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Review: Required Reading

Author(s): David Howell

Reviewed work(s):

Japan, 1868-1945: From Isolation to Occupation by John Benson ; Takao Matsumura
A Modern History of Japan: From Tokugawa Times to the Present by Andrew Gordon
Modern Japan: A Historical Survey by Mikiso Hane
Japan Faces the World, 1925-1952 by Mary L. Hanneman
The Making of Modern Japan by Marius B. Jansen

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REQUIRED READING

- Japan, 1868–1945: From Isolation to Occupation.* By John Benson and Takao Matsumura. Longman, Harlow, Essex, U.K., 2001. ix, 270 pages. \$18.00, paper.
- A Modern History of Japan: From Tokugawa Times to the Present.* By Andrew Gordon. Oxford University Press, New York, 2003. xvi, 384 pages. \$35.00, cloth; \$24.95, paper.
- Modern Japan: A Historical Survey*, 3rd edition. By Mikiso Hane. Westview Press, Boulder, 2001. xiv, 554 pages. \$33.00, paper.
- Japan Faces the World, 1925–1952.* By Mary L. Hanneman. Longman, Harlow, Essex, U.K., 2001. xvi, 170 pages. \$15.00, paper.
- The Making of Modern Japan.* By Marius B. Jansen. Belknap Press, Cambridge, Mass., 2000. xviii, 871 pages. \$35.00, cloth; \$18.95, paper.
- Japan in Transformation, 1952–2000.* By Jeffrey Kingston. Longman, Harlow, Essex, U.K., 2001. xii, 230 pages. \$15.00, paper.
- Japan: A Modern History.* By James L. McClain. W. W. Norton, New York, 2001. xxiv, 632 + 94 pages. \$35.00, cloth; \$31.25, paper.
- Japanese Political History since the Meiji Renovation, 1868–2000.* By Richard Sims. Palgrave, New York, 2001. xxiv, 395 pages. \$59.95.
- A History of Japan.* By Conrad Totman. Blackwell Publishers, Malden, Mass., 2000. xxxvi, 620 pages. \$62.95, cloth; \$29.95, paper.

Reviewed by
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I've been accused of hating Japan just once, more than a dozen years ago. The occasion was the final lecture of my debut performance teaching modern Japanese history. My student accuser did not seem angry so much as puzzled and perhaps a bit disappointed as she asked me why I reviled the country I studied for a living. I could do no better than to protest in response that I liked Japan a lot, but that liking a country does not require celebrating its history. Certainly there was much to decry in the Japan I envisioned to my class that semester. My lectures were a chronicle of crimes perpetrated by repressive oligarchs, greedy capitalists, bloodthirsty militarists, corrupt politicians, and arrogant bureaucrats. I might as well have been surveying the history of Mordor.

As I started reading this group of histories of modern Japan, I was reminded of that episode and of my subsequent attempts to be enthusiastic about Japan while maintaining critical distance. A couple of thousand pages into the enterprise I found myself wondering why anyone should bother with modern Japanese history at all. It wasn't just the fatigue. What is it, after all, about Japan's particular historical experience that makes studying it

a worthwhile part of a liberal education? When I started teaching, at the height of the bubble economy in the 1980s, the question did not come up. Japanese history was a necessary means to explore the roots of the country's current successes, a cautionary tale of the costs of untrammelled economic growth, and a case study in the making of the cold war world order. Whether as "number one" or "anything but," Japan demanded our attention. My early lectures were glum because I was disturbed by Japanese economic triumphalism, yet I assumed I was merely tempering my students' (and my own) intrinsically positive view of the country. Now, with Japan out of the news except as the object of financial-page ridicule, students are liable to dismiss both celebrations of Japan's past successes and denunciations of its shortcomings as irrelevant to their interests and needs.

Andrew Gordon is the only author under review here to justify explicitly the project of surveying the past two centuries of Japanese history. He does so by placing Japan within modernity as a global phenomenon. Rather than tell "a peculiarly 'Japanese' story that happened to unfold in the era we call modern," Gordon's aim is to tell "a peculiarly 'modern' story as it unfolded in a place we call Japan" (Gordon, p. xi). James McClain does not spell things out so plainly, but in practice his book shares much of Gordon's focus on modernity. Marius Jansen explains his project in personal terms, for his survey is not intended as a textbook so much as a synthesis of scholarship in the field to which he devoted his career, Japan and its world since 1600. The other authors are content to take "modern Japan" (or Japanese history more generally) for granted as a category of analysis. This is true even of Conrad Totman, who brings a distinctive ecological approach to his work yet never makes a case for seeing Japan as a unique or even important case study in world environmental history.

