



## In the Realm of a Dying Emperor

By Norma Field

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When the Emperor Hirohito died in 1989, Japanese newspapers had to use a special, exalted word to refer to his death, and had to depict his life uncritically, as one beginning in turbulence but ending in magnificent accomplishment. To do otherwise would have exposed them to terrorism from the vigilant right wing. Yet this insightful book by a Japanese-American scholar who grew up in both cultures reveals the hidden fault lines in the realm of the dying emperor by telling the stories of three unlikely dissenters: a supermarket owner who burned the national flag; an aging widow who challenged the state's "deification" of fallen soldiers; and the mayor of Nagasaki, who risked his career and his life by suggesting that Hirohito bore some responsibility for World War II.

*From the Trade Paperback edition.*

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## **In the Realm of a Dying Emperor** By Norma Field Bibliography

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## **Editorial Review**

From Library Journal

Field, the daughter of a Japanese mother and an American father and currently an associate professor of East Asian studies at the University of Chicago, returned to Japan for a year's study just prior to the final illness and death of Emperor Hirohito on January 7, 1989. Using this event as a means to probe the nature of contemporary Japanese society, Field presents an in-depth study of three individuals who stood up against what she sees as "the death-in-life quality of daily routine" in contemporary Japan. These include an Okinawa supermarket owner who protested resurgent nationalism by burning a Japanese flag just prior to a national athletic competition, the Christian widow of a member of Japan's Self-Defense Force who fought against her husband's inclusion in a state shrine honoring the military dead, and the mayor of Nagasaki who spoke out publicly concerning the emperor's role in World War II. The book's message is both troubling (in its overall depiction of Japanese society) as well as inspirational (in the courage displayed by Field's subjects). Altogether, this is an intelligent and thought-provoking analysis. Generally recommended.

- *Scott Wright, Univ. of St. Thomas, St. Paul, Minn.*

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From Kirkus Reviews

A provocative, multileveled "meditation" on Emperor Hirohito's 1989 death, raising dark questions about Japan's war guilt in the context of its triumphant prosperity today. As the child of a Japanese woman and an American soldier, Field (East Asian Studies/Univ. of Chicago) tells a story of postwar Japan inextricably linked to her own. She grew up in Tokyo, in her grandmother's house, "finally" leaving after high school to join her father in the US. In August 1988, Field returned to Tokyo for a yearlong stay. From her grandmother's oleander-filled, walled garden, she observed a driven, repressive "democracy" held in a deathwatch for its emperor. This "frail embodiment of the war," whose funeral becomes a "celebration of the successes of Japanese capitalism," Field sees as both promoter and symbol of Japan's "national amnesia." The economic miracle has come at astronomical cost: "In the society [the Japanese] are growing into," she writes, "the most significant and only reliable freedom is the freedom to buy ever more refined commodities." Backing into her powerful points as she shifts between personal and global issues, Field structures her narrative around the stories of three "resisters": a supermarket owner who burns the "Rising Sun" flag; a widow who sues to stop the state from making her late husband a Shinto deity; and the mayor of Nagasaki, who publicly calls the emperor responsible for the war--for the atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, for the Battle of Okinawa. The horror the Japanese refuse to remember is here most powerfully conveyed by eyewitness accounts of "babies' cries...stilled" by Japanese troops hiding from the "bloodless" American invasion. An intelligent, informed, deeply felt interrogation of Japan that offers a rare insider-outsider point of view while implicitly questioning America's influence on this rich but troubled country. -- *Copyright ©1991, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.*

Review

"Well-researched, well-observed and completely absorbing...an important and necessary book." -- The New York Times Book Review

"Remarkable...a vivid, taut, graceful piece of writing...with enormous power."-- James Fallows, The Atlantic

"Marvelous...Field uncovers a Japan rarely seen or acknowledged by Westerners, a Japan of individual expression, active dissent -- even open rebellion."-- Village Voice Literary Supplement

"Superb...one of the most important books...on Japanese who refuse to conform." -- Ian Buruma, The New York Review of Books

*From the Trade Paperback edition.*

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#### **Robert Berman:**

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#### **Na Urquhart:**

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