

BOOK REVIEW

SAITO, Makoto. *Amerika-shi no bunmyaku* [The context of American history]. Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1981. 294 pp., 1,900 yen.

The “contextual” and “structural” approach to American history can be called the most important feature of the forty-plus years of research in the field of American studies of the author of this book, Professor Makoto Saito. The book is a collection of some ten essays that have been written from this perspective by the author over the past twenty years; as he says in the Afterword, “These are intermediate essays, which differ in scope from the so-called academic paper, and rather attempt to deal with the individual phenomena in the flow of American history from a consciousness of the context of American history” (p. 286).

Professor Makoto Saito’s first encounter with American history can be traced to 1940, when he entered the Political Science Department of the Faculty of Law at the University of Tokyo as a student and attended the lectures of Professor Yasaka Takagi on “American Constitution, History and Foreign Relations.” In 1917, in order to promote friendly relations between Japan and America, the American banker A. Barton Hepburn, made a grant to the University of Tokyo for the establishment of a special chair, which was instituted in 1924 as the “Hepburn Professorship”; the first person to hold this chair was Professor Yasaka Takagi. The second holder of this chair was none other than the author of the book under review, Professor Saito, who assumed it in 1959.

Since he joined the Faculty of Law of the University of Tokyo in 1950 he has been active both within the University, where he has served as Dean of the Faculty of Law, and outside of the university in wider academic circles, having served on the board of directors of

such organizations as the Japanese Society for American Studies, the U. S. Education Commission in Japan (the Fulbright Commission), the Society for the Promotion of American Studies, and the International House of Japan. He retired from the University of Tokyo in April of 1981. Presently he is both a professor emeritus at the University of Tokyo and a professor at International Christian University in Tokyo. He also served as president of the Japanese Society for American Studies until March of 1982.

The book under review, begins with a Preface entitled "Preconceptions for an understanding of American society—time, space and people," which, although a mere four pages in length, skillfully presents the basics necessary for an understanding of Professor Saito's "context of American history." To consider these elements in turn, then, we will begin with "time." America was from its very beginnings founded as a modern society, and although its history extends only for some two hundred years, during that time it has experienced no change in its system, and has managed to preserve this system intact until the present. For this reason, although it is paradoxically a young society, it is at the same time an advanced "traditional," and "conservative" society. As for "space," the great size of the American nation, as well as the great size of the space surrounding it, should be noted. The latter has provided America with a "gratuitous guarantee of security" from European power politics, and has caused the preservation of "isolationism." The former has caused in America an industrialization that is not simply "an escape from agriculture," meaning that it has been possible for industry and agriculture to exist in a mutually interdependent relationship. Turning finally to "people," then, America is composed of immigrants. This means that there is a racial plurality but, for this reason, there is no biological unity, and unity has thus had to be supplied by artificial factors. These have been sought in the American creed, or in the American way of life.

Following the Preface, essay I, "Democracy and the dream of success—the context of American democracy," skillfully presents the history of American democracy. Then, in essay II, we have "The war for independence in world history—the context of the American Revolution," and in III, "The Declaration of Independence of 1776—a political

document." Essay IV is "Ideas of defense in the early days of the Republic—the context of the history of American defense." In these three essays the "context" of the American war for independence and the early period of the Republic, which constitute part of the repertory of Saito's historical studies, is clearly laid out. Most interesting here is the suggestion, made in the essay on the ideas of defense during the early days of the Republic, that the fundamentals of American foreign policy and defense are intensely isolationistic, and the fact that America tried not to be involved in European power politics in its early days has made Americans to link the concept of isolationism with their sense of ethical superiority. For this reason, what is essentially a national defense that has come to be seen as "common defense" has become generalized and turned to ideological uses; Saito's suggestions here have a tremendous amount of persuasive power when considering the painful experiences of the Vietnam war.

Then follows three essays on the "context" of American foreign policy and international relations: V is "Manifest destiny—the context of American expansion"; VI is "Kennedy's foreign policy and Nixon's foreign policy—the context of the history of American foreign relations"; and VII is "America's two hundred years and Japan—the context of Japanese-American relations." What will concern us here, ultimately, are the numerous suggestions made with such persuasive power by Professor Saito. These might be called instances of mutual gaps in the understanding of each other's assumptions on the part of America and Japan during the course of the relations between the two countries. The Second World War, for example, was to the Japanese a war between America and Japan, but to America it was primarily a war with Germany; and even when considering Japanese-American relations as one part of the American overall Asian policy, to America the focal point of this policy has been its relations with China. Thus, although it has been said that Japan's national strength has been relatively increasing over the past several years, America has seen its relations with the Soviet Union as being of the first importance and those with China as coming next, and Japan has been nothing more than a third axis, according to Professor Saito. Thus Professor Saito's suggestion that we should rid ourselves of the

unconscious "dependence" we have on the good will of America and adopt the attitude of a country which is making a contribution not just to America but to all nations in an international society is worthy of attention. In VIII, "The background of Nixon's resignation — the context of American politics," there is a lucid description of the real functions of moralism and the idea of the checks and balances in American politics.

The final two essays are IX, "Two intellectuals — the context of anti-intellectualism in America," which deals with Henry Adams and C. Wright Mills, and X, "The establishment of the Princeton Institute for Advanced Study—the use of unused scholarship in American history," which deals with the history of the Princeton Institute for Advanced Study; they are concerned, as their titles indicate, with the context of American intellectual history.

What, then, is the nature of Professor Saito's "contextual and structural understanding" of American history? If we were to judge from the works—including the one under review—that Professor Saito has produced to the present, it would seem to be to make some lucid hypothesis concerning the logic that runs through American history at first, then to grasp individual phenomena from this logic and to interpret them in this light. The more simplified and articulate this hypothesis becomes, then, the more abstract becomes the logic that supports it, and we sometimes can see instances in which it has become primarily rhetorical. In this sense, this is a book that will select its readers. That is, only after the reader himself has sufficient knowledge of American history will he be able, with Professor Saito, to taste the pleasures of pursuing the "context" or the "structure" of American history. There is, otherwise, a real possibility that the reader will be carried away by the sheer beauty of the rhetoric of Professor Saito's presentations of the logic, and lose his grasp of the major "context." One could also receive the impression from the subtlety of the presentations of the logic that Professor Saito's historical evidence has been sacrificed to his skills in rhetoric and use of language. Nonetheless, as one reads through these essays, one comes to understand that the "Preconceptions for an understanding of American society" as laid out in the Preface do indeed form the core

of Professor Saito's "context" or "structure," and that these could not have come about without substantial evidence. The "context" and "structure" that make up the topics of each of the essays in the book are thus developed through reference to the core laid out in the Preface. America, which has experienced the Vietnam war outside its shores and racial strife and the Watergate incident within its boundaries, is now, according to Professor Saito, facing a turning point in the beginning of her third century. For us in Japan who are engaged in American studies, this collection of essays by Professor Saito, who so strongly values the comparative approach, will be of great value to our views and understanding of American society, and will also give us many important hints when we are thinking about the course Japanese-American relations are likely to take in the future.

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