A Companion to the Anthropology of Japan

Edited by Jennifer Robertson
A Companion to the Anthropology of Japan
Blackwell Companions to Anthropology

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Part I: Introduction

1 Introduction: Putting and Keeping Japan in Anthropology
Jennifer Robertson
Robertson explores the “ancestry” of (Anglophone) Japan anthropology from the 1930s through the early 1960s, a 30-year period when Japan was acknowledged in the discipline as an important site of and for anthropological knowledge and theory-making. She asks why, since then, “Japan” seems to have passed out of, and to have been passed over by, the anthropological mainstream, and suggests that the legacy of certain “ancestors” may be partly responsible. The question, “Where is ‘Japan’ in anthropological discourse today, and what are the significant contributions to social and cultural theory that Japan anthropologists have made since 1970, and are making today?” sets the stage for the essays that follow.

Part II: Cultures, Histories, and Identities

The essays in this section critically examine the processes of history- and culture-making along with identity formation, majority and minority alike.

2 The Imperial Past of Anthropology in Japan
Katsumi Nakao
Nakao argues that to explore the history of prewar ethnographic research is tantamount to remembering and confronting modern Japan’s imperialist past. The apparent “historical amnesia” among anthropologists in Japan parallels the low level of historical consciousness of Japanese people in general about Japan’s imperial past. Ethnographic research in the first half of the 20th century collectively helped to facilitate Japan’s administration of its scattered Asian Pacific empire. As Nakao shows, Japanese anthropology of the imperial period – the late 19th century through
1945 – possessed a distinctive character that calls for wider recognition and analytical scrutiny.

3 Japanese Archaeology and Cultural Properties Management: Prewar Ideology and Postwar Legacies
   Walter Edwards

Edwards explains how, as part of Japanese efforts at modernization, the adoption of Western academic disciplines in the late 19th century included the introduction of scientific archaeology. Early cultural properties management policies had a strong ideological component, in large part a consequence of the symbolic importance placed on the imperial institution, taken to be a source of pride for the nation in the modern world due to its “unique continuity from an ancient and divine origin.” The legacy of the imperial household on archaeology today is investigated.

4 Feminism, Timelines, and History-Making
   Tomomi Yamaguchi

Yamaguchi observes that in the mid-1990s, notable numbers of books on the history of the women’s liberation movement (ribu) since the 1970s were published in Japan. Many, if not most, included a nenpyō (timeline): a chronological list of events, a style commonly used in Japanese historical writings. For feminist writers, the timeline is a vehicle for producing an alternative version of existing writings on the history of the ribu movement. Yamaguchi’s analysis of nenpyō-writing offers a significant venue to examine the philosophy of time reflected in this particular mode of history-writing, and the contested discourses on the politics of history-writing in contemporary Japan.

5 Making Majority Culture
   Roger Goodman

Goodman poses the rhetorical question, “Who are ‘the Japanese’?” While there is evidence of attempts to construct ideas of Japanese ethnic identity that go back two millennia, most commentators point to the Meiji period (1868–1912) as when this process became particularly emphasized in Japan. Faced by both internal and external threats, the Meiji oligarchs developed a rich litany of symbols and rituals that helped to construct the ideas of Japaneseness that were disseminated through an education system constructed, in part, for that purpose. Scholarly research on Japanese ethnic identity together with popular notions of the superiority of Japanese culture came to the fore again in the 1980s as the Japanese economy went into overdrive. Goodman points out the presumption, in these dominant ideas of Japaneseness, that “culture” is static, timeless, and self-evident.

6 Political and Cultural Perspectives on “Insider” Minorities
   Joshua Hotaka Roth

Roth reminds us that there are a variety of “insider” minorities in Japan – the Burakumin, Ainu, Okinawans, Nikkeijin, the disabled, and atomic bomb victims. These groups vary widely in size, history, consciousness as groups, and criteria for
membership. Yet they have several characteristics in common that justifies their treatment together. They are all “insiders” in the sense that most other Japanese currently do not question their status as Japanese. Insider status does not, however, shield any of these groups from discrimination. Roth explores and compares the two major perspectives – cultural and political – that are used by social scientists in analyzing discrimination in Japan, and offers a synthesis.

