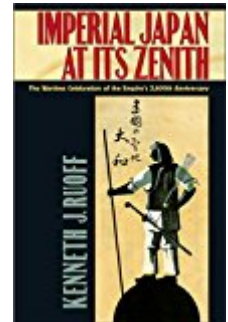


Kenneth J. Ruoff. *Imperial Japan at Its Zenith: The Wartime Celebration of the Empire's 2,600th Anniversary.* Studies of the Weatherhead East Asian Institute, Columbia University, Series. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010. Illustrations. xv + 236 pp. \$29.95, paper, ISBN 978-0-8014-7978-6.



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This slim volume provides worthwhile insight into mass participation of the Japanese populace in their nation's struggles during the 1930s and 1940s. While occasionally losing focus, Kenneth J. Ruoff argues that due to the population's voluntary and active participation, Japan was a fascist country. Ruoff also challenges the Dark Valley conception of a Japanese populace held hostage by its government. The author's evidence for this public fervor comes from a mix of government and private sources that illuminate the construction of a national mythos centered on the charismatic, and entirely fictional, Emperor Jimmu, who was widely acclaimed and reaffirmed by individuals through ritual, tourism, and public works.

In a brief discussion in the introduction, Ruoff defends his evaluation of Japan as fascist during the 1940s. He selects Mark Neocleous's definition of "fascism" as the most suitable: "Fascism is a politics implicit in modern capitalism, involving mass mobilization for nationalist and counter-revolutionary aims, militarized activism and a drive for an elitist, authoritarian and repressive

state apparatus, articulated through a nebulous vitalist philosophy of nature and the will" (p. 19). To counter Peter Duus and Daniel Okimoto's arguments of Japan as not a fascist country, Ruoff stresses that Emperor Jimmu was a substitute for a flesh-and-blood charismatic leader, even if Japan never generated single-party rule as Germany or Italy did.

Ruoff's first chapter, "The National History Boom," discusses how different levels of Japanese society were party to the creation of a new national identity. The chapter ties together the results of the Imperial Rescript on Education of 1890 with the construction of national history in the lead-up to the 2,600 year celebration (February 11, 1940). Using the government as a foil, Ruoff explains how ordinary citizens, academics, and publishers created and embraced the Emperor Jimmu foundational myth. One example that brought together the public, the academic, the government, and the publisher was the *Kokutai no Hongi* (Cardinal Principles of the Polity of Japan); the book was released in 1937, becoming the standard text on

morality and national history, and it even spawned its own cottage industry of commentaries (governmental and academic) that clarified the text for the average Japanese consumer. In the same vein, Ruoff compares Japan's creation of a national myth with Germany's and Italy's fostering of new national myths. For the author, Japan's new identity construction for the 2,600th anniversary focusing on Emperor Jimmu parallels Italy's generation of an "Augustan Exhibition of Romanity" (1938) and Germany's use of an imagined mythological past for symbolic purposes.

The second chapter, "Mass Participation and Mass Consumption," continues Ruoff's argument of a potentially fascist Japan. Ruoff elucidates how mass ritual, labor service, and other far-reaching public events were used to strengthen the ties of the Japanese people to their government. The twelve one-minute long, precisely coordinated, empire-wide public chants demonstrate, according to Ruoff, how pervasive the government's power was. In an interesting reminiscence, an elderly Japanese woman reflected how similar today's North Korea's political control is to what Japan's was during the 1930s and '40s.

The other primary theme of chapter 2 is that Japanese consumerism fed into political control. Ruoff wisely notes that department stores' main motivation was profit and that the 2,600th anniversary served as a great means of increasing revenue; Ruoff's point about the government's contradictory stance on consumption is useful to his argument. As long as consumption could be cast as being dutiful, especially as related to tourism, then the government could sanction the practice as contributing to citizenship. The inclusion of department stores also touches on Japan's modernity and capitalist practices, supporting Ruoff's fascist claims.

Following in the theme of dutiful consumption, the third chapter, "Imperial Heritage Tourism," continues the author's quest to prove that Japan was fascist. The crux of the chapter is

that local and national governments and organizations created an industry for wide and voluntary consumption of Japan's material culture and heritage by the masses. The two primary examples Ruoff provides are Miyazaki prefecture in Kyushu and Nara prefecture in Yamato. These locations marketed themselves as national heritage sites with distinct links to the founding of Japan. Further, Ruoff explains how tombs and monuments were expanded for propaganda purposes in a fashion similar to that done by Nazi Germany.

