



ISSN: 1500-0713

Japan 1941: Countdown to Infamy by Eri Hotta

Reviewed by Daniel A. Métraux

3.11: Disaster and Change in Japan by Richard J. Samuels

Reviewed by Daniel A. Métraux

Haruki Murakami and Postmodern "Japan": The Culture of Globalization and Literature by Miura Reiichi

Reviewed by Kazutaka Sugiyama

Source: *Japanese Studies Review*, Vol. XX (2016), pp. 181-189

Stable URL: <https://asian.fiu.edu/projects-and-grants/japan-studies-review/journal-archive/volume-xx-2016/book-reviews-for-2016-combined.pdf>

Eri Hotta, *Japan 1941: Countdown to Infamy*. New York: Vintage Books, 2013. 320 pp. ISBN: 978-0307739742, \$16.95.

Reviewed by Daniel A. Métraux

One of the most interesting questions I ask my students in my Modern Japan and East Asian History courses is: “Who is responsible for Pearl Harbor?” This is a far more difficult question than one might think. Certainly, the Japanese carried out surprise attacks on Pearl Harbor and other British and American bases throughout Asia, but one can argue that the American embargo on oil and scrap iron, products that Japan desperately needed to keep its economy and war machine alive, was a warlike measure that placed great pressure on Japan. Ultimately, most of my students play it safe and place blame on both the United States and Japan.

Historians have written several books on Pearl Harbor, but there are relatively few by Japanese scholars who objectively investigate Japan’s role in the attack. Eri Hotta, a well-respected Japanese historian and writer, has made a valuable contribution with her 2013 book, *Japan 1941: Countdown to Infamy*. While Hotta does analyze American acts that contributed to the Japanese attack, her focus is on Japan and the decision-making process that led to the date that will forever “live in infamy.”

Hotta writes that from April to December 1941, the Japanese leadership made a series of decisions that many initially failed to recognize as a doomed path toward war. The attack on Pearl Harbor was hardly preordained and there was little unanimity among Japanese leaders as to whether war with the United States was a necessary or even wise step. The Japanese army was bogged down in an invasion of China, and yet these leaders contemplated an additional war against the U.S. and Britain. Several influential members of the government including Prime Minister Fumimaro Konoe 近衛 文麿 (1891–1945) and Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto 山本 五十六 (1884–1943), who drew up the plans for the strike on Pearl Harbor, were convinced that simultaneous wars against China and the Western powers had little chance of success. They nevertheless went ahead with their plans and gambled that the Western powers, being preoccupied with Nazi Germany in Europe, would cave in after the first waves of attacks by Japanese bombers. But if so many of Japan’s ranking leaders were convinced that Japan would be the ultimate loser, why did they proceed?

According to Hotta, the Japanese need for consensus – combined with a convoluted government organization that allowed the military to make

decisions free from civilian control – drove Tokyo down a path that many Japanese did not want to follow. This governmental structure allowed younger naval and army officers to initiate a series of steps toward war that senior officials found themselves increasingly powerless to rein in.

In Hotta's account, Japan's war with China had become a deepening quagmire. Japan depended entirely on oil shipments and other resources purchased from the West, but meanwhile the U.S. and British governments had placed strict embargoes on Japan, hoping to force it out of China. Japan faced a hard choice: abandon military operations there and resume trade with the West or press farther into Southeast Asia and procure resources by force. The key to the latter strategy was gaining access to Indonesian oil, then controlled by the Dutch. However, seizing Indonesian oil by force was sure to provoke a war with the U.S. and Britain. The Japanese felt that this strategy must include destroying the U.S. and British fleets in the Pacific as a prelude to their invasion of Indonesia.

