CrossMark

Modern Intellectual History (2023), **20**, 612–629
doi:10.1017/S1479244322000221

CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

FORUM: HISTORY AND THE PRESENT

Past and Present in Japanese Historiography: Four Versions of Presentism

Louise Young*

Department of History, University of Wisconsin–Madison
*Corresponding author. E-mail: louiseyoung@wisc.edu

(Received 12 April 2022; accepted 14 April 2022)

For many intellectual historians, presentism is viewed as a cardinal sin—linked to unreflective anachronism and the inappropriate projection of present-day values onto a very different past context. However, by embracing the ways in which the present inevitably shapes our modes of inquiry, our historical interests, and even the moral underpinnings of our analysis, we can find in the present tools that can make our history better, and help make sense of historical debates and controversies. This essay gives an account of Japanese historiography organized around four versions of presentism. The first is political presentism, an analytic lens that emerged in the "objectivity debate" over what constituted politicized scholarship and reflected the political antagonisms of the Cold War in Asia. Consciously or unconsciously, political convictions shape our scholarship. The second version is the presentism of social context. Each decade that followed the Asia–Pacific War possessed its particular zeitgeist, and histories written during those moments were products of their time. The third form of presentism is the connection between past and present via analogy or likeness: using a past event or person to understand the present and vice versa. To analogize past and present means finding a correspondence that makes the past feel familiar and less "other." The fourth version of presentism is the project of contemporary history: the past in the present, the past leading to the present, the present as the starting point for historical inquiry.

As an American intellectual project, Japanese history has always already been a "history of the present." This term has its own history, and, as the regional essays in the current issue demonstrate, our understanding of the stakes in writing a "history of the present" vary from field to field. While aristocratic amateurs like Sir George Sansom produced the earliest scholarly histories of Japan, a robust anglophone Japanese studies emerged in the aftermath of World War II as an American Cold War project, anchored to the institutional structures of the university system and sustained by a critical mass of scholars. Because Japan was the lynchpin of the Cold War order in Asia, America invested heavily in Japan knowledge, and more than any other country outside Japan itself. Together with the hegemony of English on the world stage, this explains why US institutions have dominated the global circulation of scholarship on Japan. With the end of the Cold War in 1989, America's grip on global Japan knowledge began to weaken, as Australia, the UK, and Germany invested in Japanese studies and multiple

© The Author(s), 2022. Published by Cambridge University Press

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1479244322000221 Published online by Cambridge University Press

centers of gravity began to emerge. Nevertheless, the intellectual production of Japan knowledge remains overwhelmingly anglophone (German and Japanese scholars need to publish in English to get international visibility) and is still centered in the US.[1] From its origins in the Cold War, Japanese studies emerged an instrumental knowledge, tied to policy and informed by the politics of the US–Japan relationship. Since the discipline of Japanese history is embedded within this origin story, the history of Japanese history tracked the fortunes of Japan studies, which remained tied to the US–Japan relationship and the changing imperatives of American policy in Asia. For Japanese history, there was no escape from the present.

This essay gives a historical account of Japanese historiography through the concept of presentism. I have structured my narrative around two timelines. The first is my autobiography: the making of a Japanese historian from my days as an undergraduate studying Japan in the late 1970s to my current position as a senior historian at a public university in 2021.[2] The second is the politics of US–Japan relations: starting with the transformation of Japan from enemy to ally during the Occupation of 1945–52 and culminating in the twenty-first-century reset as Japanese economic power was eclipsed by the rise of China on the world stage. I adopt an expansive definition of "presentism" in this essay to indicate a variety of strategies historians use to connect past to the present in their historical scholarship. I realize that for many intellectual historians, presentism is viewed as a cardinal sin—linked to unreflective anachronism and the inappropriate projection of present-day values onto a very different past context. I want to suggest that by embracing the ways in which the present inevitably shapes our modes of inquiry, our historical interests, and even the moral underpinnings of our analysis, we can find in the present tools that make our history better.

My lived experience as a Japanese historian has revealed four versions of presentism. The first is political presentism, an analytic lens that emerged in the "objectivity debate" over what constituted politicized scholarship and reflected the political antagonisms of the Cold War in Asia. Consciously or unconsciously, political convictions shape our scholarship. The second version is the presentism of social context. Each decade that followed the Asia–Pacific War possessed its particular zeitgeist, and histories written during those moments were products of their time. The third form of presentism is the connection between past and present via analogy or likeness: using a past event or person to understand the present and vice versa. To analogize past and present means finding a correspondence that makes the past feel familiar and less "other." It can provide a bridge of understanding, interpretation, insight. The fourth version of presentism I address is the project

[1]For a provocative volume of essays on the challenges of producing an Asian-centric Japan studies see Kaori Okano and Yoshio Sugimoto, eds., *Rethinking Japanese Studies: Eurocentrism and the Asia-Pacific Region* (London, 2018); as well as Amy Borovoy's thoughtful review in *Journal of Japanese Studies* 45/2 (2019), 372–7.

[2]My perspective is shaped by the programs and institutions I was schooled in and the people I worked with: the University of Wisconsin–Madison, where I studied as an undergraduate with John Dower; Columbia University for graduate school, where I studied with Carol Gluck; the first part of my career at New York University where I taught alongside Harry Harootunian; and finally the University of Wisconsin–Madison where I currently teach together with Sarah Thal.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1479244322000221 Published online by Cambridge University Press

of contemporary history: the past in the present, the past leading to the present, the present as the starting point for historical inquiry. Like the other three versions, this kind of presentism can be productive and generative. The sense of urgency and immediacy of the current conjuncture lends clarity and vitality to the work of the historian.

Presentism as political lens

I first encountered the concept of presentism as an undergraduate at the University of Wisconsin in a Japanese history course in 1980. American historians of Japan, I learned, were split into two antagonistic camps. One group promoted "value-free" scholarship that situated the historian at a distance from her object. This camp eschewed linking past and present as an expression of "emotional polemics" and "ideological controversy," claiming that connections with current events got in the way of objective historical truth. The other side offered a critique of this critique of presentism, arguing that claims of objectivity were themselves shot through with political ideology. They argued that it was indisputable that research on Asia held political significance and that scholars should recognize the connection between Asian studies and public affairs. Both sides agreed that presentism represented a sort of political bias, though the "value-free" camp insisted that scholarship should stand apart from social struggle and its political passions, while the "embrace presentism" camp wore their commitments on their sleeves and called for a socially engaged scholarship. As a politically active undergraduate, my own sympathies were indelibly set on the side of engaged scholarship, a sympathy that still marks the way I remember this moment in Japanese historiography.

