Shōwashi, the Story of a Leftist
Post-War Japanese History Book

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Since its first publication in 1955, the popular history book Shōwashi (Shōwa History) has come to be considered an integral part of the leftist historiographical canon. Its pacifist message was particularly appealing to readers struggling to come to terms with the recent experience of war and the continuing threat of global conflict. It immediately became a best seller and remains in print today.

Shōwashi offered a scientific explanation of the history and structure of Japanese imperialist aggression that rendered impotent any domestic resistance to war. The Shōwashi authors, who believed that the study of history would “logically illuminate the historical and social existence of the people,” related historical facts in order to foster a scientific and rational understanding of the era.¹ They sought to uncover the meaning of war through a Marxist analytical framework—appealing to the universal truth of modern science and explaining universal historical processes in which human beings played a fundamentally important, yet also an externally determined, role. Shōwashi urged readers never again to allow the emergence of conditions that prevented effective opposition to war.

The anti-war message of Shōwashi was undoubtedly a fundamental aspect of its appeal to readers in early post-war Japan, when pacifist sentiment surged among large sections of the population.² Its best-seller status also reflected its publisher’s reputation as a sponsor of quality scholarship engaged with contemporary intellectual discourse, a reputation embodied in its popular series of small format, accessibly priced paperbacks known as shinsho.³ In this essay, I examine the publishing history of Shōwashi to show how, in shaping the book both textually

¹ Tōyama Shigeki cited in Nakamura Masanori, “Rekishigaku to rekishi jujutsu,” Rekishigaku kenkyū 716 (November 1998), 168–175, 169.
² Contemporary pacifism was a response to the tense Cold War climate, and was facilitated by the constitutional guarantee of civic freedoms. The idea that the people had been victims of wartime imperialism dominated public discourse, and responsibility was overwhelmingly ascribed to military and government leaders, rather than the people themselves. Shōwashi’s narrative of the popular powerlessness may have sat comfortably with this idea, but ordinary people in Shōwashi were by no means passive. Indeed, in the book’s final passage, the authors offered inspirational examples of how they had striven for peace and democracy after the Second World War. On the treatment in public discourse of the sensitive issue of war responsibility, see Franziska Seraphim, War Memory and Social Politics in Japan, 1945–2005 (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Centre, 2006), 1–3; on the idea of victimisation, see James J. Orr, The Victim as Hero (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2001), 15–24.
³ The term “shinsho” refers to the soft format measuring 182 x 103mm and, in combination with “Iwanami,” denotes the publisher Iwanami Shoten’s popular paperback series launched in 1938.
and symbolically, its publishers not only influenced its reception through their imprint, but also, by supporting the debate the book prompted, prolonged its life and ensured its place in the historiographical canon. More specifically, I provide an account of its publishing history, describe the circumstances of its initial production and subsequent republication, and detail instances of editorial intervention that shaped its content and character. With particular attention to the publisher’s role, I then discuss the role of an important history debate in determining the contexts in which the book was read and the meanings ascribed to it, and how it came to be included in the canon of leftist historiography.

The canon serves as a guide to what to read; inclusion in a body of canonical literature involves a process of selection that involves interventions by actors who mediate the transmission of knowledge in the broader sphere of the mass market, and recognition by established authorities in a disciplinary field. Acknowledgement that the process of canon formation is a continuing process involving the exercise of epistemic authority makes it important to examine the institutions that determine what constitutes the canon. In the case of Shōwashi, the role of the publisher in this process is especially important.

The production of the book
The idea for Shōwashi came from the publishing company Iwanami Shoten. The book was conceived of as part of a project overseen by its shinsho department to encourage reflection on the first thirty years of the Shōwa period (1926–1989). The authors’ commission was to compose an account suitable for a general audience explaining why the Japanese people had not been able to prevent the war. The thirtieth year of Shōwa was 1955; this year also marked the end of the first post-war decade, one that had seen intense discussion on the nature of post-war democracy and the direction of national reconstruction, especially after the end of the Allied Occupation. Leftist intellectuals and professional groups such as the Historical Science Society (see below) had embraced constitutionally enshrined democratic freedoms, and mobilised in their defence as early as 1947, when the marked shift in direction of SCAP-GHQ policy (the so-called “reverse course”) became apparent and began to bolster conservative Japanese politics. By the mid-1950s, this tenor of this politics was clear; indeed, November 1955 marked the birth of the conservative Liberal Democratic Party that would dominate national politics for the following fifty years.

The Shōwashi authors—Tōyama Shigeki, Fujiwara Akira and Imai Seiichi—were all known to Iwanami Shoten and the commissioning editor, Nakajima Yoshikatsu. Nakajima first approached Tōyama Shigeki with the idea, and

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5 Iwanami Shoten Henshūbu (eds), Iwanami shinsho no 50nen, 29.
Fujiwara Akira and Imai Seiichi were recruited shortly thereafter. All three were active members of the Historical Science Society, whose journal Iwanami Shoten published, and had made important contributions to the field of contemporary history research, including as part of the Historical Science Society’s writing team for the History of the Asia Pacific War (Taiheiyō sensōshi), a groundbreaking publication that had come to the attention of Iwanami editors. As Tōyama’s specialist area was the Meiji period (1868–1912)—Iwanami Shoten had published his critically acclaimed study of the Meiji Restoration in 1951—it was decided that historians with expert knowledge of the Taishō and Shōwa periods should be sought as joint authors. Imai, a political science specialist who had written on pre-war fascism, and Fujiwara, an emerging specialist of contemporary history, were qualified for the task.