The third chapter presents some fascinating issues. In a closed society like Japan's, and especially with the numerous unwritten but highly binding social expectations, one wonders if all the tourism Ruoff cites as voluntary was always voluntary. And, if some of the tourism as well as department store exhibits can be said to have multiple causes, does that undermine the validity of using voluntary tourism as a tool to measure Japanese commitment to a military ideal as well as a regime? If the validity is not undermined, does the reevaluation change the worth of that understanding; in other words, is someone who pays perfunctory respect to a place as part of a trip in the same category as someone who purposely designed the trip around the heritage site? Also, as Ruoff notes, the government wrote of some tourist activities, such as hiking and swimming, as promoting physical fitness, and, while not explicitly linked to promoting nationalism, exercise created a more useful citizen. Furthermore, while the author provides statistics on tourism to demonstrate the increased Japanese visits to Miyazaki and Nara, he does not compare these numbers to the overall number of tourist visits or to other locations and activities. Either comparison could have strengthened his argument immensely by demonstrating the popularity of national heritage tourism as compared to other types of tourist activity.

While the book's first three chapters deal explicitly with the theme of mass participation in

fascist Japan, the last three chapters focus on tourism in imperial Japan and Japanese emigrants' experiences in connecting with the empire. In chapter 4, "Touring Korea," and chapter 5, "Touring Manchuria's Sacred Sites," Ruoff shifts his focus to the paradox of conflicting assimilation and retention of the locations as exotic tourist destinations. Bureaus like the Japan Tourism Bureau and companies such as the Government Railways of Chōsen promoted Korea and Manchuria as alien places in which Japanese tourists could experience something new, while nearby having the comforts of modern Japan. Tourism was used to stimulate the region's economy, especially the transportation infrastructure: "By 1940, the railway system within Korea was closer to Japanese standards in terms of its advanced stage of development than it was to French Indochina or to China" (p. 115). This creation of an infrastructure was part of Japan's modernization and the generation of an empire that repeated the racial hierarchical practices of other powers. While the author explores fascism in both chapters, the spotlight is on colonial tourism as self-administered citizen training and imperial policy; mass participation and mythos construction are moved offstage. In particular, national heritage sites like Port Arthur and logistics surrounding tourism (marketing, travel, and lodgings) are discussed in detail while explanations of how colonialism demonstrated Japan's fascist tendencies are left for paragraphs in the chapters' conclusions.

The final chapter of the work, "Overseas Japanese and the Fatherland," describes how emigrant Japanese communities were contacted by the Japanese imperial government and encouraged to visit Japan during the 2,600th anniversary for the Congress of Overseas Brethren. The foreign nationals were supposed to serve as bridges between the Japanese government and other nations, which would help to validate Japan's behavior as an imperial power. Those bridges failed, but in the attempt Ruoff sees more ways by which Japan was fascist. The mythical figurehead, Em-

peror Jimmu, was used as a totem to inspire Japanese people to attend the conference where one of the main discussion topics was racial purity and lineage. While this chapter does not continue all of Ruoff's earlier themes, it does show more potential connections for a definition of fascism to be applied to Japan.

Ruoff's work is a fascinating study from a military and potentially transnational history perspective. As a military history, it falls squarely within the realm of home-front studies with its closest comparable work being John W. Dower's *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II* (1999). The two primary transnational elements that appear constantly in the book are comparisons of Japan with Germany and Italy, and an examination of tourism at large in the Japanese Empire. An example of the author's repeated comparisons include the similar behavior of Miyazaki prefecture and Landsberg am Lech to proclaim the city as the birthplace of the nation's leader. The remarks are interesting, but Ruoff's study is not designed or executed as a comparative transnational history. Therefore, while the book can fit within military or diplomatic history topically, it is best seen as a national political study, fitting comfortably beside such works as Carol Gluck and Stephen R. Graubard's edited collection *Showa: The Japan of Hirohito* (1990).

Ruoff's *Imperial Japan at Its Zenith* is an interesting course. The entrée of the material is presented earliest with the hors d'oeuvre last. Ruoff argues that Japanese citizens willingly committed to the militarization of Japan and claimed tourism as self-administered citizen training. Further, the author presents Emperor Jimmu as both a mythical foundational figure on which to base a uniquely Japanese worldview and as a focal point for the Japanese government's need for a charismatic figure behind which it could rally its people. Ruoff succeeds in fitting Japan into his definition of fascism and adding it to the discussion of Japan's modern trajectory.

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