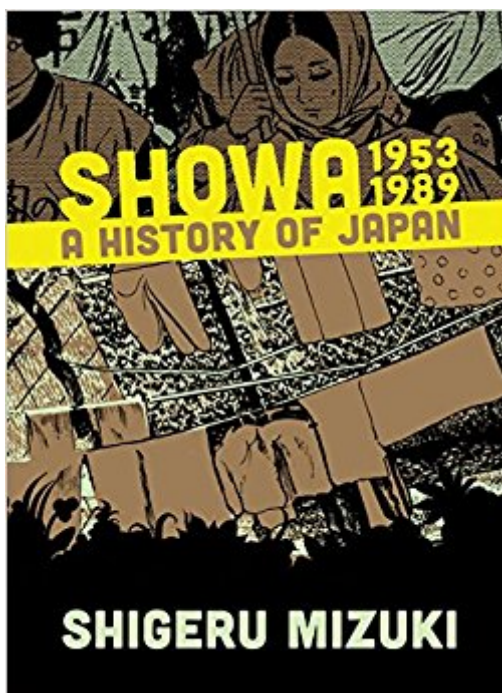


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# Showa 1953-1989: A History Of Japan (Showa: A History Of Japan)



## Synopsis

The final volume in the Eisner-nominated history of Japan; one of NPR's Best Books of 2014! "Showa 1953 1989: A History of Japan" concludes Shigeru Mizuki's dazzling autobiographical and historical account of Showa-period Japan, a portrait both intimate and ranging of a defining epoch. The final volume picks up in the wake of Japan's utter defeat in World War II, as a country reduced to rubble struggles to rise again. The Korean War brings new opportunities to a nation searching for an identity. A former enemy becomes their greatest ally as the United States funnels money, jobs, and opportunity into Japan, hoping to establish the country as a bulwark against Soviet Communist expansion. Japan reinvents itself, emerging as an economic powerhouse. Events like the Tokyo Olympiad and the World's Fair introduce a friendlier Japan to the world, but this period of peace and plenty conceals a populace still struggling to come to terms with the devastation of World War II. During this period of recovery and reconciliation, Mizuki's struggles mirror those of the nation. He fights his way back from poverty, becoming a celebrity who is beloved by millions of manga-reading children. However, prosperity cannot bring the happiness Mizuki craves, as he struggles to find meaning in the sacrifices made during the war. The original Japanese edition of the "Showa: A History of Japan" series won Mizuki the prestigious Kodansha Manga Award; the English translation has been nominated for an Eisner Award."

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

There's just something uncannily, well ... wise about Mizuki. In one segment he'll be an icy

judge, in another a cynical gadfly, then a daffy outcast. His drawing style varies wildly: He'll lavish detail on a jungle backdrop, then put two overtly cartoony soldiers in front of it. But he depicts Japan's military leaders with more realism, and his re-creations of actual photos of dead bodies -- both during and after the war -- are utterly somber. • NPR • Drawn & Quarterly's translation of Shigeru Mizuki's historical epic Showa is perhaps the great achievement in American manga publishing this year... Mizuki's canny, self-excoriating memoir draws the reader close and into the intimate heart of the 20th century's worst conflict. • AV Club Best Comics of 2014 • Showa is literature, illustrated or not, at its finest: a story that sweeps you off your feet only to find, when you return to Earth, that nothing looks quite the same. • Los Angeles Times

Born March 8, 1922 in Sakaiminato, Tottori, Japan, Shigeru Mizuki is a specialist in stories of yokai and is considered a master of the genre. He is a member of the Japanese Society of Cultural Anthropology, and has traveled to more than sixty countries around the world to engage in fieldwork on the yokai and spirits of different cultures. He has been published in Japan, South Korea, France, Spain, Taiwan, and Italy. His award-winning works include Kitaro, Nonnonba, and Onward Towards Our Noble Deaths. Mizuki's four-part autobiography and historical portrait Showa: A History of Japan won an Eisner Award in 2015.

Manga master Shigeru Mizuki's "Showa" series exemplifies the melding of memoir, history and comics. Its vast scope, comprising four large volumes in English, encompasses the entire reign of the Emperor Hirohito, which spanned from 1926 to 1989, the longest rule of any Japanese monarch. From the Chrysanthemum throne Hirohito oversaw some of the most tumultuous years the tiny archipelago nation ever experienced. During that era Japan's government morphed from late Taisho democracy into fervent nationalism, then to proto-fascism, to an all out aggressive military state and finally to the constitutional monarchy that exists today. Though Mizuki named his magnum opus after the Emperor's era, Hirohito himself makes very few appearances within its massive bulk. The story instead integrates Japanese history with Mizuki's own personal history. Both provide fascinating parallel narratives. Drafted like so many others, Mizuki served in the Japanese Army during World War II and miraculously escaped death numerous times. This frequently horrifying story takes up much of Showa volumes two and three. Volume four, the final volume, expands on the years during and following the American Occupation and Japan's "economic miracle." By 1989 Japan had emerged from the shadow of its humiliating defeat into an inexorable economic powerhouse, though Mizuki paints a bizarre and sometimes shocking picture of Japan in the late

