

Competing Capitalisms: Japan, Business Schools and Global Ideology

Michael E. Porter, Hirotaka Takeuchi and Mariko Sakakibara, *Can Japan Compete?* Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000. 190 pp. Hard cover ISBN 0-33-378658-0.

Ronald Dore, *Stock Market Capitalism: Welfare Capitalism—Japan and Germany versus the Anglo-Saxons*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000. 252 pp. Hard cover ISBN 0-19-924062-0; paperback ISBN 0-19-924061-2.

Two books of reflection by two giants in their respective fields about the Japanese economy. Two books that differ in their problematization of just what is, or is not, 'wrong' with the Japanese economic system and why. Two books with very different agendas and thus with very different answers to the problems they define. Two kinds of scholar, and thus two kinds of scholarship: one blunt, confident and typical of a business school; the other, more nuanced, extremely knowledgeable and characteristic, perhaps, of a university environment. Two different methodological, theoretical and disciplinary approaches—one (Porter) promulgating an American-oriented global strategic management studies, supported by statistical data; the other (Dore) using the vantage point of economic sociology, years of ethnographic fieldwork, and in-depth readings of Japanese materials to sift painstakingly through the whys and wherefores of a local—and now threatened—capitalist style.

Together these books epitomize the classic problem facing those who dare to study a culture and economy very different from their own. To what extent should they conduct their analyses and present their findings within a disciplinary framework that emphasizes commonalities? And how much should they recognize the influence of local cultural factors and incorporate them in their assessments of, in this case, the Japanese economy? This is the issue that in the past has clearly divided academic disciplines from area studies within the university system, and today still differentiates Anglo-American focused business school research from the broader cultural investigations of university academics. There are exceptions among the former, but they are few and far between. Which is why, presumably, Porter calls on two Japanese co-authors to present his case.

Let us start with the volume with the airport bookstore title, *Can Japan Compete?* The aims of Porter and his two Japanese co-authors are typical of the kind of 'proactive approach' to scholarship found in business schools all over the world. They claim to provide both 'a theory that can explain and interpret Japan's post-war economic trajectory', and 'an outline of what steps will be necessary to restore Japan's economic vitality, at a time when a new direction for the nation is far from clear' (p. x). Such modest aims, like those expressed in a lot of business school studies, clearly target an audience of corporate managers and government administrators, and it is for them that this book's—often repetitive—arguments and illustrative details are clearly framed. The question that immediately arises is: does this 'shareholder' approach bode well for disinterested scholarship?

Porter's argument is as follows: the Japanese economy has not been, and still is not, a unified entity. Indeed, besides all the success stories of competitive industries that astounded the rest of the world in the 1980s, there have been other industries that were, and still are, highly uncompetitive, about which nobody says anything. There are, in short, 'two Japans, one composed of highly productive export industries, the other containing the "domestic' sectors'" (p. 147). This repeats an old Japan Studies classification of 'front' (*omote*) and 'back' (*ura*) stages to social organization, but is posed as a structural problem, located at the micro-rather than macro-economic level of industry-by-industry competition.

Furthermore, continue Porter and his co-authors, Japan's apparently superior and much-vaunted 'bureaucratic capitalism' is not the cause of Japan's success. Rather, Japanese government actually mistrusts competition and so intervenes in the economy in ways that harm productivity and prosperity. In a veiled attack on a Japanese tendency to value co-operation, harmony and consensus over competition and conflict, they argue that: 'what really ails Japan has to do with the nation's deeply ingrained attitude towards competition' (p. 138). Signs of the Japanese economy's impending fall were (in retrospect) obvious: only a small number of industries were competitive in world markets; corporate profit rates were chronically low; and a large number of uncompetitive industries (agriculture, chemicals, consumer-packaged goods, medical products and software, for example) acted as a serious drag on overall productivity.

Having laid out their thesis, which differs little, if at all, from numerous studies and arguments put forward within Japan over the last decade, the authors proceed to challenge the two main models put for-

ward by scholars to 'explain' Japan's post-war economic successes (until, that is, the bursting of the financial/real estate bubble in 1990). The first of these is what they refer to as the 'Japanese Government Model', first codified by Chalmers Johnson (1982) who, in his study of MITI, Japan's Ministry of International Trade and Industry, suggested that the Japanese government nurtured industrial development by strategic investment in certain industries. The elements making up this model include an activist central government with a stable bureaucracy; targeting priority industries to enhance economic growth; aggressive promotion of exports; extensive 'guidance', approval requirements and regulations; selective protection of the home market; restriction on foreign direct investment; lax antitrust enforcement; government-led industry restructuring; official sanctioning of cartels; highly regulated financial markets and limited corporate governance; government-sponsored cooperative R&D projects; and sound macro-economic policies.

The authors' own research suggests two things: firstly, that all this was only partially correct and that the Japanese government's role was rather different from that usually espoused in the model. In some successful competitive industries (like fax machines and robotics), for example, government often stimulated early demand for new products. By setting stringent standards in others (air conditioners are cited), it triggered innovations. It also ensured a supply of engineering (but not chemistry) graduates from universities through its universal and rigorous education system, and created policies to encourage patient capital. In unsuccessful industries, however, a number of problems emerged. These included: a shortage of trained talent, and a failure by the employment system to develop specialists (as opposed to multi-skilled workers); an inefficient and high-cost wholesaling system that prevented competitiveness; a failure in basic and applied research and innovation; and a misalignment between the needs of Japanese consumers, on the one hand, and of world consumers, on the other. In short, the Japanese government model failed to discriminate between competitive and uncompetitive industries, and therefore cannot be said to have driven Japanese competitiveness as a whole.

