

History



The Abacus and the Sword:

The Japanese Penetration of Korea, 1895-1910

Peter Duus

(University of California Press, 1995)



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This is the definitive study of Japanese imperialism as directed toward Korea between 1876 and 1920. Divided into two themes, the account first examines the political process of extending Japanese control, the second treats the economic penetration, one movement reinforcing the other.

Imperialism in its Japanese form was the country's response to the presence of the Western imperialistic penetration into East Asia. Japan wanted to find its own place in this lucrative practice and felt that only its own colonial empire would compel the Western nations to accept Japan as a fellow power.

The intention was, at first, to institute basic "reforms" in Korea, and to seize economic advantages for Japan. The plan was to establish a protectorate in Korea and by 1904 the Japanese government had produced the consensus for an aggressive policy.

This move was backed by the assertion that it was necessary to its own security. In fact, however, Japan had already defeated China and Russia and it had annexed Korea with the full approval of both Great Britain and the United States. Security fears were more of an excuse, one used to justify aggression.

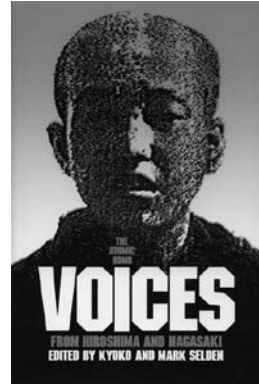
The result was a political and economic act the results of which still reverberate between the two countries.

The Atomic Bomb:

Voices from Hiroshima and Nagasaki

Kyoko Selden / Mark Selden (eds.)

(M.E. Sharpe, 1989)



On August 6, 1945, at 8:15 a.m., the atomic bomb was dropped above Hiroshima. It was a fireball with a temperature of several million degrees centigrade. On the ground the temperature instantly became three or four thousand degrees. One witness describes it. The streets were “rivers of fire,” and “the people themselves blazed like match sticks.”

More than a thousand persons died and more than a million homes were destroyed. By the end of the year the number had doubled—those dying of wounds and radiation, plus all of those killed in the second bomb dropping in Nagasaki.

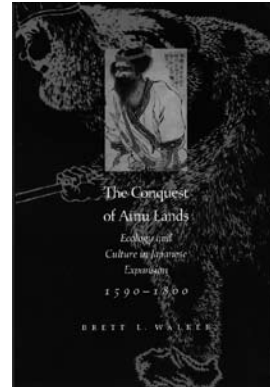
The editors of this anthology have here collected the memories of those who survived and remembered. “The memories of that day,” write the editors, “were literally burned into the consciousness of the survivors.” Here they have collected what remains: accounts, interviews, anecdotes, a few poems.

They also reflect upon other, more political, results—the US attempting to create awe at the unique power it alone possessed and ready to deploy it again, the Japanese seeking to foster victim-consciousness “centered on the inhumanity of the bomb, thereby shifting attention away from Japan’s wartime criminally aggressive acts.”

The Conquest of Ainu Lands: Ecology and Culture in Japanese Expansion, 1590-1800

Brett L. Walker

(University of California Press, 2001)



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By the beginning of the 17th-century the Ainu people were both economically self-reliant and politically autonomous. Two centuries later they were neither. Most of the Ainu lands—Hokkaido and the islands further north—had been conquered by Japan, sometimes through military action, mostly through manipulations of trade.

At the same time, the Ainu themselves facilitated the takeover. The demands of Japanese trade created financial incentives for the Ainu to exploit their own territories.

The Ainu early united to fight against this intrusion, even at considerable cost of lives, but eventually the Ainu people were driven into smaller competing groups and soon their cause was lost.

By the late 19th century this outcome was acknowledged and both Japanese visitors and American advisors saw in the new northern colony of Hokkaido parallels between the fates of the Ainu and the American Indian.

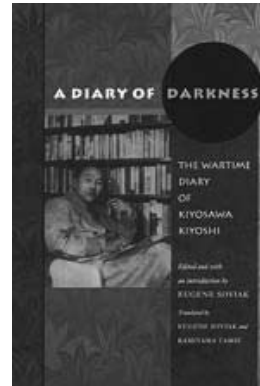
In America this had led to the 1887 Dawes Act, and it was this that provided a model for the 1899 Hokkaido Former Aborigines Protection Act. The damage, however, proved fatal. The culture had been fragmented and the ecology had been undone. It was not that the Ainu had acquiesced to Japanese advances but that the Japanese means of subjugation proved so effective.

