

Representations of Japan in American Textbooks of Anthropology:  
Focusing on the Use of Photographs<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This is a revised and extended version of the paper I read at Oxford Brookes University, United Kingdom, June 15, 1998. For a preliminary report in Japanese, see Kuwayama 1996.

## **Note**

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This paper examines how Japan is represented in American textbooks of anthropology focusing on the use of photographs.<sup>2</sup> The textbook industry is well developed in the United States of America. In the field of anthropology alone, at least 20 major introductory textbooks were available on the market in 2000.<sup>3</sup> Many of these had been revised regularly every 3 to 4 years. Given the impact of textbooks on beginning students, and considering the fact that textbooks reflect views that are generally accepted in a scholarly community, their importance cannot be stated too strongly. Little has been said, however, about how they describe other peoples' worlds. Focusing on Japan, I critically examine below cultural representations in American textbooks of anthropology.

## I. A Personal Background to the Research

In journal articles, authors seldom mention what has motivated their research. Nor do readers expect to hear much about it. Yet I feel compelled to discuss at the outset why I became interested in the issue. It would otherwise be difficult to explain the significance of analyzing introductory textbooks.

I received my degrees from Tokyo University of Foreign Studies, and was trained as an anthropologist at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). My first job was at Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU), Richmond. While I was there from 1989 to 1993 as an assistant professor, I taught an introductory course in cultural anthropology every semester. The main textbook I used was Serena Nanda's *Cultural Anthropology* (3rd edition, 1987; 4th edition, 1991). Soon after I started teaching, I began to receive

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<sup>2</sup> "Anthropology" refers here primarily to cultural anthropology. A major feature of American anthropology is the so-called "four-field approach," which comprises the biological, the archeological, the cultural or socio-cultural, and the linguistic.

<sup>3</sup> I obtained a total of 21 textbooks. In alphabetical order of the authors, they were: (1) Richard A. Barrett, *Culture and Conduct: An Excursion in Anthropology* (2nd ed.), Belmont, California: Wadsworth Publishing, 1991. (2) Daniel G. Bates and Elliot M. Fratkin, *Cultural Anthropology* (2nd ed.), Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1999. (3) Paul Bohannon, *We, the Alien: An Introduction to Cultural Anthropology*, Prospect Heights, Illinois: Waveland Press, 1992. (4) Richley H. Crapo, *Cultural Anthropology: Understanding Ourselves and Others* (4rd ed.), Guilford, Connecticut: Brown & Benchmark Publishers, 1996. (5) Carol R. Ember and Melvin Ember, *Cultural Anthropology* (9th ed.), New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1999. (6) Gary Ferraro, *Cultural Anthropology: An Applied Perspective* (3rd ed.), Belmont, California: Wadsworth Publishing, 1998. (7) Marvin Harris, *Culture, People, Nature: An Introduction to General Anthropology* (7th ed.), New York: Longman, 1997. (8) Marvin Harris and Orna Johnson, *Cultural Anthropology* (5th ed.), Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 2000. (9) William Haviland, *Cultural Anthropology* (9th ed.), Fort Worth, Texas: Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1999. (10) Roger M. Keesing and Andrew J. Strathern, *Cultural Anthropology: A Contemporary Perspective* (3rd ed.), Fort Worth, Texas: Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1998. (11) Conrad P. Kottak, *Anthropology: The Exploration of Human Diversity* (7th ed.), New York: McGraw-Hill, 1997. (12) Conrad P. Kottak, *Cultural Anthropology* (8th ed.), New York: McGraw-Hill, 2000. (13) Serena Nanda and Richard L. Warms, *Cultural Anthropology* (6th ed.), Belmont, California: Wadsworth Publishing, 1998. (14) James Peoples and Garrick Bailey, *Humanity: An Introduction to Cultural Anthropology* (5th ed.), Belmont, California: Wadsworth Publishing, 2000. (15) Richard H. Robbins, *Cultural Anthropology: A problem-Based Approach* (2nd ed.), Itasca, Illinois: F. E. Peacock Publishers, 1997. (16) Abraham Rosman and Paula G. Rubel, *The Tapestry of Culture: An Introduction to Cultural Anthropology* (6th ed.), New York: McGraw-Hill, 1998. (17) Emily A. Schultz and Robert H. Lavenda, *Cultural Anthropology: A Perspective on the Human Condition* (4th ed.), Mountain View, California: Mayfield Publishing, 1998. (18) Raymond Scupin, *Cultural Anthropology: A Global Perspective* (4th ed.), New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 2000. (19) Raymond Scupin and Christopher R. DeCorse, *Anthropology: A Global Perspective* (3rd ed.), New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1998. (20) Ernest L. Schusky and T. Patrick Culbert, *Introducing Culture* (4th ed.), New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1987. (21) Sheldon Smith and Philip D. Young, *Cultural Anthropology: Understanding a World in Transition*, Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1998.

sample textbooks from many publishers. There were even some companies that dispatched their sales staff to my office. At first, I did not pay much attention to them, but as I skimmed through the textbooks, I noticed two things. First, despite the venerable tradition of Asian studies in America, little attention was paid to Japan and the rest of East Asia. This fact contrasted sharply with the frequent references to Africa, Oceania, Latin American, and Native America. The regional bias of anthropological knowledge was clearly reflected in introductory textbooks.<sup>4</sup> Second, when Japan was mentioned at all, it tended to be cast in an exotic light or “exoticised.” For example, when pictures of Japanese women were shown, they were usually dressed in colorful kimono, which is worn today only on special occasions. Since Japan has produced many internationally known fashion designers, I wondered why the textbooks did not show their costumes, instead of the traditional clothing. As I thought about such questions, I became aware that stereotypes we often see in anthropology textbooks show in skeleton form some of the fundamental problems lurking in cultural representations.

## **II. Japan’s Place in American Anthropology**

Figure 1, taken from Rosman and Rubel (1998:2-3), clearly demonstrates the marginal place of Japan, and of East Asia in general, in American textbooks of anthropology. A box containing the names of societies mentioned in the book is superimposed on much of the region. In the authors’ mind, Japan and its neighbors do not exist. The map is in fact a testimony to their perception that East Asia is irrelevant for an understanding of the world. Although this is an extreme case, the situation is not much different in other textbooks.

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<sup>4</sup> For the situation in Great Britain, see Adam Kuper (1983:206-210). According to a survey conducted in 1981, the areas studied by British anthropologists were, in descending order of interest, sub-Saharan Africa, Britain, India and Nepal, Continental Europe, Southeast Asia, the Middle East and North Africa, Melanesia and Polynesia, South and Central America, the Arctic and North Atlantic, and the Caribbean. There was no entry on East Asia, although a few scholars, including Joy Hendry and Brian Moeran, were studying Japan at that time.



