

Encyclopedia of Contemporary Japanese Culture

EDITED BY SANDRA BUCKLEY

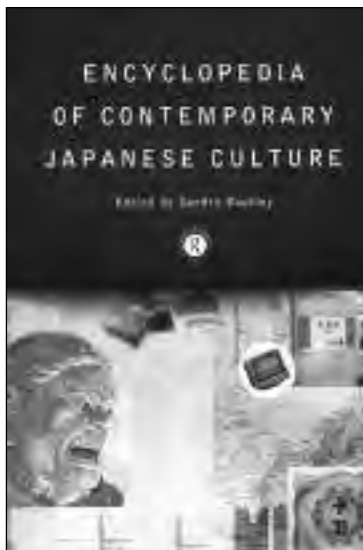
LONDON: ROUTLEDGE, 2002

INDEX, 634 PAGES, HARDCOVER: ISBN: 0415143446

Make no mistake about it, the operative words here are *Contemporary Culture*, with an unspoken Pop thrown in for good measure. The *Encyclopedia of Contemporary Japanese Culture (ECJC)* begins its investigation of contemporary with 1945, the end of World War Two, winding its way through the late 1990s. The volume includes over 750 entries, which can be accessed in a variety of ways: alphabet, index, theme, and cross-reference.

As mentioned in the introduction, the *ECJC* makes no pretense of being solely a scholarly effort. In fact, much to the editors' credit, in an effort to accommodate the non-Japan specialist, not to mention the casual reader, the overall tone of the text is refreshingly relaxed and even occasionally chatty, all of which work to make the book a fun venture. One does not usually associate playful with anything that smacks of a highfalutin reference work, but in this case the terminology seems appropriate. For example, many of the entry titles or headings are most inventive; readers encounter entries labelled "hair debate," "tainted-blood scandal," "just in time delivery," "soaplant," and "vending machines." If nothing else, such puzzling headers entice readers to scan the entry to see what something called the "hair debate" is all about. In addition, many entries are not specifically Japanese-flavored, but are in fact culturally neutral (whiskey, pine tree, meat, menopause). However, once each is held up to the light of contemporary Japanese culture, the neutrality slips away and readers are treated to new and sometimes startling definitions and relationships.

Obviously, when dealing with any sort of reference project of this magnitude, editors must be selective. Still, interested readers can sometimes be mystified as to why one entry is included and another omitted. For instance, *aoi*, the Japanese word for blue, is a separate entry, and although the word is cross-referenced under "Colours, cultural significance of," this begs the question as to why does blue have its own entry and not, say, *midori*, green, or *akai*, red? Or, to turn to another subject, if "gay male identity," why not gay female identity? Another concern deals with the "further reading" sections that conclude most of the entries. It is understandable that some more trivial, less important entries not have a further reading portion, but, surprisingly, some of the larger entries (education, theatre, computers, Confucius) lack a further reading section as well. Although a minor irritant, this can be somewhat of a disappointment for the reader on the lookout for more information about the subject.



The *Encyclopedia of Contemporary Japanese Culture* lists 109 contributors. Nevertheless, Sandra Buckley, the general editor, along with a handful of other contributors, is primarily responsible for this volume. Buckley wrote ten of the thirty-six entries in the H section, thirteen of the fifty-three entries in K, and so on. Whatever the reason (lack of interested contributors, time constraints), the book does come across as a labor of love. In fact, Buckley and the others can rest assured that their efforts make for a most entertaining reference work—one valuable to a wide range of students, from junior high school on up. Not surprisingly, the encyclopedia embraces a good deal of Japan's pop culture, which might make the book especially intriguing to younger students.

All in all, the *Encyclopedia of Contemporary Japanese Culture* is not only an informative book

for those who have even a passive interest in Japanese culture, but also, and perhaps more importantly, for those of us who have heard from a friend who knows a friend who stayed two weeks in Tokyo who said Japan is this or the Japanese are that, and we want to check the validity of such hearsay. ■

CRAIG LOOMIS is an Associate Professor of English at the American University of Kuwait. He has lived, taught, and written about Asia for sixteen years.

CGP *Bringing US-Japan Perspectives to the World*

**FUNDING FOR PROJECTS IN
E D U C A T I O N**

The Japan Foundation Center for Global Partnership (CGP) is a grantmaking organization dedicated to promoting mutual understanding and collaboration between the United States and Japan. CGP welcomes proposals for:

PROJECTS THAT FOSTER A GREATER UNDERSTANDING OF JAPAN IN K-12 CLASSROOMS

CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT
PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT
YOUTH EXCHANGE

ANNUAL APPLICATION DEADLINES
July 1 & December 1

Applications are accepted for annual program(s) only. No program development projects.

For additional information, including application materials, please visit our website at www.cgpgp.org or contact CGP directly.

THE JAPAN FOUNDATION CENTER FOR GLOBAL PARTNERSHIP
独立行政法人 国際交流基金 日本センター

112 West 87th Street, 8F, New York, NY 10024 (212) 496-1251 Fax: (212) 496-1344