

Review of 明治維新と近代日本の新しい見方 (M・ウィリアム・ステイール
著、大野ロベルト訳、東京堂出版、2019年)

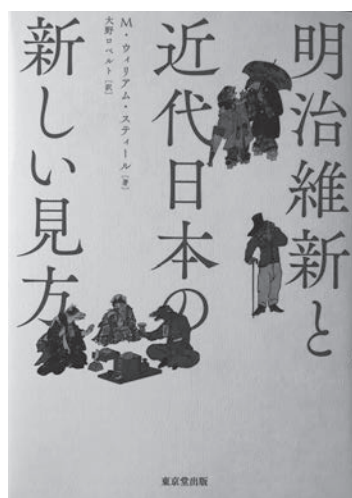
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This excellent Japanese-language book is a series of essays by M. William Steele, longtime professor of Japanese history at International Christian University in Japan. Versions of these essays have appeared elsewhere in English or Japanese and have been translated as needed by Robert Ono. In this review, I have tried to quote the original English versions wherever possible.

Since writing his doctoral dissertation on Katsu Kaishu's role in the Meiji Restoration, Steele has long been interested in the lesser known stories and perspectives on the revolutionary changes following the shogun's government's fall in 1868. Steele is especially interested in what happened to the those who supported the losing Tokugawa side of the Restoration conflict, how the upheaval affected commoners, and the opinions of those who both welcomed and feared importation of new technologies from the West. Readers interested in a wider view of the Meiji Restoration and Japan's subsequent modernization will find this book a fascinating collection of case studies that shed light on areas of Japanese history that generally do not appear in conventional Restoration narratives.

Chapter 1 seeks to explain the Commodore Perry mission in the context of American politics. While every Japanese history textbook includes



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Commodore Matthew Perry's famous arrival in Japan and demands to open the country for trade, few give much explanation of why he was there at this particular time in 1853. This chapter tells the story from the perspective of American politicians who saw California's cities as gateways for Pacific trade. As Secretary of State Daniel Webster noted, an agreement with Japan would establish, "the last link in that great chain which united all nations of the world, by the establishment of a line of steamers" (40). In their voyages from California to China, American steamships would need coal and other supplies, so Perry was tasked with securing a treaty with Japan to obtain these supplies. After these initial observations, Steele turns his attention to California's newspapers for a glimpse of what Californians thought of a new trade relationship with Japan. Editorial writers believed the people of Japan to be ready for trade but blocked by "the Government of Japan and its attendant aristocracy" which were "bigoted representatives of power." (42) Furthermore, Americans had destiny to carry freedom and commerce to the people of Japan. Californians were delighted when news of Perry's treaty reached them and merchants like San Francisco's Silas E. Burrows quickly moved to establish trading operations in Japanese ports. From this chapter, we gain a better understanding of Japan's treaties with the United States as products of a global trend toward increased trade facilitated by the rise of steamships in commerce.

Chapter 2 is an extended analysis a woodblock print entitled "A Compendium of Events and Record of the Rice Market from 1853 to 1868" published by the Kintakudo in Osaka in mid-1868. Without the benefit of a coherent historical narrative that comes from hindsight, it was unclear in 1868 what the Meiji Restoration would become. Rather than the modernization success story of later historiography, things looked ominous, even apocalyptic, in 1868. The years leading up to 1868 were marked by a series of political, economic, and natural disasters. Political turmoil was represented by depictions of foreign "black ships" challenging Japan's seclusion policy as well as conflicts between activists for an imperial restoration and the shogun's supporters culminating in civil war by 1867. Economic events included government issues of new currency and the rising cost of living for city dwellers. Natural disasters included a great storm and earthquake in 1855, an outbreak of cholera in 1858, and measles epidemics in 1859, 1860, 1861, and 1862 that affected large segments of Japan's population. Religious movements tried to make sense of these destabilizing events. As Steele observes, at the time the print was created in 1868, "the imperial forces had yet to achieve victory over the supporters of the old regime. To the residents of Japan's largest cities, Edo and Osaka, the future seemed bleak. The confluence of political, economic, religious and natural forces offered little

hope for a return to everyday stability and established morality; not only was the world turned upside down, but at what seemed to be a dead end” (111-112). Uncertainty and fear, therefore, were important elements of the Japanese people’s experience of the Meiji Restoration.

Chapter 3 also examines the experiences of Edo commoners in 1868 using woodblock prints and popular printed materials as sources. We learn that Edo commoners were often not very sympathetic to the imperial forces whom many believed to be lawless hoodlums. In the confusion, public order broke down and commoners were increasingly willing to accept any government that could restore the city’s normal operation. In this context, we see that the new government’s decision to move the emperor to Edo and rename the city Tokyo can be seen as part of a strategy to secure legitimacy and use the existing government bureaucracy to bring order after the uncertainty of civil war. Steele argues that while many Edo residents did not like being ruled by outsiders as new officials from Satsuma and Choshu took over government functions from the Tokugawa, commoners generally muddled through and tried to resume their lives under the new regime. In an analysis of woodblock prints from the era, we learn that although prayers might now be directed to the emperor rather than the shogun, “The contents of those prayers...remained basically unchanged: a chance to work hard, prosper, and enjoy life.” (149-150).

