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Japan in the American Century is Kenneth B. Pyle's reflection on his lengthy academic career by "gather[ing] my thoughts on the extraordinary relationship of the United States and Japan during the past century" (449). Tracing the U.S.-Japan alliance from the late nineteenth century to the present, with special focus on the transformative years surrounding 1945, Pyle seeks to enlighten an explicitly American audience to a "deeper understanding of the impact that we Americans have had on Japan's people and civilization" (449). Pyle's assessment of this impact is a mixed one. While he examines how the United States' post-1945 global hegemony altered Japan's political, economic, and cultural order, he also asserts that Japan's "ancient and complex civilization" and "deeply resilient...conservative tradition" has repeatedly resisted American attempts at transformation (4, 1). This is an ambitious undertaking. Yet like the relationship it seeks to explain, it is marked by inner tensions and contradictions.

Pyle builds on former diplomat and policymaker George Kennan's 1977 assertion that the U.S.-Japan alliance was an "unnatural intimacy" as the starting point for his analysis.¹ For Pyle, this "intimacy" has been "unnatural" because the United States and Japan embody fundamentally different values, historical experiences, and cultural traditions. The United States, he claims, is a "child of the Enlightenment" with a "republican heritage of liberty, democracy, and individual rights" (2). Americans have therefore long believed that their values are universal and that their system of governance "provide[s] a template for how world order should be organized" (4). In contrast, Japan's culture is the product of "collectivist norms of solidarity, consensus, community, and respect for hierarchy and status" (2). Equally important, Japanese actions and reactions have often been driven "by a complex psychology of ambition, pride, self-doubt, and anger," making Japan especially sensitive to feelings of humiliation (33). These differences, to which Pyle regularly returns

¹ George F. Kennan, *The Cloud of Danger: Current Realities of American Foreign Policy* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1977), 109.

throughout the book, profoundly shaped the two countries' policies and their interactions with each other throughout the "American century."

While historians often balk at such sweeping generalizations, which verge on cultural essentialism, they are important for Pyle's intellectual agenda. As he makes clear throughout the book, his mission is to show that over the last seventy years, Japan has "devised its own path to modernity" by "gradually [remaking] invading influences to suit [its] own purpose and distinctive cultural identity" (251). Rather than a triumph of the United States' self-assigned mission of democratization, postwar Japan and the U.S.-Japan alliance demonstrate the persistence of indigenous values and cultures; the Japanese have put a distinctive cultural imprint on American attempts at postwar reform. Pyle's main target is the persistent assumption among policymakers and thinkers that American liberal values and practices are universal and thus form the logical endpoint of modernity, beliefs held by modernization theorists and "Washington consensus" neoliberals alike (285). The durability of Japanese cultural traditions therefore demonstrates that there are different paths to modernity. In this, Pyle claims, Japan offers instructive lessons not only about the past but also for the future of American power. As Asia increasingly becomes the center of the global order, Americans would do well to grasp that "as newly rising Asia countries emerge" they "will not readily conform to our notions of universal liberal values" but will instead forge "multiple modernities" (384). Pyle does not ever fully define "modernity," leaving it uncertain as to whether he means specific technological achievements, political constellations, economic and/or social organizations, or some combination of all these. Yet he clearly holds that both the United States and Japan are "modern" civilizations.

For Pyle, the U.S.-Japan alliance is "unnatural" not only because these countries embody fundamentally distinct cultural values. Equally important are the circumstance of its creation. Pyle asserts that Franklin Delano Roosevelt's adoption of unconditional surrender during World War II is the key to understanding the United States' approach to postwar Japan. Roosevelt insisted on such a policy in order to have a "free hand to create a new American-centered world order" and "reform and remake Japan from root to branch" (3). Pyle is critical of this decision, which forestalled an alternative negotiated end to the war, for multiple reasons. It lengthened the war and dictated the destruction of Japanese cities and horrific violence against civilians, particularly the use of the atomic bomb. By cutting off the option of negotiations, it empowered Japanese hardliners, who proved continuously willing to sacrifice Japanese lives even as it became evident that the war was lost. Pyle rightly notes that historians have often focused too much on the discussions in the summer of 1945 and the "decision" to drop the bomb rather than examining and criticizing the ideological framework that made the use of the atomic bomb possible. Born of "moral fervor," unconditional surrender made "the total submission of the enemy" seem necessary and natural (84, 104).

