

**Robert I. Hellyer, *Defining Engagement: Japan and Global Contexts, 1640-1868*. Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Asia Center, 2009. 314 pp. ISBN 978-0674035775, \$39.95.**

*Reviewed by Martha Chaiklin*

Once upon a time, there was a land far, far away, all the way at the end of the world. It was so far away only a few intrepid souls ventured there but the rulers did not tolerate strangers and even the bravest were turned back at the gates. Occasionally an especially persistent adventurer managed to breach the barriers to this kingdom, but even these men were expelled shortly thereafter. The people gave up their guns inside this isolated realm and peace reigned throughout the domain. One day a warrior named Matthew C. Perry broke through the wall and this magical land was opened to the world...

Some version of this fairytale, buttressed by the wide dispersion of Engelbert Kaempfer's *History of Japan* with its essay "Should Japan Remain Shut-up" after its release in 1727, has dominated the Western perception of early modern Japan for hundreds of years. It has persisted even though for over forty years, at least since Donald Keene's *The Japanese Discovery of Europe* (Stanford University Press, 1969), scholars have shot arrows at this myth. Yet none has managed to slay it completely; the isolation myth rises from the ashes of the onslaught like a phoenix.

Robert Hellyer's *Defining Engagement* is the latest volley in this war of recurring ideas. Rather than a frontal attack on the nature of isolation the book is an oblique turning maneuver that feints to diplomatic engagement, claiming to argue "the Edo-period system of foreign relations...allowed Japanese leaders...to remain flexible and pursue nuanced approaches to intercourse with the outside world" (4), which turns out to be a Trojan Horse for economic determinism. Hellyer does note that foreign trade and diplomacy are interdependent. Nevertheless, it is clear that economic forces, rather than bureaucratic, diplomatic or intellectual ones, are the lenses of this book. Its central assumption is that economic forces are always rational and thus it is economics that form the basis of "rational systems of engagement" (4). Hellyer uses this structure to create a two-headed dragon of isolation and centralized authority to slay.

The first head, which is that of isolation, is easily dispatched because the persistence of this myth exists only among non-specialists. There are few surprises in this discussion but the details of some categories of imports that are often ignored such as Chinese medicines and a better incorporation of Chinese trade into the economic historical discourse based on the work of Japanese scholars adds new refinement to English language literature on this topic. The second head of centralized authority is where the real contribution of this book lies. This is achieved through the incorporation of two important domains into the larger picture of foreign trade, each located on the periphery.

Specifically, the histories of foreign trade in two *tozama han* (domains that fought against the founder of the Tokugawa shogunate in 1600 and excluded from shogunal office), Satsuma and Tsushima are highlighted. Hellyer shows how investigation of their trade policies and relations with the *bakufu* can produce a more nuanced understanding of the Japanese 'engagement' with the rest of the world. While conversely the *bakufu* is portrayed rather monochromatically, the added discussion of Satsuma, which funneled Chinese trade through the Ryukyus and through Chinese smuggling to its own shores, and Tsushima which conducted trade with Korea, are a much needed synthesis of scholarship on Japan's foreign trade. Nevertheless, the bold claim that "Satsuma and Tsushima...together conducted Japan's foreign relations" (250) seems more for effect than accuracy.

After the introduction, which outlines "the entrenched ideology of seclusion" (6), and some ideas about globalization in relation to Japan, the seven chapters of the book proceed chronologically. The first three chapters are primarily synthetic, and give a quick look at the first two hundred years of the early modern era. The incorporation of the *tozama han* with foreign trade, Satsuma and Tsushima, into a single economic narrative effectively complements Ronald Toby's *State and Diplomacy in Early Modern Japan* (Stanford, 1991) by fleshing out some of the underlying motivations for political actions. The fourth chapter is a bridge chapter, almost an introduction to the real book. It surveys the international economic changes of the nineteenth century. The final three chapters focus on the nineteenth and are clearly, as Hellyer himself states, the "heart" of the book (22). With the exception of certain highlights, scholarship on the first half of nineteenth century Japan has been almost entirely absent until now.

As such these chapters would be of interest regardless of content, but the incorporation of the domains of Tsushima and Satsuma into the

larger narrative is a perspective that has been almost entirely lacking. They are a significant contribution to our understanding of a pivotal period in Japanese history. The fifth chapter bears the fruit of the synthesis of the previous chapters through the examination of various encounters on the fringes of the Japanese state. The increasing number of encounters caused by Western imperialism have not been unrecognized but the emphasis on a local perspective is an element that has been lacking in previous discussion. By tying various encounters with foreigners, which until now had usually been presented as a laundry list, into a tapestry of encounter and reaction, Hellyer gives these events new relevance. Chapter 6 then progresses to trade after the opening of the ports, and the politics behind government decisions. Much of the chapter focuses on Satsuma's economic policy and commerce, which give greater context to both subsequent economic and political events. The last chapter focuses on the efforts of Tsushima to obtain assistance in the final years of shogunal authority through both these channels and those of the imperial court. The Conclusion is really a mini-chapter that analyzes the events of early Meiji to support the conclusions drawn in the earlier parts of the book.

