

**The Social Agency of Postage Stamps:  
Japanese Postage Stamps in a Global Context  
By  
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## **The Social Agency of Postage Stamps: Abstract**

This thesis is concerned with evaluating postage stamps as social agents, using Japan as a case study. For the period 1937-1988 it identifies various messages about Japanese identity implied by the symbolism used by Japanese Governments in their postage stamp designs and by their choice of special issues. It explores the extent to which those messages have been received by both Japanese and British collectors of these stamps and the reasons why their communication has been found to be largely ineffective. The study identifies the tendency of stamp users to appreciate stamps aesthetically, as art objects, rather than as symbols and the practices of stamp collecting as the major obstacles to the recognition of their symbolic messages. The view that stamp collecting is a social practice which is defined by the cultural traditions of the collectors' societies is questioned. Evidence is offered for the 'globalisation' of this form of collecting and for the evolution of postage stamps from being utility items largely confined to their issuing societies into 'collectibles' designed for a global market. The implications of: Governments' acceptance of this change in postage stamps' status; the moves to privatise postal services; and the availability of new technology, both for Governments' continued use of stamps as 'little diplomats' and for theories of collecting are shown to need further study. My thesis suggests that the social agency of postage stamps has been more effective in helping to establish the self-identity of their collectors as collectors rather than in giving those collectors insight into the identities of the countries issuing them and that the social agency of material objects is determined more by their users than by their producers.

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### Previously Published Papers:

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## 1

### Introduction

This research was occasioned by discussions in a seminar at Oxford Brookes University, held by Professor Joy Hendry for her graduate students of the social anthropology of Japan, about the social significance of various everyday objects. It became apparent that material objects which are insignificant in themselves but very commonplace have the potential to play a significant role in the formation and structuring of society. Despite stamps being such commonplace items in most societies I was surprised to discover that they had received very little attention from social scientists in general and seemingly none from social anthropologists.

Postage stamps should be of interest to anthropologists because they are widely used in all kinds of societies and play a role in communication within and between them which is not always that intended by their creators. They are also a part of material culture in the growing 'collectibles' sector.

Examination of the social sciences periodical literature<sup>1</sup> and indices of the subjects of UK and US PhD theses<sup>2</sup> over the past twenty years failed to find any evidence of anthropologists being concerned with the social roles of postage stamps. There was a scattering of articles by geographers and political scientists / historians which took postage stamp designs as their raw material but only to discuss them in a political context. For example D.M. Reid published a paper in 1984 [Reid, 1984] in which he discussed the symbolism of postage stamps in the Middle East through the numerous political changes since the Ottoman Empire issued its first stamp in 1863. He used communications theory, as developed by Lasswell, Lerner and Speier to analyse their meanings. He summarised the crucial questions as 'who is saying what to whom and why?' and claimed that 'stamps resemble monuments, coins, paper money, flags, national anthems, nationalised newspapers and ambassadors as conveyors of official viewpoints' [p224]. His concern was to show historians how to use analysis of postage stamp designs as primary sources of 'government messages'. R.S. Newman in a paper published five years later [Newman, 1989] states that he was inspired by Reid's article and Edward W. Said's *Orientalism* [Said, 1985] to examine 'how India was defined and thus

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<sup>1</sup> International Bibliography of the Social Sciences; Social Science Citation Index; Abstracts in Anthropology and the Annual Review of Anthropology

<sup>2</sup> Index to Theses at British Universities and Dissertation Abstracts on Disc for higher degrees at US Universities

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“created” in the minds of its own citizens and in those of stamp collectors around the world by the postage stamp issues of the three colonial powers who governed the subcontinent until 1947; and of how the stamps of post- independence India and Pakistan “attempted to redefine their countries””. Despite his assertion that his paper ‘is more [than Reid’s] concerned with the effects of stamp designs on users and collectors of postage stamps’ there is no evidence within it that he went beyond analysing the governments’ messages.

About the same time C.J.O’Sullivan published a paper on ‘Impressions of Irish and African National Identity on Government issued Postage Stamps’ [O’Sullivan, 1988] in which he analysed the apparent messages given by the stamp designs without considering what their effects on users and collectors were actually. This was the case also with the paper published by V.Zei [1997] on the part played by postage stamps in the post-war creation of an independent Slovenia. Similarly with papers published about the use of postage stamps to publicise territorial disputes, e.g. the Falklands Islands dispute between Argentina and the UK.[Frank Nuessel, 1992].

In 1995 David Scott, Professor of French at Trinity College, Dublin and the author of numerous papers on semiotic analysis, published a lavishly illustrated book on European stamp design [Scott, 1995] which he subtitled ‘ a semiotic approach to designing messages’. Like the other analyses mentioned above this comprehensive review of the stamp issues of the UK and four other European countries, as well as those of the British Empire and the Commonwealth, demonstrated the use of stamp designs to describe national identities and to send other political messages. In this case an explicitly Peircian analytic framework of sign analysis as index, icon and symbol, was used to explore in depth the many designers’ communication intentions but no attempt was made to examine how these were interpreted by users of these stamps other than the author. And, although the political contexts in which they were designed were related to the interpretations given there was no attempt to assess how this entered into the design process which was treated as from the designer’s point of view. The book is thus in the tradition of critical art history, not anthropology, nor even sociology.

Neither in this book nor in any of the papers discussed above is there any discussion of how the Government messages which they analyse and discuss may have been heard by users and

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/ or collectors of the stamps concerned and hence the assessment of their social importance is incomplete. Unfortunately this is also true of the only analyses published regarding Japanese stamps of which I am aware: a paper published recently by Hugo Dobson in *Japan Forum* titled 'Japanese Postage Stamps: Propaganda and Decision-making' [Dobson, 2002] which concentrates upon the politics of their issue procedure; and two books by Naitô Yôsuke, a politics lecturer at Tokyo University, which have only been published in Japan and in Japanese. In the latest [Naitô, 200] the author claims that Japanese governments in the post-war era [1946-52] produced commemorative stamps simply as a means of raising revenue from stamp collectors and that too many were issued. Although he discusses the lack of quality in their designs from an aesthetic viewpoint in some detail he is not concerned with the content of their images which he implies was determined by the market [see my report on a discussion with him in chapter 4].

By contrast this study sets out to define the wider significance of postage stamps in the societies in which they are issued and also those in which they are collected. It seeks to establish in what ways they are social agents, contributing to the structuring of those societies. This involves seeking answers to the following questions:

1. If, as various social scientists have demonstrated, some Governments have used their control of postage stamp design and issue to communicate to their citizens a sense of their national identity and to image their country, both in their eyes and in those of the rest of the world, has this been attempted in Japan?
2. Are there other political/social/economic purposes, other than the purely instrumental one of processing mail, for which governments [e.g. Japan] have issued postage stamps?
3. How have these stamp issues been perceived and understood by indigenous people?  
By others?
4. In the case of stamp collectors has membership of societies limited to the collectors of stamps of one particular foreign country caused those collectors to develop any 'community of perceptions' regarding that country and its people which is distinctive? And, if so, how do those perceptions relate to the issuing Government's own messages [if any] on these themes via its stamp issues?
5. Do any other social relationships which membership of such specialist societies create

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cause their members to evaluate the stamps with which they concern themselves mainly in other ways? e.g. to use them to define their own self-identities through specialisation, rather than as a mirror reflecting ‘the Other’?

6. Are the local cultural traditions of stamp collectors the determinants of their collecting behaviour and responses?

In examining these questions I shall demonstrate that Japanese governments have used postage stamps for propaganda purposes in much the same ways as have other governments identified in my literature search. I shall also demonstrate that because of the multivocal character of stamps their propaganda power on behalf of their issuing governments is not as important as other social scientists have suggested. I shall show that stamps have a possibly greater social significance in aspects of their being and use which are independent of their specific designs and which have not hitherto been explored by social scientists. I also show that for stamp collectors the nature of their interest in stamps has been instrumental in developing a truly international culture of stamp collecting. Consequently my thesis may appear to divide into two parts: in the first, described through chapter 4, I examine the social agency of postage stamps from the viewpoints of their producers, as have some other social scientists, whilst in the second, comprising chapter 5, I examine how postage stamps actually affect the social behaviour and attitudes of their collectors. This ‘looking both ways’ at postage stamps is my unique contribution to the analysis of their social agency. My thesis shows that both types of social agency can exist in such an object but that the social significance of that object depends on how it is perceived by its users.

In the spirit of reflexivity I should declare an interest in that I have been a stamp collector off and on since my school days. However, in making this research I have not sought to generalise my own experience but have used it to help me to understand my respondents.

The number of countries issuing postage stamps [over 160, not counting colonies etc.] and the fact that national stamp issues have now been in existence for over 160 years in some cases and that it is not uncommon for each issuing government to initiate a dozen or more new issues per year, often of several different stamps, makes a comprehensive approach to these questions an impracticable task with limited time and resources. Therefore I decided to focus

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upon the stamp issues of one significant country over a limited period of time, which is within living memory. My idea was to look first at how the stamp issues of that period affected the inhabitants of that country and then to contrast my findings with the social effects of the same stamp issues on the inhabitants of another, rather different and far removed country. I chose Japan as the issuing country and the UK as the other country. The UK because it is my home country and contains a substantial number of collectors of Japanese postage stamps; and, as the originator of the modern national postal system, provided Japan with the model on which to base its Meiji era modernisation of its own postal system. The choice of Japanese stamps as the focus of the study was made partly because I had lived and worked in that country for five years [1978-83] and later studied it for an MA in social anthropology, and partly because Japan was an early member [1878] of the Universal Postal Union [UPU], founded by the then major powers in 1874 and tended to follow their lead in developing both its postal service and postage stamps. It thereby became a typical example of the stamp issuing countries.

The period of stamp issues which has been researched is the last fifty years of the Shōwa era [1937- 1988], a period during which there were momentous changes in the political character of Japan and in its international relations but also recent enough for many people living today to be personally familiar with. These changes were sufficiently major that one could expect Japanese stamp designs to reflect them if there is a connection between stamp images and the societies which produce them. One of the questions that I have examined is whether their designs simply did reflect the changing nature of society or whether they were meant to facilitate change in certain directions. Did Japanese stamp issues in this period positively promote certain Government visions of Japanese national identity?

It could be argued that one way to examine this question would be to investigate it among the Japanese people in general but my contention is that it would be extremely difficult to get them to isolate the impact on them of stamp designs from the impacts of all the other media channels used by their government. My straw poll among Japanese people who are not stamp collectors [reported in ch.4, pp86-8] showed me that they had very little recall of past stamp designs anyway and so I concentrated my attention on Japanese collectors of Japanese stamps.

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The first chapter gives an explanation of and justification for the theoretical bases on which this research is based. This involves treating postage stamps as a form of communication, whether they be seen as miniature works of art, as advertising images, or as items of material consumption ['collectibles']. It also involves recognising that it is not only with the subject matter and imagery of individual stamps which one needs to be concerned. There is also the timing of their availability to the public and the sequencing of their issue, in considering which the social and political contexts also become significant. This chapter also contains a description of my research methods.

In order to provide a factual background against which to set this research and to examine its results the second chapter explains the characteristics of postage stamps and how these have evolved historically. Both Japan and the UK are positioned within this development. It goes on to explain how decisions are made regarding stamp designs and new issues and how stamps are used, taking Japan as an example. In explaining the creation process it concentrates on the roles of politicians, civil servants, professional designers and the public in seeking to identify how Governments might be able to use postage stamps as carriers of social and political messages. And, in order to identify the potential audiences for any such messages, it also explains the channels through which stamps reach the public, who actually handles them and sees them. It then examines how they are used by the public and shows that as material objects they have been used in ways that were not envisaged with their introduction, e.g. as a significant aspect of the wrapping of mail; as 'collectibles' and as investments. This leads into a description of stamp collecting which identifies the variety of ways in which collectors view stamps and hence identifies their susceptibility to any messages which the issuing authorities may have wished for them to convey.

The following three chapters set out the results of my research:

Chapter 3 gives a review of the messages sent by the Japanese governments during the period 1937-1988, putting them in their political / social contexts.

Chapter 4 offers an analysis of the current responses to these messages of the Japanese public; and of Japanese and British collectors of these stamps.



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Chapter 5 analyses the social significance of these stamps to their collectors in the UK and considers the implications for theories of collecting.

A final chapter discusses how, post 1990, technical and social developments in the world, and particularly in Japan, are changing the character and social significance of postage stamps, especially as communicators of Government messages. I show that commemorative stamps have now become consumer products, created and sold primarily to raise revenue by catering for the growing interest in affordable, interesting items that can be collected and displayed and that, as a result of this, that they are being designed to sustain this market rather than as vehicles for Governments' social and political messages. Also that, because this is a global market, there is developing some convergence in stamp designing but with each country trying to give its products an exotic edge in order to maintain stamp collectors' interest in their stamps.

In the Conclusions I summarise how I believe my research has responded to the questions posed in the Introduction to this study and how it has shown that stamps have changed the nature of their social agency. From being the agents of governments they are becoming the social agents of their individual collectors, helping them to define themselves to themselves and to others, in particular other stamp collectors. This is shown to be another aspect of globalisation in that the 'norms' of stamp collecting are shown to be international rather than bounded by local culture.

In the Appendix I have provided my analysis of the Commemorative and Special stamp issues of Japan between 1946 and 1989. This shows how I have catalogued all the stamp designs issued in this period, excepting only the definitive issues which have been fully described in the text, according to the nature of the issue, the subject matter of the design and its style.

During the course of my research I gave unpublished papers on my work in progress to the British Association for Japanese Studies Conference 2000 in Birmingham and to the 9th International Conference of the European Association for Japanese Studies held in Lahti, Finland in August 2000. I would like to thank the organisers of those meetings and all those

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who attended my presentations for the opportunity they gave me to test my ideas in such knowledgeable forums. I also owe thanks to Dr. Mark Williams of Leeds University and to Dr. Julie Gilson of Birmingham University for the opportunity they gave me to publish a paper on my research in Japan Forum; and to Professor Jan van Bremen of Leiden University for his encouragement and the opportunity he gave me to publish a further paper on my research findings in the Japan Anthropology Workshop Newsletter. Others who contributed materially to my understanding of Japanese stamps and Japanese stamp collectors were Dr. Naitô Yôsuke of Tokyo University; Ochiai Chuichi, managing director of Japan Philatelic Society Foundation [JPS] in Tokyo and Natsumi Sanno, on the staff of the JPS, who provided me with a wealth of contacts and information; Kazuhiro Moritomo of the Postal Services Agency in Tokyo who was most helpful to me on both my field trips to Japan; Ken Clark, a leading UK collector and dealer in Japanese philatelic material, who allowed me to use his dealer stands at various stamp exhibitions in the UK and in Japan and helped me to make useful contacts in both countries; and all those stamp collectors in both Japan and the UK who participated in my surveys and gave me their time in interviews. Finally I must acknowledge the generosity of the Great Britain Sasakawa Foundation in financing my visit to Japan in 2001 and thank Professor Arthur Stockwin for his assistance with that visit.

What has really made this thesis possible however has been the constant encouragement, combined with enlightening suggestions, from my principal supervisor, Professor Joy Hendry. My other supervisors, Professor Jeremy MacClancy and Catherine Atherton, also each helped me greatly with their different professional perspectives; and my fellow postgraduate research students, particularly Dr. Ayumi Sasagawa, contributed in too many ways to enumerate. Finally I cannot find words to do justice to the vital support role played by my wife, Lynne, over such a long time.

The illustrations used in this thesis are all photographs taken by me of stamps in my own collections, excepting only Plates 1-4 which were reproduced from the *Sakura Catalog of Japanese Stamps* by kind permission of the publishers, Japan Philatelic Society Foundation, Tokyo and the editors of the Japan Forum, in which they were used to illustrate my paper. Sakura Catalogue numbers have not been quoted in the text as they can vary with the different annual editions of this catalogue. However the provision of the official name and year of each issue referred to should make it easy to identify in any edition.

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### **Chapter 1: The Theoretical Bases of this Study and its Research Methodology**

#### *How Others have Analysed Postage Stamps*

As mentioned in the Introduction there are a number of papers written by historians, political scientists and geographers from viewpoints within their own academic disciplines, which analyse the stamp issues of a variety of countries. A useful summary is given in a recent paper by Hugo Dobson [*Japan Forum*, 2002, pp22-3], a political scientist at Sheffield University, in which he stated that: 'Arguments have been made for the stamp as potentially as useful a primary source to the historian as newspapers and diplomatic records [Reid 1984; Mcqueen 1988; Lauritzen 1988]; on the propaganda and counter-propaganda value of stamps in Nazi Germany and Communist Poland respectively [Lauritzen 1988; Evans 1992]; for stamps creating, embedding and enforcing [Western] images of the Orient in the minds of both the coloniser and the colonised [Newman 1989]'. He also mentions studies of the stamps of France [Scott 1992] and New Zealand [Bell 1997] which have explored the images of themselves that these countries wish to project and the national identity building function of stamps in the post-independence periods of the Irish Republic and South Africa [O'Sullivan 1988]. There are some others who have discussed the use of stamps to make points in inter-territorial dispute situations in both Central and South America [Nuessel 1992] and nation building in post-war Eastern Europe [Zei, 1997].

Dobson's own paper is typical of the above type analyses. It pays very little attention to the design of the Japanese stamps which it discusses but concentrates on why their images were chosen. Its concern is with the stamp producer's viewpoint and suggests that they meant to influence their users' attitudes via stamp images and the timing of their issue but it offers no discussion of the extent to which the producers' interpretations of these images might or might not be recognised and shared by the users of the stamps. The other social scientists mentioned above follow the same approach; when they do discuss the meaning of stamp designs their analyses are based also on semiotics, deconstructing the designs of particular stamps into symbols and signs. For example Newman in his examination of the stamp issues of the British administrations in India up to 1931 [1989] accepts Reid's description [1984] of them as having a 'colonial picturesque' frame surrounding a picture of the British monarch and deduces from this that they were meant to demonstrate British control and power over India; but he failed to note that the rulers of many Indian states also issued postage stamps which

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were recognised by the British authorities and to deal with the implications of this situation. His analysis had an inadequate social and political context.

Despite their being amongst the most common items of the material culture of the societies in which they are produced and used anthropologists have given no public attention to postage stamps. As shown above the few social scientists who have done so have approached their analyses of the significance of postage stamps from the position that they are 'pictures in miniature' and as such either represent or symbolise persons, places or ideas, or are simply exercises in design. Their analysis has been directed invariably towards the stamps' significance for their creators. .

My approach has been different. I start from the fact that postage stamps are material objects which are introduced into societies deliberately by Governments with more than one purpose, as I shall show in Chapter 2. I shall show that by enforcing their use only within their borders Governments use them to define their area of political control; and through their design and redesign of them and choice of the occasions for new issues they use them to express and affirm their version of their national identity, the argument that is made by most of the social scientists' papers noted above. However my research into the manner in which they are perceived and used by stamp collectors also shows that stamp collectors create other competing social agencies for postage stamps which for many obscure the representational agency given them by their producers.

### *Social Agency*

My approach involves treating postage stamps as 'social agents'. Social agency has traditionally been treated by social anthropologists as a an aspect of persons but anthropologists have always been interested in the ways in which material objects may be used to symbolise ideas and, through the manner of their use, particularly in ritual and trade [exchange] to enhance group cohesion and definition [e.g. Durkheim, Malinowski, Levi-Strauss, Turner et al]. In the context of this thesis 'social agency' is defined as the power to affect the manner in which persons and institutions are perceived and understood. However there is a difference in the type of social agency intended by Governments when they issue postage stamps and that exercised by those stamps upon stamp collectors. Governments are

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often, but not always, attempting to use stamps to represent their concepts of national identity whereas the stamps are serving as physical links between stamp collectors which create social relations between them whose nature depends on the attitudes which those collectors bring to their stamp collecting.

Thus we need to recognise that to achieve their objectives Governments are relying upon their postage stamps to represent them<sup>3</sup>. The thesis therefore has to address the issues of how Governments seek to achieve this and whether the variety of social agencies that postage stamps acquire through their use either enhance or interfere with their producers' intended representational objective. In particular the increasing use by Governments of postage stamps to raise revenues, which causes them to direct new issues at stamp collectors and to encourage the treatment of stamps as 'material objects of desire' rather than utilitarian consumables, alters the design parameters and this in turn creates the opportunity for the effective social agency of these stamps to be other than that intended by their producers.

There is I suggest an analogy here with the ways in which particular objects are used to constitute and communicate ideas of heritage. As Rupert Cox has written:

However, practices of reproduction, conservation, curatorship, collecting and the marketing of such [heritage] objects may potentially obscure their prior meanings and reveal new ones. We intend to approach heritage through 'a social life of things' perspective [Appadurai, 1986] tracing [their] trajectories through various...contexts. [*JAWS Newsletter* No.36, p12].

This thesis follows a similar approach. It rejects the notion that postage stamps have only one kind of social agency, that intended by their designers and seeks to show how their social agency varies with the social contexts in which they are observed and used and how these variations affect their representational agency.

#### *Representation*

Representation could create meaning in three different ways: it might simply reflect the

<sup>3</sup> They then become another form of cultural display which, when collected and particularly when displayed at stamp exhibitions, are analogous to those which governments organise at international exhibitions. [Hendry, 2000, ch 2]

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meaning which lies inherent in the objects which it represents; or it might propose the meaning intended by its originator; or it might be a system of communication in which meaning is constructed by its social use.

Postage stamps are a form of printed label and as such it is reasonable to start any analysis of their significance for social relations by treating them as 'representations'. The research supporting this thesis examines the case for the second interpretation of representation offered above and rejects it in favour of the third. As Stuart Hall has argued 'representational systems in which signs and symbols- sounds, written words, images, musical notes, even objects- stand for or represent to other people our concepts, ideas and feelings' can only function when 'the people concerned interpret the world in roughly the same ways and can express themselves....in ways that will be understood by each other' [Hall, 1997, p4] i.e. representation needs to be contextualised to be understood. This point is also made by Nicholas Thomas when he writes [Thomas, 1991, p4] that 'objects are not what they were made to be but what they have become' and that this becoming is a social process which changes objects' identities by recontextualisation[Thomas, 1991,p28].

#### *Stamps as Art*

As we have shown above those social scientists who have analysed the social significance of postage stamps have however adopted the second approach to their representational nature, treating them as 'pictures in miniature' which have the symbolic or representational meanings intended by their creators. The Japanese Minister for Public Management, Home Affairs, Posts and Telecommunications who wrote a foreword to the official catalogue of the Japan World Stamp Exhibition 2001 also referred in it to postage stamps as 'the greatest works of art with the smallest area'.

If postage stamps are 'pictures in miniature' should they be treated as 'art objects' ? Definitions of art are problematic [Morphy,199 ]. I recognise with Raymond Firth [1992, pp16-19] that: 'art is part of the result of attributing meaningful pattern to experience or imagined experience. It is primarily a matter of perception of order in relations..[which is] ...satisfying some inner recognition of values...often referred to as an aesthetic sensibility'. It may also be, as Jeremy McClancy [1997, p4] has written, that to answer the question 'is it

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art?’ may well be ‘to respond to [what is] a politically-motivated interrogatory in a particular social context’. Some postage stamps seem to be intended by their creators to have the character of art object whilst others seem just as clearly to be instrumental in either a symbolic or representational manner. However, they are not original art objects. When stamps are seen as art objects it is in the same way as are mass produced reproductions of paintings as prints. Such prints<sup>4</sup> are items of mass production and consumption as also are postage stamps. Indeed many stamps are just that, mass reproductions of paintings and original photographs! But postage stamps differ from prints because the latter are created only to contribute to the decor of the living environments of people and, at the same time sometimes, to convey a political or social message, whereas postage stamps serve a social function which is independent of their appearance. Consequently interpreting postage stamps as art objects is inadequate. Because of their functional social significance which is independent of their appearance they need to be interpreted in more than one way.

#### *The Semiotic Approach*

This is the form of analysis used in the other studies referred to in the Introduction [*ibid*, p 1]. Semiotics subordinates the object qualities of things to their word-like properties. It assumes, on Saussurian principles, that stamp designs are based on a vocabulary of signs and symbols whose individual meanings are established and recognised universally within the societies in which they originate.

Thus Roland Barthes in his little book on Japan [Barthes, 1983] has argued that objects and their images are signs which signify a meaning that is apparent to those well versed in the culture that produced them but that they do not portray their meaning directly, merely point towards it. In another work [Barthes, 1985, pp40-45] in which he considers photographs he suggests that they can signify meaning on three levels: immediately via the appearance of the image; subsequently, via analysis, a symbolic meaning which may be different or complementary and comes from elements in the image; and lastly a ‘poetic’ meaning which is a visual comment on the image derived from the structure of the image and the culture in which it is produced. This is the position of some in the media world who have attempted to

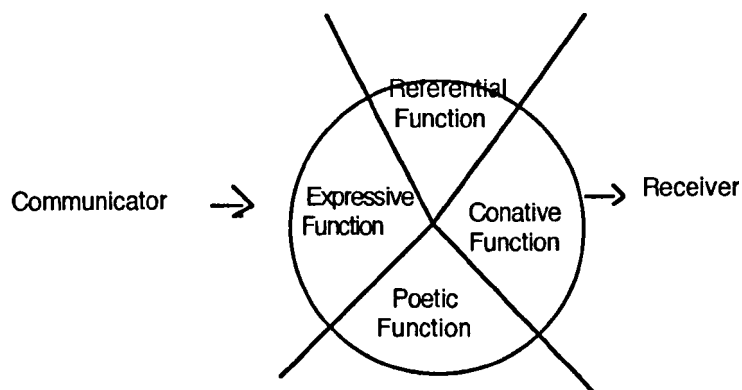
analyse pictorial communication. For example Peters [Peters, J.M., 1977] in a book on film

<sup>4</sup> I am only using the term ‘print’ here in a limited sense which excludes those produced as original works of art, most often in limited editions. It would include those however which are produced as propaganda and also commercial reprints of those that originate as works of art.

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and TV communication argues that all images should be analysed by using a 'modified Jacobsen model' [Jacobsen,R.,1960]



His analysis is explicitly semiotic and the model displayed above uses the same three major kinds of meaning that Barthes discusses. The third level of meaning, identified by Barthes as the 'poetic', is very similar to the Japanese concept of *mitate*. As Yamaguchi Masao has argued [Karp & Levine, 1991, ch.4] this is 'one of the techniques with which Japanese accentuate the hidden aspects of objects in both everyday life and in artistic contexts'. In doing so it 'associates objects of everyday life with mythological or classical images familiar to all literate [Japanese] people'.

The semiotic approach is undoubtedly extremely useful and provides an initial entry into understanding the representational character of postage stamps. However there are certain difficulties inherent in it: first it assumes a recognition which may not be there, or at least may be distorted<sup>5</sup>; secondly that meaning is independent of the manner and circumstances of the use of the object and thirdly that there is no meaning inherent in the object.

To take the last first. For the ordinary user of postage stamps the stamp is an object which has to be purchased and affixed to any piece of mail which the user wishes the post office to accept for delivery to its addressee. The user's prime concern is to ensure that they use the appropriate value stamp. Whatever image a stamp may portray, as an object it represents to

<sup>5</sup> This consideration could lead into the realms of psychology [for example see E.H.Gombrich,1977] but I have chosen to exclude these considerations.



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the user the postal service. And by choosing the appropriate value and type of postage stamp the user signals the specific type of postal service that is required, e.g. first or second class or airmail. The stamp represents a contractual relationship between the user and the postal service. One cannot apply semiotic analysis to the meaning of this activity to the stamp purchaser.

And yet the stamp may contain more than this functional meaning to its purchaser. For instance he undoubtedly sees it as an image when he affixes it to his mail even if he does not consciously appreciate the image. As Sperber [1975] has shown this seeing may result in its 'ordering his unconscious' nevertheless, according to the image's symbolic significance for him.<sup>6</sup> Billig [1995: p42] also argues that where images are of national symbols they 'may be simultaneously present and absent in actions which preserve collective memory without the conscious activity of individuals' and that when these actions are practised routinely then this form of remembering must occur without conscious awareness.

What determines symbolic significance for the individual purchaser is the culture he lives in, his *habitus*, which has both historical and physical characteristics [see also Maquet, 1986, p94]. But this is also a personal matter created through each purchaser's mediation of the culture of the societies in which they exist. To give an example: the red rose. In English female society this flower is generally associated with declarations of love. But to English historians [who may not necessarily live in England] it represents the royal house of Lancaster and to English county cricketers [who these days may come from various countries on contract] it symbolises Lancashire cricket. Thus a stamp incorporating this image may well have a number of different referential meanings<sup>7</sup> dependent on the observer rather than on the creators of the stamp. It is not easy to see how semiotic analysis will give the meaning of a stamp picturing a rose to these users because it is their social contexts which are the key determinant. Even though they may exist in the same national society as the stamp's creators it is their own micro-social contexts which determine how they see the image.<sup>8</sup> It may even be that, as Baudrillard has argued [Poster, 1988, p5], the overuse of some symbols in unrelated contexts

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<sup>6</sup> Compare with Goffman [1975] on framing and Maquet [1986, p108] on subliminal perception.

<sup>7</sup> Robert Layton makes this point in *The Anthropology of Art*, 1981, London, Granada Pubg. p108

<sup>8</sup> Victor Turner [1987] has an extensive discussion of the 'manifest' and 'latent' meanings of symbols and of how the manifest meaning of symbols varies with the ritual situation in which they are perceived often obscuring their latent meaning from the individual.

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has reduced them to being only self-referential.

It is not simply the social context of the user which needs to be considered. There is also the design context of the image used on stamps. Peters [1977, p50] describes this as the 'expressive' function [see diagram on p 14] of pictorial communication and suggests that the form of presentation indicates the attitude of the communicator towards the recipients and guides the latter in how to see the image. For example the chrysanthemum [*kiku*] has been used in two different ways in the designs of Japanese postage stamps. In a stylised, sixteen petal form it is a traditional symbol of the Emperor for Japanese people; in its natural form it is just one of a number of native flower plants. In its stylised, symbolic form it appeared on all Japanese stamps until the post-Pacific War reforms during the Allied Occupation when its use was banned. Its symbolic significance was emphasised strongly by the central position it was given in the designs of the regular series of stamps issued by Japan between 1899 and 1913 which were devoid of other images and designed to frame this one. This was the equivalent of picturing the Emperor on the stamps. See *Figure 1*.

1



On the other hand in 1966 a new series of regular stamp designs began to be introduced, a number of which showed plants and animals in their natural forms. One of these. See *Figure 2*

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showed a chrysanthemum in natural form and colours against a plain background; others showed wisteria and hydrangea similarly. The design style of these stamps has no hint of traditional symbolic references and is clearly meant to emphasise their naturalness. It is misleading to deconstruct the designs of these stamps into their elements because the overall nature of the design, its style, provides the visual context within which they are to be interpreted.

It may also be argued that it is misleading to ignore the social context in which they are designed and sold to the public. Hugo Dobson [2002, p30] gives an example of why this matters in the case of the two stamps issued by Japan in 1960 to commemorate the centenary of the US-Japan Treaty of Amity and Commerce [*Nichibei Shūkō Tsūshō Jōyaku*]. This was at the height of the public *Anpo* demonstrations against the renewal of the Japan-US Security Treaty and two years after the actual centenary. He suggests that the choice of subject and timing were seen at the time to be dictated by the current political situation, rather than history, by a wish by government to influence public opinion .

### *Does Art have Agency?*

The use of stamps as propaganda indicates that Gell's proposal to treat art as 'agency' [Gell, A., 1998, p ix ] may be helpful to understanding their social significance. He argued that material articles such as stamps are 'indexes which stand in a variety of relations to prototypes, artists and recipients. Prototypes are the things that the indexes may represent or stand for, such as the person [place etc.] depicted in a portrait [image]. Recipients are those whom the indexes are taken to affect...artists are those who are considered to be immediately

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causally responsible for the existence of the characteristics of the index but ... they may be vehicles for the agency of others...' Art [e.g. stamps as pictures in miniature] is about 'doing', theorised as 'agency' which in turn is defined as 'a process involving indexes and effects'; it is 'a system of action intended to change the world rather than to encode symbolic propositions about it'. However, in the case of stamps my researches have shown that they often simply reflect the issuing authorities' views of the societies in which they are created, without there being any attempt to mould users' views of that society although, in particular situations, they may be intended to have 'agency', to change/ shape users' attitudes. It would be a mistake therefore to adopt an approach based simply on 'art as agency'. The social agency of postage stamps is more complex than this.

#### *Stamps as Physical Objects*

Interesting and useful as they are the above approaches to the interpretation of the social agency of postage stamps fail to take into account that postage stamps are also physical objects with a defined role in societies. As material objects they have roles to play which are similar to those of bank notes [and in Japan their designers are often the same people] - they are a medium of exchange, a store of value and a demonstration of national unity - and also to 'limited edition' prints and other objects made to be collected. In this latter connection it is significant that the Japanese stamp catalogue *Sakura* prints the number of stamps issued in its lists; and also that stamp collectors become very upset with countries that allow stamp issues to be reprinted at a later date than their issue in order to sell them to collectors. As we shall see in Chapter 2 Governments deliberately produce some stamps for collectors anyway as a means of raising extra revenue and in those cases the designs are influenced by the interests of collectors rather than Government policy.

In order to understand their role in societies as physical objects which are a medium of exchange we have to be concerned with their function as facilitators of communication both within societies and between them. As explained in Chapter 2 the stamp represents to the users a contract between themselves and the national postal service. The fact that people use the same stamp to send a piece of mail anywhere within their own country but have to use a different stamp of higher value to send that same piece of mail abroad underlines the unity of their country and its separateness from others. So also does the fact that they can buy the

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same stamp anywhere there is a post office, or its agent, within their country but not when they are abroad. Apart from the stamp design always including the name of the issuing country, with one exception, it also very often also includes a symbol of that country e.g. Japanese stamps issued between 1876 and 1948 always included a stylised 16 petal chrysanthemum blossom and British stamps always include a profile of the reigning monarch. Postage stamps, together with bank notes and coins, are perhaps one of the most tangible evidences of national identity available to people on a daily basis<sup>9</sup>. To achieve this status it is not necessary that the stamps should embody particular national symbols. It is enough if their designs are such as to evoke in their observers a feeling of they're being of a particular nationality. Such 'mood creation' is a well established technique of the Japanese advertising industry<sup>10</sup> This is to recognise postage stamps as social instruments which promote a sense of belonging to one nation<sup>11</sup>. In a sense they represent the nation.

National postal services, in which stamps necessarily play a central role, are themselves capable of being analysed in such a structural functionalist manner. Historically there is justification for this in the case of Japan for instance. The expansion of telegraph and postal services to cover the whole of Japan on a uniform basis during the last quarter of the nineteenth century was one way in which the Imperial government reinforced and demonstrated its control over the outlying 'domains'. In 1882 it was decided to administer both through a national control structure independent of the Prefectural governments, which previously had a great deal of delegated authority and a national postal service uniform, and a standard design mail box were introduced to complement the postage stamps as symbols of one nation [Westny, 1987, ch.3]. They are all prime examples of the instruments of 'banal nationalism' identified by Michael Billig [1995].

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<sup>9</sup> The Universal Postal Union which was set up as one of the earliest forums of international co-operation has never attempted to substitute its own issue of postage stamps for those of its individual nation state members and has instead required that they clearly identify on their stamps the country of origin, the value and the service or services for which they are valid. The only exception is the UK which, as the originator of the postage stamp, is allowed not to identify its stamps other than by including the profile of the monarch in their design.

<sup>10</sup> Millie Creighton discusses this matter [pp138-9] in her paper titled 'The Other in Japanese Advertising' [Carrier, ed.1995,pp135-160.

<sup>11</sup> See for example any introductory text book to social anthropology such as Hendry, J., *An Introduction to Social Anthropology*, 1999, London, MacMillan, pp122-124

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### *Changing Definitions of National Identity*

Central to the argument that postage stamps are given social agency by their issuing governments is the concept of national identity [e.g. see papers by Scott (1992), Evans (1992), Bell (1997), O'Sullivan (1998)]. But 'identity' needs definition at a number of different levels. To the individual their self-identity as a singular person may be of primary concern. This self-identity has two aspects. An inner one which is largely a question of psychology and an outer aspect which is concerned with how individuals see themselves as relating to other persons. I will describe this as 'social-identity'.

This social identity has many layers, reflecting the social life of the individual. These range from those based on kinship through those which reflect that person's relationship with others in their neighbourhood to those social activities which involve others from further afield and the person's work situation. Moreover, in all these relationships there may be present, either overtly or latent, concerns about ethnicity and nationality...many clubs and societies have traditionally had rules excluding persons from them on account of their religion, politics and race/nationality/ ethnicity. It is with a meta level of social-identity, the concept of national identity, that this thesis is mainly concerned.

There has been a move in the social sciences away from explanations of national identity that associate it with 'high culture' and the elite classes of society [e.g. Gellner, 1983; Anderson, 1983; Hobsbawm, 1983; Smith, Anthony, 1998] towards explanations which root it in popular culture and the processes of everyday life [e.g. Billig, 1995; Palmer, 1998; Thomson, 2001; Edensor, 2002]. However all analysts seem to accept that governments tend to use simple concepts of national identity which are expressed through 'high culture', traditions, and historic symbols to create their visions of national identity. It does not matter if the traditions and symbols are modern innovations, as Hobsbawm [1983] has shown they often have been in Europe and Vlastos [1998] has claimed they often are in Japan, for once they have become embedded in national education systems they are given spurious historical authenticity and become absorbed by the population at large [Gellner, 1983, pp48-9].

In the case of Japan, both Gluck [1985] and Benedict Anderson [1983, pp90-93] have shown how the Japanese Government invented traditions in the Meiji Restoration era of the late

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nineteenth century and embedded these inventions in the minds of the general population via the newly established national education system and the Imperial Rescript on Education of 1890. Gluck [1985], in the Epilogue to her book, titled significantly *Japan's Modern Myths*, has shown how this policy was maintained in the subsequent history of Japan up to the Second World War.

Governments' success in such policies depends on the extent to which their vision is congruent with that which exists and continues to evolve in the course of their daily lives in their populations at large. In the case of Japan this has been made more likely both by geography: Japan is essentially a compact group of islands with a strongly centralised national education system; and by the general awareness among its population of a 'creation myth'. This myth was first recorded in eighth century chronicles and was taught in all Japanese schools as history until the end of the Second World War. It involves the formation of the Japanese islands by the gods Izanagi and Izanami and the grandson of the sun goddess Amaterasu being sent down from heaven to become the first Japanese emperor with three gifts [a bronze mirror, a sword and a curved jewel] which are still recognised by the Japanese people as the imperial regalia. [Hendry, 1995, pp8-9].

However, as physical objects stamps may also become commodified and cease to have such representational values for their owners.

#### *Stamps as Commodities*

Postage stamps are not bought only to be used on mail but also as physical objects, by collectors, for their aesthetic and/or curiosity appeal and sometimes for their rarity value, both actual and anticipated. This is particularly true of the special and commemorative issues, such as the one mentioned above, which are available for only a limited period of time and in much smaller numbers than the regular definitive issues. Such issues are looked for by collectors and the occasion of their issue noted. When these collectors trade these stamps with each other and through dealers and auction houses they become 'commoditized by metamorphosis' as Appadurai has explained [1986: Introduction; also Maquet, 1986] because in this phase of their social life as things they are placed in a situation in which their exchangeability for some other thing [e.g. money] is their socially relevant feature.

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### *Postage Stamps as 'Collectibles'*

Hence, as material objects, postage stamps may be consumed by societies as one category among a vast and growing range of 'collectibles'<sup>12</sup>. Collecting has attracted academic analysis from a wide range of disciplines: psychoanalysis [Freud, 1963; Muensterberger, 1994] social history [Pearce, 1992, 1995] sociology [Belk, 1995; Miller, 1987] aesthetics and art history [Stewart, 1984; Gombrich, 1995] etc.<sup>13</sup>. However collecting as a social activity does not seem to have been the focus for most of them. Instead it is treated in an individual manner, often with the individual collector being compared with museums, about which there is also a growing body of theoretical analysis and writing which has been labelled 'museology' [Martin, 1999, p7]. The emphasis is on the motivation for and style of collecting but the analyses do not often extend to the collector's relationships with other collectors of similar objects. An exception is Paul Martin. Unfortunately for this research he deliberately avoided 'the "old faithfuls" of stamps and coins' in the research on which he based his recent book, *Popular Collecting and the Everyday Self* [Martin, 1999 p.67]. What he and other analysts of collecting in material cultures all have in common is an explicit recognition of the extremely varied relationships which collectors have with the objects which they collect. All collectors of functional material objects are, as Hubert and Mauss [1974] have argued, converting the profane into the sacred and thereby giving them mystical properties, by withdrawing them from their roles in daily life in order to use them to create another order of life [Pearce, 1995, pp24-5]. But these new orders vary with the motivations of the collectors. Susan Pearce [1992, pp 69-88] has identified no fewer than sixteen, including aesthetics, leisure, prestige, desire to reframe objects, ambition to achieve perfection, extending the self, fantasy, investment potential. It is important then to recognise with Tilley [1989, p 192] that 'any object has no ultimate or unitary meaning that can be held to exhaust it. Rather, any object has multiple and sometimes contradictory meanings' and, because collector's motives vary so much, the same meanings may not be apparent to all.

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<sup>12</sup> Belk, Russell W., *Collecting in a Consumer Society*, 1995, London, Routledge and other titles in the Leicester University 'Collecting Culture Series', particularly Susan M. Pearce, *On Collecting*".

<sup>13</sup> Paul Martin, *Popular Collecting and the Everyday Self*, 1999, London, Leicester U.P., pages 5-12 offers a comprehensive survey of the literature.



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### *Conclusions*

I suggest that the key to interpreting the social agency of postage stamps is to recognise their multivocal character. Stamps are at once works of art, symbolic images and material objects of consumption and as the latter they have also, in Igor Kopytoff's words, 'life histories' in which they may move from being 'singularities' through 'commodity phases' and back again [Appadurai , 1986, p 17]. The theoretical basis of this thesis is that the social agency of postage stamps can not be understood by utilising only the insights afforded through analysing their images, as has been done by various social scientists. Instead understanding needs to be based on a review of these analyses in the light of the social contexts in which postage stamps are both produced and used and the recognition that their social agency changes through their life trajectories. This means that the social agency intended for them by their producers may become overshadowed and even totally obscured by other social agencies created by the manner of their use.

### **Research Methodologies**

First I would like to discuss the relationship between myself as the researcher and the people I have investigated.

I am English and brought up in England. After graduating from Oxford University I spent eighteen of the next thirty years of my life living and working in a number of countries outside Europe. I worked in an Anglo-Dutch company and even when I was working in England I was regularly visiting the Netherlands. I spent five years living and working in Tokyo [Japan]. Although I lived largely an expatriate life in Tokyo I was working mainly with Japanese management and staff, both in my own company and in associated, Japanese companies. I have been a stamp collector on and off since I was ten years of age but I have not engaged in serious study of my stamps, in the manner of a philatelist, until the last few years and as yet I do not possess a specialist collection.

I am an 'Other' in the eyes of Japanese people [slightly qualified in the eyes of Japanese stamp collectors by our common hobby] and in the eyes of specialist British stamp collectors [philatelists] although I am accepted as 'one of them' by the ordinary British stamp collectors. However my very long experience of working in a multinational company in a

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variety of societies has given me a capacity to see across the boundaries suggested by the concept of 'The Other'. It is because of this that I believe I can do justice to my informants as regards firstly, the adequacy of my own understanding of what I have observed and of what I have been told and secondly, communicating my understanding via this thesis, without shaping it by my own prejudices. As Nicholas Thomas [1991, p3] has written, whilst 'anthropology is a discourse of alterity, a way of writing in which us/them distinctions are central and which necessarily distances the people studied from ourselves this does not preclude there being similarities and identities'.

In dealing with the first issue identified above I have been helped not only by my five years of living in Japan but also by my two years study of Japanese society for an MA in Japanese Social Studies which directly preceded my research for this thesis; by my continuing participation in a weekly seminar, led by Professor Joy Hendry, on various aspects of Japanese society and culture and by my friendships with individual Japanese people.

In dealing with the second issue, particularly in Chapter 4, where I analyse the responses of Japanese people to their stamp designs, I have avoided expressing my findings in the language of anthropology because of the risk that entails of making them fit possibly inappropriate categories. Instead I have attempted a reportage style of writing which aims to convey respondents' views as directly as possible. Of course, as James Clifford and George E. Marcus' edited collection of essays, published as *Writing Culture* in 1986, has shown this may not avoid the problems of cultural bias, nor of my taking unwarranted authorial authority. In this latter connection I have of necessity related my findings in Chapter 4 to my analysis of Japanese stamp designs in Chapter 3 and that analysis must represent an imposition of my views on the data to an extent. Consequently I will now explain how the analysis in Chapter 3 was achieved.

1. I made an analysis of the design of each stamp issued by Japan, noting the subject matter and the design style. The Appendix describes in more detail how these were classified and also gives the results for the period with which this thesis is mainly concerned, 1947-88.
2. I then made a study of the history of Japan from 1867-1988, paying particular attention

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to the nature of Government policies and major changes in them and to changes in Japan's relations with the rest of the world in the period 1947-88.

3. For the period after the Second World War I also attempted to identify the changing key concerns of Japanese Governments regarding both their own domestic society and their international position.
4. Next I compared the timing and design of Japanese stamp issues to these changes in Government policies and concerns. Sometimes the connections were obvious and unambiguous, as when special stamps were issued to commemorate an event or anniversary, but often the association was less clear and dependant on an understanding of Japanese society and culture and also of Japanese visual imagery and associations of ideas, as with the possible significance of the increase in the numbers of stamps employing nature themes in their illustrations.