The fourth member of the original team, Fujita Shōzō (shown in figure 1), withdrew from the project in June 1955. Taiheiyō sensōshi was the first comprehensive analysis of the history of the Second World War to appear in post-war Japan. Edited by the Historical Science Society and published by Tōyō Keizai Shimpōsha in five volumes between September 1953 and July 1954, it was an extended statement of historical materialism, and a groundbreaking work in the emerging field of “contemporary history.” While no authors are identified in the front matter as responsible for particular chapters or volumes, the division of labour in terms of research and writing is described in the afterword to each volume. According to these, Fujiwara and Imai collaborated with Tōyama on the politics section of volumes 1 (entitled “The Manchurian Incident”) and 2 (“The Sino-Japanese War”). See Tōyama Shigeki, “Dai ichi bunsatsu no hankyō ni kotaete,” (Geppō 1 (November 1953)), in Taiheiyō sensōshi, edited by Rekishigaku Kenkyūkai (Tokyo: Tōyō Keizai Shimpōsha, 1953). In line with the Historical Science Society’s concern with the quality of history education, the work was deemed appropriate for history teachers, being included in a list of recent writing on the Pacific War recommended for this readership in early 1956 (“Taiheiyō sensō to sono shiryō,” Rekishi kōdō 4.2 (February 1956), 66–68).

Photograph courtesy of Nakajima Yoshikatsu.
Nakajima Yoshikatsu was one of four editors in Iwanami Shoten’s shinsho editorial department. He had a degree in economic history from the prestigious Waseda University, was well versed in historical materialism, and intellectually inclined towards the authors’ worldview. Close in age to Imai and Fujiwara, he was enthusiastic about the project and collaborating with the authors.9

When they began writing in June 1955, the authors based themselves at Fujiwara’s house, where they could spread out and would not be disturbed.10 Their deadline was close; it was vital that the book come out during the thirtieth year of Shōwa, that is, before the end of 1955.11 Fujiwara and Imai endured the daytime summer heat—Imai preparing the draft of the first half of the text and Fujiwara the second—and in the evening, Tōyama would call in on his way home from work at the University of Tokyo’s Historiographical Institute and review the draft manuscript.12 Both Fujiwara and Imai were absent during the revision of the manuscript in September; Fujiwara was at a writing retreat for another publishing project, and Imai in hospital with an unexpected injury. Tōyama was thus responsible for editing the entire draft and worked frantically with Nakajima to ready it for publication. Nakajima prepared the index, organising all the plates and figures according to Imai’s suggestions, and co-ordinated the jacket copy and other promotional text.13

The title Shōwashi (Shōwa history) was selected from several alternatives, including Gendaishi (Contemporary history) and Shōwa sanjūnen shi (The thirty year history of Shōwa). Nakajima and other members of the shinsho editorial department initially favoured Shōwa sanjūnen shi because it clearly reflected the scope of the narrative, but Nakajima was eventually persuaded by Tōyama’s argument that Shōwashi would have greater impact because it emphasised the war responsibility of the Shōwa emperor.14 Imai and Fujiwara also liked its simplicity

9 Fujiwara was born in 1923; Imai and Nakajima were both born in 1924. In 1955, Fujiwara was employed as a part-time lecturer at Chiba University, and Imai was an associate professor at Yokohama City University.
10 The following account is based on an interview conducted with Fujiwara Akira on 10 November 1998 and on conversations with Nakajima Yoshikatsu on 2 December 1998, 9 July 1999, 27 April 2001, and 3 September 2003. The extent to which Nakajima drove the project, including setting deadlines, participating in the authors’ study meetings and visiting their homes, is apparent from his account of the book’s production in Ōkado Masataka, ed., Shōwashi ronsō o tou (Tokyo: Nihon Keizai Hyoronsha, 2006), 318–24.
12 The division of labour was according to the authors’ expertise: Imai’s expertise was in political history, while Fujiwara, who had served in the Japanese imperial army and studied history at the University of Tokyo after his demobilisation, was an emerging specialist in military history.
13 Nakajima Yoshikatsu, personal communication, 3 September 2003.
14 Tōyama pointed to the clear association of the name Shōwa (“Enlightened Peace”) with emperor Hirohito and war’s overwhelming influence on the first thirty years of his reign. According to the nengō calendrical system, the new era that began with the ascension of a new emperor to the throne
and considered that, of all the options, it would be the most understandable by the public. The short, pithy title would also make the book easy to market, and fit perfectly with the simple elegance of the shinsho cover design.

Figure 2: Shōwashi (Iwanami shinsho edition, 1955).

