concerning how best to narrate the modern history of the poor and underprivileged. The work is confronting, and it offers a picture of the modern Japanese prostitute largely unfamiliar to this reader. She is someone who enters the global economy as a migrant labourer, engages in sex work purposefully and strategically, and suffers a class-based stigmatization only later. She is someone who was historically capable of employing knowledge and strategies of empowerment in the field of labour to her advantage, in a world where everyone asserted themselves on others for a variety of purposes, but rarely ever of their own design. She did so because she saw her labour as one that made a good deal of economic sense and did not come from a cultural context where she needed to feel any stigma for her choice. Ideas of her being an exploited victim in the face of evil men or a symbolic feminist hero who displayed amazing qualities despite her circumstances and need to work in such a lowly occupation were later constructs by scholars who dealt uncritically with their subject matter.

Such a vision of the karayukisan is doubtless inspired by the insights of a growing body of Western literature and theory dealing with borders, transnational history and mobility, and scholars in those fields will doubtless find this book informative and helpful. More orthodox historians working in the fields of early modern/modern Japanese history will also almost certainly find this provocative tome philosophically, methodologically and historically challenging, whether in questions concerning the universality/particularity of certain kinds of morality, the nature of the embeddedness of value in social practices, the empirical justification for employing certain categories of analysis, or in the treatment of archival materials regarding subjects with severe textual limitations. By issuing a challenge to scholars about how best to understand Japanese prostitutes in the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century world, Sex in Japan’s Globalization, 1870-1930 makes an original and stimulating contribution to historical work in this field.

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RECONSTRUCTING KOBE: The Geography of Crisis and Opportunity.


There are not many studies of long-term disaster recovery available. This book helps bridge the gap and provides us with a detailed view of what happened in Kobe, Japan over a ten-year recovery period from 1995 to 2005. The impact of the earthquake, and the way recovery happened, changed the way Japan does disaster recovery. Edgington provides a useful four-part
framework for organizing and understanding the research. The framework consists of: the pre-existing condition in the disaster area; characteristics of the disaster; efforts made by governments and non-state organizations; and local community attitudes and relationships with government. This is an important tool because it demonstrates his thought process and a desire to go beyond describing the event to an analytical level to understand how the local people, and the government people (at the local, prefecture and national levels) responded, and created recovery. He wants the reader to understand the Japanese model of recovery. This book delivers on all counts and will become part of the commonly referenced literature on disaster recovery.

The reader is taken down to the level of two neighbourhoods in Kobe (Shin Nagata and Moriminami) where detailed recovery histories in demographic, physical and economic terms are presented. Some neighborhoods did better than others in recovery and part of the reason for this is the level of pre-event community organizing and planning in place. The findings, at the city-wide level, on the struggle to regain economic status after 10 years, supports the work of other scholars, and demonstrates that while having substantial resources and funding helps recovery, it may not be not enough to rebuild lives and economies, at least from a 10-year viewpoint.

The reader will learn a good deal about the Japanese urban planning system from this book, down to the detailed method of “land adjustment” that allows for reforming lot (parcel) sizes to accommodate modern needs (such as fire-truck access), and the local planning association process (machizukari kyōgikai). In the case of Kobe the access to national government funding gives rise to attempts to distort the recovery process as local planners seek to take advantage of these funds to accomplish other needed development schemes along with recovery. This finding is in line with recent long-term studies of recovery in New Orleans (Olshansky and Johnson 2010) and New York City (Mammen 2011). As recovery is not a linear process some “warping” of the outcomes are the norm because the stakeholder mix changes over time and so does the form of financial support. The lesson here is that the recovery process is dynamic rather than static.

The organization of chapters follows the research framework. The chapter on neighbourhood case studies is quite valuable in establishing who gets what and why, and the detailed maps are helpful if you ever get to Kobe and wish to walk the streets and do your own follow-up research. There is a chapter on the 15 symbolic projects where the “big bang” approach is presented, and such efforts as the airport, Hat-Kobe, Port Island convention centre, and the special tax incentive packages are examined, and most found wanting.

The author has been quite meticulous on using research done by others to tell this story and to get into the intricate parts of the inherent conflicts between what city-level decisions makers want, what national government
wants, and what the victims want at the neighbourhood level. The Japanese recovery response system during this period consisted of the national government, which provided large infrastructure projects quickly and allocated funds to the prefecture (provincial or state level). The City of Kobe held special status at the time and could receive funds directly, making the top-down flow more complex.

Edgington reinforces the point made by other disaster researchers that having plans in place (be they for future development or post-disaster recovery) is an important tool for successful recovery. Kobe had just completed updating its comprehensive plan just before the quake. Thus, city leaders knew their vision, and the recovery process proved a vehicle to help get the vision in place, especially with lots of national government funds that became available. Such plans for physical development, Edgington concludes, are not enough for recovery, as they have no social and economic goals. These goals needed to be invented as the process unfolded.

There are three important appendices provided: chronology of the 10-year period; national government relied and recovery measures; and major reconstruction actions taken by local government. The appendices alone are worth getting this book. Few studies ever provide this much detail to the reader.

The book shows us that there are winners and losers in recovery, and those in authority do make mistakes as they rush to make decisions. This book is a mix of political geography, institutional analysis and urban planning. The combination works well. For those seeking a deeper anthropological approach they will be disappointed as there are no in-depth personal descriptions of individual recovery struggles. Also omitted is a discussion of an important social movement: that of student volunteers who flooded the city and created a need to address their desire to help.

The victims of such large disasters always pay a price of enduring the loss and stress and being the objects of the “life recovery” process. Edgington wisely cites the work of Maki and Hayashi (2006) in explaining that in Japan the term for recovery (fukkyū) refers to bringing back the devastated area to pre-disaster state, while the term reconstruction (fukkū) suggests long-term recovery. In every disaster the government is faced with the choice of which term to apply. It appears in the case of Kobe the national government changed its view over the 10 years. Recovery, after all, is about inventing the future, while remembering the past. This book is very well written and deepens the reader’s understanding of Japan’s way of making recovery happen.

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