However, for a book that contains "global contexts" in the title, these contexts are limited, focusing on Japanese responses to other East Asian powers. This is problematic for a number of reasons, and especially obvious in the almost total omission of the Dutch in this interaction. While the Dutch were not involved directly in trade with Satsuma or Tsushima, and in that sense do not necessarily require a central focus in this book, the best documentation of Chinese imports are contained in Dutch sources, which were never directly examined. Secondly, the decision to excise the Dutch leads to some misunderstandings of how Dutch trade worked, its importance what was imported and the reasons for Dutch actions. This also points to a related problem—the use of translations for specialized vocabulary—the "special order system" refers to *eis* (Dutch) or *atsuraimono* (Japanese), but to use it without explanation will mystify those without background. Similarly, clearing house, while perhaps the closest English equivalent to *geldkamer* (Dutch) or *kaisho* (Japanese) does not adequately explain this office, which had a greater range of responsibility.

Hellyer's book does not quite "define engagement" as its ambitious title claims, but it does provide another sharp weapon to the arsenal of the next anti-sakoku champion through its emphasis on the complex political interplay between *tozama* domains and *bakufu*. Although the argument may be too subtle to kill the monster for non-specialists, it

will be useful for those historians who seek to better define the nature of “*sakoku*” in Japan.

**Birgit Staemmler and Ulrich Dehn, eds., *Establishing the Revolutionary: An Introduction to New Religions in Japan*. Berlin and Zurich: LIT Verlag, 2011. 408 pp. ISBN: 978-3643901521, \$44.95.**

*Reviewed by Daniel A. Métraux*

One of the most fascinating phenomena in modern Japanese history is the rise of several waves of New Religions. Researchers can trace three waves of religious revival, beginning first in the late Tokugawa period and stretching to the 1930s, a second wave in the immediate postwar era and a final third wave which came to fruition in the 1980s. Today these religions claim tens of millions of followers not only in Japan, but also increasing numbers of non-ethnic Japanese abroad. These religions play important roles in Japanese society and political and cultural life and represent an interesting facet of the globalization of Japanese culture.

Birgit Staemmler, a researcher at the Japanese Department of Tübingen University in Germany, and Ulrich Dehn, a professor of the Study of Religions, Missiology, and Ecumenical Theology at the University of Hamburg, have produced a comprehensive and well-written volume, *Establishing the Revolutionary: An Introduction to New Religions in Japan*. This work begins with four long introductory chapters that analyze the historical development as well as the doctrinal, sociological and economical aspects of Japan’s new religions. The body of the book consists of chapters on ten of these religions which analyze each of their history, doctrines, membership, present situation and activities. While Staemmler and Dehn have written some of the chapters themselves, they have solicited significant contributions from such highly respected scholars in the field as Susumu Shimazono, Professor of Religious Studies at the University of Tokyo, and Masako Watanabe, Professor of Sociology at Meiji Gakuin in Tokyo. The result is a fascinating handbook about these new religions.

The body of the book consists of studies of ten of the larger or most controversial of Japan’s New Religions including Ōmoto, Seichō no ie, Risshō Kōsei-kai, Kōfuku no Kagaku and Chino Shōhō and the Pana-Wave Laboratory. I paid special attention to Ulrich Dehn’s eighteen-page analysis of the Sōka Gakkai, my major focus of scholarship. Ulrich presents a very

clear and well-developed study of Sōka Gakkai with an excellent overview of its history, doctrines, former relationship with Nichiren Shōshū, and its social and political activities. The commentary on the split between the Gakkai and Nichiren Shōshū is especially compelling. Ulrich presents a credible history of the foundation and growth of the Gakkai's unique political party, the Kōmeitō, including its controversial decision to join the Liberal Democratic Party's ruling coalition between 1999 and 2009. There are, however, a couple of factual errors here. Ulrich states that between 1955 and 1964 when Kōmeitō was founded Sōka Gakkai candidates had been elected to both houses of parliament when in fact they only entered the upper House of Councillors. Ulrich also fails to note the defeat of this coalition in the 2009 national elections.

The introductory chapters provide an in-depth study of the defining characteristics of Japan's New Religions. Birgit Staemmler provides a useful analysis of the historical development of these religions from their origins in the mid-nineteenth century to the present. Yoshihide Sakurai, professor of Sociology at the graduate school of Hokkaido University, has produced a very original chapter on how the New Religions have devised very successful methods of collecting money and financing their operations while the dwindling flow of contributions to traditional temples means that many of the older temples may be forced to shut down in years to come.