The chosen title reflected one of the book’s principal themes—that the emperor system was the fundamental cause of the war—but communicating the emperor’s war responsibility was neither the reason for the title nor the authors’

was given a new name, and years were counted according to the emperor’s reign: thus, 1945 was Shōwa 10 and 1955 was Shōwa 30.
primary motivation. According to the preface, the authors sought to counter the deleterious effect of the flood, following the signing of the San Francisco Peace Treaty, of *senki mono*—personal accounts of war experience by former soldiers—which they saw as offering one-dimensional accounts of the war that lent themselves to romanticisation. They were also motivated by the resurgence of militarism and conservative reactionary politics. Their self-appointed task was to answer, as succinctly as possible, what they thought to be the crucial questions: “Why did the war happen? Why were the people unable to prevent the circumstances that led to descent into war?” Theirs was essentially a pacifist message—“such circumstances must never be allowed to arise again”—which suggested a role for the people in creating their own future. It had immediate resonance in the context of the burgeoning peace movement.

*Shōwashi* was published in the Iwanami *shinsho* series on 16 November 1955. By the end of December it had sold more than one hundred thousand copies, and had gone into its sixth printing. In the midst of a publishing boom in similar format works, *Shōwashi* remained on the top ten best-seller list for eighteen months. In November 1957, it still ranked ninth in the top fifteen best sellers. Cumulative lists of sales figures for the thirty years following its first publication consistently place *Shōwashi* amongst the ten best-selling books.

The personal responses received from readers of *Shōwashi* took the authors by surprise: within about a month of its publication several hundred letters had been received by the publisher. The authors had had students in mind as the primary audience, but were pleased that the book sold more widely, including to readers with first-hand experience of the war “who wanted to understand the meaning of the war in a more scholarly, scientific way.” Nakajima shared the authors’ surprise that housewives and middle-aged women engaged in the peace movement constituted a notable proportion—about one third—of readers, while politically aware high school and university students constituted another third, and the remaining third were salarymen and intellectuals such as university professors. This breakdown was slightly at odds with the profile of the typical Iwanami *shinsho* reader. The Iwanami *shinsho* motto, “modern learning for modern man” (*gendaijin no gendaiteki kyōyō*) had originally envisaged a popular audience, but Iwanami *shinsho* publications typically attracted readers with a higher-than-average educational qualification and social consciousness, many of whom were already engaged with contemporary issues.

*Shōwashi*’s readership was no doubt expanded and its sales boosted by its adoption as a text by organised groups, as were many other titles in the Iwanami

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16 Fujiwara Akira, personal communication, 10 November 1998.
17 This breakdown of readership was undoubtedly based on information on cards returned to the publisher by readers, and the precise proportions are impossible to determine.
In some cases, this use was counter to the authors’ immediate aims. In the so-called “culture circles” popular within labour unions, for example, the book often prompted accounts of personal experience, rather than critical discussion of the underlying structures of militarism and causes of war.\textsuperscript{18} In contrast, in independent groups and student study circles, it was read more closely and critically discussed; Fujiwara recalls being invited to address such groups at Waseda University and the University of Tokyo. \textit{Shōwashi} was also formally adopted by instructors at Hitotsubashi Gakuin—the preparatory school for the prestigious private Hitotsubashi University—who recommended it to students preparing for the university entrance exam, which contained a section on modern history.\textsuperscript{19}

There were also, however, many negative responses to the book, the most aggressive of which emanated from the political right wing and conservative intellectuals outraged at the title’s thinly veiled reference to the emperor.\textsuperscript{20} They were also infuriated by \textit{Shōwashi}’s subtext—the responsibility of the emperor system for the war—and attacked both Iwanami Shoten and the authors. Iwanami staff dissuaded the authors from responding to these attacks; Yoshino Genzaburō, chief editor of the journal \textit{Sekai}, considered that any reply would simply play into the hands of rightists, and was reluctant to expose company employees, the \textit{Shōwashi} authors or others associated with Iwanami Shoten to the possibility of physical violence.\textsuperscript{21}

\textsuperscript{18} Nakajima Yoshikatsu, personal communication, 2 December 1998.
\textsuperscript{19} Fujiwara Akira, personal communication, 10 November 1998. \textit{Shōwashi} was never officially certified as a history textbook and thus not approved for use in history instruction at public high schools; it has not, to the author’s knowledge, been referred to in any of the “history textbook” debates that have dominated public discourse around history in the post-war period. Over several decades, these debates have intersected with a large range of topical domestic and regional political issues, in the context of which the growing tendency towards neo-nationalism in government policy has raised serious questions about the ability of the Japanese state to acknowledge fully its wartime record. For a useful summary of the centrality of textbooks to this public discourse on this record, see Yoshiko Nozaki and Mark Selden, “Japanese Textbook Controversies, Nationalism, and Historical Memory: Intra- and Inter-national Conflicts,” \textit{The Asia-Pacific Journal} 24.5 (15 June 2009). One of the most urgent yet intractable issues has been sexual slavery and Japanese imperialism, the so-called “comfort women” question. For a recent analysis of this question that highlights the inflammatory stance of prominent Japanese politicians, see Tessa Morris-Suzuki, “Out With Human Rights, In With Government-Authorised History: The Comfort Women and the Hashimoto Prescription for a ‘New Japan,’” \textit{The Asia-Pacific Journal} 10.36 (3 September 2012).

