

Book Review

“The Rise of Sharing. Fourth-Stage Consumer Society in Japan”. (2014)
Miura Atsushi translated by Dana Lewis. LTCB International Library Trust/
International House of Japan. 350 pages.

“The Rise of Sharing. Fourth-Stage Consumer Society in Japan” is an interesting narrative on Japanese society and culture, consumerism, and citizenship viewed and effectively revealed through changes and transitions in Japanese society. Author Miura Atsushi smartly weaves the characteristics of Japanese society across time, from 1921 to the present, in four significant stages. The characteristics of the era changes are attributed to Japanese society’s demographics, value systems, and consumer aspirations and worldview, all of which have manifested twists and turns over time. However, in spite of the era changes, some characteristics of the past do not necessarily go away; they continue to co-exist with those of the present. The value-changing phenomenon has to do partly with the world’s influence on Japan, including the changing temperaments of the environment, such that Japan has turned into a so-called “sensitivity society.” Over the years Japan has realized that affluence and wealth can easily be swept away by floods, earthquakes, or tsunamis. Atsushi’s insights and analysis also point to the Japanese realization of the humbling effects of the internal environment, such as the decline of the working age population and the onset of an ageing population, and the need to seek survival strategies from the harshness and challenges of an external environment. This has brought about a sort of conversion from selfish individualist consumption to an age of “shared consumption” and “new ways of living” which continue to take shape in Japan. Creating spaces for people who bridge and bond, and taking all opportunities to make people work together as a team are a profound realization. The author refers to the process and the outcome as “community revitalization,” which is present in the history and culture of Japan.

One finds this work to be a delightful insight into Japan's discerning power and capability marked by episodal events in Japanese society. Toward the end of the book the author envisions a search for new ways of living through models, most of which are characterized by social connectivities of government, local communities, and the creation of public spheres by opening up across the board – age groups, business, government, and citizens. The author envisions new models of sharing, such as from “share house” to “share town” and from the “economic principle” to the “life principle.”

At the end of my reading, I came to think that here was a society that had long secluded itself but which now recognizes how immense and broad home is, that it in fact comprises the world. The book may be considered as a reading on cosmopolitan citizenship not only because of its focal theme on consumerism but also because it sends the message that the world or the planet shapes society and that the new way of living is connectivity.

I am not sure where this book by Miura Atsushi can be accessed because, as of this date, it has not been publicized even in Amazon. I am thankful to the Japanese Embassy in the Philippines for gifting me a copy. I am sure this book will be publicly available in no time at all.

EDNA E. A. CO
Professor of Public Administration
University of the Philippines