

# H-Diplo ROUNDTABLE XXI-23

**Meghan Warner Mettler.** *How to Reach Japan by Subway: America's Fascination with Japanese Culture, 1945-1965.* Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2018. ISBN: 978-0-8032-9963-4 (hardcover, \$50.00).

**Andrew C. McKeivitt.** *Consuming Japan: Popular Culture and the Globalizing of 1980s America.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017. ISBN: 978-1-4696-3446-3 (hardcover, \$90.00); 978-1-4696-3447-0 (paperback, \$27.95).

13 January 2020 | <https://hdiplo.org/to/RT21-23>

Roundtable Editors: Thomas Maddux and Diane Labrosse | Production Editor: George Fujii

## Contents

---

Introduction by Hiroshi Kitamura, College of William & Mary.....	2
Review by Fintan Hoey, Franklin University Switzerland.....	6
Review by Jennifer M. Miller, Dartmouth College.....	9
Review by Laura Miller, University of Missouri-St. Louis.....	14
Review by Meredith Oda, University of Nevada, Reno.....	18
Response by Meghan Mettler, Upper Iowa University.....	22
Response by Andrew C. McKeivitt, Louisiana Tech University.....	24

---

 INTRODUCTION BY HIROSHI KITAMURA, COLLEGE OF WILLIAM & MARY
 

---

In the years after fighting a bloody and vicious war in the Pacific Theater, the United States and Japan formed a close bilateral relationship, one that has remained intact for three quarters of a century. How did the two countries overcome their animosities of the World War II era and cultivate this new transpacific bond? Who were the ‘agents’ and ‘players’ that contributed to its formation? How did the dynamic change over the course of time? Why has the relationship lasted for so long?

This roundtable features Meghan Warner Mettler’s *How to Reach Japan by Subway: America’s Fascination with Japanese Culture, 1945-1965* and Andrew C. McKeivitt’s *Consuming Japan: Popular Culture and the Globalizing of 1980’s America*—a pair of fascinating monographs that address these critical questions. Even though the former largely focuses on the 1950s and 1960s, and the latter the 1980s, both books probe into the cultural politics of ‘alliance formation’ by studying the consumption of things Japanese in the United States in the post-World War II era. Deviating from the scholarship on official, state-to-state policymaking, Mettler’s and McKeivitt’s books refreshingly examine a diverse body of ‘ordinary publics,’ from Ikebana teachers, interior decorators, Zen enthusiasts, factory workers in automobile plants, sushi chefs, to hard-core fans of anime shows. Relying on a wide variety of primary sources including newspapers, magazines, films, novels, food, and fan surveys, they uncover the complex ways in which cultural formations influence public opinion and popular sentiment. Taken together, these two new studies help broaden and deepen our understanding of the ‘United States in the world.’

The four reviewers—Fintan Hoey, Jennifer M. Miller, Laura Miller, and Meredith Oda—have good things to say about the two monographs. Jennifer Miller sees them as “rich and captivating histories.” Oda is pleased that Mettler has written a “lively, highly readable account” and that McKeivitt provides “a rich, clearly-argued book.” Likewise, Hoey regards *Consuming Japan* a “thoroughly enjoyable and engaging” study and *How to Reach Japan by Subway* “a book with something important to say.” Laura Miller refers to Mettler’s volume as “a fascinating and fresh study” and McKeivitt’s a “well-written book” with an argument that is “conceptually fascinating.”

The reviewers also offer a range of questions, comments, and criticisms, one of which concerns causality. What is the relationship between cultural formations and state policy? Does the former affect the latter, and if so, how? Hoey directs such questions to Mettler by asking how the craving for shoji screens and Zen Buddhism was “connected to the exigencies of American national security policy.” Mettler suggests the link in part by referring to President Dwight Eisenhower’s desire to encourage the importation of Japanese goods to revive Japan’s war-damaged economy, but Hoey wishes to see more. “The reader is not shown precisely how this was connected to the vagaries of fashion and taste in mid-century America,” he writes. By contrast, Laura Miller argues that Mettler’s study “succeeds in linking these fads [the consumption of Japanese aesthetics and pastimes] to larger societal and governmental goals” in part by demonstrating the involvement of U.S. government offices such as the State Department. Jennifer Miller similarly notes that the American engagement with an imagined Japan, as detailed in Mettler’s (and McKeivitt’s) work, has “become deeply entangled with geopolitical realities and understandings of American global power.”

Another issue involves the identity of U.S. consumers. While acknowledging that the demographics in Mettler’s study are for good reason “largely limited to white, well-off Americans,” Jennifer Miller notes that *How to Reach Japan by Subway* is “less attentive to the role of Japanese Americans.” Their relative absence, writes Jennifer Miller, “sometimes inadvertently replicates [the book’s] protagonists’ limited view” that “elevated an ostensibly timeless Japanese ‘style’ above the contemporary reality of Japanese and Japanese American bodies.” Oda holds a different view, as she believes that Mettler is “consistently attentive to Japanese Americans.” Laura Miller agrees with Oda by crediting Mettler’s inclusion of the likes of Frank Okamura and Mary Takahashi, who reinvented Japanese aesthetics in the United States, but in turn asks McKeivitt to clarify who he means by “Americans.” She specifically points to his chapter on sushi, an enterprise that undoubtedly involved Japanese-American chefs and customers who may well have produced and consumed this culinary dish well before the 1980s—the decade that anchors McKeivitt’s study. Jennifer Miller also contends that “Japanese and Japanese Americans (and Asian peoples more broadly) play a smaller role in McKeivitt’s story.” Claiming that “McKeivitt is sometimes less

explicit about the identity of his protagonists than Mettler,” she suggests that “[i]t would be helpful to have more attention to the migration of not just products and ‘culture’ but also the people who served as intermediaries in various ways.”

The reviews also comment on the question surrounding the “cultural odorlessness” of Japanese texts and artifacts. Laura Miller expresses confusion over McKeivitt’s claim that anime, among other objects introduced in *Consuming Japan*, is characterized by the absence of national identity, as she asks: “if much of the material in the book does not convey Japaneseness, why should we consider it to be consumption of Japanese popular culture that had a globalizing effect?” Yet if the perceived lack of nationality troubles Laura Miller, it provokes resonance and fascination in Hoey, who recalls that his first personal encounter with Ōtomo Katsuhiro’s *Akira* evoked “something simultaneously familiar and exciting foreign.” Additionally, Hoey remembers recording the film on a VCR—another core topic in McKeivitt’s book—without realizing that he was “using Japanese technology to capture a Japanese film.” Interestingly, Oda looks at the objects in Mettler’s study in a similar fashion. Oda observes that “[s]amurai films, Ikebana, Japanese-landscaped gardens, shoin architecture, Zen Buddhism, and other materials were all eagerly consumed by Americans drawn to a culture that seemed so exactly foreign yet fundamentally familiar, perfectly and productively opposing their own.”

Meantime, some of the reviewers call for a deeper reading of certain cultural texts, especially in relation to Japanese nationalism and imperialism. In evaluating Mettler’s work, Jennifer Miller points out the fact that the Japanese government used Ikebana to further its colonial objectives. It thus appears “ironic” to see how Japan enthusiasts in the United States would then embrace this art of flower arrangement “in the service of American postwar dominance.” The other example is the early writings of D.T. Suzuki, who strove to “promote wartime nationalism by celebrating Japanese exceptionalism and the Japanese people’s ‘unique spirit’ during the 1930s.” Laura Miller reacts to McKeivitt’s treatment of Sony co-founder Morita Akio by asking why “the book details the image of the ‘global’ Morita as represented in the U.S. but not the ‘nationalist’ Morita, who made some racist claims about why the U.S. was a failing society.” She wonders how Morita’s “ultra-nationalist” inclinations could be reconciled with the image of Sony as a cosmopolitan and globally-minded enterprise.

In addition, the reviews raise questions about the impact of Japanese artifacts and ideas on U.S. publics. Laura Miller challenges McKeivitt’s premise that the consumption of Japanese cultural productions fueled the “globalizing” of America. She specifically points to white Americans who might brutally mistreat Mexican immigrants while savoring Mexican salsa and tortilla chips. Perhaps disagreeing with the way McKeivitt conceptualizes “globalization,” Laura Miller maintains that the consumption of the latter “does not mean that non-Latin Americans are somehow becoming more ‘globalized’ or receptive to Mexican culture or people.” Jennifer Miller argues that the Japan enthusiasts of the 1950s and 1960s did not operate “against the grain of hegemony” as Mettler claims, but rather seem to have “perpetuated imperial and orientalist logics” of white America. Oda agrees with this view as she maintains that *How to Reach Japan by Subway* “tell[s] us more about what the particularly U.S. Cold War hegemon looked like.”

Finally, reviewers point to the contemporary relevance of the two studies. Jennifer Miller invokes the U.S. public’s recent obsession with tidying expert Marie Kondo and her decluttering techniques, which, yet again, seem to have reignited mainstream America’s fascination with ‘traditional’ Japanese virtues and customs. Oda is inspired to think of U.S.-China relations, which appear to be marred by a form of “economic xenophobia” even as the U.S. continues to import a cornucopia of made-in-China goods. I agree with Oda that one could draw meaningful ‘lessons’ that apply beyond Japan. The story of Honda’s Marysville factory, for example, anticipates the current business of Chinese companies such as Fuyao, which took over a former General Motors plant in Ohio to manufacture glass in the United States. As vividly illustrated in the Netflix documentary *American Factory* (2019), which was released through a production company owned by Barack and Michelle Obama, Fuyao, like Honda in the 1980s, has attempted to implement its own business and managerial model in the U.S. heartland, and has faced cultural and political challenges in dealing with the Ohio workforce. The kinds of “local encounters” that Oda satisfyingly spots in McKeivitt’s analysis of Honda can be seen today in the operations of this Chinese company. To add further, McKeivitt’s discussion of anime fandom may prove useful in understanding the popular embrace of Korean television dramas and popular music, a glimpse of which could be gained at Korean wave conventions (KCONs) and the scores of “Random Play Dances” held across major cities (some of which can be spotted on YouTube).