Prime Minister Konoe predicted that an all-out war with the United States would bring total defeat for Japan, and many senior military officials like Admiral Yamamoto agreed with this assessment – that overstretch was particularly dangerous given that Japan had never fully gained control of the war in China. However, mid-level strategists from Japan's army and navy argued that the Western forces in Asia were weak, that a sudden attack would destroy their morale, and that they would not want to extend a European war to the Pacific. It was a case of now or never. If Japan continued the war in China, the embargo would cripple Japan, while to pull out of China after so much blood was unthinkable. Senior leaders, wanting to save face, appease the restless young officers, and achieve a consensus, persuaded Konoe to make preparations for war while hoping for a diplomatic breakthrough with the West. But when it became clear that the embargo would continue and that there would be no diplomatic settlement, Japan finally decided to gamble on war. Hotta summarizes Japan's war rationale as follows:

[T]he root problem in the Japanese government remained consistent throughout 1941: None of the top leaders, their occasional protestations notwithstanding, had sufficient will, desire or courage to stop the momentum for war. ... From April to December 1941, the Japanese leadership made a series of decisions that many at first failed to recognize as constituting a doomed path toward war. But with each step, room for maneuver was lost. The

unwinnable war with the West was never an absolute inevitability, however. Despite the risk of losing all that had been achieved since Meiji, the leaders ultimately succumbed to a destructive – and self-destructive – course in the name of maximizing Japan’s chance of survival and self-preservation in the short term and, more ambitiously, building an Asia for Asians under Japan’s leadership in the long term. Neither the short-term nor the long-term goals were ever realizable because the planning for them was not realistic. Japan approached the war as a gambler would, taking comfort in the likelihood of initial advantages while deluding itself that it would be able to take the money and run, though running was never an option in this game. (286)

Given that contemporary Japan and China are now confronting each other over a small group of rocky islands in the East China Sea, Hotta wonders whether Japan’s conservative and highly nationalistic government might inadvertently push Japan into another no-win conflict. Writing in *The New York Times*, she speculates that the old self-defeating pattern might be recurring:

Watching Prime Minister Shinzo Abe today, tensing up and pushing back against China’s provocations in the East China Sea, one wonders how much of that tradition has survived within the Japanese leadership. Mr. Abe seems determined to be defiant. He has recently pushed through Parliament a bill to establish a U.S.-style national security council and allow the government to withhold information it deems vital to national security. He has argued for revising Japan’s Constitution, including its war-renouncing provision. Is this tough talk the same kind of ultranationalism that led Japan into war with China in the 1930s and then the West? Hotta acknowledges that Japan of 2014 is very different from Japan of 1941, but she fears that the emergence of ultra-nationalism in Tokyo even now could lead to problems in Sino-Japanese relations. (Hotta 2013)

Overall, Hotta's meticulously researched book provides a complex and detailed look at the Japanese decision-making process that led to Pearl Harbor. She does not answer all one's questions, but she brings perfect candor to those she does answer, placing the blame for the attack squarely on Japan and the young militarists who carried the day.

Richard J. Samuels, *3.11: Disaster and Change in Japan*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2013. 274 pp. ISBN: 978-0801452000, \$29.95.

Reviewed by Daniel A. Métraux

We all know that Japan was struck by the shock waves of a 9.0 magnitude undersea earthquake on March 11, 2011 originating roughly fifty miles off of its eastern coastline. The most devastating earthquake in Japan's recorded history produced a devastating tsunami. Waves reaching heights approaching 30 feet destroyed miles of coastline in Japan's Tohoku region and caused a dangerous nuclear meltdown at the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant. This catastrophe claimed over 20,000 lives, which led to the destruction of many coastal towns, and is estimated to cost many billions of dollars for reconstruction.

The 3.11 catastrophe has raised many questions about the future of Japan. The disaster exposed heroes as well as villains, strengths as well as weaknesses, and even forced Japan to confront issues that have plagued the nation over many years. One issue, for instance, was nuclear power. Should Japan abandon nuclear energy in favor of other sources of power? What about the relationship between business and government? Would the long-held tradition of tight collusion continue? Would there be any changes in the relationship between political parties and the bureaucracy? Another question focused on the future role of Japan's military in the wake of its massive and generally successful relief efforts.

Richard Samuels, director of the Center for International Studies at Massachusetts Institute of Technology and a longtime student of Japanese politics, spent the better part of a year studying life in Japan after the 3.11 disaster. His book *3.11: Disaster and Change in Japan* is a very detailed analysis of the debate emerging in Japan as a result of this catastrophe. His answer is simply that, while there are some encouraging signs of reform, the

old saying that “the more things change, the more they stay the same” is very true in contemporary Japan.

