

JOHN WHITNEY HALL 1916–1997

John Whitney Hall, professor emeritus of history at Yale University and a former president of the Association for Asian Studies (1967–68), has died after a long illness in Tucson, Arizona, at the age of 81. Born of missionary parents in Tokyo, he spent his entire life promoting the study of Japan, becoming one of America's leading scholars and teachers of its premodern tradition. He was the author or editor of numerous books and series, and the Ph.D. advisor of a remarkably varied group of students at Michigan and Yale. In addition, he was the chairman of virtually all the leading professional committees relating to Japan, exercising a many-sided influence that was quite extraordinary. Professor Hall was one of that handful of figures most responsible for the development of Japanese Studies in the West in the twentieth century.



After spending much of the first part of his life in Japan, he graduated from Amherst College in 1939, returning to Kyoto where he taught at Doshisha University for two years. After working in naval intelligence during the war, Hall joined an illustrious cohort of graduate students at Harvard, which included Marius Jansen, Thomas Smith, Donald Shivley, Howard Hibbett, and Robert Scalapino. Under the direction of Edwin Reischauer, who was only six years older than Hall, he completed his Ph.D. in 1950, with a dissertation bearing the prescient title of "Modern Trends in Tokugawa Japan: The Life and Policies of Tanuma Okitsu-gu." At the time, life under the regimented feudal authority of the Tokugawa was thought to have had little to commend it, with Japan all but untouched by any indices of growth or progress, and with peasant rebellions the harsh underside to an era of surface peace.

Even before completing his degree, Hall joined the history faculty at Michigan (1948), where he rose to the rank of full professor by 1959, and where he set the basic course of his scholarship and teaching career. In collaboration with colleagues like Robert Hall, Richard Beardsley, and Robert Ward, he helped to organize and administer the Okayama study project, the first interdisciplinary field-based effort of its kind. He also began to work with and train graduate students, of whom Grant Goodman was the first to complete his Ph.D. (1955). Other students, including Bernard Silberman, Harry Harootunian, James Crowley, and Irwin Scheiner, soon followed. From the mid-1950s until he left Michigan in 1961, Hall was the Director of Michigan's Center for Japanese Studies (which, coincidentally, has just celebrated its fiftieth anniversary).

Hall moved to Yale in 1961 to become the first holder of the A. Whitney Griswold professorship of history, commencing a new phase in his career. The 1960s were his most active period in terms of national leadership, and he helped to set the agenda for the field as a whole. From 1958 to 1968, he served as chair of the AAS's Conference on Modern Japan, which sponsored a series of meetings whose binational character helped to integrate scholars from the two countries. Ultimately, a six-volume series on the modernization of Japan was published (Princeton 1965–71), with its list of contributors a virtual Who's Who in Japanese studies at the time. Several dozens of scholars across all the disciplines dissected the Tokugawa and the Meiji, utterly transforming the history of 300 years in the process. The feudal straitjacket that had been fastened and secured by earlier historians was, in a Houdini-type escape, now thoroughly cast off.

But just as Hall and his colleagues were riding the crest of this revisionist wave on the Tokugawa, he was already turning his attention to the pre-Tokugawa. Japan's all but neglected first millennium was about to be tackled in a magisterial way in Hall's greatest book. His research for *Government and Local Power in Japan, 500–1700: A Study Based on Bizen Province* (Princeton, 1966) had begun as part of the Okayama project more than a decade earlier, and its appearance helped to transform the conception and construction of the larger field. If "premodern" had once meant essentially the Tokugawa, Hall now set about to give equal time and treatment to all periods.

And what a remarkable treatment it was, a world away from the exploits of great and petty men and events, which had informed most previous writing on the medieval. Indeed, by demonstrating that the center of gravity of the historical profession in Japan lay in the early and the medieval, and by showing that those centuries might be susceptible to modern analysis, the book helped to destroy the era's remote, antiquarian image, making it seem suddenly accessible for those who were willing to approach it. Under the influence of *Government and Local Power* (and also the work of Paul Varley), the first cohort of graduate students now began to form at Yale, Columbia, Harvard, and elsewhere, abuzz with the certainty that the pre-1600 epoch was beckoning each one of us. I was one of the group from that late 1960s era, which also included Cappy Hurst, Neil Kiley, Martin Collcutt, Pres Wintersteen, and Betsy Sato.