Mettler and McKeivitt have produced carefully researched, thought-provoking, and insightful studies that recast the history of the United States and Japan in productive ways. The reviewers' questions and comments point to the usefulness of the two books in studying this bilateral relationship. Another lesson may be that the story is not yet complete. It is my hope that *How to Reach Japan by Subway* and *Consuming Japan* will trigger an even greater interest in U.S.-Japan relations and transpacific affairs among scholars, students, and the wider public.

**Participants:**

**Hiroshi Kitamura** is Associate Professor of History at the College of William & Mary. He is the author of *Screening Enlightenment: Hollywood and the Cultural Reconstruction of Defeated Japan* (Cornell University Press, 2010). Currently, he is working on two projects: a book on Hollywood and East Asia during the Cold War, and an in-depth study of film critic Yodogawa Nagaharu.

**Andrew C. McKeivitt** is associate professor of history at Louisiana Tech University. He received his Ph.D. from the Department of History at Temple University in 2009. In 2011, the Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations awarded him the Stuart L. Bernath Scholarly Article Prize for his *Diplomatic History* article, "You Are Not Alone!: Anime and the Globalizing of America." Supported by a grant from the Louisiana Board of Regents, he is on leave during the 2019-2020 academic year, writing a book about the intersections of U.S. gun violence and foreign relations.

**Meghan Mettler** is the Maltbie Chair of Social Sciences at Upper Iowa University, where she is an assistant professor of history. Other works include: "Godzilla versus Kurosawa: Presentation and Interpretation of Japanese Cinema in the Post World War II United States" in *The Journal of American - East Asian Relations* 25:4 (2018), "Modern Butterfly: American Perceptions of Japanese Women and their Role in International Relations, 1945-1961" in *The Journal of Women's History* 26:4 (2014), and "Gimcracks, Dollar Blouses, and Transistors: American Reactions to Imported Japanese Products, 1945-1964" in *The Pacific Historical Review* 79:2 (2010). She is currently in the early stages of a project exploring the history of America's international reputation as a nation plagued by violence.

**Fintan Hoey** is associate professor of history at Franklin University Switzerland and was a Swiss National Science Foundation funded Public Policy Fellow at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, Spring 2019. He is the author of *Sato and America: U.S.-Japanese Relations, 1964-1972* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015) and his current research focuses on U.S.-Japanese civil nuclear energy relations in the 1970s and 1980s.

**Jennifer M. Miller** is an assistant professor of History at Dartmouth College and scholar of U.S. foreign relations since 1945, focusing on interactions between the United States and Northeast Asia. She received her Ph.D. in the history of U.S. foreign relations and international history from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Her research examines the intersections between foreign policy and domestic ideas, ideologies, and political narratives; her work explores how post-World War II interactions between America and East Asia transformed both sides' thinking about security, democratic governance, citizenship, and economic order. Her first book, *Cold War Democracy: The United States and Japan* appeared with Harvard University Press in 2019. She is currently starting a new project examining how East Asian economic growth (1970s - 1990s) affected American thinking about capitalism, social strength, and economic vitality.

**Laura Miller** is the Ei'ichi Shibusawa-Seigo Arai Endowed Professor of Japanese Studies and Professor of History at the University of Missouri-St. Louis. She is the author of *Beauty Up: Exploring Contemporary Japanese Body Aesthetics* (2006), and co-editor of *Diva Nation: Female Icons from Japanese Cultural History* (2018), *Modern Girls on the Go: Gender, Mobility, and Labor in Japan* (2013), *Manners and Mischief: Gender, Power, and Etiquette in Japan* (2011), and *Bad Girls of Japan* (2005).

**Meredith Oda** is Associate Professor and Undergraduate Director of History at the University of Nevada, Reno and earned her Ph.D. from the University of Chicago. She is the author of *The Gateway to the Pacific: Japanese Americans and the*

*Remaking of San Francisco* (Chicago, 2018) and has articles in *Diplomatic History* and the *Pacific Historical Review*. Her current book project examines alienage and Japanese American resettlement from World War II incarceration camps.

## REVIEW BY FINTAN HOEY, FRANKLIN UNIVERSITY SWITZERLAND

Ruth Benedict famously reduced Japanese society and culture to two contrasting tendencies; a warrior-centered militarism and a serene love of nature and refined artistry.<sup>1</sup> While *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword* has been much criticized and debunked since it was first published in 1946, the duality she described retained a hold on American views of Japan as these two books illustrate. In *How to Reach Japan by Subway* Meghan Warner Mettler describes a post-war American fascination with *shibui*, a particular minimalist aesthetic which Benedict would have regarded as falling into the chrysanthemum category. In *Consuming Japan* Andrew C. McKeivitt shows how by the late twentieth century both the chrysanthemum and the sword featured in American conceptions of Japan as a nation threatening America's balance of payments with well-designed cars and electronics and refined cuisine.

In Mettler's telling, *shibui* was well suited to mid-century American tastes. Its clean lines, understated elegance, and playful and minimal decoration fit in with the modernist styles of the time. It also transcended the machine coldness of the age with its focus on craftsmanship and a supposed affinity with the natural world. In these ways *shibui*, at least as it was conceived and consumed in America, could carry out the feat of simultaneously complementing the positive aspects of modern style while also serving as a foil for the time's perceived excesses. Tradition was placed in the service of modernity and also in opposition to it. Mettler shows how this fascination was expressed in the popularity of Japanese home furnishings, *ikebana* and *bonsai*, Zen Buddhism, and samurai films. All of this was facilitated by the fact that in these early post-war years Japan was no longer seen as a military threat and not yet seen as an economic one. Japan, or rather an imagined pre-modern, traditional Japan, was inoffensive and ripe for consumption.

The strength of this book is what it tells us about American society, or, more accurately, about a particular elite slice of American society, in the mid-twentieth century. As Mettler notes, this was an elite phenomenon with upper class tastemakers spending and accruing cultural capital by displaying an affinity with the new and exotic. This highbrow culture filtered down to a larger market of aspirational, middle class, and middlebrow consumers. It was further stratified along lines of class and gender: This was primarily a white and a female phenomenon. To be sure the masses also had an opportunity to consume Japanese films and products. However, films such as *Godzilla* were dubbed and re-cut with extra scenes in order to play down their Japaneseness and, it was hoped, boost their box office returns.<sup>2</sup> This was also true for mass-market Japanese goods, the inexpensive consumer items designed to replicate American equivalents and with discrete 'Made in Japan' labels. In contrast to a later era when Japanese imports were seen as a major threat, at this time the growing presence of Japanese goods on American store shelves was just as likely to give rise to mild annoyance or bemusement.

One key argument is harder to accept. Mettler takes Naoko Shibusawa's *America's Geisha Ally* as something of a jumping off point for her own study. Shibusawa deftly shows how Americans re-imagined their defeated enemy as a feminized, infantilized ally in the immediate post-war years.<sup>3</sup> However Mettler's book is less successful in showing how these patterns of consumption were connected to the exigencies of American national security policy. To be sure, while many Americans did flirt with Zen and adorn their homes with Americanized plastic *shoji* screens, it is less clear that they did so out of a desire to further American foreign policy. While this may well have been the case, it is hard to accept based on the evidence presented here. Mettler cites a speech by President Dwight D. Eisenhower in which he explains the need to open America's domestic market to Japanese imports in order to ensure Japan's prosperity and its place in the western anti-communist orbit (184).

<sup>1</sup> Ruth Benedict, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword: Patterns of Japanese Culture* (Boston: Mariner Books, 2005 [1946]).

<sup>2</sup> Ishiro Honda (dir.), *Gojira* (Tokyo: Toho, 1954).

<sup>3</sup> Naoko Shibusawa, *America's Geisha Ally: Reimagining the Japanese Enemy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006).

Certainly, this was a central tenet of America's early cold war policy.<sup>4</sup> The reader is not shown precisely how this was connected to the vagaries of fashion and taste in mid-century America. Mettler points to the post-war re-opening of municipal Japanese gardens in the 1950s as evidence of the connections made by Americans between Japanese culture and the actions of the Japanese state or people. When Japan was perceived as threatening, such cultural artifacts were taboo; once this threatening image had subsided, Japanese cultural products became, once again, welcome (111-112). There is a difference, however, between appreciating a foreign culture because it is unthreatening, and actively celebrating it because it belongs to an ally. The reader is told that Zen Buddhism "could also support the foundational image of a humble, serene, and peace-loving Japan," but is not shown that it did so. (156) Moreover, it is hard to see how Beatniks and society ladies alike connected their fascination with Zen to Japan specifically and not to an imagined exotic 'Orient.'

There are some minor issues that should be mentioned: Japanese-Americans were *interned* and not *interred* during the Second World War (3, 80, 90); The Meiji Restoration cannot be described as a 'republican political revolution' (7); and the Castle Bravo nuclear test at the Bikini Atoll in March 1954 was not classified. Not only had it received advance press coverage, but U.S. authorities had declared a—completely inadequate—exclusion zone around the test site (191).

In the final analysis this is a book with something important to say about elite culture in mid-century America. Mettler ably shows how the selective consumption of a particular Japanese aesthetic, seemingly modern but simultaneously timeless and exotic, captivated American tastemakers for a time and seemed to provide an antidote to the pressures of the age.

In *Consuming Japan* Andrew C. McKeivitt takes up this story at the point where Mettler leaves off; the August 1971 Nixon Shock which ended the period of America's patronage of Japan's economic growth. He continues to the early 1990s and the collapse of Japan's 'bubble' economy. He makes an equally bold claim about the importance of Americans' consumption of Japanese products in the long-1980s. As with Mettler's approach, he links this consumption with ideas and challenges of modernity and, more specifically in this case, with *post-modernity* defined as arising from an "end of the most endearing Western narrative of the modern era: the promises of American liberal democratic capitalism" (12). Another similarity between the two books is the connection made between such consumption and America's place in the world vis-à-vis Japan. In the case of McKeivitt's book this link is better substantiated, and he skillfully shows how opinion makers, politicians, and ordinary consumers grappled with the specter of Japanese power and influence. Going further still, McKeivitt argues that Japan was crucial in the globalization of American culture, stating that "consuming all things Japanese helped create a globalized America, a condition that became so natural—so ordinary—that Japan's role in that process has been overlooked" (2). He deftly sidesteps arguments over the current nature of globalization and whether it is homogenization or hybridization, and instead seeks to historicize the process.<sup>5</sup> In his telling, what happened across the Pacific and within American society entailed many distinct, localized, micro-globalizations, rather than a single phenomenon whose causes, meanings, and dimensions are easily delineated.

