

Symposium | Trauma : [Symposium 64] The long-term effects of the Asia-Pacific War and its transmission across generations in individuals, collectives and societies

🏛 Sat. Sep 27, 2025 10:40 AM - 12:10 PM JST | Sat. Sep 27, 2025 1:40 AM - 3:10 AM UTC 🏛 Session Room 5 (Conference Room A)

[Symposium 64] The long-term effects of the Asia-Pacific War and its transmission across generations in individuals, collectives and societies

Moderator: Koh Eugen (University of Melbourne), Tadashi Takeshima (Taisho University)

[SY-64-02] The Impact of the Asia-Pacific War on Suicide and Mental Health Policy in Japan

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Keywords : suicide、 mental hospital bed、 Asia-Pacific War、 long-term effect、 mental health policy

Japan experienced three waves of suicide increase after the Asia-Pacific War. The first wave was around 1955, when suicides among young people who had experienced drastic social changes before and after the war increased sharply. The second wave was around 1985, and the third wave was from 1998 for about a decade. The second and third waves were characterized by a significant increase in suicides among the same generation as the first wave. The first national law regarding mental healthcare in Japan was the Psychiatric Patients Custody Law of 1900. This law permitted private confinement and was inadequate in terms of medical care. To address this, the Mental Hospital Law was enacted in 1919, but many psychiatric patients remained in private confinement. With the outbreak of the Asia-Pacific War, the number of psychiatric beds decreased due to war damage and other factors. After the war, with the approval of the GHQ, the Mental Health Law was enacted in 1950 through a private member's bill, abolishing private confinement and requiring the hospitalization of psychiatric patients in psychiatric hospitals. The 1954 National Survey by the Ministry of Health revealed a severe shortage of psychiatric beds, leading to the establishment of national budgetary provisions for the establishment and operation of psychiatric hospitals, resulting in a rapid increase in mental hospital beds, which is known as the "psychiatric hospital boom," with a sharp increase in the number of hospital beds. The post-war surge in suicide deaths, the rapid increase in mental hospital beds, and the delayed development of community care are all considered to be part of the negative legacy of the Asia-Pacific War. It cannot be denied that the war had a significant impact on mental health policy in Japan.