

# **Dismantling the East–West Dichotomy**

Essays in honour of Jan van Bremen

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## 19 Fear and Loathing of Americans Doing Japan Anthropology

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For several decades, there has been a widespread perception that American-based anthropologists dominate Japan anthropology – in access to funding, in setting the research agenda, and in determining career patterns and journal access. The 2002 JAWS meetings at Yale devoted an entire plenary session to this issue, and it produced some strong opinions from the panelists and membership.<sup>1</sup>

I have continued to puzzle after that plenary about whether this perception of American dominance is accurate. My answer is ‘yes, but’. Yes, indeed, by a number of crucial indices, programmes, resources, and personnel in the anthropology of Japan have been overwhelmingly concentrated in the US for half a century since the 1950s. But, while most US-based anthropologists would acknowledge this, we pay it little attention. Perhaps this is the casual indifference of the advantaged to their position, but we regard it to be of minor importance – while many of our colleagues elsewhere feel it to have introduced distortions in the intellectual development of the field of study and inequities in access to visibility and standing.

A number of conferences, volumes, and articles have already considered how anthropologists’ nationalities and/or ethnicities might determine their research agendas and analytical perspectives on Japan.<sup>2</sup> What I am considering here is a different issue, which is the degree to which American-based anthropologists have occupied a privileged place in Japan anthropology and whether the effects of this have been healthy, insidious, or innocuous. Are there ‘alternative’ anthropological scholarships of Japan elsewhere that have been overshadowed by American dominance and that deserve more recognition and funding? This chapter details some of the reasons for American numerical superiority and some of its consequences. I suggest a couple of reasons why we in the US don’t feel much like the dominant centre of a world system of Japan anthropology, and I argue that, nonetheless, such an apparent concentration of resources has not determined the intellectual trajectory of Japan anthropology. This trajectory has been more shaped by intertextual influences and the changing realities of Japanese society than by the social location of anthropologist-writers.

Of course, one might immediately challenge my premise with the case of the Japan Anthropology Workshop (JAWS) itself, in whose series this book falls. JAWS contains a breadth of national representation and regular channels of transnational communication that is unusual for anthropologists of a world region (Latin Americanists, Europeanists, Oceanianists, and others have caught up with JAWS but the organisation was a prescient example of transnational scholarly exchange). And the fact that it took twelve meetings and nearly twenty years for JAWS to gather for the first time in the US (at Yale in 2002) is perhaps a powerful argument against any notion of American hegemony. We Americans were an afterthought – the thirteenth afterthought, wedged between Finland in 2001 and Poland in 2003!

Conversely, though, the US delay in sponsoring could be given the opposite spin, reflecting American arrogance towards participation. Perhaps it meant that we really didn't need JAWS, and it remained an organisation of so many small David's aligned against a single Goliath that remains imperiously detached (just as English soccer famously ignored the FIFA World Cup for its first three decades).

No doubt the real relationship of JAWS and the US lies somewhere between, but it does seem to me, as a premise whose significance is worth exploring, that the overwhelming relative magnitude and strength of Japan anthropology in the US is indisputable, when compared with Japan anthropology in all other national contexts, including Japan itself. I would measure this by a number of indices, especially the following four:

1. The sheer number of persons who have trained to specialise in Japan anthropology at US universities overwhelms all other countries. From John Embree's 1937 PhD at the University of Chicago through the most recent postings at DAI, there have been 240 PhDs awarded for Japan anthropology dissertations at North American and British universities, of which 210 have been from US universities. This total also dwarfs PhDs granted in Japan anthropology from universities in Europe, Canada, Australia, Hong Kong, Korea, and Japan.
2. The US also dominates in the number of its universities and colleges that employ Japan anthropologists. There are at least fourteen major research universities where Japan anthropologists are part of Departments of Anthropology and/or interdepartmental Japan programmes and as many other universities and liberal arts colleges with Japan anthropologists in regular ladder faculty positions.
3. US citizens and those studying at US universities are greatly privileged in the funding that is available for scholarly research, dissertation research, and institutional support. Many research universities themselves generously support doctoral students with fellowship assistance. Among external benefactors are the Japan Foundation (whose budget is still inordinately devoted to US-based scholars and institutions); the Fulbright

and Fulbright-Hays Commissions; the Social Science Research Council; private foundations and companies (Ford Foundation, Luce Foundation, Freeman Foundation, etc.); and Japanese companies and foundations (including generous gifts from Mitsubishi, Sumitomo, Toyota, Nomura, US-Japan Foundation, and others).

