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## REVIEWS

### ***Japanese Up Close—15 Lessons on Society and Culture in Japanese*** クローズアップ日本事情 15—日本語で学ぶ社会と文化

By **Mizue Sasaki**. Tokyo: The Japan Times. xi, 208 pp. ¥2,500.

***Reviewed by***  
**Naomi Geyer**

Targeting students with upper-intermediate to advanced proficiency, *Japanese Up Close—15 Lessons on Society and Culture in Japanese* (hereafter *JUC*) is a textbook for *nihon jijō* “Japanese society and culture” courses to deepen and broaden learners’ understanding of Japan and shed light on some of the multicultural aspects prevalent today. The textbook consists of fifteen thematic units covering various topics such as travel, food, traditional and pop cultures, sports, technology, environment, education, and economy. These are independent units progressing from basic everyday topics to more abstract and specialized ones.

The first five units introduce basic knowledge about Japan and its people. Unit 1, “What kind of country is Japan?,” includes subtopics such as geography and population, seasons and weather, and volcanos and forests. It introduces cultural information such as *sakura zensen* (cherry blossoms front) and how to deal with earthquakes while in Japan. Unit 2,



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“City life, country life,” covers topics such as Japan’s cities, the revitalization of rural communities, the *kominka* (old house) boom, while also asking learners questions about lifestyle issues in their own countries. Unit 3, “Getting around Japan,” takes up the topic of travel as well as subtopics like the Shinkansen, airplanes, subways, Japan’s minute-by-minute rail service, how to choose the right route, and transit passes. These observations are followed by Unit 4 on food, titled “Let’s eat!,” discussing Japan’s food trade and self-sufficiency, school lunches, local food consumption, the spread of Japanese food culture, *michi-no-eki* (roadside service stations), Japan’s delectable water, “Grade-B cuisine,” local delicacies, and foreign cuisines in Japan. Unit 5, “Events for enjoying the seasons,” introduces a calendar of seasonal events, organized by month, from January to December with added explanations.

The next group of units deals with Japan’s history, traditional and popular culture, and sports. Unit 6, “Reflections on Japanese history,” provides a comprehensive overview of Japanese history starting from the Jōmon and Yayoi periods and extending to the Meiji period and beyond. The two culture units, “Experiencing traditional culture (unit 7)” and “Modern culture and pop culture (unit 8),” present an extensive sampling of Japanese culture. The subtopics of unit 7 are *waka*, *haiku*, *senryū* (types of Japanese poetry), *gagaku* (traditional Japanese music), the *bon* dance, *kabuki*, *nōgaku*, *sadō/cha-no-yu* (tea ceremony), and *kadō/ikebana* (flower arrangement). Unit 8 covers topics such as smartphones, animation, and pop music. The following unit on popular sports, “Enjoying sports,” touches on popular sports such as sumo and baseball and introduces several famous Japanese athletes abroad.

The last five units turn to more social-oriented themes. Unit 10, “The march of science and technology,” illustrates how the Japanese government funds science and technology and lists several innovations in science and technology (among others, 3D printers, planetarium projectors, and canned bread with a long shelf life). These types of innovation must be accompanied by considerations for the environment, which are the theme of unit 11, “Things we can do to save the earth.” Issues such as global warming, greenhouse gas emissions, and the “3Rs (reduce, reuse, recycle)” are reviewed. The next unit, “Education and children,” takes a look at the steady decline in the number of children in Japan, the country’s school system and educational curriculum, as well as “education aside from coursework” such as club activities and students cleaning their own classrooms. Unit 13, “Industrial structure and economy,” provides an overview of the industrial structure of Japan before it turns to more

specific topics such as “expansion of exports from the primary and secondary sectors,” “globalization and the future of Japan’s industries,” and “artificial intelligence and its impact on industry.” Unit 14, “Government and the constitution,” reviews Japan’s constitution, parliamentary cabinet system, the National Diet and elections. The last unit introduces the theme “Aiming for a multicultural society (unit 15).” Japan’s globalization is examined in subtopics like “foreigners living in Japan,” “steadily rising inbound tourists,” and “to achieve a multicultural society.”