My classification of Japanese stamps in this manner and interpretation of the results represent my personal responses to them. These were either validated or critiqued by the responses of the British and Japanese people to these same stamps which I report in Chapter 4.

#### *Methods for Establishing Public Responses to Japanese Stamp Designs*

The research methods used in my study were a combination of participant observation with questionnaires and interviews based on random sampling<sup>14</sup>. I also utilised one focus group meeting.

The questionnaires were used to elicit opinions in an open-ended manner. The forms were kept brief, fitting onto one side of A4 paper including space for answers. They opened by asking a few questions to define the respondent [leaving optional the giving of names & addresses] and the nature of their stamp collecting. In the case of British respondents there were also a few questions to determine the extent of their familiarity with Japan. There followed 4 key questions regarding their opinion on the social significance of Japanese stamp designs in issues made since 1947. The wording of these questions was as follows for the Japanese collectors:

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<sup>14</sup> The text of this section is based on an appendix to my paper on the findings of my research which was published in the Japan Anthropology Workshop Newsletter number 34 of February 2002.

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1. What characteristics of Japan as a nation do you think they show?
2. How do they describe Japanese people?
3. Do you personally think the pictures of Japan and the Japanese people which these stamp issues give are accurate? And if not what are the reasons for your disagreement?
4. Do you think that the Japanese stamp issues of the last ten years or so have become more “international” in appearance? Perhaps more concerned with appealing to youngsters to collect them?

The wording was varied slightly for the British collectors and instead of Question 3 they were asked if they thought that the designs of those Japanese stamps most used on foreign mail from Japan suggested any different images of Japan and the Japanese people from the general run of issues.

Respondents were encouraged to offer narrative answers and to use the back of the form if they required extra space, which some did. Although asked to identify specific stamps which had influenced their answers not many did.

Each questionnaire was accompanied by an explanation of my research aims. The one to British collectors in UK, which was sent to the members of the British Society for Japanese Philately [BSJP], was supported by an article in their journal [*Kiku Shimbun*] which was issued in advance of my questionnaire. In the case of Japan my questionnaire was given two distributions. It was circulated [in English] with an issue of the English language journal [*Philately in Japan*] of the Japan Philatelic Society Foundation in which my explanatory article was published. This journal is sent to their Japanese collector members who request it and to a few foreigners. The questionnaire was also sent [again in English] to all the Japanese members of the International Society for Japanese Philately [ISJP] who are resident in Japan. This questionnaire was accompanied by an explanatory letter based on my articles. As most Japanese collectors of Japanese stamps belong to both the JPSF and the ISJP they were advised to answer [English preferred but Japanese accepted] only one of the two questionnaires, which were both returnable to the same address in Japan. There was no duplication and there was only one response in Japanese.

The response rate from the British collectors was quite high at nearly 50% [out of a total of

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100] but it was very low from the Japanese collectors, perhaps 10% [out of a similar total]. Whilst the total number of British collectors contacted is known, the number of Japanese collectors is known to be at least as large, but is uncertain in total because of overlap in the two distributions made there. I have not been able to determine why there was such a disparity in the response rates. It may be because of my use of English language in the Japanese case. I chose to do so for several reasons. The most important was that my knowledge of Japanese language was not adequate for me to use it directly. I considered the option of using interpreters but rejected it when I discovered how difficult it is to get any consistency in their translations; and I could not afford to employ a professional. Moreover my Japanese contacts were all members of two stamp collectors' organisations who subscribed to English language stamp journals which those organisations each published. Hence I could reasonably expect that they could at least read English. But with hindsight I think I should have emphasised more strongly the option, which my Questionnaire offered, of their replying in Japanese.

I have followed up these questionnaires with personal meetings, as far as possible, with both British and Japanese collectors. In the case of Japan I spent two weeks in Tokyo and attended the Japan World Stamp Exhibition which is held every ten years and lasts a whole week. This gave me opportunity to arrange substantial discussions with a number of Japanese collectors, some of whom had felt unable to complete my questionnaire. Also I was able, with the help of a Japanese collector, to arrange one 'focus group' type meeting with a group of Japanese collectors. My discussions with the Japanese collectors represented my first meeting with most of them and it is therefore possible that their responses were 'polite' [*tatamae*] rather than sincere [*honne*]. But the nature of my questions and of their responses leads me to conclude that this was not likely to prove seriously distorting. Clearly it would have been more satisfactory to have had the time in Japan to establish personal relationships with them beforehand and thus to create a base for further research in this area.

In the case of the British collectors I have used meetings of the BSJP to arrange individual discussions after becoming familiar with the individuals involved. In the case of these discussions I have also been able to introduce some dialogue into my findings by offering them the opportunity to comment on my interpretations of their interviews. I have carried out the

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same exercise with the officers of the two stamp societies whose operations I have described and interpreted. The results have been incorporated into chapters 4 and 5.

Participant observation has proved a most significant and illuminating aspect of this research. As a collector of Japanese stamps [albeit I concentrate mainly on forgeries of the earliest issues] I am accepted as an ordinary member of the three stamp collectors' societies mentioned above although I have made known and explained my active research interests to both the British and the Japanese societies. For the past two years I have attended the majority of the meetings of the BSJP and in late 1999 I was invited to help represent the Society in an exhibition for the UK Japan Society in London. I used this opportunity to display the results of my research and to involve their members in discussion of them. In addition I have attended the Japan World Stamp Exhibition 2001, two of the regular annual stamp exhibitions held in Tokyo and similar major annual exhibitions in the UK as well as the World Stamp Exhibition held in London in May 2000. At all these exhibitions I have had access to the stall of a professional dealer in Japanese stamps which allows me to observe collectors' interests in the displays and their discussions with the dealer regarding buying for their collections. In the case of the World Stamp Exhibition in Tokyo I had also access to the JPSF's Members' Lounge which enabled me to make informal contacts with Japanese collectors. The stamp exhibits themselves also gave an insight into what interests collectors and how they look at their stamps. However it is clear that my understanding of the Japanese stamp club scene would have been greatly improved had I had the opportunity and language facility, as I had in the UK, to participate in their ordinary meetings.

The other sources of information on collectors' interests I have used are the periodical literature of the stamp societies and the stamp catalogues in which stamps are classified and valued. Each of the three stamp societies concerned with Japanese stamp collecting to which I have already referred publishes a journal for its members. I have mentioned two of them. The third is that of the ISJP [*Japanese Philately*] which is the oldest and has been published continuously since 1947. It is in English and is edited in the USA. I have examined all the back issues of this journal as well as the past three years' issues of the other two, which are less substantial. There are two stamp dealing catalogues of Japanese stamps which are pre-eminent in the English speaking world: Stanley Gibbons [UK] and Scott's [USA]. In Japan the JPSF

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publishes both a standard [*Sakura*] and a specialised [JSCA] catalogue of Japanese stamps. All these catalogues are updated annually and follow much the same classification systems for the stamps, differing mainly in the degree to which they go into detail about variations and in the values that they give. But it is noticeable that the latter are coming close together as stamp trading , especially via the internet, becomes ever more global.

For non-collectors the main source of information has been that of personal discussions with individuals. I have aimed at a small but varied sample of Japanese people only, reasoning that British non-collectors outside Japan would see too few Japanese stamps to have any informed views on their designs. This Japanese sample was obtained during my visit to Japan in 2001 and was varied in terms of age, education, occupation and sex. I have supplemented it with a further sample of Japanese people visiting and resident in UK. In all these cases my discussions were based on asking them about the feelings they have about the Japanese stamps they both buy and receive and the discussions have been relaxed and informal/unstructured.

As far as secondary sources are concerned I have found none written from an anthropological viewpoint concerning Japanese stamps although I have done several literature searches.

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## Chapter 2: Postage Stamps: How they are created and used

It is useful to define what is meant by 'postage stamp'. Chambers Dictionary defines it as 'an embossed or printed stamp or an adhesive label to show that the postal charge has been paid'. This definition follows from the original concept of the postage stamp as being simply a receipt for the service of carrying mail to an agreed destination. As such it needs only to show that the rate for this service has been paid to the provider of the service. As the charge is pre-paid there needs to be some method also of indicating that the receipt has been honoured so that it cannot be used more than once. None of these requirements necessitates the use of illustrations or symbols. Simple typescript would do. And in a number of instances this is exactly how postage stamps have been created. For example see *Figure 3*

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But even in its earliest form the adhesive postage stamp was symbolic of much more than this. The originator of the pre-paid, adhesive postage stamp, Sir Rowland Hill, the UK's Postmaster General, used it as the visible symbol to the public of the introduction of the first national, pre-paid postal service. A service which was available at a uniform cost, varying only with the weight of the item of mail, for delivery throughout the country. His first stamps, the famous 1d black and 2d blue issued in May 1840, were designed to do more therefore than acknowledge the receipt of the correct amount of carriage cost from the sender - until then most mail delivery systems had required the receiver to pay. By using a portrait of the Queen the stamps indicated that they were issued on behalf of a national service organisation which had Government backing. They were identifiable as 'legal tender' and were and remain equivalent to the coinage. And by not including the name of the country in their design but leaving that identification to the symbolism of Queen Victoria's profile they began the usage of postage stamps as national symbols. See *Figure 4*.



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For the next thirty years there was no international convention on the use of postage stamps outside their country of issue and their designs reflected the fact that they were issued for domestic use. Hence symbolism such as that described in the case of the earliest British stamps is understandable. Other countries were slow to follow the UK's example of establishing a national, pre-paid postal service, with uniform rates of postage and postage stamps [Brazil was first in 1843, followed by USA in 1847 and then France, Belgium and Bavaria in 1849] but in the 1850s the idea was taken up with enthusiasm. [Phillips, 1960, p10]. Between then and the early 1870s virtually all the countries of Europe, North and South America, as well as Egypt, The Ottoman Empire and Persia, had instituted such government controlled, national postal systems and made the issue of postage stamps state monopolies. The European colonial powers also set up such systems and issued distinctive postage stamps in their colonies; and as new states were formed [e.g. the kingdom of Italy in 1860, Imperial Germany in 1870] they quickly followed suit and issued postage stamps; a practice which has continued ever since, whenever new sovereign states are formed. Japan was the first independent Asian country to do the same, issuing its' first postage stamps in 1871; followed by China in 1878, Siam [Thailand] in 1883 and Korea in 1885.

At this point it may be as well to digress briefly in order to mention that prior to the introduction of Government backed postage stamps there had been many and varied postal systems which were private and locally based and usually required the recipient of the mail to pay according to the distance it had travelled. Some of these systems in Europe were inter linked, and capable of delivering mail internationally but none offered a comprehensive national service. Even after the introduction of national services local, private services



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The first [Dragon] and second [Cherry Blossom] series of Japanese stamps did not clearly identify the country of origin as required by their membership of the UPU and therefore the third [Koban] series illustrated in *Figure 6* was introduced which includes the name of the country in Roman letters.

From the very early days of postage stamps Governments recognised their potential to be carriers of messages through their own appearance. Any use of symbols or pictures in their design will necessarily connote meaning[s] to the user, e.g. I have already commented on the significant use of the profile portrait of Queen Victoria on the first postage stamp.

Consequently, apart from issuing a series of stamps for the different values that the public might require to prepay their mail [referred to as the 'regular' or 'definitive' issue] it became the standard practice of most countries in the later nineteenth century to issue every year different stamps for use on mail, as an optional alternative to the regular stamps, for a limited period of time. These were to commemorate the lives and / or achievements of selected people and also the anniversaries of selected events. Usually the subjects would be chosen from the country's own history but sometimes, particularly since the formation of the United Nations, they may be of international rather than national significance. These stamps are referred to as 'commemoratives'. Clearly the selection of the subjects for such issues is pregnant with possibilities of creating particular interpretations of the character of the issuing country.

Alongside the development of commemorative issues many countries created other special types of issue: some for general use for a limited time such as New Year stamps [e.g. Japan, *Figure 9*] and in favour of certain charities, to be sold at a premium [e.g. Denmark, *Figure 10*]; others for particular types of mail [e.g. railway mail stamps in Belgium, *Figure 11*] and later and more generally, air mail stamps, parcel post stamps, express letter stamps, postage due

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stamps for underpaid mail, official stamps for Government mail etc.



All these different classes of postage stamp would have their own, distinctive designs. However the fashion for having a wide variety of classes of postage stamp has passed and today most countries limit themselves to a regular issue and a selection of commemorative issues, albeit that some of the commemorative issues are on a regular, annual basis [e.g. Japan, at fixed dates each year issues stamps which honour their national athletics championships, postal services week, international letter writing, their re-afforestation campaign etc.].

Reference to a standard catalogue of the world's postage stamps [e.g. Gibbons, 2002] will demonstrate that the designs of regular and commemorative issues are very varied and often very beautifully executed, whilst those for special classes of mail are generally more utilitarian and less elaborate and varied in their use of images. It is suggested that this may be related to the issuing Governments' perception that the latter issues are not suited to the sending of social and political messages because of their restricted audiences.

One should not assume that their small size makes postage stamps insignificant, nor underestimate the numbers of people each use of a stamp involves. It is also the very wide

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distribution of the regular and commemorative issues<sup>16</sup> and, in the former case, their long life, which makes them peculiarly suitable as a mode of communication via their designs; together with the facts that they are not overtly serving this purpose, as would be the case with outright advertisements in the press or other media and that, unlike advertisements, they are self financing. That stamps act as advocates of causes espoused by their issuing governments was openly acknowledged by the Japanese Minister for Public Management, Home Affairs, Posts and Telecommunications, Katayama Toranosuke, in his message to the Japan World Stamp Exhibition 2001 [*Philanippon '01*] held in Tokyo, 1st-7th August, 2001, wherein he referred to postage stamps as 'miniature diplomats' [*Official Catalogue*, 2001, p4].

Before we discuss the manner in which postage stamps are created it is helpful to recognise that we are dealing with a class of objects and not just with a single species: the definitive, regular issues; commemorative stamps, issued alongside the definitive issue; and also special issues for various limited purposes destined only for a limited range of customers / users.

Different species of postage stamp are used and seen by varying but not exclusive groups of people. They are different instrumentally and their social significance is therefore potentially different, both in intention and in actuality. As I have explained in chapter 1 postage stamps are material objects which have more than one purpose in society and people use and regard them in a variety of ways which affect the manner in which they are created.

In Japan it is the Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications [MOPT]<sup>17</sup> that formally commissions postage stamps and issues them, but it does so on behalf of the Government as

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<sup>16</sup> The *Sakura Catalog of Japanese Stamps* gives the numbers printed for each commemorative issue. It seems usually to be in the order of 20 million copies of each value. The Ministry of Public Management, Home Affairs & Posts and Telecommunications in its' annual report, "Japan's Postal Service 2001" notes that there are over 24,000 post offices [p21] and 150,000 stamp selling agencies [p22]. Over 24 million pieces of private mail are processed annually [p36].

<sup>17</sup> On 1st June 2001 this Ministry was merged into a 'super ministry' which is known as the Ministry of Public Management, Home Affairs, Posts and Telecommunications and from 1st January 2002 the Postal Services Bureau of the MOPT has been renamed the Postal Services Agency in preparation for its becoming an autonomous state company on 1st April 2003. So far as I know there is no published material regarding the procedures for the issue of Japanese postage stamps. The MOPT was unable to refer me to any Japanese sources but agreed during an interview I had with the Director of the Stamps and Correspondence Promotion Office of the Postal Bureau in Tokyo in May, 1999, to their subsequent completion of a questionnaire which I left with them. Their replies have become the major source of my information on this matter.

I have since found some corroborative information in various articles published in the staff magazine of the Postal Bureau which have been made available to me by a personal contact in the MOPT and also in a long letter which I have received from a retired Art Director of the Postal Bureau.



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a whole and the procedure for establishing changes in the design of existing stamps and the annual programme of new issues is quite complex and diffuses responsibility widely. In the case of commemorative and special issues the Head of the Postal Bureau in the MOPT canvasses the views of other ministries in April each year regarding ideas for the issues to be made in the following year and usually receives some 50-60 suggestions. He refers these to a small, informal committee which he creates by inviting a representative stamp collector, his Art Director, the head of stamp printing, an art historian and maybe one or two other experts to form it. They reduce the total to some 20-25 proposals on technical difficulty grounds, or because ideas overlap, or they seem commercially unattractive. But the political weight of the proposers' ministries is also taken into account, as also are current Government policies. He then has the task of persuading his colleagues in the other ministries to accept this reduced list, which he usually achieves by the end of June. The list next has to be approved by the Minister of MOPT and, if any inter-ministry disputes over it remain which he can't resolve, by the Cabinet. The Head of the Postal Bureau then delegates the task of creating the designs to his Art Director. In the case of the regular issue, major changes in its design are usually instigated only by the Cabinet, who decide on a theme and delegate the task of implementing it to the Head of the Postal Bureau, who in turn delegates the task to his Art Director. All the designs to be issued in the following year have to be approved by the Head of the Postal Bureau and, if he thinks it necessary, by the Minister, by early October. Thus, on the commissioning side there is not just one 'patron' but a combination of politicians and civil servants. And on the artistic side there is not just 'the artist' but a whole mix of persons comprising, in addition to the actual designer, the Art Director and his advisory committee.

The Art Director of the Postal Bureau is an artist with professional training but also a civil servant<sup>18</sup>. It is the Art Director who decides whether to use a small team of in-house graphic designers [numbering 4-5] employed by the Government Printing Bureau and also responsible for the design of bank notes, or whether to commission designs from a small group of independent artists with whom he maintains personal contact. These are not always graphic designers: sculptors and painters in oils and water-colours have also been used. The Art Director keeps in close touch with the selected designer[s] and also uses another small, informal committee comprising a graphic designer, a printer and an appropriate academic expert in the subject of the design to advise him.

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<sup>18</sup> He is employed by the Postal Bureau.

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This 'creation by committees' can have unintended outcomes as visual communication is not unambiguous. For example see Gombrich [1995] regarding portraits about which art historians debate at length regarding the artist's interpretation of his sitter and in so doing bring into the debate all that is known about the artist and his relationship with his sitter. With regard to Japanese postage stamps this is guarded against by having two persons in crucial 'control positions', the Head of the Postal Bureau and his Art Director. Because it is the Art Director who actually screens that which the Head of the Postal Bureau has to decide upon it is perhaps he who is key to the whole process. Consequently his social and political, as well as his artistic, sensibilities may well affect the impact that a new design has on the public and on stamp collectors although clearly these will be subordinate to any overriding political direction from the Minister<sup>19</sup>. However, as Maquet [1986, pp155-6] has argued, this may not prevent these stamps from having more than one message for their viewers. He used as an example a famous sculpture by Brancusi of Adam and Eve and his own varying interpretations of it when seen in different perspectives.

The Minister and his civil servants are subject to constraints imposed by statute law. In Japan during the Occupation one of the reforms was a law redefining the duties of the Postal Bureau which set out a list of criteria for the issue of postage stamps which is still in force today<sup>20</sup>. It states that Commemorative and Special issues are decided upon at the initiative of the Minister of MOPT and all stamps are designed within the following guidelines: their designs should,

1. record nationally important events which [MOPT believe] people should remember;
2. deepen international friendship and understanding;
3. enhance tourism and industry by recording:
  - a. Japan's traditional culture,
  - b. local activities,
  - c. Japan's natural beauty;
4. honour persons who have contributed to Japan's culture and academic learning;
5. support campaigns in Japan and internationally which are important [in the estimation of

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<sup>19</sup> Dobson [ 2002, pp29-30 ] describes how the Ministers of Posts in the 1950s and early 1960s ensured that the annual National Parks issues featured the districts with which they were associated politically.

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MOPT];

6. record significant [in the opinion of MOPT] Japanese historical events;
7. support letter writing and improve interest in and understanding of stamps.

N.B. the brackets above indicate my additions.

Three types of subject were never to be used:

1. religious, political and industry groups
2. living people
3. those that would be controversial, either politically or socially.

The MOPT Postal Bureau Annual Reports to the public state also that account is taken of current political policies and of trends in society. These criteria leave a great deal of discretion to the MOPT, particularly as regards which categories of commemorative/ special issues should be given prominence at any time<sup>21</sup>

By contrast the UK appears to have a somewhat more democratic approach, based on the existence of a Stamp Advisory Committee, a body supposedly of eminent persons drawn from a variety of specialist fields and responsible through the Prime Minister to the monarch for the design of all new stamp issues. However, this public accountability is more apparent than real. It is the Royal Mail, a department of the Government until it became an autonomous state body in 2001, which has always decided upon the nature and number of new stamp issues. In doing so it follows a set of conventions which resemble quite closely the legal Criteria used by the Japanese postal authority described above, including the obligation to support Government policies [Hansard, 23rd May 1996, column 975]. The Stamp Advisory Committee which, until the first post-war Labour Government, had been headed by someone eminent in the fine arts world, has, since 1964, been chaired by the civil servant who is head of the Royal Mail [now the Managing Director of Consignia, which is reverting to being known as Royal Mail!] and of its 13 members has always had six from that department,

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<sup>21</sup> Again, as far as I know there is no published material in the public domain on the procedures for the design of Japanese postage stamps, in either Japanese or English. There are occasional articles in the staff magazine of the Postal Bureau of the MOPT about particular issues. I gained most of my information from my contact with a retired Art Director of the Postal Bureau who was responsible for postage stamp issues from 1985-1995. He has made it clear that he preserved a sympathetic feeling for the 'traditional spirit' of Japan and says that he sought always to have this conveyed by the designs for which he was responsible. He instanced a very large series of stamps issued over the years 1987-89 using a number of graphic designers and calligraphers which commemorated the diary of Matsuo Bashō.



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one MP and another civil servant representing trade and industry. That leaves only 5 truly external members and of these two are representative philatelists and another represents minorities, leaving only two places for eminent representatives of the fine arts. These are not household names. The last such to be a member was Sir Kenneth Clark [later Lord Clark] who resigned in 1964 because he regarded the Committee as too subservient to the Post Office and too commercial in its attitude .

The two substantial differences between the Japanese and British systems of creating stamps - that the British monarch gives personal approval to all new stamp issue designs and that the Royal Mail makes much more use of young, independent artists for its designs - do not detract from the argument of this thesis that governments use postage stamps to mould public opinion. The dispute in the British press over the content of the Millennium special issues which were said by some to be too symbolic of New Labour's vision of 'Cool Britannia' is indicative of that .

We may summarise governments' reasons for issuing postage stamps as follows:

1. the primary instrumental role of all postage stamps is to show that the fee for the delivery of the piece of mail to which they are attached has been prepaid; and in some cases that the payment is insufficient; and the means and/or priority of delivery;
2. In the case of the definitive, commemorative and some special issues the issuing authority may also give them an instrumental 'advertising' role in which they are intended to promote Government policy ;
3. Their sale to the public may also be promoted to raise revenue, either in the hope that the stamps will not be used for mail purposes but be held as 'collectibles'; or / and via the additional use generated by the availability of special 'first day' cachets / postmarks and sometimes also of specially designed envelopes which increase the volume of mail and thereby reduce unit costs and improve profitability.

In recognising that postage stamps are material objects which could appeal to the public's collecting instincts issuing authorities have responded to the users/observers of postage stamps by the creation of a further set of instrumentalities for them. From the very early days of stamp issuing in the 1840s a new hobby began of collecting examples but it was in France

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in the 1850s that the foundations of the hobby of stamp collecting as a serious activity [philately] were established [Williams, 1956, p65] and a trade in stamps was begun. This was soon emulated in England e.g. by the start of the firm of Stanley Gibbons in 1856 [which continues as a leading dealer to this day], and in the United States. In 1861 Alfred Potiquet published the first catalogue of the known 1080 different stamps so far issued in the world and gave a trade value to each [Williams, 1956, p68]. In 1862 the first purely philatelic periodical began publication in Liverpool soon to be followed by many others, both in the United Kingdom and in the United States and Europe [Williams, 1956, ch.17]. Also in that year the first public auction of postage stamps was held at the prestigious sale room, *Hôtel Drouet*, in Paris [Williams, 1956, p95].

With the rapid increase in the use and collecting of postage stamps forgeries began to appear which were designed to defraud both post offices and collectors. They were sufficiently important by 1862 for a Belgian collector to publish privately the first guide to them and for their identification to become one of the motives for the creation in that decade of the first societies of stamp collectors. In the UK the Royal Philatelic Society [RPS] was founded in 1869 [see web site: [www.rpsl.org.uk](http://www.rpsl.org.uk)]. These societies encouraged the study of stamps by collectors and were the vehicles through which agreement was reached on how to classify and describe stamps. The RPS and similar leading societies in various other countries offered expert advice and certification regarding the genuineness of collectors' stamps and they provided venues in which collectors could trade and exchange their surplus stamps.

Members began to show parts of their collections to each other at club meetings and from this developed the idea of competitive exhibitions. In the UK the first national exhibition was not organised until 1890 but the first international exhibition was held in Vienna in 1881.

However it was only in 1926 that the first international body, *Fédération Internationale de Philatélie* [FIP], was created to enable the many, by then, national associations of stamp collectors societies to co-operate in creating international exhibitions<sup>22</sup>. The FIP has since then evolved a set of rules for competitive exhibitions and established a structure which enables their organisation and also facilitates the creation of expert judging panels. It also maintains a continuing liaison with national associations and postal authorities [including since 1990 the Universal Postal Union] regarding the encouragement of the hobby. Japan has been

<sup>22</sup> See web site at <http://www.f-i-p.ch>

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represented in both these bodies since their early days [1878 in the case of the UPU].

The result is that many countries now have annual national exhibitions<sup>23</sup> and there is a World Exhibition held in most years in one country or another. The last was in Seoul [Korea] in 2002. There was one in Tokyo [Japan] in 2001 and the year before there was one in London [UK]. At each of these meetings the exhibits are judged in various classes and awarded an internationally recognised range of awards of merit by international juries of experts. It is significant that the Government postal authority of the host country is invariably involved with the organisation and financing of these international exhibitions and usually has a prominent stand in the exhibition. The postal authorities of other countries also usually take stands. This is only occasionally the case with national exhibitions [for example in Japan but not the UK].

Such exhibitions enable a snapshot of the nature and direction of development of stamp collecting to be obtained through analyses of the visitor attendance; the nature of the classes of collection for which awards are offered; the nature and number of the entries to those classes; the types of dealer stands and perhaps most significant the tone of the exhibition.

The Japan World Stamp Exhibition 2001 provides a good example. The number of visitors was 59,303 of whom 85% were adult males; 10% children and only 5% adult females. The tone was set by the Logo, repeated in all the advertising material, which emphasised children. It was enhanced by the presence of greeters at the entrance who were dressed as characters on the Japanese Letterwriting Day stamps created by Dick Bruna, a Dutch stamp designer who has created a series of such stamps in recent years which have become very popular with Japanese children. It was emphasised by the provision of: a Stamptown Post Office where those stamps were on sale and could be postmarked with a Dick Bruna character and with a special commemorative date stamp; a Stamptown movie theatre which showed continuous videos of his characters; a Stamptown Museum and a Stamptown library, both given over to the work of this children's stamp designer. There were also various activities available for children such as how to collect stamps; how to use stamps in craft work; how to decorate your letters. In the words of the President of the Organising Committee, Katayama Toranosuke, the Minister responsible for the postal services in Japan, 'the goal is to promote

<sup>23</sup> The UK has at least two, the Spring and Autumn 'Stampex', as does Japan with 'Japex'.

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philately and especially to disseminate interest in the field among children'. [*Official Catalogue*, p 4]. Of the twenty one classes into which exhibits were organised four were defined by age limits as children's classes and in addition there was an Open Class, which was picked out for special mention by the President of the *Fédération Internationale de Philatélie* [FIP] as 'the class which more than any other will promote philately for new collectors' [*Official Catalogue*, p6]. It was also the class which indicated a future direction for collecting in that amongst its 34 entries there were a number, particularly from New Zealand, which showed stamp collecting being used to explain various social themes e.g. 'the Victorian era in Great Britain'; 'health - a common ground between nations'. These exhibits showed collectors using their hobby as a springboard for studies of society. This thesis is perhaps another example!

Historically stamp collecting has involved people in many different ways. One of the earliest motivations to collect was because stamps were seen as decorative. As early as 1842 *Punch* magazine reported that ladies were amassing used stamps to paper their dressing rooms! [Williams, 1956, p12]. The subsequent development of collecting stamps according to the subject matter of their design [theme collecting] seems to have derived from this attitude to them. They are regarded as 'pictures in miniature'.

Collecting developed in two other main directions. First in time came the close study of the stamp as a physical object: the style of its design and method of its printing and any variations in these, both intended and accidental [=errors]; the colours used and any variations in them; the type of paper used and any watermark in it; the manner in which sheets of stamps are perforated with lines of holes between the rows to make separating the stamps for use easier; the type of gum applied to the reverse of the stamps to give them adhesion; the variations in the style of postmark used by the post offices to cancel them as used etc. This has become known as classic philately. Originally these philatelists set out to collect the stamps of the world but with the increase in the numbers of countries and colonies issuing them and with the proliferation of commemorative and special issues this became impractical and also ruinously expensive. Consequently such collectors now specialise in the issues of one or a few countries, and even in just certain issues. This has become reflected in the creation of societies of collectors which specialise in such interests e.g. there is an International Society

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for Japanese Philately based in the United States and affiliated to it a British society and both are linked with a Japanese society based in Tokyo. Not surprisingly stamp dealers have also specialised in some cases and sought close links with such societies e.g. a leading dealer in the UK in Japanese stamps is on the Committee of the British Society of Japanese Philately.

Dealers are very often also collectors and *vice versa*. Catalogue publishers have not been slow to cater for such specialisation. For example Stanley Gibbons produce a number of individual country catalogues, in addition to their general ones, which go into great detail regarding the various printings of each issue and the often very subtle differences between them. Such publishers encourage specialist collectors to co-operate with them in listing newly discovered varieties<sup>24</sup>. As do the publishers of various monthly magazines for stamp collectors of which there are several in both the UK and Japan [e.g. *Gibbons Stamp Monthly* in the UK and *Yūshū* in Japan].

More recently the varied nature of the illustrations used on stamps has encouraged an interest in collecting those which relate to particular themes, such as individual persons and events or varieties of plants and animals. Such collections are designed to explain aspects of the world around us and of our history. This style of collecting has become known as 'theme collecting' and places stamps in both physical and social contexts. Major stamp exhibitions have a Theme Class which caters for such collectors<sup>25</sup>. A rapid and ever more widespread use of new commemorative issues by all governments since the Second World War has been both a cause and a response. In the case of the UK the number of such issues has increased from fewer than one per year in the 1950s to about a dozen annually in the 1990s; and in Japan from about five issues to some twenty five annually<sup>26</sup> over the same periods. Again dealers have sought to cater for this market as have the publishers of stamp catalogues and magazines who produce lists of stamps illustrative of particular themes and also articles about them.

There is also a smaller group of collectors who, as I have already noted, simply see them as 'pictures in miniature' and collect them as works of art for the aesthetic pleasure received

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<sup>24</sup> The Japanese Philatelic Society Foundation in Tokyo not only publishes annually its full colour *Sakura Catalog of Japanese Stamps* which runs to some 280 pages of listings but also its *Japanese Stamp Specialised Catalogue* which requires nearly 800 pages to deal with the same issues!

<sup>25</sup> The official catalogue of the Japan World Stamp Exhibition 2001 lists 56 entrants in this class the largest number for any class, with exhibits entitled: The Computer; Go by Cycle; African wild Mammals; The Horse and its Dedication to Mankind; Marvellous Waterfalls etc.

<sup>26</sup> Stanley Gibbons' *Stamps of the World* catalogues.

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from viewing them. Unlike their nineteenth century female forerunners who simply saw them as 'decorative' these collectors now want their examples to be mint, unmounted and in pristine condition, having never been through the mail.

And lastly there is a group of collectors who have no interest in stamps *per se* but recognise that the interests of other types of collector give them a market value and hence make the rarer stamps speculative investments. They only manifest themselves at the major stamp auctions and are also catered for by some specialist dealers.

As we have seen collectors rely mainly on dealers, auctions and other collectors to augment their collections, rather than the mail service. However the latter is the channel through which the majority of people become aware of postage stamps. Commemorative and special issues are sold through Post Offices in Japan where a whole range of special illustrated envelopes to use with them and of pre stamped postcards are also sold [Postal Bureau, 2000/2001, pp64-5]. When an issue involves more than one design, whether they all be of the same value or of different values, it has become an increasingly common practice for special souvenir sheets to be printed containing one example of each. *Figure 12* below represents the issue made for

the World Fair held in Osaka in 1970. There are displays advertising such issues in all the

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larger post offices. Japan still maintains an extremely extensive network of post offices [some 20,000 plus over 4500 sub-post offices in 2000; see Postal Bureau 2000/2001, p40] in every one of its 3252 municipalities, as well as providing for sales of the most commonly used definitive stamps through automatic vending machines and some 150,000 agencies in shops etc. The result is that many people are aware of the range of designs available at any time even if they are not buying them. [This is a point that I will return to in discussing the findings of my research in ch.4.] In this respect it is relevant to know that post offices in Japan, as in UK, are used by Government to provide a number of social security services to the public, not the least in the case of Japan being savings facilities.

The use of a stamp involves quite a large number of people in handling the piece of mail to which it is attached, in addition to the purchaser and the recipient. For the recipient the design of the stamp may often not be as apparent as it is to the purchaser because of the method used by the post offices for cancelling stamps. Normally this is done automatically in the larger post offices, but by hand using a rubber hand stamp in the smaller ones, the design of the cancellation mark being the same, a circle containing the date, time and place of cancellation [a CDS] and in its modern version this usually does not obscure the stamp design materially.

See *Figure 13*

13



However, two developments associated with the automation of the process do. The one causing the biggest problem in this respect is the use of a continuous band of ink lines, broken at intervals with data re the date, time and place of posting, which is applied continuously across the envelopes. See *Figure 14*.

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The second, which may be associated with both this system and with the traditional circular CDS system, is the addition of further ink stamp marks in the form of advertisements, sometimes only words but sometimes showing quite elaborate images. Even when these do not obscure stamps they can distract attention from them. See *Figure 15*.

15



The Japanese post office goes to great lengths to stimulate interest in stamps and the use of the mail service. Every year they jointly sponsor workshops with some 1000 local stamp collectors clubs to encourage stamp collecting and join with the Japan Philatelic Society



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Foundation in promoting national stamp exhibitions. They also stimulate letter writing by sponsoring the Japan Association of Pen Friend Clubs which has over 24000 members; a Senior Pen Friend Club with over 5000 members; and by issuing special stamps annually for both International Letterwriting Week and Letterwriting Day. Post offices around Japan even hold letter writing classes.<sup>27</sup> Retired employees of the Post Office are encouraged to join the Association for Postal Culture Promotion which undertakes an annual campaign to promote awareness of the new stamp issues to be made each year.

Charities in the UK are at the forefront of the effort to persuade people and organisations not to waste their received stamps but to save them and to give them to the charity which then sells them on to stamp dealers! In the trade this is known as 'kiloware' because the value is determined by the weight of the stamps.

Thus individual stamps are created via the co-operation of many people and once created may pass through many hands before finding themselves consigned to the trash bin or , as is increasingly likely today, recycled as items to be saved, traded and collected. But all these situations have one thing in common. The way in which the stamp is viewed is determined by the environment of the viewer.

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<sup>27</sup> Annual reports of the Postal Bureau

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## **Chapter 3: Analysis of Japanese Stamp Issuing Policies**

In this chapter I shall be using the semiotic approach of Roland Barthes, as described in chapter 1 [p13], to analyse the representational social agency of Japanese stamp issues. But it should be noted that the Japanese governments did not rely only on the symbolism of its stamp images in using stamp issues to define the national identity. In defining Japan's place in the world it was the occasions of stamp issues rather than the images appearing on them which were significant. The deliberate decision to commemorate/celebrate certain events gave them symbolic significance e.g. the decision to commemorate the anniversary of the treaty with the United States opening Japan's ports to foreign trade in 1960 discussed later in this chapter. Equally the decisions not to celebrate/commemorate certain social/political developments could be seen as a way of downgrading them in the eyes of the public. Mention will be made in the course of this chapter of how this affected the issues of democracy, the reform of local government and popular culture.

Japan's national postal system and its postage stamps were the creation of an ambitious but obscure young samurai, Maejima Hisoka who became head of the Postal Bureau in the early 1860s. He visited England for a year in 1870/1 with a Japanese mission to negotiate a railway loan and used the opportunity to investigate thoroughly the British postal system. On his return to Japan he resumed his post of head of the Postal Bureau, which was then within the Ministry of Finance. But as a relatively junior official it took him ten years of dogged persuasion and argument to apply what he had learned in England to establishing in Japan a national postal service as a government monopoly, with uniform rates of postage for deliveries throughout the country.

Stamp issuing and the postal service have been at the heart of Japanese government since the early days of the Meiji reforms. However for the first fifteen years of its existence the Postal Bureau, which controlled both, remained a Bureau within Ministries with much wider interests [until 1874 the Ministry of Finance, then the Home Ministry until 1881, and the Ministry of Agriculture & Commerce] until 1885 when it was joined with the Telegraph service and two smaller bureaux, which supervised maritime shipping and lighthouses, to become the Ministry of Communications with a seat in the newly constituted Cabinet. As Westney [1987, p124 ] writes 'the moves between the finance agency and the agencies of

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domestic administration illustrate a certain ambivalence about its role'. She speculates that it may have been its potential as a contributor to Government revenues which led to its elevation to cabinet status under the new Meiji Constitution of 1885, a status which it maintained until the reorganisation of Government ministries in 2001. Westney quotes [ 1987, p125 ] statistics of the net revenues raised by the postal services of Japan and the UK [ where the service was regarded as a revenue raising department. See Daunton, 1985, ch3 ] over the early years of their lives as percentages of the total postal revenues raised by their Governments.

Postal Services Nett revenues to Govts. as % of total Govt. postal revenues:

Year	UK	Japan
1850	39	-
1879-80	37	7
1889-90	35	23
1899-1900	28	31
1909-10	26	45

But it would be a mistake to assume therefore that the Japanese stamps were designed and issued only with that end in view. Both the national telegraph and postal services were seen from the earliest years of the Meiji restoration as key elements in the Imperial government's struggle to control the outlying and sometimes rebellious domains. In 1871 the sixteen petal double chrysanthemum was officially adopted as the Imperial crest [*mon*] and it was incorporated as a central feature in the design of the first Japanese commemorative stamp issue in 1894. See *Figure 16*.

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As Yamamoto Yokichi , a retired Head of the Postal Bureau wrote in 1940<sup>28</sup> ‘The chrysanthemum crest symbolises the honour and glory of the Japanese empire’.

The first issue of Japanese postage stamps was designed by Maejima Hisoka just before he left for an extended visit to England but the copper engraver, who was also under commission from the Bureau of Paper Currency to create new paper money, changed the design, for reasons unknown, to reflect that of the paper money he was creating. On his return from England Maejima Hisoka decided that an improved design was required and is believed to have completed it himself. This second issue included the basic design elements of the definitive issue which were to be maintained over the following sixty five years: the Imperial chrysanthemum crest and a further symbol with imperial associations, in this case paulonia [ *kiri* ] leaves, set within a formal border. *See Figure 17*

17



In the whole period [1871-1936] only a few pictorial stamps were issued: two small series for use on foreign mail, two high value stamps and a few commemorative sets.

The foreign mail stamps are interesting because the first issue in 1875 used illustrations of

<sup>28</sup> The quotation comes from page 20 of a small handbook in English published jointly by the Japan Tourist Board and the Japan Government Railways as number 30 of a series intended for foreign visitors and titled *Japanese Postage Stamps* which has been out of print since the early 1960s. The only copy of which I am aware is in the JICC library in the Japanese Embassy in London.

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three different birds of which only the wild goose, traditionally associated in Japan with communication, was native. The second set specifically for foreign mail was issued in 1926 and for the first time used images of 'Japanese scenery' [ Yamamoto, 1940 ] on Japanese stamps. These images were, Mt. Fuji, the *Yomeimon* at Nikko, and the *Donjon* of Nagoya Castle. Both these issues included also the imperial chrysanthemum crest prominently in their designs.

The two high value stamps used a portrait of the semi-mythical Empress Jingû Kôgô who, keeping the death of her husband [the Emperor ] a secret and disguised as a man, is reputed to have subdued the kingdom of Silla in Korea [Yamamoto, 1940 ]. Redrawn in 1924 these stamps continued in use until 1937 and are the only Japanese stamps to carry an imperial portrait to this day. The reason for this is not known<sup>29</sup>. Japanese people with whom I have discussed the matter, including eminent stamp collectors, have suggested that the absence of other portraits is out of respect for the semi-divine, [ *pace* MacArthur ] status of the Emperor to deface the Emperor's image with a postmark, which would be inevitable were the stamp to be used, would be an act of sacrilege or at least *lése majesté*. All the other kingdoms which issue postage stamps use their royal portraits, even Thailand which has the world's most harsh laws against acts of *lése majesté*. Japanese regard the imperial chrysanthemum emblem, which appeared on all Japanese stamps after the first issue, as standing for the Emperor and that is why it was banned by General MacArthur in 1948, during the post-Pacific War Occupation<sup>30</sup>.

Of the 22 commemorative stamp issues made before 1937 only 11 were in respect of events which were unrelated to the Emperor and of these 3 represented celebrations of the successful ending of major wars in which Japan was involved, one the 30th anniversary of the Japanese occupation of Kwantung and 4 postal service events. The focus of stamp design throughout this long period was on Japan as both an ancient and a powerful empire.

But it was the military dominated nationalist governments of the immediate pre-war and wartime years, with their Greater Japan ambitions regarding overseas expansion, who

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<sup>29</sup> Dobson [2002, pp26-29] suggests that it was due to the conservative influence of the Imperial Household [*kunaichô*].

<sup>30</sup> Such symbolic rendering is known as the rhetoric of concealment [ *tôkai no shuji* ] and was also used in China.

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developed the use of postage stamps as a form of social propaganda. In 1937 they had issued through the Ministry of Education [*Mombushô*] The Cardinal Principles of National Polity [*Kokutai no Hongi*]. This spelled out their 'Tennôsei philosophy', based on the invented tradition of 'the nation as family' under the patronage of a divine Emperor [Hunter 1989, pp 171, 176].

The primary purpose of the Occupation of Japan after the war was to turn it into a peaceful democracy, to give it a new identity [Passin in Gluck & Graubard eds. 1992] and the overriding political imperatives for the post-war Japanese governments were reconstruction and international rehabilitation [Gluck in Gordon ed. 1993, p71]. Dower quotes Prime Minister Katayama Tetsu as telling the first Diet session under the new, 1947 Constitution, that the goal must be 'the construction of a democratic nation of peace, a nation of culture' [Gordon ed. 1993, pp3-4].

Until 1955 however, the priority was economic reconstruction. In that year MITI announced the 'citizen car era' [*kokumin jidôsha no jidai*] and the 'electrified household era' [*katei denka no jidai*] and the national goal became economic growth based on a mass consumer culture. In the 1960s this evolved into catching up the major Western economies through higher value added exports. Democracy and culture were not the highest priorities. With the establishment of economic growth there came both industrial and some political unrest. Whilst the industrial unrest was contained through general improvements in the economic standard of living [e.g. Ikeda's policy announcement in 1961 of his 'income doubling' plan] the social and political unrest caused by the alliance with America and her involvement in Viet Nam continued to concern governments through the 1970s. It was a decade of 'shocks', starting with the American devaluation of the dollar and recognition of China and continuing with the two oil crises and the trade disputes with both America and Europe.

However economic success built confidence. By the 1980s Japan saw itself as the most successful of the Western style economies, with something to teach the West and the Japanese people had become conspicuous consumers. But the security alliance with America was maintained for want of any practicable and acceptable alternative and because there was a sense of unease about the vulnerability of their economy to international disruptions. This history has been reflected in their postage stamp issues. These demonstrate an increasingly

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complex vision of national identity.

### The Evolution of the Definitive Issue 1936-1989

In their efforts to redefine their national identity post the Second World War Japanese governments made use not only of symbols associated with their creation myth and imperial traditions but also of others from what is termed 'high culture' such as artistic 'national treasures'. And they also used the landscape of the main islands, particularly Mount Fuji. It will be shown that, as the Shôwa era progressed, their definition of national identity became less elitist and included some images of popular culture, such as local festivals, traditional folk tales and songs and sumo. It also responded to events. In this way the Japanese governments moved from a relatively simple, elitist vision of national identity to one that was more complex and representative of the living experiences of the Japanese people<sup>31</sup>. Tessa Morris-Suzuki sums up the Japanese government's approach as:

In defining the boundaries of the nation and creating images of national belonging, governments, academics and the popular media made use of both spatial and temporal dimensions. The nation is seen as a bounded geographic entity, whose shape is imprinted on the minds of children by maps on the walls of countless classrooms. It is also an environmental space, understood in terms of familiar imagery of climate and landscape. This sense of nation as a spatially bounded natural entity is often closely connected with ideas of ethnicity: of citizens as sharing a genetic and cultural heritage adapted to the natural environment of the spatial realm in which they live[1998, p4].

Japanese governments also made use of sporting images on their postage stamps in their attempts to define the national identity. Social anthropology studies have shown how many countries have used particular sports activities as emblematic of their nations [MacClancy, 1996] and Japan is no exception. It has used Sumo and the imported sport of baseball, which,

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<sup>31</sup> It seems to me that the two main ways of defining national identity noted earlier are not necessarily in conflict. That which concentrates on the concept of national identity being elitist and based on high culture seems to be the approach adopted initially by governments whilst the latter, which places its emphasis on the role played by popular culture and the processes of everyday life, shows how this government vision is tailored and modified by individuals in their daily lives.