The objectivity debate held particular salience for East Asian history in America, where China, Korea, and Japan became the first front in the US Cold War in Asia and McCarthyism fundamentally shaped the field for decades. The "loss of China" to Communism was viewed as a political, but especially an intellectual, failure. Critics of the Truman administration condemned China experts like Owen Lattimore and their allies in the State Department as Communist sympathizers whose misguided analysis and naive admiration for Chinese Communism undermined American support for Chiang Kai-shek. In their search for scapegoats, public institutions purged left-wing China hands from their ranks, leaving the field to the cold warriors.[3] Because the US–Japan Mutual Security Treaty represented the lynchpin of American efforts to contain Communism in Korea and to isolate China, Japanese studies also experienced the impact of ideological cleansing. The classic victim of McCarthyism was the great scholar and diplomat E. H. Norman—a Canadian who studied at Harvard and wrote some of the most influential English-language interpretations of Japan during the 1940s. Over the following decade, however, Norman's writings went out of print, when American scholars began to dismiss his work as derivative of Japanese Marxism. Spurning Norman as a crude mouthpiece

[3]The pursuit of "who lost China" turned up a vast Communist conspiracy among journalists and scholars who covered the Chinese revolution in the 1930s and 1940s. For these associations, organizations like the Institute for Pacific Relations lost funding; virtually all China experts were purged from the ranks of the civil service; journalists like Edgar Snow and Theodore White found it difficult to publish.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1479244322000221 Published online by Cambridge University Press

for outmoded scholarship, American historians of Japan treated him as an anachronism until his rediscovery in the mid-1970s. After being hounded relentlessly with accusations about his politics and associations with the Communist left in Japan, Norman committed suicide in 1957.[4] For later generations, Norman became a martyr of the Cold War, and an exemplar of politically engaged presentism.

The conservative tilt of early postwar scholarship on Asia shaped the founding moment of East Asian area studies. Established in the 1950s with funding from the Ford Foundation and the National Defense Act, area studies constituted a form of instrumental knowledge to promote American interests abroad, designed to prepare a generation of experts to win the Cold War and engage the newly independent African and Asian world of nations. Area studies centers proliferated in the American academy in the 1950s and 1960s and provided critical lifeblood for non-Western history—including Asian studies, African studies, and Latin American studies. For Japan, this led to the creation of a handful of centers of study at Harvard, Stanford, Yale, Princeton, Columbia, and some of the major public universities like University of California, University of Michigan, and University of Washington. Since they had been purged from the ranks of China and Japan specialists, the Old Left was excluded from these newly created faculty posts.[5]

The founding generation of American historians of Japan who occupied these positions represented a transwar generation. Their experience coming of age during America's "good war" and launching their careers in the midst of the American-led recovery profoundly shaped their scholarly outlook. Most grew up in Japan in the 1920s and 1930s as children of missionary families or acquired expertise through wartime language and intelligence training. Many participated in the American Occupation from 1945 to 1952. These experiences gave them a sense of goodwill as well as an understanding of Japanese perspectives. They saw themselves as ambassadors for the remade Japan, vanquishing stereotypes of militarism and war hates. They shared official goals of fostering the US–Japan alliance and took pride in the ideals of the Occupation—which sought to demilitarize and democratize Japan. They also regarded themselves as area studies experts, embracing the interdisciplinary identity of "Japanologist." They believed in the efficacy of American social science and its capacity for fact-based, scientific analysis of the past and present in order to help policy makers chart a better future. In short, the founding generation were happy warriors in the defense of American liberal internationalism during the heady aftermath of the "good war." While they were easy for later generations to demonize as tools of American foreign policy, our critiques did not fully acknowledge the dramatic shift in perspectives on Asia before and after the shock of the Vietnam War Tet offensive in 1968 and the damning revelations of the Pentagon Papers in 1971. Ironically, though the founding generation would lead the charge against presentism in Japanese studies in the 1970s, their work in the 1950s and 1960s was profoundly present-oriented. In telling a

[4]John W. Dower, "E. H. Norman, Japan and the Uses of History," in E. H. Norman, *Origins of the Modern Japanese State: Selected Writings of E. H. Norman* (New York, 1975), 3–102, esp. 31–45.

[5]University of Michigan Center for Japanese Studies, "History of CJS," at https://ii.umich.edu/cjs/history-of-cjs.html (accessed 5 Dec. 2021); University of California, Berkeley Institute of East Asian Studies, "History of IEAS," at https://ieas.berkeley.edu/ieas-home/about-ieas/history-ieas (accessed 5 Dec. 2021).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1479244322000221 Published online by Cambridge University Press

rosy story of Japan's social transformation under American guidance, they aimed to put the war hates behind them and grounded their scholarship in the values of liberal internationalism.

The first occasion of the "objectivity debate" took place between these Japanologists and their counterparts in Japan—another transwar generation who had emerged from Japan's defeat committed to a radical politics of social revolution. Japanese scholars saw historical analysis as an instrument for diagnosing the pathologies of the social, political, and economic structures that led to the rise of militarism and imperialism culminating in a ruinous war. They also looked to the past in order to chart the future, though they employed Marxist theory to periodize stages of capitalist development rather than modernization theory to periodize the stages of economic takeoff. The two groups faced off at an international conference in Hakone, Japan, in 1960. Organized by Americans and paid for by the Ford Foundation, the conference brought together thirty-four scholars from the US, Japan, and elsewhere to discuss the "modernization of Japan." From the outset, a gap emerged between the American agenda to account for the overall success of the Japanese experience and the Japanese side's interest in diagnosing the failure of Japanese modernity. A foundational moment for Japanology, the Hakone conference became the basis of a six-volume series that launched "Japan" as a model for Third World development, but also produced antagonism between Japanese and American scholars. The Japanese scholars blasted modernization theory as nakedly political and condemned the effort to introduce it to Japan as "American cultural imperialism," while the Americans derided Japanese "Marxist–Leninist" historiography for "fighting present enemies in treating their past."[6] While simultaneously condemning the other's political presentism, both sides shared a commitment to a useable past: for the Japanese this meant identifying social pathologies to better expunge them, while for the Americans this meant using politically neutral, scientific measures to track social progress.