The second conclusion from the research conducted by Porter and his colleagues is one frequently repeated by both Americans and, nowadays, a considerable number of Japanese confused at the continuing economic recession in their country: namely, that the Japanese government's 'convoy system' (managing and protecting the interests of a limited number of companies) is obsolete, and that systemic change is

needed, involving a whole new array of mutually enforcing policies that include trust in the idea of competition and open trade; the building of a world-class university system; the modernization of archaic and inefficient domestic sectors; the creation of a 'true' system of corporate accountability; encouragement for innovation and entrepreneurship; and decentralization, regional specialization and cluster development.

Having disposed of one leg of the theorizing that once set the 'Japanese way' of capitalism apart from other ways, while invoking grudging admiration from beleaguered American and British businessmen and politicians, Porter and his co-authors set out to 'rethink' the second explanatory model that has focused on Japanese management methods. Here, 'Japanese corporate success is built on the notion that a company can achieve both the highest quality and lowest cost simultaneously by employing fundamentally better managerial practices than its rivals do' (p. 69). Its elements include high quality and low cost; a wide array of models and features; lean production; employees as assets; permanent employment; leadership by consensus; strong intercorporate networks; long-term goals; internal diversification into high-growth industries; and a close working relationship with government (p. 70). They agree that the Japanese corporate model's stress on teamwork, a long-term horizon, and dedication to continuous quality improvement is justified, but also argue that it has encouraged conformity and a dangerously incomplete idea of competition. They note the internal consistency of this model, which is reinforced by the Japanese government model. When pointing to what they call 'warning signals', however, the authors proceed to repeat the criticisms they have already made of the Japanese government model (thereby adding their own 'reinforcement' and 'internal consistency'): low returns on investment and low profits; competitive success limited to small number of industries; declines in hitherto successful industries since the 1980s; and precious few new success stories (p. 77).

What, then, is required for Japanese companies to transform themselves into competitive, profit-oriented, strategically smart organizations? The 'new corporate agenda' laid out by Porter includes such elements as creating distinctive, long-term strategies which take account of industry structures; expanding companies' focus of operational effectiveness and shifting their goal from growth and market share to profitability; reversing unrelated diversification; updating the Japanese organizational model by improving governance, relaxing hierarchy, and providing new forms of incentives (like stock options and various in-

centive pay systems). In short, 'what is necessary is no less than a re-definition of corporate goals in Japan and a whole new conception of how competitive advantage is created and maintained' (p. 180).

This argument is intriguing for the way that it proposes a new business school and management paradigm. In the heady years of the 1980s, when the Japanese economy seemed so overwhelmingly vibrant and all-conquering, there was much discussion of the decline in the economic performance of the United States, which was attributed to 'the failure of US companies to attend to, and manage, the cultural aspects of organization, a failure which was seen to be in direct contrast to Japanese companies' (Salaman 1997: 246). Such reflections gave rise to the Corporate Culture movement, which for over a decade flourished in business schools and management circles as *the* answer to all corporate problems. Now, Porter is spearheading a new business school-*cum*-management buzz phrase: 'competitive strategy'. Ironically, however, it is once again the *non*-Western economic system of Japan that is the instigator of this American-led propagation of a global ideology.

So, can Japan compete? Yes, say Porter and his co-authors, provided that people realize that their 'deeply ingrained social and cultural norms' are 'inconsistent with the innovation, entrepreneurship, and risk taking that are the hallmarks of today's competition' (p. 181). Are we witnessing here another example of American cultural imperialism, perhaps? Porter's insistence on (an undefined notion of) 'competitiveness' and 'strategy' would suggest so, especially when he claims that few Japanese corporations have any strategy whatsoever (p. 91). Indeed, he hoists himself by his own petard when he argues that 'the choice of what not to do is central to strategy' (p. 90), since one strategy adopted by Japanese companies has been *not* to go for the kind of immediate profits that Porter believes they should.

'Fortunately', however, things are moving in the right direction. Or so we are told. Foreign investors are becoming more significant equity shareholders in Japanese companies; foreign companies are entering Japan in growing numbers, often through acquisitions of Japanese companies; the *keiretsu* system of alliance capitalism (Gerlach 1992) is on the decline; government organizational reforms are under way; a new 'generation' of CEOs is assuming leadership; young entrepreneurial companies are getting larger and more important; and—yes—Japanese culture will change. Final victory, then, to the Pax Americana.

In the current political climate, one might be excused for thinking that this kind of argument sounds like an academic equivalent of the recent Anglo-American military invasion of Iraq, especially when Porter repeats his points time and time again with the monotony of the US aerial bombardment of Baghdad. He has the same kind of audacity as the 'Little Bush', it seems, when he begins to tell 'Japanese citizens' what they 'must begin to understand' and 'must learn' (p. 140). One thing is that, as consumers, they are far too fussy and spoiled, since they are provided with 'services never found in other countries' (p. 149). These apparently reflect a 'misalignment between Japanese home customer needs and the needs of the global market' (p. 34) which may be interpreted as shorthand for saying that, since American businesses cannot hope to meet such consumer demands, Japanese consumers have to forget about local cultural traditions and accept that globalization is here to stay.

It is true that Porter does not openly expect Japan to become 'a clone of American capitalism' (p. 188), but it is striking that, in his assessment of the state of Japan's economic system, Porter uses a vocabulary that clearly continues a patronizing colonialist—and Orientalist (cf. Said 1978)—tradition. He thus distinguishes between (American) '**good**' (*accountability, aggressive, competitive, creative, distinctive, dynamic, efficient, entrepreneurial, freedom, individual[ized], independent, innovative, maverick, openness, originality, productivity, progress, revolutionary, sophisticated, specialization, striking, transparent, unique, vibrant*) and (Japanese) '**bad**' (*anachronistic, collaboration, compromise, consensus, constraint, control, cumbersome, emulation, entrenched, (rigid) hierarchy, homogeneity, identical, idiosyncratic, imitative, impediments, inefficient, ingrained, obsolete, outmoded, over-regulated, protective, second rate, standardization, (unhealthy) tradition, uncompetitive, uniform, unproductive*). Indeed, although he would never express it so crassly, Porter almost presents Japan as part of an economic 'Axis of Evil' (comprising all those other nations in East and South-east Asia whose leaders propound an Asian, or at least non-American, 'way') that must be overcome if American capitalism is to reign supreme.

