

Japanese Economists and WWII as a Turing Point: AKAMATSU Kaname during and after the war

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I Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to investigate the attitudes of a Japanese economist toward WWII, taking AKAMATSU Kaname (1896-1974) of Tokyo University of Commerce (present Hitotsubashi University) as an example.

Akamatsu, internationally known for his “Wild Geese Flying Pattern theory” or “*Gankou Keitai Ron*” presented in the first half of 1930s, engaged in education of economics and economic research activities in Nagoya Higher Commercial School (1921-39) and then in Tokyo University of Commerce from April 1939. From the middle of 1930s to the beginning of the war he participated in the researches in Southeast Asia commanded from the Japan Army, during which we can find his gradual and clear changes in his attitude toward the war.

Studies on the research activities of Japanese economists or the development of economics in wartime Japan have been little known even in Japan, although some 70 years have passed since the end of WWII, which has caused the blanks in the studies of the history of Japanese economic thought. This study would contribute to such a present situation.

II “Asia Studies” in HCSs and Akamatsu

After the establishment of the first government-run HCS attached to “Tokyo School of Foreign Languages” (“*Tokyo Gaikokugo Gakko*”, present Tokyo University of Foreign Studies) in 1884, more than fifteen HCSs were newly build by the 1920s. In these schools practical or academic education such as commercial education, foreign languages and economics, and research activities were closely correlated, which lead to the idea of establishing the research institutes or bureaus. One of their characteristics was “Asia Studies”.

With the widespread of the Japanese territories through the wars in Asia, providing business persons with higher commercial knowledge and skills of foreign languages, HCSs also began to research native customs and markets in the new colonial areas of Japan for further commercial and industrial development. In fact, Nagasaki HCS, Yamaguchi HCS² Otaru HCS

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² The case of Yamaguchi HCS, see (Matsushige 2006).

and Takaoka HCS, located in provincial important port cities in Japan and also within an easy access to the Japanese colonial areas, newly opened the courses specializing in practical studies on trade between East Asia, especially China and Japan. So HCSs came to establish research bureaus for further both education and researches.

Tokyo HCS or later Tokyo UC, though the first national commercial university, could not have research bureaus until 1940 because of the disapproval of the budget for it by the Ministry of Education³. So, then president Ueda Teiji, who was quite interested in the development of East Asia, made efforts to establish the institute. In April 1940 this was finally realized as “*Toua Keizai Kenkyusho*” by the contribution from Kagami Kenkich (1879-1940), a graduate of Tokyo HCS and then president of Tokyo-Kaijyou Fire Insurance Company. In 1939, one year before the establishment of the institute, Ueda also had invited Akamatsu at Nagoya HCS to be professor of Tokyo UC. Then, in February 1942, the institute became government-run, which however, soon led to an ironic result for not only this bureau, but also Akamatsu.

III The Outbreak of WWII and Akamatsu’s Pacifism

1. Akamatsu’s Pacifism before the Nationalization of the Research Institute

During his Nagoya period, Akamatsu could advance his researches, using synthetic dialectics and empirical studies, especially till the middle of 1930s. However, in July 1937 “the Marco Polo Bridge Incidence” and then in December “the Second Sino-Japanese War” broke out, which inevitably caused the atmosphere of fascism also in HCSs. There can be pointed out some changes in his works from around in this period.

In 1936 he wrote as follows, admitting the colonial expansion by Japan and controls by the government:

“[...] The formation of Manchuria has surely created demand for the intelligentsia and mental workers, and has played a significant role in giving brightness to all schools in our country. *When the new land for the youth develops, the age is in all aspects bright.* [...] It is needed to strengthen the government control more thoroughly” (Akamatsu 1936, 98-99. The italics originally have dots over the words.)

At the same time, however, he also pointed out the risks brought by the government control:

³ It does not mean Tokyo UC did not have any interest in Asia before then. It provided some lectures such as “economic conditions in east Asia”, “colonization policy”, and “Manchurian and Mongolian Affairs”.

