

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

criticism of the genre from the 1980s. Perhaps because he subscribes closely to the latter position, Loftus does not address the assumptions inherent in the former stance. Quoting extensively from the writing of feminist scholars, Loftus then traces the evolution of feminist autobiographical criticism from the “path-breaking works” of Estelle Jelinek, Donna C. Stanton, and Sidonie Smith, and the works that “followed in rapid succession” (5; he lists no fewer than fourteen publications in a footnote) to the more recent work of Judy LONG (1999), from which he borrows the title of his own book. This provides the background to an account of Loftus’s encounter with and interest in “Japanese female self-writing,” in which he introduces (and quotes lengthy passages from) the autobiographies of radical socialist Fukuda Hideko and radical historian Takamura Itsue. Struck by the intensity, passion, and frankness of personal reflection in these narratives, Loftus shifted his reading on autobiographical theory to focus on “women’s self-writing” and explored other Japanese women’s autobiographies, explorations which inspired this larger study of the autobiographical writing of Japanese women activists. This discussion of the nature of women’s autobiographical narrative (or “self-writing” as Loftus also refers to it) will be of particular interest for students of autobiography; for readers unfamiliar with the field, it is a rather heavy introduction.

The translations contained in the book are introduced in Chapter 1, “Producing Writing Subjects: Women in the Interwar Years,” in which Loftus profiles each text and its author and outlines his “four general arguments” (16). In short, these address the importance of gender as a complicating factor in Japanese society of the 1920s and 1930s; treat feminists and activists as sites of political and cultural contestation; recognise autobiographies as offering insight into the new subjectivity of women in the interwar years; and identify female self-writing as subversive of the dominant discourse. He describes his primary aim as being to attend to the “‘cultural specificities’ of Japanese women’s self-representational narratives” (18). Students of modern Japanese history interested in exploring women’s voices might begin their reading here without missing out on the theoretical dimensions of Loftus’s study.

The following four chapters discuss the autobiographies of Oku Mumeo, Takai Toshio, Nishi Kiyoko, Sata Ineko, and Fukunaga Misao—self-motivated women who became social and political activists and contributed to women’s, labor, and proletarian literary movements in the interwar years and in one case, in the early post-WWII period. Forming the main body of the book, the chapters consist of an introductory essay providing a basic outline of the narrator’s career and Loftus’s comment, and translated extracts of autobiography interspersed with Loftus’s commentary. The translations are invaluable in that they vividly convey the voices of individual women and assist readers to understand the challenges that faced women intellectuals and activists from a personal perspective. A talented and experienced translator, Loftus provides the Japanese titles of publications and the English calendrical equivalents of dates referred to by the authors. In contrast, the absence of justification for editorial-style interventions, such as the choice of particular passages and the omission of other passages of the original text (including some quite lengthy, up to sixteen pages, sections) is surprising. It is also not clear whether the headings in the translated passages are from the original text or are the translator’s additions.

Less satisfying than the translated narratives are the commentaries that punctuate the autobiographical narratives. While in some instances they provide useful explanations and additional information to connect non-sequential sections of narrative, not infrequently they do little more than summarise the previous passage or distil that which follows (“Below, the narrator wrestles with what to do with herself next” [59]), or comment on the personality of the author (“Few critics were more articulate or hard-nosed than

Yamakawa Kikue" [55]). Particularly when they are didactic in tone or reference Western feminist scholarship, these commentaries tend to interfere with the reader's appreciation of the narrative and to detract from the impact of the women's own voices. This reviewer wonders if some of Loftus's observations could have been revealed to greater effect in the words of the women themselves.

Despite these reservations, *Telling Lives* adds significantly to our understanding of the inner struggles and contemplations of Japanese women social and political activists in the interwar period. It makes important texts available to non-Japanese readers, and suggests the value of collections of translations as teaching resources. (The extensive bibliography is especially useful for students of Japanese women's history or feminist studies.) It also opens up another approach to women's writing, that of the subjective formative process of self-writing, in so doing making a unique contribution to the growing body of critical literature on modern Japanese women.

NOTE

1. A trend identified by Sally Ann Hastings in her review of Barbara Sato's *The New Japanese Woman: Modernity, Media, and Women in Interwar Japan* (2003) in the *Journal of Japanese Studies* 20 (Summer 2004): 499–502, 501.

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CHINA

BØRDAHL, VIBEKE, FEI LI, and HUANG YING, Editors. *Four Masters of Chinese Storytelling: Full-Length Repertoires of Yangzhou Storytelling on Video* (揚州評評話四家藝人). Copenhagen: Nordic Institute of Asian Studies (NIAS), 2004. xix + 197 pages (English text); xix + 174 pages (Chinese text). Numerous illustrations and photographs, bibliography, VCD. Hardcover £48.00; ISBN 87-91114-64-0.

The Four Masters of Chinese Storytelling is an innovative work that introduces one of the great Chinese oral traditions to audiences around the world. The uniqueness of this book is immediately apparent from glancing at the book's covers. This book emerges from a large-scale project of Børdahl and the book's contributors, "Large-scale Registration of Chinese Storytelling," and is written in a bilingual format with double covers, one in English and the flip-side in Chinese. This book and the accompanying VCD are a part of a collaborative work between scholars and performers from China and the West that resulted in the collection of performances of four Yangzhou storytelling masters of their entire repertoires. The book's accompanying VCD is a sample of the larger VCD collections of Yangzhou storytelling.¹