

Chapter 13

The Issue of Historical Perspective from the Post-Heisei Era: Looking Back at Meiji from the Postwar Period, and Looking Ahead



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Abstract This chapter presents a high-level, historical retrospective from modern-day Japan, looking back at the Meiji period with which the book began, through the immediate postwar period and into the 1960s and Japan’s rise as an economic power. It then looks at Japan’s “meanderings” following the end of the Cold War and the collapse of its bubble economy, before taking a speculative look at what might lie ahead for the nation in the new era of Reiwa. The author posits a need to supplant the popular “Shiba view of history” with a perspective more appropriate to the present changing postwar order and that reevaluates the successes of the Meiji period.

What Is Meant by Historical Perspective

In this chapter, instead of addressing any particular issues in the modern history of Japan, I would like to discuss the topic from the angle of historical perspective. To the question “What is history?” there can be various replies, such as the famous one by E.H. Carr in his classic work, *What is History?: “an unending dialogue between the present and the past”* (Carr 1962). My reply here is to take history as a “map on the axis of time.” A regular map is drawn out on a spatial axis, but when a map is drawn on a time axis or timeline, we call it history. In this analogy of history as a map, the monographs undertaken by expert history researchers are comparable to the work of drawing an accurate map, through the collection of basic data and by measuring the landscape using precise, scientific methods. These days, the principal aim of academic historical research that is usually called empirical history in Japan is to reconstruct an accurate past based on historical materials that have been scrutinized rigorously as historical evidence. Though other standards to evaluate quality of research such as narrative clarity can be included, in principle, the rigor with which

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the historical materials are investigated forms the framework for the system of knowledge called empirical history.

However, greater detail and precision does not necessarily make for a better map. Too fine a map sometimes becomes impractical. If I wish to go 100 m in front of me, a map with the scale of 1 cm, or even 1 mm, safe to say, is not more helpful than one with a scale of 1 m. The duty of a map, is to give a sense of spatial direction, so it may be handier to have an easy-to-understand outline drawing that simplifies away the precise details of survey measurements. You can say the same thing about history. It is often difficult to grasp a broad sense of direction from historical research that focuses on the details. What we desire from a “bird’s-eye view from 30,000 feet” is not every detail on the ground down to the last centimeter; likewise, what we expect from a bird’s-eye historical perspective is an omission of minor facts that are too trivial: we want a sense of direction from the present to the future. What I describe here is similar to what Mutsu Munemitsu, a highly esteemed Meiji-period diplomat, wrote in the preface to his memoir *Kenkenroku*, making a contrast between a survey map, whose measurements derived from official archives and records, and a bird’s-eye view painting drawn from life, and then characterizes his book as the latter sort (Mutsu 2015).

Not many historians of the present day, however, involve themselves often with such broad overviews; they cannot, in fact, for fear that colleagues in their line of work will criticize them for sketching out some perfunctory sort of map when, being an expert in the field, they should be drawing highly detailed maps. In *What is History?*, Carr disdainfully mocked German historian Oswald Spengler and British historian Arnold Toynbee for preaching the history of mankind from a perspective of the rise and fall of civilizations.

Meanwhile, every society holds the desire for a general overview map of its own history. Therefore, the writing of such a map more often falls to novelists and general historians than academic researchers. Oftentimes these broad maps are sloppy, having no clear connection to detailed surveys of historical research. “Deduction from above” was how author and literary critic Takeyama Michio¹ once criticized Marxist-influenced histories written in the 1950s. This does not pertain only to Marxism; any history that cherry-picks facts and historical evidence to support its predetermined conclusion runs the risk of being drafted as a good-looking overview. Just as an attractive map drawn without reference to proper measurements cannot help you find your way to your destination, a simplistic and clear-cut view of history that is not based in fact will deceive the public, leading them astray into dogmatism. What is needed in these cases is a well-drawn overview that is mindful of the trade-offs between precise detail and intellectual utility. In this chapter I plan to look back over postwar history by focusing on the issue of how a “historical view” or “historical perspective” was created as a series of bird’s-eye view maps of the Japanese postwar period.

¹ Active in the Shōwa period he is famous for his novel *Harp of Burma*. In criticizing historical materialism, Takeyama wrote in his *Shōwa no seishinshi*: “When interpreting history, it is a mistake to establish a principle that serves as a major premise first, and then proceed on that basis to explain specific phenomena. ‘Deduction from above’ always leads to wrong conclusions.”