Figure 1: Anthropologists' "world map". Source: Rosman and Rubel 1998:2-3 (redrawn for Kuwayama 1996)

The marginality of East Asia is also observed in the anthropological community at large. This is best shown in the unfavorable time zones to which sessions on Japan are assigned at annual meetings of the American Anthropological Association (AAA). The meetings are held for five days toward the end of the year, Wednesday through Sunday, and Japan sessions are most often given on the first and the last days, when attendance is low. Also, the rooms allotted are usually small. Another indication of the marginal status of East Asia within the AAA is the belated establishment of a "section" devoted to its study. As of December 2001, the AAA has 35 sections, including the American Ethnological Society, and it was only in 2000 that the East Asia Section was officially recognized.<sup>5</sup>

### III. A Content Analysis of American Textbooks of Anthropology

The findings to be reported below are based on my analysis of 19 textbooks that were published around the early 1990s (Table 1). Many of them have been updated since then, and I will mention the newer editions wherever necessary. Differences in edition, however, are not critical because in the United States, where there is a huge market for used textbooks, major changes between editions ordinarily occur in book designs, page layouts, and photo selections. Since these changes are necessitated more for commercial

<sup>5</sup> Before the establishment of the East Asia Section, the following regions were recognized as sections: Africa, the Middle East, Europe, North America, and Latin America. Melanesia has an "interest group," one rank below "section." Major areas of the world that are yet to be represented are concentrated in the Asia-Pacific region and Russia.

reasons than for academic ones, substantial revisions in the text are uncommon, at least in a time span of ten years. There are, of course, exceptions, such as the 6th edition of Nanda's *Cultural Anthropology* (1998), which the new co-author Richard Warms has revised from a postmodern perspective (See Kuwayama 2001 for the details). On the whole, however, earlier editions are sufficient to examine general features.

### **(1) The Subjects and the Frequencies of Representations**

Table 2 classifies representations of Japan, including those of ethnic minorities like the Ainu, in the 19 textbooks on Table 1. According to the typical structure of American textbooks, they are classified into 16 subjects: (1) race; (2) prehistory; (3) language; (4) subsistence; (5) economy; (6) marriage and family; (7) kinship; (8) gender; (9) class; (10) politics and law; (11) psychology, socialization, and education; (12) religion; (13) art; (14) culture change; (15) applied; and (16) other.<sup>6</sup> In locating Japan in the textbooks, entries in the index, both names (e.g., “Benedict,” “Hendry,”) and subjects (e.g., “*burakumin*,” “*wa*,” “Zen”), have been used. The classification of materials follows the authors' own systems. Thus, when the *ie* is discussed in the chapter on “marriage and family,” instead of “kinship,” I have classified it as belonging to the former. There are, however, cases when classification is difficult and arbitrary, so Table 2 should be taken as showing a general pattern.

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<sup>6</sup> This structure is convenient for classroom use because many American universities have adopted the 15-week semester system. Also, textbook chapters are usually arranged in the order mentioned in the text, from the tangible to the intangible, which follows the materialist model like Marvin Harris, or, more generally, the evolutionary model based on the classification of subsistence patterns. This fact contrasts with the strong influence of the symbolic/hermeneutic school on professional anthropologists.

**Table 1. Introductory Textbooks of Anthropology Selected for Content Analysis**

- (1) Barrett, Richard  
1991 *Culture and Conduct: An Excursion in Anthropology* (2nd ed.). Belmont, California: Wadsworth Publishing.
- (2) Bates, Daniel G., and Fred Plog  
1990 *Cultural Anthropology* (3rd ed.). New York: McGraw-Hill.
- (3) Bohannon, Paul  
1992 *We, the Alien: An Introduction to Cultural Anthropology*. Prospect Heights, Illinois: Waveland Press.
- (4) Crapo, Richley H.  
1993 *Cultural Anthropology: Understanding Ourselves and Others* (3rd ed.). Guilford, Connecticut: Dushkin Publishing.
- (5) Ember, Carol R., and Melvin Ember  
1990 *Cultural Anthropology* (6th ed.). Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall.
- (6) Ferraro, Gary  
1992 *Cultural Anthropology: An Applied Perspective*. St. Paul: West Publishing.
- (7) Harris, Marvin  
1991 *Cultural Anthropology* (3rd ed.). New York: Harper Collins.
- (8) Harris, Marvin  
1993 *Culture, People, Nature: An Introduction to General Anthropology*. New York: Harper Collins.
- (9) Haviland, William  
1993 *Cultural Anthropology* (7th ed.). Fort Worth, Texas: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.
- (10) Howard, Michael C., and Janet Dunaif-Hattis  
1992 *Anthropology: Understanding Human Adaptation*. New York: Harper Collins.
- (11) Kottak, Conrad Phillip  
1991 *Cultural Anthropology* (5th ed.). New York: McGraw-Hill.
- (12) Nanda, Serena  
1991 *Cultural Anthropology* (4th ed.). Belmont, California: Wadsworth Publishing.
- (13) Oswalt, Wendell H.  
1986 *Life Cycles and Lifeways: An Introduction to Cultural Anthropology*. Palo Alto: Mayfield Publishing.
- (14) Peoples, James, and Garrick Bailey  
1991 *Humanity: An Introduction to Cultural Anthropology*. St. Paul: West Publishing.
- (15) Robbins, Richard H.  
1993 *Cultural Anthropology: A Problem-Based Approach*. Itasca, Illinois: F. E. Peacock Publishers.
- (16) Rosman, Abraham, and Paula G. Rubel  
1992 *The Tapestry of Culture: An Introduction to Cultural Anthropology* (4th ed.). New York: McGraw-Hill.
- (17) Schultz, Emily A., and Robert H. Lavenda  
1990 *Cultural Anthropology: A Perspective on the Human Condition* (2nd ed.). St. Paul: West Publishing.
- (18) Scupin, Raymond, and Christopher R. DeCorse  
1992 *Anthropology: A Global Perspective*. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall.
- (19) Schusky, Ernest L., and T. Patrick Culbert  
1987 *Introducing Culture* (4th ed.). Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall.

**Table 2. Classification of Representations of Japan in 19 American Textbooks of Anthropology Used in the Early 1990s**

Subjects	Frequencies (number of times)			Total (percentage of each subject in the grand total)
	Textual representations only	Textual representations and photos	Photos only	
(1) Race	5	2	1	8 ( 6.0%)
(2) Prehistory	1	1	0	2 ( 1.5%)
(3) Language	11	1	3	15 (11.3%)
(4) Subsistence	1	0	3	4 ( 3.0%)
(5) Economy	5	0	6	11 ( 8.3%)
(6) Marriage and Family	9	1	4	14 (10.5%)
(7) Kinship	0	0	1	1 ( 0.8%)
(8) Gender	3	0	1	4 ( 3.0%)
(9) Class	7	1	0	8 ( 6.0%)
(10) Politics and Law	2	0	1	3 ( 2.3%)
(11) Psychology, Socialization, and Education	16	2	3	21 (15.8%)
(12) Religion	4	0	3	7 ( 5.3%)
(13) Art	2	0	2	4 ( 3.0%)
(14) Culture Change	7	0	3	10 ( 7.5%)
(15) Applied	4	2	1	7 ( 5.3%)
(16) Other	13	1	0	14 (10.5%)
Grand total	90 (67.7%)	11 (8.3%)	32 (24.1%)	133 (100%)

Note: Figures are based on an analysis of the 19 textbooks on Table 1. “Representations of Japan” include those of ethnic minorities like the Ainu.

