

*Imitation and Innovation: The Transfer of Western Organizational Patterns to Meiji Japan.* By D. Eleanor Westney (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1987) 252 pp. \$25.00

That Western studies of Japanese society came of age under the dominance of the modernization paradigm has proved a mixed blessing. One of the decided advantages of such timing has been that, from the first, both historians and social scientists have viewed collaboration and disciplinary crossovers as natural and necessary. Thus, Westney follows a distinguished scholarly line that includes Ronald Dore, John Hall, Marius Jansen, Chalmers Johnson, Thomas Smith, and Robert Smith.<sup>1</sup> Yet

1 See, for example, Ronald Dore, *Land Reform in Japan* (Oxford, 1959); John W. Hall, *Government and Local Power in Japan, 500 to 1700* (Princeton, 1966); Marius B. Jansen, *Sakamoto Ryôma and the Meiji Restoration* (Princeton, 1961); Chalmers Johnson, *MITI and*

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her book itself demonstrates its own theme—that emulation produces innovation, not replication.

The nation-state building and industrialization of late nineteenth-century Meiji Japan is frequently portrayed as a unique variant of modernization. Westney, by contrast, places Japan's experience within what Kenneth Boulding labeled the "organizational revolution" of the nineteenth-century world, in effect, the bureaucratic transformation of the institutions of public life (10). In the latter half of that century, Japan borrowed not only new industrial machines but also emerging organizations, and it is this complex process of institutional adoption and adaptation from Western models that is the subject of her study. The army and navy, the banks, the legal system, schools, professional societies, political parties, and scores more were all crafted from direct or indirect contact with templates from a dozen or so Western countries. For this book, Westney presents the organizational histories of three cases: the police, the postal service, and the newspaper press. She applies to them the analytical insights of organizational sociology to argue that a full account of "cross-societal emulation" must consider timing, values, and organizational environment—that is to say, the historical, cultural, and institutional contexts of organizations (6).

A national police force, for example, was a top priority of the new Meiji government both to contain internal threats and to satisfy provisions attached to its unequal treaties with Western powers. The model chosen was the French police force, but geographical circumstances and political considerations encouraged many deviations. Closest to the original was a powerful police agency for the national capital, similar to the Paris Prefecture of Police. Even here, neighborhood police boxes were added as a third tier of control, the telegraph was used to coordinate communications, and formal police training (predating similar programs in the West) attempted to stabilize and standardize agency personnel. Outside Tokyo, a national police system took longer to organize and was an even paler copy of the French. The result, by the 1880s, was a police force that was more standardized and centralized, and yet probably more effectively dispersed, than any Western counterpart.

Westney details a similar pattern of adaptation in the case of the postal system. Great Britain was recognized as having the most advanced service, and Japanese ministry officials adopted many of its key features (uniform rate, parcel post, postal savings, and the dual system of regular post offices and local contractor substations). Yet, almost immediately, antecedent practices, geographical differences, and a dissimilar organizational environment provoked departures and innovations—in transport, staffing, administration, and marketing. Westney also emphasizes here, and in the third case of the newspapers, the impact of the emerging

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*the Japanese Miracle* (Stanford, 1982); Robert J. Smith, *Ancestor Worship in Contemporary Japan* (Stanford, 1959); Thomas C. Smith, *The Agrarian Origins of Modern Japan* (Stanford, 1959).

organization in reconfiguring its own institutional nexus. The new postal system considerably influenced commercial transport patterns as well as the standardization of weights, measures, time, and place names; and the aggressively promoted postal savings contributed importantly to banking and investment strategies and institutions.

It is the focus on the mutual conditioning of organizations and their “environment” that is most significant in Westney’s work. Leaders in Meiji Japan claimed a formula for success in a popular slogan of the times: “Japanese spirit, Western technology.” Our own scholarly explanations of the period often mimic this dichotomy as we try to measure the relative importance of Japanese “tradition” and Western “rationality.” Thus, there are frequent debates about divergence (the persistence of “culture”) and convergence (the “imperatives” of industrialization). Scholars who add the period effects of state-led “late-developers” do not sufficiently transcend these crude polarities. Westney demonstrates that pulls toward and away from Western organizations must be conceptualized at a more precise level, around issues such as the degree of “continued interaction with and exposure to the foreign model” (217), the changing basis of organizational legitimacy in an increasingly confident state, and the nature of the “resources” available in an organization’s environment. Such an approach requires both historical specificity and analytical rigor, and, in combining the two, Westney sets a new standard in our understanding of the distinctive trajectories of organizations in Japan’s century of modernization.

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