In the opening two chapters McKeivitt sets out the overarching contours of how the American image of Japan and Japanese things changed from one of delight and curiosity (typified by the TV series *Shogun*) to fears of Japanese power reminiscent of earlier periods of 'Yellow peril' (marked by the publication of Michael Crichton's bestseller *Rising Sun*). In the subsequent five chapters McKeivitt brings us closer to the ground and considers several cases which feed into his overarching narrative. These illustrate the profound, but also the diverse, impacts of Japanese things on American society. At a time when Japanese

---

<sup>4</sup> The stand out study of this is Sayuri Shimizu, *Creating People of Plenty: The United States and Japan's Economic Alternatives, 1950-1960* (Ken: The Kent State University Press, 2001).

<sup>5</sup> On the homogenization argument see George Ritzer, *The McDonaldization of Society: Revised New Century Edition* (Thousand Oaks: Pine Forge Press, 2004). On hybridization see Arjun Appadurai *Modernity at Large: Cultural dimensions of globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996); Ulf Hannerz, *Transnational Connections: Culture, People, Places* (New York, Routledge, 1996); and Jan Nederveen Pieterse, *Globalization and Culture: Global Mélange* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2009).

auto imports were seen as threatening blue-collar jobs, we meet the workers at Honda's first American plant in Marysville, Ohio who resisted efforts at unionization by United Auto Workers. We are shown how adventurous diners sought an 'authentic' sushi experience. While this was the acme of sophistication for some, others, bizarrely, saw it as the death knell for that totem of American masculinity; the ballpark hotdog. This was just one example of the boom in warnings about Japan and jeremiads about American society which were omnipresent at the time but which made no impact on the fans of Japanese animation and graphic novels who organized themselves into clubs and societies.

McKevitt resists a simple narrative and his book is the better for it. He is sensitive to the complexity and contradictions of his case and turns that into a compelling feature of his investigation. By unifying these different and disparate thread he shows how American culture and society were globalized and also Japan's influential role in that process. To illustrate this, the ordinary and the local are crucial, both to the argument McKevitt builds and to the evidence he uses. In his discussion of American *otaku* culture, for example, McKevitt created and circulated a questionnaire among these pioneering *anime* and *manga* fans.

McKevitt closes his introduction with the hope that his readers will see something of themselves in the book's "structures of feeling" (20). This was certainly the case for this reviewer. I recognized myself in the excitement which greeted the release of the Japanese animated film, *Akira*.<sup>6</sup> Watching this dystopian epic in the early 1990s I felt a connection to something simultaneously familiar and excitingly foreign. I also recorded the film on my family's videocassette recorder (VCR), though, in common with the vast majority of western consumers at that time, I did not realize that I was using Japanese technology to capture a Japanese film. McKevitt makes much of the fact that this "early icon of contemporary globalization" (7) did not "smell" Japanese (153). This, along with the fact that imports of VCRs did not threaten any established American industry, meant that their runaway success and cultural impact did not occasion any crisis of confidence or hand-wringing. It also helps explain why Japan's role in globalizing American culture has gone relatively unnoticed.

This is a thoroughly enjoyable and engaging book and deserves a wide audience, not only among those concerned with U.S.-Japanese relations but also those interested in consumer culture, the importance of feelings and emotions in understanding the past, and the social history of America in the long-1980s.

---

<sup>6</sup> Katsuhiro Otomo (dir.), *Akira* (Tokyo: TMS Entertainment, 1988).



## REVIEW BY JENNIFER M. MILLER, DARTMOUTH COLLEGE

At the dawn of 2019, many television viewers in the United States embarked on yet another moment of fascination with Japanese ‘culture.’ The source? A new Netflix show, *Tidying Up with Marie Kondo*, which brought the Japanese decluttering expert to a wider audience. Under Kondo’s benevolent gaze, clothes, books, toys, baseball cards, souvenirs, even hundreds of nutcrackers were collected, folded, organized, and donated. Kondo utilized a series of seemingly kooky rituals—greeting people’s houses upon entry; tapping books to wake them up; encouraging people to hold, contemplate, and thank their items before disposing of them; only keeping things that ‘spark joy’—to cheerfully coax reluctant Americans to confront their piles of stuff. According to contemporary media coverage, such methods were not simply individual quirks but instead came from Japanese religious traditions. They stemmed directly from the Shinto belief that “kami—or the sacred—exists in everything.”<sup>7</sup> This expression of ancient Japanese culture and wisdom would seemingly save Americans from themselves, or at least from being crushed under the physical avalanche of consumer capitalism.

This public celebration of Kondo as the newest embodiment of ‘Eastern wisdom’ for Western problems immediately came to mind as I read these two rich and captivating histories by Meghan Warner Mettler and Andrew C. McKeivitt. Both skillfully show that this reception of Kondo as the representative of ancient culture and tradition is but the most recent iteration of a long-standing trope, which began when Americans embraced Japanese products and cultural practices after World War II. McKeivitt himself recently noted that Kondo’s show is a powerful reminder that the “relationship between the United States and Japan pervades our consumer culture in quiet, but often persistent, ways.” Drawing on research by Mettler and himself, McKeivitt claimed that Kondo needs to be historicized in “in decades of economic and cultural exchange between two societies in which people are increasingly anxious about the problems wrought by consumerism.”<sup>8</sup> Indeed, consumption and its significance for understanding both the self and others are striking themes running through both books. Both authors offer a compelling exploration of the ways in which Japan—both real and imagined—has become a central site for Americans to grapple with modernity. According to these authors, the remarkable malleability of ‘Japan’ as a signifier gives it a unique role in the American imagination. Simultaneously ancient and modern, of the time and timeless, geisha and *Blade Runner*, culturally specific and culturally “oderless,” Japan has continued to serve as refuge, corrective, and mirror to modern American life.<sup>9</sup>

Focusing on the two decades after World War II, Meghan Warner Mettler’s *How to Reach Japan by Subway: America’s Fascination with Japanese Culture, 1945-1965* traces upper middle- and upper-class white America’s embrace of Japanese products and Japanese style after 1945. Each of her chapters focuses on one cultural import, such as samurai films, ikebana and bonsai, and Zen Buddhism to argue that postwar cultural trends and fashions bolstered larger geopolitical goals by “reinforc[ing] Japan’s friendly yet subordinate position toward the United States during the era of occupation and the early

<sup>7</sup> See, for example, Mika Doyle, “How Shinto Influenced Marie Kondo’s KonMari Method Of Organizing,” *Bustle*, 24 January 2019, <https://www.bustle.com/p/how-shinto-influenced-marie-kondos-konmari-method-of-organizing-15861445>; and Margaret Dilloway, “What White, Western Audiences Don’t Understand About Marie Kondo’s ‘Tidying Up,’” *Huffpost*, 22 January 2019, [https://www.huffpost.com/entry/marie-kondo-white-western-audineces\\_n\\_5c47859be4b025aa26bde77c](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/marie-kondo-white-western-audineces_n_5c47859be4b025aa26bde77c). For critical reflections on this coverage, see Jolyon Baraka Thomas, “Domesticity & Spirituality: Kondo Is Not an Animist,” *Marginalia Review of Books*, 8 February 2019, <https://marginalia.lareviewofbooks.org/domesticity-spirituality-kondo-not-animist/>; and Tara Fickle, Andrew Way Leong, and Grace En-Yi Ting, “Sparking Joy: Religion, Representation & Marie Kondo,” *The Revealer*, 20 February 2019, <https://therevealer.org/sparking-joy-religion-representation-marie-kondo/>.

<sup>8</sup> Andrew C. McKeivitt, “The KonMari Method as Consumer Theory: How Marie Kondo helps us re-learn to love the things we buy,” *Public Seminar*, 11 February 2019, <http://www.publicseminar.org/2019/02/the-konmari-method-as-consumer-theory/>.

<sup>9</sup> I have drawn the concept of the Japanese mirror from Helen Mears’s *Mirror for Americans, Japan* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1948). See also Kevin Y. Kim, “Against the ‘American Century,’ Toward a Third World New Left: The Case of Helen Mears,” *Diplomatic History* 43:1 (January 2019): 130-156, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1093/dh/dhy025>.

Cold War” (2). American celebrations of Japanese culture as “tastefully austere,” Mettler argues, conceived of Japan as a society that was spiritual and timeless yet culturally distinct, clearly “behind” the United States’ innovative cultural modernity. Fruitfully drawing from Anne McClintock’s concept of anachronistic space, she asserts that Americans depicted Japan as “harmlessly locked in a subdued and tasteful past” (18). As Mettler explores in chapter four, for example, American admiration of Japanese architecture elevated one specific fourteenth to nineteenth century building style, *sho-in*, as a “Japanese house.” Tatami and shōji became evidence of “harmless” Japanese cultural values such as efficiency, simplicity, and serenity with nature. By borrowing Japanese artifacts, then, Americans reaffirmed the United States and Japan’s postwar geopolitical transformations; no longer a threatening enemy, a subtle and restrained Japan was now a feminized “subordinate partner” and “helpmeet,” “unable to compete with the modern virile United States” (13-15).

