

## Meiji Education and the Uses of Local History

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One of the most ambitious, radical nationalizing projects in world history occurred in Japan during the last few decades of nineteenth century. A loose network of relatively autonomous domains was transformed into a rationalized, hierarchical political structure guided by an (eventually) powerful central government in Tokyo. This new Meiji government formally abolished status distinctions in order to erase the intermediary boundaries that stood between the people and the national state, thereby weakening alternative, non-national loci of identification. The Meiji government also redrew the boundaries of local life (with school districts, new units of political administration, Shinto shrine registration districts, and so on) in order to heighten the sense of discontinuity with pre-existing local identities and patterns of life, creating new people undistracted in their identification with each other and with the new government.<sup>1</sup>

Another radical reform essential to the Meiji government's nationalizing project was the creation of a centralized, compulsory educational system. Schools were deemed necessary to inculcate future generations with the knowledge and values that were important to the modernizing nation, and to integrate children and families on a daily basis into the institutions of the state. In addition, the new school system played a central role in the Meiji government's attempt to stigmatize the local. The two principles that defined the new educational system were centralization and standardization; in the minds of early Meiji officials, these principles served as

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<sup>1</sup>Michio Umegaki, *After the Restoration: The Beginning of Japan's Modern State*, New York: New York University Press, 1988, deals with political administration; on religion, see James Ketelaar, *Of Heretics and Martyrs in Meiji Japan: Buddhism and its Persecution*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990; Helen Hardacre, *Shinto and the State, 1868-1988*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989.

early Meiji officials, these principles served as counterweights to the backwards, narrow-minded influence of old, evil schooling practices entrenched in the village.<sup>2</sup> The government sought to bring new schools to isolated mountain villages, illuminating the dark corners of the local with the light of the nation.

Whether our focus is on official ideology, institutional development, or popular consciousness, our analysis of Meiji education is unavoidably structured by the narrative of nationalization—even if we successfully divest that narrative of its late nineteenth-century moral connotations (which is done with surprising infrequency). Historians of Meiji education who purport to engage in "local history" must therefore confront some basic questions: When studying a time (the Tokugawa-Meiji transition) and a topic (education) in which nationalization is of such obvious importance, what is the role of local history? Can the local history of Meiji education pose a challenge to national narratives, despite the fact that the educational system played such a crucial—and effective—part in the effort to establish those narratives as unchallengeable? This essay explores some of the ways in which postwar historians in Japan and the West have addressed these questions. In addition, based on my own investigation of educational system-building in Nagano prefecture, I suggest an alternative way of conceptualizing the challenge that local history can pose to national narratives—a challenge in which local history is used not principally to negate or critique the emergence of the national state, but to highlight the influence of local society upon the national state's formation.

As Philip Brown discusses in the comments for to this volume, local history has played only a marginal role in the English-language historiography on Tokugawa and Meiji Japan for much of

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<sup>2</sup>One can find such rhetoric in most official pronouncements on education during the early Meiji years, but the most influential example is the prologue to the 1872 Fundamental Code of Education (*Gakusei*). For an English translation of this document, see Herbert Passin, *Society and Education in Japan*, New York: Columbia University, Teachers College Press, 1965, pp. 210-211.

the postwar period. As Brown points out, a number of scholars have focused their research on specific localities, but most of these scholars selected these localities either because they played significant roles in a national historical narrative (for example, Choshu), or because those localities were deemed typical or representative enough to illustrate presumably "national" trends. The few monographs published in the field of educational history follow this general pattern. For example, Ronald Dore's study of Tokugawa education culls data from various prefectures, but Dore's purpose in using such local data is to find evidence of national trends.<sup>3</sup> Richard Rubinger's book examines a number of private academies in Tokugawa Japan (many of which were located outside of the urban centers of Edo, Tokyo, and Osaka), making extensive use of archival material relating to these institutions. However, Rubinger examines these local institutions precisely because their significance transcended the locality: he argues that these schools played an instrumental role in breaking down regional isolation, cultivating a national consciousness, and creating a group of elites who would later assume roles of national leadership in the Meiji state.<sup>4</sup> In other words, educational historians, too, have either assumed an explicitly national focus or have used local studies to reaffirm the primacy of the nation as the legitimate unit of analysis.

