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Anthropology of Modern Japan

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INTRODUCTION

The discipline of social and cultural anthropology and the study of Japan have a long, well documented history.¹ What are the strengths and the accompanying weaknesses of anthropological research of Japan? This chapter attempts to encapsulate some of the methodological approaches and thematic issues that have dominated the field in the post-war era, offer an explanation as to why anthropology makes an important contribution to Japanese studies and give a snapshot of some of the predominant themes in anthropological research in the post-war era.

At the forefront of most anthropological research is a concern for 'human culture': describing it, interpreting it and using it to understand social relationships and practices, and to explain how and why certain events occurred around the world. Despite this, anthropologists rarely agree on what the term means; it can be seen as distinct from nature (as in the 'nature versus nurture' debate) as well as from society (structures that form relationships between people and groups, as well as institutions like the family, the workplace, the community and the nation-state). Robert LeVine wrote:

Anthropologists who converse with scholars in other disciplines are often asked what culture is,

sometimes with the implication that the concept is outdated and ambiguous and that its use is an indicator of obscurantism in anthropology. Indeed, culture is often treated in quantitative social science as representing the unexplained residuum of rigorous empirical analysis, an area of darkness beyond the reach of currently available scientific searchlights... For many anthropologists... culture is a source of illumination, not a veil of obscurity... [C]ulture is a shared organization of ideas that includes the intellectual, moral, and aesthetic standards prevalent in a community and the meanings of communicative actions. But formal definitions do little to clarify the nature of culture; clarification is only possible through ethnography. (1984: 67)

LeVine's definition touches on the nature versus nurture debate (in that culture is outside 'scientific searchlights'); his basic description of culture as a 'shared organization of ideas... and the meanings of communicative actions' seems reasonable to most observers of Japan. While the notion of culture as shared is important we must be mindful not to allow this idea of an ideal 'shared' culture to overrun the diverse realities of everyday life in every society. Japanese culture in particular has been described by Japanese and foreign scholars alike as a rather fixed and monolithic entity

(see Babb, Chapter 19, this volume), yet this is rarely the case. As these chapters demonstrate, Japanese society and culture has changed tremendously in the past century. Culture changes over time just as society and values do. Culture is something both tangible and intangible, and something that is able to shift and change while maintaining some links from the present to the past. These links include a consistent and shared 'message' that we get from cultural icons and institutions but also their critiques. Understanding culture is the main intellectual goal of anthropology and, as LeVine remarks, culture is understood through ethnographic fieldwork, the method of choice for anthropologists. Therefore, any discussion of the anthropology of Japan must begin with a conversation about ethnographic methods.

ETHNOGRAPHY: BACKGROUND AND METHODS

Visions of past figures of anthropology – the young cultural anthropologist Margaret Mead wrapped in a grass skirt and beads in Samoa, or the dashing but fictional archaeologist/treasure hunter Indiana Jones – romanticise the study of other cultures as exotic, exciting, undiscovered and even dangerous; in the past anthropology was always about knowing the 'Other'. This is not always the case today. Anthropologists study 'first world', urban, industrialised societies just as often as they do the developing world. Romantic icons aside, the most important distinguishing characteristic of anthropological studies is its methodological focus on extended, in-depth fieldwork: 'participant-observation'. As a senior colleague once quipped, this difference is made most plain when comparing the cognate fields of anthropology and sociology: 'sociologists know a little about a lot of people. Anthropologists know a lot about few people'. Implied here, however, is that what they do know is deep and complex. They have shared days and nights with these individuals, living together in a particular social and physical environment, breathing the same air, eating the same food, speaking the same language, scratching the same insect bites... this focus on the 'lived experience' – both of the people being studied as well as of the researcher him/herself – is what separates anthropology from other kindred disciplines like sociology. This lived experience – more commonly expressed by academics as 'ethnographic fieldwork' – is the hallmark of anthropological research and writing. Living in the field, speaking the same language when necessary (steep learning curves often accompany this

kind of research; translators are not unheard of but are not considered best practice) creates understanding as no survey snapshot ever could.

Despite this physical, emotional and linguistic closeness, there has always been distance between the anthropologist and the informant. Ahmed notes that '[a]nthropology, it has often been said, served as a handmaid to colonialism' (1992: 155). Many past (and some current) ethnographic contexts involve researchers who are not in equal socio-economic relationships with their informers. This is the nature of knowledge as power, where the society with capital to spare deems it important to learn about others, partly to preserve its own position of privilege and partly to further extend its influence, as Ahmed writes, through colonial and neo-colonial projects. This history is not absent from the Japanese anthropological research but the discipline has followed its own particular path, which charts the rise of Japanese global influence.