twentieth century. Many prospered but some prospered more than others. Some suffered horribly. At the end of volume three, Mizuki catches a train to Tokyo, chasing the nascent comics boom. So far his career in Kamishibai has proved mostly fruitless. He sets out to change that. Volume four begins with a discussion of the political climate in the early 1950s. The US Occupation government initiates a military alliance that involves Japan in the "proxy wars" between the US and USSR in Korea and Vietnam. Responding to massive inflation, Communism takes hold in Japan, followed by purges and violence. NHK begins broadcasting and the influence of television slowly spreads. The Sen, once a unit of Japanese currency, falls to inflationary pressure in 1954, the same year Godzilla first appears. The LDP forms, which, despite its full name, "Liberal Democratic Party," combines the right into a single political bulwark against the socialist left-wing. Nezumi Otoko, a constant presence in the series, says that the left-wing still refocuses, purges and "works within the system" to the present day. "The socialists. The communists. The LDP. They never change," he concludes. Mizuki inadvertently insults artist Soyama, but following an apology with whiskey, he introduces Mizuki to publishers. He gets work, though low paid, and produces "Rocketman" while pawning most of his possessions. The first economic booms occur, named after Japanese Emperors, the Jinmu, Iwato, Izanagi, etc. As the Soviets under Stalin disturb the left, a new youth culture emerges complete with pop music and comics. Mizuki works so much that reality and manga merge. People become "apartment dwellers" and a series of ghastly murders begins around 1958. Then an Imperial Wedding. Someone protesting the gratuitous show of wealth throws a rock at the royal entourage on live television. Nonetheless, sale of luxuries increase. Mizuki's parents find their almost forty year old son a wife. Mizuki describes her as "horse faced." She plays a shadowy and marginalized role throughout the book. The "Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security" pits the right versus the left. Violence breaks out and the extreme left, known as the "Bunds," loses face. More violence and assassinations follow, including the infamous 1960 killing of Inejiro Asanuma. Mizuki's fortunes don't improve and he now lives with a pregnant wife. Finding money in the emergent manga world proves difficult. As times and finances worsen, Akuma-kun arises from Mizuki's frustrated mind. Pollution from rapid growth results in new diseases gripping the population. Some companies come under fire for poor environmental practices. Shinkasens appear in time for the Tokyo Olympics. When the Vietnam war breaks out, the US uses Japan as a supply base. Mizuki finally makes some real money drawing for magazines, possibly presaged by a flying Kanadama. Student rebellions break out. Mizuki's creativity takes further root and some of his most famous characters emerge: TV boy, Sanpei the Kappa and Graveyard Kitaro. TV adaptations follow. Money finally starts trickling in, allowing him to buy back his pawned possessions and hire a team of

assistants. But, as Mizuki says himself "I found success could be as punishing as failure." Endless work and crippling deadlines soon dominate his life. Interpersonal dramas with his "strange assistants" also heats up. Protests continue to heat up, especially around 1968. "Fortress Yasuda" falls. Under enormous pressure and amidst publishers barging into his room fulminating about deadlines, Mizuki has a breakdown. He yearns to travel back to New Guinea. Tobetoro's home. He and two friends find their way back to Takarazuka. Horror awaits them in dreams about fallen war comrades begging for proper burials. Their bones still litter the ground thirty years later. Mizuki eventually meets up with Tobetoro and his friends who helped him survive the war. They greet him as "Paul" once again. He reunites with Epupe and vows, a la MacArthur "I shall return." Back in Japan, the Expo '70 World's Fair opens. Communists hijack Flight 351 and fly to North Korea, hoping to start a revolution. They become prisoners and apparently remain there to this day. Yukio Mishima commits seppuku. He tried to start an uprising, but, as Nezumi Otoko interjects "his audience was raised on luxury, not sacrifice." "An-An" girls rival "Non-No" girls through fashion magazines. More riots, murders and pyramid schemes top the headlines. The US turns Okinawa over to Japan but keeps its bases in a move that still remains controversial. The Asama hostage incident pretty much ends the extreme left in Japan. Welcome to the 1970s. Even more beguiling were the soldiers who remained on duty, not knowing the war had ended and did not capitulate until the 1970s. 1972 also saw the rise of the notorious Prime Minister Kakuei Tanaka, a "man of the people" who later became embroiled in one of Japan's largest government scandals: the Lockheed bribery scandal. Prior to that, inflation and embargoes impacted the Japanese economy horrendously. People even hoard toilet paper. Mizuki couldn't find any one day in 1973. Then a very strange thing happens. One chapter relates a dream in which death visits Mizuki's house and offers him afterlife insurance. Soon Mizuki walks into the afterlife through the bath. While he wanders, a spirit inhabits his physical body, but it decides to leave after realizing that Mizuki has a terrible life. Japan saw hard times as well as unemployment and bankruptcy rose throughout the 1970s. Nixon invites Hirohito to the USA in 1975. The following year Mao Tsu Tung dies and the infamous "gang of four" are arrested. Japan rides out the energy crises of the late 70s thanks to its efficient management. Few other industrialized countries fare as well. According to Nezumi Otoko, many Japanese become comfortable and "...more politically conservative. People care about protecting what they have and staying inside their own little worlds." Video games. Karaoke. Stand-up comedy. Entertainment becomes a dominant force. Mizuki once again returns to New Guinea. More mysterious personal cults and murders occur, such as the grisly metal bat murders and the cannibalistic Paris human flesh case. An airline pilot deliberately crashes a plane. Greed grips harder. Mizuki escapes into more