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according to Whiting [1977], has been 'naturalised' by the players being subject to 'the Samurai Code of Conduct for Baseball' so that it has become characteristically Japanese in the manner in which it is played. But on Japanese stamps sporting images have served a different purpose. They seem to have been chosen to display examples of physical fitness and the achievement of individual skills i.e. as role models for the individual in his working life.

The first moves beyond the use of traditional imperial symbols associated with the creation myth came when the pre-war, nationalist government issued a new definitive series of postage stamps for regular use in 1937-39, the first complete redesign since 1913. These continued in use, with minor modifications, until after Japan's defeat in 1945.

This was the first Japanese definitive issue to use realistic images rather than stylised symbols [see *Plate 1* after this page]. Today the Japanese describe them as the 'first Shōwa issue' but many of them hark back in both their subject matter and style to the Tokugawa era and earlier - 17th century merchant ship [1/2 sen], Yomei gate in Nikko [10 sen], Kasuga shrine at Nara [14 sen], Miyajima Torii [30 sen], Gold Pavilion in Kyoto [50 sen], and the Great Buddha in Kamakura [1 Yen] - and to classic scenes of rice harvesting [1 sen], Lake Taisho [5 sen], Mt. Fuji with cherry blossom [20 sen], and Plum trees [10 Yen]. They would be instantly recognisable as classical clichés of Japaneseness, by such analysts of Japanese nationalism as Harumi Befu [1992] and Yoshino Kosaku [1992] and as such they illustrate an attempt to forge a sense of national identity through the use of 'invented traditions', national symbols and references to high culture.

There were also two modern images: a hydroelectric power station and a monoplane. The aeroplane is shown flying over a map of Korea and Eastern China as well as Japan. This is an obvious reference to Japan's imperial ambitions which is confirmed by two other images: Garambi lighthouse in Taiwan [6 sen], and the Diamond Mountains in Korea [7 sen]. Finally we may note that the remaining images in the set are of three victorious wartime leaders: Prince Fujiwara [5 Yen], General Nogi [2 sen], and Admiral Togo [4 sen].

The stamps most used by the ordinary population would have been those with the images of rice harvesting, with its very strong evocation of a particular historical form of Japanese



# The Social Agency of Postage Stamps Plates 1 & 2



180 米印船 181 稲刈り 182 乃木希典 182e



183 水力発電所 184 東郷平八郎 185 上高地 オーロワンピ  
灯台



187 クムガンタン (金剛山) 188 明治神宮 189 日光東照宮陽明門 190 航研機



191 春日神社 192 富士と桜 193 法隆寺 194 厳島神社



195 奥蔵寺金堂 196 鎌倉の大仏 197 藤原鎌足 198 梅花模様



267 農織 (すかしなし#279) 268 補鯨 (すかしなし#280) 269 炭鉱夫 270 芋摘み



271 印刷女工 (すかしなし#282) 272 炭鉱夫 (すかしなし#283) 273 紡績女工



274 穂高岳 (8C156に注意) 275 緑林 (すかしなし#285)



276 郵便配達 (すかしなし#286) 277 電気が (すかしなし#287) 278 機関車の製造 (すかしなし#288)

## Plate 1

## Plate 2

The illustrations are from the Sakura Catalog of Japanese Postage Stamps by kind permission of the publishers, The Japan Philatelic Society Foundation.

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identity [ Ohnuki-Tierney 1993 ] and the two successful modern military leaders. The use of an image of country women harvesting rice was a powerful metaphor. Most Japanese, even those living in the cities, still had their roots in rural hamlets in which rice farming was the main occupation<sup>32</sup>. And rice was their staple food. Moreover nationalists had given Japanese rice a mystical quality which identified it as unique and pure like the Japanese race [Ohnuki-Tierney, 1993, p232]. The two military leaders made their reputations in the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-5 which for many Japanese marks the occasion when Japan emerges as a modern military power.

In designing this issue there seems to have been an attempt to suggest links between pre-Meiji Japan with its strong Shinto and Buddhist culture, which had evolved distinctive styles of architecture and artistic representation, the power of a modern state and victory in expansionist warfare. Perhaps this was an attempt to suggest that Japan had achieved successful modernisation without Westernisation. The symbolism of the whole set, the combination of images of Shintoism and Buddhism with those of modern and ancient military exploits and evocation of an older and rural Japan, each image surmounted by the Emperor's emblem, the sixteen petal chrysanthemum, suggests also the sort of official ideology [*tennōsei*] which was then being created and aggressively promoted [Hunter, 1989, p176 ; Gluck, 1985, p282 and Garron, 1997, Pt.1]. The fact that it relied upon the invention of traditions made it no less powerful and similar inventions were to underpin post-war official explanations of Japan's economic success [Vlastos, 1998].

This set was complemented by special issues: in 1937 to raise money for the air force; in 1940 to mark the 2600th year of the Japanese Imperial calendar and to mark the 54th anniversary of the Imperial Rescript on Education; and in 1942 to celebrate the 10th anniversary of the puppet state of Manchukuo etc. The definitive issue was modified during the war years by the addition of stamps depicting civilian war efforts; the area of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere and the Emperor's declaration that 'the enemy will surrender'. Thus the mix of images of modernity and success in expansionist, modern warfare with those referring to Japan's ancient past and Buddhist / Shinto traditions was maintained and with it the message that modernisation had Eastern, not Western, roots. Reliance was still being placed on

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<sup>32</sup> Barely 15% of the population lived in urban areas in 1910 but by 1935 some 30% lived in cities of over 50,000 inhabitants. [ Gluck, 1985, 282 ].

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the use of design references to traditions defined and even invented by the governing elite and their illustration in examples of high culture, as would be expected by Gellner [1983] and Anderson [1983].

The contrast with the first post-war issue, made after the introduction of the new, American imposed, democratic constitution of 1947, is striking. This complete redesign of the definitive issue was the first since the one we have just considered and was instituted by the short-lived, christian socialist led coalition government of Katayama Tetsu. It came when the Japanese were facing the enormous task of rebuilding their shattered cities and economy and its message was clear. It identified the Japanese people as workers. In stark contrast with its predecessors there was no looking back at a glorious past, no reference to either Buddhism or Shintoism, and no imperial chrysanthemum symbol [for the first time]. There was in fact only one stamp whose subject was not work, and that was the high value [16 Yen] picture of Mt. Hodaka. This is the third highest mountain in Japan, a favourite with Japanese rock climbers and described by Japanese photographers as 'a typical Japanese mountain'. It had a very small print run. See *Plate 2*.

The images were seemingly chosen to send a message to the Japanese people that what was now needed was for them to work hard and efficiently. It is noticeable also that women were portrayed as working as printers as well as in a mill and in traditional agricultural pursuits. In fact out of the ten different occupations illustrated four were identified with women. This was perhaps because their participation in the labour force was 'clearly central to the reconstruction of Japan's post-war industrial base' [Sandra Buckley in Gordon, 1993, p 350] but was also at odds with the contested but prevailing conservative orthodoxy of 'good wife, wise mother' [*ryōsai kenbo*, see Uno, K. in Gordon, 1993, pp 293-322].

Of the six different designers who created this 'revolutionary' series one had also been one of the two designers who had created the 1937-9 series and two others had helped to design wartime special issues. The other designer of the 1937-9 series was also still employed in the department and designed subsequent commemorative issues under conservative governments. Thus it appears that these designers were professional in their work and followed the directives given them. This reinforces the point made earlier about the importance of the

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Postal Bureau's Art Director.

The style of this issue, particularly the stamps designed by M. Hioki [the 2.00, 3.00, 5.00, and 8.00 Yen] was very reminiscent of those issued in the 1930s by the USSR. See *Figure 18*.

18



It is a style that has been described as 'socialist realism'<sup>33</sup> and is one which had never before been used in Japanese stamp design. Clearly this was a set of designs which was symbolic also of the new, democratic Japan that some of the more idealistic members of SCAP hoped to create [Dower 1999, p 75]. But within one year the Cold War had caused America to 'change course' and to give priority to making Japan a bulwark against Communism in East Asia [Stockwin 1999, p 206].

The conservative governments that succeeded the coalition in late 1948 immediately began making piecemeal changes to this issue to reflect the change in the political climate by bringing in additional value stamps with traditional motives of plum blossoms [10 Yen] and cranes [4 Yen]. And in 1952 they instituted a total change which took three years to complete and which resulted in all the images of workers being substituted with a mix of animal, plant and 'national treasure' images. The latter were mainly pictures of Buddhist temples, Shinto shrines and related images. For example the Tahoto Pagoda at Ishiyama Temple [4 Yen], the Kanzean Bosatsu [10 Yen], the Chuson Temple [20 Yen], the Phoenix Temple at Uji [24 Yen], and the Yomei gate at Tosho Shrine [45 Yen]. There was also an illustration of the top

<sup>33</sup> For an explanation of this art style and its social significance, as it was evolved in both the Soviet Union and in Hitler's Reich in the 1930s, see Jacques Maquet [1993, pp 214-220]. He states that 'being a visual imitation of an outside entity, a naturalistic representation immediately directs the beholder's attention to the outside entity...particularly if its aesthetic quality is mediocre' which is usually the case in social realist art. McLeish [1993, p 693] states that 'Socialist Realism was a doctrine first approved at the Congress of Socialist Writers in 1934...until then Soviet artists had been allowed to associate political radicalism with artistic revolution. However, after Stalin's rise to power, the Soviet regime developed a dislike of "bourgeois" avant-gardism and replaced it with the idea of Socialist Realism. This stated that the role of the artist was to serve the people by producing positive, upbeat and accessible works of art. The social function of art was to elevate and educate..'

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of an old lacquer box on the highest value [500 Yen]. See *Plate 3*.

To some extent these changes represented the ambivalent attitude of the conservative Japanese leadership to the American imposed reforms of the Occupation but they were not a reversion to the nationalism of pre-war as the subsequent development of the definitive issue shows. Rather they seem designed to help the Japanese people find their bearings in the post-war world by re-establishing approval of some cultural links with their past. Another example of social agency. This issue was to remain in use until 1967 with occasional adjustments via the issue of new values and in 1963 by the substitution of a sea shell for the Tahoto Pagoda on the 4 Yen and of cherry blossom for the Kanzean Bosatsu on the 10 Yen. These changes swung the balance between the three categories of illustration from 'national treasures' towards 'nature' and also reduced the references to Shintoism and Buddhism.

In 1966/7 a new 'animal, plant and national treasures' series began to be instituted in which the balance between these three categories was changed further towards 'nature' as far as their general use was concerned by restricting the use of 'national treasure' images to the higher values, which were not used for postcards, letters nor small packets. Moreover the national treasures chosen for illustration now included the garden of Katsura Palace and an ancient clay model of a horse as well as Buddhist and Shinto objects. See *Plate 4*.

Thus there was a clear direction of development in imaging towards 'nature' and, if one looks ahead to the next major change in the design of the definitive series, which was instituted after the enthronement of the Emperor Heisei, in the early '90s, one sees that images of 'national treasures' are dropped and that the whole series is devoted to images of animals and plants. This use of references to 'nature' may reflect Peter Ackermann's thesis that, by persuading the Japanese people to identify themselves with the natural world they would more readily accept the *status quo* of the social order [Ackermann 1997, p 50]. But the significance of these images of nature was wider than this. They resonate with the ideas of Tessa Morris-Suzuki [*ibid*, p 53] and can better be appreciated by examining the other postage stamp issues of this period, the special and commemorative stamps.

### The Evolution of Special and Commemorative Issues

In the 1950s there were only about half a dozen issues annually but between 1960 and 1970



## The Social Agency of Postage Stamps Plates 3 & 4



Plate 3



Plate 4

Illustrations are from the Sakura Catalog of Japanese Postage Stamps by kind permission of the publishers, The Japan Philatelic Society Foundation.

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there was a substantial increase in the numbers of special and commemorative stamps issued each year. These rose from under 10 series involving  $\pm 15$  stamps to over 20 series involving 30 - 40 stamps per year [Sakura 2000] and this higher annual rate of issue has been maintained at about the same level since then. This has given much more scope for the Government to use these stamps to send messages to the public and a second major theme soon became apparent in them: defining Japan's place in the world. There was also evidence of concern with helping the definitive issue to define Japanese national identity via the use of images of 'nature' but there was little evidence of any interest in the development of democracy. Late in the period another development which had been latent since the criteria for the design and issue of postage stamps had been established in 1947, was given much greater prominence. This was the promotion of stamps as components of a mass consumption, material culture. See the Appendix for my detailed analysis of these issues.

### *Contribution to the Definition of National Identity*

The connection of the Special and Commemorative issues with the theme of Japanese national identity was mainly through two special series.

The more significant was a series of National Parks Issues which came out annually over the period 1949-1974, sometimes with several issues of 2-4 stamps in one year. They were all pictures of well known landscapes with some issues after 1957 including images of Japanese people in traditional dress. See *Figures 19, 20*.

19



20



Morris-Suzuki [1998, p 35] has discussed 'how visions of nature are central to modern constructions of national identity' in the Japanese context. In order to be effective these visions need to represent actual, identifiable places, such as those carried around in people's

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memories after a visit or after looking at photographs, rather than stylised or idealised images. In fact this series used mainly retouched photographs. Dobson [2002 ] has made the point that some of these images were chosen as a result of pressure from Ministers of Posts to honour places which were in their political constituencies. They became known as *daijin kitte* [Ministers' stamps] and occasioned a political scandal and the abandonment of the series in the mid-1970s. But this political use of their designs did not necessarily detract from their usefulness also in helping to define the Japanese people's sense of place.

These images, taken in conjunction with the increasing use of 'nature' images in the definitive series discussed earlier, meant that people were receiving a continuous reminder both of their place in a geographically defined space and that they were part of a natural order which has its own harmony<sup>34</sup>. In Japanese anthropologist Ishida Eiichiro's words, quoted in Morris-Suzuki [1998,p 35] they were given a unique 'natural sense' [*shizensei*]. This special relationship with nature may or may not been intentionally illustrated and reinforced by the increasing frequency of special issues devoted to illustrating native plants and animal life. Beginning in 1961 with a series on Flowers there followed, in the next ten years, further series on Birds, Fishes and Birds again. From 1974 there was at least one and sometimes several series each year devoted to these subjects or others in similar categories e.g. plants , insects, mammals. These later series were mostly described as in support of conserving the species which, in the case of two related to Birds in the mid 1980s, were described as endangered. It is probable but not proven that to some extent the motivation for issuing such series was the parallel growth in stamp collectors' interest in theme collecting i.e. in collecting particular design subjects [e.g. birds] but there also seems to have been an intention to show that Japanese people care about their natural environment; hence the addition of references to nature conservation [*shizen hogo*] and endangered native birds [*tokushu chôru*] in respect of the issues made after 1974.

There were 27 'nature' series issued between 1961 and 1988 and taken together they provided

<sup>34</sup> There has been much discussion of the relationship of the Japanese with nature and of how, in any sense, it may be special [e.g. Morris-Suzuki, 1998 ]. There is little doubt that in their popular culture many Japanese express an empathy with nature and believe themselves to be special in the extent of this characteristic [ Ackermann, 1997 ]. But there is also evidence [ Kalland, 1992 ] of their concern at nature being wild, even dangerous, and needing to be controlled, tamed or separated from people [as it is in stamp illustrations]. This concern with the dangers inherent in untamed nature may be related to Shinto beliefs which link nature with the supernatural *kami* [ Holton, 1997,p11] and with the fact that untamed nature is *ipso facto* part of the outside [*soto* ] and hence associated with uncertainty and pollution [Hendry, 1995,p 184 ]. It has been argued also that images of nature represent both order and continuous change and , in so doing, drive home the importance of correct behaviour and interpersonal relationships, thus maintaining an orderly society [Ackermann, 1997,p50].



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a comprehensive illustration of Japan's native flora and fauna which complemented the earlier national parks issues. See *Figures 21, 22, 23 & 24*.

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The second special series which was significant in defining Japanese people was an annual issue to celebrate the National Athletics Championships. Starting in 1947 these stamps invariably illustrated individuals displaying the techniques of various sports, including team games. On the apparent level they are about sport which is of course competitive but what they did not celebrate was the winning of competitions. Their subtext seems instead to be a celebration of individuals seeking to achieve perfection in their performance of a wide variety of tasks. See *Figures 25, 26*.

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Such a message was clearly relevant to the early post-war imperative of rebuilding the country and its relevance continued for the improvement of the competitiveness of the Japanese economy. Sportsmen and women were offered as role models in a way which was analogous to their use by the Soviet Russian government in its 1938 issue. See *Figure 27*.

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There were also various scouting issues [in 1949, 1962, 1963, 1971 and 1972, see Appendix] which suggested the themes of co-operation and self help and thereby the value of social cohesion and individual responsibility for self development. A further example of using stamps as social agents which reinforced the conservative vision of the national identity.

### *Nihonjinron* and *Kokusaika*

As Japan succeeded in developing its exports in competition with Western economies in the years following 1970 there developed also a concern to identify the bases of that success. This was at a time of some continuing tensions with America and Europe which contributed to a public discussion, encouraged by Government, of what might be unique attributes of the Japanese, the *Nihonjinron* debate [Befu, 1992; Yoshino, 1992; Waswo, 1996]. This was a debate about ethnicity. It came to no conclusions despite being undertaken by many of the intellectuals of the time and exploring a wide range of suggestions, which varied from Japanese people having differently wired brains to their having an unique aesthetic sense. But it did foster in ordinary Japanese people a sense and expectation of difference from other peoples.

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In the ten years following 1970 there was a series on modern Japanese art which, in thirty two illustrations, included only three that showed Western influences despite the existence of many Japanese artists working successfully in the West and painting in Western styles. There were two major series devoted to showing the unique attributes of Japan's pre-Meiji artistic heritage, such as Buddhist and Shinto architecture and imagery, screen painting and lacquer ware; and there were further series imaging traditional theatre [Kabuki, Noh, Bunraku, Gagaku], traditional folk tales and songs, and ukiyo-e prints of Sumo. See *Figures 28,29,30,31,33*.

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The introduction of images of Sumo [*kokugi*, the national sport] and of folk tales and songs was highly significant for it marked the beginning of the deliberate use of images based on popular culture as a component in the structure of national identity. Prior to these issues, which began in 1973, there had been only one such issue, of four stamps, in 1964 which celebrated local festivals. There was perhaps an attempt to link the Sumo subjects with high culture by the use of nineteenth century *ukiyo-e* images rather than photographs but it is more likely that the motivation was to remind the users of that particular art form which had been a significant part of the popular culture of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries although it has since become a high price component of the collectors' material world.

In this *Nihonjinron* context it is significant to note that there were no equivalent issues to celebrate the achievements of Japanese architects and artists in modernist traditions, although there were many with international reputations.

Concern for the vulnerability of their economy to international 'shocks' caused the Government gradually to become concerned with promoting 'internationalisation' [*kokusaika*] in the 'eighties. As far as the rest of the world was concerned this seems to have been an attempt to 'win friends' by making Japan appear co-operative and caring ; as far as the Japanese people were concerned there was this message and also there were attempts to give them a better understanding of 'the West'. The number of issues related to the UN, as compared with the 'seventies, doubled [from 4 to 8] as did the number of issues [from 15 to 34] related to international meetings [re business, sport and scientific research] held in Japan;

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and there was a stamp series devoted to Western architecture in Japan. For comparison during this same period the UK made no such issues.

However the *Nihonjinron*-type concern with identifying the uniqueness of Japanese culture continued. There were more series devoted to Japan's own cultural heritage: three large ones totalling 60 different designs illustrated traditional arts and crafts; and another of 40 stamps illustrated Basho's Diary. This latter issue was conceived and promoted by the Art Director of the Postal Bureau who commissioned eminent calligraphers and artists to create the original designs in, as he wrote to me, an attempt to express the culture of Japan and to capture its 'Japaneseness' [*Nihon rashisa*]. See Figure 33.

From the evidence of these stamp issues it seems that the desire to promote *Nihonjinron* was stronger than that of promoting greater understanding in Japan of the outside world. The issues that I have identified as promoting *kokusaika* seem more likely to promote in Japan a feeling of Japan's playing a significant international role i.e. defining Japan's place in the world.

### *Japan's Place in the World*

The second theme that was evident in the Special and Commemorative issues was the attempt to redefine Japan's role in the world. This was tackled through the careful selection of the international events etc. which were commemorated in special stamp issues; and also by the way in which such issues about Japanese events portrayed Japanese concerns.

In commemorating Japanese events the emphasis was on those that showed that the nation

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now abhorred the horrors of war. For example in 1949 there was an issue to commemorate the creation of the new 'peace city' of Hiroshima and another regarding the classification of Nagasaki as a 'cultural city'. However it should be remarked that there has not been any issue commemorating anniversaries of the San Francisco peace treaties [recorded in a 1951 issue of four stamps] although the UN's Year of Peace was recorded in 1986 and the tenth anniversary of the peace treaty with China was recorded in 1988; as also were the centenaries of treaties of friendship with Thailand [1987] and Mexico [1988].

Issues devoted to the economic development of the country, which also appeared in most years, concentrated upon the domestic transport infrastructure, land reclamation and communications technology; and none illustrated the industrial activities in which Japan was excelling. As one of my British contacts among collectors of Japanese stamps, who had lived in Japan for many years, starting in the late 1950s, pointed out the frequency of these issues suggests that there was an economic strand to this theme of Japan's place in the world: a desire to be seen as a modern nation and on a technological par with the leading Western industrialised countries. I will have occasion to remark later on the large number of stamp issues that recorded anniversaries of the Meiji era modernising reforms [see p.71]. The issues, to which I referred above regarding the current economic development of the country were initially weighted towards the development of new road and rail links throughout Japan, often involving impressive, underwater road and rail tunnels e.g. in 1958 the Kan-Mon tunnel and in 1962 the Hokuriku tunnel; and bridges, e.g. in 1962 the Waikato Suspension Bridge [Plate 5].

The year 1964, in which Japan became the first Asian country to host the Olympic Games, was marked by a number of 'economic' stamp issues which celebrated Japan's achievements in a variety of fields: there was the opening of the overhead Tokyo city expressway system, the start of operation of the *Shinkansen* 200 kmph rail system and the striking architecture of the Olympic stadia [Plate 5]. Japan's successful staging of the Olympics was a turning point in her post-war history. It was an event which signalled to the Japanese people, as well as the rest of the world, that Japan was a first-class country and this was underlined by the annual meeting of the World Bank being held in Tokyo in the same year, also commemorated in a stamp issue.

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There were many further issues of stamps to commemorate expansion and improvement of Japan's high speed road and rail systems [1969, 1973, 1977, 1982, 1985, 1987, see Appendix] and her modern approach to architecture was demonstrated again in issues to commemorate the World Fairs held in 1970 in Osaka and in 1985 in Tsukuba .

There were also stamp issues that showed that Japan was not just good at making things but was also in the vanguard of research. In 1983 a stamp was issued to commemorate the launch of a scientific research vessel, the *Shirase*, which was to support the permanent research base which Japan had established in the Antarctic as early as 1956. In 1969 there was an issue to commemorate the launch of a nuclear powered cargo vessel and in 1977 another to mark the start up of Japan's first fast breeder reactor . Japan's innovative capabilities in shipbuilding were further illustrated in a 1976 series on its historical development in Japan which culminated in the issue of a pair of stamps to show a super tanker and a very large container ship [*Plate 5*].

A number of issues demonstrated Japan's capabilities in the fields of computing and telecommunications [e.g. in 1967 and in 1985] and there were issues to mark the holding of the World Computer Congress in Tokyo in 1980 and the World Telecommunications Conference, also in Tokyo in 1987 .

Although Japanese stamps did not directly demonstrate the success of various industries such as the automobile and consumer electronics industries, as was remarked by various of my British respondents, they did show indirectly that the country had a very modern and powerful industrial base. A selection is shown in *Plate 5*.

Although there has been an annual issue devoted to promoting reforestation since 1948 there were none devoted to other 'green issues' until the mid- seventies. Thereafter exhortations to conserve native flora and fauna, especially endangered species of birds, were the subject of issues almost every year but stamps gave no indication that the government was taking any steps in this matter. See *Figures 23,24*. Perhaps this show of concern is related to the international campaigns against Japan's alleged overfishing of whales and tuna and the culling of dolphins which were gathering pace in the 1970s.

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As already noted above what did become more evident as the 1970s progressed and continued through the 1980s was the attempt to portray the traditional culture of Japan through series which displayed examples of its various unique styles, to show that this was a nation both conscious and proud of a wide-ranging artistic heritage which sets it apart. See *Figures 28-33, and 34,35* below.

In international affairs the emphasis was on Japan as co-operator: in matters related to trade and business; in scientific , particularly medical, research; and , from the later '50s, as a supporter of the humanitarian concerns of the UN through stamp issues regarding the Declaration of Human Rights; the Freedom from Hunger campaign; International Co-operation Year and the 20th anniversary of UNESCO. See *Figures 36,37,38,39*.

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Political issues were not dealt with except once, at the height of the anti-alliance with the U.S. [Anpo] demonstrations in 1960, when two stamps were issued to celebrate the centenary of the first Japan-USA treaty of friendship [Nichibei Shûkô Tsûshô Jôyaku]. The issue was politically controversial and interpreted at the time as a public confirmation that this relationship would remain the basis of Japan's international relations [Dobson, 2002: 30].

Apart from these two themes of National Identity and Japan's Place in the World there is only sparse evidence regarding others that might have been expected to be evident, particularly the introduction of democracy.

### *The Emperor and Democracy*

The 1947 Constitution, which declared the Emperor to be only a constitutional monarch and the country a parliamentary democracy, was accorded two memorial stamps at the time, one showing a wreath of roses and wisteria and the other of some ambiguity: it offered an image of a woman holding a young boy, both in some sort of kimono and the Kanji used on it were in a nineteenth century style. See *Figures 40,41*

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One interpretation is that this was an attempt to treat what was intended by the US and its allies as a major change of political philosophy as no more than a modernisation of the Meiji constitution. Neither stamp contained an image of the Emperor as would have the stamps of most other countries so constituted [Thailand, UK, the Netherlands, the Scandinavian countries etc.] and his image never appeared on a stamp thereafter, which again is unusual in an international context. When Prince Akihito was nominated Crown Prince in 1952 the

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commemorative issue again carried no portrait. See *Figures 42,43*

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nor did the issue regarding his foreign tour the next year. Only in 1959, on the occasion of his wedding to a commoner, was his portrait used on a stamp, and it has not appeared since. For his enthronement as Emperor Heisei symbols were used on the commemorative stamps. See *Figures 44,45*

Whilst this can no doubt be explained as being due to the respect that it is felt should be accorded to the Emperor it is a unique attitude among the remaining kingdoms of the world. As remarked earlier even Thailand, which maintains and exercises a very strict *lèse-majesté* law, does not have such a rule. Could it be that the head of state and his family had still not been quite 'demythologised'?

What about 'democracy'? There have been very few stamps dealing with the subject. In 1960 the 70th anniversary of the Diet was recorded, and in 1965 the 75th anniversary of the first, very limited grant of male suffrage. Anniversaries of the extensions of the male suffrage in the Taishō era and the grant of full male and female suffrage by the 1947

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Constitution were not recorded.

Major post-war reforms of the school system of education were recorded in two stamps only: one in 1948 which showed a little boy and girl reading a book together marked the change to coeducation at the primary level; another in 1959 commemorated the 10th anniversary of Parent-Teacher Associations but linked this in the design of the stamp with the centenary of the death of a pre-Meiji Japanese education reformer. See *Figure 46*



There were two other stamps regarding children's education which both recorded the centenaries of Meiji era reforms: one in 1972 which marked the centenary of the 'modern education system' with a girl's head superimposed on a boy's and another in 1979 recording the start of education provision for the handicapped. The only stamps dealing with higher education were two to mark the centenary anniversaries of the founding of Tokyo and Keio, two of the country's elite universities; and one in 1984 to mark the centenary of 'industrial education' which showed the heads of two men wearing safety helmets and one woman. There were no stamps to mark the expansion and reorganisation of state and private higher and technical education post the Pacific War.

Regarding the major changes in local government there were no stamps issued.

Overall the impression given by special and commemorative stamp issues is of a wish to treat the post-war reforms as merely an extension of Meiji reforms and, if that were not possible, to ignore them. Gluck has explored this theme [1993]. In this regard it is pertinent to note the substantial number of stamps issued to record Meiji era reforms and modernisation: there was at least one such issue annually from 1970 onwards, but there were only four recording anniversaries that predated Meiji. Further there were two series recording 'men of culture'

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but both portrayed only those who made their reputations in the Meiji era.

The attitude of the MOPT can perhaps be gauged from noting that all three annual series of special stamps for which they had the sole responsibility [International Letter writing, Philatelic Week and the New Year issues] always illustrated traditional Japanese culture, using regional rural toys and games and wood block print [*ukiyo-e*] scenes. See *Figures 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52.*

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In fact until 1997 there were no stamp issues that recorded twentieth century developments in popular culture and then it was only a series illustrating 'my favourite songs'. Although the Letter Writing Day annual series has been changed to use illustrations suggested by children and characters created by a Dutch children's book illustrator [Dick Bruna], there has been no recognition of the many 'avant garde' movements in the Japanese arts.

From the analyses given above one may recognise that the statement made by the Japanese Minister for Public Management, Home Affairs, Posts and Telecommunications in his introduction to the official catalogue of the Japan World Stamp Exhibition 2001 that 'postage stamps in particular provide a concentrated image of the history, natural environment and arts of their respective countries' is a good guide to Japanese stamp issuing policy but with qualifications: the history is limited and the arts are representative only of mainstream traditional culture. It is significant that the statement leaves out reference to the economy and to public institutions.

But there is more to the analyses than this. At another level they indicate the continued interest of the authorities in promoting a nationalist ideology by using postage stamp designs to represent it. As Gellner [1997] has argued each nationalism is dependent on its supporters believing they have a common cultural bond which is given definition by the Government, often by the invention of tradition and the rooting of present policies in a carefully chosen past. Stephen Vlastos [1998] and Carol Gluck [1993] have shown how this happened in Japan during the Shōwa era and I am suggesting that postage stamps were one of the means by

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which the desired images were communicated to the Japanese people to help create this 'social memory'<sup>35</sup>. For my case to be made it is not necessary that this was a formal policy of the Governments concerned and it is unlikely to be so, except in extreme circumstances such as obtained during the period of 'nationalist' government from the mid-thirties until 1945. It is sufficient that the government ministers and leading civil servants should share a common culture.

### *Stamps as Part of Material Culture*

An increase in the number of issues aimed at stamp collectors was the other most notable feature of the late Showa period. It was a time when economic success was taken for granted; people had increasing disposable incomes, and the popularity of stamp collecting reached a peak. The issues concerned were the special issues which did not commemorate any particular event or person and were each designed as a series of related sets of two or four stamps issued over a period of two to four years. See the Appendix: examples are steam locomotives [1974-5, 5 sets of 2 stamps], ships [1975-6, 6 sets of 2 stamps], alpine plants [1984-6, 7 sets of 2 stamps], butterflies etc. [1986-7, 5 sets of 4 stamps]. There were 15 of these series issues between 1970 and 1989, totalling some 259 different stamps. From about 1970 the earlier practice of issuing selected stamps of some series [e.g. the New Year issue] in a combined form as a decorative mini-sheet which was clearly meant to be saved whole i.e. the stamps were not expected to be detached and used, began to be used much more extensively. They were even labelled 'souvenir sheet', see *Figure 12* and the Appendix. The same thing became true also of the practice of printing the different stamps of a set either as a pair or as a block of four, according to whether there were two or four different stamps to be issued at the same time. Once again this was an invitation to the purchaser to save them unused in this form rather than to separate them and use them for postage. See *Figures 32,33*.

I have described in chapter 2 [p 47] the efforts made by the Japanese postal authorities to attract people to stamp collecting, particularly younger children. Here I want to add something about their merchandising of stamps to collectors. I have described above how they have developed attractive packages in the form of mini sheets which often carry some

<sup>35</sup>The existence of 'collective' or 'social' memory is problematic. The concept has its roots in Durkheim and was developed by Halbwachs. Fentress and Wickham [1992] argue that it comprises individual memories that are shared with others and shaped by that sharing process so that it is a social construction. It needs to be articulated via rituals and in speech and images. In the process it becomes conventionalised and simplified and thereby conceptualised, which enables it to achieve stability and to reinforce the sense of identity of those who share it.



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information about the issue's subject and are decorative in themselves. Every year they also sell all the new issues for that year in 'presentation packs' which include further information about the subjects and the creation of the stamps; and at the 2001 Tokyo World Stamp Exhibition they had a very large stall where it was possible to view and to purchase all the stamps they had issued since the previous Tokyo World Stamp Exhibition in 1991, at their face value. Later in 2001 they even announced that they had 'surplus stocks' of some older commemorative and special issues, including national parks sets, which they would sell in sheet form at their face values to the first applicants! Here were stamps being treated almost as though they were no longer fashionable consumer goods such as pop posters and unlimited edition prints. This was not the first time that the Japanese postal authorities had sold off surplus stamps. Nishioka Tatsuji<sup>36</sup>, in his memoirs of life as a stamp dealer [1993, pp78-9], recorded that, in the early 1950s when inflation was high and postage rates were raised substantially, the postal authorities found they had large stocks of wartime and post-war issues which were of too low face values to be of practical use for postage. So they sold them to stamp dealers in sealed packs of 100 sheets of 100 stamps each for only Yen 50.

This is not to argue that even the series issues discussed above were aimed only at stamp collectors' pockets. As I have explained earlier a large number of these series also contributed to the promotion of a selective view of Japan's traditional culture [see the *Nihonjinron* discussion on pp 62-5] and some others were also intended to promote a view of Japan as being 'conservation minded' [see p 67]. In fact most issues of postage stamps are intended to have at least three roles: to act as receipts; to increase the income of the postal authorities and to carry a message of some sort via their designs and occasion of issue. But in examining the responses of the users of Japanese stamps to their design and issue it will become clear [Chapter 4] that the increasingly aggressive marketing of them to collectors has tended to obscure their representation role as carriers of social messages from the Government and has given them different social agencies which are explored in the following chapter.

### Epilogue

Since my discussions with stamp collectors all took place in 2001-2002, which was a decade

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<sup>36</sup> Nishioka Tatsuji had been a leading stamp dealer in Osaka for over 65 years when his memoirs were first published in 1989 and had gained an international reputation. The Japanese original had the title *Kitte Akinai 65 Nen - Nishioka Tatsuji no Yūshu-Shōwa-shi*. An English translation was made in 1993 by Scott Gates and Robert Elliott.

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after the period whose stamp designs I am studying had ended [1989] I decided to examine also the Japanese stamp issues of the period 1989-2000 to see whether there were any trends in their nature which might have particularly influenced my respondents.

There has been little change in the total number of 'commemorative' [*kinen*] stamps issued in the decade of the 1990s compared with that of the 1980s [520 v 510]. What has changed within this total is the substantial recent growth in the number issued in the form of special sheets containing more than two stamps. There has also been some increase in the number of values of the definitive issue and in the number of different designs for the special 'greeting / condolence' stamps [*keichô kitte*], which were introduced in 1981 in a series of five stamps and in the 1990s expanded to six values, plus five different sheets each containing five more designs and one sheet containing twelve.

This proliferation of the issue of stamps in special miniature sheet form is a feature commented upon by my respondents and indicative of the Government's desire to sell more stamps to collectors as the sheets are clearly meant to be saved whole rather than broken up into their individual stamps [see for example my discussion with AC reported on p 105]. I have already discussed this development in talking about stamps becoming a part of the Japanese material culture in chapter 1[p 21].

But the phenomenon of the 1990s has been the introduction of the Provincial [*Furusato*] series and the increase in the number of their new issues each year. The Sakura catalogue lists nearly 400 such stamps issued between 1989 and 1999. These seem to be the main cause of collectors concerns about the over-issue of new postage stamps. *Furusato* stamps were introduced by the Japanese government on 1st April 1989 as a means by which the various Prefectures could advertise their attractions [local festivals, scenery, historic buildings etc.]to tourists. For the purpose of making and selling these issues the 47 Prefectures are grouped into 11 postal regions. Each Prefecture's stamps are sold only in its postal region and at the Tokyo Central Post Office, although they are valid for postage throughout Japan. During the first three years each Prefecture made at least one issue and the annual number of issues rose from 18 in 1989 to 21 in 1991. Between then and 1998 it fluctuated between 15 and 20 but has since increased dramatically, to 60 separate issues in 1999, falling back to 37 in 2000.



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Clearly these recent increases had made an impact on my respondents.

In addition to the very clear commercial objectives of the *Furusato* issues there does seem to be an attempt to reinforce a feeling in the population for a sense of place to which they belong and in this they have perhaps re-instituted one of the key objectives of the National Parks series which ended in the 'seventies.

An interesting question for this research project is what has happened to the pictorial character of the other postage stamps? I have already described how the definitive [*futsū*] issue was redesigned in the 1990s to be entirely concerned with insects, flowers and birds and this also happened to the special 'greetings' series. This seems to mark the end of a long evolution which I have already discussed in chapter 3.

What about the regular annual special issues? The International Letter writing Week and the Philatelic Week issues continued to be based on nineteenth century *ukiyo-e* prints; the Afforestation issue was given a larger and more 'picturesque' design format [*fuzei no aru*] and whilst remaining symbolic of the need to conserve and promote native trees becomes from time to time concerned with a wider range of flora, such as coral; the National Athletics Meeting issue ceased to offer photographic realism and became more 'impressionistic' [*inshōhagaka*]; and the Letter Writing Day issue increased in number and became more clearly directed at children with the use of Dick Bruna's characters. Finally the New Year's Greeting stamp issue continued to illustrate various forms of animal toy. Overall, there was little change in the style of their imagery.

There has been more change, as one might expect, in the 'Commemorative' [*kinen*] issues. There has been an increase in the number of series issues [from 9 to 12] and 3 of these series included images from 'pop' culture for the first time. Whereas the most ambitious series of the 1980s illustrated Bashō's Diaries through specially commissioned calligraphy and images of nature the most ambitious series of the 1990s was the Twentieth Century [*Nijūseiki*] series, issued in illustrated sheets of ten stamps, each showing different aspects of Japanese life in the last 100 years and including cartoon characters and baseball players. This links with the suggestion which I offered in chapter 3 about the increasing complexity of the Government's

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attempts to define Japanese national identity through stamp issues and with their introduction of some images of popular culture [*ibid*, p 64 ].

Commemorative stamps celebrating historical events continued largely to ignore Japan's pre-Meiji history. But whilst in the 1980s there were only 4 series dealing with the pre-Meiji period and all these were about the arts [*geijutsu*], in the 1990s there were 3 such issues and also 4 marking ancient anniversaries.

The other most notable change was in the number of issues related to Japan's relations with the rest of the world: the number to do with relations with other countries and with the United Nations doubled [from 13 to 24].

The question is: Are these postage stamps still giving social messages? It seems to me that firstly there has been a sustained and growing attempt to attract children and young people to collect stamps. Note well the introduction of illustrated stamp booklets for the Letter Writing Day issue and also souvenir sheetlets in 1986; the increase from 2 to 4 values in this series in 1997 and the introduction of Dick Bruna cartoon characters, followed by the emphasis given to these characters and to attracting children at the *Philanippon '01* exhibition. There is also an increased use of cartoon imagery in commemorative issues of the 1990s which seem to be targeting the young adult audience through the use of *manga*-type images. And In 1996-7 there was the '50 Post-war Memorable Years' series which included five stamps showing stars of popular culture. There is also the use of public competitions to create new stamp designs. For the first time in many years there were three issues showing entries in the early 1990s. So my first conclusion is that there is evidence that priority is now being given to making stamps more popular in the hope that they will sell in larger numbers i.e. they are being designed and marketed increasingly to raise revenue rather than being used to represent any Government ideology.

However this decade also saw the issue of series showing various aspects of Japan's traditional culture such as horse paintings in 1990-91, Kabuki scenes in 1991-2, World heritage sites in Japan in 1994-5 and traditional house types in 1997-9, together with the restarting of the series on 'Men of Culture' in 1992, but with them now being issued in pairs

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with one person being usually of the pre-Meiji period; plus the recognition given to events in Japan's early history e.g. the 1200th anniversary of Heiankyo in 1994. There has been a perhaps natural decline in the references to the Meiji era modernisation reforms and some switch of attention to both the more recent past and to more ancient history. These issues give evidence of there being a continued interest in designing them in a representative type social agency manner to offer a classic definition of national identity via references to a shared historic high culture. But it is noticeable that most of these issues are presented in ways which make them also attractive to theme collectors and thus they are also part of the 'commoditisation' of postage stamps and, as will be shown [chapter 5] consequently acquire other social agencies.

I have already commented on the increase in this decade on the number of issues which had an international theme. A balancing act was seemingly being attempted with the historical/cultural issues strengthening the Japanese people's awareness of their own culture and its long history whilst at the same time, through the international issues, encouraging them to think more internationally.

In reminding Japanese people of their traditional culture their special relationship with nature also continued to be commemorated [e.g. the Flowers of Four Seasons series in 1993-4] and in particular the huge new *Furusato* series which are often of landscape images and always geographically located. Many issues were of pairs of stamps or even of strips of four different designs which look as though they are meant to be saved as such. Again the stamps clearly have more than one purpose: they are both educational and mercantile.

Thus the use of postage stamps to help define the national identity was continued into the Heisei era but this use was overshadowed by the increasing emphasis on postage stamps as revenue raisers i.e. as commodities. Their representational social agency thereby became subordinated to other social agencies created through their use in stamp collecting.

### **Comparisons with the Stamp Issues of the UK and USA**

Before leaving this analysis of Japanese stamp issues, which has been conducted within the

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framework of Japanese society and culture, it is useful to consider the question whether there were extraneous influences which seriously affected Japanese decisions regarding the planning of their stamp issues. Western [1987] has shown that the UK was the model on which the modern Japanese postal system, created in the Meiji era, was based and it is not unreasonable to suppose that the early Japanese stamp issues were influenced by British stamp designs. Except in a very limited manner this does not seem to have been the case, as a comparison of *Figures 6 and 56* will show. The only similarity is in the design concept. In the case of the UK that was that the major component should be an image of the ruler and in the case of Japan that it should be his symbolic representation. However, Japanese stamp issuing policy diverged from that of the UK as early as 1875 when Japan made a special issue for use on international mail which used bird images as its centrepieces. Again, in 1894 Japan made its first issue of commemorative stamps for the Emperor's Silver Wedding whereas the UK made no such issues in respect of Queen Victoria and indeed did not issue its first commemorative stamp until 1924.

Japan was an early member of the Universal Postal Union [1878], which was an interstate body that came into being in 1874 to help countries link together their postal systems [see p 32]. It evolved into a body with expertise in all aspects of postal services and also served as an information exchange. Hence by the later nineteenth century Japan was well aware of postal developments world-wide and not dependant on any single source of inspiration. This can be seen from the fact that Japan issued two stamps with portraits on them in 1894 which were not of the ruler but of the commanders of her sea and land forces in her victorious war with China. However it was 1965 before the UK used a non-royal portrait in addition to that of the ruler on a stamp [the Churchill commemorative]. Japan also predated the UK in the introduction of other types of image into its stamps: imperial regalia in 1915; a symbolic 'dove of peace' issue in 1919; the Meiji shrine in 1920 and Mt. Fuji and deer in 1922 for example. It was after World War II before the UK did anything similar. And, as we have seen above, in 1937 Japan abandoned the use of Imperial symbols as the principal component of its definitive issue and used instead a variety of images, a move which has not yet been made in the UK. Consequently I conclude that the UK was not a significant determinant of the nature of Japanese stamp issues.

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It could be argued however that the USA, as a result of Japan's defeat in World War II and the American led Occupation for five years thereafter, was in a position to determine the nature of Japan's stamp issues in the early part of the period with which this study is most concerned and to influence it later, through the close political and economic relationship between the two powers. It was as a direct result of the Occupation that the Japanese Ministry of Posts introduced a set of Criteria for the design and issue of postage stamps [*ibid*, pp 37-8] and abandoned the practice of symbolically including the Emperor in their designs. But these Criteria were not overly restrictive and their application seems to have been left to the Japanese Minister of Posts, who continued to decide on the subjects and timing of new issues, in consultation with other ministries.

An examination of the types of stamp issue made, both during and after the Occupation, fails to show any positive linkage with US stamp issues. American stamp issues have been, almost invariably, related to domestic anniversaries and personalities, particularly the latter. Other than for two or three years either side of 1960 there have not been more than one or two issues in any year related to external events or persons and in fourteen of the forty three years between 1946 and 1989 there were none. US domestic commemoratives were mostly devoted to recognising individual American achievers. This is directly contrary to the Japanese practice in that same period although this has changed somewhat since. There were no series celebrating the scenery in US National Parks, nor their national artistic treasures; and they did not commemorate any of the many international scientific and medical conventions held in America, in contrast to the Japanese record [see Appendix]. Whereas the Japanese developed a number of regular annual special issues encouraging letter-writing, advertising their annual philatelic exhibition, encouraging re-afforestation etc. as well as a New Year greeting issue, the USA limited itself to an annual Christmas issue.

Nor is there any obvious connection between the design styles of the American and Japanese stamp issues post World War II. America has no equivalent to the rich pre-Meiji visual artistic traditions of Japan and American stamps have seldom reproduced American paintings / drawings whereas this has been common in Japanese stamp design [see Appendix]. There is also a difference in the manner in which images and text are related to each other in the two countries. In Japanese stamps the text is marginalised and not allowed to intrude into the

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image space: it becomes a frame and is often quite small. This is not the case with American stamps as a comparison of the illustrations in stamp catalogues [ e.g. see Stanley Gibbons' *Stamps of the World*, any edition ] will show.