“What we are cautious [...] is that the government control often has possibility to deprive the people or students of spontaneity and progressiveness” (*ibid.*, 99)

According to Akamatsu, he “developed into the totalitarianism utilizing the synthetic dialectics” then (Akamatsu 1938a, 2). He further noted as follows in his article presented in December 1938:

“The totality of our nation is incarnated as the Emperor in the meanings of the foundational principle or the absolute spirit, while in the meanings of intuitive existence [the totality of our nation] is the whole life of our nation” (Akamatsu 1938b, 15).

Akamatsu, regarding the Emperor as the absolute spirit of the nation, positively evaluated Japan’s invasion. At the same time it should be noted that he did not hope the worsening of the situation. In fact, after moving to Tokyo UC, he presented an article in June 1939, when the research bureau had not realized yet, he still hoped that WWII would not break out:

“If WWII broke out within some ten years, ..., that is not so easy a problem for human beings. It would be fortunate if what I am writing now would be fallacy and only a theoretical discussion.” (Akamatsu 1939a, 60)

We can also find another article by Akamatsu in November 1941, just one month before the Attack on Pearl Harbor in December.

“The bold Prime Minister must not urge [to the war]. First of all he must prostrate the rising wave. Then, what should the great politician do other than that? ” (Akamatsu 1941e, 1)

Unfortunately however, on December 8th 1941, the Attack on Pearl Harbor began. The members of the institute including Akamatsu agreed among themselves that they would assist militaries, putting their emphasis on academic researches, and also keeping their status as professor (Fukami 1988, 120).

2. Cooperation with the Japanese Military Administration and Changes in Akamatsu’s Pacifism

In September 1942 then President Takase of Tokyo UC was asked from his younger brother Takase Keijiro (1905-1982), who was then Lieutenant Colonel of the Imperial Headquarters, to cooperate with the research activities by General Army in the Southeast Asia. This was because the Japan Army (the 25th Army) had no researchers and little references or information on the occupied area at the beginning of the Japan's military administration (Akashi 2006, 8). Seven months before this request, when the research institute was founded, president Takase had already written as:

“Since this Great East Asia War Japan has developed in Southeast Asia very vigorously, so our country needs to research newly economy in this area as soon as possible.... Our institute wants to advance our activities positively so as not to miss this golden opportunity... And we would also like to contribute to the national policy sufficiently. ... We are going to send our staff there as soon as possible, and to collect materials on economy and important problems there.” (Takase 1942, 1)

Takase found the agreement in the idea on the necessity of the research in Southeast Asia with his brother, so he accepted the request from the military administration (Akamatsu 1975, 44).

According to Akamatsu's autobiography, however, on knowing Takase's acceptance, Akamatsu told that he would like to dispatch as few members as possible because the institute was in its early stage. But Professor Sugimoto Eiichi (1901-52) told that “we should cooperate with the army thoroughly”, and also “asked Akamatsu to go to Southeast Asia as a leader”⁴ (*ibid.*).

At the same time, however, Akamatsu's description also came to have some changes. In Akamatsu (1942a), for instance, he wrote as follows:

“This war has enabled the widespread of East Asia area. It is a good opportunity for this institute to be government-run. Especially to establish this area is now clearly becoming the national policy. ... our purpose is now also clear and vast. But our researches should not be that for the current policy. Such researches will be done by the government and our institute should advance our research more plainly.

It will take forever for Japan to establish the Great East Asia area. The research institutes in universities aim to advance researches which will the give directions for this long-run policy. ... I would like to make this institute as such.” (Akamatsu 1942a, 1)

⁴ Akamatsu was surprised at the changes in Sugimoto's thinking into right-wing caused by his feeling a sense of Japan's crisis, because he studied Marx (Akamatsu 1975, 44).