In doing so, Japan also served as a mental and emotional respite from the regimented materialism of modern America. Woven through Mettler’s discussion of her protagonists is their belief that Japanese “characteristics,” such as subtlety, discipline, restraint, and love of nature offered a corrective for the chaos and tackiness of postwar American life (96-98, 112). With mid-century America’s growing focus on “normality” (exemplified by the rise of psychology), such thinking was particularly prominent around Zen Buddhism, which psychologists, religious scholars, and composers and writers alike elevated as a way to address the mental stresses and conformist pressures of modern American life.<sup>10</sup> If the “social emphasis on conspicuous consumption” had led Americans to “place too much value on acquisition and ambition,” Zen represented a premodern time that “valued serenity over material things” thus putting people “back in touch with their inner feelings.” (153)

As a persuasive treatment of the mutual constitution of aesthetics, consumer tastes, geopolitics, and self-understanding, Mettler’s study brings in an important range of private actors who cast themselves as cultural intermediaries. These range from philanthropists like John D. Rockefeller III and military wife and founder of Ikebana International, Ellen Gordon Allen, to entrepreneurs such as Michio Kushi, who persuaded Takashimaya, Japan’s largest department store, to open a branch in New York City. Mettler is clear that she is talking about a phenomenon that was largely limited to white, well-off Americans, many of whom were eager to acquire social cachet assigned to Japanese style, which often dovetailed with mid-century modern aesthetics. It is worth noting that she is less attentive to the role of Japanese Americans, sometimes bringing them in as cultural and economic mediators, while also asserting that they played a surprisingly small role in this postwar boom.<sup>11</sup> In part, she claims, many white Americans bypassed Japanese Americans, a window into their thinking that elevated an ostensibly timeless Japanese ‘style’ above the contemporary reality of Japanese and Japanese American bodies. This omission, however, comes at a price, and Mettler’s book sometimes inadvertently replicates its protagonists’ limited view.

In drawing connections to the larger geopolitical context, Mettler partially attributes American interest in Japanese culture to postwar internationalist ideology. The belief that the United States could weld its new global power “benevolently, to uplift and improve all nations to ensure a more lasting peace” not only encouraged the consumption of Japanese culture, but also led many to see American power as constructive and beneficial (19). Yet this consumer interest was rooted in much more than internationalism. Just as important (and as Mettler occasionally recognizes), it was a product of imperial dominance. This is not particularly surprising. Far from working “against the grain of hegemony,” as Mettler claims,

---

<sup>10</sup> See James H. Capshaw, *Psychologists on the March: Science, Practice and Professional Identity in America, 1929–1969* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), Anna G. Creadick, *Perfectly Average: The Pursuit of Normality in Postwar America* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2010), and Ellen Herman, *The Romance of American Psychology: Political Culture in the Age of Experts* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

<sup>11</sup> For a study that foregrounds Japanese-Americans in the processes of building postwar trans-Pacific ties, see Meredith Oda, *Gateway to the Pacific: Japanese Americans and the Remaking of San Francisco* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018).

consumption has always been a central way that the metropole experiences and internalizes empire.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, Mettler's book innately demonstrates the extent to which the ideology of postwar internationalism perpetuated imperial and orientalist logics. As she notes, much of this interest in Japanese culture, especially ikebana and bonsai, was itself a product of the large number of American soldiers (and wives) stationed in occupied Japan, serving as a tangible example of the occupation's impact on domestic American life. Internationalism, that is, was premised on harsh material and military inequalities.

What is more, this entanglement of consumption and dominance had ironic consequences, as American advocates of Japanese culture sometimes perpetuated tropes of Japanese imperialism. During the war, for example, the Japanese government had sent ikebana masters to Japanese colonies to foster support for Japanese dominance. In the following decades, American soldiers and their families replicated these imperial gestures as a consequence of their own occupation experiences, in the service of American postwar dominance. Similarly, Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki's *Zen and Japanese Culture*, written in the 1930s to promote wartime nationalism by celebrating Japanese exceptionalism and the Japanese people's "unique spirit," became an American bestseller in the 1950s (159).<sup>13</sup> It is doubtful, as Mettler notes, that Americans consciously sought to replicate Japanese wartime ideologies, of which they likely had only a superficial understanding.<sup>14</sup> Yet the ease with which they embraced a notion of Japanese culture as ancient and unique underscores the imperial and hierarchical rationalities shared by twentieth-century America and Japan. Such beliefs did not simply relegate Japan to a subordinate position, but produced and even rehabilitated Japanese imperial ideology, perpetuating and celebrating Japanese exceptionalism in the service of America's exceptional postwar power.<sup>15</sup> One self-professed exceptional society, it seems, was eager to recognize and embrace that quality in another.

The meaning and consequences of ideas about Japanese exceptionalism are also a central theme of Andrew C. McKeivitt's *Consuming Japan: Popular Culture and the Globalizing of 1980s America*. Exploring a time when the trajectory of the U.S.-Japanese relations felt far more uncertain, McKeivitt effectively expands our understanding of U.S.-Japanese encounters in the 1980s beyond the framework of 'Japan-bashing.' McKeivitt explores Americans' widespread consumption (and sometime production) of 'Japanese' culture and products such as Hondas, videocassette recorders (VCRs), sushi, and anime. Like Mettler, McKeivitt focuses on consumption as a generative space through which Americans understood themselves and their country's place in the world. Buying stuff, he claims, was a central site for American encounters with Japan and as a means through which Americans have defined both local and national communities. McKeivitt is particularly interested in highlighting the lived and localized experiences of the 1980s, from working at Honda from eating sushi to watching anime. In McKeivitt's telling, 'consuming' Japan was more than the expression of personal style or participation in taste making; it

---

<sup>12</sup> See among many examples, Kim Brandt, *Kingdom of Beauty: Mingei and the Politics of Folk Art in Imperial Japan* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007) and Kristin L. Hoganson, *Consumer's Imperium: The Global Production of American Domesticity* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007).

<sup>13</sup> See Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki, *Zen Buddhism and its Influence on Japanese Culture* (Kyoto: The Eastern Buddhist Society, 1938) and *Zen and Japanese Culture* (New York: Pantheon, 1959).

<sup>14</sup> On wartime understandings of Japanese culture and history as ancient and unique, see Kenneth Ruoff, *Imperial Japan at its Zenith: The Wartime Celebration of the Empire's 2600<sup>th</sup> Anniversary* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010).

<sup>15</sup> For a discussion of similar themes in postwar American and Japanese development policy, see Jennifer M. Miller, *Cold War Democracy: The United States and Japan* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2019), 250-272, and Aaron S. Moore, "Networks of Post-Colonial Development in Cold War Asia: Japan's First Wartime Reparations Project in Burma" in John Di Moia, Hiromi Mizuno, Aaron S. Moore, eds., *Engineering Asia: Technology, Colonial Development, and the Cold War Order* (New York and London: Bloomsbury Press, 2018). For a treatment of concepts of Japanese American "exceptionalism" in the domestic sphere, see Ellen Wu, *The Color of Success: Asian Americans and the Origins of the Model Minority* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014).

was building new intellectual, cultural, and sensory landscapes that fundamentally changed how American experienced the world around them.

Where Mettler talks about internationalism, McKevitt interrogates globalization to argue for Japan's transformational impact on everyday American life. Rather than simply evidence of America's imperial decline after the Vietnam War, Japan's breathtaking economic boom was also the lens through which Americans imagined a new world order. As he puts it, "U.S. business elites and intellectuals espousing globalism through the 1980s first conceived of the concept of globalization with Japan as the model of a dramatic world economic revolution that would transform relationships between peoples and states; in fact, it would alter the very nature of power" (25). In the minds of some, Japan was the "borderless nation" of the future, "attuned to the sounds of transnational capital" (43). This excited some and unsettled others. But as McKevitt makes clear, this transformation was more than the stuff of imagination. Rather, Americans 'lived' Japan's economic growth in very real and localized ways. This is especially clear in the two stellar chapters that examine the opening of Honda's first American plant in Marysville, Ohio. Rather than simply fearing and despising Japan, the residents of Marysville demonstrated that "the globalizing of Japanese capital and culture worked not only to the benefits of a particular nation-state but also to the benefit of those local communities that connected to global transformations taking place largely independent of the borders of the nation-state" (82). Indeed, the United Auto Worker's attempts to unionize the plant ultimately failed, as employees and residents banded together to cast the UAW as the threatening outsider seeking to undermine Honda's revitalization of Marysville. Global and local thus merged in unexpected ways.

For McKevitt, America's simultaneous fascination and discomfort with Japan stemmed from the difficulties of placing Japan in a mental map of modernity, an idea he explores more explicitly than Mettler. McKevitt skillfully and critically unpacks this idea through different cultural depictions of Japan on page and screen that bookended the long 1980s. Works such as James Clavell's *Shōgun* (1975), which was adapted into a hugely popular television miniseries, offered a "stereotypical yet respectful portrait" of Japan (48). With geisha, samurai, calligraphy, and tea ceremonies, *Shōgun's* depiction of Japan resonated with the cultural encounters of the 1950s and their emphasis on Japan's embodiment of a timeless and harmless past. By the 1990s, however, things looked very different. Michael Crichton's bestselling *Rising Sun* (1992, film released in 1993) narrated the murder of a white woman by the employee of a Japanese corporation in Los Angeles, depicting Japan through nefarious, corrupt, and racist plutocrats. Crichton presented a world in which the United States was "open to plunder by Japan's economic and cultural imperialists" (68), with American culture overrun and undermined by a distinctly 'foreign' and incomprehensible agents. Indeed, for Crichton, Japanese 'culture' served as the explanation for all behaviors, whether business practices or arm movements; this culture made differences between the United States and Japan insurmountable. Such depictions, McKevitt asserts, highlighted Japan's challenge to modernity and even its postmodernity, the prospect of a future when the United States "held neither political hegemony nor a monopoly on the credulity of a global vision of liberal democratic capitalism" (50). Rather than reaffirming the United States' global hegemony, these images of Japan helped imagine a world in which Americans were no longer capitalism's top beneficiaries. Indeed, it is not an accident that President Donald Trump's first foray into political life came through criticism of Japanese imports and the U.S.-Japanese alliance. He forged his vision of an America in "carnage" in the 1980s by claiming that the Japanese cheated the global trading system—and benefited from "stupid" American leadership—to "knock the hell out of our companies" (205).<sup>16</sup>

