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Concise Dictionary of Modern Japanese History, by Janet H.
Hunter

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have been either too unwieldy for most purposes (for example, Zentaro Kitagawa, ed., *Doing Business in Japan* [New York: Matthew Bender & Co., 1980]) or too specialized for the average business executive (for example, Takaaki Hattori and Dan F. Henderson, *Civil Procedure in Japan* [New York: Matthew Bender, 1983]).

Hahn's book is helpful as far as it goes, but we ought to ask whether we should not be going further. Even if law schools are trade schools, essays on foreign law need not devote themselves to cultural generalizations for deal-making law partners or to legal minutiae for their contract-drafting associates. Those in the Japan field have heard too often about Japan's "Western veneer," about Confucian notions of hierarchy, and about the wonders of Japanese industrial policy. Those in law have read (and written) too many tedious articles about hypothecation rights, arbitral clauses, and commercial paper.

We ought to be able to move beyond these cultural stereotypes and doctrinal legal analyses. As fine as it may be to talk as Hahn does of Confucianism and harmony, the analysis need not stop there. Not only can we ask how articulated and unarticulated preferences for consensus, compromise, and reconciliation shape the ways Japanese perceive law and the legal process. We can also ask how the structures of legal norms and incentives—rules about arbitration agreements or resale price maintenance—alter both the way Japanese behave and the way they perceive their legal structures, their behavior, and their society. Moreover, because law defines the incidence of political and economic rights, we might investigate the impact of legal structures in Japan on the distribution of power and wealth. Having studied that impact, we could then ask how Japanese perceptions of their law, behavior, and society explain and justify that distribution. The inquiry would take us full circle: from the sociology of perception to economics and political science and back to the question of perception.

However, these are not Hahn's concerns, at least in this book. He has written a short and simple guide for executives and lawyers. Novices need books, too, and what Hahn has set out to do, he has done well.

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Concise Dictionary of Modern Japanese History. Compiled by JANET E. HUNTER. Berkeley and Tokyo: University of California Press and Kodansha, 1984. xiv, 347 pp. Maps, Appendixes, Glossary, Japanese-English Index. \$32.50 (cloth); \$10.95 (paper).

Janet Hunter and the University of California Press are to be congratulated for providing this very welcome addition to the growing body of Western-language reference materials on Japan. It is no match for the new *Kodansha Encyclopedia of Japan* (9 vols., Tokyo: Kodansha, 1983) in breadth or depth, but this is not its intention. Its objective is "to provide a handy source of information on the individuals, events, and organizations that have played a significant role in Japan's modern history" (p. ix). Not satisfied with being merely handy, it is also well organized, accurate, and inexpensive—desirable qualities for any compact reference work whether or not compiled, as this one is, for students and nonspecialists.

Hunter provides introductory material setting forth the organizational principles of the dictionary and a guide to its use. Back matter includes appendixes listing era names, the modern emperors, and all the cabinets and their members since 1885. In addition, the inevitable chart plotting political-party development is given in appendix

4. A useful glossary and a selective Japanese-English index follow the appendixes. The nearly 950 entries cover the general period from 1853 to 1980, although the post-World War II years are rather thinly represented. The usage of cross-listing by pseudonym and by alternative terms or translations is logically and thoroughly applied. Most entries conclude with a brief list of references for the interested reader.

This work is very different from the compact historical dictionaries on which non-Japanese readers have had to depend until now. E. Papinot's *Historical and Geographical Dictionary of Japan* (Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle, 1972), which is dated, and Joseph M. Goedertier's *A Dictionary of Japanese History* (New York and Tokyo: Walker/Weatherhill, 1968), which is too general, are both of limited utility for questions related to modern history. Because Hunter has limited her time frame and clearly defined her selection criteria—the focus “is on political, diplomatic, and socio-economic developments” (p. x)—entries are of sufficient length to give the reader a sense of the complexity of the individual or event being discussed. Moreover, the dictionary has incorporated the interpretive thrust of Western scholarship on Japan into its entries. Entries are not, therefore, merely pale shadows of those in Japanese-language historical dictionaries; rather they are original contributions and creative formulations expressive of the state of the field. Compare, for instance, the entry on Kawakami Hajime (pp. 90–91) with those in Seiichi Iwao's *Biographical Dictionary of Japanese History* (Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1978), (pp. 382–83), or Kadokawa's popular *Nihonshi jiten* (Tokyo: Kadokawa Shoten, 1974), 2nd. ed., (p. 222). Among the most interesting and provocative entries are those on large, general topics such as “Bureaucracy” (pp. 19–20), “Education” (pp. 36–37), “Railways (Japan)” (pp. 173–74), or “Women's Movement” (pp. 243–44). These and others are finely wrought brief essays that constitute superb entrances into major historiographic problem areas.