I have made a comparison of the treatment given to events which both Japan and USA have recognised with stamp issues in the period 1946-1989. I grouped these in two categories: domestic and international. In the domestic category the main groups are: the opening of new constructions, historical anniversaries and events. In the international category the main groups are: relations with other individual countries, United Nations and other international bodies related issues, participation in international events such as the Olympic Games, World Fairs etc.

The international category is perhaps the most interesting because there is the potential for both countries to cover the same event. In fact the overlap is very small. I have found only ten instances in the whole period 1946-1989, one being the centenary of the US-Japan Treaty of Friendship in 1960. The two issues regarding this event were totally different in character. The American issue was a single stamp showing the Washington Memorial [in Washington] with a wreath of cherry blossom around it. The Japanese issue was of two stamps on which they reproduced paintings from the period, one of which showed the Japanese ship crossing the Pacific in stormy weather with the delegation and the other the delegation being received in state in Washington by President Buchanan. A second was the centenary of the opening of Japanese ports to foreign trade. Interestingly the two countries differed on the date with the Americans choosing the earlier date, of 1853, when Commodore Perry appeared in Tokyo Bay with his 'black ships' and the Japanese opting for 1858, when the treaty opening her major ports to foreign traders became effective. Again the two countries chose quite different designs. The Americans showed the head of Perry and a view of his fleet in Tokyo Bay whilst the Japanese opted to show a statue to the Japanese negotiator of the treaty, together with images of a paddle steamer and of a modern merchant ship. The other issues in this category were all regarding anniversaries of various international organisations to which both countries belong: the International Red Cross, the International Telecommunications Union, the Universal Postal Union and the United Nations Organisation; and various campaigns sponsored by the United Nations: Freedom from Hunger, Year of the Disabled, International

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A Comparison of U.S. with Japanese Stamp Designs



1960 U.S. - Japan Friendship Treaty



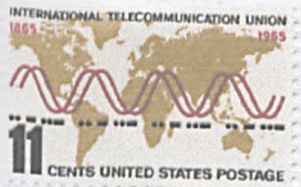
1963 Freedom from Hunger Year



1962 / 1970 50th Anns. of Girl Guides



1963 International Red Cross centenary



1965 Internat. Telecomns. Union centenary



1970 25th Anny. of United Nations



1979 Internat. Year of the Child



1981 Internat. Year of the Disabled

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Youth Year. In each of these cases, too, different artistic treatments were used by the two countries. They are shown in *Plate 6*.

Examination of the domestic issues on similar themes also demonstrates that the approaches to design in the two countries were independent of each other. As an example one could take their issues to commemorate the 50th anniversary of Girl Guiding in their countries. The Japanese stamp offers a symbolic picture of a Japanese girl guide saluting in front of a tent set up in the countryside. The American stamp also shows a symbolic picture but of the head only of a girl guide in front of the stars and stripes. See *Plate 6*.

The conclusion which I draw from this comparative study is that the Japanese did not generally look abroad for their inspiration in stamp designing. It is therefore appropriate to analyse and interpret their stamp designs within their own culture and history, as I have done in this chapter. I have shown that Japanese postage stamps have been designed to represent various aspects of the Japanese national identity. The question next considered is with what result?



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## Chapter 4: Responses to the Government Messages

One of the aims of my research was to establish to what extent the use by Governments of postage stamp issues is an effective mode of communicating. For this purpose I looked at the responses of three groups of users of Japanese postage stamps. These were : ordinary Japanese users, Japanese collectors and British collectors.

Primarily I was aiming to establish the extent to which these users noticed the social/ political messages which the issuers intended them to receive through their designs and/ or the occasion of their issue; how they reacted to them and why it might be that they did not notice those messages. I was also interested to discover for the British collectors whether their common interest in collecting Japanese stamps created in them any 'community of perceptions' about Japan and if so how this might relate to the Japanese government messages.

All my respondents will have formulated their answers to my questions about Japanese stamps within framework representations of Japan and of Japanese national identity which had been given them by their education, exposure to the media and social intercourse. And the effects of these influences will have varied with their ages and individual personalities. It was not practicable for me to discover the resultant appropriate visual and discursive contexts for each of my respondents. The most that I could do was to recognise dominant visual representations and discourses regarding Japan and Japanese national identity, in both Japan and England, to which they had been exposed, as it is reasonable to suppose [in the absence of specific other information] that these will have given primary definition to their responses.

### *The Japanese Frames*

It is part of my thesis that Governments issue postage stamps as a part of their efforts to influence the ways in which users see their countries. It is appropriate therefore to look first at the ideologies of Japanese Governments in the period with which this research is concerned [1937-1988]. In chapter 3 [pp 51-2] I summarised very briefly the successive changes in these ideologies. The point was made that The Allied Occupation after World War II attempted to create a major change by promoting democracy, demythologising the Emperor and redefining the nation as one of peace and culture [Gordon,ed. 1993, pp 3-4]. Japanese people, part or the whole of whose education had taken place prior to 1947, could be expected to have a

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fundamentally different orientation from those entering education thereafter. However this divide was bridged to varying extents by the traditional respect of the young for their elders. Even the post-war generations therefore will have absorbed some of the pre 1945 ideas. I was made aware of this when I visited the Imperial Palace grounds in Tokyo in April 1982 with many thousands of Japanese of all ages, on the occasion of the Emperor's official birthday [*Tennô Tanjôbi*]. A quiet deference verging on reverence was shown towards him which was similar across all the generations present, including many younger families of post-war vintage.

the concept of Japan as a homogeneous and cohesive middle-class society was a powerful ideological force in post-war [Japanese] history. The concept was supported by many dominant institutions- the mass culture industry, schools, businesses and political parties from the LDP through the centrist opposition- and it was articulated over the post-war decades in discourses of culture, class, cohort and lifecycle.[Gordon, 1993, pp 461-2].

The effectiveness of this promotion was brought home to me during my residence in Tokyo in the early 1980s by the reports in *The Japan Times* of the annual survey of social trends carried out by the Prime Minister's Office which invariably reported that over 90% of the Japanese people considered themselves as middle-class. But, as Ivy has argued [Gordon, ed. 1993, pp 239-258] most Japanese participated in this mass culture mainly as consumers of sophisticated commodities. The emphasis was on 'modernity', sophisticated technology, creating an 'information society' [*Jôhô Shakai*][Morris-Suzuki, 1988]. The facilities made available for the Tokyo Olympic Games in 1964, particularly the striking architecture of the stadia; the newly opened overhead expressway [toll road system] in Tokyo and the start up of the *Shinkansen* [very high speed rail service] followed in 1970 by *Expo '70*, a grand international exhibition held in Osaka which was visited by over 62 million Japanese, were public manifestations of these ideals. The latter used the slogan 'Progress and Harmony for Mankind' and in its mix of exhibits juxtaposed the two strands of the official view of Japan, 'modernity' and 'tradition'. It was not accidental that the subtext of the advertising campaign, begun in this period by Japan National Railways for its expanding *Shinkansen* high speed rail service, combined these two seeming opposites. It urged the newly urbanised population to use these trains to go back to visit the fast disappearing rural way of life, to 'Discover Japan'.

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Ironically 'modernity' [high speed trains] were to enable people to reconnect with 'tradition'.

In one sense the *Nihonjinron* debate [see also ch3, p 62] which burgeoned in the 1970s, was an attempt to explain this apparent paradox of marrying success with being 'modern' with respect and support for 'tradition'. It sought to do so by describing the Japanese people as unique, arguing that their mentality was different from those of other peoples. Key demonstrations of this were said to be the Japanese people's traditional unusually sympathetic understanding of and empathy with 'nature' [*shizen*] and their non-confrontational pursuit of harmony [*wah*]. Conservative politicians and business leaders were among the leading proponents of *Nihonjinron* because they saw in its promotion of these traditional ideas a helpful basis for maintaining a stable society and good industrial relations [Yoshino, 1992, pp 137-140 and 163-176] and because it also provided a mystique which was useful in international bargaining.

The concept of 'modernity' was also useful to the political-economic establishment because they were able to use it to create and to maintain a mass consumer market, based on products offering convenience and fashionable one-upmanship as a result of continuing technological innovation. By the last decade of the Shōwa era the Japanese people had become accustomed to the idea that they lived in the Number 1 Economy and that its success was related to their perception of their having a unique type of culture which was at once both ancient and modern. Reference to the Appendix will show that, during the later 1970s and 1980s, stamp issues which portrayed major feats of engineering were accompanied by others which celebrated Japan's pre-Meiji artistic heritage and traditions of rural culture such as folk crafts, folk songs and story telling.

It is within the framework of perceptions about Japanese identity discussed above that the following findings of my research into Japanese perceptions of the social and political significance of their postage stamps need to be understood.

### *The Japanese Responses*

I will deal first with the ordinary Japanese users of postage stamps who are not stamp collectors. These were mainly people whom I met on my research trip to Tokyo in August

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2001. They were an arbitrary selection, who ranged in age from the mid-twenties to the over seventies and included both men and women.

### *Male Responses*

The men had very little awareness of the designs of the stamps they were currently using, let alone those of earlier years. One, who is in his sixties, President of his company and has a keen interest in the visual arts, said 'I never think about the stamps I put on my personal mail. I never notice how they look'. Another, a white collar worker in his forties, said 'I don't take much notice of the pictures on stamps. Sometimes one will catch my attention if it is somewhere or something that I recognise'. A younger man, in his thirties, said 'I don't use stamps very much. When I do I just take what the Post Office sell me and don't really look at them'. None of them could recall the stamps of the post-Pacific War period, nor even of the 1980s. There was some feeling that the number of new issues each year had increased but none regarding any change in their subject matter.

### *Female Responses*

Among Japanese women the responses were slightly more positive. A well educated woman in her sixties said, 'I buy small stocks of the stamp designs which I find attractive [*miriyoku-teki*], usually those showing flowers or plants. When I use them I try to select a design which I think suits the person I am mailing or the occasion of my writing, but this is not always possible'. Another, university educated woman in her forties, who works for the Japan Philatelic Society Foundation in Tokyo admitted that she had 'never thought about the meaning of stamps' but in response to my question thought that they contained a lot of images of nature, probably because 'Japanese people have a special feeling for nature'. A younger woman, in her thirties, said that she liked 'beautiful [*utsukashii*] or cute [*kawaii*] images' but added that 'I never think stamps have a meaning, its just that some are more attractive [*miriyoku-teki*] than others'. As for the men, none of the women with whom I discussed Japanese stamps could remember the images they carried before the current decade and thus they were not conscious of any changes in the subject matter chosen to illustrate them.

These responses are typical, not only of the Japanese people with whom I spoke in Tokyo

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but also of those, mainly female, Japanese with whom I have discussed Japanese stamps in the UK. Of course, in this latter case they are not choosing the Japanese stamps they see but responding to the choices of the senders of their mail from Japan. Among Japanese students I met two older ones who were here on postgraduate courses who said that they were happy when they received mail with stamps using ukiyo-e print images because these were typically Japanese, but in general my contacts did not think about the stamps they received as imaging their country.

### Some General Considerations

These findings should not be regarded as surprising. Most people buy stamps of only a few values, and often in bulk to save trips to post offices / stamp machines. Consequently they do not, even over a period of years, gain any exposure to the whole range of designs which are being issued, even allowing for the stamps they also receive on mail posted to them. Moreover there are factors involved, both with the act of purchase and with the post offices' handling of mail, which work against stamp buyers and receivers perceiving any social /political messages implied by the stamp designs.

In the case of stamp purchases the most important of these factors is the attitude of the purchaser. In most cases it is one of impatience with a chore which is only too familiar and often involves waiting in a queue. Concern is limited to getting the correct value stamp for the mailing concerned; or with restocking with standard letter and perhaps postcard rate stamps. When Japanese purchasers are concerned with the way stamps look they are seeking an aesthetic quality in them such as *kawaii* or *miryoku-teki* [see above] or, when there is a variety of choice, sometimes seeking a design that will complement the packing of their piece of mail, regarding the stamp[s] as a part of the wrapping.<sup>37</sup> These concerns clearly distract the attention of the Japanese stamp purchaser from consideration of other symbolic meanings offered by the stamps. For receivers of the mail there is the likelihood that the stamp image

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<sup>37</sup> Certainly in these cases the stamps are intended to help to convey a meaning but it is not that of the stamp issuers! Instead the stamps are intended to form part of a harmonious whole packing design which will prove attractive to the receiver and perhaps enhance the significance of the contents for them. See Hendry [1993] for a very wide-ranging discussion of the use of wrapping in Japanese culture.

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will be partially , or even wholly, obscured by a postmark<sup>38</sup>. See *Figures 53,54*



It may also have to compete for attention with any advertising which is added to the postmark. At its simplest this may take the form of a slogan which is substituted for a part of the wavy line pattern or added besides the cds and may be either commercially sponsored or be a message which the Government wishes to give independently of any contained in the stamp design<sup>39</sup>.

Advertising may be more elaborate, using a small picture to advertise some place; many Japanese towns advertise their touristic attractiveness in this way with 'scenic cancellations', see *Figure 55* on the next page. The addition of this eye-catching material around the postage stamp could distract the recipient's attention from the stamp itself<sup>40</sup>.

<sup>38</sup> Postmarks are cancellation marks applied to postage stamps on mail by the receiving post office to ensure that they are used once only to prepay the postage due. Originally this was done in Japan by using inked wooden seals carrying a simple design which completely obscured the part of the stamp to which they were applied, see *Figure 53* in text. These were soon superseded by 'cds' [ circular date stamps ] which contained the name of the receiving post office, the date and sometimes the time of receipt, see *Figure 54* in text. These are still in use but being phased out as a result of mechanisation which utilises a style of 'ribbon cancellation'. This consists of a band of ink lines a little less wide than the standard definitive postage stamp which is interrupted at regular intervals to give the same data as the cds and runs right across the piece of mail. Chance and the location of the stamp[s] on the piece of mail determine how much of the stamp design is obscured. See also page 45. Modification of the 'ribbon' of ink lines so that they are further apart and wavy means that they are now less likely to obscure the stamp designs

<sup>39</sup> Examples with which older British readers may be familiar include 'Come to Sunny Brighton' and 'Post Early for Christmas'.

<sup>40</sup> These scenic cancellations have become so numerous and interesting that there are now collectors who specialise in collecting them and a Japanese acquaintance of mine has just published an illustrated handbook of them [Yamamoto Takashi, 1998].

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There is one situation in which this is unlikely to be the case. That is when the sender buys a specially designed 'first day' envelope and the appropriate postage stamp. Such envelopes are sold at post offices in many countries, including the UK and Japan, as part of the marketing of new commemorative and special stamp issues. In such cases the envelope is decorated with wording and illustrations which explain the occasion and purpose of the stamp issue and when it goes through the mail system it is carefully postmarked so as not to obscure the stamps. Thus the message of the stamp issue is brought home to both the sender and the receiver. However this service is only the case on the first day of issue and when the mail is placed in the special posting boxes in post offices. Hence the audience is quite small and mainly is limited to stamp collectors and stamp dealers. See *Figure 55* below,



But before leaving the question of the responses of the ordinary members of the Japanese public to the social / political messages of postage stamps we ought to consider one further matter: whether such users are influenced unconsciously by them. As I explained in chapter 1 [p15] it is possible that the constant sighting of certain images may result in the viewers' unconscious being shaped according to the symbolic significance of those images for them. This point was made by Newman [1989; p74] when he wrote of such stamps 'creating scratches on the mind' and it is the argument made by those practitioners of advertising who

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argue that the extent of the conscious recall of their advertisements by the public is not the measure of their effectiveness; that the true measure is whether the public buys more of whatever is advertised or changes its attitude in the direction advertised. The trouble with this line of argument is that it is unverifiable. There is seldom, if ever, a unique connection between the advertising and the sales, or future attitudes. This is particularly the case with opinion-forming advertising by governments. A great deal of related information is being received by the target audience, through a wide range of channels. And when the messages are in code, i.e. they use symbols, there is the added complication that there can be no certainty that they will not be variously interpreted or, even as Poster reports that Baudrillard has suggested [Poster, 1988, p5], be simply 'self-referential' having been used so widely in the many categories of visual communication that they have lost their referential character. However it is worth noting that several collectors [Japanese and British] suggested that Japanese stamps may act in just this way i.e. reinforcing already accepted images of Japan and Japanese people [*ibid*, pp 92,93,95,103].

### *Japanese Collectors of Japanese Stamps*

I conducted two surveys of Japanese collectors of Japanese stamps and also a number of face to face interviews, as well as one 'focus group'.

The rates of response to the questionnaires were too low [10 out of 83 in one case and 10 out of an undetermined but larger number in the other] to be statistically significant. However I was able to supplement the information from the questionnaires through in-depth, face to face interviews with six serious collectors who have a considerable awareness and knowledge of Japanese stamps and postal history and a 'focus group' discussion with fifteen other experienced collectors.

Those interviewed were all male, ranging in age from the early thirties to over seventy. The youngest was a lecturer at Tokyo University who has written many articles in the Japanese stamp collectors' journal *Yūshū*, and also published two books about the post-Pacific War Japanese stamps. I also had short talks with four ordinary Japanese stamp collectors during their visit to the *Philanippon '01* stamp exhibition.



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### Responses to Questionnaires

My surveys were conducted amongst the Japanese members of the International Society for Japanese Philately [ISJP] who are resident in Japan and amongst the Japanese subscribers to the English language stamp magazine *Philately in Japan* which is published in Tokyo by the premier Japanese stamp collectors club, the Japan Philatelic Society Foundation [JPSF].

It is highly probable, but I was unable to check the matter, that the Japanese members of the ISJP are also members of the JPSF but I guarded against receiving duplicate questionnaire responses by asking the latter to respond only if they had not responded to my ISJP inquiry. Effectively I was contacting about 100 different Japanese collectors which made that sample size about twice the size of the one I used for the British collectors of Japanese stamps.

Both the quantity and quality of the response from Japanese collectors was disappointing. Only five attempted to answer my three questions [*ibid*: ch. 1 on methodology] regarding their interpretation of the images on Japanese stamps. The others gave me requested basic details about themselves and their collecting and ignored these questions. Amongst those who answered there was one who disagreed with my analysis, saying that he did not think that stamp issues have been meant to influence the way in which Japanese people see themselves, nor were they intended to give foreigners any particular ideas about Japan: they were simply designed to sell. He is well aware of the designs of Japanese stamps and has collected all the new issues since 1975. However his was the only such negative reply. Two of the others, both of whom I was able to interview subsequently, gave my thesis qualified approval.

The respondent who argued that the only motivation for the issue of Japanese commemorative stamps was economic was echoing the theme of the book by Naitô Yôsuke [Naitô, 2001] to which I referred in my Introduction [p 3]. In a discussion with me at the Japanese World Stamp Exhibition 2001 the author confirmed that this is his view and added that he considers the MOPT to be 'very old-fashioned' and always driven to raise money because of budget constraints. He did volunteer that some issues have resulted from political pressure and instanced three examples but he maintains that there is no coherent policy in Government regarding postage stamp design and that the pattern of issues each year results from interdepartmental negotiation. This is true and describes the process whereby the subject matter of new stamp issues is determined but, as my discussion of it in chapter 2 shows,

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does not mean that their designs do not carry political messages. This point was also made by two other stamp collectors attending the exhibition to whom I referred above.

The first was Mr. M., a successful businessman in his sixties, who is a director of the JPSF and a 'behind the scenes' organiser of the Japan World Stamp Exhibition [ *Philanippon '01* ] at which he also exhibited in the championship class. He is a keen philatelist who has had a lifelong interest in Franco-Japanese relations and has a prize-winning collection of the postal history of that subject, particularly the French post office in Yokohama<sup>41</sup>. He believes that there was no deliberate attempt to impose particular images of Japan and the Japanese people in the post-Pacific War period but that the stamp designs chosen reflected the instinctive views of the bureaucrats and politicians concerned. He commented particularly on the Japanese people's love of nature and of how this was reflected in the various national parks issues and in the increasing use of nature images in the definitive series. And he also noted that this was a politically 'safe' development because such images suggested a peaceful and conservation minded people. Likewise he feels that the use of traditional *ukiyo-e* woodblock print images on issues expected to be used on mails sent abroad [ e.g. the annual International Letter Writing series, see *Figures 47, 48* ] was both what foreigners would have expected and also a safe way of imaging Japan. He sees the major motivation for the increasing use since the later 1980s of images of popular culture and designs that appeal to children as the authorities' desire to reawaken a desire to collect stamps in young people because he says 'the young have deserted stamp collecting since the 1980s'. Overall he left me with the impression that he believes Japan's stamp issues have been an instinctive projection of the traditional conservative mainstream views of the bureaucrats and politicians involved rather than a conscious attempt to manipulate perceptions<sup>42</sup>. And thus they have social agency through their representation of those views.

The second respondent who expressed some agreement with my views was Mr.T., a senior Vice-President of the Japanese associate company of a leading British engineering group. He also is in his sixties and has been collecting stamps since he was eight years old. Although he

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<sup>41</sup> From the opening of Japanese ports to foreign traders until the 1880s several countries were allowed to maintain their own post offices in certain key ports to process foreign mails.

<sup>42</sup> A paper published in *Japan Forum*, v14, no.3, pp425-441 by Akito Okado which describes the attitudes of senior civil servants and LDP politicians to education reform in post-war Japan describes attitudes which are very similar to those I am suggesting were promoted by the stamp designs of this period.

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has a general collection of Japanese stamps his main interest for many years has been in the wartime issues made by the Japanese in the countries they occupied between 1941 and 1945. He recognises the definitive issues of the post-Pacific War period of Allied occupation as being 'political' - first the Vocational issue [see *Plate 2*] and then its replacement by the Animal, Plant and National treasures series [see *Plates 3,4*] - and agrees with my interpretation of their symbolism. Like Mr. M. he mentioned the Japanese love of nature as the reason for the increasing use of such images on stamps in the following years. However he also doubts that, following the ending of the Occupation, there were any deliberate policy with regards to stamp designs, other than that they should be 'safe' in the eyes of foreigners in the manner in which they depicted Japan and that their designs should appeal to the Japanese public. In seeking to meet these targets he argued the conservative bureaucracy adopted clichés of the Japanese classical artistic tradition and the beauties of nature which *inter alia* reflected their idealised view of Japan, as had Mr M. Again I was being told that these stamps have social agency through such representations of Japanese identity.

Another respondent picked out the 'National Treasures' special series of 1967-9 and 1976-8 [Sakura, 2000: pp 85-87 and 101-102; *figures 28,29*] as being influential reminders for Japanese people of their culture and what it means to be Japanese but does not believe that any stamp issues were made to influence foreigners in their perceptions of Japan because 'the designers could not think of the way of designing [such images]. They are Japanese'. One of my other respondents, Mr.W., completely misinterpreted my questions and answered them in respect of the aesthetic quality of the designs used. This was a typical response of stamp collectors in my interviews when asked about the significance to them of Japanese stamp designs: they often saw them as 'pictures in miniature' and responded to them as they would to a piece of art. For these collectors the social agency of the stamps does not lie in their representations but in their being items of choice by these collectors.

What emerged from all the replies was that the collectors who responded had all refined their collecting from the mere accumulation of as many different stamps as possible to an interest in either particular issues or in the postal history of particular times, places etc. As a result they were either examining their stamps in a 'philatelic manner' i.e. looking for differences in various examples of seemingly the same stamp, which might be due to a redrawing of its

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design when the printing plates had got worn; the use of slightly different shades of the ink colour[s]; printings on different types/ quality of paper; changes in the manner of perforating between the rows of stamps to enable them to be detached individually etc. or they were more interested in how the stamp had been used e.g. its postmark. Both refinements led to a lack of interest in the overall significance of the design. They were not looking at the wood but at the individual trees composing it. This conclusion was reinforced when I was invited to discuss my ideas with a group of Japanese stamp collectors by one of my respondents during my visit to *Philanippon '01*.

### The Focus Group

The meeting involved some fifteen collectors who all meet regularly as they are interested in the stamps Japan issued during World War II for use in its occupied territories. Most of them also have other stamp collecting interests. They were all male and varied in age from their early thirties to about sixty. My host had already explained to them my research interest and I was invited to begin the session by summarising my position after which there was a general discussion of my points. From the discussion it was clear that none of them had considered the possible social / political significance of the designs of Japanese stamps although it was also clear that they were familiar with the stamps of the period with which my research is concerned. As several of them put it I was asking them to 'look at stamps in a new way' because they were normally looking at particular aspects of a stamp in the ways described as 'philatelic' above.

Even so there was general agreement that the 'First Shôwa' issue of 1937-9 [see *Plate 1*] reflected the philosophy of the nationalist military leadership and that the immediate post-Pacific War 'Vocational' series of 1948-50 was also political with its 'democratic' imaging of ordinary Japanese working people and also the omission of any symbolic references to the Emperor, both for the first time on stamps *i.e* they recognised a significant representational social agency in these issues. However there was uncertainty that any subsequent issues were meant to create any particular image of Japan although one or two did comment that the increased use of nature images, first in the National Parks annual issues [e.g. see *Figures 19,20* ] and then in both the definitive and special issues which used images of fauna and flora [e.g. see *Figures 21,22,23,24* and *Plate 4.*] and the annual 'Afforestation' issue starting in 1948 [Sakura, 2000: p63] were all intended to respond to the Japanese love of nature and to

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suggest that the Japanese were a peaceful, 'green people'. Other suggestions made were also in line with my individual interviews with other philatelists reported above and included that the introduction of individual stamps and special series showing National Treasures [Sakura, 2000: pp 85-7 and 101-2; e.g. *Figures 26,27* ] was because these made the Japanese people conscious of their long established culture and showed the rest of the world they are a civilised people; and that the absence of issues regarding industry was because any specific ones would be controversial within Japan as they might be thought to favour particular firms and / or industries. The idea that stamp images were chosen to avoid controversy and yet to appeal to the sensibilities of Japanese people, thereby causing them to buy them, probably found the widest support. In doing so they were reflecting the view expressed by both Mr M. and Mr T that Japanese stamps reflect some sort of standardised picture of Japaneseness and in doing so exercise a representational social agency. Most of those present expressed the view that *Yūshū* [the Ministry of Posts] was becoming ever more commercially minded and that its main current motivation is to increase stamp sales.

After my discussion session they moved into a normal meeting. Now they were concerned with such matters as for how long and where particular stamps were used; variations which occurred in the overprinting on some; differences between various printings of the same stamp etc. The designs of the stamps *qua* images were not mentioned. This is the norm with advanced collectors i.e. philatelists and I found it interesting to compare their approach to their stamps to that of ordinary stamp collectors. Luckily another of my interviewees was able to arrange this for me.

### *An Informal Discussion*

This was a meeting with a small group of two men and two women. One of the women [in her forties and married] buys only stamps that appeal to her aesthetic sense, meaning those imaging Japanese pre-Meiji history and culture. The other woman, also married and of similar age, collects images of animals. For both of them the images which the stamps offer are their most important aspect. As for the men, who were both a little older, they both admitted to being 'squirrels' who keep everything that comes their way but they also are on the lookout for examples of themes in which they are interested: in one case ships and in the other the cute [*kawaii*] labels which are attached to Japanese New Year stamps. The collectors of animal and ship themes did not confine their interest to Japanese stamps. Whilst the other two did they

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saw their stamps as imaging particular aspects of Japan rather than the country or its people and one of them wasn't interested in the stamps but rather in an attachment to them. These collectors explained that because they tend to use only a few values of the definitive issues in their ordinary lives they don't have an opportunity to think about these series as a whole and that when it comes to commemorative and special issues they notice only those that fit into their collecting themes. Others, especially those involving abstract designs and symbols, are not appreciated unless the symbols are very traditional e.g. Mt. Fuji and cherry blossom. Thus, as with the philatelists, their awareness of stamp designs is conditioned by their collecting interests but unlike the former they lacked any general impressions of Japanese stamp issues.

Mr.S., who organised this meeting for me, provided a link between this group of ordinary Japanese stamp collectors and the philatelists as in his own eyes he is somewhere between the two positions. He echoed the thoughts of the ordinary collectors about not seeing enough of the types of stamps issued to come to any judgements regarding how they image Japan and claimed that the proliferation of new issues made any attempt at a comprehensive collection impossible. In his own case this had led him into a concern for postal history and thus away from accumulating different stamps.

### Some General Considerations

The idea that the number of new issues is swamping collectors came up in virtually all my talks with collectors in Japan. It was echoed by officials of the JPSF. The consensus was that too many different stamps were being issued each year, particularly when account is taken of the growing tendency to add mini-sheets and illustrated postcards to each issue and that this was driving collectors of Japanese stamps into ever greater selectivity in their collecting. For the serious philatelists this meant their ceasing to collect issues made from some time in the 1970s, or even earlier, and often concentrating upon some portion of an earlier period or even a single, long-lasting definitive issue. The *Philanippon '01* exhibition contained plenty of examples of collectors who had specialised for instance in the hand engraved 'dragon' series; the 'koban' series and the 'Taishô era definitives'[Official Catalogue, p79]; for the ordinary stamp collectors the choice was to ignore general collecting and to concentrate on a theme or themes which led them away from collecting on a country basis. Again the *Philanippon '01*

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exhibition contained plenty of examples in a large Thematic class of 55 entries [Official Catalogue, pp 101-103 where there were such themes as Eagle, motor car, the Red Cross]. In both cases their collecting habits prevented collectors from being able to notice any patterns in the later Shôwa and subsequent issues.

The Japanese people who do not collect stamps are not conscious of stamp images affecting their ideas about what it means to be Japanese and Japanese stamp collectors, who might be thought to be more likely to notice the messages in stamp designs, are led away from paying attention to them by the habits of their hobby. However, there is some evidence, as shown above, that the main reason Japanese people do not notice the messages in their stamp designs about what it means to be Japanese is that the stamps are reiterating clichés made familiar by the media generally. Their very lack of notice could be treated as evidence of the Government's success in embedding these images in their unconscious. This is a factor which was discussed in Chapter 1 [page 15] and whose importance has been acknowledged by other researchers into national identity such as Michael Billig [1995].

### **The British Response**

Because of the rarity of Japanese mail for most British people I did not consider it useful to attempt to establish their perceptions of Japanese stamp images. Even among stamp collectors generally the awareness of Japanese stamp designs is low. I used my membership of the Oxford Philatelic Society, which has regular monthly meetings attended by some 30-40 members, to discuss this matter informally with individuals. Only a minority had collected any Japanese stamps and amongst those who deliberately acquired any the interest was in them as contributors to their theme collections i.e. not as Japanese stamps but as pictures of particular things such as fauna and flora [This is another demonstration of my finding that postage stamps can have serial meanings, determined by the circumstances in which they are seen and the purpose for which they are sought]. Consequently I restricted my survey researches to those who identified themselves as collectors of Japanese stamps.

#### *British Collectors of Japanese Stamps*

My contacts with the British collectors were made in the same manner in which I approached the Japanese collectors. First I wrote an article outlining my ideas about the social / political

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messages of the post-war Shōwa stamp issues in the journal of the British Society for Japanese Philately [BSJP]<sup>43</sup>, then I followed that up with a questionnaire to each member who is listed in the records as collecting generally as well as having a specialist interest, asking for their views on the same questions that I asked the Japanese collectors. Finally I interviewed a number of them.

As in the case of assessing the Japanese responses it is necessary to locate the British responses within their cultural context. In the case of my British contacts their perceptions of Japan and the Japanese people have been molded by interactions between the two cultures over the past one hundred and fifty years. The easiest way to convey the complicated tapestry that has resulted is to summarise briefly the highlights in the development of that interaction.

### *British Views of Japan*

The opening of Japan to the outside world resulted in a widespread interest developing in the upper and middle classes in Great Britain in the traditional arts of Japan. There were Japanese pavilions at the many major international exhibitions and world fairs organised in Europe and USA after 1862, which displayed the traditional Japanese arts and sometimes the craftsmen at their work<sup>44</sup>. Fashions developed for the collecting of pottery [particularly the colourful Satsuma and Imari ware]; lacquer wares; carving in wood and ivory [particularly netsuke]; woodblock prints, screen paintings etc. These had an enduring effect on Western artists<sup>45</sup>. Japan acquired a reputation for having great artistic sensibility and an exotic life style which was popularised in the light opera stories of *Madam Butterfly* and *The Mikado*. However the public's resultant picture of the Japanese was, as a result, an Orientalist stereotype which excluded very largely the modernisation brought about in that same period and proved remarkably enduring.

Japan's successes in wars with China and Russia and her participation with the Great Powers [ of Europe ] and the USA in the defeat of the Boxer Rebellion brought recognition of her military capacity which was symbolised by the Anglo-Japanese Alliance of 1902 and

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<sup>43</sup> The BSJP, formerly known as the Japan Stamp Group, publishes a journal, *Kiku Shimbun*, with colour illustrations, three times a year which circulates to just over 100 British collectors of Japanese stamps.

<sup>44</sup> See both Hendry[2000] pp 54-60 and Hotta-Lister[1999] Appendix A

<sup>45</sup> See for example Greenhalgh [1988] pp148-9 and Sato & Watanabe [1991]



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confirmed by Japan's participation in the Great War as one of the four principals on the Allied side. However, the popular Orientalist images of the Japanese remained, despite the Japan British Exhibition of 1910 in London which the Japanese intended should give a balanced, realistic picture of the country<sup>46</sup>. [There was not another such exhibition in the UK until The Japan Festival in 1991]. Japan's very grudging acceptance of the Washington and London naval treaties of 1922 and 1930; and her interventions in China and Mongolia, resulting in the setting up of a puppet regime in the latter and open war in China, gave her image in Britain an aggressive cast which was made worse by the reporting of atrocities committed by Japanese troops [e.g. at Nanjing in 1937]. These negative impressions were compounded by Japan's alliance with Germany and Italy in the Second World War and the reported behaviour of her troops towards prisoners of war [e.g. in the building of the Burma Railway]. By the end of the Second World War the Japanese had acquired an image of inexplicable, savage brutality, even among British people with no familial connections with events in the Far East who were informed by the British media. *The Bridge on the River Kwai*, a film about the building of the Burma Railroad by British and other prisoners of war and made from the prisoners' perspectives, has been shown annually on British television from the year it was made [1957] and has perpetuated that wartime image.<sup>47</sup>

Perhaps as a consequence post-war Japan was viewed with suspicion and her efforts at economic recovery belittled as those of a cheapjack copier of Western manufactures, dependent for any success on low wages and a compliant workforce. Even after her automobiles began to dominate the UK and other European markets and her consumer electronic companies delivered sophisticated products to their markets at prices and qualities their own manufacturers could not meet in the 1970s, there was a general view in the UK and Western Europe that in the words of an EC Commission document leaked in 1979 to the press 'the Japanese people are workaholics, living in rabbit hutches' [Wilkinson, 1981, p 224]. The implication of inhumanity in this image was a subtle variation on that forged in the earlier wartime and it was reinforced by the environmental lobby's campaign against Japanese fishing practices [e.g. the Greenpeace led campaign against whaling and tuna fishing in the deep oceans and the Blue Water led campaign against the annual dolphin cull around Japan's

<sup>46</sup> The press reports concentrated on the traditional arts and craftsmanship and wrote off their manufacturers as 'cheap imitators' [Mutsu, 2001]. Also Hotta-Lister, 1999 and Sato & Watanabe, 1991.

<sup>47</sup> Workshop at St Anthony's College Oxford, 'The Media and Contested Memories of the Asia-Pacific War' 11th-13th March 2004.

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southwest coast<sup>48</sup>].

The Great Japan Exhibition at the RCA in London in 1981/2 did not do much to alter these kinds of perception as it concentrated upon 'art of the Edo Period, 1600-1868' [subtitle to the official catalogue]. In doing so it harked back to the collecting interests of the late Victorian era and did nothing to reconcile these historic achievements with the Japan of the 1980s. In its defence one should note that it was but following the lead of the Japanese political establishment and that the Japanese postal authorities had also ignored modern Japanese cultural achievements, preferring to base their stamp designs on that same historical period and its artistic heirs. [see the Appendix e.g. National Treasures series 1976-78 and even the Modern Japanese Art series 1979-82, both fully illustrated in the *Sakura Catalog of Japanese Stamps, 2000*].

The two Japan festivals held in Great Britain in 1991 and in 2001 were largely dominated also by displays, explanations and practical demonstrations of Japanese achievements in their traditional arts [Hotta-Lister, 1999, ch 7]. This is a subjective, and largely personal judgement but it is based on my active participation in the latter festival's organisation. What was deliberately exemplified in Japan 2001 was what the British people who participated in its organisation wanted and was not therefore representative of how Japanese people would see themselves. Rather it demonstrated the positive, but historically skewed, stereotypical British view of Japan which I have described above.

The result is that ordinary British people, including collectors of Japanese stamps, have developed a picture of Japan which is a disjointed caricature. They recognise it as an ancient civilisation, manifesting itself in delicate artistic creations, but also as a nation which is cruel, selfish and materialistic in the extreme. The vast majority neither visit Japan nor meet Japanese people. and have no way of testing these impressions. One who had collected Japanese stamps for many years visited the country for the first time in 2001. Before doing so he had held many of the above described conventional views but on his visit he was bowled over by both the modernity in art and architecture and the gentle humanity, artistic

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<sup>48</sup> There are numerous sites on the World Wide Web detailing international reaction to Japan's whaling and annual dolphin slaughter. Examples are:  
[www.greenpeace.org/oceans/whaling/japanesewhaling.pdf](http://www.greenpeace.org/oceans/whaling/japanesewhaling.pdf) and [www.buzzle.com/editorials/11-21-2003-47836.asp](http://www.buzzle.com/editorials/11-21-2003-47836.asp)

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sensibility and hospitality of Japanese people. Both Japanese 'modernity' and 'humanity' came as a surprise to him<sup>49</sup>.

I suspect that the difficulty of reconciling artistic achievement, wartime atrocities and economic imperialism was the reason some of my British contacts failed to respond to my questions about Japanese identity and that others complained that Japanese stamps ignored the reality of modern Japan's dynamic economy.

### Responses to my Questionnaire

The rate of response to my questionnaire to British collectors was much higher than in the Japanese case [48% v. 10% out of totals of approximately 100 in each case] but only 23% made comments germane to my questions! Of those most [9%] made comments along the lines of the statement in the official catalogue of *Philanippon '01* [p4] that Japanese stamps 'give a concentrated image of the history, natural environment and arts of the country' and wrote about a nation of ancient culture and beautiful scenery with a strongly developed aesthetic sense. 8% commented on the beauty of their stamps and mentioned that they are an artistic people but only 2 respondents noted the prevalence of nature images and associated the Japanese people with a special feeling for nature. There was only 1 respondent who seemed to agree with my analysis whilst adding that 'they seem to show the country and people as they are to a great extent'. However there were 3 others who commented on the lack of reference to Japan's economy and technology and regarded the picture they gave of the country as showing only 'a quaint, picturesque country' and 'the old way of life'.

Perhaps not surprisingly those few who responded at any length seemed not to be analysing what the stamps had told them about Japan but explaining what they had concluded from personal experience and from reading. There were several indications that collectors felt that mine was not the way to look at stamps, which were labels made to sell, not to be analysed, and that they did not feel comfortable with my approach. Another type of negative reaction was to explain that they had no opinions on the questions I asked because they were no longer active general collectors but had specialised in earlier issues or had turned their attention to postal history. Generally respondents were much readier to give their opinions on how Japanese stamp designs had changed in terms of artistic merit and sophistication and to

<sup>49</sup> Conversations with 'AC' and his article in '*Kiku Shimbun*', No.125, Dec./Jan.2002, pages 104-106

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bemoan the increasing commercialisation of stamp issuing in the last decade.

#### Selected Interviews

The interviews helped to flesh out these responses. In particular an interview with 'KC' who is both a collector and a dealer in Japanese stamps was very useful. He is a man in his early sixties who had a 'high technology' business with interests in Japan which caused him to make annual visits, starting in the early 1970s. During these visits he often had to visit small towns upcountry and was frequently the only *gaijin*[non-Japanese] where he was staying. He obviously enjoyed these visits and made efforts to experience the culture and to understand the language. It was as a result of being taken to the annual national stamp exhibition [*Japex*] in Tokyo in 1974 and discovering the Japan Philatelic Society Foundation that he became interested in collecting Japanese stamps and he soon built up a representative collection of all periods. In 1998 he decided to retire from business and he then set up as a dealer in Japanese philatelic material, becoming the UK agent for the publications of JPSF. Since then he has visited Japan on average twice per year to attend major stamp exhibitions and to meet Japanese dealers. He is on the committee of BSJP and edits and writes most of the content of *Kiku Shimbun*, their members' journal.

KC's views on British collectors of Japanese stamps are trenchant. He regards the majority as 'anoraks' who have little or no interest in Japan and its people. This is an attitude he bases on his contacts with them, both as a dealer in Japanese stamps and also as the editor of *Kiku Shimbun* as well as being an active member of the BSJP. Apart from a handful, who are mostly on the Committee, he also finds them unsociable, with a very narrow interest in Japanese stamps which is defined by their collecting habits and that they mostly only want to complete their collections and to look for undiscovered rarities. Their interest in Japanese stamps is either 'philatelic' or mercenary!

His own interest in Japan has caused him to concentrate on Japanese postal history: first that of the foreign post offices established in the major ports in the early Meiji years and then on mail relating to the Russo-Japanese war and currently the Second World War. He is a successful exhibitor at major stamp exhibitions and has won many prestigious awards in these classes. However, he is very aware of the post World War II stamp issues and he supplies

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British collectors with a new issue service.

KC believes that the first definitive post-World War II issue [ see *Plate 2* ] was meant to foster a particular view of Japan and its people among foreigners. He argues that by concentrating on issues depicting Japanese scenery [the National Parks issues, particularly those containing figures in traditional dress], National Treasures [always from much earlier periods of their history] and Buddhist and Shinto images, they were creating a deliberately 'historical view' of the country, one that was centred on the arts. Also, by using so many images of plants and animals and recording so many international meetings in Japan of conferences on health and human welfare issues they were suggesting the Japanese people to be essentially 'caring' and in harmony with nature. And he contrasted this with the reality, that the country was a powerhouse of modern industrial and technological development; defended commercial whale hunting against the overwhelmingly negative views of most other countries and was seen internationally as a ruthless exporter of manufactured products. However, he believes this propaganda effort has waned since the later 1980s and that designs and issues have become increasingly focussed on increasing stamp sales. Hence the introduction of designs and issues which are directed at children as collectors and the special series featuring images attractive to theme collectors. His views thus coincide quite closely with my analysis of the representational social agency of these stamps intended by the Japanese governments, which I offered in chapter 3.

KC has no views on whether such stamp issues were also meant to have an impact on how the Japanese people viewed themselves although he supposes that they probably reflected in part how they liked to think about themselves, thereby echoing some of my Japanese respondents [*ibid*, pp 92 & 93 for example]. As he told me in the interview he had not consciously thought about Japanese stamps in this way until he read the article<sup>50</sup> which I persuaded him to publish in the *Kiku Shimbun* journal which he edits.

I showed KC my interpretation above of his views on Japanese stamps and their collectors and he expressed his agreement with them.

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<sup>50</sup> This is the article which I produced to provide background for the British collectors of Japanese stamps before I circulated my questionnaire to them.

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My interviews with other members of the Committee of the BSJP were supportive of his views on collectors in general. AC has given up collecting Japanese new issues made since the end of the Shôwa era because he finds there are too many and they are too obviously designed to appeal to stamp collectors. His interest now is in collecting the different types of cancellation used in Japanese post offices, particularly the ribbon variety which is associated with automated cancellation systems. As a result he corresponds with three or four other British collectors and also with two Japanese collectors whom he was able to meet on a visit to Tokyo. He finds the other members of the Committee of the BSJP a 'congenial bunch' and joins with them in having a drink in a pub and sometimes a meal after the meetings. Otherwise, despite also being a member and the librarian of the Oxford Philatelic Society, he finds stamp collecting does not create social contacts.

AC, who is a professional soldier, now collects only Japanese stamps and has had an interest in them and that country's culture since his daughter made friends with two Japanese girls at school, over twenty years ago. However, although he had met Japanese officers occasionally in the course of his work as an instructor at an Army college, he had never visited Japan until 2001. In that year he spent a week there, with KC, visiting a major stamp exhibition and sight-seeing around Tokyo. He found the scale of that metropolis and its juxtapositioning of modern design and technology with ancient temples and culture something that Japanese stamps had not prepared him for. He felt that they had introduced him to the traditional culture but, as KC had argued, had not shown him the modernity based on science and technology. After reflecting on his personal experience and my article in *Kiku Shimbun* he feels that Japanese stamps of the post-war Shôwa era give a distorted view of Japan as being almost a 'cultural museum of ancient arts', rather in the way that the British Tourist Board used to promote the UK's history. This was a safe way of imaging Japan to the rest of the world [a point made by several of my Japanese contacts e.g. pp 92,93] and maybe was intended to help to balance the memories in other countries of the wartime behaviour of their armed forces in China and South-east Asia.

I gave AC the opportunity to review my above interpretation of his views. He wrote as follows:

My interest in Japanese stamps began 48 years ago when a schoolboy of 15

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years. At this time I had already been collecting other countries' stamps for some 8 years. Among my strongest interests at school were physical geography and art. My decision to collect Japan was sparked by the acquisition one day of a few beautiful stamps depicting volcanoes and artistic subjects. Many years later, having collected both new and older issues from that date I was pleased to have my first contact with Japanese people when introduced to my daughter's Japanese school friends and later still their friends visiting the UK.

I finally abandoned the collecting of new issues in 2001. The main reason for this decision was not that the issues were very expensive in total [ they were], but that there were far too many to properly enjoy. Bearing in mind also the lack of English language information on the new issues, one just could not find the time to enjoy them, i.e. study their designs and learn from them and write them up in a meaningful collection. Since then the new issue numbers have increased another magnitude it seems.