In any case, few of these books would ever have been written were it not for the ubiquity of the survey course in university history curricula. Accordingly, I will address myself to instructors of Japanese history surveys who may be agonizing over their choice of textbook. Let me start with my overall recommendations and then proceed to a discussion of the individual works. I present my choices realizing that, insofar as questions of taste and pedagogical style are involved, choosing a textbook is a more intimate matter than deciding whether to read a monograph. Some people may want the textbook to be a bland, chronological collection of facts, the agar-agar in which to culture one's own themes and interpretations. Others may prefer a textbook with an argument so strong that it practically teaches the course by itself. No doubt most people prefer something in between.

Gordon and McClain are the clear winners of the textbook sweepstakes. Their general problematic ("modernity") reflects current scholarship, and they present their material attractively and accessibly. They do differ considerably in length and narrative emphasis, but the user's needs rather than

differences in intrinsic quality should guide the selection of one over the other. Both succeed specifically as textbooks—that is, their arguments are clear but not overbearing, and they present an accounting of cause and effect that is subtle and flexible enough to allow for professorial tweaking in lecture without confusing or alarming the students. Not too bland and not too spicy, they satisfy the inner Goldilocks.

Jansen and Totman are worth considering as well. Jansen's book is an elegantly written, magisterial synthesis, but it is probably too much for most undergraduates. Rather than press it on your students, give a copy to that loved one who never understood why you went to graduate school. Totman's work reflects its author's erudition, expansive vision, and humanism. It is too idiosyncratic for most course syllabi but will suit the needs of a minority of instructors, and many general readers, perfectly. Among the others, Jeffrey Kingston's cranky overview of postwar Japan is useful, but it does not offer anything not covered more thoroughly and pleasingly by Gordon or McClain. John Benson and Takao Matsumura's survey of imperial Japan is inane, and Mary Hanneman's brief look at the interwar period is weak and derivative. Richard Sims's dry but thorough political-history narrative is best left for cribbing details for lectures. Finally, I save a special negative recommendation for Mikiso Hane's awful book. It has been around in various incarnations for a long time and may well be the most widely used of all the works under review here. With the advent of the new surveys, particularly those by Gordon and McClain, no one ever need adopt this bizarre and outdated book again.

A significant strength of Gordon and McClain is that they cover recent events in detail. It's not simply a matter of their being up-to-date, but rather that both write with a refreshing postbubble sensibility. Japan's recent economic malaise has undermined the need to trot out culturalist explanations of its modern "miracle" and has made the corollary project of debunking essentialist myths anachronistic. Japan now looks a lot like a regular country. Its present economic problems are rooted only partly in domestic structural eccentricities and hardly at all in innate cultural patterns. Knowing how vulnerable Japan will appear by the end of their narratives, Gordon and McClain generally avoid dwelling on the old questions of Japanese exceptionalism—the failure of prewar democracy, the keys to rapid modernization, and so on—in favor of connecting Japan's historical experience to that of the rest of the modern world.

In contrast, most of the other authors duly note the big events of the early 1990s, such as the bursting of the speculative bubble and the Liberal Democratic Party's loss of electoral dominance, yet they seem unable to shed the view that Japan as a country is uniquely deserving of our admiration or vilification, a perspective rooted in either case in the rapid economic growth of the 1960s and 1970s. Jeffrey Kingston, for example, devotes a

good portion of his *Japan in Transformation, 1952–2000* to the situation since 1990, but he does so in a tone reminiscent of the critiques of the dark side of postwar economic development published back in the days when emulating Japan seemed like a reasonable idea. It made more sense in 1986 for Gavan McCormack and Yoshio Sugimoto to question the cost to democracy of Japan's successful capitalist development than it does for Kingston today simply to catalogue the pervasive deficiencies of Japanese social, economic, and political life.¹ His cover photo, of a Minamata-disease protester, telegraphs the grim message of the entire book. (In contrast, the early 1960s middle-class family doting over their new "my car" on the cover of Gordon's edited volume, *Postwar Japan as History*, conveys a more subtle message concerning the allure and vacuity of consumption-as-prosperity.²) To be sure, much of Kingston's critique of Japanese society is valid, but he misses the opportunity to engage with universal questions of the costs of development, alienation, and popular memory in his insular treatment of problems such as Minamata disease, Aum Shinrikyō, and the history textbook debates.