Is there nothing, then, that the Japanese can do, other than huddle in the frail shell of their corporate communities and wait docilely for the victory of the kind of Anglo-American capitalism that guru Porter and his converted Japanese apostles propound? In the end, probably not. But, in the meantime, other academics sympathetic to the Japanese cause can put up a token fight, even though they sense that it will be to little avail. So we have Ronald Dore to thank for revealing, and filling in, all

the chinks in Porter's seemingly superior theoretical armour, and for providing us with a little understated irony to help cope with Porter's otherwise overwhelming missionary and—in the context of a Harvard Business School professor continuing to try to make his distinctive mark among top managers, bureaucrats and politicians—strategic zeal.

Dore's central theme is whether there will continue to be a stable 'alternative form of capitalism' (p. x) to the kind of stock market capitalism propounded as a global reality by English and American politicians and businessmen, as well as by scholars eager to please them. And the way he frames his arguments reveals a very different scholarly orientation: one that is culturally sensitive, exceedingly well-versed in the twists and turns taken by the Japanese economy over the past 50 years, and, above all, humane. Although Porter and his co-authors claim to be analysing 'Japan' at the 'micro-economic level', it is Dore who is able to go beyond their limited understanding of what such a micro-economics consists of (innovation and strategy, apparently) and to talk about 'living people' and different kinds of 'Japanese' (p. viii). Thus, where Porter manages three and a half lines on the role of women in the workforce (p. 160), Dore provides more than three and a half pages (pp. 59-63); where Porter provides a dismissive 12-line paragraph on the protection of the uncompetitive construction 'industry' (p. 148), Dore devotes three pages to the different players (contractors, public officials, politicians, Ombudsman's associations, media, *sokaiya* thugs, American trade negotiators) involved in this aspect of public contracting (pp. 143-46).

Right from the start of *Stock Market Capitalism: Welfare Capitalism*, readers find themselves looking at the 'Japanese economic system' in the same academic mirror, but seeing a sharper picture reflected there, with all its background details in full focus. As Dore puts it in his Preface:

If you want to know why people work hard, work conscientiously, work creatively, work entrepreneurially, money is only a small part of the answer. You need also to look at social structure, the perceived fairness of organizational arrangements, friendships, collegiality, obligations arising from personal relations, as well as the intrinsic satisfactions of the work itself [pp. vii-viii].

None of these are mentioned in *Can Japan Compete?*, where the bottom-line is money (in the form of profits from competitiveness). And it is precisely at the 'post-industrial' form of modern capitalism found in the United States and Britain—specifically, at its embrace of 'marketization plus financialization'—that Dore takes careful aim. At the same time, he is good enough to admit his prejudices, while taking

considerable care to present all sides of every argument regarding the pros and cons of Japan's economic system. This is in stark contrast to Porter's attitude that 'economic culture can and will change as the context changes' (p. 187) and that Japanese must realize that globalization is changing their lives irrevocably, whether they like it or not.

Dore quickly helps us realize that the key policies of the neoliberal radicalism of Thatcher and Reagan happen to be the key policies propounded by Porter and his co-authors in their recommendations for change in Japan: lower taxes and smaller government; improved national competitiveness through encouragement of a spirit of enterprise; and a belief in superior efficiency and justice of allocation through competitive markets, rather than through politics and administration (pp. 4-5). Both groups—politicians and business school professionals—advocate

an economy centred on the stock market as the measure of corporate success and on the stock market index as the measure of national well-being, as opposed to an economy which has other, better, more pluralistic criteria of human welfare for measuring progress towards the good society (p. 10).

It is in Dore's book that the view of the workings of the Japanese economy put forward by Porter and his co-authors can be seen to be one-sided, simplistic, and—occasionally (as with their overemphasis on internal trading requirements within *keiretsu* industrial groups [p. 165])—factually wrong. First, there is the downside of those arguments they have presented in such a shining light. For instance, American companies as a whole spent US\$220 billion in 1998 buying back shares so that employees could 'exercise their options' (p. 12). Then, 'corporate strategy' (a field dominated by Porter himself in business school consultancy and theorizing) is becoming more and more equated with the buying and selling of (bits of) companies, so that senior management is dominated by financial, rather than by engineering, expertise (p. 13). Finally, upsizing in corporate profits is usually accompanied by downsizing in individual workers' employment and wages (p. 18). Porter mentions nothing of this in his recipes for Japanese competitiveness.

Second, there are those aspects of the Japanese economy that are criticized without regard for what is going on in the American economy. Here Dore's comparative approach is much more illuminating and balanced in its arguments. For example, while accepting that gasoline price controls and consequent high petrol pump prices up to the early 1980s criticized by Porter and his co-authors were, indeed, anti-competitive, Dore adds that American oil companies did so well out of this particu-

lar piece of legislation that it never featured in bilateral trade talks between Japan and the United States. In discussing the so-called *dango* in the Japanese construction industry—which Porter describes as 'bid-rigging' (p. 148) and sees as symptomatic of Japanese inefficiency, protectionism and corruption—Dore points out that *dango* (which he translates more accurately as 'coming to a conclusion through discussion' [p. 144]) is—or was—effectively a system of negotiated contracts of the kind that is found in defence contracting in the United States and other modern industrial societies. Finally, to keep the list short, Porter and his co-authors argue that research in Japan should be according to what Dore nicely refers to as 'the graduate school whiz-kid/entrepreneurial individualism/venture capital/eventual IPO recipe', rather than according to its present 'corporate research/corporate finance/corporate commercialization recipe' (p. 236). In response, Dore points out that: 'a careful count would almost certainly show that in the United States, too, it is in fact the latter, corporate recipe which produces the overwhelming bulk of innovative activity' (ibid.). It is observations such as these that make Porter's analysis seem suspect. Is he really concerned to help the Japanese? Or is his aim to help American businessmen successfully force their Japanese counterparts to adapt to their way of trading? And why does he not mention the fact that one of the problems with the commercialization of academic research is the fact that corporations tend to muffle results that show them in a poor light (Klein 2001)?

