

From the Editors' Desk

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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

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"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-

tional history, without the subject-object dichotomy so common in the master narrative.

The late nineteenth century has most frequently been studied for clues as to what came before and after it. The "legacy of the Tokugawa" scholarship looks at the way in which Meiji government, economics and culture are continuations of pre-Restoration society, both to challenge the "modernization transformation" motif of early 20th Century scholarship and to cast light on the less well-sourced Tokugawa society. The "key to the future" scholarship looks for clues to Japan's 20th century imperialistic nationalism and economic success. Both of these kinds of studies answer important questions, but they are difficult to integrate into a coherent picture: Japan is *either* lingeringly pre-modern *or* an incipient modern society. Local studies can complicate this dichotomy, perhaps even eliminate it, by examining systemic change in terms of the individuals and communities who participate, as both subject and actor. Most importantly, local historical studies give scholars a chance to sift through the raw data of history, looking for the typical and atypical, the striking details that lead to questions, and the questions that lead to greater understanding.

This is what I am trying to do in my own research on Meiji-era international emigration and its effects on local social and economic development in Yamaguchi Prefecture. This is an intensely regional phenomenon: most emigrants in the 19th century came from five prefectures, usually from a few counties within those prefectures; outside of the high emigration regions, international emigration was nearly non-existent until colonial migration. Nonetheless, histories of these regions rarely point to the flow of people and money as a significant factor in local growth. The reason, if I may anticipate my own research, seems to be threefold: scholars focused on the growth of capitalism have neglected the history of the labor-rich, capital-poor regions; local historians are loath to characterize their hometowns as poor labor-exporting migrant societies; finally, the effect of the income from international remittances and hand carried earnings seems to have been muted, by remittances and income from migration to cities or industrial areas. I hope this research will elucidate the complex and active

movements of Japanese in a changing national economy and international environment. It will also provide the foundation for closer examination of the effects of "national" trends and phenomena – the Matsukata deflation, unequal treaties, growth of the banking system, etc. – on small communities.

When I put out a call for scholars to join me presenting a panel on Japanese local history at the American Historical Association (AHA) 2000 Annual Convention, I expected a few responses, and had some candidates in mind for gentle persuasion if recruitment failed. The response was so strong that I decided to forego presenting a paper myself in order to have the chance to hear as many of the other papers as possible. Of the presenters, only one was previously known to me (Edward Pratt), which suggested to me that there are a lot more people working in the area of local history than I had realized. So the panel, "The Diverse Japanese: Local History's Challenge to National Narratives," represents just a small portion of this new wave of scholarship, but covers a wide range of topics within a relatively focused time period. Taken together, these papers suggest the potential of local history to both answer questions raised at the national level and to question answers accepted as national truisms.

Ed Pratt challenges conventional ideas of village structure by looking at both cooperative and competitive behavior together rather than seeing the two in Manichean opposition. His essay exemplifies the wonder of discovery in local historical study, how the most important discoveries begin, as Isaac Asimov said, with "That's odd" rather than with "Eureka!" The diary of Ichikawa Shōemon provides a vivid and detailed account of both family and hamlet affairs in the late 19th century. The village is indeed a cooperative unit and one that values harmony highly, but neither of these things operates automatically: rather they are the result of constant effort, often in the face of social and economic turmoil. Disputes arise frequently in this account, but they are more the result of violations of social norms than of economic class clashes. More common, were communal activities, celebrations, mutual assistance, local administration, but these required coordination and negotiation.

John Van Sant highlights the dissension that remained after the Meiji Restoration within the samurai class, and the need for Tokugawa loyalists to absent themselves from the modernizing state. The Meiji Restoration is frequently touted as "nearly bloodless" and the unity that followed is considered remarkable, but this paper highlights the destruction seen in Aizu-Wakamatsu, as well as the punitive treatment it received afterwards, which led to both internal and international migration. Though we usually do not think of the Japanese as refugees, the Meiji Restoration did produce substantial political and economic disorder that produced large numbers of them.

Brian Platt's study of Nagano education reform complicates the conventional narrative of modernization by balancing central and local initiatives, and suggests a dynamic and multilateral process. Perhaps most striking, for a discussion of education in Japan, his narrative is neither triumphant nor tragic. Nagano, though lacking the sort of public protest that makes it an obvious resister to centralization, nonetheless articulated distinctly local needs and advocated for substantial modifications to the education system. The central government, without compromising its goal of using the education system as an element in national unification, responded positively to local requests. He argues that the development of education in Nagano fails to fit any of the powerful paradigms of Japanese historiography -- Marxist determinism, Populist resistance, or Modernization theory developmentalism -- as well as complicating the traditional national uniformity with which education development is usually portrayed.

Sarah Thal's study of shrines and pilgrimages adds a regional depth to our understanding of the crucial intersection of religion and nationalism in Modern Japan. The tension between new identities -- the religious and "traditional" rural versus the secular, "modern" urbanite -- and local actors' deliberate use of central government policy to advance regional development suggest a much subtler negotiation and development than any previous narrative of Meiji religious history. Though the "State Shinto" structure might have been imposed, the religious and social power of sites like Kōpira depended on active and apparently earnest participation by local individuals.

The success and popularity of pilgrimage shrines affected (and was shaped by) regional and local governments' economic policies, not to mention regional identification. The success of the shrine also draws attention to a tension in national priorities: the elites, educated in Western scientific ideas, criticized and denigrated the traditional religious faith which was such an important part of the structure of Japanese nationalism.

Philip Brown, our panel commentator, has provided a much more extensive and detailed discussion of the ebb and flow of local historical study in English-language scholarship on Japan. Though it was not at all intentional in the panel formation, he identifies a thread of confrontation running through these studies, sometimes in the form of violence, which suggests a much more dynamic and active response to change than has traditionally been attributed to Japanese commentators. He has very thoroughly outlined the challenges and the potentials of local historical studies, and the place that local history can and should -- and will, if the papers presented here are any indication -- play in the dialectic synthesis of Japanese history.

How do these studies of local history advance our understanding of Japanese history? First, they challenge scholarly assumptions, not because of ideological schism, but because the documents and data do not fit the inherited paradigms. Second, though their conclusions are exciting, they are tentative, because all of these scholars recognize the particularity of their data; the "final" word on all of these questions must await further study of more regions, which these papers clearly invite. Third, these papers make it clear that Japan in the 19th century was an intensely regional place, with local identity and society far more important to most people than national concerns or events, and with a great deal of regional variation among economic, religious, political and social systems. Finally, without denying the importance of national leadership and "Great Men", these papers highlight the experiences of Japanese with little or no official authority, and credit them with active, thoughtful and effective participation in social, economic, religious, and political arenas.