The following three categories are used to assess the frequencies of representations: (i) “textual representations only,” when there are descriptions of Japan in the text without photographs or other visual images; (ii) “textual representations and photos,” when descriptions of Japan in the text are juxtaposed with photographs of the country; and (iii) “photos only,” when photographs of Japan are used without any explicit reference to the country in the text. The last category is particularly interesting because even though the text mentions nothing or very little about Japan, its photographs are shown to illustrate explanations of a particular subject. Figure 2 is a typical example. This fact suggests that for American readers, Japan’s Otherness lies more in its appearance than in its reality – a point I will discuss later.<sup>7</sup> Textual representations have been counted each time descriptions of Japan occupy a sizable portion of one or more sequential paragraphs in the text.<sup>8</sup>



**Figure 2: A typical example of “photos only”**

**Taken from the chapter on culture change in Ember and Ember (1990), the caption says, “These Japanese women have accepted ice cream, but they have not adopted Western clothing.” There is, however, no clear explanation of why the Japanese women should appear in *kimono* to illustrate culture change in general. Source: Ember and Ember 1990:322 (with permission of Photo Researchers, Inc.)**

<sup>7</sup> According to Catherine Lutz and Jane Collins (1993:120), among the countries featured from 1950 to 1986 in the popular photo-journal *National Geographic*, Japan appeared most frequently. Also, in terms of the proportion of a country’s population to the frequency of its appearance in the same magazine, Japan is second to none.

<sup>8</sup> To be statistically precise, words in each textual representation should be counted. The area occupied by each photograph should also be measured, which in turn should be converted into a comparable number of words by a systematic method. I have omitted this complex process, however, because my purpose is to show a general pattern.

As is clear from Table 2, of all the 16 subjects, Japan is represented most often in “Psychology, Socialization, and Education” (15.8%), followed by “Language” (11.3%), and “Marriage and Family” (10.5%). Since there is not enough space to analyze all of the subjects, I will discuss the top three as examples.

*Psychology, Socialization, and Education:* A major factor in the extensive coverage of Japan on this subject is the lasting influence of Ruth Benedict’s *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword* (1946), a psychological study of Japanese national character. About half of the textual representations are related to Benedict. The following description is typical:

The search for *national characters* was an important part of the culture-and-personality school of thought. This involved establishing traits that characterized the psyches of different nationalities. National character studies became important around World War II, when the United States government used them to assess the psychological characteristics of people involved in the war. Most influential was Benedict’s book *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword* (1946), which played a role in justifying the American restoration of the Japanese emperor. (Howard and Dunaif-Hattis 1992:368-369).

Another factor that explains Japan’s frequent appearances is the huge literature on Japanese personality in the culture-and-personality school or what is called today “psychological anthropology.” The emphasis here is on the well-known opposition between Western individualism and Japanese collectivism. Different styles of playing baseball in the United States and Japan are sometimes used to illustrate the point:

Like Americans, the Japanese stress the importance of competition and success, but their emphasis is on competition between groups rather than individuals. Loyalty to the team counts more heavily than the individual’s ability to excel. [In “You’ve Gotta Have *Wa*,” Robert] Whiting (1979) has compared the Japanese and American approaches to baseball and reports a consistent Japanese willingness to sacrifice outstanding individual team members when their lack of cooperative team spirit threatens the sense of *wa*, or group harmony. Whiting summarizes the different feelings about individualism and cooperation in the two cultures: “The U.S. is a land where the stubborn individualist is honored and where ‘doing one’s own thing’ is a motto of contemporary society. In Japan, *kojinshugi*, the term for individualism, is almost a dirty word. In place of ‘doing your own thing,’ the Japanese have a proverb: ‘The nail that sticks up shall be hammered down.’ It is practically a national slogan” (Crapo 1993:374-375).

In some acclaimed textbooks, however, cautionary notes are added, which reflects the

growing skepticism among Japan specialists about the simple U.S.-Japan binarism. Marvin Harris, for example, writes:

Japan's managerial and governing elites have long advocated and extolled the virtues of team spirit, loyalty to firm and state, and peaceful family-style acquiescence to authority. But it is often forgotten that social conflict is also part of Japan's traditions.... Dissent often accompanied by violence has been registered by various antipollution and environment movements, the student movement, the consumer movement, the movement against nuclear weapons, the movement against noise pollution, and the decade-long farmers movement to prevent the expansion of Tokyo's Narita airport (Harris 1993:378; repeated in Harris 1997:362).

*Language:* Three features of Japanese are emphasized: (1) the writing system; (2) the use of *keigo* or honorifics; and (3) a distinctive style of non-verbal communication. Regarding the first feature, the Otherness of *kanji* or Chinese characters for Americans is such that their photographs are often shown conspicuously in anthropology textbooks. The description below dramatizes the difference between *kanji* and the alphabet:

Japan may in fact be the only country in the world where the blind have advantages in learning over those with sight. Because blind students learn to read and write by means of a simple phonetic braille, they do not have to invest the enormous amount of time that other Japanese students must in memorizing thousands of characters (*kanji*) (Barrett 1991:108-109).

Curiously, little has been said about *kana*, the *hiragana* form of which played a vital role in the emergence of women's literature among court ladies in ancient times, as well as in the attainment of a high literacy rate among commoners in later periods.

*Keigo* is another feature that is highlighted. It is usually discussed in relation to speech levels, for which gender differences are also important:

In the Japanese and Korean languages, honorific forms require speakers to distinguish among several different verb forms and address terms that indicate deference, politeness, or everyday speech. Different speech levels reflect age, gender, social person, and outgroupness (the degree to which a person is considered outside of a particular social group) (Scupin and DeCorse 1992:200; repeated in Scupin and DeCorse 1998:261 and in Scupin 2000:111).

In Japanese there are also marked differences between male and female speech, so strong that some observers talk about a "true" women's language. In contrast to

Malagasy, it is the women's speech in Japanese that is characterized by the more frequent use of polite forms (Rosman and Rubel 1992:53; repeated in Rosman and Rubel 1998:59).

Among the Japanese styles of non-verbal communication, bowing has received the greatest attention from Americans. This is partially due to the influence of Hollywood movies, in which Japanese actors bow deeply when they greet people, often joining hands in a Buddhist style. Here is a classic example:

Nonverbal communication is an important aspect of social interaction. Obvious gestural movements, such as bowing in Japan and shaking hands in the United States, may have a deep symbolic significance in certain contexts. The study of nonverbal communication will enrich our understanding of human behavior and might even improve communication among different societies (Scupin and DeCorse 1992:202; repeated in Scupin and DeCorse 1998:264 and in Scupin 2000:114).

This statement is juxtaposed with a photograph of three Japanese women in kimono, engaged in a tea ceremony, who are bowing to each other (Figure 3).



**Figure 3: Nonverbal communication in Japan**  
The caption says, "Japanese bowing to one another. The nonverbal communication is a demonstration of respect."  
Source: Scupin and DeCorse 1992:202 (copyright holder unknown)

*Marriage and Family:* Regarding marriage, *miai* or arranged marriage is the focus of

attention. Although marriages are arranged in many societies by the new couples' immediate relatives, Japan and China are frequently mentioned as typical examples of this custom. The *miai* is then contrasted with the romantic marriage in the West:

In an appreciable number of societies, marriages are arranged: negotiations are handled by the immediate families or by go-betweens. Sometimes betrothals are completed while the future partners are still children. This was formerly the custom in much of Hindu India, China, Japan, and eastern and southern Europe. Implicit in the arranged marriage is the conviction that the joining together of two kin groups to form new social and economic ties is too important to be left to free choice and romantic love  
(Ember and Ember 1990:185; repeated in Ember and Ember 1999:168).