One area of debate has been surfacing about the future of nuclear energy in Japan. Many Japanese demanded that as a result of the destruction of the aging nuclear power plants in Fukushima, Japan should reverse its goal of enhancing nuclear power. Even former Prime Minister Yoshinoko Noda vowed to phase out nuclear energy by 2030, but this promise was quickly reversed by the new Liberal Democratic Party-led government that came to power in December 2012. The new LDP government announced that it was determined to restart as many of the existing nuclear power plants as possible to meet Japan’s huge energy needs. Public support for the anti-nuclear movement has diminished and grass-roots efforts that once brought out huge demonstrations in Tokyo have lost their power.

A report issued by an allegedly independent study group, which was commissioned by the Japanese government, has been noted for strongly criticizing the close relationship between industry and government as well as the inherent tradition in Japan that encouraged conformity and deference to authority. Samuels notes that there has been some change in the relationship between business and government: “Collusion, long the accepted narrative of their relations, was replaced by confrontation, particularly over nuclear power” (198). While this is a positive development that may lead to more open debate in Japanese society, Samuels finds that in more cases than not, Japan’s political institutions returned to the status quo. Samuels furthermore comments on the heightened respect for Japan’s military, but regrets that while the help of American forces was very much appreciated, on-going disputes concerning the presence of American bases in Okinawa have not been resolved.

Other positive developments included a growing sense of volunteerism among Japanese. Thousands of Japanese as well as many foreigners volunteered their time, money and energy in helping relief efforts. Another notable change came with the actions of the local government. Local governments are now much more focused on helping other prefectures that are heavily affected by disasters – a welcome move away from almost a complete dependency on the central government. Another very positive development was that “a robust Japanese democracy filled with well-informed, active citizens eventually emerged from the crisis. For each leader who failed the test of agility and flexibility...there were policy entrepreneurs who directed innovative ideas for change at an enraged public. Despite the

dysfunctions in Japan's political class, we have seen abundant evidence of creativity in its policy class" (200). Samuels concludes his study by noting:

So we are left with a paradox. The 3.11 catastrophe was not the "game changer" many policy entrepreneurs desired. It did not cause structural change to the Japanese body politic. Normal policies prevailed, with all its imperfections, and "staying the course," rather than the more forward leaning "put it in gear" seemed to prevail. The rhetoric of crisis infused democratic politics, empowered new actors, stimulated long-awaited if piecemeal reforms, aroused considerable public protest, and may have pushed the policy process in the direction of transparency. At a minimum, the catastrophe opened all of these possibilities and, in a famously conservative system, the first months that followed the quake, the tsunami and the meltdown provided encouraging (if limited) signs of change for those who hoped for a new style in Japanese politics. Would these early moves result in long-term alterations in the country's politics? Nearly two years later it was still too early to tell too soon to conclude otherwise: a 3.11 master narrative was still under construction. (200)

Hence, Samuel's *3.11: Disaster and Change in Japan* is a brilliant study of the very complex evolution of Japanese politics and society. A chapter on past disasters in Japan and abroad and changes brought about as a result provides good insight into what is going on in Japan today. This work is very carefully researched by a scholar who has a deep grasp of Japanese history and society. The writing is clear and the research is superb. Every scholar with an interest in contemporary Japan should carefully examine this book.

Miura Reiichi, *Murakami Haruki to Postmodern Japan: Global ka no Bunka to Bungaku* [Haruki Murakami and Postmodern “Japan”: The Culture of Globalization and Literature]. Tokyo: Sairyusha, 2014. 183 pp. ISBN: 978-4779120053 (hardcover), ¥ 1,800.

Reviewed by Kazutaka Sugiyama

Few would disagree that Haruki Murakami is one of only a few internationally renowned Japanese novelists. His books have been translated into various languages, and he has received multiple literary awards, such as the Franz Kafka Prize and the Frank O’Connor International Short Story Award. However, Reiichi Miura, a professor of American literature at Hitotsubashi University in Japan, challenges this assessment because he sees Murakami as a global novelist who happens to be Japanese. The difference between the two claims is subtle but important: while the former (Murakami as a Japanese novelist) underscores Murakami’s nationality, the latter (Murakami as a global novelist) undermines it. If Murakami has anything to do with Japan, Miura argues, it is not the Japanese literary tradition but with a Japan that is a mere locality in a larger, globalized world. Miura’s attempt to understand Murakami in the context of globalization distinguishes the book from a typical literary study if we understand this as an interpretation of texts through close reading. Instead, Miura discusses Murakami alongside with American and British literature as well as Japanese pop culture; in doing so, he uses Murakami as a vehicle to analyze the cultural trend of globalization that replaces history with memory, and social class with identity.

