The 1st JASCA International Symposium

Bridging Anthropology/ies in/out Japan
Engagement, Interaction, Integration

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As I understand it, this symposium attempts to use personal narratives as a means through which to consider how anthropologists involved in Japanese Studies in and out of Japan might be brought into closer relationships with each other, and in particular, according to the organizer, how Japanese anthropologists can contribute to overseas Japanese studies. On the one hand, I think these are sensible enough concerns. On the other hand, however, I think that there are some complexities that may require some mutual self-criticism by all parties concerned in order to create a common space of recognition and cooperation.

I divide my discussion into three sections. First, I briefly describe my own scholarly trajectory as an anthropologist dealing with Japan as researcher, educator and resident. I next problematize who is or is not a “Japanese anthropologist.” Finally, I make some suggestions regarding how to further the engagements of Japan-based anthropologists with colleagues and communities outside of Japan.

My Engagements with the Anthropology of Japan

My interests in Japan began when I was an undergraduate at the University of Florida in the latter half of the 1970s. Although I majored in anthropology, I also took courses in Asian Studies and American Literature, and became especially interested in contemporary Japanese literature (as then available in English). I received both my Bachelor’s and Master’s degrees from the Department of Anthropology at the University of Florida. My Master’s thesis was based on fieldwork in Jamaica and dealt with the local effects of and adaptations to large-scale redundancies in the bauxite-alumina industry resulting from a global decline in the aluminum industry in the early 1980s.

After completing my thesis, I decided to combine my interests in Japan(ese literature) with my interests in cultural anthropology and so transferred to the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa.

I entered the Department of Anthropology at UH as a Ph.D. candidate in the Fall of 1985 and began my training in Japanese studies. I took classes and did directed readings in the anthropology and sociology of contemporary Japan with scholars such as Takie Sugiyama Lebra, L. Keith Brown and Patricia Steinhoff, the former becoming my Ph.D. committee chair. Among my classmates were Diana Bethel, Karen Kelsky, Fumi Nitta, Nobue Suzuki, and Christine Yano, who have all done research about Japan. Other classmates included Hideki Harajiri, Yasuyuki Karakita and Satoshi Tanahashi. Wesley Yueunten was a classmate in a course taught by Patricia Steinhoff. I also came to know Mamoru Tsukada, then a Ph.D. candidate in sociology. During my last years at UH, we organized a group called “the Japan Ethnography Research Circle,” which included as members Glenda Roberts and Joseph Tobin, both then relatively new faculty members at UH. Thus, my graduate training in the anthropology/sociology of Japan at UH was directly—as in Takie Sugiyama Lebra, Nobue Suzuki and others—or indirectly influenced by Japan-born Japanese scholars and classmates.

Furthermore, in addition to three years of Japanese language classes at UH, I also studied Japanese language at International Christian University, in Tokyo, during the summer of 1986, and at the Inter-University Center for Japanese Language Studies, in Yokohama, for one intensive year from 1988 to 1989. Classmates at the latter included Noriko Aso, Gerald Figal, Jeffrey Hester, Thomas Lamarre, David Odo, Gennifer Weinsenfeld and others. While in Tokyo for language training and subsequent Ph.D. fieldwork, I also participated in the Anthropology/Sociology subgroup of the Ph.D. Kenkyūkai at the International House of Japan, Tokyo. Participants included Noriko Kawahashi, Nobuhiro Kishigami, Brian McViegh and others.

Following my language training in Yokohama, I conducted fieldwork for my Ph.D. dissertation on working class Japanese men and women employed in small-medium enterprises. This research was supported by Fulbright Foundation and Japan Foundation grants, and my advisor in Japan was Toshinao Yoneyama at Kyoto University. This research remains one of the few ethnographically based discussions of the class-contexted constructions of life-course and identity among members of that fraction of the working classes in Japan employed outside of larger corporations (see Roberson 1998). As an outgrowth of this research, and for me involving a critical rethinking of some of my own work, I co-edited a book with Nobue Suzuki on men and masculinities in contemporary Japan (see Roberson and Suzuki 2003). Contributors to this book included an international group of scholars, including native Japanese based in Japan and abroad such as anthropologists Nobue Suzuki and Karen Nakamura, and non-anthropologists Masako Ishii-Kuntz, Takashi Kazama, Kazuya Kawaguchi, and Tadashi Nakamura.