More than a few textbooks have noted changes in Japan's marriage customs. Still, the emphasis is on the persistence of *miai* as a tradition:

With industrialization in Japanese society, romantic love has had an effect on selecting marital partners, and presently many Japanese individuals choose their own mates. But as anthropologist Joy Hendry (1987) notes [in *Understanding Japanese Society*], the "love marriages" are still held suspect and go up against the serious practical concerns of marital ties and the traditional obligations felt by people toward their parents. In many cases, *miai* are still employed in arranging marriages in this highly modern society  
(Scupin and DeCorse 1992:362; repeated with a slight revision in Scupin and DeCorse 1998:416 and in Scupin 2000:269).

As for family life, the *ie* is described as the traditional form of Japanese family, but receives less attention than does the *miai*. Interestingly, Japan appears quite often in the category of "Marriage and Family" (10.5%), but is seldom referred to in "Kinship" (0.8%). This difference is likely related to the arbitrariness of classification mentioned earlier, but may also be explained in terms of the different degrees of Otherness of Japanese customs for Americans. Putting aside the relatively recent origin of the Western family created by romantic love (Shorter 1975), arranged marriages are rare in the United States, at least in the mainstream of society. The *miai*, therefore, looks exotic and attracts attention. By contrast, the Japanese kinship system is similar to the Western system in many respects. For example, in both systems, kinship terminology is of the so-called "Eskimo type" – a favorite topic in American anthropology. Also, descent is bilateral (cognatic) in the two systems, although the *dôzoku*, a hierarchically organized group of *ie*,

has a patrilineal bias. Since Japanese kinship has only a low degree of Otherness for American readers, it is probably considered to be of no special interest. In anthropology textbooks, different, exotic Others tend to be described colorfully and in detail, whereas those people and customs similar to one's own tend to be neglected.

Another subject on Table 2 that calls for an explanation is "Art." Given the reputation of Japanese aesthetics throughout the world, it is curious that there are only a few references to Japan (4 out of 133 times or 3.0 percent) in this area. This fact contrasts with popular books on Japanese culture for tourists. In *Introduction to Japanese Culture* (1996), for example, edited by Daniel Sosnoski, a whole section is devoted to this topic, which includes the following entries: *chanoyu* (tea ceremony), *ikebana* (flower arranging), *yakimono* (pottery and ceramics), *nihonga* (Japanese paintings), *shodô* (calligraphy), *hōgaku* (traditional music), and *kabuki*. These arts are amply illustrated with beautiful color pictures. Indeed, no travel book on Japan would be complete without an introduction to its artistic tradition.

Perhaps a major reason for the relative neglect of Japanese art in anthropology textbooks is the discipline's commitment to the study of ordinary people rather than elites. This commitment derives from anthropologists' conception of culture as the totality of a people's way of life, which translates in our context into the bias toward folk art as opposed to high art. The arts mentioned above generally belong to the higher class, although townsfolk played an important role in the development of those arts in premodern times. As such, they tend to be passed over in the introductory class of anthropology. There is, however, a curious twist in this neglect because photographic images of Japanese arts, especially those of the tea ceremony, are frequently displayed, as will be discussed below.

## (2) On the Use of Photographs

The use of photographs in American textbooks of anthropology deserves a close examination for two reasons. First, as Table 2 shows, Japan is represented a total of 133 times, 32 (24.1%) of which are by “photos only.” When “textual representations and photos” (11 times or 8.3%) are added, photographic representations occur 43 times, which accounts for 32.3% of the total.<sup>9</sup> Why are pictures used so often? And how are we to interpret their impact on readers? These questions must be answered. Second, the frequent use of photographs is one of the salient characteristics of anthropology textbooks in the United States. Indeed, we may say that they display photographic images of other peoples just as ethnological museums exhibit their objects – a feature largely absent in British textbooks (e.g., Hendry 1999).

Like the preceding section, examples will be taken from the top three subjects. On the subject of “Psychology, Socialization, and Education,” it has been mentioned that Benedict’s book *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword* (1946) has greatly influenced representations of Japan. As the title indicates, Benedict’s major theme was about the duality of Japanese character, which she summarized as follows: “The Japanese are, to the highest degree, both aggressive and unaggressive, both militaristic and aesthetic, both insolent and polite, rigid and adaptable, submissive and resentful of being pushed around, loyal and treacherous, brave and timid, conservative and hospitable to new ways” (Benedict 1946:2). This duality is best represented in the two photographs in Figure 4. Taken from William Haviland’s popular textbook *Cultural Anthropology* (5th edition, 1987, p. 131), the women in kimono performing a tea ceremony signify the “aesthetic” side of the Japanese, whereas the male warriors in the *banzai* posture point to the “militaristic” side. It goes without saying that these images correspond to the “chrysanthemum” and the “sword,” respectively.

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<sup>9</sup> Percentages are rounded to one decimal.



**Figure 4: The duality of Japanese character**

Ruth Benedict's theme of Japanese duality is symbolically expressed by juxtaposing photographs of the tea ceremony and the military conquest.

Source: Haviland 1987:131 (with permissions of Photo Researchers, Inc. and AP)

Two things should be noted here. First, there is a gender bifurcation in the photographs: the Japanese aesthetics, politeness, timidity, and submission are associated with women, which contrasts sharply with their men's militarism, insolence, courage, and aggression. In the United States, this bipolar image of the Japanese has a long history, especially in the mass media including magazines, with the geisha symbolizing Japan's elegance, and the samurai, its brutality (Ebuchi 1992; Johnson 1988). Second, many of the Japanese people who were photographed are women. Would it be too much to say that this fact reveals American men's fascination with the "femininity" of Japanese women? Lafcadio Hearn in fact remarked that the best product of Japanese culture is the Japanese woman, and its worst product, the Japanese man. Underneath such an attitude is a hidden desire to dominate Japan. As will be discussed later, signifying the Other as feminine or "feminization" is widely observed when the stronger represent the weaker. In

this context, we should remember that “Oriental women” were central to modern American and European men’s sexual fantasies.

Going back to Figure 3, taken from Scupin and DeCorse (1992:202), the photograph shows the Japanese pattern of non-verbal communication, a major topic in “Language.” Two women, right and left (in kimono), are bowing to each other ceremoniously. The apparatus placed near the woman in the middle shows that this is again a demonstration of the tea ceremony, a tradition originally imported from China which later spread among feudal warriors. To the Japanese, it is clear that this is a special occasion separated from everyday life, which has some sort of ritual significance. For the non-Japanese unfamiliar with the local context, however, it creates the impression that the ritual bow is an ordinary event that can happen anytime anywhere. This impression accords with the prevailing image of Japan created by Hollywood movies, which is further strengthened by the photograph’s generalized caption: “Japanese bowing to one another. This nonverbal form of communication is a demonstration of respect.”

