

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY
University of Wisconsin - Madison
Autumn 1983

History 455. JAPAN'S MODERN CENTURY, 1853-1952:
THE RISE & FALL OF THE IMPERIAL STATE

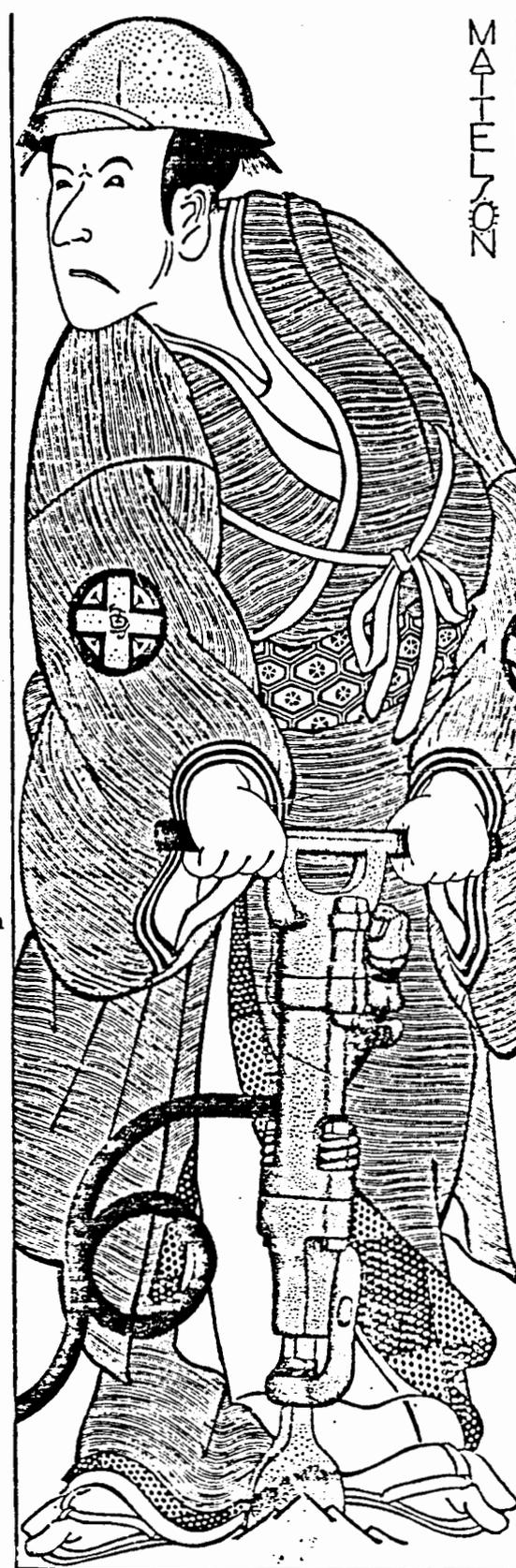
John W. Dower

5114 Humanities Building
Hours: Wednesday, 2-4 p.m.
or by appointment

Course Description. History 455 deals with the extraordinary century during which Japan developed from an isolated feudal society into a global power--ending in war, defeat, and a new start after World War Two. Initial readings as well as the first several weeks of lectures introduce the feudal legacy to modern Japan from various perspectives. Here we will examine, among other topics, the samurai ruling class and its structures of political control; the nature of the premodern economy; popular culture and the urban pleasure quarters that have been so vividly captured in the famous woodblock prints; peasant rebellion and local heroes; and traditional thought and values, as well as the rupture of intellectual orthodoxies in the 18th and 19th centuries.

The "modern" period in Japanese history can be conveniently dated from 1853, when Commodore Perry of the United States forced Japan's feudal leaders to abandon their policy of isolation and open their country to foreign contacts. The decade and a half that followed was tumultuous, and ended with rebel forces overthrowing the Bakufu (the central government headed by the Shogun in Edo, the former name of Tokyo) and establishing a new government under the young Emperor Meiji. These developments, culminating in the "Meiji Restoration" of 1868, are dealt with in the next small block of lectures and readings.

By the end of the Meiji period (1868-1912), Japan had made rapid progress in attempting to catch up with the Western powers--and done so at considerable cost to its own people as well as other Asians. It had adopted a parliamentary form of government resting on a potent mystique of veneration for the throne, established a solid basis for "take-off" as a capitalist economy, won two major wars (against China and Russia), and established itself as a major imperialist and colonial power. The nature of these developments, as well as their social costs and the explosive "contradictions" they contained, will be covered in the weeks up to roughly the middle of the semester.