\textsuperscript{20} While the era name was commonly used in dates, it was only applied to emperors posthumously. To use the reign name Shōwa in relation to anything other than a calendar year during the emperor’s lifetime was considered highly disrespectful. See footnote 14 above.

\textsuperscript{21} This possibility was veritable: violent right-wing ultranationalists disturbed union meetings, and assisted management to break up labour union strikes on several occasions in the 1950s; and in early 1961, a young ultranationalist broke into the home of the president of the Chūō Kōron publishing company, seriously wounding his wife and killing a maid, in protest at a short story published the previous year in the journal \textit{Chūō kōron} in which the crown prince and princess are beheaded. This
Shōwashi also provoked critical responses from within intellectual circles and the academy, and Tōyama did reply to one particular response, that of literary critic Kamei Katsuichirō. Their exchange rapidly developed into a multifaceted discussion of history writing which came to be known as the “Shōwashi debate.”

The Shōwashi debate

Shōwashi’s status as a history book and its incorporation into the leftist historiographical canon are in large part attributable to the debate prompted by its publication. Sparked by the exchange between Tōyama and Kamei Katsuichirō, and fuelled by responses, counter-criticisms, self-criticisms, and comments on these, the Shōwashi debate soon became a broad-ranging discussion of historiographical issues such as the portrayal of the individual in history; the relationship between literature and history, and between historical theory and historical narrative; coincidence and inevitability in history; war experience and war responsibility; and the social obligations of historians.

Kamei’s extended review appeared in the March 1956 issue of the literary and intellectual monthly Bungei shunjū.22 He described four ways in which he thought the Shōwashi narrative exemplified histories written from the perspective of historical materialism. First, the portrayal of the people revealed none of the subtleties of humanity: as researchers of humanity, Kamei insisted, historians must put themselves in the shoes of their subjects and ask what they would do in their place, feeling their strengths and weaknesses. Shōwashi revealed a lack of compassion. Second, the authors narrated history in terms of the abstract concept of “class struggle.” Its authors considered only the army, politicians and entrepreneurs, and the communists and liberals who opposed them. The ordinary citizens in the middle, precisely the group that would be expected to appear in a history of the war, were nowhere to be seen. Kamei’s third, related, criticism was that where individuals’ behaviour was depicted as reflecting the nature of the times, scant attention was paid to how their characters were subtly changed by the times; the characterisations were flat and gave no sense of the living person. Finally, Kamei pointed to the scant treatment of important facts such as the entry of the Soviet Union into the war and the uncritical portrayal of the Japanese communists’ struggle. In effect, he queried whether oppression was the sole reason for the communists’ failure to develop a firm popular support base, and asked “Was there no fault in their strategy and tactics?” He thus raised the issue of political bias in Shōwashi.

incident served as a further warning to the media against infringing the so-called “Chrysanthemum taboo” that required media self-censorship in relation to treatment of the emperor or the imperial family.

22 “Gendai rekishi e no gimon,” Bungei shunjū 34.3 (March 1956), 58–68.
Tōyama’s response, published in the June issue of the prominent intellectual journal *Chūō kōron*, did not engage directly with Kamei’s criticisms, but argued generally that his expectations of historical narrative were unrealistic. Tōyama opined that the purposes of literature and history were fundamentally different: whereas literature was artistic creation and sought to entertain, history was scientific inquiry and sought to relate facts about the past. He asserted that historians, who were constrained by the available documentary evidence and their obligation to objectivity and historical fact, could not be expected to portray people as literary authors did. As Kamei elaborated his critique in successive issues of *Chūō kōron*, others began to engage in the debate. In December, *Shōwashi* and Kamei’s critique was the focus of a round-table discussion on “writing contemporary history” between established historians and prominent literary figures, a record of which also appeared in *Chūō kōron*.

Among the many other prominent public intellectuals who contributed to the debate as it unfolded into 1956 and 1957 were paediatrician and best-selling author Matsuda Michio, University of Tokyo political historian Shinohara Hajime, and Marxist historian and leading member of the Historical Science Society Inoue Kiyoshi. Matsuda had earlier anticipated Kamei’s criticism of *Shōwashi* in a front page article in the March 1956 issue of the leading book review weekly *Nihon dokusho shinbun*, in which he lamented the book’s failure to convey the pain of the people who lived through the Shōwa era. He regretted the fact that such a limited perspective was being promoted to youthful readers.

In what would form a separate strand of the debate, Shinohara and Inoue exchanged views on contemporary political history methodology from anti-Marxist and pro-Marxist positions respectively.

Other critics pointed to the deficiencies of *Shōwashi* as illustrative of the fundamentally problematic nature of contemporary historical research—for which there was both a lack of official documents and an abundance of individual experience and personal testimonies from which to draw—and questioned whether or not objectivity was possible in this field. It was in particular connection to contemporary history that the Historical Science Society entered into the debate. At a special round-table discussion it hosted in mid-September 1956, *Shōwashi* was the starting points for a broad ranging consideration of, *inter alia*, the portrayal of people in history and other disciplines, history’s relationship to

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23 “Gendaishi kenkyū no mondaiten,” *Chūō kōron* 71.6 (June 1956), 52–61.
24 See, for example, Wakamori Tarō, “Rekishi kagaku to ningensei,” *Chūō kōron* 71.12 (November 1956), 95–105 and Shidehara Hajime, “Gendaishi no fukasa to omosa,” *Sekai* 132 (December 1956), 143–58.
25 “Gendaishi no kakikata o megutte,” *Chūō kōron* 71.13 (December 1956), 74–85.
other fields of scholarship, and the link between history and politics. Tōyama was among the senior historians who participated alongside social critic Ara Masato, and prominent literary figures Kinoshita Junji and Noma Hiroshi.

