

Book Review

Routledge Handbook of Japanese Culture and Society

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Routledge Handbook of Japanese Culture and Society
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This Handbook is an interdisciplinary reference work for those interested in an introduction to the contemporary Japanese culture and society. Taking as a starting point the end of World War II (1945) and referring back to major historical events that precede 1945 and important periods for understanding Japan today (Tokugawa period, Meiji period, Taisho period and early Shōwa period) when needed, this is one of the few books in the market that offer a broad view on the different complexities of contemporary Japan, from architecture, culture, education and law to class and identity issues in society, as well as cuisine, comic culture (*manga*), films and more.

The book presents a collection of 22 chapters, structured in 3 parts. Part I (Social foundations) with 7 chapters, Part II (Class, identity and status) with 8 chapters, and finally and Part III (Cool Japan) with 7 chapters. The first part of the book takes a closer look of Japan's cultural and social foundations and analyses their changes since 1945. These chapters explore interesting topics like Japanese educational system and the 2002 school education reforms and prospects for the future, English as the predominant foreign language in Japan since 1868, politics, religion, new spiritual movements and individualization, Japan's law system and the urbanization of the Japanese landscape.

The second part explores very crucial topics: social class, identity and status in contemporary Japan and the shifting patterns both in the period of high growth of the economy and the recession, the politics of gender in the Japanese society, the changes in families in their social and economic contexts, queer cultures before and during the World War II and the postwar, race, ethnicity and minorities in modern Japan (Ainu, Burakumin, Okinawans, Koreans, new minorities), male communities of homelessness, migrant workers and people with disabilities, aging and social welfare in Japan and finally the rise of the civil sector in Japanese society.

And finally the third part of the book explores the rich Japanese popular culture, from films and TV to comic books and Japanese animation (*anime*), the twentieth-century history of popular music, music culture (*enka* or ballads, hip-hop, idol pop, jazz, etc.), cultural flows in Japan and East

Asia, contemporary architecture in Japan, sportscares in Japan, with a particular focus on baseball and soccer (outside sports incorporated into Japan) and sumo and judo (sports coming from earlier Japanese practices), etc.

The back section of the book includes useful resources like a brief timeline of major dates in Japanese history, a glossary of Japanese terms that contributes to deepen the knowledge and understanding on these issues as well as a wide selection of bibliography. Written by an international group of experts of Japan, this interdisciplinary handbook will be very useful for students, academics and the general public interested in Asian Society and Culture, and in particular, in Japan. After reading it, you will feel the need to explore more on Japan.