

Local History's Challenge to National Narratives

Philip C. Brown

Ohio State University

Local history's Post-war boom in Japan has produced a tremendous volume of publications, hundreds of volumes that provide materials for Japanese historians of all stripes, local sophisticated amateurs and professional university historians alike. As Gary Allinson noted years ago, these materials also provide a rich trove of materials for scholars outside of Japan: the best include not only surveys of prefecture, county, city, town and village history – surveys that often assume one of a rather limited number of patterns – but also volumes of transcribed primary source materials. American and Western historians have made some use of these materials, but often in the context of writing analyses of ostensibly national developments.¹

Trends in the Uses of Local Histories

Although an increasing part of late twentieth-century Western historiography, local history has not been prominent in the post-war Japan field. Many of the early examples of it either explored regions that had a special historical role or were used to provide a detailed example of presumably national developments. Examples of the former include works such as Albert Craig's *Choshu in the Meiji Restoration*,² Marius Jansen's *Sakamoto Ryōma and the Meiji Restora-*

tion,³ and Thomas Huber's *The Revolutionary Origins of Modern Japan*.⁴ In the latter category fall studies such as J.W. Hall's *Government and Local Power in Japan 500-700*.⁵ The clear early exception to these patterns of local history monographs is William J. Chambliss's *Chiarajima Village: Land Tenure, Taxation, and Local Trade, 1818-1884*.⁶ The book was recognized as an interesting and well-done discussion of one village's transition under the Meiji state, but has not been treated as breaking new intellectual ground: the explanations it invoked reinforced the emerging interpretations (e.g., Thomas Smith's "The Land Tax in the Tokugawa Period,"⁷ and Ronald Dore's "Agricultural Improvements in Japan: 1870-1900,"⁸) that stressed the latitude for villagers to expand their economic horizons and the positive contributions of traditional values during the Meiji transformations. Chambliss's work is perhaps the exception that proves the general rule for local studies: despite the fact that he plowed through a number of manuscript sources, 1) his work did not deal with an epoch-making region and 2) it was not cast as a "nationally representative" case. The book found publication in the Association for Asian Studies "Monographs and Papers" series, a very useful venue but one designed specifically to publish very specialized materials that would not fit the needs of other academic or for-profit presses.

During the 1960s and most of the 1970s, advanced graduate students received encouragement to exploit the materials of local history. Two studies drew inspiration from the work of both local and national-level historians: Peter Arneson's *The Medieval Japanese Daimyō: The Ouchi Family's Rule of Suō and Nagato*⁹ and

¹ Gary Allinson, "Modern Japan: A New Social History," *Historical Methods Newsletter* 6:3 (June 1973), 100-110. Susan B. Hanley and Kozo Yamamura, "Quantitative Data for Japanese Economic History," in Val R. Lorwin and Jacob M. Price, eds., *The Dimensions of the Past: Materials, Problems, and Opportunities for Quantitative Work in History*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1972, 503-530, also noted the value of local histories.

² Cambridge, Ma: Harvard University Press, 1961.

³ Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1961.

⁴ Stanford, Ca: Stanford University Press, 1981.

⁵ Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1966.

⁶ Tucson, Ariz.: Published for the Association for Asian Studies by the University of Arizona Press, 1965.

⁷ *Journal of Asian Studies* XVIII:1 (November 1958), 3-20.

⁸ *Economic Development and Cultural Change* IX:1, Part 2 (1960).

⁹ New Haven, Ct: Yale University Press, 1979.

William Hauser's *Economic Institutional Change in Tokugawa Japan: Osaka and the Kinai Cotton Trade*.¹⁰ Both drew much of their import from the fact that they studied regions that played major political or economic roles in the medieval and Tokugawa periods.

During the same period, several works appeared that drew heavily on social science methodologies and its problem focus. These studies were associated with the "new social history," comparative politics and demographic history and did not draw inspiration directly from problems defined by past Western-language historical treatments of Japan or even from Japanese historical debates. Indeed, in a number of respects these studies were pioneering or nearly so even in the Japanese scholarly context. Thomas Smith's *Nakahara: Family Farming and Population in a Japanese Village, 1717-1830* explored demographic history through family reconstitution based on records of religious affiliation (the *shūmon aratame chō*).¹¹ In the field of modern Japanese history, Smith's student, Gary Allinson, contributed two monographs based on the study of communities, works that raised questions often drawn from the theoretical and comparative literature of political science as much as from questions derived from Japanese historical processes.¹²

The results of a number of young scholars' explorations of local history were not published at all; others found their way into print, but in the form of periodical literature, not monographs. Prominent among such publications were studies of demographic history and related studies based on the use of records of religious affiliation. The early work of Susan Hanley readily comes to mind in this regard.¹³

¹⁰ Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1974.

¹¹ Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1977.