7 Japan’s Ethnic Minority: Koreans
Sonia Ryang

Ryang argues that studies of ethnic minorities in Japan lag behind in the overall scheme of the anthropology of Japan. Koreans in Japan, perhaps the best-explored group in light of this situation, still need to be looked at from multiple angles and dimensions in terms of analysis and interpretation. This has been done by Korean and Japanese writers in Japan, but the Anglophone literature on Koreans in Japan has many gaps. Ryang reminds us that the main purpose of studying Koreans in Japan is to understand their position in Japanese society as an indissoluble part of Japan itself, as well as to grasp their internal situation as “resident aliens.”

8 Shifting Contours of Class and Status
Glenda S. Roberts

Roberts looks critically at the contours of class and status in Japan, focusing in particular on the rise of egalitarianism in the postwar era and the manifestations of social class through the lens of gender. She argues that we need more research on the ways in which gender and ethnicity inform social class practices. The contours of class and status in Japan appear to be shifting away from a large “middle-mass” toward a more polarized society, characterized by less job stability even for the middle classes, and increasing concern in the media over the uncertainties that accompany the current fluid situation.

9 The Anthropology of Japanese Corporate Management
Tomoko Hamada

Hamada notes that during the 1960s, Japan was often cited as a case in point to support or refute dominant Western theories of economic development and modernization, and the “Japanese style of management” was presented as a distinct cultural form. With the bursting of Japan’s economic bubble in the early 1990s and the consequent continuing recession emerged a new research agenda to investigate the pathological aspects of corporate Japan. As Hamada shows, in the 21st century, the theme of “globalization” has been affixed to this agenda, where the global standard as the dominant Western norm is positioned against the reality of diverse adaptative mechanisms among and within contemporary capitalistic entities of unequal relations.
10 Fashioning Cultural Identity: Body and Dress
Ofra Goldstein-Gidoni

Goldstein-Gidoni explores the centrality of distinctions in dress in the construction of Japanese cultural identity. Modern Japanese wear both Western-style clothing (yōfuku) and Japanese-style attire (wafuku), although the latter is worn mainly on ceremonial occasions. She considers the dynamic process of the construction of gendered cultural identities in modern Japan through both a historic perspective and present-day ethnography, looking closely at the gendered effects created through clothing in the coming-of-age ceremony (seijin shiki). The sartorial politics of cultural identity in modern Japan consists of two separate but related aspects: the cultural construction of what is Japanese and what is Western, and the construction of “the traditional” and “the modern.”

11 Genders and Sexualities
Sabine Frühstück

Frühstück identifies three main trends that have characterized anthropological studies on sex, gender, and sexuality in Japan. Studies on women as Other attempt to bring women’s lives into view where previously this had not been pursued as a research objective in its own right. Gender studies since the late 1970s have been based on a feminist understanding of the sex-gender system as consisting of two distinct if intertwined categories of biological characteristics and sociocultural attributes. These studies have also overwhelmingly focused on women, but they more critically examine gender-formation processes in a variety of areas ranging from families to health and politics. A third, recent, trend suggests that genders and sexualities in Japan are even more ambivalent and ambiguous than previously acknowledged. These most recent analyses reconsider and interrogate the integration of women’s and men’s social and sexual experience.

Part III: Geographies and Boundaries, Spaces and Sentiments

The essays in this section explore the different degrees and configurations of the geographic and sentimental boundaries delineating Japanese-ness.

12 On the “Nature” of Japanese Culture, or, Is There a Japanese Sense of Nature?
D. P. Martinez

Martinez observes that conventionally, “the Japanese” sense of nature is depicted as being both unique and homogenous: it is seen to be holistic and different from “the Western concept.” She challenges this representation as one that falls back on the simplest forms of Othering and Orientalism. Yet, it must be noted, there is a widespread Orientalist assumption among many Japanese that their nature is somehow unique and that part of the experience of being Japanese includes the “unusual”
experience of living on islands, with the threat of earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, and
typhoons, and with four very clearly marked seasons. Martinez questions whether this
is really the most accurate way to understand Japanese attitudes toward nature.

