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From the Editors' Desk
編纂者から

This issue of EMJ is devoted to papers that were presented at the American Historical Association’s annual meeting in Chicago, in January 2000. The session, “The Diverse Japanese: Local History's Challenge to National Narratives in the Nineteenth Century,” brought together four papers that focused on developments in nineteenth century Japan and employed local history materials and perspectives to critique our understanding of the transition to Meiji. In the process, they raise some significant questions about how we create our “national” narratives and deal with issues of local variations in telling the story or stories of Japanese history.

The Diverse Japanese: Local History's Challenge to National Narratives in the Nineteenth Century: An Introduction
Jonathan Dresner
Coe College

"But history is neither watchmaking nor cabinet construction. It is an endeavor toward better understanding and, consequently, a thing in movement. To limit oneself to describing a science just as it is will always be to betray it a little. It is still more important to tell how it expects to improve itself in the course of time. Now, such an undertaking inevitably involves a rather large dose of personal opinion. Indeed, every science is continually beset at each stage of its development by diverging tendencies, and it is scarcely possible to decide which is now dominant without prophesying the future. We shall not shirk this obligation. The dread of responsibility is as discreditable in intellectual matters as in any others. But it is only honest to give the reader fair warning." -- Marc Bloch, The Historian's Craft, pp. 12-13.

The nineteenth century is perhaps the most frequently studied period of Japanese history, but it remains poorly understood. It is complex, dynamic, contradictory, and clearly crucial to understanding what Japan is and was. It is a Ror-schach test for historians, because it tends to reflect and reveal what is sought. Scholarship on Japan in the United States has been searching for new approaches and directions for some time, and the substantial studies of Japan's local history produced recently in English suggest that local history may be the means by which our understanding of Japan is going to take its next steps forward.

Much scholarship on the 19th century is focused on the question of Japan's national history, and takes as a given the uniformity of Japan's development. Part of this is due to the deliberate obfuscation of regionality on the part of the Meiji government, and part of it is due to the unintentional difficulty of getting beyond the nation-state unit in our thinking. Tokugawa scholarship has begun to articulate a concept of "Japan" not as a unitary national society but as an interactive system of classes, regions and communities, but only recently has there been scholarship that gave real attention to diversity and regionality in the late 19th century. Recent scholarship is beginning to challenge the imposition of paradigmatic history with complex and diverse studies that are both local in focus but regional and national, sometimes even international, in implication.

Local history, by both professional and amateur historians, has been steadily popular in Japan since the end of World War II. The presentation of local history is not immune to the errors of dogmatism. Much of this scholarship was devoted to either promoting or denying the importance of the central state in the modernization of Japan in the 19th century, and was highly politicized; most of the rest were sentimental attempts to situate important national movements in largely neglected peripheries. Though it is important to deconstruct the concept of Japanese nationhood, local history should be more than just a challenge to the nation-state unit of historical writing. Nor can it simply glorify the "common people", though it certainly brings their stories to the fore and makes it possible to gain a sense of what life was like during this period of change. Rather than focusing on local history as "exemplar" or "challenger" to national narratives, we need to build up a substantial body of broad local histories, which can then become the foundation of a regionally diverse but interactive na-