1. Susan Burns' subject is late Tokugawa discourse about ancient Japan. Through her analysis of the intellectual movement of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries that was known as 'kokugaku'—"the study of our country" or 'national learning'—she makes a fascinating contribution to debates about how and when ideas about Japan as a community or a 'nation' emerged, and how they developed. Kokugaku has long been considered a precursor of modern nationalism in that its practitioners developed ideas about the singularity of Japanese culture, amongst other things; it has been condemned by some as a pillar of ultranationalism in the period before the Second World War. Burns' most significant contribution is to reveal the complexity and plurality of Tokugawa interpretations of Japan's ancient past. In doing so she shows the connections between diverse Tokugawa studies of the past and the contemporary Tokugawa political and social order. In addition, however, she also demonstrates what happened to kokugaku in the Meiji period and beyond, thus contributing to an ongoing discussion about how the forms of nationalism of the late nineteenth century onwards should be linked with earlier manifestations of national consciousness.

2. Burns' main focus is on the period between 1780 and the 1840s. Her object is to explore kokugaku 'as a "prehistory" of the nation form,' but at the same time she is careful to note that 'The "Japan" of which the kokugaku scholars spoke and the forms of community they envisioned do not evolve into, or produce, or explain modern Japanese "nationness"' (p. 9). Hence she avoids the term 'nation' in her analysis of kokugaku writings, preferring the term 'Japan as community.' (Abruptly, in the last three pages of the book, she switches, borrowing from Prasenjit Duara to adopt the term 'culturalism.' It might have been better to do this earlier, if 'culturalism' is indeed a better term.) The core chapters of the book examine how early Japanese literary works, especially the Kojiki [Records of Ancient Matters, dated to 712], were read by four quite different kokugaku scholars. The Kojiki, which is written in Chinese script, records the supposed mythological origins of the Japanese people, describing the activities of the deities from whom they were said to be
descended, and the subsequent progress of earthly people. It was compiled in 712 on imperial instructions, and was intended to strengthen the legitimacy of imperial authority by showing the close and unique links between the emperors and the gods who had supposedly founded Japan.

3. After useful introductory chapters on the intellectual, political and social crises of late Tokugawa Japan, and on earlier Tokugawa understandings of the *Kojiki*, Burns begins with the prominent figure of Motoori Norinaga (1730-1801), author of the *Kojikiden* [Commentaries on the *Kojiki*], an annotated version of the *Kojiki* that began to circulate in 1780, becoming 'a consistent point of reference for all practitioners of kokugaku in the Tokugawa period' (pp. 4-5). In subsequent chapters she turns to a series of texts that in turn had been written as critical responses to the *Kojikiden*, by the scholars Ueda Akinari (1734-1809), Fujitani Mitsue (1767-1823) and Tachibana Moribe (1781-1849), before moving in a final substantive chapter to an assessment of the place of *kokugaku* between the Meiji Restoration and the Second World War.

4. Though they were prominent enough in their own time, Ueda Akinari, Fujitani Mitsue and Tachibana Moribe are not particularly well known in the modern period. Modern scholarship has focussed much more often on the 'great men' of *kokugaku*, especially Keichū, Kado no Azumamaro, Kamo no Mabuchi, Motoori Norinaga himself and Hirata Atsutane, and, according to Burns, in designating Norinaga's work as the 'mainstream' of *kokugaku*, has tended to dismiss those who criticised him. By concentrating on lesser-known figures, Burns argues, she is able to distance herself 'from the modern narratives that identify kokugaku as a point of origin for Japanese nationness' (p. 220). The interpretations of the Divine Age narrative that she examines instead constitute 'disparate forms of kokugaku that ... were not directly implicated in the Bakumatsu movement to bring down the Tokugawa bakufu,' but that certainly were interested in constructing 'new visions of community' (pp. 11-12). What they collectively produced in the late Tokugawa period was 'a complex and contentious discourse' on the nature of Japan, an attempt to make 'Japan,' rather than class or domain or village, into 'the source of individual and cultural identity' (p. 220).