Japan, 1868–1945: From Isolation to Occupation, by John Benson and Takao Matsumura, is another book lost in the 1980s. The authors repeatedly assure the reader that Japanese history cannot be explained by simple reference to the quirks of the Japanese character or to Japanese ethnic and cultural homogeneity. True enough, but their attempts to provide alternatives to culturalist stereotypes are often banal. Thus, in concluding their chapter on politics, they write,

The resilience and flexibility of the political system, and the co-existence of the old and the new make it much less easy than it seems to know what stance to adopt when considering Japanese politics between 1868 and 1945. Developments were opposed as well as supported; . . . it is only fair to compare what happened in Japan with what happened in other countries at the same time—and not with some ahistorical ideal of what ought to have occurred. When this is done, it becomes less clear whether Japan was a leader or a laggard, an example to be emulated or a pariah to be exorcised. Generalisation remains difficult, and judgement highly subjective. (Benson and Matsumura, p. 47)

Perhaps the book reads better in Britain, where it was published and where reflexive hostility toward Japan seems to be more widespread than in

1. Gavan McCormack and Yoshio Sugimoto, eds., *Democracy in Contemporary Japan* (Armonk, N.Y.: M. E. Sharpe, 1986).

2. Andrew Gordon, ed., *Postwar Japan as History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

North America.³ In any case, the book's lack of depth and insight, its confusing thematic format (which makes for a lot of chronological jumping back and forth), and tired temporal framework—1868 to 1945, after all—mean there is little point in adopting it.

Mary Hanneman's *Japan Faces the World, 1925–1952* deals mostly with domestic politics and foreign relations during the period of Japanese military expansion, war, and defeat. It offers little beyond brevity to recommend itself as a text. It rehearses familiar material on the gradual expansion of economic and military involvement on the continent, with some information on domestic politics thrown in to provide context. Hanneman has little to say about domestic social conditions. The book is based overwhelmingly on older textbooks by Peter Duus, Kenneth Pyle, Conrad Schirokauer, Ann Waswo, and particularly Mikiso Hane (including an earlier edition of the work I discuss below).

Any survey text that devotes more words to post-World War II domestic forestry policy (about 1,250) than to Hara Takashi, Konoe Fumimaro, Yoshida Shigeru, and Kishi Nobusuke combined (about 1,000) is bound to stand out from the crowd. Unlike the other books reviewed here, Conrad Totman's *History of Japan* is a general survey from earliest times to the present. Totman thinks in terms of the *longue durée* and organizes his book accordingly, with sections on dispersed agriculture (450 B.C. to A.D. 1250), intensive agriculture (1250 to 1890), and industrialism—"the early decades" (1890 to the present). The epilogue even has a map (Totman, p. 536) showing likely deposits of methane hydrates—your GameCube will run off the stuff someday—around the edges of the tectonic plates surrounding the archipelago.

On a geological scale, even a white-collar war criminal like Kishi is just another carbon-based life form. Totman is dubious about the benefits of industrialism in general and provocatively nonjudgmental about the particular course and consequences of Japan's modern development. Industrialism is Totman's conceptual answer to modernity. The age of industrialism is characterized by the quest for unlimited economic growth. Growth comes at a devastating cost to the environment, of course, but it also requires competition among economic actors for fossil fuels and other natural resources. The consequence of that competition for Japan was empire-building and war. Totman implicitly accepts the argument made by Japanese policymakers in the 1920s and 1930s that imperial expansion was the only way to secure access to fossil fuels in a world dividing itself into mutually hostile, autarkic zones. He does not condone Japanese imperialism—far from it—but nei-

3. Michael Montgomery, *Imperialist Japan: The Yen to Dominate* (London: Christopher Helm, 1987), and Jon Woronoff, *Japan as—Anything but—Number One* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1991).

ther does he single it out as qualitatively different from other types of economically motivated aggression. In the framework of Totman's view of industrialism, little of substance separated Japan's drive for regional hegemony from the capitalist powers' move after World War I to look for ways to cooperate in the exploitation of the markets, resources, and people of undeveloped regions.

Throughout the chapters dealing with the modern period, Totman emphasizes basic economic issues, particularly problems of land use and production, and corollary social matters, such as urbanization and demography. He also devotes a lot of space to "articulate culture," including music and art as well as literature and thought, largely in compartmentalized sections. These are topics the other authors tend to deal with more briefly, if at all. Conversely, Totman offers only scant coverage of politics and policy debates. Thus one cannot rely on the book for detailed reinforcement when teaching the big political events that anchor most syllabi—and here I mean the *really* big events, such as the Meiji Restoration and its immediate aftermath, the Pacific War, and the occupation.

This combination of emphases and lacunae will repel some users even as it attracts others. If you see the textbook as a resource to fill in areas not covered in lectures or supplementary readings—and if your own lectures stick mainly to politics and policy—Totman's book may work well for you. Conversely, if you see the textbook as serving mainly to reinforce the lectures and other readings, you will have to embrace Totman's focus on ecology and production as your own and teach the history of modern Japan mainly as an apt illustration of the logic and environmental consequences of industrial development. If neither choice fits your syllabus or teaching style, you should probably avoid assigning the book.