At Yale during that decade, a group of as many as nine or ten Ph.D. students became part of the Hall *kashindan* (the word that was actually used), with dissertations in preparation on both the Edo and pre-Edo. Among those of that era were Bill Hauser, Sue Hanley, Hal Bolitho, Bernie Susser, Pres Wintersteen, and myself, to be followed by Jim McClain, Dick Staubitz, Peter Arnesen, and Suzanne Gay (who was actually Hall's last student). It is fair to say that it was an exciting and stimulating time for all of us, even though not everyone ended up as a member of our profession.

The 1960s had greater significance for Hall than just the appearance of *Government and Local Power*. Indeed, the decade began with what I believe was his most important methodological contribution, a new way (for the Japan field) of seeking to understand historical change. In 1961, the *JAS* published his remarkable paper on the stages of daimyo development in which he showed that mayhem and chaos in Japan's Dark Ages actually explained nothing. For him, experimentation and remodeling by the most astute of the pragmatists of that era might be the basis for identifying a sequence of types across several centuries. To put it mildly, the field was given its first real taste of the "Hall approach." This paper, along with others, and a number by Jansen and other authors on the Edo, were then collected into one of the most influential volumes of the era—the *Studies in the Institutional History of Early Modern Japan* (coedited with Jansen, 1968). A deft maneuver with words—the formal christening of the Tokugawa as Japan's "early modern"—not only helped to promote a fundamental reconfiguring of the divisions of Japanese history, but to the emerging field of the pre-Edo a chance to claim what was now no longer taken. The early and the medieval became Japan's premodern age.

Nor did Hall wait very long to press the new advantage. In 1972, he invited the apprentice historians now working in the Heian through Muromachi to a series of weekend workshops in New Haven, leading to the first collection on the medieval in English (*Medieval Japan; Essays in Institutional History*, Yale 1974). Being "present at the beginning" is how those of us who were there now remember the experience, as a new field, under Hall's leadership, came to be forged and consolidated. The sub-periods of the medieval quickly became the logical next quarry, prompting Hall to organize additional conferences. The first, held in Kyoto, was on the Muromachi, and it led to *Japan in the Muromachi Age* (coedited with Toyoda Takeshi, California, 1977), which cleared the skies of whatever darkness still hovered over the Ashikaga centuries. The second conference was devoted to the Sengoku era, and it led to the wonderfully-named *Japan Before Tokugawa* (coedited with Kozo Yamamura and Nagahara Keiji, Princeton, 1981).

The 1970s witnessed the start of another, even more ambitious project which bore fruit as the six-volume *Cambridge History of Japan* of which one—on the Tokugawa—was edited by Hall himself. That book appeared in 1991, long after Hall had retired from Yale, and it represented his last great gift to scholarship on Japan.

Naturally, all during this period he had continued to serve the profession in a number of ways, from being named the ongoing chair of the Conference on U.S.–Japan Educational Exchange (CULCON, from 1968), to being named the first chairman of the Japan–United States Friendship Commission (1976). It had been Hall and Bob Ward who had taken the lead in the lobbying effort to persuade the Congress to establish the commission. At the same time, these were the years of Hall's most active academic statesmanship overall, and he was a tireless promoter of more teaching positions, support for libraries, and fellowships. Much of this effort was channeled through his role on the American Advisory Committee of the new Japan Foundation, but there was also his lengthy chairmanship of the Japan Committee of the SSRC. Many dozens of applicants during this period will have been unaware of the time and effort he devoted to reading their project descriptions, and of his efforts to secure the funding needed to support them. Finally, Hall was an active member of the editorial board of the *American Historical Review*, and he worked tirelessly, if somewhat frustratingly, to have Japan accorded a more prominent place within the parent organizations of historians in America (the AHA).

