Henry D. Smith II on the "Five Myths about Early Modern Japan" is one students will read and find enlightening. Students will be receptive to the process of exposing stereotypes of Asian societies as being dictatorial, feudal, and isolated. Tokugawa Japan was more peaceful that it has been made out to be; Qing China, faced with manifold pressures in the nineteenth century, had an integrated social system, and Korea was not isolated, weak, and stagnant.

If one is still concerned about what could be included in Asia in world history thematically, the last section with eleven essays can settle many doubts. One does not have to be dogmatic in following all the themes, but the judicious use of some of the significant themes can produce a valuable framework.

While this last section briefly covers the entire history of significant countries and histories, it is also a useful section for valuable insights to help one maintain coherence and to stress continuity in Asian history. Familiar themes such as cultural borrowing, empire building, nationalism, and modernization are included. Misconceptions, such as those concerning Chinese history, are exposed, and one can use some of the major themes to develop a framework for comparative studies. In addition, the relationships between Japan and the United States, Asia and Latin America (countries and regions that have shared mutual histories and impacted each other), are topics offered in the book so readers can better understand these kinds of interrelationships.

In identifying the "texts, themes, and comparative concepts" (p. xi) on Asia, the authors of the fifty-seven articles and essays successfully offer their readers a wide selection of insights that could be included into Western and world history even as the scope and definition of these histories change. Terms such as "Asia," "empire," "culture and civilization," and even "modernization" have to be defined succinctly. Student needs will also define what significant themes and insights will be integrated into Western and world history.

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The book is intended to steer instructors in what could and should be included in teaching Asia in Western and world history. While the book is a guide, it is an indispensable resource for instructors, and college and university libraries. ■

Ernest LeVos

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Editor's Note: We are pleased to publish this review of the third volume in the series *Columbia Project on Asia in the Core Curriculum*. The reviews of the earlier two volumes appeared in previous issues of *EAA*. The review of Volume 1: *Case Studies in the Social Sciences* was published in *EAA* vol. 1 no. 1, Feb. 1996. The review of Volume 2: *Masterworks of Asian Literature in Comparative Perspective*, appears in *EAA* vol. 1 no. 2, Fall 1996.

Japan
The Childless Society

BY MURIEL JOLIVET
TRANSLATED BY ANNE-MARIE GLASHEEN
LONDON AND NEW YORK: ROUTLEDGE, 1997

Japan in the 1990s has a very low birth rate, Japanese women seem to be postponing marriage until later and later ages, publications aimed at young mothers present an ideal of mothering that is difficult to attain in practice, and some mothers of young children and infants seem overwhelmed by the burdens and requirements of mothering. Jolivet's argument in this book is that the low birth rate is explained by other phenomena.

Much of the evidence to support this view that Jolivet presents comes from scholarly and, even more, popular analyses of Japanese society currently part of the cultural landscape of Japan. Japanese TV, radio, popular press, and publications aimed at informed readers carry huge volumes of analysis of Japan to Japanese consumers. What she offers us, then, is a Japanese view of a Japanese problem, with commentary from an informed and sensitive outsider.

Jolivet uses letters from young mothers to advice columns, and calls to a young mothers' hotline, to establish the loneliness and isolation of young mothers; their frustration at the loss of social contacts and meaningful work, as well as interaction with adults that motherhood often brings to women living away from their families, who are forced to quit work at the birth of a child. The jobs available to women before marriage and childbearing are the source of great frustrations to young women, who often feel their education and talents are ignored and underutilized. They are aware of the career frustrations that come in an employment system that hires well educated young women for limited jobs, "because they will only quit when they have children anyway," then pressures them to stop work when they give birth, leaving them with less seniority and experience when they are ready

to re-enter the workplace, and then expects they will leave again to take care of aging parents and in-laws. That women lament the loss of even such jobs as these is evidence of the frustrations in their alternative, motherhood.

Motherhood usually comes to Japanese women at the point when their husbands are subject to the greatest time demands of their own working lives. Even if fathers wanted to participate in the rearing of their children or the daily life of their household, and there is little evidence that they do, this is the period when family welfare requires long working hours on the part of the father. The dismal career prospects for women only reinforce this decision.