Japan's place in the anthropological landscape seems to be contested. On the one hand, cultural anthropological research on Japan, as we will see below, has had enduring influence in the discipline, as evidenced by very long print runs of classic monographs. On the other hand, as Jennifer Robertson notes, '[i]t... appears that anthropologists in general do not regard Japan as a geographical "prestige zone"; that is... they do not regard Japan as a cultural area of choice and theoretical cachet' (2005: 4). This is because Japan was 'somehow perceived as too much like "us"' and any information yielded about Japan or about the West (via comparative analysis) would be uninteresting and weak. Furthermore, Japan does not fit into a simplified 'West and the rest' or core-periphery model, which has dominated our diplomatic and academic understandings of international relations since the 1970s.² Yet, as this exchange between veteran anthropologists demonstrates, there is still a great deal to be learned from the study of Japan:

D. Plath: Are [the Japanese] different?

K. Brown: They are, in fact... I got into this question thirty years ago. And I was not so sure. And I thought maybe when Japan 'catches up', they will look like those of us from the Western world. They don't. . . and that was a dumb assumption.

...

D. Plath: It all looks familiar at least on the surface and then you go around the corner and it's not the same. It's not opposite; it's not topsy-turvy land. I tell students all the time: don't think of Japan as 180 degrees out from American life, where everything is different and everything is opposite.

If anything, what is fascinating to me is that it's 18 degrees different – not 180 degrees. (Plath, 1992)

As these two veteran anthropologists note, many scholars' original interest in Japan was rooted in a desire to see if modernisation theory (in other words, the 'catch up' game to the West) would prove true in Japan. To some extent there are similarities between contemporary Japanese society and other societies in Europe and North America; but it is the gradation of difference (the '18 degrees') that intrigues today's scholars. Furthermore, it is precisely that fine detail of 18 degrees that one could argue requires the 'thick description' that only long term ethnographic fieldwork can convey. Broad paint strokes may capture a 180-degree difference, but they are less capable of communicating subtleties. Clifford Geertz notes that 180-degree differences in human cultures may yield defensible but somewhat disheartening results when he writes that 'there is a difference between difference and a dichotomy. The first is a comparison and it relates; the second is a severance and it isolates' (1995: 28). It seems that many initial inquiries into Japan find it in the latter category, but after careful consideration place it in the former. That is the true intellectual contribution of anthropology in the study of any culture: to connect and relate ideas from another culture to shed light on the understanding of one's own. Even though the anthropological research cited in the essay below is mostly focused on a single site (in some cases a location such as a particular village, school or company; for others a genre of music or a particular industry, for example), implicit in all of these cases are the comparative lessons. While we learn about Japan we learn about ourselves, and others around the world.³

THE ANTHROPOLOGY OF JAPAN: BEGINNINGS

The study of Japan through foreign anthropological research has had many intellectual outcomes over the years. In its early days it transformed the study of anthropology by presenting a complex picture of a nation that had undergone drastic economic, social and military transformations. When John Embree first began his fieldwork in 1935, Japan was already well on its path of industrialisation; his book *Suye Mura: A Japanese Village* (1939) was the first systematic study of prewar Japan. The Japan he encountered had moved on from the quaint stories he might have read by his foreign predecessors, British traveller Isabella Bird (whose *Unbeaten Tracks in Japan* was published

in 1880) or American journalist Lafcadio Hearn (the densely ethnographic travelogue, *Glimpses of Unfamiliar Japan*, was published in 1894). Bird and Hearn (the latter naturalised as Japanese) were early Anglophone writers who sought to 'capture' the difference of Japan from North America and Europe, while Embree strived to understand how 1930s rural Japan worked, both literally and figuratively, through his mapping of cooperative social structures and emphasis on political and semi-professional or social organisations.

