Kojima: Japan After World War II

Kojima Nobuo (1915-)

- 30 volumes of fiction, biography, literary criticism
- Theme: Postwar Japan borrowed Western economics and values but sometimes lost identity, traditional morality.
- “The American School” shows teachers trying to decide their national identity.

After Militarism, What?

- The Norton editor describes Kojima’s typical character as the “Japanese antihero: the befuddled ordinary man uprooted by failure, crushed by society, oppressed by go-getters” and "timid and profoundly ineffectual."
- To understand this post-World War II figure, we need to know Japan’s heritage of the samurai, the shogun, and modern conquest.

After Militarism, What?

- 1603-1853 Japan isolated by Tokugawa rulers
- 1857 End of shogun rule
- 1868-1912 Meiji Period makes Japan a modern industrial nation, military power
  - Attacks China 1895
  - Attacks Russia 1904
  - Attacks Korea 1910
  - Attacks Manchuria 1932
  - Bombs Pearl Harbor 1941, then invades Philippines

After Militarism, What?

- Wartime atrocities are still controversial. U.S. prisoners of war died at a rate of 37% in Japanese prison camps.

After Militarism, What?

- The Rape of Nanjing was the slaughter of 300,000 Chinese civilians in 1937, and is still remembered bitterly in China. Japanese flags are burned in a 2005 protest against Japanese textbooks’ downplaying WW II atrocities.
After Militarism, What?


Postwar Ruin

- 3 million Japanese had died in WW II including almost a million civilians
- All but one major city had been destroyed by air raids and atomic bombs. Over 30 percent of Japanese had lost their homes.
- Food shortages, devalued yen, ruined factories
- In "The American School," notice scarcity of food, leather shoes, and transportation; teachers' salaries; Michiko's widowhood; dismay at "luxurious" American school buildings.

Allied Occupation, 1945-1952

- Demilitarize. Military forces abolished.
- Sovereignty to the people. Emperor no longer divine. The Diet (parliament) has supreme authority.
- Free elections. Women vote. Schools teach democratic ideas.
- Kojima's "The American School" takes place 3 years after war ended.

Language and National Identity

- Common theme in postcolonial literature (literature of nations that once struggled as colonies or commonwealth). Conquerors always try to plant new religion and new language, to undermine the old identity. E.g., when Japan conquered Korea, it outlawed Korean language and installed Japanese-language schools. England did likewise with Ireland.
- To be a teacher of the conqueror's language inevitably raises questions of loyalty and identity.

Credits

- Text and arrangement by Dr. Chris Willerton