For foreigners, especially Westerners, the kimono, the tea ceremony, the deep bow, and the *tatami* mat have a high degree of Otherness. Among the many features of Japanese culture, these “indexes of Japaneseness” together express dramatically the distance between “us” and “them.” To the extent that they are Japanese traditions, the scene depicted in the photograph is not a falsification. When, however, certain features are selected arbitrarily and highlighted out of proportion, they reinforce cultural stereotypes, which deepens the gap that already exists between “us” and “them”. As a result, the exotic Others become more exotic, distant, and strange than before.

The construction of different Others through photographs is also evident in Figure 5, which appears in Ember and Ember (1990:186). Intended as a visual “aid” to the authors’ explanation of arranged marriage that was quoted earlier in “Marriage and Family,” this photograph shows two Japanese men in kimono, facing each other across a table on the *tatami*, which is placed against a paper wall that portrays court aristocrats in play. The caption says, “In many societies, people other than the bride and groom may determine important things about a marriage, as, for example, a ‘go-between’ priest in Japan decides on a lucky day for the marriage.” This may only be taken as a jest, for there is no such occupation in Japan as a “go-between *priest*.” The English word “go-between” is a translation of the Japanese word “*nakôdo*,” a mediator who works as a bridge between

two parties, especially in a marriage. He or she is not a professional priest. Furthermore, the photograph's artificial settings casts doubt on its ethnographic credibility.



**Figure 5: Arranging marriages in Japan**

The caption says, “In many societies, people other than the bride and groom may determine important things about a marriage, as, for example, a ‘go-between’ priest in Japan decides on a lucky day for the marriage.” Such inaccurate explanations damage the high-quality text.

Source: Ember and Ember 1990:186 (with permission of Photo Researchers, Inc.)

Many of the pictures shown in American textbooks are the works of commercial photographers. They have theatrical effects, like those photos in the journal *National Geographic*, but are of limited value as ethnographic data. In *Anthropology and Photography 1860-1920* (1992), the editor Elizabeth Edwards argued that until the early twentieth century, photography was “part of the collective endeavour in the production of anthropological data” (Edwards 1992:4). With the separation, however, of university-based anthropologists from ethnological museums, coupled with the increasing emphasis on the analysis of invisible, social organization, photography became marginalized within the discipline (*ibid.*). Perhaps this marginalization is responsible for a limited supply of reliable photographs to be used in anthropology textbooks, which has made the authors dependent on the commercial industry. This dependence in turn explains the gap between the generally admirable texts and the dubious images of other cultures.

The gap between text and image is amply illustrated in Figure 6. This photograph is juxtaposed with an explanation of the nuclear family in industrial states. According to the authors, Raymond Scupin and Christopher DeCorse,

During later phases of industrialization (especially since the 1960s), population growth began to decline in societies like England, Western Europe, the United

States, and Japan.... In contrast to preindustrial societies, in which high birthrates were perceived as beneficial, many people in industrial societies no longer see large families as a benefit. One reason for this view is the higher costs of rearing children in industrial societies. In addition, social factors such as changing gender relations – more women in the work force and the reduction in family size – have contributed to lower fertility rates.... Increased knowledge of, and access to, contraceptives helped people to control family size (Scupin and DeCorse 1992:351-353; repeated in Scupin and DeCorse 1998:406-407 and in Scupin 2000:259).

This statement is summed up in the photograph’s caption: “In industrial states such as Japan, most couples prefer small families.”



**Figure 6: A modern, nuclear family in Japan**  
The caption says, “In industrial societies such as Japan, most couples prefer small families.” The same photograph is used in Scupin and DeCorse (1992:353; 1998:407).  
Source: Scupin 2000:260 (copyright holder unknown)

Yet, the impression created by Figure 6 is that of a traditional family, not a contemporary one. We may well ask why a newer image has not been presented, for the Figure is supposed to show modern, industrial Japan. Moreover, people familiar with Japanese fashion will immediately notice that the couple’s hairstyles and clothing are both quite old. Again, it is the cultural features/objects portrayed in the photograph that

produce the mismatch of text and image – the woman’s kimono in the foreground and a Shinto shrine in the background: there is little doubt that the couple is visiting the shrine for *miyamairi* (reporting the birth of a new child to the local protective deity).

The same disparity is found in the most recent edition of Harris’ *Cultural Anthropology* (5th edition, 2000), co-authored with Orna Johnson (Figure 7). As the caption says, the photograph in Figure 7 shows a “Japanese nuclear family at home.” Note that all of the family members are dressed in kimono.<sup>10</sup> Behind the wife/mother is a *butsudan* (Buddhist altar), at the side of which are placed a *kakejiku* (hanging scroll) with an *ukiyo*e image, a Japanese doll in a glass case, and a Japanese-style vase. In front of the doll is a hibachi (brazier), on which you see an iron kettle and iron chopsticks, which are very difficult to find in Japan today. This perfect array of traditional Japanese objects makes us suspect that there is something fictitious about the photograph. Significantly, it appears on the cover page of the chapter on “domestic life.”<sup>11</sup>



**Figure 7: Another look at the modern, nuclear family in Japan**  
The caption says, “Japanese nuclear family at home.” This photo appears on the cover page of a chapter on domestic life. Its ostensible purpose is to show that the nuclear family is adaptive in industrial societies like Japan, but the objects depicted in the photo emphasize Japan’s traditional aspects.  
Source: Harris and Johnson 2000:125 (courtesy of Stock Boston, Inc.)

The case of the Japanese nuclear family is particularly interesting in considering some unintended effects of the use of photographs in anthropology textbooks. In the text, Japan

<sup>10</sup> The type of kimono shown in the photograph is called “*yukata*,” which is made of light fabric. Since the end of World War II, the kimono’s popularity has declined, but the *yukata* made a comeback among young women in the 1990s, when it became a trendy garment worn to firework shows in the summer. For the details, see Wada (1996:158).

<sup>11</sup> The 3rd edition of Harris’ *Cultural Anthropology* (1991) shows an image similar to Figure 6 on the cover page of Chapter 8 “Domestic Life.” It depicts a Japanese father, in the Oriental squatting position, taking pictures of his nuclear family on the precinct of Meiji Shrine, Tokyo. The same photograph is used as a visual aid to the text in Harris’ more comprehensive textbook *Culture, People, Nature* (6th edition, 1993, p. 259; 7th edition, 1997, p. 246).

is described as an industrial society, in which, unlike preindustrial societies, large families are no longer considered an advantage, hence the spread of nuclear families. In this regard, Japan is allied with the West. By contrast, the photographs put side by side with the text show Japan's traditional aspects, emphasizing the differences between the two societies. In other words, Japan is at first included in the West as a member of the industrial world – it in fact plays a central role in the Group of Seven (G7) –, but is instantaneously excluded from the West because of its Asian origin. It is not difficult to detect here an unconscious, Orientalist desire to keep “them” separate from “us,” especially in the realm of ethos, which is believed to lie beneath the material surface. As the use of old pictures like Figure 6 suggests, this separation works both in time *and* space. Consequently, the different Others are denied what Johannes Fabian (1983) called “coevalness” with the observing Western self. They are condemned to live in a distant past, contained in an exotic “field” far away from the “home.”<sup>12</sup>

The denial of coevalness through visual images is observed on other subjects. In “Culture Change,” for example, the focus of textual representations is on Japan's development into a major economic power. That Japan has retained its tradition, despite the great social transformation since the 19th century, is described as a good example of how modernization co-exists with indigenous culture. However, pictures like Figures 6 and 7 spoil such sensible, balanced descriptions because they ultimately communicate to readers those traditions that stubbornly resist change, rather than continuity *in* change.