The Shōwashi debate constituted a thorough critique of the Marxist conception of history, including the role it envisaged for historians. Marxist historical narrative was attacked as arid and impersonal, and based on categorisations that paid insufficient attention to the portrayal of “the people” and human suffering; it was questioned whether an experience as horrific as war could be reduced to a predictable result of class conflict. The debate contributed to the unsettling of this dominant ideology’s authority within historical circles and among intellectual groups generally.

Underpinning these various criticisms was a frustration with the dominance of Marxism in post-war thought, as well as a complex mix of deep-seated resentment and heartfelt disappointment towards the Japanese Communist Party. This sentiment tended to conflate scholarship informed by Marxism with politics influenced by Communism. The absolutist nature of the Party’s political and historical analyses had placed many sympathisers in an invidious position in the face of the absolute authoritarianism of wartime government; they had either to denounce their convictions or to suffer punishment including torture and possibly death. In the immediate post-war period, following the defeat of the military regime, the Party was embraced by many intellectuals, some of whom would become disenchanted by its apparent inability to pursue a policy line independent of the Cominform and by its consistent failure to deliver on the vision promised in its rhetoric. It continued to represent itself as a credible force for democracy, even as voters, suspicious of the Party’s apparent commitment to a strategy of radicalism that countenanced violence, and its subservience to the Cominform, turned away in droves. By the time the Party finally acknowledged the weaknesses of its policies on the occasion of its Sixth National Conference in July 1955, it had already lost the confidence of many students and intellectuals, an important support base. While the self-criticism issued at this event represented an important turning point for the Party, popular distrust of the Soviet Union

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27 See “Rekishi to ningen–toku ni gendaishi no mondai o chūshin ni–,” Rekishigaku kenkyū 200 (October 1956), 17–40.
28 The forces influencing intellectuals’ political loyalties during this period are complex. The views of Shōwashi’s critics were undoubtedly informed by larger forces such as the anti-communist climate of the 1950s. This climate was fostered by the reactionary policies of increasingly right-wing conservative governments subservient to the United States under the US–Japan Alliance. This uneven relationship is beyond the scope of this essay; for a comprehensive account, see Akira Iriye and Robert A. Wampler, Partnership: the United States and Japan, 1951–2001, Tokyo: Kodansha International, 2001.
in particular and communism in general was compounded by Khruschev’s denunciation of Stalin at the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the USSR in February 1956, and the brutality of the Soviet response to the Hungarian uprising in October–November that year.\footnote{Popular sentiment towards the Soviet Union and communism would have been strongly influenced by the memory of the “red purge” during the Allied Occupation (1945–52), the anti-communist rhetoric of conservative Japanese politicians, and the hysteria of McCarthyism.}

These events paralleled the unfolding \textit{Shōwashi} debate. That they fed into it was not surprising considering their coincidence with the tenth anniversary of the end of the war. Discussion of the Stalin criticism highlighted \textit{Shōwashi}’s treatment of the Japanese Communist Party during the war and the question of war responsibility. In the view of many of the book’s critics, the authors had failed to reflect upon the mistakes of Party and its supporters. Marxist groups such as the Historical Science Society—associated with the Party in the minds of their critics—and its members were tarred with the same brush. Their scholarship was criticised as ideologically driven and sterile, and incapable of inspiring, or of effecting, real change in the lives of ordinary people. The \textit{Shōwashi} debate, however, was more than an exchange between Marxists and non-Marxists (or anti-Marxists); it suggested the existence of different attitudes towards the legacy of the past, and fundamentally divergent views of the ideal of post-war democracy. The issues that it raised were of enduring importance and continued to echo in intellectual discourse, and the activities of such groups as the Historical Science Society, well into the 1960s.\footnote{Contemporary history methodology was also the focus of the October 1959 issue of Iwanami’s journal \textit{Shisō}, which featured lengthy articles by Shinohara Hajime, philosopher Komatsu Shigeo, University of Kyoto social historian Kawano Kenji, and Marxist economist Asada Mitsuteru, as well as Matsuzawa Hiroaki’s review of the new edition of \textit{Shōwashi} (see footnote 39 below).}

