

Modernity in Common: Japan and World History

Carol Gluck

Columbia University

A Globeful of Modernities

Just as one cannot tell the modern history of any society in isolation from the world, the history of the modern world can be grasped from the vantage point of any place on the globe. In this instance, that place is Japan. One of a contemporary “globeful of modernities,” Japan shares commonalities and connections with other modern societies. At the same time it offers the opportunity to develop ideas about the “modern” based on empirical evidence different from the European experiences that underlay earlier theories of modernity. Here I examine four questions frequently asked about modern Japanese history, from the nineteenth century until the present, in order to see how they appear when viewed in a global context – in the context of “modernity in common.”

To consider “modernity in common” does not imply that there is a single or universal modern to which every society will, or must, converge – such was the view of “modernization” theorists of the 1950s and 1960s, who defined modernity in Western terms and assumed the rest of the world would follow them, defining modernization in a Western way. But and this is also important, the commonalities and connections among modern societies are strong enough that it is not possible, I believe, to speak of “alternative modernities” or “multiple modernities,” either. This has been the fashion in recent years, precisely because it seemed to allow the different societies of the world to be modern in their own way and not be obliged to follow Western models. But how many elements of modern life are truly optional – the political form of the nation-state? Integration of local and national economic life in the global economy? The shift of populations away from agriculture? In short, these elements are not optional. The world’s societies have modernity in common because, as historian Sanjay Subrahmanyam noted, modernity is “historically a global and conjunctural phenomenon, not a virus that spreads from one place to another.”

There is then a common “grammar of modernity,” which includes the political form of the nation-state, increasingly urbanized mass society, a national citizenry and identity, and integration in the geoeconomic and geopolitical world order. This grammar of modernity is embedded in particular historical sentences, which thus read differently in different societies. But there is no universal modernity, no single model. This means there are no “late modernizers”; instead there are commonalities

and connections differently inflected in modern historical experiences around the world. This also means that theorists of modernity no longer need to begin with theories based on European experience but can in fact use the globeful of newer histories to develop theories of modernity on a different empirical basis, including that of modern Japan. And in addressing the *globeful of modernities* that now exist, scholars will necessarily consider Japanese history in the context of modernity in common, which is what I do here in regard to the four questions nearly always asked about modern Japanese history: the modernization question, the imperialism question, the war memory question, and the lost decades question.

The Modernization Question

How and why did Japan become modern in such a short span of time, largely during the Meiji period: from the Meiji Restoration of 1868 to the death of the Meiji emperor in 1912, when Japanese were fond of boasting that it had taken them merely fifty years to do what Europe did in two hundred, acquiring such nineteenth-century national accoutrements as a centralized nation-state, modern army, public education, constitution, parliament, and a recognized place in the world order. Meiji Japanese, like moderns everywhere, spoke as if these aspects of the modern age had suddenly sprung forth in a geyser of change after 1868 – as if all were new. The word they used was “unprecedented.” Yet in fact the first aspect in any historical analysis of seemingly unprecedented change must be what I call the *pre-existing conditions* at the moment of the supposedly all-at-once modernization: in short, what a society looked like before the reform or the revolution, or in Japan’s case, before the Meiji Restoration of 1868. Pre-existing conditions are not determining or causal in themselves; it is rather the *particular historicity* at the time of allegedly rapid change that sets the conditions of the possible. Pre-existing conditions are not the same as “tradition” nor do they imply a dichotomy between East and West of the sort so often evoked in nineteenth-century Japan. They are instead a historical snapshot, a freeze frame in the rolling footage of history, that captures a particular moment in time.

In nineteenth-century Japan, one example of such pre-existing conditions was the expansion of the intellectual horizons of the elite, an elite that had come over the course of the Tokugawa period to include not only samurai but also commoners, many of them with enhanced economic status and rising social, political, and especially, educational expectations. These elites provided the energies of leadership during the Restoration years, and it is possible that society accommodated the ensuing onslaught of change without a social revolution in part because these people, however broadened their horizons, belonged more or less to the elite orders of various levels of late Tokugawa society. Another pre-existing condition was political: a combination of institutional enervation at the shogunal center and

centrifugal energies in the feudal domains. In effect, the *ancien régime* in Japan was a softer target than it had been in France, and the demise of the Tokugawa shogunate was as much a “fall” as an “overthrow.” Its weakness helps to explain why, in Japan’s case, the centralization of the state took precedence among the wholesale reforms after the Restoration. Only pre-existing conditions can explain why hundreds of feudal lords agreed to surrender their ancestral lands, held in familial hands for generations, to the central government in 1869, without significant opposition or rebellion.

