

Communications to the Editor

Concerning Japanese Fascism

Although the articles on Japanese fascism presented in the November 1979 issue of the *Journal of Asian Studies* (39, 1) make interesting and instructive reading, it seems to me that they arrive at an unfortunate and incorrect conclusion. They suggest that the study of Japanese fascism has come to a dead end and argue that, if indeed there ever was such a thing as Japanese fascism, it was an "aberrational phenomenon." Instead of "remaining transfixed" by fascism, scholars should move on to explaining Japan in terms of the "world economy." To make the point dramatically and succinctly, let me begin by pointing out that the same could be said of Hitler's Germany except that the memory of the Holocaust refuses to go away.

It is possible to argue that there has been an excess of theorizing about Japanese fascism, to the point of its becoming an armchair exercise in which the *results* of Japanese fascism are obscured or forgotten. In the intellectually pleasing article by Miles Fletcher, which reflects numerous fine studies of Japan's course toward fascism in the 1930s, both Western and Japanese, the worst that happens is the substitution of single-party for multiparty politics with the establishment of Konoe's IRAA. A few people are jailed, temporarily, but no one gets killed.

However, one need only look at the photographs of some of the victims of Japan's China "incident" (war) to see why historians should ferret out the malignant causes of what Maruyama Masao has called the "pathology" of Japanese fascism before it is presumed to be a dead (and harmless) matter. Fortunately, an uncensored photographic record of the road to prosecution of Japan's "Greater East Asia" war is available, although as yet little used by Western scholars. This is the Mainichi Shimbunsha's collection entitled *Ichi-oku-nin no showa shi* (The history of 100 million people during the Showa era). This magnificent picture history series, published in Tokyo during the 1970s, includes a multivolume section on *Nihon no senshi* (Japan's wars), which tells the sad story of Japan's "aberration" into fascism so vividly that, whatever may be the verdict of intellectual history, the results will not soon be forgotten by those fortunate (or unfortunate) enough to leaf through the series, even if they are unable to read the Japanese captions. An important project for the future should be an English translation of this series.

Along with *Ichi-oku-nin*, Otis Cary's *War Wasted Asia* (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1975) has never received the attention it deserves, even though its *JAS* reviewer, Lawrence Olsen, recommended it as "required reading in all courses on modern Japan" (*JAS* 36, 1 [Nov. 1976]: 150-52). The section on Japanese "cannibalism" in China (pp. 196-217) gives a vivid, to say the least, portrayal of the ultimate meaning of the fascistic ideas Prince Konoe and his friends played with on the golf courses of Japan. Another book that is just beginning to have an impact on the Western scholarship of Japan, although it was first published in Japanese in 1968, is Ienaga Saburo's *Taipeiyo sensō* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten), which has at last been translated into

English and published in the United States (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978). Ienaga says, "There were no concentration camps or mass killings in Japan. . . . Strangely enough, this may mean that oppression was actually greater in Japan. Every aspect of life was so regimented and controlled that no one could plan a treacherous act worthy of the death penalty" (p. 114).

Of course, it may be argued that the heavy attention given to theories of and about fascism and its Japanese manifestation in various Japanese journals of historical opinionizing, such as *Rekishigaku kenkyū* (no. 397 [1973] and no. 451 [1977]) and *Shiso* (nos. 619 and 624 [1976]) has overcooked the brew of ideas about the study of fascism in Japan so brilliantly concocted by Maruyama Masao during his convalescence from illness in the 1950s and published in English as *Thought and Behavior in Modern Japanese Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1963). Be that as it may, and so be it that the "modernization school" of Japanese historical studies has now reached the stage of viewing Japan "as Number One" (Ezra Vogel, Harvard, 1979), there is still a severely blemished historical record that even friends of Japan, and I count myself as one, can not, or rather should not, gainsay. It hinders historical understanding to forget past tragedies of any nation or people. Having spent several years looking for, and insisting that my students look for, the bright spots in the historical record of Japan's relations with the outside world, especially China, I nevertheless feel it necessary in my own analysis of our "search for balance" to remind readers of the brutal Japanese "Rape of Nanking." (See Alvin D. Coox and Hilary Conroy, *China and Japan: Search for Balance Since World War I* [Santa Barbara: ABC-Clio Press, 1978], esp. pp. 325–31.)

Whatever one thinks of "world economy" explanations of history, it is my contention that discussion of any ideology, system, or "ism" is not a dead issue until the toll of dead, wounded, and brutalized it produced has been considered in more than a theoretical way.

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