[Course Description - cont.] The second half of the course examines Japan's progress from triumph to tragedy. Here a strict chronological approach is especially difficult, since developments which took place simultaneously must be separated out and addressed thematically. Special attention is given here, especially in the lectures, to the emergence of a "dual economy" dominated by giant oligopolies (the zaibatsu); class tensions and ideological conflicts; and the blighted flowering of bourgeois culture between World War One and World War Two (including the vogue of the "modern girl" and "modern boy," and the interwar fad of "eroticism, grotesqueries, and nonsense"). Readings, especially in the assigned book by Mikiso Hane, provide an intimate view of the hopes and sufferings of the less privileged groups and classes during this period. Students should expect to emerge from these readings and lectures with a picture of Japan that differs considerably from the old stereotype of a "harmonious" society. They will also find that most of these developments are not "peculiarly Japanese." They involve a diverse range of people involved in social, political, economic, and cultural activities entirely comparable to those we address in Western history.

Japan's "road to war" is approached from an international as well as domestic perspective. It is analyzed, in part, as an imperialist struggle and a response to the Depression and the crisis of the global economic order. Attention will be given to the "socialization for death" to which the Japanese were subjected as the international crisis mounted. The assigned book by Saburo Ienaga focuses, from a very critical perspective, on developments in Japan between 1931 and 1945. Several lectures will focus on other aspects of the same period, including the racial aspects of World War Two in Asia, the U.S. decision to drop the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and the atomic-bomb experience in Japanese eyes. Fires on the Plain, a translation of a novel by one of Japan's most esteemed authors, portrays the war in the Pacific through Japanese eyes.

The final several lectures in the course will deal with the Allied Occupation of Japan from 1945 to 1952, which was actually dominated by the United States. During this period, early reformist ideals of "demilitarization and democratization" were gradually superseded by the objective, on the part of both the United States and the Japanese elites, of rehabilitating Japan as an anti-communist ally in the cold war. The Occupation period can be compared to the early Meiji period in terms of the dramatic changes it brought about; but like the Meiji period, it also rested firmly on powerful legacies from the past. The course will thus conclude in 1952 looking both back at the legacies of Japan's "modern century" and forward to the legacies of the Occupation to present-day Japan.

Classes. Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, 11 - 11:50 a.m. The fourth contact hour required of undergraduates will be met by special discussions, lectures, or presentations announced ahead of time. These may include campus showings of Japanese movies produced between the 1930s and 1952. Slides and other graphics will be utilized throughout the course.

Course Requirements. Students may choose one of two options to fulfill course requirements. Option #1: Midterm examination (25% of final grade; a paper of approximately 10 typed double-spaced pages based on additional reading and related to general course content (25%); and the final examination (50%). Option #2: No midterm examination; a substantial "research" paper of approximately 20 typed double-spaced pages (50% of the final grade); and the final examination (50%).

Papers. Paper topics, plus the proposed sources to be used, must be submitted to the instructor ahead of time for approval (see the calendar below). For basic suggestions, you are advised to peruse the bibliographies in the assigned texts by Pyle and Wray & Conroy. Also, you should not hesitate to consult with the instructor after class or during office hours. Option #1 papers may be based on a critical reading of a substantial monograph, or the equivalent thereof in the form of articles or short monographs. Option #2 papers should reflect a substantial research effort. Modern Japanese literature in translation may be used as the basis for papers. In both options, papers must be properly and fully annotated (notes, as well as the bibliography, can be placed at the end).

Readings. There are five assigned books, all in paperback:

- * Kenneth B. Pyle. THE MAKING OF MODERN JAPAN (1978: Heath).
- * Mikiso Hane. PEASANTS, REBELS, AND OUTCASTES: THE UNDERSIDE OF MODERN JAPAN (1982: Pantheon).
- * Harry Wray & Hilary Conroy, ed. JAPAN EXAMINED: PERSPECTIVES ON MODERN JAPANESE HISTORY (1983: U. Hawaii).
- * Saburo Ienaga. THE PACIFIC WAR, 1931-1945: A CRITICAL PERSPECTIVE ON JAPAN'S ROLE IN WORLD WAR II (1978: Pantheon; the original Japanese version was published in 1968).
- * Shohei Ooka. FIRES ON THE PLAIN. Translated by Ivan Morris from the 1952 novel Nobi (1957: Tuttle).

In addition to the above books, short readings will be made available as the semester progresses.

Calendar.

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| August 29 | First day of classes |
| September 23 | Paper topics due (including proposed sources) |
| October 14 | Midterm examination |
| November 14 | Papers due (for both Option #1 and Option #2) |
| December 9 | Last day of class |
| December 12 | Final examination from 12:25 p.m. |