4. There is also a numerical advantage in the number of US-based presses and journals that feature works of Japan anthropology – and, as one consequence, the effective promotion of English as the dominant language of Japan anthropology.

Thus, whether we measure the training of Japan anthropologists, the location of professional Japan anthropologists, the amount of funding for Japan anthropological research, or the scholarly language and outlets of Japan anthropology, the US has the overwhelming concentration of programmes, resources, and personnel.

No doubt, this privileged environment for our work is a legitimate target of fear and/or loathing by those Japan anthropologists who must labour elsewhere with far less support and far fewer colleagues and students. And many, if not most, of us US-based anthropologists will acknowledge this disproportional weight of resources and researchers when it is pointed out. Nonetheless, as I asserted at the outset, we otherwise pay it little attention; indeed, we wonder why Japan anthropologists in other parts of the world have been so exercised by it. I think there are a number of reasons for our nonchalance, which bear on the structural location of Japan anthropology in the US institutional and intellectual landscapes.

- First is the long-time marginal position of Japan anthropology within our discipline in the US. That is, within US anthropology, we Japan specialists have never felt particularly dominant, or even noticed, and we tend to dwell on our inferiority complex in the discipline at home rather than revel in our dominance in global Japan studies.
- Furthermore, all academic specialists on Japan, especially anthropologists, often feel overwhelmed and under-appreciated by the legions of journalists and popular writers who highlight Japan (while ignoring Japan academics).
- And within Japanese studies in the US, Japan anthropologists have felt that 'their' concept of culture and at least some of their work has been hijacked and co-opted not only by popular writings but also by other disciplines. By this I mean the frequently reductionist abuse of the culture concept by economists, political scientists, and even historians and literary studies scholars writing within Japan studies.
- Finally, US-based Japan anthropologists have felt further beleaguered for a decade or so by a strong scepticism towards so-called 'area studies', within the academy broadly and even within American anthropology. Japan and any other local space-time are disparaged as legitimate

subjects of inquiry, tolerated only as fodder for the higher labour of theory-building.

For these and no doubt other reasons (which I suspect our colleagues in parts of the world also experience), we frankly don't feel much like the centre of a world system of Japan anthropology!

Of course whether we acknowledge it or not, we are nonetheless dominant, quantitatively. It is thus important to examine some of the reasons for this numerical superiority and its effects, and surely we must begin with the distinctive political and economic histories that have bound Japan and the US for at least three-quarters of a century (e.g. Janssens 1995, Robertson 1998, and Ryang 2004).

Although most accounts of Japan anthropology in the US begin (and sometimes end) with Ruth Benedict's notorious study (with secondary mention of other anthropologists involved in wartime cultural-analysis-at-a-distance), I am more inclined to ground the last half-century of academic Japan anthropology more firmly in the political and economic conditions of the post-World War II era: from the Allied (but overwhelmingly American) Occupation of Japan in the late 1940s and early 1950s through the Cold War interests that shaped American attentions to East and Southeast Asia from the mid-1950s to the US-Japan economic rivalries of the late 1970s to early 1990s. Japan obviously loomed much larger in the strategic and economic priorities of the US than European countries and even Australia, and this both demanded and enabled scholarly attention.

A corollary of this Cold War complex in the US was early official support (from the 1950s) for 'foreign area studies', a rubric for multi-disciplinary scholarship, language training, and teaching. This was a target for generous, continuing government assistance (the Fulbright Commission, National Science Foundation, the Defense Department, the Peace Corps) and private foundations (especially the Ford Foundation), and was reflected in the growth of disciplines like anthropology.

Further encouragement came from the earlier expansion of higher education in the US in the 1960s, compared to Great Britain, Japan, Europe, and Australia. There was enormous growth in student enrolments, doctoral programmes, and faculty positions. Again, anthropology and area studies more broadly benefited, gaining an early advantage over Japan anthropology elsewhere in training yet more graduate students, many of whom came of professional age from the late 1970s through the early 1990s, when Japan's economy loomed large to American corporate and political interests, sparking a further augmentation of faculty positions and funding commitments.