A Diary of Darkness:

The Wartime Diary of Kiyosawa Kiyoshi

Kiyoshi Kiyosawa

(Princeton University Press, 1998)



This wartime diary of Kiyoshi Kiyosawa (1890-1945), the *Ankoku Nikki*, was originally published in 1948 and soon attained an unusual level of acclaim and popularity. Among the reasons was that here was a book that criticized wartime leadership and had done so at a time (the diary begins in 1942) when others were notably silent.

Another reason for its continuing interest is that this is a chronicle of Japan's war years and offers all sorts of telling details. It is social history at its most interesting, one that, as the author has said, became an "inadvertent autobiography."

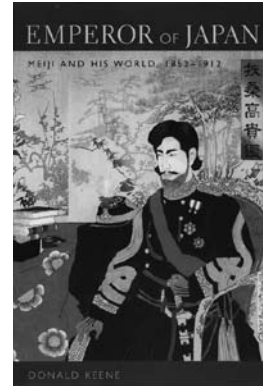
Originally intended as notes for a history of the period (one that due to the premature death of the author was never written) the diary is now considered one of the most important and compelling documents from wartime Japan. It here appears in the English translation of Eugene Soviak and Kamiya Tamie.

Filled with a criticism of Japanese military authoritarianism that had to be repressed publicly, with the rise of hysterical pro-military propaganda, with increasing poverty and disorder, and with the author's own struggles to avoid arrest, this is a courageous and perceptive account of wartime Japan.

Emperor of Japan: Meiji and His World, 1852-1912

Donald Keene

(Columbia University Press, 2002)



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The Meiji emperor is most often portrayed as a symbolic figure, moved about and motivated by others in his court, a ruler with no will nor power of his own. His long reign (1868-1912) is commonly thought of as having marked his country's transition to modernity, but he is usually given little credit to its having accomplished this.

Donald Keene's biography of this emperor examines his life and indicates what he did. The rich detail of this account shows that he took part in the political and social affairs of his country and strongly influenced these events.

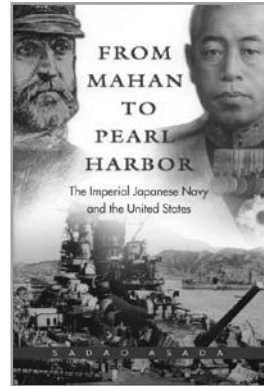
Despite his acceptance of modernism and, to an extent, Westernism, the Meiji emperor had an equally strong commitment to Japanese traditional life and its national morality. What he did not support was the rising militarism of his country. Even Japan's adventures in Korea and in China met with little enthusiasm from him.

In this definitive biography Keene gives the full history of the Meiji restoration but he tells it not in terms of various forces challenging the feudal order (the usual interpretation) but in terms of the calculations and the motives of the individuals involved, including those of the emperor himself.

From Mahan to Pearl Harbor: The Imperial Japanese Navy and the United States

Sadao Asada

(Naval Institute Press, 2006)



This major work by a leading naval historian begins from the influence of Alfred Thayer Mahan, whose classic study on sea power influenced Japan's decision to empower their own navy. This power was eventually used against the U.S., and so, in a way, it was Mahan's ideas that allowed the Japanese Navy to see itself as a potential enemy of the Americans.

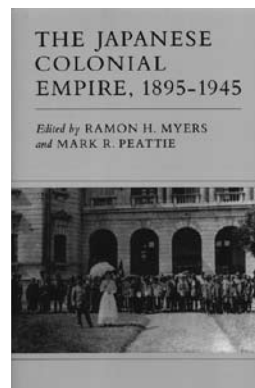
The work is not, however, about naval strategy nor is it a viewing of Japan's national policy, nor the militarism it created. Rather, it is a detailed history, based in many instances upon sources not hitherto available, of Japanese naval policy and its application to the war with America.