¹² *Japanese Urbanism: Industry and Politics in Kariya, 1872-1972*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1975, and *Suburban Tokyo: A Comparative Study in Politics and Social Change*, Berkeley, Ca: University of California Press, 1979

¹³ Hanley, Susan B. "Migration and economic change in Okayama during the Tokugawa period," *Keio Economic Studies* 10:2 (1973), 19-36; "To-

The early 1980s witnessed the publication of six additional monographic studies that focused largely on specific regions. Thomas Huber's *The Revolutionary Origins of Modern Japan*¹⁴ followed the early pattern of exploring "activist" regions, and James L. McClain's *Kanazawa: A Seventeenth-Century Castle Town*,¹⁵ re-examined Toyoda Takeshi's national-level generalizations regarding daimyo management of castle-town growth. McClain's study drew its problem focus from Japanese historiography – how closely were daimyo able to plan the growth of their castle towns – and focused on the largest urban area outside the three great cities, Edo, Osaka and Kyoto. Conrad Totman examined Akita as a case demonstrating the ways in which Tokugawa developments created precedents for modern forest conservation.¹⁶ On the other hand, Neil L. Waters, *Japan's Local Pragmatists: The Transition from Bakumatsu to Meiji in the Kawasaki Region*, explored Meiji grass-roots history and did so in an area that "did nothing" during the Restoration and had no other claim to prominence.¹⁷ In this regard, Waters' work parallels that of Chambliss. The decade produced one other local monographic study, *Deference and Defiance in Nineteenth-Century Japan*, and that not by an historian, but by an anthropologist, William W. Kelly.¹⁸ While these studies all fall

ward an analysis of demographic and economic change in Tokugawa Japan: a village study," *Journal of Asian Studies* 31, no.3 (May 1972), 515-537; "The Japanese fertility decline in historical perspective," In: Cho, Lee-Jay and Kazumasa Kobayashi eds. *Fertility Transition of the East Asian Populations*. Honolulu, Hi: University Press Of Hawaii, 1979, 24-48; "Fertility, mortality and life expectancy in pre-modern Japan," *Population Studies* (London) 28, part 1 (Mar 1974) 127-142

¹⁴ Stanford, Ca: Stanford University Press, 1981.

¹⁵ New Haven, Ct: Yale University Press, 1982.

¹⁶ Totman, Conrad D. *The Origins of Japan's Modern Forests: The Case of Akita*, Honolulu, Hi: Center for Asian and Pacific Studies, University of Hawaii: University of Hawaii Press, 1985.

¹⁷ Cambridge, Ma: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University: Distributed by Harvard University Press, 1983.

¹⁸ Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press,

into the realm of social and political history, J. Victor Koschmann's *The Mito Ideology: Discourse, Reform, and Insurrection in Late Tokugawa Japan, 1790-1864*, is distinguished by its emphasis on locally based intellectual history that is intimately related to the mid-19th century restoration movement.¹⁹

Local history production has reached a peak in the 1990s. At the start of the decade, Hitomi Tonomura, in *Community and Commerce in Late Medieval Japan: The Corporate Villages of Tokuchin-ho*,²⁰ explored the economic and social history of a community on the shores of Lake Biwa; my own work examined domain formation in Kaga-han;²¹ Mary Elizabeth Berry examined Kyoto in the Sengoku era;²² David Howell explored economic development in Hokkaido;²³ Kären Wigen explored the economic transformation of Shimoina;²⁴ and Luke Roberts examined economic policy in Tosa.²⁵ James Baxter explored the adaptation of Ishikawa Prefecture to the new Meiji state.²⁶ In a study of Okinawan thinkers, Gregory Smits explored how the Ryukyu kingdom saw itself in relation to both Japan and China.²⁷ Finally, anthropologist Arne Kal-

land, in *Fishing Villages in Tokugawa Japan*,²⁸ explored coastal village society in Kyushu. This work employs historical materials, but its main focus is to use them to reflect on issues of marine resource management, contextualizing them in a broader network of economic and social activities. While not local histories in the sense of being studies sharply focused on only one or two locations, recent work by Herman Ooms,²⁹ Edward Pratt,³⁰ and Mark Ravina³¹ all draw extensively on local histories and local archive collections.³² Finally, this decade has also produced the first essay collections devoted to particular regions, both with a number of contributions by Western authors: *Edo and Paris: Urban Life and the State in the Early Modern Era*³³ and *Osaka: The Merchants' Capital of Early Modern*.³⁴ More such work is in progress, as the essays in this symposium clearly indicate.

1985. Kelley's work implies, but does not elaborate, a much wider applicability for his findings.

¹⁹ Berkeley, Ca: University of California Press, 1987.

²⁰ Stanford, Ca: Stanford University Press, 1992.

