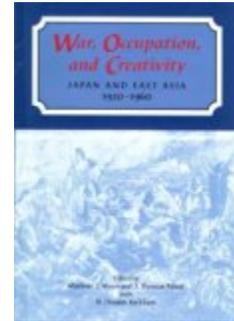


Marlene J. Mayo, J. Thomas Rimer, H. Eleanor Kerkham, eds. *War, Occupation, and Creativity: Japan and East Asia 1920-1960*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2001. xiii + 405 pp. \$30.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8248-2433-4; \$60.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8248-3022-9.

Reviewed by Bill Sewell (Department of History, Saint Mary's University)
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Cultural Terrains of the Japanese Empire

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Like many volumes based on conference proceedings, at first glance this intriguing collection only presents a rather broad integrating theme. In this case the general goal was to address a particular gap in the literature concerning relations between the Japanese and other East Asians that is apparent in “the aesthetic life” as evidenced in such important areas of human creativity as literature and the visual and performing arts” (p. 1). The volume therefore seeks to provide “the first systematic, interdisciplinary attempt to address the social, political, and spiritual significance of the modern arts both in Japan and its empire—and former empire following defeat in World War II—during the period from 1920 to 1960” (p. 2).

These are grand objectives and difficult to meet. What follows are four articles on Korean and Taiwanese artists and literati living within the constraints of the Japanese empire, four articles on Japanese producers of culture compelled to refocus their crafts during the Pacific War, and four articles examining Japanese dramatists and writers seeking to display their talents or pursue political agenda during the American Occupation. A closer examination reveals that the third group of essays may be further divided into two categories: one focusing on artists trying to keep their craft alive and three addressing individuals hoping to revolutionize Japanese society. Thus, while the essays as a group are not exactly “systematic” (most obviously missing are prewar Japanese perspectives of the colonies, perspectives of

Japan by postcolonial Koreans and Taiwanese, and the perspectives of mainland Chinese or Southeast Asians of any era), they do provide useful vantage points from which to survey key aspects of this varied experience.

The first third of the volume, titled “Empire: Occupied Territories,” includes essays on a Korean poet, a Taiwanese novelist, official exhibitions of paintings in Taiwan, and trends in Korean painting. Together they demonstrate that artists from the subject populations not only could not help but collaborate in some way with the colonial regime if they were to succeed in their craft, but also that this collaboration contributed to their success. Exploring the work of the Korean poet Sowol, for example, David McCann illustrates that the brief Korean renaissance of the 1920s incorporated foreign techniques, despite the misery inherent in the early years of foreign occupation. Angelina Yee’s essay on the novelist Yang Kui similarly reveals an accommodationist rather than a confrontational attitude. Like Sowol, Yang studied in Tokyo and eventually developed a style that demonstrated a variety of foreign influences. Nor were the influences purely artistic as both Sowol and Yang came to more nuanced perceptions of the Japanese—after coming to Japan not all Japanese could be hateful in their eyes. Neither individual would eventually evolve into simple Korean or Chinese nationalists either. Yang, for example, tended towards socialism and criticized the Guomindang pointedly in the postwar era.

The experience of Taiwanese and Korean painters

displays a similar ambiguity. In his essay considering the sixteen official art exhibitions organized by the colonial government between 1927 and 1943, for example, Wang Hsiu-hsiung concludes that on the whole the Japanese presence stimulated Taiwanese painting. Painters became proficient in Japanese and Western styles, and while some forms of anti-Taiwanese discrimination were apparent, Wang finds no evidence to suggest that Japanese artists gained more awards simply because of their nationality. Indeed, Taiwanese artists even served as jurors (p. 97). Such perspectives are underscored in Youngna Kim's essay on Korean painters in the 1930s in which it is apparent that Japanese artists and Korean painters returning from Japan also helped promote new styles of painting on the Korean peninsula. In the window open to Korean painters before the advent of war—and official restraints on artistic freedoms—many proved able to become proficient in an array of new styles.