Like Mettler, McKevitt looks at a broad range of actors, from intellectuals and commentators to autoworkers and anime fans. On the one hand, this gives a broad sense of the diverse ways in which Americans 'consumed' Japan; while some products, such as sushi and anime, were received as distinctly Japanese, others, like the VCR and to some extent, Honda, were able to consciously or unconsciously shed their association with Japan, becoming culturally 'odorless.' On the other hand, like Mettler, Japanese and Japanese Americans (and Asian peoples more broadly) play a smaller role in McKevitt's story. McKevitt notes, for example, that sushi's growing popularity was not connected to changing patterns of Asian

---

<sup>16</sup> See also Jennifer M. Miller, "Let's not be laughed at anymore: Donald Trump and Japan from the 1980s to the Present." *Journal of American-East Asian Relations* 25:2 (2018): 138-168.

migration after the 1965 revision of U.S. immigration law, yet, as he states, the first wave of sushi chefs was Japanese. Indeed, many Japanese restaurants across the United States are now run by Korean, Chinese, and Vietnamese migrants. It would be helpful to have more attention to the migration of not just products and ‘culture’ but also the people who served as intermediaries in various ways; in a sense, McKevitt’s book also reproduces the eliding of Japanese, Asian, and Asian American bodies that it critiques. Indeed, McKevitt is sometimes less explicit about the identity of his protagonists than Mettler—who is clear that she is largely talking about white members of the middle and upper class—nor is he always attentive to questions of regional variation, particularly on the West Coast. How did the experience of ‘consuming’ Japan look or feel different in the West and Hawai’i, where patterns of migration and immigration restriction, violent racism, wartime internment and economic dispossession, and postwar emphases on multiculturalism and trans-Pacific ‘gateways’ left mixed and complex legacies?<sup>17</sup>

Taken together, Mettler’s and McKevitt’s books make clear that ‘Japan’ has served as a crucial site for Americans to reckon with modernity over the second half of the twentieth century, both as a cause and a corrective for American ills. They argue that Japan played this role because many Americans have encountered it through the medium of things, products that are always subject to adaptation, interpretation, and malleability. ‘Japan’ thus embodied a variety of contradictions. Such encounters simultaneously presented Japan as a representative of a premodern past and a consumerist future, while, in the words of McKevitt, “effac[ing] the Japanese present” (19). The ubiquity of Japanese products represented a foreign other, with all its promise and perils, yet also served as a blank screen for American projections of the self. These processes, as both authors make clear, have become deeply entangled with geopolitical realities and understandings of American global power. As such, the American fascination with Japan, on some level, has constantly been about the United States and Americans themselves, yet the reflections provided by the Japanese mirror has not always satisfied these American observers.

---

<sup>17</sup> See Oda, *Gateway to the Pacific* and Sarah Miller-Davenport, *Gateway State: Hawai’i and the Cultural Transformation of American Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019).

## REVIEW BY LAURA MILLER, UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI-ST. LOUIS

Scholars of Japan are often fascinated with the ways in which Japanese culture is understood, borrowed, demonized, and represented outside Japan. In recent decades excellent books have been published on the global reception of Pokémon, Godzilla, Hello Kitty, manga, anime, cosplay, and TV dramas.<sup>18</sup> All these books were successful because the authors approached them equipped with firm understandings of Japanese culture and history, and then limited their scope to manageable topics. Two of the newest additions to the Japanese culture-in-America bookshelf are Meghan Warner Mettler's *How to Reach Japan by Subway: America's Fascination with Japanese Culture, 1945-1965*, and Drew McKevitt's *Consuming Japan: Popular Culture and the Globalizing of 1980s America*. At first pass both books might appear to be similarly concerned with the impact and meanings of Japanese culture in the United States, albeit covering different time periods. But they are miles apart in what they consider to be forms of Japanese culture that were adopted by or consumed by Americans. Mettler's work successfully presents original research about the flow of Japanese culture into the U.S. in the early postwar era; while McKevitt's well-written book references mountains of 1980s American discourse on Japanese people, trade, and representation.

Mettler's book provides a fascinating and fresh study of how Americans (mainly white Americans) eagerly consumed Japanese aesthetic goods and pastimes, as well as a revamped version of the Zen religious-philosophical system, during the early postwar years. Mettler succeeds in linking these fads to larger societal and governmental goals of rehabilitating the image of an aggressive wartime Japan, creating in its place a timeless, artsy Japan. Her survey encompasses aesthetic pastimes of art-house film appreciation, ikebana flower arrangement, bonsai miniature tree growing, interior home and garden design, and Zen-influenced poetry and other writings. Her central thesis is that borrowing of Japanese cultural forms became an element of cultural capital for Americans, who found the minimalist or elegant aesthetics of certain art forms to be useful markers of class and taste.

Mettler discusses the backgrounds of the Americans and other groups and individuals who participated in, or created, Japanese culture in the U.S. during the 1950s and early 1960s. This included the many cultural and government institutions (the State Department, the Japan Foundation in its earliest configuration as the Society for International Cultural Relations, museums, botanical gardens, art clubs, hobby groups), the media (films, women's magazines, publishers of coffee table books, national newspapers and magazines), the Zen writers and practitioners (D.T. Suzuki, Allan Watts, Gary Snyder, Ruth Fuller Sasaki, and Yeita Sasaki, the founder of the Buddhist Society of America in 1931), and the core individuals who worked to promote or interpret Japanese culture for Americans (architects, poets, film critics, ambassadors, philanthropists, women's leisure group presidents, art connoisseurs). Her short biographies of some of these individuals offer a valuable contribution to this history. It is pleasing to read her narrative about Ellen Gordon Allen, the founder of Ikebana International, which by 1962 had established almost fifty chapters all over the U.S. (75). In 1965, the *Chicago Tribune* went so far as to claim that ikebana was a top hobby in Chicago (74). Japanese brides of the American occupation cadre, who never cared about ikebana while they were in Japan, also took up the art form in the U.S. in order to maintain cultural identity (something that one still observes today).

One of the most admirable aspects of Mettler's study is that it brings our attention to the specific types and groups of the Americans who were the agents of exchange: the military wives who brought back the art of ikebana flower arrangement, the

---

<sup>18</sup> Koichi Iwabuchi, *Recentering Globalization: Popular Culture and Japanese Transnationalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002); Roland Kelts, *Japanamerica: How Japanese Pop Culture Has Invaded the US* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006); William M. Tsutsui, *Godzilla on My Mind: Fifty Years of the King of Monsters* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004); Tsutsui and Michiko Ito, eds., *In Godzilla's Footsteps: Japanese Pop Culture Icons on the Global Stage* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006); Neriko Musha Doerr and Debra J. Occhi, eds., *The Augmented Reality of Pokémon Go: Chronotopes, Moral Panic, and Other Complexities* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2019); Christine R. Yano, *Pink Globalization: Hello Kitty's Trek Across the Pacific* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013) and Joseph Tobin, ed., *Pikachu's Global Adventure: The Rise and Fall of Pokémon* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004).

mostly male fans of Japanese art cinema and Zen Buddhism, the bonsai growers and Japanese garden fans, and the Japanese Americans who were also there for all of it. She notes that many of the Americans involved in specific exchanges were not only gendered, but also from white middle class and highbrow backgrounds. Even though the consumers of Japanese aesthetic culture were mainly white Americans, the role of Japanese Americans in providing training, instruction, and materials was crucial. For example, Frank Okamura was the curator and bonsai instructor at the Brooklyn Botanic Garden from 1947, and Japanese American nurseries and garden centers on the West Coast were also key to the spread of bonsai enthusiasm. Mary Takahashi was a widely known founder of the Chicago chapter of Ikebana International and owner of an Ikebana school who gave lectures and TV interviews (80).

It was a revelation to find out that the aesthetic concept of *shibui* (understated elegance) had been taken up by people in the U.S. in the 1960s. The currently more familiar concepts of *sabi* (simplicity, rustic beauty, unpretentiousness) and *wabi* (patina of age, appreciation of imperfection) have dominated the American imagination in the decades since. For contemporary readers who are not as familiar with the concept of *shibui*, it might have been useful to have some additional disentanglement of the different aesthetic concepts. I recall a 2014 TV series about the legendary swordsman Musashi Miyamoto, in which one of the characters named Seijūrō Yoshioka is played by heartthrob actor Shota Matsuda. In one scene Matsuda wears a luxurious light grey and mauve silk kimono with a taupe cape. His presentation was ultra *shibui*, but could be called neither *wabi* nor *sabi*. Mettler's misidentification of the prominent anthropologist Ruth Benedict as a sociologist (7), and the occasionally mannered use of 'shibui culture' notwithstanding, the book is crammed with nuggets of original information that will appeal to Japan specialists and American studies specialists alike. There are many historic gems that were uncovered in her research. I like that she found an article from a 1960 issue of the American magazine *House Beautiful* entitled "How to be Shibui with American Things" (11).

Finally, I greatly appreciated Mettler's conclusion, in which she compares 1950s American enthusiasts of Japanese culture with contemporary fans of manga and anime, pointing out that for both groups, Japanese culture or products served as "signifiers of social distinction" (213). The manga and anime fans have adopted the once denigrated term *otaku*, destigmatizing it in the U.S. to mean something like 'avid fan.' As she notes "Often viewing themselves as stepping outside mainstream American tastes, otaku bond over their enthusiasm for cultural forms that few of their fellow countrymen appreciate" (213).

In *Consuming Japan: Popular Culture and the Globalizing of 1980s America*, McKevitt focuses on the decade of the 1980s, when for a brief moment it seemed to many that the U.S. was being 'invaded' by all things Japanese. Within this ten-year period, McKevitt surveys a wide spectrum of the way Japanese people and culture were represented or experienced; two popular English language novels and an American TV series about Japan; a Honda auto parts plant in Ohio; the massive importation of videocassette recorders (VCRs) and other trade goods; the rise in popularity of sushi; and the growth of anime fan groups. The link between these disparate issues, according to McKevitt, is that they were all forms of consumption of things Japanese that contributed to making the U.S. more global. He argues that "In all of these contexts, I argue, the consumption of Japanese things served as a catalyst for the material and ideological globalizing of America" (7).