Conducted in mainstream newspapers and weekly magazines, as well as opinion and professional journals, the \textit{Shōwashi} debate not only provided publicity for the book, ensuring sustained sales,\footnote{Nakajima Yoshikatsu, personal communication, 2 December 1998.} but also focused attention on the nature of the newly emerging field of contemporary history, and prompted a series of extended studies on this topic.\footnote{Publications that appeared in the wake of the debate include Kamei Katsuichirō, \textit{Gendaishi no kadai} [Issues of contemporary history] (Tokyo: Chūō Kōronsha, 1957) and Nezu Masashi, \textit{Hihan nihon gendaishi} [Critical contemporary history] (Tokyo: Nihon Hyōronsha, 1958). Nezu would later note in the preface of his \textit{Nihon gendaishi} [Contemporary Japanese history] (Tokyo: Sanichi Shobō, 1966) that it had been written with \textit{Shōwashi} and its defects in mind.} Furthermore, it inspired other writers to examine their own experience of the period, and attempt their own narratives of Shōwa history. Symbolically, if not explicitly, studies of contemporary history referenced the \textit{Shōwashi} debate, and thus served to introduce the book to new readers, incorporate it within new interpretations, and reinforce its foundational status.\footnote{See for example, Takeyama Michio’s \textit{Shōwashi no seishinshi} (Tokyo: Shinchōsha, 1956) and}
New edition
A new revised edition of Shōwashi was published in August 1959. Since the publication of the first edition, a considerable quantity of new material about the Shōwa period had appeared—including many memoirs by former servicemen in the nostalgic senki mono (accounts of the war) style—and Nakajima Yoshikatsu, who was again the commissioning editor, was conscious of the importance of objective accounts such as Shōwashi. Moreover, inspired by the success of the first edition, and encouraged by its widespread use in history instruction, Iwanami Shoten was eager to enhance Shōwashi’s features as a potential textbook.

Tōyama, Fujiwara and Imai had basically the same instructions as for the first edition, but were conscious of Iwanami Shoten’s expectation that the new edition be suitable for marketing as a textbook. As stated in the preface, they almost completely rewrote the text: the most important revision involved extending the narrative to cover the period of the First World War to highlight the international forces that influenced domestic politics, an understanding of which was considered crucial to explanations of “why the [Second World War] happened and why popular strength did not prevail.” The second major revision was the introduction of as many references to political events and personal names as possible—factual information came to take priority over explanation of historical change—in acknowledgement of the fact that the book was being used as an educational text.

In preparing the new edition, a deliberate effort was made to soften the political tone of the narrative by limiting argument and structural analysis based on historical materialism and reinforcing the political history narrative. Although Fujiwara later conceded that the new edition was more “objective,” he rejected any link between the conservative shift in the prevailing ideological mood in broader society and the softer political tone of the new edition, instead pointing to the fact that it was planned as a textbook. Tōyama was again responsible for drafting the foreword—the direct appealing tone of which contrasts sharply with the neutral prose of the main text. In contrast to the first edition, Fujiwara and Imai also had a say in this material, as did the shinsho editorial department. Nakajima would later opine that these changes made the argument clearer and easier to understand, and

35 Nakajima Yoshikatsu, personal communication, 2 December 1998.
36 Fujiwara Akira, personal communication, 10 November 1998.
38 Imai, in particular, thought that this would assist those readers who had lived through the period to understand it correctly. Other differences included new chapter titles, expanded back matter including a longer chronological table, a ten-page bibliographic essay, and an increased number of maps, charts and tables. These changes added sixty pages to the book.
39 Fujiwara Akira, personal communication, 10 November 1998.
the book accessible to an even wider audience.\(^{40}\) Like the earlier edition, the new edition sold well: by mid-2001, it had sold more than one million copies and was into its sixty-first printing.\(^{41}\)

**Representations of the *Shōwashi* debate**

*Shōwashi*’s connection with the debate that took its name ensured the book’s incorporation into the canon of leftist historiography. In both post-war historiography and histories of post-war thought more generally, the debate is an ineluctable reference point, representing a pivotal moment in the development of ideas about Japan’s recent war.

The debate is inevitably discussed in the literature on post-war historiography. In the post-war period, new generations of progressive historians regularly examined the traditions of past scholarship in an attempt to locate themselves in relation to it. The “Lectures” (Kōza) tradition of Marxist historiography was a constant focal point of such examinations; in recent decades it has been the focus of (re)appraisals of post-war historiography and its core epistemological and theoretical paradigms. The embeddedness of the debate in post-war historiography serves to reinforce the significance of *Shōwashi*. Each time it is discussed, including in the reminiscences of the authors themselves,\(^{42}\) the debate is summarised and given a nuanced interpretation. In the process, details such as the contribution of the editor and publisher are elided.\(^{43}\)

Most accounts of the debate share a similar analytical and chronological framework, in which the events of 1955–1956 are represented as a turning point for Marxist thought in Japan, and in which the tenth anniversary of the end of the war is represented as an opportunity to evaluate post-war society and re-examine the war. One of the earliest accounts focused on its methodological implications for contemporary historical research. In 1963, historian Inumaru Giichi treated

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\(^{40}\) Nakajima Yoshikatsu, personal communication, 2 December 1998. One of the few reviews was by Matsuzawa Hiroaki in the October 1959 issue of *Shisō*, 107–13. Ōkado reproduces this review alongside the earlier essays that sparked the debate (*Shōwashi* 263–70). In the aforementioned account (footnote 10), Nakajima notes three recent publications that engage with *Shōwashi*, as well as interest in the debate from overseas scholars, suggesting clearly that the debate continued to resonate into the twenty-first century.

\(^{41}\) Personal communication with Iwanami Shoten editor Kojima Kiyoshi, 21 August 2001.

