

BOOK REVIEWS

ReMade in Japan by Tobin; *Japan: Why It Works, Why It Doesn't* by Mak, Sunder, Abe and Igawa; Joy Hendry's books *Understanding Japanese Society*, *Interpreting Japanese Society*, *Wrapping Culture*; and Nancy Hume's *Japanese Aesthetics and Culture*. It overlaps with each, although Richie's essays are less academic.

I cannot comment on all twenty-eight essays, but I will mention five of my favorites to provide a flavor of them. "Japanese Rhythms" (1984) describes the use of time. Japan uses a mix of "modern" and "traditional" time with a lot of time devoted to maintaining social relations. Time is less "wasted" than "invested" into maintaining relations and distinctions of status. It is not a moral concept as it often is in the United States.

In "Tokyo, the Impermanent Capital" (1979) Richie describes Tokyo's urban environment as different from other cities, and even when it looks like some other cities externally, it operates differently. The city lacks central planning and is more a large collection of semi-independent areas. The city also reflects the cultural idea that physical structures are independent, impermanent and subject to constant renewal.

In "A Vocabulary of Taste" (1983) he introduces several Japanese aesthetic terms for which there is no direct English translation, and which Richie believes would improve American sensitivity. This aspect of Japanese culture illustrates how a culture can recognize many artistic distinctions and sensitivities, even when its urban physical environment and daily work routines appear to be dull and mundane. One example is the attitude *mono no aware*. Richie notes that it has had a place in Japanese culture at least since the *Tale of Genji*. Its meaning, "sensitivity to things" or "things which move one," tempered with an acceptance of the transience of life, is rich and captures a dimension of the Japanese outlook.

Richie gives us a history of Japanese reactions to the Western practice of kissing and the growing adoption of the practice in Japan in "The Japanese Kiss" (1983). He also discusses the restricted meaning of kissing in contemporary Japan. This is useful not only in illustrating the Japanese response to Western cultural practices, but in sensitizing students to the assumption that cultural practices found in their own culture are "natural."

"Pachinko" (1980/1986) describes this popular form of recreation. Richie discusses what attracts the Japanese to Pachinko and its meaning for them. Playing it has a numbing effect, and there is great emphasis on finding a machine that feels right. He says it is a distraction, but its true aim is "The annihilation of self, a most pleasant state" (p. 233). He suggests Pachinko should be seen as more akin to an unusual type of Zen meditation than a frenzied Las Vegas-style pursuit of monetary gain.

I would not assign this book to my undergraduates, although it would make a valuable library addition. I would consider assigning a few essays from it. The essays are short and easy to read, as their initial appearance in an English-language newspaper, travel magazines and newsletters suggests. As with any collection of essays written over a long period, they vary in relevance and perceptiveness.

There are three difficulties for classroom use. First, enough of the essays are dated or dependent on first-hand experience that their utility as a window into contemporary Japanese daily life and culture is limited. Second, the topics covered are eclectic. This is

not necessarily a problem, except important aspects of Japanese culture are omitted. The film essays are outstanding, but anyone not familiar with Japanese cinema of 20+ years ago will have difficulty appreciating them. Third, the essays are uneven. Some are worth re-reading for their insights, others are only worth several minutes of entertainment in a daily newspaper.

In sum, even if it does not make a good assigned text, this book is worth having in the library and reading for selected essays. You may find one or two that work as a short, insightful entrée into Japanese culture for your students. ■

W. LAWRENCE NEUMAN is Professor of Sociology and Coordinator of the Asian Studies program at the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater where he also directs the Pacific Asia Educational Resource Center. He was a Fulbright lecturer to Tohoku University in Sendai, Japan during the 1995-96 academic year. He participated in institutes by ASDP at the East-West Center and Fulbright-Hays Summer Seminars Abroad to Asia. He is developing a new course for undergraduates, Sociology of Contemporary Japanese Society.

The Encyclopedia of Japanese Pop Culture

By Mark Schilling

NEW YORK: WEATHERHILL, 1997

343 PAGES

PHOTOGRAPHS AND ILLUSTRATIONS



In this superb book Mark Schilling has gone a step beyond the usual academic rigmarole and has presented a text that should not only be *required* reading for all Japan scholars and students, but one that is also such an interesting journey into the mysteries of contemporary Japan that its readers may find it very difficult to put down.