Selecting the Regime in the Immediate Postwar

The era from Japan's defeat in 1945 to 1960 was a busy one, as the country and people responded to the many changes that defeat and the occupation brought about. It was an era when people were too busy making history rather than thinking about historical perspectives.

Selecting a regime, a form of government, was the most important task in the immediate postwar period. "Preserving the national polity" was the sitting Suzuki Kantarō administration's objective at the time of Japan's surrender, so the process of enacting the Constitution of Japan throughout 1946–1947 meant carrying out the most fundamental selection of a system in that environment. The greatest concern of Japan's leadership was to avoid the fate that had befallen Germany. Subjected to the harsh peace imposed on it under the Treaty of Versailles after World War I, Germany found itself divided and occupied by four major powers at the end of World War II. Japan's request to preserve the national polity was tied to the mindset wishing to escape such a fate. As is well known, when the Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers (SCAP/GHQ) presented them with the draft constitution, the administrations of Shidehara Kijūrō and Yoshida Shigeru, which followed, had to accept it. It is likely that for Supreme Commander General Douglas MacArthur revising the constitution was the means rather than the objective, because he had a strong interest in preventing any interference in the Occupation of Japan from the Far Eastern Commission (which also included the Soviet Union, Australia, [the Republic of] China, and other Allies). At the same time, the Japanese government welcomed the draft because the new constitution guaranteed the status of the emperor, albeit as a symbol, and thereby did preserve the national polity.

Several "cons" weighed against this "pro": the "no-war clause" of Article 9 paragraph 2 was finalized at this very early stage of the postwar period, and the constitution overall had been drafted rather hastily. Ironically, because the Cold War was intensifying, the issue of Japan's security reached a key turning point as the Constitution of Japan was going into effect in May 1947. Here, too, there was a balance of merits. It was a major advantage to Japan that, under a strategy to strengthen Japan as an ally in the Cold War, the US-led Western bloc had adopted a basic policy linked to a generous peace. But it was detrimental for Japanese politics that Japan rearmed itself while keeping Article 9's stipulations intact, because constitutional revision became impossible with the nation split politically under the Cold War.

The start of the Korean War in June 1950 precipitated a head-on confrontation between the United States (as a member of the United Nations' forces) and the People's Republic of China (with its "People's Volunteer Army"). The war resulted in a US security commitment to the Korean Peninsula by, among others, US military stationing in South Korea, a positive for Japan's own national security. But the attendant divisions of China, Taiwan and the Korean peninsula complicated the post-World War II settlement as well as Japan's efforts to form its own ties with these countries, a negative for Japan. Yoshida Shigeru was especially eager to build relations with China after Britain recognized the People's Republic of China

(hereafter, China), which was in control of the mainland, as early as January 1950. But out of consideration for US wishes (the United States and China had become belligerent adversaries), Yoshida could only secure a peace treaty with the Republic of China (hereafter, Taiwan), which left Japan's relations with China in an unsettled state.

As for Japan's domestic regime, what came to be called the "1955 regime" was established as political party system in 1955 when the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) was formed, the left and right wings of the Japan Socialist Party were reunified, and the Japan Communist Party abandoned its armed struggle line. The government's economic white paper issued the following year contained the phrase "the postwar period is already over." Yet at this stage, the anti-Yoshida forces leading the LDP were pushing to revise the constitution and rearm the country; the progressive left, meanwhile, fiercely opposed rearmament and the Japan-US Security Treaty system; and there were several foreign policy issues outstanding. The riots over the 1960 revision of the security treaty brought a temporary resolution to these issues. Under Kishi Nobusuke's administration, the LDP, which had been split between the Yoshida and anti-Yoshida factions, decided to accept the US-centric policy line that Yoshida had created as its general framework, and to prioritize the revision of the Japan-US Security Treaty thereby pushing off constitutional revision. Consistent with this choice, the LDP expressed its basic policy that Japan would not become involved in military conflict outside of its own territory by stating that, "the exercise of the right of collective self-defense [for Japan to participate in another country's conflict overseas] . . . is not permissible under the Constitution." As a result, the Japanese people chose a balance in general elections from the end of the 1950s, entrusting the LDP with the power and authority to rule yet giving the opposition parties over one-third of seats, thereby preventing revision of the constitution.

Formation of the "Postwar" Consciousness in the 1960s

Japanese people could not view the "postwar" year from a historical perspective until the start of the 1960s, when the issue of the political regime had been settled. This point itself is easily understandable. Yet, it must be noted that the postwar social consciousness formed in the 1960s had the following two features.

