

However, Wolfgang Mieder aimed high. He invited scholars from England, Japan, and various places in America and published the results in a respectable hard-bound volume. Always the teacher, in this publication Mieder has shown how “to kill two birds with one stone” and make the most of an occasion. Despite the erudition, the volume keeps a common touch by including the children’s painting and a German newspaper cartoon that Mieder’s father sent him after circling the recognized proverbs for the sake of his son, the noted proverb professor.

Read this book and the other books and articles of the presenters. If you have not paid much attention to proverbs before, *The Netherlandish Proverbs* will show you the fun and treasures you have been missing. (And to repeat a request made in similar reviews: let’s see more studies on Asian proverbs.)

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JAPAN

SUSAN L. BURNS. *Before the Nation: Kokugaku and the Imagining of Community in Early Modern Japan*. Studies of the Weatherhead East Asian Institute, Columbia University. Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2003. x + 282 pages. Appendix, bibliography, index. Paper US\$23.95; ISBN 0-8223-3172-1. Cloth US\$84.95; ISBN 0-8223-3183-7.

The book under review is a truly scholarly work, providing an abundance of information and insights—and it is not easy to read. The latter point is no fault of the author. The English is clear, and she announces again and again (34, 39, and so on) what she is going to discuss in the next chapter or passage. The opening passage of the *Kojiki* 古事記, which she uses to illustrate the different interpretations of its commentators, is given at the end of the volume in the original (*kanbun* 漢文) and in seven transcriptions in Latin letters. Misspellings are few, but they unfortunately occur also with Japanese names: Tanuma Okitsugu 田沼意次 is rendered Okitsuga on pages 22, 25, 28, as well as in the Index, and the evil deity Magatsuhi 禍津日 is at one point rendered Matatsuhi (93).

These minor flaws cannot diminish the great value of the work. The book deals with four Kokugakusha 国学者 (National Learning School scholars)—Motoori Norinaga 本居宣長, Ueda Akinari 上田秋成, Fujitani Mitsue 富士谷御杖, and Tachibana Moribe 橘守部—who each have their own chapter. Three post-Restoration scholars of Kokugaku, Konakamura Kiyonori 小中村清矩, Haga Yaichi 芳賀矢一, and Muraoka Tsunetsugu 村岡典嗣—appear in the last chapter on the New Kokugaku. This appears already to be a pretty heavy load, yet I counted sixteen additional figures including, of course, all the famous Kokugakusha from Watarai Nobuyoshi 度会延佳 to Tsuda Sōkichi 津田左右吉, whose views are presented at greater length, plus an even number of minor references. The first two introductory chapters give an overview of the economic, social, and political background, and of the pre-Norinaga editions and interpretations of the *Kojiki*. In order to prevent readers from getting lost amongst all the different viewpoints, I would recommend they read the last chapter on New Kokugaku and the Conclusion first before turning to the Introduction and the main chapters.

Each reader will probably find different points of interest and will profit in different ways from this work. For this reviewer, who is not a specialist of Kokugaku, the most important insights were to see how many editions of the *Kojiki* have been published, how

much related work had been done before Norinaga started writing his *Kojikiden* 古事記伝, and how diverse the discourse within Kokugaku actually was. To summarize *Before the Nation* with a few words is impossible, and to even try and comment on the main subject of the work, the views on community held by the four main figures, would by necessity lead to simplifications and distortions. Therefore, in order to give the reader an idea of the variety of the insights contained in *Before the Nation*, it must suffice to present some minor impressions of each of the four main figures.

To a person from a Christian background, the well-known examples of Norinaga emphasizing “the absolute power and inscrutability of the deities” (177) and asserting that “apparent inconsistencies [in the *Kojiki*] are not evidence that the text is flawed or corrupt but reflect instead the limited understanding of the reader” (111) look rather familiar. His argument “that it was the ‘public realm’ upon which the deities acted”, and that thus people should “adhere to officially defined norms, rules, and laws” (95) is definitely reminiscent of Romans 13: 1–2. In contrast, Ueda Akinari’s realism and relativism look very modern when he argues that “if one inspects European maps, it is clear that Japan is a small land, so how could anyone believe that this land was formed before all the others and that the sun and moon emerged from it?” (112), or when he points out that Norinaga’s “references to Japan’s superiority precisely mimic the cultural chauvinism of the Chinese” (113).