Tirelessly researched, *The Encyclopedia of Japanese Pop Culture* (henceforth "J-Pop") serves as an introductory primer to the side of Japan that most Westerners are oblivious to—the wild side. Through his minute examinations of everything from the 1970s pop music sensation Pink Lady to



Hello Kitty, page 222

the charms of Hello Kitty, Schilling has seemingly left no stone unturned in his pursuit of those cultural icons which define postwar Japanese society. Simply stated, this delightful study of the “power of pop” uncovers the humanistic side of a Japan that most Westerners see only as a nation of stern-faced businessmen and rogue samurai and has shown us that, yes, indeed, the Japanese know how to have a good time.

Arranged in alphabetical order, Schilling’s entries average three to four pages each—more for the “heavy hitters”—and are therefore the perfect size for periodic supplemental readings in most Japanese language and culture curricula. Lightly satirical and “naughty” at times, *J-Pop* is best suited to high school (upper level) and university students. Teachers will find that this text will help to make learning fun, and that it may indeed stimulate further interest in Japan and Japanese studies.



Instant ramen, page 69

For example, many college students will relate well to the “Instant Ramen” entry which sings the praises of instant noodles and tells would-be gourmets that 5.02 billion (yes, with a “b”) instant ramen packs were consumed in 1993, calculating out to 40.2 packs for every man, woman and child in Japan. High schoolers will eat up the Godzilla section (no pun intended), and will be interested to find out the true origins of Mario (of Nintendo fame), named after the landlord of Nintendo’s first U.S. headquarters, and of Hello Kitty, who, according to her life story, was born and raised in London and is now in the third grade—who knew?!? *J-Pop* is filled to the point of overflowing with these kinds of offbeat facts, but in my opinion, there is no better way to understand Japanese society than through this type of in-depth study of its pop cultural icons.

Rich in period photographs, Schilling’s entries paint an extremely rich portrait of social life in Japan from the late 1940s on, taking as their theme those groups, people, and objects that acted as keystones in the construction of postwar Japanese popular culture. Complete with a very useful Subject Guide and Index at the back of the book, Schilling breaks *J-Pop* into the following main subject headings: “Anime” (Japanese Animation), “Comics and Comedy,” “Fads, Trends and Obsessions,” “Food,” “Games, Toys and Technology,” “Magazines,” “Manga” (Japanese comic books), “Movies and Movie Stars,” “Music and Singers,” “Publishing,” “Scandal and Controversy,” “Sports and Martial Arts,” and finally “Television and Television Shows.”

Thus, there is something for everyone here; from would-be sumo wrestling fans to those interested in the life of Japan’s “Madonna,” the singer Seiko Matsuda, readers will more likely than not find that this book opens many new avenues into our understanding of Japan and its people.



Rikidozan, Japan’s first television star, page 195

Teachers will further find that thanks to its diverse subject topics, *J-Pop* can be easily integrated into a wide range of courses and is as equally at home in a Japanese economics course (for example, students can use the text as a research tool on the subject of profits in the recording industry, etc.) as it is in a World Cultures survey course.

Equally balanced and objective, *J-Pop* does an incredible job of explaining how and why the Japanese act and think the way they do through its cultural anthropological “excavation” of contemporary Japanese society. In fact, the only critique I have of this text is the occasional lapse in editing acumen—typos abound throughout—but this is nothing that future editions (and hopefully supplements) will not be able to mend. That being said, Schilling does a wonderful job of explaining in detail the cultural attributes that in essence help to form a shared Japanese mindset, and as a result, a shared national identity.



Mario, page 112



Power Rangers, page 191

Much the same way that most Americans in their late twenties were influenced in some way by Sesame Street, Atari, and Culture Club in their youth, so too were their Japanese counterparts affected by Doraemon (a robotic cat with magical powers), karaoke, and SMAP (a five-member male pop group). By reaching an understanding of these shared cultural mores, students of Japan will be able to apply this new-found knowledge to their specific field of study—whether that be business, language or culture—and will thus be that much closer to realizing how life functions on a daily and human level in Japan. All too often, students forego this study of the human element and miss out on the overall cultural climate of the country to which their studies are dedicated. Luckily, Mark Schilling has come to the rescue (much akin to the Japanese superhero Ultraman) by providing students of Japan with the most powerful cultural study that this reviewer has seen in some time, *The Encyclopedia of Japanese Pop Culture*. ■

ERIC C. SHINER is a graduate student in the Department of Art History at Osaka University in Japan. A recipient of the Mombusho Scholarship, Eric studies Japanese Contemporary Art, specifically the work of Morimura Yasumasa. He is a former Program Manager of the Japanese Science and Technology Management Program at the University of Pittsburgh and former Program Director of the Japan-America Society of Pennsylvania.



Namennayol cat with attitude, page 23