First, the postwar consciousness created in the 1960s has survived the 70 years since the war's end largely unchanged. This partly stems from the fact that during this interval Japan has not encountered any momentous changes, such as a world war. The historical consciousness of the 1960s still strongly shapes the politics and society of today's Japan, over half a century later—this point is perhaps one feature of "postwar Japan" on the axis of time.

Second, the postwar consciousness formed in the 1960s is deeply connected to the historical consciousness of how to view modern Japan since Meiji, something that had existed well before World War II. We must distinguish this point from the

historical consciousness that the great reforms of the Meiji period, the Meiji Restoration, ushered Japan into a new era. Though 1945 was the origin of the “postwar” era, it is a “beginning” only in a moderate sense; in fact, in a chronological sense, it is seen as a second starting point since the Meiji. To put it another way, the postwar consciousness had been shaped and taken hold as a corollary to the consciousness of modern Japan since Meiji.

Already in the 1950s there were debates within intelligentsia stretching from the prewar period among the Marxists over the Meiji Restoration or the failed modernization school of thought of progressive scholars, epitomized by Maruyama Masao. But they were strongly characterized by what Takeyama Michio criticized as “deduction from above,” mentioned previously. In contrast to these arguments, a new way of looking at Japan’s modern history emerged—on the one hand, rooted in more empirical historical research and, on the other, influenced by modernization theory that had been a growing school of thought within the West since the latter half of the 1950s. This new approach, based on its understanding that Japan since Meiji was an exemplar of successful modernization, took the wars of the Showa Period as a deviation from its success. For instance, Ueyama Shunpei’s *The Significance of the Greater East Asian War*, Hayashi Fusao’s *The Affirmative Thesis on the Greater East Asian War*, and *Asianism* edited by Takauchi Yoshimi are books published in the early 1960s that construct a historical consciousness, laid along a continuous timeline from the Meiji period onward, that states the task of postwar Japan is to recover from the temporary mistake of veering off into war and return to work vigorously on its path of modernization. What grabbed the public’s attention in this trend of thought was Shiba Ryōtarō’s *Ryōma ga yuku* (published as a serialized article in the newspaper from June 1962 to May 1966).² Sakamoto Ryōma, a figure known by all Japanese today, was all but forgotten for a time after a brief rise to prominence in the Meiji/Taishō periods. Through his serialized novel featuring Ryōma as its heroic protagonist, Shiba tied the spirit of the Meiji Restoration to the Japan of the 1960s.

Around the same period, international political scholar Kōsaka Masataka of Kyoto University made his debut as a public intellectual, publishing his theses *Prime Minister Yoshida Shigeru* and *Concept of Japan as a Maritime State*. These theses, written as essentially current policy affair writings, laid out an appraisal of Yoshida Shigeru and the proper form of Japanese diplomacy, and both were linked to an assessment of the Meiji state. These works characterized Yoshida—before the war, a diplomat in the camp favoring Anglo-American cooperation who came into conflict with the military and was later suppressed; after the war, a prime minister—as choosing a policy line that prioritized economic recovery through commerce, light military armament, and the Japan-US security alliance. Depending on how you see it, this approach can be understood as an attempt to position Yoshida’s postwar choice as an extension of “*senchū hassaku*,” an eight-point program that Ryōma

²Published in English as *Ryōma! The Life of Sakamoto Ryōma: Japanese Swordsman and Visionary*, a four volume set.

conceptualized around the end of Edo period for the restoration and foundation for a new government.

Concept of Japan as a Maritime State is a relatively long essay, patterned after Watsuji Tetsurō's *Sakoku: Japan's Tragedy* (published in 1950), that starts with a comparison of Japan and Britain in the seventeenth century. According to this article, Britain by that period had become a maritime state under the reign of Elizabeth I, whereas Japan, which had once been open to trade and interaction with the world at large, had made the choice to become an island country under the *sakoku* policy of self-imposed national isolation. Watsuji had called that "Japan's tragedy," a sense that Kōsaka embraced, asserting that postwar Japan should become a maritime state by adopting policies for open commerce and by investing in natural resources to make full use of the oceans.

Thus, a historical perspective was formed, particularly in the early 1960s, that overlay that time with the Meiji period, asserting that postwar Japan must recreate itself as a maritime state, a claim rooted in the belief that despite having the potential to develop as a maritime state, Meiji Japan had erred at some point in time by deciding to use military force in an effort to become a continental state. The fact that they held the Tokyo Olympics and started operating the Tōkaidō Shinkansen in 1964 at exactly that time underpinned the social consciousness that they were not only recovering from the devastation of war but creating a new Japan in terms of having learned from mistakes in its modern history.

