

Review

Kristine Harris
Columbia University

Riben tongshi 日本通史 [Comprehensive History of Japan]. Ed. Zhao Jianmin 赵建民, Liu Yuwei 刘予苇, et al. (Shanghai: Fudan University Press, 1989). 504 pp. Hardcover, 10 yuan; paper, 6.55 yuan.

During the 1980s, when academic institutions across the People's Republic of China began to reestablish curricula for Japanese history, a group of seven specialists from Shanghai, Tianjin, Beijing, Anhui, and Hangzhou came together to write Riben tongshi, the first Chinese college textbook since 1949 to focus exclusively on Japanese history.

The editors explain that they concentrate here on culture, thought, and foreign relations, because they believe that aspects of political, economic, and military history have been sufficiently detailed elsewhere. As a case in point, the authors limit to three pages the familiar terminological debate over the "feudal" qualities of the imperial regime, and the extent to which the Meiji Restoration was revolutionary or merely reformist. They emphasize, rather, the role of cultural and political reforms, such as bunmei kaika 文明开化 and constitutionalism, and the speed of Japan's industrialization during the Meiji era, in producing a strong and independent nation. This angle resonates with concerns in China today over the relationship between rapid economic development, social change, and authoritarian rule.

Indeed, while the six long chapters describing Japanese imperialism on the Chinese mainland are articulated with a Marxist vocabulary, Riben tongshi also manages to incorporate a modernizationist paradigm. Even though the book is not divided into historical periods, but simply into chapters of equal length, a full two-thirds of its contents are devoted to the period following the disintegration of sakoku 鎖国 and the arrival of Commodore Perry in the mid-19th century, as is fairly common in recent PRC historiography on Japan. Again, we can surmise that such weight given to the period when Japan moved decisively into the international arena speaks to the current PRC interest in similar kinds of cultural and political

exchange that have become available since the end of the Cultural Revolution.

For scholars of Sino-Japanese studies, the gem in Riben tongshi is a multi-textured coda by Tang Zhongnan 湯重南 set just in front of the standard textbook chronologies and maps. In this bibliographic essay, Tang analyzes the debates that have developed over four decades in PRC historiography on Japan through 1949. Issues from periodization and feudalism to expansionism, fascism, and foreign relations are all outlined here. Tang's clear and accurate footnote references, in conjunction with the book's extensive classified bibliography, provide a good introduction to further reading in the rapidly growing body of Chinese scholarship on Japan. From here, one might go on to read Wu Anlong 武安隆 and Xiong Dayun's 熊達雲 still more comprehensive on Chinese historiography about Japan, published in Japanese by Rokkō shuppan in 1989: Chūgokujin no Nihon kenkyū shi 中國人の日本研究史 [A History of Chinese Scholarship on Japan], reviewed by Joshua A. Fogel in Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies 53.2 (December 1993), pp. 550-564.

As a mark of this book's significance, and the general improvement in the intellectual exchange across the two sides of the Taiwan Straits, a paperback fanti 繁體 printing is now available in Taiwan as well.