Given the rich complexity of Dore's analysis of the Japanese economic system, it will probably come as no surprise to hear that *Stock Market Capitalism: Welfare Capitalism* is not nearly such an easy work to summarize as *Can Japan Compete?* Not that complexity of argument means obtuseness in style. Dore's prose is succinct, jargon-free and pleasantly laconic—so different from the endless two-line sentences strung together by Porter and his colleagues. One can only hope and pray that the businessmen who should be reading Dore's book have the time, inclination and intelligence to move beyond such PowerPoint sentences as: 'the Japanese economy is not a special case after all' (Porter *et al.*: 118); 'Japan must make universities the center of its innovation strategy'; and 'Japan must base its innovation strategy on competition rather than on collaboration' (ibid.: 153).

Dore's concern is, first, to outline the important differentiating characteristics of the Japanese economic system as they existed around 1990 when the so-called 'bubble' burst and when Japanese themselves were more or less happy with the way things were. These centred on four

factors: the structure of the corporation, relational trading, inter-competitor co-operation, and a strong role for government. Together they constituted a society of long-term commitments, in which the firm was viewed as a community of stakeholders (employees, customers, suppliers and subcontractors, creditors, and so on) rather than as the property of shareholders. The shaping of the modern Japanese corporation (which, legally, is not so different from a British or American corporation) was facilitated by four events historically: the Second World War, the post-war Labour Movement and its militancy, the development of stable cross-shareholdings, and a reliance on debt finance.

Relational banking and relational employment were accompanied by relational trading, or the pattern of inter-firm trading which generated mutual obligations between companies and their suppliers. The Japanese generally, for one reason or another, have generally been more inclined towards co-operative, rather than competitive, adversarial patterns of relations. Here Dore, in passing, shows how culture-bound is the idea of 'competitiveness' propounded by Porter. For example, market share—criticized by Porter—is, in Japanese eyes, the most direct measure of a company's competitiveness (Dore, p. 26). Second, it is not just a matter of the price and quality of its products that determine a company's competitiveness. Rather, competition in relational trading is measured by 'the purchaser's subjective assessment of willing effort to improve price and quality' (p. 37). It is the fact that excessive competition, although virtually impossible to define precisely, tends to offend the norms of decent behaviour in Japan (p. 41) that led to 'administrative guidance' by the country's bureaucrats. Dore's own term for the ways by which the various government ministries managed excessive competition through different kinds of cartels is 'umpire state' (rather than Johnson's 'developmental state' vis-à-vis America's 'regulatory state').

All in all, Dore argues that two different mechanisms worked to create 'the system-ness' of Japan's economic system. One of these was institutional interlock between such interrelated practices as lifetime employment, long-term, obligated customer-market supplier relations, and long-term committed equity capital, which enabled trust to prevail over contracts, long-term over short-term views, and so on. The other was motivational congruence and the consistency of explanations for certain kinds of behaviour in a wide range of economic and social situations.

Having outlined the way things were, Dore proceeds, in the second part of his book, to look at a broad range of factors affecting Japanese dispositions to behave in certain ways, and thus affecting the institu-

tions that mould those dispositions. As he puts it about the forces now changing the 'system':

The factors range from unwilling social evolutionary changes in class structure, or in the distribution of material and social capital, to changing interest-group objectives based on changing perceptions of self-interest, ideological influences, technological change, and globalization. They cover the whole gamut of modes of coercion, modes of persuasion, and modes of production [p. 48].

In examining these changes, Dore shows how the American model has begun to take root, regardless of 'the defects of American society', 'the excesses of American boardroom salaries', and Americans' 'self-righteous arrogance in trade talks' and 'hectoring advice on economic policy' (p. 55). He then juxtaposes this model with different aspects of Japanese society—long-term value changes, gender and the family, and class and equality. He shows how advocates for change have called for adaptations to be made to lifetime employment and insiderism in the face of global financial markets, the need for capital and increases in shareholder leverage (all the stock options, share buy-backs, auditing reforms and so on called for by Porter). He then traces actual changes in corporate governance (everything from employment relations, enterprise unions, and cross-shareholdings, on the one hand, to restructuring, dividends and payout ratios, and pensions and shareholder pressure, on the other) which suggest a move from favouring employees to favouring shareholders, before assessing whether the employee-favouring firm stands a chance in the future (the answer: probably not much).

When it comes to relational trading between firms, relational banking, and the solidarity within mutually trading *keiretsu*, advocates for reform as a matter of principle are not so vociferous. Actual change is certainly taking place, but not as much or as dramatically as reported in the Western financial press. In particular, subcontracting patterns are not changing substantially, while cross-shareholding arrangements have for the most part held up.

Rather more signs of change are to be found, however, in the competition/co-operation balance among market competitors in Japan, where deregulation has played a considerable part in loosening the limits on competition. 'The sense that each industry constitutes a community whose member firms have some kind of minimal duty to help each other' (p. 146) has certainly weakened during the course of the 1990s, although Dore provides two or three impressive examples of continued industry solidarity. All in all, the balance between co-operation and competitiveness is likely to depend in the future on the role of the bu-

reaucracy in Japan's economy. Here the really imponderable factor is the quality and prestige of the civil service itself. Once seen to be an independent and disinterested force working for the people, Japanese bureaucrats found themselves the focus of media attention several times during the 1990s as one or other of their number was discovered to have been making personal profit from government-directed transactions. Part of the problem has been the political system which has never really been anything other than corrupt, so that until politicians get their act together and learn to rule as well as reign, the civil service will always find itself in a difficult position.