As we come to the later part of the decade, however, the consciousness of the issues slightly shifted. Though high-speed economic growth had entered its peak, Japan also entered a political season at home and abroad. The United States was bogged down in the quagmire of the Vietnam War; China was feeling the full devastating force of the Cultural Revolution; and in Japan, student protests had become so radicalized that the University of Tokyo cancelled its entrance examinations. It was in these conditions that the first state funeral in the postwar period was held, for Yoshida Shigeru who died in 1967, and that the 100th anniversary of the Meiji Restoration was celebrated as a government-initiated program the following year. This meant an even greater awareness of the continuity with Meiji. With the growing awareness Japan's postwar economic achievements, interest shifted to the sequence of events linking Meiji's successes to Shōwa's failures, and interest in how to avoid repeating the mistakes of the past came to the fore.

To cite an extreme example of this, Mishima Yukio, the most conspicuous of postwar pundits, wrote a short essay for the *Sankei Shimbun* that smacked of a suicide note: "If things continue at this rate, Japan will disappear. . . perhaps leaving behind an economic powerhouse in a corner of the Far East that is inorganic, empty, neutral, neutral-colored, affluent, and shrewd. I no longer have any interest in speaking to people who think that such a development is alright." His dramatic suicide in November 1970 can be interpreted as a man of letters with such acute sensibilities expressing his irritability and the sense of unease which he held toward postwar Japan.

Even as their consciousness of the issues overlapped with Mishima's, Shiba Ryōtarō and Kōsaka Masataka actively tried to avoid the solution which Mishima had hoped for, a revival of nationalist sentiment stemming from the traditional spirit

to revere the emperor. To begin with, aspects of what Mishima hoped for miss the mark. Mishima's spirit of revering the emperor in truth is not something traditional, but a modern product of the Meiji period, a fact pointed out by Hashikawa Bunzō that even Mishima could not help but acknowledge.

Shiba's *Clouds above the Hill*³ began its serialized run in the *Sankei Shimbun* newspaper in April 1968. A long novel that was started clearly influenced by the Meiji centennial, this work of historical fiction depicting the era from the Shogunate's close and the Meiji Restoration weaves its narrative through parallel storylines focusing on several characters, rather than centering on a single protagonist. As is well-known, the story at first begins as a *bildungsroman* of three young men, the Akiyama brothers (Yoshifuru and Saneyuki) and Masaoka Shiki. But Shiki dies in the third volume of the complete set of eight, and the Akiyama brothers become lost within the military historical description of the Russo-Japanese War. The main theme of the latter half of the story is that of Japanese leaders barely managing to keep in check the dangers brought about by irrational spiritualism, which Shiba ascribed to Nogi Maresuke,⁴ to lead the country to victory in the war. As has been widely noted, Shiba's depiction of Nogi is undeserved, and major parts of the bitter fighting that was the Russo-Japanese War originated in the inhumanity of war in an industrial age that, with World War I, became obvious war. Be that as it may, Shiba's motive was to imply that after the Russo-Japanese War, Meiji's modernization success gave way to the path toward irrational spiritualism, precipitating the mistakes of Shōwa, a caution for postwar Japan against falling into Mishimaesque spiritualism.

Kōsaka, too, planned a symposium titled, "Illusion of 'a Powerless State'" (hosted by the Japan Cultural Congress) in 1969, where he argued the dangers of Japan disregarding the importance of political concepts as it achieved its economic successes. Kōsaka was laying out his maritime state concept as not something conceived simply from an economic viewpoint, but as the political objectives for which postwar Japan should be aiming.

Success and Challenges of an Economic Power

This resulted, however, in half-accepting and half-ignoring the recommendation for realism that Shiba and Kōsaka offered. For sure, there was no revival of spiritualism or Mishimaesque ideology. Yet Japan of the 1970s increasingly defined its identity as an economic power, falling into a habit of making light of politics.

³Translated into English as *Clouds above the Hill: A Historical Novel of the Russo-Japanese War*, published in four volumes.

⁴A national hero in Imperial Japan, General Nogi captured Port Arthur (Lüshun) in the Russo-Japanese War at the cost of many lives; he committed *seppuku* on the day of Emperor Meiji's funeral, an act that simultaneously marked the end of an era, influenced contemporary writers, and made him a public symbol of loyalty and sacrifice.

