

The Asia-Pacific Journal

Japan Focus Course Readers

SERIES EDITED BY LAURA HEIN

AVAILABLE AT [HTTP://WWW.JAPANFOCUS.ORG/COURSE_READERS](http://www.japanfocus.org/course_readers)

Reviewed by Peter K. Frost

The first four of fifteen scheduled readers published by Professor Laura Hein's *The Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus Course Readers* project are certainly a technological triumph. Each online reader reprints *Asia-Pacific Journal* articles, endnotes, and suggestions for further readings. Links allow visitors to view individual articles; go directly to suggested further readings if these are online; and, in some cases, access relevant material in individual articles. The editor includes a number of Japanese authors, as well as others from outside the United States. All of the authors—and certainly the ones I know—are impressive scholars who write clearly and usually back up what they wish to say with plenty of documentation. All of the articles are very recent, with only one going back to 2005. Most striking of all, the readers can be downloaded at no charge.¹ Undergraduate teachers like me thus have access to ample material that provides multiple options either to enhance our own knowledge or for cost-effective student assignments. Given the number of financially hard-pressed students these days, this in itself is a cause for celebration.

As the titles themselves suggest, each reader concentrates on problems facing Japan. Articles about World War II are featured in two works, the

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atomic bombing of Japan in a third (Siniawer), and the Cold War in the fourth (Barske) reader. Barske's introduction, in fact, announces that it is “echoing feminist activism around the globe.” The first article in her reader (by Mire Koikari) states that General Douglas MacArthur's dramatic landing in Japan in 1945 symbolized “a richly gendered and racialized symbolism: the United States imposition of white masculine military authority over Japan, now a defeated and subjugated nation in the Far East.”² Koikari argues that feminist scholars need to go beyond the standard enumerations of such gendered reforms as the Equal Rights Amendment in the 1947 Constitution; the subsequent laws allowing women's suffrage, coeducation and marriage rights; and the work of individual women who were part of the Occupation. She sees in the Occupation of Japan both the “familiar colonial trope of heterosexual rescue and romance” and the fact that “driven by a feminist intention of emancipating other women, Western women's feminist reform work provided a crucial means for US imperial expansion abroad, lending force and justification to its pursuit of hegemony.”³

Other criticisms are more subtle. In the “War and Popular Culture” reader, for example, Aaron Gerow argues that the popular film titled in English “Yamato” (Yamato no Otokotachi, or “The Men of Yamato”) has both pro- and anti-war sentiments but also allows particularly young viewers to block out the problems of a troubling present.⁴ I expect to use this article in my film class. Similarly, in the “War and Visual Culture” reader, Series Editor Laura Hein and Akiko Takenaka's article on how Japanese and American museums must deal with passionately different interpretations of World War II provides a creditable (and troubling) sense of right-wing pressure groups in both countries,⁵ while Siniawer's “Environmental History” reader must inevitably deal with the environmental issues stemming from pollution cases, US military bases, and the appalling Fukushima nuclear disaster. “Fukushima,” writes Jeff Kingston in his well-documented article, “was preceded by a series of mishaps, cover-ups, irresponsible practices, close calls and ignored warnings.”⁶

And so on . . . The beauty of this use of the Internet is that readers can browse through the eighteen articles in these four works, open ones they think they'd like to read, and immediately decide for themselves (at no cost) whether the subject matter and perspective meets their particular needs. Surely this is a good thing.

My concerns are rather with the tone of both the present and, apparently, the eleven future readers currently in the works.⁷ Overall, the choice of subjects and the hard-hitting scholarship portray a Japan that is in an unhealthy relationship with the US, has not adequately come to grips with its role in World War II, is sexist and is ruled by what Kingston calls the “nuclear village” of underregulated pro-energy elites. Gone is the once-popular picture of Japan as a homogenous and stable nation that—apart from its “dark valley” during the 1930s and 40s—provides a model for how

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Asia should modernize. Well and good. Yet pedagogically, I would like to be able to assign material that also shows some of the better features of Japan and hence allows (forces, if you like) my students to look beyond their own ethnocentricity. Sometimes, crudely politicized as the conflict between “Chrysanthemum Clubbers” and “Japan Bashers,” the real debate should be about how to strike a credible balance between openly discussing Japan’s problems and enlarging student perspectives by giving a fuller picture of that nation’s substantial positive achievements. Given their technological talent for producing easily accessible scholarship, helping create this balance by producing a wider range of articles is surely what the Japan Focus Project, if it ever wished to, ought to be able to do well. ■

NOTES

1. My copies had only a few places where Japanese names did not print properly.
2. Valerie Barske, “Introduction to Women and Japan’s Political Economy” *Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus Course Readers*, no. 4 (2012): 4 and Mire Kokairi, “Feminism and the Cold War in the U.S. Occupation of Japan” in “Women and Japan’s Political Economy,” ed. Valerie Barske, *Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus Course Readers*, no.4 (2012): 8, <http://tiny.cc/aubq0w>.
3. *Ibid.*, 9, 17.
4. Andrew Gerow, “War and Nationalism in Yamato: Trauma and Forgetting the Postwar” in “War in Japanese Popular Culture,” ed. Matthew Penney, *Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus Course Readers*, no. 3 (2012): 103 – 113, <http://tiny.cc/aubq0w>.
5. Hein, Laura and Akiko Takenaka, “Establishing World War II in Japan and the United States” in “War and Visual Culture,” ed. Hong Kai and Jooyeon Rheed, *Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus Course Readers*, no. 1 (2012): 68 – 92, <http://tiny.cc/aubq0w>.
6. Jeff Kingston, “Mismanaging Risk and the Fukushima Nuclear Crisis” in “Environmental History,” ed. Eiko Maruko Siniawer, *Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus Course Readers*, no. 2 (2012): 200-224, <http://tiny.cc/aubq0w>.
7. Judging only by the titles, the eleven additional readers planned (including more on bombing, Okinawa, two more on the Fukushima nuclear disaster, etc.) may have the same tone.

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