What then of the global context? The arrival of US Commodore Perry’s black ships in Edo bay in 1853 is often taken as the catalyst of Japan’s modernization, embodying as they did the Western threat to Japan’s sovereignty. But pre-existing conditions were more important, and one of those was the striking absence of most of the Western world in Tokugawa Japan, which for two centuries, was left to change, as it were, on a calendar of its own making. But this also meant that the Meiji Restoration of 1868 was in part the result of a shogunal regime spectacularly unprepared for dealing with the nineteenth-century world.

A second crucial aspect in any historical analysis of this nature is the *available modernities* at the time when such modernizing change occurred. This is not a matter of early or late modernization; it is about the differences between the late nineteenth century in Japan’s case, and the 1960s in the case of many newly independent African states, or the 1990s for the new nations that emerged from the former Soviet Union. Indeed, these available modernities are one reason for the commonalities of modernity, not only at the moment of intensive change but subsequently as change continues to occur across time. This is what it means to say that “modernity is not a virus but historically a global and conjunctural phenomenon.” Some aspects of the global and conjunctural phenomenon were coercive: for example, imperialist rule in India or Korea, or Japan’s “defensive modernization” to preempt loss of sovereignty in the West-dominated international order of the late nineteenth century. One might think of this as the *coercive modern*. Other aspects, however, are aspirational, driven by the magnetic attraction of the modern not only for elites but for the wider society as well.

For Japan, the global and conjunctural moment was the last three decades of the nineteenth century, with definitions of “civilization,” which seemed both Euro-American (*Ōbeika* in Japanese) and universal to numbers of Japanese in the Meiji period. This then is the *aspirational modern*. In the decades around 1900, for example, nationalist reformers in China, Japan, Egypt, and other places regarded the unified nation-state as the universal – not only European – political form of modernity and for that reason, considered it desirable, even necessary. In response to *their* conjunctural moment, they assumed that modernity demanded a world of nations and they looked both to existing Western models and also to the political theories that explained or underlay them. It is important to note that these commonalities

of contemporaneity did not apply only to such “new nations” as Japan, Germany, and Italy, all unified in the years around 1870, but also to nations as old as France, which were similarly responding to the changed imperatives of the nineteenth-century form of the nation-state. This is to say that Japan’s modernization occurred and was shaped by the global and conjunctural context of that particular late nineteenth-century time. Such timing had posterior consequences as well in such things as the path dependence of institutions, e.g., the time when criminal codes, university systems, or national ideologies were established influenced changes that took place later. Modernity is a process not a product, and as times change, so does society.

The interaction between *pre-existing conditions* in late Tokugawa Japan and the *available modernities* in the late nineteenth-century world generated rapid modernization in Meiji Japan, which while it had the grammar of *modernity in common*, possessed distinctive features of its own, precisely because of this interaction. For Japan, or any other country, the process of becoming modern depended on the modernities available in a given moment in world history.

And yet, as I said, a common grammar means nothing unless it is embedded in sentences, all of which have a subject and a verb, which are not necessarily the same in different societies. Who, for example, were the *protagonists of modernity*? In the canonical story of Meiji Japan, as Meiji Japanese themselves enunciated it, the protagonist of modernizing change was the state (*kokka*). In truth, the Meiji government did far less than it claimed to have done, and surprisingly little in a number of important respects. Compulsory national education, for example, was famously and proudly promulgated in 1872, but the new national government did little to finance it. Localities built the schools and paid the teachers, and parents paid fees for their children to attend.

