

YOSHIO SUGIMOTO and ROSS E. MOUER, editors. *Constructs for Understanding Japan*. London and New York: Kegan Paul International, 1989. Pp. xv, 396. Figures, tables, index.

This volume, selected from papers presented at a 1982 Noosa Heads colloquium, is one of several concerted assaults by the editors on what they believe to be a pernicious and dominant "group model" of Japanese society. The culling and revising of a larger set of papers no doubt has improved the individual quality and group coherence of the contributions, but the considerable delay in publication has taken much of the edge off of the organisers' original aims. It is now commonly lamented that, in Japan and abroad, much academic writing and journalistic commentary has enshrined a national stereotype of consensus-seeking, self-effacing groupies. In large part through the earlier efforts of Sugimoto and Mouer, we now discount such a portrait as partial, self-serving and ideological.

Thus one wonders about the wisdom of yet another volume cast in such anti-group terms. To be sure, the editors claim in their introduction that even in the late 1980s the dangers remain of a Hydra-headed *Nihonjinron* paradigm that keeps reappearing in new forms and permutations. As fast as Nakane's *tate shakai* is cut down, Hamaguchi's *kanjinshugi* pops up in its place. Perhaps "vigilance, eternal vigilance" is the proper posture to assume against an ideological enemy that is so elusive and so resourceful. However, there is considerable danger in giving such ideas the attention of sustained critique. Not only does one confer intellectual distinction on sloppy thinking and patent partisanship, but it can force one's own search for theoretical alternatives and methodological rigour into a narrowly oppositional mode.

An example of the latter that is especially troubling to this anthropologist is the rather

naive culture-bashing that runs through a number of chapters. In their drive for "meta-theoretical" reflection, the editors seem to have ignored "culture". Their justifiable disdain for Japan culturology (*Nihonbunkaron*) leads them to dismiss summarily any concept of culture as an explanatory variable (for example, p. 194). In place of this, they prefer to talk of social rewards and resources. Of course culture as monolithic tradition or national character is a caricature, not a concept, but no serious theorist of culture maintains otherwise. What are such constraints, rewards and resources in their schema of social action, if not constitutive of culture?

It seems to me Mouer and Sugimoto's arguments here (chapter 5) as elsewhere for a "multi-dimensional stratification" could as profitably draw from Pierre Bourdieu as from John Goldthorpe. At present, their causality is mechanistic: "agents of stratification" delineate variations in many behaviours, including sports, leisure pursuits, music listening and religious practice. Yet by a more subtle notion of "culture"—as always partial, interested and ideological—such pursuits and preferences are themselves meaningful "distinctions" of symbolic capital that express and enforce the divisions of society. Mouer and Sugimoto admit unease in avoiding "the distinction between ideology and culture, and the impact of ideology on social behavior" (p. 11). Most contemporary theorising about culture confronts these issues directly.

Fortunately, most of the papers are not themselves so tied to an anti-group rhetoric. No doubt through editorial hard work, they all share an indisputable covering premise: that analyses of Japan must centre on self-aware and self-interested actors shaping and being shaped by interpersonal relations of power and stratified institutions. This is elaborated specifically by David Plath in an elegant essay on idioms of lifecourse; Koike

Kazuo on factory QC Circles; Kawamura Nozomu on family ideology and household structure; Susan Pharr on three cases of resolving status conflicts; and Sone Yasunori on what interest groups give to and get from electoral campaigns, budget markups, and policy councils. The premise also informs the more abstract analyses of Harumi Befu on social exchange, Solomon Levine on industrial relations, Reiko Atsumi on the nature of Japanese friendship, Mouer and Sugimoto's model of social stratification and J. V. Neustupny on typological analysis.

It is a distinguished cast of contributors, although any diligent student of contemporary Japan will be familiar with the general arguments of each paper. There are no radical novelties or sharp departures in any of the contributions from what its author has written elsewhere. However, the editors have assembled a handy compendium of some of the most interesting social scientists from across the spectrum. And in giving prominence to such Japanese scholars as Koike, Kawamura and Sone they provide a healthy corrective to more frequently translated authors.

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PETER TASKER. *Inside Japan: Wealth, Work and Power in the New Japanese Empire*. London: Penguin Books, 1989. Pp. 376. Contents, acknowledgements, prologue, epilogue, index. Paper, \$14.99.

"Of the world's top fifty banks, four are British, five American, seven German, and twenty, including the seven largest, Japanese" (p. 45). "With just 2.6 per cent of the world's population and 0.1 per cent of its inhabitable area, she generates 10 per cent of world economic value" (p. 2). With facts like these scattered through the nearly four hundred pages of this easy-to-read book the

reader is jolted into a realisation of the power of today's Japan. I say "jolted" because the audience the author has in mind is the smug, uncomprehending "intelligent layman" of, primarily, Britain and the United States for whom Japan is a "far away country about which we know little". But the truths of this book should be given wide publicity in Australia too!

In a sense Peter Tasker has written a "Traveller's and Businessman's Guide to Japan" in ten chapters quickly absorbed in the plane from London or Sydney to Tokyo. No previous knowledge of Japan is assumed and the author, in a skilfully written series of thumbnail sketches manages to guide the fascinated reader through the historical, political, economic and social aspects of Japan. The reader is left rather breathless at the pace at which all this is performed but at the end he/she will feel that whilst Japan is still "strange" an opening into the culture has been made.

Peter Tasker is a graduate of the University of Oxford where he was a member of the reviewer's college, Balliol. It is probable that he read PPE (politics, philosophy and economics) at Oxford and that he preferred the "politics" side of the course because it is his interest in Japanese "politics"—broadly interpreted to mean "institutions"—which stands out in his book. Despite his being a "financial specialist" who "divides his time between Tokyo and London" (according to the publisher's note) the author seems curiously reluctant to cover in any depth major economic issues. And where they are mentioned en passant they are unsubstantiated or plainly wrong. For instance, can we really believe that "a surplus of workers ... is likely to be the main problem facing Japan in the years ahead"? (p. 30) And Japan is not "one of the largest dispensers of development aid" (p. 30)—it is the largest. Oddly enough the author seems to equate "aid" with accepting refugees ("the most direct type of succour"