

Atkins is both well informed of contemporary scholarship of the plays he takes up, and possessed of original insights. As can be seen from the topics chosen, his readings raise a number of issues that are central to the study of Noh.

This work is then a welcome addition to the secondary literature on Noh, full of original insights, by a well-informed scholar, and, as it happens, beautifully produced with a large number of illustrations. It suffers however, at times, from a lack of intellectual clarity. This probably derives ultimately from the insuperable difficulties in its aims, arising from the obscurity of Zenchiku's views and the uncertainty of his attributions.

Contemporary Japanese Thought.

By Richard F. Calichman, ed. New York: Columbia University Press, 2005. Pp. 320. Cloth. ISBN: 0-231-13620-X.

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Some years ago, I contributed an essay on postwar social and political thought to a volume entitled *Modern Japanese Thought* (Cambridge University Press, 1998). The cover featured a large chrysanthemum flower, with a small drawing of a *torii* reflected on water toward the bottom, all set against a gray background motif consisting of stylized lotus leaves and blossoms. The message seems to have been that Japan ought to continue to be thought of in terms of its connections, symbolic or otherwise, with its own past rather than as embedded in any larger world, whether geographical or conceptual.

Not so this volume, which is all about Japan's embeddedness in the world. It is in many ways an admirable, engrossing, and valuable collection, if also, from time to time, a tendentious one. The gap between the volume of serious writing in Japanese – scholarship, criticism, polemics – and what is available of it in translation is immense, and Richard Calichman is to be congratulated for both addressing and redressing the problem, in this and his other work along the same lines.⁶

In his lengthy introduction, Calichman unaccountably declines to define the “contemporary” period, instead focusing on the contingency of such notions as “Japan” (or “Japanese”) and “thought.” “That which is called ‘modern Japanese civilization’,” he asserts, “... exists nowhere else but in the inscriptions that at each instant institute or found modern Japanese civilization” (p. 6) and is in no way “natural or necessary” (p. 4). “Institutions” are rather formed by a decision “made in the face of all contingency” that, with “prescriptive force,” thereby produces “a new and entirely unprecedented reality” (p. 9). Rather than disclosing a tradition (“an experience that becomes extended,” as the theologian Edward Schillebeeckx puts it⁷), the past can only exist “retroactively” (p. 7). Such a view may be meant as a corrective to a heavy-handed historicism that has no other function than to justify a particular present, or to counter a “naturalizing” perspective that fixes collective “identity” (such as that of a nation) to the exclusion of alterity. But it is surely an overcompensation to insist that these “institutions” are as momentary, as devoid of weight and subject to the next “decision,” as Calichman makes out. Marx must have been delusional in thinking that the past (the “tradition

6 Richard Calichman. *What is Modernity? Writings of Takeuchi Yoshimi*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2005; *Takeuchi Yoshimi: Displacing the West*. New York: Cornell East Asia Series, 2004.

7 Edward Schillebeeckx. *I Am a Happy Theologian*. New York: Crossroad, 1994, p. 42.

of the dead generations”) was a “nightmare,” when all he really had to do was simply decide to alter reality at will.⁸

Calichman laid down two principles in selecting essays for this volume: “the principle of practice,” whether in choice of subject matter, willingness to draw out the political stakes of a past or present issue, or to engage in direct polemic, is clearly evident. With one exception, Japan (however defined) is the subject of all the essays. A second “principle of gender” is also at work. “In Japan,” Calichman argues, “the term *shisō*, or ‘thought,’ does not include feminism” (p. 3): this is a convention he is determined to overturn, if it has not already been.⁹

The arrangement of the essays in this volume is democratic: the authors’ works appear in alphabetical order. First is Ehara Yumiko, a sociologist, who examines the “politics of teasing” in the Japanese mass media as a response to the feminist movement and the issue of sexual harassment. Deployed as “play” against women from whom “indulgence” and “forgiveness” are presumed, teasing aims at “disparagement, attack, or critique” (p. 49), while refusing any real engagement with its object. A second piece critiques Maruyama Masao, albeit on the basis of a highly selective reading of his work. From the perspective of second-wave feminism, with its “strong distrust of modernity” (p. 60), Ehara sees in Maruyama an apparent desire to shape a homogeneous “national community,” a desire that both “dilutes the problem of Japanese fascism into the problem of Japanese backwardness” (p. 66) and seems constitutionally incapable of recognizing women as modern and yet not men. This is due, she argues, to the compounding effects of Maruyama’s having been both a “Japanist” and “modernizationist.” Insofar as Japanese feminists rely on Maruyama’s analyses, she warns, they will remain trapped in a “clever logic” (p. 67) of self-subjection.