My alternative, indeed main interest now, is partly philatelic in that I collect the hand-applied roller wheel postal cancellations as used on overseas mail from Japan- not the automated cancellation systems. On the foreign mail 'rollers' the Post Office name is in Roman alphabet letters [i.e. English language] and this has given me the challenge of the hunt plus a greater knowledge of Japanese locations and place names, complementing my interest in the physical geography of Japan and also its varied culture/cultural locations.

It is not correct that I find that philately brings no social contacts; it most certainly can do but I am fortunate in having many other social contacts and so have not sought to make new contacts for purely social i.e. non-philatelic purposes.

Apart from correcting my abbreviated history of his stamp collecting and spelling out his current interest in cancellations as being more restricted than I had suggested I do not find in his comments any disagreement with my interpretation of how he has related Japanese stamp images to Japan. There is I think confirmation of my suggestion that one of the reasons that stamp collectors do not notice the social / political messages of stamp designs and issues is

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their interest in other aspects of stamps, in this case their cancellation marks. He also indicates that his interest in the stamps before this specialised interest developed was both aesthetic and educational. It appears that he treated those stamps which displayed aspects of Japan's traditional culture as an invitation to find out more about that culture and as I wrote did not realise until he visited the country the gap between that image of Japan and today's reality.

Although AC writes as if he is rebutting my suggestion that he did not find that membership of stamp clubs extended his social life in general he in fact confirms this point!

I also interviewed a Dutchman, married to a Scotswoman and resident in England since he retired some eighteen years ago. He is a past President of the BSJP and has been collecting Japanese stamps for over fifty years. He is good friends with the other long serving members of the Committee of the BSJP and lives quite close to KC with whom he often travels to the BSJP meetings and attends stamp exhibitions and dealers' stamp fairs. However, he claims that he does not find other stamp collectors to be very sociable and he has had little success in corresponding with Japanese collectors, which he recognises may be due to his lack of Japanese language ability.

He has never thought of postage stamps as 'propaganda' [his interpretation of my way of looking at them]. His main interest in stamps is aesthetic and it was the quality of design and their use of colour that initially drew him into collecting Japanese stamps. At first he was a general collector, with a special interest in those issues depicting sports activities [see *Figures 25,26.*] which he found 'very realistic'. But since the later 1980s he has concentrated on postal history, particularly regarding the Japanese occupation of Manchuria. He has a very comprehensive general collection and is expert in detecting forgeries of the early issues [he is a key member of the BSJP 'experts advisory subcommittee'] but he is not interested in the new issues of the Heisei era. He finds them, in common with AC, to be too frequent, too obviously made to be collected and 'too much influenced in their design by the Western world'.

He has always regarded the *Shōwa* era issues as a good guide to Japanese culture but has not thought of them as offering a comprehensive picture of the country and its people. He



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recognises that as he has never visited Japan and has a limited acquaintance with Japanese people he is in no position to judge how accurate a reflection they may offer. But his main concern with Japanese stamps is with the aesthetic pleasure their images provide and the interest they offer him as a philatelist; not with any meanings they may convey to others. Thus Japanese stamps have little or no representational social agency for him but they exercise a different sort of social agency in helping him to define himself as a stamp collector.

I gave him an opportunity to review what I had written about our interview but he was reluctant to write anything. In a 'phone conversation he did volunteer that:

I do not have anything to add to what we discussed. I agree with what you write.

It was interesting to compare his reactions with those of MN, a man of similar age [ sixties ] who had lived and worked in Japan for nearly ten years [ 1959-68 ]. This man was a stamp collector before he went to Japan and whilst there decided to concentrate on collecting Japanese stamps because he found them to be 'so well produced'. Unlike the previous three interviewees he has remained a stamp collector rather than a philatelist and is motivated mainly by the desire to complete his collection and to keep it up to date. He is aware however of the investment value of what he collects. In Susan Pearce's categorisation of collectors [ Pearce, 1992, pp69-88 ] he is one seeking perfection<sup>51</sup>.

For him collecting stamps is a personal past-time which does not impact on his social life. As for his Dutch colleague on the Committee it is the aesthetics of the stamps which are their appeal but unlike him he has noticed certain peculiarities of the post World War II issues. The first is the prevalence of images of landscape and nature which he understood to reflect the Japanese love of nature, a characteristic he had noticed in his Japanese friends. The second was his feeling that, after the triumph of the Tokyo Olympics, there was an increase in stamps referring to Japan's past and in 1966 the reintroduction of 'Nippon' in English on all stamps, which he interpreted as reflecting a rising feeling of 'nationalism'; perhaps because he had been aware whilst in Japan of the public emergence of the *Nihonjinron* debate [ *ibid*, p85 ].

<sup>51</sup> Pearce lists collecting motivations as: leisure; aesthetics; competition; risk; fantasy; a sense of community; prestige; domination; sensual gratification; sexual foreplay; desire to reframe objects; the pleasing rhythm of sameness and difference; ambition to achieve perfection; extending the self; reaffirming the body; producing gender identity; achieving immortality [Pearce, 1992, pp69-88].

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He was sympathetic to the idea that Japanese stamp issuing policy included a desire to promote certain ideas about Japan but this is not something in which he is interested.

Another collector of Japanese stamps, who is a member of the BSJP but not on the Committee, with whom I discussed my ideas held views very similar to those of KC regarding the interpretation of the images on Japanese stamps. This man is a general stamp collector, rather than a philatelist, who belongs also to the Oxford Philatelic Society but seldom attends the meetings of either society. His membership is mainly so that he may receive and contribute to the circulating boxes of stamps offered for sale by the members at heavily discounted [cf. stamp catalogues such as Sakura, 2000] prices. For him stamp collecting is a leisure activity which began when he was a schoolboy in the 1950s. It is a personal thing from which he doesn't seek nor expect social benefits. Although he is a general collector by inclination the plethora of new issues means that as far as his general collection is concerned he only now attempts to 'fill in the gaps' and does not attempt to keep it up to date. He is mainly attracted to stamp issues by their aesthetic appeal ; he now collects 'what he likes the look of' and in that way his collecting becomes an illustration of his taste. Perhaps as Paul Martin has put it his collecting is 'a search for certainty and identity in an increasingly fluid, transient and ill-defined society'[1999, Preface]. Whilst he recognises the representational social agency of Japanese stamps he claims not to be interested in it and uses these stamps in a self referential manner to define himself as a collector.

His view of Japanese stamps of the post World War II Shōwa era is that they illustrated 'a quaint, picturesque country' and ignored the reality of its industrial development which has led to huge cities and world leadership in the technological development and production of electrical consumer goods. It was, he supposes, an attempt to paint a non-threatening picture of the country as one in which 'a nature-loving, artistic and cultured people, live in harmony with their natural environment'. However, he had gathered from conversations with Japanese language students whom he has accommodated during their courses at Oxford language schools, that that is a very selective picture. His view is that Japanese post World War II stamps present an image of the country which is designed for international consumption. The nature of that image , he thinks, was determined by the failure of Japan's attempt to create a Greater Co-Prosperity Sphere in East Asia by force of arms and her consequent need to re-

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establish herself as an acceptable member of the world community. He points out that the displays of aggressive / triumphal nationalism in the Japanese stamp designs and issues of 1937-41 were 'quite restrained' in comparison with those of Nazi Germany in this period but adds that whereas the post-war German Federal Republic had issued stamps acknowledging its guilt for war crimes the Japanese have never done so. In his eyes Japanese stamps are part of the Government's information giving machinery [ as he believes they are in many countries] and present an 'establishment view' of their country.

### Some General Considerations

Unlike the Japanese case all my British survey and follow-up interview contacts were male. This is because there are very few female members of the BSJP and none returned my questionnaire. This seems to be a fair reflection of the situation in British stamp collecting which is almost exclusively male in its organised state, although there is a large number of female collectors and they play significant roles in stamp dealing. Meetings of the BSJP seldom have women members attending and the Oxford Philatelic Society, which is a non specialist club, open to all collectors, rarely has more than three women at meetings where the attendance is usually about 30 in total.

I found only one thing in the way of common attitudes towards Japan and the Japanese people which unites British collectors of Japanese stamps and that was an admiration for the quality of their design and printing. Other attitudes varied with age, the sort of contact individuals had had with the country and people and the extent of their reading. There seems to be no deeper nor more complex 'community of perceptions.' However there was some common ground between the responses of British and Japanese collectors of Japanese stamps. There were a few of each who commented that Japanese stamps probably reflect a mainstream, established view of Japanese national identity [and by doing so reinforce it. My comment]. And some identified a love of nature as a key element in this view and speculated that this was a safe way of defining Japan, whilst some others thought the same of the illustration of traditional art works.

But what was most notable was the fact that for both British and Japanese collectors the customs of their hobby distracted their attention from these representational meanings and

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gave these stamps social agency in other directions: as the defining element in their collecting and hence in creating their individual collector identities; and as the common ground between them and hence as the bonding agent in their relations with other collectors. This demonstrates a serial change in the social agency of Japanese postage stamps such as is described in the conclusions to my chapter 1, on the theoretical bases of this study and is one of the important contributions of this research. It is further explored in the next chapter.

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### Chapter 5 The Social Significance of Japanese Stamp Collecting

I have been discussing the social agency which is intended to be given stamps by their designs and the occasions of their issue. The previous chapter showed that this representational social agency is seldom recognised by stamp collectors or ordinary stamp users and gave reasons for this, among which were the character of stamp collecting. However, it is now appropriate to recognise that there is another way in which stamps exercise social agency. This is as a result of their being 'collectibles', the objects of collectors' interest. The social agencies which they exercise in this role are often both more effective than and even obscure the representational social agency imparted to them by their designers.

I discussed in Chapter 1 some of the current theoretical analyses of collecting and made the point that they tend to ignore the social aspects of this activity. For example Paul Martin in his survey of popular collecting has only one page out of one hundred and fifty devoted to the subject [Martin, 1999, p 70]. There is no doubt that stamp collecting is essentially an individual activity. Although collectors often join together in clubs it is not pursued by them through these organised groups as, for example, may be investment in the stock market. Stamp collectors clubs exist to facilitate the activity of stamp collecting by their individual members and came about in order to both do this and to give the hobby social respectability and recognition. This last point is indicated for example by the prominence, on the web site of the Royal Philatelic Society, given to its acquisition of the right to use 'Royal' in its title<sup>52</sup>. But it is a point that has been given little attention in various published studies of collecting [Martin, 1999; Pearce, 1995 and 1998; Belk, 1995]. These same studies however recognise the importance of collecting to the self esteem and identity of the individual collectors and it is because of this aspect of collecting that it is important to many, but not all collectors,<sup>53</sup> that their hobby be socially legitimised by their being members of an appropriate club. For some, and in the case of Japanese stamp collecting it is impossible to assess how many, it may be this sense of their collecting being uniquely important to themselves as individuals that prevents them from sharing their experience of it with other collectors. To discover that there was another person with an identical collection which might be better than one's own could be morale shattering.

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<sup>52</sup> See <http://www.rpsl.org.uk>

<sup>53</sup> Susan Pearce points out [ 1995, p231 ] that the majority of collectors, probably the very substantive majority, do not identify themselves as club members.

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However all collecting has of necessity social dimensions. The mere accumulation of stamps which happen to come one's way is not collecting. Collecting involves the deliberate acquisition and organised saving of material objects selected by individuals from their man-made or natural environment<sup>54</sup>. It is active not passive and in its acquisition phase, in the case of Japanese stamp collecting in the UK, almost always involves interaction with other people. These interactions are essentially of two categories which sometimes overlap; the commercial and the collegiate [i.e. other collectors].

Commercial relations are usually between collectors and dealers, and sometimes with the staff of stamp auctioneers on a one to one basis. Both relationships may be either casual or regular and in the latter case a rapport is often established between the collector and the dealer / auctioneer such that they are on first name terms<sup>55</sup> Stamp dealers are also often stamp collectors. I have written about one case in the preceding chapter where I described the position of 'KC' who is both a collector who wins prizes at international exhibitions for his collections of Japanese postal history and the leading specialist dealer in Japanese philatelic material in the UK. In his collector rôle he is on the committee of the BSJP and cultivates a friendly relationship with all the members attending meetings. Of course many of them are his customers. It may be recalled however that he described to me many of his customers as 'anoraks' because he found them antisocial and lacking in wider interests.

However, not all dealers are collectors. Nishioka Tatsuji who was a leading expert on Japanese philately in Japan and an active dealer there for over 65 years wrote in his memoirs [Nishioka, 1993, p4] 'I have devoted myself to dealing with stamps and think of them as a business in which they are bought and sold. Other than a few early etched Japanese stamps that I keep around for reference I do not have anything that could be called a stamp collection'.

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<sup>54</sup> There is an extensive literature on how to define collecting with alternatives each emphasising some aspect of the process but all agree that collections are defined by acts of choice on the part of the collector and that these involve him/her in abstracting the chosen object from its natural environment and placing it in one designed by the collector. See for example Pearce [1995, pp20-27]; Belk [1995, p 67].

<sup>55</sup> Both are anxious to create strong relationships with individual collectors who are able and willing to spend money on acquisitions. They do this by giving them advice on the stamp market and by being pro-active in areas of interest to the collector. I have first hand experience of this and know that other collectors are in the same position. In the case of specialist dealers this can result in close friendships but is less often the case with the staff of auctioneers who are more interested in cultivating such relationships with 'the trade' [dealers] because most of their business is with them.

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At the ordinary meetings of the Oxford Philatelic Society [OPS] I have come across at least one collector / dealer. Whereas KC kept his dealer activity quite separate from the meetings of the BSJP I have noticed this one because he brings small quantities of stamps for sale to the ordinary meetings of the OPS in a pocket size stock book and offers them to the other individual members he thinks will be interested, during the refreshment break. His activity is unofficial but not frowned upon by the other members whom he approaches or the officers, to whom he appears to be well-known.

The wider social contacts between collectors *qua* collectors come as a result of their membership of stamp collectors' clubs. In the course of my research I have been able to observe two of these clubs from within.

### *British Society for Japanese Philately*

The BSJP is a club for all those stamp collectors who have an interest in collecting Japanese stamps. It began its existence in 1946 as the UK chapter of the International Society for Japanese Philately [ISJP] and began to operate as a semi-independent society [Japan Stamp Group] in 1970. It changed its name to the present one only in 2001 and remains affiliated to the ISJP. However, membership of the BSJP does not automatically confer membership of the ISJP for which there is an additional annual subscription, which was paid by 57 of the 117 members in 2002 and is an indication of the number who are serious collectors of Japanese stamps.

Members of the BSJP may not only collect Japanese stamps and are often members of other UK stamp collectors clubs. Hence any categories of membership are likely to overlap. The statistics for 2002 are:

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Membership	Total	Male	Female
	117	110	7
Japan Specialists	79	75	4
Generalists	38	35	3
Included above:			
Dealers	8	8	-
Overseas	24	24	-
Members of other clubs	57	53	4

The membership of the BSJP is widely scattered throughout England [there is only one in Scotland and one in Wales]. London has the heaviest concentration with 11 and there are a further 23 in the 'home counties'. Consequently the monthly meetings are held in a very accessible location in central London, at 6 pm on the first Monday in each month. However they can seldom attract even a dozen members and attendance usually numbers only 6-7 who are regulars [and mainly on the Committee]. Those who do attend come from as far afield as Tonbridge in Kent and Oxford so clearly the possible attendance is much higher, possibly in the region of 30. I joined the Society in 1999.

I have shown my description and analysis of the BSJP to a former long-serving Chairman ['the Dutchman'], the current Secretary [ AC ] and a committee member responsible for the Journal [ KC ] and I have interwoven their reactions into what follows.

Most meetings involve a discussion of past and future events of interest to BSJP members, including the Society's programme and any exhibitions and stamp fairs which anyone present feels may be of interest, particularly those at which a member might wish to exhibit. The meetings are an ambiguous mix of committee and open member meeting. Everyone present joins in all the discussions. Minutes are kept and votes are taken in which all present



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participate [without regard for whether they are on the committee or not]. The discussions are followed usually by a prearranged display, by a member, of Japanese stamps or postal history, or displays by several members based on a theme advertised in advance in the Society's journal. Meetings all have a set pattern: an introductory, informal half hour of general chat after which the Chairman calls the meeting to order and the various officers report anything of note. This may occupy about an hour. Then the display for the evening is set out for general viewing and discussion. After about half an hour the Chairman congratulates the member[s] responsible for the display and the meeting is closed. The meetings have to close by 9 pm as that ends the time for which the meeting room is available to the BSJP but they usually end about 8.30pm.

Following the meeting a 'hard core' of five long time members, all male and all but one of whom are in their sixties or older, retire to a nearby pub for another hour before going to homes which are far apart. This group comprises three of my interviewees [ AC, KC, the Dutchman ], a recently retired vicar who is the current Chairman, and the Treasurer. Only the Chairman lives in London. Each of these collectors has his own special collecting interest and they are all different, but they are all able to appreciate each other's expertise, which makes them unique and interesting in a context familiar to them all: Japanese stamps. Thus each is partially defined by his expertise which also is part of the social bond between them. I and any other ordinary member who happens to attend the meeting are always invited to join them in the pub afterwards and they show interest in what we are collecting. However that interest is only maintained if one shows that one has studied one's collecting subject matter and is not simply aiming to 'complete the set'<sup>56</sup>. Their interest is an interest rooted in 'philately' which involves the study of one's stamps both as objects and as elements in a postal system. At the pub the talk is dominated by such aspects of Japanese philately because these are all enthusiastic, experienced and expert collectors in various of its fields although more personal matters intrude from time to time, as they know each other well. As a result the pub gathering is rather like a club within a club and unless newcomers have real expertise in some aspect of Japanese philately they are likely to remain largely observers rather than participants.

Both the Dutchman and AC had some comments to make on my remarks about the reception

<sup>56</sup> One of the motivations for collecting noted by Susan Pearce [ Pearce, 1992, pp 69-88 ]

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given to new members in general. AC wrote:

I have for a long time been worried that the meetings do not appeal sufficiently to new members as usually there is a wide gap in the level of expertise between old and new not to mention the extent [ and value ] of their collections. I feel somehow that though the new members are always welcomed, the welcome is not quite right...

but 'the Dutchman' felt that:

New members are always made welcome. We bring material to the meetings that we think will interest them but too often they seem to be too shy to reciprocate. Maybe they are intimidated by our expertise.

It is significant that both notice the 'gap' between new members and the 'hard core' who turn up at most meetings and form the committee as being one of expertise in Japanese philately, which confirms my own observations. It also highlights the difference between philatelists and stamp collectors on which I have commented elsewhere<sup>57</sup>

Clearly these meetings are not the main link between the members. That is provided by the Society's journal, *Kiku Shimbun*, which is an impressive, full colour publication with a plastic binder cover. Each issue contains detailed notes on all the new issues of Japanese postage stamps made since the previous publication with colour illustrations; details of forthcoming meetings of the BSJP and reports on the meetings held since the previous issue, together with any other news about the Society; as well as articles of both general and specialist interest to Japanese philatelists. It also contains advertisements by the Editor as a dealer in Japanese philatelic material of all kinds; by another such dealer located in Japan and by a travel agency who specialise in organising visits to Japan. It is edited, designed and much of it composed by KC, the collector / dealer on the Committee, and serves as a convenient tool for him to advertise his dealer services. That said it is a very professional publication which wins prizes at international stamp exhibitions [e.g. at *Philanippon '01*]. It is published three times each year and the cost of production and distribution is the major expenditure by the BSJP each year and hence determines the subscription level. Included with the first issue each year is an insert which is a list of the BSJP members, detailing their collecting interests and giving contact details where these are not withheld at the member's request. This states that 'the aim of this document is to allow members to locate other members with similar interests and meet

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<sup>57</sup> See particularly pages 42-4.

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or correspond accordingly’.

There is no record of the contacts made by members with each other as a result of these publications but some contact does result, either with the secretary of the BSJP or with the editor of *Kiku Shimbun*, after each issue, mainly with the latter. Of the three other services provided for members of the BSJP which are in principle valuable to members two are little used: a library of reference books which may be borrowed by post; and a box of books of surplus philatelic material made available by members for sale, which is poorly supported and therefore seldom circulates. The third is an expert committee which authenticates stamps for members for a small fee but is too newly established to be assessed as yet. The fact that most members renew their membership without attending the meetings suggests that it is the Journal which they find worth their subscription and provides them with a sense of community<sup>58</sup> although it could be argued that mere membership of such a Society is important to them as a social validation of their Japanese stamp collecting hobby which, in an English social context, may otherwise seem rather eccentric / exotic.<sup>59</sup>

Both AC and ‘the Dutchman’ have commented on my above observations. AC has written:

There is little evidence to say that it [ the list of members ] is used to initiate correspondence and none that it is used to facilitate local/regional meetings between those who have asked for inclusion of their [ collecting ] details. In 10 years the Secretary has received no requests to forward mail to those who do not publish their full address.

and ‘the Dutchman’ advised me that:

I do not think that KC makes use of the Journal for boosting his dealer business. He loses money in producing it so well.

This last point is quickly dealt with. It is factually correct that it costs KC more to produce the Journal than he charges the Society but he uses the distribution list as one way in which to identify those collectors who are likely to be interested in his Japanese philatelic material and

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<sup>58</sup> Paul Martin argues that this is the case in most collectors’ clubs [ Martin, 1999, p 74 ].

<sup>59</sup> Susan Pearce discusses the ambivalence with which collecting is often regarded by society and the role that collectors’ clubs play in establishing particular forms of collecting as a social norm [Pearce, 1995: chapter 12, particularly pp231-2]. See also Martin, 1999, p74.

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he always 'buys' a full page advertisement in it, as a dealer. KC, the member in question, accepted my interpretation of the situation. AC's point about the lack of use apparently of the members' list is interesting in that it reinforces the perception of stamp collectors as being essentially happy to pursue their hobby in isolation, as an act of personal fulfilment.

It would appear that, with such a widely scattered membership, this Society would find a web site on the internet a useful tool for keeping in touch with members and they with it, and perhaps each other. However there is not one as yet although the idea has been approvingly discussed in its meetings. It seems that the failure to implement it is due to there being no one ready and able to create it. The elderly nature of the active membership could have something to do with this as a comparison with the case of the Oxford Philatelic Society shows.

### *The Oxford Philatelic Society*

The Oxford Philatelic Society [OPS] is one of the oldest local stamp clubs, founded in 1890 and based in Oxford city. Whereas the BSJP is a club for those in the UK and even abroad with a locality defined [Japan] stamp collecting interest the OPS is a club for all kinds of stamp collectors but is locally based, drawing most of its membership from within a radius of some 25 miles. Three collectors are members of both Societies. The OPS, like the BSJP, has regular monthly evening meetings, an occasional Newsletter rather than a Journal, and arranges the circulation of boxes of booklets of members' surplus philatelic material for sale. However the two Societies make substantially different uses of these activities.

Meetings are the main social contact for OPS members<sup>60</sup> and usually have an attendance of some 30 members and visitors out of a total of about 70 members. These meetings are held regularly at monthly intervals. Until 2002 they were always held in the evening, at 7 pm for 7.30pm and lasted until 9 pm, but an experiment has just started of holding three extra meetings in the morning, from 10 am to noon, in December, January and February which it is hoped will attract older, retired members who don't care to venture out on those dark, midwinter evenings. These regular meetings are members' meetings and no formal Committee business is transacted. The first half hour is to allow informal mingling by the members, after they have signed in, and to give them a chance to return and borrow books/ catalogues from

<sup>60</sup> This is contrary to the findings of Paul Martin who concluded from a postal survey of 128 collectors clubs of various sorts that 'the material link that gives members a continual sense of community is the club magazine or newsletter' [ Martin, 1999, p74 ]

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the Society's small reference library. The availability of the latest Stanley Gibbons catalogues is greatly appreciated as the cost of a whole world set is now in the order of £100. This introductory period is followed by a presentation, either by a member of some aspect of his collection, or by representatives of another stamp collecting club. The visiting of other stamp clubs is a recognised part of the activity of such local societies and is participated in by members not involved in any presentation. The OPS' signing in book has a separate column for visitors which always contains at least one name. A break of about fifteen minutes is scheduled for 'tea and biscuits', which are served by a volunteer and paid for out of the Society's funds and time is always left at the end for questions and to allow individuals to inspect the exhibits; and for the President to make a formal speech of thanks to the presenter[s] and to remind members of future activity. The meetings are held in a church hall and at their end volunteers tidy it up and remove all trace of their meeting, under the watchful eye of the caretaker. The reference library is packed into locked boxes and placed in a store room. Generally members seem to attend individually although there are usually one or two married couples.

During the informal opening period the Secretary, who is a married woman in her forties, seeks out any strangers and makes them welcome. The members mostly stand around in groups of two or three and one, who seems to be an dealer / collector has a little pocket stock-book of stamps which he offers for sale to individuals he thinks will be interested. Conversations are very varied in content with some being purely social whilst others discuss such stamp-related matters as stamp auctions, dealers' fairs and exhibitions which they have visited and maybe have exhibited at, or those which may be visited in the future. Seldom does one overhear any direct comment on collector's own collecting and when one does it is usually about the problem of locating reasonably priced new material. Not surprisingly the same groupings tend to repeat at each meeting but the impression received by this observer is that these friendships are defined by common stamp collecting interests and do not often extend beyond to family social arenas as one often hears remarks to the effect that the last/next encounter concerns a stamp collecting event. This point was also confirmed to me by a member who has been so for the past ten years and is a past President of the Society. The 2002 Newsletter contains an article which describes one such friendship which was based on the negative common ground that neither collected any British Commonwealth stamps. This

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resulted in the two collectors going to stamp fairs and exhibitions together and looking out for material of interest to the other but not on further socialising. As already indicated some are involved in dealings with the Librarian. At the 'break' the conversation tends naturally to centre on the topic being presented and larger groupings form. And at the end there is only time for brief suggestions of when members expect to see each other again. There is no *après ski* socialising.

Whereas the meetings are reasonably well attended and seemingly popular the Newsletter is much less impressive. It appears at midyear, after the AGM, when subscriptions are due to be renewed, and reports on the election of officers and the programme for the coming year. The 2002 edition also carried just one article, about an older collector's experiences as a collector, written in humorous vein and a request for members to contribute more. A competition was also announced for the design of a 'logo' for the Society. The meagreness of this publication may be explained partly by the fact that the Society has just acquired its own web-site on the internet. This is very detailed and well designed and includes the full text of the Newsletter as well as allowing for members to advertise thereon their buy and sell requirements<sup>61</sup>. It will also show photos of events. It is the work of the Secretary's son who is a doctor and not a member of the Society. It claims that it will be updated regularly [this remains to be seen and is the weakness of most such sites] and for those with access to the web this could prove to be superior to a printed newsletter which the Society can only afford to circulate once or twice per year.

On the other hand the circulation of boxes of stamps offered for sale by members is a very active matter. There is a 'packet secretary' whose responsibility it is to see that the circulation list is varied in its order so that each member gets to receive a box at an early stage of its circulation and that the material offered is of reasonable potential interest. He also monitors the rate of circulation as each recipient has to advise him in writing to whom the box has been passed on and when and to send him payment for any stamps taken. The Society keeps a very small percentage of the proceeds of sales. Apart from providing members with an opportunity to buy for their collections at prices lower than those of dealers the circulation of the box ensures that members get to meet each other in the process of passing on the box, which has to be done in person as it is not insured. Not a few collectors join the Society

<sup>61</sup> The internet address is [www.oxfordps.freeuk.com](http://www.oxfordps.freeuk.com)

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purely for the opportunity to participate in this activity. The annual subscription, at only £4 in the case of the OPS, is low enough to make this attractive and some collectors join more than one Society in their region for this same purpose. My interviewee DM is one such member.

Despite offering this descriptive analysis of the OPS to the Vice-Chairman, the Secretary and one ordinary member for comment I received only a couple of very minor factual corrections which have been incorporated into my text. Otherwise they each thought it was accurate.

### *Some General Points about Stamp Societies*

#### *Meetings*

The nature of club meetings has been summed up in this quotation from Susan Pearce:

Collecting club members have an ambivalent relationship with each other. They, too, wish to protect the joint identity of themselves and their material, but they also wish to impress others with what they have achieved and to put themselves in the way of fresh acquisitions. The result, as experienced by a club visitor, is a curious mixture of mistrust and complicity, characterised by cryptic conversations and elliptical pronouncements, all embraced within a good deal of jockeying for position. What sustains the group is partly the good opportunities which it offers for acquisition, and partly, of course, the feeling of solidarity. [Pearce, 1995, p231].

But it is not wholly accurate in this observer's experience because it implicitly assumes that all the collectors in each club are collecting much the same things and hence in potential competition with each other. I find that this is seldom the case with stamp clubs, particularly in a stamp club such as OPS that caters for all stamp collectors, but it is also true of the BSJP. Collectors use stamp clubs as a way of learning more about their hobby from other enthusiasts and finding others with similar collecting interests. Because even when they find others with similar collecting interests they can usually take reassurance in their own

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singularity by establishing that they are using different collecting criteria<sup>62</sup>. In fact overlap without identity of collecting interests is a positive matter for members as it means that they can contribute to each other's understanding without fear of competition. It is this fact that makes attendance at club meetings useful from the acquisitions point of view; one collector's unwanted material is another's chosen field. Consequently the result experienced by Pearce's club visitor is not typical of the stamp club meetings which I have attended. Pearce also fails to notice the very real curiosity that collectors have regarding other collectors' specialities, different from their own. The annual programmes of the OPS meetings show this interest clearly and one of the members remarked to me that they go to the meetings partly because they can meet there 'people with so much more fascinating knowledge than I have of stamps that I usually learn something interesting'<sup>63</sup>. My research shows that members of stamp clubs attend their meetings out of interest in what others have to say about their hobby, rather than in the hope of making acquisitions, but they do expect to gain knowledge which they may be able to apply in their own chosen field of collecting. This may be knowledge about how to present their stamps in exhibition; about sources of information on particular types of stamp and about forthcoming dealer stamp fairs, auctions and exhibitions; as well as verdicts on them. Some also attend because doing so represents for them a complete break from family and work social environments. Being an active member of the stamp club is their personal activity and in the words of one, who is a married woman with a full-time job, provides 'private space' and helps to define her as an individual person.

### *Newsletters*

The importance of Newsletters to stamp collectors varies with the nature of the club. Paul Martin's statement that 'the material link that gives club members a continual sense of "community" is the club magazine or newsletter' [ Martin, 1999, p74 ] is not true of the OPS

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<sup>62</sup> These criteria vary very widely because postage stamps as manufactured objects, often of intricate design and multi coloured, may exhibit slight differences as a result of changes in the printers and of repair / redrawing as the original plates get worn. There may also be changes made to the way in which sheets of stamps are perforated with lines of tiny holes between the rows of stamps to make them easy to separate; and they may be overprinted, either mechanically or by hand, from time to time to indicate changes in value or in the identification of the issuing authority. The paper they are printed on can vary as can the watermark which is often incorporated for security reasons. More fundamentally stamps may be collected either as issued i.e. 'unused' or as used; and in this latter case the postmark will vary from place to place and from time to time. Any or none of these variations may be of interest to the individual collector. Collector AC in the BSJP is primarily interested in one type of Japanese postmark which has been in use for a considerable time, during which it has evolved in appearance.

<sup>63</sup> Conversation with Mrs 'L' regarding her reasons for going to meetings of the OPS.



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where the attendance at meetings and being on the circulation list for the stamp box are more frequent and meaningful markers for most of their members and where it is expected that access to the internet will make their web-site their key communication tool [conversation with the Secretary] in the future. This is a club with a membership drawn from a relatively small area. By contrast the BSJP, which is a nation-wide club with significant overseas membership, relies heavily on its Journal for contact with its members and for most of them it is the sole material benefit of their membership. In this latter case the Journal is also a much more informative publication, which performs some of the roles of the OPS meetings and stamp box circulation as its editor 'doubles up' as a major specialist dealer in all Japanese philatelic materials.

### *Acquisition of Stamps*

"The collector club", I propose, represents an alternative environment or society in which various behavioural patterns, such as acquisitiveness, are permitted and supported' [Martin, 1999, p 67]. For some such clubs are the main source, through their circulation of boxes of stamps for sale, of additions to their collections. But for most this is too passive and uncontrolled a way to improve their collection. In the case of the members of societies such as the BSJP which cater for relatively narrowly defined needs and do not have an active circulation of members' material for sale there is no alternative to their seeking dealers in what they collect. This is why KC, the collector of Japanese stamps who is also a dealer in them, is happy to edit and produce the BSJP journal for no more than its material cost. It always contains a large advertisement for his business and this offers the members ready access to new material which otherwise would be hard to locate in the UK.

On the other hand, as Pearce has written, "hunting for material to add to the collection" is a characteristic expression which collectors use' [Pearce, 1995, p183 and Belk, 1995, p 92] and accounts for the existence of regular stamp dealers fairs<sup>64</sup> as well as dealers' shops<sup>65</sup> and the existence of monthly stamp magazines containing pages of dealer advertising as well as advertisements for stamp auctions [e.g. *Stamp and Coin Collecting*, a monthly magazine]. The existence of stamp dealers and their fairs is a response to the collector's desire to hunt for new

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<sup>64</sup> Oxford has a monthly one held on the first Sunday of every month in a W.I. hall in Botley which attracts 6-10 dealers and a steady stream of collectors of all ages and both sexes.

<sup>65</sup> There are two in Oxford.

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collecting material which cannot be satisfied within their clubs ; also to the fact that an undetermined but possibly large proportion of stamp collectors do not belong to any stamp club [Pearce 1995, p 231]. The collector's desire for new material has in it an element of 'passion' which distinguishes it from the ordinary activity of shopping [Belk, 1995, pp 70-72] and its force is explained by Pearce as the collector's attempt to repeat the essentially transient emotional satisfaction of the 'kiss of possession' when successful [Pearce, 1995, p173] and when it is not the satisfaction of having pursued the chase, to continue the hunting metaphor<sup>66</sup> . As a collector of Japanese philatelic material related to their research base in the Antarctic<sup>67</sup> I can confirm that the hunting metaphor is appropriate and that the element of 'passion' in the chase is such that when a desirable item is located the intention to remain financially prudent is frequently forgotten, particularly at auctions [see also Belk, 1995, pp 68-69]. This may well explain the recent success of the offering by some dealers of their stamp auction catalogues on the internet and of the E-Bay auction site which has a huge amount of stamp material offered by dealers and collectors from all around the world.

This last point is illustrative of the long established fact that serious stamp collectors have never restricted their search for new items to their own country but have been prepared to buy world-wide. This remained an activity restricted to the more wealthy collectors and to those who travelled until the arrival of the internet. Now it is open to anyone with access to the world-wide web. As a result dealers are coming into contact with collectors whom they will never see and international relationships are developing on this basis<sup>68</sup> . One of the reasons that this is happening is that there are internationally recognised ways of describing stamps and their condition and their images can be shown. One of the results is that it is further internationalising the *mores* of stamp collecting. The world's major catalogues, such as those produced by Stanley Gibbons in the UK, Scott's produced in the USA and Michelin produced in France all agree that the key characteristics are: date and occasion of issue; type of printing process used; type of paper and any watermark in it; the type of perforation system used to enable individual stamps to be separated from the sheets in which they are printed and its absence in some cases; and the colours and designs of the individual stamps,

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<sup>66</sup> For most collectors "the collection must be acquired in a serial manner. This seriality provides a means for defining or classifying the collection and the collector's life history" [Stewart, 1984, p 166] and enables the hunt to be repeated.

<sup>67</sup> See web site [www.nipr.ac.jp](http://www.nipr.ac.jp) for a description of Japan's research interest and history .

<sup>68</sup> Personal experience and that of other members of the BSJP reported to me.

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most of which will be illustrated, usually in black and white and not life size. Values will be shown for used and unused stamps and also for the more rare condition of being in 'unmounted' i.e. mint condition. Specialised catalogues for a single country or small group of countries also agree that collectors should look for variations in any of these matters which may have occurred on purpose [change of colour(s), change of printing company, change of perforation etc.] or accidentally due to repair to worn printing plates or to mishandling of the printing process which may result in portions of the design or colouring being missing etc. [See also my remarks on pages 93-4].

### *Social Bonding in Clubs*

On the face of things the basis of social bonding in these two types of stamp collectors clubs might be expected to be different in that the members of BSJP have the country Japan as the source of all their material whereas the members of OPS collect stamps from a very wide range of countries. As we have seen however there is little evidence of any common attitudes towards or even interests in Japan among the BSJP members and in fact the common grounds that they find with each other are much the same as those found by the members of OPS. Essentially these are the techniques which they use to define and to assemble their collections. These techniques vary considerably from the simple acquisitive hoarding of every stamp that comes their way, described as fetishistic by Pearce [1992, p 62-88] to an interest in the most minute and unobvious variations between examples of a single stamp issue, which can lead to attempts to reconstruct complete sheets of the stamps, as originally printed. This can only be done when there are characteristics which define the position of each stamp on the printing plate. In the case of Japan the first [Dragon] issue [See *Figure 5*] was hand-engraved on a copper plate and this makes it possible, by identifying the minor variations that occurred in drawing their quite intricate designs repeatedly, to locate each stamp's position on the original plates. In the case of the UK 'Penny Red' issue, which followed the first 'Penny Black' issue, each stamp's position on the printing plate was identified in the design of the stamp by the inclusion of letters in its corners and also elsewhere an inconspicuous plate number. See *Figure 56*.

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As each plate, in both the Japanese and UK cases was used to print many sheets of stamps this means that in theory there should be examples of stamps from each position on these plates remaining in existence. However, the search for them is tedious and difficult and there is strong competition for identified examples. Such collecting is obviously systematic and also a 'search for completeness' [Pearce, 1992, pp 62-88]<sup>69</sup>. In between these extremes are the interests of most collectors. These are often aesthetic, perhaps involving one particularly admired method of printing<sup>70</sup> or the subject matter of the designs<sup>71</sup> but more often particular types of stamp, such as the definitive issues of a particular country or group of countries [e.g. the Commonwealth]; all the issues of one or more countries, perhaps up to a certain date or after such a date; those for 'air mail' issued by various countries including Japan etc. [e.g. there are groups who specialise in the Japanese wartime occupation issues]. There is also the huge realm of 'postal history' in which the collector's interest is not in the stamp *per se* but in how it has been used i.e. in the postmarks applied to it and the wrapping / envelope [= cover] to which it is attached [e.g. the dealer in Japanese stamps referred to in ch.5 is currently offering envelopes used in the Russo-Japanese War by Japanese soldiers].

It is interesting that these various interests are mirrored by the Japanese stamp collectors with whom I have been in contact. If one compares the contents of a specialised catalogue of

<sup>69</sup> *Philanippon '01* contained several examples of this type of collecting, including prize-winning displays of the popularly called 'Dragon Issue' of Japan and the 'Cape of Good Hope Triangulars' stamp issue.

<sup>70</sup> There are several, ranging from the hand engraving of copper plates through the photographic reproduction of such engravings [ which eliminates the possibility of variations in the stamps on a single plate ] to Typography, or surface-printing ; Lithography and Photogravure. [Phillips, 1960, ch.6 ]

<sup>71</sup> This is part of what is called 'theme collecting'. The theme is defined by each collector to suit themselves. It may be 'butterflies' or it could be 'transport' or any other type of image. Themes may also be ideas with a wide variety of illustrations but then their appeal is perhaps emotional rather than aesthetic [see *ibid* pp 43-4].

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Japanese stamps published in Japan<sup>72</sup> with a similar specialised catalogue of UK stamps published in the UK [e.g. Stanley Gibbons' Great Britain Specialised Catalogues] one will find the analyses of the stamps to be along exactly the same lines. There is no evidence of the differences between the two cultures. There are some differences in the extent to which they are inclusive [e.g. the Japanese catalogue includes more information on postal stationery and gives more attention to the variety of postmarks on the earliest issues] but these seem due to the nature of the publishers rather than to their being of different cultures. Of course both postage stamps and the hobby of stamp collecting were introduced to Japan as part of the Meiji modernisation and Westernisation in the later nineteenth century but it seems that the nature of this collecting activity has not been 'Japanised' as have so many other Western imports. Perhaps Japan's early and active membership of the Universal Postal Union [*ibid* p32] and the fact that some of the earliest specialist collections of Japanese stamps were made by American and British collectors [Nishioka,1993: ch.4 ] helped to set the parameters of stamp collecting in Japan. Certainly one of the most respected and authoritative books on the early Japanese stamps was written by an American, Tracy Woodward as long ago as 1928 [Nishioka,1993, p 19]. However this is circumstantial evidence and needs to be backed up by further research into the actual behaviour of Japanese stamp collectors.

### *Gender Roles*

It is rare to find husbands and wives both pursuing this hobby. Most often it belongs to the husband and his wife adopts in public an amused acceptance of what she regards as a harmless eccentricity. Meetings of both the BSJP and the OPS are attended mainly by married men on their own. Delivery of the OPS stamps for sale box to the homes of OPS members brings me into contact with a number of wives who invariably have taken this attitude. But this is odd because stamp collecting originated as a female hobby . However it was appropriated by men who made fun of its decorative, aesthetic appeal to women [Gelber, 1992, p 746] and instead gave priority to collecting in sets and by seeking to fill gaps in those gave both used and unused stamps a commodity value separate from their intrinsic postal, and in the case of unused stamps, monetary values. This market value was enhanced when collectors competed for particularly scarce issues and the buying and selling of these stamps took on the

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<sup>72</sup> The two main ones are *Japan Stamp Specialised Catalogue* published annually in Tokyo by Japan Philatelic Publications for the Japan Philatelic Society Foundation and the annual catalogue, also published in Tokyo, by the Japan Stamp Dealers Association [JSDA].

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characteristics of that male domain [until very recently], the stock market. For some men their stamp albums then became 'a catalogue and repository of wealth' [Gelber, 1992, p 748] although I have found very few who would admit to this.

Despite this women continued to collect stamps but in the male manner. Some few even excelled and were elected by the Philatelic Congress of Great Britain to its International Roll of Distinguished Philatelists. Of the 314 philatelists who received this honour, between its inception in 1921 and 2001, 4 were women. There was just one case of a husband and wife each becoming a member in their own right. This preponderance of males in the hierarchy of stamp collecting is reflected also in the membership of the committees of the BSJP and OPS. In the case of BSJP there is only one woman on the committee of seven, who is responsible for 'public relations'. In the case of the OPS there are two in a total of eleven, one being the Secretary and the other, Assistant Treasurer. It was even more evident in the list of National Commissioners responsible for liaising with the Japanese organisers of *Philanippon '01*: there were no women among the total of 66.

However, the explosion of stamp issuing that has occurred world-wide since the early 1980s has led to a change in the styles of both stamp issues and of collecting. Stamps became much more openly consumer goods, designed to have 'eye appeal' across national boundaries and at the same time it has become increasingly costly to attempt to collect everything, even for collectors prepared to limit their interest to one or a few countries<sup>73</sup>. One result has been a renewed interest in the aesthetic appeal of stamps and the development of theme collecting. As explained in chapter 1 in this style of collecting stamps are treated as 'little pictures', not as masterpieces but rather as snapshots taken by a tourist. It takes two forms. In the simplest it involves collecting all the stamps a collector can find which illustrate some object of interest to them e.g. a particular animal or form of transport, such as the camel or the car. In the other it involves illustrating some aspect of human existence, e.g. the development of health care, by a choice of stamps. It is still in the mainstream tradition of collecting sets but in these cases the composition of the sets is determined by the collector rather than the stamp issuing authority and they are open-ended. This is important to collectors because it empowers them:

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<sup>73</sup> The Secretary of the OPS has advised me in conversation that she has had to give up automatically buying all the issues of even such a small stamp issuing authority as the Channel Island of Guernsey for this reason and it was an almost universal complaint by collectors and dealers [!] attending *Philanippon '01* that too many new issues are being made.

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they decide when a set is complete. As Susan Pearce has written [Pearce, 1995, p 185]: 'the twin ideas of selection by imaginative metaphor and dominance through active choice,...come together concretely in the way we encourage our collections to be open and closed..[but] there is an inherent tension in this...because once [completion] has happened the collector's occupation has gone'. However as Danet and Katriel [1989] have shown collectors have a variety of strategies, including seeking perfection of the items included in the collection, to postpone this end. This artistic and creative variety of stamp collecting has attracted female collectors to a hobby which they originally created by their aesthetic appreciation of stamps. In my interviews with stamp collectors, both in Japan and in the UK, it was the women who responded that they collected stamps because of their appearance<sup>74</sup>. One female collector whom I know once explained to me that she collects Irish stamps 'because there is something about their design which I like'.

Male collectors rationalise their form of collecting on different bases. I received explanations such as: 'I have been there' [= capturing memories?]; 'I inherited / was given a collection as a boy which gave me a good start' [in seeking completion?]; 'I see it as an investment'; 'I am interested in the country' [= part of a learning process?]. Gelber argues [1992] that men import into their stamp collecting the attitudes of their workplace and make it an extension of their working lives. They adopt a scientific and structured approach [see also Pearce, 1995] which is also competitive and reflects the work ethic of the market place. This could be an explanation of why so many active stamp collectors are retired males and also of why a successful businessman such as KC converted his stamp collecting hobby into a stamp dealing business upon his retirement. But perhaps it does not distinguish men from women, even those women who are married and without a job, because the latter also adopt the attitudes of their workplace [the home] in their collecting, by emphasising the aesthetic appeal of stamps.

Perhaps the main gender difference is in the manner in which collecting is undertaken. Men treat it as being about gaining expertise, recognition from peers [via showing portions of their collections in society meetings and at stamp exhibitions] and by establishing dominance of

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<sup>74</sup> During one afternoon in October 2001 which I spent at a dealer's stand at Philatex, the 'London International Stamp and Cover Show', which was attended on that occasion by 120 dealers, this dealer received 14 serious visitors of whom only two were female, but both purchased for their thematic collections whereas the other male buyers were interested in completing their collections by buying individual stamps that filled gaps in their collections of issued sets.

