

BOOK REVIEWS

Recent Publications on Japan

By Janet Goff

Janet Goff reviews books on Japan for Japan Quarterly.

BUSINESS

GEMBA KAIZEN: A COMMON-SENSE, LOW-COST APPROACH TO MANAGEMENT

MASAAKI IMAI

New York: McGraw-Hill, 1997

354 pages, \$24.95

The author of the international best-seller *Kaizen: The Key to Japan's Competitive Success* (1986), who made *kaizen* (improvement) part of the English-language business lexicon, is back.

Not everybody got the message correctly the first time around. As one of Imai Masaaki's devotees in the United States observes in the sequel: "Almost all U.S. manufacturing managers that you talk with today will tell you that they are doing just-in-time, but most of them are way off-track. Half of them think of just-in-time as some sort of inventory system that in turn means that what they should do is beat up their suppliers."

For those who missed or misunderstood the concept of *kaizen* before, Chapter 1 of *Gemba Kaizen* offers a summary of its key components and the systems such as total quality control and just-in-time production upon which it rests. The book focuses on *kaizen* techniques in the workplace, or *gemba* (scene of action). Imai defines *gemba* as the sites where businesses develop, produce and sell goods and services. The term covers everything from labs to retail outlets. In this book, he focuses on places where products are created.

Gemba kaizen is an integrated, process-oriented approach to improving the quality

of work, avoiding *muda*, or wasteful practices, and procedures that inflate costs, and delivering products on time to satisfied customers. The hallmarks of *gemba kaizen* are good "housekeeping, *muda* elimination, and standardization;" elements that create a clean, orderly workplace and work habits; eliminating "anything that does not add value," and establishing and maintaining fixed standards. Imai shows how this low-risk, process-oriented approach can reap tremendous benefits by offering everyday solutions to everyday problems, instead of resorting to expensive technology.

Imai's approach involves everyone up and down the corporate ladder from the CEO to rank-and-file workers, although he devotes special attention to the role of supervisors and managers. He dispenses his commonsensical advice in the form of check lists, anecdotes and case studies illustrating successful applications of *gemba kaizen* principles. The book is sometimes repetitive and relies too much on Japanese words (*muda* is one) and acronyms, but Imai's message is clear and simple.

HISTORY

NEW DIRECTIONS IN THE STUDY OF MEIJI JAPAN

EDITED BY HELEN HARDACRE

WITH ADAM L. KERN

Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 1997

782 pages, \$233.75

The drive to create a modern industrial state in the Meiji era (1868-1912) brought about radical economic, political, social and cultural