



Japan Through the Looking Glass

Alan Macfarlane

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This entertaining and endlessly surprising book takes us on an exploration into every aspect of Japanese society from the most public to the most intimate. A series of meticulous investigations gradually uncovers the multi-faceted nature of a country and people who are even more extraordinary than they seem. Our journey encompasses religion, ritual, martial arts, manners, eating, drinking, hot baths, geishas, family, home, singing, wrestling, dancing, performing, clans, education, aspiration, sexes, generations, race, crime, gangs, terror, war, kindness, cruelty, money, art, imperialism, emperor, countryside, city, politics, government, law and a language that varies according to whom you are speaking. Clear-sighted, persistent, affectionate, unsentimental and honest - Alan Macfarlane shows us Japan as it has never been seen before.

Japan Through the Looking Glass Details

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From Reader Review Japan Through the Looking Glass for online ebook

Jana M says

Tahle kniha mohla být skvělá, ale není. Podle m? si autor nevyty?il publikum ani ?ánr. Nechápala jsem, zda to psal pro laiky a nadšence do Japonska, nebo pro kolegy antropology. Tomu odpovídal i jazyk, kdy n?která slova byla p?íliš odborná, na druhou stranu k vysoké odbornosti chyb?ly zdroje a odkazy v textu a další podklady. Nejv?tší slabinou knihy je však její chyb?jící struktura, pokud by každá kapitola byla rozpadnutá do více podkapitol a více graficky rozd?leny, ?etlo by se mi v ní mnohem lépe. I p?es její slabiny jsem se však dozv?d?la spoustu zajímavostí o Japonsku a Japoncích.

Bernadette says

The historical references are quite interesting. But the author does not *get* Japan, despite all his studying and trips here. Actually some parts were rather insightful.

Barbora Romanovská says

Ideální kniha k rozjímání ve stínu strom?! Neot?elý a do širokého kontextu zasazený pohled na japonskou společnost a její kulturu - um?ní, náboženství, politiku, tradice, rodinu. Zase ve mne Japonsko svou jinakostí vzbudilo touhu jej navštívit a blíže jej poznat.

Luciano Zorzetto says

This book is interesting if you want to dig in the Japanese mindset beyond the public image of pachinko, karaoke and sushi.

I liked it as a Japanese enthusiast on a binge of "Japan reading" before a trip. The chapters about Time and Ideas were really insightful.

However, it has several slow parts - namely, the beginning and the chapter about religion. I also had somewhat unrealistic expectations and I was disappointed when it glossed over aspects of the society that I wanted to know more about, but this is no encyclopedia.

Pet peeve: the recurring comparisons to Britain sounded a bit grating, with a faint whiff of "Britain may be on the forefront of social evolution".

Jirka says

moc p?kn? zpracované, vtipné, glosy z osobních zážitk? :) a tenké ke ?tení, pokud to neodložíte jako já a pak nem?žete m?síce najít :)

Myriadofsins says

Embarrassingly bad. It has all stuffiness of an airless university lecture (he never lets you forget he is a professor at Cambridge) and all the prejudices of a old white man's memoir. The author sets out from the beginning that he has a) never lived in Japan, b) has only visited 6 times and c) his Japanese collaborators didn't always agree with his conclusions. The book is badly organized and is clearly cobbled together from his various talks and papers. His grasp of women's issues is particularly unsympathetic and uniformed. If you want to learn about Japanese culture I heartily suggest trying a JSTOR search on specific topics and P. Sean Bramble's excellent and succinct 'Culture Shock! Japan'.

Peachesxyz says

an eye opener..beautifully written and easily read, this is one of the very few books on my shelf that will be read again

Bryan Crossland says

Very interesting, well written and insightful. As a "japanophile" and reader of Japanese literature I found the insights and research very intriguing and eye opening. Great read if you want to know more about Japanese culture why it's not different, it just is.

Jarkko Laine says

This book offers lots of interesting ideas and thoughts about Japan, but lacks in the writing style which is quite academic and thus uninspiring.

However, a good read for anyone interested in cultures and Japan in particular.

Filoména says

Japonsko za zrcadlem není kniha, jež by si kladla nároky na zevrubné objasnění japonské kultury. Macfarlane se pokusil z každé oblasti postihnout to zásadní, ale p?edevším všechny kousky nechat propojené, což je hlavní myšlenkou celého textu: Japonsko je zemí kontextu, souvislostí, propojenosti, vzájemné závislosti. Nic - a? už ?lov?k ?i kulturní prvek - nestojí samo o sob?, odst?ižené od situace, okolností, jednoduše od okolí. To se snažil Macfarlane p?edevším ukázat a domnívám se, že úsp?šn?.

