

# H-Net Reviews

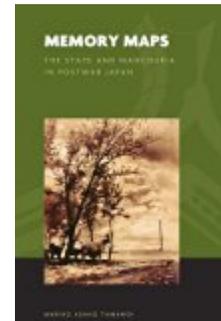
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

**Mariko Tamanoi.** *Memory Maps: The State and Manchuria in Postwar Japan.* Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2009. x + 211 pp. \$49.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8248-3267-4.

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## War, Memory, and Perspective

This book examines the lives of some of the Japanese colonialists in rural Manchuria, of the children who remained behind after 1945, and of Chinese who resided in Manchuria during the “age of empire” and after.[1] As one might expect, the research reveals a range of memories, from hopeful goals to bitter recriminations, but in so doing the author exposes the reality of history, that events cannot help but generate multiple and conflicting perspectives. The author herself appears to have succumbed to this reality, because while she initially intended to explore a particular set of prewar Japanese visions for Manchuria, a sudden realization compelled her to expand the study’s scope substantially. For this we are fortunate, because in juxtaposing these perspectives the study becomes much more valuable.

Mariko Asano Tamanoi’s ostensible goal is to write “the history of the present” (p. 3). By this she means exploring how some Japanese, Japanese-Chinese, and Chinese variously remember Manchuria, taking into consideration the reality that postwar thoughts themselves shift over time. This is in and of itself a laudable goal, but the author does not stop there. In dissecting these memories, Tamanoi meditates upon their relationships with the state, and in so doing provides food for theoretical reflection.

Four chapters comprise the core of this book, each creating a particular “memory map.” Here the term does not refer to imagined reconstructions of places that no longer exist, but rather denotes an effort “to organize, in

terms of time and space, the narratives of those who remember, and [to] reveal complex interactions between ‘the present’ and ‘the past’” (p. 19). Thus, each chapter looks back from several perspectives, and takes into consideration an array of subjective impulses. Tamanoi’s material is derived from both written and oral sources.

Tamanoi’s first map considers Japanese colonial settlers, sketching their Depression-era destitution, their hopes, and some of the realities about their lives in Manchuria. She usefully introduces the notion that colonists “carried the state with them,” because their hopes for the future and their views of how they interacted with non-Japanese in Manchuria reflected the views of wider Japanese society as imagined then (p. 49). Yet postwar memories of this era reflected an uncertainty as to how former colonists might ultimately choose to perceive it, because despite being part of a larger community many eventually claimed that the Japanese state had deceived them.

The second memory map explores repatriate memoirs to consider the often difficult means by which Japanese returned home, or perished en route. Many were victims of Chinese attacks, compulsory group suicide, rape, and disease. In the process of this mass flight, many children were left behind, some even sold. There is now an extensive literature available in Japan recounting this evacuation, as many have sought some means of catharsis or of fitting themselves back into Japanese society, or to simply inform other Japanese of what happened.[2]

Rending this experience more traumatic, however, has been the role of the Japanese state. Threading through Tamanoi's analysis here are painful realities: the desertion of Manchuria by Japanese officials and members of the military before the end of the war and the decision to have some two million Japanese overseas stay overseas after war's end. As a result, many of these memoirs are understandably critical of the Japanese state.

The third map considers orphans' memories. Official Japanese policy eventually relented to allow more than twenty thousand of those left behind to come to Japan, even though many had few, if any, actual memories of Japan. Yet if childhood memories were understandably hazy, later memories were not. Many who chose to return—of those who were allowed—often faced hardship. Although many Japanese sympathize with their plight, these people have had to contend with the loss of their adoptive families, culture shock, and suspicions that some misrepresented themselves in order to take advantage of Japan's relative affluence. Tamanoi concludes this chapter with what appear to be three case studies that highlight the ironies of this experience. The first reveals that Japanese social assistance is modest at best, and restrictive at worst. Despite living in an age of globalization, these people are not always considered genuine Japanese, and may have their benefits clawed back if they reach out to their adopted families. The second two note some of the dilemmas that arise in attempting to address these issues.

The final map addresses what is too often missing in studies of empire—voices of the colonized. Here Tamanoi reveals some perhaps unexpected findings, for in addition to memories of persecution and exploitation she also finds sympathy for Japanese rural settlers among Chinese, albeit chiefly after the Japanese surrender. Chinese memories of course had also to fit the popularly imagined needs of the Chinese state. More recent Chinese perspectives, such as those involving the orphans who returned to Japan, are less sanguine. Many adoptive Chinese parents were saddened to lose their children, as well as financially burdened, while others have appealed to Japan to look after those orphans who had not managed to return. This said, Tamanoi concludes the chapter by discussing three orphans who opted to stay in China rather than return to Japan, reminding us against assuming that certain desires might be automatic.