²¹ Philip C. Brown, *Central Authority and Local Autonomy in the Formation of Early Modern Japan: The Case of Kaga Domain*, Stanford, Ca: Stanford University Press, 1993.

²² *The Culture of Civil War in Kyoto*, Berkeley, Ca: University of California Press, 1994.

²³ *Capitalism from within: Economy, Society, and the State in a Japanese Fishery*, Berkeley, Ca: University of California Press, 1995.

²⁴ *The Making of a Japanese Periphery, 1750-1920*, Berkeley, Ca: University of California Press, 1995.

²⁵ *Mercantilism in a Japanese Domain: The Merchant Origins of Economic Nationalism in 18th-century Tosa*, Cambridge, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

²⁶ *The Meiji Unification Through the Lens of Ishikawa Prefecture*, Cambridge, Ma: Harvard University Press, 1994.

²⁷ *Visions of Ryukyu: Identity and Ideology in*

Early-Modern Thought and Politics, Honolulu, Hi: University of Hawai'i Press, 1999.

²⁸ Honolulu, Hi: University of Hawaii Press, 1995.

²⁹ *Tokugawa Village Practice: Class, Status, Power, Law*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1996.

³⁰ *Japan's Proto-Industrial Elite: The Economic Foundations of the Gōnō*, Cambridge, Ma: Harvard East Asian Monographs 179, Harvard University Asia Center, 1999.

³¹ *Land and Lordship in Early Modern Japan*, Stanford, Ca: Stanford University Press, 1999.

³² Hanley, Susan B. and Kozo Yamamura, *Economic and Demographic Change in Preindustrial Japan, 1600-1868*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1977, might arguably be added to this overall list. While, like Ravina and Ooms, it does not fall within the scope of what I normally think of as local history, it does use two domain case studies extensively to bolster their argument.

³³ James L. McClain, John M. Merriman, and Ugawa Kaoru, eds. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994.

³⁴ James L. McClain and Wakita Osamu, eds. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999.

The Challenges of Doing Local History

Why, when a number of historians have clearly discovered the value of local archival collections and the expanding array of published local histories, has the production of local histories been rather modest until quite recently? The relatively low volume of locally-focused histories is a bit puzzling, given the attention paid to local studies in the 1960s to 1980s in the fields of American and European history, studies which exemplified the "new social history" in fields which broadly define the models that Western, and especially American scholars of Japan often emulate.³⁵

Certainly individual career paths and personal predispositions played some role, but structural factors also were important.

In the period through the 1960s the field of Japanese history was still quite new and small; there were few trained specialists of any stripe and very few Japanese history courses. In these circumstances the demand for a clear, national narrative for any aspect of Japanese history loomed large and conditioned what scholarship could get published. American audiences in particular, if not Western audiences generally, wanted quick, very generalized and readily comprehensible analyses of Japanese history. That demand for a national narrative for Western audiences dates back to well before the birth of modernization theory, to at least the nineteenth century, of course, and such demands early in the development of Japanese studies are certainly understandable. Nonetheless, they discouraged the analysis of specific regions unless the author could claim that the study played a readily evident national role or represented a broad national development. In the end, the demands on the field and the small number of scholars available to meet that demand (much less to meet any de-

³⁵ Two of the well-known works serve as useful exemplars of a large literature: Merle Eugene Curti, *The Making of an American Community; A Case Study of Democracy in a Frontier County*, Stanford, Ca: Stanford University Press, 1959, and Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, *The Peasants of Languedoc*. Translated with an introd. by John Day. Urbana, Il: University of Illinois Press, 1974.

mand for more detailed, sophisticated studies) created little opportunity for scholars to exploit local history materials and still get published. One suspects that such demands were among the variety of influences shaping the limited employment opportunities of scholars like Les Metchnik³⁶ and David Davis,³⁷ who focused on Choshu and the Kaga regions respectively, or the publication prospects of Franklin Odo³⁸ or Ronald DiCenzo,³⁹ who both made case studies of local areas for their doctoral theses but did not ultimately publish monographs based on them.⁴⁰

The fact that most of the studies published to date overwhelmingly focus on the Tokugawa-Meiji transformation in its various aspects may also suggest why the most populated field of Japanese history, *kin-gendaishi* has seen relatively few local histories: Late Tokugawa administrative units (villages, towns, cities and counties as well as domains) were transformed during the Meiji era into subunits of a centralizing state, largely dependent on Tokyo for direction and budget alike. Once we see the advent of a truly centralized administration, the large number of national-level administrative documents it spewed forth as well as the growth of national political movements that produced fairly centralized archival collections may have created circumstances too convenient and easy to exploit, further tempting students away from local history. Even for the Tokugawa era the volume of materials available is daunting if we think about what it

³⁶ "Traditional and Transitional Tax Systems During the Early Modern Period: A Case Study of Choshu Han, 1600-1873," (Ph.D. dissertation) University of California at Los Angeles, 1972.