After turning aside to take a look at the German economic system, which he sees as broadly comparable to that of Japan, Dore sums up by asking whether 'nice guys finish last?' It would seem so. Reformers, both inside and outside Japan, seem to be having their way and, in the process, contributing to the tendency to 'increase inequality, increase the ruthlessness of competition, destroy the patterns of cooperation on which social cohesion rests, and thus promise to degrade the quality of life' (p. 220). For the fair-minded Dore, this is little short of tragedy. True, changes may be slow, but they are seemingly sure, and so are likely in the end to herald the triumph of bottom-line-ism in Japan as elsewhere—unless, that is:

The coming bursting of the Wall Street bubble is more cataclysmic than a 'correction' and real depression in the dominant economy gives enough backing to 'global capitalism in crisis' talks, [that] things could change ... But, if the hiccups in the system are not greater than, say, those produced by the 1987 Black Monday stock market fall, in the long run vice will prevail over virtue [p. 221].

In spite of his overall pessimism, Dore reckons that Japan is more likely to survive the stock market capitalist onslaught than Germany – first, because the Japanese have a stronger sense of their country's cultural and racial distinctness; second, because their 'corporatism' is more holistic and serves 'national' rather than 'class' interests; and third, because of their neighbours Korea and China, each of which is currently wrestling with American 'corruption' of its (Confucian) soul. Moreover, present trends suggest that in 20 years' time, China and the other East Asian economies will anyway have eclipsed American might. In which case, the ball game will be totally new. All of which leads to the hope that maybe—just maybe—current American activities in the Middle East will end up in 'imperial overstretch' and serious global economic recession before a new, and hopefully more pleasant, age of capitalism flour-

ishes. That Saddam Hussein should end up indirectly as saviour of a fairer, community-centred capitalist system, however, would be an irony of ironies that only history could imagine.

It will be clear from this review that, when it comes to comparing the work of two scholars highly respected in their different fields, I remain unconvinced by the business school approach taken by Porter. Of course, he makes a number of good and relevant points, but, so far as I can judge, they have been made before and therefore do not contribute anything new to the discussion of what 'should' be done to jump-start the Japanese economy. For his part, Dore, too, summarizes a lot of former arguments, but with a cultural depth and vision that not even Porter's Japanese co-authors can begin to match. At the same time, he frames his overall assessment of the Japanese economy within a much broader critical discussion of the place of capitalism in our modern 'post-industrial' societies, and provides us with philosophical reflections that Porter clearly cannot begin to entertain. If only the Nobel Committee were to name Dore as the next recipient of its economics prize (as vain a hope as the ultimate victory of Japanese-style welfare capitalism)! His integrity is too scarce a resource to be ignored in an age when academic scholarship is fast turning into little more than marketing strategy and competitive self-promotion.

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Daniel Arghiros, *Democracy, Development and Decentralization in Provincial Thailand*. Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, Nordic Institute of Asian Studies, Democracy in Asia Series, no. 8, 2001. 308 pp. Paperback ISBN 0-7007-1523-1.

In recent years the literature on political change and democratization in Thailand has expanded, probably in response to the diminishing role of the state bureaucracy and to pressures for liberalization. The literature has focused on understanding the changing role of the national politics, vote buying, money politics, corruption, cronyism and nepotism, reforms of the bureaucracy, and new modes of interaction between the state apparatus and political parties. Another strand has explored the links between NGOs and the bureaucracy, but rarely beyond the national, urban and provincial levels.

This book by Arghiros adds an important dimension to the literature by switching the perspective to electoral and factional politics at the rural and local level and its integrated relationship at the provincial and national levels. By adopting a bottom-up approach to elections, the book attempts to trace the rise of new classes and changing power relations in society. This perspective is extended to focus on decentralization and devolution of administrative and fiscal powers to elected bodies at both central (parliament), provincial (Provincial Administrative Organization PAO), and the local levels (Subdistrict Administrative Organization SAO).

Democratic decentralization has apparently received support from both the left and right, but the legacy of bureaucratic authoritarianism leads to obstruction from conservative forces and a paradoxical tendency whereby the extension of local government powers strengthens rather than limits the state's influence over local affairs. The explanatory model of the book refers to only two variables: vote-buying and political clientelism but sees decentralization as a political device and not merely a technical exercise.

The book is divided into nine chapters including the introduction and conclusion. Chapter 2 gives a comprehensive historical account of the transition from a bureaucratic polity to a bourgeois polity as one where provincial and big business elites dominate. Chapter 3 moves to the central plains district, Klang, with specific emphasis on one constituent subdistrict called Ban Thung. This subdistrict consists of five administrative villages and about 450 households and 3,000 residents. Both chapters deal with local elections of businessmen politicians who either become local leaders (often described as godfathers [*jao pho*]) or are bankrolled by them.

The next four chapters focus on case-study material based on the author's fieldwork on local factional politics. Chapter 4 discusses competition for the position of subdistrict head and notes that the winners in Thailand's new local electoral politics are those prepared to use money (estimates claim that about half of the votes cast throughout Thailand were bought, while 70-90 percent of votes cast in the Northeast involved an exchange of money). Chapter 5 examines the impact of democratic decentralization on provincial council elections. Chapter 6 analyses villagers' participation in three general elections over a five-year period (1990-95) which includes a military coup. Chapter 7 turns to provincial council elections and the general election of 1996.

