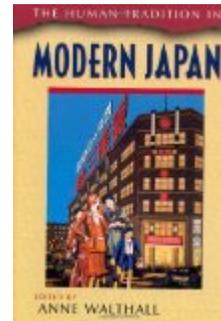


# H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Anne Walthall, ed. *The Human Tradition in Modern Japan*. Wilmington, Del.: Scholarly Resources, 2002. xx + 241 pp. \$27.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8420-2912-4; \$84.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8420-2911-7.

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## History in the Lives of Everyday People

### History in the Lives of Everyday People

This anthology is a collection of biographical essays that examine the lives of a wide range of individuals from a portrait of the Tokugawa-era Princess Shinanomiya Tsuneko (1642-1702), to the popular post-War musician Misora Hibari (1937-1989). The individuals chosen for inclusion were perhaps not the most significant individuals in terms of shaping modern Japanese history. As the title implies, however, they were selected to add to a discourse on the human tradition within modern Japanese history. I believe this serves two purposes.

First, the collection of biographies connects the larger stream of Japanese history to its impact on individuals in Japan. In that respect, this volume will be of interest to those who feel history is not complete without examining how historical change affects people. It may also be useful in undergraduate classes when the instructor feels that a more personal connection will further engage the students in the process of learning Japanese history.

Second, the scope of the biographies has implications that address the nature of historical scholarship, particularly with respect to Japanese history. Much of higher education is oriented toward creating a discipline-based schemata of knowledge. If we view the discipline-oriented schemata as a structure such as a house, what this work also does is to step outside to see if the view changes. The work as a whole addresses the question of whether or not a rational approach that views history more in terms of forms and structures is truly adequate to

understanding why and how those very forms and structures came to be. In some of the lives described it is apparent that events beyond these individuals' rational expectations had a profound effect on the course that those lives ultimately took. It is important that scholars occasionally stop and consider whether the same might not have been true for individuals who played a more central role in our definition of history, and what implications that might have on the historical models with which we view the world.

One of the strengths of this volume is Anne Walthall's introduction, which places the work within the larger context of Japanese history scholarship. I also found the essays by Yoshikuni Igarashi and Gail Lee Bernstein to be particularly effective. Readability is an important characteristic of biographical writing and I found these two essays to be a little more readable than the others. Igarashi's essay is a very fluid description of how Shouichi Yokoi's life was influenced by the larger context of the Pacific War. Yokoi was a Japanese soldier on the island of Guam at the time it fell to American marines in August 1944. He was among the small clusters of Japanese soldiers who refused to surrender, hiding in the jungle and not returning from the war until 1972. The essay has additional interest in that it considers how Yokoi chose to represent himself, which is tied implicitly to how we choose to represent history. In the course of Bernstein's essay describing Matsuura Asami, a clear picture of the man develops. He was a rural landlord and father of fourteen children. He was exceptional in the

fact that he sent all fourteen children on to receive college degrees in the early part of the twentieth century. The essay is primarily a portrait of a Japanese father, but also sheds light on how a peasant family took advantage of the promise of education offered by the modernizing state.

A possible weakness is the degree of authenticity. To create a greater sense of authenticity, I would like to have seen more of the subject's voice in the form of quotations or paraphrases. It should be pointed out, however, that there may be a negative correlation between my desire for greater authenticity and my familiarity with the covered topic. In essays with less familiar subject matter,

I wanted to hear the voice of the subject more. On the other hand, I think it can reasonably be said that in essays of this length, it is difficult to bring the voice of the subject in while maintaining a coherent discussion. While the essays may not be as authentic as a longer biography or autobiographical material, the authors have done a good job in characterizing the lives of these individuals for our consideration.

This would be an appropriate text for use in an undergraduate Japanese history class, and might also be used along with longer biographical materials on the graduate level.

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