This logic undergirded American ambitions to radically transform Japan after the war through a military occupation. For Pyle, this misguided policy "deprived" the Japanese "of a unique opportunity to reform themselves according to their own history and tradition" (143). The postwar occupation, then, should not be described as democratizing Japan because democracy must be achieved, rather than imposed through "alien institutions and values"; Japanese democracy therefore developed through a longer "evolutionary process" and was not bestowed in 1945 (143, 8). Much of the modern Japanese experience, Pyle asserts, comes back to the American adoption of unconditional surrender. Befitting this claim, the chapters assessing the development and implementation of this policy are the most detailed and convincing portion of the book. While we will never know if a change in U.S. policy could have facilitated Japan's surrender, Pyle's emphasis on this origins, implementation, and consequences of this policy serves to denaturalize the end of World War II and remind

American readers of the choices and human price behind America hegemony during and after the so-called “good war.”²

Unsurprisingly, the alliance that emerged from these “unnatural” origins has proved to be “twisted” and “contradictory” (246). For Americans, the alliance did not stem from the desire to aggregate American and Japanese power or “common purpose” against a shared enemy (for example, Pyle does not discuss Japanese anti-Communism at length). Instead, U.S. policymakers sought to control Japan, secure American bases, and prevent Japan from pursuing neutrality or an independent foreign policy (6). Similarly, Japanese policymakers did not find ideological community with the Americans. “Turning subordination to their advantage,” Japanese elites, perhaps cynically, seized on their advantageous position in the American-led global order to become a “trading state, uninvolved in international politics, standing for no clear political principles” (375). Only with the end of the Cold War, growing challenges to the American-led liberal order, and the rise of China has Japan begun to develop plans for its own national security, normalizing the U.S.-Japan alliance into one based on “reciprocity and common purpose” (352). Japan is therefore adopting a newly activist role in international politics: “Japan is regaining its voice. The political will and spirit first silenced by the trauma of defeat and then suppressed by the strategic priorities of a mercantilist foreign policy are resurfacing” (352).

In seeking to reflect on over one hundred years of both U.S.-Japanese relations and Japanese history, Pyle mostly relies on an extensive literature of secondary sources. His book therefore functions as a work of both historical and historiographical synthesis and his footnotes range broadly across many decades of literature, along with fruitfully utilizing the memoirs of both American and Japanese policymakers, including Kennan, former U.S. national security advisor and secretary of state Henry Kissinger, and longtime politician and former Japanese prime minister Miyazawa Kiichi. However, both the notes and the acknowledgements are dominated by male scholars. Pyle engages productively with the work of Christina Klein, Yukiko Koshiro, Dale Hellegers, and Amy Borovoy, among others.³ But important scholarship on relevant questions of national ideologies, conceptions of modernity, wartime planning, and gender and race goes unmentioned, including the research of Carol Gluck, Sarah Kovner, Naoko Shibusawa, Sabine Frühstück, Dayna L. Barnes, Mire Koikari, Sayuri Shimizu, Susan L. Carruthers, and Franziska Seraphim.⁴ In particular, many of these

² Historians such as Richard B. Frank and Tsuyoshi Hasegawa have emphasized the extent of Japanese preparations for an American invasion and the lengthy Japanese discussions about surrender, discussions that persisted after the U.S. bombing of Nagasaki and Soviet invasion of Manchuria. See, for example, Richard B. Frank, *Downfall: The End of the Imperial Japanese Empire* (New York: Penguin Books, 1999) and Tsuyoshi Hasegawa, *Racing the Enemy: Truman, Stalin, and the Surrender of Japan* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005).

³ Christina Klein, *Cold War Orientalism: Asia in the Middlebrow Imagination* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), Yukiko Koshiro, *Imperial Eclipse: Japan's Strategic Thinking about Continental Asia Before August 1945* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013), Dale Hellegers, *We, the Japanese People: World War II and the Origins of the Japanese Constitution* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001, 2002), Amy Borovoy, *The Too-Good Wife: Alcohol, Codependency and the Politics of Nurturance in Postwar Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

⁴ See, for example, Dayna L. Barnes, *Architects of Occupation: American Experts and Planning for Postwar Japan* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2017); Susan L. Carruthers, *The Good Occupation: American Soldiers and the Hazards of Peace* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2016); Sabine Frühstück, *Uneasy Warriors: Gender, Memory, and Popular Culture in the Japanese Army* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007); Carol Gluck, *Japan's Modern Myths: Ideology in the Late Meiji Period* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985); Mire Koikari, *Pedagogy of Democracy:*

works emphasize the construction of national ideologies and the impact of on-the-ground interactions between Americans and Japanese, interactions that complicate narratives about the major ideological and cultural forces shaping the U.S.-Japanese relationship.

Pyle is critical of the belief that “universal” American values exemplify the highest form of modernity. Yet his emphasis on the durability of Japanese culture, on its “ancient and complex civilization,” risks reinforcing the hierarchies he seeks to dismantle (107). Indeed, in emphasizing the presence of “multiple cultural paths to modern civilization,” he accepts “modern” as a distinct historical stage. In doing so, Pyle invokes hierarchical concepts of “advanced” and “backward” cultures and societies, describing Japan as “economically backward” in the mid-nineteenth century (16 – 17, 19). What is more, it is not always clear if Pyle believes that all modernities are equally valid. Though he asserts that the Western liberal tradition is not modernity’s only possible realization, he utilizes ideas and values derived from European and American development and political practice (quoting, for example, Alexis de Tocqueville and John Stuart Mill) to assess the reality and nature of Japanese democracy. For example, in talking about divergent American and Japanese conceptions of law, he notes that “the rule of law is an essential foundation of a democracy” (340). While “Americans’ commitment to the rule of law has always been strong,” the “Japanese approach to law is markedly different”; even after reforms of the occupation, “the rule of law [in Japan] has been limited by traditional values that discourage litigation and the assertion of individual rights” (340, 341, 344). Pyle criticizes American excesses in imposing their own visions on the world, yet the book also implies that the United States has achieved a higher level of democratic modernity than Japan.