Chapter 8 explores the level of generalization and validity of the case-studies examined in the previous chapters. It re-examines the relationship between the impact of recent decentralization reforms aimed at empowering subdistrict local government bodies and the use of money as a means of gaining influence. The conclusion is that the bureaucratic polity is very much alive in the countryside, thus democratization in general and especially democratic decentralization has not translated into greater freedom for the majority of the rural population. This is a reflection of the state's emphasis on local leaders as a medium for bringing development to their communities, which explains why candidatures are so attractive for legal and illegal business. The term 'representative clientelism' defines the electoral politics of contemporary Thailand and denotes a specific type of vertical network held together by the distribution of money and development grants. Its core is the mechanism of manipulative giving, which defines electoral contests at all levels. But the terrains over which the electoral contests are fought are entirely fashioned by the state.

Elections often yield representatives who are only a little more accountable than are non-elected civil servants. Patronage and mutually beneficial relations between bureaucrats and the commercial elite mean that power remains concentrated within this sphere. The result is that the benefits of democratic decentralization at the community and provincial levels tend to be captured by local capitalists. Candidates who make use of tightly run networks of canvassers, vote-buying and political patronage are also the ones who most probably win the elections.

The book's emphasis on case-studies begs the question whether the author sometimes stretches his arguments too far. For instance, there is a lack of emphasis on the role of ideology and institutions in the promotion of certain types of non-participatory democratization, and es-

pecially on the significance of conservative ideology which tries to preserve status quo. In addition, Arghiros's dismissal of radical development thinking is problematic as it fails to take account of the existence of between 10- 20,000 NGOs, many of which are concerned with various types of alternative development. This contrasts with the evidence of the author's own informants who, for example, note that 'Without a doubt, it is the poor who make money for the rich', and 'The rich ride on the necks of the poor' (p. 56). The question as to why workers and landless farmers do not have any interest-based political representation is not presented here.

In conclusion, the book represents a significant contribution to the literature on Thai local elites. Its main strength lies in its exploration of certain key themes in relation to local politics: poor and marginalized rural people's participation (or lack of it); the role of religious leaders and monks who act as canvassers; and the influence of other individuals and groups. As such, it makes a valuable contribution to our understanding of bottom-up politics by its uncompromising exploration of elections at the village and subdistrict level. One major conclusion is that, seen from the rural voters' perspective, 'national elections are of little significance; local elections are what matters'. Nonetheless, it seems that democracy is more evident in discourse than practice as it represents a continuation of hierarchical and authoritarian traditions of administrative rule: the poor as a social category are routinely subjected to intimidation and even their voting behaviour can be detected, despite 'secret' balloting. The reluctance of the state to devolve substantive powers to the local level is a major constraint to increasing popular participation in local government. Money will continue to define electoral politics and political parties will continue to be weak and in a state of flux.

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Michael Jacobsen and Ole Bruun (eds), *Human Rights and Asian Values—Contesting National Identities and Cultural Representations in Asia*. Richmond, Surrey: Curzon, Nordic Institute of Asian Studies Series, 2000. 330 pp. Hard cover ISBN 0-7007-1212-7; paperback ISBN 0-7007-1213-5.

The 14 topical chapters in this book derive from papers presented at a workshop held in Copenhagen in May 1997. The book deals with topics of quite general relevance to the discourse on human rights and Asian values and is therefore of interest even though the chapters build on papers delivered in 1997.

The book opens with an introductory chapter by the editors on the Asian values discourse in general. The editors note that their aim is to broaden the perspective of human rights and Asian values to be understood as a global concern, guarding human rights against political and cultural myth-making.

The authors of the 14 different chapters represent a range of disciplines, including Asian studies, political science, sociology, history, law and anthropology. Their geographic locations also reflect an interesting variation, coming as they do from several countries in Asia (the Philippines, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Vietnam), in addition to the more Westernized backgrounds of Australia, Denmark, England, Iceland, Ireland, Norway and USA.

In his contribution, Edward Friedman discusses the Asian values discourse from the angle that human rights are not Western alone, and concludes that what is at question is not a matter of different values East or West, but an issue of the policies of ruling groups at particular moments of history. Michael Freeman then discusses concepts of Asian values and human rights in the context of culture, taking his point of departure in a recognition of the complexity and mutability in this area. He emphasizes a need for dialogue in the interpretation of human rights principles, and the protection of human rights as necessary for genuine dialogue. Joseph Chan debates human rights and Asian values in terms of 'thick' and 'thin' accounts of human rights. He asks how the specificities of a particular society affect the understanding and content of universal human rights. Drawing on the examples of freedom of expression in the case of pornography, Chan discusses the Asian values discourse as an issue of extent and legitimacy of systematic ideological or cultural interpretations of human rights, and the significance that this has on Asian societies.

Maria Serena I. Diokno focuses on human rights in the Philippines. She discusses and questions reasons for rejecting international standards of human rights, particularly (over-)emphasis on civil and political rights, the international human rights regime as a product of Western thought and tradition without applicability to Asia, and the use of human rights conditionality by Western governments in relation to aid and trade. Vo Van Ai provides the reader with views on human rights and Asian values in Vietnam, discussing paradoxes and contradictions of the discourse in the current political system, and links to Vietnam's tradition. The author supports the existence of an original Vietnamese concept of human rights, arguing that this is based more on ethics than on law, and founded in Buddhism and Confucianism.

Jon O. Halldorsson looks at Indonesia as the cradle of Asian values consciousness and focuses his discussion on the role of Islam and the national ideology of *Pancasila*. Hugo Stokke bases his chapter on a discussion of whether modernization is also Westernization, and whether one is possible without the other. This is exemplified through the cases of Singapore and Malaysia. Tine Gammeltoft and Rolf Hernø focus on reproductive rights and economic rights in Vietnam, discussing Vietnam's policies and practice against a background of selected international human rights instruments. David Kelly discusses freedom as an Asian value, taking his point of departure in historical sociology.