13 The Rural Imaginary: Landscape, Village, Tradition
Scott Schnell

Schnell writes that, although Japan has become a highly urbanized and cosmopolitan
society, its culture is still perceived as being heavily rooted in the agrarian –
and specifically rice paddy – traditions of its rural villages. The privileging of rice
production as cultural exemplar, however, serves to both obscure and discredit a
number of alternative traditions, such as those of mountain communities where the
land is too rugged for growing rice. Many rural communities have turned to local
tourism as a means of economic development, often reinforcing in the process
the stereotypes about them. Schnell argues that rural residents are more knowledge-
able about the metropolitan center than the center is about them, and that the
flow of information from television and other nationally distributed mass media is
unidirectional.

14 Tokyo’s Third Rebuilding: New Twists on Old Patterns
Roman Cybriwsky

Cybriwsky reports on recent changes in Tokyo’s built environment that are strikingly
represented in four sites near the city’s center: the commercial center of Shinjuku;
the well-known redevelopment project named Yebisu Garden Place; a new urban
district on fresh landfill named Daiba; and a redeveloped old residential neighbor-
hood named Shioiri. Collectively, these are new landscapes that provide insight to
current features of Japanese society. He offers a critical analysis of the four sites, and
points to the various excesses that characterized the economic bubble of the 1980s
and early 1990s, the disproportionate influence on the country of the construction
industry, the peculiar and extraordinary desire of Japanese to show themselves as
being “international” and world-wise, and the persistence of various old ways in
modern Japanese life.

15 Japan’s Global Village: A View from the World of Leisure
Joy Hendry

Hendry shows that leisure activities in contemporary Japan encompass an interest in
“the global.” She offers an interpretation of the significance of foreign country
theme parks, some apparently foreign restaurants, and longer-standing architectural
innovations, as well as influences in contemporary music. Recent trends in local
tourism demonstrate the deep interest of Japanese people in many parts of the
world beyond the United States, whose influence has dominated postwar Japanese
perceptions of “abroad.” The choice of restaurants, theme parks, and holiday loca-
tions has recently been made in a spirit of greatly increased knowledge of the places in
question, and Hendry attempts to show how this richer awareness may have affected
aspects of daily life, internal attitudes to global issues, and sources of Japanese
identity.
Part IV: Socialization, Assimilation, and Identification

The essays in this section introduce institutions, in the broadest sense, that both enable and inhibit personal and cultural agency.

16 Formal Caring Alternatives: Kindergartens and Day-Care Centers
   Eyal Ben-Ari

Ben-Ari explores the role and rationale of the Japanese state in structuring the preschool system, and shows that a focus on how children constantly question different structures of meaning is important. Japanese preschools enroll over 95 percent of Japanese children and are differentiated into kindergartens and day-care centers. Whereas kindergartens are educational institutions, day-care centers have a custodial role for children of working mothers. The main differences between preschools are based on class, government versus private institutions, and religious affiliation. The trend to smaller families has led to competition centered on attracting children on the basis of each institution’s distinctive character.

17 Post-Compulsory Schooling and the Legacy of Imperialism
   Brian J. McVeigh

McVeigh investigates how Japan’s imperial legacy relates to its post-compulsory schooling system. Vestiges of imperialism and trans-war continuities are apparent in two ideological currents: “colonial Japan” and “superior Japan.” In order to illustrate these currents, throughout his analysis of post-compulsory schooling McVeigh weaves five themes: (1) trans-war continuity of state structures; (2) an educational-examination system driven by economic nationalism; (3) the myth of a “homogeneous” Japan; (4) confronting the wartime era; and (5) a patriarchal capitalist system. Such themes deeply implicate definitions of “Japaneseness” (political/citizenship, ethnocultural/heritage, or “racial”/perceived physical traits).

