

## BOOK REVIEWS

# The Dark Side of Japanese Business

## Three 'Industry Novels'

BY IKKŌ SHIMIZU

TRANSLATED AND EDITED BY TAMAE K. PRINDLE

ARMONK, NEW YORK: M.E. SHARPE, 1996

277 PAGES

**T**his book consists of three novels dealing with aspects of Japanese business life, written over a span of twenty-four years. The first, *Silver Sanctuary*, dating from 1969 and included in slightly different form in Prindle's earlier translation, *Made in Japan and Other Japanese "Business Novels,"* concerns a breach of bank secrets, eventually traced to a female bank employee seduced and rejected by her coworker, a man on the executive track. The story illustrates the tension in gender roles and expectations in Japan, and the different career trajectories that these different roles entail. The second novel, *The Ibis Cage*, first published in 1968, is about the negotiations and manipulations involved in the defloration of a geisha: an eighteen-year-old well coached in her role of attracting the desire and earning the money of rich old clients. The third novel, *Keiretsu*, first published in 1992, makes up by far the bulk of the book. It concerns a first-tier *keiretsu* parts supplier, Taisei Automobile Lighting Company, and its strained relations with Tokyo Motors, its parent company and major customer, by whom it is ceaselessly exploited. The novel unfolds through Shigeya Hamada, the aging president of Taisei, and his efforts to install his son as president, as against the efforts of Tokyo Motors to take over Taisei's presidency; this takes place against the backdrop of the 1985 Plaza Accord, the 1987 stock market crash, the death of the *Shōwa* Emperor, and other events of the late 1980s.

Although they contain interesting insights into Japanese human relations, I would be reluctant to use the first two of these novels in my classes on Japanese society and on culture and business. Students already prone to exoticize Japan don't need to read about geisha defloration in the context of contemporary Japanese business; nor do students already prone to hold stereotypes about Japanese women need to read about young women throwing their lives away on men who spurn them. These novels, as noted above, were written in the 1960s, and are indeed dated. Since the value of Shimizu's novels for an English-speaking audience is pedagogical rather than literary, it seems odd that Prindle selected these novels to translate: why not more recent works by Shimizu or other "industry novelists," works less susceptible to the lures of stereotyping and exoticism?

The third of these novels, *Keiretsu*, is, however, an altogether different matter. This novel, in its portrayal of the human miseries created through the "colonial" relationship between parent company and supplier, is important as an antidote and counterpoint to more abstract and more positive accounts of the structure and workings of

the Japanese economy. There are a number of recent ethnographies discussing the quandaries faced by Japanese blue-collar workers, but I know of none discussing the plight of employees in small supplier companies at the mercy of their *keiretsu* parent company. One must be cautious about using a novel to illustrate social reality (I would think twice before assigning John Gresham to a class studying the American legal system); but the novel's portrayal of Japanese business, while a touch melodramatic, does ring true to my ears.

This novel is by no means a great piece of literature—its characters often sound in their conversations as if they are self-consciously explaining Japanese economics to a gallery of college students—but this hardly matters. The story is gripping, and teaches a great deal about "the dark side of Japanese business," as well as about other aspects of Japanese life. I will use it in my own classes, and I recommend other teachers of courses on Japanese society or Japanese business consider using it as well. ■

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# Exploring Indonesia

## Past and Present

BY BJORN SCHELANDER

HONOLULU: CENTER FOR SOUTHEAST ASIAN STUDIES  
SCHOOL OF HAWAIIAN, ASIAN AND PACIFIC STUDIES

UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII, 1996

**T**his volume is an introductory textbook on the social history of Indonesia, a country of immense diversity. The book is divided roughly into three parts, written in strict chronological order. Part One deals with the physical characteristics of the country. Part Two deals with the historical development of the Indonesian state, and finally, Part Three deals with contemporary Indonesia.

Chapter 1 provides a brief overview of Indonesia, including its geography, natural resources, and peoples. Major ethnic groups, religions and cultural beliefs are all briefly surveyed. Chapters 2 to 5 concentrate on the historical development of the Indonesian society. Chapter 2 concentrates on the early Indonesian empires (Srivijaya, Shailendra, Mataram and Majapahit) and contacts with the great