

The Long Defeat: Cultural Trauma, Memory, and Identity in Japan. Akiko Hashimoto. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015. Pp. 208. USD \$24.95 paper.

Although the field of collective memory and trauma studies deals extensively with cultural artefacts and narratives, it has largely failed to engage the dilemmas posed by cultural differences. Akiko Hashimoto's new book rightly puts cultural difference front and center in explaining the Japanese encounter with the legacy of World War II. To date, scholarship in this area has been largely based upon studies of Western countries and is dominated by Western scholars. Given this imbalance in the scholarship and scholars, it is hardly surprising that certain biases and assumptions have crept into the literature.

The most significant exception to this general focus on Western countries in the literature has been Japan. But even here the scholarship is very thin in terms of recognizing how the cultural differences between Japan and other Western countries might play a significant role in shaping how the country has processed the violent legacy of World War II. That Japan has taken a different route from that of Germany is generally acknowledged, but the reasons offered in the existing literature are curious for their lack of culturally specific explanations. This is doubly curious for a field of scholarship that is highly qualitative in nature and draws extensively upon the analysis of cultural artifacts. One reason for this probably relates to the lack of explicit comparative work in the field, although again here the one outstanding exception is that Germany and Japan have been brought into direct comparison most frequently. But even here, the explanation for the differences often comes back to politics, economics, and international relations.

Akiko Hashimoto's newest book does a great deal to correct this imbalance in the literature and will hopefully alert scholars, not necessarily interested in Japan, that they need to be more aware of the cultural differences that exist between different cases and how these factors can have a dramatic impact on how countries deal with their difficult histories. One reason why Hashimoto does a far better job at this than many others is that she recognizes the centrality of how micro-level, daily interactions in the family can have profound effects on how the national narratives about the past are shaped (19-20). And she knows the Japanese family quite well. Raised in the Japan of the 1960s, she is able to reflect on her personal experiences. Furthermore, the changing and persistent characteristics of the Japanese family and household have been, until now, her primary field of research.

There are certainly some universal or near universal aspects of collective memory formation that travel across many different locations today, and throughout human history, but these aspects probably also exist on a continuum in terms of their salience. For example, all humanity has to deal with the basic problems of human existence, such as mortality. However, how different human civilizations cope with death and define the relationship between the living and the dead varies a great deal. All human civilizations have recognized a privileged relationship between parents and children, but the cultural rules that govern the obligations between the two again vary significantly.

On both of these factors, Japanese life differs significantly from Western norms. While it is true that confrontation between the generation of "perpetrators" and the postwar generation in West Germany was difficult and something to still be avoided within families if not also in public, such confrontations did occur. In Japan, these confrontations hardly materialized inside Japanese families or in the general public. The reason for this, Hashimoto notes, is that the *generational proximity* and dependence is significantly different in Japan compared to Western

norms. Patriarchy, age hierarchies, gender norms, and filial obedience made any criticism of parental authority "anathema" (36-37). All of these factors tended to shut down difficult discussions about the wartime past, especially with regards to perpetrator narratives, and to focus attention instead on a pervasive sense of powerlessness. Postwar Japanese children came to abhor war, and there is no question that pacifism is a strongly held sentiment in Japan, but by coming to see their parents as powerless, Japanese children have developed little understanding of how effective resistance against an unjust authority might be mounted or even justified..

Let me quote Hashimoto at length on this point because it goes to the heart of why it matters so much for present day politics, "A pervasive sense of inefficacy, shaped by accounts of defeat, is part of what forms the narrow apolitical vision of the postwar generation...This problem of inefficacy also makes sense when we realize that postwar pacifism failed to train postwar citizens to think about, or even imagine, the legitimate means of resistance to a military machine at war...This prescription to delegitimize aggression and belligerence declawed the citizens, and also deprived them of the legitimate means to act *against* authority when needed" (47-48).

And here we come to one of the most striking differences between the West German case, and indeed *any* Western case in relationship to German fascism and World War II, and Japan - *resistance*. This is the non-barking dog in Hashimoto's narrative, which would have been fascinating for her to explore in this book. In every single case related to German fascism, there is now, today, a celebration of the *resistance against an obvious evil*. The national resistance against German fascism is celebrated in Germany, France, Italy, the Netherlands, Denmark, everywhere. In Japan, one would assume based on postwar discussions that there had been no resistance at all, which was not the case. Indeed, in Hashimoto's fascinating discussion of school textbooks and popular culture, the Japanese wartime resistance is *never* discussed. Why?

Hashimoto does not address this question in this text, but there are ample suggestions as to why this is the case in her other writings about Japanese families, as well as the writings of others on Japan. For example, in her essay, "Culture, Power, and Filial Piety in Japan," she writes, "that the child comes to understand that rebellion is useless, that it results in defeat, and that she/he is powerless to do otherwise than acquiesce."¹ Similarly, Masao Maruyama wrote in his classic essay, "Theory and Psychology of Ultra-Nationalism," of how even Japanese liberals could not conceive of violating the central tenets of filial piety.² Saburo Ienaga also puzzled over the lack of Japanese wartime resistance in his book, *The Pacific War, 1931-1945*. Ienaga wrote about the examples he could find, but most of them involved passive resistance and withdrawal, rather than active resistance. Those that did take an active resistance role tended to be Christian converts, notes Ienaga.³ The reason for this, according to Robert Bellah and Hashimoto is that Christianity provided converts with a transcendent view of the ultimate truth, which went beyond the existing social order dominated by the principle of filial piety.⁴ It gave them a moral justification for their resistance. Ienaga hoped that the Japanese would draw upon the examples of wartime resistance as a way to learn about how one can and should resist unjust authority. But even today, the Japanese wartime resistance is almost wholly ignored.

And this brings us back to why *The Long Defeat* is such a significant contribution to the literature -- Hashimoto's cultural analysis, her focus on the micro-level and the family, and the emphasis upon the fact that the way in which collective memory formation takes shape in non-Western countries may be significantly different from those in Western countries, which

currently dominate the field. It is truly a beautifully written book, exceptional in its clarity of prose and organization.

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¹ Akiko Hashimoto, "Culture, Power, and the Discourse of Filial Piety in Japan: The Disempowerment of Youth and Its Social Consequences," in *Filial Piety: Practice and Discourse in Contemporary East Asia*, ed. Charlotte Ikels (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004): 186.

² Masao Maruyama, "Theory and Psychology of Ultra-Nationalism," in *Thought and Behaviour in Modern Japanese Politics*, edited and translated by Ivan Morris, 1-24 (Expanded Edition ed. London: Oxford University Press, 1969).

³ Saburo Ienaga, *The Pacific War, 1931-1945*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1978.

⁴ Akiko Hashimoto "Culture, Power and the Discourse of Filial Piety in Japan," 191. Robert N. Bellah. *Imagining Japan: The Japanese Tradition and Its Modern Interpretation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 169.