18 Theorizing the Cultural Importance of Play: Anthropological Approaches to Sports and Recreation
   Elise Edwards

Edwards notes that, paralleling trends in the United States and Europe, the discipline of physical anthropology in Japan was a central force in the late 19th-century development of physical education programs and influenced the character of sporting practices. She provides a sense of the questions and interests that have fueled anthropological explorations of sport and recreation in Japan, and underscores the social scientific roots of modern athletics, highlights the political and ideological forces that have shaped investigations into the culture of sport past and present, and identifies the promising possibilities of recent studies and future projects.

19 Popular Entertainment and the Music Industry
   Shuhei Hosokawa

Hosokawa presents “entertainment” as a vehicle for creation, recreation, and socialization that encompasses numerous issues, including cultural agency and collective
sensibility. As a cultural institution, entertainment consists of production teams, products, and audiences. Hosokawa deals mainly with the cultural history of popular music since the Meiji period (1868–1912), and emphasizes the interplay of reproductive and audiovisual technologies, the entertainment industry and popular audiences.

20 There’s More than Manga: Popular Nonfiction Books and Magazines
Laura Miller

Miller focuses on the past and present trends in Japanese nonfiction book and magazine publishing, and points out that the volume and breadth of print media in Japan offer scholars a rich resource for understanding contemporary cultural processes, especially shifts in the display and exercise of cultural authority. Print media practices and representations also have much to tell us about the formation of individuals into productive workers, national subjects, and gendered reproducers.

Part V: Body, Blood, Self, and Nation

The essays in this section highlight the confluence of the body, politics of “blood” – as a metaphor for kinship, family, and nationality – social reproduction, and nation-building.

21 Biopower: Blood, Kinship, and Eugenic Marriage
Jennifer Robertson

Robertson writes that in fin-de-siècle Japan, the ideal of “eugenic modernity,” or the application of scientific concepts and methods as a means to constitute both the nation, its culture, and its constituent subjects (New Japanese), crystallized in the space of imperialism. The legacy and ramifications of early expressions of eugenic modernity remain salient today. Three of the main themes she explores are the application of eugenic principles to make connections between biology, kinship, and the plasticity of the human body; the scientific rationalization of historical stigmas; and the promotion of “pure-bloodedness” and “ethnic-national endogamy” as ideal modes of sexual and social reproduction.

22 The Ie (Family) in Global Perspective
Emiko Ochiai

Ochiai places the ie (household) in the context of global family history and attempts to answer some of the questions raised in previous discussions on the ie and the stem family, including the questions of whether the Japanese ie is a stem family, and whether it can be placed in the same category as a generalized European stem family. Her discussion focuses on regional diversity within Japan, and takes into consideration various aspects of the household system, including size and structure, the living arrangements of elderly members, marriage and fertility, and headship succession.
23 Constrained Person and Creative Agent: A Dying Student’s Narrative of Self and Others
Susan Orpett Long

Long reviews some of the central interpretations of Japanese personhood and argues that we must explore the ways in which sex, gender, age, and social class shape and constrain the construction of “the self.” Yet, through the narrative of defining who one is, broader social meaning is created and enacted as well. Excerpts from a series of conversations Long had with a dying 21-year-old college student demonstrate the ways in which the young woman drew on her personal relationships, her experiences of age, gender, and class, and especially her own illness experience to construct a narrative of personhood. In the process of creating an articulate and meaningful “self” for the anthropologist, the young woman also established a strong social agency, attempting to negotiate the levels of assistance and independence she desired, thereby influencing the behaviors and practices of those around her.

24 Nation, Citizenship, and Cinema
Aaron Gerow

Gerow notes that recent theorizations of the nation, both inside and outside Japan, have investigated the historical formation of the conception of the nation as an ancient, bordered entity containing citizens united by language, “blood,” and culture, and have posited that the nation and its particular manifestation, the nation-state, are of recent origin. He reviews the recent work on theorizing the nation, particularly the scholarship that attempts to deconstruct “Japan,” arguing that it is a historical entity exhibiting more differences than unity, defined by phenomena such as language that are really modern constructions. Gerow employs cinema as a discursive example to illustrate the problems and transformations experienced in creating the nation, as well as the paradoxes posed, in the process, by a globalized world system.