It is just a historical “what-if” exercise, but what if this era had held an opportunity for Japan to make a serious diplomatic decision, how would that have changed Japan thereafter? For instance, if Japan had been able to engage China on establishing diplomatic normalization before US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger’s July 1971 visit to Beijing, it may have been able to combine a policy of Japan-China diplomatic ties co-existing with Japan-Taiwan relations with the US reversion of administrative control over Okinawa, and if so, subsequent history may have changed. Of course, given the international environment of the time, it would have been extremely challenging to make this move, but there may be some value in simply considering the possibility at least.

In the event, Sino-US rapprochement went forward, and the Tanaka Kakuei administration played catch-up to achieve a restoration of diplomatic ties with China. By then, there were growing trade frictions between Japan and the United States evidenced in the bilateral textile negotiations held in the later days of the Satō Eisaku administration. In addition, Japan was forced to respond to yen appreciation resulting from the Nixon shocks related to the economy.⁵ Subsequently, Japanese society experienced a major panic with the first oil shock in 1973. Japan’s self-perception as an economic power had taken hold firmly before the country surmounted this chain of crises in the mid-1970s. A summit was held in 1975, at France’s overture, by the leaders of the advanced industrial economies (which became the G7 the following year); afterwards, Japan was recognized as a leading economic power, by itself and others, becoming one corner of the triangular relationship among Japan-US-Europe.

Japanese diplomacy as an economic power certainly scored some successes in the 1970s and 1980s. Firstly, Japan took the initiative to focus Asian regional international relations on economics by using terms like “Pacific Rim” and “Asia-Pacific.” The activities of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the fundamental regional mechanism, increased starting with its leaders’ summit in 1976; thus, Prime Minister Fukuda Takeo announced his “Fukuda Doctrine” in Manila in 1977. Through Japan-Australian cooperation, Prime Minister Ōhira Masayoshi called for a Pacific Economic Cooperation Council (PECC), which became the basis for Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) that started in 1989. In addition, as China’s Deng Xiaoping changed course toward reform and opening in 1978, a shift supported by Japan and the United States, Japan pursued a diplomatic strategy to avoid splitting Asia and the Western world that combined free trade and economic cooperation/development assistance.

Secondly, Japan contributed to international cooperation, particularly on the economic front, as the first advanced industrial nation in the non-Western world to be included in the G7. One praiseworthy success of Japanese diplomacy was its very adoption of the basic policy that “international order is a public good, and an

⁵ A series of anti-inflationary economic measures the Nixon administration took in 1971, including wage and price controls, surcharges on imports, and the ending of the gold convertibility of the US dollar.

economic power must bear its proportional share to maintain it," something that was communicated in the concept of "comprehensive security" formalized by the Ōhira administration.

However, just because you have economic power does not make politics unnecessary. First, economic tensions deepened with Europe and the United States as Japan's economic power grew relative to theirs, and they increased pressure on Tokyo to open its markets and restrict its export abilities. The situation became so serious in the 1980s that the revisionist school of thought, which claimed the threat that Japan was trying to control the world through its economic power, had an influence on politics.

Second, an assessment of Japan's modern history became an international political problem. The historical debate over the war into the 1970s had always focused on relations between Japan on the one hand with the United States and other Western countries on the other, and criticisms of the International Military Tribunal of the Far East were asserted from the viewpoint that Japan's modern history was that of confronting Western imperialism (epitomized by Hayashi Fusao's *The Affirmative Thesis on the Great East Asian War*). The enshrinement of the Class A war criminals in Yasukuni Shrine in 1978 took place in the context of such debates.

Beginning in the 1980s, however, political frictions began to aggravate the history issues with Asian countries that had been dealt with until then on the basis of economic cooperation. Part of the background for this change is the growth of nationalism that accompanied economic growth in these Asian countries; an anti-Japanese posture was used as an excuse to criticize the ruling authorities and in political struggles for power. But the fundamental problem was that the historical perspective of modernization established in the 1960s had no clear response to the questions of how to characterize relations with Asian countries in Japan's modern history since Meiji, and how to evaluate these relations historically. Moreover, before Japan could address these questions head on, the Cold War ended, which roiled Japan's postwar identity.

Post-Cold War Meanderings

Though Japan and the other countries from the West naturally greeted the Cold War's sudden demise with cries of delight, they did not inquire too deeply why the Cold War ended so abruptly and peacefully. It was accepted relatively simply as the victory of liberal democracy and market economics.