5. Much of what concerned both Norinaga and his critics was directly related to language—specifically, the nature of the language used in the ancient texts, and its significance, including the status of oral language of the ancient period. As Burns notes, 'the ideal of an original, authentic, and enduring "Japanese" language was a powerful means to explain and thereby constitute cultural identity' (p. 12). Other inescapable issues included the nature of cultural difference, especially in relation to China, and the relation between humans and the deities. Ultimately, the work of the four *kokugaku* scholars examined here was, according to Burns, 'ordered by a concern for interrogating political authority and for recovering community as something distinct from political power and from the Confucian ideology of virtue used to legitimate it in the Tokugawa period' (p. 223).

6. For Norinaga, the *Kojiki* represented a transparent record of oral transmissions concerning the actions of the deities in the Divine Age. Crucially, he also maintained that it recorded the ancient Japanese language, a language that predated cultural contact with China and was therefore authentically Japanese. Burns points out that the assertion that such a language existed 'made possible a conception of Japaneseeness that transcended not only differences in status but also the divisions of domain and province, west and east, city and village' (p. 99). Thus 'Japan' was not inherently Confucian; it had an original cultural identity of its own.

7. Ueda Akinari, on the other hand, completely rejected Norinaga's assertion that Japan
possessed an innate cultural identity, and refused to subscribe to a belief in Japan's superiori
ity over other nations. He further maintained that the ancient texts were not the record of the actions of the deities, but rather were the products of human authors and reflected power relations within the society in which they were produced. All in all, Akinari's perspective seems startlingly 'modern' or even post-modern. Akinari also believed that in the 'private realm,' as distinct from the realm controlled by political rulers, it was possible to write stories that would contest orthodox versions of community. As a result, 'new and more authentic forms of community' would be produced (p. 130). Fujitani Mitsue also considered the Kojiki to be the work of a human author, though its interpretation required the mastery of a special kind of linguistic practice that recognised the texts as complex systems of metaphor and allegory. Successful negotiation of the ancient texts would involve the internalisation of a set of social norms produced by the ancient rulers and, ultimately, the emergence of a community based on empathy. Tachibana Moribe, too, was centrally concerned with issues of language, and agreed with Norinaga that study of the ancient texts could produce knowledge of 'an original and authentic Japanese identity' (p. 221). Once again, however, the texts were not transparent, requiring considerable deciphering through the identification of 'narrating words' that were keys to the underlying meanings of the texts. For Moribe, 'Japan' was a product of rituals—rituals that were performed by the emperor and the Japanese people working together as one 'body' [kokutai] to sustain and protect Japan, not least from the evil that might enter at any time from the hidden, spirit world.

8. In the Meiji period, various scholars appropriated Tokugawa analyses of the past to suit new purposes, always taking care to appropriate selectively. Burns' chapter on the 'new kokugaku' is very valuable in itself, and at the same time, provides a bridge between pre-Meiji conceptions of the Japanese 'nation' and the modern nationalism of the post-1868 years. Certain modern writers, Burns demonstrates, sought to align kokugaku with the ideology of the new Meiji state, thus concealing 'the newness of the Meiji conceptions of nation' (p. 197), and attempted to 'resituate kokugaku as a point of origin for modern Japanese nationalism,' in the process discarding any attempts by earlier kokugaku scholars to 'constitute community in ways that resisted and interrogated political authority' (pp. 199-200). In other words, the heterogeneity of the kokugaku discourse of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was ignored in favour of interpretations that would support the new regime. True kokugaku became that which supported the 'uniqueness' of Japan and the 'Japanese character.' Other pre-war scholars interpreted the Tokugawa canon differently again. The point, for Burns, is that all the post-1868 authors she examines extracted 'certain elements of the Tokugawa discourse,' 'organizing them in order to create a "history" for their own projects so that they appeared to be not subjective enterprises rooted in the necessities of the particular political moment, but somehow transcendent, objective, and normative' (p. 218).

9. Susan Burns has produced a fine study of a complex and important subject. It is not flawless. At least three dozen errors that escaped copy-editing mar the text, for example; and in a book that deals so much with detailed questions of language, the failure to include Chinese/Japanese characters at key points of the analysis is strange, especially in these days when it is relatively easily done. Further, the sudden introduction of new theoretical concepts in the last three pages is frustrating. If these concepts are useful at all, then they would have been useful at a much earlier point. Nevertheless, the book will be read with great profit by historians, linguists, specialists in literature and anyone trying to untangle the many puzzles of Japanese nationalism.