Next is Kang Sangjung, a specialist in political thought and a high-profile critic, whose paired essays rest on an interesting paradox. They seek to “rupture” a strong narrative of modern (Japanese) history that has posited a fundamental, and exculpating, break at 1945. Kang insists instead on the historical continuity of the imperial with the postwar era, in the sense that it was Japan’s initial assertion of hegemony in northeast Asia that created the “region” in the first place, not least in the realm of systems of knowledge. Japanese scholarship – Kang’s case here is the historian Shiratori Kurakichi – did not “discover,” but rather created, the “Orient.” By forcefully returning the empire and its heterogeneous peoples to historical discourse, Kang seeks to use continuity in time to provoke a rupture in narrative.

Karatani Kōjin, probably the contributor best known among English-language readers, then takes up the 1942 symposium of writers, philosophers, and critics called to “overcome modernity.” “It was not so pernicious as some have claimed,” Karatani writes, and even produced “shocking” statements suggestive of resistance based on “literary liberalism.” The problem was that “in a Japan that utterly lacked any actual liberalism,” such freedom to resist – to face contradictions – had to be “realized at an imaginary level, and could only be ‘aesthetic’” (p. 109). By contrast, Karatani finds in the writer Sakaguchi Ango a genuine “overcoming” of the modern in his insistence that “real life” as it is was to be “affirmed” (p. 117). Karatani’s other contribution is a shortish piece on Natsume Sōseki’s *Kokoro*, which he treats as a formal and historical anachronism. An epistolary “confession,” long out of fashion, in its central theme of “delay” (or failure to intervene with speech at the right moment), it evokes the unrealized, “concealed and forgotten” possibilities of early Meiji that had been excluded from the “modern nation-state system” (p. 128).

Nishitani Osamu’s essay, “The Wonderland of ‘Immortality,’” is the orphan of the collection. Entirely unconcerned with Japan, it examines the implications of brain death and organ transplantation for the understanding of “individuality.” For Nishitani, “individuality” is literally a composite

8 Karl Marx. *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*. In *Surveys from Exile*. London: Penguin, 1992, p. 146.

9 Kano Masanao. *Kindai Nihon shisō annai*. Tokyo: Iwanami Bunko, 1999 includes a substantial chapter on feminism.

or hybrid, and any possible notion of “immortality” must now be “nomadized” as body parts and genetic capacities are migrated from one site to another. Unless I misread him, Nishitani strikes a conservative tone at odds with the other contributors. Troubled by “the idea of using the (assumed) personality-less human body as a material resource,” he remarks: “It is therefore not unreasonable if the ‘brain death’ debate calls to mind ‘Auschwitz,’” since both are a “creation of advanced technology” (pp. 147–48).¹⁰

In “Two Negations,” Naoki Sakai seeks to uncover the “general technology of imperial nationalism, a technology by means of which a subject of the imperial nation is manufactured out of so-called minority individuals” (p. 162). Juxtaposing readings of fictional texts (in Japanese) by colonial-era Taiwanese writers to an examination of John Okada’s *No-No Boy* (1957), Sakai asks whether a viable “counter-scenario” to the induced desire to identify with the national-colonial hegemon is possible. Okada’s “Ichiro,” he finds, is largely “free ... of the obsessive desire for national identification” (p. 183), while colonial Taiwanese writers were “not allowed” to make their characters refuse the path of emulation, and had to content themselves with (spurious) self-esteem. Sakai sees that this is a “crucial difference” (p. 178) between the texts, but cannot bring himself to say that it may represent a crucial difference between two societies as well.

“I believe there can only be confrontation,” proclaims the philosopher Takahashi Tetsuya in his first contribution – a polemic directed at Katō Norihiro, who argued in his *Haisengo ron* (1997) that Japanese must reconstitute themselves as a national community by first mourning their own war dead before they can properly address the dead of “Asia.” For Katō, Japan is a Jekyll-and-Hyde society driven to suppress the memories of its “dirty” origins in defeat and subjection, but (as repeated “slips” by public officials and politicians testify) is unable to do so. Takahashi refutes Katō’s central claims, upholding instead a “democracy without nationalism” (p. 210) as one free of coercively homogenizing politics. In his second essay, written in opposition to the 1999 National Flag and Anthem Law, Takahashi dismisses the casuistry that permitted some intellectuals to reject the anthem *Kimigayo* for its reference to the “eternity of the emperor’s reign” while accepting the flag *Hinomaru* on aesthetic grounds: it was no less a symbol of aggression than the anthem. The underlying issue, for Takahashi, is the legitimacy of the symbol-emperor system itself as a mechanism for exclusion of Asia’s “others,” not least those “others” internal to the “national community” itself.

