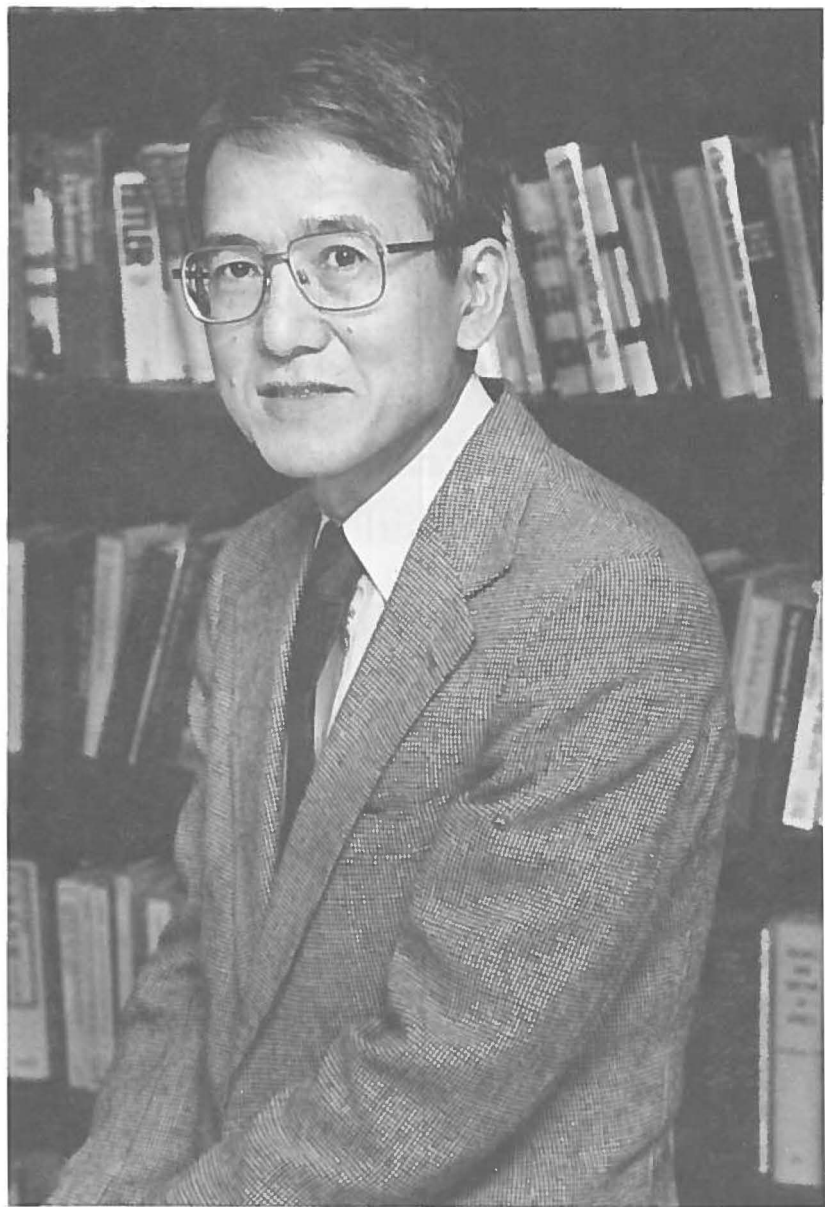


**Akira Iriye**  
**President**

**American Historical Association**  
**1988**



Akira Iriye, first Asian-born president of the American Historical Association, has enjoyed a career without parallel in the Association's past. Born and raised in Japan, he was one of the first Japanese to come to the United States to study after the occupation. Here he attended Haverford College, where he encountered the incomparable Wallace MacCaffery, under whose tutelage he studied English history, and wrote a senior thesis on the "Anglican Clergy in the Eighteenth Century." After graduating Phi Beta Kappa from Haverford, he received a Woodrow Wilson Fellowship to study at Harvard. Once he arrived in Cambridge, first Oscar Handlin and then Ernest May and John Fairbank took him in hand. They recognized in Iriye the exceptional talent they were seeking to implement their plan to place the study of American-East Asian relations at the forefront of work in international history. Their goal was to train scholars who would have a dual competence, in American and East Asian history--scholars able to use sources written in the languages of both sides of the Pacific. These scholars would transcend ethnocentrism and see issues from the different perspectives of Americans and Asians. The quality of their work would surpass that of the more narrowly conceived works of the past and might lead to a more enlightened foreign policy. In retrospect, they were overly optimistic about the possibility of training people who could handle the requisite languages, but with Iriye their most visionary expectations were met.

