

# Hiroshima in America

Robert Jay Lifton and Greg Mitchell, Avon Books, N.Y., U.S.A., 429 pages, U.S. \$15.00, Can \$20.00.

By Ikemi Kiyoshi

Prior to visiting Japan, President George Bush was asked by a television reporter if a statement of regret was forthcoming from him about dropping the atomic bomb in Hiroshima, and his reply was, "Not from this president." When asked if Harry S. Truman made the right decision, President Bill Clinton said, "Yes, based on the facts he had before him."

These words illustrate the assertion by the authors of this book that no American president, while in office, "has publicly questioned dropping the bomb. Indeed, such questioning came close to a taboo, especially within the White House itself."

Notwithstanding this official position taken by the U.S. chief executives, Robert Jay Lifton and Greg Mitchell in this thought-provoking book look into the circumstances leading to Truman's decision to drop atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, efforts to cover up facts, and, above all, how these bombs impacted not only the victims in Japan but also the entire American society.

In its early chapters, the book describes how the U.S. Government tried to "hide half the picture" by insisting that the bombs were targeted only against military installations, that no serious injuries were inflicted on civilians in the bombed cities, and that the bombing expedited Japan's surrender and saved the lives of a large number of American soldiers. American journalists were not even permitted to visit the two cities immediately after the war.

The authors seem to think it was most unfortunate that Truman had to assume the presidency following the death of Franklin D. Roosevelt in the closing days of the war, because during the beginning period of the presidency in particular, "Truman was totally dependent upon his advisers" and his psychological state "can best be described as a struggle for survival."

Would Roosevelt have made a different decision? The answer is not clear in the book, which only says that Roosevelt, having authorized the bomb, was more psychologically able to stop it and that Truman, in contrast, inherited that authorization (or responsibility) from Roosevelt and might well have felt unable or disinclined to "violate" that authorization by not using the

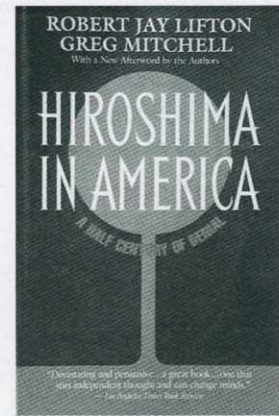
weapon.

When it was time for the United States to decide whether or not to develop hydrogen bombs, however, Truman had settled into the presidency, and gave a go-ahead signal despite strong opposition from many leading scientists, according to the book.

The authors summarize Truman's views on Hiroshima and Nagasaki even after leaving the White House with a series of statements he made: that the Japanese started the war by bombing Pearl Harbor without provocation and thousands of young American sailors and civilians were murdered by this unwarranted and unheralded attack; that America's ultimatum from Potsdam in 1945 evoked only a very curt and discourteous reply; that after a successful American demonstration on July 16, 1945, of the greatest explosive force in the history of the world, it was decided to drop the weapon on two Japanese cities devoted to war work, resulting in Japan's surrender a few days later; that the sacrifice of Hiroshima and Nagasaki was urgent and necessary for the prospective welfare of both Japan and the Allies; that the need for such a fateful decision never would have arisen "had we not been shot in the back by Japan at Pearl Harbor"; and that "in spite of that shot in the back" the United States has been willing to help in every way the restoration of Japan as a great and prosperous nation.

Nevertheless, Truman is described as having spent the rest of his life "in the throes of unrealized guilt" following the use of the two atomic bombs, as he is quoted as saying, "That was the most terrible decision that any man in the history of the world had to make."

Perhaps the most significant feature of this book is that Lifton and Mitchell devote a large portion of it to the impact of the atomic bombings that continues to hover over the United States to date, as they state: "Since Hiroshima, we have been captive of nuclear weapons. We rely on them and we flaunt them, but psychologically and politically they have imprisoned us. In exploding atomic bombs over Hiroshima and Nagasaki we frightened no one more than ourselves. Ever since, we have struggled to overcome our own terror and re-establish lost



'security' by means of embracing the object of that terror and attaching ourselves to their ultimate power, their omnipotence. At the same time our insistent need to justify the atomic bombings has required us to view nuclear devices as potentially usable weapons. We have created a vicious circle of atomic-bomb use and justification of that use, fearful vulnerability, further atomic and nuclear buildup, imagined or threatened use of the weaponry (from whatever source), more vulnerability and buildup – so that now, tens of thousands of nuclear warheads exist on the earth."

As one example of the need for such "justification," the book describes at length how the plan to exhibit the Enola Gay, the aircraft which carried the bomb to Hiroshima, at the Smithsonian along with the effect of the bombing had to be eventually called off because of strong opposition mainly from the veterans, who claimed such an exhibition would be tantamount to offering "an apology to Japan." Media sided mostly with those who opposed the exhibit.

In the words of the authors, all the facts surrounding the bomb have been "from the secret" to those which are "actively concealed" and finally to "falsification."

