



Japan: The Story of a Nation

Edwin O. Reischauer

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This text chronicles the evolution of premodern (early A.D. to 1850), modern (1850-1945), and postwar (1945-1989) Japanese civilization from imperial rule through the death of Emperor Hirohito. Professor Reischauer, a former U.S. ambassador to Japan, explores the roots and development of the military dictatorship that brought Japan into World War II, the dubious leadership of its emperor, and the effects of the postwar American occupation.

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Japan: The Story of a Nation Details

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Temple Dog says

This started off so well and then meandered toward the end. Snooze.

Dorly says

Questa sintesi della storia giapponese è scritta in maniera scorrevole e in modo da coinvolgere il lettore. A parte la descrizione piuttosto dettagliata dei fatti storici, il libro è ricco di analisi e spiegazioni e riesce pienamente nel suo scopo di presentare il mondo giapponese a noi occidentali, un affare non certo facile. Ottimo come prima lettura, stimola approfondimenti.

?????? ?????? says

One of the basic books for any learner of Japanese language and culture

Bobbi says

An excellent and easily read history of Japan through the 60s. A great book if you don't like extremely "textbook" style history.

David says

There is an art to writing history that is both brief and accessible, and it is a shame that Edwin Reischauer is no longer alive to demonstrate his considerable proficiency in both respects by updating his seminal work on Japan's entralling history.

Japan: The Story of a Nation is a quick way that anyone could gain a strong basic knowledge of Japan from its origins as one of the last areas of the globe settled by mankind to its stunning ascent from a regional backwater to an international power during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. However, Reischauer's appreciation of brevity (a quality too often lacking among many historians) does not diminish the scholarly foundations of the book. Reischauer research was complete and his appreciation for detail is only emphasized by the book's discretion where its length and scope are concerned.

Reischauer's treatment of the post-war occupation of Japan by the United States deserves special note. Despite being raised in Japan, serving in the U.S. Army during the Second World War, and later as the U.S. ambassador to Japan, Reischauer presents an admirably fair treatment of the impact and nature of the occupation period. He accredits the occupation with endorsing or planning many reforms that were not likely to be implemented by a purely native government, but he specifically explains that the ultimate success of

many policies was due to original American directives being modified and implemented by Japanese authorities. He also explains how some of the occupation's policies-while well-intentioned-were ultimately impractical and would echo through American-Japanese relations for decades afterwards.

Japan is starting to show its age more than the first time I picked it up more than ten years ago. Reischauer's account ends in 1980, leaving the picture of a Japan that is undisturbed by the economic and political rise of China or the economic hardships of its "Lost Decade" during the 1990s, and it is flavored with a teleological and linear history than is currently favored by the historical community. While more modern developments may require additional reading, I cannot see many better alternatives for an introduction into the basics of Japanese history than what Reischauer's scholarship can still offer more than twenty years after his death.

Andrew says

This history by Edwin Reischauer, is an immensely readable book. Reischauer not only presents the history of the island nation with clear ideas and language, he also presents it with a certain panache and an incredible understanding.

The author was born in Japan to missionaries and grew up in the language and customs of Japan. Throughout his life he was devoted to studies of the East and especially Japan, teaching at Harvard and eventually becoming U.S. Ambassador to Japan in the Kennedy/Johnson administration.

He takes us on a journey from the beginning of Japan, to the mid-seventies, explaining the prevalent historical and cultural forces that shaped the country. And he does not over-explain. In one chapter, talking about Japan going into a depression he explains one of the causes (and I paraphrase) "...and the country decided to try to get back on the gold standard at exactly the wrong time."

Now a lot of authors would have tried to explain that in economic terms, but Reischauer wisely does not do this. He is writing a popular history of Japan, not an economic thesis. He leaves that to his suggested reading list, to point the way for anyone wanting more information.

His explanations of Japan include economic, political and social, and he intermixes these to create a whole portrait of the land and its people. The book is especially good in examining why they became so militarized prior to WW II, really looking at the causes of their colonization of China and entry into the war.

He has a tremendous understanding of this nation of the people, and yet he does not let that cloud his disdain for their brutality during that time. He is clearheaded about this subject, but does look at how it came to be.

This book is a great introduction to Japan, for those wanting to understand this sometimes difficult to understand nation.
