



## *The Japanese and the War: Expectation, Perception, and the Shaping of Memory* by Michael Lucken.

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In *The Japanese and the War*,<sup>1</sup> author Michael Lucken<sup>2</sup> picks out the principal threads of Japanese war memory from the 1930s up to the present day. With special interests and expertise in social history, ethnography, modern art, and aesthetics, he is the first scholar to develop an integral and organic study of his subject. He also provides an illuminating comparative analysis of Japanese and European societies' experience and remembrance of war. He sets out his thesis in his introduction:

What characterizes perceptions of World War II in Japan is not a rejection of national responsibility or victimization but rather a structural opposition between several memories—a situation that stems from ideological stances, political acts, and personal experiences that predate 1945. Just as in France, in 1940, Gaullism and communism began to develop different yet complementary narratives that determined how history was perceived after 1945, so in Japan, the dividing lines separating the various memories must be traced back to the war period. While the decisions taken during the American occupation certainly played a vital role, they are connected to the different representations of the national bond prior to defeat. (xvii–xviii)

Lucken sketches the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century seeds of Japanese aggression in the 1930s and 40s:

The highly peculiar form of totalitarianism adopted by the Japanese government between 1940 and 1945 was a radicalization of the spirit of institutions created between 1870 and 1900 to counter Western colonialism.... In Japan's case, fear played a crucial role. The colonial ambitions of the great Western powers had ceased to pose a real threat to Japan by the end of the nineteenth century, but the image of the West as predator long persisted in the collective imagination, with memories of this reawakened by the Russian Revolution and the war in Siberia. A further factor was the fear of being bombed. In the late 1920s the Japanese developed a fear of aerial attack, which the destruction caused by the Great Kantō Earthquake of 1923 enabled people to imagine in frighteningly real terms. These factors go some way to explaining both Japan's policy of continental conquest and the tragic heroism of its armies. (xix–xx)

The author fails to note that, although in the 1930s many of Germany's European neighbors feared a recrudescence of German expansionism and the possibility of air attacks, they did not embark on careers of preventive conquest like Japan's. Instead, he is preoccupied with the perceptions of Japan's artists and general population, rather than the motives of political and military elites who actually made war. He does insist, however, that "The figure of the emperor is a key to understanding Japan at war" (xi), and that Hirohito played a central role in instigating and sus-

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1. Orig., *Les Japonais et la guerre, 1937–1952* (Paris: Fayard, 2013).

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taining the conflict (81–86). Lucken certainly has company<sup>3</sup> in blaming the Shōwa emperor as he does, but there is at least an equal weight of opinion holding that Hirohito was dragged reluctantly into war; Lucken dismisses that view as a political artifice that Gen. Douglas MacArthur's occupation command devised to make it easier to govern the emperor's conquered subjects. The evidence is too sketchy and ambiguous to decide the issue one way or the other, but Lucken weakens his argument by leaning so heavily on the assumption of imperial guilt.<sup>4</sup>

Acknowledging that most Japanese did not clearly articulate their feelings and thoughts even when they did leave records, most of which were lost in the war, the author offers a clear image of Japanese social attitudes and behavior by applying an evolutionary perspective. Anglophone readers may be surprised by the (warranted) emphasis placed on French influences on Japanese intellectuals. Lucken detects growing resistance to foreign ideas in the 1930s, but describes Japan's brand of totalitarianism as "soft" compared to its European versions. Executions, "accidental" deaths, and "disappearances" were much rarer and imprisonments, while harsh, were briefer and less brutal. Most political detainees were released after a year or two and allowed to take up some remnants of their previous lives. The point was not to punish but to remake them into compliant servants of the national unity regime. Though the cosmopolitanism of Japanese intellectual life survived, it came under pressure.

National unity, *kokutai*, became a cult, but, unlike in fascist and communist Europe, it was blended with a major religion, in this case, Shintoism. The institutional embodiment of *kokutai* was the Imperial Rule Assistance Association (IRAA), which served the functions of political and social control that the fascist parties filled in Europe (35–38). Yet the IRAA was the child not of insurgents in the shadows but of Prince Konoe, imperial cousin and three-time prime minister, who admired the "modernity" of European fascism. The book persuasively demonstrates that Japan's wartime "fascism" both resembled and differed from its western counterparts and exerted its hold on the population with less recourse to coercion.

Students of military history will appreciate the author's account of the shift of popular opinion in favor of a "psychological war, with victory going to whoever wanted it most, in accordance with Japan's belief in the absolute primacy of spiritual strength over reason and material strength" (47). This, combined with a faith in the justice of the imperial cause, made war seem both inevitable and righteous. At the same time, ample evidence shows that many held more "realistic" views and stressed Japan's deficit in material factors, particularly in the Navy. The author attributes the growing pro-war sentiment in Japan to totalitarianism, fatalism, and martyred romanticism (60–61).

Lucken takes up many fascinating and significant aspects of the Japanese war experience, including: the degree of Japan's totalitarianism; the power structure of the wartime state; Japanese analyses of American and British character and society; the barbaric cruelty of the campaign against China; the contradictions between Japanese colonialism and putative pan-Asianism; the venomous antisemitism among a people that had scarcely any contact with Jews; Japanese wartime and postwar funerary practices and commemorations; and the varying understandings of the atomic bombings.

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3. See, further, among others, Herbert P. Bix, *Hirohito and the Making of Modern Japan* (NY: Harper, 2000).

4. See esp., contra Bix, Noriko Kawamura in "Emperor Hirohito and Japan's Decision to Go to War with the United States Reexamined," *Diplomatic History* 31 (2007) 51–79), and *Emperor Hirohito and the Pacific War* (Seattle: U Wash Pr, 2015).

There are a few odd errors of detail. For instance, the author blames “Kwantung Army officers from the Special Higher Police” (45) for the arrest that initiated the infamous Yokohama Incident. In fact the Special Higher Police (*tokkō*) was an organ of the Home Ministry, staffed exclusively with civilian officers. The War Ministry had its own gendarmerie, the *kenpeitai*, which clashed with the *tokkō* over jurisdictional issues.<sup>5</sup> Curiously, Lucken also claims that

One of the fundamental stances of American historiography regarding the Pacific War is that the Japanese initiated hostilities as part of a long-nurtured plan, or a “ninety-three-year dream,” as is occasionally written in reference to the time between the American fleet’s arriving on Japan’s shores in 1853 and the country’s defeat in 1945. (57)

But he cites no source in all the vast American historiography on the war for such a “fundamental” stance. The same problem vitiates his assertion that “Presenting Japan’s opposition to America as revenge for the events of 1853 was a recurrent theme in Japanese propaganda both before and during the war” (74).

One wishes the author had extended his time horizon back before the rise of the Meiji state, which he sees as the root of Imperial Japan. The motives of the Meiji rulers are largely inexplicable without some consideration of the Tokugawa “bakuhan” state that they toppled. And most Japanese of the wartime-era would have known, as most do today, that Hideyoshi (1537–98), after forcibly unifying Japan after decades of civil strife, twice invaded Korea, intending to go on to conquer China and indeed the known world. Could this precedent not have served to rationalize twentieth-century imperial expansion on the Continent as a case of “manifest destiny?”

Notwithstanding such scarcely avoidable drawbacks, *The Japanese and the War* is a fresh and penetrating study of some key, but little-explored, issues in Japanese thinking about the Pacific War. Scholars, students, and other interested readers will be thankful for the grace and clarity of Michael Lucken’s exposition of the subject.

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5. See Elise K. Tipton, *The Japanese Police State: The Tokkō in Interwar Japan* (Honolulu: U Hawaii Pr, 1990).