

BOOK REVIEWS

shoulders" (p. 328). In a well-written essay about *Farewell My Concubine*, Wendy Larson continues the discussion about social castration. She also points out the political significance of concubinage. The last chapter by Yi Zheng is intended to serve as a conclusion, because both identity and gender issues are addressed. The author makes the interesting point that when those filmmakers sought the Chinese identity, they looked through the "Other," i.e., women, intellectuals and peasants. From these people, it is relatively easy to find the old traits. Like some essays in this volume, this interesting point is not well developed. Exactly half of the notes come from one single book, which makes this essay look more like a book review than a research article. ■

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Japan

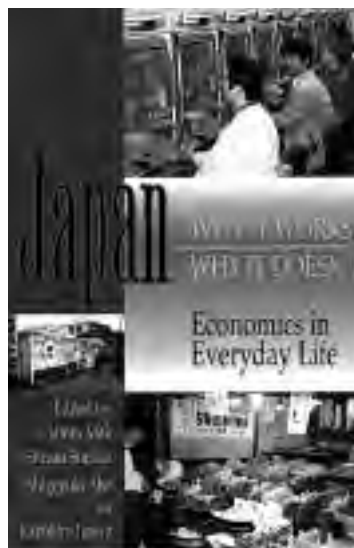
Why It Works, Why It Doesn't: Economics in Everyday Life

Edited by James Mak, Shyam Sunder,
Shigeyuki Abe, Kazuhiro Igawa

UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII PRESS, 1998
219 PAGES

Japan: *Why It Works, Why It Doesn't* evolved out of a 1995 visit to Japan by American economics professors James Mak and Shyam Sunder. Arriving in Japan with little understanding of the society, Mak and Sunder began asking questions of their Kobe University hosts (including their co-editors, Shigeyuki Abe and Kazuhiro Igawa) about what they saw around them. Many of these questions became the titles of the various essays that make up the book. By focusing on everyday life, the book explains some interesting aspects of the internal dynamics of Japan's economy.

Each of the essays is around eight pages long, and they are organized into three sections—Living, Work, and System. The section on living discusses aspects of life and society, while the essays on work cover aspects of the business world. "System" refers to the economic structures of life in Japan and includes contributions on the *keiretsu* (Japanese industrial conglomerates), health care, and banking. The essays are wide ranging and tackle topics from "Why So Many Gifts?" to "Do the Japanese Work till They Drop?" to "Why Do Doctors Prescribe So Many Pills?" The book does not offer



comprehensive coverage of Japan; instead it gives an up-to-date introduction to a random variety of specific topics about the intersection of the society and economy of Japan. Designed for high school or college students, the language is intentionally simple, and technical language is kept to a minimum. The authors often discuss their own experiences, impressions and opinions. The writing is engaged and accessible.

Japan: Why It Works, Why It Doesn't would be

useful in a high school or undergraduate class about Japan. The eclectic choice of topics and fairly brief coverage of important issues mean that this book would not serve as a core text. As a supplementary text, however, it would keep students interested and intrigued. For students or anyone embarking on an excursion to Japan, it would be well worth reading and discussing some of the essays before and after the trip. As the essays discuss questions which come to the minds of curious short-term visitors to Japan, those visitors will be keen to read essays like "Why Can the Japanese Manage Without Personal Checking Accounts?" and "Why is Pachinko So Popular?" which cover topics seldom discussed in introductory texts.

While the book has many strengths, there are a few weaknesses. *Japan: Why It Works, Why It Doesn't* does not, for example, answer either of the questions posed in the book's title. Portions of the answers are provided in the various essays, but the authors do not provide an overarching analysis that addresses these fundamental—and fascinating—questions. As is evident by the short length of many of the chapters, coverage of individual subjects is brief and sometimes too simplistic for an academic audience. In a number of cases, the essays do not address the questions posed in the title, but rather provide a brief overview of the subject. Most importantly, there is a decidedly American focus to the examples and comparisons used in the essays. This makes the book of more limited interest to non-U.S. audiences or American audiences seeking broader comparisons. Nonetheless, there is much of value in *Japan: Why It Works, Why It Doesn't* and it will be of interest to those eager to learn more about some of the different aspects of economic life in Japan. ■

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