This emphasis on national narratives and the subsequent marginalization of local history is not surprising, given the influence of modernization theory upon the Japan field in the postwar period.<sup>5</sup> In Cold War-era modernization theory,

the nation-state was almost invariably the subject of historical inquiry, for it represented the culmination of the process of modernization. "Becoming modern" was seen as the pivotal experience in human history, and this process necessarily took place in the setting of the nation and reached its fulfillment in the modern nation-state. Even when studying time periods (like the Tokugawa period) in which the nation-state did not yet exist, Western scholars of Japan nevertheless took as their spatial focus the geographical territory that would eventually constitute the boundaries of the nation-state. Indeed, if we see Japanese history through the framework of modernization (as it was defined by postwar scholars in the West), local boundaries and particularities are significant only in their inevitable disappearance: since modernization is characterized by centralization, standardization, and nationalization, then the image of Japan as a "success story" of modernization presumes that Japan had overcome local differences to become a national unit.<sup>6</sup>

As many critics of modernization theory

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of Regions: Reflections on the Historiography of Sub-National Places in Modern Times," *American Historical Review*, vol. 104, no. 4 (October 1999), pp. 1157-1182.

<sup>6</sup> Perhaps the most systematic attempt at defining modernization can be found in John Hall's essay, "Changing Conceptions of the Modernization of Japan," in Marius Jansen, ed., *Changing Japanese Attitudes Toward Modernization*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965, pp. 19-23. It should also be noted that Western scholars of Japan during the postwar period rarely made an explicit connection between their focus on modernization and their geographical focus on the nation. For example, the "seven essential features of modern society" generated from discussions at the famous Hakone conference in 1960 only mention the word "nation" once—and even then, only parenthetically. They focus on presumably universal characteristics of modern society (rather than the particular space of the nation), but, in practice, the publications produced by the conference participants invariably picture "modern society" as a nationalized society. The nation is assumed to be both the natural outgrowth of modernization and the setting in which social, intellectual, political, and economic—and educational—modernization takes place.

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<sup>3</sup>Ronald Dore, *Education in Tokugawa Japan*, New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1965. Herbert Passin's *Society and Education in Japan* takes a similar approach, using national statistics whenever possible.

<sup>4</sup>Richard Rubinger, *Private Academies in Tokugawa Japan*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982.

<sup>5</sup>In her discussion of the place of sub-national histories in the historiography on modern Europe, Christina Applegate demonstrates how postwar modernization theory has reinforced the emphasis on the nation as a unit of analysis and, in the process, has marginalized local history. Applegate, "A Europe

have pointed out, this focus on modernization often leads scholars to privilege those elements of the pre-modern historical experience that presumably contributed to Japan's modernization, while marginalizing those that presumably did not.<sup>7</sup> The case of educational history is instructive here. Tokugawa education was, by all accounts, decentralized, unstandardized, and distinctly local in structure and orientation. However, since postwar scholars studied Tokugawa education with the explicit goal of evaluating its contribution to educational modernization during the Meiji period—in Dore's words, its "legacy"—they either de-emphasized these pre-modern (or anti-modern) aspects of the Tokugawa schooling experience or treated them as remnants that would eventually be overcome during the process of modernization.<sup>8</sup> In turn, when narrating the shift from Tokugawa to Meiji,

<sup>7</sup>Tetsuo Najita makes this point in his "Introduction: A Synchronous Approach to the Study of Conflict in Modern Japanese History," in Najita and Victor Koschmann, eds., *Conflict in Modern Japanese History*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982. Harootunian makes a similar argument in his essay, "America's Japan/Japan's Japan," in Harootunian and Masao Miyoshi, eds., *Japan in the World*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993.

<sup>8</sup>The term "legacy" is used in the title of the final chapter of Dore's *Education in Tokugawa Japan*, and also in his article, "The Legacy of Tokugawa Education," in Jansen, ed., *Changing Japanese Attitudes Toward Modernization*. Richard Rubinger, for example, addresses these characteristics of the Tokugawa educational experience in some detail, framing them as "traditional patterns" and contrasting them with "modern portents" that were also present in Tokugawa education. Rubinger, "Education: From One Room to One System," in Marius Jansen and Gilbert Rozman, eds., *Japan in Transition: From Tokugawa to Meiji*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986, pp. 196-202. Consequently, though Rubinger gives "traditional patterns" and "modern portents" equal treatment, the former are inevitably relegated to a marginal role in the historical narrative when the goal of history is modernity. As a result, "the local" again loses out in the narrative of nationalization and modernization, serving as a witness to its own impending irrelevance.