\(^{42}\) See, for example, the interviews with Fujiwara and Imai recorded in the supplements to *Jūgonen sensō shi* (published by Aoki Shoten between June 1988 and March 1989).

\(^{43}\) A recent exception is Ōkado, *Shōwashi*, in which Ōkado discusses the debate in the context of the emerging sub-field of contemporary history and the discursive environment of the 1950s, and situates it in relation to the “interrogation of historical method and knowledge from the 1990s” (ii). As noted above, Ōkado reproduces the seminal contributions to the debate. An interview between Ōkado and Nakajima, which is also reproduced (318–24), reveals Nakajima’s very close involvement in the planning and writing process; he set deadlines, attended study meetings, and visited the authors’ homes to collect drafts (318–21).
the debate in the context of an explanatory essay on contemporary history in the famous “Iwanami Lectures on Japanese History.” In his classic account of post-war historiography and historical consciousness, *Sengo no rekishigaku to rekishi ishiki* (1968), also published by Iwanami Shoten, Tōyama reviewed the principal contributions to the debate and highlighted the fact that it raised important issues for how contemporary history should be researched.

Other accounts point to contestation of the prolonged dominance of the “Lectures” faction over Japanese Marxism, and of Marxism over social science. In 1965, Toshiaki Ōkubo considered the debate in the context of criticisms of Marxist historical methodology in modern history. That same year Horigome Yōzō also implied that the debate reflected a re-examination of the ascendancy of “Lectures historiography” when he observed that it “focused attention on the theoretical foundations of Japanese historiography.” Accounts from the mid-1970s also highlighted the debate as an early instance of criticism of Marxist historiography. Thus, for example, in 1975, in a volume of “Iwanami Lectures on Japanese History” on post-war historiography, Nagahara Keiji located the debate in the context of the methodological diversification of research in Japanese history.

Also that year, Fuji Shōichi identified the *Shōwashi* debate as a “contemporary history debate” that outlined two tasks for contemporary historical research: first, to clarify how scientific historiography comprehends history as something made by people; and second, to identify history as an “all round social science” with its own unique methods not limited to the analysis of fact. Implicit in Fuji’s characterisation was the understanding that Marxist ideology necessarily inflected contemporary historical studies.

Although not traversed in the above-mentioned publications, another important influence of the debate that contributed to the ongoing prominence of *Shōwashi* was literary critic Kamei Katsuichirō’s appraisal of the book’s treatment of “ordinary people.” The work of Irokawa Daikichi provides one illustration

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45 On this phenomenon, see Andrey E. Barshay, *The Social Sciences in Modern Japan, the Marxian and Modernist Traditions* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 56.
47 *Rekishi to ningen* (Tokyo: Nihon Hōsō Shuppankai, 1965), 32. Despite Horigome’s assertion that this book was not an explanation of the *Shōwashi* debate, its structure adhered very closely to its development.
of the way in which this strand of the debate inspired historians to explore
the relationship between history and literature in regards to the depiction of
ordinary people, especially the differences between historical narrative and literary
prose. Drawing inspiration from the Shōwashi debate, Irokawa developed an
enduring concern with the challenges of constructing historical narrative, and
the form of the historical novel. Considering the distinction between the work
of historians and writers, Irokawa concluded that although the creative licence
of historians is restricted by an obligation to the historical record, this was not
an excuse for unengaging narrative.51 Another historian inspired by the debate
to contemplate the historian’s obligations in regards to historical narrative is
Nakamura Masanori.52 In his study of workers and peasants in modern Japan, he
succeeded in describing the subjective action of historical figures and the objective
structures with which they interacted, something which required both sensitivity
to the subject and skill as a writer.53

More than forty years after it was first published, issues raised by Shōwashi
and the Shōwashi debate were still being explored in ways that confirm its
foundational place in post-war historiography. For example in 1995, in another
multivolume “Iwanami Lecture” history publication, Yoon Keun Cha situated
Shōwashi and the Shōwashi debate within a broader analysis of the view of Asia
in post-war historiography, observing that neither the book nor the debate were
concerned with the Japanese people’s view of Asia and the war responsibility that
this entailed.54 When the issue of enshrining the spirits of A-class war criminals

