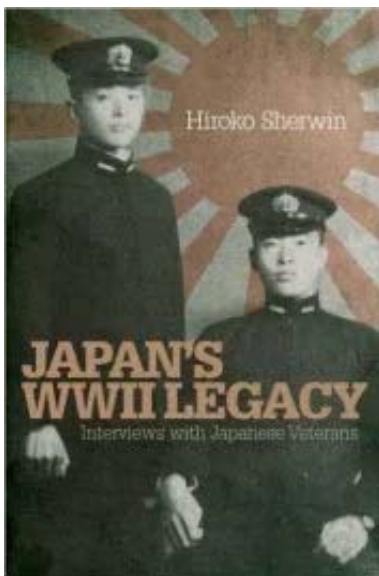


# Bookmunch

Book reviews and occasional interviews

## "A fascinating and gripping book" – Japan's WWII Legacy by Hiroko Sherwin



For many people, it can be easy to forget the role the Japanese played in the Second World War. Rightly or wrongly, it seems as though the atrocities committed both by and against them are often overshadowed by other, more infamous elements of this horrific period of history. Some, particularly those of the younger generations, may even be surprised to see the title of this collection of interviews with Japanese Veterans. They may wonder what legacy the Japanese actually have from this war.

You'd think, though, that this wouldn't be the case in Japan. But it is. In fact, of all the fascinating things to be found inside this work of non-fiction, the revelation that revisionists in Japan have long tried to eradicate the more disturbing facts of their foray into this battle from the history books is perhaps the most intriguing.

Because regardless of the endless evidence for the existence of 'comfort girls', forced suicide attacks, massacres, and routine torture, many in Japan, including their president, still deny any wrongdoing.

Seeing the injustice of this, Hiroko Sherwin saw it as her duty to do something about it. Setting out to interview surviving veterans, she is met with tales of the most horrific violence. What makes this book so powerful is the realisation that many of these veterans, who are now haunted by their actions, believed they were doing no wrong at the time. Brainwashed by Japanese propaganda, they couldn't understand why they would later be arrested for war crimes. Because of the way the emperor and the country refused to accept any blame, many of these veterans took decades to understand what they'd done. Now, though, these heartbreaking interviews make apparent the struggles these people have been through since the realisation hit home.

It is not all heartbreak, though. For some of the interviewees, and the children that have also had to live with their parents' guilt, redemption has been possible. As horrific and harrowing as many of the recollections of war in the book are, perhaps the most emotional moments come when we hear how the perpetrators of this violence have come out the other side. Through

charity work, through connecting with POWs, and through talking in schools and colleges about the atrocities they committed, many of the people in the book have begun to find a kind of peace. When reading their accounts, it's difficult to argue that they haven't earned this respite.

**Any Cop?:** This is not only a fascinating and gripping book, it's also a very important one. Countries involved in conflicts such as this one often have to find a way to atone and move on. You only need look to Germany for an example. Many in Japan feel that this still hasn't happened there, so literature like this can only be a benefit to the process. That Sherwin manages to paint these pictures in prose worthy of a top work of literary fiction only adds to the power of the book. Among the most affecting reads of the last few years.

Fran Slater

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