scholars taking this perspective usually privileged continuity over disruption, characterizing the process as a relatively smooth, consensual transition.<sup>9</sup>

While the emphasis on modernization, viewed and modeled at the national level, continued to prevail in the West during the first few decades after World War Two, the same period in Japan generated a widespread interest in local history. Mainstream historical scholarship in Japan continued to focus mainly on the geographic unit of the nation—or, to focus on specific localities in order to demonstrate how they exemplify and illustrate national trends. However, professional and amateur historians—especially those working in prefectural universities, archives, museums, and other local research institutions—began to produce voluminous scholarship with the primary purpose of exploring the particular historical experience of the locality. Though we can trace the genealogy of Japanese local history back to prewar (and earlier) literary and intellectual developments, the postwar local history movement (under the rubric *chihōshi*) began in the 1950s and culminated in the 1970s and 80s with the widespread publication of local histories at the prefectural, city, and village level.<sup>10</sup> This burgeoning of local history was fueled by a number of interrelated factors, including the reaction (particularly of leftist academics) against both wartime nationalism and the postwar conservative government, the political movement against excessive centralization, the critique of Western modernity, the fear that high-speed economic growth would result in the permanent loss of Japan's national heritage and cultural identity, and the creation of formal institutions entrusted with the task of preserving the cultural and historical resources of the locality.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>9</sup>Harootunian, "America's Japan, Japan's Japan."

<sup>10</sup>Kimura Motoi, "Kyōdoshi, chihōshi, chiikishi kenkyū no rekishi to kadai," in Asao Naohiro, et. al., eds., *Iwanami kōza Nihon tsūshi, bekkā 2: Chiikishi kenkyū no genjō to kadai*, Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1994, pp. 3-30.

<sup>11</sup>Amino Yoshihiko traces some of the factors behind the postwar local history movement in "'Undō to shite no chiikishi kenkyū' o megutte," in Asao Naohiro, et. al., eds., *Iwanami kōza Nihon tsūshi*,

Although this local history movement did not develop as a critique of the postwar Western focus on the process of national modernization, its explicitly local focus resulted in scholarship that undermines some of the assumptions of modernization theory. For example, in contrast to the image of the Tokugawa-Meiji transition as an essentially smooth, consensual process, local historians in Japan who focused on the local response to the Meiji government's reforms revealed that this transition was far from conflict-free. This is particularly the case in the study of Meiji educational reform, which was often seen by Western historians as a success story of rapid change, a positive transformation that was initiated by a reformist state but one that received the full cooperation of the Japanese people. However, local historians in Japan discovered not only a tremendous gap between central policy and local conditions, but also uncovered a significant amount of local resistance to Meiji educational reforms.<sup>12</sup> Incidents that appear to be mere bumps in the road from the perspective of long-term, inevitable nationalization, often reveal themselves as moments of real opposition to the basic principles of the government's vision of education.

The most obvious example of this resistance took the form of the "anti-new order uprisings" (*shinsei hantai sōjō*), in which villagers destroyed nearly two hundred new schools in around ten separate riots in the years following the promulgation of the new education laws in 1872.

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*bekkan 2: Chiikishi kenkyū no genjō to kadai*, Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1994, pp. 105-113.

<sup>12</sup>For example, see Kurasawa Takashi, *Shōgakkō no rekishi*, vol. 1, Tokyo: Japan Library Bureau, 1963, pp. 1002-1019; Morikawa Teruki, "Meiji 9-nen Shinpeki-machi sōdō no kyōikushiteki kentō," *Kyōiku undōshi kenkyū*, vol. 15 (1973), pp. 19-29; Morikawa, "Gakusei no minshūteki juyō to kyōhi," *Kōza Nihon Kyōikushi Iinkai*, ed., *Kōza Nihon kyōikushi*, vol. 2, Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1984, pp. 307-333; Hori Kōtarō, "Gifu-ken nin okeru shōgakkō setsuritsu katei to Ise bōdō," *Nihon no kyōikushigaku*, vol. 23 (1980), pp. 12-31; Chiba Masahiro, "Gakusei gakkō sōsetsu jijō to funjō," *Kōchi daigaku kyōiku gakubu kenkyū hōkoku*, vol. 42 (1990), pp. 113-120.