The next major anthropologist's work on Japan was of such great influence it has been called 'the master narrative' by those in the field (Ryang, 2004: 28). Ruth Benedict was commissioned by the US Government in 1944 to write a psychological profile of the 'enemy', resulting in the much criticised, but still in print, volume *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword: Patterns of Japanese Culture* (1946, 1974). Benedict, a successful anthropologist in her own right who had established herself as an expert on south-west Native American culture, was unable to carry out direct field work due to the hostilities between Japan and the USA and based much of her writing on secondary sources (in particular, she notes a debt to Embree's work (1974: 6) and to Japanese films (1974: 7)), supplemented by interviews with Japanese Americans, particularly those who had been born and educated in Japan. Many of these interviewees, including her main informant Robert Hashima, were internees at 'War Relocation Camps', individuals who Benedict herself describes with some sympathy as being in 'a most difficult position' (1974: frontispiece). Lummis, a scholar who has recently studied Benedict's interview notes for this volume, has written:

given that the research was mainly done during World War II and the book published shortly after, it seems remarkably liberal and tolerant. Perhaps it was the best American liberalism could have produced under those circumstances. Nevertheless judged by the criterion that matters most – whether it helps or hinders understanding of Japanese culture – it is deeply flawed. (2007)

The flaws Lummis describe centre not so much on Benedict's inability to speak Japanese or visit Japan directly (which would be expected), but on the fact that she 'took the ideology of a class for the culture of a people, a state of acute social dislocation for a normal condition, and an extraordinary moment in a nation's history as an unvarying norm of social behavior'. Her classification of Japan as a 'shame culture', one which primarily motivates the individual to acceptable behaviour through external rather than internal means (Benedict, 1974: 177–194), has been critiqued by both Japanese and non-Japanese scholars; but, on

the other hand, some of her observations remain 'useful' (Lummis, 2007). William W. Kelly recognised that Benedict 'portrayed the Japanese as oriented to multiple social positions and thus caught in culturally marked, exclusive circles of obligation and duty that forced painful choices in normative behavior' (1991: 400). While the stakes of the painful choices are may be radical today than in the days of wartime Japan, some of the struggle between 'obligation' (*giri*) and 'duty' (*on*) are still culturally resonant in observing contemporary dilemmas that the Japanese face, such as family responsibilities versus professional requirements. Takami Kuwayama,⁴ a Japanese anthropologist who was trained in the USA, notes that one of the most important lessons we have gained from *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword* is not necessarily about Japan but rather about the USA. His essay 'Ethnographic Reading in Reverse: *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword* as a Study of the American Character' (2004: 87–114) suggests that it is an American bias towards a necessary moral and psychological 'unity' and 'absoluteness' that created the concept of a Japanese 'duality' and perceived 'contradictions' in behaviour. Lastly, the American privileging of an ideology of egalitarianism finds its reverse in the complex hierarchical relations described by Benedict's chart of duty and obligation. Kuwayama's analysis of the 'ethnography in reverse', notably, attempts to bridge the gap between Geertz's 'difference' versus 'dichotomy'. In *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword* we find valuable lessons if we read the text as an exercise in the delineation of the important and emerging, if dichotomous, relationship between the USA and Japan.

The next set of anthropological tomes were dominated by English-speaking scholars but, interestingly, also included those that were penned by Japanese scholars such as Nakane Chie (a Japanese anthropologist who had, during her postgraduate career, studied England and Italy, conducting fieldwork in India.). Post-war Japan differed significantly from 'classic' anthropological sites. Not only was it competing with the first world in economic terms, Japan also had its own educated and articulate class of scholars who made important contributions to the anthropological debate. As William W. Kelly wrote in his 1991 review of the field:

We Japan specialists ... are actually caught between rival polemics. We are dealing with a nation whose power in many respects equals our own: It has a more potent economy, a more literate citizenry, a massive cultural industry and a distinguished and independent academic establishment. (1991: 396)

This constant shifting (balancing) between the prominence of Western scholars of Japan and the Japanese scholar (plus further permutations, which include the Japanese American scholar, and the Resident Korean scholar, whose perspectives give them an interesting and different voice) has been an important intellectual phenomenon over the post-war era. Furthermore, unlike anthropological research in less developed nations, published work on Japan is open to review and criticism by Japanese readers and scholars due to its highly developed publishing industry that includes many translated books from English to Japanese. In this sense, it is important to note that the non-Japanese ethnographer can no longer claim sole privilege of bringing Japanese society to a wider audience.