In reviewing what I think is generally accepted about the post-World War II context for Japan anthropology, I am decidedly not attributing and reducing the diverse motivations of individual anthropologists to the conditions that favoured certain institutional directions. For instance, it was

within the context of the Allied Occupation that the American anthropologist Gordon Bowles helped to restart the University of Tokyo Department of Anthropology and that a cohort of young Americans undertook field research around the Inland Sea (Richard Beardsley, Robert J. Smith, John Cornell, Edward Norbeck, and later, George DeVos), and a few years later David Plath and Ezra Vogel established a Japan anthropology based in long-term fieldwork, local language competence, and ethnographic representation.<sup>3</sup> To be sure, national concerns with Japan and the resources that came available because of that were the context for their work. However, it misjudges their quite varied studies and often heterodoxical analyses to reduce this work to some prevailing Benedictine character drama or modernisation fixation.

Even if the emerging US-based Japan anthropology did not reflect official interests or even scholarly conventions, one can easily identify a number of reasons why it should have shaped the wider field of Japan anthropology. That is, there are several features of university organisation, pedagogy and career patterns that set American academic life apart from English, Japanese, Continental, and Australian styles and that might be expected to shape the research and writing conventions of a field. For instance, American universities have rather distinctive pedagogies of graduate training, often taking in students without extensive backgrounds in anthropology and relying heavily on coursework and basic seminars in the first several years of the doctoral programme. British and Continental programmes structure the doctorate more as a research degree, with students' identifying and pursuing projects from the outset.

Department organisation has also taken a peculiar form in American universities. With few exceptions, there is an absence of interdisciplinary departments like Japanese Studies, through which many Japan anthropologists have emerged in other national systems. Almost all US-trained Japan anthropologists have come out of two-, three-, and four-field anthropology departments, often with broad coursework requirements and experience in general anthropology teaching through TA-responsibilities.

A third difference between American and other systems is in its career trajectories, university personnel structures, and professional associations. These include the recruitment procedures of faculty (including announcement, interview, and assessment practices), the peculiar American tenure system, higher mid-career mobility, the formal structuring and informal styles of American Anthropological Association and Association for Asian Studies national meetings, and even the organisation of university libraries.

All of these give a distinctive cast to the conditions of academic production in the US, and might be expected to shape research priorities, the writing styles and representational forms, and the standards of evaluation for what counts as Japan anthropology. And yet, has any of it in fact mattered? Has the distinctiveness of the American academy and its overwhelming numbers within Japan anthropology shaped (or some might say,

deformed) the agenda of the specialty in a clearly 'American' direction? Would Japan anthropology look much different today if Japan anthropologists and training and resources had been distributed through the scholarly world in a different pattern?

This is a provocative counter-factual and admittedly difficult to assess, but frankly, I can see little evidence that this uneven terrain has decisively directed (or deflected) the trajectory of Japan anthropology. Numerical superiority – by the indices that I mentioned above – has not translated into intellectual dominance and the ability to shape ideas and determine an agenda. There have been very clear directions in Japan anthropology over more than a half a century, but I would propose that the peculiar 'landscape' (or 'academic political economy') of Japan anthropology has been no more determinative of these directions than has the pattern of scholars' nationalities.

The one exception may be that America's Japan anthropology establishment has made English the dominant language of publication in the speciality. It is not clear, though, that this gives a decided edge to US-trained and US-based scholars. A number of us are not in fact native speakers of English-language education, and the presence of indigenous English in a number of other Japan-research countries and the high quality of English competence among other colleagues probably dilutes any US linguistic hegemony rather than reinforcing it.

In taking this contrarian position, I am not denying the social production of knowledge, but in the case of Japan anthropology, the lineaments of the social are tangled. The persisting concentration of training and professional employment in the US, despite the distinctive features of its academy and of US–Japan relations, has been undercut (or perhaps, cross-cut) by the varieties of the students and scholars who have composed US-based Japan anthropology. The permutations of ethnicity, nationality, gender, class, and age cohort have disaggregated any agenda-setting and disrupted any efforts at boundary maintenance. We have never composed a social field, a *champ* in the sense that Bourdieu used it in *Homo Academicus* (1988). Our double marginality, within American anthropology and within public US discourse about Japan, and our own diverse personal locations, gave us no incentive and no leverage even if we had wished to protect exclusivity and exercise a collective control.