³⁷ "The Kaga Ikkō Ikki, 1473-1580," (Ph.D. dissertation) University of Chicago, 1978.

³⁸ Odo, Franklin S. "Saga Han: The Feudal Domain in Tokugawa Japan," (Ph.D. dissertation) Princeton University 1975. Professor Odo moved into Asian-American studies.

³⁹ DiCenzo, Ronald J. "Daimyo, Domain and Retainer Band in the Seventeenth Century," (Ph.D. dissertation), Princeton University, 1978. Professor DiCenzo has taught at Oberlin College since receiving his Ph.D.

⁴⁰ Nor, to my knowledge, have they published articles based on these very interesting dissertations.

might take to explore local sources, even just printed sources; it was more convenient to exploit the collected works (*zenshū*) of well-known thinkers, the printed materials of the *Dai Nihon shiryō* and the like rather than brave the morass of local materials.

There is also much in contemporary Japanese society that encourages a stress on the “national,” the presence of national uniformity, and policies or social trends emanating from a clearly dominant center such as Tokyo: Racial and ethnic homogeneity is virtually a mantra, and juxtaposed by some to the impossible diversity of a society such as the United States. To Tokyo is ascribed the premier role in setting consumer standards and public opinion.⁴¹ The national government exerts extensive control over prefectural and local administrative budgets as well as issuing extensive and detailed regulations to guide local administrative and legal affairs. None of these or other images of contemporary Japan suggest that there is much room for diversity of experience, initiative from below, or meaningful conflict in modern Japan. That image is replicated in (projected into?) treatments of earlier eras with distorting consequences (several examples are indicated below).

Despite the volume of available materials, another challenging problem confronts scholars who wish to study one region over a long period of time: the problem of getting sufficient data for a good longitudinal study of just one area. This is less of an obstacle for scholars who focus on the nineteenth century, but even in the first half of that century, and certainly earlier, this represents a major challenge. In the realm of printed materials, a major part of the problem lies in the need for editors of local histories to be selective in compiling the transcriptions of docu-

ments that comprise an extensive part of prefectural histories and the best of other local histories. Frequently only sample documents are included. This is especially true for statistical data that consume large amounts of space. A second issue lies in the different emphases of Japanese as opposed to Western scholars. The problem frameworks of each tend to be sufficiently different that Japanese local histories may not include an adequate volume of the kinds of material of interest in some Western research.⁴² As just one illustration, consider the contrast between many Japanese local histories that are cast either in the context of either Marxist frameworks or telling the story, local “progressiveness” or just stressing the prominence of local eminences on the one hand, and the interest of American scholars in issues requiring the use of repetitive, statistical data associated with family reconstitution and inheritance (as studied by Susan Hanley, Laurel Cornell or Ann Janetta, for example). From personal experience, I can also indicate that some local histories fail to treat local institutions, such as land redistribution systems (*warichi*) because there is no standard historical framework

⁴²There is a partial remedy to this situation, but it, too, is often daunting for most young scholars: learn to work with at least some types of handwritten materials. Because the responsibility for creating and using local documents shifted over time – among village headmen or village group headmen in the Tokugawa, from the private collections of Tokugawa village headmen to the offices of newly defined Meiji local governments, for example – there are often sharp breaks in a single village’s documentary record. The problem is further compounded by a lack of trained archivists, inadequate indexing, restricted or closed scholarly access to private collections, and the like.

Pre-Meiji “public” documents such as village headmen’s records are typically treated as the private family documents; they have never legally been classified as public records. While the compilation of local histories in Japan seems to offer a partial remedy to restricted access to these documents – locations of private collections are identified and indexes are created – local archivists also indicate that in the process of researching and duplicating documents, many are in fact misplaced or lost, actually worsening the situation.

⁴¹ びっくりデータ情報部編、『これがニッポン人の平均値だ!』、東京：夢文庫、1997, presents more than 200 pages of opinion and marketing survey results on issues such as when, if ever, single women are planning to marry, what the average time is when people go out for “a little drink”, and other subjects. A disproportionately large share of the data was collected only from the Tokyo region despite the fact that the book purports to discuss attitudes and practices of the average Japanese.

into which it fits, despite the widespread presence of the system in that region. Or if it is treated, it is in a single, essentialized fashion, rather than in the context of change and development over time.

The best remedy for the selectivity of printed sources is to extend one's research beyond them and into the realm of manuscript materials. This is a challenge few scholars are willing to accept. Western graduate schools provide no training in reading manuscripts on a regular basis and for many the time that must be invested in mastering the techniques of reading manuscripts is daunting. The use of manuscript sources is further complicated by the necessity of consulting collections that may be inconveniently located and indexed to only a limited degree.

