

**The Postwar Japanese System: Cultural Economy and Economic Transformation**



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This aptly named collection by scholars from the PRC, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and the United States illuminates the moving frontiers of ethnicity and nationality in China. It explores political and intellectual “civilizing projects” imposed upon “peripheral peoples” by imperial Confucianists, nationalistic Communists, and missionary Christians. These essays offer a critical voice on the politics of ethnicity, a growing issue of concern as nationalistic sentiments wax popular in the post-Mao era. Attempting to historicize the creation of ethnic identity and consciousness through firsthand empirical fieldwork or the reviewing of earlier writings by both Chinese and foreign authors, contributors illustrate the importance of approaching ethnicity through the prism of center-periphery power relations.

As half its contributors are graduates of the University of Washington’s Department of Anthropology, the volume arguably may be read as a manifesto of the critical scholarship on ethnic minorities in China developed there under Harrel, who, by his own admission, has been “intent on calling the whole enterprise [of orthodox Chinese history on the country’s ethnic groups] into question with critical metahistorical speculations” (p. 69). There is, however, confusion in some essays regarding distinctions between nation and state or ethnicity and nationality (it seems inappropriate, for example, to characterize a “nationality” as simply a “single ethnic group” [Diamond, p. 92]). Part of the problem may be attributable to the ambiguous category of *minzu* in the Chinese lexicon. Often glossed alternatively as “ethnicity” or “nationality,” *minzu* has a strong historical relationship with Soviet (especially Stalinist) nationality theory, as McKhann suggests.

Harrel’s own metacritique of ethnohistory on “the Yi” shows how *minzu* categories have often been constructed or defined by state elites with little sensitivity to local notions of identity among cultural minorities themselves. Rigger offers one of the more critical and dynamic treatments of ethnicity in this volume, demonstrating how changing political and economic contexts in the 17th through 20th centuries reshaped notions of Manchu identity, at times rendering such a category irrelevant. Yet she also explores how identification with and membership in the Han majority was conditioned by similar concerns. The only nonanthropologist among the contributors, Rigger implicitly offers a metacritique of ethnicity itself, questioning its limitations as an analytical concept that sometimes masks more than it reveals. Ethnicity theory in this multicultural age seems to stand at a crossroads not dissimilar to the Lenin-Luxemburg debate on the nationality question. It may offer some a vehicle of popular empowerment, but we ought not to lose sight of whose interests it ultimately serves.

Readers are left, perhaps deliberately, to draw their own conclusions from this volume. One consistent theme to emerge is that conceptualizations of ethnic minority identity and history have often been cloaked in pseudoscientific and arguably racist rhetoric that defines cultural minority status as inherently backward and thus legitimizes political pro-

grams of assimilation, education, or modernization that serve the interests of state elites. Strikingly reminiscent of Fried’s modeling of the “notion of tribe,” the moving frontiers of ethnicity in China seem intimately tied to the politics of center-periphery interaction. Despite nearly half a century of communism, there has been little effective challenge to the principal assumptions of the Confucian civilizing project; the Han Chinese continue to represent *the* cultural model that other ethnic groups in China are expected to emulate and follow. What remains is the looming question of what ethnonational conflict and reaction may bring to China in the postsocialist future. There may be little cause for optimism.

***The Postwar Japanese System: Cultural Economy and Economic Transformation.* WILLIAM K. TABB. New York: Oxford University Press, 1995. vi + 414 pp., notes, bibliography, index.**

WILLIAM W. KELLY  
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William Tabb’s Japanese system refers both to a modeling of the post–World War II Japanese economy and to a transformative stage beyond the Taylorist production techniques, regulatory state policies, and adversarial management-labor relations that have characterized American political economy and dominated visions of mature capitalist production for much of this century. In Japan, by contrast, the developmentalist state became a more directive and strategic presence (ch. 4), production techniques are more flexible and corporate planning longer term (ch. 5), industrial relations are more inclusive and co-optive (ch. 6), and the national economy more tightly concentrated around the core metropolitan centers of Tokyo and Osaka (ch. 7). All of this constitutes a form of late-developer capitalism that has brought aggregate national wealth, a prosperous but treadmill life for citizen-workers, and decidedly mixed international reputation to its most ardent practitioner, Japan.

Much of what Tabb has to say will be familiar to any Japan social scientist as he synthesizes much of our own specialist literature (here leavened with a reading of the business press), and synthesizes several controversies about the role of the postwar bureaucracy, the linkages across companies, the nature of management-labor relations, formal-law consciousness, and so on. Tabb is a voracious consumer of English-language materials and has produced a plausible reckoning of policies and institutions, but the study breaks no new ground and does not—nor does it intend to—speak to present concerns in the anthropology of Japan.

It is to his credit that he does not essentialize Japan’s distinctiveness, but rather treats its four and a half decades from surrender in World War II to the collapse of the Soviet Union as a historically specific socioeconomic formation. Both the antecedents of this developmentalist state (ch. 3) and its recent decomposition (chs. 8–10) figure in his account. His treatment of historical origins is predictable; more interesting is his argument that a crisis of accumulation particular to Japanese-style capitalism fueled

the immense speculative boom in the mid-1980s and contributed strongly to the present fragmentation of systemic relations of the postwar political economy.

