



EARLY MODERN JAPAN

An Interdisciplinary Journal

Volume VIII Number 2

CONTENTS

November 2000

From the Editors' Desk 編集者から 2

Articles 論文

The Diverse Japanese: Local History's Challenge to National Narratives in the Nineteenth Century: An Introduction 2
Jonathan Dresner

Community and Conflict in Nineteenth-Century Japan: A Re-consideration 5
Edward Pratt

Lost in History: Aizu and the Meiji Restoration 14
John E. Van Sant

Meiji Education and the Uses of Local History 20
Brian Platt

Sacred Sites and the Dynamics of Identity 28
Sarah Thal

Local History's Challenge to National Narratives 38
Philip C. Brown

Book Notes, Etc. 研究書ノート等

Book Introduction: **Questioning Edo as a Free-Sex Paradise: Koyano Atsushi**
小谷野敦, *Edo gensō hihan—"Edo no seiai" raisanron wo utsu* 『江戸幻想批判—江戸の性愛』礼讃論を撃つ』 ('Critiquing the Edo Fantasy: Shooting Down the Discourse in Praise of 'Edo Sexual Love') 48
Lawrence Marceau

Editors

Philip C. Brown

Ohio State University

Lawrence Marceau

University of Delaware

Editorial Board

Sumie Jones

Indiana University

Ronald Toby

University of Illinois

For subscription information please refer to the end page

The editors welcome preliminary inquiries about manuscripts for publication in *Early Modern Japan*. Please send queries to Philip Brown, *Early Modern Japan*, Department of History, Ohio State University, 230 West 17th Avenue, Columbus, OH 43210 or, via e-mail to brown.113@osu.edu.

Books for review and inquiries regarding book reviews, please contact Lawrence Marceau, Review Editor, *Early Modern Japan*, Foreign Languages & Literatures, Smith Hall 326, University of Delaware, Newark, DE 19716-2550. E-mail correspondence may be sent to lmarceau@udel.edu.

Subscribers wishing to review books are encouraged to specify their interests on the subscriber information form.

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-