I have hinted above at one final, significant issue that stands in the way of more aggressive use of local historical studies lies in the problem of how to contextualize a local study. In particular, how representative is a given locality? What does it represent? While many of the local histories mentioned above do not directly address this issue -- leaving the impression that their subject was representative -- each of the papers in this symposium as well as studies by Chambliss, Brown, and Waters (for example) raise questions of representativeness. Thall, Platt and Pratt quite explicitly broach the issue, Van Sant's does so by reflection since regions which actively participated in the Meiji Restoration were the exception, not the rule.

Once we move away from those places that played unique historical roles such as activist domains in the Restoration there are a variety of ways in which one might frame questions of representativeness. Three general approaches quickly come to mind. One approach is that based on a statistical model. This method may be possible in a number of cases, but seems to impose very stringent, even insurmountable obstacles: substantial effort may be required to collect sufficient data to determine a statistical measure of central tendency such as a mean or median, or to help us to identify a pattern of behavior as the most commonly followed. This is especially the case for the early modern era and earlier when national compilations of data are rare and independent efforts would be required to generate a comprehensive database.

Other potential approaches are less daunting: one might, for example, examine two or three local case studies and develop a tentative typology of e.g., village political evolution, factors conditioning the use of infanticide, or similar developments. Still another approach might simply be to show that other locations also exhibited the characteristics a scholar has identified, indicating that the case was not just a statistical outlier. Each of these approaches can establish that a small number of cases represent more than just a statistical outlier, a freak example.

In the first post-war decades even the less stringent of these approaches may have been difficult to implement, but since then several Japanese publication projects considerably ease the task of getting a quick handle on the characteristics and development of most regions of Japan. Scholars can more readily conduct a comparative exploration of developments outside the locale that is the focus of their own work. Three major examples of this kind of material may be briefly noted: One such project is the Yamakawa Shuppansha series of prefectural histories, a number of which are now undergoing revision and updating. The Heibonsha and Kadokawa prefectural place name dictionaries both contain considerable historical data as well as place names. All three employed pre-eminent local historians as authors. While not perfect or complete in their coverage, they are useful in discovering parallel developments in a number of different regions.

The Potential Contribution of Local History

Whatever the reason for their relatively low numbers, local histories have altered our understanding of Japanese history and they have the potential for even greater contributions. They have illuminated major players in epoch-making political developments, the Meiji Restoration in particular. A number of studies provided concrete evidence for developments that were previously described in relatively abstract terms. Despite exceptions, however, many local studies served to underline and represent an existing national narrative, one that focuses overwhelmingly

on the rise and collapse of shogunal regimes, or the birth of a strong, modern central administration.

The demand for a national narrative in the writing of Japanese was very powerful, powerful enough to be implemented even in the absence of a centralized state. We see it in descriptions of “estates” (*shōen*) the writing of medieval histories, histories of the Sengoku and Tokugawa eras. Even periods of civil war are treated in ways that assume that actors all share a “national” ambition, all but ignoring (for example) the more defensive posture of one of Oda Nobunaga’s most formidable enemies, the Ikkō *ikki*.

Delving into local history involves a willingness to complicate our picture of Japanese history, a willingness to come to grips with the diversity of Japan’s historical experience; yet when treated at all, diversity of historical experience has been confronted in very limited degree, and its acknowledgement has often been viewed in negative terms. John W. Hall’s observations on early Japanese historians’ treatment of an earlier period, the medieval era, reflect this problem: “The Muromachi age, for all its cultural brilliance, has been regarded as a time of political weakness and institutional decay Some historians have gone so far as to claim that nothing which happened prior to the Onin War could be considered relevant to modern Japan.”⁴³ He noted further, “Although historians have recognized the evidence of economic growth, they have seen it almost as a contradictory element, something to set against the picture of political decay. They have given little thought to the possibility that such growth might be related to the fundamental changes in the popular substructure of Japanese society.”⁴⁴ Despite the effort of several conferences, the output since the late 1970s on medieval Japanese history is paltry in volume, a fact that I believe is related to the tentative nature of the national narrative during this time and to the need to immerse oneself deeply in local history materials for the majority of subjects. The pic-

⁴³ John W. Hall, “Introduction,” in John W. Hall and Toyoda Takeshi, eds., *Japan in the Muromachi Age*, Berkeley, Ca: University of California Press, 1977, p. 2.

⁴⁴ John W. Hall, “Introduction,” p. 6.

ture may simply be too “disorderly” to attract many scholars, especially non-Japanese scholars, and that untidiness leads to a sense of discomfort. The same issue confronts the problem of how we understand local histories that may not readily fit the national narratives on which we have relied to date.

