

Union. One may hope that Japan will be able to critically examine its wartime responsibility by acknowledging that its wartime culpability extended beyond those at the Tokyo War Crimes Tribunal to civilian Japanese. The various agencies and formats of Japanese imperial propaganda reveal the extent to which the collusion between civilians, bureaucrats and military leaders collectively produced “democratic fascism” (p. 26). As postwar Japan continues to struggle in creating a coherent narrative about its moral and political responsibility of its wartime actions, Kushner’s book just may contribute to providing the historical datum necessary to foment the beginning of the Japanese state’s moral acceptance of its wartime actions in the Asian region.

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The Art of the Gut: Manhood, Power, and Ethics in Japanese Politics. By ROBIN M. LeBLANC. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2010. xix, 229 pp. \$24.95 (paper).

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Robin M. LeBlanc invites her readers to accompany her on two exciting trips to two very different localities in Japan. Literally along the way she explains what does and does not work in local level politics in Japan and in political campaigning in particular. LeBlanc presents the results of her multi-year, in-depth ethnographic studies (starting in 1999) in her two field sites before acquainting us with her main argument on the character of Japanese politics, which is that “masculinity and power seem inseparable” (p. 162).

One of our trip’s destinations is Takeno-machi, a coastal village of 30,000 on the Japan Sea, where Japan still is as rural as it can get and communal ties are still intact. This is where we meet Baba-san, the owner of a local liquor shop. As a businessman Baba-san for decades has profited from local politicians purchasing gift certificates to hand out to their supporters and those whose votes they hoped to win. Yet, facing the substantiate danger of Takeno-machi being chosen as the site of a nuclear power plant, Baba-san gives up his silent (and happily performed) support of the old-guys’ political networks and their customs, and instead becomes a driving force behind the newly formed Referendum Association. The Referendum Association’s goal was not to oppose the construction plan *per se*, but to open an avenue for public expression of citizens’ opinions on the construction plan and help shape the terms of the political discussion. Ultimately the Referendum Association aimed at bettering the quality of democracy in Japan through ensuring that the majority’s political will was being heard and maybe even followed.

The second trip takes us to Shirakawa Ward (population of 240,000) in central Tokyo, where we get to meet Takada-san, an unmarried man in his

late-30s who seemingly is in search of a job. Ever since graduating from university, Takada-san has continued his law studies on the side and helped out in his parents' building maintenance company as well as his father's election campaigns. Since Takada-san senior, a member of the Liberal Democratic Party of Japan (LDP) decided not to run again for office after almost three decades of "unbroken service in the ward assembly," his son felt called upon to demonstrate filial duty and to run for office himself, mostly in order to keep his father's seat in the family (p. 73). Takada-san junior is portrayed as an almost apolitical person with no passion for any area of public policy. He does, however, have at his command his father's closely-knit network of supporters to mobilize support and finance his campaign. In addition, it is his mother's unflagging dedication to and deep experience with political campaigning that makes success possible, despite his display throughout the campaign of dispiritedness, disinterest, and disorganization.

LeBlanc's study of the two political campaigns draws our attention to some central and well-known characteristics of Japanese politics. One of these is the relative high number of *nisei giin* or second-generation politicians in Japan, who back in the 1990s when she commenced her research comprised about one third of the members of Japan's Lower House and today hovers around one fourth. Other books on Japan's political system have already explained these relatively high numbers by pointing out the important role of the so-called *kōenkai*, the supporter groups usually made up of local business owners and leading figures of neighborhood associations, that is, the people with the ability to provide the necessary funds for a political campaign and/or mobilize fellow citizens as voters for the candidate. These support groups form over time and often are handed from one candidate to another candidate within the same political party or even within the same family. LeBlanc adds to these previous analyses a colorful picture of what agony some candidates (such as Takada-san) have to undergo in attempting to bond with his father's *kōenkai*. LeBlanc presents insights into Takada-san's conflict with his father's supporters based on generational conflicts and Takada-san's poor communication skills and lack of will. Simply hilarious is LeBlanc's narration of a *hatsumode* trip (first trip of the year to a Shinto Shrine), which Takada-san embarked on with his father's group of supporters. Out of personal distaste Takada-san chose not to join in the "raucous fellowship" (p. 87) filled with laughter and alcohol on the bus to and from the *hatsumode*, thus deliberately missing out on this opportunity of impressing upon the group "his fitness as a candidate so that they might recruit friends, family members, and neighbors to turn out for him" (p. 86).

This scene, as are many others, is so beautifully written it activates the readers' imaginative powers to the degree they can see and smell and hear everything just as if aboard that bus themselves. However, what I often miss in ethnographic studies such as this one are sufficient data and background information to gain a clear perspective on particular narratives. When the readers learn, for example, that eventually, after many twists and turns, the plans to construct a nuclear power plant in Takeno-machi were in fact stopped, they might wonder whether this was in fact due to a public referendum in which citizens' action

halted the plans. Unfortunately readers are not informed of the legal restrictions that come with the political instruments of direct democracy in Japan, such as the necessity to gain approval of the executive office in order to be able to hold a referendum in the first place (even if the numerical quorums are met) and the non-binding character of referendum outcomes in general. We are left to wonder if, and if yes, *how* this legal framework influenced Baba-san's political activities.

Nonetheless LeBlanc's book is hugely informative and instructive and exceedingly innovative. She combines this study on Japan's political system with gender studies, not by focusing on the more obvious research question of why women are underrepresented in the world of politics but by asking why *some* men are also underrepresented. She manages to trace the thought process of a responsible community leader such as Baba-san who made sure nobody wishing to join the campaign mounted by the Referendum Association would by virtue of his participation endanger the financial wellbeing of his family. Here we see how the male role of the family breadwinner constrains access to the world of politics, which comes with relatively low wages and a high risk of privately bearing campaign costs to some degree. She also manages to reveal the thoughts of the well-off Takada-san for whom a successful career in politics requires understanding the concept of *hara gei*, that is "conversations from your gut" (p. 111) as opposed to spelling out all the details. This is why, according to Takada-san, women in general but also some men simply cannot be good politicians. While to Takada-san silence is an art of policy-making that only those of the inner circle might ever be able fully to grasp, Baba-san is shown to make use of silence as a rhetorical means of conversation, in order "to change the ethical rules of the political game" (pp. 182–3), namely the exclusion of women and non-wealthy men from the world of politics as seen in the strategy meeting of candidates of the Referendum Association and their supporters LeBlanc recounts. What Baba-san and Takada-san have in common, nevertheless, is their rather gloomy approach to being in politics. Baba-san even sees his political career as "the ultimate sort of cheating" (p. 185) since he betrayed the networks that for so long provided him an economic safe haven and communal ties, in order to engage an issue he thought of as just and important and worth all the trouble.

Despite leaving its readers in a bit of a gloomy mood with regard to the state of Japanese politics, in particular its accessibility to political actors from outside the inner circles and its ability to reform itself, this beautifully written story of two very different political personalities definitely warrants reading by students of Japanese politics and political science in general.

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