Over the past ten to fifteen years, I have been conducting research about the cultural politics of music and identity in contemporary Okinawa (see, for example, Roberson 2003, 2006, 2007, 2010). During this time, I have benefitted especially from conversations and introductions offered by Noriko Kawahashi, Susumu Kumada and Christopher Nelson. In 2002, I was on a panel on “Memory and Music in Okinawa” at the American Anthropological Association.
meeting (in New Orleans) in which Masamichi Inoue was co-presenter and Yoshinobu Ota discussant. And, in 2004, I co-organized a panel on “Performing Okinawa: Identity, Politics and Performance in/out Okinawa,” for the Association for Asian Studies meeting (San Diego) in which co-presenters included Kazama Maetakenishi and Yoshitaka Terada. Over the past three years (2012-2014), my research has focused on attempts to use music for local economic and cultural revitalization in Koza (Okinawa City). I have received a Japan Society for the Promotion of Science (JSPS) grant in support of this research.

Furthermore, especially since my return to Japan in 2004, I have had a number of opportunities to participate in a variety of professional activities based on my anthropological training and research interests and making use of my Japanese language abilities. These have included invitations to participate in a series of kenkyūkai research groups at the National Ethnological Museum in Osaka. Professor Hirochika Nakamaki invited me to participate over a number of years in research groups he organized dealing with the anthropological study of Japanese companies. I have also been able to participate in a very interesting group focusing on gender and the anthropology of work organized by Ayami Nakatani and Taeko Udagawa. This group is producing a book which will include a Japanese translation of a short essay I produced for this (see Roberson 2015b). More recently, Takami Kuwayama invited me to participate in a research group he organized to critically review the contributions of anthropological studies of Japan done by non-Japanese scholars outside of Japan. I have also been invited to contribute to the Japanese language publication planned for this (see Roberson 2015a).

In addition, I have briefly served on the editorial board and have translated and edited manuscripts for publication in the Japanese Review of Cultural Anthropology. And, for several years I similarly served on the editorial board of the Social Science Japan Journal, edited out of Tokyo University. The latter journal publishes in English (some translated from Japanese) a broader range of social science research about contemporary Japan. My role on the latter editorial board was facilitated by fellow Japan-based anthropologists and former board members Tom Gill (Meiji Gakuin University) and Glenda Roberts (Waseda University).

I have also, finally, been an occasional member of the Executive Committee of the Anthropology of Japan in Japan (AJJ) group. This group sponsors twice-yearly meetings in eastern and western Japan that allow Japanese and non-Japanese students and scholars studying Japanese culture and society opportunities to present and discuss their research in a bilingual and scholarly, if informal, environment. Presidents of this group have included Harumi Befu, Hirochika Nakamaki and Noriya Sumihara.

My teaching experience has been rather international in that I have taught cultural anthropology and Japanese studies related courses, primarily at the undergraduate level, at universities in the United States, Australia, England and Japan. Outside of Japan, this has required the use of English-language texts and readings—though this does not necessarily mean only things written by non-Japanese. Inside of Japan, where I have in fact spent the longest portion of my career, I have tried to make my teaching more bi-lingual—although I have encountered obstacles endemic to particular institutions and to Japanese higher
education in general in doing so, including the difficulties of assigning multiple textbooks (especially those published abroad) and heavy reading loads....

Who Is a “Japanese Anthropologist”?

Thus, as I believe to be the case for a great many other foreign-born and foreign-trained anthropologists studying Japan, I have at various stages of my research and professional career benefitted directly and indirectly from interaction not just with other foreign-born individuals but with Japan-born teachers, mentors, classmates, colleagues and students—as well, of course, with friends and informants. While my experiences may be peculiarly complicated, I believe that they suggest that the distinctions between Japan(ese) and non-Japan(ese) involved in contemporary anthropological (and other) research, writing and teaching about/in Japan are more complicated than may be imagined.

