

# JAPANESE RESOURCES FOR TEACHING ABOUT JAPAN

## Introducing *Japan Focus*

By Mark Selden

Teachers from primary school through university now have available a host of vivid and varied primary sources for introducing modern and contemporary Japan: Japanese film and *anime*, *manga*, a vast photographic record, survivor drawings and murals depicting the atomic bombing, novels, short stories and haiku, and translations of government documents—to name a few of the resources that make it possible to bridge the “inscrutable” East-West divide via print, visual, and electronic media.

A conspicuous exception to this flourishing of inter-cultural communications has been Japanese thought and writing on the great modern and contemporary issues such as war and peace, nuclear war, US-Japan relations, empire, nationalism, war memory, minorities and discrimination, social movements, economy and society, citizenship, gender, social class and environmental pollution, to name a few themes of compelling interest. What explains this phenomenon?

Throughout the long twentieth century there has been a virtual one-way flow of ideas between Japan and the English-speaking world, and still more with respect to other Western languages. Virtually everything of significance (and much that is trivial) has been translated into Japanese, debated, and sometimes adapted to Japanese needs and perspectives. By contrast, with the important exception of literature, technology, and the arts, little significant Japanese thought has made its way from Japanese into Western languages. This is strikingly so of Japanese social, political, and historical thought. If this is true, we are much the poorer for our own insularity. At present, the most innovative, creative, and progressive voices in Japanese society—and they are many and important—remain largely silent outside Japan. One consequence of this is the near total disjuncture in the scholarly and political discourses taking place in Japan and internationally.

Over the past year, *Japan Focus* has made modest efforts to break this silence, to chip away at the imbalance. What has emerged can provide teachers and students valuable points of entry into contemporary Japanese thought and politics, and insight into important trends taking place not only in Japan but also across Asia and the Pacific. The result is writing that defies many of our expectations about contemporary Japan and Japanese society, as in a recent piece describing a peace movement among convicted war criminals in Tokyo’s Sugamo Prison in the wake of World War II, or the voices of Japanese fishermen near Bikini reflecting on their experience half a century ago sailing the *Lucky Dragon* in the aftermath of a US nuclear test, or a Japanese veteran discussing his personal war atrocities committed in China six decades ago.

The *Japan Focus* Web site at <http://japanfocus.org> brings together contemporary reportage and in-depth writing about Japan, featuring work primarily by Japanese authors in translation. *Japan Focus*

draws on a range of Japanese press and journals of opinion, including weekly, monthly, and quarterly magazines across the political spectrum with an emphasis on sources and voices hitherto inaccessible to Western readers. In addition to translations provided by our associates, we make available a spectrum of sources that have appeared in other venues. In our first year we concentrated on providing translations of two types of material in areas where Japanese thought and experience seem exceptionally pertinent, contentious, and important, while gradually expanding the scope of our offerings. These are:

1. Issues of war, peace, colonialism and conflict, and war memory, including Japanese international policy, East Asian international relations, Okinawa, the North Korea issue, and the response of citizens’ movements to war and peace issues. The decision in 2003 to send Japanese forces to Iraq, and the redefinition of Japanese security policy, touched off a flurry of policy and constitutional debates reflected in our pages at a time when Japan seems poised to abandon the central provisions of the peace constitution, Article 9. A series of articles addresses nuclear issues including the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the Bikini radiation of Japanese fishermen that touched off the world anti-nuclear movement, and Japanese responses to American use of depleted uranium weapons and the development of new generations of nuclear weapons. Japan-North Korea-US relations, issues pertaining to Okinawa and US bases, the consequences of Japan’s decision to send troops to Iraq, the controversy over the Prime Minister’s visits to Yasukuni Shrine, and a number of regional and comparative themes related to war, colonialism, and war memory have also been analyzed from diverse perspectives.
2. Social issues, social conflicts, and social movements, particularly those related to women, the environment, peace, education, and ethnicity (e.g., resident Koreans in Japan, Okinawans, Burakumin, and Ainu). Several articles addressing such issues as the suicide of Japanese teachers and teacher protests against the revival of wartime symbols of Japanese nationalism in the schools illustrate important dimensions of current conflicts in Japanese education and society, and invite comparison with issues of war and nationalism in the contemporary United States. Other articles explore the position of Koreans in Japan and Okinawans in Japanese society and examine anti-militarism and anti-base movements in Japan and Okinawa.

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Articles can be accessed by author and by such subject categories as war and peace, Japan and Asia, US-Japan relations, nationalism, people's movements, and economics and finance. Increasing numbers of students, teachers, and researchers from around the world have begun to consult the Web site.

In addition to contributions by Japanese authors, *Japan Focus* makes available writings by international authors who engage similar themes, issues, and perspectives, including both *Japan Focus* exclusives and reprints from a range of sources. *Japan Focus* authors include Asai Motofumi, Herbert Bix, Bruce Cumings, Andrew DeWit, John Dower, Funabashi Yoichi, Akira Iriye, Ishida Takeshi, Gavan McCormack, Laura Hein, Ito Ruri, Chalmers Johnson, Kang Sangjung, Kaneko Masaru, Douglas Lummis, Medoruma Shun, David McNeill, Emily Rosenberg, Sakamoto Yoshikazu, Suh Kyungsik, Tessa Morris-Suzuki, Yuki Tanaka, Ui Jun, Umehara Takeshi, Wada Haruki, Ann Waswo, and Geoffrey White.

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The coordinators of *Japan Focus*, based in Japan, Australia, and the United States, are Andrew DeWit, David McNeill, Gavan McCormack, Mark Selden, Yuki Tanaka, and Julia Yonetani. The heart of *Japan Focus* is the contribution of more than thirty associates who provide translations, their own writings, and recommendations for items to translate and post.

For further information about *Japan Focus*, contact Mark Selden at [Ms44@cornell.edu](mailto:Ms44@cornell.edu). ■

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