Equally impressive is the complicated, yet sophisticated reasoning of Fujitani Mitsue whereby he constructs his system of thought based on an obscure term that appears just once in the *Nihon shoki* 日本書紀 (138). He argues that “the disappearance of Ame no Minakanushi [天之御中主 the first deity mentioned in the *Kojiki*] from the surface narrative signified that that [sic] this deity was acting through or by means of” the next two deities that appear (149)—hardly a convincing proof! On this last point, Tachibana Moribe reaches the same results (173 and 178) as Fujitani Mitsue, but when he discards “episodes as Izanami and Izanagi’s making of the land by stirring the brine from the floating bridge of heaven” or “Susanō’s insistence on going to the land of his mother” (172) as “childish stories,” one is struck by the astounding diversity and breadth of Kokugaku.

As the author indicates on the last page of the Conclusion (226), her motivation in dealing with Kokugaku is not so much to gain a better understanding of the past for its own sake, but rather to contribute to a better understanding of present-day Japan. Laudable as this approach is, it also leads to the only weakness of this work. The author is at her best when she describes and analyzes, which she does in the introductory and main chapters. In the chapter on New Kokugaku and in the Conclusion she tries to prove a point. The tone of the narrative changes, the author’s likes and dislikes appear, some criticisms seem to be a bit too harsh, and some reasoning is not very convincing.

The author accuses Haga Yaichi of a “purposeful misreading of the work of the German scholars he cited” (205), among them Wilhelm von Humboldt. At issue is whether von Humboldt’s description of philology as “Wissenschaft der Nationalität” is correctly translated into “science of the nation,” that is “Kokugaku” (Haga’s position), or whether nation should be rendered as *Volk*, and *minzoku* 民族 an ethnic group (Burns’s position, following a modern Japanese author, Hatanaka Kenji) (204, 205). Of course, the author is right when she approvingly quotes Hatanaka’s position “that many of von Humboldt’s contemporaries had begun to use the term *Volk* in opposition to ‘nation’ precisely in order to foreground the distinction between cultural communities based on language and modern political communities” (205). But she forgets that at the beginning of the nineteenth century, when von Humboldt was writing, there was no single German state. Cultural and political community were not identical. That only changed with the creation of the German

Reich in 1871, when the German *Volk* was transformed into the German nation—a situation that already existed in Japan in Haga's time.

More importantly, the author rejects the use of the term “nationalism” (and uses instead “culturalism”) to describe Kokugaku discourse, “in order to avoid the teleological assumption that premodern conceptions of identity ‘develop into’ modern national identities.” To illustrate her point, she notes that some post-Restoration scholars “selected, reorganized, and adapted aspects of Kokugaku practice to sustain new conceptions of national character and national culture,” thereby portraying the rise of the Meiji state “as a result of nationalism, rather than nationalism as the product of the nation-state” (224 and 225).

I do not understand the author's meaning of “developing into” when discussing ideas and ideologies. How else but through the activities of scholars or ideologues, who by necessity work selectively and adapt what they have found, can a concept develop into its next stage? Furthermore, if she negates the existence of nationalism in pre-Restoration Japan, how can she explain that within four years (!) after the Restoration both the social stratification into four classes (*shimin byōdō* 四民平等) and the geographic-administrative division into domains (*haihan chiken* 廢藩置縣) were abolished? And above all, how does she imagine the rise of “nationalism as the product of the nation-state”? Does she feel that soon after the Restoration a group of men came together and decided to create a modern ideology called “nationalism”?

In the last parts of this otherwise brilliant study, preconceived ideological (“critical”) thinking seems to have won over Burns's otherwise cool and detached analysis. Still, the book is a must for anybody who is interested in Kokugaku.

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LOFTUS, RONALD *Telling Lives: Women's Self-Writing in Modern Japan*.
Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2004. xi + 310 pages. Photographs,
bibliography, index. Paper US\$25.00; ISBN 0-8248-2834-8.

Ronald P Loftus's *Telling Lives: Women's Self-Writing in Modern Japan* eludes any strict categorization and departs from the trend of existing scholarship on modern Japanese women's history, being neither a history of women's organization nor a history of women's involvement in political movements.¹ It consists, rather, of both an exploration of women's autobiographical practice and a compilation of translations of the autobiographies of five Japanese feminists who came to prominence in the interwar years.

Telling Lives begins with a review of the development of research and literature on autobiography and in the field of autobiographical criticism. Loftus foreshadows his particular interest in this field when he refers to the tension between autobiography as the “process by which autobiographical meaning or ‘truth’ is constructed” (1) and autobiography as “one of the major forms of discourse by which myths about the individual and self-formation are produced and sustained” (1–2). In relating the development of autobiographical criticism, he describes the distinction between, on the one hand, the previously “hegemonic practice” and “universalizing agenda” of treatments of prominent male figures, which “left little room for the kind of multiple, contradicted subjectivities that might be encouraged in women's self-writing” (2), and, on the other hand, the more complex and nuanced treatments of female subjects, which recognized the “discontinuity, fragmentation” (3) and particular foci of their texts, and which were prompted by feminist scholarly