The failure to cope with the diversity of local experience extends well beyond this example and, in particular confronts the problem of how we understand local histories that may not readily fit the national narratives on which we have relied to date. Survey treatments typically describe the early organization of Imperial landholding under the Taika reorganization, and then treat the later organization of *shōen* as though it became the dominant form of organizing landholding throughout the Heian era and beyond. While we are beginning to treat Kamakura (and perhaps middle to late Heian) as a transitional era in which increasingly distinct military and aristocratic organizations co-existed, the tendency heretofore has been to treat the Heian as aristocratic government and the period following Kamakura as a military government with a superficial aristocratic appendage. The apparent presupposition behind such treatment is that there can only be one center of authority.⁴⁵ We dutifully describe Ashikaga shogunal patterns of administration but largely ignore the regional and local forces that routinely operated outside its sphere of influence and even downplay the autonomy of some of the components of shogunal administration.⁴⁶ One outcome is that there is a reasonable description of the precipitating events of the Onin Wars, but little sense is conveyed of the dynamics that made *shūgo* administration itself so unstable as to make the Onin Wars the trigger for a complete disintegration of any sem-

⁴⁵ Bob T. Wakabayashi, “In Name Only: Imperial Sovereignty in Early Modern Japan,” *Journal of Japanese Studies* 17:1 (1991), 25-57, confronts this problem of multiple political centers for a later period.

⁴⁶ Lorraine Harrington, “Regional Outposts of Muromachi Bakufu Rule: The Kantō and Kyūshū,” in Jeffrey Mass and William B. Hauser, eds. *The Bakufu in Japanese History*, Stanford, Ca: Stanford University Press, 1985, p.66-98.

blance of order and the rise of endemic civil wars. A more prominent place for discussion of the tensions between *shūgo*, their deputies the *shūgodai*, *jitō* (land stewards) and local notables, illustrated with pertinent local case studies, would help convey the profound political frailty of the Ashikaga political order. The orders of Hideyoshi are typically seen as propelling the methods of land surveys, the separation warrior from peasant and other late sixteenth-century reforms when local studies suggest a more complicated picture.⁴⁷ Despite the diversity long apparent in the Japanese literature, mid-Tokugawa political developments have long been largely treated as following a single pattern. Now, fortunately, that sense of diversity is being made available in English.⁴⁸

These examples can be multiplied and suggest that failure to exploit local history materials leaves us with a somewhat stilted picture of the unfolding of Japanese history and the processes through which it evolved.

Despite the challenges to doing good local history, Japanese local histories and materials are sufficiently rich as to reward scholarly efforts with important new perspectives and insights that can critique the narratives we have relied on to date. There can be no better indication of this than the four essays that form this symposium. All present examples of how local histories might revise and extend our understanding of Japanese history, moving beyond the dominant national narrative. These works suggest an alternative approach to the criticism of “meta-narratives” voiced by literary theorists, one that is grounded in the inductive social science methodology that recognizes variation as well as central tendency and the limits of one’s sample. All go beyond using the “local” to illustrate the “national”.

⁴⁷ E.g., Michael Birt, “Samurai in Passage: The Transformation of the Sixteenth-century Kanto,” *Journal of Japanese Studies* 11:2 (Summer, 1985), 369-399; Philip C. Brown, *Central Authority and Local Autonomy in the Formation of Early Modern Japan: The Case of Kaga Domain*, Stanford, Ca: Stanford University Press, 1993.

⁴⁸ Mark Ravina, *Land and Lordship in Early Modern Japan*, Stanford, Ca: Stanford University Press, 1999.

The papers by Thall, Platt and Van Sant focus on how national administrative initiatives were implemented in the face of both threatened and actual local opposition. Thall and Platt suggest a clear influence of the local on the central, demonstrating the potential for local manipulation and use of the central initiatives for the ends of local figures and organizations. Van Sant’s essay in particular, but also Platt’s, present evidence that strongly contradicts the dominant image of the Meiji transition as “peaceful”, analyzing the violence that the center visited on the local. (Van Slant’s analysis of the Bōshin War can be extended to Niigata. Residents there also experienced extreme increases in tax burdens; even today residents feel Niigata was punished for local resistance to Imperial forces. One might extrapolate and conclude that native son Tanaka Kakuei’s aggressive pursuit of “pork” was an act of revenge for that hostile treatment.)

Three of these papers (Platt, Thall and Van Slant) constructively complicate our picture of Meiji political processes even while concerned with the development of a national centralized administration. In this effort they assume that the “national” equals the “state” and that there is only one state in the period they discuss. Such perceptions are natural in the context of the Meiji era, and certainly increasingly reasonable as we move from the early to middle and late Meiji periods. Yet such an assumption should be taken as problematic for earlier eras. In this regard, the works by Brown, Ravina, and Roberts mentioned above all call into question the presence of either an effectively functioning central administration or the existence of a single state in the Tokugawa era. That skepticism can be constructively extended into even earlier periods.