For textbook writers, this problem is largely unintended, and they may well feel that it is unavoidable because the selection of photographs is usually the task of “photo editors.” Like photojournalism, the power of editors is strong in textbook production. We must remember, however, that the books have been published in the authors' names. Since the impact of visual images often exceeds that of written texts, careful attention should be paid to the selection of photographs.

#### **IV. Some Theoretical Issues**

In this section, I will explore from a theoretical perspective some of the issues raised in the foregoing. The focus is on the images of kimono in the United States. There are two

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<sup>12</sup> For the contrast between “field” and “home,” see Gupta and Ferguson (1997). They argued that the “field,” in which live the exotic Others anthropologists study, has been radically separated from “home,” i.e., the dominant, majority culture of the West. Furthermore, the value of each “field” is determined by the degree of its Otherness from an archetypal anthropological “home,” and this practice has brought about a “hierarchy of purity of field sites” (Gupta and Ferguson 1997:12-15).

major reasons for this choice. First, as the above photographs have shown, the kimono is a hidden motif in the textbook representations of Japan. Second, by examining one cultural object as a case study, we can understand what kinds of problems are involved in cultural representations.

### **(1) Symbolic significance versus statistical significance**

The use of kimono as an index or signifier of Japaneseness suggests that we should distinguish between “symbolic significance” and “statistical significance” in the study of culture. By symbolic significance, I mean the value attached to a particular object or phenomenon, which is disproportionately greater than that recognized among members of the local community, because it possesses a high degree of Otherness in representing that community to the outside world. Symbolic significance is contrasted here with statistical significance, which refers to the value of that object or phenomenon based on how often it actually occurs in the local community. These two kinds of significance do not always coincide. If anything, they tend to be in an inverse relationship because things that happen only occasionally in one place, but which are least likely to happen elsewhere, will attract people’s attention, whereas things that happen often, but which are observed almost everywhere, will arouse little interest. The kimono is an archetypal example of objects with a good deal of symbolic significance, but without much statistical significance.

Similar examples abound throughout the world. Yasuko Takezawa showed, in her article on ethnic stereotypes in the United States, that whereas the feather headdress of Native Americans was worn only by a small number of tribes (approximately 20 out of 500 tribes in the late 19th century), and even though most of the Native Americans were either farmers or fishermen, the headdress and the horse have long stood for the entire Native population. Takezawa maintained that ethnic markers are selected arbitrarily and that they reflect the perceived distance between the target ethnic group and the dominant society (Takezawa 1988). Similarly, Kirin Narayan contended that the “self-torturing holy man” of India who is practicing *tapas* – “standing on one leg, never lying, keeping an arm aloft, hanging upside-down over fire, and so on” – is an example of partial truths being translated into generalized facts. As she put it, this man has become “a stock character in the landscape of difference mapped onto India by the Western eye.”

Following Arjun Appadurai, Narayan argued that the “urge to exoticize, to essentialize, and to totalize” underlies Orientalist constructions of the Other (Narayan 1993:480).

This is, of course, not to say that something loaded with symbolic significance is unimportant in the study of culture. When, however, it is magnified so much that it represents the entire culture of which it is only a part, we should not only be cautious, but also ask how it has come to assume such a high profile. Many factors are at work, but the impact of mass media and tourism should be noted carefully. As Shinji Yamashita (1996) and others have shown, tourism has become very popular since the late 19th century, and its influence in industrialized society is far greater than is commonly thought. Particularly important are the images of other cultures deriving from travel books, tourist brochures, picture postcards, and photo journals. For example, *National Geographic* printed in 1911, one year after its first epoch-making color series appeared, a photograph of six young Japanese women in bright kimono holding paper umbrellas and fans. Titled “Dancing Girls,” it was part of the color series called “Glimpses of Japan” (Bryan 1997:126). In 1995, the same magazine ran a 16-page article entitled “Geisha.” All of the entertainers depicted were clad in exquisite kimono as they sang, danced, and conversed with their patrons. (This article was deleted from the Japanese edition of *National Geographic*). Images like these have been strengthened and spread by American tourists who visited a geisha house in Kyoto or elsewhere, and have eventually formed part of Americans’ knowledge of Japan. This knowledge is in turn used in interpreting the kimono as the essence of imagined Japaneseness.

A comparison with the “Italian-ness” in France clarifies this point. Following Roland Barthes’ notion of “myth” as a meta-language, Stuart Hall argued that a photo advertisement showing some products of *Panzani*, a French maker of Italian pasta, placed in a string bag with vegetables, becomes at the level of myth “a message about the essential meaning of Italian-ness as a national culture” (Hall 1997:41; emphasis in original). Since the advertisement was run in France, this message was obviously directed toward the French people, rather than Italians. Put another way, the commodities shown in the photo are signifiers of the French notion of Italian-ness, which the Italians may or may not be aware of. As Barthes remarked, “It is specifically ‘French’ knowledge (an Italian would barely perceive the connotation of the name [*Panzani*], no more probably than he would the Italianicity of tomato and pepper), based on a familiarity with

certain tourist stereotypes” (quoted in Hall 1997:69), that helps identify *Panzani* with the Italian-ness in France. By the same token, the kimono as a signifier of Japaneseness makes sense in terms of the American (and more broadly Western) knowledge of Japan, especially that associated with tourism and mass media.

## (2) “Conspiracy” between the describer and the described

The role played by the Japanese in making the kimono a signifier of Japaneseness should also be noted. To understand this point, we should briefly look at the history of kimono. In Japanese, “kimono” (literally, things to wear) refers to a broad category that includes many different types of clothes. The one identified in the West as the kimono derives its origin from the *kosode* (literally, small sleeves), which was worn as an outer robe among warrior-class women in early feudal times. Having evolved from the ancient court attire, the *kosode* became known in Europe through trade with Japan in the late 16th century. Later, when Japan virtually secluded itself, the *kosode* gradually became extravagant as a hedonistic culture developed among the townsfolk. This happened despite the sumptuary laws issued by the Tokugawa government. Kabuki actors and courtesans set the fashion trends at that time; *ukiyo*e woodblock prints that depicted their images were much sought after. Later still, a type of *kosode*, called “*furisode*” with long sleeves, became popular among younger women. When Japan re-opened its ports in the middle of the 19th century, the extravagant *kosode* and *furisode* fascinated the Westerners who visited the country. They called the dress by one word – “kimono” (Wada 1996).