Here, as was often the case in implementing the changes pronounced by the central government, the village elites described by Christopher Craig as the “middlemen of modernity” played a prominent role in school construction and support, another example of continuity in elite leadership across the Restoration years. Their reasons for doing so included local pride and rivalries as well as self-interest, while parents, for their part, acted in accord with the 1872 act establishing a national school system, which famously stated that “education is the ladder to success.” Both village leaders and families demonstrated the value commoners had come to place on education in the course of the Tokugawa period. Theirs was an aspirational modernity: people sometimes reached for change – or resisted it, protesting school fees, even burning schools down in protest against losing their children’s labor in the household or fields – because it served, or did not serve, their purposes, met their needs, or promised to enhance their interests. In so doing, one can say that over time Meiji Japanese helped to nationalize themselves, but not necessarily with conscious intent since they were for the most part pursuing

concerns far more immediate to them than those of the nation.

The main protagonist of modernity in Meiji Japan, I argue, was not the state, but society. In fact, I would characterize the Meiji state as a *not-so-strong state*. For if one looks to the motors of change – not its enunciators but its engines – one finds them more often in society than in the government. The state often made grand claims, leaving the implementation – and the financing – of those claims to social rather than state actors, much as it did in the initial establishment of the national school system. Granted that my hypothesis of a not-so-strong state is vociferously contested, I suggest nonetheless that an examination of the actual processes of modernizing reveals a more diverse cast of protagonists than appears in the self-proclaimed or conventionally identified accounts of Meiji modernizing change. Indeed, there are ways in which the not-so-strong state worked more effectively to unify the nation in its own image than a more directly dictatorial government might have done.

The Imperialism and War Question

How was it that a nation so effective, for good or ill, in its late nineteenth-century modernization turned to militant imperialism and aggressive war in the first half of the twentieth century? Or, as Japanese often expressed it after the defeat in the Second World War, “What went wrong?” Indeed, many postwar commentators saw the war as a judgment on Japan’s modernity, which seemed to have led the nation catastrophically awry. To answer how that happened, one has again to look *outside Japan* to three aspects of Japan’s relation to the nineteenth-century world.

The first, once again, is *absence*. Consider the global context of Meiji Japan’s modernization. Western gunships may have steamed into Edo bay with displays of superior power in the 1850s and forced Japan to open its borders to trade and to sign unequal treaties, but the fact remains that the ships went away again and did not return, leaving Meiji Japan to modernize largely without interference or even any great peril posed by the outside world. Japanese “Euro-americanized” their “civilization” on Western models, hiring Western experts to help them, but the real world, including that of the West, was not standing with a stick on Japan’s doorstep. And this absence was an important enabling condition for Japanese modernization. But the absence also meant that the problem of *finding a place* in the modern world order remained unresolved. Toward the West, Meiji foreign policy was reactive, focused on revision of unequal treaties, assertions of sovereignty based on acquiring civilization, understood as becoming modern in Western terms. But for nineteenth-century Japan, the world was never conceived as an East-West dichotomy, but rather as a triad of power and culture, in which Japan stood between Asia (primarily China) and the West. And in Japan’s foreign relations toward the East, the posture and the story were different, and that difference, too, depended on a second aspect of the real world of the time:

empire.

Japan initiated and won a war against China in 1894-95 over Korea, and then ten years later in 1904-05 initiated and won a war against Russia, this time over Manchuria and Korea. It was this war that brought modern Japan to the admiring notice of the wider world, its bushidō fighting spirit admired by the American president Theodore Roosevelt, while the sight of a modern Asian nation defeating one of the five great Western powers was cheered and celebrated in the non-Western world by reformist and nationalist elites, whether those under colonial rule as in Indochina and Egypt, or not, like late Ottoman Turkey. In the Japanese rhetoric of the time, “Japan had gained parity with the Powers” – “had entered the ranks of the Powers” – and was recognized as having done so, patronizingly by the West, and inspiring in aspiring nations of Asia and the Middle East.

In fact, of course, the two Meiji wars marked the full-fledged surge of Japan’s imperialism, and by 1910 both Taiwan and Korea were under direct Japanese colonial rule. What mattered here was *the global context* in the real world of the nineteenth century: the world of territorial empire that was so closely tied to the spread of “civilization.” Like available modernities, in the conjunctural moment, available forms of empire helped to determine the commonalities between Japan’s imperialist enterprises and those underway elsewhere. It was perhaps not surprising then that powerful Western nations supported the expanded Japanese empire, which in its early years was funded by borrowing in the liberal international financial order, a mode of cooperative or “dependent imperialism,” when as Mark Metzler shows, Japan was a large state borrower in London money markets. In this respect until the end of World War One, Japan’s empire was recognized in the West-dominated international order of the time.