daydreams, this time as a customer of the "extra-marital affairs company." The 1980s begin and Ronald and Nancy Reagan visit Japan. Kidnappers pull Glico's president from a public bath. Then "the fiend" appears and terrorizes Japan with randomly placed cyanide-laced candy. He receives a 100 million yen ransom but escapes arrest. In 1987 an airliner explodes in mid-air and the abduction of Japanese citizens by North Korea comes to the surface. The economy tanks and housing becomes unaffordable for many. Mizuki's father passes away saying "my life was not a good one." Then the Showa period comes to an end. Mizuki's Kitaro sees a resurgence in popularity just as Hirohito undergoes medical treatment. In January 1989 the Emperor passes away. The Heisei era begins under still reigning Emperor Akihito. Mizuki muses on his own mortality and returns once again to New Guinea. This time he repays his debt to the people who helped him survive during the war. The final chapter reflects on the entire Showa era. Mizuki wonders how poverty turned to nationalism, which led to numerous sacrificial deaths. Japan's defeat by a foreign power and then, according to Nezumi Otoko, "that same foreign power forced democracy on you. What they called freedom." Mizuki wonders if slaving away in an office qualifies as happiness? Why do companies seem to matter more than individuals in modern Japan? What happened to "the brotherhood of humanity" that Mizuki experiences in New Guinea? The final pages ask people to "never forget what happens when the military rules a country" and to never make the same mistake again. A final section includes full-color pages that accompanied "Showa's" initial release. Subsequent releases removed them and Drawn & Quarterly decided to restore them at the end of their four-volume reissue of the original Japanese 8 volume series. Each page is exquisite. The final color page shows Mizuki receiving the Kodansha manga award for "Showa." Nezumi Otoko eats heartily in the foreground. Mizuki lived until late 2015 when he died at age 93. He has become one of the undisputed masters of manga. Interest in his work seems to just keep expanding. "Showa" undoubtedly stands as one of his masterpieces. It has the complexity of a medieval cathedral and the stratifications and depth of a Wagner opera. The combination of history and personal narrative works seamlessly and the work never becomes tedious or tiresome. In fact, quite the opposite. In it, Mizuki grows from a young do-nothing into an overworked manga master. He depicts fame as a blessing and a curse. He fervently excoriates the militarism that rose in Japan before World War II and the ensuing fascism that led to countless deaths. Though the series targets Japanese readers, its message won't be lost on readers from other countries or cultures. As the final generation from World War II slowly fades away, Mizuki sadly now among them, a risk emerges that people with no living memory of the horrors of that catastrophic war may meander into similar territory. We can only hope that humanity won't repeat such costly mistakes, though it often seems bizarrely condemned

to do so. Excellent works such as "Showa" can provide guidance for future generations through the minefield of power politics and re-ignited tensions. Hopefully humanity will take its message to heart. We'll see.

I lived in Japan as a boy. I love the way that Mizuki san informs us while showing the life of a starving manga artist. I wish he had more like this in English.

The best retelling of 20th Century Japanese history - personal, painful, and totally relevant.

Cool book. Has a very interesting storyline with any things to learn.

Awesome way to learn about Japan's history!

Great historical manga

Great art, except for the cat-thing that appears in all the stories. Never could understand that.

This is the last in the four-volume manga history of Japan under Emperor Hirohito expertly translated by Zack Davisson, and as you'd expect, wraps up with some personal conclusions from Mizuki (who died just a few weeks ago at the age of 93). And those conclusions are that for Japan and Mizuki, millions of brave ordinary people sacrificed their lives "for the empty words of loyalty and patriotism." If I may quote from the end of the book: "There is no individual, only country.' But it was individuals who received those death sentences called draft notices. We were supposed to be proud to die for our country. Scattered across the world for a country that cared nothing for us. For good or evil, our country was utterly defeated by a foreign power. The military was a kind of cancer removed by the surgery of war... I can't deny that Japan is better off than we were. We're an economic powerhouse. But it seems like companies are benefitting more than individual workers. The average office worker slaves away to pay his bills. Is that happiness? The brotherhood of humanity... it's a treasure money can't buy. Japan's drive for success and efficiency has commoditized humanity. We are uniform and disposable again. It's strange... no matter how much wealth people accumulate, they'll never know the richness of life in places like this (the jungles of Papua New Guinea where Mizuki was stationed in the war)." While the other volumes in the series covered the momentous events of the war, this one was fascinating about the struggles of ordinary Japanese in the post-war

period as well as Mizuki's personal rise in prominence in the manga world. Highly recommended for anyone interested in understanding Japan, manga and 20th Century world history.

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