Indeed, the causal role of Japanese “culture” and “values” in shaping Japan’s modernity is not always clear, as shown in Pyle’s discussion of the role of women in Japanese society. Noting that the occupation “took great pride in its reforms to benefit women,” Pyle traces the mixed legacies of such reforms by citing contemporary surveys to demonstrate the ways in which Japan lags behind other countries in the number of women legislators and in indices of gender equality. For Pyle, this is an example of women’s “ambivalence” (309). “Japanese women,” he notes, “have lagged far behind the women of most other countries in the *pursuit* of gender equality” and that “the reasons are debated but in general, women do not find politics attractive” (*italics mine*, 309, 314, 315). While such language implies that the lack of gender equality in contemporary Japan is the result of women’s choices, Pyle acknowledges elsewhere the persistence of ideological and cultural values as well as larger structural challenges. He identifies the family as “the fundamental Japanese social institution,” which provided “training in collectivist values and hierarchy, respect for age, male superiority [and] sacrifice for the overall good” (294). Is it really women’s “ambivalence,” then, that fosters their failure to seek equality, or is it the persistence of hierarchical cultural, economic, and political structures? If an individualistic vision of gender equality is as alien to Japanese culture as Pyle implies, and unique to “Western” versions of modernity, how should we understand Japanese women’s unequal position within a distinct Japanese modernity?

Feminism and the Cold War in the U.S. Occupation of Japan (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2008); Sarah Kovner, *Occupying Power: Sex Workers and Servicemen in Postwar Japan* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002); Franziska Seraphim, *War Memory and Social Politics in Japan, 1945 – 2005* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2006); Naoko Shibusawa, *America’s Geisha Ally: Reimagining the Japanese Enemy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006); Sayuri Shimizu, *Creating People of Plenty: The United States and Japan’s Economic Alternatives 1950 - 1960* (Kent: Kent State University Press, 2001).

The inner tensions that arise from Pyle's framing of the relationship between culture and policy also shape his efforts to synthesize American values and traditions. Throughout the book, Pyle describes the United States as the embodiment and promoter of "liberal values," including human rights, individual rights, freedom, democratic capitalism, and liberty (2, 384). He therefore claims that the goal of American foreign policy has been to create a liberal international global order; this was the point of postwar occupation, and this why Pyle worries that Donald J. Trump, who cares little for human rights and international organizations, raises "uncertainty" about the future (352). It is less clear, however, how much these values actually represent the American experience or shape U.S. policymaking. On the one hand, Pyle aptly demonstrates how such ideas—especially the importance of individual rights and unleashing the individual conscience—fundamentally undergirded the initial goals of the U.S. occupation of Japan. On the other hand, he repeatedly notes that the United States has violated these values in its foreign policy in Japan and beyond. The initial reform agenda of the occupation, for example, was "compromised" from the start "by retaining the imperial institution and the powerful conservative bureaucracy" (145). The start of the Cold War further perpetuated "a steady backtracking on...democratization goals" as U.S. leaders "more and more aligned themselves with the old guard Japanese conservatives who had little commitment to liberal democratic ends," a shift that shaped this alliance for the following decades (146, 148). This was replicated more broadly beyond Japan, as Cold War-era U.S. policymakers soon gave into "the pressures to compromise these [democratic] values" with "compromise readily rationalized as necessary for the greater good of victory in the global conflict" (196). But if the United States has so frequently retreated from these liberal values, to what extent did they truly guide policy? What is the role of such values if so much of American policy vis-à-vis Japan—a country so fundamentally shaped by American hegemony—was a deviation from, rather than a reflection of them? Perhaps the alliance with Japan helps us to better understand the many ways that the American project—including its values—was inherently less liberatory or egalitarian than its architects claimed. As U.S. policymakers' record in Indonesia, Congo, or Vietnam indicates, the "liberal international order" was made not through the projection of ideals, but through their much more complex intersection with geopolitics.

Ultimately, Pyle's work forces the reader to think critically about the relationship between culture, values, and policies. It reminds us how crucial it is to think carefully about the entangled histories of the United States and Japan as the consequence of aggressive and imperial warmaking by both states. *Japan in the American Century* is an important critique of the totalizing narratives of unified modernity that have so often bedeviled American thinking. As its unresolved tensions show, however, the task of replacing this narrative's hierarchies and assumptions is not yet complete.

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