25 Culinary Culture and the Making of a National Cuisine
Katarzyna Cwiertka

Cwiertka sketches the culinary scene of contemporary Japan and provides insight into its historical development during the last century by identifying the forces that molded Japanese culinary culture into its present form. Food is not merely purchased in Japan’s omnipresent supermarkets, convenience stores, vending machines, and restaurants, it is also a favorite souvenir and seasonal gift, and frequently appears in religious rituals. Moreover, many Japanese presume that foodways are a fundamental key to national character and that food reflects social attributes and cultural values. Food is also a regular feature of the Japanese mass entertainment. From cookery books, recipes, and restaurant reviews in newspapers and magazines to cooking shows and culinary documentaries on television, the entertainment value of food is enormous.
Part VI: Religion and Science, Beliefs and Bioethics

The essays in this section critically review scholarly and everyday practices with respect to religion, science, and biotechnology.

26 Historical, New, and “New” New Religions
Ian Reader

Reader writes that the complex structure of Japanese religion includes numerous sects of established Buddhism, Shinto, an ethnically oriented historical tradition, and numerous “new” religions. Japan is especially significant for anthropologists and sociologists of religion as a highly developed post-industrial society in which the various problems and vicissitudes of, and theoretical issues relating to, religion in modern societies are manifest, such as questions of secularization, the relationships of religion, state, and society, religious reactions to modernity and globalization, and so forth. Reader shows that Japan provides a vital comparative frame of reference to the post-industrialized Western world in such contexts – and often correctives of Western-derived theories.

27 Folk Religion and its Contemporary Issues
Noriko Kawahashi

Kawahashi considers the kinds of questions and issues salient today that must be considered when researching Japanese folk religion. She addresses these issues and discusses recent reassessments of folk religious terminology together with a consideration of the ways in which the field of folklore studies itself has been critically re-examined. Special emphasis is placed on gender-related issues in folk religion, the practice and the field of study.

28 Women Scientists and Gender Ideology
Sumiko Otsubo

Otsubo observes that modern Western science enjoys a popular image as universal, objective, value-neutral, and international, and that scientific research and development is conducted in a decidedly male-dominant environment. Science has perpetuated an androcentrically hierarchical view of sex and gender. She examines the careers of women scientists before, during, and after the Asia-Pacific War (1937–45), and reviews their education, family, employment, mentors, and social activism. Her aim is to illustrate the basic structure of Japanese scientific research and to analyze: female (Japanese) research subjects; the mechanism of constructing, deconstructing, and reconstructing gender stereotypes in scientific research; and the unintended impact of science in shaping gender perceptions.

29 Preserving Moral Order: Responses to Biomedical Technologies
Margaret Lock

Lock emphasizes that a consideration of the ways in which the body is represented and managed in health and illness provides insights into how subjectivity, self and other, mind and body, the individual and society, are commonly conceptualized.
in any given society. She employs ethnographic data from Japan, combined with an analysis of relevant texts in connection with death and dying, terminal care, organ transplants, and new reproductive technologies, to show how widely shared values and associated disputes are aired in connection with the subjective experience and management of these events and conditions. Lock underscores the utility of examining societal reactions to the body in health and illness as an indispensable lens for gaining insights about everyday life in contemporary Japan and the broader social and political forces that impinge on the lived experience of individuals.
Eyal Ben-Ari is Professor, Department of Sociology and Anthropology, the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. He has carried out fieldwork in Japan (on white-collar suburbs, early childhood education, and the contemporary self-defense forces), Singapore (on the Japanese community), and Israel (on Jewish saint worship, the Israeli army, and United Nations peacekeeping forces). Among his recent publications are Body Projects in Japanese Childcare: Culture, Organization and Emotions in a Preschool (1997) and Mastering Soldiers: Conflict, Emotions and the Enemy in an Israeli Military Unit (1998).


