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JAPAN AND ASIA:
REPRESENTATIONS OF SELFNESS AND OTHERNESS

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FOUNDED BY

AUORE YAMAGATA-MONTOYA, MAXIME DANESIN & MARCO PELLITTERI

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JAPAN AND ASIA:
REPRESENTATIONS OF SELFNESS AND OTHERNESS

EDITED BY
MARCO PELLITTERI & AURORE YAMAGATA-MONTOYA

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Rewriting History in manga: Stories for the nation – **Nissim Otmazgin & Rebecca Suter (Eds)**

New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016, 191 p.

Review by Christopher P. HOOD | Cardiff University, UK

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Workshops work. Many edited collections start life as papers and ideas presented at workshops. *Rewriting History in Manga's* origins, according to text in the Acknowledgements, were in a workshop held at the University of Sydney in August 2012. One can imagine, from both the discussion in the book and from my own experience at workshops, that the project may have started from some ideas about testing new ground without necessarily knowing if it would, or could, lead to anything more significant. Not all research does go onto chapters in books, articles in journals or other outputs. That is the nature of research. The workshops are necessary as a mechanism for people to come together and test the water. And sometimes, the water is well and truly tested and from that it is possible to develop a coherent and interesting study. *Rewriting History in Manga* does this and reveals why workshops are so valuable.

Edited collections can work too. Whilst monographs arguably remain the gold standard, there has been a pressure, in many countries, for academics to write articles for refereed journals. This has seemingly undermined the role of edited collections, despite that these, as books, may be the very source that academics and the public alike would turn to when looking to discover more about a subject. One of the problems of edited collections is that the quality can vary so greatly — often stemming from issues such as a lack of sufficient theoretical work underpinning each chapter or the collection as a whole, or inconsistencies in writing style or length of chapters. Another issue, which has been particularly problematic with collections related to media studies (in the broadest sense of the field) is that chapters are sometimes meaningless unless you have experience and knowledge (to the extent of deep interest) of that particular movie/book/author/band yourself and some chapters may

be an attempt to package a personal hobby/interest/fandom as an academic study. However, *Rewriting History in Manga* does not fall into these problems and highlights why edited collections remain valuable.

Rewriting History in Manga covers a wide range of Japanese history, and is not merely concerned with manga that deals with the Pacific War. The book is separated into three parts; Part One is entitled 'Historicizing Political Manga' and the two chapters in it deal with manga from the Tokugawa and Meiji periods; Part Two contains three chapters that are primarily concerned with how manga play a role in covering history; Part Three also contains three chapters which provide case studies relating to the decoding and recoding of history. The three parts of the books come together well to cover the subject matter in a comprehensive and largely easy-to-read manner. But I was left wondering who is this book really for? Books are often what people turn to when starting to research a subject. They are also often recommended to students taking courses. It would have been helpful if the editor had provided more clarity in the introduction about their intended audience for this book and then, perhaps, thought more about how to ensure that all of the chapters come together to address that audience.

In the introduction of *Rewriting History in Manga*, the author states that 'An important distinction should be made between manga as a historical material that historians should use to learn about the past and manga as an historical genre that depicts and reconstructs scenes from the past' (p. 10). This is undoubtedly true, but it was not always clear exactly what this book was doing and whether all of the contributors were approaching the subject the same way. The impression that many chapters left me with was that manga are — seemingly due to their widespread consumption — treated as though they have influence over the way people understand historical events. If this is the case, it would have been instructive to have more discussion on the relevant theories (and theory only appears briefly in most chapters as there is a preference, as often happens in edited collections, to focus upon case studies) and also to consider in what way manga are different to documentaries, dramas, novels or movies. Although this book is obviously about manga, it is perhaps situated a little too much in isolation from studies that consider other genres in relation to historical events.

Whilst overall *Rewriting History in Manga* is an excellent introduction to the subject, there were a number of aspects of the book which could have been strengthened. As with too many edited collections, the individual chapters were seemingly just glued together

into the whole. The end result is that we have separate bibliographies and a list of references for each chapter. Perhaps only a minor issue, but it does mean that the book lacks some of the cohesion found in some edited collections. We can also find formatting differences between chapters — with the prime example being a switching between macrons and circumflexes to denote long vowel sounds. We also find inconsistencies between chapters (and sometimes within an individual chapter) in the name order of Japanese names. In fact, these are not the only formatting issues. In the footer of each chapter there is a small envelope emoji after the name of the author. Presumably in an eBook version this would allow us to click on it and email the author; but in the printed version it looks out of place. It is also a great shame that a book which is dealing with such a graphic topic as manga did not find a mechanism to ensure that the manga prints that appear in the book (of which there are only fifteen, nine of which come in one chapter) were of a much higher quality. There were quite a few instances when particular images were discussed, but they were not presented. Naturally there can be copyright issues which make including images difficult, but there were also times when I found that the discussion appeared to assume that the reader could see the image — it was almost as though the author was presenting text as it had been delivered at the original workshop, when presumably participants could see the image on display, rather than having considered how to update the text to take account of the reader of the book not being able to see the image. Indeed, in far too many chapters, the authors did not provide detailed references about which manga they were referring to or which page of which edition of a particular manga they were discussing. The lack of attention to such details could seriously undermine the overall effectiveness of *Rewriting History in Manga* as a whole. There is no doubting that the chapters make a series of interesting points and the conclusions of each appeared valid, but the way in which the conclusions were reached could have been strengthened in a number of the chapters.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Christopher P. HOOD is a Reader in Japanese Studies at Cardiff University. His research interests revolve around issues relating to transportation in Japan, particularly the shinkansen ('bullet train') and aviation. He is the author of *Japan: The Basics* (2015), *Osutaka: A Chronicle of Loss in the World's Largest Single Plane Crash* (2014), *Dealing with Disaster in Japan: Responses to the Flight JL123 Crash* (2012), *Shinkansen: From Bullet Train to Symbol of Modern Japan* (2006), and *Education Reform in Japan: Nakasone's Legacy* (2001). He was also the editor of the four volumes collection *The Politics of Modern Japan* (2008), co-editor of *Doing Business with the Japanese* (2003) and author of the novel *Hijacking Japan* (2017). He is currently the President of the British Association for Japanese Studies.