With the Restoration of Meiji in 1868 began a Western-style modernization. The Japanese regarded their tradition as “barbaric,” something to be eliminated on its way to “civilization.” Clothes and appearance were easy targets, and *wafuku* (Japanese clothing) was quickly replaced with *yōfuku* (Western clothing) among the upper class. A reaction set in, however, against such an excessive Westernization, and women’s clothing became a national concern. As Yoshiko Wada (1996:153) explained,

The ensuing critique of the 1890s stressed the problems with Japan’s blind rejection of its own cultural heritage. Emphasis was placed on women’s clothing, and claims were made that Western corsets were endangering women’s health. As a result, women reverted to wearing *wafuku*, and the kimono took on a new symbolic resonance, embodying *the essence of Japanese tradition* – something it would do in Japan and the world for years to come. From this point onward, the

kimono became synonymous with *Japanese femininity*, which ironically supported the Western misconception of the kimono as an exotic feminine garment when in fact it had been worn by both sexes and all classes and ages until the Meiji period (emphasis added).

At first glance, this history may be read as a story of national resistance, but it in fact reveals how the Japanese “conspired” with Westerners in making the kimono Japan’s “national dress.” It is well documented throughout the world that people often go back to their tradition to preserve their national identity when threatened by colonial forces. In this process of return to the tradition, persons or things that presumably represent the people’s past are selected as their collective symbols. The above account shows that the kimono was one such symbol in Meiji Japan. This is, however, not to say that it was thoroughly opposed to Western civilization. If anything, the kimono was presented as Japan’s proud tradition, in which Westerners could also take delight. Whatever the nationalists’ intention might have been, re-defining women’s kimono as the essence of Japanese culture had the effect of elevating Japan’s status in the international community. Had the Westerners regarded the kimono negatively, it might have been banned or discarded like many other Japanese customs and traditions, such as the samurai hairdo and mixed bathing.

Herein lies the paradox of traditions among subjected people. On the one hand, they are compelled to “invent” a tradition (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983) to heal their injured pride, to restore their dignity, and possibly to compete against the colonizers. On the other hand, this invented tradition should be presentable to the wider world, especially in the rulers’ eye, because a “strange” tradition may give them an excuse for further aggression and control than before. Thus, the project of making a national tradition inevitably reflects the will of colonizers, and is carried out under their gaze. The result is often a collaboration or “conspiracy” between the two parties.

In today’s international relations, so-called “cultural festivals” give an ample room for the conspiracy just mentioned. Public, including governmental, organizations established to promote friendships, often sponsor these festivals. In Anglo-Japanese relationships, for example, the first such activities were performed by the Japan Society, which was founded in London in 1892. In the inaugural ceremony, a senior Japanese official gave a lecture on judo, which was enlivened by practical demonstrations. Subsequently, the Society disseminated information on the *Noh* Theater, tea ceremony, flower arranging,

and so on (Victor Harris 1997:144). This tradition has continued to date, and the one I attended in Oxford, 1998, featured *kyûdô* (archery), *shakuhachi* (bamboo flute), *haiga* (*haiku* or poem painting), *shodô* (calligraphy), in addition to the tea ceremony and flower arranging. Many of the people who demonstrated these arts were Japanese, and they were all clad in kimono. (This looked to me curious because the Japanese performers were long-time residents of Great Britain or elsewhere outside Japan. Also, the tea master's wife, who worked as his assistant throughout, was a Japanese-Brazilian). In the United States, the Japanese pavilion at the 1876 Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition launched a "Japan Craze," of which the kimono was a common motif (Stevens 1996:17).

In this context, we must remember that there are many souvenir shops in Japan that make available a variety of goods using the kimono as a main motif. Interestingly, they cater to both foreign tourists *and* Japanese tourists going abroad. For the latter, the kimono, and for that matter any other esteemed Japanese tradition, provides opportunities to rethink their cultural identity through foreign eyes. When one's culture is objectified and appropriated in this way, we may speak about a "conspiracy" between the guest and the host. Many different forces are working in tourist sites, and power does not flow in one direction.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> In the introduction to *Tourists and Tourism* (1997), Simone Abram and Jacqueline Waldren remarked that there is an "interplay between government interests, the tourism industry and the development of concepts of heritage, local identity and perceptions of belonging" (Abram and Waldren 1997:9). They further argued that the power relation is often "mutual exploitation," with hosts biting back, thus blurring the distinction between actors (*ibid.*).

### (3) Feminization of the Other

Still another issue that deserves attention is the “feminization” of Japan by displaying repeatedly pictures of Japanese women dressed in colorful kimono. Concerning Table 2, out of the 43 times Japan is represented photographically, the kimono is shown a total of 15 times (34.9 percent), and most of the people wearing it are women. This representation is lopsided because men’s kimono is different from women’s, and it has as much symbolic significance as does women’s.<sup>14</sup> Although the figures just given concern textbooks, they suggest a general tendency in cultural representations to feminize foreign people, especially those who are less powerful than the describers. In feminization, the more powerful position themselves on men’s side, from which they see the less powerful as women. These women are then subjected to the colonialist gaze, in which they figure as objects of domination, whether political, economic, or sexual.

Feminization of the Other is a most insidious form of discrimination that can happen in cross-cultural encounters. In the relationships between Japan and the United States, it was classically observed during the occupation period after Japan’s defeat in World War II. In John Dower’s book *Embracing Defeat*, which received a Pulitzer Award for 1999, two photographs of the Japanese are juxtaposed. One of them was shot in late 1944. It depicts a naked prisoner of war being “deloused” on the deck of an American warship, surrounded by hundreds of U. S. sailors, who looked both amused and confused to see the newly captured “subhuman” as the caption says. The other photo was shot soon after the war. It depicts a young Japanese woman in kimono standing elegantly on the turf of a garden, a scene reminiscent of the “dancing girls” portrayed in *National Geographic* in 1911. In stark contrast to the POW, this woman was surrounded by GIs who, having been fascinated by her beauty, flocked to take her pictures from whatever angle that pleased them. As Dower (1999:238) commented, “The defeated country itself was feminized in the minds of the Americans who poured in... Japan – only yesterday a menacing, masculine threat – had been transformed, almost in the blink of an eye, into a compliant, feminine body, on which the white victors could impose their will.”

If the vanquished were doomed to be feminized, did the opposite – “masculinization” – happen when the victors and the losers changed their places? To answer this question,

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<sup>14</sup> Lutz and Collins (1993:146) reported that, in *National Geographic*, “women alone populate galleries of portraits.” The only exception is Melanesia, which is known for men’s decorative practices. Lutz and Collins also contended that developing countries have customarily been feminized (pp. 179-180). Until pornographic magazines became widely available in the 1960s, *National Geographic* was known as “the only mass culture venue where Americans could see women’s breasts” (p. 172).

we only need to remember what happened between the two countries' economies four decades after the war. Beginning in the early 1980s, America's trade deficit with Japan soared so high that Lee Iacocca, the CEO of Chrysler Motors at that time, said that a "trade war" was going on. Contrary to the previous image as a compliant nation, Japan was now depicted as a fierce competitor who, in the eyes of many Americans, was determined to take over their country by the powerful yen. The cartoon on the front cover of *Business Week* (August 7, 1989) captured the ambience of the time (Figure 8).<sup>15</sup> A Japanese businessman, with the typical slanted eyes, is wearing a warrior's helmet. He is placed in a red circle against the white that surrounds it. This two-color design signifies the Japanese flag. Japan is undoubtedly represented here as a masculine figure with the samurai spirit – a trend widely observed in Asian museums.<sup>16</sup>



**Figure 8: Masculinization of Japan by the American media**  
A Japanese businessman wearing a *kabuto*, samurai helmet, is prominently displayed.  
Source: *Business Week*, August 7, 1989 (drawn by the author)

<sup>15</sup> Figure 8 was drawn by the author for copyright reasons. The original cover page was entitled "Rethinking Japan," and the following description appeared at the side of the samurai figure: "After years of haggling, the U.S. still runs a \$52 billion annual trade deficit with Japan, and Japanese society remains closed in crucial ways. As a result, a radical shift in U.S. thinking about Japan is under way. This revisionist view holds that Japan is really different – and that conventional free-trade policies won't work. Once, such view would have been dismissed as 'Japan-bashing,' but now they have an intellectual base. At a time of political crisis in Japan, America's challenge is to restore economic balance without destroying our broader relationship."

