



W. Puck Brecher. *Japan's Private Spheres: Autonomy in Japanese History, 1600-1930.* Leiden: Brill, 2021. xx + 364 pp. \$157.00, cloth, ISBN 978-90-04-44754-7.

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Public Individuality: Ferber on Brecher

How do the private (individual) and public (state or institutional) realms interrelate to each other in a society? Are there significant differences between Western countries and in the East? If there are differences, what are the reasons for them? As this review's title signals, Japan is not a *peculiar* case but rather a plausible historical example of state-society relationships and their changing roles in everyday life. Reading this book will offer an opportunity to reconceptualize the importance of this topic, not just in Japan or East Asia but for Western countries, too.

In this historical monograph, Brecher offers various philosophical and historical answers to the questions that opened this review. Although in the last few decades there have been successful attempts to explain the characteristics of social interactions in Japanese society, to the best of my knowledge, this is the first monograph that systematically applies East Asian (mainly Chinese and Japanese) religious and philosophical concepts to changing relations in the public and private in a systemic and systematic way. The author examines how the "public" and "private" continually evolved between the Tokugawa period (1600-1868) and the so-called modern periods,

namely the Meiji era (1868-1912) through the first years of the Showa period in the 1930s. The two dimensions of social interactions are interdependent, as in every society, but as Brecher thoroughly examines and analyzes here, both had been simultaneously experiencing socioeconomic and cultural changes.

One of the most important perspectives of the author is how the original public (*ko*, or in Chinese, *gong*) and the private (*shi* and *si*, respectively) are historically based on Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism. The philosophical and religious principles were applied by the central authorities represented public morality, and accordingly these moral principles, similarly governed individual (or private) conduct. The state, even in the Tokugawa period, clearly defined and redefined the priority of public duties for individuals and drew strict lines between "individually motivated" actions and public duties.

Paradoxically, as the warrior state centralized, developed, and became more efficient, it was unavoidable that more and more often, private duties took precedence over public ones. Although the chapters on the Tokugawa period masterfully use case studies to explore the changing relations

between the two realms, interestingly, the author does not link these changes to the financially weakening bakufu, lower-class social groups, or merchants' emerging role in financing the warrior state.

The Meiji period certainly was "enlightening" for both the public and private. It was not only a result of eager learning and selective emulation of Western ideas on individuality, human rights, and freedom, but also the specific nature of Japanese modernization (catching up and getting even), which required efficient and affluent local and central institutions. These institutions (the modern army, police system, and educational facilities) transmitted the moral (i.e., social) duties of the enlightened individuals to become loyal subjects of the Meiji state. Nevertheless, modernizing the public (the state) required limiting the private, or more precisely, redefining the private as a new concept. Brecher's work helps one to understand clearly why constructing a modern state together with modern (and in a way Westernized) institutions created an inherent and invisible contradiction between business-oriented individual behavior and the publicly required loyalty to the nation-state. This contradiction was partly resolved before the enforced opening of the country, as John Sagers's important monograph, *Origins of Japanese Wealth and Power* (2006), proves, and partly explained by the "new" ideologies that advocated the national interest as profit. (As Fukuzawa Yukiichi succinctly quipped: learn to earn, earn to learn.) Therefore, pedagogical and educational concepts and practice proved to be crucially important, especially from the third decade of the Meiji period, in shaping pupils' attitudes toward the "new" principles of the Meiji state in order to become public, and thus loyal individuals.

The twentieth century's second decade, according to the author, did bring significant, more articulated changes in the dual dimensions of public and private, namely by the *kokutai* (national polity) ideology and its practical, state-initiated

"movements" (*undo*). One of the most important (although a bit short) subchapters of this monograph is "Public Fitness as Statecraft (1920s-)." It demonstrates that the "national polity" from the 1920s pragmatically linked the individual to the state and the private realm to the institutionalized ideology, the body's strength with the state's strength and the individual spirit to the state's capacities. Of course, this was more than a simple propagandistic tool. It also included the extension of health care, educational facilities' mandatory physical training, and, when the new technology, the radio, became available, regular programs designed to educate mainly the urban populace how to be strong and fit. I think it is not an exaggeration to state that the public and private amalgamated relations (both conceptually and practically) and paved the way to the "efficient" mobilization of the populace in the years after Pearl Harbor.

This monograph requires careful reading since its language primarily targets an audience that is familiar with Japanese history and its terminology. As such, however, it can be used as excellent teaching material in graduate schools. The book is not only recommended to historians of Japan and East Asia but also to social scientists who are interested in the dynamically changing relations between private and public in general.

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