So, it was hoped that the Cold War would similarly end in Asia. Though the forces pushing for political reform in China were suppressed in the Tiananmen Square Incident in 1989, it was hoped that reform and opening even under the Communist Party's leadership would ultimately promote liberalization, faced with the overwhelming impression of the collapse of the Soviet Union and its Eastern European bloc. The same held true for the socialist countries of North Korea and

Vietnam. It is with these expectations that Japan struggled to find an amicable settlement of history with China, South Korea, and North Korea.

The Japanese emperor's visit to China in 1992 and South Korean President Kim Dae-jung's visit to Japan in 1998 marked breaks in their respective history issues and the visits had been planned as a means to construct future-oriented relations. In the same manner, the Japanese side expressed its apologies regarding the comfort women issues and responsibility for the war through government statements: the Kōno, Hosokawa, and Murayama statements (*tanwa*). Japan and North Korea seemed to pursue normalization of diplomatic relations, kicked off by the dispatch of a supra-partisan group of Japanese lawmakers to North Korea in 1990. Even the 1998 state visit to Japan by Chinese President Jiang Zemin, who sought to press Japan on its historical responsibility, was seen at the time as bearing diplomatic results in the joint declaration both sides issued.

The collapse of Japan's bubble economy and the First Gulf War that occurred contemporaneous with the end of the Cold War shook Japan's postwar identity. Under the 1955 system built on the premise of the Cold War structure, postwar Japan had made its identity the pursuit of pacifism and economic prosperity as a means to overcome military disputes, after reflecting on its history of militarization since the closing days of the Meiji period. However, the collapse of the bubble laid bare the weaknesses of the Japanese capitalist economy; the Gulf War exposed the contradiction between its basic policy of nonparticipation in international conflicts and its contributions to the UN-led order, a contradiction that during the Cold War had been completely unforeseen, leaving Japan concerned about international criticism and scorn. Naturally, Japan's primary task in the 1990s became its response to these shocks.

Generally speaking, the 1990s was a chaotic period for Japan, notwithstanding certain changes that occurred, such as domestic political administrative reforms and Japanese participation in UN Peacekeeping Operations. First among the factors for this was that Japan was pressed to respond to two overlapping tasks simultaneously: the political task of selecting a post-Cold War political system and diplomatic policy line as well as the economic task of clearing the bad debts of the bubble and transforming the structure of the economic system to better match a shrinking labor population and the increasing role of information technology. Economic reforms were nigh impossible without political stability, but economic turmoil caused political reforms to lose their sense of direction. Political chaos forced putting off measures for the economy, giving rise to a vicious circle resulting in a feeling of stagnation and ever deeper discontent toward politics.

The second factor was that Japan was influenced by the excessive optimism the rest of the world felt toward the shape of the post-Cold War order. In recent years there have been assertions that throughout the postwar period the international order was a liberal one. But the international order during the Cold War should be viewed as combining liberal and illiberal elements, with liberalism becoming predominant only after the end of the Cold War. At the end of the 1990s, globalization came to be touted as the world standard, as the BRICs (Brazil, Russia, India, China) and other emerging market economies joined the US-led new liberal global marketplace.

Japan's attempt to rapidly introduce global standards despite the weakness of its political and economic systems precipitated a drop in its international influence. International cooperation in the Asia-Pacific was in retreat with the 1995 APEC (Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation) Osaka Summit, and at the time of the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis, Japan was unable to demonstrate its international leadership, beset by its own financial system crisis, leaving China, the future economic power, an opportunity to boost its presence.

A temporary halt to this situation came with Koizumi Jun'ichirō, who rose to prominence and bolstered his popularity by calling for reforms within the LDP; by following a structural reform policy line, he achieved his aims of reducing public works spending and reforming the postal system. Internationally, on the one hand, Japan-US relations became even closer in the wake of the 9/11 terrorist attacks in 2001 and the ensuing war on terror, with the dispatch of Japan Self-Defense Forces to the Indian Ocean region. In Asia, on the other hand, frictions with China and South Korea increased because of Koizumi's Yasukuni Shrine visits, and diplomatic normalization talks with North Korea stalled because of Pyongyang's admission that it had abducted Japanese citizens and its nuclear program developments. Also, radical liberalism emphasizing global standards provided impetus for insisting on pursuing the issue of individual suffering from war politically. This trend especially aggravated the territorial issue and historical debate over the responsibility for colonial rule between Japan and South Korea, issues the governments had dealt with through a series of political compromises.