Samozřejmě, p?i takovémto p?ístupu se nemohl vyhnout určitým, místy značným, zjednodušením a zobeč?ování, nijak za zlé mu to ale nemám. Jako antropolog byl ke ?tenáři od za?átku up?ímný, p?edest?el svou výchozí pozici, popsal své p?edsudky a o?ekávání a v pr?b?hu knihy je na pat?i?ných místech op?t

připomínal. Oceňuji to, mimo jiné i právě pro tu kontextuálnost, o níž píše a již má neustále na zřeteli. Je vskutku důležité vědět, **kdo** promlouvá, bez tohoto vědomí by mělo být přijímání jakýchkoli informací obezřetné.

Macfarlane je poctivý i v přiznání, že navštívil Japonsko pouze několikrát, nezná jazyk a podstatnou část podkladů pro svou knihu získal rozhovory se svými dvěma japonskými přáteli. I to je mi sympatické. Nehraje si na nic. Studoval, přemýšlel a debatoval poctivě a pečlivě a s otevřenou myslí i srdcem a výsledek je, myslím, více než dobrý. Styl má lehký a v jiných komentářích vytýkaná akademickost mi na obtíž nijak nebyla, ať repetitivní to místy vskutku je.

Japonsko je extrémně kontextuální země bez potřeby vytvářet jasné hranice mezi protiklady. To je vnímání světa, které se na Západě nejspíš opravdu obtížně vstřebává, ale ke mně právě tahle skutečnost mluví známa. Není potřeba si vybrat, jestli černou, nebo bílou, sladký, nebo slaný, zimu, nebo léto. Prostě není. Obojí. Obojí zároveň. A dává mi to perfektní smysl. Jen je těžké snažit se to vysvětlit.

Mauk says

The book takes off a bit slow and sticks to a meditative or thoughtful tone throughout which might put some people off but I didn't mind in the least. What I really liked about this book was particularly the humble, thoughtful approach Macfarlane takes. He analyses the contradictory aspects of the Japanese society and is interested in knowing why the society is what it is. The book strikes me as well-referenced and a tad academic, again something that I find no fault in but might put off some other readers who enjoy a more fast-paced, dare I say populist touch. Not perhaps the best book for someone who has just recently become interested in Japan but a must read for anyone who really wants to understand the whys and hows of the country. Serves equally well a reader from the UK or any other country, in my view.

Terrance says

An average read that didn't manage to enlighten me on Japan in any way. Everything seemed to go in circles and only touch on the surface of many issues with constant comparisons to Britain for some reason. Alan Booth's travel books are a far better way for readers to acquaint themselves with this fascinating country.

Arend says

A book on Japan that left me knowing more about the author than about Japan.

The book is written as a long series of small vignettes, organized into chapters ("Wealth", "Ideas", etc.). I liked the episodic feel (quite Japanese), the many rich references and quotes from those who have visited Japan before (quite academic), and some of the interesting historical backgrounds to certain developments in Japanese society (he shows his grounding as an historian here).

What made me want to throw this book against the wall was the lack of awareness, an absence of critical engagement, and an overall attitude of "Japan is unknowable so let's throw my hands in the air and keep writing." His descriptions of the Japanese language and its use are full of dilettantism (he doesn't speak

Japanese), showing how second-hand his knowledge is. His discussion of women in Japanese society is apologist and sometimes appalling (his vignettes on comfort women). His analysis of bathing culture in Japan is shallow, and shows his English roots all too clearly. In the end the book feels like it is the expected return for 15 years of boondoggle trips to Japan.

Don't bother.

Karri says

Very interesting book, could not stop reading it. Even if it seems like he's trying to over-simplify / generalize way too much.

But I learnt a lot. Japan truly is even more unique than I first thought.

Daniel says

This is a very interesting book examining Japanese society. The author does have some great insights on the country, but, as he points out early in the book, not many people will be able to fully understand the society because of the contradictions. Macfarlane includes himself in this group of people, as an outsider, it would be nearly impossible for him to "get" Japanese society when the uniqueness of it is impressed upon its people from a very early age. Even Japanese have a hard time explaining their society in certain ways. If someone is interested in Japan, this book is certainly worth a read, but it merely skims some of the nuances of Japan and explains their possible origins. It certainly isn't a bad book, it just takes a while to fully get into what the author is saying.