The antagonistic politics of the early Cold War reemerged with a vengeance in the 1970s, when the Vietnam War birthed a generation of scholars who embraced a politically engaged presentism. The antiwar movement changed the climate of opinion on America's role in the world, and nurtured a revisionist scholarship on American imperialism in East Asia and Japan. These critical Asian scholars were committed to producing a knowledge that would educate future generations about the violence America had wreaked on Asia. In contrast to the McCarthyite suppression of the Old Left in the 1950s and early 1960s, now the antiwar movement encouraged the flowering of the New Left in the American academy. The second generation of Japan scholars mounted a wide-ranging critique of area studies expertise and the institutions that supported it—university centers, professional organizations, academic journals, and research foundations. Determined to eschew

[6]Dower, "E. H. Norman, Japan and the Uses of History," 54–5. For more on the Hakone conference and its impact see Sebastian Conrad, "'The Colonial Ties are Liquidated': Modernization Theory, Post-war Japan and the Global Cold War", *Past and Present* 216/1 (2012), 181–214; Victor Koschmann, "Modernization and Democratic Values: The 'Japanese Model' in the 1960s", in David C. Engerman, ed., *Staging Growth: Modernization, Development, and the Global Cold War* (Amherst, 2003); and Stefan Tanaka, "Objectivism and the Eradication of Critique in Japanese History," in Masao Miyoshi and H. D. Harootunian, eds. *Learning Places: the Afterlives of Area Studies* (Durham, NC, 2002).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1479244322000221 Published online by Cambridge University Press

collaboration with the Japanology establishment, they created their own institutions—starting with the Committee of Concerned Asian Scholars and its flagship journal, *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars*. Its inaugural issue opened with a broadside against scholars who "bear responsibility for the consequences of their research and the political posture of their profession" and were unwilling "to speak out against the implications of an Asian policy committed to ensuring the American domination of much of Asia."[7] Battle lines were drawn once again in an objectivity debate, as the establishment fought back with their own condemnations of the politicization of research and called for an end to presentism in favor of "fact-based" and "value-free" scholarship.

This second iteration of the debate over objectivity and presentism became monumentalized for future generations via an essay by John W. Dower, a founding member of the Committee of Concerned Asian Scholars. Dower rediscovered the suppressed voice of Old Left Asianists by editing a new edition of E. H. Norman's writings on the *Origins of Japan as a Modern State*. He opened the volume with a 101-page polemic, "E. H. Norman, Japan, and the Uses of History," which quickly became one of the main attractions of the book. Dower's homage to Norman's scholarship showcased its incisive analysis of the social character of Japan's modern revolution as well as the relevance of Norman's progressive humanism to Japan studies. He pilloried "Norman's successors" and the institutions of area studies as transparent agents of American imperialism and laid waste to the so-called "Princeton school"—the authors of the six-volume series in the Studies in the Modernization of Japan brought out by Princeton University Press. In no small part because of Dower, politics became the lens through which later generations were taught to view area studies and the concept of "modernization." Both had become indelibly tainted by their connection to American foreign policy.[8]

Only recently has East Asian area studies begun to reemerge from under the cloud. During the 1980s political polemics gradually disappeared from the pages of Asian studies journals and panel titles in annual meetings. With the end of the Cold War, social-science disciplines abandoned regional and area studies expertise in favor of universalizing quantitative methods and big-data analysis. As Japan and China experts vanished from the faculties of economics, political science, and sociology departments, the East Asian studies community mounted a defense of cultural and language expertise for the social sciences, often using arguments that reprised the founding moment of area studies. By the 2000s, making a case for the importance of regional expertise to support American foreign policy was more likely to be embroiled in an intra-university struggle between the

[7]"Read the Committee of Concerned Asian Scholars Founding Statement" (March 1969), at https://criticalasianstudies.org/about (accessed 5 Dec. 2021).

[8]Recent critiques of area studies have not done much to revise Dower's analysis, a point made by Andrew Gordon's book review, "Rethinking Area Studies, Once More," *Journal of Japanese Studies* 30/2 (2004), 417–29. The six volumes in the Princeton University Press series are Marius B. Jansen, ed., *Changing Japanese Attitudes Toward Modernization* (Princeton, 1965); William E. Lockwood, ed., *The State and Economic Enterprise in Japan* (Princeton, 1965); Ronald P. Dore, ed., *Aspects of Social Change in Modern Japan* (Princeton, 1971); Robert E. Ward, ed., *Political Development in Modern Japan* (Princeton, 1968); Donald Shively, ed., *Tradition and Modernization in Japanese Culture* (Princeton, 1971); and James Morley, ed., *Dilemmas of Growth in Prewar Japan* (Princeton, 1972).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1479244322000221 Published online by Cambridge University Press

quantitative social sciences and the qualitative humanities than in a battle between left and right over the politics of scholarship. At the same time, the objectivity debate itself faded into memory as Asia receded from the ranks of geopolitical hotspots, replaced by the Middle East and the War on Terror. When the political potency of current events dissipated, both the critique of presentism in the name of objectivity, and the critique of the critique of presentism in the name of political transparency, became anachronisms in Japanese studies—a relic of the Cold War in Asia.

Presentism as Social Context

During my days as a graduate student in the late 1980s, I discovered a second iteration of presentism. My formal training in historiography taught me that historical topics and methods changed over time. Histories were produced within the zeitgeist of the moment, the social conditions of possibility for knowledge production. Moreover, historians were also products of their time, and we could track their backgrounds and influences to explain how they saw the world around them. Since the 1980s represented the beginnings of the turn to cultural history in my field, it was no coincidence that historiography as socially contextualized intellectual history emerged as a new way of conceiving presentism.

The American social context of the 1980s already represented a big shift from the days of anti-Vietnam War activism and the zeitgeist that incubated the founding of the *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars*. The big chill that blew through Reagan's America coincided with China's political liberalization and the peak of Japan's economic miracle. The Vietnam War became a "syndrome" and American military interventionism in Asia viewed through a rearview mirror—not yet history, but no longer the immediate present. As the title of the best-selling book *Japan as Number One: Lessons for America* (1979) announced, Japan no longer required the tutelage or patronage of the United States. Escaping the company of the Third World, Japan entered the ranks of the world's leading economies. Asian specialists lost interest in American imperialism, seeking instead the secrets to Japan's economic success and issuing warnings about "The Danger from Japan" (a 1985 *New York Times* magazine cover) threatening to overtake America. Japan's economic juggernaut drove a booming demand for explainers on the developmental state and the high-growth economy. The glare of public attention to the miracle–rival–threat almost inevitably gave rise to a cottage industry of critics who pointed out the cost to growthism. In books such as *Peasants, Rebels and Outcasts: The Underside to Modern Japan* (1982), social historians wrote about the people ground down under the wheels of progress.[9] Questions posed by Japan's economic strength and its rising position in the world animated the field of Japan studies—and for the cultural historian this seemed to reflect how presentism worked.