We can find that he asserted the importance of the difference between the researches by this institute and those by government, while showing his satisfaction with the nationalization of this institute. At the same time he also came to approve the foundation of the Great East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere. He further continued to state his opinion on this point in June 1942.

“The Great East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere has been almost achieved gloriously by the Imperial Military. ... But we do not still include India, Australia and the Chiang Kai-sek government in Burma....To gain these areas we further advance both the military and economic war.” (Akamatsu 1942c, 18)

It should be clearer that at this time Akamatsu supported for the widespread of the invasion by Japanese military. He added as:

“... our all intelligence has been invested for forming the economy of the Great East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere” (Akamatsu 1942c, 19)

Akamatsu himself was conscious of his participating in this Japanese invasion even though he was not a military.

In September 1942, three months after this publication, he further stated as:

“Now the Imperial Military has absorbed all the inside of the Great East Asia Co-Prosperity sphere, and the victories of our military in the continental part of China are developing rapidly, and finally this Co-Prosperity sphere is now preparing for the stabilization of the undefeated empire”. (Akamatsu 1942d, 1)

In this period, he came to advocate “the historical inevitability of the construction of the great sphere economy in the Great East Asia Co-Prosperity” (Akamatsu 1942a, 2). That is, he thought that this war would cease someday, and that the peace time would come. But he at least admitted the expansion of the Great East Asia Co-Prosperity through the war.

Finally on 18th December 1942 the research group commanded by Akamatsu left Kobe port for Singapore, where the headquarters of the Japanese Military Administration in Southeast Asia was placed then (Akamatsu 1975, 44; Fukami 1988, 122-123).

According to Akamatsu, more than forty people attended this research. At first he decided to establish the third bureau in the Southeast Asia, followed by that in Nagoya and Tokyo, and tried to advance research activities academically. The Japanese military administration, however, demanded not academic researches but urgent practical research for the development of

resources because the war situation had been worsening for Japan already⁵. Akamatsu made efforts to change the research styles and contents, but in vain. Within a year, “our academic research is not a central issue” (Akamatsu 1975, 46), and his idea of establishing the third bureau completely disappeared.

At last, in the middle of 1944, the research activities were completely finished. Instead, Akamatsu and other members, especially Itagaki Yoichi (1908-2003), made efforts to grasp the mind of native people in Malaya. Akamatsu thought it important to permit Malaya to gain its independence because this would help Japan’s army in that the natives there would resist the British Armed Forces. But this idea was not permitted by the Imperial Conference. So, he “decided to conduct a movement for the independence of Malaya by himself” and asked “the leaders there to take part in it”, explaining that “Malaya would be governed by Britain again [after the end of WWII]”. Shortly such a movement was approved by the army, regardless of the decision by the Imperial Conference. Finally, through this movement Indonesia became decolonized from the Netherland before the end of the war, while the independence of present part of Malaysia was realized after the war (*ibid.*, 46-7).

As we can see, Akamatsu’s pacifism was clearly different between before war and the nationalization of the bureau. In the advancement of the war Akamatsu’s pacifism came to be “disappeared” especially after 1942, but we can say that at least he never hoped the outbreak of the war and wished the peacetime. His positive help of the independence of the Southeast Asian areas could or might be regarded as the reappearance of his pacifism which might arise from his realization of the defeat of Japan in a short time.

IV Conclusion

Akamatsu is one of a few economists who confessed his wartime experience if not that is all, while some have kept them secret or removed them from their career. So, in Akamatsu’s case, it might be easy to conclude that he had to change the expression and furthermore his way of thinking in order not to be against the situation as a leader of a national research institute, and this would be correct to some extent. But he changed his theory partly without any explanations, and declined the decoration from Japan in 1970 (Ando 1975, 338; Hirakawa 2013, 59). Such a case will be important and thus inevitable in examining continuity or discontinuity of the history of Japanese economic thought.

*Reference list will be provided at the Conference.

⁵ The details of the research activities in Southeast Asia, see Ohtsuki (2010).