MAJOR THEMES IN ANTHROPOLOGICAL RESEARCH IN JAPAN

The Self: Individual in Society

Introductory students of Japan often focus on the conformity of Japanese society because they see it as an immediate contrast to the individualism they prioritise in their own cultural values: the expected 180-degree difference appears and represents 'difference' to be mastered and understood. Professional scholars of Japan, however, in anthropology have frequently sought to do the opposite: to find similarities and to clarify and de-bunk this myth of the monolithic 'group-ism' of Japan by focusing on different conceptualisations of the individual in Japanese society and how they relate to others in groups. Research in the area of selfhood and Japanese society peaked in the early post-war period when research by Japanese and American psychologists and anthropologists built an image of the Japanese 'self', as expressed through 'personality'. Work by Caudill (1963), Doi (1981, 1986), and Lebra (see Lebra and Lebra, 1974; 1986) epitomised this period's focus on childrearing, family relations and psychological strategies in the home, which were then projected into adult relationships. Much like Benedict's work early research on the Japanese self was of great interest to those who wanted to figure out 'what made the Japanese tick' during the period of Japan's high economic growth. Doi (1981) was a psychologist who posited that much of adult interaction in Japanese society could be explained by a dependency theory that was ingrained in the mother-child relationship (note the continuity with Benedict's work). According to his theory of dependency in the book *The Anatomy of Independence* (1981) (*amae* in Japanese, also translated as 'passive love') he posited that the

indulgent dependency experienced by children in the family sets the tone for relationships in other social contexts. For example, personal relationships between spouses, and employees and employers, could be analysed based on an understanding of socially accepted levels of one party's *amaeru* (seeking indulgence; creating a dependent, emotive relationship) and the corresponding other's *amaesaseru* (to indulge another person as an expression of love). His interest in *amae* stemmed from his position as a psychologist: *amae*, when it worked, created stable families and corporate groups; when it went wrong it resulted in clinical neuroses (Doi, 1986: 122). In other words, *amae* seemed to be 'what made the Japanese tick', much as Benedict's *on* and *giri* had seemed to be.

Doi's psychological model provided the emotional glue that made another Japanese anthropologist's argument hold water: Nakane Chie's theory of vertical society (*tateshakai*) stated that hierarchical relationships were more psychologically dynamic than horizontal ones. She published this idea first in Japanese and then in English in the slim but influential book *Japanese Society* (1970). Although her work focused on the hierarchical aspect of Japanese society, many took home the message that Japanese society was a 'group-based' society, and this 'group model' stuck in the popular imagination of the non-Japanese world. From Ruth Benedict's *on-giri* model through Doi's *amae* to Nakane's pyramid of hierarchical relationships non-Japanese people began to see Japan as a set of nested and triangle-shaped 'groups' that from the outside appeared to be interacting a sometimes 'irrational' way, but when considered in light of anthropological research the cultural logic made sense. This was the way for the 'Other' to understand the mysteries of Japanese behaviour.

Westerners (the 'Other' in the above sentence) were bent on figuring out what motivated the Japanese in both political and economic terms; understanding their 'culture' and their 'personalities' was deemed crucial to successful business negotiations. The Japanese were more than obliged to help the 'Other' learn about them and in the process created a national mythology of self-definition. *Nihonjinron*, or theories of the Japanese people, serves as a useful interlude to the discussion of Japanese cultural anthropology. This body of work, which arose from both popular and academic presses in Japan, rested on the idea that the Japanese culture, language and even race are unique compared to other societies. Thus, it is difficult, if not impossible, for an outsider to penetrate Japan's meaning or to master its manoeuvres. *Nihonjinron*'s emergence is thought to have been instigated not only by indigenous Japanese thought but by the initial isolating gaze of the foreign observer: '[i]n particular, though the

debt is rarely acknowledged, virtually the entire discourse of that branch of Japanese studies called *Nihonjinron* has been carried out within the framework established by Benedict's book' (Lumms, 2007). More succinctly William W. Kelly writes: '*Nihonjinron* is the Occidentalist retort to our Orientalist illusions' (1991: 396).

In the 1970s and 1980s the ideas of Japan as 'unique' and a 'collective society' have had resonance with scholars as well as general readers interested in the phenomenon of 'Japan Inc' (Japan's spectacular rise to economic power in the post-war era). Many wrestled with it, but perhaps the most powerful critique of this set of ideas was that made by two sociologists based in Australia, Ross Mouer and Yoshio Sugimoto. Their book *Images of Japanese Society: A Study in the Social Construction of Reality* (1986) was a methodological debunking of the myths that had gradually accumulated about Japan's special place in the world, simply by noting that their research had

raise[d] doubts whether, in comparison with people in other societies, the Japanese are *more* group oriented, place *more* emphasis and social harmony, value *more* deeply group membership or social solidarity, or are more accustomed to 'vertical' forms of organization. Certainly every society is unique; but is Japanese society as 'uniquely unique' in terms of its levels of consensus and social integration as so many seem to suggest? (1986: 11, original emphasis)