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some niche sector of collecting e.g. KC has a gold medal winning collection of postal history pertaining to the Russo-Japanese war.

Female stamp collectors have been contrasted with the above male image because it is said they 'err towards aesthetics and emotional connection and decoration' rather than analysis, expertise enhancement and competition, and use their collecting to create relationships with others [Martin, 1999, p70]. The few I met in connection with Japanese stamp collecting fit this description in part. Whilst they are more ready than male collectors to express their interest in collecting in emotional terms they adopt many of the same collecting techniques as their male peers. But there is often a main and crucial difference, which is their being less interested in specialised collecting [which is dependent on their detecting faults, errors and variations in design i.e. what has become recognised as traditional philately]; and in showing portions of their collections competitively [e.g. on club exhibition evenings<sup>75</sup> and at larger stamp exhibitions open to the public]. They treat their stamp collections rather in the same manner as their collections of photographs, as possessions to be enjoyed by themselves and to be displayed to visitors whom they feel will appreciate them. This may well be a reason why there are so few women who are active members of stamp clubs<sup>76</sup>. For them their stamp collecting is a personal activity which they share only in personal contact with other individuals, as a part of their social bonding.

It may be that the social approval currently being accorded to collecting for profit, as a result of buying cheaply items whose values are not appreciated by their sellers,<sup>77</sup> will change the attitudes of women towards stamp collecting and bring them closer to their male counterparts, by making the gaining of expertise in the valuation of stamps attractive to them. Because those valuations are determined by the *mores* of the existing stamp market, which has been created through the male style of collecting, this would bring female collectors into the mainstream of philately and in time result in the organised structures of this hobby ceasing to be so male dominated. However at this time I have not established evidence that this is happening.

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In the course of the last three years there has been only one instance of a female member of the BJPS exhibiting part of her collection on a club evening.

<sup>76</sup> Pearce has discovered [1998, p 32] that there are probably as many female as male stamp collectors but that they are much less likely to join stamp clubs.

<sup>77</sup> Note the popularity of television programmes such as 'Flog it!'.



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## Chapter 6 Future Discontinuities

Change does not always come incrementally. There can be sudden breaks with the past. The pre-paid, adhesive postage stamp, as the key component of a national postal service, was such a change in the mid-nineteenth century. Now, in the twenty-first century, it seems it may be made obsolete by a series of technological and administrative breaks with the past.

Until the introduction of the 'penny post' national postal service by Sir Rowland Hill in the UK in May 1840 the postal service in all countries had been left to locally centred private enterprises, sometimes with quite extensive, even international connections, but in no case offering a countrywide service; and the mail receiver paid according to the mileage the mail had travelled. The creation of the 'Penny Black' and 'Two Penny Blue' adhesive postage stamps and the establishment of a uniform postal charge for the whole of the UK began a century during which postal services became government monopolies, run on a centralised basis and from 1874 co-ordinated internationally by one of the first successful international co-operation organisations, the Universal Postal Union. The generation following World War II has seen the ultimate flowering of this system, with the break-up of empires and the emergence of over 160 independent countries, each with such a postal service, including its own postage stamps. But it has also seen changes, administrative and technological, which seem likely to lead to the demise of the adhesive postage stamp as a product of national policy in the twenty-first century.

### *Stamp Agencies*

The success of the system has led to one such change. Every new nation has wanted its own postage stamps<sup>78</sup>. When countries had existed previously as colonies their rulers had usually arranged stamp issues for them, often using a common design template for the definitive stamp issue in all their colonies. See *Figures 57, 58, 59* below which show examples from the British [Straits Settlements], French [Côte D'Ivoire] and Portuguese [Cabo Verde] empires respectively:

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<sup>78</sup> See Vida Zei [1997] for a discussion of their importance to the new nations of Eastern Europe after the collapse of the Russian communist hegemony in the 1990s.

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And when commemorative and special issues were made, as for example to celebrate Victory after the Second World War and to honour the Silver Jubilee of King George V in 1935, the British colonies all used the same designs for their stamp issues, with only the name of the colony being different. See *Figures 60, 61*.

60



61



Even when this was not the case the designs were decided centrally and in many instances bore resemblance to each other. The design and printing were contracted out to specialist firms. In the case of the UK with its huge pre-World War II empire the printing of all the stamps was shared mainly between three specialist printing firms, who also printed the banknotes required; and they played a part in the design role in the case of the standardised definitive issues. This pooling of requirements by the UK government enabled stamp issues for even the smallest colonies to be made economically. With their independence the smaller ex-colonies were no longer willing nor able to use these economies of scale and yet they wanted their postage stamps to reflect well upon their countries. The solution was offered by private enterprise stamp agencies who offered them a package service embracing the design and printing of their postage stamps in return for the exclusive right to market them world-

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wide to stamp collectors. For the Agencies postage stamps were 'consumer goods' to be marketed in competition with all the other material goods that compete for the consumer's discretionary spending. As a result there was a proliferation of new issues, each designed to attract collectors rather than to reflect the countries on whose behalf they were issued. Of course there had to be some connection between their designs and the countries of origin but this was often tenuous and the designs were heavily influenced by the demonstrated interests of theme collectors e.g. sets with the themes of butterflies, birds, flowers, cars, ships etc. Many of these issues had no foundation in the needs of the postal services of their countries of origin, nor were they even used much therein. The demand by collectors was generally for mint condition stamps anyway but that of the minority interested in used copies with a postmark was also catered for by the postal agencies, who obtained from some of the issuing countries' governments a license to 'pre-cancel'<sup>79</sup> a proportion of their supply in bulk, without their ever having to go through the postal system. See *Figure 62*.

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More knowledgeable collectors scorn such stamps but they are easily sold to the young and novice collectors. In this way much stamp issuing has become divorced from the postal services of the countries of origin and such postage stamps have entered a different category of material consumption: they have become items of entertainment, also in some instances of education.

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<sup>79</sup> Pre-cancellation is a practice which began in the USA in the late nineteenth century in order to provide business users with stamps for their bulk mailing, which could then be handled in bulk by the post offices without them having to postmark each item separately. When the practice was copied by certain Central and South American governments they extended its use to supply stamp dealers with stocks of 'used' stamps for sale to collectors and this practice was followed by some European governments but not by either UK or Japan.

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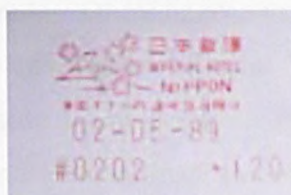
#### *Post-paid Franks*

Another change which resulted from the continuing quest for lower costs by both users and postal administrations directly challenged the continued existence of the adhesive postage stamp. This was the introduction of meter-printed postage paid franks. These may be applied at either the post office [see *Figure 63*], or by the sender of the mail using a machine supplied by the post office which meters his use. See *Figure 64*

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Such mechanisation is not suited to the ordinary individual<sup>80</sup> and business users of the postal service but offers considerable savings to bulk mail users and to the post office. However, in order for the franking machines not to be expensive to build and for them to be reliable in use, they do not produce elaborate images, although they can be designed to print messages beside the data registering the amount of postage paid, the date and the location/identification of the sender. As things stand franking and bulk mailing seem to cancel each other out and to leave the traditional demands for adhesive postage stamps largely unaffected.

<sup>80</sup> A trial was held at a limited number of Spanish post offices in 2001 of a system of franking the mail offered over the counter by individuals instead of selling them stamps. The result is unknown as of writing but the experiment has not been extended.

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A recent development related to this system however may be more threatening to the continued use of the adhesive postage stamp. Led by the USA several national postal services have begun to explore the use of electronic stamps distributed via the internet. America began internet postage tests in 1998, by authorising several companies to sell a postage service on line. For a monthly fee plus the cost of the stamps customers purchase a small software download which enables them, using a simple laser or inkjet printer, to print directly onto their mail, or onto labels if they so choose, a frank which contains their license number, the date and the amount of postage they have prepaid. This service, unlike the older franking system described above is aimed at the small and home-business user. Australia is using a similar system to expand and improve its service to rural and remote areas; and in Europe the Netherlands, and Germany are starting such experiments. Thus far the UK and Japan have been giving priority to administrative reform of their postal services, but are expected to follow suit soon with such experiments [ article in the Times newspaper dated 11th December, 2000 ] although the UK has been reported to be more interested in the Spanish experiment of providing this service via franking machines at post office counters [report in a stamp dealer's circular dated June 2002].

#### *Privatisation of Postal Services*

In both the UK and Japan priority is being given to 'privatisation' of the postal services, by the removal of their monopolies via a staged series of reforms. In the UK the postal service has already been converted into a quasi-commercial enterprise [= Consignia] and the same is due to happen to the Postal Services Agency in Japan in 2004. The next stage, already being debated in the UK, is for their letter and small parcels delivery services to be opened to competition from private enterprises. The logic of such a move is for the private carriers involved to issue their own stamps and for the ex-national postal service to lose its privilege of issuing national [Government backed] postage stamps. In this way postage stamps would lose their status as 'de facto' currency and emblems of the realm.

#### *Electronic Communication Alternatives*

This is but one of the negative consequences of the development of the IT revolution in communications for adhesive postage stamps. The creation of the world wide web [internet]



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and of e-mail has made it convenient and cheap to substitute electronic communication for paper-based systems such as letter and memo' writing, not only for business but also for personal purposes. Moreover the development of miniature, easily portable telephones, with both text messaging and now e-mail facility, is making electronic communication the preferred and more fashionable mode. In fact greetings cards are already cheaper to create and send via the internet than to purchase in the traditional manner and may even be animated and accompanied by sound effects! However the fact that the internet is not easily and cheaply accessible to everyone is still limiting its effects on the traditional modes of communication and is likely to continue to do so for a considerable time.

### **Implications for Postage Stamps and their Collectors**

One result of the above developments has been a plateauing in the volume of letter post<sup>81</sup> and an increase in the importance of bulk mailing by businesses<sup>82</sup> most of which does not use adhesive postage stamps. Another has been a dramatic decline in the profitability of postal services. In both the UK and Japan they had moved from healthy annual profits in the early 1990s to substantial deficits at the end of that decade, just when they were due to become publicly accountable profit centres. Hence the incentive for them to reduce costs [e.g. substituting franking for postage stamps] and to increase revenues [e.g. by treating the postage stamp as a product to be sold in its own right rather than as a receipt for a service].

A development in Austria, which is the most popular of the European countries among stamp collectors, makes this last point. From year 2002 Austrian commemorative and special issues of postage stamps ceased to be available for purchase from their post offices! They are still being created and valid for use on mail but they are only sold to selected 'philatelic outlets' [stamp dealers] and on prepaid annual subscription service to the public. Obviously they are no longer regarded as primarily required for postal purposes and are being directed at stamp collectors: official recognition of the transition of this type of postage stamp into the category of 'consumer collectible'. This will clearly affect future decisions on the design and issue of these stamps. It has already been suggested that in such a market-oriented situation

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<sup>81</sup> In Japan the volume has risen only very slightly from 25.5 million items in 1996 to 25.7 million in 1999 [ the latest year for which statistics are available, p.53 in the Japan Postal Service Report 2000/2001 ]

<sup>82</sup> In Japan personal mail items accounted for only some 10% of the letter post total whereas business mailing to individuals represented over 26% of the total by 1997, the latest data available, p56 of the Japan Postal Service Report 2000/2001.

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the issuing Government is likely to choose designs for its stamps with its main concern being for their appeal to collectors in a very competitive market rather than for the transmission of social / political messages. The opening of postal services to private competition suggests [as indicated above] also that there will emerge privately created alternatives to the definitive postage stamp, which are unlikely to be adhesive stamps and more likely to be types of 'frank'; and that any advertising messages associated with them will be commercial in nature.

Until now postage stamps have been associated primarily with Governments and have had social status as a result of this and of their being legal tender for small amounts. Indeed the collecting of them has been described as 'the king of hobbies and the hobby of kings' [Phillips, 1936, quoted in Gelber, 1992, p743]. Obviously this will change if stamps can no longer be treated as interchangeable with the coins of the realm and become indistinguishable from commercial coupons which have only limited monetary validity. Whilst this will alter their social status it seems unlikely to remove them from the class of 'consumer collectibles' which contains many other items without social status nor any intrinsic monetary value, such as used phone cards. Their appeal to many collectors will continue to lie in the aesthetics of their designs and images; the opportunity they give to accumulate sets; and the prospect they offer of making money e.g. through the collector's discovery of a rare specimen or accumulation of those that become more highly valued over time as a consequence of their appeal to collectors and limited availability. The change brought about by these developments and by the development of material culture is that the financial 'investment potential' of stamp collecting may become a more important motivation than it has been hitherto. This would represent a qualitative change in the attitude of collectors to stamps. Errors in, and varieties of, stamps which were in limited supply have always commanded higher prices in the stamp collectors' world. But in the past this has reflected a competitive urge to possess such rarities to complete one's collection and only by the way to make it more valuable. With the 'commoditisation' of not only stamps but also much of the rest of the material items making up the consumers' world a popular culture of collecting for profit has evolved, which in the UK is epitomised by television programmes such as 'Flog it!'. This is described as a programme about 'collectibles' but is in practice about disposing of possessions. In this activity the motivation is not to collect for the satisfaction of possession but to do so in order to sell at a profit; it is financial.

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Electronic communication via the world-wide web has had some positive effects on the hobby of stamp collecting. It offers an alternative and much broader opportunity to exchange information than the traditional stamp clubs and stamp magazines and it has stimulated the international exchange of stamps on a much wider scale than heretofore. It is one of the forces acting to further internationalise this hobby and the culture of stamp collecting.



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## Conclusions

This study was established to define the social significance of postage stamps by examining the issue and collection of post World War II Japanese postage stamps. By comparing the collecting of these stamps in both Japan and the UK it was intended to establish a model of their social significance which can be used to look into postage stamps' social roles in other societies.

In the Introduction I posed a number of questions in order to define the study. The first was: 'Has the Japanese Government used their control of postage stamp design and issue to communicate to their citizens a particular sense of their national identity and image of their country, both in their eyes and in those of the rest of the world?' The study found it useful to extend its time frame backwards to the mid-1930s, when the military dominated nationalist governments came to power, because it was under them that the practice seems to have begun in Japan. It was found to have been continued in a very different vein by the post-war conservative governments until the later years of the Shōwa era. Whereas the pre-war stamps promoted the *Tennōsei* philosophy and Japan as the imperial power in East Asia, post-war stamps promoted Japan as a beautiful, peaceful country, whose people were nature-loving and compassionate, supportive of UNESCO; and whose main attention was directed towards improving the communications infrastructure of their country. After the successful regeneration of their industrial economy and hosting of the 1964 Olympic Games this message was given a historical dimension with the promotion of those aspects of Japan's culture which were seen as uniquely Japanese, a reflection of the *Nihonjinron* thinking which was then becoming fashionable in conservative circles, and culminated in 1987-89 in both a very large and an elaborate series of stamps devoted to illustrating Bashō's Diary [see *Figure 33* and comment pp62-5] and a third and last series illustrating Japan's 'national treasures'. At the same time other stamps showed a 'Westernising' and modernising Japan and other historical references were restricted to the Meiji era reformers and origins of these reforms. It was an attempt to identify Japan with 'the West'.

The second question was, 'Were there other political/social/economic agendas governing Japan's postage stamp design and issue in this period?' The study found that there were at

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least three. Firstly, Japan's wish to be accepted fully into the international fraternity of nations oriented to 'the West' and especially its desire to play a, if not the, leading role in UNESCO was promoted by a long-lasting policy of issuing special stamps which supported that organisation's various campaigns and the anniversaries of Japan's joining. By contrast the UK issued none! [refer to the listing in the Appendix of special issues in 1957,1963,1966, 1970,1978,1979,1983,1985 categorised as 8 and 9]. Secondly, Japan's ambition to establish a political leadership role in East Asia was shown by stamp issues to commemorate her friendly relations with many of these countries and support for regional activities such as the Asian Games and scouting jamborees [refer to the listing in the Appendix of special issues in 1958,1962,1963,1966,1976,1982,1985 categorised as 3 and 8]. The third theme identified was the attempt to portray the country as 'caring'. In the seventies and eighties a large number of stamps were issued to commemorate international meetings held in Japan which were concerned with human welfare [the UK issued no such commemorative stamps] and there was the annual issue in support of re-afforestation [refer to the listing in the Appendix of special issues categorised as 8d and 7].

It was also shown that certain themes were avoided when they might have been expected to be celebrated. There were no stamp issues to celebrate Japan's technical and business leadership rôle in various industries, and very few that could be related to the post-war development of democracy; the treatment of the Emperor in stamp design and issue continued to be traditionally deferential and conservative. If there is an overall theme to postage stamp designs and issues in the post-war Shôwa era it appears to have been an attempt to show Japan as a civilised, ancient culture intent on economic modernisation and 'Westernisation' as in the Meiji era, to which stamp issues were frequently related. Images of pre-Meiji history and also that of the 1930s and 1940s were not used; and there was little recognition of Japanese achievements in modern movements in the arts, design and fashion.

The third question was, 'How were these stamp issues perceived and understood by the Japanese people and by other people?'. The answers arrived at in this study should be treated as tentative but they are extremely interesting in view of the findings described above as answers to the previous two questions. The simple answer is 'seldom as the Japanese government intended'. Neither the Japanese public nor the collectors of these stamp issues, in

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Japan and in the UK, took much conscious notice of their government messages. In view of the effort, both financial and artistic, that is invested by governments, not just in Japan but world-wide according to many political scientists<sup>83</sup>, in creating postage stamps that are meant to give social and political messages to their users this is surprising. However it has been shown in chapter 4 that it is explicable.

The study found that in the case of the Japanese public their opportunity to become aware of the political/social messages in stamp designs is limited because of their manner of using stamps. They do not buy sets of stamps to use, they buy only those denominations required for their expected mailing and these are limited to a few values only by the standard postal charging system. It is only infrequently that they need a variety of values / high values to make up the postage on larger parcels. In Japan there are special stamp issues each year for people to use on foreign correspondence and for New Year greetings which have maintained a set design format throughout the post-war period and which can play only a small part in the Government's attempts to send a variety of messages via special issues and stamp designs. Moreover most people were found to regard the business of buying stamps to put on their mail as a necessary chore to be done as quickly and automatically as possible. They were found to hardly look at the stamps. The minority who admitted to doing so however did so with their own agendas. They were found to look at stamps as part of the wrapping of their mail and to be seeking to use those stamps that they thought best reflected their own or their addressee's personalities or the occasion for the mailing. In all these cases they were evaluating the designs available, in relation to themselves or some other person, as decoration and not seeing them as symbols in a broader context. It may also be of course that modern advertising has so devalued the referential power of certain symbols by overuse [Mt. Fuji?, Cherry blossom?] that they have become self-referential and unrelated to the real world in the eyes of the public, as Baudrillard has suggested [Poster, 1988, p 5].

People also receive stamps on the mail sent to them which increases marginally the opportunity they have to see a variety of stamp designs. In this situation there were found to be two factors militating against notice being taken of the stamps. The first is a result of the wrapping with the stamps on it hiding that in which they are interested, the message and / or contents. The receivers' minds are engaged with speculation about the nature of the contents,

<sup>83</sup> See the references quoted in the Introduction .

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and not inclined to analyse their wrapping, other than in the case of packets / parcels to note its overall aesthetic impact on them. Secondly there is the fact that on mail received the stamps are always cancelled by a postmark which, apart from partially obscuring the stamp design, may also itself consist in part of a competing design meant to attract the eye and whose message may not have any relation to that of the stamp[s].

It was anticipated that the other class of stamp user, the stamp collector, might be more likely to notice the design of the stamps and to become aware of their messages. Again however my research showed this to be the exception rather than the rule. Just as with ordinary users of postage stamps their collectors were found to have their own agendas which interfere with their appreciation of the Government messages of their design and issue. There are two groups of stamp collectors; the 'philatelists' who might be described as the professionals because they study their stamps in depth and the 'amateurs' who remain just stamp collectors because what they do is to accumulate stamps, either in the hope of completing sets or to assemble displays of design themes chosen by them.

The philatelists, with their deep interest in studying their stamps individually, are interested in identifying variations in them due to changes and errors in their production and use processes rather than analysing what the stamp may represent. They may also be concerned with their images but only in the matter of their accuracy, as any specialised stamp catalogue will demonstrate. It could be said that 'they do not see the wood for the trees'. My research has shown that it is not the overall design of the stamp which draws their attention but individual details of it; the manner in which they have been printed; the type of paper used etc. And when they collect used specimens it is again seldom the stamp which is the focus of their attention but rather the nature of the postmarks applied to it. My research has also shown that because of this desire to study their stamps in depth such collectors often restrict their collecting not just to a single country but only to certain issues it has made. In the case of Japan, with nearly 3000 different stamp designs issued, not counting varieties of the same stamp, this is almost inevitable. And the same is true for most other countries of any size. Hence philatelists are precluded by their collecting practices from appreciating the Government's messages.

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Among the other groups of stamp collectors my researches have shown that those who collect stamps to illustrate some theme in which they are interested are also unlikely to perceive the messages of Government because they are not collecting on a national basis. My researches showed that only the collectors who accumulate their stamps by country and arrange them in sets according to their issue are likely to perceive the Government messages. These are the classic, general collectors, the hoarders. But mostly they are very young and just beginning as stamp collectors. In a very short time they discover that there are just too many stamps to be acquired and restrict their deliberate collecting to one or a few countries. Even then, as my research has shown, the constant flow of new issues in a country such as Japan makes it expensive to keep up to date and often leads such collectors to give up or to specialise. My research indicates that even in this group only a small minority actually notice the Government messages in these issues and that they are mainly the British collectors of Japanese stamps. The reason again seems to be that the collectors are more interested in what they are doing than in what their stamps may be trying to tell them. They are looking to the stamps to fill gaps in their sets. Their interest is in finding the missing stamps and for the vast majority this is made difficult by the cost and time involved, so that they are never finished. And what is their attitude to completed series? It is akin to that of the Big Game hunter of Victorian times to his hunting trophies, a desire to display them in an aesthetically pleasing manner, rather than to examine them for meaning. Thus my research indicates that the processes and customs of stamp collecting tend to distract stamp collectors of all persuasions from noticing the Government messages in their stamps.

I also considered the possibility that the collectors of Japanese stamps are being influenced unconsciously in their views of Japan and its people by their collecting. I found no satisfactory way of investigating this question which is at the heart of debates over the effectiveness of most advertising. As I have discussed in Chapter 4 it is quite likely that Japanese stamp collectors may have found these stamps reinforcing subliminally images of their Japanese identity which their governments were promoting in a wide range of other ways, but this is not so likely to be the case for British collectors.

The fourth question I raised in my Introduction was whether the collectors of the stamps of a country develop any 'community of perceptions' of that country. As far as Japanese

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collectors of Japanese stamps are concerned I was unable to identify any such common ground. It may well be argued that to have done so would be very problematic as they are receiving through various media so many messages which relate to these matters that to be able to distinguish the effects of those obtained from postage stamps would be highly unlikely. In any case the messages concerning Japanese identity conveyed by postage stamps may be hidden from their Japanese collectors because they are mirror images of the too familiar. In the case of the British collectors of Japanese stamps however there was some evidence for saying that their collecting had helped to produce some identity of views among a group of them. This was their appreciation of Japan as a land of ancient culture and beautiful scenery and of the Japanese people as having a strongly developed aesthetic sense which is reflected in the quality of their postage stamp design and printing. However this common attitude was found to coexist along with very mixed views of Japan as a nation which appear to have resulted from World War II memories and reports thereof, media news stories, personal experiences and individual reading.

As for the question posed in the Introduction regarding the impact of local culture on collecting practices and behaviour what was most noticeable throughout my periods of participant observation and in the answers to my questionnaires was the similarity of the behaviour of Japanese and British collectors of Japanese stamps, whether they were philatelists or ordinary stamp collectors. Whilst my awareness of the behaviour patterns of the British collectors is fairly well established it has to be admitted that my conclusions in respect of the Japanese are based on very much less direct evidence of their actual behaviour and should be seen as hypotheses largely based on circumstantial evidence.

The definition of 'philatelist' appears to be common to both cultures: someone who studies stamps and as a result becomes expert in detecting variations in their design, production and use and bases his collecting on these variations. The extent of interest in each aspect was found to vary with the individual collector but not as between those who are British and those who are Japanese. One way of checking this is to compare the specialised catalogues produced by Stanley Gibbons for collectors of Great Britain stamps with the *Japanese Stamp Specialised Catalog* [JSCA] produced by the Japan Philatelic Society Foundation for collectors of Japanese stamps. The basic systems of classification will be found to be

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identical, as also are the concerns for variations in the basic stamps listed. As was explained in chapter 5 this is not really surprising because collecting stamps in a serious manner is an international activity and the rules for public exhibitions of stamps are set by an international body [the F.I.P.]. Serious collectors [ philatelists ] have never confined their search for new material to their own countries and their example is being followed on an increasing scale by ordinary stamp collectors, partly as a result of stamp dealers opening web sites on the internet.

As for the balance of stamp collectors it was found that in both societies they fall either into the class of those who collect generally and try to arrange their stamps in sets which they then aim to complete or into that which collects stamps to illustrate some theme chosen by the collector and that many collectors pursue both paths. Again it was found that there are no significant differences between British and Japanese collectors in the manner in which they acquire and maintain these collections. It may be that the subjects collected by theme collectors show some national bias. At the Japan World Stamp Exhibition 2001 the New Zealand Representative made an impassioned plea for a category of 'social collecting' to be given separate status as a class at international exhibitions but it was clear from audience reactions that this was not a peculiarly New Zealand concept and I have found no identifiable difference between the subject matters chosen by Japanese and British collectors. Because the Japanese stamp catalogues provide separate values for mint and unmounted mint stamps and the Stanley Gibbons catalogues do not it might be thought that the Japanese collectors are more discriminating than their British counterparts but I found that in practice the British collectors value unmounted mint stamps more highly than mounted mint stamps just as do the Japanese. In short it seems that local cultural traditions do not play any significant role in stamp collecting, as practised in Japan and the UK<sup>44</sup>.

The other question which I examined was the role that stamp collecting plays in collectors' relations with each other. Contrary to Susan Pearce [1995, p23] I found that members treat their club meetings as information gathering opportunities and are happy to discuss their collections, albeit often with a show of modesty. This fits with the finding of commentators on collecting such as Pearce [1998], Beck [1995], Martin [1999], that collectors use their collecting as a metaphor for and an extension of their own identities. My observations

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<sup>44</sup> See Pearce [ 1995, p 30 ] for a contrary view

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confirmed that collectors seek to extend their knowledge via their collecting and even more generally use it to express and experiment with their own aesthetic sensibilities. Their collecting is a personal matter, as one put it to me, 'my own personal space', in which they like the idea that they are in control. Probably also this explains why the majority of stamp collectors are not members of stamp clubs. I also found that, with few exceptions, those who are do not regard their membership of stamp societies as part of their other social lives where they use that membership to legitimate their hobby. The exceptions were the committee members of the BSJP, which is a specialist stamp club. It is significant that each has his own speciality within the field of Japanese stamp collecting and therefore they are not in competition with each other. A common enthusiasm for an exotic and not widely popular field of collecting in which they are each experts does draw them into a social relationship which is more than instrumental for their collecting. But even then I found that their conversations tend to be confined to Japanese stamp collecting matters and it appears that they do not mix in each other's other social circles. To an extent this is perhaps due to the varied nature of their socio-economic status and to the fact that they mostly live some distance from each other. But the fact that they clearly enjoy each other's company suggests that they like to keep this association apart from the rest of their lives. This seems clear also from the behaviour of members of the Oxford Philatelic Society. They mostly live within easy reach of each other and yet they are even less inclined to socialise outside their meetings. I conclude that stamp collecting promotes social bonding in only a very controlled and restricted manner and that stamp collectors regard it as an escape from 'normal life' rather than an extension of it.

Within stamp clubs the other aspect of collectors' social relations which is striking is the need felt by a minority to gain approval and admiration from their peers for their collections. This is exemplified in the club exhibitions of members' collections which are organised regularly and which are supplemented by visits to other stamp clubs with exhibitions and by public competitive exhibitions which culminate in an annual World Exhibition. This is perhaps a further example of the need for social legitimacy, but in this case largely within the stamp collecting world. My research did not enable me to determine the motivations for participating in stamp exhibitions. Informal contacts with a number of exhibitors however indicates that they are very varied in their life paths and personalities and that success in exhibiting does not seem to be easily correlated with other aspects of their lives. Nor did I investigate in any



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depth the response of non-exhibiting stamp collectors to those who do. From observation I noted no evidence of any envy or jealousy but rather interest in and often admiration for the displays and curiosity as to how they had been assembled.

There are many other 'loose ends'. The significance of Governments' use of stamp designs and issues to transmit political and social messages to their users may prove to have been underestimated if their subliminal effects can be investigated effectively; the position of the majority of stamp collectors i.e. those who are not members of stamp clubs, needs to be investigated as it is likely that there is a gender bias in research limited to stamp club members; the effects of the internet in providing greater opportunity for both collectors and dealers to communicate internationally needs further evaluation, particularly if it is found that new forms of stamp clubs arise out of this form of communication e.g. from 'chat rooms'. As of now I have not identified any. But perhaps most significant of all for the future social significance of postage stamps is the fashion for 'privatisation' that is sweeping the world and resulting in postal services being transferred from Governments to private enterprises. As yet this revolution is in its early stages with the Government departments responsible for postal matters being reorganised as autonomous state bodies [e.g. Consignia in the UK and as from 1st April 2003 the Postal Services Corporation in Japan] and the opening of parts of their monopoly of services to private competition, but it foreshadows a change in status of the postage stamp from 'government document with legal tender status' to 'commercial receipt and product'. A full circle in historical terms.

Finally, a few words on social agency. This research began by looking at the social agency given to postage stamps by their issuing governments as representations of their ideas on national identity. However it demonstrated that the practices of collecting stamps as a hobby obscure this social agency by investing collected stamps with other types of social agency to do with personal identity and collecting; and it showed that governments, by promoting the sales of stamps to collectors as revenue raisers rather than as receipts for a service, have been led to tailor their designs to this market instead of having them simply reflect their own ideologies. This research has not attempted to create new theories of social agency but rather to use those that exist in a new area and to show that the social agency objects acquire through use may override those intended by their creators.

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Universal Postal Union [UPU] [www.upu.int/](http://www.upu.int/)

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## APPENDIX

### An Analysed Listing of Japan's Special & Commemorative Stamp Issues 1946-89

All Japan's post- World War II stamp issues to 1990, excluding only the definitives, have been listed by name below in date of issue order and analysed as follows:

- By category of issue, the categories having been chosen by me to reflect as economically as possible the many different matters regarding which issues have been. The categories have been identified in the lists by an arabic numeral and subsets have been identified by the addition of a lower case letter immediately after the name of each issue, as follows:
  1. Cultural events and anniversaries, divided between a.high and b. popular
  2. History before the Meiji era;
  3. Sport and Recreations, divided between those that were a. domestic and b.international;
  4. Modernisation anniversaries, divided between those that related to a. the Meiji era and b. subsequent periods;
  5. The Economy divided between those that related to its a.infra-structure [including communications] and b. trade, industry, agriculture and fishing;
  6. The Natural Environment divided between those related to a. conservation and b. all others;
  7. Scientific research
  8. International Relations divided between a. Political [ incl. UN ]; b. Economic; c.Scientific; and d. Welfare, Education etc.
  9. Domestic Social Events divided between a. Political and b. Welfare, Education etc.
  
- By type of issue i.e. as individual stamps and / or as Mini-Sheets, se-tenant pairs, or in blocks of four. When stamps were sold in a multiple format only this is indicated by an \* in this column. When no entry is made the issue was sold as individual stamps.
  
- By subject matter of the individual stamp designs, categorised by me as follows
  1. Person or persons
  2. Japanese art works [ incl. sculpture, painting, drawing, designated buildings, craft



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and other articles; theatrical and Sumo performances ]

3. Buildings, other than those designated National Treasures;
4. All other constructions, divided between a. Handicrafts and b. Manufactures [which include roads, bridges, railways, all kinds of vehicle, and technical things / structures ];
5. Flora and Fauna;
6. Landscapes and skylscapes;
7. Symbols divided between a. traditional Japanese, b. those from nature and c. all others plus graphics.

• By Design Style divided between

1. Painting and drawing divided between a. Traditional Japanese [ incl. symbolism ];  
b. Other art styles including Graphics;
2. Representational e.g. photographic likenesses

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Year	Name of Issue	Category	No. of Designs	Mini-sheets etc.	Subject category	Design Style
1946:	75th Anny. of Govt. Postal Service	4a	4	-	2x4, 1x7a 1x1	3 x 1a 1 x 2
1947:	Inauguration of new Constitution	9a	2	yes	1x1 1x7a	1 x 1b 1 x 1a
	Re-Opening Foreign Trade	5b	2		2x7b	1b
	Know Your Stamps Exhibition-Tokyo	3a	1	yes*	6	2
	“ “ -Kyoto	3a	1	yes*	6	2
	Relief for ex-Convicts Day	9b	1		7a+b	1b
	Japan Railways 75th anny.	4a	1	yes	4b	2
	2nd National Athletics Meeting	3a	4	yes	1	2
	Philatelic Week	3a	1	yes	2	1a
	Community Chest	9b	1		7b	1b
	Know Your Stamps Exhibition-Sapporo	3a	1	yes*	1	2
1948:	“ “ - Osaka	3a	1	yes*	5	2
	“ “ - Nagoya	3a	1	yes*	5	2
	Encouragement of Afforestation	6a	1		5	1b
	Know Your Stamps Exhibition- Mishima	3a	1	yes*	5	2
	Death of Hokusai Centenary	1a	1	yes	2	2
	Communications Exhibition - Tokyo	3a	1	yes	6	2
	“ “ - Fukushima	3a	1	yes	6	2
	Newspaper & Postage Stamp Exhibition- Aomori	3a	1	yes	6	2
	Reorganisation of Education System	9b	1		1	2
	Japanese Horse Racing 25th Anny.	3a	1	yes	5	2
	3rd National Athletics Meeting - Summer	3a	1	yes	1	2
	Government Alcohol Monopoly 10th Anny.	9b	1		4b	2
	3rd National Athletics Meeting - Autumn	3a	4	yes	1	2
	Philatelic Exhibitions- Kunamoto, Nagano, Skikoku, Kanazawa/Takaoka	3a	2each	yes*	7c	1b
	Red Cross & Community Chest	9b	2	yes	1x1, 1x7c	1b
	Philatelic Week	3a	1		2	1a
1949:	New Year Greeting	1b	1	yes	1	2

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Year	Name of Issue	Category	No. of Designs	Mini-Sheets etc.	Subject Category	Design Style
1949:	4th National Athletics Meeting	3a				
	Tourism in Beppu	5b	7	yes	1	2
	International Trade Fair - Yokohama	5b	1		6	2
	Communications Exhibition - Matsuyama et al	3a	1		7c	1b
	Peace Exhibition - Nagano	8a	1	yes	6	2
	Encouragement of Afforestation	6a	1	yes	1	1b
	National Park - Yoshina Kumano	6a	1		5	1b
	Children's Day	9b	4	yes	6	2
	Electrical Communications Week	5a	1	yes	1	2
	Central Meteorological Observatory 75th Anny.	7	1		4b	1b
	Estab. of joint Ministry of Posts & Telecommunications	5a	1		3	2
	National Park - Fuji-Hakone	6a	1		7b+c	1b
	Hiroshima City of Peace	8a	4	yes	6	2
	Nagasaki City of International Culture	8a	1		7b+c	1b
	1st National Scout Jamboree	3	1		7b+c	1b
	Newspaper Week	5a	1		1	2
	Universal Postal Union 75th Anny.	8b	1		7c	1b
	Mizusawa Latitude Observatory 50th Anny.	7	2	yes	7c	1b
	Men of Culture	1a	1		4b	1b
	Philatelic Week	3a	1		1	2
	Airmail Stamps	5a	1	yes	2	1a
1950:	New Year Greeting	1t	1		7b	1b
	Radio Broadcasting 25th Anny.	5a	1	yes	2	2
	Joint Ministry of Posts & Telecommunications 1st Anny.	9a	1		7b	1b
	National Park - Akan	6a	1		7b	1b
	Men of Culture	1a	4	yes	6	2
	5th National Athletic Meeting	3a	5		1	2
1951:	New Year's Greeting	3a	1		1+5	1b

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Year	Name of Issue	Category	No. of Designs	Mini-Sheets etc.	Subject Category	Design Style
1951	Japanese Postal Service 80th Anny.	4a	1	yes*	1	2
	Children's Charter	9b	1		1	2
	Airmail stamps	5a	2		1x4b+2 1x4b+6	2
	Peace Treaty	8a	2		1x5, 1x7a	1a
	Men of Culture	1a	6		1	2
	6th National Athletic Meeting	3a	2	yes	1	2
1952:	New Year Greeting	1b	1	yes	2	2
	Membership of Universal Postal Union 75th Anny.	4a	2		1x4b+6 1x6	1b
	Japanese Red Cross 75th Anny.	4a	2		1xb+c 1x1	1b 2
	Airmail Stamps	5a	2		1x4b+2 1x4b+6	2
	National Park - Chubu-Sangaku	6a	4	yes	6	2
	Tokyo University 75th Anny.	4a	1		3	2
	7th National Athletic Meeting	3a	2	yes	1	2
	National Park - Bandai-Asahi	6a	4	yes	6	2
	Investiture of Crown Prince Akihito	1a	2	yes	7a	1a
	Men of Culture	1a	6		1	2
1953:	New Year Greeting	1b	1	yes	4a	2
	Electric Lighting in Japan 75th Anny.	4a	1		4	1b
	Tourism in Japan - Kintai Bridge	5b	2	yes	3	1a 2
	Airmail Stamps	5b	1		4	1a + 2
	National Park - Ise Shima	6a	2	yes	6	2
	National Park - Shikotsu Toya	6a	2	yes	6	2
	Return of Crown Prince from Overseas Tour	1a	2		7a	1a
	8th National Athletic Meeting	3a	2	yes	1	2
	Tokyo Observatory 75th Anny.	4a	1		3	2
	National Park - Unzen	6a	2	yes	6a	2
1954:	New year Greeting	1b	1	yes	1b	2
	World Speed Skating Chps. in Sapporo	3b	1		1	?

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Year	Name of Issue	Category	No. of Designs	Mini-Sheet etc.	Subject Category	Design Style
1954	International Freestyle Wrestling Chps.	3a	1		1	2
	National Park - Jo-shin-Etsu Kogen	6a	2	yes	6	2
	9th National Athletic Meeting	3a	2	yes	1	2
	Japan's membership of Int. Tele' Union-75th Anny.	4	2		4b	2
	Philatelic Week	3a	1	yes*	2	2
1955:	New Year Greeting	1b	1	yes	4a	2
	National Park - Chichibu-Tama	6a	2	yes	6	2
	15th Intern. Ch. of Com. Meetg. - Tokyo	8b	1		2	2
	National Park - Rikuchu-Kaigan	6a	2	yes	6	2
	10th National Athletic Meeting	3a	2	yes	1	2
	Philatelic Week	3a	1		2	1a
1956:	New Year Greeting	1b	1	yes	4a	2
	World Table Tennis Champs. - in Japan	3b	1		1	2
	World Judo Champs. - Tokyo	3b	1		1	2
	International Children's Day [ U.N. ]	8d	1		1+4b	1b
	National Parks Law 25th Anny.	6a	2	yes	6	2
	Tokyo 5th Centenary	2	1		3	2
	Sakura Dam Completion	5a	1		4b	2
	11th National Athletic Meeting	3a	2	yes	1	2
	Philatelic Week	3a	1		2	1a
	Conquest of Mt. Manasiu	3	1		1+6	2
	Electn. of Tokaido Railway	5a	1		4b+6	2+1a
	Floating Machinery Fair	5b	1		4b+7c	1b
1957:	New Year Greeting	1b	1	yes	4a	2
	Japan's Admission to U.N.O. 1st Anny.	8a	1		7c	1b
	International Geophysical Year	8c	1		7c	1b
	Completion of Japan's first Atomic Reactor	7	1		4b	2
	12th National Athletics Meeting	3a	2	yes	1	2
	Philatelic Week	3a	1		2	1a

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Year	Name of Issue	Category	No. of Designs	Mini-Sheet etc.	Subject Category	Design Style
1957	Japan's Iron Industry Centenary	4a	1		4b	2
1958:	New Year Greeting	1b	1	yes	4a	2
	Kan-Mon undersea tunnel opening	5a	1		7c	1b
	Philatelic Week	3a	1		2	1a
	Opening of Ports to Foreign Traders Centenary	8b	1		7c	1b
	3rd Asian Games- in Tokyo	8a	4		7c	1b
	Japanese Emigration to Brazil 50th Anny.	4b	1		7c	1b
	Quasi-National Park - Sado Yahiko	6a	2		1x6 1x6+1	2 2
	International Medical Congress in Tokyo	8d	1		7c	1b
	International Letter Writing Week	3a	1		2	1a
	13th National Athletic Meeting	3a	2	yes	1	2
	Keio University Centenary	4a	1		1+3	2
	International Child & Social Welfare Confs. Tokyo	8d	1		7c	1b
	Declaration of Human Rights 10th Anny. [UNO]	8d	1		7c	1b
1959:	New Year Greeting	1b	1	yes	4a	2
	Reclamation of Kojima Bay Completion	5a	1		7c	1b
	Quasi-National Park - Akiyoshidai	6a	2		6	2
	Asian Buddhist Congress in Tokyo	8a	1		7c	1b
	Crown Prince's Wedding	1a	2	yes	1x1 1x2	2 2
	Philatelic Week	3a	1		2	1a
	Adoption of Metric System in Japan	4a	1		7c	1b
	Red Cross Centenary	8d	1		1	2
	National Parks Day	6a	1		6	2
	Quasi-National Park - Yaba-Hita-Hikosan	6a	2		1x6 1x6+5	2 2
	Nagoya 350th Anny.	2	1		7b+c	1b
	International Letter Writing Week	3a	1		2	1a
	15th IATA Meeting in Tokyo	8b	1		7b+c	1b
	14th National Athletic Meeting	3a	2	yes	1	2

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Year	Name of Issue	Category	No. of Designs	Mini-Sheet etc.	Subject Category	Design Style
1959	15th Session of GATT, in Tokyo	8b	1		7c	1b
1960:	New Year Greeting	1b	1	yes	4a	2
	Ozaki Memorial Hall in Tokyo completion	1a	1		1+7c	2+1b
	Transfer of Capital to Nara 1250th Anny	2	1		7b	1b
	Scenic Trio	5b	3		6	1a
	Quasi-National Park - Mitawa Bay	6a	1		6	2
	Philatelic Week	3a	1		2	1a
	Japan - USA treaty of Friendship Centenary	8a	2	yes	2 4b	2 2
	12th International Bird Preservation Congress, Tokyo	8c	1		5	2
	Radio Japan 25th Anny.	8a	1		7c	1b
	Quasi-National Park - Abashiri	6a	1		6	2
	Quasi-National Park - Ashizuri	6a	1		6+1	2
	Japanese Emigration to Hawaii 75th Anny.	4a	1		7c	1b
	Japanese Aviation 50th Anny.	4a	1		7c	1b
	49th Inter-Parliamentary Union Conference, Tokyo	8a	2		1x7c 1x1a+3	1b 1a+2
	Crown Prince & Princess's visit to USA	1a	2	yes*	1x1 1x2	2 2
	International Letter Writing	3a	1		2	1a
	Okayama Astrophysical Observatory Opening	7	1		3	2
	15th National Athletic Meeting	3a	2	yes	1	2
	1st Japanese Antarctic Expedition 50th Anny.	7	1		1+7c	1b
	Japanese Diet 70th Anny.	4a	2		7c	1b
1961:	New Year Greeting	1b	1		4a	2
	Japanese Flowers	6b	12		5	2
	Quasi-National Park - Minami-Boso	6a	1		6+1	2
	Japanese Postal Service 90th Anny.	4	1		1	2
	Philatelic Week	3	1		2	1a
	Quasi-National Park - Lake Biwa	6a	1		6	2
	52nd Rotary International Convention, Tokyo	8b	1		7c	1b

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	Name of Issue	Category	No. of Designs	Mini-Sheet etc.	Subject Category	Design Style
1961	Quasi-National Park - San'in Kaigan	6a	1		6+1	2
	Quasi-National Park - Onuma	6a	1		6	2
	16th National Athletic Meeting	3a	2	yes	1	2
	International Letter Writing Week	3a	1		2	1a
	Tokyo Olympic Games Fund-raising 1st issue	3b	3	yes	1+7c	1b
	National Diet Library Opening	1a	1		7c	1b
1962:	New Year Greeting	1b	1	yes	4a	2
	National Park - Fuji-Hakone	6a	4		6	2
	Quasi-National Park - Kitanagato-Kaigan	6a	1		6	2
	Seasonal Festival Folklore series	1b	4		1	2
	Philatelic Week	3a	1		2	1a
	Quasi-National Park - Kinkowan	6a	1		6	2
	“ “ - Kongo-Ikoma	6a	1		6	2
	“ “ - Suigo	6a	1		6	2
	Hokuriku Rail Tunnel Opening	5a	1		4b	2
	Tokyo Olympic games Fund-raising 2nd issue	3b	3	yes	1+7c	1b
	Asian Scout Jamboree on Mt. Fuji	3a	1		7c	1b
	National Park - Nikko	6a	4		6	2
	Wakato Suspension Bridge Opening	5a	1		4b	2
	International Letter Writing Week	3a	1		2	1a
	Tokyo Olympic Games Fund-raising 3rd issue	3b	3		1+7c	1b
	17th National Athletic Meeting	3a	2		1	2
1963:	New Year Greeting	1b	1		4a	2
	Quasi-National Park - Ishizuchi	6a	1		6	2
	Merging of Five Towns into Kita-Kyushu City	9a	1		7c	1b
	National Park - Unzen-Amakusa	6a	2		6	2
	“ “ - Hakusan	6a	2		6	2
	Quasi-National Park - Genkai	6a	1		6	2
	Freedom from Hunger Day [UNO]	8d	1		7c	1b
	Philatelic Week	3a	1		2	1a