Newly appointed teachers were attacked, and some were beaten to death with bamboo clubs. Protesters perceived the new schools as a symbol of the unpopular reforms that had been enforced by the Meiji government—in particular, the new land tax, the conscription laws, and the liberation of the *burakumin*. In turn, the destruction of the schools expressed popular opposition and anxiety, both towards these reforms and towards the new government that had initiated them.<sup>13</sup>

But popular opposition was not confined to general statements of hostility or uncertainty. Particularly during the second wave of anti-new school uprisings in 1876-77, protesters expressed more specific criticisms of the new educational policies. In particular, they resented the fact that the new government expected localities to pay for this intrusive institution. The principle of local funding was not new: pre-Meiji commoner schools, too, were funded by the community in which they were located. However, the new system of educational funding, outlined in the 1872 Fundamental Code of Education, departed from pre-Meiji precedent in two important ways. First, while pre-Meiji commoner schools were funded by the tuition payments of children who actually attended the school, Meiji schools were funded primarily by school taxes—which were usually levied upon all families, regardless of whether or not their children attended the new schools. Second, pre-Meiji schools were both funded and controlled at the local level; there existed no institutional mechanism by which the Tokugawa *bakufu* or domain governments influenced the practices of these local institutions. As a result, the schools necessarily responded to the demands and expectations of the families who paid for the school. In contrast, while the Meiji government passed the burden of school funding onto the locality, the central government reserved for itself ultimate legal authority over the administration of each local school. Both local officials and ordinary people recognized this contradiction between local funding and central control, and often resented it. For example, protesters in

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<sup>13</sup> I discussed these uprisings in detail in chapter four of my dissertation, "School, Community, and State Integration in Nineteenth-Century Japan," University of Illinois, 1998.

Gifu articulated such a recognition when, after destroying several new school buildings, they approached a new school held in an *old* building and destroyed only the new equipment housed inside, carefully avoiding any damage to the structure itself.<sup>14</sup> Protesters in Mie also expressed a resentment of the new principle of central control when they burned over forty schools while shouting the slogan, "Destroy and burn everything that belongs to the government!"<sup>15</sup> In other words, these protesters were arguing that the local school now "belonged to" the government, by virtue of the fact that local administrative control over the new schools had been wrested from the locality by the central government. Burning the schools, in turn, articulated both an awareness and resentment of the fact that local people had to pay for an institution that did not serve their interests. Other complaints articulated by the Japanese people about the content, schedules, and other aspects of the new schools were informed by a recognition of this basic contradiction.

In Nagano prefecture, the focus of my own research, there were no such violent uprisings in opposition to the Meiji school system. In fact, just as Western scholars have often held up Japan as a model of rapid, yet peaceful, educational reform, Nagano was often held up by the Meiji government itself as the model for other localities to emulate: the project of establishing new schools and encouraging parents to send their children to them proceeded more rapidly in Nagano than anywhere else in the country. And yet, even in Nagano, I have found various non-violent forms of local opposition to Meiji educational reforms. For example, pre-Meiji village schoolteachers who were both criticized and left unemployed by the Meiji education laws often spread rumors about the new schools, impeded fundraising efforts, and even re-opened their old schools illegally. Families defied authorities by refusing to pay the new school taxes, and, more commonly, simply refused to send their children to the new schools. These were

not the acts of a stubborn peasantry opposed to the very idea of formal education; in fact, towns and villages throughout Nagano had established over six thousand schools during the century and a half that preceded the Meiji Restoration in 1868, with essentially no support from political authorities. Consequently, we should see these acts as strategic statements of opposition to specific aspects of the new school system that people deemed undesirable—for example, compulsory attendance, centralized control, rigid schedules, school taxes, irrelevant curriculum, and so on.

One does not necessarily have to do local history to identify these acts of resistance. Indeed, some of the scholarship on popular resistance to the new school system—particularly those works on large-scale, violent rebellions—has been done by scholars who probably would not assume the mantle of "local historian." Nevertheless, we are more likely to ascribe significance to these acts of opposition when the geographic focus is narrower: the stakes seem much larger, the effects more immediate, the tragedies more personal. This is undoubtedly one reason why Japanese scholars have positioned the local overwhelmingly as a site of resistance—or, more broadly, as a site of alterity—vis a vis the Japanese state. Unlike those Western scholars who implicitly celebrated Japanese modernization and its concomitants, many postwar Japanese scholars have lamented these developments, emplotting them into a tragic narrative of loss, betrayal, and thwarted potential. Neither Marxist historians nor People's Historians, who reflect the two major historiographical perspectives in postwar Japanese scholarship, necessarily oppose modernity itself. Rather, they espouse visions of an alternative modernity, one that is more democratic and (for People's Historians) more authentically Japanese than the modernity that eventually took shape in nineteenth and twentieth century Japan.<sup>16</sup> Because Marxist

<sup>14</sup>Hori, p. 24.