The Great Japan Empire (*Dai Nippon teikoku*) followed much of the pattern of nineteenth-century European territorial imperialism, if with one notable difference, a difference that constituted a third aspect of Japan’s relation with the real world of that time. It can be summed up by Sayaka Chatani’s term, *nation-empire*, which refers to the fact that Meiji Japan began to create an empire at the same time that it was still building a nation. To a greater degree than in other metropole-colony interactions, the Japanese government and intellectual elites were putting into practice the same institutions in Taiwan after 1895 and Korea after 1910 that they were only then establishing at home, institutions like the nationally and imperially imposed local youth associations, for example. At the turn of the twentieth century, Japan was thus engaged in constructing a nation-empire, with both nation and empire reflecting the available modernities of the nineteenth-century world.

And when the real world changed, so did Japan’s foreign policy. During the relatively liberal world context of the 1920s, Japanese foreign policy followed the Western powers in the post-World-

War-One diplomacy of peace and disarmament, despite having been denied equal stature at Versailles in 1919 by its Western allies and seeing them reject Japan's proposed racial equality clause in the preamble to the League of Nations. At home, in the era of Taishō democracy, Japan had elements of this phase of domestic political modernity in common with Republican China, Republican Spain, and Weimar Germany, affected as they were by the postwar global context of cosmopolitanism, internationalism, and social reform and in the Soviet Union, radical social and economic transformation after the 1917 Revolution. Then, in the early 1930s, democracy and republicanism gave way to Nazism, fascism, dictatorship, authoritarian rule in Germany, Spain, Italy, Japan, and other places against the global background of World Depression and a visceral fear of Bolshevism, a fear strong and strengthening in many countries, including the United States. Like the socialist left, the radical right was a global phenomenon, too. And as economic and ideological nationalism intensified, the practices of empire changed as well. Think of it as *the global imperative of imperial power in dark times*. Hitler's war aims from the first included a great German empire in Eastern Europe; Mussolini sought an Italian empire in Ethiopia; Japan invaded Manchuria in 1931 and established the puppet state of Manchukuo. Among the causes of the Second World War, the role of this imperial imperative was crucial – for Germany and Japan to expand their empire – not together, but separately – and for Britain, the Netherlands, and France to maintain theirs, for the sake of natural resources, strategic location, and – in a word – power.

War, for Japan, meant China, which retained its place as the third element of the international triad of Japan, the West, and Asia that had been set in Japanese thinking since the mid-nineteenth century. The Japanese invaded Manchuria in 1931 and instigated total war with China in 1937, a war which Japan was unable to win and which led to Japan's attack on the United States at Pearl Harbor in 1941. The China War remained central, if unwinnable, as the *geometry of global war*, which was overlaid on the global imperative of imperial power in dark times, led Japan to further aggression in the European colonies of Southeast Asia. After Nazi victories in Europe, Japan invaded French Indochina and the Dutch East Indies, leading to the conflict renamed the Greater East Asia War and with it Japan's military occupation of Southeast Asia for more than three-and-a-half years. This was Japan's *wartime empire*, vast and far flung, stretching from the Pacific islands to the borders of India, the Asian counterpart of Hitler's wartime empire across Europe.

If a World War, by definition, is global and cannot be understood solely in national terms, nor in similar ways can the defeat. Japan was defeated not by China but by the United States, in Pacific fighting and brutal home island bombing, including two atomic bombs. With the defeat, the definition of the real world changed once again, as Japan's global context shrank to a bilateral relationship. Japan was occupied by the US, not the Soviet Union; and with the Security Treaty signed at the same time as

the San Francisco Peace Treaty in 1951, Japan became allied with the United States in a close Cold-War relationship, which supplied Japan – by default – with a solution to the perennial puzzle of where modern Japan should seek and find its place in the world.

