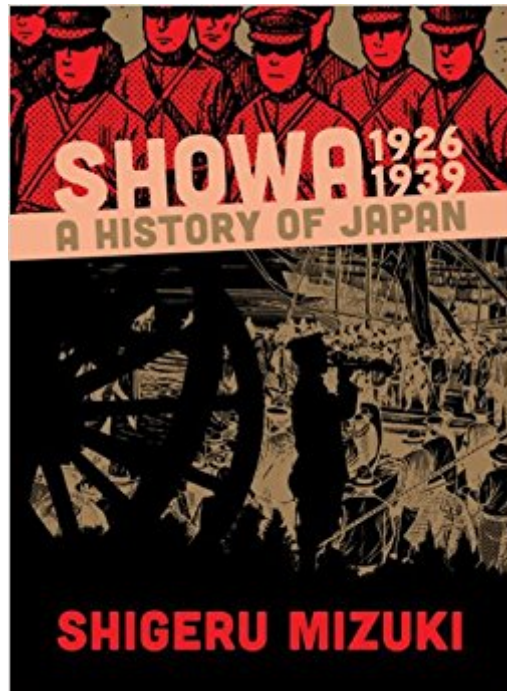


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# Showa 1926-1939: A History Of Japan (Showa: A History Of Japan)



## Synopsis

A fascinating period in Japanese history explored by a master of manga  
1926–1939: A History of Japan is the first volume of Shigeru Mizuki's meticulously researched historical portrait of twentieth-century Japan. This volume deals with the period leading up to World War II, a time of high unemployment and other economic hardships caused by the Great Depression. Mizuki's photo-realist style effortlessly brings to life the Japan of the 1920s and 1930s, depicting bustling city streets and abandoned graveyards with equal ease. When the Showa era began, Mizuki himself was just a few years old, so his earliest memories coincide with the earliest events of the time. With his trusty narrator Rat Man, Mizuki brings history into the realm of the personal, making it palatable, and indeed compelling, for young audiences as well as more mature readers. As he describes the militarization that leads up to World War II, Mizuki's stance toward war is thoughtful and often downright critical—his portrayal of the Nanjing Massacre clearly paints the incident (a disputed topic within Japan) as an atrocity. Mizuki's Showa 1926–1939 is a beautifully told history that tracks how technological developments and the country's shifting economic stability had a role in shaping Japan's foreign policy in the early twentieth century.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Gr 9 Up • Mixing memoir and political history, this graphic novel presents a tumultuous time in Japan's past through the eyes of someone who lived it: influential 20th-century manga artist

Mizuki. The early years of Japan's Showa era were marked by government and military corruption that ultimately led the nation to World War II, and Mizuki's frank account of this period does not gloss over unflattering truths. At first glance, this tome may appear to be strictly for history buffs and Japanophiles—but any reader will be hooked by the juxtaposition of the author's humorous anecdotes of his rural childhood and the sobering picture of his country's financial instability, political turmoil, and harrowing acts of aggression in Asia. It's an eye-opening reading experience, a window into a segment of history not taught in typical American classrooms. The sheer number of unfamiliar names and places can be daunting, but one of Mizuki's famous characters, Nezumi Otoko, pops in and out to help the contemporary audience make sense of key events. Black-and-white illustrations vacillate between cartoonish in the sections portraying boyish antics and stunningly detailed when depicting more serious subject matter, illuminating the dichotomy of everyday life in Japan and the rising tensions on the political landscape. Less successful are the too-frequent references to endnotes that don't always add to the narrative. Whether or not teens choose to read them, this book clearly shows how seemingly remote political decisions can profoundly affect the average person. Thought-provoking and powerful.

—Allison Tran, Mission Viejo Library, CA

Mizuki, one of Japan's most celebrated manga artists, was born only a few years before the start of the Showa period, one of Japan's most turbulent eras. In this, the first of four volumes, he traces history along two tracks: the first is Japan's story, spanning the years between the great Kanto earthquake and the start of WWII; the second is the story of the author and his family growing up in a port town far from the drama taking place in Tokyo. Using a series of narrators to keep the story flowing, Mizuki prevents the account, which could have easily been a mere list of tragic incidents, from becoming dry, repetitive, or confusing. Looping his own story in and out of the narrative and switching back and forth between a photo-realistic art style and broadly drawn cartoons, Mizuki shows how politics and war affected the Everyman. Mizuki is not afraid to show his country in a less than flattering light, and Showa, 1926–1939 provides an opportunity to understand Japanese history from a new point of view. --Eva Volin

This book is an incredible feat- a combination of history of Japan and a very personal autobiography. Mizuki manages to combine both with a dramatic presentation of a country spiraling into economic despair and blinding nationalism. He is unsparing when it comes to the country's misdeeds, and gives a sense of what people were thinking on the ground. His mix of drawing styles, tone, and narration are jarring at first, and his historical narrative is dense with facts and people, but

once the reader gets used to the transitions, they really serve the overall historical picture in a way that any other medium simply could not. It seems that no one is harder on Japan, and on himself, than Mizuki. This is a man that does not look at his childhood through sepia-tinted glasses. He is the first to show the failings of his youth and those around him. This book is an immense challenge to translate, and Zack Davisson gives this work the translation it deserves. With cultural notes, historical notes, stylistic notes, and explanations about things that the average Japanese reader would instinctively know, the reader is guided in a way that only enhances the reader's appreciation for this work. I can't wait for the next volume!