This first section supports a key perspective in the introduction, that “[d]uring this time, Japan played multiple roles of occupier and occupied, colonizing and colonized, recreator of the modern and inventor of tradition, teacher and disciple, victimizer and victim. The colonized were pupils, dissenters, rebels, collaborationists, and postcolonialists” (p. 3). As illustrated here, the relationship between imperialists and imperialized was often more ambiguous than what was once thought. Unfortunately, however, this section concludes the volume's concern with the perceptions of non-Japanese.

The second section of this volume, “Conflagration: World War II in East Asia and the Pacific” explores wartime attitudes of Japanese artists and intellectuals, illustrating some of the positions artists held during these years. Haruko Taya Cook, for example, looks at Ishikawa Tatsuzo, a writer who visited Shanghai and Nanjing in January 1938 and tried to publish a book based on his experience in March of that year. Unfortunately for Ishikawa, his realistic style got him into trouble with the censors who deemed his manuscript an anti-war statement. Given the recent slaughter of Chinese civilians in Nanjing, censors may have been a bit overly zealous, but what makes this essay especially intriguing is that suppression occurred despite the self-censorship practiced by Ishikawa and the publisher, Chuo Koron. Indeed, that self-censorship even failed to stave off later police investigations. Still more ironic, Ishikawa's depiction of events did not protect him in the postwar era when the same manuscript was sometimes perceived as a work celebrating war.

Thomas Rimer's account of the playwright Kishida Kunio dovetails with Ishikawa's experience in that Kishida also inclined towards realism in a book based on his experiences following Japanese troops in China in 1937 and 1938. Kishida's observations, however, were more psychological than graphic, emphasizing the need to understand Japanese and Chinese actions rather than simply depict them. Kishida eventually concluded that the Japanese had to be constructive as well as destructive, thereby inducing the Chinese to accept the Japanese empire rather than resist. Kishida did not, however, question the Japanese presence in China. Rimer thus concludes that Kishida's book “stands as a tacit, weary testimony to the powerlessness of the intellectuals when faced with the realities of military control” (p. 184).

An artist usually considered to be one of the more enthusiastic supporters of the military was the prolific wartime painter Fujita Tsuguji. Mark Sandler's essay, however, reveals that Fujita's early career was decidedly different; it took not only the “authoritarian perversion of the prewar Japanese art world” by the military but also personal failures on the part of Fujita to encourage him to switch from society portraiture to military propaganda (pp. 189-93). Once converted, however, he applied his talents prodigiously.

A contrasting perspective is offered by Kyoko Hirano's study of the filmmaker Itami Mansaku, father of the late Itami Juzo. Having contracted tuberculosis, Itami did not make any films after 1938, but that was not all that restrained him. Hirano portrays Itami as critical of not only the war, but also of Japanese in general. This attitude extended to the point that after the war Itami could not bring himself to join the anti-war movement and condemn those who had collaborated with the military. Itami's position was thus more consistent than many, something Hirano demonstrates well by contrasting him with the wartime and postwar attitudes of Kurosawa Akira (p. 220).

The final section of this volume, “Aftermath of Total War: Allied-Occupied Japan and Postcolonial Asia”, considers Japanese intellectuals coming to grips with the legacy of empire and war under the constraints of foreign rule. In this era, a no-longer imperial Japanese had suddenly to conform to the rules of another, becoming semi-colonized themselves.

The oscillating career of the cartoonist Kato Etsuro illustrates nicely important long-term shifts within Japanese society at large. To Rinjiro Sodei, Kato's life exhibits a “double conversion” (p. 236), meaning that while

a youthful Kato exhibiting strong leftist inclinations became an ardent nationalist after 1939, a repentant postwar Kato swung back to communism rather than dally with democracy. Such wild swings seem logical to Sodei because it seems to him that Kato was a genuine political cartoonist, someone more interested in substance than merely getting laughs, and as such was committed to the construction of a new and better Japan. Thus with Kato, the phenomenon of *tenko* (apostasy) comes full circle, a course apparent among many Japanese intellectuals.