Even when we exclude war, major riots such as those in response to compulsory education, conscription, and other despised national policies or the more violent side of the people’s rights movement (*jiyū minken*), Ed Pratt’s essay shows that in the normal course of village activities might encompass inwardly-directed violence. Such violence was not simply reflective of internal class conflicts, nor did its presence preclude persistent efforts to maintain “harmony” and the continued functioning of cooperative endeavors within the village. Studies by Margaret

McKean of village management of the commons (*iriai*) shows efforts that parallel Pratt's description. Only in one village she studied did a complete break result: a family that broke village rules over the commons (*iriai*) was denied assistance during funerals, in putting out a house fire (perhaps set by other villagers) and other major activities associated with maintaining their day to day lives. Such findings reinforce the complementary nature of conflict and cohesiveness that sociologist George Simmel postulated decades ago: communities are bound together by common understanding as to how to deal with conflict and when and to what degree violations of the group rules can be accommodated.⁴⁹

Two papers suggest uses of local history in addition to examining the development of a national administrative organization. Thall extends the potential of local history into the realm of cultural and intellectual history, noting the role of local sites in the efforts of urban intellectuals for a critique of the countryside, and the rural residents' use of the same sites as a device for carving out a new self-image during the Meiji. Pratt takes us into the day-to-day relationships and processes of village society, a new direction in the context of Japanese social history.

As a group, the perspectives raised by these papers certainly have the potential to transform Japanese historians' perceptions of Japanese history. A "new historiography," rooted in local historical sources and studies would be a substantial contribution for the scholarly world in itself. It would increase the sophistication and depth of our understanding of Japanese history. But there are significant broader implications of a new emphasis on the study of Japanese history.

Broader Implications: Teaching and Public Perceptions

Once we move away from a single national pattern of development we complicate the task of writing Japanese history; yet the consequences of

such a "new historiography" extend well beyond the boundaries of the scholarly world and into the realm of changing public perceptions of Japan and the way in which we teach about Japan. We can discuss five general ways in which benefits from increased use of local history that may accrue to fields beyond the scholarly realm.

Diverse images of Japan created by these and other studies of local history will increasingly attack and wear down the perception that Japanese society and its history are composed of automatons. More concrete and detailed descriptions reveal diverse attitudes and conflicts will and help to humanize images of Japan. We will see the role of the nation-state and its reach as more limited and the unfolding of Japanese history as more colorful than heretofore.

Beyond this, local historical study has the potential to promote a new historiography that treats the vaunted "homogeneity" of Japanese society differently and more critically. This endeavor is important strictly within the context of Japanese history. It is important for people to understand that despite racial and ethnic homogeneity, there were plenty of instances in which that was inadequate to maintain a harmonious and peaceful society. As a corollary, we will see that such "homogeneity" does not make Japan uniquely free of significant lines of friction within its social structure as well as its political structures.

Important as such revisions are, they may also provide useful fodder for us to reconsider the whole problem of race and ethnicity: Japan has been a very interesting example of the creativity of a society in generating invidious ascriptive distinctions. In effect, we have many examples here (as Ooms has begun to point out in *Tokugawa Village Practice*) of creating discriminatory mountains out of molehills of social differences even in the context of racial and ethnic homogeneity. By stressing those concerns that plague our contemporary world, we have ignored or downplayed issues of comparable import to the people of past times.

Local histories should help us uncover regional differences that have a significant impact on social, economic and political developments in Japanese history. It is common, for example, that economic historians divide Japan into ad-

⁴⁹ Simmel, Georg, *Conflict*, translated by Kurt H. Wolff. *The Web of Group Affiliations*, translated by Reinhard Bendix. Glencoe, IL: Free Press, 1955.

vanced (read “large urban areas and the countryside that directly serves them”) and “backward” regions but these distinctions do not permit us to see gradations that may have had a significant impact on economic diversification and development. We have done little in the early modern era, for example, to examine the impact of domain size, territorial contiguity, distance from Edo and similar factors on the effectiveness of domain administration, despite the fact that generalizations abound. We hear of bifurcations such as eastern Japan’s agriculture was based on horse-power, western Japan’s was based on oxen/cattle, but one wonders if more complex considerations would not yield smaller, more meaningful regional differentiations. In the development of greater sensitivity to regional variations, studies by non-historians such as Kelly and Kalland may also be useful.