Throughout *A History of Japan*, Totman's voice is strong and distinctive. That is one of the book's attractions for the general reader but it also makes it difficult to use as a course textbook. One must actively accept or refute Totman's narrative line, and there are a number of points at which that line runs against the grain of the monographic literature. A striking example is Totman's treatment of the latter half of the Tokugawa period. He characterizes the period after about 1720 as a time of political, economic, and demographic stagnation, or "stasis." He plays down the ample evidence of economic growth and structural change and instead emphasizes the lack of population growth (at the national level) and the rigidity of political institutions. Although Totman does devote considerable attention to the liveliness of Edo culture, his generally negative portrayal of late Tokugawa society contrasts with the now solidly orthodox view of McClain, Jansen, and Gordon, all of whom accentuate the period's growth and vitality.

The late-Tokugawa-stasis paradigm colors Totman's treatment of the Meiji period. It leads him to portray Japan as decisively "premodern" until

the onset of factory industrialization at the close of the nineteenth century. This may account for his decision not to dwell at length on the Meiji Restoration and its subsequent institutional changes, for in Totman's view the Meiji reforms had little immediate impact on the agrarian population. The stasis model, with its focus on energy, land, and other factors of production, highlights the momentousness of the advent of the industrial economy and the nation's concomitant dependence on fossil fuels. In contrast, McClain, Jansen, and Gordon emphasize the incremental development of the late Tokugawa economy, represented by the spread of protoindustrial production and commercial expansion, as the bases of capitalist development in the mid-Meiji period and beyond.

Totman's narrative ends in 1990, more or less with the bursting of the bubble. He justifies this by characterizing the period between 1960 and 1990 as "Shōwa Genroku" (a reference to the vitality of the Genroku period, 1688–1704; we must be stuck in Heisei Kyōhō now). Since Totman is not much concerned with fiscal policy or party politics, 1990 is as good an ending as any to the latest episode in the ongoing story of the "early decades" of industrialism. Just as the bubble came and went, the current downturn too will work itself out eventually, but until someone figures out how to tap usefully into those methane hydrate reserves, the basic story line—fossil-fuel-driven industrialism, not modernity—will continue.

Political history, and particularly the history of party politics, is prominent in every book under review here except Totman's. The centrality of politics to any analysis of modern Japan once would have been beyond question, for scholars looked to political history to diagnose Japan's prospects for developing Anglo-American-style democracy. Although the "dark valley" paradigm is out of fashion, political history is still an important tool to address problems such as the sources of popular support for imperialism and the relationship between civil society and authoritarianism.

Straight high-politics narrative may not be the most efficient way of getting at such issues, but it dominates several of the works under review, particularly Richard Sims's *Japanese Political History since the Meiji Renovation*. Sims makes a show of eschewing *restoration* as a translation of *ishin*; hence the *renovation* in the book's title. In the text itself, however, he usually uses "Meiji Ishin." In any case, the book deals only briefly with the Meiji Restoration, and so it hardly seems worth the effort of taking such a spectacular stand. In fact, the narrative focuses almost entirely on politicians and their relations with one another. Sims discusses policy at length, albeit in a tone that suggests it was often not the end of politics but rather a by-product of politicians' personal relations. He makes few claims for the significance of Japanese political history per se beyond noting that the "'politics of compromise' may be seen as less deserving of condemnation" than its suggestion of an absence of principle may suggest: "A willingness

to accommodate different interests and to exercise restraint in the pursuit of power may have played a key role in the evolution of a viable political system which, for all its faults, allowed an increasing measure of popular participation while remaining basically stable" (Sims, p. xv).

Unless your students are the sorts to get together to watch C-SPAN reruns over Cheetos and Yoo-hoo, you can forget about trying to use this book in the classroom. It is often tedious, the product of a combination of Sims's unadorned writing and his nearly exclusive focus on the politics of the electoral and legislative process. Important political actors outside of the oligarchy, Diet, and cabinet—bureaucrats, military officers, journalists, the Japanese people in general—appear only sporadically, and culture and society are all but absent from his account. As a result, the book reads at times like chapter five of *Genesis*—Mahalaleel begat Jared, Jared begat Enoch, Enoch begat Lamech—with admirals, retired finance ministry officials, and professional politicians begetting cabinets, parties, factions, bribery scandals, and overseas wars.

Nevertheless, the cumulative effects of the book are instructive: the sort of dysfunctional partisan wrangling that fills news broadcasts in Japan today has characterized Japanese parliamentary politics with remarkable continuity for more than a century. More important, Sims suggests that corruption has always been an inextricable part of Japanese politics, for Diet members are beholden to their local constituent bases in ways that cost a lot of money. Needing more money than they can come up with through legitimate means, they necessarily become corrupt or at least dependent on the corruption of their factional benefactors. Many of those gold bars found under Kanemaru Shin's floorboards were earmarked for the support of his faction's Diet members. Corruption may be endemic to Japanese politics, but at least it is essentially different from the Ferdinand-and-Imelda style of kleptocracy that undermines stability and prosperity in so much of the world.

