



Pacific Dementia On the Polymorphous Epithet in Japan under Pax Americana

A hybrid *u: japan* lecture by Hitomi Koyama

平和が見えま すか

視力検査表のPEACEの字が見えますか。
もし、よく見えないならば……
戦後五〇年、私たち日本人は
かなり平和への視力が衰えています。
いまこそ、この五〇年をふりかえり
「不戦」と「非武装」の原理を
見直さるべきではないでしょうか。

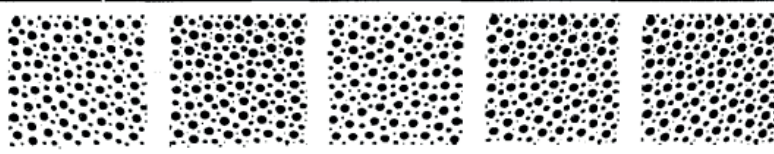
●あの敗戦から五〇年

一九四五年夏、日本の敗戦がはじまり、私は幼少の頃を過ごした。そして一九五五年のいま、私はこれに五〇年、何をしようか、このような疑問を自分自身に繰り返して聞いている。私には、

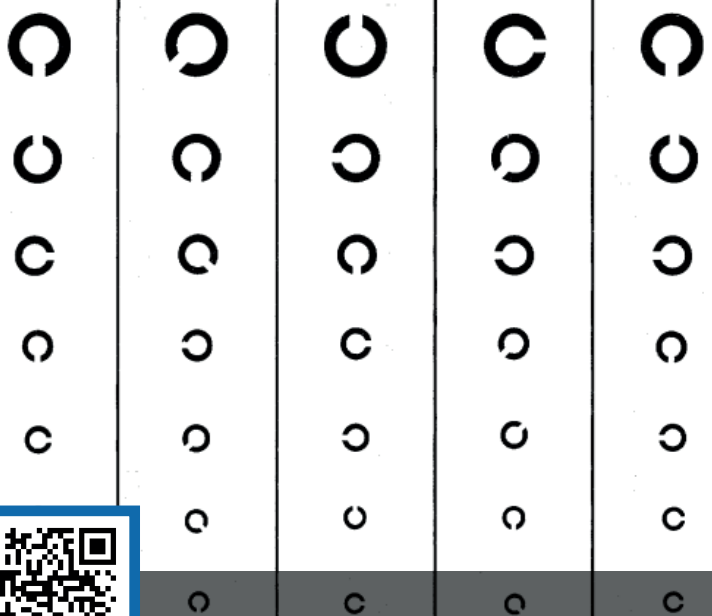
Thursday
2025-04-03
18⁰⁰~19³⁰

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あなたの手を動かして、



P E A C E



●市民の不戦宣言

一九九五年八月、日本は終戦五〇年を迎えた。日本は明治以来、天皇を神の御孫と信じてきた。戦後、日本は民主主義国家として生まれ変わった。市民の不戦宣言は、平和を求め、戦争を拒否する意志を示すものである。



<https://japanologie.univie.ac.at/ujapanlectures>

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When US President George W. Bush declared victory in Iraq in 2007, he addressed the veterans that bringing democracy to the Middle East will be feasible because Americans have already accomplished this before in Japan. In the narration of US-led liberal international order, Japan became the symbol of a successfully rehabilitated former enemy that is now a thriving liberal democracy. Little did Bush know that across the Pacific, while the United States was touting Japan as the success case, the Japanese were using an epithet against one another, that the Japanese people have become “pacifically demented [*heiwa boke*],”—that is, demented, because of peace brought under Pax Americana.

The epithet is ubiquitous. Explanation as to why one couldn’t prevent the assassination of Shinzo Abe is “pacific dementia,” youths standing in demonstration declare themselves as “pacifically demented,” stump speeches on the street calls for the need to “awaken the Japanese people who have become pacifically demented”—while the phrase does not appear in polite Defense White Papers, the epithet can be found in comic books,

in sensational magazine headlines, in heated National Diet Sessions, and in everyday references as a shorthand for the Japanese people’s inability to realistically think about war, peace, and security. This raises a question, how does an epithet which pairs peace with dementia—a condition which is negative as it pertains to deterioration of thought—become ubiquitous in a pro-US state such as Japan? The fact that the epithet is always paired, instead of being used as “you are demented,”—calls for a historicized investigation.

In this talk, I argue that attending to this polymorphous epithet can reveal important features of contemporary Japanese politics. I ask what kind of work does the epithet do? How does the epithet work to constitute progressives as out of touch with reality? How has the figure of the “pacifically demented” worked as foil for the realist and the conservatives to normalize their political vision? How is the interpellation, that “you are pacifically demented” paralyzing, but also giving rise to a countering subject?



Hitomi Koyama (Ph.D., Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore) is an Assistant Professor in the Faculty of Humanities, Leiden University, the Netherlands. She is an international relations theorist working at the intersection of comparative political theory, global intellectual history, and Japanese international political thought. Her first book, „On the Persistence of the Japanese History Problem: Historicism and the International Politics of History“ (Routledge, 2018) asks why postwar Japanese society remains caught in an impasse over atonement for its imperialist past. Her most recent publication is “Supposing the moral state: Japan and historical justice under liberal internationalism,” *International Affairs* (2023). She is now currently working on her second monograph on Pacific Dementia, asking what the sudden proliferation of the epithet in post-Cold War Japan says about the reappraisal of Pax Americana in a state where more than eighty percent of the population feels affinity for the United States.

<https://japanologie.univie.ac.at/ujapanlectures>
ujapanlectures.ostasien@univie.ac.at