Bottom Line First Showa 1926-1939: A History of Japan (Showa: A History of Japan) Paperback

by Shigeru Mizuki (Author), Zack Davisson (Translator)  
November 12, 2013  
achieves most of its purpose. Shigeru tells and illustrates his autobiography as a child of the period of Japanese history he is also telling. His reason for this history as picture book is that Japanese students tend to receive a very sanitized version of Japan's role as aggressor in more than the 15 year period that the Imperial Japanese Army engaged in a number of incidents in neighboring Korea and China. As a graphic history, rather than a graphic novel it is a superior effort. Writer, artist Shigeru Mizuki is one of the top names in Japanese Manga. That is he is both an artist and a writer and became one year after losing his writing arm as a soldier in World War II. This is an easy recommendation for fans but a slightly less enthusiastic recommendation for a more serious minded reader. It is a fairly old story that Japan has not done a good job of teaching its 20th Century history to its students. They are aware that their country lost World War II but may have a little or no appreciation for the aggressive way their country helped to initiate the war and the often vicious method employed as warriors and conquerors. Showa is the name for the period of Japanese history corresponding to the reign of the Shōwa Emperor, Hirohito, from December 25, 1926, through January 7, 1989. Mizuki also lived through this period and his intention was to tell his life's story as context for also telling something closer to the truth about how Japan acted during this era. He begins with a great earthquake in 1923 and follows with a series of episodes as the Japanese economy follows the world's economy into what he calls the "American Depression". Much of the narrative is carried by a famous Mizuki character called Ratman. Vaguely akin to America's Donald Duck but a more serious guide rather than a trickster. The narrative begins as mostly disjointed recollections and simple facts about certain events. The absence of analysis can make it hard to understand why we are being told things, but this is also the time of a very young Mizuki

who may have only had a vague awareness of the larger events of his country. Towards the end there may be some analysis but never much and never at any depth. We are shown that the Japanese Army empowered itself to launch invasions and conduct military incidents seemingly despite or without any direction from the civil government. Ministers and opposing voices are assassinated with a regularity that has an almost casual feel to it. In a few years there are reported several attempted military takeovers, backed by killings and no one seems to have been held accountable in such a way as to thwart or deter the next plotters. If the historic content is lacking the artwork is not. Important people, events and iconic images are reproduced exactly using a technique developed to achieve photo realism. Other images are more impressionistic and typical of Japanese graphic novels, but this is a style all the author helped to develop. As a study, Showa is uneven and lacking in depth. As a Graphic History, autobiography and demonstration of the serious capabilities of manga it is more than worth reading. I will be seeking out a copy of the next collection of this 3 volume series.

This is an outstanding comic. It combines a very strong survey history (absolutely everything with politics and the military, as well as a bit of culture) of the time with the personal stories of the author's childhood. The art is fantastic. Mr. Mizuki utilizes different styles for political/war scenes than for his personal stories. Additionally, he does a wonderful job drawing Japanese streets and the interiors of homes and businesses. It is a great view into the time period. Mr. Mizuki's historical survey shows the xenophobia of the Japanese military, the turmoil of the government, how the depression affected the farmers and common people, how the military used the depression and xenophobia to put a foothold in China, how the military created incidents with the Chinese to justify their invasions, and how the Japanese people suffered from the aggression of the military, weakness of the government and greed of the war profiteers. But the absolutely delightful part of this book are the childhood stories of Mr. Mizuki. He and his friends walked a total of 25 miles one hot summer day to try donuts (they were 3 yen each...they had 10 yen, so they couldn't take public transportation). The boys fought battles, threw poop at each other, studied the population of random cities, collected newspapers, and tried to make sense of the world around them (they were often confused by their families and teachers' reactions to the major events). Mr. Mizuki wrote that he slept late all the time and was usually late for school. He eats a lot, can't see well, does very poorly in school and college, gets fired from multiple jobs, and struggles early in his life. He is unsparing on himself. His family is poor, and his grandmother is a lovely lady. What is stunning is how his childhood in 1920s Japan is similar to mine (USA, 80s) and others. The imagination, feelings and

struggles are universal. A wonderful book.

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