Mouer and Sugimoto gave many examples of a more diverse and even disruptive Japanese society, which weakened the hold that the many theorists, culminating in the *Nihonjinron* and group-model supporters, had held for many years. For example, they noted variation and conflict in Japanese society on all levels and throughout history; the constant comparison between Japan with the West skewed its meaning (1986: 13–14, 16). Their ideas consolidated and gave voice to the discomfort other scholars felt regarding the popularity of the group model. Anthropologist Harumi Befu had argued similarly in 1980 that, amongst other things, historical evidence of enduring conflict, 'paternalistic neglect', strife that led to labour movements and scholarly 'failure to distinguish between ideology and behaviour' (1980: 31–36) had led him to believe that Nakane's group model was not a valid way to think of Japan as 'different' or 'unified'. This was mostly a kind of *kireigoto* ('nice things in Japan which Japanese find it comfortable to discuss with outsiders whose approval they seek' (1980: 39)) rather than an empirical description of social life in Japan.

While Mouer and Sugimoto were not card-carrying anthropologists, their challenge to the hegemonic view of Japanese society as a unified entity that could be understood only on its own terms had wide reaching influence on anthropological research. In the 1980s, concern with diversity in Japanese society grew: anthropologists conducted fieldwork that yielded messages about gender, identity, tradition and change. For example, the exploration of the Japanese 'self' was revisited with the publication of Dorinne Kondo's *Crafting Selves: Power, Gender and Discourses of Identity in a Japanese Workplace* (1990). Rather than focusing on the family or the individual's relationship to the corporate state or other entity, Kondo took a more nuanced approach to the understanding of Japanese social interaction in a variety of contexts. In her informative first chapter entitled 'The Eye/I' (1990: 3–48) she uses a discussion of the first person pronoun ('I') in Japanese to demonstrate the fractured but sensible 'wholeness' of the Japanese self (1990: 26). Kondo used the phrase 'referential solidarity' to refer the way the self is defined through a 'spatialized ideology of meaning as reference'; these referents are primarily determined by relationships to other conversational partners (1990: 35). While these discussions are not new in the field of Japanese social linguistics, this book did much to elevate anthropological studies of the self out of old binaries, and her reflective focus on her own selfhood not as a Japanese scholar or an American or British scholar but as an Asian American scholar further disrupted old mind sets about 'studying the "Other"'. The flourishing of Asian American studies was close to follow.

My own work on social marginality hinges on another aspect of the Japanese self: its interaction with others. As a student I was interested in Harumi Befu's previously mentioned essay 'A Critique of the Group Model of Japanese Society' (1980), where he convincingly argued against the group model as the main descriptor of Japanese society and instead offered the social-exchange model. In other words, the 'I'll scratch your back if you scratch mine' motto was more of a motivator than 'I have been programmed to respect people hierarchically superior to me in ways that no one else can understand'. Japanese people (like most humans on the planet) were equally motivated by 'individual self interest' (1980: 39) and thus were not any more 'unique' or more impenetrable than any other human beings. This made sense to me, but then I also wondered if Japanese people were strongly motivated by reciprocity why did volunteers working with the disadvantaged and homeless residents of Kotobuki-chô in Yokohama offer their time, energy and labour in an environment where there was little if any possibility for return? In *On the Margins of Japanese Society: Volunteers and the Welfare of the Urban Underclass* (1997), I observed that

the fundamental inequality of the economic and social status of the volunteers and residents in Kotobuki prevents their relationship from becoming truly reciprocal. [Yet, i]nequality is what brings the groups together... Volunteer activities provide an opportunity for Japanese to overstep social boundaries and have an impact on the underclass. (244)

In other words, though the 'self' in Japan had been previously bound to a group to which an individual was not only hierarchically embedded but was also caught up in a 'give-and-take' relationship, there was significant activity by some Japanese against the strong borders that separate individual or corporate interests. It was precisely this kind of against-the-grain activity that arose from the unrest and dissatisfaction described by Befu, Mouer and Sugimoto in their criticisms of Japan as a serene homogenous society. The Japanese self was fractured and relational but also one that was active and took risks rather than staying within the status quo.

Another more contemporary view of the self offers a different perspective on the relationship between individual will and self-expression. While Benedict's or Doi's model had portrayed the Japanese self as bound by certain theoretical concepts that 'stuck' the individual in certain roles with specific expectations during their life stages, Laura Miller's work on the beauty industry in contemporary Japan eloquently illustrated that the self (as seen through the body) in Japan is not merely a static, nature-given object. In *Beauty Up: Exploring Contemporary Japanese Body Aesthetics* (2006) Miller saw the body as a concrete example of the self, certainly gendered, but that its expression and aesthetic values could be molded and contoured (literally as well as figuratively!) to create a self-image that appealed to the individual's sense of beauty as well as discipline, as a pleasingly expressed face and figure was equivalent to a well disciplined mind (2006: 3).