Roman Cybriwsky is Associate Dean, Temple University, Tokyo and Professor of Geography and Urban Studies, Temple University, Philadelphia. A specialist in urban social geography, he has written extensively about Tokyo’s recent growth and development, including Tokyo: The Shogun’s City at the Twenty-First Century (1998), as well as about various other cities such as Philadelphia, Singapore, and Jakarta. He is presently working on the urbanization of Batam Island in Indonesia and his fourth book about Tokyo.

Elise Edwards is Assistant Professor, Department of Anthropology, Butler University. Among her several articles is “From Boom to Bust? The Political and Cultural

**Walter Edwards** is Professor and Chair, Japanese Language Course Department of Asian Studies, Tenri University. He authored *Modern Japan through its Weddings: Gender, Person, and Society in Ritual Portrayal* (1990). His current research interests focus on Japanese notions of identity and how these are linked with readings of its past, including its archaeological heritage. Edwards has written many articles on Japanese archaeology, introducing the results of Japanese archaeological research, and also examining how that research relates to contemporary views of the nation’s cherished traditions.

**Sabine Frühstück** is Associate Professor of Modern Japanese Cultural Studies, Department of East Asian Languages and Cultural Studies, University of California, Santa Barbara. Her research interests include modern Japanese history and anthropology; theory and history of sexuality and gender; knowledge systems; colonial and postcolonial history; military–societal relations; violence; and mass culture. She is the author of *Colonizing Sex: Sexology and Social Control in Modern Japan* (2003) and co-editor (with Sepp Linhart) of *Japanese Culture Seen through its Leisure* (1998). She is currently completing a new book, “Avant-garde: The Army of the Future.”

**Aaron Gerow** is Assistant Professor of Film Studies, Department of East Asian Languages and Literatures, Yale University. He has published widely in a variety of languages on early, wartime, and recent Japanese film, including articles for *Yuriika*, *Iris*, *Sekai*, *Eizōgaku*, *Iconics*, *Screening the Past*, *Image Forum*, *Eiga geijutsu*, and *Gendai shiso*. He is currently writing a book on Kitano Takeshi for the British Film Institute. Gerow has also worked as a coordinator at the Yamagata International Documentary Film Festival and continues to write reviews of recent Japanese films for the *Daily Yomiuri*.

**Ofra Goldstein-Gidoni** is Senior Lecturer, Department of East Asian Studies and Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Tel Aviv University. She is the author of *Packaged Japaneseness: Weddings, Business and Brides* (1997) and of numerous articles relating to Japanese weddings, professional housewives, gender, tradition in modern Japan, Israeli images of Japan, and globalization.

**Roger Goodman** is Nissan Professor of Modern Japanese Studies, Nissan Institute of Japanese Studies and Institute of Social and Cultural Anthropology, University of Oxford. His primary research interest is in Japanese educational and welfare
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PART I

Introduction
CHAPTER 1

Introduction: Putting and Keeping Japan in Anthropology

Jennifer Robertson

Ancestors, Legacies, and Adumbrations

Thirty-five years ago, John Bennett (1970) remarked that social research on Japan “has not yet made significant contributions to social and cultural theory.” Although Bennett’s remark remains relevant, it is not quite accurate. The wartime ethnographies by Japan anthropology ancestors John Embree and Ruth Benedict entered the mainstream of (American) anthropology where “Japan” became a proving ground for debates about the pros and cons of National Character Studies and of the Culture and Personality school (Benedict 1946; Embree 1945). Actually, Embree’s earlier monograph, *Suye Mura: A Japanese Village* (1939), the progenitor of ethnographies of Japan, was part of a global series of comparative field studies on literate communities or villages – and the first on types of East Asian societies – orchestrated by social anthropologists (affiliated with Harvard University and the University of Chicago) Fay-Cooper Cole, A. R. Radcliffe-Brown, Robert Redfield, and Lloyd Warner (Embree 1939:ix–x, xvi–xvii).

