialism). Operating on the basis of historical materialism, Marxists were extremely abstract and optimistic about the prospect of making a revolution in Japan. Consequently, most of their academic products tended to be far from being based on the real wants and needs of the general public. For Marxists, political objectives took precedence over human feelings. They tended to take human needs (humanism) and the well-being of an individual citizen as a secondary consideration. For this reason, the JCP leadership and elite Marxists were often criticized for being arrogant and not very sensitive to human feelings. They were regarded as cool and callous to the sufferings of individuals. Moreover, it has been pointed out that the JCP leadership and orthodox Marxists, in particular, are notorious for being hypocritical with their moral code of a double-standard. Due to being authoritarian, sectarian, and subjective, they tended to be extremely severe and intolerant toward others who happen to disagree with them. Resting on the authority of Soviet Marxism, however, they were criticized for being lenient to themselves about their self-righteous way of life and about the errors that they committed. They had a tendency to confuse love of power with love of the general public (which they claimed they had). Being atheists, they had neither a strong incentive nor much experience to confront the inner-self spiritually and discipline themselves to become civilized human beings. As a result, they were so dogmatic and narrow-minded that it was difficult to see their own limits as frail and fallible human beings. Thus, the JCP and Marxists lost much of the confidence and support of the general public. Japan’s rapid economic growth and the resulting influence of society had a corrosive effect on the social consciousness of working people by the end of the 1970’s. It led them to have second thoughts about giving unquestioned allegiance to the JCP and Marxism. See Kuyama Yasushi, ed., Sengo nihon seisshinshi [A History of Postwar Japanese Ethos], (Tokyo: Sōbunsha, 1961), pp. 213–216.


8) The participants in the discussion were Shimizu Ikutarō, Hayashi Kentarō, Maruyama Masao, Miyagi Otoya, Matsumura Kazuto, Kozai Yoshishige, and Mashita Shin’ichi, “Yuibutsuron to shutaisei” [historical materialism and independence], Sekai, February 1948, pp. 13–43;


10) They include Nakaya Ken-ichi, Saitō Makoto, Imazu Akira, and others.


12) They include Ohara Keiji, Suzuki Keisuke, Kikuchi Ken’ichi, and others.


15) Modernization theory called for value-free scholarship based on quantifiable empirical data by positing basic values as givens and set up “objective” criteria which would presumably prove applicable to any society and nation.

16) The Japanese Association for American Studies numbers approximately 1200 members today.

18) Perhaps it may be necessary to clarify the meanings of the “New Left” that the term connotes in Japanese. In Japan, the New Left means a group of radical Marxists who left the JCP under the influences of the de-Stalinization of 1956, a Sino-Soviet split, the revolution of 1968, and the counter-culture movement around the world. While keeping a rigid adherence to a Marxist-Leninist doctrine, they were opposed to all forms of entrenched power including the JCP. They regarded the JCP as too distant and aloof from the real needs of the people and they sometimes called themselves Maoists. They rejected a type of socialism licensed by the Soviet Union. They harshly criticized the Soviet socialism, because they believed that the evils of doctrinaire authoritarianism were reigning rife and rampant in the Soviet socialism. They were preoccupied with an anti-systemic movement and favored direct participatory democracy.

19) Muramoto Takeshi, “Kaiko to tenbō” [Retrospect and Prospect], *Shigaku zasshi* [The Journal of History], 78–5 (1968).

20) Shimizu Tomohisa and Tomita Torao, “Kaiko to tenbō” [Retrospect and Prospect], *Shigaku zasshi* [The Journal of History], 77–5 (1967).


25) Ibid., p. 42.

26) Ibid., p. 312.

27) Ibid., p. 13.

