

Christopher P. Hood. *Shinkansen: From Bullet Train to Symbol of Modern Japan*

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In 1964, two events epitomized Japan's spectacular recovery and growth after World War II. One was the Tokyo Olympics, starting on October 10 of that year. The other was the opening of the Tōkaidō Shinkansen, a high-speed railway system connecting Tokyo and Osaka. Also known as the bullet train, it started operation on October 1, just in time for the Olympics. It later grew into the network of shinkansen covering most areas of Japan. Christopher Hood, Director of the Cardiff Japanese Studies Center, Cardiff University, has conducted a historical and sociological study of this transportation infrastructure. Hood's overall argument is that "the shinkansen has become a symbol of Japan," and that "the way it was established, [the way] the network has developed, how it is operated, and even the way it looks reflect many different aspects of Japanese society" (p. 1).

Hood approaches the topic from a remarkably broad range of perspectives. After explaining the methodology for the study in Chapter 1, he provides a concise summary of the history of the shinkansen in Chapter 2. Then, in Chapter 3, Hood goes on to discuss the shinkansen against the background of Japanese culture. He examines how the Japan National Railways (JNR) determined the names of train services such as "Hikari" and "Kodama" and the names of stations, to what extent the shinkansen fits the criteria of beauty put forward by philosopher Yanagi Sōetsu, and how the shinkansen is represented in films, stamps, and television programs. In Chapter 4, Hood turns to Japan's political culture, assessing how and to what extent "pork-barrel" politics affected the construction of the shinkansen. Hood rightly points out that, even where politicians seemingly had strong influence in determining the route and the location of stations, technical/practical considerations were also always there. In Chapter 5, Hood takes up the financial issues, analyzing the cost of the shinkansen's construction and its profitability. Here he also discusses the impact that the shinkansen had on the national and regional economies. In Chapter 6, Hood focuses on what he calls the "software" of the shinkansen, namely

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the training of employees supporting the shinkansen's effective operation. Here he underscores the cultural differences among JR East, JR Tōkai, JR West, and other JRs which came into being after the privatization of JNR in 1987. In Chapter 7, Hood further explores a variety of connections between the shinkansen and Japanese society. The topics here include countermeasures against natural hazards such as snow and earthquakes, efforts to reduce noise and vibration, CO₂ emission and energy consumption, religious rituals and suicides, traditional roles of female workers and increase in the number of female conductors, and common activities of the passengers. Finally, in Chapter 8, Hood briefly describes the construction of the Taiwan high-speed railway, which opened recently.

Dealing with such a wide range of topics in a single volume is an ambitious task. It is all the more demanding because the book covers not only the Tōkaidō Shinkansen but also other lines such as the Sanyō Shinkansen and the Jōetsu Shinkansen. As a result, the book constitutes a balanced account of the shinkansen as a whole, with analysis from an unprecedented width of perspectives as well as basic historical facts and statistics, but its discussion is sometimes rough and superficial. For example, Hood has performed a search of such words as "Japan," "shinkansen," and "Mt Fuji," in an image database and then asserts that the Tōkaidō Shinkansen has had high representation in media and that its link with Mt Fuji has been relatively strong, just by indicating the number of hits in the database (p. 58). In another example, he compares the characters of JRs to historical figures in Japan. He suggests that JR Tōkai is like Ōda Nobunaga, who would kill a nightingale that would not sing, JR West is like Toyotomi Hideyoshi, who would ignore it, and JR East is like Tokugawa Ieyasu, who would be patient and wait for it to sing (p. 152). To the reviewer, such a comparison sounds too crude. It is also surprising that Hood's explanation of the popular characterization of the three historical figures is mistaken: Hideyoshi would not ignore a nightingale but try to have it sing. To add just another minor mistake, Ōda is a wrong pronunciation, Oda is correct.

Similar mistakes can be found in many parts of the book. Hood points out that JNR workers' attitude changed from one of 'notte yaru' (I'll let you ride) to that of 'notte itadaku' (Please ride with me; p. 150). This observation is correct, except that 'nosete yaru' should replace 'notte yaru', whose meaning is quite different. In another example, he tells us that people sleep well on the shinkansen partly because of the long hours of work in Japan. In doing so, he introduces a popular adage "pass with five, fail with seven" in reference to the number of hours of sleep for those preparing for entrance examinations (p. 189). The correct one is "pass with four, fail with five." Although Hood has studied about Japan for many years (his previous book is on Japanese education reform), such mistakes make the reviewer wonder how firm his understanding of Japanese culture is. In some parts of the book, Hood tends to cite a limited number of English books and articles rather than relevant materials in Japanese. For example, the most informative study of the shinkansen's economic viability, Kakumoto Ryōhei's *Shinkansen Kiseki to Tenbō* is not cited in Chapter 5. To be fair, Hood often does cite important books and articles in Japanese. Also, we should be appreciative that he let us be aware of some English materials that are virtually unknown in Japan.

Overall, it seems to the reviewer that the significance of Hood's work is that it has shown us the diversity of approaches that one could take in studying the shinkansen. Discussion on topics that have been relatively unexplored, such as oppositions to the shinkansen's construction and the training of JR employees, would stimulate the reader. It is the first substantial scholarly work on the shinkansen in English. It is hoped that more work will follow this ambitious and pioneering book.