Marina Svensson's contribution is, in the eyes of the present reviewer, possibly the most important in the volume. Discussing the Chinese debate on Asian values and human rights, Svensson argues for a clarification of underlying assumptions behind the Asian values discourse, including that of 'Confucian' values. She warns against trying to discover proto-human rights within Confucianism, arguing simultaneously that such a search is unnecessary, because the absence of an indigenous human rights tradition does not preclude the contemporary realization of human rights. Discussing also official and dissident Chinese views on human rights and the development of the Chinese discourse on human rights since the late 1970s, Svensson concludes that China bases its claims more on economic and political factors than on culture.

Mab Huang discusses Chinese liberalism through examples from the 1920s to the 1970s, including parts of the Taiwanese experience, and concludes that there is a genuine dialogue on Chinese liberalism and human rights. Colin Campbell and Avril McDonald look at states of emergency and human rights protection, assessing cases in China, India and Malaysia and their impact vis-à-vis constitutional provisions

and human rights. Richard Pierre Claude deals with human rights education in the Philippines as an issue of international and constitutional law and of politics, providing perspectives from Cambodia, Thailand, Japan and Malaysia. Contrasting the cases of South Korea and Singapore, Deborah J. Milly in the final chapter discusses foreign migrant workers as vulnerable groups at particular risk of human rights violations.

The book does not deal in detail with particular points of the discourse on human rights and Asian values, but rather is like a sketchbook introducing different angles of the discourse. A thorough cross-disciplinary discussion of one or two of the topics might have strengthened the book's contribution to the academic discussion on the universality of human rights and how to provide this debate with legitimacy across cultures. The discourse on human rights universality being one not least of international law, one or more contributions on the legal aspects of the universality discourse in relation to Asian values would also have provided a useful framework. However, the range of disciplines represented by the authors provides the reader with interesting and heterogeneous perspectives that serve to underscore the diversity of the discourse of the issue of cultural relativism in relation to human rights and Asian values. The essays may well serve as useful appetizers to readers interested in specific topics in the discourse or in perspectives of a particular discipline.

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Can-Seng Ooi, *Cultural Tourism and Tourism Cultures. The Business of Mediating Experiences in Copenhagen and Singapore*. Copenhagen: Copenhagen Business School Press, 2002. 277 pp. Paperback ISBN 87-630-0091-1.

Not too long ago, tourism was considered a service industry that provided only a minor contribution to the overall economy of most countries. With the breathtaking expansion of international travel in recent years—the 9/11 terrorist attack, the Iraq war and the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) outbreak notwithstanding—the situation has changed dramatically. It is now the world's largest industry, affecting the lives of many people directly and indirectly. The tourism industry

has become a key part of the economic development strategy of many countries. Tourism is thus an important phenomenon, which deserves social scientists' increased attention.

Can-Seng Ooi's highly original book on cultural tourism and tourism cultures in Copenhagen and Singapore focuses on how cultural mediators appropriate destination cultures and package them into products of cultural tourism and on how their mediation affects the consumption of the products and influences the host society. The book is organized into nine chapters and comes with a 20-page references section, more than 50 attractive black-and-white photos and tables as well as an excellent index, which makes it very easy to quickly locate special areas of interest.

As a Singaporean who has lived for quite a few years in Copenhagen, Ooi is in a privileged position to write about the two capitals' approaches to cultural tourism. The two locations of course differ immensely. Singapore, branded as 'new' (formerly 'instant') 'Asia' in tourism-authority-speak, is a tropical island city-state with a poly-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-lingual population of 4 million, and also (by far) Southeast Asia's most developed country. 'Wonderful Copenhagen' (in the lingo of the tourist marketers), on the other hand, has an ethnically more homogeneous population and is justifiably famous for the Little Mermaid, H.C. Andersen, smørrebrød, and perhaps Christiania, among other things. The vast cultural differences between these destinations, however, by no means weaken, but rather strengthen Ooi's theoretical and empirically grounded argument that mediators play similar roles in both locations.

Chapter 1 provides an introductory overview and explains some key concepts. These key concepts (especially mediation, decentring and recentring and Ooi's dialogic understanding of tourism), together with a theoretical framework, are further elaborated in chapters 2 and 3. Chapters 4 and 5 focus on the contexts of tourism and look into mediated consumption and the versatile tourist as well as tourism economics and strategies. Chapters 6, 7 and 8 focus on selected cultural products and exemplify certain types of mediation by looking into destination branding, living cultures, history and art in both Copenhagen and Singapore. The concluding chapter 9 revisits the key issues of the book and also provides an outlook as to where Ooi's original theoretical framework could be applied other than in tourism research.

As I believe that Ooi is making a rather important theoretical contribution not only to tourism research, but also to cultural studies in general, some of the key concepts used in his research deserve special men-

tion. While 'mediation' is often understood as a process to help consumers, i.e. as an enhancing and non-intrusive process, Ooi argues convincingly that the cultures that are packaged into products for tourist consumption are also influenced in the process.

Decentring and recentring are two aspects of cultural mediation, which take place simultaneously and dialogically. In terms of tourism, culture is decentred at two levels. First, 'tourists are removed from the local embeddings and have limited resources to truly appreciate local cultures', and second, 'the packaged culture can only approximate the "real" culture' (p. 41). The gap between the local culture and the tourist is attempted to be closed in the process of recentring, during which selected local cultural elements are accentuated and aestheticized for tourists. Tourists are also offered easy-to-digest cultural snippets and lessons. While many tourists desire to experience the world-of-the-local, they are and can only be engaged in the world-of-presenting-the-local (p. 184). The dialogic concepts which Ooi employs, such as heteroglossia, polyphony, genre, chronotope and the carnivalesque, are all reinterpretations of Mikhael Bakhtin's colourful, tremendously rich and useful terminology.