"What has been lost sight of is the role Hiroshima concealment has played in encouraging subsequent American cover-ups," they say, adding: "One need only recall Vietnam (concealment of unauthorized bombing and human effects), Watergate (concealment of a string of Constitutional violations), and Iran-Contra (concealment of illegal government paramilitary activities)."

The book, which begins by saying, "You cannot understand the twentieth century without Hiroshima," ends with these words: "Confronting Hiroshima can ... enable us to emerge from nuclear entrapment and rediscover our imaginative capacities on behalf of human

good... We return to Hiroshima, then, to confront our own dark truths – but also to awaken in ourselves our many-sided moral and psychological alternatives for living and dying, and for enhancing the human project.”

*Ikemi Kiyoshi, formerly with Honda Motor Co., Ltd., is now a freelance translator, and serves on the Editorial Board of the Journal of Japanese Trade and Industry.*

# Japanese Consumer Behavior

John McCreery, Curzon Press, Richmond, Surrey, U.K., 278 pages, paperback, £14.95

By Prabhu Gupta

The Hakuodo Institute of Life and Living (HILL) was set up in 1981 and is Japan's earliest think tank devoted to the study of society and specifically of consumer behavior in order to help its mother company, the advertising agency Hakuodo, better sell its services. HILL's position as an independent entity clearly makes sense. "HILL researchers are individuals given the remarkable opportunity to study what seems most interesting to them in changes in their own society. As guerrilla ethnographers, they search for insight and inspiration concerning topics that, more often than not, are of special personal relevance to themselves." And it is interesting to have the Hakuodo President's evaluation that HILL has succeeded in remaining independent. But it would be more persuasive if a Japanese academic unconnected with HILL – or, better, from a competing institution – agreed with that view.

In this book, an anthropologist reads its research, exploring Japan through the eyes of Japanese researchers and discovering patterns of change that are both uniquely Japanese and shared by consumers in other advanced industrial nations. Does this make for a book which is worth more than John Clammer's *Contemporary Urban Japan: A Sociology of Consumption* (1997) or George Fields – *Gucci on the Ginza: Japan's new consumer generation* (1989) or *Re-made in Japan: Everyday Life and Consumer Taste in a Changing Society* (a collection of essays edited by J.J. Tobin, 1992)? Well, perhaps not a book worth more, but certainly a very different kind of book, including translations of HILL reports which are by turns tendentious, stimulating, and often graphic like comics rather than like research reports.

However, it remains slightly incestuous to review the work of an institution for which you have worked for 13

years, and to conclude the book with an interview with the man who hired you to work there in the first place. Cynically, this book can be seen as a bit of corporate PR for a PR firm. Is there not a single one of the numerous other research institutes working in this field that have even once produced a study with findings relevant to this subject? If so, that is a remarkable state of affairs and surely worthy of comment and analysis, but if other institutes have in fact produced research on this field, why leave them out? However, if McCreery had included these, probably this book would have been less interesting.

There is a wide range of material here, including some to which people who don't read Japanese would not normally have access: things observed, the explanations provided by Japanese and Western individuals, and information on the factual background to changing Japanese consumer behaviour in the 1980s and 1990s. And these kinds of material span, in separate chapters, everything from the position of women, through what constitutes an Ideal Couple, to the changing behaviour and values of children, young people, old people, and how people think regarding dying as well as about their dream house.

Hakuodo President Shoji Takashi's view is that the Japanese have become "worthless individualists" (that is, they do whatever they like without taking responsibility for the wider political and social questions). If this is to be remedied, "companies have to stop acting like hothouses.... For the individual, living in a hothouse can be very comfortable. But new things are created only when people overcome difficulties, when they have to suffer a bit. Now people don't see themselves confronted by problems that they themselves have to overcome. They expect someone else to solve those problems

for them.... At this point, the Japanese have lost ... motivation. But if the environment changes, we can get moving again ... it was a sense of impending doom that drove the Meiji restoration, and the sense of their individual lives at risk which drove the post-war recovery; the danger that people feel now is nothing like that. If things change now, they are going to change more slowly." While fascinating as the view of one (important) person, it is typical that the author does not probe this view: if the economy is opened up, and people start working hard for themselves, there may well arise a new individualism where people take more responsibility for themselves. But the question remains: will these new individualists take responsibility for Japan?

Don't read this book if you are looking for answers to questions about any of the areas it touches, but it certainly makes for a fascinating journey of discovery, full of scintillating sidelights, in a Japan that has moved far from its traditions though it is not in danger of becoming like any other place: "there is a greater salience of physical sensation in the way that music and other things are being perceived ... the pace of change is quicker and the lifecycles of trends are shorter ... consumers pick out things that impress them at the moment; the same thing is happening to brands.... Snacking or grazing is more prevalent now.... It's all first impressions.... The people we ask can't tell us why they buy things, and that ... makes it hard to plan marketing strategies" (p50).

*Prabhu Gupta is the Director of Executive and Organizational Development at the Wolfsberg Executive Development Center, Switzerland; and the non-executive Chairman of ADVANCE: Management Training Ltd., U.K.*