If some recent textbooks are stuck in the 1980s, Mikiso Hane's *Modern Japan: A Historical Survey* is the *That '70s Show* of Japanese history. It is terrible from its lapel-grabbing opening line—"In 2000, Japan ranked ninth in the world in population size" (Hane, p. 1)—to its closing musings on the possibility that, with the onset of the Heisei era in 1989, "the mind of Japan will be freed from the mystic [*sic*] of the emperor system and the *kokutai* (unique national polity)" (Hane, p. 485).

The book under review here is marketed as the third edition of a volume originally published in 1986, and as an update of the 1992 second edition. In fact, however, the bulk of the text is virtually unchanged from Hane's *Japan: A Historical Survey*, published in 1972, though no reference to that earlier volume is made anywhere in *Modern Japan*.⁴ Moreover, other than

4. Mikiso Hane, *Japan: A Historical Survey* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1972). Chapters three to fourteen of *Modern Japan* (pp. 45–363) are nearly identical to chapters nine

some updated tabular material (the list of prime ministers at the end of the book, for example), the book makes practically no mention of events since about 1994. Hane's approach in preparing new editions of his survey seems to be to reorganize a bit, add some new content on recent events, and update a few statistics ("Today Japan ranks seventh in the world in population size" is the opening line of the 1972 edition⁵). As he puts it, "Only minor revisions were made in the prewar chapters" (Hane, p. xiii); similarly, in the prefaces to the 1986 and 1992 editions Hane makes no mention of anything other than organizational changes to the chapters dealing with the prewar period.⁶

To read Hane is to be transported back through the history of Japanese historiography to 1969, with a brief layover in 1985. With only a handful of exceptions, his description of everything from the origins of the Tokugawa regime to the occupation is based on work published in the 1960s or before. (The 32-page "selected bibliography" tacked onto the end of the book includes a large number of new works, but their insights are not reflected in the main text.) So much good work has been published, with such dramatic effect on our view of Japanese history, in the 30-odd years since Hane wrote his first textbook that seeing it ignored like this is irritating.

The chapters on the Tokugawa period are particularly badly out of date and filled with errors; those on the Meiji period through the Pacific War are mostly just dull; and those on contemporary Japan are the worst, filled with all manner of simpleminded examples of patronizing cultural essentialism. Readers familiar with Hane's other work will be surprised to learn that the weak and downtrodden hardly appear in the text at all. To be sure, every now and then the "masses" rise up just long enough to get kicked in the face by the authorities, but then they subside until it is time to taste the jackboot again (see Hane, pp. 57–60, 125–28, and 210–11). History from the bottom up it ain't. Instead of detailing the lives and struggles of peasants, rebels, and outcasts, the core chapters on the Meiji period through the Pacific War are devoted to a close narrative of high politics, reminiscent of Sims's book.

Although he makes due mention of economic growth and cultural and intellectual vitality, the Tokugawa era is Japan's Dark Ages in Hane's presentation. He starts his discussion by asserting, quite erroneously, that, "[Tokugawa] Ieyasu froze the social order, adapting Confucian China's four-class system" (Hane, p. 25), on his way to invoking for the first of many times the samurai's supposed privilege of *kirisute gomen*—the right to cut

to twenty of *Japan* (pp. 218–562). The only changes are stylistic: for example, the new edition uses *seppuku* rather than *hara-kiri* to describe self-disembowelment, and a few sentences have been shortened or reorganized.

5. Hane, *Japan*, p. 1.

6. Mikiso Hane, *Modern Japan: A Historical Survey* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1986), pp. xiii–xiv; Mikiso Hane, *Modern Japan: A Historical Survey*, 2nd ed. (Boulder: Westview Press, 1992), p. xiii.

down impudent commoners with impunity. Introduced to the topic with such nonsense, students reading the book will come away thinking of the Tokugawa period as a reign of arbitrary violence.⁷ Numerous other errors and questionable assertions have survived the successive revisions of the book.⁸ Perhaps the worst sentence in this regard, with three significant blunders in just eleven words, is, "The Koreans were permitted to trade through Iki Island off Honshu" (Hane, p. 26). Make that Tsushima. Off Kyushu (as is Iki). *Permitted* to trade? Only in the most self-serving Japanese interpretations. I could continue to read back my show-trial transcript, but the point is clear enough: Hane's is an incompetent survey of Tokugawa history.