The War Memory Question

The US-Japan alliance may have offered a world-insulating framework for Japan's postwar peace and prosperity, but it also provides one clue to the answer to the third question so frequently asked about Japan today: why has the Japanese government failed to acknowledge the enormity of its wartime actions and atrocities in China, Korea, and other parts of Asia? These include the Nanjing massacre, the hundreds of thousands of Chinese and Korean forced laborers, and the so-called comfort women, the Asian sex slaves of the imperial Japanese military. For most of the Cold War, from the 1940s to the 1980s, Japan did not have what South Koreans and Chinese later came to call its "history problem." The reason Japan did not have such an internationally identified and prominent "history problem" until the 1990s was due to what I call the *chronopolitics of memory*, which is a fancy way of saying that memories of the Second World War are determined as much or more by present politics as by past events. And when it comes to public memory of a world war, it is also very much determined by changes in the global context. This is true everywhere, which explains why memories of World War II again became such a pressing political and cultural issue since the 1990s in Eastern Europe and East Asia, two regions in which the real "postwar" can be said to have begun only after the Cold War ended in 1989.

In the chronopolitics of Japanese war memory, the greatest change in global context was the transition from a bilateral order in which the United States dominated Japanese foreign relations to a world that included the rising powers of Asia, so long occluded by the politics of the US-Japan alliance. Indeed, until the 1990s Japan's war story remained the one sanctioned by the Occupation in 1945, when the Americans oversaw a change in name from the Greater East Asia War to the *Pacific War*, the war that stretched from Pearl Harbor to Hiroshima, which of course was the war the United States had fought against Japan. The consequence of this reduced chronology was the narrative disappearance of the China War, which had been the reason for the Pearl Harbor attack in the first place. In addition, also under American guidance, the war was recounted as a domestic story, in which the causes of the conflict lay entirely within Japan, in its political, economic, educational, ideological, and other systems, precisely because these were the structures the Occupation intended to reform. The consequence of diminishing the international elements in the account of a world war was a narrative *amnesia of empire*, in which Korea and Manchuria, though never forgotten, did not figure in the main story of the war. Under US

direction, Japan lost its empire without becoming post-imperial, its imperialist past submerged by the postwar vision for the future.

If the original war story was produced and maintained, chronopolitically, under the sign of binational US-Japan relations in the context of a global Cold War, the challenges to Japan's war memory emerged from a change in regional chronopolitics in the context of the global ending of the Cold War. During the Cold War decades Japan had stood facing the United States across the Pacific, with its geopolitical, if not economic, back toward China, which figured in the American Cold War as "lost" to Communism. At the same time in China the memory of the Anti-Japanese War of Resistance, as Chinese called it, was overshadowed by the memory of the 1949 revolution and not officially commemorated in a major way. Both these postures began to change during the 1980s and surged from the 1990s on. That is to say, Asia returned to importance in Japan's international relations, no longer dominated only by the United States, and Asians challenged Japanese to remember, not the Pacific War but the war in Asia. And within China, the death of Mao created political needs for unity that were partly met by new patriotic commemorations of the Second World War and with them, renewed public attention to Japan's atrocities during the long China War. In South Korea, the combination since the 1980s of political democratization, local and global feminist movements, and the willingness of now elderly former comfort women to speak of their horrific wartime experiences to people who were now ready to listen to them, made the comfort women the embodiment both of Japan's wartime brutality and the brutality of 35 years of Japanese colonial rule in Korea. At issue was not the war between Japanese and Americans, but what since 1995 Japanese were coming to call – belatedly but appropriately – the Asia-Pacific War.

So the decades-long amnesia of Japan's empire in Asia was challenged at the same time as its historically truncated narrative of the Pacific War. Here was a simultaneity that resembled that of the nation-empire, if in reverse. For unlike France, for example, which dealt with the public memories of World War II and of Algeria in different time frames and with different outcomes, Japan's confrontation with its wartime and its imperial past, was not only delayed by nearly half a century but when it began finally to occur in the 1990s, Japanese had to deal both with the war and the empire at the same time. The simultaneous nation-empire building at the beginning of the twentieth century was mirrored by the challenge of postwar-postempire as the century came to an end.

