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Book Review

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Japan Study as a Public Good in Asia

Springer, 2019, 80pp

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As one of Kobe University Social Science Research Series, this book aims to describe and clarify the common problems confronting countries in Asia. It is a collection of studies on declining birthrate and aging, the rapid technological innovation and society changes, and the recovery from natural disasters from researches in Japan, China, South Korea, Singapore, and Indonesia.

This book is incredibly concise and readable. It is consisted of 7 chapters by top scholars and is organized in three parts. The first part focuses strictly on “Declining Birthrate and Aging” (Chapter 1-2), the second part explores “Technological Innovation and Social Change” (Chapter 3-5) and the third part deals with “Robust Society against Natural Disasters” (Chapter 6-7). Each author sets out to identify an issue they perceive to be important to the theme of public good in Asia, rather than providing an overall review of the literature on the Asia Studies. The result is an incredibly extensive set of papers with new findings that provide important contributions to our knowledge concerning several controversial problems throughout the countries in Asia, particularly in Northeast Asia.

In the opening chapter “Japanese Social Welfare System Reform and Transformation of Social Governance”, Jin-wen Song and Lin Huang focus on the critical discriminants for governance transformation and the transition of the welfare-state in Japan from the perspective of the relationship between multiple segments such as the state and market, government and private sector, family and individual, to gain insight into the truth about the transformation of the social

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welfare system in Japan. The chapter starts with some basic concepts and understanding of Japan's social welfare reform, then goes on to discuss the institutional reform and transformation in management format, and ends with the outcomes and problems of the institutional reform. In conclusion, the paper points out that the institutional reform of Japan's welfare system since 1980s does have some reasonable aspects like the expansion of social welfare entitlement and better service provision, but the provision of welfare service is constrained in its format, method, funding, process, and outcome, which make it limited to fulfil a thorough reformation to reach a level of institutional necessary for delivering the idea of welfare society while the Japan's welfare reforms is going forward and aiming to reach a new social government of community welfare.

The second chapter, "Aging Population, Decreasing Birthrate and National Security: Searching for the Possibility of Cooperation between Japan and Korea" by Kijeong Nam, in light of the problems that most East Asian countries are experiencing, discusses and compares how Japan and South Korea perceive the problems of declining birthrate and aging that has led to security concerns, slower economic growth as well as financial deficits. It also considers the possibility of cooperation between Japan and South Korea to promote regional cooperation and peace. Nam illustrates Japan's defensive power and population problems with figures and analysis in efforts to better explain how the financial problems and long-term demographic issues resulted from the decreasing birthrate and aging would directly influence the formulation of defense policy in Japan. Similarly, the national defense strategy in South Korea is also related to its population problems, with profound impact on the national defense policy. The National Reform Basic Law and the Basic Act for Human Resource Development were enacted in 2006 to downsize national personnel through technology-intensive reform. To sum up, the fast-changing demographic structure slows economic growth and increases the welfare cost, both further limits military spending and growth, and weakens military competition.

Chapter 3, "The Impact of Modern Technology on Japan Studies" by Benjamin Wai-ming Ng, examines the impacts of IT technologies, such as the use of word processing, computers, the Internet from the 1980s to the present, evaluating the pros and cons of using modern technology. Modern technology is now a requirement for research and teaching but it could not shape the ups and downs of Japanese study for it is shared by scholars in all fields and disciplines all over the world. It concludes that computing technology increases the pace but cannot determine the direction of research in Japanese studies. Computing does not necessarily improve the research quality; though it helps gather data, makes it easy to communicate with scholar and pro-

motes research profiles, revolutionizes quantitative research but it may also create research ethnic problems.

In chapter 4, “Social Technology Research in Japan as a Public Good”, Qiu-ju Wang introduces the questions concerning technology with the trends and current situation of social technology in Japan, which has experienced different stages and involves a deeper challenge under the background of globalization. It is identified that natural and social technology aim to solve social problems, which inevitably engage the government and planning. Anyway, the chapter presents new methodology and research models by improving the application of science and technology in a safer and more comfortable environment to benefit the public with “comprehensive research” methodology and through flexible interdisciplinary collaboration. They are valuable experiential insights and research models to Asia and the world.

Chapter 5 “The New Overseas Chinese in Japan: What Case Studies Tell Us”, presents an empirical study by investigating how the new overseas Chinese compare to the old overseas Chinese in regards to their daily lives, work and relationship with Japanese society. Both interviews and questionnaire were used in collecting data from those who have lived in Japan for more than five years and been employed in a university or done research work in major companies. The study shows that the new overseas Chinese are integrating with the Japanese culture but they do not intend to naturalize in Japan as they maintain a strong sense of belonging to the culture of their mother country. So that it is not easy for the Japanese society to become a multicultural society and to achieve co-existence with foreigners including overseas Chinese.

Chapters 6 and 7 deal with the problems related to disasters. Ikaputra argues in chapter 6 that the level of vulnerability people with different abilities might experience is not always indicated by the scale of the disaster, for they are excluded from disaster relief activities not only due to stigma and discrimination but also a lack of understanding and knowledge about their existence by the government or relief organization, the suffering of Jogjakarta (Yogyakarta) earthquake in 2006 and its post-earthquake experience are presented as typical examples which show that people with different abilities should be cared about not only in terms of physical barriers but also non-physical ones such as economic and social barriers, in particular, the support to the elderly and children. A case study investigated by Mei Huang in Chapter 7 focuses on the impact of different types of media advertisement and the interactive impact of destination image on visiting intention to a post-disaster destination by comparing severely damaged regions with other regions in Japan after the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake. Two hypotheses are proposed and argued with in the study, (1) there is no difference between severely-affected

disaster areas and other affected areas in how destination attraction perceptions positively affect visiting intention, and (2) the impact of the radiation exposure risk factor impact on visiting intention differs between severely-affected areas and other-affected areas. It concludes that external advertising must be chosen mainly during post-disaster destination recovery, with the combination of as many forms of media as possible.

Overall, this is a book worth reading for those who are interested in gaining new knowledge and perspectives into Asia studies, for finding new approaches to those contentious issues. It is realized that Japanese studies in Asia are increasing necessary as a public good while people chewing the multidisciplinary content of the chapters which making a particular unique contribution to the study of Japan and also the Asia countries. It is particularly hard to give an overall flavor of the book. I hope that I have provided some useful discussion about what I see as the book's most intriguing aspects. In short, the book is not a bad gift for the serious thinker in your life.

On the other hand, given the state of the heated problems today, *Japan Study as a Public Good in Asian* is unlikely to provide overwhelming solutions. It is suggested to carry out studies from specific perspectives on the burning topics concerning infectious diseases, juvenile delinquency, resource shortage, etc., in order to acquire a more comprehensive understanding of Asia problems as well as to provide exemplificative data to the world study.