Whereas Hane's depiction of the Tokugawa period can be dismissed as merely dated and ill-informed, the cultural essentialism that runs throughout the book is downright troubling, particularly since it is most prominent in what are supposed to be the most thoroughly updated chapters, those dealing with contemporary Japan. Sometimes he reaches for stereotypes in lieu of analysis: thus, he invokes *kirisute gomen* to account for the dreadful violence of the Rape of Nanking and attributes popular support for aggression on the continent to the "militaristic thinking [that] originated in the ancient past and got stronger with the emergence of the samurai as the ruling class" (Hane, p. 327). To be sure, these examples pertain to particularly vexing issues, but the tendency runs through Hane's depiction of Japanese society.⁹

7. "The courtesy, politeness, humility, and subservience of the common people were instilled in them at the edge of the sword" (Hane, p. 32); "the virtues of hard work, thrift, self-discipline, obedience, and selfless service had been instilled in the Japanese people by the edge of the sword" (Hane, p. 201).

8. Some of the errors are factual: for example, a map shows Taiwan as part of contemporary Japan (p. 2); Hane places Mishima Yukio's suicide in 1969 (p. 32), not 1970; and he states that "only about 9 percent of the homes had flush toilets in the late 1980s." (In fact, according to Japanese government statistics, in the late 1980s about 82 percent of all dwellings had flush toilets: see Table 55 of the Housing and Land Survey (1998), www.stat.go.jp/english/data/jutaku/1520300.htm [accessed March 4, 2003].) Many other statements are misleading or based on weak or badly outdated scholarship. Some examples from the chapters on the Tokugawa period: "the Ainu [are] a people of proto-Caucasian origin" (p. 7); "[Tokugawa] Ieyasu wanted his vassals . . . to be steeped in Confucian learning" (p. 29); "the rulers not only regulated the peasants' mode of farming and other work but also told them what to eat, drink, and wear and what kind of hut to live in" (p. 34); "the ruling class believed that the peasants should not receive any education beyond learning the virtues of obedience, docility, humility, loyalty, frugality, and hard work. Some insisted that both peasants and townspeople should be forbidden from studying" (pp. 34–35); "the peasants were forbidden to leave the villages" (p. 35); "the government did not recognize the outcastes as legal entities" (p. 37); "another possible contributing factor [to increasing peasant contention in the late Tokugawa period] that should not be overlooked is that the peasants were getting bolder in challenging the ruling class because the latter had lost some of its militaristic qualities" (p. 59); "the peasants remained politically unsophisticated partly because of the Bakufu's success in keeping them isolated and politically ignorant" (p. 59).

9. See, for example, Hane's discussions of the self-image of the Japanese as a "chosen people" (p. 436); social in-groups and out-groups (p. 437); the education system (pp. 452–53);

Prominent in the latter part of the book is the image of Japan as a closed nation of clever but not profound imitators. Sometimes it is marshaled to reinforce tired stereotypes about the insularity of Japanese society: "If a gaijin [foreigner] becomes too well versed in things Japanese (particularly in the language), the Japanese begin to feel ill at ease with that person. Such a person threatens the faith that only the Japanese can truly understand the Japanese mind and soul" (Hane, p. 436). Other times it is used to deny Japanese culture its place in global modernity. Thus, Hane—the translator of Maruyama Masao!—chastises Japanese intellectuals for treating ideas as "garnishes on a *sashimi* dish. Western schools of thought are adopted for display," and then dropped as soon as they fall out of fashion in the West (Hane, p. 459). Hane does not give Japanese intellectuals credit for being cosmopolitan participants in transnational discourses.

In fact, Hane's insights into contemporary Japanese society come mainly from the memoirs of bitter, been-in-Japan-too-long ex-patriate Europeans and Americans (including Jared Taylor, who spent his childhood in Japan and eventually went on to found the white supremacist organization American Renaissance¹⁰). A startling proportion of those recollections are from *The Japan Experience*, a book published in 1973 but cited repeatedly as indicative of conditions in Japan today.¹¹ The most outrageous observation comes from the film buff Donald Richie: "No minority in the world (no minority that I know anything about) is treated more badly by a majority than the Koreans and the Chinese by the Japanese. And it makes the black-white thing in America look like kindergarten in some ways" (quoted in Hane, p. 439). Sure, Koreans have often been treated shabbily in Japan, but was their situation the *worst* in the world in 1973? Is it now? That Richie could utter such foolishness so soon after Martin Luther King Jr.'s murder is astounding and that Hane could leave the quotation in the book after the ethnic cleansing in the Balkans and Rwanda is appalling.

Marius Jansen often expressed to me his satisfaction that the field of Japanese history had grown so much in the half-century span of his career. (Full disclosure: Jansen was my dissertation adviser at Princeton University.) *The Making of Modern Japan* is his statement of the state of the field,

the engagement with Western high culture (p. 458); and the cultural bases of foreign policy (p. 480).