The shifts in regional and global geopolitics that put pressure on Japanese to acknowledge their nation's wartime actions and empire in Asia occurred during the same years that developments in Japanese domestic politics also impelled changes in official war memory. These developments can be summarized as the multiple falls of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), which fell first in 1993 and

again in 2009, each time, the new non-LDP leaders apologized for Japanese wartime actions, including in a 1993 statement about the comfort women, and also eschewed visits to Yasukuni Shrine for the war dead. When the LDP returned to power in late 2012, the Abe government reversed this posture, promising to “transcend the postwar,” revisit earlier apologies, and make Japanese views of the past “more forward looking.” But even as staunch a nationalist as Abe could not follow through on his recidivist promise, as vocal opposition emanated not only from Korea and China but from the United States, Germany, and elsewhere. Geopolitical pressure and the chronopolitics of the global context doubtless affected the LDP stance during the seventieth anniversary of the end of the war in 2015. The late December agreement between Japan and South Korea on the comfort women issue, which fell short of truly recognizing and compensating the former comfort women was surely more than the Abe government would have done without international pressure.

At the same time domestic chronopolitics played its role to push in the contrary direction, Prime Minister Abe, in addition to his strong personal feelings on matters of national pride, used war memory as a patriotic call to galvanize the conservative, nationalist base of his party. Yet it is important to note that the majority of Japanese held different opinions from those of the LDP, as polls consistently showed from the time Emperor Hirohito died in 1989, by chance ending the more than six decades of the Shōwa era in the same year as the fall of the Berlin wall presaged the end of the Cold War. In a 2015 poll, in which only 6% of the respondents were old enough to have experienced the war, 49% considered the war to have been a “war of aggression” and 67% thought that Prime Minister Abe should apologize for colonial rule and wartime actions. In 2013 when Osaka Mayor Hashimoto said that comfort women were necessary to “offer rest” for the soldiers, polls showed within hours that 75% disapproved of the remark. These chronopolitical considerations suggest that when the LDP finally falls for the last time, the Japanese government’s refusal to acknowledge Japan’s wartime actions in Asia will fall with it.

The reason for this assertion lies with another factor at work in the world that affects public memories of the war. It is the existence of what I call a *global memory culture*, referring to the gradual changes over seven postwar decades after 1945 in the *global norms* of public memory of the Second World War. These norms developed in part from the now nearly universal public recognition of Holocaust memory in Europe and elsewhere. In part they emerged from changing views of responsibility, which began with demonic leaders like Hitler, expanded to the organizational guilt of those who were “following orders,” and came by the 1990s to include the responsibility of “ordinary men,” not only those who engaged in killing but also those who stood by rather than resist the brutalities of occupation and war. In part these changes in memory norms reflected the growing importance of the politics of apology, whether of states to their own citizens or of states to other states. Something near

to unthinkable in the diplomacy of the 1950s – one head of state apologizing to the people of another state – had by the end of the 1990s become a commonplace demand in international relations. In short, the global practices and norms of public memory changed in the second half of the twentieth century, and many of those changes occurred through national and international processes of remembering and commemorating World War Two.

If Japan's original Pacific war story had not been frozen in place by the chronopolitics of the US-Japan alliance and domestic LDP dominance, Japanese might have begun to confront the history of the Asian war earlier, at a time when international norms of memory were quite different, as they were, for example, in the 1950s. But because the intense Asian challenges to Japanese war memory did not occur until the 1990s, Japan's public re-remembering of the war occurred in the context of the global memory culture that was now in place. That culture helps to explain why Japanese public opinion has changed and also why I say that eventually Japanese officials will apologize for their nation's wartime actions. Again, one must turn to commonalities in the wider world to understand developments within a single nation, Japan or any other.

The Lost Decades Question

The fourth question frequently asked about modern Japanese history after the turn of the twenty-first century is why the economy of Japan, which in 1968 had reached the rank of the world's second largest economic power, remained mired in recession after the economic bubble burst in 1990. Why did the "lost decade" of the 1990s turn into two, going on three lost decades, a stubborn pattern that Abenomics, the policy of the LDP government in power since late 2012, sought finally to halt. It is true that the global economy was in crisis at least three times in the quarter century after the onset of Japan's recession: the 1997 Asian financial crisis, the 2000 burst of the dot-com bubble, and the Great Recession of 2008. If one is relating national history to its global context, as I am doing here, there were clear global factors that set back Japan's economic recovery.