Miura begins by illustrating how Murakami is a distinctly different kind of novelist from other renowned Japanese novelists. He argues that unlike Kenzaburō Ōe and others, whose writings are engaged with Japanese national culture as a singular cultural experience, Murakami shares more thematic and stylistic experiences with American postmodern novelists such as Tim O’Brien and Raymond Carver. While this characterization is nothing new in Murakami scholarship, Miura elaborates on this claim by presenting the idea of a new era of imperialism in globalization articulated by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri in *Empire*. If, as they argue, postmodernism – decentralization and deterritorialization of power – is not a political subversion against imperialism but a radicalization of it, Murakami’s resemblance to American postmodern novelists appears as a symptom of

Hardt and Negri's new global empire. In this framework, Murakami is not a Japanese novelist but rather a global novelist who happens to be Japanese.

Following American literary critics such as Fredric Jameson and Walter Benn Michaels, Miura characterizes globalization as the ideological shift from Welfare State to neoliberalism – the rise of identity politics and the fall of socialism.¹ As a result, political disputes are no longer over social stratification but over cultural identity. To corroborate the global ideological trend asserted above, Miura reads Murakami's works (*1Q84* in particular) along with Hayao Miyazaki's films, the British novelist Kazuo Ishiguro's novels, Hollywood blockbuster films, and other works in Japan and elsewhere show how current cultural representations are invested in depicting one's identity while class issues often disappear from them. The primacy of cultural identity, Miura argues, implies that history as a common ground is replaced with cultural memory since for one's identity, what happens in the world is not relevant but instead it is what she or he remembers (or not). By analyzing various cultural products and showing their devotion to cultural identity, Miura concludes that Murakami, along with other artists, depicts postmodern Japan in the globalized world – a floating imagery of Japan, as a nation which is disconnected from history and rearticulated as a cultural memory.

After analyzing the ideological trend in globalization by using Murakami as a vehicle, in the final chapter, Miura pushes his analysis further as he takes on Murakami's newest novel, *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage*, in relation to American modernist literature. Looking at the transition from realism (Upton Sinclair) to modernism (F. Scott Fitzgerald) in American literary history as a decisive moment for the construction of American national identity, Miura historicizes the culture of globalization. His genealogy of global culture prepares him to discuss Murakami's newest novel as a failed attempt to highlight the significance of history over memory. However, precisely by failing to be a realist novel in the sense György Lukács defines, Miura characterizes the novel as a realist novel that intricately depicts our inability to escape global neoliberalism.

¹ Author's Note: Although Miura does not explicitly name Michaels in the book, his criticism on postmodernism plays a significant role in the book. Miura translated Michaels' work into Japanese in addition to the fact that he completed his second Ph.D. in English at the University of Illinois at Chicago under his supervision.

Miura's realism, in other words, is a literary style that strives to illustrate the totality (or the inability to do so) of the new imperialism (160–2).

Although the book does have Murakami's name in the title and devotes a significant portion describing him in the text, Miura aims more than just merely situating Murakami in the culture of globalization. Through historicizing the global culture, Miura delineates what we might call a new realism, a realism which depicts (and again, the inability to do so) the neoliberal empire, as an appropriate critical approach for contemporary literary study. One might argue that Miura could have added more thorough case studies to validate his argument further rather than relying heavily on American literary scholarship, or that he could have demonstrated a more concrete example of an alternative to the new imperialism for which this critical approach allows us to imagine. He doubtlessly would have done so if he did not regrettably pass away in 2013. Despite these shortcomings, Miura's work provides us a plausible framework for a literary study with a more inclusive framework to critically investigate the empire of global neoliberalism in which many of us find ourselves caged without realizing it.