Despite Koizumi's reforms, the LDP government lacked the ability to respond to developing domestic structural problems: an aging society and declining birthrate as well as expanding inequalities between Tokyo and the municipalities at home; and international problems such as decline of American influence amid the chaos in its postwar administrations of Afghanistan and Iraq and in the wake of its 2008 financial crisis sparked by the collapse of Lehman Brothers; global economic recession; and the growing assertiveness of China and other emerging market economies. After the Koizumi administration, criticisms of the LDP grew so loud that the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) won a landslide victory in the August 2009 general election. At first, the public had high hopes for the DPJ administration, but confusion increased owing to intra-administration conflict over the direction of reforms. In particular, the Japan-US alliance and China's hardline stance surrounding the Senkaku Islands, as well as the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake all heightened the Japanese public's sense of crisis and increased its disillusionment toward not only the DPJ government but the path of reform itself.

The second Abe Shinzō administration took the stage, its slogan "Take back Japan" matching the popular sentiment of the time. The three arrows of his Abenomics plan also struck a favorable impression with the people: the first arrow of unconventional monetary easing by the central bank would be painless, with the possibility for a second arrow of fiscal spending and a third arrow of structural reform. Interstate competition and conflict drew greater attention in the 2010s, as the world entered a period of reassessing the optimistic theory of a "Liberal International Order." It was in this context that the Abe administration, which valued geopolitical

strategic concepts, strengthened the Japan-US alliance and bolstered Japan's diplomatic presence, fully grasping the mood of the times in terms of diplomacy, too.

And yet, it remained rather nebulous whether the Abe administration was seeking to escape from the postwar system or aiming to revive the earlier good old postwar years. The matter became murkier when it was decided that the 2020 Olympics would be held in Tokyo, easily harkening back to the image of the 1960s: would the Olympic Games be used to revive the good postwar years or to move on from them? This vagueness was reflected in Abe's statement on the 70th anniversary of the end of the war issued in 2015. The statement elicited sympathy with its use of a historical perspective commonly called the "Shiba view of history." The Abe statement neatly applied the Shiba perspective which considered post-Meiji Japan a successful example of modernization that absorbed the modern order of the West, thus it deemed the period from the Manchurian Incident in 1931 through the end of the Pacific War an aberration. This framing also underscored the opportunity for *Meiji 150* in 2018, as if to relive the experience of the 100th anniversary of Meiji (in 1968).

The Task of a Historical Perspective Looking to the Future

Amid the deepening turmoil in the world at present (2019), it is quite natural that the Japanese people seek stability from something like a "Shiba view of history." However, Shiba Ryōtarō himself rejected such an expression and, lest we forget, he insisted that history is that which is built on the accumulation of small facts. Shiba's thinking may be inferred from the fact that, before he died, he never granted his permission for *Clouds above the Hill*, his representative work treating the Meiji period to be made into a movie.

All the same, "Shiba view of history" expression gained currency among the population because the "postwar identity" formed during the Shōwa 30s (1955–1964), which characterized postwar Japan as an extension of the narrative of Meiji Japan as successful Western-style modernization, is so comfortable to the Japanese even today.

However, the Japanese people cannot stay with, if not outrightly reject, the Shiba view of history now, when the postwar order is undergoing significant transformation. I believe that we need a new historical perspective that comprises three mutually overlapping issues. First is to move beyond regarding Meiji as the sole starting point and consider how to incorporate the experiences of the prior Edo period. A nation under self-imposed isolation from the world (*sakoku*) is the perception of Japan born at the end of the Edo period. But it has become common historical knowledge nowadays that during the Edo period Japan communicated and had relations with the Qing (China), the Joseon (Korea), the Ryūkyū (Okinawa), and the Ezo (in Hokkaido). We need to find a perspective for a comprehensive understanding of the process of melding this experience into the modern Western order after Meiji. For instance, the background to the enormous domestic political and foreign policy problems that the *Seikanron* (plan for a punitive expedition to Korea)

generated right at the start of the Meiji Restoration should be understood in the context of a process of transformation from the Edo international system to the Meiji international system.

Second is Japan's relations with the countries on the continent. The process of modernization since Meiji has greatly depended on cooperative relations and the alliances with Britain from Meiji through the Taishō period, then with the United States after World War II. This undoubtedly was a choice suited to the nature of Japan, as a maritime country surrounded by the seas. Then again, as an island nation not far from the continent, Japan cannot just make do without having relations with the countries on the continent: China, Russia, and the Korean Peninsula. Modern Britain, in fact, established a role for itself as the balancer of power on the European continent while simultaneously being a maritime country. Japan has not yet defined its own role that it should play on the continent. We should inquire once more of Japan's modern history as to the reasons and consequence for that.