Alongside the zeitgeist of the 1980s, the institutional landscape of the academy was also changing—in the process transforming the conditions of Japan knowledge

[9] Ezra Vogel, *Japan as Number One: Lessons for America* (Cambridge, MA, 1979); Theodore H. White, "The Danger from Japan", *New York Times Magazine*, 28 July 1985 Section 6, 19; Mikiso Hane, *Peasants, Rebels and Outcasts: The Underside to Modern Japan* (New York, 1982).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1479244322000221 Published online by Cambridge University Press

production. A major impetus for this transformation came from the Japanese government, which responded to rising trade friction with a major investment in cultural diplomacy. Beginning in the 1970s, a lavishly funded Japan Foundation seeded Japanese language and culture programs in colleges and universities across the country and sponsored academic exchange through fellowships for fieldwork in Japan and joint research projects. This led to the diffusion and diversification of Japanese studies in the US, and multiplied the ranks of Americans with experience, knowledge, and sympathy for Japan. In the 1980s, the newly created International Research Center for Japanese Studies (Nichibunken) generated a stream of publications on Japanese cultural exceptionalism. This scholarship highlighted the unique importance of family, the group, and community to Japan's social cohesion; the national strength drawn from cultural homogeneity; and the benefits of social hierarchies and Confucianist morality.[10] Based in the ancient capital, Kyoto—an outdoor museum of Japan's most famous temples—the International Research Center for Japan Studies fostered US–Japan collaborations on the cultural origins of Japan's economic success and sponsored the dissemination of these ideas to an American audience. Together, these developments changed the politics of Japan studies in the US, as well as the interactions between the American and Japanese academies. Earlier antagonisms and ideological divisions were replaced by joint research projects and the submersion of political polemics. Such changes in the institutional ecosystem also revealed the operations of presentism—how governmental projects and investments could powerfully shape the social conditions for knowledge production.

The impact of these changes on the field of Japanese history was profound. As Japan exited the Third World of developing nations to enter the First World of mature economies, the term "Asia *ex* Japan" emerged to describe this reclassification and underscore Japanese exceptionalism. At the same time, as Japanese studies deepened and extended its presence across the American academic landscape, the faculty inhabiting these programs sought to escape what they regarded as an exoticized area studies ghetto. However unconsciously, historians embraced Japan's exit from Asia; they bristled when Japan was lumped together with China, or categorized as part of the non-Western Third World. They rejected the term "Japanology" and its interdisciplinary orientation. Historians wanted to identify with their disciplinary tribe rather than their fellow "Japan hands" in the social sciences. Japan's rising power in the world, its demonstrated economic success, and the equalization of the US–Japan alliance system, all advanced the sense that Japan belonged with mature capitalist societies of Europe and the US. The field of Japanese history integrated itself with trends in Euro-American historiography, where Michel Foucault, E. P. Thompson, and Theda Skocpol were important muses. France, England, Germany, and the US became the major points of comparative reference, replacing Turkey and China.[11] These shifting affinities and the constitution of a new identity for

[10]For an analysis of the literature on Japanese exceptionalism or *Nihonjinron* see Harumi Befu, *Hegemony of Homogeneity: An Anthropological Analysis of Nihonjinron* (Melbourne, 2001).

[11]E.g. the critique of Japanese history's association with area studies in Masao Miyoshi and H. D. Harootunian, "Japan in the World," introduction to special issue of *boundary 2* 18/3 (1991), 1–7; and H. D. Harootunian, "Tracking the Dinosaur: Area Studies in a Time of 'Globalism'," in Harootunian, *History's Disquiet: Modernity, Cultural Practice, and the Question of Everyday Life* (New York, 2002).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1479244322000221 Published online by Cambridge University Press

"Japanese history" were reflections of the time—the present leaving its mark on Japanese history's quest for liberation from an orientalist imaginary of "East Asian tradition."

The aura of global success and prestige reached its peak in the mid-1990s, just as the Japanese economy began to stall with the collapse of the stock bubble, and China's economic growth started to take off. However, the significance of both these developments did not sink in for a decade. The age of Japan triumphalism shaped the interests of a new generation of historians, like myself, who began their professional lives and published their first books in the 1990s. We discovered the roaring twenties and the modern girl, who took her place with other modern girls around the world. We published on modernist cinema, literature, and art—the Japanese avant-garde and philosophical modernism. And we discovered the empire—Japan's territorial expansionism and the social, political, and cultural technologies of rule.[12] The seeming inexorability of Japanese economic power in the present directed us to look at the history of Japanese imperialism and to view the arc of the twentieth century as the story of Japan as a great power. Historians and their episteme, ideas whose time had come: the present continued to animate our research and to direct our historical inquiry. Though I did not see it at the time because I lacked historical perspective, in retrospect my own scholarship was profoundly shaped by the cresting wave of Japanese economic power. Indeed, Japan triumphalism was the social context—the presentism—that produced me and became embodied in the Japan knowledge that I in turn produced.

The relationship between knowledge production and presentism suggests one way of analyzing Japanese historiography. As successive generations built on and reacted to their intellectual forebears, their changing presents became trapped in the amber of their scholarship. The transwar generation brought us the Studies in the Modernization of Japan and a host of books examining the significance of the Meiji Restoration as Japan's modern revolution.[13] The Vietnam War generation bequeathed

During the 1980s and 1990s, Harootunian and his colleague Tetsuo Najita trained a generation of students at the University of Chicago. Through his productive association with Duke University Press and its stable of journals, Harootunian engaged in collaborations with theorists across the humanities. Known for their engagement with Continental and Marxist theory, the "Chicago school" produced a philosophically inflected intellectual history that reshaped the ecosystem of Japanese humanities. For an analysis of Japanese historiography written from the vantage point of the late 1990s see Carol Gluck, "House of Mirrors: American History-Writing on Japan," in Anthony Molho and Gordon S. Wood, eds., *Imagined Histories: American Historians Interpret the Past* (Princeton, 1999), 434–54: reorientation to Western historiographic trends, at 443–4.

[12]On the modern girl: Barbara Sato, *The New Japanese Woman: Modernity, Media, and Women in Interwar Japan* (Durham, NC, 2003); for a volume that canvases the sites of modern culture: Elise K. Tipton and John Clark, eds., *Being Modern in Japan: Culture and Society from the 1910s to the 1930s* (Honolulu, 2000); on philosophical modernism: H. D. Harootunian, *Overcome by Modernity: History, Culture and Community in Interwar Japan* (Princeton, 2000); on empire: Louise Young, *Japan's Total Empire: Manchuria and the Culture of Japanese Imperialism* (Berkeley, 1998).

