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Historical Perspectives on Contemporary East Asia

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Goldman, Merle and Andrew Gordon (eds.): *Historical Perspectives on Contemporary East Asia*: (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), xiii + 362 pp., pbk \$ 19.95. ISBN 0-674-00098-6.

Intended to serve as an item on the reading list of an undergraduate course, this book was designed as a follow-up volume covering essentially the same terrain as James B. Crowley, ed., *Modern East Asia: Essays in Interpretation* (1970). Each of the ten chapters offers an interpretive perspective on a different phase of the modern history of China, Japan or Korea. The introductory piece by Warren I. Cohen sets the stage by placing East Asian history in its international context. The coming of the West upset the order of things in a part of the world where for thousands of years the inhabitants had set their own terms for contact with the outside world. East Asian countries were forced to deal with problems of an unprecedented nature. Each subsequent chapter (five on China, three on Japan and one on Korea) explores the ways by which one of these countries has struggled to achieve national wealth and independence in the face both foreign pressure and the conditioning circumstances imposed by its own history and (changing) culture.

The editors imposed no requirement that chapters be coordinated around a common set of themes, yet predictably, in view of the dominant trends in contemporary scholarship, a number of topics readily emerge. One can easily trace a few common threads that render the whole coherent.

Nationalism, for example, is shown to have emerged as a powerful force for change. Resistance to foreign encroachment proved to be strong and contributed to major transformations in national culture and politics. In China, Mary Backus Rankin demonstrates, the inability of the Qing state to devise a successful response to foreign aggression contributed to its own demise. Nationalism, sparked by foreign imperialism, worked against the interests of a regime that, in an already weakened state, was incapable of retaining its mantle of legitimacy. It fueled the growth of an oppositional public opinion that, while it may not have affected government policy directly, helped foster reformist sentiment and an ethos of citizen participation that were instrumental in bringing down the imperial government. Meanwhile, in Japan during the Meiji-Taisho era, nationalism was harnessed to serve the needs of a centralizing state devoted to a vigorous program of defense-oriented Westernization. David L. Howell shows that Japanese leaders in pursuit of modernizing ambitions utilized a variety of techniques, including compulsory education, universal conscription into the armed forces and imperial pageantry, to generate a sense of belonging to a national community. State-sponsored nationalism was a powerful force for modernization, a "special sauce" that completed the Japanese recipe for a modern nation-state. Carter J. Eckert demonstrates that in Korea the colonial experience strengthened and intensified a pre-modern sense of national entitlement that persists to this day. A "deep-seated psychocultural disposition," this "will to greatness" has inspired a thrust for national achievement that has transcended political and ideological differences in a nation that has been divided for more than half a century.

A second theme concerns the inner dynamics of change in each of these countries. Andrew Gordon shows that in postwar Japan the consequence of modernization has been not the enhancement of social cohesion but a condition of unprece-

dented political and cultural diversity and contention. Similarly, R. Keith Schoppa shows that a tendency toward disintegration in China, the product of particularistic loyalties that suffused traditional Chinese society, was exacerbated by the forces of change. New social groups bearing their own self-conscious identities – the military, youth, women, and urban workers – accentuated the pluralistic quality of Chinese society. William C Kirby demonstrates that the Nationalist government during the 1920s and '30s did much to lay foundations for a strong party-state, but Schoppa follows through with an analysis of the extraordinary efforts the Communist regime took to foster cohesion, showing that, ironically, the results were disintegrative. Land reform and collectivization “cellularized” the rural world, and the policies of the Great Leap forward produced not social cohesion but fragmentation and a legacy of “social suspicion,” i.e., division into economic/political categories and an “enemy ethos,” that led to the disasters of the Cultural Revolution.

Nowhere in East Asia has modernization led to liberalism. By the end of the 20th century Japan had become a hugely inegalitarian society in which the masses were ruled by a narrow oligarchy of state bureaucrats and corporate executives. Meanwhile, in Korea, even in the South, the will to national greatness has been so dominant a presence within the intellectual and political arenas that the voices of those seeking to participate in the formulation of Korea's modern identity have been heard only to the extent they have been seen to contribute to the goal of national greatness. In China, of course, the record is clear. As Merle Goldman and Andrew J. Nathan point out, the one-party dictatorship erected by the Maoist regime trapped individuals for life in a “virtual caste system” that brought the power of the state directly into people's lives and exploited natural social cleavages in order to invoke terror. The excesses of the Maoist period are gone, political campaigns are no longer a common feature of Chinese life, but the regime still persecutes its critics and adheres to an elitist political model.

Another theme in this collection is the degree to which change in East Asia has been conditioned by the past. In each of these countries the events of the past two centuries have been powerfully influenced by the traditional settings, and some of these essays devote considerable ink to discussion of continuities in East Asian culture. Indeed, since the Crowley (ed.) anthology was published a great deal has been uncovered that sheds light upon the interaction between the forces of tradition and modernity. Thus, the authors of this volume have had available to them thirty years of new scholarship. The result is a subtle and more carefully nuanced picture of modern East Asian history than was possible when Crowley's collection was published. The book should be very well received.

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Xu Dixin and Wu Chengming (eds.): *Chinese Capitalism, 1522–1840*. (London: Macmillan Press/New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), xl + 517 pp., \$ 79.95. ISBN 0-312-21729-3.

Study of the origins of capitalism in China became embroiled in politics during the Cold War. Seeking to justify his own revolution which was based upon the Marxist paradigm of social development from feudalism to capitalism to so-