It was the military decisions of the Japanese armed forces that led to a war that took place in the important context of the bureaucratic skirmishes between the Japanese army and navy. In this reading it was the "ghost of Mahan" that hung over Japanese commanders as they led their ships against the U.S. and made their incorrect conclusions about relative Japanese and American strength. The Japanese Navy was responsible for its own defeat. It was a victim of its past successes and decades-long bureaucratic sniping had sapped its strength.

The Japanese Colonial Empire, 1895-1945

*Ramon H. Myers /
Mark R. Peattie (eds.)*

(Princeton University Press, 1984)



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Product of a 1979 conference at Stanford's Hoover Institution, this volume collects the contributions of thirteen scholars on the growth, collapse, and meanings of Japan's overseas holdings: Taiwan in 1895; Karafuto and the Kwantung territories in 1905; Korea, 1910; and Micronesia in 1914—all liberated when Japan surrendered in 1945.

Japan was the only non-Western colonist during this period and was a resented new-comer. Japan thought of its colonies, however, as mainly security buffers. It followed the examples of British rule over racially different peoples, and Germanic/Slavic expansions over peoples racially similar.

Actually, though, Japan gave neither the autonomy, implied in the British model, nor the homeland civil liberties and assimilation implied in the Germanic model.

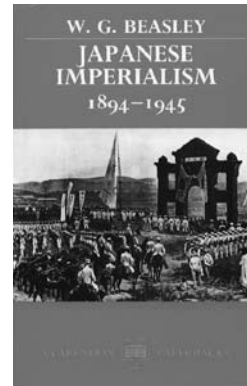
Thus Japan received little thanks for its enterprising empire-building even (or particularly) when this was disguised as somehow saving smaller Asian countries from Western predators.

Divided into four parts, this collection first discusses the meanings and origins of Japan's empire. The following sections offer a chronological account of the results of initial Japanese assumptions, and how Japanese exploitation deepened in accordance with Japan's economic needs. Questions proliferate and are answered in an objective manner in this impressive volume.

Japanese Imperialism, 1894-1945

William G. Beasley

(Clarendon Press, 1987)



Japan is the only modern Asian country to have succeeded in building both a sound economy and (for a time) an empire. It is the author's contention that these accomplishments were related, that Japan's aims were from the first influenced by Western imperialism and that its growing economy was matched by an equal growth in both needs and ambitions.

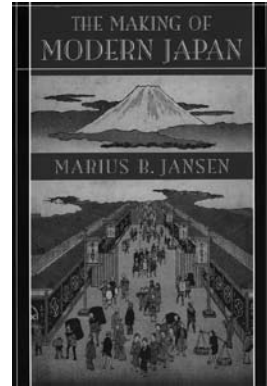
Of particular note is the attention that the author pays to internal political and economic reasons behind Japan's stated policies. In this manner the story of Japan's economic rise to the 1945 debacle is made understandable and, indeed, inevitable. Actual causes are revealed and only rarely is the self-serving notion of "Japanese culture" used at all.

In outline the story is a familiar one, but it has rarely been told in so concise and yet comprehensive a manner as it is here. Japan's response to modernism, its attempts at empire-building from the Meiji Restoration to the Pacific War, its intellectual justifications for such expansion as a "liberation" of Asian peoples from European colonialism, and the results for all this, are accounted for in a rendering that is neither pro-imperialist nor an apology for a colonial past.

The Making of Modern Japan

Marius B. Jansen

(The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2000)



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This magisterial work represents the culmination of six decades of scholarship. It chronicles Japan's political, economic and intellectual life from 1600 to 2000 and in so doing it provides a solid, authoritative and reliable interpretation of Japan's past and how this served as foundation for the country as it is today.

Considered are the implications and results of three periods of social change: the imposition of hegemonic order by the Tokugawa shogun; the opening of Japan's ports by Commodore Perry; and the defeat in WWII.

Charted are the social changes which begin with the founding of the shogunate in 1600, the emergence of castle towns with consumer populations, and the diffusion of samurai values. This was followed by the adaptation of Western models, by growing trade and, eventually, by the postwar occupation reforms which were imposed by General Douglas MacArthur.