Each unit follows the same format: an introduction called *Tobira*, section 1 (reading material), section 2 (model dialogues) and a page with additional information. The introduction consists of a thematic photograph encapsulating the unit theme and a question about the photograph. For instance, the travel unit starts off with a photograph of bowing figures in uniform lined up in front a train with the caption “Have you seen this before? Who do you think they are?” The answers to these questions are found on the last page of the unit. The group shot in front of a train, for instance, turns out to be of maintenance staff about to clean the interior of a *shinkansen*.

The reading material in section 1 introduces the unit theme from various viewpoints. It consists of five to seven subtopics, is four to eight pages long (depending on the unit theme) and contains ample visual aids (photographs, illustrations, figures, tables, etc.) to help with learners’ comprehension and classroom interaction.

Section 2 contains one or two model dialogues addressing the overall theme and is usually two pages long. Overall, while section 1 presents expository texts on subtopics in formal written style, the dialogue section introduces various levels of formality in spoken Japanese, depending on the setting of conversation and its participants. The participants are learners of Japanese living in Japan and native speakers of Japanese whom they encounter in their daily lives, such as teachers, friends, and host family members.

Each subtopic or dialogue in both sections 1 and 2 is followed by a relevant task. Users are instructed to explore the topics, gather specific information, discuss in pairs or groups, and/or develop presentations about topics introduced by the reading materials and dialogues. Some tasks are accompanied by relevant photographs, graphs, and tables, to give users the opportunity to familiarize themselves with the application of such data in Japanese.

Each unit ends with a colorful page of photographs. These provide answers to the questions asked in the introductory page, give cultural background for the unit's theme photo, and supply additional information on the unit theme.

A substantial appendix section completes the fifteen units. Unit-by-unit worksheets check learners' understanding of the presented content. There are two types of questions: multiple-choice questions, where learners choose the correct vocabulary to complete summary sentences of the reading material; and vocabulary output questions, where learners add key words after reading the definition or explanation of vocabulary. The worksheets are followed by a list of words in *kanji* and *hiragana* and their English translations. Since the textbook is intended for upper-intermediate learners, the list includes the vocabulary that is covered in N1, 2, and 3 of the Japanese Language Proficiency Test. The final portion of the appendix consists of English translations of the reading texts in section 1 of each unit.

For those who would like to acquire knowledge about Japan in a systematic manner, this textbook provides an excellent sampling of themes, from everyday topics such as food, travel, and seasonal events, to topics that are more abstract and/or specialized, such as government and the constitution, economy, and environmental issues, demonstrating the breadth of topics that can be covered in a *nihon jijō* (Japanese society and culture) course. In addition, the book strives to include diverse angles on opposing notions such as past versus present, urban versus rural, and domestic versus foreign. As the author states, this diversity of viewpoints and juxtapositions aims to boost learners' interests and multicultural awareness. Covering the contents of this textbook in class can undoubtedly foster a broad, systematic knowledge of Japan. Learners are provided with the vocabulary to discuss diverse topics and with opportunities to develop critical thinking skills through comparing and contrasting different cultures. It is possible to use *JUC* as a main textbook, but each unit can also be studied in a stand-alone lesson—an option that adds flexibility. Users can easily adjust the way they use the textbook. Those with limited time have the choice to pick parts they need to study or teach.