In some ways, however, reliance on Japanese reference works is clear. *Haihan chiken* may be a well-known historical term, but how many “nonspecialists or students just embarking on the study of Japanese history” (p. ix) would look up “Abolition of the Domains” (p. 2)? Would these same readers be inclined to search out “Rehabilitation of Samurai” (p. 176)? Probably not. Headings such as “Broadcasting” (p. 17) or “Car Industry” (p. 21), too, might be considered obscure for very different reasons.

Inevitably, the selection and balance of the entries reflects the weaknesses as well as the strengths of the scholarship in the field. For example, virtually every major and minor political party has a separate entry, whereas the only prewar bureaucratic ministries listed are the ministries of Home and Justice. Moreover, the same amount of space is allotted to the short-lived Teiseitō as to the Ministry of Justice while the entry on the Kaishintō is nearly two-and-a-half times the length of the entry on the dominant Home Ministry. Similarly, the usual complement of radical women, including Hiratsuka Raichō and Yamakawa Kikue, is present but, except for Fukuda Hideko and Kishida Toshiko, nonradical institution-building feminists and middle-class women have been excluded. To say this is less a criticism than an acknowledgment that the dictionary reflects with considerable accuracy the state of the field in 1980, the cut-off date for entries and references alike.

This said, it is necessary to add that Hunter has provided the most well-balanced and thoughtfully prepared compact basic reference work on modern Japanese history that we have. Her effort is complemented by the careful editorial work of the University of California Press. Mistakes are very few and minor. The *Concise Dictionary of Modern Japanese History* is, in short, a model of what a basic reference work should be. Those

beginning students and nonspecialists for whom it was compiled will be thankful to have it.

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The Culture of the Meiji Period. By IROKAWA DAIKICHI. Translation from the Japanese edited by MARIUS B. JANSEN. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1985. (Princeton Library of Asian Translations.) xvi, 320 pp. Preface to the English Translation, Editor's Introduction, Index of Names Cited. \$33.50.

Outspoken, zealous, and self-consciously polemical, this historical study is both a fascinating account of aspects of Japanese culture between 1868 and the early twentieth century and—at least when it was first published in Japanese in 1970—a stirring manifesto for the emerging field of “people’s history” (*minshūshi*). Irokawa Daikichi is an indefatigable researcher, and the fruits of his own and others’ labors on back roads and in old storehouses are amply represented here. Moreover, he has discovered materials untouched since the Meiji period, and he is able to interpret them in fresh, provocative ways. He makes excellent use of poetry, letters, diaries, and songs to probe the *mentalité* of peasants and rustic intellectuals, and he interprets his findings in a way that challenges major post–World War II trends in historiography.

Most explicitly, the author criticizes the views of intellectual historian and political scientist Maruyama Masao and his school. In keeping with Irokawa’s love of detail and an inductive approach, he does not fully lay out his theoretical critique until the final chapter. There he takes his adversaries to task for their interpretation of the ideological core of the prewar “emperor system,” the mystical *kokutai* (national polity). He agrees with Maruyama that the *kokutai* successfully assigned “unlimited responsibility” to the people while exempting the government from any at all, and that it enveloped the populace in a totalistic miasma. However, he denounces Maruyama’s “Weberian” notion that the *kokutai* ethos penetrated the culture deeply enough to become its “spiritual axis”; he also contests the view that the village community constituted the “smallest cell” of the system. He argues, rather, that a deep stratum of popular culture, rooted in the village community, showed surprising resiliency under the onslaughts of “modernity.” (An intense aversion to Europocentric approaches to the study of Japan underlies Irokawa’s critique. Yet his own preoccupation with a Japan-West dichotomy is clearly exposed in the introduction and emerges often thereafter).

A second, less explicit target of the author’s polemical energy is vulgar historical materialism. Irokawa refuses to trivialize culture as a derivative superstructure, and here his approach is entirely consistent with Maruyama’s: although they recognize the importance of economic forces, both want to see the emperor system as consisting fundamentally in a “spiritual structure (*seishin kōzō*).”

Although opposition to Maruyama and the Marxists underlies Irokawa’s entire historical enterprise, he does not make abstract disputation the main focus of his work. Chapters 1 through 7 present a colorful array of detail on rural festive cycles and beliefs, local debating societies, the travels and travails of village intellectuals, the drafting of grass-roots constitutions, and the seemingly conservative affinity of local activists in the freedom and popular-rights movement (*Jiyū Minken Undō*) for Chinese poetry. He also shows how the lower-peasant moral code of “hard work, frugality, honesty,