Masako Watanabe focuses on a sociological approach to the New Religions noting that a prime motivation for joining a new religion "is said to be a serious shortage in the fulfillment of fundamental needs, as in poverty, illness and strife. This kind of deprivation is felt to be the result of individual failure, but if looked at from a larger perspective, it is often the product of social conditions" (70). Many of these religions experienced their greatest growth during the chaotic period right after World War II when huge social change threatened and dramatically altered the lives of most ordinary Japanese. Watanabe notes that these religions have been successful because they can "provide an emotional place of belonging and bring about psychological and spiritual stability" as they also "can give meaning to people's lives, make their lives worth living again, and lead to rediscoveries of human solidarity" (87). These religions' emphasis on small group activities promote a sense of inclusiveness so essential to Japanese culture and their relief activities after major disasters have won them a favorable image in the public eye.

The best chapter in the book is Susumu Shimazono's study of "The Concept of Salvation" among the New Religions. Shimazono stresses that their focus on the concept of finding true happiness here and now is crucial to their success. He notes that the New Religions differ from those of traditional Buddhist schools in that they deal with everyday problems facing people in their present lives: "In new religions, even when their teachings refer to a world after death, salvation is not thought to be achieved in a world beyond or a different dimension, but to be realized as a happy life in this world.... [S]alvation means a calm life in which poverty, sickness, and discord have been resolved and one's days are spent in peaceful and harmonious relations with family and friends.... Health, wealth and peace are the embodiment of salvation" (45).

The only real fault of Ulrich's study of Soka Gakkai is his almost complete failure to address the organization's international activities. Sōka Gakkai International has chapters in over 200 countries and territories with perhaps two million or more members. Sōka University has established an affiliated college in California that is growing rapidly. While membership growth of Sōka Gakkai has stagnated in Japan, its international membership, especially among Koreans and ethnic Chinese in Southeast Asia, has grown rapidly in Japan. While other authors do address the international activities of several of the New Religions, a separate chapter on the international expansion of these religions would have been a welcome addition to this work.

Erica Baffelli and Birgit Staemmler's chapter on Aum Shinrikyō is an excellent overview of the group's controversial past. The main value of the chapter, however, is its study of the transformation Aum into two separate small groups, Aleph and Hikari no Wa, and the political and social consequences of Aum's controversial and murderous activities in the mid-1990s.

Staemmler and Dehn's *Establishing the Revolutionary* is the best general introduction to Japan's New Religions available today. The chapters are well-written and meticulously researched using excellent and up-to-date source material. This work belongs in the Asia section of every major personal and institutional library.

**Alan Tansman, *The Aesthetics of Japanese Fascism*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009. 355 pp. ISBN 978-0520245051, \$55.00.**

*Reviewed by Laura Specker Sullivan*

As Alan Tansman writes in the conclusion to *The Aesthetics of Japanese Fascism*, aesthetics has a striking power in the formation of a culture of fascism (280). In other words, aesthetic experience, when considered in opposition to logical thought, has the power to upend critical judgment for the sake of momentary pleasure. In this book, Tansman traces how a certain style of aesthetic production in 1920s and 30s Japan bled into fascism, and may have helped fascist ideas gain traction in Japanese society. The specific aesthetic moments that Tansman traces are not *necessarily* fascistic; his interest lies in the effect that aesthetic sensibilities can have on politics and culture. Thus, this work investigates the significance that an aesthetic sensibility can have in a time of increasing fascism, rather than the inherent fascist tendencies of such a sensibility. This entails recognizing, as Tansman writes, that fascist aesthetics is a *style* of thought and representation, without requiring any specific content (278).

In the introduction Tansman lays out his premise that “culture is where fascism forms its ideological power, and...Japanese fascism was fueled by a literary sensibility” (1). Throughout the book, Tansman explains this sensibility and how it may have contributed to fascism. What is crucial to understanding Tansman’s point is that he does not think that the writers he considers necessarily intended to create fascistic works (although some may have). On the contrary, he writes that, “writers can aesthetically sow the seeds of a fascist atmosphere without intending to do so” (2). Tansman argues that certain writers, including Yasuda Yojūrō, Kawabata Yasunari, and Kobayashi Hideo, were responding to the sense of loss of legitimate culture that was commonly experienced as a result of the conditions of modernity. As Tansman writes, the “atmosphere of crisis” that such an experience engendered led to the exploration of narrative forms that could creatively respond to crisis by providing a sense of safety in beauty that could calm the Japanese public. To be sure, the sense of beauty that was developed by these writers reflected native Japanese aesthetics, but in the context of the rise of fascism in Japan this native aesthetics became ripe for political use. Thus, Tansman argues that these aesthetic works allowed for a

“slip from art to politics” (23) that may have made the Japanese public vulnerable to fascistic ideology.