Not only does the textbook showcase various topics of Japanese society and culture, it also attempts to make significant contributions to the teaching of these topics. The major strength of *JUC* lies in the tasks of a diverse nature that users find throughout the volume. In the introduction, the author argues that effective learning happens when learners engage not only in receptive but also in active learning that gives them ample chance

for output. The book offers such opportunities through various tasks introduced in Sections 1 and 2. While some prompt learners to provide spontaneous opinions (for instance, by asking learners to compare their own society and culture to those of Japan), most of the tasks guide them to engage in mini-projects involving the introduced topics. Among these are tasks that ask learners to go outside of the classroom to observe, investigate and interact with people using the target language. In conjunction with these activities, *JUC* suggests concrete locations and organizations where learners can experience Japanese culture, such as the Baseball Museum and the Sugunami Animation Museum. Such information would be of particular interest for those who are teaching and learning Japanese in Japan or for those who are preparing to study abroad there. Despite their appeal, some of the tasks that require learners to actually reside in Japan may pose issues for those who do not.

Section 2 (model dialogues) of each unit provides examples of how classroom and other interactions may look like when discussing the unit theme, and helps learners utilize the vocabulary and other knowledge they acquired in the lesson. The variety of settings (a chat among friends, classroom talk, exchanges during a field trip, a dinner conversation with the host family, and so on) permits the inclusion of different speech styles. In some instances, the model dialogues serve to connect an abstract unit theme to learners' everyday life. For instance, in the unit on Japan's industrial structure and economics, dialogues on a part-time job at a convenience store and on online shopping translate the complex topic into something more accessible.

Another strength of *JUC* is the quality and quantity of visual aids. Numerous photographs, tables, and graphs support learners' comprehension and attend to their affective needs. An ample offering of tables and graphs helps them organize their knowledge and utilize the acquired data in classroom discussions and presentations. Even though some units contain specialized and abstract vocabulary, the visual aids make the volume accessible and user-friendly.

Overall, *JUC* would undoubtedly be of great interest to both teachers and learners of *nihon jijō*. The book provides a useful sampling of topics that can be explored further through activities designed to be performed inside and outside the classroom. In many ways, it qualifies as a resource for upper-intermediate and advanced Japanese language classes. However, because it is intended as a *nihon jijō* textbook, *JUC* does not offer lists and explanations of relevant grammatical structures, instructions geared towards effective reading (e. g., pre-reading questions and explanation of

phrases), or instructions as to what learners are expected to do with the conversations in section 2, as you may expect in intermediate and advanced Japanese language textbooks. Therefore, using this textbook in Japanese language classes may require instructors to be proficient in content-based instruction. Depending on the level and interest of students, the book can introduce a variety of topics and engaging tasks for an upper-level, content-based language classroom.

In sum, *JUC* is an excellent textbook of *nihon jijō* for learners of Japanese at upper-intermediate and advanced proficiency, suitable for the classroom or for independent study. Ample visual aids make even sophisticated topics accessible. Learners will benefit from performing different tasks introduced throughout the volume to explore and investigate Japanese culture on their own, to interact with their classmates and with people outside of the classroom, and to make presentations about their findings.

***Residual Futures: The Urban Ecologies of Literary and Visual Media of 1960s and 1970s Japan***

By **Franz Prichard**. New York: Columbia University Press, 2019.  
268 pp. + x. Paperback, \$35.00.

***Reviewed by***  
**Atsuko Sakaki**

This book is ambitious and exuberant—not so much in its scope (which is highly selective and specialized) as in its urgent and earnest call for a conversation between diverse intellectual inquiries, from urban studies to literary studies to media studies. Prichard gives uninhibited voice to social and political problems to which we have been alerted by many intellectuals of our time, such as the inequality, banality, and precarity of lives lived in late capitalist urban space, as visually and textually mediated, as well as to the critical discourse that engages with these registers. As the book proceeds in addressing these current issues, the reader hears a chorus of other thinkers as well, some of whom it foregrounds more than others.

Framing its immediate referents historically and geopolitically, as stipulated in its subtitle, the book complicates temporality. The primary sources—film, fiction, photography, and essays on them—that Prichard discusses have both addressed results of the then recent past political crises