Lastly, while identity has been discussed in many fruitful ways, another interesting recent approach by an anthropologist is the work of Karen Nakamura on the deaf community in Japan. Her book *Deaf in Japan: Signing and the Politics of Identity* (2006) proposed that deaf people, like any other ethnic group in Japan, such as the Ainu or the Resident Koreans, constituted an ethnic minority which has its own language and which experiences limited access to mainstream positions of power and status. Like race, deafness is thought to be biological, but there is socio-historical construction behind deaf identity that varies immensely (2006: 11–12). The self has an undeniable physicality but Nakamura demonstrates that the social, economic and political landscape of the deaf

culture in Japan has a great deal in common with other attributes such as gender, ethnicity or class.

Modernity and Tradition

A strong interest in the changes Japan was experiencing during the reconstruction period (beginning in 1945 and ending with the 1964 Tokyo Olympics) and the ensuing 'rapid growth period' (1955–1973), with all its economic, social and ideological reforms, resulted in a great many monographs on Japan's transition from a pre-war imperial state to a democratic consumerist nation. Befu notes that anthropologists have been particularly 'interested in the generalized cultural patterns, social practices, and personality traits which have contributed to Japan's *modernization*' (1971: 183, emphasis added), implicitly referring to the Benedict Doi Nakane legacy mentioned above. He continues by noting that anthropologists have looked at modern Japan using a number of tropes; one of interest here is the 'Japan as a Borrower' (1971: 183–4). He notes that Japan 'has not been simply a copier... [but] has devoted her energy to making refinements' (1971: 183). This idea of 'refining', or, in other words, an active change to an existing cultural or social form intended to produce a desired effect or benefit, is a focal point for research on the social and cultural changes that Japan underwent in the post-war period.

While Thomas P. Rohlen's *For Harmony and Strength: Japanese White-Collar Organization in Anthropological Perspective* (1974) and Ronald P. Dore's *Shinohata: A Portrait of a Japanese Village* (1978) were some of the earlier examples of this concern with a transforming society (the former has been considered closely aligned with Nakane's model of vertical society), other scholars have looked at Japan's progress to, through and perhaps out of modernity in a multitude of innovative ways. For example, Theodore C. Bestor, who undertook fieldwork in an 'old' Tokyo neighbourhood, found that the historical evidence behind some of the 'traditions' was actually rather thin. Instead, Japanese community leaders and other participants relied on

the use of social idioms or metaphors that seek to clothe the present in a mantle of venerable antiquity... [where] residents construct and manipulate ideas about what are supposed... to be historical patterns of community organization so as to shape the present to their own advantage. (1989: 258)

Jennifer Robertson's book *Native and Newcomer: Making and Remaking a Japanese City* (1991) is a more recent example of the re-examination of community construction in wider metropolitan Tokyo. Both these ethnographies showed the importance of

'history' and 'tradition' in Japanese society, but delved deeper into the social consequences as to what 'history' meant to real people in their real lives.

Another ethnography that addresses contemporary manifestations of tradition and modernity in Japanese society is Scott Schnell's *The Rousing Drum: Ritual Practice in a Japanese Community* (1999). Schnell tracks the 'unruly' drum performances in a communal festival in Furukawa, Gifu Prefecture. Schnell argues that the ritual meaning within this festival is 'continually amended, reinterpreted, or transformed according to the needs of its practitioners – needs that clearly change over time in response to changing sociopolitical and economic conditions' (1999: 4). While the festival dates back to the early 1830s, the 'traditional' aspects of this ritual are manipulated by current performers to express resistance and to legitimate change in this community.

The use of the term 'history' in inverted commas is deliberate. Anthropologists have examined the use and the manipulation of this term extensively in recent scholarship. Marilyn Ivy's essay 'Itineraries of Knowledge: Trans-figuring Japan' in her book *Discourses of the Vanishing: Modernity, Phantasm, Japan* (1995: 29–97) argues that post-war cultural expressions of 'Japanese-ness' have been seen through the prisms of the past, the present and even through 'Other'-ed geographic references. 'Traditional' Japan had become as 'exotic' to its own urbanised inhabitants as a trip to a foreign country. By essentialising 'Japan' as historic and exotic, the full-speed-ahead pace of postmodern Japan was allowed a space to preserve the idea of a past, even as it left that idea behind. This creatively strategic malleability of Japanese historical traditions continues to capture our attention: Christine R. Yano's ethnography of the musical genre of *enka*, *Tears of Longing: Nostalgia and the Nation in Popular Song* (2002), focuses on looking back (and forward) through popular music. *Enka*, she notes, is not 'mere nostalgia', idealising a cultural past that has been lost or has never truly existed; instead, it

is always newly created ... *enka* denies that the past is past and provides a space within the present where the values, interactions, and emotions associated with the past can continue to exist. (26–27)

