

Othernesses of Japan: Historical and Cultural Influences on Japanese Studies in Ten Countries



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American Anthropologist, New Series, Vol. 95, No. 3 (Sep., 1993), 740.

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versus necessity, infinity versus finitude, to great chains, and the nature of movement.

Sahlins's foreword on the cultural constitution of reality, which must certainly be a misplaced introduction to another work, might have been replaced by his excellent critique of the confusion of classification and generalization in the work of another anthropologist: "the greater the 'generalization' or 'law' the less it says about anything in particular" (*Culture and Practical Reason*, University of Chicago Press, 1976, p. 15).

Othernesses of Japan: Historical and Cultural Influences on Japanese Studies in Ten Countries. *Harumi Befu and Josef Kreiner*, eds. Monographien aus dem Deutschen Institut für Japanstudien der Philipp-Franz-von-Siebold-Stiftung, Vol. 1. Munich: Iudicium Verlag, 1992. 342 pp.

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The contributors to this conference volume were invited by the two organizer-editors to consider a proposition on the sociology of knowledge about Japan. To what extent have national institutional and intellectual factors shaped foreign scholarship about Japan? Is there, for example, something recognizably British in Brian Moeran's work, or distinctly Dutch in Cornelius Ouweland's studies? Conversely, how different is the "Japan" in the gaze of an Indian scholar from the "Japan" in the gaze of a Korean scholar? Such questions risk much in the asking. They can provide an intriguing line of attack to the tendency to characterize the object of our studies monolithically as "Japan." And they speak to the discipline's recent autohistorical interest in national anthropologies, both Euro-American and Third World. At the same time, national character is a phantom we Japan specialists thought we had vanquished, and it is disconcerting to face it in the mirror.

To walk this tightrope, Befu and Kreiner assembled Japan specialists from nine countries—the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Austria, the United States, the Soviet Union, India, and the Republic of Korea. Five of the country chapters are followed by commentaries from Japanese scholars about their view of that country's perspective. Most of the papers were prepared in English and all are published here in that language, an editorial decision that is

convenient but, curiously, unexamined in the volume.

It is a mark of the conference's success, as well as the editors' integrity, that most contributors evince a healthy skepticism about national influences. David Plath puts it most deftly: "Is an automobile styled by Italian designers, engineered in Detroit, produced in Brazil, and marketed by Ford, an 'American' car?" (p. 202). They prefer instead to emphasize such factors as disciplinary field, theoretical orientation, generation, and language training—none of whose boundaries are neatly defined by the nation-state. Indeed, both editors hedge considerably about "national factors" in their own introductory essays. Befu would rather speak of "cultural influences," although he quickly restates the national basis of these influences with his stress on the priorities of research-funding agencies, on dominant state ideology, and on the need to appeal to a home-language audience (pp. 33–34). Kreiner's introduction treads a safer path in outlining a history of Japanese studies in Europe; he only touches on the conference proposition by suggesting that "the influence of one great pioneer and his school" (p. 57) may be, under certain circumstances, the most crucial national factor.

It is predictable that a conference room of scholars could quickly decompose such a stark proposition into a long list of more particular conditions. This is fortunate; we are safe from the ghost of national character past. Less fortunately, though, there is little effort in the volume to re-compose these factors of scholarly production into a more compelling analysis of the groundedness of our studies of Japan.

The volume is still very much worth our attention, however. It no doubt reflects the editors' own disciplinary bias that 11 of the 19 contributors are anthropologists. In addition to Befu and Kreiner, they include Roger Goodman (United Kingdom), Sepp Linhart (Germany and Austria), Sergei Arutiunov (Russia), Ch'oe Kil-Sung (Korea), Jan van Bremen (Netherlands), David Plath and Robert J. Smith (United States), and Abito Ito and Takao Sofue (Japan). Taken together, they offer the beginnings of an international history of the anthropology of Japan that makes this collection of special reference value. It should also instruct colleagues concerned with the larger issues of why and by whom certain kinds of anthropological knowledge are produced.