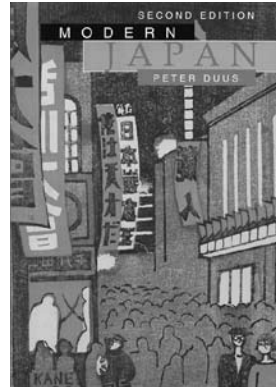
The history is one of changes but at the same time a consistency is present, one whose continuities outweigh developmental upheavals, and the waves of influence from outside have served to strengthen the Japanese sense of what is unique and native to it.

In telling this story the work offers a real social history—a history of how people actually lived in these times.

Modern Japan

Peter Duus

(Houghton Mifflin Company, 1998)



Though modern Japan is now more familiar to the rest of the world than it used to be, ignorance on how Japan got to be the way it is remains commonplace. In this book one of the finest of the current historians attempts, as he says, to bring this newly familiar Japan into sharper focus.

Japan was not always the economic superpower we today acknowledge it to be. In the middle of the 19th-century it was poorer and less technically adept than any of the Western societies which so abruptly intruded upon it. Determined to “catch up,” this is just what the Japanese did, first as students of Western models, then as competitors in the Western imperialist game, and finally as creators of that rapidly developing economic giant which is modern Japan.

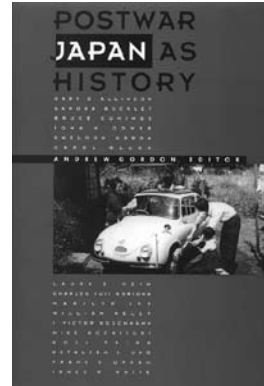
In telling this story, the author focuses on major political, economic, and social trends, but he also examines the lives of peasants, workers, farmers, the structure of the family, the position of women.

In doing this he deals first with the fall of the Tokugawa order (1800-1868); then with the pursuit of power and wealth (1868-1905); on to crisis and World War II (1905-1945); and then into an era of relative stability (1945 to the present).

Postwar Japan as History

Andrew Gordon (ed.)

(University of California Press, 1993)



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Japan's rise to world economic power occasioned much comment, but few have considered this as a result of, among other things, history. Here, sixteen scholars do just that.

They examine three related themes from postwar history, all describing ongoing historical processes; Japan's extraordinary economic growth and at the same time such unanticipated continuities as the endurance of truly conservative rule.

For over fifty years now Japan has been governed by a conservative hegemony that appears to sacrifice political pluralism to the necessities of economic growth. The bubble grew larger and larger. With the continued presence of U.S. economic comparisons, this gave rise to a kind of management culture, an ideology through which the people traded national wealth and industrial power for very meager increases in their own standards of living.

Pessimistically, one can see—as do a number of these scholars—the greatest discontinuity since the Meiji Restoration: the WWII defeat, the postwar occupation. It is this discontinuity that represents Japan's great problem, which is stasis itself.

Optimistically, others believe that despite all the mistakes and accidents, the continuity of Japanese culture itself will provide the source for more versatility and for greater success.

Sakamoto Ryoma and the Meiji Restoration

Marius B. Jansen

(Columbia University Press, 1994)



By the middle of the 19th century, Japan saw itself facing Western imperial ambitions. Having observed the fate of India and of China, it now sought different means. The result was the Meiji Restoration, a unified national state struggling to achieve international equality and leadership in Asia. It was, in effect, a real revolution.

Here the author tells the Restoration story by examining the career of Ryoma Sakamoto, originally from Tosa, one of the fiefs that played an important role in Restoration politics. In telling this story, the author necessarily concerns himself with the way in which the Restoration came about, rather than discussing it in terms now common in Japan—why it had to come about.

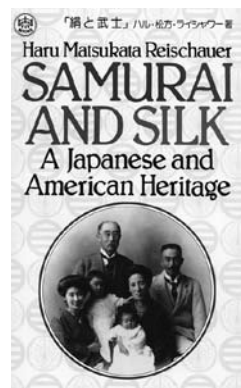
Though originally against such Western intruders as Commodore Perry and his followers, Ryoma understood that the only way to counter the West was to emulate it. He envisioned a Japan inspired by the kind of equality that he had observed in the United States.

