Labor and Imperial Democracy in Prewar Japan by Andrew Gordon
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intelligent, cultivated, and colorful characters to whom their companies and the region owe a great debt.

As an account of the economic development of Bahrain, the work is less adequate. Although there are plenty of facts, there are fewer figures and no attempts at quantitative estimation, which might help to put developments into perspective. The book is basically an unfolding story, in chronological order. The demise of the pearl industry in the 1930s is discussed, as is Bahrain's role as a stopover on Imperial Airways routes. Bahrain was also significant in the Second World War, and there is an account of the Italian bombing of the island, which was a key British military base.

The latter part of the book is about BAPCO, the Bahrain Petroleum Company, and the modern development achievements of Bahrain. Although all this is no doubt of interest to the book's sponsors, and to the International Research Center for Energy and Economic Development, which published the volume, the approach taken is not one that will appeal to the modern social scientist. There is little questioning of the development strategy or of economic objectives, but Clarke is less well qualified to undertake that task in any case.

The book deserves to be included in any library on the Gulf, and it is a serious study, not a mere armchair volume. Good use has been made of company archives and of material in the India Office Library in London. Angela Clarke has provided a fascinating account of the early development of Bahrain in the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s; the coverage of later years reflected in the title is not as strong.

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This is a curious book, one that the reviewer would like to praise but ultimately cannot. It presents some new information on labor and social movements of 1910s–1930s Japan and proposes something of a new, albeit diffuse, way of viewing changes in these years: "imperial democracy" rather than the heretofore common "Taishō democracy." Unfortunately, Andrew Gordon has spread himself thinly in spots. One has the feeling of reading what would have been a good article puffed up into a book.
Indeed, Gordon describes his work as “the unexpected product of a slight detour in my research . . . that took on a life of its own” (p. xv).

The most focused portion deals with the labor movement in Nankatsu, the abbreviated name of Minami Ktasushika, an industrial and residential district on the east side of Tokyo. Fairly detailed discussions of labor activity in Nankatsu, interwoven with a more general narrative of labor and social movements in the first three decades of the twentieth century, constitute the first two-thirds of the book. The final third essentially abandons the local and bottom-up emphasis of the first portion for a national and ultimately elite perspective on the labor movement. The rationale for this shift is a lack of Nankatsu materials for the late 1930s.

The first section is useful in that it documents aspects of the labor movement previously not well covered in English scholarly literature (although generally familiar to readers of standard Japanese labor histories and English-language newspapers published in prewar Japan). The narrative is, however, essentially Kantō- (Tokyo and vicinity) centered. This is ironic, since Gordon worked at the Ohara Institute of Social Research, an agency originally funded by a Kansai (Osaka and vicinity) industrialist. To ignore the Kansai, its labor movements, and the reaction of its business community to those movements is to paint a very incomplete picture in these years.

For a work on labor history, this book is curiously devoid of historical economic data or analysis. Gordon operates from a model that seems to assume that the labor and social movement in Japan should have resisted militarism and imperialism. Certainly Marxist formulas expect the proletariat to be united across national boundaries against imperialist wars. To operate from this expectation is, however, to ignore the record of most labor movements. More important, by ignoring economics, Gordon fails to see that Japan’s invasion first of Manchuria (1931) and later of China (1937) had a significant positive impact on wages and employment in those industries where organized labor was strongest.

Labor and Socialist leaders were not slow to notice that militarism was good for their constituents. Nor did it escape them that, when full war mobilization was required, labor, especially skilled labor, was in very short supply, and that the government was prepared to court and coopt those it thought useful in mobilizing labor. Certainly there were some sticks used against labor in the late 1930s, but it was also offered some very large carrots fertilized by military spending.

The “conclusion” to this book is particularly weak. Ideas are strewn about with much indignation over the failings of others, even as Gordon fails to pursue the logic of his own evidence and assertions. He seeks to wrest the term “fascism” away from those who would deny that the Japan of the 1930s was fascist. His argument for applying the term to Japan as a whole requires ignoring the absence of a mass fascist party in Japan, the lack of an analog to Adolf Hitler or Benito Mussolini, no paramilitary police under the leader or party, a conventional military that set its own agenda, among other factors.
That Italy, Germany, and Japan had economic crises followed by economic policies that had a mutual resemblance is true enough. But one can also document a strong Stalinist strain in Japanese economic policy. Moreover, it is not difficult to draw up a list of points that would include the USSR in the fascist camp. Indeed, no less an authority on the subject than Mussolini is said to have described Stalin as a “closet fascist.” One might also note that until relatively late in the 1930s, advocates of some of the policies seen as fascist by Gordon would point to the New Deal under Franklin Roosevelt for precedents.

Further failure to follow through on his own evidence and ideas is found in the curious bow Gordon makes to the analysis of Japanese “fascism” by Maruyama Masao. Gordon asserts that his ideas still remain “suggestive” (p. 338). Yet, by stressing the fascist character of 1930s Japanese economic policy and by documenting the role of top intellectuals and bureaucrats in pushing Nazi-inspired labor and economic policy, Gordon undermines a key element of the Maruyama analysis: that the elite intelligentsia of 1930s Japan was hostile or “passively resistant” to fascism.

Overall, this book leaves the impression that it was a rushed job, pushed out to meet something other than an intellectual imperative.

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