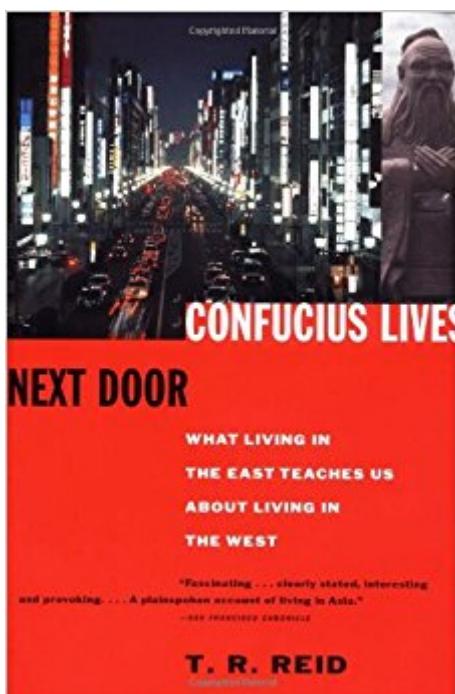


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# Confucius Lives Next Door: What Living In The East Teaches Us About Living In The West



## **Synopsis**

"Fascinating...clearly stated, interesting and provoking.... A plainspoken account of living in Asia." —San Francisco Chronicle Anyone who has heard his weekly commentary on NPR knows that T. R. Reid is trenchant, funny, and deeply knowledgeable reporter and now he brings this erudition and humor to the five years he spent in Japan--where he served as The Washington Post's Tokyo bureau chief. He provides unique insights into the country and its 2,500-year-old Confucian tradition, a powerful ethical system that has played an integral role in the continent's "postwar miracle." Whether describing his neighbor calmly asserting that his son's loud bass playing brings disrepute on the neighborhood, or the Japanese custom of having students clean the schools, Reid inspires us to consider the many benefits of the Asian Way--as well as its drawbacks--and to use this to come to a greater understanding of both Japanese culture and America.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

Despite setbacks, the economic "miracles" achieved by many Asian countries in the latter 20th century have been impressive. This entertaining and thoughtful book invites the reader to consider East Asia's other miracle: its dramatically low rates of crime, divorce, drug abuse, and other social ills. T.R. Reid, an NPR commentator and former Tokyo bureau chief for the Washington Post, lived in Japan for five years, and he draws on this experience to show how the countries of East Asia have built modern industrial societies characterized by the safest streets, the best schools, and the most stable families in the world. Reid credits Asia's success to the ethical values of Chinese

philosopher Confucius, born in 551 B.C., who taught the value of harmony and the importance of treating others decently. This is not a new perception--Lee Kuan Yew of Singapore and others have rather heavy-handedly invoked it to claim moral superiority over the West--but the author's vivid anecdotes strengthen its relevance. Public messages constantly remind Asian citizens of their responsibilities to society. To enhance a sense of belonging, civic ceremonies encourage individuals' allegiance to a greater good; across Japan, for example, April 1 is Nyu-Sha-Shiki day, when corporations officially welcome new employees, most of whom remain loyal to their company for life. Citing Malaysia's ideas of a "reverse Peace Corps," Reid sees a case for Asians coming to teach the West in the same way that Westerners have evangelized in Asia for over four centuries.

--John Stevenson --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

In this breezy homily, Reid, an NPR commentator who was the Washington Post's Tokyo bureau chief for five years, offers a look at what he calls Asia's "social miracle" (as opposed to its once vaunted economic growth). The nations of East Asia, he reports, have "the safest streets, the strongest families, and the best schools in the world." Along with their enviably low rates of crime, divorce, unwed motherhood and vandalism, countries like Japan, South Korea, Singapore, Taiwan and Thailand boast a burgeoning middle class, a general aura of civility and a more egalitarian distribution of wealth than the U.S. enjoys. Like many other Asia watchers, Reid attributes this social cohesiveness to a shared set of core values?discipline, loyalty, hard work, a focus on education, group harmony, etc.?that he traces back to the Confucian classics. Yet Reid, now the Post's London bureau chief, readily admits that the East Asian model of Confucian prosperity has glaring flaws: most cities he visited were drab and ugly; Singapore is a "self-righteous and thoroughly intolerant place controlled by a small clique." Reid, who transplanted his family of five from a small Colorado town to Tokyo, serves up amusing anecdotes and cross-cultural observations (his two daughters enrolled in a Japanese public school), but his report reads like one long radio spiel and covers well-trod terrain. After gently berating Westerners for more than 200 pages, he gets to eat his rice cake and have it, too: Confucian values and our own Judeo-Christian morality, he concludes, are basically the same, differing mainly in nuance. Author tour. Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

