

Book Review

Hiroshi Inose, ed., *Scientific information systems in Japan*, North-Holland Publishing Company, Amsterdam, 1981, 257 p. US \$58.50/Dfl.120.00, ISBN 0-444-86151-3.

This is not a normal book review, but an impression. A friend employed by our publishers sent me this book for my personal information. In browsing through it I became impressed: imagine a country in which the government quite rightly thinks that information technology has some future. That is not too difficult; most of our governments think so. But, please, then, do mention the government to me which allocates \$4.4 mil. for a three-year study to be carried out by the leading 500 experts in the area and succeeds in getting it done. The sheer discipline with which it has been carried out both thrills and frightens me. We can have endless discussions on whether information technology is a bliss or a curse. Their outcome is clear from the beginning: if you want to be dogmatic in adhering to principles which distrust modern technology you will remain poor as an individual, or as a nation. Nationwide, it is our common choice, but remember that some other countries will become richer by just applying modern technology and not bother too much. That's the strength (some will call it poverty) of Japan, in my opinion, and this book makes that abundantly clear.

From the point of view of national information policy the book, thus, is impressive. For the rest it is a committee/race-horse/camel. It is a peculiar mixture of sensible proposals for national co-ordination and very sophisticated computerese jargon. Even when you're not in for the latter, the book gives you every reason for thought ... and I, as a Westerner, ended up with jealousy, fear, admiration, doubt and long-lasting applause for its goals to incorporate modern technology into our lives.

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