Ooi's choice of concepts is influenced by the so-called post-modernist discourse, but is refreshingly different from many of the post-modernists. He is very clear in his use of language and provides an attractive theoretical framework that never threatens to descend into obscurity. Avoiding 'de(con)struction' (preferring 'reconstruction') and the temptation of black-versus-white structuralist dichotomies—and perhaps in line with a more 'Asian', syncretic approach—the author adopts a perspective of a continuous dialogue with his topics.

The question arises whether such a theoretical framework may not be 'too all-encompassing' and—like, for instance, psychoanalysis—neither falsifiable nor contestable from within. Ooi certainly does not adopt such a neo-positivist or critical-realist conceptualization of theory (which is at the core of such a question) and has more of a Foucauldian 'toolbox' approach in mind, where conceptual tools are used eclectically.

Space does not allow me to place equal emphasis on the descriptive strengths of Ooi's work, in addition to its theoretical forte. Even a reader extremely familiar with Singapore is bound to learn new things about the city. Although this reviewer is not as familiar with Copenhagen, I suspect that the same can be said about the description of cultural tourism in that capital.

The empirical example offered in Ooi's book is cultural tourism. His book, however, is also a study of mediation and cultural intermediaries such as tourist agencies, radio and television producers, presenters, magazine journalists and professionals from the caring industry, to name but a few. As a consequence, Ooi makes a substantial and highly readable contribution to a sociological approach to culture, which analyses meanings that have become tangible by their transformation into commodities. He masterfully analyses these meanings within their specific social milieux.

Ooi's book is a remarkable and unique work of scholarship. For anybody interested in global tourism or a highly original sociological approach to culture, Can-Seng Ooi's book is mandatory reading.

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Arviand Rajagopal, *Politics after Television: Religious Nationalism and the Reshaping of the Indian Public*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001. 393 pp. Hard cover ISBN 0-521-64053-9.

Professor Rajagopal has written a fascinating and illuminating book about the rise of Hindu nationalism and its transformative impact on the Indian politics. The book analyses the skilful use of political space afforded to the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), a party that for many decades did not hold much sway among Indian voters. While political space creates the possibility for a political party to reshape its fortunes, whether or not this transformation occurs depends on how skilfully the political party is able to exploit the emerging opportunities.

The failure of the state in India to initiate and sustain a high rate of economic growth had created profound disenchantment within the populace at large. The profound disenchantment was reflected in the declining influence of the Congress Party in India. This led to the emergence of what Rajagopal describes as 'non-committed voters', i.e. voters who were willing to cast their lot in with any party willing to articulate an alternative vision about India. The political space created by the declining fortunes of the Congress Party was skilfully exploited by the BJP, which thereby began its ascendancy in the Indian political environ-

ment. BJP was able to forge an alliance between the proponents of economic liberalization and the proponents of Hindu nationalism. The strategies used by BJP in reshaping the Indian political environment, and the underlying reasons for its success, forms the central thrust of this study.

A major theme of the book is that BJP's success in reshaping the Indian political environment was crucially influenced by the broadcast of the *Ramayana* series on Indian television. This ancient Indian epic resonates strongly with the Indian public. Indeed, as Rajagopal (p. 87) notes, 'The power that has been attributed to the *Ramayana* is extraordinary—to know *Ramayana*, is to know India, it is said.' The decision to broadcast this series was made by the Congress party with the goal of enlarging the television audience. Within a few months of its launch, market estimates suggested that the viewing public had increased from 40 to 80 million per week. The symbolic significance was profound in that *Ramayana* offered 'a way of talking not just about faith and the epic past, but what kind of leadership a society required, and the mode of public engagement appropriate for its members' (p. 119).

The broadcast of this series provided BJP with a perfect opportunity to sell the Hindu identity, or what Rajagopal describes as 'Retail Hindutva'. In other words, it furnished the context within which the BJP could create a new vision of what India would be like under a new leadership. The other element which Rajagopal draws attention to is the notion of the 'split public'. This refers to the discrepancy between the goal of the modernizing elite to create a secular society and its inability to fulfil this mission in its entirety. The implications of this division became very apparent in the context of the Ram Jannabhumī movement, when the Vindhya Hindu Parishad proposed a foundation ceremony for the proposed Ram temple closed to the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya. The English language press viewed this movement with alarm, fearing that it would threaten stability in the country, whereas the Hindi language press exhibited much more diversity in its coverage. Rajagopal notes that this split provided the Hindu nationalists with a strategic resource which they were able to effectively use to garner support, but he notes that this support is somewhat unstable given the underlying contradictions that exist within the Hindutva project.

The book makes a contribution in several different areas and for that reason is likely to be of interest to scholars in different disciplines. It is a treatise in the political sociology of India as it explores the shifting political fortunes of the different political parties in the Indian polity and how the changing political environment was skilfully exploited by the

BJP. It is also an exploration of how television as a medium dramatically altered the landscape and how this challenged the different political parties to devise strategies that created both new opportunities as well as new threats. Finally, the book also provides an in-depth look into the BJP and the factors that led to its shaping as a potent political force. Chapter 6 'Hindutva Goes Global' is particularly illuminating in documenting how the Hindutva project drew global support, although the manner in which the project was conceived in the Indian context was undoubtedly different from how it was conceived globally.

Overall, this is a book well worth reading. It is extremely well written and well documented and provides an illuminating account of how politics was transformed in India. Although the book provides an insightful analysis as to how BJP gained power, it is unclear if the dynamics of gaining power will reflect the dynamics entailed in maintaining power. The author does note that the party continues to be politically weak even as it increases its cultural acceptability. A disjunction between the two is interesting and invites greater exploration. My second observation is that while the content of Hindu nationalism was undoubtedly different from its predecessor (viz. the Congress Party), in my view, both represent an idealistic mode of thinking. Hindu nationalism was symbolically concerned with a return to the mythical past whereas the Congress Party was trying to make India strong through a focus on the developmental state. The project of the Congress did not succeed; it remains to be seen if BJP will prove any more successful.

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