<sup>16</sup> According to Kenji Yoshida (2001:118), the focus of display at major war memorial museums in China and Korea is on Japan's military aggression during World War II. These museums opened in the mid-1980s, when there was a strong protest against the alleged distortion of facts by the Japanese government in the process of inspecting school textbooks of history. For a detailed report on how Japan is displayed in foreign museums, see Kurita (2001), of which Yoshida's paper is a part.

These examples show that although feminization is the dominant mode of seeing other cultures among colonizers, it is occasionally reversed when external forces threaten them. Generally, the gender with which a particular culture is associated is determined by the relative strength of that culture at a particular time. Thus, images of Japan in the United States have oscillated between geisha and samurai or between chrysanthemum and sword, depending on Japan's relative position in world politics.

From the three issues we have examined above, we may conclude that American textbooks of anthropology, in which visual images of other peoples are abundantly displayed, reflect cultural representations in the wider society of the United States and that they cannot be divorced from the ethnic images created by, and circulating in, the mass media and tourism.

#### **(4) The Pitfalls of Cultural Relativism**

Finally, as a modern, industrial nation, Japan has many similarities with the United States and Western Europe. As the example of kimono demonstrates, however, it is represented in anthropology textbooks as a culture radically different from the West. Not only different, it is also regarded as opposite and polar apart, as the dichotomy between individualism and collectivism shows. It is safe to say that few countries represent the radical break between "us" and "them," the West and the rest, more dramatically than does Japan.

A major factor in this dichotomous thinking is cultural relativism. Historically, Franz Boas developed this idea as a challenge to the unquestioned belief in Western superiority that was commonly held in his time. Relativists' notion that each culture deserves admiration in its own right, and their respect for cultural differences as differences, were directly opposed to the evolutionary view of society, in which the West was placed at the pinnacle of human progress. Cultural relativism was, and still is, liberal in its conception of humanity.

On the other hand, the particularism contained in relativism, especially the search for each culture's unique "configurations" or "patterns," as Benedict (1934) called them, has made anthropologists oblivious of the many similarities that exist across cultures. In cultural representations, one's own culture is ordinarily taken, whether explicitly or implicitly, as a reference point. Inevitably, the emphasis tends to be placed on those

features that distinguish “them” from “us,” but this tendency is particularly strong in the relativist tradition. So strong that other peoples are often made to look more different than they really are. A major problem of cultural relativism, then, is the maximization of differences between cultures, and the concomitant minimization of differences within a culture. The construction of different Others, such as the exotic Japan, derives in part from this problem.

Another pitfall of relativism is that, contrary to common assumptions, it tends to put the self in a positive, if not ideal, light. Certainly, relativist respect for cultural differences generates a sympathetic understanding of foreign people, many of whom live in deprived conditions materially and socially. This understanding is, however, easily transformed into an uncritical self-affirmation unless one is prepared to see those foreigners as mirrors for oneself. Consider, for example, the following textbook description of gender:

Even in male-dominated societies like traditional Japan and China, the eldest female in a household usually had the right to manage household affairs with a fair degree of autonomy. Yet in China, Japan, and many other societies, women were not allowed to participate in public affairs, had hardly any property of their own, had little say over whom they married, and were clearly subordinate to their fathers and husbands socially and even legally  
(Peoples and Bailey 1991:238; repeated in Peoples and Bailey 2000:173).

The authors have maintained that gender is constructed differently in different cultures. Their intention is, therefore, not to condemn Japan and China, but to warn against the ethnocentrism of judging foreign people by one’s own standards. Although this is true, such descriptions have the effect of putting students, especially women who are likely to experience gender discrimination at home, in a state of “relative deprivation,” in which they comfort themselves by comparing themselves with more unfortunate people. Furthermore, a sense of relief produced in this way will induce an uncritical affirmation of the self – “Thank God we are not like them!” When this happens, what at first was a respect for differences will eventually be turned into an indifference toward the Others or even contempt for them.

It should also be noted that an accurate understanding of women’s status would be impossible without comparing the Japanese and Chinese situation with that in the United States at a comparable time. This task is virtually impossible, however, because the text quoted above just says “traditional Japan and China,” and the exact time or period to

which it refers is unclear. What is implicated, instead, is a “generic past” (Kahn 1995:328), in which the Eastern Other is deprived of coevalness with the Western self. Thus, students are unable to reflect on their own country’s history. It was only in 1920 that the 19th Amendment to the U. S. Constitution gave women the right to vote.

## **V. Concluding Remarks**

By way of conclusion, I offer practical suggestions for solving two common problems in American textbooks of anthropology. Regarding the mismatch between written text and visual image, this drawback may be corrected relatively easily by a closer cooperation between authors and photo editors on the one hand, and between textbook producers and regional specialists on the other. In the formative period of anthropology, taking high-quality photographs needed the skills of trained professionals, but with the advance of technologies, it is now within the reach of laypeople. Indeed, there is often a large collection of visual data, such as photos, videos, and films, in the anthropologist’s office. They may not be as attractive as photojournalists’ works, but are valuable ethnographically. Using such materials in introductory textbooks may diminish their commercial value, but it will undoubtedly enhance their academic credibility.

The other problem is the gap in the amount of information given about different aspects of a culture. As we have seen on Table 2, Japan is described in detail on such subjects as “Psychology, Socialization, and Education,” “Language,” and “Family,” but is almost ignored on “Kinship” and “Politics and Law.” This gap is widened when photographs that exaggerate one particular aspect illustrate the text visually. Consequently, students are unable to grasp a balanced, total picture of a culture. It is not easy to solve this problem, but a reasonable solution would be possible by limiting the number of cultures discussed in textbooks. Describing in detail a relatively small group of selected cultures in all their aspects may not be ideal in showing the diversity of human culture, but it does have the advantage of avoiding lopsided representations that have produced Orientalist stereotypes lurking in textbook descriptions.

The representation of culture has been one of the most important subjects in anthropology since the mid-1980s. In the United States alone, many articles have been published in major journals like *American Anthropologist* and *Cultural Anthropology*. In the former have also appeared regularly review essays on museum exhibits and displays,

and more recently, on visual anthropology. To my knowledge, however, no detailed analysis has ever been conducted of cultural representations in introductory textbooks of anthropology. This is both curious and unfortunate because they play a vital role in the “home” of most anthropologists – the classroom. If there is any merit in this paper, it is because I have addressed an issue that has hitherto escaped attention.

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