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Year	Name of Issue	Category	No. of Designs	Mini-Sheet etc.	Subject Category	Design Style
1963	International Red Cross Centenary	8d	1		7c	1b
	5th Intern. Irrigation & Drainage Congress, Tokyo	8c	1		7c	1b
	National Park - Bandai-Asahi	6a	2		6	2
	Japanese Birds	6b	3		5	2
	Tokyo Olympic Games Fund-raising 4th issue	3b	3	yes	1+7c	1b
	Nagoya-Kobe Expressway Opening	5a	1		7c	1b
	Asian Girl Scout Camp at Nagano	3a	1		1+7c	1b
	National Park - Seto Inland Sea	6a	2		6	2
	“ “ - Daisetsuzan	6a	2		6	2
	14th Intern'l Scientific Radio Union Conference	8c	1		7c	1b
	International Letter Writing Week	3a	1		2	1a
	Pre-Olympics Athletics Meeting - Tokyo	3a	1		7c	1b
	18th National Athletics Meeting	3a	2	yes	1	2
	Tokyo Olympic Games Fund-raising 5th issue	3b	4	yes	1+7c	1b
	Quasi-National Park - Izu Islands	6a	1		6	2
1964:	New Year Greeting	1b	1	yes	4a	2
	Japanese Birds	6b	3		5	2
	Quasi-National Park - Wakasa Bay	6a	1		6	2
	“ “ - Nichinan-Kaigan	6a	1		6	2
	National Park - Ise-Shima	6a	2		6	2
	Regional Festivals	1b	4		2	2
	Philatelic Week	3a	1		2	1a
	Restoration of Himeji Castle	2	1		3	1a
	19th National Athletic Meeting	3a	2	yes	1	2
	Japan-USA Submarine Cable Opening	5a	1		7c	1b
	Tokyo Olympic Games Fund-raising 6th issue	3a	4	yes	1+7c	1b
	Tokyo Expressway Opening	5a	1		4b	2
	IMF Convention in Tokyo	8b	1		7c	1b
	Tokyo Olympic Games 1st issue	3b	1		7c	1b
	Tokyo Olympic Games 2nd issue	3b	4	yes	3	1b

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Year	Name of Issue	Category	No. of Designs	Mini-Sheets etc.	Subject category	Design Style
1964	Reclamation of Hachirogata Lagoon	5a	1		7c	1b
	Tokyo-Osaka Shinkansen [high speed rail] Open	5a	1		4b	2
	International Letter Writing Week	3a	1		2	1a
1965:	New Year Greeting	1b	1	Yes	4a	2
	National Park - Daisen-Oki	6a	2		6	2
	Quasi-National Park - Niseko-Shakotan-Otaru	6a	1		6	2
	Mt. Fuji Met' Radar Station Completed	7	1		6+3	2
	National Park - Jo-Shin-Etsu Kogen	6a	2		6	2
	Post & Telecoms.Museum Opened	9b	1		3	2
	Philatelic Week	3a	1		2	1a
	National Children's Garden Opened	9b	1		1	2
	Re-Afforestation	6a	1		7b	1b
	International Telecoms. Union Centenary	8b	1		7c	1b
	National Park - Aso	6a	2		6	2
	International Co-operation Year [UNO]	8a	1		7c	1b
	Maritime Day 25th Anny.	9b	1		4b	2
	Campaign for Blood Donors	9b	1		7c	1b
	9th Intern. Atom. Energy Authy. Conference Tokyo	8c	1		3	1b
	10th National Census	9b	1		7c	1b
	International Letter Writing Week	3a	1		2	1a
	National Suffrage 75th Anny.	4a	1		7c	1b
	20th National Athletic Meeting	3a	2	yes	1	2
	International Medical Conference in Tokyo	8d	1		7c	1b
	National Park - Shiretoko	6a	2		6	2
	Reopening Antarctic Observation Base	7	1		7c	1b
	Japanese Telephone Service 75th Anny.	4a	1		7c	1b
1966:	New Year Greeting	1b	1	yes	4a	2
	Japanese Fish	6b	8		5	2
	Famous Japanese Gardens	1a	3		6	2
	Quasi-National Park - Zao	6a	2		6	2

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Year	Name of Issue	Category	No. of Designs	Mini-Sheets etc.	Subject Category	Design Style
1966	Quasi-National Park - Muroto-Anan Kaigan	6a	2		6	2
	Conference of Intern. Assoc. of Ind. Property	8b	1		7c	1b
	Philatelic Week	3a	1		2	1a
	UNESCO 20th Anny.	8a	1		7c	1b
	11th Pacific Science Conference, in Tokyo	8c	1		7c	1b
	Amakusa Bridges Completion	5a	1		4b	2
	Post Office Life Insurance Service 50th Anny.	4a	1		7c	1b
	International Letter Writing Week	3a	1		2	1a
	9th International Cancer Conference, in Tokyo	8d	2		7c	1b
	21st National Athletic Meeting	3a	2	yes	1	2
	Japanese Fish	6b	4		5	2
	Japanese National Theatre Opening	1a	3		1x3 2x2	3x2
	International Rice Year	1b	1		7c	1b
1967:	New Year Greeting	1b	1	yes	4a	2
	JAL starts Round-the-World air service	5b	1		7c	1b
	Japan Modern Literature Museum opened	9b	1		3	2
	Philatelic Week	3a	1		2	1a
	5th International Ports & Harbours Congress, Tokyo	8b	1		6	2
	Welfare Service 50th Anny.	4b	1		7c	1b
	Road Safety Campaign 20th Anny.	9b	1		7c	1b
	National Park - Southern Alps	6a	2		6	2
	7th International Biochemistry Congress, Tokyo	8c	1		7c	1b
	"Universiade 1967", Tokyo	3a	1		1	2
	International Tourist Year [UNO]	8b	2		7a	2
	International Letter Writing Week	3a	1		2	1a
	22nd National Athletic Meeting	3a	1		1	2
	Asuka Period National Treasures	1a	3		2x2 1x3	2
	13th World Road Congress, Tokyo	8b	1		7c	1b
	National Park - Chichibu	6a	2		6	2
	Quasi-National Park - Sobo-Katamuki	6a	2		6	2

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Year	Name of Issue	Category	No. of Designs	Mini-Sheets etc.	Subject Category	Design Style
1968:	New Year Greeting	1b	1	yes	4a	2
	Youth Goodwill Cruise	8d	1		1+4	2
	Nara Period National Treasures	1a	3		2	2
	Quasi-National Park - Yatsugatake-Chushin Kogen	6a	2		6	2
	Philatelic Week	3a	1		2	1a
	Quasi-National Park - Rishiri-Rebun	6a	1		6+1	2
	Heian Period National Treasures	1a	3		2	2
	Hokkaido Centenary	9a	1		7c	1b
	Return to Japan of Ogasawara Islands	9a	1		6	2
	Postal Codes Campaign	5a	1		7c	1b
	Quasi-National Park - Hida-Kisogawa	6a	2		6+1	2
	International Youth Hostel Conference, Tokyo	8d	1		7c	1b
	50th High School Baseball Championships	3a	2	yes	1x7c 1x1	1b, 2
	Kamakura Period National Treasures	1a	3		2	2
	National Park- Towada-Hachimantai	6a	2		6	2
	23rd National Athletic Meeting	3a	1		1	2
	International Letter Writing Week	3a	1		2	1a
	Meiji Era Centenary	4a	2		1x7c 1x2	1b, 1a
	Japanese Lighthouses Centenary	4a	1		7c	1b
	Imperial Palace Completion	1a	1		7a+3	2
	National Park - Kirishima-Yaku	6a	2		6	2
	Human Rights Year [UNO]	8d	1		7c	1b
	Promoting Savings	9a	1		7b	1b
1969:	New Year	1b	1		4a	2
	Quasi-National Park - Echizen-Kaga-Kaigan	6a	1		6	2
	Muromachi Period National Treasures	1a	3		2x3 1x2	2
	Quasi-National Park - Chokai	6a	1		6	2
	World Fair 'EXPO 70' Osaka 1st Issue	8a	2		1x7c 1x2	1b, 2
	Quasi-National Park - Koya-Ryujin	6a	2		6	2
	Philatelic Week	3a	1		2	1a

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Year	Name of Issue	Category	No. of Designs	Mini-Sheet etc.	Subject Category	Design Style
1969	Road Safety Campaign	9b	1		7c	2
	Tokyo-Nagoya Expressway Completion	5a	1		4b	2
	Launch of Japan's 1st Nuclear Powered Ship	7	1		4b+7c	1b
	Japan Sea Cable Opening	5a	1		7c	1b
	Postal Codes Campaign	5a	2		7c	1b
	52nd Lions International Convention, Tokyo	8b	1		7c	1b
	Quasi-National Park - Shimokito-Hanto	6a	1		6	2
	Momoyama Period National Treasures	1a	3		1x3 2x2	1x2 2x1a
	Quasi-National Park - Honosen-Ushroyama	6a	2		6	2
	National Park - Akan	6a	2		6	2
	Edo Period National Treasures	1a	4		4x2	1x2 3x1a
	16th Universal Postal Union Congress, Tokyo	8b	4		1x7c 3x2	1x1b 3x1a
	International Letter Writing Week	3a	1		2	1a
	24th National Athletic Meeting	3a	1		1	2
	National Park - Rikuchu Kaigan	6a	2		6	2
	International Labour Organisation 50th Anny.	8d	1		7c	1b
1970:	New Year Greeting	1b	1	yes	2	2
	Quasi-National Park	6a	1		6+1	2
	World Fair 'EXPO 70' Osaka 2nd Issue	8a	3	yes	1x7c 1x7b 1x2	2x1b 1x1a
	Philatelic Week	3a	1		2	2
	National Park - Yoshino-Kumano	6a	2		6	2
	World fair 'EXPO 70' Osaka 3rd Issue	8a	3	yes	2x7c 1x2	2x1b 1x1a
	Japanese Theatre - Kabuki	1a	3		2	2
	Japanese Girl Scouts 50th Anny.	4b	1		1	2
	Quasi-National Park - Noto-Hanto	6a	2		6+1 & 6	2
	4th UN Congress on Crime	9b	1		7c	1b
	Quasi--National Park - Myogi-Arafune	6a	2		6	2
	International Letter -Writing Week	3a	1		2	1a
	25th National Athletic Meeting	5a	1		1	2

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Year	Name of Issue	Category	No. of Designs	Mini-Sheet etc.	Subject Category	Design Style
1970	Telegraph Service Centenary	4a	1		2	1a
	United Nations 25th Anny.	8a	2		7c	1b
	International Vocational Trng. Compn. Chiba	8d	1		7c	1b
1971:	New Year Greeting	1b	1	yes	4a	2
	Winter Olympics, Sapporo 1st Issue	5b	2		2	2
	Japanese Theatre - Gagaku	1a	3		2	2
	Women's Suffrage 25th Anny.	9a	1		1+3	2
	Japanese Postal Service Centenary	4a	3		2	2
	25th Bird Week	6b	1		5	2
	Antarctic Treaty 10th Anny.	8c	1		5	2
	Philatelic Week	3a	1		2	1a
	Afforestation Campaign	6a	1		7b	1b
	National Park - Saikai	6a	2		6	2
	Postal Codes Campaign	5a	1		7c	1b
	13th World Scout Jamboree, Asagiri	8d	1		1+7c	1b
	Family Conciliation System 50th Anny.	4b	1		7c	1b
	International Letter Writing Week	3a	1		2	1a
	European Tour by Emperor & Empress	8a	2	yes	7a	2
	26th National Athletic Meeting	5a	1		1	2
	National Family Registn. System Centenary	4a	1		7c	1b
	Govt. Printing Works Centenary	4a	2	yes	2	2
	National Park - Shikotsu-Toya	6a	2		6	2
1972:	New Year Greeting	1b	1	yes	4a	2
	Winter Olympics, Sapporo 2nd Issue	3b	3	yes	1	2
	Japanese Theatre - Bunraku	1a	3		2	2
	Japanese Railways Centenary 1st Issue	4b	1		4b	2
	Quasi-National Park - Hiba-Dogo-Taishaku	6a	2		6	2
	World Heart Month [UN]	8d	1		7c	1b
	Philatelic Week	3a	1		2	1a
	Return of Ryukiu Islands to Japan	8a	1		7a	1b

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Year	Name of Issue	Category	No. of Designs	Mini-Sheets etc.	Subject Categories	Design Styles
1972	Afforestation Campaign	6a	1		5	1b
	Quasi National Park - Kurikoma	6a	2		6+4a	2
	Postal Codes Campaign	5a	2		7c	1b
	National Park- Chubu-Sangaku	6a	2		6	2
	Japanese Theatre - Noh	1a	3		2	2
	Japanese Education System Centenary	4a	1		7c	1b
	International Letter-Writing Week	3a	1		2	1a
	Japanese Railways centenary 2nd Issue	4a	2		1x2 1x4b	1x1a 1x2
	27th National Athletic Meeting	3a	1		1	2
	Japanese Boy Scouts 50th Anny.	4b	1		1	2
	Japanese Customs Service Centenary	4a	1		2	1a
1973:	New Year Greeting	1b	1	yes	2	2
	Quasi-National Park - Tsurigi-san	6a	2		6	2
	“ “ - Meiji no Mori	6a	2		6	2
	Preservation of Takamatsuzuka Yomb Murals	1a	3		2	2
	Afforestation Campaign	6a	1		5	2
	Philatelic Week	3a	1		2	1a
	Quasi-National Park - Suzuka	6a	2		6	2
	National Park - Ogasawara Islands	6a	2		6	2
	Postal Codes Campaign	5a	2		7c	1b
	Quasi-National Park - Nishi-Chogoku-Sanchi	6a	2		6	2
	“ “ - Tenryu-Okumikawa	6a	2		6	2
	International Letter-Writing Week	3a	1		2	1a
	28th National Athletic Meeting	3a	1		1	2
	Kanmon Suspension Bridge Opening	5a	1		4b	2
	Japanese Folk Tales “Hanasakajijii” 1st series	1b	3		1	2
1974:	New Year Greeting	1b	1	yes	2	2
	Imperial Golden Wedding Anny.	9a	2	yes	7a +3	1b
	Japanese Folk Tales “TsuruNyobo” 2nd series	1b	3		1	2
	International Ocean Exposition, Okinawa, 1st series	8c	1	yes	2	1a

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Year	Name of Issue	Category	No. of Designs	Mini-Sheets etc.	Subject Category	Design Style
1974	National Park - Irimoto	6a	2		6	2
	Nature Conservation, 1st-3rd issues	6a	3		5	2
	Philatelic Week	3a	1		2	1a
	Afforestation Campaign	6a	1		5	2
	Supreme Court Bldg. Completion	9b	1		3	2
	Japanese Folk Tales "Isshun Boshi" 3rd Series	1b	3		1	2
	61st Inter-Parliamentary Union Congress, Tokyo	8a	2		1x7c 1x2	1x1b 1x1a
	International Letter Writing Week	3a	1		2	1a
	Universal Postal Union Centenary	8b	2		1x7c 1x2	1x1b 1x1a
	29th National Athletic Meeting	3a	1		1	2
	9th International Conference on Edible Fungi	8c	1		7c	1b
	Nature Conservation 4th issue	6a	1		5	2
	Steam Locomotives 1st series	4a	2	yes	4b	2
1975:	New Year Greetings	1b	1	yes	4a	2
	Nature Conservation 5th issue	6a	1		5	2
	Japanese Folk Tales "Urashima Taro" 6th series	1b	3		1	2
	Nature Conservation 6th issue	6a	1		5	2
	Steam Locomotives 2nd series	4b	2	yes	4b	2
	Japanese Radio [NHK] 50th Anny.	9b	1		1a	2
	Steam Locomotives 3rd series	4b	2	yes	4b	2
	Japanese Folk Tales "Nozumi no Jodo" 7th series	1b	3		1	2
	Philatelic Week	3a	2	yes	2	1a
	9th World Petroleum Congress, Tokyo	8b	1		4b	2
	Steam Locomotives 4th series	4b	2	yes	4b	2
	Afforestation Campaign	6a	1		7b	1b
	Steam Locomotives 5th series	4b	2	yes	4b	2
	International Women's Year [UN]	8d	1		7c	1b
	Intern. Ocean Exposition Okinawa 2nd series	8c	3	yes	2x2 1x7c	2x2 1x1b
	Nature Conservation 7th issue	6a	1		5	2



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Year	Name of Issue	Category	No. of Designs	Mini-Sheets etc.	Subject Category	Design Style
1975	Apple Cultivation in Japan Centenary	5b	1		5	2
	Japanese Ships 2nd series	2	2	yes	4b	2
	International Letter-Writing Week	3a	1		2	1a
	Emperor's Tour of USA	8a	2	yes	7a	1b
	Japanese P.O. Savings Bank Centenary	4a	1		7c	1b
	30th National Athletic Meeting	3a	1		1	2
1976:	New Year Greeting	1b	1		4a	2
	Nature Conservation 8th issue	6a	1		5	2
	Japanese Ships 3rd series	2	2	yes	4b	2
	Nature Conservation 9th issue	6a	1		5	2
	Japanese Ships 4th series	4a	2	yes	4b	2
	Philatelic Week	3a	2	yes	2	1a
	Afforestation Campaign	6a	1		7b	1b
	Japanese Ships 5th series	4b	2	yes	4b	2
	Nature Conservation 10th-12th issues	6a	3		5	2
	Japanese Ships 6th series	4b	2	yes	4b	2
	International Letter-Writing Week	3a	1		2	1a
	31st National Athletic Meeting	3a	1		1	2
	Opening of Sino-Japanese Cable	8b	1		7c	1b
	Emperor Hirohito's Golden Jubilee	9a	2	yes	1x2 1x7a	2
	Kindergarten Schools Centenary	4a	1		1	2
	Health Insurance System 50th Anny.	4b	1		7c	1b
	National Treasures -1st series	1a	2		2	2
1977:	New Year Greeting	1b	1	yes	4a	2
	National Treasures 2nd series	1a	2		2	1x2 1x1a
	Nature Conservation 13th series	6a	1		5	2
	World Figure Skating Chps., Tokyo	3b	2		1	2
	National Treasures 3rd series	1a	2		2	1x2 1x1a
	Afforestation Campaign	6a	1		7b	1b
	Philatelic Week	3a	2	yes	2	1a

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Year	Name of Issue	Category	No. of Designs	Mini-Sheets etc.	Subject Category	Design Style
1977	Nature Conservation 14th issue	6a	1		5	2
	19th Congress Intern. Council Of Nurses, Tokyo	8d	1		1	2
	Joyo Fast Breeder Reactor on Line	7	1		7c	1b
	Japan Admission to UPU Centenary	8b	2	yes	7c	1b
	National Treasures 4th series	1a	2		2	1x1a 1x2
	National Safety Week	9b	4	yes	1	1b
	Nature Conservation 15th issue	6a	1		5	2
	“ “ 16th “	6a	1		5	2
	National Treasures 5th series	1a	2		2	2
	Okinawa-Luzon-Hongkong Cable Opening	5a	1		7c	1b
	27th Congress International Soc. of Surgeons	8c	1		7c	1b
	Nature Conservation 17th issue	6a	1		5	2
	Amateur Radio League 50th Anny.	3a	1		4b	2
	32nd National Athletic Meeting	3a	1		1	2
	National Science Museum Centenary	4a	1		9b	1b
	National Treasures 6th series	1a	2		2	2
1978:	New Year Greeting	1b	1	yes	4a	2
	Tokyo Underground Railway 50th Anny.	4b	2	yes	4b	2
	National Treasures 7th series	1a	2		2	2
	“ “ 8th “	1a	2		2	2
	Nature Conservation 18th issue	6a	1		5	2
	Philatelic Week	3a	2	yes	2	2x1a
	Rotary International Convention, Tokyo	8b	1		7a+c	1b
	23rd Ophthalmological Congress, Tokyo	8c	1		7c	1b
	Narita Airport Opening	5a	1		3	1b
	Afforestation Campaign	6a	1		6	1b
	Nature Conservation 19th issue	6a	1		5	2
	61st Lions International Convention, Tokyo	8b	1		2+7c	2
	Sumo 1st series	1b	3	yes	2	2
	Nature Conservation 20th issue	6a	1		5	2

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Year	Name of Issue	Category	No. of Designs	Mini-Sheets etc.	Subject Category	Design Style
1978	Radio Gymnastic Exercises 50th Anny.	9b	1		7c	2
	Japanese Chambers of Commerce Centenary	4a	1		3+7c	2
	Sumo 2nd series	1b	3	yes	2	2
	Tokyo & Osaka Stock Exchanges Centenary	4a	1		3	2
	International Letter-Writing Week	3a	1		2	1a
	33rd National Athletic Meeting	3a	1		1	2
	14th Congress of Ortho' Surgeons, Tokyo	8c	1		7c	2
	Tokyo Astro' Observatory Centenary	4a	1		6+4b	1b
	Sumo 3rd series	1b	3	yes	2	2
	Declaration of Human Rights [UNO] 30th Anny.	8d	1		1	1b
1979:	New Year Greeting	1b	1	yes	4a	2
	Education for Handicapped	9b	1		1	1b
	Sumo 4th series	1b	3	yes	2	2
	“ 5th series	1b	3	yes	2	2
	Telephone Automation Completion	5a	1		7c	1b
	Western Medicine in Japan Centenary	4a	1		7c	1b
	Philatelic Week	3a	2	yes	2	1a
	Afforestation Campaign	6a	1		6+7b	1b
	Modern Japanese Art 1st series	1a	2		2	2
	“ “ 2nd series	1a	2		2	1x2 1x3
	Quarantine System Centenary	4a	1		7c	1b
	Letter Writing Day	3a	2		1x4a 1x7c	1x2 1x2
	National Amateur Baseball Chps. 50th Anny.	4b	1		7c	1b
	International Year of the Child [UNO]	9b	2	yes	7c	1b
	Japanese Songs 1st series	1b	2		1+6	2
	Modern Japanese Art 3rd series	1a	2		2	1x1a 1x2
	International Letter-Writing Week	3a	1		2	1a
	34th National Athletic Meeting	3a	1		1	2
	Joining Intern. Tele. Union Centenary	4a	1		7c	1b
	9th Intern. Obstetrics etc. Convention, Tokyo	8c	1		7c	1b

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Year	Name of Issue	Category	No. of Designs	Mini-Sheets etc.	Subject Category	Design Style
1979	Modern Japanese Art 4th series	1a	2		2	2
	Japanese Songs 2nd series	1b	2		2	2
1980:	New Year Greeting	1b	1	yes	4a	2
	Japanese Songs 3rd series	1b	2		2	2
	Modern Japanese Art 5th series	1a	2		2	2
	Government Audit Bureau Centenary	4a	1		7c	1b
	Japanese Songs 4th series	1b	2		2	2
	Philatelic Week	3a	2	yes	2	1a
	Japanese Songs 5th series	1b	2		2	2
	Modern Japanese Art 6th series	1a	2		2	2
	Sail Cadet Ships 50th Anny.	4b	1		4b	2
	Afforestation Campaign	6a	1		6+7c	1b
	Fire Fighting Service Centenary	4a	1		2	1a
	Japanese Songs 6th series	1b	1		2	2
	Modern Japanese Art 7th series	1a	2		2	2
	Letter Writing Day	3a	2		7c	1b
	16th International Congress of Entomology	8c	1		5	2
	Internat. Geography. & Cartogy. Congresses	8c	1		7c	1b
	Japanese Songs 7th series	1b	2		2	2
	World Computer & Medic. Info' Conferences	8c	1		7c	1b
	International Letter-Writing Week	3a	1		2	1a
	35th National Athletic Meeting	3a	1		1	2
	Modern Japanese Art 8th series	1a	2		2	2
	World Congress Junior Chambers of Commerce	8b	1		7c	1b
	Japanese Diet 90th Anny.	4a	1		3	2
1981:	New Year Greeting	1b	1		4a	2
	Japanese Songs 8th series	1b	2		2	2
	Modern Japanese Art 9th series	1a	2		2	2
	Japanese Songs 9th series	1b	2		2	2
	Kobe Exposition	8b	1		7c	1b

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Year	Name of Issue	Category	No. of Designs	Mini-Sheets etc.	Subject Category	Design Style
1981	Agricult. Forest. & Fishery Prom. Centenary	5b	1		7c	1b
	Philatelic Week	3a	2	yes	2	1a
	Afforestation Campaign	6a	1		7a	1b
	12th International Port & Harbour Conference	8b	1		7c	1b
	Modern Japanese Art 10th series	1a	2		2	2
	Land Erosion Control Centenary	5b	1		7c	1b
	8th International Congress of Pharmacology	8c	1		7c	1b
	Letter Writing Day	3a	2		7c	1b
	National Parks 50th Anny.	6a	1		5	2
	Energy Conservation	9b	2		7c	1b
	Japanese Western Style Architect. 1st series	1a	2		3	2
	International Year of Disabled [UNO]	8d	1		7c	1b
	International Neurological Conference	8c	1		7c	1b
	International Convention of Trade Unions	8d	1		7c	1b
	International Letter-Writing Week	3a	1		2	1a
	International Stamp Exhibition, Tokyo	3b	4	yes	2	2
	36th National Athletic Meeting	3a	1		1	2
	Japanese Western Style Architect. 2nd series	1a	2		3	2
	Modern Japanese Art 11th series	1a	2		2	2
1982:	New Year Greeting	1b	1	yes	4a	2
	Japanese Western Style Architect. 3rd series	1a	2		3	2
	Modern Japanese Art 12th series	1a	2		2	2
	Japanese Western Style Architect. 4th series	1a	2		3	2
	Ueno Zoo Centenary	4a	4	yes	5	2
	Philatelic Week	3a	2	yes	2	1a
	Return of Okinawa 10th Anny.	9a	1		7a	2
	Afforestation Campaign	6a	1		7b	1b
	16th World Dermatology Congress	8c	1		2	2
	Japanese Western Style Architect. 5th series	1a	2		3	2
	Tohoko Shinkansen Service Opened	5a	2	yes	4b	2

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Year	Name of Issue	Category	No. of Designs	Mini-Sheets etc.	Subject Category	Design Style
1982	Letter Writing Day	3a	2		7c	1b
	Modern Japanese Art 13th series	1a	2		2	2
	Special Correspondence Stamps	5a	3		7a	1b
	Japanese Western Style Architect. 6th series	1a	2		3	2
	Christian Boys Delegation to Europe, 400th Ann.	2	1		7c	1b
	Restn. of Dip. Rels. with China, 10th Ann.	8a	1		2	2
	37th National Athletic Meeting	3a	1		1	2
	International Letter-Writing Week	3a	1		2	1a
	Central Bank System, Centenary	4a	1		3	2
	Joetsu Shinkansen [rail] Opening	5a	2	yes	4b	2
	Modern Japanese Art 14th series	1a	2		2	2
1983	New Year Greeting	1b	1	yes	4a	2
	Modern Japanese Art 15th series	1a	2		2	2
	Japanese Western Style Architect. 7th series	1a	2		2	2
	Modern Japanese Art 16th series	1a	2		2	2
	National Museum of History Opening	1b	1		7c	1b
	Philatelic Week	3a	2	yes	2	1a
	Afforestation Campaign	6a	1		5+7b	1b
	50th Nippon Derby	3a	1		5	2
	Islands Clean-up Campaign	9b	1		7c	1b
	Japanese Western Style Architect. 8th series	1a	2		3	2
	Government Journal Centenary	4a	1		4b	2
	Letter Writing Day	3a	2		7c	1b
	Japanese Western Style Architect. 9th series	1a	2		3	2
	National Noh Theatre Opening	1a	1		3+1	2
	Endangered Birds 1st series	6a	2		5	2
	International Letter Writing Week	3a	1		4a	2
	38th National Athletic Meeting	3a	1		1	2
	World Communications Year [UNO]	8a	2		7c	1b
	Showa Memorial National Park Opening	1b	1		7c	1b

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Year	Name of Issue	Category	No. of Designs	Mini-Sheets etc.	Subject Category	Design Style
1983	71st World Dental Congress, Tokyo	8c	1		7c	1b
	Maiden Voyage of Antarctic Res. Ship	7	1		4b	2
	Endangered Birds 2nd series	6a	2		5	2
	Decln. of Human Rights 35th Anny.[UNO]	8a	1		7c	1b
1984	New Year Greeting	1b	1		4a	2
	Endangered Birds 3rd series	6a	2	yes	5	2
	Intern. Science & Techy. Exzhbn., Tsukuba	8c	1		7c	1b
	Japanese Western Style Architect. 10th series	1a	2		3	2
	20th Confectionery Fair, Tokyo	5b	1		4b	2
	Endangered Birds 4th series	6a	2		5	2
	National Bunraku Theatre Opening	1b	1		3+4a	2
	Philatelic Week	3a	2	yes	2	1a
	Afforestation Campaign	6a	1		5+7b	2
	National Weather Forecasts Centenary	4a	1		7c	1b
	Endangered Birds 5th series	6a	2	yes	5	2
	Fedn. of UNESCO Clubs World Congress	8d	1		7b	1b
	Letter Writing Day	3a	2		7c	1b
	Disaster Prevention Week	9b	2		7c	1b
	Alpine Plants 1st series	6b	2		5	2
	6th International Virology Congress, Sendai	8c	1		2	1a
	Alpine Plants 2nd series	6b	2		5	2
	Electronic Mail	5a	1		7c	1b
	International Letter Writing Week	3a	1		2	2
	International Internal Medicine Congress, Kyoto	8c	1		2	2
	39th National Athletic Meeting	3a	1		1	2
	Traditional Crafts 1st series	1b	4	yes	2	2
	Tokyo Baseball Club 50th Anny.	4b	3	yes	2x1 1x7c+1	2x2 1x1b
	Technical Education Centenary	9b	1		7c	1b
1985	New Year Greeting	1b	1	yes	4a	2
	Alpine Plants 3rd series	6b	2		5	2

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Year	Name of Issue	Category	No. of Designs	Mini-Sheets etc.	Subject Category	Design Style
1985	Traditional Crafts 2nd series	1b	4	yes	2	2
	Alpine Plants 4th series	6b	2		5	2
	World's Fair, Tsukuba	5b	2	yes	7c	1b
	University of the Air Opening	9b	1		3	2
	Nippon Telephone & Telegraph Privatisation	5a	1		7c	1b
	World Import Fair, Nagoya	5b	1		2	2
	Industrial Patents System Centenary	4a	1		7c	1b
	Philatelic Week	3a	2	yes	2	1a
	Afforestation Campaign	6a	1		5+6	2
	Traditional Crafts 3rd series	1b	4	yes	2	2
	Radio Japan 50th Anny.	8a	2	yes	2	2
	Birth of Hiroka Maeshima 150th Anny.	4a	1		1	1a
	Great Naruto Bridge Opening	5a	1		4b	2
	Traditional Crafts 4th series	1b	4	yes	2	2
	International Youth Year [UNO]	9d	1		7c	1b
	Letter Writing Day	3a	2		1x7b 1x7c	2x1b
	Alpine Plants 5th series	6b	2		5	2
	Electronic Mail	5a	1		7c	1b
	Traditional Crafts 5th series	1b	4	yes	2	2
	Yukawa's Meson Theory 50th Anny.	7	1		1+7c	1b
	University Games	3a	1		1	2
	Internat. Vocation. Trng. Competn.	9b	1		7c	1b
	Japan-S. Korea Diplomatic Rels. 20th Anny.	8a	1		5	2
	Alpine Plants 6th series	6b	2		5	2
	Kan-Etsu Tunnel Opening	5a	1		7c	1b
	International Letter Writing Week	3a	1		2	2
	Japanese Overseas Co-opn. Vols. 20th Anny.	8d	1		1	2
	International Bee-Keeping Congress, Nagoya	8c	1		7b	1b
	40th National Athletic Meeting	3a	1		1	2
	Traditional Crafts 6th series	1b	4	yes	2	2



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Year	Name of Issue	Category	No. of Designs	Mini-Sheets etc.	Subject Category	Design Style
1985	Cabinet System of Govt. Centenary	9a	1		7c	1b
1986	New Year Greeting	1b	1	yes	4a	2
	Alpine plants 7th series	6b	2		5	2
	Traditional Crafts 7th series	1b	4		2	2
	Architecture Institute Centenary	4a	1		7c	1b
	Philatelic Week	3a	2	yes	2	1a
	Emperor's Accession 50th Anny.	9a	2	yes	7a	1a
	Economic Summit of Ind. Countries, Tokyo	8b	1		2	1a
	Afforestation Campaign	6a	1		5+6	2
	Japanese Pharmacopoeia Centenary	4a	1		7c	1b
	Japanese Standard Time Centenary	4a	1		7c	1b
	Letter Writing Day	3a	2	yes	7b	1b
	Merchant Navy Trng. 110th Anny.	4a	1		4b	2
	Insects 1st series	6b	4	yes	5	2
	Internat. Library Assocns. Conference, Tokyo	8d	1		2	1a
	Internat. Electron Microscopy Congress, Kyoto	8c	1		7c	1b
	Internat. Social Welfare Conference, Tokyo	8d	1		7c	1b
	Insects 2nd series	6b	4	yes	5	2
	International Letter Writing Week	3a	1		2	2
	41st National Athletic Meeting	3a	1		1	2
	World Ikebana Convention, Kyoto	1b	1		2	2
	Insects 3rd series	6b	4	yes	5	2
	International Peace Year [UNO]	8a	1		7c	1b
1987	New Year Greeting	1b	1	yes	4a	2
	Insects 4th series	6b	4	yes	5	2
	Land Registration Centenary	4a	1		7c	1b
	Basho's Diary 1st series	1a	4	yes	3x2 1x6	3x1a 1x2
	Insects 5th series	6b	4	yes	5	2
	International Orchid Conference, Tokyo	8c	2		5	2

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Year	Name of Issue	Category	No. of Designs	Mini-Sheets etc.	Subject Category	Design Style
1987	End of Railway Mail	5a	2	yes	1x4b 1x2	2x2
	Privatisation of Japan Railways	5a	2		4b	2
	Japanese Marine Biology Studies Centenary	4a	1		5	2
	Philatelic Week	3a	2	yes	2	1a
	AGM of Asian Developpt. Bank, Tokyo	8b	1		7c	1b
	Afforestation Campaign	6a	1		5+6	2
	National Treasures new 1st series	1a	2		2	2
	Basho's Diaries 2nd series	1a	4	yes	1x5 3x2	1x2 3x1a
	National Treasures new 2nd series	1a	2		2	2
	Letter Writing Day	1b	2	yes	2x7b	1b
	Modern Flood Control Centenary	5a	1		7c	1b
	Basho's Diaries 3rd series	1a	4	yes	1x5 3x2	1x2 3x1a
	Japan-Thailand Friendship Treaty Centenary	8a	1		3+7a	2
	International Letter Writing Week	3a	2		2	1a
	International Accountants Conference, Tokyo	8b	1		2	1a
	Yokohama Waterworks Centenary	4a	1		4b	2
	42nd National Athletics Meeting	3a	1		1	2
	International Smoking & Heart Conference, Tokyo	8d	1		7c	1b
	International Telecoms. Conference, Tokyo	8c	1		4b	2
	World Historic Cities Conference, Kyoto	8d	1		2	2
	Internat. Year of the Homeless [UNO]	8d	2		2	1b
1988	New Year Greeting	3a	1	yes	4a	2
	Basho's Diaries 4th series	1a	4	yes	1x5 3x2	1x2 3x1a
	National Treasures new 3rd series	1a	2		2	2
	Seikan Railway Tunnel Opening	5a	1		7c	1b
	Basho's Diaries 5th series	1a	4	yes	2x5 2x2	2x2 2x1a
	Seto Grt. Road & Rail Bridge Opening	5a	4	yes	4b	2
	Philatelic Week	3a	2	yes	2	1a
	'Silk Road' Exhibition	9b	1		2	2
	Afforestation Campaign	6a	1		5+6	2

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Year	Name of Issue Category		No. of Designs	Mini- Sheets etc.	Subject Category	Design Style
1988	Basho's Diaries 6th series	1a	4	yes	2x6 2x2	2x2 2x1a
	National Treasures new 4th series	1a	2		2	2
	International Volcanoes Conference, Kagoshima	8c	1		6	2
	Letter Writing Day	3a	4	yes	7b	1b
	International Puppet Festival in Japan	1b	4	yes	4a	2
	Japan-China Friendship Treaty 10th Anny.	8a	2	yes	5	2
	Basho's Diaries 7th series	1a	4	yes	1x5 1x6 2x2	2x2 2x1a
	International Poultry Congress, Nagoya	8b	1		5	2
	International Rehabilitation Congress, Tokyo	8d	1		7c	1b
	National Treasures new 5th series	1a	2		2	2
	International Letter Writing Week	3a	2	yes	2	1a
	43rd National Athletic Meeting	3a	1		1	2
	Basho's Diaries 8th series	1a	4	yes	1x5 1x6 2x2	2x2 2x1a
	Japan-Mexico Friendship Treaty Centenary	8a	1		7c	2
	Declaration of Human Rights, 40th Anny. [UNO]	8d	1		7c	1b
1989	New Year Greeting	1b	1	yes	4a	2
	National Treasures new 6th series	1a	2		2	2
	Basho's Diaries 9th series	1a	4	yes	2x6 2x2	2x2 2x1a
	Asia-Pacific Exhibition, Fukuoka	8d	1		1x3+7c	1b
	'Space & Children' Exhibition, Yokohama	9b	1		1x2+3	1b
	World Bonsai Convention	8d	1		5	2
	Philatelic Week	3a	2	yes	2	1a
	'Holland Festival '89'	8d	1		2	1a
	3rd Japan-Hawaii Cable Opening	5a	1		7c	1b
	Basho's Diaries 10th series	1a	4	yes	2x5 2x2	2x2 2x1a
	Afforestation Campaign	6a	1		5+6	2
	International Garden Exposition, Osaka	8d	1		7c	1b
	National Treasures new 7th series	1a	2		2	2
	World Design Exposition, Nagoya	5b	2		7c	1b



POSTAGE STAMPS AS WINDOWS ON THE JAPANESE

STATE AND ITS PEOPLE 1

Japanese postage stamps as social  
agents: some anthropological  
perspectives

DOUGLAS FREWER

**Abstract:** By relating the stamp issues made during the period 1937–89 to the changing Japanese political environment, this paper identifies themes in their designs which involve attempts by government to redefine Japanese national identity and Japan's desired role in the world. The paper suggests why certain other themes, which might have been expected to be prominent, were virtually missing from these stamp issues. The roles of politicians, civil servants and artists/designers in the creation of designs are described. The problems of analysing images on stamps for their social significance, involving theories of symbolism and semiotics as well as of the anthropology of art, are briefly explored and the choices made for this analysis of their apparent themes are explained.

Before the extent and nature of their social agency can be properly assessed, this research needs to be extended to include assessments of how the users of these postage stamps, both in Japan and abroad, interpret and act on their designs. It is also noted that, as a result of stamps becoming a part of material culture, there is a different social agency in their collection which further research may show results in new forms of social bonding.

**Keywords:** Japanese (postage) stamps, theme, (national) identity, (social) agents, image

Postage stamps are a significant item of material culture in any society and can usually be related to wider issues. This paper concentrates on the Japanese postage

stamp issues made in the run up to World War II and in the years after, to the end of the Showa era. This was a period in which the Japanese were successively exposed by their political leaders to two very distinct social and political philosophies. This paper shows how Japanese governments during this period used postage stamps to help set new directions for Japanese society, in respect both of how Japanese defined themselves as Japanese and of how they wanted the rest of the world to view Japan. It shows how they were concerned, after the war, to relate these new directions to the reforms of the Meiji period rather than to the more recent or distant past, discusses other matters with which these stamp issues might have been expected to deal and offers an explanation as to why they were not apparent. Finally, it points out the increasing emphasis by the Japanese and other governments on the revenue-raising utility of postage stamps marketed as another item of material culture.

### **Postage stamps**

The basic purpose of a postage stamp is to serve as a receipt for payment for a service. In this economic (and social) role it needs only to show the value of the payment and the service for which the payment was made and to identify its issuer. It is, of course, desirable that it should not be forged easily but, beyond that requirement, there is no need for elaboration by way of including images and/or additional words. The world's first postage stamp, the Penny Black issued by the UK in May 1840, is a good example, but one where a symbol, the Queen's head, rather than a name is used to identify the issuer (Gibbons 2000). Where such symbols, pictures and/or additional words are present in the design, it is because the issuing authority, in this case the UK government, has some motivation other than simply to issue a receipt. In the case of the Penny Black it seems to have been to reassure purchasers that it was a receipt with the full backing of the state; at the same time, however, it emphasized that the government saw the country as a monarchy. The Penny Black was the first postage stamp to form part of a national postal system, but this concept was not copied by other countries with any enthusiasm until about 1850. Between then and 1870 virtually all the countries of Europe; North and South America as well as Egypt, Turkey and Persia instituted government-controlled national postal systems and made government-issued postage stamps into state monopolies. The European colonial powers also issued postage stamps in their colonies and dominions; and, as new states were formed (for example, Imperial Germany in 1870), they quickly issued distinctive postage stamps, a practice which has continued ever since (Gibbons 2000). The use of postage stamps for purposes of political propaganda was soon developed. In India, for example, Britain used stamp pictures to bolster its imperial position (Newman 1989: 74-8).

Japan was the first independent Asian country to issue postage stamps, in 1871 (although the European colonial powers were already doing so in India, the Dutch

East Indies, Hong Kong and so on). China made her first stamp issue only in 1878, followed by Siam (Thailand) in 1883 and Korea in 1885. However, Japan's issues were relatively few (less than twenty) until the 1930s when her stamp designs became a tool for promoting government ideology.

Japanese postage stamps fall into three main categories (Sakura 2000). First, there is a definitive, regular series which offers all the values likely to be required by the public for any postal service. This is on sale continuously and its designs are changed only infrequently. Second, there are special issues for annual events, such as New Year, which are made regularly but only for a limited period, and which generally are restricted to only one or two values representing the basic letter postage rate. Third, there are commemorative and other special issues which are decided year by year and on sale in a limited number of values at particular dates in the year. The special, annual events issues, which grew over this period from one to six, each adopted an easily recognizable design style. Only the commemorative and special, one-off issues had their own individual designs. However, these were issued in very much smaller quantities than the other categories (currently typically 20 million each or fewer, compared with 50–90 million each for the annual issues and unlimited quantities for the regular issue).

### **The social agency of postage stamps**

The idea that agency can inhere in things (objects) has been explored and supported by Miller (1987: 95–112). Such 'social agency' as an attribute of objects can have several meanings but, when used with respect to postage stamps, it may be used in three different ways:

1. postage stamps serve as receipts linking their buyer with the state in a contractual relationship;
2. their designs represent messages from the state intended to influence their users;
3. their existence creates a desire in people to collect them and then to relate to other stamp collectors.

In all these cases, particular groups of people are bound together by their use of postage stamps into various kinds of social relationships. Sometimes the same person is involved in all three of these functions, but this is not necessarily the case. This paper concentrates upon the second category.

Gell too has given a definition of the sort of 'social agency' which is involved here. He identifies it as that person or thing which 'has the capacity to initiate causal events in his/her/its vicinity which (can be ascribed) only to . . . intentions' (1998: 19). He has also written that art objects are devices 'for securing the acquiescence of individuals in the network of intentionalities in which they are enmeshed' (1992: 43). This paper is concerned with how the images of postage stamps are intended to act upon and affect their users. Some, such as Barthes



180 朱印船 181 輪刈り 182 乃木希典 182a



183 水力発電所 184 東郷平八郎 185 上高地 186 オーロワンピ  
灯台



187 クムガンサン  
(金剛山) 188 明治神宮 189 日光東照宮陽明門 190 航研機



191 春日神社 192 富士と桜 193 法隆寺 194 厳島神社



195 鹿苑寺金閣 196 鎌倉の大仏 197 藤原鎌足 198 梅花模様

Plate 1 The First Showa Series 1937-44



267 農婦 (すかしなし#279) 268 捕鯨 (すかしなし#280) 269 炭鉱夫 270 茶摘み



271 印刷女工 (すかしなし#282) 272 炭鉱夫 (すかしなし#283) 273 絹織女工



274 穂高岳 (IC156に注意) 275 植林 (すかしなし#285)



276 郵便配達 277 電気研 278 機関車の製造  
(すかしなし#286) (すかしなし#287) (すかしなし#288)

Plate 2 The Vocational Series 1948-50





301 前島密 (#290を変更)  
302 秋田犬 (あきたいぬ)  
303 ホトトギス  
304 石山寺多宝塔



305 オンドリ  
306 カモシカ  
307 観音菩薩像 (#293を変更)  
308 姫路城 (#294を変更)



309 中尊寺金色堂  
312 金魚  
313 日光東照宮陽明門  
314 弥勒菩薩像 (#296を変更)



310 平等院鳳凰堂 (#296を変更)  
311 平等院鳳凰堂



315 マリモ  
316 オオムラサキ  
317 萩陽子  
318 やつば

Plate 3 Animal, Plant and National Treasure Series 1952-66



803 シオカラトンボ  
804 ミカドアゲハ  
805 テントウムシ  
806 オンドリ



807 メジロ  
808 キジバト  
809 ヤマガラ  
810 ヤマセミ



811 カルガモ  
812 ウソ  
813 サギソウ  
814 カワラナデシコ



815 カタクリ  
816 ツユクサ  
817 ノハナショウブ  
818 タチツボスミレ



819 カマキリ  
820 タカ

Plate 4 The Heisei Series 1992-

(1975), have seen Japan as 'a land of signs', of symbols, and this can lead to an over-reliance on semiotic explanations of Japanese images. Miller has noted that mass consumption items such as postage stamps only appear to have the type-token nature of words. He argues that such objects also play a role in the ordering of the unconscious, which he likens to that of Goffman's 'frames' (1974). Consequently they have both symbolic meaning and 'material force' (in Gell's terminology, 'social agency').