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51 See, for example, “Rekishi kijutsu to bungaku,” Shisō 409 (July 1958), 68–78; “Shisō no kotoba,”
52 As a university student, Nakamura’s interest in history was reinforced by the Shōwashi debate,
and he grappled with the challenge of how to produce engaging historical narrative over many years
(Rōdōsha to nōmin (Tokyo: Shōgakukan, 1998), 492, 493).
53 Nakamura, Rōdōsha, 494–95. Nakamura cites Rikkyō University Emeritus Professor Kurihara
Akira’s statement that this study was a young researcher’s “splendid answer to the unresolved
Shōwashi debate, one that showed the possibility beyond the black and white choice of either people-
centric or history driven by social laws”(Rōdōsha to nōmin, 493–94, quotation is from 494).
54 Yoon Keun Cha, “Sengo rekishigaku no ajikan,” in Iwanami köza Nihon tsūshi bekkan 1:
Rekishi ishiki no genzai, edited by Asao Naohiro et al. (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1995), 249–80,
262. The question of the extent to which ordinary Japanese shared the war responsibility of
those militarists prosecuted in the International War Crimes Tribunal for the Far East (or,
alternatively, felt victimised by them) is complex. Complicating factors include: their awareness
of the conduct of the imperial armed forces; their ability to effect any change in wartime
policies; and their political subjectivity. Shōwashi did not grapple directly with the question of
popular war responsibility or subjectivity; it simply explained to readers the structural bases of
Japanese militarism. Nevertheless, in providing this explanation, it did focus readers’ attention
on contemporary politics, including signs of remilitarisation and authoritarian government, and
perhaps lead some to active engagement. The extent to which consciousness of war responsibility
or victimhood inflected pacifist movements in the 1950s is beyond the scope of this essay, but has
been taken up by Orr and Seraphim, cited in footnote 7 above.
separately to those of other war dead at Yasukuni Shrine was raised in the summer of 1999, an article in the Yomiuri newspaper referred to Shōwashi, its treatment of war responsibility, and the Shōwashi debate. After discussing various views of war responsibility, the article’s author suggested that a “real Shōwashi debate” on why war broke out was still necessary. This article illustrates how Shōwashi and the Shōwashi debate are symbolically mobilised in the public sphere. It is yet another example of the enduring legacy of the debate and its continuing role in maintaining the status of Shōwashi as a classic book.

Conclusion

Shōwashi’s place in the leftist historiographical canon is also a result of Iwanami Shoten’s role in the planning and creative processes, and the book’s inclusion in the Iwanami shinsho series. As discussed above, the Iwanami shinsho department not only commissioned the book; its editors, particularly Nakajima Yoshikatsu, also collaborated closely with the authors in aspects of its production that influenced its reception, ranging from the choice of title to whether or not to engage with critics of the book. The debate around the text developed partially in periodicals published by Iwanami Shoten: the monthly intellectual journal Shisō and the journal of the Historical Science Society, Rekishigaku kenkyū, published between 1941 and 1959. The company had a longstanding relationship with academic historians, having lent its name to the monumental multivolume series “Lectures on Japanese History” (Iwanami köza Nihon rekishi) which it published in the 1930s, 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, and other similarly titled multivolume history studies. These publications compiled the latest developments in historical research and, from the 1960s, included volumes on contemporary history. Iwanami Shoten’s close association with the “Lectures” faction of Marxist history can be traced to its 1932–33 publication of the foundational statement on the development of Japanese capitalism (Nihon shihonshugi hattatsushi köza). As an Iwanami Shoten publication authored by members of the Historical Science Society, Shōwashi leveraged the reputation of these publications and the publisher’s stable of authors.

More than other established publisher, Iwanami actively supported the rejuvenation of intellectual life and encouraged popular engagement in post-war

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56 As early as 1964, Shōwashi was included in an anthology of representative “great books” of the Shōwa era entitled Shōwa no meicho: kyōyō no tame no hyakusen (Tokyo: Yūbun, 1964).
57 Iwanami editors also had regular contact, social and professional, with leading scholars and intellectuals. The “consultant group” (sōdanyaku) for the prestigious journal Shisō comprised several preeminent intellectuals, including Maruyama Masao. Prior to joining the shinsho editorial department, Nakajima Yoshikatsu had been an editor for this journal and developed a close working relationship and friendship with many of its contributors.
Japan. This commitment is apparent in the statement on the occasion of the relaunch of the shinsho series in March 1949, which observed:

Today, after experiencing a collapse as never before and surrounded by ruin, we are rising from the depths of abyss to face the dawn of a new era. The problems which confront us, however, are grave. The world is experiencing a great period of change, and the course of history is full of conflict and struggle and continues to create shock waves. The path towards peace and the building of an independent democratic Japan is rugged indeed. Today, it is vital that we look towards the future with determination, hope and courage, and fearlessly confront our present circumstances. In recommencing publication of Iwanami shinsho and bringing it to our readers in its new cover, it is our long-cherished desire to respond to this urgency and nourish a spirit of independence in the Japanese people.58

Finally, the Iwanami shinsho format lent the publisher’s reputation as a dedicated sponsor of intellectual discourse and serious scholarship to Shōwashi. In the boom in the sale of similar format books in the mid-1950s, Iwanami shinsho books stood out from their competitors as being serious, quality non-fiction titles. The series was associated with new works treating topical issues. Inexpensive to buy and convenient to read, it was a format well suited to the times, and its popularity contributed to Shōwashi becoming a best seller.

The history of Shōwashi and the debate it provoked provides an insight into how publishers and editors collaborated with intellectuals as they sought to understand the significance of the past in the present in early post-war Japan. In sponsoring publications, through various periodicals and important multivolume studies on Japanese history, Iwanami Shoten supported intellectual discourse on, and scholarly inquiry into, the meaning of the recent past for contemporary society. The publisher did more than produce the book; it played an important part in shaping its content, reception, and legacy, and in the process contributed to its status in the leftist historiographical canon.

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58 Iwanami Shoten Henshūbu, eds., Iwanami shinsho no 50nen, 145–46. This statement appeared in the back matter of every shinsho volume until the launch of a new colour for the cover design in 1977.
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