Finally, local histories and the conclusions drawn from them may help us to eliminate clear oversimplifications that we inadvertently communicate to non-specialists by virtue of the emphasis we have placed on a national narrative of institutional development and progress. I have in mind the example of Alan Macfarlane, an assiduous scholar with degrees in history and anthropology, who undertook an extensive comparison of how Japan and England escaped the dual Malthusian traps. In the course of his analysis of the English language literature, he pored over the volumes of the *Cambridge History of Japan* and based on its treatment, concluded that warfare did not have a major impact on Japanese population trends because there were no major conflicts in late medieval and early *kinsei* Japan!⁵⁰

Conclusion

With the aid of local histories such as those in this symposium, we can generate many new

insights into Japanese history. There is still a significant place here for the study of unique events. Van Sant’s and Pratt’s essays provide poignant evidence that in this realm, too, there is still much to investigate as part of an effort to tell a more conflict-ridden and human story in Japanese history. Even a study that simply tests accepted generalizations and concludes that there were other similar cases without determining that they were broadly representative or part of a tentatively identifiable set of patterns will challenge standing interpretations and suggest alternatives for future investigation. Such studies have the potential to make the unfolding of Japanese history appear more tentative, more open to recognition of choices made from a variety of options, and less dominated by a sense of inevitability.

But we also may begin to think about patterned regional variation rather than just a simple uniform narrative. The particular approach taken as scholars deal with the issue of the degree to which a given case represents broader phenomenon will have an impact on the picture that emerges from the use of local history. One that contextualizes a local study through statistical analysis will give us a clear sense of how close a given case is to the mean as measured by a number of variables and it will also give us a sense of variation through a statistical measure of deviation. Other approaches may yield a relatively comprehensive and final typology of some sort. Some typologies may be more tentative or incomplete, but still be very useful if taken seriously and investigated in relationship to other issues. For example, we are already well aware of accepted means of classifying daimyo. To name just the most obvious -- large, contiguous domains and small, scattered domains; *fudai*, *tozama*, and *shinpan* domains. Some of these categories have been invoked to explain developments in the Tokugawa economy or the degree of political autonomy, but they have not been tested systematically to determine if the supposed relationship can be demonstrated.⁵¹ By using

⁵⁰ Alan Macfarlane, *The Savage Wars of Peace: England, Japan and the Malthusian Trap*. Oxford and Malden, Ma: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 1997, p. 57-58. Macfarlane specifically cites the treatment of war in the medieval and early modern volumes of *The Cambridge History of Japan*.

⁵¹ For example, Hanley and Yamamura, 21-22, suggest the importance of contiguous and non-contiguous territoriality of domains; Ravina, 20, stresses a distinction between country-holding and non-country-holding daimyo.

local histories to recognize the presence of multiple and varied actors, we again can contribute to telling the story of Japanese history in a less deterministic way that places more emphasis on variation in both process and outcome, and hence provides an image that is less predetermined and perhaps more human.

In discussion during and after this symposium, Professor Donald Hata, California State University, Dominguez Hills, has noted that the images we create of Japan's history bear on the way in which Japanese immigrants to North America are perceived. A sound understanding of Japanese history helps us to understand the Nikkei residents' experience as they adapted to and became more fully assimilated in their new homeland. A greater sense of diversity in the Japanese historical experience can help break down the sense that Japanese immigrants were all part of a "perfect minority" and increase our understanding of Nikkei as having diverse experiences. Such a new direction helps to correct a stereotyped image of Nikkei as seen from without, and consciously cultivated by many Japanese-Americans themselves.⁵²

Whether in the restricted field of Japanese history, in the broader application of our subject to the fields of public images of Japan, the Japanese and Japanese - Americans, or in the field of public education, continued studies of the sort presented here

⁵² Comments during discussion of the papers presented in this symposium, private discussion following the session, "The Diverse Japanese: Local History's Challenge to National Narratives," 114th Annual Meeting of the American Historical Association, Chicago, IL, January 7, 2000, and personal e-mail communication of 27 February 2000. Professor Hata specifically noted parallels in the use of shrines as described by Professor Thall and the use of shrines in Garden, California. He also mentioned efforts of some Japanese-American leaders encountered in the course of research (his own or that of acquaintances) to deny the presence of prostitutes in the Japanese-American communities of the nineteenth century and intermarriage with blacks as part of an effort to bolster the image of Japanese Americans as a "perfect minority."

have a substantial and positive role to play in helping improve our appreciation of the diverse Japanese.



Two wooden Buddhist sculptures by Enkū 円空, d. 1695.

**Book Introduction: Questioning
Edo as a Free-Sex Paradise**
Lawrence Marceau
University of Delaware

For those interested in the ever-expanding discourse in early modern Japanese gender and sexuality issues, it seems that the temperature has risen a few degrees over the past year. In English, Timon Screech has published *Sex and the Floating World: Erotic Images in Japan, 1700-1820* (Honolulu: U Hawaii P, paper ed. 1999) to supplement the version translated into Japanese by Takayama Hiroshi, *Shunga: Katate*