Rather, our field has been shaped inter-textually. It is foolhardy to characterise briefly six decades of research, but as I reflect on the range of topics that we Japan anthropologists have taken up, they seem to have spread in ink-blot fashion from an early, limited set of concerns to sites and issues that take us across the full spectrum of Japan and beyond. In the first two decades (the 1950s and 1960s), work centred on the social organisation of and family forms in rural villages and urban neighbourhoods, moving to salaryman locations like banks and *danchi* housing. These interests persisted in the 1970s and 1980s, but Japan anthropology broadened to incorporate such topics as preschool and primary education sites, the OLs and housewives

who were the other essential elements of salaryman life, medical clinics and the culture of health and healing, and early studies of marginalised groups of resident Koreans and Burakumin. Many of these sites and topics continued in the 1990s to the present, but the past fifteen years or so have added additional focus on popular culture and consumer society, mass media, sites of globalisation within and outside Japan, further work on the substantial margins of mainstream society (e.g., Okinawa, day labourers, foreign workers, Ainu, homeless), and forms of civil society within Japan.

This is hardly exhaustive of the richness of Japan anthropology (see Hendry 1986, Kelly 1991, Lie 1996, and Robertson 2005 for analytical surveys), and I cannot defend but merely assert my argument in this brief essay. However, I do believe that a historical cartography of who and how and why our research has taken the ever-widening directions that it has will show that the social locations of its production have been of limited consequence. Rather, I would argue that the textual discourse of knowledge and the actual conditions of Japanese society have been more decisive in shaping the trajectory of Japan anthropology research. Rural and urban studies developed in tandem, workplace research inspired wider venues (e.g., from white-collar to blue-collar to underclass workplaces), the androcentrism of salaryman studies provoked attention to female labour force participation, workplaces led to leisure sites, conventional secondary classrooms were an entrée into a wide spectrum of educational ethnographies, and so forth. Japan anthropology has been more an open field of critical exchanges and mutual stimulation than an uneven terrain of protective enclaves of scholarship.

And what of the future? The new Directory of Japan Specialists in North America that the Japan Foundation is funding and that Patricia Steinhoff and Michael Donnelly are editing for an anticipated publication in 2006 will provide some important quantitative data about the new institutional landscape of Japan anthropology. Given the wider distribution of doctoral programmes, Japan's more global presence, and perhaps a decline in US public concern with Japan, it will document that the field is much less concentrated in the US than even a decade ago. But Japan anthropology has always been more cosmopolitan than a simple reading of its institutional locations and materials resources would suggest, and that accounts for its longstanding vibrancy and diversity.

## Notes

- 1 An audio transcript of that plenary session can be found at [http://pantheon.yale.edu/~wwkelly/JAWS\\_2002/index.html](http://pantheon.yale.edu/~wwkelly/JAWS_2002/index.html)
- 2 Examples include Befu and Kreiner 1992 (cf. Kelly 1993), Kuwayama 1997, 2004A, Ryang 1997, 2000. I am trying here to distinguish the effects of *where* Japan anthropology is done from the felt national identity of *who* is doing it. To mention but a few examples, Takie Lebra, Harumi Befu, Dorinne Kondo, Sonia Ryang, and Karen Nakamura are all among those US-based anthropologists



whose training, citizenship, and/or ethnic identities are variously tied to Japan. John Clammer, Jerry Eades, Tom Gill, David Slater, and Jane Bachnik are among those Japan-based anthropologists whose training, citizenship, and/or ethnic identities are variously tied to GB and US. Lynne Nakano is a Japanese-American, trained here at Yale, who is teaching at Chinese University of Hong Kong. And the complexities go on, refracted further by gender, generation, class, and other dimensions of identity, personal and professional.

- 3 To this first cohort of fieldworkers we must add the distinguished contributions of the Englishman Ronald Dore, but this only demonstrates the overwhelming American numbers even from the start.