[13]For example, Marius Jansen, *Sakamoto Ryōma and the Meiji Restoration* (Princeton, 1961); Albert M. Craig, *Choshu and the Meiji Restoration* (Cambridge, MA, 1961); W. G. Beasley, *The Meiji Restoration* (Stanford, 1972).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1479244322000221 Published online by Cambridge University Press

a history of modern Japan overdetermined by US power in the world—"empire and aftermath" viewed through the lens of "America's Asia."[14] The generation of the big chill held first-row seats during the retreat of activism from college campuses, but also witnessed Japan's economic recovery and reemergence on the world stage. They turned their attention to the sources of social and state power in modern Japan, yielding a stream of works on ideology and institutions that underpinned the state–society relationship.[15] The seeming triumph of the developmental state in achieving a second shot at great-power status in the twentieth century forged my own Japan triumphalism generation that rolled out studies of total empire and the phenomena of modern life that made Japan so much like other great powers.[16] By the turn of the millennium, the long-term significance of economic collapse had begun to set in and with it a new generation of scholarship became steeped in the melancholia of Japan in decline. The peripheralization of Japanese power in Asia and the sinking fortunes of "Japan, Inc." gave rise to new scholarship on multicultural Japan, the margins and interstices of empire, and the limits of state power.[17] As this generational reading of Japanese historiography suggests, we do not write history so much as history writes us.

To be sure, some caution is merited about an overly rigid definition of "generations" here. Good scholars evolve in their thinking and continue to be shaped by a social context that also evolves. The best historians of Japan belong to several of my "generations." Even so, an examination of presentism as social context can help create an archaeology of knowledge that makes sense of the accretions laid down by each generation. Scholarship develops through genealogy—ancestral founders and their progeny, family feuds and the occasional patricide. And beyond intellectual family trees, the successive layers of scholarship preserve the zeitgeist of the age that produced them. Much like scientific discovery and other forms of knowledge, historical ideas emerge and disappear because their time has come and gone.

[14]These phrases from book titles of the era: John W. Dower, *Empire and Aftermath: Yoshida Shigeru and the Japanese Experience, 1878–1954* (Cambridge, MA, 1979); Edward Friedman and Mark Selden, eds., *America's Asia: Dissenting Essays on Asian–American Relations* (New York, 1971).

[15]E.g. Carol Gluck, *Japan's Modern Myths: Ideology in the Late Meiji Period* (Princeton, 1985); Andrew Gordon, *The Evolution of Labor Relations in Japan: Heavy Industry, 1853–1955* (Cambridge, MA, 1985), Sheldon Garon, *The State and Labor in Modern Japan* (Berkeley, 1987); Andrew Barshay, *State and Intellectual in Imperial Japan: The Public Man in Crisis* (Berkeley, 1988).

[16]See note 12 above.

[17]For some examples of recent scholarship that examines the failures of state projects and the social spaces that evaded the power of the imperial state: David R. Ambaras, *Japan's Imperial Underworlds: Intimate Encounters at the Borders of Empire* (Cambridge, 2018), Robert Stolz, *Bad Water: Nature, Pollution and Politics in Japan, 1870–1950* (Durham, NC, 2014), Benjamin Uchiyama, *Japan's Carnival War: Mass Culture on the Home Front, 1937–1945* (Cambridge, 2019), Michael Wert, *Meiji Restoration Losers: Memory and Tokugawa Supporters in Modern Japan* (Cambridge, MA, 2013). On multicultural Japan and the reset with Asia: David Blake Willis and Stephen Murphy-Shigematsu, *Transcultural Japan: At the Borderlands of Race, Gender and Identity* (London, 2008); Koichi Iwabuchi, *Recentering Globalization: Popular Culture and Japanese Transnationalism* (Durham, NC, 2002); Leo T. S. Ching, *Anti-Japan: The Politics of Sentiment in Postcolonial East Asia* (Durham, NC, 2019).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1479244322000221 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Presentism as historical analogy

A third kind of presentism came to me in the summer of 1991, when I was struggling to gain traction in the early stages of dissertation writing just as the First Gulf War was breaking out. Day after day, I sat at my home office in Brooklyn, New York, shuffling through stacks of magazine articles published during Japan's invasion of Manchuria in 1931 and 1932. Day after day, I watched the nightly news, which breathlessly covered Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait and the US-led coalition of forces building up in Saudi Arabia. I saw America consumed with war fever in my present—much like Japan was consumed with war fever in my documents. The likeness sparked epiphany, an understanding of the family resemblances between these two events separated by space and time. Historical analogy worked as "common sense" in two meanings of the term. My insight into the meaning of the documents I was reading from 1930s Japan drew on a likeness, a commonality between then and now; and the ability to see this likeness drew on my intuition, my common sense.

What were these family resemblances? The centrality of a commercialized mass media in stirring up war fever, for one; as well as technological innovation during a national emergency and the transformation of the marketplace for news. The First Gulf War brought into being CNN and twenty-four-hour cable news coverage, introducing a devastating competitor for the three network news channels and transforming the market for broadcast journalism. For Japan, sharply rising demand for news in 1931 provided a heaven-sent opportunity for Japanese media companies to emerge from the Depression slump. The Manchurian incident was Japan's first radio war and marked the entry of the national broadcast company NHK into news production. Radio competed with the major newspapers to break the news from the battlefront with "news flashes" that interrupted scheduled programming multiple times a day. NHK invested in cable connections between the Japanese archipelago and the Chinese mainland, staging live broadcasts of "entertainments for our troops in Manchuria" to showcase the possibilities of radio technology. The Osaka- and Tokyo-based metropolitan daily newspapers bought fleets of airplanes to shuttle special correspondents and equipment back and forth from the continent, along with high-speed cylinder presses and the photo telegraph machines. Deploying these new technologies, the Asahi and Mainichi newspaper chains amplified their importance by bringing out glossy photograph extras and filling their front pages with breaking news, direct from Manchuria. They produced newsreels of live action from the front and screened their films in public parks to showcase the possibilities of visual journalism. Radio competed with the big dailies, and the big dailies competed with the local press in a frantic drive to command the marketplace. The appetite for news drove a soaring demand for radio contracts as well as the consolidation of the national newspaper market, as many smaller regional papers went bankrupt and the metropolitan chains expanded their market share. Responding energetically to these opportunities for commercial expansion, the mass media infected the country with war fever.[18]

[18] I write about this in Ch. 3 of *Japan's Total Empire*: "War Fever: Imperial Jingoism and the Mass Media."