Thus, as I have argued elsewhere, it was in the 1940s that “Japan” entered mainstream (Anglophone) anthropological debates (Robertson 1998). And, Japan – often paired with Turkey – was also very much part of the anthropological discourse of modernization theory in the 1950s and early 1960s (Bellah 1957; Ward and Rustow 1964). Since the 1960s, and in keeping with Bennett’s observation, “Japan” seems to have passed out of, and to have been passed over by, the anthropological mainstream. What happened? Could it be that only as, simultaneously, a militaristic imperial power – a threat to the United States and western Europe – and a nation of villages (epitomized by Suye) – a quintessential anthropological subject – did Japan attract the intellectual interests of anthropologists? Where is “Japan” in anthropological discourse today, and what are the “significant contributions to social and
cultural theory” that Japan anthropologists have made since 1970, and are making
today?

These questions address both the efforts made by Japan anthropologists to engage
with social and cultural, and more recently critical, theories, and also the apparent
disinterest in and ignorance of Japan of many anthropologists who, suffice it to say at
this moment, should know better.3

It would appear that anthropologists in general do not regard Japan as a geograph-
ical “prestige zone”; that is, that – unlike Bali or Morocco or the Andes, or Oaxaca,
Mexico – they do not regard Japan as a cultural area of choice and theoretical cachet.
The existence of prestige zones has partly to do with the distance of anthropological
theorizing from current affairs, and partly to do with the colonial history of
Euro-American anthropology and the canonical emphasis since the 19th century on
the cultures of peoples of color with a history of domination by “the West.” (For
largely the same reason western Europe – the “Old Europe” – and North America are
still under-represented in anthropology.) Japan confounds the simple binarism
informing the construction of anthropology’s Other: it was never a colony of “the
West,” and in the first half of the 20th century Japan occupied the ambivalent
position of an anti-colonial colonizer, although its ambiguity in this regard was
overshadowed in the United States first by its status as absolute enemy and later by
its unconditional surrender in 1945. Moreover, the discipline of anthropology in
Japan was itself facilitated, if not motivated, by Japanese colonialism in Asian and
Pacific Rim countries (see chapter 2 in this volume). The rhetorical question thus
arises: Is Japan, like western Europe and the United States, somehow perceived as too
much like “us” to be recognized and appreciated as a worthwhile subject of anthro-
pological inquiry?

At this juncture, I would like to insert, in two parts, an excerpt from a review
I wrote in 1995 (but which was published in 1998) about the place of Japan in
American anthropology.4 The excerpt compares the intellectual engagements and
legacies of Japan anthropology’s two renowned – especially in the United States –
ancestors, Ruth Benedict and John Embree, and constitutes one response to the
rhetorical question I raised at the end the previous paragraph.

[Gyokusai was a] wartime expression coined by military ideologues to beautify self-
sacrifice and mass deaths in combat. . . . Gyokusai literally means “jewel smashed.” It
was precisely such baroque expressions and drastic acts that occasioned the Office of War
Information to commission Ruth Benedict to write The Chrysanthemum and the Sword,
in which she attempted to “understand Japanese habits of thought and emotion and
the patterns into which these habits fell. . . . The Japanese were the most alien enemy the
United States had ever fought in an all-out struggle. In no other war with a major foe
had it been necessary to take into account such exceedingly different habits of acting and
thinking . . . We had to understand their behavior in order to cope with it” (Benedict
1946:4, 1).

Earlier, in 1943 . . . Embree published The Japanese as part of the Smithsonian’s War
Background Studies series. This was followed by The Japanese Nation in 1945. Benedict
cites the latter along with Embree’s more well known ethnography, Suye Mura,
A Japanese Village, published in 1939, but Embree himself is conspicuously absent
from her acknowledgments in The Chrysanthemum and the Sword. Embree too directed
his wartime studies toward better understanding and determining Japanese attitudes and