There were parts of this book I really enjoyed, like where Reid talks about NKK Steel and their trying to redefine their business. There were other parts that I had a very hard time getting behind. Reid knows a great deal about Japan and most of it jives with both my limited experience and what I have

read in the past. He knows the players well, and many of them personally and his knowledge of Japanese culture and language serve him well in making his arguments. I feel though, that he has bitten off more than he can chew. If his thesis was "What living in Japan teaches us about living in the West" I might buy it. However, his argument that Asia is Confucian and that there is a great binding philosophy that encompasses all Asia is nothing something I would readily agree with. I have lived in China and Korea for almost a decade and traveled extensively in Asia. I would agree that Singapore, Korea, and Japan are largely Confucian based but when it comes to China I would have to disagree. Reid's knowledge of China seems to come from the media and he explains it to be a place where it is safe to walk the streets. I hate to be the bearer of bad news but China is anything but safe. I have had friends beaten and robbed, a co-worker had her throat cut, another co-worker witnessed a stabbing, my cab driver was beaten bloody in the front seat of the taxi while my wife and I sat in the back, and a fight broke out in the kitchen of a restaurant where we were eating and several workers left bloody and beaten. China is a violent place where Confucian values are barely a concern anymore. I have witnessed and been the victim of more crime in the five years I have lived in China than in the 10+ years I lived in Washington, DC! The Chinese are a hard working people and they do believe strongly in the value of education but they do not fit into the Japanese-Korean realm of Confucianism. It is interesting that I read this book right after Leslie Chang's "Factory Girls" which paints an entirely different picture of Chinese society. I did like that Reid references the arguments of Kishore Mahbubani, who though I sometimes disagree with him, is an incredible genius and the true architect of Reid's line of thought. If you are interested in a comparison of Asian and Western culture I suggest "Can Asians Think?". I recommend Reid's book for people who are interested in Japan and Japanese culture but I wouldn't recommend it as an overview of Asian culture as a whole.

The author lived in Asia for several years. In the book he discusses what we in the west might learn from the east. The east has lower crime rates, lower unemployment, safe, clean public places. He traces the roots of the Asian miracle to the emphasis and tradition of the Confucian ethic. That is the basic thesis of the book, but a large part of the pleasure of the book comes from Mr Reid's direct, down home writing style. He has many hilarious anecdotes. Mistranslated English, exotic asian pizzas... He writes about a steel company that made a giant indoor ski area and how that grew from an effort to keep people employed. His neighbor, an elderly gentleman inducts him in Japanese customs... Never dogmatic, always entertaining. The basic message is there are things we can learn from asia, so he lets us see some of the good stuff going on there. Certainly a good message.

T.R. Reid spent several years in Japan as a bureau chief for the Washington Post, and *Confucius Lives Next Door* is, on one level, about his and his family's experiences. Reid, however, is most interested in the "social miracle" he observes in most of East Asia: the low crime and drug use rates, the stable family structure, the relatively egalitarian distribution of wealth, the successful schools. His thesis is that this social harmony derives from the system of values in the teachings of Confucius, particularly the idea of "wa" or group harmony. If you, like most westerners, know little about Confucius, Reid provides a basic introduction. Interestingly, at the end of the book, he offers an "atogaki" or counter-thesis to his own, observing, among other things, that Confucian values are not very different from Judaeo-Christian ones and that the difference between western societies and the ones of East Asia may be that the East Asians do a better job of bringing moral values to bear on daily life. Whether or not you agree with his thesis, Reid offers some sharp observations of daily life in Japan. The book is a good place to begin if you're planning to travel to Japan. Sure, there are a lot of generalizations, as is typical in this sort of book, but the writing is good and the book functions well as an introduction to Japanese culture.

A great book enjoyed by all the book club members. It has history and humor and beautifully written by a favorite author. An American family lives in Japan and the next door little old man is "Confucius" Read it for fun. Read it for history lessons>

An excellent read, engaging in the common thread that binds all Asians and lessons in how to be for the rest of the world - especially for Americans.

T.R. Reid manages to explain a topic as vast as the Far East in a serious but entertaining book. Reid describes his experiences in Japan as he navigates Tokyo, and eventually enrolls his young daughters in a Japanese elementary school. Reid became enchanted with Confucius, and my guess is that he had to have missed other factors that contribute to the Asian mind. He glosses over Taoism and Shinto in a few short paragraphs while spending an entire chapter on the history of Confucian thought. Nonetheless, the book managed to be a page turner. T. R. Reid is a reporter for the Washington Post and a commentator for National Public Radio.

Facinating and informative. anyone who is interested in or works with the Japanese should read this book. can't wait to read another Reid book

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