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1479244322000221 Published online by Cambridge University Press

I wrote about these events in the present moment of the Iraq War fever, with its own staged media events for the troops on the ground, reports from embedded journalists, and nightly commentary from the retired generals who fanned out across the networks. Japan's past appeared much like America's present, and revealed the response of a commercialized news media to a golden opportunity to sell news and introduce new technology. In both times and places war offered career-making openings for the personalities who inhabited the news ecosystem. Thinking through these parallels made the past seem familiar and Japan a lot "like us."

Ten years later, the Second Gulf War broke out while I was working on an essay about battlefield atrocities and the acceleration of violence in the Asia–Pacific War.[19] The reaction to the published photographs of American soldiers at Abu Ghraib Prison prompted my reflection on the interconnection between home-front attitudes and battlefront actions. In both 2000s America and 1930s Japan news coverage played an oversized role in shaping public understandings of battlefield violence. In both cases news coverage normalized atrocities as the unfortunate, but necessary, brutality of a new kind of war. Public justifications for aggressive tactics in America's war against terror resembled the excuses made for stern measures in Japan's military encounter with the guerrilla forces of the Chinese resistance. And in both cases, government censorship and (dis)information campaigns influenced what appeared on the front page—though most Americans underestimate the extent of government intervention in the public narratives of the Iraq War, while most Japanese exaggerate the role of the state in the 1930s media environment. As the mass media inundated American and Japanese publics with violent images depicting the Iraq and China campaigns, the moralization of atrocity emerged in multiple genres of news and entertainment.

Such resonances gave me insight into the reception of war crimes: how the Japanese public became inured to the killing of Chinese civilians caught up in the fighting. Throughout the China War, civilians—especially those in the countryside—became a deadly pawn for both sides. The Chinese Army relied heavily on their relationship with rural villages for food and shelter; Chinese troops escaped through and into them. The Japanese Army also depended on rural villages to requisition supplies and to secure intelligence on the movements of Chinese troops. Civilians thus became a strategic target of military operations for both Japan and China. Beginning with the invasion of Manchuria, mass murder of villagers who hid guerrilla fighters, either for revenge or to deter a repetition, became an increasingly routine element of Japanese tactics.

Newspapers, intellectual journals, and even children's magazines published accounts of the fighting that dramatized the escalation of violence against civilians. Interviews with Japanese soldiers recounted the stories of killing civilians, but they did not appear as atrocities—just the normalized rough treatment needed to deal with conditions in a war zone. Japanese soldiers explained that instead of surrendering, Chinese troops abandoned their uniforms and slipped off to hide among

[19]Louise Young, "Ideologies of Difference and the Turn to Atrocity: Japan's War on China," in Roger Chickering, Stig Förster, and Bernd Greiner, eds., *A World at Total War: Global Conflict and the Politics of Destruction, 1937–1945* (Cambridge, 2004), 333–53.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1479244322000221 Published online by Cambridge University Press

the civilian population or in rural villages. Japanese patrols had been ambushed by these cowards, who refused to fight fair, and instead concealed themselves behind women and children. Worse still were the civilians who pretended to be friendly, only to suddenly strike out at Japanese soldiers. In this situation, it was impossible to tell soldier from civilian: you needed to treat all Chinese as potential enemies and act accordingly. Setting fire to barracks to smoke out the enemy soldiers who refused to surrender, killing an old woman because you saw a knife in her skirt—these were acts of self-defense. Such were the stories that normalized the escalating violence of the war in China. Without the flash of recognition that our present provides, it is easy to feel repulsed by the inhumanity of Japanese atrocities and to enclose them within the alterity of an Asian field of battle. But the present offers an experiential lens to bridge the divide between American empire in the Middle East and Japanese empire in Asia. We can see ourselves in another country's past, as uncomfortable as that recognition might be.

If the past is a foreign country, as L. P. Hartley famously wrote, then the presentism of historical analogy provides us with a bridge of understanding, a space of imagination where intuition, empathy, and common sense can arise. To analogize past and present means finding a correspondence that makes the past feel familiar and less "other." This gives us a hermeneutic, a way to translate and interpret the past in the language of the present that need not lead to the sin of anachronism—but rather can help us see the world through the eyes of those who lived it.

Presentism as contemporary history

A fourth kind of presentism began to inform my scholarship several years ago, as multiple "crises" erupted around all aspects my work. Public universities faced a financial crisis, with dwindling state support and a backlash against rising tuition prices. History departments faced an enrollment crisis, as anxious parents pressured students to choose "practical" majors. Ph.D. programs faced an identity crisis, with the meltdown in the academic job market. Conferences, workshops, and roundtables examining our dire condition proliferated—from the Crisis in the Humanities to the Death of Japan Studies.[20] This ongoing state of emergency has prompted reflection about the core value of history and especially its relevance for our current moment. Why does history matter? Why does it matter for *today*? I found myself revamping my classes and bringing them up to the present. I found myself reframing my research projects to reflect their relationship to contemporary events. I found myself thinking of my work in terms of making the case: why study Japan *now*? What is the payoff to thinking the path to the present through Japan?

[20]On the crisis in the humanities: University of Wisconsin Center for East Asian Studies, Symposium on Japan and the Humanities Crisis, 5 Dec. 2015, at https://eastasia.wisc.edu/events-archive (accessed 8 Dec. 2021). On the Death of Japan Studies panel at the 2019 Association of Asian Studies meetings in Denver, Colorado, and subsequent Association of Asian Studies-sponsored debates on the state of the field, see the planned Embracing the Rebirth of Japan Studies, Association of Asian Studies annual conference, 22–4 March 2022, at www.asianstudies.org/embracing-the-rebirth-of-japanese-studies; and a write-up of a 2020 AAS panel: Paula Curtis, "Virtual Roundtable: The 'Rebirth of Japan Studies'," at http://prcurtis.com/events/AAS2020 (both accessed 5 Dec. 2021).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1479244322000221 Published online by Cambridge University Press

One answer to these questions lies in an examination of the Japanese version of a global phenomenon—the rise of neo-fascist scapegoating, of xenophobia and hating on migrants, and of demonizing various categories of social others that is part of our contemporary moment.

Japan's reversals of fortune in East Asia map out a regional decline connected to the vaulting economic and political power of China, but also to increasing competition from South Korea and Taiwan. Notably, these are all countries that were once part of the Japanese empire. The economic decline of the past two decades hollowed out Japan's industrial society as export markets shrank and production was offshored to lower-wage economies in East and Southeast Asia. The loss of secure, high-wage jobs quickly followed, as did a rise in the precariate and concerns about the "income gap society." As Japan's high-growth economy became the rust belt of Asia and the middle-class Japanese dream faded into smoke and mirrors, national and identity politics took a familiar turn. Since the late 1990s, coinciding with the economic downturn, neo-nationalism in Japan changed its quality—from a triumphalist "Japan as #1" and "Japan That Can Say No" (to the US) to a new version that shifts the target of grievance politics from the US to Asia.[21] Shot through with a strong strain of restorationism and nostalgia, neo-nationalism now issues a call to bring back the glory days of postwar Japanese high growth and Japan as #1.