Ryoma, idealistic, individualistic, realized that in order to compete with an industrial outside world, Japan must itself change—after centuries of the Tokugawa Shogunate, leadership had grown impotent. He advocated strengthening the country. Japan had to modernize and in order to do so the government had to be overthrown.

Samurai and Silk: A Japanese and American Heritage

Haru Matsukata Reischauer

(Tuttle Publishing, 1986)



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Haru Matsukata led an unusually interesting life. Both parents had lived in the United States and both retained these ties. This occasioned some difficulty when she returned to Tokyo in 1937, but in 1945, after Japan's defeat, she found ready work as translator and correspondent, and in 1955 she married Edwin Reischauer, who was appointed as United States Ambassador in 1961. Rather than write a personal memoir, however, she here explores what she regards as her dual heritage, through the lives of her two grandfathers. Silk was the province of one of them, a man of peasant origins. The other was of samurai descent. Together, both of these grandfathers played roles in reshaping Japan. The author clearly sees them as playing a part in laying the foundations of contemporary economic power.

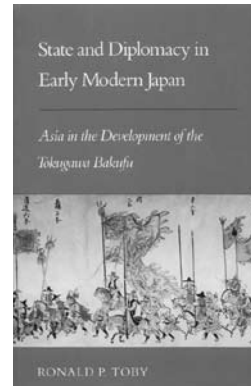
The samurai grandfather was eventually made Prince Masayoshi Matsukata and was twice prime minister. More importantly, as finance minister he helped create Japan's financial system. The "silk" grandfather emigrated to America and founded a financial empire there. As the author observes, their careers complemented each other. In her book she herself provides the saga of an author mediating between her two cultures.

State and Diplomacy in Early Modern Japan:

Asia in the Development of the Tokugawa Bakufu

Ronald P. Toby

(Stanford University Press, 1991)



In most received versions of Japanese history we are told that Japan had during the Tokugawa period government (*bakufu*) shut its gates to the rest of the world and imposed its long-standing isolation. This, continues the common version, was because all foreign influences were undesirable. The perceived seclusion is called *sakoku*.

Toby's book, rather, seeks to describe how Japan manipulated existing diplomatic channels to ensure national security. Indeed, the term *sakoku* is one which originally came from works in English and Dutch.

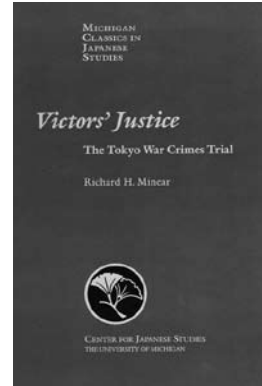
Rather, far from aiming at seclusion, Japan's diplomacy in the seventeenth century was orchestrated to achieve certain objectives, both outside the country and inside it. The aim was to build Japan into an autonomous center of its own. Since the country was "closed," elaborate and expensive foreign embassies were obliged to make the journey to Edo. Countries which were perceived as potential threats, such as Portugal and Spain, were excluded from this process.

Only those such as the Chinese and the Dutch, with whom trade was recognized as desirable, were allowed a supervised presence in Japan itself. Closing the gates to Japan was not the object. Rather, carefully judging just when they should be open and shut was the aim.

Victors' Justice: The Tokyo War Crimes Trial

Richard R. Minear

(University of Michigan Center for Japanese Studies, 2001)



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The Tokyo war crimes trial took place over half a century ago, beginning in May, 1946, and lasting for two and a half years. Its purpose was to try leaders of imperial Japan for committed wartime “crimes.” Considered contentious at the time, the trial has since been heavily criticized, but never as cogently as in this now classic account of its aims and its proceedings.

In stating his aims the author quotes a legal advisor at the trials: “I do not hold a brief for Tojo [Hideki, Japan’s wartime minister and ex-prime minister]. I do hold a brief for justice, even to my enemies.” In pursuing this end Minear states that “my major concern has been to challenge the prevailing image of the trial, to demolish its credibility and its verdict.”

All of the processes of the trial are here assembled and questioned. The aim is to discover if Tojo was right when, before his execution, he said: “This trial was a political trial. It was only victors’ justice.”