In this instance, however, I want to focus on reasons within Japan, rather than outside. To that end, I will allude to a much abbreviated version of my modestly titled "Grand Unified Theory of Japanese History," which pretends to explain "how change happens" in Japan. It is too complex to present here, except to mention the part most relevant to an explanation of the lost decades. All theories proceed on assumptions, in this case, the main assumption of the theory is the primary importance that Japanese attach to social relations and to a stable social order, or more precisely expressed, their *disinclination* toward social *disorder*. This disinclination toward social disorder favors long periods of incremental change, whether to restore an allegedly lost stability or to adjust to new conditions without

destabilizing society. Most of Japanese history happens in these long periods, more I think than in many places, although incremental, rather than radical, change is the usual pattern in most societies. The theory can explain seemingly abrupt change, too, like the Meiji Restoration, but for my purposes here, it is gradual incremental change that matters.

Once again, one looks to society rather than politics to account for the lost decades. Note first the considerable incremental change in the structure of the Japanese economy that took place after the Plaza Accord of 1985. Fifteen years of neoliberal reforms and a decade of corporate restructuring in response to the recession did indeed alter the shape of Japan's political economy. To the outside world, these changes seemed to come very slowly, leading foreign markets and commentators to express increasingly negative views of Japanese short- and long-term economic prospects. These views were conditioned by the world's running on what I think of as JET, Japan External Time, which seems to move at a faster pace than time inside Japan. Inside Japan, one reason it took so long to make these changes in public and private economic structures was because of choices that were made to minimize social disruption – to lay off as few workers as possible, for example, and to proclaim continuing crisis in unemployment when Japanese rates were 4% as against 10% in France or 8% in the US, and so on. Yet these incremental changes were felt in Japan as deeply unsettling and lightening quick, which they were for Japanese accustomed to JIT, Japan Internal Time, where any changes that may affect social stability are magnified in perceived size and effect. Yet the Gluck Theorem suggests that Japan's economy – which in its third almost lost decade remained the world's third largest, even if the demotion was hyperbolically greeted in the Japanese press as an “economic defeat” comparable to defeat in World War Two – will continue to recover but very very slowly – Abenomics or no Abenomics – and when it does it will exhibit slow growth, or “slowth,” as had become the case in other advanced economies like France and the United Kingdom.

The only thing that would upset this tortoise-like pace to recovery is a crisis, whether economic, military, or geopolitical, that occurs *outside Japan*. This is because the normal patterns of incremental change in Japan rest on the foundation of Japanese social relations, which do not apply in the rest of the world. So we are *back to society*: the same social strengths that were responsible for Meiji modernization and that have been preserved through the recent lost decades, and are still being tested after the triple catastrophe of March 11, 2011, again through incremental measures, as exemplified by the excruciatingly slow pace of change in Fukushima, for example. These aspects of social relations, however fairly or unfairly they operate, work only within Japan; they are not for export. Indeed, when Japanese look back on their modern history, the successes they recount were largely at home, in society, while the failures took place abroad, notably imperialism, war, and defeat. This also means that the

perennial problem of Japan's finding its place in the world in the post-Cold War global order had few, if any, successful precedents on which to draw in modern Japanese history, which was one reason why contemporary Japan remained so long reluctant to play an international role commensurate with its economic strength. Thus, the Gluck Theorem suggests that it is patterns of incremental change within Japan in the context of the global economy that best explain the lost decades after 1990.

Modernity in Common

My main contention is that none of the four questions asked about modern Japanese history can be answered without attention to the *commonalities and connections* between Japan and the world, between the nation and the globe. Nor, I believe, can we understand either our own modern histories, or modernity in general, without reference to the diverse inflections of modern experience in societies like Japan, India, Iran, and (my favorite example) Newfoundland. And because all of us now have some version of “modernity in common,” to bury our faces in national history is not only to misunderstand the commonalities and connections of the past, it is also – and worse – to endanger our common and connected futures.