Chapter 4 investigates Katsu Kaishu’s 1880s revision of Meiji Restoration history in terms more favorable to the Tokugawa regime. After the Matsukata Deflation, the Freedom and Popular Rights Movement grew critical of the Meiji oligarchs’ hold on power and what they saw as a general lack of progress toward greater political participation since the Restoration. In the 1880s and 1890s, Katsu Kaishu and others assembled documents from the Tokugawa archives and reevaluated the Tokugawa side of the Restoration conflict. They argued that the Tokugawa had acted out of a desire to protect the country and promote its interests. In fact, the Tokugawa regime deserved most of the credit for opening the country to trade, sending missions abroad, and beginning to modernize Japan’s military. In Katsu’s view, the Meiji government continued rather than reformed many of the Tokugawa Shogunate’s initiatives. Moreover, nostalgia for the Tokugawa in history writing became an avenue for criticizing the problems of the Meiji government.

Chapter 5 looks at the cultural conservative Sada Kaiseiki who was suspicious of things imported from the West. He believed that replacing Japanese products like lamps, paper, and writing brushes with items imported from the West would undermine Japan’s independence and culture. In Sada’s view, the Civilization and Enlightenment movement’s love of Western things

was misguided and would lead to serious problems. Later nationalists and cultural conservatives would express similar ideas as they looked back to earlier Japanese culture with nostalgia.

Chapter 6 examines the effects of wheels, rickshaws, and bicycles on Japanese society. When restrictions on the use of wheels were lifted after 1868, transportation allowed people unprecedented mobility. At first bicycles were status symbols ridden by men, but by the 1920s and 1930s they had become utility vehicles for all classes and genders. For women, bicycles were originally associated with a lack of morality, but gradually became more popular as physical fitness was incorporated into women's education. Bicycles and the mobility that they brought to people's lives became closely associated with modernization.

Chapter 7 looks at how Japanese folk arts drew from Western critics of modernization and rationalism. In response to the global spread of modern science and technology, nationalists turned to distinctive cultural traditions, arts, and crafts to preserve their cultural identities. When Japanese students went to Europe, they encountered this new value put on premodern crafts and returned to Japan with a desire to promote Japan's folk arts and crafts as part of the nation's cultural heritage. Yanagi Muneyoshi was a philosopher and scholar of the folk-art movement who looked to traditional Japanese arts to counter what he believed to be the excessively mechanical, artificial, and individualistic elements of Western culture. Western scholars like Basil Hall Chamberlain also found much to admire in the arts of Japan. This chapter demonstrates that the Japanese folk-art movement really developed as part of an international conversation regarding the aesthetics of traditional Japanese arts and crafts.

Chapter 8 focuses on the Great Northern Famine of 1905-1906. Cold and wet year led to crop failures in area around Sendai. Western missionaries in the region were among the first to spread the news of the ensuing famine and a worldwide relief effort developed. The international attention on Japan during these years was mixed. While praised for Japan's victory over Russia, the Japanese government was also criticized for not doing more to help the victims of the famine. The Japanese government called on self-help and shamed the people of Northeastern Japan for their backwardness that invited misery. Western missionaries joined in promoting the view of the region's backwardness and helped organize a relief effort. Sending relief to far off places was a new practice in the 1870s and 1880s with missionary organizations like Salvation Army and International Red Cross leading the way. Their efforts were facilitated with faster telegraph communications, growing popular Christian journalism, the ability to wire money internationally using services like Western Union. The Northeast region's reputation for backward-

ness continued into the twentieth century and there were some echoes of this view in the international relief efforts following the 2011 earthquake and tsunami.

A chapter on Kume Kunitake's views of the Meiji experience forms the book's epilogue. Kume was an official present at the start of the Meiji modernization project and was the author of the official report of the Iwakura Mission that toured Europe and the United States between 1871 and 1873. At 90 years old in 1929, Kume compiled his own autobiography which put his earlier experiences in historical perspective. He recognized that science and technology brought national wealth and power, but as the First World War had shown, modern wars were inhuman and highly destructive. From his perspective, modernization had helped Japan solve some problems, but also introduced a new set of dilemmas for the future especially in the field of international relations.

Hopefully, Steele will continue his research on the international contexts of many of the changes people in Japan were experiencing and the ways Japanese thinkers contributed to a global debate on the nature of modernization during the Meiji era. It is well known to historians of Japan that Japanese enthusiasm for "Civilization and Enlightenment" and globalization was often in tension with the forces of cultural pride and nationalism. It would be interesting to explore further how these trends in Japan both reflected and contributed to global movements toward internationalism and isolationism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

In sum, this book is a welcome series of case studies examining the Meiji transformation's effects on people outside the realms of government and big business. It also demonstrates that Japan's modernization was not enthusiastically embraced by all and shows us the real ambivalence people at the time felt about the changes they were observing. The book is highly recommended for anyone interested in alternative views of Japan's modern history.

