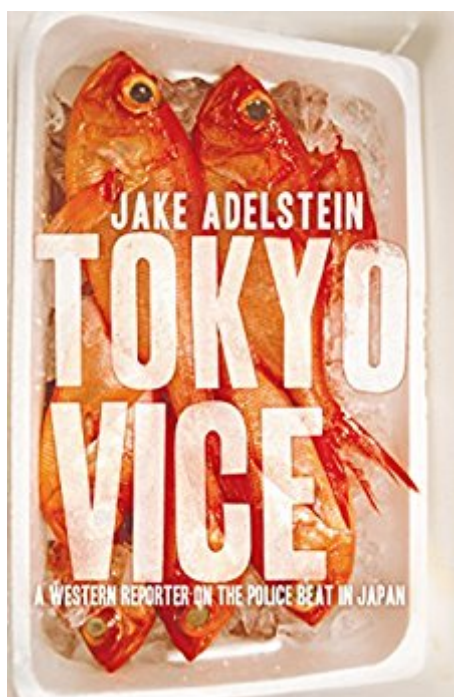


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Tokyo Vice: A Western Reporter On The Police Beat In Japan



Synopsis

From the only American journalist ever to have been admitted to the insular Tokyo Metropolitan Police Press Club, here is a unique, firsthand, revelatory look at Japanese culture from the underbelly up. At the age of 19, Jake Adelstein went to Japan in search of peace and tranquillity. What he got was a life of crime — crime reporting, that is, at the prestigious Yomiuri Shimbun. For twelve years of eighty-hour work weeks, he covered the seedy side of Japan, where extortion, murder, human trafficking, and corruption are as familiar as ramen noodles and sake. But when his final scoop brought him face to face with Japan's most infamous yakuza boss — and with the threat of death for him and his family — Adelstein decided to step down — momentarily. Then, he fought back. In Tokyo Vice, Adelstein tells the riveting, often humorous tale of his transformation from an inexperienced cub reporter to a daring investigative journalist with a price on his head. With its vivid, visceral descriptions of crime in Japan and candid exploration of the world of modern-day yakuza that even few Japanese ever see, Tokyo Vice is a fascination, and an education, from first to last.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Or, in Jake Adelstein's case, it doesn't -- thankfully, because American readers now finally have access to a book that chronicles the real Japan, free of stereotypes and even more well-rounded

and nuanced as any of the 'foreigner abroad' books we are accustomed to reading from Americans who head off to the more culturally-familiar terrain of Europe. Full disclosure: I lived in Tokyo for parts of early 80s before finally leaving in 1985, before Adelstein arrived to study at Sophia University. Like him, I began my journalistic career there, although it was as a copy editor at the English-language Japan Times rather than as a reporter for a Japanese daily. Even in 1985, being a 'gaijin' (foreigner) and a female would have put paid to any such plans, even if my decidedly unfluent Japanese hadn't. Adelstein, however, benefited from the passage of time, his language skills and his gender and landed a job at the Yomiuri newspaper, one of the country's largest. Automatically an unusual person in Japan's extraordinarily homogenous society (at the time I lived there, at least, there was no space on a driver's license for hair or eye color -- because it was assumed that all would be the same...), Adelstein ended up covering another kind group of misfits in Japan: the country's yakuza, or organized criminals. It's a fascinating world, part of Japanese popular culture as much as the Mafia is here, and yet virtually unrecognized outside of the country. Along with writing about the yakuza, Adelstein does a fabulous job of raising the curtain on the lives of ordinary Japanese, finally debunking all the stereotypes. Japanese men gawk at the pictures in Madonna's "Sex"; the male reporters openly read porn magazines in the workspace.

with a pitcher of beer, sort of watching the game. A novelist and a reporter sit down on either side of you. They want to make you a deal: they get to have some of your beer and in exchange, each of them will take turns telling you incredibly good stories. At first you're a little worried because, well, who are these guys drinking your beer? Within a couple minutes, you are not worried anymore. You are ordering another pitcher. And then another one. These guys are two of the best storytellers you've ever met, and the drunker they get, the more they appear to be trying to outdo each other. The stories they are telling you are as engaging as they are strange and unbelievable. Now imagine that both of these guys, the novelist and the reporter, are actually the same guy, and the stories they are telling are all true. That's what reading this book is like. The subject matter is the obvious initial draw to this book. Mr. Adelstein's relays his years of experience as a reporter for the Yomiuri Shinbun with efficiency, clarity and wit, while at the same time managing to convey some of the structure and texture of a number of complex institutions and sub-cultures (the Tokyo Metropolitan Police Department, other prefectural police departments in Japan, crime reporters for the Yomiuri and, of course, the yakuza). Beyond the fascinating subject matter, however, I could and would and will recommend this book solely for the quality of writing. Mr. Adelstein works expertly at the level of the sentence and the vignette. He doesn't accumulate detail, but instead precisely curates it, giving

just enough to put you right there with him. Any less detail and the narrative would be flat, lifeless.

Japan is not entirely the land of Zen gardens and precision cameras as most Americans born after WWII tend to believe. It is a nation with a major dark side, openly racist and sexist, with a wide public tolerance of perversions such as child pornography. Japanese 'salarymen' in suits stand on their lunch hour reading comic books about teenage schoolgirls. This is also the country that was equalled only by Nazi Germany in their wartime cruelties against civilians and prisoners. But the Japanese above all believe in social cohesion, and these regrettable parts of human behavior are regarded as inevitable, so why not provide for them in a socially integrated way? Thus it is not surprising that organized crime is considered just another part of daily life, with office buildings and business cards (!) for the so-called yakuza. Tokyo Vice is the autobiographical story of Jake Adelstein, a middle-class boy from the American Midwest who grew up attracted to Japanese culture and language, and how he learned about all this first hand. Adelstein relocated to Japan in his teens to study Buddhism and go to college, and stayed. Amazingly, he eventually managed to be hired as a reporter for the largest Japanese daily newspaper, writing and working entirely in the Japanese language for twelve years. He served on the crime beat, becoming an expert on the seamy underside of Japanese life. Eventually however, Adelstein went beyond his objective reporter role and stood up as an advocate and crusader, especially on behalf of foreign women whom he discovered being trafficked into sexual slavery in Japan. He was appalled to find that these crimes were ignored by the Japanese establishment; the victims were women, prostitutes and foreigners and therefore triply of no importance.

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