Japanese women who find themselves the mothers of young children are faced with a truly daunting job description, drawn partly from tradition, but even more from the advice and admonitions of childrearing experts. Their recommendations start with a rigorous prenatal regime for enhancing the health and intelligence of the fetus through proper diet and activities, including singing to the child, talking to it, up to and including speaking to the fetus in foreign languages to give it a head start in English or French.

After birth, the suggested daily regime means that mothers spend every waking and sleeping moment with the child, nursing it, preparing special food, being so attentive to its needs that the child never feels frustrated or deprived enough to cry. Perhaps most extreme, from an outsider's point of view, is the strident tone of the rhetoric condemning the use of disposable diapers, said by these experts to be more uncomfortable than cloth diapers, so that using them undermines a child's confidence in its mother's love and care, encouraging the child to become inert, rebellious, naughty, and even having adverse impacts on the timing of toilet training and the development of IQ.

Jolivet also discusses the role of abortion in modern Japan, and its connection with the onerous nature of motherhood. Because of the commitment to small family size, and the use of the most unreliable methods of birth control, many married Japanese women find themselves having abortions. In spite of their commonness, abortions are stressful for the mothers and families involved; they are conceived of as the necessary murder of a living soul. Jolivet discusses the development of Buddhist rituals which both soothe and exploit the women who have abortions in modern Japan.

The author does a good job of vividly presenting the dilemma confronting young Japanese women as they try to formulate a life encompassing motherhood, self-fulfillment and social usefulness, as Japanese people perceive it. It does less well at placing Japanese women's behavior in any comparative framework. The low Japanese birth rates are not the lowest in the world, surpassing those of Italy and Germany, for instance. Nor do all Japanese mothers buy into the intense ideal prescribed by the experts, nor do they all fail to find social contacts and family support through what has, since Westerners started observing Japanese society, been considered the hardest period of a woman's life. Are infants harder to live with than mothers-in-law? ■

Gail Benjamin

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Understanding Japanese Society

By Joy Hendry
Second Edition, New York: Routledge, 1995

"Scintillating" is not a word one would use to describe Joy Hendry's *Understanding Japanese Society*. Nonetheless, this attempt at a general overview of Japanese culture can be a serviceable supplementary text in courses on postwar Japanese culture or a useful reference for nonspecialists who would like to include Japan-related material in more general classes. Hendry claims that her book is designed to "open a door" into Japanese life primarily through the examination of the findings of anthropological studies of Japan. Having read *Understanding Japanese Society*, students will be, she says, "armed with background information" that will make it "possible to achieve a deeper understanding of specialist books in other areas" (3–4). I think her claims are largely true.

Hendry's book is organized rather traditionally, with a beginning chapter tracing Japanese history from the beginning of time to the postwar era followed by a series of chapters that break Japanese society down into unsurprising categories such as "The House and Family System" and "The Education System." Each chapter is followed by a well-rounded list of references and suggestions for further exploration, some of which include films and novels as well as scholarly books and articles that relate to the chapter topic. Hendry moves along systematically, acquainting the reader with the findings of the most well known works on Japanese culture and detailing some of the differences between research done in different time periods and in different locations in Japan. In both good and bad ways, Hendry's chapters read most like literature reviews.

Hendry's readers will receive a broad orientation to the work available on many different topics. Given the conscientiousness with which Hendry points out differences between specialists' various perspectives, one is likely to take away a fairly realistic impression of the difficulty of making all-encompassing general statements about Japanese society. Students will get a summary explanation of theoretical approaches that have made an important mark on the Japanese studies field; they will also be cautioned about the limitations of those approaches. For example, in her chapter "Status and Stratification in the Wider World," Hendry offers a detailed and cogent description of Nakane Chie's famous "vertical principle" explanation of Japanese social structure (86–89). However, Hendry also points out that "Nakane's model has been criticized for being too all-embracing," and Hendry describes ways in which social behavior among housewives, for instance, may not conform to Nakane's analytical framework (89–90).

Hendry's even-handedness is sometimes her downfall. The book moves smoothly from topic to topic but seldom digs deeply enough into a single one to be truly fascinating. Furthermore, although, she is careful to avoid shaping her interpretation of Japan according to one simplistic perspective, the matter-of-course tone with which she moves through topics as diverse as toilet training and geisha training