Culture does not fare as well as history in Tabb's societal modeling. His joint appointment in a sociology department has tempered his economist instincts, and he is at pains to insist on the cultural embeddedness of economic structures and behaviors as well as the mutual conditioning of political forces and economic interests. This Polanyiesque premise is not objectionable, but the work does not engage any current culture theory in anthropology. In short, the anthropological reader looking for a reasonable overview of Japan's postwar political economy will find this a useful work of reference, but it will be neither ethnographically satisfying nor theoretically provocative.

***The Return of the Ainu: Cultural mobilization and the practice of ethnicity in Japan.* KATARINA SJÖBERG. Chur, Switzerland: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1993. xii + 221 pp., notes, photographs, bibliography, index.**

EMIKO OTAKE  
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Sjöberg's *The Return of the Ainu* is a timely addition by an anthropologist to the current concern of the international community with ethnic minorities. Critical of previous research on the Ainu, which she claims lacks an emic approach, Sjöberg tries to present a picture of the Ainu people as active agents who are strategically resorting to their cultural uniqueness in negotiating with a larger society and central government that maintains the official view that Japan is a racially homogeneous society without ethnic minorities. The book is a revised version of Sjöberg's Ph.D. dissertation and is based on archival materials and interviews from her fieldwork conducted in 1985–86.

However noble the author's objectives and aims may be, the book contains too many errors, and these detract from her analysis. First, any reader with even a basic working knowledge of the Japanese language would be irritated by Sjöberg's transcription system for Japanese words. Instead of employing the modified Hepburn system (the standard for English publication), Sjöberg uses a system that is not only outdated but deficient. For example, this outdated system uses "u" to denote long vowels for some words (such as "social strata referred to as the *Shi-nou-kou-shou*" [p. 7] instead of *shi-nō-kō-shō*). In other cases the long vowels are not denoted at all (e.g., "the emperor, the *Tenno*" [p. 33]). Furthermore, her transcription also lacks accuracy: the Japanese name for the Hokkaido Colonial Museum appears as *Katakinenka* on page 10 and *Kaitakinenka* on page 21, when the correct transcription should be *Kaitakukinenkan*.

Second, the book contains many factual errors in names, dates, and other fundamental data on both Ainu and Japanese cultures and societies. To list just a few: the accepted and standardized English appellation for *Hokudai* is Hokkaido University; it is not

the "Sapporo State University" as she states on page 12 and elsewhere, or the "State University of Hokkaido" as she calls it elsewhere. If by *Kaitakushi* she means the Hokkaido Colonization Office, this institution existed from 1869 until 1882, and not until 1899 as she states on page 7. Also, the birth year of Shigeru Kayano, Sjöberg's key informant and who seems to have greatly influenced Sjöberg's views on Ainu culture, is 1926, not 1915 (p. 192). The list of factual errors of this nature is quite long. Taken together, these slips weaken the overall credibility of the research in the reader's mind.

Third, a far more serious problem is Sjöberg's superficial understanding of Ainu and Japanese societies and cultures. For example, the statement that the "state religion of today's Nihon is Buddhism" (p. 36) is questionable and should not be taken literally. In the latter part of chapter 5, where she discusses the history of the Ainu, her presentation of the *Emishi* of ancient Japan as the ancestors of the present Ainu in Hokkaido is a topic still debated by scholars and not an unquestionable historical fact as Sjöberg suggests.

It is unfortunate that Sjöberg's book contains so many serious weaknesses that undermine the reader's confidence in her analysis. Even though *The Return of the Ainu* has something to contribute to the area of ethnic minority awareness, it fails to reach the current standard of Japanese anthropological research, as is necessary for a truly fruitful analysis of Ainu culture in the larger context of Japanese culture.

***Wrapping Culture: Politeness, Presentation, and Power in Japan and Other Societies.* JOY HENDRY. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993. xiv + 200 pp., figures, plates, notes, bibliography, index.**

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Keys to unlocking Japan have, to a degree perhaps unusual in the descriptive literature of other peoples, periodically appeared in academic and popular works. The goal of this text is to provide another of these keys, but one based on "anthropological speculation" and one, I think, worth pondering. In part, this text furthers a general movement toward the analysis of implicit microtechniques or technologies that have, especially in traditional discussions of power, been overlooked. Hendry sees these techniques as "wrappings" and argues that their study should not be subsidiary to the study of things "wrapped." Such wrappings comprise "culturally variable methods of presentation" indicating "politeness, indirection, diplomacy and dissimulation" (p. 4). Outsiders to a society are likely to misunderstand such wrappings. Thus Hendry's central interest is in intercultural communication. This is appropriate for a text written more for the general reader than the academic specialist.

The notion of "wrapping" encourages us to bridge familiar topics in a number of often discrete fields such as sociolinguistics, transactional analysis, and symbolic anthropology. It also encourages us to