Globalisation and Consumption

As previously noted, Japan has been seen as a geographical area with little to offer theoretical advancements in the field (Robertson, 2005: 4). Recent research in the area of globalisation and consumption, however, trumps this long-held position that anthropologists of Japan have little to contribute to theoretical understanding of global phenomena.

Japan's own preoccupation with globalisation's linguistic predecessor 'internationalisation' (*kokusaika*) means that there is a wealth of published research on transnational issues concerning Japan, even before 'globalisation' became a catchword in academia (see 'Japan and Globalization' by Dobson, this volume). For example, Roger Goodman's long-term research on the internationalisation of education in Japan covers many aspects of globalisation as seen from an anthropological perspective, from his first ethnography on *kikokushijo* (returnee students) (1993) to his more recent work on internationalisation as an aspect of educational reform, and wider issues of globalisation in Japan (for example, Goodman et al. 2003).

Another anthropologist who has written convincingly about globalisation in the Japanese context is the veteran scholar Harumi Benu. His article 'Globalisation Theory from the Bottom Up: Japan's Contribution' (2003) argues that the diffusion of Japanese culture around the world provides an empirical 'bottom up' approach that challenges the assumption that globalisation is a Westernising process (2003: 4–5).⁵ This idea (globalisation equals Westernisation) has been most directly challenged by evidence provided by voluminous Japanese cultural flows to other parts of Asia and the West, making Japanese popular culture an important decentring force in the contemporary global landscape (Iwabuchi, 2002). In particular, the transnational consumption of Japanese popular culture (in the form of food, consumer electronics, anime films, fashion and so on) has been at the heart of these globalisation processes. Ian Condry's book *Hip-hop Japan: Rap and the Paths of Cultural Globalization* (2006) is of great interest in this discussion not only because of its timely topic but also because of its strong reliance on anthropological methods to analyse a complex cultural phenomenon in Japan. Condry employs cultural-studies theory but privileges the ethnographic context, using the emic term *genba* to describe the 'scene' (coincidentally, I often heard this same term in the context of day labouring, referring to the construction site – obviously, whatever the context, the *genba* is 'where it's at'). Condry's major contribution is that he gives a concrete context that demonstrates that the development of globalisation and its counterpart, localisation, proceed simultaneously and cannot be examined separately.

While Japanese products have been enormously successful in overseas markets, despite ongoing recessions since 1991, Japan's domestic consumption patterns of both domestically and internationally produced goods are also highly developed. Whether Japan is selling high-tech electronics or automobiles to international trade partners, or importing foreign luxury goods, everyday basics or

basic food stuffs, Japanese society itself has developed into an intensely consumerist environment. Consuming is empowering, both for the individual and the collective nation: my research on Japanese popular music industry recounts a reflected rise in the 'positional power' of Japan vis-à-vis the USA, which is seen as the leader of a constructed 'West', from 'conquered' nation to 'valued consumer' in a global market (2008: 37). Popular cultural production and consumption is the main arena in which everyday citizens could participate in this shifting cultural relationship, merely by choosing (or not choosing) to buy certain products.

While consumer electronics, computer games, *manga*, and *anime* (and the music associated with these latter two products) have been the most significant cultural exports to Japan, food culture is an emerging subgenre in scholarship about Japanese cultural consumption. With the success of sushi and other Japanese food products overseas, interest has been focused on what Japanese culinary culture means in Japan as well as abroad. Food purchasing, preparation and consumption, all of which constitute a total social event in the daily lives of every Japanese citizen, have potent cultural meaning. Theodore C. Bestor's *Tsukiji: The Fish Market at the Center of the World* (2004) is another important anthropological monograph that demonstrates that the raw materials of Japan's beloved cuisine of sashimi, sushi and other seafood dishes are globally traded yet internally quite powerful in their ability to convey meaning to consumers. Merry I. White, who has written extensively on the Japanese family, zeroes in on this communicative ability of food culture to convey powerful messages. Her essay 'Ladies Who Lunch: Young Women and the Domestic Fallacy in Japan' (2001) demonstrates that consumption patterns of Japanese young women show how the consumption of food (both in restaurants and in shops) conveys changing notions of femininity in Japanese society. White argues that the 'self-expressive bond between young women and food' works to create 'unfeminine acts and expression, which one might see as small resistances to the contradictions of the "domestic fallacy"' (2001: 64).