We see restoration nationalism in the conservative Liberal Democratic Party's pronouncements about programs to reform and rejuvenate Japan's stalled economy.[22] The promise to bring back the economic juggernaut appealed to the so-called "lost generation" of the 1990s and 2000s, who were born in a high-growth era and entered the job market just after the bubble burst. They held a sense of entitlement to a Japanese dream of lifetime employment enjoyed by their seniors, but found themselves pitched out into the precariate.[23] The economic anxieties of the lost generation made them susceptible to a politics of grievance and racialized geopolitics. Here, the rising popularity of a mass culture of racism and hostility towards Asia, together with nostalgia for the good old days of empire, provided an outlet for anger and despair. Beginning in the 2000s, neo-nationalist writers like Kobayashi Yoshinori became cult figures and part of a booming literature fanning race hates towards Asian countries and Asians-in-Japan. Kobayashi's best-selling graphic novels trafficked in imperial nostalgia.[24] They blamed China and South Korea for Japan's economic woes and invited the "lost generation" to

[21]Vogel, *Japan as Number One*; Shintaro Ishihara, *The Japan That Can Say No: Why Japan Will Be First among Equals* (New York, 1991).

[22]The project of economic restorationism emerged most clearly with the slickly branded program of "Abenomics" under the administration of Abe Shinzō (2006–7, 2012–20): Government of Japan, "Abenomics: For Future Growth, for Future Generations, and for a Future Japan That Is Robust" (May 2017), at www.japan.go.jp/abenomics/_userdata/abenomics/pdf/170508_abenomics.pdf (accessed 5 Dec. 2021).

[23]David H. Slater has done excellent research on issues of social class and contemporary politics: "Social Class and Social Identity in Postwar Japan," in Victoria Bestor, Theodore C. Bestor, and Akiko Yamagata, eds., *Routledge Handbook of Japanese Culture and Society* (London, 2011), 103–15.

[24]For a good introduction to Kobayashi see Rumi Sakamoto, "'Will You Go to War? Or Will You Stop Being Japanese?' Nationalism and History in Kobayashi Yoshinori Sensoron," *Asia–Pacific Journal: Japan Focus* 6/1 (2008), 1–16.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1479244322000221 Published online by Cambridge University Press

take refuge in a comforting fiction that Japanese colonialism gave Asia the gift of economic modernity. Instead of being grateful, South Koreans and Chinese turned on Japan, engaging in "Japan bashing" and stealing their markets. This is an old story; class-based politics were derailed in the 1930s because government and business elites successfully redirected their energies into aggression against Asia. The restructuring of economy and society in contemporary Japan offers possibilities for a new politics of class and a new social imaginary that could lead to a push for redistributive justice. But it could go in darker directions as well. These issues are all rooted in *history* and help explain the appeal of engaging in the presentism of contemporary history. Contemporary politics animate the fierce urgency of the call to action felt by historians to provide analytic framing and historical context, to make sense of why this is happening, everywhere, now.

If Japan offers a place to examine the local political economy of restorationism and grievance that we see in different forms around the world today, it also prompts us to inquire into the peculiar pull of contemporary history at our current moment. What can Japan tell us about the contemporary-history boom, about the presentism of this form of presentism? While the Vietnam War era gave rise to scholarship inspired by the desire to understand Japan's position within Cold War Asia, interest in contemporary history went to ground until the 1990s. A conference volume published in 1993, *Postwar Japan as History*, dramatically reclaimed current events as the legitimate province of history. Declaring possession over the "45 years of postwar Japan" and their connection to the "dilemmas facing Japan today," *Postwar Japan as History* set down a marker that others were quick to pick up. What began as a trickle soon grew into a flood of new scholarship on the postwar era, and the sheer volume demanded more granular periodization—the occupation, the early Cold War, Japan's 1960s, and the high-growth era all became new fields of specialization.[25]

Why did the contemporary history boom begin in the 1990s? Why did *Postwar Japan as History* come out in 1993? The dates coincided with Francis Fukuyama's famous declaration of the "end of history" and the apparent triumph of liberal democracy over communism in the global war of ideas. While 1989 signaled the end of the Cold War in the West, for Asia 1989 marked a different set of epochal events: the death of the Showa Emperor, Hirohito, and the Tiananmen Square massacre. These events also signaled the "end of history." For Japan, Hirohito's passing marked the end of the Showa period, which lasted from Hirohito's ascension in 1926 to his death in 1989. Hirohito's reign encompassed the Asia–Pacific War and its aftermath, and the Showa period was invariably broken at 1945 into two parts: prewar Showa and postwar Showa. Just as there were two Showa's, there were two Hirohitos. In prewar Hirohito's name the nation fought and lost a total war; Hirohito served as the commander in chief for an imperial Japanese Army that carried out a catalog of atrocities—the Rape of Nanking, the Burma Death March, the human experiments of Unit 731, and more. As many as 15 million people died as a result of Japan's war on Asia, all on Hirohito's watch. Following

[25]Founded in 2002, the online, open access journal *Asia–Pacific Journal: Japan Focus* has provided a forum for scholarship on Japan that is strongly anchored in the present and reflects the trends in postwar historiography. See https://apjjf.org/About (accessed 8 Dec. 2021).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1479244322000221 Published online by Cambridge University Press

surrender, Hirohito reinvented himself as a symbol of peace and the leader of a democratized and demilitarized Japan. The postwar Hirohito shed his military uniform and stabled his white warhorse, appearing amongst the people in a rumpled hat and business suit. In his reinvention, postwar Hirohito cut himself off from his former self. He refused to take any responsibility for the devastation wrought in his name. Against the express wishes of many in the imperial family and widespread expectations among the public, Hirohito declined to abdicate. Up until the moment of his death, he never acknowledged his responsibility or apologized to his people. He broke history in two so that his rule could continue.[26]

The passing of the Showa Emperor in 1989 unleashed a torrent of self-reflection and self-criticism over the war that reverberated across the 1990s. As Hirohito lay dying, the mayor of Nagasaki publicly voiced what many had held in private: that the emperor was responsible for the war. His words invited a flood of letters to newspapers and magazines echoing his sentiments: Hirohito should have apologized; he should have abdicated.[27] Following the example of the newly crowned Heisei Emperor, a succession of prime ministers publicly expressed remorse to Asian victims of the war. Though many of these apologies were less than full-throated, they nevertheless represented a departure from the official position prior to 1989.[28] The end of the Showa era meant that history and memory could finally come to terms with the war and its aftermath, as scholars and citizens looked back at the stream of time from 1926 to the present, and began to put the war and the postwar back together. It was in this context that the *postwar* came into view as *history*. What followed was an outpouring of books on "transwar history" that reconnected Showa prewar to Showa postwar and a boom in scholarship on "history and memory" that placed past and present together in a single analytic frame.[29] Never had the past seemed so present nor the call for understanding the roots of contemporary events so pressing.