<sup>15</sup>Tsuchiya Takao and Ōno Michio, eds., *Meiji shōnen nōmin sōjōroku*, Tokyo: Nanboku Shoin, 1931, p. 305.

<sup>16</sup>See Carol Gluck, "The People in History: Recent Trends in Japanese Historiography," *Journal of Asian Studies*, vol. 38, no. 1 (November 1978), pp. 25-50; and Kevin Doak, "What is a Nation and Who Belongs? National Narratives and the Ethnic Imagination in Twentieth-Century Japan," *American Historical Review*, vol. 102, no. 2 (April 1997), esp.

and People's Historians in Japan link the suppression of these alternative modernities with the rise of an absolutist, centralized Japanese state, the local becomes an effective site of alterity vis a vis the Japanese state—a site where the Japanese people attempted, nobly but futilely, to resist the state. Local history, in turn, often functions to recover those voices of opposition from the past, and provides the weight of historical precedent to voices of opposition in the present.<sup>17</sup> The case of education is especially relevant here, as educational historians often emphasize the suppression of local, dissenting voices during the formation of the modern educational system in order to critique the highly centralized, bureaucratized educational system of the present.<sup>18</sup>

Although local history can indeed provide an effective foundation from which to challenge the narrative of a smooth, consensual, centrally-directed process of nationalization and modernization, we should also recognize the potential problems with a brand of local history that automatically positions the local in opposition to the national state. First, localist loyalties are not necessarily counterproductive to the cause of nationalization. As Kären Wigen has demonstrated, local loyalties can serve as an integrative force for the nation.<sup>19</sup> In the case of the Meiji educational system, village elites in Nagano often used local pride as a mobilizing force when collecting funds for school construction or when encouraging attendance, thus furthering national goals while trumpeting local particularity. In addition, efforts to preserve the autonomy of the local school in the face of an encroaching state were often successful, but usually were achieved by following proper administrative procedures, which served to legitimize the machinery of the

state. Consequently, while using localist rhetoric or pursuing decidedly localist goals, people often fostered the integration of the locality into the state.

A second problem with positioning the locality in opposition to the Meiji state is that the local response to state policies was not always one of resistance and recalcitrance.<sup>20</sup> While some villagers did respond with indifference or even open hostility to the new educational policies, others responded with enthusiastic cooperation. In particular, many village elites adopted the cause of educational reform as a personal mission, making every effort to meet—in fact, to exceed—the government's recommendations. Many village elites scurried around frenetically during the early 1870s, raising funds, studying the architectural plans of the latest schools in Europe and America, overseeing the schools' construction, personally visiting with families to convince parents of the value of education, and proclaiming proudly that their local school would bring progress to the community and glory to the nation. Of course, their cooperation was usually based on motives and assumptions that were quite different from those of central policymakers. Furthermore, this cooperation was often conditional: many people who had initially responded with enthusiasm to the Meiji government's educational project later opposed it as their interests diverged from those of the new state.<sup>21</sup> Nevertheless, seeing the local exclusively as a site of resistance fails to capture the complex range of local responses to the state's

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pp. 299-309.

<sup>17</sup>Amino, pp. 105-107.

<sup>18</sup>For example, see Ishijima Tsuneo and Umemura Kayo, eds., *Nihon minshū kyōikushi*, Tokyo: Azusa Shuppansha, 1996.

<sup>19</sup>Kären Wigen, "Constructing Shinano: The Invention of a Neo-Traditional Region," in Stephen Vlastos, ed., *Mirror of Modernity*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998, pp. 229-242. Applegate argues a similar point in "A Europe of Regions," p. 1177.

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<sup>20</sup>Sheldon Garon's new book highlights the cooperative aspects of the relationship between state and society in modern Japan, although his focus is on private social groups rather than on the locality *per se*. See Garon, *Molding Japanese Minds*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997.

<sup>21</sup>This was particularly the case with a large number of village elites who, after spearheading efforts to establish new schools in local areas, grew disillusioned with the Meiji government's educational policies and infused the People's Rights Movement with a sharp critique of the centralized educational system. See chapter five of my dissertation, "School, Community, and State Integration in Nineteenth-Century Japan."

educational reforms.