Of all the essays in this volume, Marlene Mayo's assessment of the predicament faced by postwar Kabuki is perhaps the most straightforward. Hoping to purge from Japan any lingering aspects of a "feudal mentality," naive American authorities initially sought to fundamentally reorganize the Japanese theater. Given Kabuki's long experience in evading official censorship, however, not to mention the language barrier, it should not be surprising that the theater proved able to resist these efforts. It became even easier though as some Americans grew to love Kabuki, and shifting American priorities for Japan—the so-called "reverse course"—refocused occupation policies. When all was said, the occupation actually helped expand Kabuki's audience and transform it into a more national institution.

The final two essays explore some of the intellectual dynamics apparent in the celebration of decadence evident in the early occupation years, an era sometimes known as "*kasutori* culture".[1] Two of the most noted figures of the era were Tamura Taijiro and Sakaguchi Ango.

Tamura's ostensible goal in *Shunpuden (The Biography of a Prostitute, 1947)* was to bring to light the phenomenon of the "comfort women" (*jugun ianfu*). Eleanor Kerkham, however, demonstrates correctly that Tamura's underlying goal was more personal—the promotion of a theory of living, one that celebrated the body (*nikutai*) as concrete and real, something that contrasted markedly with the prewar and wartime emphasis on the *kokutai*, the abstract "national essence" (or national polity) that all Japanese were supposed to hold dear. Essentially, Tamura wanted the Japanese to jettison things vague and imprecise in favor of the logic of physical needs, beginning with the carnal. Thus, his theory of the body (*nikutai no ron*), allowed Tamura to challenge the essence of what it meant to be imperial Japanese in order to get Japanese to rethink their circumstances and invent themselves anew.

Tamura, a repatriated soldier, sought to contribute to the reconstruction of Japan through new priorities and

heroes. To Alan Wolfe, Sakaguchi Ango wanted similarly to aid in the emergence of a new society. Indeed, by extracting the philosophical essence of Sakaguchi's work, Wolfe finds his decadence to be humanistic in origin. What Sakaguchi argues is that while the cataclysm of war allowed Japanese to reinvent themselves by destroying all of their prewar bindings, the destruction only went so far. Japanese still needed to fall further in order to cleanse themselves of all mistaken loyalties. Armed with a clean slate, Japanese could only then regenerate society humanely, careful not to fall into any new traps (such as those apparent in either democracy or communism). It is for those reasons that Sakaguchi became such a well-known promoter of decadence.

In her introduction to this volume, Marlene Mayo suggests that "[t]hroughout all of these essays run common themes of artistic creativity, either in confrontation or in collaboration with cultural imperialism or in indifference, resignation, and retreat" (p. 24). As such they display more than creative aspirations; these essays document struggles with hegemonic discourse. This suggests that perhaps the weakest aspect of this fascinating volume is the introduction itself (or the lack of a conclusion). Although Mayo invokes Edward Said on the first page and notes some of his shortcomings with regard to Japan, she does not seek to apply his perspectives (p. 25, n 2).[2] Nor does Mayo consider any of the perspectives derived from postcolonial studies. This is a shame, since some assert that historians need to give greater consideration to theory and the topics addressed in this volume seem to be precisely the kind of material appropriate for creating such insights.[3]

At the least, as a group the essays here reveal that cultural creativity is certainly more dynamic and autonomous than terms like "hybridity" often imply.

Notes

[1]. The term comes from *kasutori shochu*, a powerful but poorly refined alcoholic drink made of sake dregs. For a brief discussion of this phrase see John W. Dower, *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II* (New York: Norton, 1999), pp. 107, 122-3, 148-58.

[2]. Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978) and Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Knopf, 1993).

[3]. For one perspective highlighting the need for theory see H. D. Harootunian, "Postcoloniality's unconscious/area studies' desire," *Postcolonial Studies* 2:2 (1999), pp. 127-47.

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