As I have argued, the presentism of contemporary history signifies both the urgency of the call for a historical perspective to our current conjuncture, and the compulsion to study the past that we have lived through. This fourth version of presentism reveals itself under conditions of surplus, what Arthur Schlesinger described as "the increase in the velocity of history."[30] Interest in contemporary history is driven by the eventfulness of the present—the feeling journalists report of

[26]On Hirohito's reinvention: John W. Dower, *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II* (New York, 1999), 277–345.

[27]Norma Field, *In the Realm of a Dying Emperor: Japan at Century's End* (New York, 1991), 177–266.

[28]Sheila Miyoshi Jagar and Rana Mitter, "War, Memory and the Post-Cold War," in Miyoshi Jagar and Mitter, eds., *Ruptured Histories: War, Memory and the Post-Cold War in Asia* (Cambridge, MA, 2007), 1–14.

[29]E.g transwar history: Jonathan Abel, *Redacted: The Archives of Censorship in Transwar Japan* (Berkeley, 2012), Miriam Kingsberg Kadia, *Into the Field: Human Scientists of Transwar Japan* (Stanford, 2020); Charlotte D. Eubanks, *The Art of Persistence: Akamatsu Toshiko and the Visual Cultures of Transwar Japan* (Honolulu, 2019). E.g history and memory: Lisa Yoneyama, *Hiroshima Traces: Time, Space, and the Dialectics of Memory* (Berkeley, 1999); Franziska Seraphim, *War Memory and Social Politics in Japan, 1945–2005* (Cambridge, MA, 2008); Mariko Tamanoi, *Memory Maps: The State and Manchuria in Postwar Japan* (Honolulu, 2009).

[30]Arthur Schlesinger Jr, "On the Writing of Contemporary History," *The Atlantic*, March 1967, at www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1967/03/on-the-writing-of-contemporary-history/305731 (accessed 20 Dec. 2021).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1479244322000221 Published online by Cambridge University Press

"drinking from a firehose of news"—a glut of epic, traumatic, game-changing events. In response to this sense of existential crisis run wild, historians are changing their pedagogy and offering more courses on contemporary history. They are engaging the public through social media and podcasts to offer historical analysis of our current moment. At the same time the eventfulness of today provides a motive force for the current generation in their historical research. The present is their inspiration, their command, their starting point, their clue, their question. The present, in short, is their muse.

* * *

The prohibition on presentism frequently invokes the specter of the Whig historians, who narrated the history of civilization to validate the triumph of British imperialism and their own liberal politics. A similar case could be made against the Confucianist "praise and blame" school of history in East Asia, which mines the accounts of past administrations to validate the policies of the current head of state. Even if these are caricatures or even straw men, the pitfalls of presentism are real. To avoid them historians should seek to describe and analyze, rather than judge and condemn, the past. They should avoid viewing history through the lens of contemporary morality, but rather understand the actions of the past through the values of the past. They should eschew chronocentrism: the belief that the present is paramount, a vantage point all-seeing to the past, and the belief that only history that impacts the present matters. These are all helpful cautions. However, I want to suggest that connecting past to the present offers the historian a number of generative methods for both making history and understanding how history is made. Presentism can be a tool for historical and historiographical analysis.

Based on the particular timeline of my own experience, I have suggested four versions of presentism. Others may come up with an additional ten—or even a hundred versions. My four include the politics that shape history and emerge in points of debate and interpretation (the political conscious and subconscious); historical generations and their social contexts (the history that writes us); the connections, analogies, and resonances between past and present (making the past familiar); and current events and eventfulness as the motive force for historical inquiry (the present as muse). These are all different tools, and can be productive in different ways.

In this essay I have presented the four versions of presentism in a diachronic narrative, through a succession of presents. This is how each version sequentially came to shape my own historical practice. However, these different presentisms should be understood as operating synchronously. There is always a politics embedded in historical analysis—even if the politics is to claim standing outside politics. Social context is embodied in the successive generations of Japanese historians and the bloodlines that structure their relationships. Our analytic mind always invokes comparisons, both implicit and explicit: we explain *X* in terms of *Y*; we seek out a historical problem because it reminds of something else. Contemporary history embraces the "long present" of postwar Japan from 1945 to today. Thus Version 1 (political lens, my late 1970s) overlaps with Version 4 (contemporary history, post-Cold War): both represent presents with a surplus of politics. Versions 3

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1479244322000221 Published online by Cambridge University Press

(historical analogy) and 4 (contemporary history) occupy the same timeline: the historical analogies that I reached for and my questions were prompted by the pull of contemporary events. Version 2 (social context) and Version 1 (political lens) both define the zeitgeist of successive generations. The politics of the US–Japan relationship runs through all four versions. All these presentisms can be productive, both to unpack the multiple layers of historical debate and to sharpen instincts for historical detection. Presentism can help the historian to understand why she cares about her subject and answer the "so-what" question. Presentism can help us find ways of engaging students, readers, and the public.

Even if we wished it, is a presentism a choice? I think not. There is no escape from our episteme—either from its politics or from its social determinations. We are all products of our times. Yet there is a distinction between what might be called presentism *in itself* and presentism *for itself*—between a presentism that is unacknowledged, unrealized, and unconscious, and a presentism that is self-reflexive and pressed into service. If we tread carefully to avoid the pitfalls of anachronism and history-as-propaganda, the latter can be a powerful tool.

Acknowledgments. With thanks to Carol Gluck, who taught me how to think about historiography, as well as Patrick Iber, Charles Kim, Judd Kinzley, Derek Kramer, Viren Murthy, Jennifer Ratner-Rosenhagen, Sarah Thal, and an anonymous reviewer for their careful reading and helpful suggestions.

Cite this article: Young L (2023). Past and Present in Japanese Historiography: Four Versions of Presentism. *Modern Intellectual History* **20**, 612–629. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1479244322000221

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1479244322000221 Published online by Cambridge University Press