28) Previously most Americans equated imperialism with the policy of a metropolis which absorbed and controlled foreign territories as an integral part of a “formal empire.” They interpreted American imperialism of the turn of the nineteenth-century as an “aberration” in U.S. history and insisted that it was “liquidated” soon afterwards. They tended to emphasize psychological and non-economic factors of imperialism and dismissed the Hobson-Leninist definition of imperialism as too simplistic an economic determinism. Williams, of course, challenged such a narrow construction of imperialism, and yet he did not necessarily accept the Hobson-Lenin paradigm of imperialism. Drawing on the works of British historians Gallagher and Robinson who challenged
Lenin’s paradigm of imperialism, Williams applied the concept of “the imperialism of free trade” or the idea of “informal empire” to the American experience.


30) Contrary to the general image of the state as a neutral organ, it should be emphasized that the state frequently served as an agent of corporate capital at the time of economic difficulties and showdowns between capital and labor.

31) A notable example is Professor Asada Sadao, the “last and favorite” student of Samuel Flagg Bemis at Yale. He harshly criticized Williams’ *Tragedy of American Diplomacy* for being too simplistic an explanation of American foreign policy.


33) Williams explained that “when an advanced industrial nation plays . . . a controlling and one-sided role in the development of a weaker economy, then the policy of the more powerful country can . . . be described as imperial.” Williams, *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy*. second and revised edition, p. 55.


35) Ibid., p. 594.

36) Ibid.


41) Of course, throughout Japan there was a variety of New Left historians who studied other branches of history. It can be safely said, however, that Shimizu and Takahashi represented a small group of the Japanese New Left scholars of American history.


47) The present writer believes that these two faces of modernity constitute the integral parts of a modern civil society. Each one of them not only functions complementarily but also reinforces one another.


49) Muramoto Takeshi, “Kaiko to tenbō” [Retrospect and Prospect], *Shigaku zasshi* [The Journal of History], 78–5 (1968).


52) McCormick was invited first in 1983 as a keynote speaker to the annual meeting of the Japanese Association for American Studies held in Kyoto where he presented his paper entitled “Drift or Mastery? A Corporatist Synthesis for American Diplomatic History” and exchanged views with Japanese scholars including Aruga, Takahashi, and Igarashi Takeshi.


56) Takahashi was an orthodox Marxist when he was younger, but he later became a scholar who studied American foreign policy from the perspective of world-systems analysis.


59) The CCAS scholars, for example, are Franz Schurmann, Noam Chomsky, Mark Selden, John Dower, Herbert Bix, and others. It is unfortunate that space precludes the present writer from discussing the popularity of CCAS scholars in Japan in detail. For further information on the CCAS in Japan, see Kosugi Shūji, “Amerika niokeru Ajia kenkyūsha no atarashii ugoki” [A New Trend in Asian Scholars in America], *Rekishigaku kenkyū*, 355 (December 1969), pp. 54–58; Kinbara Samon, “Higashi Ajia mondai to Amerika no Ajia kenkyūsha” [East Asian Problems and Asian Scholars in America], *Rekishigaku kenkyū*, 368 (January 1971), pp. 46–61; Mark Selden, “Wareware wa nani wo yūryō suru-ka” [What Are We Concerned About?], *Asahi jānaru*, (March 8, 1970), pp. 17–18; Takeuchi Yoshimi, Franz Schuman, and Mark Selden, “Teidan: Ajia to Chūgoku wo shiru koto” [A Tri-Cornered Conversation: To Know Asia and China], *Sekai*, 294 (May 1970), pp. 82–97.


62) Younger Japanese scholars of American history criticized Williams for his lacking a structural approach, pointing to the fact that he was weak in his theory of the state, although they all acknowledged the fact that Williams was an outstanding scholar of insight and imagination. In his attempt to gain the knowledge of the state in modern America, one scholar chose to review the books in which Gabriel Kolko and Robert Wiebe outlined the theory of the state. It is interesting to note, however, that Williams was conspicuously absent in that review. Amerikashi kenkyūkai, ed., *Amerikashi-kenkyū* [Studies of American History], 1 (1978).