To wit, I wonder just who is or is not a “Japan(ese) Scholar”, as referenced in the remit for this symposium. Is the distinction here that of Japan-born scholars based in Japan versus foreign-born scholars based abroad? If so, this would entail some rather sticky ethno-nationalistic distinctions. For example, how would one then categorize the scholarly activities and contributions of Japan-born scholars based abroad? When are they (not) Japanese anthropologists? These scholars include my advisor at the University of Hawaii, Takie Sugiyama Lebra, as well as (in alphabetical order by family name): Haengja Chung (Smith College), Tomoko Hamada-Connolly (College of William and Mary), Masamichi Marro Inoue (University of Kentucky), Satsuki Kawano (University of Guelph), Sawako Kuron (University of Redlands), Karen Nakamura (Yale University), Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney (University of Wisconsin-Madison), Sonya Ryang (University of Iowa), (sociologist) Yoshio Sugimoto (La Trobe University), Hikaru Suzuki (University of Sydney), Satsuki Takahashi (Princeton University), Lisa Yoneyama (University of Toronto), and many others.

Conversely, what would it take for foreign-born scholars based in Japan to be recognized as members of the Japanese anthropological community? Are we excluded because of our ethno-linguistic backgrounds, even when teaching, doing research, participating in meetings and symposia, etc. in the Japanese language here in Japan? Besides myself, foreign-born anthropologists (and a few sociologists) based long-term at Japanese universities whose research is also about Japan include (in alphabetical order by family name): Rosemarie Bernard (Waseda University), Kyle Cleveland (Temple University), Emma Cook (Hokkaido University), Jerry Eades (Ritsumeikan University), Walter Edwards (Tenri University), John Ertl (Kanazawa University), Steven Fedorowicz (Kansai Gaidai University), Tom Gill (Meiji Gakuin University), Paul Hansen (Tsukuba University), Jeff Hester (Kansai Gaidai University), Gracia Liu-Farrer (Waseda University), John Mock (Temple University Japan Campus), Scott North (Osaka University), Deborah Occhi (Miyazaki International University), Gregory Poole (Doshisha University), Glenda Roberts (Waseda University), John Russell (Gifu
University), Michael Shackleton (Osaka Gakuin University), Richard Siddle (Hokkaido University), David Slater (Sophia University), Bruce White (Doshisha University), Gavin Whitelaw (International Christian University), Beverley Yamamoto (Osaka University), and others.

If the distinction between "Japanese" and "non-Japanese" is not related to ethno-linguistic backgrounds but to scholarly intellectual training, then problems again arise. For example, if a Japan-born scholar receives her/his anthropological training abroad and then returns to Japan, are they (intellectually at least) "Japanese" anthropologists? How well is their English-language scholarship known by Japan-born and -based scholars? Such scholars whose Ph.D. dissertations, at least, have been written in English but which are about Japan would include, among others (in alphabetical order by family name): Sachiko Horiguchi (Temple University), Estuko Kato (International Christian University), Hirofumi Katsuno (Osaka University of Economics), Noriko Kawahashi (Nagoya Institute of Technology), Takami Kuwayama (Hokkaido University), Ichiro Numazaki (Tohoku University), Yoshinobu Ota (Kyushu University), Ayumi Sasagawa (Independent Scholar), Hideki Sensui (Kanagawa University), Atsushi Sumi (Meiji University), Noriya Sumihara (Tenri University), Nobue Suzuki (Chiba University), Masako Tanaka (emerita, Ochanomizu Women's University) and others.

If ethno-linguistic background or current country of residence are not the determining factors separating "Japanese" from "non-Japanese," then perhaps the contributions in "bridging" Japan-based and foreign-based scholars need to be more complexly recognized and integrated into this discussion. If the issue at stake here is that of language of teaching and/or of publication, things are still not as straight-forward as it might at first appear, since there are native speakers of Japanese who publish frequently in English, and, while not as many or done with as much frequency as one might hope, there are non-native speakers of Japanese who have published in Japanese.

**Anthropological Bridges**

Finally, let me make a few suggestions regarding the building of bridges between those anthropologists of Japan working primarily in the Japanese language and those primarily working in the English language.