10. Hane repeatedly cites Taylor's *Shadows of the Rising Sun: A Critical View of the "Japanese Miracle"* (New York: Morrow, 1983). In fairness, Taylor, who is perhaps best known as the author of *Paved with Good Intentions: The Failure of Race Relations in Contemporary America* (New York: Carroll and Graf, 1992), did not found American Renaissance until 1990, and one cannot necessarily read his later ideas into *Shadows of the Rising Sun*. On Taylor's career and organization, see the Anti-Defamation League's Law Enforcement Agency Resource Network website (accessed February 3, 2003): http://www.adl.org/learn/Ext_US/amren.asp?xpicked=5&item=amren.

11. Ronald Bell, ed., *The Japan Experience* (New York: Weatherhill, 1973).

presented in the form of a narrative history. It is the longest—by more than 100 pages—of the books under consideration here, with the main body of text running 765 pages. Its length alone probably disqualifies it as a textbook for many courses, though it reads very well. It offers comprehensive coverage of the sorts of themes that are likely to dominate most syllabi, but does so in a way that privileges narrative style more than most books written explicitly for the classroom.

The Making of Modern Japan delivers what one would expect from Jansen, who devoted much of his career to the study of the Meiji Restoration and the relationship between Japan and the outside world, and then focused later on writing broad syntheses of important topics in Japanese history, such as the chapters he contributed to the nineteenth-century volume of the *Cambridge History of Japan*.¹² Likewise, in the present book, Jansen offers particularly rich discussions of Japan's diplomatic and intellectual intercourse with China and Europe, the collapse of the Tokugawa regime, and the reforms instituted by the Meiji state. Jansen's admiration for the Meiji leaders is clear: they kept the colonialist wolves at bay, maintained themselves in power without cracking open too many skulls, and laid the foundations for Japan's emergence as an economic and military power in the first decades of the twentieth century.

The book reflects the interests and research of a lifetime, but it also reflects Jansen's mastery of the literature in the field and his willingness to incorporate new perspectives into his own synthesis of Japanese history. Thus he devotes sections to topics such as the Tokugawa status system, Taisho period youth culture, and Manchukuo's function as a laboratory for state planning. Jansen does not fully internalize the sensibility of the most recent scholarship, as Gordon does, but his achievement is impressive nonetheless. I make special note of the fact that the book is up-to-date because I saw firsthand the author's determination to finish it even as his health in general and eyesight in particular steadily deteriorated. Reading the new works whose insights are reflected in the text took enormous effort for Jansen, who was legally blind by the time he finished the manuscript. *The Making of Modern Japan* is literally a monumental work, for Jansen received the first advance copies only about a week before his death in December 2000. Knowing the circumstances of its completion makes it impossible to complain about the minor errors scattered through the text.

In any case, Jansen's book is strongest on the Tokugawa and Meiji periods, on which he did most of his own work. He collapses the history of Ja-

12. In addition to editing the volume (and serving as one of the series' general editors), Jansen contributed three chapters to *The Nineteenth Century* (*Cambridge History of Japan*, Vol. 5) (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989): "Introduction" (pp. 1–49), "Japan in the Early Nineteenth Century" (pp. 50–115), and "The Meiji Restoration" (pp. 308–66).

pan since 1952 in a single chapter at the end, with the result that the treatment of recent events is relatively thin compared to the books by Gordon and McClain. I should note that Jansen's book is one to consider as a text for a course that focuses on early modern history—the seventeenth through nineteenth centuries—for it is much more detailed than any of the others under review here. Its only significant competition is Conrad Totman's solid *Early Modern Japan*, which is even more detailed but whose coverage ends around 1850.¹³

As noted at the outset, James McClain's *Japan: A Modern History* and Andrew Gordon's *A Modern History of Japan* are the two volumes I recommend most warmly for classroom adoption. Even aside from their superior content and format, they win on technical grounds: both are well written, make effective use of illustrations, and do a good job with the usual textbook paraphernalia, such as lists of suggested readings. Although they are addressed mostly to undergraduate students, both will appeal to interested general readers. They expose the complexities of modern Japanese history without going over the heads of their readers and for the most part succeed in balancing a clear narrative line with interpretive capaciousness, so that they should complement most syllabi without overwhelming them. In addition, Gordon has a website (www.oxfordjapan.org) to go with his book; at the time of this writing it is still rather thin, with a few primary sources (the Meiji Constitution, for example), links to other reputable Japanese studies sites, and a list of "questions for discussion" and "paper topics" posted for the benefit of instructors and students. (None of the other books has a companion website.)

McClain's book is nearly twice the length of Gordon's and is commensurately more detailed, particularly on the Tokugawa period. Throughout, the author emphasizes social forces and incremental change over individual leaders' actions and momentous turning points. This approach succeeds in avoiding a teleological view of Japanese history because changes over time are presented as building on one another in a logical but not necessarily inevitable progression. McClain succeeds particularly well at telling the story of the weak and vulnerable (including women, minorities, and the poor) without descending into mere tooth-gnashing and lamentation. He also discusses in more depth than any of the other authors important issues that are just now making a belated appearance in the literature. Most notable in this regard is his extensive coverage of Japan's colonial empire and his concomitant awareness that, until 1945, the modern history of Japan was very much a history of acquiring, administering, and understanding an empire.

