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Victoria Lyon Bestor, Theodore C. Bestor with Akiko Yamagata (Eds.). Routledge Handbook of Japanese Culture and Society. London and New York: Routledge, 2011.

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The *Routledge Handbook of Japanese Culture and Society* is a thorough guide, useful for non-specialists to quickly gain baseline understanding of contemporary Japan. As I read I imagined its usefulness for a scholar focused elsewhere in Asia, such as myself, suddenly assigned to teach a course on Japan. Although not designed like a textbook (there are no exercises, review questions, or chapter summaries), each chapter in this volume avoids excessive citation, theoretical gymnastics, and minute details from personal research in favor of creating a scaffolding on which to hang an understanding of Japan, today. As a single introductory volume to Japanese culture and society, I am confident in its effectiveness to familiarize English-speaking undergraduates or even advanced high school students to the tumultuous changes in Japanese society during the past few decades.

Despite its overall strengths, not all 22 chapters are equivalently valuable. Two chapters felt as if the authors could not stand back from their own research far enough to write an introduction to the topic. As a Koreanist reading those chapters I felt the authors had assumed too much background knowledge on the part of their reader. In addition, several chapters dwelt excessively on providing a historical evolutionary portrait of the topic, and used up their allotted space without suitably explaining the present moment.

What struck me about this book was its seeming desire to avoid romanticizing the past or pandering to an audience of non-experts who may be fascinated by pre-modern Japan. Unfortunately, perhaps as a side effect of avoiding topics like tea ceremonies and Kabuki, not a single chapter discussed the evolution of traditional craft, performing arts, rites of passage or events on the traditional calendar and how these have transformed in the face of modernity. Finally, the near-absence of Japanese scholars in the book is puzzling. The contributors are characterized as “regularly engaged in cross-cultural translation and analysis of Japanese culture and society for non-Japanese audiences” (p. 1), yet I am confident that this must surely describe more than two Japanese scholars.

The book itself is organized into three over-arching sections: (1) social foundations, (2) class, identity and status, and (3) cool Japan. The second section has eight chapters, while the other two have seven each. The groupings of chapters made sense, particularly if having three equal-sized sections was desirable, although other logical organizations are possible since chapters could be assigned to students in almost any order. The book does not have a unified thesis; rather, it allows the various chapters to fashion a mosaic representing Japanese culture and society collectively.

The first section, on social foundations, starts out exceptionally with a chapter by Peter Duus on the Showa Period (1926-1989). Through Duus’ broad overview the reader quickly transitions from an agricultural and rural life to the booming Japanese economic industrialized, urbanized world of the late ’80s. Throughout the chapter Duus maintains a focus on how these rapid changes impacted social life, rather than being side-tracked by explanations of historical details. Next, David Leheny discusses what he calls the four cultures of Japanese politics. Nanette Gottlieb’s chapter on the culture and politics of the Japanese language is a fascinating sketch that problematizes the discourse of “one nation, one civilization, one language, one culture, and one race.” Gottlieb’s chapter provides surprising details—such as script policy centered on writing by hand—but also manages to hit issues ranging from the use of English, the gendered nature of spoken Japanese, and shifts in language caused by text-message culture. The chapter on education and educational reform by Roger Goodman eschews a long history by focusing on educational practices in the last 30 years and the significant education policy shifts in this time period. The writing in this chapter is particularly vivid and clear, and easily ranks as most likely to elicit impassioned student discussions. Mark Mullins’ chapter is on the confusing topic of religion in Japan, so confusing in fact that the number of adherents to various religions, according to the religious groups, exceeds the total

population of Japan. The chapter addresses the multi-religious context in Japan, fringe religions, and even the Yasukuni Shrine issue. Lawrence Repeta introduces the sources of law in Japan. Paul Waley's chapter on urbanization in Japan is elegantly laid out into sections on urban governance, urban terrain, and urban life-spaces. As he discusses the "remorseless process of urban extensification" (p. 89), we learn that Japan's urban landscape is due in large part to problematic policies that failed to respond to sprawl appropriately. The entire chapter is full of masterful turns of phrase that colorfully but without cliché explain Japan's urbanization (otherwise termed the "Tokyo-ization of the Japanese landscape" p. 98).

