

Book Review #2

Chulapol Thanomsing

Japanese Culture and Society

Book: “*Japan: Asian Power*” (1971), Irwin Isenberg

Summary

This book discussed many issues concerning Japanese as some of the major historical trends that have shaped the Japanese society and economy, a broad view of Japan in terms of its political, economic, and sociological context, a detail analysis of the Japanese economy-how it runs, what make it tick, and what it has achieved-and Japan’s relations with the world.

Of course, the US occupation forces after WWII also played an enormous role in the shaping of contemporary Japan, however we should be interested in understanding some knowledge of Japan’s history before WWII. For instance, reopening Japan’s doors in the beginning of the Meiji Restoration, Japan set out to achieve in many aspects that had taken centuries to develop in the West: the creation of a modern nation, with modern industries and political institution, and a modern pattern of society. In addition, the most important factor in Japan’s economic development was a strong and integrated control by the central government. In case of the Meiji government initiated the modernization of industry, its role was important in the latter.

In the case of Japan’s political, economic and sociological, this book considers that the most worthy target we can set for ourselves would be to direct the creative capacity of the Japanese people to man’s welfare and particularly to the peace and stability of Asia. Japanese economical and political today are much closer to United State and Western Europe than to their neighbors on the Asian continent. These results come from influence of the US occupation

after WWII. This occupation not only reformed Japan's political and economic life and fostered a new class of leaders but also attempted to give the Japanese a new set of values to replace those lost in the war and defeat. These new values were implicit in the demilitarization and democratization programs. The "grow now, plan later" policy of the business-dominated government has led to the concentration of almost half the nation's people and most of its industrial activity. Moreover, the Japanese today are thinking of nationalistic in sense of putting national power or prestige above individual.

Japan's present economic growth and strength had its origins in the late nineteenth century and that industrial and human resources have been developed systematically for generations. As the loser of WWII, the Japanese suffered great destruction of their factories, transportation systems and international trade arrangements. In the early 1950s, United State economic aid and offshore procurement for the Korean war made vital contributions to Japanese growth and free-world resources and export markets in the decade later provided necessary raw materials and outlets for Japanese trade.

Japanese economic miracle, Japan has been achieved mostly by hard work. At the countless such meeting, the Japanese business consensus is forged-a common understanding on goals and procedures and a feeling among participants of having been consulted in the process. Some authors suggest that Japanese companies have the ability to operate on borrowed money that is one reason for their success in economy. In terms of the cozy relations between business and government come naturally that is since major industries were created by the government after the restoration of Meiji emperor, the event that launched Japan into the modern world.

In the section of Japan's relations with the other country, the book considers the relations in terms of military and geopolitical implications which, however, cannot be divorced from Japan's economics that Japan's changing role in Asia might result in changed ties between Japan and United State.

Reflection

Through this book, I strongly believe the contents. I could summarize the point of Japanese economic growth. First effect is in the beginning of the Meiji Era that Japan begins to contact foreign countries and adapt the Western ideas of modernization of industry. The US occupation after WW II was also an influence. Moreover, the government invention in most of industrial activities is of great benefit for Japanese economic control and development. The good managing investment of Japanese companies is positive ability to develop and accomplish in the world economic. It is very difficult for investment of foreign investors in Japan because of the collaboration among four largest companies.

The contents of this book are very comprehensive because the editor adds the idea of many authors in every subject. The period mentioned in this book is not long, beginning around 1860 till 1971, so some contents might be not up-to-date for current and this book missed some information before 1860 that is significant to study. The two points that I would like to mention are the significance in the period before and after period of this book mentioned.

Most of the authors did not argue back to Edo era that was isolation period. The influence of isolation remains in the economic policy currently. For instance, most of business activities have to be control by government. In the other hand, the merchandises remain like to be the last class of society, so they have to find anything to serve needs of their customers.

Because of the old age of this book, this book lacks some contents concerning business collaboration. Although, some authors mentioned about *Zaibutsu* that is one important activities of business collaboration in Japanese economic. Today, *Zaibutsu* is developed to new structure but also remain same idea so-called *Keiratsu*. *Zaibutsu* is collaboration between only four largest companies in Japan. *Keiratsu* is collaboration between big companies and / or between big and small companies. So, now Japan has many group of *Keiratsu* that affect to protect foreign investment in Japan.