While McKevitt's argument is conceptually fascinating, I nevertheless found it to be occasionally confusing. The text shifted back and forth between consumption and representation of Japanese things without a clear articulation of how these are different. From my perspective, young people going to anime conventions to celebrate Japanese media products could be considered a type of consumption, while writers or magazine editors who used Edo period (1603-1868) samurai to index Japaneseness were dealing with representation. Later in the book, however, McKevitt states that "Like Sony VCRs and Honda Accords, anime could cross borders without carrying a distinct national identity" (182). This leads to more confusion: if much of the material in the book does not convey Japaneseness, why should we consider it to be consumption of Japanese popular culture that had a globalizing effect?

I was not convinced by McKevitt's main argument that "Consuming all things Japanese helped create a globalized America..." (2). To take a modern analogy, currently the U.S. government is caging immigrant children and detaining and

brutalizing Mexicans who are in terrible border circumstances. Meanwhile, Mexican salsa and tortilla chips, which have become one of the most popular snacks in the country in the U.S., are consumed in skyrocketing numbers. I take this to mean that consumption of Mexican food does not mean that non-Latin Americans are somehow becoming more ‘globalized’ or receptive to Mexican culture or people. Similarly, I do not think that white Americans who consume sushi, salsa, hummus, or any other food items are becoming more global or culturally sensitive by doing so.

McKevitt recounts a tale spun by former Sony chairman Akio Morita, who made grand claims about the creation of the company’s name. Morita presented the story in an English-language memoir produced with the aid of two collaborators. *Made in Japan: Akio Morita and Sony* was very popular in U.S. business circles.<sup>19</sup> As reported by McKevitt, the famous Japanese executive said that he had to explain to fellow Japanese why the name Sony needed to be written in the Latin alphabet (40). Morita’s self-serving account, however, was non-scholarly, corporate mythology that is not historically accurate when it says it was the first Latin alphabet brand in Japan. At least from the Meiji era (1868-1912) Japanese products have carried English brand names written in the Latin alphabet, such as Lion Toothpowder, Club Toothpowder, and The Nice unisex hair coloring. In addition, while Morita was best known in the U.S. for the cosmopolitan air he presented in the *Made in Japan* English-language book, in Japan he is also known as someone who co-authored an ultra-nationalist book.<sup>20</sup> I am curious about why the book details the image of the ‘global’ Morita as represented in the U.S. but not the ‘nationalist’ Morita, who made some racist claims about why the U.S. was a failing society. How does the ultra-nationalist Morita jibe with the image of Sony, which he chaired and made globally famous as “the company without borders or a distinct ethnic or national identity” (39)?

I would also have welcomed more sensitivity to who is meant by ‘Americans’ in the different chapters with the use of occasional qualifiers. In the introduction McKevitt mentions an intention to discuss “America’s first encounter with sushi” (7), which I first assumed meant the Japanese Americans and others who lived in Hawai’i or the West Coast and were eating sushi decades before the 1980s. Merry White, the well-known American scholar of both Japan and its food, once told me she ate sushi in the late 1950s in New York. But later McKevitt writes that “No scholar has yet to return to sushi’s U.S. arrival and interrogate what this curious new delicacy meant for its first American consumers” (157), which seems to indicate that he locates sushi’s arrival in the 1980s, and that he means white Americans. Although historians and food writers often point to different places and people when discussing who introduced sushi to the United States, some reading of oral histories by Japanese Americans, or some interviews with Japanese Americans (not restaurant owners, who have a stake in the game), would be a good starting point here. The history of sushi in the U.S. is a well-trod scholarly domain, as is discussion of its hybridity.<sup>21</sup> Even as I continue to wonder when “America’s first encounter with sushi” really occurred, I know first-hand that it was before the 1980s.

When a book has “popular culture” in its title we expect engagement with some of the key points in the academic study of popular culture. For example, scholars understand that popular culture does ‘ideological work.’ In other words, it is motivated by the creator’s particular beliefs and goals for expressing them. McKevitt discusses the ideological efforts found

---

<sup>19</sup> Akio Morita, with Mitsuko Shimoura, and Edwin M. Reingold, *Made in Japan: Akio Morita and Sony* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1986).

<sup>20</sup> Morita and Shintaro Ishihara, *“No” to ieru Nihon* (The Japan That Can Say “No”) (Tokyo: Kobunsha, 1989).

<sup>21</sup> Jonas House, “Sushi in the United States, 1945–1970,” *Food and Foodways* 26:1 (2018): 40-62; David L Wank, and James Farrer, “Chinese Immigrants and Japanese Cuisine in the United States: A Case of Culinary Globalization,” in James Farrer, ed., *The Globalization of Asian Cuisines: Transnational Networks and Culinary Contact Zones* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015): 79-99; Rumi Sakamoto and Matthew Allen, “There’s Something Fishy about That Sushi: How Japan Interprets the Global Sushi Boom,” *Japan Forum* 23:1 (2011): 99-121; Paige A. Edwards, “Global Sushi: Eating and Identity,” *Perspectives on Global Development and Technology* 11:1 (January 2012): 211-225; Cindy Hsin-I Feng, “The Tale of Sushi: History and Regulations,” *Comprehensive Reviews in Food Science and Food Safety* 11:2 (2012): 205-220; Theodore C. Bestor, “How Sushi Went Global,” *Foreign Policy* 121 (2000): 54-63.



in two English language books (*Rising Sun* by Michael Crichton and *Shōgun* by James Clavell) and for the TV series *Shōgun*, but I struggled to find similar analysis in his discussion of imported Japanese cultural products. Despite the fact that the *Shōgun* TV series was filmed on location in Japan and had some lead Japanese actors, it was a thoroughly American production, and a terrible flop once it aired in Japan. I recall living in Japan in 1981 and hearing people in Osaka making fun of the many bloopers and the mangled Japanese language used by the American actors in the series. McKeivitt's extended analyses of non-Japanese cultural products such as *Shōgun* is intended to illustrate the way in which Japan was represented in the U.S., but the same attention to actual Japanese things and products is missing. The chapter on anime from Japan considers these cultural products in terms of the appearance of their characters, their plots, and their scenes without discussion of the ideological work involved in their creation in Japan, and whether or not those meanings were also appreciated by people in the U.S. Which cultural values and meanings encoded in Japanese popular culture were understood or overlooked by U.S. consumers?

To sum up, I would say that white Americans who put calligraphy scrolls up in their homes and studied Zen and flower arrangement were consuming Japanese culture (Mettler's book), but white American people who purchased VCRs, drove Toyotas, and read flawed popular fiction were not consuming Japanese culture or popular culture, they were simply buying trade goods and reading stereotypes (McKeivitt's book). Mettler's book offered new insights and surprising new material, and I appreciated her sensitive attention to the U.S. producers and cultural consumers of Japanese culture. For those of us who lived through the rancorous period of 1980s U.S.-Japan relations, little of the information McKeivitt's book provides is new. It has been studied, discussed, and analyzed. Nevertheless, McKeivitt's work, in pulling these disparate pieces together, makes for a handy compendium.

## REVIEW BY MEREDITH ODA, UNIVERSITY OF NEVADA, RENO

Right now, the United States is on the edge of a trade war with China, just the most recent iteration of recurrent economic xenophobia. That U.S. dependence on Chinese trade goods is shaded with racist hostility is also a familiar story. In the postwar era, U.S. relations with Japan, through the exchange of products and ideas, is a stunningly apt precedent for America's current situation. Together, Meghan Warner Mettler and Andrew McKeivitt's books shed light on this history by illuminating the post-World War II precedent in the U.S. fascination with and hostility towards Japan, its products, and its people. Building on the histories of World War II-era and immediate postwar U.S. images of Japan by John Dower and Naoko Shibusawa, as well as the policy histories of U.S.-Japanese relations, these two books take U.S. thinking about Japan to the end of the twentieth century.<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, they take us into the ordinary, personal experiences of material goods and everyday encounters. We see the ways in which a broad range of Americans—from middle-class housewives and socially critical Beats, to young anime enthusiasts and rural Ohioans—helped to form a sense of the U.S. in the world through their experiences with Japanese products and ideas.

Mettler's book is a lively, highly readable account of the Japanese products, fashions, and ideas that were so popular with Americans in the 1950s. This mid-century 'Japanese craze' was frequently observed by contemporaries, surrounded as they were by Japanese-themed houseware, architecture, art, and even philosophies, but the trend has long begged for sustained scholarly scrutiny. Mettler's rich and detailed account is well up to the task. *How to Reach Japan by Subway* explains how and why Americans so enthusiastically adopted (and adapted) the products of a recently reviled enemy nation. Samurai films, ikebana, Japanese-landscaped gardens, *sho-in* architecture, Zen Buddhism, and other materials were all eagerly consumed by Americans drawn to a culture that seemed so exactly foreign yet fundamentally familiar, perfectly and productively opposing their own. Primarily using material published at the time, in addition to some wonderful ephemeral sources from U.S. Japanese enthusiasts, Mettler demonstrates how encounters with Japanese goods and ideas drew on long-standing stereotypes to produce a resonant image of Japan that coordinated well with the needs of both ordinary Americans and Cold War foreign-policy aims.

Contemporary Americans interpreted a broad range of Japanese goods and ideas as all expressive of a fundamental essence of Japanese culture: "*shibui*," a Japanese term that became a "shorthand for a particular graceful, minimalist Japanese aesthetic"—understated, delicate, spiritual, timeless, and refined (10). While *shibui* materials were excitingly exotic, they also appeared to possess a simplicity and timelessness valued by harried Americans coping with mass consumption and busyness. For example, the *sho-in* style of architecture influenced many a well-heeled, highbrow home in the period. The spare and open style, made modular by regularized tatami-based floorplans and sliding *shoji* walls, was embraced by curators, architects, and homeowners as a useful corrective to crowded, mass-market, and overly decorated U.S. aesthetics. But even the wooden knick-knacks or plastic *shoji* screens accessible to middle-class consumers imparted a sophistication to its owners, neatly corresponding with fashionable modernist design and providing durable, easily maintained enhancements to modern interiors. Supposedly rooted in a timeless Japanese aesthetic (dating to the fourteenth century but contemporaneously out of style in Japan), *sho-in* interiors and architecture and their U.S. adaptations complimented U.S. sensibilities and needs.

