

GARY DECKER & CHRISTOPHER BJORK (Eds.). *Japanese Education in an Era of Globalization: Culture, Politics and Equity*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press. (2013). 224 pp. \$49.95 (paperback). (ISBN 978-0-8077-5423-8).

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GARY DECOKER & CHRISTOPHER BJORK (Eds.). *Japanese Education in an Era of Globalization: Culture, Politics and Equity*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press. (2013). 224 pp. \$49.95 (paperback). (ISBN 978-0-8077-5423-8).

DeCoker and Bjork's edited volume *Japanese Education in an Era of Globalization: Culture, Politics and Equity* presents a novel approach to the study of 21st century education by positioning Japanese education within a global context. In doing so, DeCoker and Bjork argue that by holding a mirror up to Japanese society, what is reflected back are concrete lessons that may enlighten other nations grappling with the increased demands of globalization on education. DeCoker and Bjork contend that their edited volume is not just for the benefit of stakeholders of Japanese education, but instead can provide a transnational lens for examining the effects of rapid social change on education. The broad range of global issues, specific and general, covered in the volume – from bullying and student guidance to minority populations and early childhood education and more – will be of interest to scholars of history, sociology, political science, education, and Asian studies, in addition to educational practitioners and policy makers attempting to navigate the complex world of education in an era of globalization.

DeCoker and Bjork's book includes a compilation of essays documenting the results of numerous studies conducted on Japanese education by leading scholars in the field. The scholars either have Japanese ancestry or a research interest and extensive publishing history in the area of Japanese education studies. As explained by DeCoker and Bjork, the volume is the result of discussions that took place at the annual conference of the Comparative and International Educational Society (CIES), specifically the CIES – Japan Special Interest Group, during 2007-2011. Both DeCoker and Bjork are founding members of the CIES – Japan Special Interest Group and accomplished professors in the fields of education (DeCoker and Bjork) and Japanese studies (DeCoker). Their expertise in the field of Japanese education studies is evidenced by the vast array of books and articles they have each published in this area.

DeCoker and Bjork's volume is divided into eleven chapters, which are further subdivided into four distinct parts. The first part contains two chapters that frame the overall orientation of the book. The first chapter (DeCoker's) provides a brief overview of historical and contemporary issues affecting Japan's education system. These issues are then placed within a broader global context by linking them to universal educational dialogues concerning equality, academic achievement, privatization, diversity, and the influence of the media. The second chapter (Hoffman's) describes tensions in the field of Japanese education. Part two of the book contains three essays on the themes of school context, social change, and global perceptions. This section includes discussions of the tensions in Japanese preschool education between the preservation of traditional Japanese culture and progressive educational reforms (Hayashi & Tobin), the challenges faced by Japanese middle school educators with providing guidance and discipline to students (Bjork & Fukuzawa), and the connections between student-teacher relationships and bullying (Akiba & Shimizu). Part three of the volume contains three essays focused on the issues of minority groups and educational reform. The content in this section includes discussions of the development of ethnic schools and multiculturalism (Okano), Indigenous education and self-determination (Frey), and the challenges posed by the Nikkei population struggling to reclaim their Japanese identity and reintegrate into Japanese society (Gordon). Finally, Part four includes three essays that examine the outcomes of educational reforms. Key discussions in this section include issues of inequality in Japanese education (Park & Lee), the effects of government spending and cultural capital on academic achievement (Nomi), and the commercialization of education through junior high school entrance examinations (Tsuneyoshi).

The chapters, although brief, are accessible to a wide audience of researchers, educational practitioners, and policy makers with varying research backgrounds because they are written without the use of highly technical specialist language. The innovative nature of the book stems from its coverage of a wide range of contemporary educational issues that are not just specific to Japan, but have universal implications. It is the universality of the book that will make it appealing to those looking to compare issues in Japanese education to their own domestic education situation. This is especially true for educational practitioners looking to enlighten themselves about the challenges and responses of other nations to contemporary educational problems.

One of the minor limitations of DeCoker and Bjork's book is the startlingly brief historical context that is provided in the introduction. For those unfamiliar with the economic and political history of Japan, contextualizing the compilation of essays into the broader social, economic, and political narrative of Japanese society may be difficult. In comparison to other recent publications on Japanese education in the era of globalization (see for example Kariya & Rappleye, 2010; Willis & Rappleye, 2011), DeCoker and Bjork's edited volume

fails to provide the reader with sufficient information to fully understand the basis for Japan's modern educational reform movement. Readers will therefore want to familiarize themselves with Japan's economic and political history before reading DeCoker and Bjork's book in order to fully appreciate the ideas expressed in each chapter.

Despite this limitation, DeCoker and Bjork's book stands as a very worthy contribution to the field of Japanese education studies. Due to the interdisciplinary research backgrounds of its contributors, the volume allows the reader to understand the impacts of globalization on Japanese education from multiple perspectives, such as those stemming from sociology, education, anthropology, policy studies, international and comparative education, and many more. The interdisciplinary nature of the book also has very practical applications for the world of academia. It will be a valuable text for instructors and students in international and comparative education, Asian studies, comparative politics and international relations, curriculum studies, and the sociology of education. Additionally, the book will be of use to educational practitioners and policy makers as a guide for understanding the potential impacts of educational reform in the era of globalization.

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