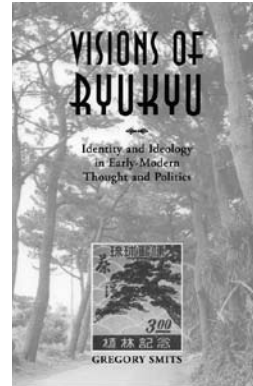
When this book was originally published the American war in Vietnam was underway. The unpopular actions of the U.S. military found parallels with Japanese wartime activities and made the concept of victors’ justice a very real one.

Visions of Ryukyu:

Identity and Ideology in Early-Modern Thought and Politics

Gregory Smits

(University of Hawai'i Press, 1999)



For centuries the Ryukyu archipelago (Okinawa and its adjacent islands) formed a semi-independent state with a semi-colonial status. Japan laid claim but respected China's tributary relationship. Later, Japan (the Satsuma domain) invaded the place and in 1879 it was "annexed" to Japan but actually became merely its first colony. It is now officially one of Japan's prefectures but is still treated as somehow full-fledged.

One of the results of these centuries of ambiguity (1609-1879) is that the people living on these islands had to craft their own "visions of Ryukyu identity." The author of this history explores the various notions of this held, in particular, by local scholars. Through these the political implications of their visions are unveiled.

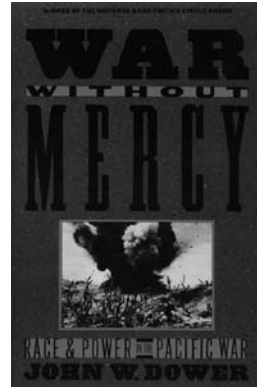
Smits explores historical perceptions of Ryukyu and the major circumstances that informed discourses on Ryukyuan identity. At the same time he examines the various strategies used to fashion, to promote, and to implement these visions.

The ambiguous position between Japan and China inspired thought and eventually one vision prevailed. The kingdom's destiny lay with the Ryukyuans themselves. Moral parity with Japan and China seemed at that time possible.

War Without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War

John W. Dower

(Pantheon Books, 1986)



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In this important book the author examines the propaganda of the US-Japanese conflict in WWII to explore what he calls “the patterns of a race war.” These include the deliberate structuring of racist stereotypes, the wide process of “othering” the other.

In doing so Dower discovers differences as well. Whereas racism in the West is characterized by the denigration of others, the Japanese are concerned with elevating themselves. Though not above belittling other races, they are more interested in wanting to believe they are unique among “races,” and that this has made them superior.

Consequently perhaps, they do not differentiate by color, at least not to the extent that does the West. The Japanese use a different set of considerations. There are, says Dower, the two categories of insider and outsider. The Japanese are insiders; the non-Japanese are outsiders. This is Japanese racism. Combined with American racism it produced “the war without mercy.” Such attitudes did not disappear with end of WWII. Rather, they adapted to peace, for “the archetypal demon of Japanese folklore has always had two faces, being not only a destructive presence but also a potentially protective and tutelary being.”

From Marco Polo Bridge to Pearl Harbor: Who Was Responsible?

The Yomiuri Shimbun

(The Yomiuri Shimbun, 2006)



In 2006 the Yomiuri Shimbun published *Kensho—Senso Sekinin* (“Verification: Responsibility for WWII”), a full report of the findings of the War Responsibility Reexamination Committee which undertook to determine where the responsibility lay for the aggression against Manchuria, for Pearl Harbor, and for the Pacific War that ended in Japan’s defeat and killed the better part of a whole generation of Japan’s youth. That the Yomiuri Shimbun did so, stated Henry A. Kissinger, was “a matter of conscience and integrity.”

The paper’s editor-in-chief, Tsuneo Watanabe, said that he thought it the Yomiuri’s responsibility to tell its readers just who was responsible and that he hoped the finding would “serve as a cue for peoples elsewhere to examine and explore what kinds of miscalculations or blind beliefs could trigger wars in the future.” Though there has been, and remains, an amount of criticism that Japan had not confronted its past as has Germany, this book is a major step in doing so. Donald Keene has said that “many Japanese apparently prefer not to know what happened when the military forces of their country behaved in a manner that seems almost incomprehensible today ... this book deserves the attention especially of those who never knew or have forgotten the horrors of the long years of war.”