At the same time, Mettler argues, these new trends were not just fads or cultural whims. They also reflected, even encouraged, the U.S.-Japanese Cold War alliance: "American consumers' adoption of Japanese culture as a fascinating alternative to their own reinforced Japan's friendly yet subordinate position toward the United States during the era of occupation and the early Cold War" (2). Even the violent, feudal, early samurai films imported into the United States were interpreted by observers as evidence not of the auteurs' individual visions but of a timeless and restrained Japanese artistry, one suitable to a compliant and critical ally.

<sup>22</sup> John Dower, *War without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1986); Naoko Shibusawa, *America's Geisha Ally: Reimagining the Japanese Enemy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010).

*Shibui* did not mark all Japanese imports, however. Cheap knock-offs and Godzilla films were exceptions to Japan's peaceable, graceful, and spiritual image. Still, such materials did not explicitly challenge *shibui* imagery, as they were often produced and distributed in ways that disguised their Japanese roots for the mass market. Nonetheless, by engaging examples contrary to her claims about the centrality of *shibui* aesthetics to U.S. understandings of Japanese materials, Mettler helpfully balances what might appear at times to be an overly uncomplicated parallel between popular culture and foreign policy aims.

Mettler's account takes clear inspiration from Edward Said's *Orientalism*: she sees U.S. ideas of Japanese goods, ideas, and sometimes people as relatively coherent and constitutive of a particular power dynamic between the two nations.<sup>23</sup> She also builds on scholars such as Kristin Hoganson and Christina Klein to tease out the complexity of her Orientalism and, notably, the heterogeneity among her Orientalists.<sup>24</sup> As McKevitt does, she investigates how a range of actors not ubiquitous in foreign-relations history engaged with Japanese materials: middle-class homemakers, Beat social critics, diplomatic wives, museum curators, working-class drive-in-audiences, and wealthy, socialite Zen priests. Moreover, she is consistently attentive to Japanese Americans, another group who engaged with Japanese imports, but in ways informed by their historical racialization. Even though she asserts that most Japanese Americans were not wholehearted proponents of the *shibui* trend, examples can be found throughout her book of individuals readily catering to Americans' interest in Japanese culture.

Mettler's book ultimately does more than tell us about a mid-century trend, one that supported changing American alliances even as it faded within a couple of decades. The trend did not so much as go "against the grain of hegemony" as tell us more about what the particular U.S. Cold War hegemon looked like (2). Beginning with the nation most recently defeated and distinctly reviled, U.S. power spanned the globe, absorbing and adapting foreign cultures in its attempt to demonstrate the universality of U.S. ideals and to legitimate its expansive power. This was a global dynamic with critical counterpoints at home.

McKevitt's book takes up almost seamlessly from where Mettler's leaves off, explicitly interpreting American encounters with Japanese imports as a process of globalization. If Mettler describes a more rarified environment in which 1950s Japanese housewares, ideas, and aesthetics could easily pass many Americans by, McKevitt turns to the 1970s through 1990s, when "the consumption of Japanese products [was] a central facet of US social and cultural life" (2). Combined with economic decline and concomitant insecurity in geopolitical status, along with the omnipresence of Japanese goods, Americans were faced with what seemed like an existential threat, giving rise to both the imports' popularity and to trends in 'Japan-bashing'. In both individual and national encounters, Japanese products in the United States shaped ideas about the identity and place in the world of the Japanese, and, even more so, of the Americans. As McKevitt argues, "the consumption of Japanese things served as a catalyst for the material and ideological globalizing of America" (7). This is an original and ambitious argument, one that flips the story of globalization as an Americanization of the world in order to innovatively situate Japan at the heart of the U.S. experience with, and newfound understanding of, globalization.

McKevitt's story is as much a historicization of globalization in the United States as it is a tracking of American consumption of Japanese goods. This focus turns McKevitt's eye towards unusual actors and places for a historian of U.S. foreign relations. The first chapter is the primary exception, setting up the framework of globalization for the book. Here, he convincingly reads the work of U.S. commentators and intellectuals who were struggling to understand changing U.S. global power, and finds that "no country was more central to their thoughts than Japan" (38). Americans coping with lagging U.S. power in the face of the loss in Vietnam, crippling oil crises, economic stagflation, and Japanese market dominance sought

---

<sup>23</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979).

<sup>24</sup> Kristin Hoganson, *Consumer's Imperium: The Global Production of American Domesticity, 1865-1920*; Christina Klein, *Cold War Orientalism: Asia in the Middlebrow Imagination, 1945-1961* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003); Melani McAlister, *Epic Encounters: Culture, Media, and U.S. Interests in the Middle East since 1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005); Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York: Routledge, 1995).

explanations for what seemed like a global rebalancing of power. Whether optimistic or pessimistic, Japan bashing or celebrating, the figures in this chapter interpreted shifts in geopolitics and U.S. strength through the lens of Japanese economic might, which gave them a vocabulary for interpreting economic-based, border-traversing global power without military domination or Cold War polarities. What had begun as hand-wringing or admiration of Japan's presence in the United States became the concept of 'globalization,' a new framework for understanding international power.

Subsequent chapters flesh out the experience of globalization on the ground, which McKeivitt sees as a kind of "global interconnectedness" (178). As a result, he turns to local and more mundane encounters and actors in the United States. These include film and television portrayals of Japan as well as sushi enthusiasts (and satirists). Two fascinating chapters look at the opening of the first Honda plant in the United States, in Marysville, Ohio. Americans' "insatiable desire for Japanese things," in this case small and affordable cars, led to the transformation of a community by connecting its "local spaces to global flows" (83). This connection led to cultural exchange, a new workforce demographic, novel employee-employer relations, and transformed labor practices. These changes proved disruptive for union leaders, whose efforts to organize plant workers ran headlong into workers' greater identification with a Japanese multinational than with a national union whose demands and provisions seemed anachronistic and dangerous. Marysville was connected "to global economic flows that bypassed the national level," showing the dynamic of global connections in a small, rural town (130).

The most intricately sourced and argued chapter, based on McKeivitt's award-winning *Diplomatic History* article, looks at anime fandom.<sup>25</sup> Through surveys of those early fans and the artifacts they produced, McKeivitt uncovers the transnational, grassroots networks that "enabled non-elites to participate creatively in global cultural exchange enabled by Japanese popular culture" (179). While the form came to U.S. markets via Japanese media studios and American broadcasting networks, this was "grassroots globalization" (203): fans mobilized and expanded personal connections to broaden what had been a small range of anime in the United States, learn about Japanese culture, form connections with others in the U.S. and abroad via their fandom, interpret a foreign-language medium, and establish networks of clubs and publications to "pull the global into the United States" (202).

In perhaps the most brilliant chapter, McKeivitt follows a product abroad in order to complicate our understanding of globalization as the "Americanization" of the world. The globally dominant Japanese videocassette recorder (VCR) transformed U.S. leisure; as he notes, the VCR's ability to record and playback material left academics, cultural critics, and consumers marveling at its ability to "time-shift" and "liberate viewers" from the set schedules of broadcast TV (141). But transformations were even starker outside U.S. borders. The device's lack of a national identity—"the VCR did not 'smell' Japanese"—allowed it to be an almost invisible carrier of American pop culture to people all over the world, in both seemingly isolated and authoritarian areas (153). Meryl Streep and Michael Jackson became familiar in places from Hanoi to Havana, made so by the products of Japan, which served as American soft power's "Great Facilitator" (152).

This is a rich, clearly-argued book that, like any work of excellent scholarship, raises questions for its readers. I will focus on the ones that struck me as an urbanist, that is, those that focus on the local level. The narrow focus of the Marysville chapters robustly examined the ties between local and global affinities, practices, and institutions. I wonder, though, what kinds of complications might have been added with an examination of municipal or local records, beyond local dailies? I wonder what Marysville's adaptations looked like on an everyday basis for their multiple constituents, and what relationships between Japanese nationals and longtime Marysville residents looked like when most of the former lived outside Marysville itself. Additionally, I wondered at times if the 'local encounters' often referred to in the text—in the introduction, McKeivitt characterizes all but the first two chapters in this way—might have been better understood as 'individual,' 'personal,' or, as he writes in the last chapter, 'grassroots.' The sense of place built into the Marysville chapter is less apparent elsewhere. This is not a fault in the book; I do not think local context would have added much to my understanding of anime fan clubs, for example. But I do think an alternative term might have underscored one of the real strengths of the book: McKeivitt

---

<sup>25</sup> Andrew C. McKeivitt, "'You Are Not Alone!': Anime and the Globalizing of America," *Diplomatic History* 34:5 (2010): 893-921.

demonstrates on a granular level how Japanese encounters and experiences of globalization effected transformations in fundamental forms of identification for all sorts of Americans, from yuppies to autoworkers to anime nerds.

These are fun, at times even funny, books that would work well in a graduate or advanced undergraduate classrooms while offering new, rich arguments and themes to specialists. Mettler's and McKeivitt's books expand our understandings of U.S.-Japanese relations with new actors and scales, focusing on the ways in which ordinary Americans came to rethink their place in the world through their engagement with Japanese materials.

RESPONSE BY MEGHAN METTLER, UPPER IOWA UNIVERSITY

---

I would like to thank the roundtable participants for their thoughtful feedback and their criticism of my book. It is always wonderful to see my work being considered and appreciated by colleagues throughout my field. I would also like to thank H-Diplo for doing me the honor of selecting my book, and pairing it with Andrew McKeivitt's. To place two works on a similar topic such as ours in conversation reveals subtle differences and opens both works to critique that otherwise might go overlooked.

The most prevalent concern discussed by the reviewers, in particular Fintan Hoey and Jennifer Miller, is the book's failure to draw a solid and clear connection between the cultural exchange practices that I describe and foreign policy toward Japan. I would agree that this linkage could have been stronger, and I especially like the parallel that Miller drew between imperialist Japan and the imperialist United States as they both created exceptionalist images of themselves and each other. I formulated a similar idea in an informal conversation with a colleague once, but for some reason I never developed it well enough to include in the book, so the point is well taken and I thank her for articulating it better than I did. Furthermore, I am coming to regret the phrase "against the grain of hegemony," to which Miller and Meredith Oda both allude. It sounded very clever just out of graduate school, but I realize now that it perhaps implies that this cultural exchange was more subversive of the existing power structure than it actually proved to be.

