

**"Doing Business with the Japanese: A One-stop Guide to Japanese Business Practice"
by Geoffrey Bownas, et.al.**

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Sir Stephen Gomersall, British Ambassador in Japan, wrote an opening chapter that serves as an eye opener. He states that, "British exports to Japan in 2002 were worth three times as much as to China". While tales of discrimination against foreign products were justified in the 1980s, British exports to Japan are now up 40% on their 1990 levels. Little wonder that, "in the last four years (of his tour of duty in Tokyo) there have been almost no complaints of discrimination from British suppliers".

I must disclose a conflict of interest here as I contributed a chapter that follows Sir Stephen's. Yet objectively speaking, the book, edited by three British Japan experts whose combined dealings with the country amount to a striking length of 88 years, is one of the handiest guides ever written on Japan for "doing business with the Japanese".

The tone is upbeat, as is demonstrated by the title of Sir Stephen's chapter "Don't be put off by talk of recession!" Foreign goods are finding leeway in Japan's consumer market, which has been liberalised and is no longer as compartmentalised as it was only 10 years ago. Mergers and acquisitions are on the rise month by month, so essentially Japan has become more like Britain, or for that matter, the US, the book tries to argue. And this argument does sound more convincing than before as the economy is heading upwards.

Little known in Japan and elsewhere is the fact that in the UK, the Japanese government has remained the single biggest employer bar none of college graduates through a programme called JET (The Japan Exchange and Teaching Programme). In the year 2002 it hired as many as 1,287 UK graduates. Some of the UK JET alumni have settled down in Japan and started their own businesses - like Julian Ehrhardt, whose cyber-space venture has taken off well, according to David Powers who interviewed Mr. Ehrhardt. The book also sheds light on such individuals and carries their personal case histories, both of successes and slight failures. It is hence more than an assortment of analytical articles.

Indeed, the book is an up-to-date analysis of the state of the Japanese economy, combining case histories of up to ten British individuals who have done business with the Japanese, a textbook of business "Dos" and "Don'ts", and practical guides on how to live and work in Japan with appendices full of day-to-day advice for those new in Japan. It is testament to three such astute and seasoned editors that they have managed to incorporate such diverse subjects as these into a relatively modest volume of 193 pages.

Geoffrey Bownas established the Department of Japanese Studies at Oxford University nine years after WWII, and became the

University of Sheffield's first Professor of Japanese Studies in the mid 1960s. In the early years he was taught by Hideki Kaizuka at Kyoto University. He later became a good friend of Yukio Mishima and his own pupils include Sir Stephen, whose command of Japanese is unrivalled amongst diplomats stationed in Tokyo, past and present. David Powers spent a total of almost ten years in Tokyo working with the BBC, while he frequently appeared on NHK programmes. Christopher Hood, himself a JET alumnus, interviewed Yasuhiro Nakasone many times and wrote a doctoral thesis on Nakasone's educational reforms.

So, in a nutshell, this book is a testimony of the accumulation of both knowledge and practical experience found in hardly any other nation. The only drawback is that the editors appear to cater primarily to British readers. A chapter titled "Law in Japan: A Guide for *British* Investors" should simply have stated "Investors" so as not to sound parochial, which this book most certainly is not.

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