A third problem that results from assuming an intractably antagonistic relationship between local society and the Meiji state is that such an assumption diverts our attention from the ways in which local society influenced the state's development. Most Marxist and People's historians in Japan are heavily invested in claiming (and ruing) the failure of local opposition to the Meiji state: by denying that the people had any voice in the formation of the state, "the people" and "the local" are shielded from implication in the less desirable parts of Japan's modern history. In the process, localities are often denied agency as well, thus paradoxically celebrating the local while reaffirming the primacy of national history.

However, if we study the local response to Meiji educational reform while keeping one eye on the changes in educational policy made by the central government, we can see how local society shaped the development of the national educational system. For instance, when state policies met with resistance at the local level, the central government usually responded not with suppression, but compromise. While the large-scale rebellions were indeed put down violently, many of the demands articulated in those rebellions—demands that were expressed in more localized, non-violent forms at the village level and communicated to prefectural and central government officials through village notables—were accommodated in subsequent policy changes. The 1879 Educational Ordinance, for example, represented a clear compromise by the Ministry of Education to local demands for smaller schools, shorter commutes, more relevant content, less demanding schedules, and more local autonomy. While the Ministry of Education revised this ordinance a year later to emphasize the prerogative of central government in education, many of these compromises remained, and local demands continued to find their way into central government rhetoric and policy.

While localities often took an oppositional stance towards the new educational system in order to influence central policies, they could also shape the educational system from below through an active, positive response to the call for educational reform. In fact, enthusiastic cooperation by communities often functioned as a kind of

preemptive strike to dictate the terms by which the educational system would take shape in their own local area. For example, villages often took the initiative to raise funds and establish a school for an area that did not conform to the newly drawn school districts. Villagers would then write a petition to open the school, skillfully co-opting the language of educational reform sanctioned by the state to justify their local claims. Local officials would write the prefectural government for guidance, and the prefectural government would then send the query on to the Ministry of Education in Tokyo, which usually responded by accommodating demands from below. Often, the collective weight of hundreds or thousands of these local claims would influence the central government to consider changes in policy. In fact, following the promulgation of the Fundamental Code of Education in 1872, the Ministry of Education was inundated with queries and complaints from local officials about how to implement the often vague or impractical policies in their own local areas.<sup>22</sup> In its responses, the Ministry of Education frequently amended or qualified its initial policies in order to accommodate the realities of local implementation. Furthermore, by publishing its answers to these questions and distributing them to prefectural and local governments throughout the country, the answers functioned as precedence for future decisions, thus enabling local society to influence policy debates at the national level. In this fashion, the Meiji educational system emerged out of a dialogue, or negotiation, with local society.

This dynamic of compromise and negotiation played a crucial role in the process of modern Japanese state formation, yet it can easily be concealed by a historical methodology that focuses exclusively on the center or on the nation as a whole. Consequently, much of the value of local history lies in its capacity to expose this important area of contingency in the formation of the national state, thus challenging the narratives constructed by modern states to legitimize their authority. Of course, highlighting the agency of

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<sup>22</sup>Many of these queries were printed in *Monbushō Nisshi*, a Meiji-period education journal published by the Ministry of Education.

local society in the process of state formation does not amount to a denial of the eventuality of centralization and nationalization in Meiji Japan. In the area of education, for example, Japan did indeed have a relatively centralized and standardized school system by the end of the Meiji period in 1912. However, this does not represent the triumph of the state over local society, as is often portrayed by both critics and supporters of the state. Such an interpretation relegates to

local historians the role of what Marc Bloch calls "energetic gardeners," unearthing facts to be assimilated into the national narrative, whether that narrative is triumphal or tragic. Instead, by recognizing the role of local resistance, local initiative, and local identities in the process of state formation, local history can challenge national narratives by pointing out the ways in which the national state bears the imprint of local demands and expectations.



Old Kaichi Elementary School  
Matsumoto City, Nagano Prefecture, Japan.

This building, designated as a National Important Cultural Property, was constructed in Meiji 9 (1876) and is the first Western-style school building in Japan. ©Arai Michimasa 新井通正, Sankubo-Cho 22-18, Kawagoe City, Saitama Prefecture. Reprinted by permission from Dejicame Shashinkan, Matsumoto-jō · Kaichi Gakkō, at <http://www.asahi-net.or.jp/~JZ3M-ARI/dejicame/dejicame.htm>.