My first suggestion is that Japan-based, Japan-born scholars be individually willing, institutionally enabled and internationally recognized so as to act as participants in the training of especially foreign-born undergraduate and graduate students, from throughout the world, who are receiving their primary training abroad. This may be done in the form of arranging institutional affiliations and acting as advisors for research students coming to Japan for (post-)graduate fieldwork and research. This should help such junior researchers not just in conducting their research, but more ideally, through interaction with scholars and
students here in Japan, in becoming better acquainted with Japanese language scholarship that they might otherwise not be required/encouraged to read.

I would also like to encourage Japan-based scholars writing primarily in Japanese to more fully and critically engage with the English language literature being produced by anthropologists and others about Japan, and I would like such scholars to require that their advanced graduate students do so as well. This is important for a number of reasons. One reason is that providing, in English or in Japanese, written critiques of the English language research about Japan would provide critical feedback regarding that research, available to both Japan- and foreign-based Japanese Studies scholars for further consideration. Another reason is that knowledge of the English language scholarship about Japan may help Japan-based scholars writing in Japanese to sharpen their arguments and contributions to scholarship as a whole, not restricted to that in Japanese. (The converse of this of course also stands—that non-native speakers of Japanese should make efforts to critically engage with the Japanese language literature.)

Thus, for example if Japan-born and -based scholars find the English language scholarship about Japan to be lacking as scholarship, then it behooves them to make this scholarly critique in forms and fora that will encourage if not require scholars, as a whole, to improve their scholarship. It is not, I believe, sufficient to criticize “foreign” anthropologists for writing about what, to a “native” of Japan, seems obvious about Japanese culture, society, etc. All anthropologists study what is otherwise part of the everyday worlds of (other) people. However, if a “foreign” anthropologist fails to cite important Japanese language scholarship or fails to make convincing theoretical/interpretive sense of Japanese cultural practices, etc., then this needs to be critically engaged with, for the sake of all concerned.

Next, I would like to encourage anthropologists otherwise writing in Japanese to more proactively engage in writing in English or in having their work translated into English. This will, no doubt, require for many that they receive institutional (departmental, university, scholarly associational, governmental, etc.) encouragement, support and rewards for doing such. Here, perhaps the Japanese Society of Cultural Anthropology may play an important role in garnering from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology the funds necessary to support the translation of a wider range of both article- and book-length manuscripts. In the related terms of making current scholarship more globally available and accessible, the JASCA journals, namely 『文化人類学』(Japanese Journal of Cultural Anthropology) and Japanese Review of Cultural Anthropology, need to be made fully available and easily searchable (via EBSCO, etc.) on-line, if they are not already.

Finally, I encourage Japan-based, Japan-born scholars to increase their active collaboration with non-Japan-born scholars, in organizing academic conference panels, symposia and workshops. This should lead to increased mutual opportunities for the exchange of ideas and for publication. If one does not regularly participate in the scholarly networking created through conferencing, then one unfortunately risks remaining or becoming “out of sight, out of mind,” regardless of native language and regardless of the value of one’s scholarship as such.
Inter-action and extending the social-scholarly boundaries of inclusion across linguistic and other bridges is, however, a mutual shared obligation.

There are many obstacles to building or reinforcing the bridges that allow Japan-born and foreign-based to more fully participate in or collaborate with scholars based abroad or scholarship written in languages, especially English, other than Japanese. For many anthropologists affiliated with Japanese universities, these problems include access to adequate research funding and to sabbatical and other systems for taking the lengthy leaves-of-absence necessary for ethnographic fieldwork; adequate funding and time necessary to attend foreign symposia, etc., or to organize domestically held symposia to which foreign-based scholars are invited; support and rewards for publishing in or having one’s research translated into a non-native language, and so forth.

At the same time, and in conclusion, let me say that we must recognize that many Japan-born anthropologists as well as foreign-born anthropologists, based both in Japan and abroad, have for many years played sometimes very important roles (as scholars, teachers, classmates, colleagues, etc.) in creating intellectual, institutional and inter-personal bridges critical to the “long engagements” of anthropological scholarship about Japanese culture and society. It would be well for us to recognize and build on the foundations already laid and on-goingly renewed by such “Japanese” and “non-Japanese” anthropologists in increasing the volume, frequency and quality of intellectual and inter-personal exchange across these bridges.

REFERENCES

Roberson, James E. ローパーソン、ジェームズ