13. Conrad Totman, *Early Modern Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

McClain's style fits his overall aim of telling the story of the Japanese people's encounter with modernity as one fraught with possibilities and hazards. The flip side of this narrative style is that McClain at times appears almost too balanced, at least in the sense that major events seemed to have just happened: no one takes particular credit or blame for the outcome of history. Thus, the downfall of the Tokugawa regime was mostly the product of foreign pressures, but it was not inevitable. Itō Hirobumi and his colleagues in the Meiji oligarchy were instrumental in implementing the Meiji reforms, but their actions alone cannot account for Japanese modernization. Ishiwaro Kanji and other officers of the Kwantung Army were behind much of Japanese militarism on the continent, but no single person or group was entirely accountable for the disastrous course of Japanese foreign policy in the 1930s and 1940s. The recovery after the Pacific War was indeed impressive, but it was hardly the product of any miracle-working by General Douglas MacArthur or officials at the Ministry of International Trade and Industry. Perhaps McClain is right: the Meiji Restoration, Taisho democracy, the U.S. occupation, and the like were not events so much as processes, and to focus too much on the impact of pivotal moments or individuals strips away the possibility of a nuanced interpretation. Preserving nuance is particularly important in a field like modern Japan, which is so vulnerable to the evil triplets of conceptualization: history-as-conspiracy-theory, history-as-glorious-destiny, and history-as-national-character.

The focus on modernity characterizes Gordon's book throughout, beginning indeed with the cover art, which is taken from the illustration on the sheet music for "The Tokyo March," a popular song from 1929. (The covers of the McClain and Jansen books, in contrast, have striking but conventional Edo street scenes by the *ukiyo*e master, Hiroshige, while Totman uses a more complex Meiji print by Kiyochika.) As noted above, making modernity the running theme of the book is a particularly effective way to connect Japanese history to its global context. After all, by any standard Japan was one of the first countries in the world to experience "modernity" (a fluid concept, to be sure), but because of its place outside the West, its engagement with the ideas and institutions of modernity was necessarily different from that of other countries. In particular, the fact that its engagement with modernity began under the imminent threat of Western colonialism and hence incorporated from the outset a keen awareness of the centrality of imperialism to the modern project makes Japan an instructive case study for all students of the modern world.

The militarism and authoritarianism of the 1930s and 1940s was, in Gordon's presentation, a regrettable and avoidable yet logical by-product of Japan's particular engagement with global modernity. To be sure, the military did hijack the political process, both by taking advantage of the flaws of the Meiji Constitution and by pushing forward with aggressive actions on

the continent that had the effect of making decisions for an indecisive civilian government. Nonetheless, those actions occurred in the context of widespread disaffection with *laissez-faire* economics and a move toward corporatist politics throughout the industrialized world. Militarism and its attendant authoritarianism were thus not the manifestation of a demented Japanese national psyche, but rather were a response to world conditions, expressed in an idiom that many thinkers and policymakers in Europe and North America would have recognized, even condoned. Gordon even makes a case for seeing Japan as fascist, though he admits that he is probably fighting a losing historiographical battle. (And indeed, McClain's argument against treating Japan as fascist is more persuasive.) In any case, whether Japan was "really" fascist or not, there is no question that many leaders were profoundly influenced by corporatist thinking, including fascism.

Although Gordon terms his book a history of Japan "from Tokugawa times to the present," in fact the content is decidedly weighted in favor of the twentieth century. In particular, he devotes almost a third of the text to the period since the end of the occupation in 1952. Consequently, Gordon's coverage of the Tokugawa era, while quite solid, lacks the depth and texture of the treatments by Jansen, McClain, and Totman. Mostly the compactness of the text is a virtue: Gordon is particularly good at making essential points with an economy of expression. Although he tends to focus relatively more on economic questions and social policy than on "softer" cultural issues, he makes a point of connecting Japanese policy to intellectual currents.

Let us treat Japan as a regular country, a distinctive but not incomparable example of global modernity. Or global industrialism. Or plain old globalization. Or even the global struggle of the proletarian masses for liberation (if anyone out there still thinks in such terms). Any transnational framework that makes Japan instructive for people who don't care about Japan *per se* will work, though I like the way modernity embraces culture and society as the objects of study even as it entangles them with political economy. Only by treating Japan as a regular country can we persuade our students to consider what makes a country "regular" anyway. Maybe the United States will look like the exceptional one to them in the end.