The honors he received are too numerous to list, except for a select few. In 1975 he was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences; in 1976 he received the prestigious Japan Foundation award; in 1980 he was awarded the Japanese Order of the Sacred Treasure; and in 1987 he became the first historian of Japan to be recognized by the AHA for lifetime scholarship. In recognition of his many contributions to Japanese studies, the AAS established the "John Whitney Hall Prize" for the best book on Japan or Korea, awarded annually.

I have said nothing of the many services he rendered for Yale, from the years he spent as the Master of Morse College, to his years as the chairman of Yale's department of History. The period at Morse came at the height of student unrest in the late 1960s, and many of his reminiscences were of nightly activities that had nothing to do with scholarship. However, they did help him to refine his skills as a mediator, which he then put to effective use within his profession. As is well known, part of his reputation derived from his very special talents as an academic peacemaker.

I have not mentioned Hall's other major works, especially those of a more pedagogical nature. In 1965, he published *Twelve Doors to Japan* (with Richard Beardsley), and two years later a textbook, *Japan From Prehistory to Modern Times*; the latter is still in print and remains much used. There was also an annotated bibliography, mostly on the Tokugawa (*Japanese History: A Guide to Japanese Reference and Research Materials*, 1954); a monograph on Tanuma Okitsugu (1955), which was based on his dissertation; and *Village Japan*, coauthored with Richard Beardsley and Robert Ward (1959). Collaborative projects such as the last are now, of course, commonplace, but Hall was one of the pioneers for this kind of activity relating to Japan. Indeed, he may have been the first to actually coauthor a paper with a Japanese historian, his 1956 article on the Meiji Restoration with Sakata Yoshio (*JAS* 16.1). Collaboration with historians in Japan in fact marked his entire career, perhaps never more fruitfully than with Kanai Madoa of the Shiryo Hensanjo, but also with many other scholars as well. The Muromachi and Sengoku collections, already mentioned, are obvious examples.

A shared sense of purpose continued to mark Hall's relationship with many of his former students, a number of whom chose to honor him with a festschrift in 1985 (*The Bakufu in Japanese History*, Stanford). There have also been several books personally dedicated to him, including one of my own from 1976. For myself at any rate I think I should like to remember him as he was when I first met him a decade earlier, soon after the appearance of *Government and Local Power*, and just after he had written a young student about the lure of that first millennium. He spoke in that letter of the boundless possibilities for someone "of my high abilities," an act of scholarly seduction for which I had no defense. I abandoned the Meiji, and have never, for 30 years, "stopped looking back," this last a frail example of the kind of play on words that Hall always loved. He would pound us with puns, as his face broke into a smile, which, in an instant, became a devilish grin. At the same time, his love of the mountains, like his love of scholarship, had him scaling new peaks all his life—though he would have delivered this flash of wit much more cleverly.

Professor Hall is survived by his wife, Robin, of nearly 55 years, who went everywhere with him and who was part of everything he did. My final story, I think appropriately, therefore deals with the two of them. In 1989, the Halls came to visit us in our tiny village near Oxford, and the next day we took them on a walking tour of that glorious old city. Now I have actually taken many visitors on such tours, and there is no hope of seeing more than a fraction of the three dozen colleges. But the indomitable Jack Hall wanted to keep going and was the last among the four of us who was finally ready to quit. In fact, not wanting to quit evokes the spirit and essence

of this special man, who inspired so many of us by sheer example. The cruelest part of his illness was its curtailing of that unshakable desire always to do more.

I regret that I never really knew any of the three Hall children, but I hope they are aware of the depth of the admiration and affection in which their father was held by so many. They should also know that for those of us in the fields of premodern and early modern Japanese history, we would not be able to do what we do now if not for his vision and scholarly energy. When we were all young, much of the heavy lifting was being shouldered by John Whitney Hall. When combined with his contributions to the development of our profession, his was an achievement whose legacy will continue to be felt by all Asianists. Finally, for those whose lives he touched in a personal way, we have lost a great friend, a caring mentor.

JEFFREY P. MASS
Stanford University