

## Communications to the Editor

J. Marshall Unger's response to Mikiso Hane's review of *Literacy and Script Reform in Occupation Japan* (JAS 60.2:566–67)

Few scholars have written more eloquently than Mikiso Hane about the inadequacies of compulsory education in prewar Japan (*Peasants, Rebels, and Outcasts: the Underside of Modern Japan* [New York: Pantheon, 1982], esp. pp. 51–54, 259–61). Even now, as he writes in the review, he “consider[s] the traditional mindset that views the mastery of massive numbers of *kanji* as a sign of intelligence and superior learning as being misguided” (p. 567). Yet he reveals himself to be a prisoner of that very mindset when he claims that “*kanji* have the advantage of serving as pictograms and ideograms.” It was to refute that baseless misconception as much as to set the record on script reform straight that I wrote my book, yet Hane blindly repeats it.

Hane writes, “Among the SCAP officials who called for the policy of eliminating *kanji* and using only *kana* was Lieutenant Commander Robert King Hall, who had initially favored use of *romaji*.” In fact, Hall advocated exclusive use of *katakana* before setting foot in Japan; only after his arrival in Tokyo did he become an advocate of romanization.

Likewise, after mentioning the *tōyō kanji* of 1946 and the *jōyō kanji* of 1980, Hane writes “Since the list was merely a guide, not an official prescription, more *kanji* began to be used in journals, newspapers, and books.” As I explained in the book, the *tōyō kanji* list did set a ceiling on the number of *kanji* for public use, which was respected by the government and the press. It was the later *jōyō kanji* list that was introduced as a mere “guide” (*meyasu*), but that was many years after reactionary authors first flouted the *tōyō kanji* limitations.

Hane's carelessness and misunderstandings converge in the paragraph in which he reports that I found correlations between differences in class, gender, occupation, and residence and differences in literacy. Hane, without disputing those findings, immediately continues, “The difficulty in achieving perfect mastery of the *kanji* was based on the complexity of the many *kanji* which were not phonograms or pictograms but ideograms and logograms (representing words).” First, I said no such thing, though Hane's wording implies that I did. I deny that *kanji* are ideograms or, except in certain contexts, logograms, and never make an issue of graphic complexity. (pp. 5, 9–13, 44–49, 148 n. 1). Second, Hane's claim is illogical because if *kanji* “complexity” caused the difficulty, correlations with social, economic, and demographic variables could not arise. Finally, I explained that the restricted literacy in prewar Japan consisted of much more than imperfect “mastery of the *kanji*.” Hane himself has noted that the government routinely inflated literacy statistics, and I specifically identified the use of *bentaigana*, anachronistic *kana* spellings, multiple *kanji* readings, unregulated *okurigana* usage, and the coexistence of diverse writing styles as additional impediments to full literacy (e.g. p. 25).

Evidently, Hane did not give my book a full or unbiased reading. Had he done so and still believed that the structure of the writing system has nothing whatever to do Japan's past or present educational problems, he should have explicitly discussed the evidence I presented to the contrary.