Chapter 1 describes the beginning of this creative response to modernism through the works of Akutagawa Ryūnosuke and Kobayashi Hideo. According to Tansman, these writers played with language in order to disorient their reader from set ideas about the meanings of words, ideas that they believed were dominant in the “direct, positivistic prose” that was then common in Japanese writing (35). That is, they wanted to free language from the world of logical, political assertion in order to convey the sense of loss, and ultimately of vertigo, that accompanied their experience of modernity. For them, “language has lost its poetry” (40), and so the only solution to the situation was to revive the Japanese linguistic tradition through the poetic novel. By treating language more as music than as logical statements, the poetic novel enables a free play of words in which rhythm allows for the blending of words and meanings. Such a tactic disorients readers, lulling them into acceptance of the beautiful form of the written word while at the same time disengaging their critical faculties. This makes the poetic novel ideal ground for the growth of fascism, if Tansman is correct in claiming that the fascist aesthetic is an experience to which one “submits oneself while feeling oneself to be free” (227).

This point gets to the heart of Tansman’s idea of the fascist aesthetic and the specific way in which he thinks that such an aesthetic functioned in Japanese society. Essentially, Tansman’s contention is that writers in 1930s Japan, beginning with Akutagawa, were so dissatisfied with the political, positivistic language of the time that they attempted to unhinge language, so to speak, to allow for a more free-flowing, natural, and universal linguistic culture. However, such an aesthetic sensibility could not rest idle in this free, universal linguistic space, but rather retied language to the concrete condition of the Japanese people. This secondary move was a direct response to the threat perceived in Western cultural hegemony, and the Japanese writers who employed it were trying to recreate native Japanese space, thus restoring its power. While Akutagawa does not necessarily take this secondary step, it is developed by the writers that Tansman considers in the latter portion of the book, most notably Yasuda Yojūrō (Chapters 2 and 3) and Kobayashi Hideo (Chapter 6).

Yasuda and Kobayashi stand out because of the clear way in which their particular aesthetic sensibilities lead to moments of violence. Tansman reads Yasuda as using the image of the Japanese bridge to convey the sense of a connection, both of the present with the past and of nature with human

artifice. This “harmonized linking” (83) essentially provides the sense of binding that serves as a successful antidote to the splintering of modernity. Yasuda takes this one step further and connects the human aspect of bridges with self-sacrifice, in that bridges were also used as burial grounds. However, given the collapsing of human artifice into nature, this makes human death part of the natural, beautiful, aesthetic moment represented by Yasuda’s bridges. In this way, violence and death are aestheticized, and included within the eternity of the aesthetic moment, which then becomes the fascist moment.

Kobayashi also allows the lure of the aesthetic moment to supersede recognition of the realities of violence. In Chapter 6, we see how Kobayashi’s ability to see the devastation in Manchuria was blocked by his enjoyment of the sublime music of Mozart. Inspired by Mozart, Kobayashi’s attentiveness to the natural, formal beauty of everyday life made him blind to the concrete human suffering before him. This led Kobayashi to go as far as “endorsing state restrictions of expression in the name of beauty” (246) and even writing a semi-laudatory account of Hitler’s thought (241). Therefore, Tansman argues that Kobayashi’s ignorance of the political, ethical dimension of his experience allowed his aesthetic moments to become fascist moments.

While the other aesthetic sensibilities that Tansman considers are not as blatantly tied to violence as those of Yasuda and Kobayashi, Tansman sees them as contributing equally to the rise of fascist culture in 1930’s Japan. In the novels of Kawabata Yasunari and Shiga Naoya (Chapter 3), as well as the successful film *Mother Under the Eyelids* (Chapter 5) and the government publication *The Essence of the National Polity* (Chapter 4), Tansman traces similar responses to modernity through repetitive, musical language and images that upended the Japanese masses’ critical judgment and made them susceptible to the slip into violence that is so clear in Yasuda and Kobayashi. In these other works, Tansman remarkably presents how the fascist aesthetic arose as a cure for modernity in 1930s Japan (254), despite the fact that fascism is never explicitly present in these works. Indeed, he himself acknowledges that his goal in this work was not to consider obvious proponents of the fascist aesthetic, such as Mishima Yukio, but “figures that... were slippery in the ways they connected beauty and politics” (257). Tansman’s consideration of such figures in this manner is certainly groundbreaking.

However, it seems that the critical conclusion of this work is that the “fascist aesthetic is always available for cultural use” (255). While

Tansman specifically studies the interaction of a certain aesthetic sensibility with a given place and historical time, the takeaway is that we should always be attentive to (and wary of) the power aesthetics has to interact with and change a given national culture. Tansman has succeeded at making the case for this conclusion, and the hope is that it will lead to a greater understanding of and respect for the power of aesthetics.