I would, however, like to offer some explanation as to why my book might have been less-than-convincing in its claims that the consumption of Japanese culture helped further foreign policy. I believe the roots of the issue lie in the fact that—unlike a lot of my colleagues on H-Diplo—my background is in American cultural history as opposed to foreign policy. Therefore I approached this project primarily asking questions about cultural appropriation in and of itself, rather than its effects on international relations. Simply put, my underlying point in the book was that even the most well-intentioned exchange between the citizens of an imperial power and one of that power's subject nations will inevitably turn out to be problematic at best. Incidentally, this is also why I make no apologies here for focusing on white affluent Americans, since they are the ones who typically possess the power to engage in such a practice. I took for granted that the connections between non-state actors and U.S. foreign relations had been well established by previous scholars mentioned in these reviews, like Naoko Shibusawa and Christina Klein,<sup>26</sup> and therefore such arguments served more as background context than scholarly contribution in my own work.

Furthermore, I completely concur with Hoey that it is unlikely that many of the actors I cover in my book consumed Japanese culture to intentionally further an international alliance (and I state as such on page 19). Attempting to analyze the personal motives of past American consumers raises one of the frequent difficulties in writing cultural history: how to provide evidence of something that few people—famous or ordinary—left records on, such as their thought processes while enjoying popular culture. In the end, we cannot really know what was going on in the minds of suburbanites when they purchased bonsai or shoji screens; the best a scholar such as myself can do is analyze the discourse and context of their time, and assume that the actions of such people reflected and reinforced it.

This last point brings me to another aspect of the book mentioned in these reviews: the fact that Japanese Americans play supporting roles in my narrative. Part of the reason for their reduced presence is the fact that there simply is not a lot of direct evidence out there to use. Since the majority of them did not actively participate, Japanese Americans rarely recorded their opinions on the phenomena I describe. I am therefore once again left to speculate on their reactions, or lack thereof, based on what I know of context of the time. Moreover, while casting Japanese Americans in bit parts here might run the risk of repeating the mistakes of the past by overlooking racial minority groups, Japanese Americans did not appear in the dissertation version of this manuscript out of concern for falling into a related trap: the conflation of Japanese Americans with Japan. If we assume that Nisei, many of whom grew up on American cuisine, sports, and entertainment with little to no

---

<sup>26</sup> Naoko Shibusawa, *America's Geisha Ally: Reimagining the Japanese Enemy*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), Christina Klein, *Cold War Orientalism: Asia in the Middlebrow Imagination, 1945-1961*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

knowledge of written Japanese, need to feature prominently in a story like mine, are we taking for granted some inherent connection with their ancestral country of origin? And in doing so, might we be guilty of the same mindset that presumed their loyalty to Japan during World War II based on their racial heritage? Such questions make for a very fine line to walk when approaching the subject, which led me to proceed with caution, but the point is taken that perhaps I was overly cautious in the end.

Finally, I feel I need to address Laura Miller's comments regarding "shibui" versus "wabi" and "sabi." I have to confess that as a hopelessly un-hip academic, I had no idea Americans were currently using these terms until one of my manuscript readers at the University of Nebraska Press informed me. The only time I saw the words used in my research was in D.T. Suzuki's *Zen and Japanese Culture*, originally published in the 1930s, so they did not appear to be in common use in the 1950s.<sup>27</sup> I would concur that there is a distinction between "wabi/sabi" and "shibui," and that "shibui" connotes an element of suave, upper-class elegance that the other terms might not. Perhaps if I had reflected more on the subject, I could have unpacked them more thoroughly, and I am further aware that at times I might have leaned on the word "shibui" a little too heavily.

I would like to conclude by once again expressing my gratitude to the reviewers for their time—especially in reading two books for this roundtable—and their well-considered thoughts and analysis. I am encouraged to see that overall they felt that my work makes a worthwhile contribution to our understanding of how cultural exchanges have enriched and complicated the relationship of Americans with an imagined Japan, as well as how U.S. consumers more generally conceive of the world outside their borders.

---

<sup>27</sup> Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki, *Zen Buddhism and its Influence on Japanese Culture* (New York: Pantheon, 1936, 1979).

## RESPONSE BY ANDREW C. MCKEVITT, LOUISIANA TECH UNIVERSITY

I want to express my deep gratitude to the four reviewers for producing a thoughtful roundtable on Meghan Warner Mettler's *How to Reach Japan by Subway* and my *Consuming Japan*. A few years ago, I was asked to write a 'state-of-the-field' essay on the historiography of U.S.-Japan relations. As I worked, I came to the conclusion that the field's productivity had spiked at the end of the millennium and then declined rapidly in the twenty-first century, surely a product of, among other things, Japan's economic downturn and the U.S. foreign policy response to the September 11, 2001 attacks. With a couple of significant exceptions,<sup>28</sup> the energy and liveliness of the field appeared to have dissipated. The past several years have shown how shortsighted that conclusion was, with a spate of important new works appearing, including Fintan Hoey's *Satō, America and the Cold War: US-Japan Relations, 1964-72* (2015), Meredith Oda's *The Gateway to the Pacific: Japan Americans and the Remaking of San Francisco* (2018), and Jennifer M. Miller's *Cold War Democracy: The United States and Japan* (2019).<sup>29</sup> Just as I finished a first draft of the historiography essay, then, I had to scramble, thanks to these productive and innovative scholars, to rethink the trajectory of the history of U.S.-Japan relations. I'm grateful for the work they've done and look forward to decades more of it.

I would like to thank Meghan Warner Mettler, too, for writing an inventive and insightful book. I wrote about it for the December 2019 *American Historical Review* and I praised it, among other things, for its creative way of accessing the history of U.S. foreign relations through actors we do not often identify with that subject. In that regard it made a great deal of sense to review our two books together.

Two years out from *Consuming Japan*'s release, I have a better appreciation for what it did and did not accomplish, and these attentive reviews help clarify that. A lot of books are better than the sum of their parts, but I think *Consuming Japan* is the opposite: each of its parts are strong and useful in different contexts, but some readers find the whole less compelling. I have heard from instructors who have assigned individual chapters to students, because they teach classes on globalization, food, pop culture, or labor history. It is gratifying to know that different kinds of scholars, outside of my own field of U.S. foreign relations, and even outside the discipline of history, have found bits and pieces of the book that appeal to their particular interests. The reviews' attention to the significance of individual chapters, whether on Honda in Ohio or VCRs in American living rooms, reminds me of the book's value in this regard.

I appreciate the substantive critiques these reviewers offer, however. Laura Miller, for instance, finds a number of faults in *Consuming Japan*, and with the perspective provided by distance, I do too. I agree that the book exhibits unresolved tension, if not outright confusion, between consumption and representation. And throughout there is too little distinction in what I mean by "Americans"—Jennifer Miller also rightly makes this observation, that I elide class or ethnic patterns of consumption, and regional as well. Laura Miller does not find my argument about the "globalizing of America" convincing, and I think here too the confusion over representation persists. Did Japan really 'globalize' the United States in the 1980s, or did representations of Japan just portray this as happening? The book's answer to that either-or question is simply 'yes,' to some readers' confusion. I always aimed to historicize 'globalization,' to avoid claiming that I knew what it was, and instead to let the idea float among the various actors of the era who believed they knew it when they saw it. That was an intentional

<sup>28</sup> See Naoko Shibusawa, *America's Geisha Ally: Reimagining the Japanese Enemy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006); and Hiroshi Kitamura, *Screening Enlightenment: Hollywood and the Cultural Reconstruction of Defeated Japan* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010).

<sup>29</sup> Fintan Hoey, *Satō, America and the Cold War: US-Japan Relations, 1964-72* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015); Meredith Oda, *The Gateway to the Pacific: Japan Americans and the Remaking of San Francisco* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018); Jennifer Miller, *Cold War Democracy: The United States and Japan* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2019).



conceptual decision, but I think ultimately it makes the “globalizing of America” argument less sticky than it otherwise might be.

Fintan Hoey neatly sums up my point better than I could: “what happened across the Pacific and within American society entailed many distinct, localized, micro-globalizations, rather than a single phenomenon whose causes, meanings, and dimensions are easily delineated.” Meredith Oda generously describes this as “an original and ambitious argument, one that flips the story of globalization as an Americanization of the world in order to innovatively situate Japan at the heart of the U.S. experience with, and newfound understanding of, globalization.” I admit that this kind of praise of my argument is the best I could hope for, but I also concede that at times I share Laura Miller’s skepticism. (Minor note: I did find it odd that Laura Miller misrepresents my sushi chapter as stating that sushi arrived in the United States in the 1980s, which was obviously not the case at all, and not something the chapter claims. I mention California sushi restaurants in the 1960s, among other things, and a glance at the footnotes shows a number of sources from the 1960s and 1970s.)

The roundtable has prompted me to consider where the history of postwar U.S.-Japan relations has been and where it’s going, or what wartime anthropologist Ruth Benedict might make of twenty-first-century organizational guru Marie Kondo. Between Hoey’s opening paragraph and Jennifer Miller’s, we leap across three-quarters of a century to see the continued relevance of American ideas about Japan, or at least how those ideas help scholars better understand questions of American identity. In Jennifer Miller’s words, “the American fascination with Japan, on some level, has constantly been about the United States and Americans themselves.” Such a statement articulates my own understanding of what I intended in *Consuming Japan*: I was always writing about the United States, not Japan; I was not, in fact, qualified to write about the latter. It’s possible I took Edward Said too far, and too unsophisticatedly, early in graduate school; I could not, as a white man born in the United States at the beginning of the 1980s, ever really produce knowledge of Japan independent of an orientalist paradigm. But I could know the society I came from, and I could try to find myself in its history and the way its people tried to make sense of a rising power’s changing place in the world. And in doing so, in Hoey’s words, I could hope that “readers see something of themselves in the book” that came out of that effort.