The concluding chapter assesses the role of the state in the construction of these memories. Most obviously, while many Japanese may well have “carried the state

with them” into Manchuria, they were often sorely let down by the state at war's end and after. More important to Tamanoi here though is how various Japanese defined the state over the twentieth century. Many Japanese, before and after the war, seemed to have identified the state with a particular national body (*kokutai*), one typically conceived in narrow and ethnic dimensions. Japanese activities in Manchuria, however, had to take place within a more mixed definition, even if Japanese ascribed to themselves a leading role. As a result, Japanese views of the state in the age of empire were necessarily ambiguous, but Tamanoi suggests that “the memoirists and interviewees discussed in this book recounted to us their subjective beliefs about the Japanese state in several specific historical settings, in which they tried either to separate themselves from the state or to attach themselves to it” (p. 151). That is to say, as circumstances and personal needs were not always congruent, individual perspectives could gravitate towards or differ considerably from the needs of the state. At the same time, Tamanoi notes that any individual's beliefs and actions may not always coincide. These realities produce “holes and gaps” within and among the memory maps, and their shifting perspectives expose their assumptions. For example, rural colonists may well have perceived themselves in synch with the state as they went to Manchuria, and afterwards saw themselves as marginalized, yet they could eventually still attempt to seek compensation as citizens. For Tamanoi, “[i]t is these processes that made the Japanese state *appear* to exist to them (and to us)” (p. 152, emphasis original). People expect the state to act in certain situations, and in those expectations reify the state.

Tamanoi's study also illustrates points less abstract. Perhaps most pointedly she shows that the Japanese empire was not monolithic, including also an enormous number of poor Japanese.[3] In a similar vein, Tamanoi echoes work by Lisa Yoneyama indicating that the sense of victimization felt by Japanese regarding the war era is similarly less than monolithic.[4] This said, Tamanoi rightly points out that the perspectives she uncovers are limited—they cannot serve as an alternative history. Memories are subject, inescapably, to interpretation.

Tamanoi's own interpretation is laudable. Although she implies that she does not seek to use oral testimony to create a subaltern view (p. 21), she is clearly engaged in rescuing forgotten voices. Rather than castigating former settlers as allies of a predatory military, for example, she suggests that it is more useful to see them as unwitting accomplices, victims of “rural poverty in the age of empire” as well as of “postwar Japanese society,

which saw them only as victimizers” (pp. 51-52). Likewise, rather than become skeptical of memoirs that focus only on selective events, such as repatriation, she suggests we mine these experiences for “historical lessons” rather than “blame the victim” (p. 83). And in a book focusing on Japanese in China, she reminds readers of some of the tragic experiences of Chinese, including some in Japan. While not grinding a theoretical agenda, this is still history from below, and a sensitive one at that.

In coming to terms with memories of life on a colonial estate and then in a Japanese prisoner of war camp, Ernest Hillen concludes that “[m]emory, finally, is all we own.” [5] Memory serves a variety of purposes, but it is ultimately personal. Tamanoi’s study illustrates this well. Memory helps people understand the wider world yet evolves over time, rendering broadly shared shifts and meaningful avenues of inquiry. This book will appeal to diverse readers, including not only those interested in Sino-Japanese relations, international relations, and the history of empire, but also to those interested in the burgeoning fields of migration and memory studies.

#### Notes

[1]. “Manchuria” typically refers to China’s three northeastern provinces, indicating the homeland of the Manchus. Although it would more accurate to include

stretches of now Russian territory and exclude areas that would more appropriately be labeled Inner Mongolia, the provinces of Heilongjiang, Jilin, and Liaoning have been taken to define Manchuria popularly because of the Japanese seizure of them after September 18, 1931—the Mukden Incident—and their incorporation as the quasi-state of Manchukuo. This said, Chinese and Japanese texts often place the term “Manchuria” within quotation marks to indicate its indeterminate status, and preface the term “Manchukuo” with a prefix meaning “fictitious” or “false.”

[2]. I have noted some of this literature in Bill Sewell, “Postwar Japan and Manchuria,” in David W. Edgington, ed., *Japan at the Millennium: Joining Past and Future* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2003), 97-119.

[3]. An earlier work considering Japanese in rural Manchuria not listed among Tamanoi’s references is Okabe Michio, *Manshūkoku* (Tokyo: Sanseidō, 1978).

[4]. Lisa Yoneyama, “Memory Matters: Hiroshima’s Korean Atom Bomb Memorial and the Politics of Ethnicity,” *Public Culture* 7, no. 3 (1995): 499-527.

[5]. Ernest Hillen, *The Way of a Boy: A Memoir of Java* (Toronto and London: Penguin, 1994), 200.

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