Third is the understanding that the rapidity of modernization since Meiji is belied by its shallowness. This was something perceptive Japan's intelligentsia were keenly aware of when they viewed their country after the Russo-Japanese War. "Under Reconstruction," a short story that Mori Ōgai wrote in the waning days of Meiji, ends with the protagonist coolly responding to a former lover who has come from Germany to see him that "Japan is still under reconstruction." This story can be interpreted as a work satirizing the thin veneer of civilization that Japan hurriedly donned following Western models as "under reconstruction." Around the same time, Ōgai advocated the need for an organization for knowledge that understood both Western and Eastern knowledge, as represented in his expression "the two legs of knowledge." This task remains unfinished still to this day.

In his short essay "My Sōseki," Shiba Ryōtarō remarked that "One of the reasons Japanese are bad at foreign languages is because the Japanese language became established as a written language in the last days of Meiji." Japan is the only late-stage development country that made textbooks for physics, chemistry, and mathematics all in Japanese. And the man who perfected such written Japanese was Natsume Sōseki, according to [Shiba \(2006\)](#). In other writings, Shiba also remarked that it was in the Shōwa 30s that written Japanese became something for the masses, along with the spread of weekly magazines ([Shiba 2000](#)). These days Shiba's novels are called "national literature," but Shiba's writing itself might be called the crystallization of a postwar Japanese language that popularized the written Japanese style Sōseki had perfected. This way of writing Japanese spread among the general populace, so that it could perhaps even be called the cultural identity of the present-day people of Japan. This useful Japanese language itself, however, has also become an unintentional barrier opening a large knowledge gap with the world. The average Japanese is likely unaware that the term for the Japanese (*kokugo*) used as the language by Japanese at their places of learning and work is distinguished from the term for Japanese (*Nihongo*) used for the language foreigners learn. What the sages of Shōwa would expect from the Japanese of Reiwa is not that they live contentedly with the memories and historical perceptions of the past successes Japan

experienced from Meiji through Shōwa, but that they construct new expressions and historical perspectives, wouldn't they?

Bibliography: For Further Reading

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Shiba, Ryōtarō. 2000. “Gengo ni tsuite no kansō (Thoughts on Language)” in *Kono kuni no katachi 6* (The Shape of this Country, Vol. 6). Tokyo: Bunshun Bunko.

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Additional Bibliography

Hattori, Ryūji. 2018. *Kōsaka Masataka: sengo nihon to genjitsu shugi* (Kōsaka Masataka: Postwar Japan and Realism). Tokyo: Chūkō Shinsho.

As an international political scholar, Kōsaka Masataka had a significant impact on postwar Japanese diplomacy as well as its historical consciousness; this biography carefully traces his footsteps. For a collection of Kōsaka's essays treating the various aspects of his achievements, I would recommend Iokibe, Makoto; Nakanishi, Hiroshi (eds). 2016. *Kōsaka masataka to sengo nihon* (Kōsaka Masataka and Postwar Japan). Tokyo: Chūō Kōron Shinsha.

Iokibe, Makoto. 2014. *Sengo nihon gaikōshi dai-3ban hochōban* (Postwar Japan's Diplomatic History [Third Revised Edition]). Tokyo: Yūhikaku.

I would recommend this as a textbook, patterned on academic analysis, which depicts how postwar history unfolded, though mainly through the lens of Japanese diplomatic history.

Saitō, Shinji (ed). 1996. *Shiba ryōtarō no seiki* (Shiba Ryōtarō's Century). Tokyo: Asahi Shuppansha.

Shiba Ryōtarō is a permanent presence in any discussion of the historical consciousness in the postwar period. However, it is difficult to know where to start, as there are voluminous writing and critiques regarding Shiba. This book is a trustworthy introduction to Shiba.

Watanabe, Akio; Katō, Yōko; Amamiya, Shoichi; Kage, Rieko; Muramatsu, Michio; Ōtake, Hideo. Fukunaga Fumio; and Kōno Yasuko (eds). 2014. *Sengo to wa nani ka: seijigaku to rekishigaku no taiwa. jōgekan* (What was the Postwar?: a Dialogue between Political Science and History). Tokyo: Maruzen Shuppan.

A record of a study group and questions-and-answers on the theme of the evolution of political science and history studies in the postwar years. Though a collection of essays targeted at researchers interested in academic history, it is valuable for understanding how shifts in academia were situated during postwar history.

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