The second section, on class, identity, and status, begins with David Slater's account of social class and social identity in postwar Japan. Slater lays out patterns, focusing particularly on the middle class, and how defining this group has shifted. The sobering portrait painted here illustrates that Japan's economic success (and the post-bubble stagnation) has come at great human cost. At first Robin LeBlanc's chapter on the pervasive impact of gender on life in Japanese society feels like an extension of one theme from Slater's chapter, but as the chapter progresses LeBlanc stretches to include very different aspects of gender dynamics beyond the man as breadwinner/woman as homemaker "ideal."

Merry White addresses the changing Japanese family, resurrecting some of LeBlanc's themes but providing a more historical overview from the late 19th century, through the increasing importance of educating children as an essential family task and on to the sad reality that, despite increased elderly in the population, there are fewer multi-generational families. Mark McLelland, Richard Siddle, and Carolyn Stevens present three chapters that address oft-ignored subsections of the Japanese population. First McLelland introduces issues for the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender population in Japan, tracing changing ideas about non-hetero-normative lifestyles and the activism that has led to greater visibility and acceptance of LGBT people in the present. Siddle addresses how the idea of a homogenous Japanese population works "against the acceptance and equal treatment of those who reside within the territorial boundaries of Japan but are categorized as Other" (p. 162) with details related to Japanese ethnic minorities and populations of Koreans, ethnic Japanese from overseas, foreign workers, and marriage immigrants. Stevens' chapter is on life on the margins of Japan—illustrating the struggles of the homeless, migrant day laborers, and the disabled. She illustrates the struggles of these often-invisible people powerfully, leaving little room for hope. The next chapter, by Leng Leng Thang on aging and social welfare in Japan, is equally depressing. Thang addresses the consequences of Japan's rapidly graying population and introduces welfare measures, but concludes that Japanese innovations may offset many of the impacts of the demographic shift. The second section ends with Akihiro Ogawa's chapter on the rising power of the civil sector in Japan, a challenging topic for a short introduction with a limited number of pages.

The third section, on cool Japan, begins with William Coaldrake's discussion of major trends in Japanese architecture from the 1950s to the present. Aaron Gerow addresses film and television—discussing how both types of media have been part of "struggles over defining a new modern mass culture" (p. 213). The chapter begins with the start of cinema in Japan, and touches on major developments while making clear the government's role in Japanese media from the rise of television and through to modern spectatorship practices. Susan Napier's chapter on manga and anime, characterized as "true social and artistic phenomenon" (p. 226), follows a developmental history with the surprising revelation that these fantastical forms may appeal to audiences due to their psychological realism. Ian Condry's chapter on popular music in Japan provides a historical survey and discussion of *enka*, jazz, idol pop, and hip-hop. In his conclusion Condry returns to a point from the start of the chapter—market success cannot be the sole way to characterize what music is important in understanding the culture and society from which it emerges.

Japan's sportscape is addressed by William Kelly in a chapter that discusses structures of personal and collective power visible in athletics. Kelly approaches four sports—baseball and soccer (imports), as well as sumo and judo (domestic)—to illustrate his points. Koichi Iwabuchi's chapter

addresses cultural flows in East Asia, and is the only chapter to directly tackle Japanese relations with neighboring countries, if only within the context of TV dramas. Iwabuchi explains that cultural power, once strongest where cultural items were produced, is now “exercised through the processes of active cultural negotiation in each local destination” (p. 265). He illustrates this point with examples of inbound and outbound cultural flows between Japan, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Korea. The final chapter, by co-editor Theodore Bestor, addresses cuisine and identity in Japan. The chapter touches on the Japanese attitudes towards rice, seasonal cuisine, and even the ways that foreign food changes within Japan. Bestor reminds the reader that Japanese cuisine may be the domestically and internationally beloved pinnacle of Japan’s soft power.

While each of the topics has been given attention elsewhere, these introductions will be more approachable for non-specialists than long, nuanced, theoretical examinations. The chapters, usually just 10 pages, quickly convey enough information to begin classroom discussions and are followed by suggestions for further reading. In conclusion, this book will be an invaluable resource for non-Japan specialists due to its jargon-free introduction to a wide scope of Japanese culture and society.

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