The contributors to the edited volume by Iokibe Makoto, *The Diplomatic History of Postwar Japan*, assert that it is never too early to look backwards. In this new edition, five Japanese experts retell the story of the past sixty years, filling in the historiographical lacunae of postwar diplomatic history that traditionally treats the years following the American Occupation of Japan as an afterthought. When the first edition came out in 1999, Iokibe and his fellow contributors had created the first comprehensive history of postwar Japanese diplomacy, a text that would become a scholarly success and win the prestigious Yoshida Shigeru Prize for history. Asserting that “the history of postwar Japan, in which the country became a significant actor in international society as an economic power, rivals the drama of its prewar history of modernization,” these Japanese authors weave together a coherent vision of Japanese domestic and international development over the last half of the twentieth century (ix). Indeed, the authors make a compelling argument that the postwar history of Japanese diplomacy should be understood as that of a country “pursuing economic ‘expansion through cooperation’” in contrast with the prewar policies of “‘expansion at the expense of cooperation’” (1, emphasis in the original). Now, Routledge has published a new edition which brings the text even further into the recent past, confronting the first turbulent decade of the twenty-first century.

The stated purpose of this text is to provide a handbook for students of Japanese studies to comprehend the big picture history of modern Japan and how that story fits into international relations. It accomplishes this feat by narrating the trends in Japanese postwar history chronologically, broken down by decade. The structure of the book highlights what the authors consider to be the key moments in Japanese post-war diplomacy. For Iokibe, the decadal
periodization is self-evident, corresponding with the Security Treaty crisis of 1960, economic
growth of the 1960s, the crises of the 1970s which bespoke an era of international change, the
new conservatism of the 1980s, and the post-Cold War shifts characteristic of the 1990s. While
admitting the danger of such an approach, the text deftly uses such chronologies to advance its
analysis, arguing that “the odd-numbered decades – the 1950s, 1970s, and 1990s—can be said to
have a period of rapid change and crisis in systems, while the even-numbered 1960s and 1980s
were decades of relative stability and development” (10). Rather than focusing on discrete
events in the past, the majority of the chapters instead seek to analyze diplomacy as a cumulative
work in progress, with each stage always providing the foundation for what follows in the next.
Using primary sources from declassified diplomatic documents, published memoirs, and diaries,
these historians unpack the history of postwar Japan into a comprehensive and coherent narrative
of modern Japan that does not end in 1945, or even in 1953, but in 2005.

With the publication of this volume, finally, the reader gains access to a clear and easy to
follow synopsis of the events that shaped our most recent past. It is an ideal desk reference for
any lecturer, highlighting not only the people and events critical to our understanding of postwar
Japanese diplomatic history, but also providing a bounty of primary materials to draw upon in
the classroom for course readings and research paper assignments. Perhaps, however, the most
fascinating part of this text emerges when the authors attempt to make sense of history that every
reader, to some extent or another, remembers: the critical years following the 2001 terrorist
attacks in the United States. In fact, in his final empirical chapter, Iokibe expressly connects the
diplomatic lessons of the twentieth and twenty-first century with regard to reconstruction policy:
“it can be said that the United States and the countries of Europe have begun to realize that the
rebuilding of economies provides the foundation for stability and peace, something Japan has
argued for many years” (201-2). Indeed, the discussion of the United States occupation policy for Iraq carries with it the ghost of the book’s earlier treatment of the Allied Occupation of Japan, pointing subtly to many reasons why the Iraqi policy may have floundered.

On whole, the book does a remarkable job of presenting a fairly detached analysis of the past sixty years of Japanese diplomatic relations. However, there are moments, particularly in the updated materials added to this new edition, which expose the fraught nature of relating contemporary events as historical narrative. In his reworked chapter on Japanese diplomacy after the cold war, it is easy to see the passion of Iokibe regarding the twenty-four Japanese who “were among those indiscriminately killed” at the World Trade Center on 9-11, particularly when he continues, declaring that “President Bush had an appointment with destiny to become the representative of America at this time who needed to unite the country in its battle with terrorism” (198). His feelings on Japan’s role in international peace keeping are equally on display, with his comments comparing the SDF (Security Defense Forces) role with other UN peacekeepers. “The SDF were not there to keep order by pointing their weapons at civilians,” Iokibe explains, “but instead were given the mission of restoring infrastructure, supporting the needs of the civilians, sponsoring festivals with them, and otherwise providing care to the people of the region, an unusual mission as compared to those other militaries” (201). Thus, Iokibe occasionally loses a little scholarly detachment and falls prey to the hyperbole so common when relating contentious contemporary history.

One strength of this text for the educator is that the translator, Robert D. Eldridge, gives Romanized Japanese terms when discussing particular factions, for example taigai-ko (those with a strong stance against foreign powers), joi-ha exclusionists, etc. This is important for students who wish to be able to easily move between Japanese and English secondary source
materials later in their career. One minor flaw with the English edition is that some chapters overuse passive constructions, resulting the flattening of the political landscape into a single entity of “Japan.” This is most evident in phrases like “Japan's national interests were being sacrificed simply to avoid conflict” or "Japan was now being forced to choose between the two objectives, expansion or cooperation” (5). In other words, while the authors do often identify and name key players, the style of the narrative occasionally reifies the concept of a monolithic entity that is "Japan."

Ignoring those few moments, the most important contribution of this text is the authors’ unwavering ability to create a unified, well-documented, and largely self-aware text that traverses the dangerous terrain of contemporary historical analysis. Sixty years after the end of the Pacific War, this book provides an excellent entrée for academic historians and lecturers alike to address and redress a different aspect of “history problem” that exists in many college courses in the United States: the relegation of postwar Japanese history to the position of an afterthought in syllabi.

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