

Doing Business with the Japanese

By Geoffrey Bownas, David Powers, Christopher P Hood

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Below the title on the front cover of this deceptively modest paperback a large claim is printed: a one-stop guide to Japanese business practice. This claim also proves to be modest.

Articles by experienced contributors give an impressively wide-ranging introduction to the Japanese market; its scope and importance, its special characteristics and difficulties, and, in some detail, how best to approach it. The reader is even gently tempted to engage with the Japanese language; and is offered guidance on travel in the country, and on where to go for further advice and support, from officials or from booksellers.

As if this were not enough for a slim volume, there are also perceptive discussions of the current state and future prospects of the Japanese economy. Even here, complex argument is combined with practical conclusions.

Overall, a formidably comprehensive presentation succeeds in sustaining a straightforwardly encouraging lightness of touch. Right from the start, the reader is given the soundest possible advice: don't be put off by talk of recession.

A principal objective underlying and inspiring this study is the deliberate demystification of its subject. The idea that Japanese business practice is arcane, inaccessible, unfathomable and wholly beyond John Bull's comprehension is to be discarded. It is indeed about time that this vital message was more widely understood. It is exactly the right time, since there is clearly a matching understanding in Japan today of the contribution which foreign business activity can bring to press forward the reinvigoration of the economy.

The book includes a fascinating collection of success stories, written by the prize-winners themselves, which most effectively ram this point home, and incidentally leave the reader reassured that the spirit of enterprise is still alive and well in Britain, too.

The editors, following Geoffrey Bownas' clear-sighted conception of their work, and in collaboration with their many distinguished contributors, are to be congratulated on the production of a guide which many will find not merely most useful, but absolutely essential.

In his deservedly enthusiastic foreword, Professor Ronald Dore remarks that the only essay missing from this book is about the pleasures of doing business in Japan, or of being in Japan to do business. He concludes that is something readers can find out for themselves. Your present reviewer would recommend as preliminary exercises a few hours wandering through rooms of Japanese pottery, porcelain and woodblock prints in the British Museum, revisiting one or two of the greatest Japanese films, and, above all, taking selection of the most highly rated Japanese novels (so many available in excellent English translations) for the aeroplane, and for lasting enjoyment.

Sir Sydney Giffard

Her Majesty's Ambassador to Japan, 1984-86