The sociologist Ueno Chizuko addresses the relations between feminism and orientalism. Ueno argues that if Japanese men were already “feminized” by the West, Japanese women were subject to a double feminization; women seeking to contest this twofold subjection could be accused of displaying what Motoori Norinaga had disparaged as a “Chinese” – universalizing – mind. In Japan, Ueno sees a “transvestite patriarchy” (p. 241) marked by “mother dominance,” but no less patriarchal for that. When anticolonial discourse takes up gender in its own cultural context,” Ueno emphasizes, “it turns into an oppressive discourse that justifies the sexist status quo” (p. 233) – one that has co-opted Barthes’ famous “empty center” and refeminized the once martial modern emperor. In her second essay Ueno tracks the collapse of morally masochistic “Japanese mothers” through a reading of works by Etō Jun and Kojima Nobuo, pointing out the emergence of a new type, capable of expressing negative feelings, even hatred, for their children. Her point is not to affirm this “new motherhood” (p. 259), but that “Mother” must continue to be deconstructed.

The final pair of essays is by Ukai Satoshi, a specialist in French studies, who writes on the “two-in-one event of colonialism and modernity” (p. 278) via a consideration of writings by, among others, Takeuchi Yoshimi and Frantz Fanon. For Ukai, “colonialism” and “modernity” are “not entirely

10 Cf. Martin Heidegger, “Insight into That Which Is” (1949): “Agriculture is today a motorized food industry, in essence the same as the manufacture of corpses in gas chambers and extermination camps, the same as the blockade and starvation of countries, the same as the manufacture of atomic bombs.” As cited in Richard Wolin, *The Heidegger Controversy*. Chicago: MIT Press, 1993, p. 15.

translatable ... A reserve of latent meaning” binds them to “Europe,” whose “essence is self-expansion” (pp. 264, 266) from the “nation” outward. No one, even the most acute analysts of empire, “could command a bird’s-eye view” of the phenomenon in its entirety; “it can be thought only in the midst of multiple voices” (p. 278). A short essay, again on the flag-and-anthem controversy, concludes the volume. Though no less polemic than Takahashi’s, Ukai’s is more subtle. He turns to members of the very wartime generation – among them the poet Tanigawa Gan – for whom the experience of the Hinomaru taught them “an absolutely indelible mistrust of aesthetic experience in general” (p. 284). Only those capable of mobilizing language to portray the wordless emblem of Japan as (for example) a “red Tupperware container” or “autistic ... demon child” (pp. 287, 288) will be able to resist the suave, naturalizing aesthetics that will lull “progressives” into accepting the contemporary version of political unconsciousness.

A few thoughts in conclusion. Putting together the title of this volume with its contents, one can see that “contemporary Japanese thought” is defined here as deconstructionist in principle of the postwar nation-state conception. This deconstruction entails a rupture in the “narrative of rupture” itself – that is, the view that 1945 marks a substantial break in the course of Japanese history – and the installation of an alternative “narrative of continuity” in which modern “Japan” began as and remains an empire at heart. I do not draw this conclusion from Calichman’s introduction, because he is silent on historical context, but rather from the contributors themselves. Though much that they say is persuasive, it would certainly have been more honest to title this collection something like “Is There an Intellectual Left in Japan Today?” Might not the reflexive denial of “nation” spring from a kind of historical sour grapes or (to be fairer) alienation? Personally, I doubt that a political force capable of rule would refuse in principle to recognize as substantial the collectivity whose fate has been entrusted to its hands.

The Thought War: Japanese Imperial Propaganda.

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The question of the political and cultural makeup of wartime Japanese society has excited many and various accounts over the last several decades. One of the perennial questions has revolved around the issue of whether and to what extent there was widespread complicity in the rhetoric of Japanese imperialism, particularly during the 1930s and early 1940s, or whether this was merely the product of (and thus the responsibility of) a small, elite group of intellectuals or militarists. Until relatively recently, it has been the orthodox position that there was little (if any) dissent within Japan during this time. The vogue over the last ten years or so has been rather in the opposite direction – scholars have attempted to locate and explicate a number of instances of agents of resistance in the so-called “Dark Valley” of wartime Japan.

In his intriguing new book, Kushner appears to stand against this recent tide and makes the argument that Japanese civil society as a whole was responsible for the production as well as the consumption of imperialist propaganda. Indeed, Kushner is so convinced by this organic unity between the military elites and civil society more broadly that he speaks of the existence of “democratic fascism” during this period, by which he means to support the assertion (of Tsuganesawa and Satō) that the masses were “not solely a depository for information, but acted as soldiers within the ‘thought war’” (p. 26).