Iriye is the quintessential American-East Asianist, as was apparent in his doctoral dissertation published as *After Imperialism*, for which he used British, Chinese, German, Japanese, Soviet, and American primary sources. Deftly, he pulled together the initiatives of the powers as they tried to withstand a Soviet-supported Chinese effort to

play by rules of their own choosing. In *Across the Pacific*, he provided a sweeping sketch of Chinese, Japanese, and American images of each other and themselves, anticipating important work by Robert Jervis and Edward Said. In *Pacific Estrangement* he focused on the disintegration of the idealized Japanese image of America, shattered by racism in the United States. He demonstrated how American mistreatment of Asian immigrants—America as it really was—affected the debate in Japan over the terms and direction of Japanese expansion and the discourse between the nations.

Central to much of Iriye's work, including *Power and Culture: The Japanese-American War, 1941-1945*, is his conception of peoples seeking world order, whether through conferences, such as those at Washington in 1921 and at Yalta in 1945, or through war, as between Japan and the United States. In *Power and Culture* he examines the interaction of Japan and America as nations and cultures and how cultural systems affect national struggles for power, elaborating on ideas offered in his presidential address to the Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations in 1978. The book was nominated for the Pulitzer Prize in 1982. His current work, outlined in the 1988 Albert Shaw lectures at Johns Hopkins, focuses on questions of war and peace in the twentieth century. He is also preparing a volume on the period between the first and second world wars for the Cambridge History of American Foreign Relations.

In addition to the publications cited, Iriye has written seven other books, in Japanese as well as English, edited and coedited nearly a dozen more, and organized an incredible list of conferences, bringing together specialists in American, Japanese, Chinese, and Soviet studies as well as scholars from a wide range of disciplines, to explore cultural, economic, and political relations from every conceivable angle. The conference volumes and the work stimulated by these conferences will continue to appear for at least the remainder of the century.

Iriye's scholarship has won him a wide range of honors, including a Guggenheim Foundation Fellowship, the Yoshina Sazuko Prize for "the best magazine article on public affairs" in 1970, a share of the Yoshida Shigeru Prize for "the best book in the field of international relations" for his contribution to Dorothy Borg and Shumpei Okamoto's *Pearl Harbor as History* in 1974, and sole possession of the

Yoshida Prize in 1979. In 1982 he was elected to membership in the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, and in 1987 Wittenberg University awarded him his first honorary doctorate.

Iriye's teaching career began at Harvard where he taught in various capacities from 1959 to 1966. After short stints at the University of California, Santa Cruz and the University of Rochester, he moved to the University of Chicago in 1969, where he has been Stein-Freiler Service Professor of History since 1985. At the University of Chicago, he has also served as chairman of the Department of Far Eastern Languages and Civilizations and of the Department of History. He has been a visiting professor at the University of California, Berkeley, the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales in Paris, and Harvard. For many years, especially during the years of service as president-elect and president of the AHA, he has crisscrossed the country giving lectures and seminars at countless universities. He has spoken at many Asian and European institutions as well. It is noteworthy that this Japanese-born scholar has turned out, in addition, a number of superb university teachers and scholars, doctoral recipients who hold important posts in the government of the United States and in the Guomindong government on Taiwan. Among his current students are several from the People's Republic of China.

In addition Iriye has filled an extraordinary number of professional service positions. Since 1974 he has served as chairman of the Committee on American-East Asian Relations, originally appointed by the AHA and now affiliated with SHAFR. Working closely with Dorothy Borg, Warren Cohen, Roger Dingman, John Fairbank, Waldo Heinrichs, Michael Hunt, Ernest May, and Nancy Bernkopf Tucker, he has used that committee and the funds he has raised for its operations to keep the field of American-East Asian relations one of the most exciting in the historical profession. He is now serving as series editor for the University of Chicago Press's "The United States in the World: Foreign Perspectives" and the "Twayne Series in International History." He is or has been a member of the board of editors of the *Encyclopedia of Japan*, *Diplomatic History*, *The Pacific Historical Review*, *The Journal of Japanese History*, *The Journal of American History*, and *World Politics*. Among the myriad other posts he has held are memberships on the China Council of the Asia Society, the Japan

Foundation Fellowship Committee, the Social Science Research Council Fellowship Committee, the Board of the Institute of European Studies, the Committee on Scholarly Communication with the People's Republic of China, and the National Advisory Committee to the Librarian of Congress.

In brief, the career of Akira Iriye has been devoted to the study of the interaction of cultures, to the search for mutual understanding in the cause of peace. His ultimate concern has been to assure understanding between Japan and the United States, to find the basis for compatibility between the culture in which he was born and raised and the culture in which he has lived all of his adult life. The Pacific War and the occupation that followed provided the formative experiences and his life's work has offered guidelines for a world order in which the relationship between power and culture is recognized and the confrontations between cultures can be resolved peacefully. This is his legacy.

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