

Dogs and Demons: Tales from the Dark Side of Japan


By Alex Kerr




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A surprising assessment of the failures and successes of modern Japan.

In *Dogs and Demons*, Alex Kerr chronicles the many facets of Japan's recent, and chronic, crises -- from the failure of its banks and pension funds to the decline of its once magnificent modern cinema. He is the first to give a full report on the nation's endangered environment -- its seashores lined with concrete, its roads leading to nowhere in the mountains -- as well as its "monument frenzy," the destruction of old cities such as Kyoto and construction of drab new ones, and the attendant collapse of its tourist industry. Kerr writes with humor and passion, for "passion," he says, "is part of the story. Millions of Japanese feel as heartbroken at what is going on as I do. My Japanese friends tell me, 'Please write this -- for us.'"

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Kerr (Lost Japan), a 35-year resident of Japan and the first foreigner to win that country's Shincho literary prize, contends that the Japanese miracle has become a Japanese mess. Once admired, and perhaps feared, for its spectacular economic successes, Japan, Kerr claims, has become a land of "ravaged mountains and rivers, endemic pollution, tenement cities, and skyrocketing debts." What happened? He says that ideology and bureaucracy are to blame. Japan is in effect managed by an autonomous and corrupt government bureaucracy, driven by an ethos of economic growth at any cost and a mania for control. Everywhere Japan's natural beauty is being destroyed by useless construction projects, as nature must be controlled and construction companies rewarded. The great ancient cities too representative of old, underdeveloped Japan are being replaced by monuments and hotels that are concrete monstrosities. Japan's banking system has failed, yet no one really knows the extent of the damage, as the bureaucracy keeps accurate information hidden. Meanwhile, the bureaucracy continues to pour money into older industries, while Japan falls dangerously behind in the development of new information technologies. There is popular discontent, but protest is hard to come by, because the bureaucratically controlled educational system emphasizes obedience above all else. Japan is stuck, concludes Kerr, and he sees no easy way out. While perhaps alarmist in his message, Kerr fascinates with detailed descriptions of Japan's dilemma and offers a surprising, if controversial, vision of a land in trouble.

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From [Booklist](#)

In what may prove to be a highly controversial book, Kerr argues that Japan is in big trouble: a self-destructive country that is systematically destroying its landscape, its environment, its very culture by adherence to ideas and policies that are decades out of date. The author describes land-preservation schemes that end up destroying the land; a national health program that's near collapse; an education system that values conformity over originality; money-eating government programs that no one can seem to stop. In 1994, Japan produced 91.6 million tons of concrete (30 times as much as the U.S.), much of it used to build structures that serve no purpose. In 1998, Japan's government spent \$136 billion on public works, more than what it cost to build the Panama Canal. It's hard to know if Kerr hits the mark here, but he makes a strong case. Expect him to start showing up on talk shows soon, and when he does, the requests for this inflammatory position paper will begin to build. *David Pitt*

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Review

"Keen insight into the unique causes and disastrous results of the once heralded 'Japan Model' of development . . . a must read." ?*Michael Judge, The Wall Street Journal*

"Should be required reading for anyone who writes about or studies the Japanese economy . . ." ?*Eric Johnston, The Japan Times*

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Ernest Villa:

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Ella Woods:

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