Within the scholarship on consumption, a focus on specialised consumption, or fandom, has also emerged as a subset of interest in Japanese practices. William W. Kelly's edited volume *Fanning the Flames: Fandom and Consumer Culture in Contemporary Japan* (2004) made convincing arguments that fandom as a kind of active and intimate consumption was a useful tool for understanding the dynamics of a variety of social relationships and a number of aesthetic preferences in Japan; meanwhile, the concomitant explosion of the popularity of 'Japan's Gross National Cool'

(a phrase coined by American journalist Douglas McGray in 2002) meant that English-speaking audiences were no longer interested in 'what made Japan tick' in terms of winning or losing military wars, but rather 'what made them make such cool stuff?'. Yet in this maelstrom of interest and fascination lies judgement: the predictable and defensive reaction to the initial Western fascination with Japan's 'soft power' is a kind of cultural put-down of consumers of Japanese pop culture (both Japanese and non-Japanese) as 'deviant' (Stevens, 2010). Further studies of Japanese popular culture are necessary, I believe, to 'rescue' fandom from its current association with social ostracism, placing it instead in a logical structure of a historical consumer culture in Japan and in the West.

CONCLUSION

In this essay I have necessarily narrowed a rich and lengthy disciplinary 'story' in two ways: first by interrogating its methods and then by focusing on a selected portion of its content. The latter part of the story (here described under the rubrics of 'studies of the self', 'tradition and modernity' and 'globalisation and consumption') is crucial because it provides important, if debatable, insight into an empirical reality we hope to know as 'Japan'. In terms of other disciplinary contributions to this volume, information about Japan as supplied by anthropologists (versus sociologists or political scientists, for example) demonstrates its methodological priorities as it focuses on particular aspects: the self, social interaction and social ideologies of identity.

Perhaps then we can say that while the content is interesting and valuable, anthropology's singular contribution is in its methods. Ethnographic fieldwork, as an epistemological philosophy, underpins all of the research I have mentioned above (though I note there are many more worthy volumes omitted by space constraint rather than by quality). Laura Miller underwent many of the 'esute' procedures she describes in her book, physically experiencing the same sensations to better understand why her informants sought to shape their bodies in certain ways; Karen Nakamura is fluent in both ASL and Japanese *shuwa* (sign language). Fieldwork, where this kind of first hand experience is embedded, results in what anthropologists hope is a better understanding of the 'Other', hopefully at an 'intimate "grass roots" level' (Hendry, 2003: 3) rather than one which is distant and described with broad brush strokes. The detail that intrigues us is also the detail that informs us to consider our own selves as an object of inquiry and reflection. Robertson's statement that 'anthropologists... [have] continued to work *both through and against*

a conventionalized conception of Japan as a mirror image of... the United States [and more generically] "the West"' (2005: 6, emphasis added) demonstrates this struggle to understand the differences between 'Self' and 'Other'.

NOTES

- 1 See Robertson (2005) and Ryang (2004) for critical reviews of the history of Western anthropologists of Japan, and Kuwayama (2004) for a review of how Western anthropologists' work has interacted with those whom he refers to as 'native' scholars. A definitional caveat: this chapter focuses on socio-cultural anthropology, although studies of the linguistic anthropology and archaeology of Japan are present in the wider field. Also, for reasons of scope and space, I am limiting my focus to works published in English by scholars from North America, Europe, Australia and Asia.
- 2 This stance is illustrated by Immanuel Wallerstein's influential world-systems theory (1974).
- 3 One anthropologist in particular who has made this point explicit in many of her publications is Joy Hendry: for example, her book *Wrapping Culture: Politeness, Presentation, and Power in Japan and Other Societies* (1993) is clearly about Japan, but gives attention to related customs of wrapping in the Middle East and Africa.
- 4 Generally, Japanese names in this chapter are presented in the Japanese fashion (family name first, personal name second) except in the case where the author has published extensively in English, such as Takami Kuwayama, Yoshio Sugimoto and Harumi Befu.
- 5 This article followed his co-edited volume with Sylvie Guichard-Anguis entitled *Globalizing Japan: Ethnography of the Japanese Presence in Asia, Europe and America* (2001), an earlier collection of essays on globalisation and Japan.

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