### **Postage stamps and visual communication**

Postage stamps are a part of visual culture as are posters, comics (*manga*), works of art, films and TV programmes. All are forms of visual communication with layers of meaning, and all are preserved, collected and studied. Postage stamps are perhaps the most ubiquitous. Also, they are produced in vast numbers: in 1997 in Japan, for example, 15 million copies of each of two stamps celebrating the Kyoto Conference on Climate Change were issued and also 80 million copies of the annual stamp to celebrate Letter-Writing Day. In the same year, some sixty different commemorative and special stamps were issued in Japan, apart from the regular issue (Sakura 2000).

In the field of visual communication in Japan (as in many other democratic countries) postage stamps, unlike other genres, are unusual in being a government monopoly. Hence, changes in their design and new issues may reflect changes in government policies – although this is not necessarily the case. Some new issues, for instance, may be simply a consequence of the government's wish to increase revenue from sales.

It would be a mistake to dismiss postage stamps as a medium of communication merely because they are rather small and their designs often receive only a cursory glance. To do so would be to overlook the fact that:

1. individuals not only purchase stamps on many occasions, but also receive mail bearing them;
2. regular (definitive) issues remain on sale for a considerable time;
3. stamps are purchased not only for use on mail but also as additions to collections; and stamp collectors often collect thematically, that is to say, according to the subject matter of the design. Collectors are always alert for variations/errors in designs (for example, wrong/missing elements and/or colours) and therefore examine them closely.

It is also relevant that Japan has a highly developed system of postmarking using cachets comprising interesting scenes and/or slogans that draw the eye to the stamps. As Hendry (1993) and others have shown, Japan has a 'wrapping culture' which leads to attention being paid to the outer covers of things: for example, Japanese people use specially designed postage stamps on their New Year's greetings cards and also on messages of condolence and for sending congratulations.

Japanese postage stamps offer images, often reproductions of pictures, in miniature. Less frequently symbols are deployed, such as cogwheels to denote machinery, which have currency in the world of graphic design for issues related to international events. Symbols traditionally connected with the Emperor and the seasons, such as the sixteen-petal, stylized chrysanthemum and plum blossom, are also used for some issues related to domestic affairs. However, the vast majority of Japanese postage stamps are pictures of scenes, objects and people which are photographic in their realism. They are representational art designed to remind Japanese people of particular aspects of their native culture.

Gell argued that art objects are 'a by-product of the mediation of social life' (1998: 8) and viewed art as a 'system of action intended to change the world rather than to encode symbolic propositions about it' (1998: 6). He offered the example of warriors' patterned shields, which, he suggested, are not 'beautiful' anthropologically but rather 'fear-inducing', that is to say that they exercise social agency (1998: 6). The same argument holds in the case of those stamps that may be classified as representational art. Their meanings are not to be found by analysing only the constituent parts of their designs, as semiotics would propose, but by looking at them as a whole, as pictures within their social contexts, and also by recognizing that these contexts change in space and time (Layton 1981: 108). But there are postage stamps which are clearly symbolic and consciously utilize symbols, and these need to be assessed by taking account of the traditional uses of the symbolism involved, both in Japanese society (Joli 1908) and in Western societies when the stamps are designed for foreign mail (Hall 1994). Barthes has made the point that there may be as many as three levels of meaning in any image:

1. that which is immediately apparent in the appearance of the image;
2. that which may be implied by the inclusion of any symbols in the image;
3. a 'poetic' meaning which may be derived from the nature of the whole image and the circumstances of its creation (Barthes 1985: 40-5).

The third level comes close to Gell's position: it is not the content of images which should be interpreted (as objects); rather, images must be regarded as a part of a social process of interaction between their creator(s), themselves (the images) and their audience(s). Hence, in interpreting the social significance of Japanese postage stamps we should be asking the questions, 'Who is communicating?', 'What is being communicated?', 'To whom?' and 'How is the audience understanding what is said to them?'<sup>1</sup> This paper focuses upon the first two of these four interlocking questions.

### **The Japanese postage stamp creation process**

To begin with the first of these questions, postage stamps are commissioned like some works of art and advertisements, but this does not mean that it is at all easy

to determine who is responsible for them individually. In Japan, it is the Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications (MOPT) that formally commissions the stamps and issues them, but it does so on behalf of the government as a whole and the procedures for establishing changes in the design of existing stamps and the annual programme of new issues are quite complex and diffuse responsibility widely.<sup>2</sup> In the case of commemorative and special issues, the Head of the Postal Bureau in the MOPT canvasses the views of other ministries in April each year regarding ideas for the issues to be made in the following year and usually receives some fifty to sixty suggestions. These are referred to a small, informal committee, which he creates by bringing together a representative stamp collector, his art director, the head of stamp printing, an art historian and maybe one or two other experts. They reduce the total to some twenty to twenty-five proposals, rejecting suggestions on technical difficulty grounds, or because ideas overlap, or because they seem commercially unattractive. But the political weight of the proposers' ministries is also taken into account, as also are current government policies. The Head of the Postal Bureau then has the task of persuading his colleagues in the other ministries to accept this reduced list, a process usually achieved by the end of June. The list then has to be approved by the Minister of MOPT and, if any inter-ministry disputes remain which he is unable to resolve, by the Cabinet. The Head of the Postal Bureau then delegates the task of creating the designs to his art director.

In the case of the regular issue, major changes in design are usually instigated only by the Cabinet, who decide on a theme and delegate the task of implementing it to the Head of the Postal Bureau, who in turn delegates the task to his art director. All the designs to be issued in the following year have to be approved by the Head of the Postal Bureau and, if deemed necessary, by the Minister, by early October. Thus, on the commissioning side there is not just one 'patron' but a combination of politicians and civil servants. On the artistic side, there is not just 'the artist' but a whole mix of persons comprising, in addition to the actual designer, the Art Director and his advisory committee. The Art Director of the Postal Bureau is an artist with professional training but also a civil servant.<sup>3</sup> It is the Art Director who decides whether to use a small team of in-house graphic designers (four to five people) or whether to commission designs from a small group of independent artists with whom he maintains personal contact and who are not always graphic designers; sculptors and painters in oils and watercolours have also been used. The Art Director keeps in close touch with the selected designer(s) and also uses another small, informal committee comprising a graphic designer, a printer and an appropriate academic expert in the subject of the design to advise him. This 'creation by committees' would not be important if visual communication were normally unambiguous. It is anything but. Gombrich (1959), for example, examines debates over the artist's relationship with his sitter. With regard to Japanese postage stamps, two persons are in crucial 'control positions': the Head of the Postal Bureau and his Art Director. Because it is the

Art Director who actually screens what appears before the Head of the Postal Bureau, it is perhaps he who is key to the whole process. Consequently, his social and political, as well as his artistic, sensibilities may well affect the impact that a new design has on the public and on stamp collectors, although clearly these will be subordinate to any overriding political direction from the minister.

### **The Japanese social and political context**

What is noticeable about all Japanese stamp designs is that they have never displayed any of the 'anarchism' of the Japanese 'avant-garde' artists (Munro 1994). Instead, stylistically they have been based either on pictures by famous 'traditional' artists of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries or on photographs; where they have used symbolism it has been in a simple, figurative style that was international and, just occasionally, classical Japanese (as described above). In these latter cases their 'Japaneseness' is indicated also by their economy of line and their use of space, both notable aspects of traditional Japanese art. This is not surprising because they represent the 'establishment', which is concerned with using art as affirmation rather than as protest. And, as a result, they have reflected the political and economic concerns of Japanese governments and of the allied powers during the post-war Occupation.

One of the reforms during the Occupation was a law redefining the duties of the Postal Bureau which set out a list of criteria for the issue of postage stamps which is still in force today. It states that commemorative and special issues are decided upon at the initiative of the Minister of MOPT and all stamps are designed within the following guidelines: their designs should:

1. record nationally important events which (MOPT believe) people should remember;
2. deepen international friendship and understanding;
3. enhance tourism and industry by recording Japan's traditional culture, local activities and natural beauty;
4. honour persons who have contributed to Japan's culture and academic learning;
5. support campaigns in Japan and internationally which are important (in the estimation of MOPT);
6. record significant (in the opinion of MOPT) Japanese historical events;
7. support letter writing and improve interest in and understanding of stamps.<sup>4</sup>

Three types of subject were never to be used: religious, political and industry groups, living people and controversial issues. The MOPT annual reports to the public state also that account is taken of current political policies and of trends in society. These criteria leave considerable discretion to the MOPT, particularly as regards which categories of commemorative/special issues should be given prominence at any time.

**The evolution of the definitive issue 1936–89***Changing definitions of national identity*

The pre-war, nationalist government issued a new definitive series of postage stamps for regular use in 1937–9, the first complete redesign since 1913. These continued in use, with minor modifications, until Japan's defeat in 1945. This was the first Japanese definitive issue to use realistic images rather than stylized symbols (see Plate 1). Today the Japanese describe them as the 'first Showa issue' but many of them hark back in both subject matter and style to the Tokugawa era and earlier: for example, a seventeenth-century merchant ship (1/2 sen), the Meiji Shrine (8 sen), the Yōmei gate in Nikkō (10 sen), the Kasuga shrine at Nara (14 sen); Miyajima Torii (30 sen), the Golden Pavilion in Kyoto (50 sen) and the Great Buddha in Kamakura (1 yen); and to classic scenes of rice harvesting (1 sen), Lake Taishō (5 sen), Mt. Fuji with cherry blossom (20 sen) and plum trees (10 yen). They would be instantly recognizable as classical clichés of 'Japaneseness', by such analysts of Japanese nationalism as Befu (1992) and Kosaku (1992). There were two modern images: a hydroelectric power station and a monoplane. The plane is shown flying over a map of Korea and Eastern China as well as Japan. This is an obvious reference to Japan's imperial ambitions and is confirmed by two other images: Garambi lighthouse in Taiwan (6 sen) and the Diamond Mountains in Korea (7 sen). Finally, we may note that the remaining images in the set are of three victorious wartime leaders: Prince Fujiwara (5 yen), General Nogi (2 sen) and Admiral Tōgō (4 sen). In designing this issue there seems to have been an attempt to suggest links between pre-Meiji Japan and its strong Shinto-Buddhist culture, the power of a modern state and victory in expansionist warfare. Perhaps this was an attempt to suggest that Japan had achieved successful modernization without Westernization.

The stamps most used by the ordinary population would have been those with the images of rice harvesting, with its very strong evocation of a particular historical form of Japanese identity (Ohnishi-Tierney 1993) and the two successful modern military leaders. This set was complemented by special issues: in 1937 to raise money for the air force; in 1940 to mark the 2600th year of the Japanese Imperial calendar and to mark the fifty-fourth anniversary of the Imperial Rescript on Education; and in 1942 to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the puppet state of Manchukuo. The definitive issue was modified during the war years by the addition of stamps depicting civilian war efforts – with regard to the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere and the Emperor's declaration that 'the enemy will surrender'. Thus the mix of images of modernity and success in expansionist, modern warfare with those referring to Japan's ancient past and Buddhist/Shinto traditions was maintained and, with it, the message that modernization was based on Eastern, not Western, roots. The use of postage stamps as social agents was being maintained.

The contrast with the first post-war issue, made after the introduction of the new, US-imposed, democratic Constitution of 1947, is striking (see Plate 2). This complete redesign of the definitive issue was the first since the one we have just considered and was instituted by the short-lived, socialist-led coalition government of Katayama Tetsu. It came when the Japanese were facing the enormous task of rebuilding their shattered cities and economy and its message was clear. It identified the Japanese people as workers. In stark contrast with its predecessors there was no looking back at a glorious past, no reference to either Buddhism or Shinto, and no imperial chrysanthemum symbol (for the first time). There was, in fact, only one stamp whose subject was not work, and that was the high value (16 yen) picture of Mt Hodaka, which had a very small print run. The images were seemingly chosen to send the message to the Japanese people that what was now needed from them was hard work. Stamps were again being used as social agents.

Of the six different designers who created this 'revolutionary' series one had also been one of the two designers who had created the 1937–9 series and two others had helped to design wartime special issues. The other designer of the 1937–9 series was also still employed in the department and designed subsequent commemorative issues under conservative governments. Thus it appears that these designers followed the directives given them, which reinforces the point about the importance of the Postal Bureau's Art Director. The style of this issue, particularly of the stamps designed by Hioki Masatoshi (the 2, 3, 5 and 8 yen), was very reminiscent of those issued in the 1930s by the USSR. It is a style that has been described as 'socialist realism' and is one which had never before been used in Japanese stamp design.<sup>5</sup> Clearly this was a set of designs which was symbolic also of the new, democratic Japan that some of the more idealistic members of the Supreme Command of Allied Powers (SCAP) hoped to create (Dower 1999: 75). But, within one year, the Cold War had caused the US to 'change course' and to give priority to making Japan a bulwark against Communism in East Asia (Stockwin 1999: 206).

The conservative governments that succeeded the coalition in late 1948 immediately began making piecemeal changes to this issue to reflect the change in the political climate, by bringing in additional value stamps with traditional motives of plum blossoms (10 yen) and cranes (4 yen). And in 1952 they instituted a total change, which took three years to complete and which resulted in all the images of workers being substituted with a mix of animal, plant and 'national treasure' images (see Plate 3). The latter were mainly pictures of Buddhist temples, Shinto shrines and related images: for example, the Tahoto Pagoda at Ishiyama Temple (4 yen), the Kanzean Bosatsu (10 yen), the Chūson Temple (20 yen), the Byōdōin (Phoenix Temple) at Uji (24 yen) and the Yōmei gate at Tōshō Shrine (45 yen). To some extent, these changes represented the ambivalent attitude of the conservative Japanese leadership to the American-imposed reforms of the Occupation, but they were not a reversion to the nationalism of pre-war

Japan as the subsequent development of the definitive issue shows. Rather they seem designed to help the Japanese people find their bearings in the post-war world by re-establishing approval of some cultural links with their past, thereby demonstrating another example of social agency.

This issue was to remain in use until 1967 with occasional adjustments via the issue of new values and, in 1963, by the substitution of a seashell for the Tahoto Pagoda on the 4 yen and of cherry blossom for the Kanzean Bosatsu on the 10 yen. These changes swung the balance between the three categories of illustration from 'national treasures' towards 'nature' and also reduced the references to Shinto and Buddhism. In 1966/7 a new 'animal, plant and national treasures' series was instituted in which the balance between these three categories, as far as their general use was concerned, was changed further towards 'nature' by restricting the use of 'national treasure' images to the higher values, which were not used for postcards/letters or small packets. Moreover, the national treasures chosen for illustration now included the garden of Katsura Palace and an ancient clay model (*haniwa*) of a horse as well as Buddhist and Shinto objects. Thus there was a clear direction of development in imaging towards 'nature' and, if one looks ahead to the next major change in the design of the definitive series, instituted after the enthronement of the Emperor Heisei in the early 1990s, one sees that images of 'national treasures' are dropped and that the whole series is devoted to images of animals and plants (see Plate 4). This use of references to 'nature' seems to reflect Ackermann's thesis that, by being persuaded to identify themselves with the natural world, the Japanese would more readily accept the *status quo* of the social order (1997: 50).

However, the significance of these images of nature was wider than this and can be appreciated better by examining the other postage stamp issues of this period, the special and commemorative stamps.

### **The evolution of special and commemorative issues**

In the 1950s there were only about half a dozen issues annually, but between 1960 and 1970 there was a substantial increase in the number of special and commemorative stamps issued each year. This rose from under ten series involving approximately fifteen stamps to over twenty series involving thirty to forty stamps per year (Sakura 2000) and this higher annual rate of issue has been maintained at about the same level since then. This has given much more scope for the government to use these stamps to send messages to the public and a second major theme soon became apparent: stamps were now issued seeking to define Japan's place in the world. There was also evidence of concern with helping the definitive issue to define Japanese national identity via the use of images of 'nature', but there was little evidence of any interest in the development of democracy. Late in the period, another development, latent since the establishment of the criteria for the design and issue of postage stamps, was now given much greater prominence:



stamps were now promoted as components of a mass consumption and material culture.

### *Contribution to the definition of national identity*

The connection of the special and commemorative issues with the theme of Japanese national identity was achieved mainly through two special series. The more significant was a series of national parks issues, which came out annually over the period 1949–74, sometimes with several issues of two–four stamps in one year. They were all pictures of well-known landscapes, with some issues after 1957 including images of Japanese people in traditional dress. Morris-Suzuki has discussed ‘how visions of nature are central to modern constructions of national identity’ in the Japanese context (1998: 35). In order to be effective these visions need to represent actual, identifiable places, such as those carried around in people’s memories after a visit or after looking at photographs, rather than stylized or idealized images. In fact, this series used mainly retouched photographs. These images, taken in conjunction with the increasing use of ‘nature’ images in the definitive series discussed earlier, meant that people were receiving a continuous reminder both of their place in a geographically defined space and that they were part of a natural order which has its own harmony.<sup>6</sup> In Ishida’s words, they were given a unique ‘natural sense’ (*shizensai*) (cited in Morris-Suzuki 1998: 35).

The second special series that was significant in this connection was an annual issue to celebrate the National Athletics Championships. Starting in 1947, these stamps invariably illustrated individuals displaying the techniques of various sports, including team games. On the surface level they are about sport but their sub-text seems to be a celebration of individuals seeking and achieving perfection in their performance of a wide variety of tasks. This was a message that was clearly relevant to the early post-war imperative of rebuilding the country and its relevance continued for the improvement of the competitiveness of the Japanese economy. This is a further example of using stamps as social agents adding a new dimension to the national identity.

### *‘Nihonjinron’ and ‘Kokusaika’*

As Japan succeeded in developing its exports in competition with Western economies in the years following 1970, there developed also a concern to identify the roots of that success. This was at a time of some continuing tensions with the US and Europe, which contributed to a public discussion, encouraged by government, of what might be attributes unique to the Japanese, the ‘*Nihonjinron*’ debate (Kosaku 1992). There were two major series devoted to showing the unique attributes of Japan’s pre-Meiji artistic heritage, such as Buddhist and Shinto architecture and imagery, screen painting and lacquer ware; and there were further series imaging traditional theatre (*Kabuki*, *Noh*, *Bunraku*, *Gagaku*),

traditional folk tales and songs, and *ukiyo-e* prints of Sumo. There was also a series on modern Japanese art, which, in thirty-two illustrations, included only three that showed Western influences.

Concern for the vulnerability of their economy to international 'shocks' caused the government gradually to become concerned with promoting 'internationalization' (*kokusaika*) in the 1980s. This seems to have been an attempt to 'win friends' by making Japan appear co-operative and caring to the outside world while providing the Japanese with a better understanding of global affairs. The number of issues related to the UN, as compared with the 1970s, doubled (from four to eight) as did the number of issues (from fifteen to thirty-four) related to international meetings (such as those on business, sport and scientific research) held in Japan; there was also a stamp series devoted to Western architecture in Japan. However, concern with identifying the uniqueness of Japanese culture continued. There were more series devoted to Japan's own cultural heritage: three substantial issues, totalling sixty different designs, illustrated traditional arts and crafts; and another (of forty stamps) illustrating the haiku poet Bashō's diary.

The concept of identity is one with which anthropologists and others have had some problems. Social anthropologists have come to see that a sense of personal identity is 'multiple, moving and changing' and that 'people define themselves in relation to their distance or difference from other people' (Rosenberger 1992: 14). This is a shifting relationship which involves dimensions of both space and time. People's sense of their national identity is equally fluid. Hence, each Japanese person may define the Japanese nation as 'a bounded geographical entity . . . an environmental space understood in terms of familiar imagery of climate and landscape . . . with its citizens sharing a genetic and cultural heritage adapted to the natural environment' (Morris-Suzuki 1998: 4). All these concepts vary between individuals and over time. In reality there are no universally valid generalizations about Japanese national identity, but, in political and popular discussion, variations are elided and use is made of shared paradigms, created in part by their postage stamp portrayals of Japanese national identity.

### *Japan's place in the world*

The second theme that was evident in the special and commemorative issues was the attempt to redefine Japan's role in the world. This was tackled through the careful selection of the international events which were commemorated in special stamp issues and also by the way in which the issues relating to Japanese events portrayed Japanese concerns. In commemorating Japanese events, the emphasis was on those that showed that the nation now abhorred the horrors of war. For example, in 1949 there was an issue to commemorate the creation of the new 'peace city' of Hiroshima and another commemorating the classification of Nagasaki as a 'cultural city'. Regular annual sports issues tended to concentrate on illustrating individual performance rather than competition; and there were

various scouting issues which had the theme of co-operation. Even the issues devoted to the economic development of the country concentrated upon the domestic transport infrastructure and land reclamation. There was also an annual issue devoted to promoting reforestation and a few to other 'green' issues.

In international affairs, the emphasis was placed on Japan's co-operation in matters related to trade and business, on scientific, particularly medical, research and, from the later 1950s, as a supporter of the humanitarian concerns of the UN. These were illustrated through stamp issues regarding the Declaration of Human Rights, the Freedom from Hunger campaign, Children's Day, International Cooperation Year and the twentieth anniversary of UNESCO. Political issues were not dealt with except that, at the height of the anti-US alliance (*Anpo*) demonstrations in 1960, two stamps were issued to celebrate the centenary of the first Japan-US treaty of friendship, as a confirmation that this relationship would remain the basis of Japan's international relations. For stamps specifically designed for international correspondence (for example, for the annual International Letter-Writing week), designs were based on classic *ukiyo-e* prints of the Edo period, reassuringly familiar images of a cultured people.

### *The Emperor and democracy*

The 1947 Constitution, which declared the Emperor to be a constitutional monarch and the country a parliamentary democracy, was accorded two memorial stamps at the time, one showing a wreath of roses and wisteria and the other of some ambiguity. It offered an image of a woman holding a young boy, both in some sort of kimono and the kanji used on it were written in a nineteenth-century style. It did not contain an image of the Showa Emperor as is customary in the stamp issues of most other countries so constituted (for example, Thailand, the UK, the Netherlands, Scandinavian countries and so on). Indeed, the Emperor's image never appeared on a stamp thereafter, which again is unusual in an international context. When Prince Akihito was nominated Crown Prince in 1952, the commemorative issue again carried no portrait nor did the issue regarding his foreign tour the next year. Only in 1959, on the occasion of his wedding, was his portrait used on a stamp, and it has not appeared since. For his enthronement as Emperor Heisei, symbols were used on the commemorative stamps. While this can no doubt be explained as being due to the respect that it is felt should be accorded to the Emperor, it is a unique attitude among the remaining monarchies of the world. Even Thailand, which maintains and exercises a very strict '*lèse-majesté*' law, does not have such a rule. Apparently, the head of state and his family had still not been quite 'demythologized'.

In 1960 the seventieth anniversary of the Diet was recorded, and in 1965 the seventy-fifth anniversary of the first, very limited granting of male suffrage. Anniversaries of the extensions of male suffrage in the Taisho era and the granting of full male and female suffrage by the 1947 Constitution were not recorded.

Major reforms of the whole system of education were recorded in two stamps only: one in 1948 which showed a little boy and girl reading a book together marked the change to co-education at the primary level and another in 1959 commemorated the tenth anniversary of parent-teacher associations (but linked this in the design of the stamp with the centenary of the death of pre-Meiji Japanese education reformer Yoshida Shōin). The only stamps dealing with higher education were two to mark the centenaries of the founding of Tokyo and Keio universities. Regarding the major changes in local government no stamps were issued.

Overall the impression given by special and commemorative stamp issues is of a wish to treat the post-war reforms as merely an extension of Meiji reforms and, if that were not possible, to ignore them. Gluck (1993) has explored this theme. In this regard it is pertinent to note the substantial number of stamps issued to record Meiji era reforms and modernizations: there was at least one such issue annually from 1970 onwards, but there were only four recording anniversaries that pre-dated Meiji. Further, there were two series recording 'men of culture' but both portrayed only those who made their reputations in the Meiji era. The attitude of the MOPT can perhaps best be gauged from noting that all three annual series of special stamps for which they had sole responsibility (the New Year, International Letter-Writing and Philatelic Week issues) illustrated traditional Japanese culture, using regional rural toys and games and *ukiyo-e* scenes.

### *Stamps as part of material culture*

An increase in the number of issues aimed at stamp collectors was the other most notable feature of the late Showa period. It was a time when economic success was taken for granted and people had increasing disposable incomes. The MOPT saw sales of some special issues and of miniature sheets of them as well as of other commemorative issues as easy revenue raisers. Their 'collectability' was promoted and encouraged by the choice of subjects (for example, native birds, alpine plants, insects and so on) for special issues which lent themselves to the fashionable hobby of theme collecting which was becoming established internationally in the 1970s (Gibbons 2000). The MOPT thus deliberately made stamps a part of the consumer society.

### **Conclusion**

Stamp collecting is a very large hobby activity in Japan. It has been officially encouraged by the MOPT since 1946; and one of the obligations laid on MOPT in the Postal Services Act of 1948 was to improve the general populace's study and understanding of Japanese postage stamps. As a result, the MOPT actively promoted stamp collecting, especially among school children, throughout the country. In 1947/8 special commemorative miniature sheets of stamps were sold to collectors at ten major stamp exhibitions which MOPT organized in large towns

around the country (for example Sapporo, Osaka, Mishima, Nagano, Fukushima) to popularize stamp collecting. The Postal Bureau's 1998 Annual Report mentions 'stamp workshops, held jointly with local philately organizations, were held at some 1000 places around the country' (pp. 12–13); and every year, since the early 1950s, they have organized an All Japan Stamp Exhibition for established collectors in Tokyo for which they issue a commemorative postage stamp. Displays of all the currently available postage stamps are always on show in the larger post offices. The MOPT also provides financial support for the Japan Philatelic Society Foundation in Mejiro (Tokyo), which publishes a monthly stamp magazine (with a quarterly version in English) and two standard catalogues of Japanese postage stamps, maintains a philatelic reference library and organizes stamp exhibitions. Retired officials of the MOPT form and run the Association for the Promotion of Postal Culture, which exists to stimulate interest in new issues of Japanese stamps and stamp collecting. They publish annually, in Japanese, English and French, descriptions of the new issues to be produced in the following year.

Stamp collecting, like many other collecting hobbies, is both a solitary and a competitive (that is to say, social) activity. Consequently, it spawns societies of collectors on local, national and even international bases. There are societies for collectors of Japanese stamps at all these levels, not only in Japan but also in other countries such as the US, Germany and the UK. These societies encourage their members to study their Japanese stamps and to exchange information about them by publishing journals and by holding exhibitions with prizes for the best exhibits.

This brief survey of certain Japanese stamp issues in the Showa era has attempted to show what the issuing authorities were aiming to achieve. It has shown that, following the example set by their war-time and immediate pre-war predecessors, these authorities used postage stamp design and issues to promote a particular sense of Japanese identity and that they did so within a context which emphasized its links with late Meiji modernization. This paper has shown, in its analysis of the treatment of imperial themes, that there remained some ambivalence regarding the concepts of constitutional monarchy and democracy. The important question of who influences the selection of these themes and designs will be addressed by Dobson in the next paper.

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All the illustrations are taken from the *Sakura Catalog of Japanese Stamps* published annually by the Japan Philatelic Society Foundation of Mejiro, Tokyo, Japan. They are reproduced with their kind permission.

**Notes**

1. This approach was developed initially by Reid in his 1984 paper on 'The symbolism of postage stamps: a resource for historians'. Earlier uses of postage stamps by social scientists had been as recorders of facts about the countries issuing them (Hazard 1960; Ribelow 1956). Reid described them as 'primary sources for the symbolic messages which governments seek to convey to their citizens and to the world' (1984: 223). In his analysis of the stamp issues of the Ottoman Empire and its successor states he formulated the first three of the four basic questions identified above. It was R.S. Newman, building on his ideas in a paper published five years later (1989), who added what for anthropologists is a most important, fourth question: 'With what effect?'
2. As far as I know there is no published material regarding the procedures for the issue of Japanese postage stamps. The MOPT was unable to refer me to any Japanese sources but agreed, during an interview I had with the Director of the Stamps and Correspondence Promotion Office of the Postal Bureau in Tokyo in May 1999, to their subsequent completion of a questionnaire which I left with them. Their replies have become the major source of my information on this matter. I have since found some corroborative information in various articles published in Japanese in the staff magazine of the Postal Bureau, which have been made available to me by a personal contact in the MOPT, and also in a long letter which I have received from a retired art director of the Postal Bureau.
3. Again, as far as I know, there is no published material in the public domain on the procedures for the design of Japanese postage stamps, in either Japanese or English. A retired art director of the Postal Bureau has made it clear that he preserved a sympathetic feeling for the 'traditional spirit' of Japan and says that he sought always to have this conveyed by the designs for which he was responsible. He instanced a very large series of stamps issued over the years 1987-9 using a number of graphic designers and calligraphers which commemorated the diary of Matsuo Bashō.
4. Information from correspondence with the Director of the Stamps and Correspondence Promotion Office of the Postal Bureau of the MOPT on 3 June 1999.
5. 'Socialist Realism was a doctrine first approved at the Congress of Socialist Writers in 1934. . . . until then, Soviet artists had been allowed to associate political radicalism with artistic revolution. However, after Stalin's rise to power the Soviet regime developed a dislike of "bourgeois" avant-gardism and replaced it with the idea of Socialist Realism. This stated that the role of the artist was to serve the people by producing positive, upbeat and accessible works of art. The social function of art was to elevate and educate . . . an adherence to "bourgeois" values was forbidden' (McLeish 1993: 693).
6. There has been much discussion of the relationship of the Japanese with nature and of how, if in any sense, it may be special (Morris-Suzuki 1998). There is little doubt that in their popular culture many Japanese express an empathy with nature and believe themselves to be special in the extent of this characteristic (Ackermann 1997). But there is also evidence (Kalland 1992) of their concern at nature being wild, even dangerous, and needing to be controlled, tamed or separated from people (as it is in stamp illustrations). This concern for the dangers inherent in untamed nature may be related to Shinto beliefs which link nature with the supernatural (*kami*) (Holton 1997: 11) and with the fact that untamed nature is *ipso facto* part of the outside (*soto*) and hence associated with uncertainty and pollution (Hendry 1995: 184). It has been argued also that images of nature represent both order and continuous change and, in so doing, drive home the importance of correct behaviour and interpersonal relationships, and thus of maintaining an orderly society (Ackermann 1997: 50).

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# JAPAN ANTHROPOLOGY WORKSHOP NEWSLETTER No. 34

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## Japanese Postage Stamps in Social Contexts: A Report on Research in Progress

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This paper describes some of the results of my continuing research into the social agency<sup>1</sup> of Japanese postage stamps. This research was occasioned by discussions in a seminar at Oxford Brookes University, held by Professor Joy Hendry for her graduate students of the social anthropology of Japan, in which the social significance of various everyday objects was the subject. Material objects which are insignificant in themselves and very commonplace have the potential to play significant roles in the formation of society. In the case of Japanese postage stamps I have found that they may have helped to both mold and to reflect society in Japan; and that in different ways they have created sub-societies of collectors which are not bounded by national boundaries. In neither of these roles has their agency received the attention of anthropologists. Some geographers and historians/ political scientists<sup>2</sup> have discussed them in non-Japanese contexts and one political scientist is researching the politics of their issue in Japan.<sup>3</sup>

In talks last year at the annual conferences of the BAJIS in Birmingham and the EAJS in Lahti I outlined my ideas on the social significance of Japanese postage stamps and my findings regarding messages about Japanese identity which had been sent via their designs and issues both before and after the Second World War. In this paper I will outline my further research into how these messages have been heard by both Japanese and British users of these stamps and what effects they may have had.

This stage of my research has been influenced by reading Alfred Gell's posthumously published "Art and Anthropology – An Anthropological Theory" [1998] in which he set out his theory of the social agency of art [pp.16-19], viewing "art as a system of action intended to change the world" [p. 6] and arguing that "images...and the like have to be treated as person-like, that is, sources of and targets for social agency" [p. 96] He argued that art should not be interpreted as just encoding symbolic propositions about society as proponents of semiotic and symbolic interpretations have proposed [Barthes, 1983; Layton, 1981]. My position is that Japanese stamps certainly seem to play a functional [symbolic] role in reflecting and thereby confirming Japanese society [Hendry, 1995 and 1999] but that there are issues concerned with the extent to which they do so;<sup>4</sup> whether also they play a part in reshaping that society [as Gell's social agents]; and also their social importance as art objects in material culture [Miller, 1987]. These are the matters with which this research is concerned.

Are stamps art? They certainly often reproduce pictures which are generally accepted to be in that category and at other times may be original visual creations. Whilst their basic purpose has nothing to do with their appearance my research shows that they are bought by both collectors and other users for aesthetic as well as utilitarian reasons. The Minister responsible for the Japanese postal services chose to speak of them as "the greatest works of art with the smallest area" at the opening of the recent Japan World Stamp Exhibition 2001 in Tokyo.

昭和切手  
SHOWA SERIES

I. 第1次昭和切手  
1st SHOWA Series

1937-44(昭和12-19) 白紙・昭和すかし(W3), 凸または凹(♯185-7, 189-90, 192, 194, 197-8), 13×13½, 国100



産業図案切手  
VOCATIONAL SERIES

後にすかしなし用紙に変わるまでのシリーズを、「産業図案切手」としてまとめた。

1948-50(昭和23-25) 白紙・昭和すかし(W3), 凸または凹, 13×13½, 国100(♯274のみ50)



Plate 1

Plate 2

Illustrations are from the Sakura Catalog of Japanese Postage Stamps by kind permission of the publishers, the Japan Philatelic Society Foundation.

But before describing my findings in relation to the questions raised above it will be helpful if I summarise very briefly the case for believing that Japanese governments<sup>5</sup> have used postage stamps for social/political purposes.

- Postage stamps, being a receipt for a service need only to identify the service, the amount received, the service provider and, when used, the date. There is a need to make their design difficult to copy/forged but this does not entail a need for them to carry illustrations. The fact is that since 1922 Japanese stamps of the definitive<sup>5</sup> issue have usually carried pictures; and that since 1894 there have been also special and commemorative<sup>6</sup> issues which, by their very nature, are intended to carry messages and are usually illustrated.
- The Japanese postal service is a Government monopoly which operates under the control of a Minister who is a member of the Cabinet. The post World War II reforms included an Act in 1948 which *inter alia* established rules for the design and issue of postage stamps. However they leave a lot of discretion to the Head of the Postal Bureau and his Minister and make clear that stamp issues should serve the national interest.<sup>7</sup> This last point is underlined by a comment in the Postal Bureau's 2000/2001 annual report [p. 1] that "one of the goals of the MPT [Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications] is to enhance the role of the nation's 24,600 post offices as regional centres of information, peace of mind and of communication."
- The process by which commemorative and special issues are decided involves the Postal Bureau in consultations with all the other major departments of Government for each annual programme in order to ensure that, in principle, the programme reflects the Government's current priorities. However, in practice individual politicians may be able to insert their special interests.<sup>8</sup>

However an examination of the different stamps issued which takes into account the timing of their first issue is the most persuasive indicator that the Japanese Government treats postage stamps as "miniature diplomats" [*chiisa na gaikookan*]. This is a description used by the Minister in charge of the Postal Bureau in his official message to the Japan World Stamp Exhibition 2001, held in Tokyo, 1st-7th August 2001.

It is not the purpose of this paper to make this examination. I gave a summary of its results to the two meetings referred to in the introduction and it is also presented in a paper which is being published in the first issue of "Japan Forum" for 2002. However, as an example, there is the complete redesign of the definitive issue ordered by the military dominated, nationalist government, that came into power in 1937, which was redesigned to illustrate its ideology of state Shinto under the Emperor and of Japanese colonial expansion to create a co-prosperity sphere [Hunter, 1989, pp. 171, 176] [Plate 1]. After defeat in World War II the need for a vast rebuilding programme of cities and industries caused the Government in 1948 to again completely redesign the definitive issue, but now it was to show only images of working people in their work environments. These governments also introduced a new special annual series for the National Athletics Championships which used illustrations of individuals striving for success in various activities, a not too subtle recommendation of hard and effective work! [Yoshida, 1948?, p. 25] [Plates 1 and 2]. These two issues certainly "mirrored" if they did not make that the call to the public.

But it is not just particular issues that are important. Trends in stamp design which persist over time and involve various specific issues are probably more so. In this respect my research has suggested that there were the following themes in Japanese stamp designs in the post-war Showa period:

- the primary one was an attempt to redefine the Japanese people, to both themselves and to the rest of the world, as nature-loving within a special natural environment and having an unique relationship [*shizen*] with it;
- this was supplemented in time with the suggestion that the Japanese people are concerned for human welfare on a global basis and supportive of the United Nation's humanitarian initiatives;
- meanwhile there was a continuing reminder of their lifestyle's links with the Meiji modernisation reforms;
- and that theirs is an ancient and artistic [peaceful] culture.

However other themes which might have been expected to become evident were very weakly represented, e.g.

- support for the growth of democracy in Japan and recognition that the Emperor is only a constitutional head of state;
- equality for women;
- post-war developments in the arts;
- the creation of a world class industrial economy.

The guidelines for stamp issues and design [note 7] do not give encouragement to deal with these matters but developments in the 1990s have shown that they would not have prevented them from being dealt with if that had been the desire of the Postal Bureau.

The result is that throughout this period Japanese stamps have continued to present Japan to itself and the rest of the world as a sort of quaint oriental museum!

The purpose of this paper is to report the results of my more recent research among the users and collectors of these Japanese stamps. The primary purpose of that research was to establish the extent to which these Japanese postage stamps could be regarded as social agents in the sense in which Gell used this term i.e. as molders of users views on the meaning of being Japanese. Have the messages been heard? One way of helping to establish this was to look for any evidence for believing that collectors of these stamps had developed any "community of perceptions" about Japan.

The research is being conducted mainly among the membership of the foremost society for collectors of Japanese postage stamps, the International Society for Japanese Philately, which is based in the United States but has a world-wide membership.<sup>9</sup> The first contact was made via articles in two separate philatelic society members' journals for Japanese stamp collectors which circulate within Japan and the United Kingdom. These articles explained my ideas in an accessible fashion. Thereafter almost equal numbers of Japanese collectors living in Japan and of British collectors living in the United Kingdom were contacted and asked to complete "open-ended" questionnaires [Neuman, 1997] which sort their views on the visual imagery of Japanese stamps and how it related to Japan and Japaneseness. Since then follow-up interviews are being held with a number of these respondents in both Japan and the United Kingdom.

In addition an attempt has been made to contact a cross section of ordinary Japanese users of Japanese stamps, both in Japan and in the United Kingdom, which is still continuing.

The non-collecting Japanese buyers of these postage stamps interviewed thus far have the least awareness of their imagery. They just buy these 'labels' to stick on their letters etc. because that is part of the process of mailing them and when they receive them they hardly notice them unless they are they are commemorative or special issues. When they do admit to noticing the imagery they often respond to it

aesthetically. These issues are bought either because they approve of / are interested in the event concerned or because they find their images attractive [*miryokuteki*] or cute [*kawaii*] or beautiful [*utsukushi*] and these are also the responses on receiving them.

A minority of respondents [female] have indicated that they have bought some issues in bulk because of such aesthetic reasons and because they thought this made them especially suitable for their personal correspondence. They found that they reflected their and / or their correspondents' artistic tastes and interests. For this group the political/social messages of the stamp designs would be irrelevant, because their designs were being given meaning by the personal social context in which they were to be used. Their use was part of the 'wrapping' of their messages which made statements about their own and / or their recipients tastes [Hendry, 1993, ch.1]. They were acting as social agents, but in a very limited context.

The stamp collectors' responses have been more varied although the aesthetic response has been very evident. Occasionally it has been the main motive for their starting to collect Japanese stamps.

However in the United Kingdom awareness has generally been shown of Japanese stamps giving 'a concentrated image of the history, natural environment and arts of the country of origin' [Japan World Stamp Exhibition Catalogue, 2001, p. 4] Many, who otherwise had no direct knowledge of Japan and because there are relatively few stamps dealing with technology and industry, tended to see Japan as essentially a land of ancient culture and beautiful scenery. Nearly all had noted the prevalence in stamp images of those with a nature theme and had associated the Japanese with having some kind of special feeling for nature.

Among Japanese collectors however there was less willingness to admit to noticing patterns in their stamps' images. Only two said they thought I might be correct in my assessment of the role of nature and of its representing something uniquely Japanese.<sup>10</sup> Otherwise the nearest they came to noting themes in the images was in the negative. Several commented on the absence of designs which celebrated Japan's modern economy and expressed disappointment at this lack of recognition of Japan's achievements, for example in electronics and automobile production. On the other hand they did respond to them aesthetically and often commented on the quality of the printer's craft they demonstrated.

This type of response suggests that generally the images of Japan and of Japanese society presented by Japanese stamps were seen as mirror images of the too familiar; that far from changing their feelings and understanding regarding them the stamps were acting as reflectors. This may be too facile. Whilst the element of reflection may well be true [it would take a great deal of additional research to establish this] it does not follow that what was reflected was not reshaping their understanding, because what was reflected was not the whole picture, as some explicitly recognised [see the previous paragraph] but only a selection from it. It is to the cumulative impact that such a selection of images makes that one must look for the social agency of Japanese stamps within Japanese society.

This cumulative impact is however hard to measure. Like so much of advertising it has subliminal effects which are not unique to this one medium of communication. In this area [Japanese identity] stamps are performing within the same context as many other media of communication and would seem to have no unique traits which would enable their effects to be distinguished from those of the others.

The difference between the responses of the British and the Japanese collectors was that between the Native and the Other and is explained by their different social contexts. For the British collectors the 'mirror effect' is replaced by what is better

described as the 'torchlight effect'. Japanese stamps illuminate for them specific aspects of this Other. But these illuminations are selective and partial as are the effects of using a torch in a dark, strange room. Unlike the Native they are not always so conscious of this. They lack his direct personal experience and do not have so many other communications media performing the same service from different perspectives. Even so the problem of identifying the role of stamp imagery in their understanding of Japan and whether it is a formative one remains much the same as it does in the case of the Japanese collectors.

One conclusion is that there is no "community of perceptions" regarding Japan identifiably resulting from their Japanese stamp collecting, among either the Japanese or British collectors, which would distinguish them as groups within their societies. The interest in and activity of collecting Japanese stamps does not bind those involved together because of their perceptions of any social / political messages contained in the designs of the stamps they collect. It is other aspects of Japanese stamps which create a sense of community for their collectors and in doing so help to explain why those collectors are not remarking such messages.

Those other aspects are common to both Native and Other collectors. They are those aspects of the stamps to which the stamp dealers' catalogues<sup>11</sup> give most of their attention and become the stamps's defining characteristics for stamp collectors. These aspects are the technical ones associated with the production of this material object . . . the paper type and any watermark; the techniques used to create and reproduce the design; the colours used; the method chosen to enable one stamp to be separated from another; variations in the design and appearance resulting from redrawing or from accidents in the production processes and changes in the colour inks used, as well as the first date of issue. These factors allied to the dealer-publisher's assessment of the supply-demand balance determine a value for each variety. However there are further aspects of a stamp's material condition which cause the dealer to modify that value, such as whether it is existing as a single copy, or as part of a sheet [in a pair, block, or strip] and whether it is in mint state or has been mounted on a display page, or used in the post. If it has been postally used he may also give a differential value if it is on a 'first day cover' which is either a card or envelope specially printed for that day's use or at least one on which there is a clear date stamp. Not all collectors choose to take concern for all these aspects but as the dealers' catalogues are the primary sources of information available to them regarding the stamps of the various countries, including their own, they are led into this way of examining their stamps. It may seem strange but the postal authorities of countries do not make available lists of the stamps they have issued in the past, only lists of those they intend to issue in the next year. One result of the catalogues' way of listing stamps is that collectors are encouraged to "look at the trees and not the wood". The overall look of the stamp is only important to them as a means of finding it in the catalogue.

This concern with detail is characteristic of collecting more generally,<sup>12</sup> a subject on which a considerable body of anthropological literature is developing, although not much of it makes reference, except in passing, to postage stamps.

This is a pity because this research has shown that to understand the social significance of postage stamps it is necessary to understand how they affect their collectors, whose numbers run into the millions in both the United Kingdom and Japan. And in the case of Japan the promotion of philately, as stamp collectors call their hobby, is regarded as one of the seven key roles of the postal authorities. The Postal Bureau regularly reports on its' efforts to promote stamp collecting: the "Postal Service and local philately organisations jointly sponsor workshops to increase

awareness of the pleasures of stamp collecting annually at some 1000 places around the country” [Annual Report 2000/2001, p.12]. They also sponsor, with the Japan Philatelic Society Foundation, an annual stamp exhibition in Tokyo which, every ten years [starting in 1981] becomes a World Exhibition, involving postal authorities, dealers and stamp collectors from around the world. This year 106 countries were officially represented. There were 34 foreign stamp dealers’ stands; 445 exhibitors from abroad and 96 from Japan; and in the seven days it was open it attracted over 60,000 visitors [advice from the Japan Philatelic Society Foundation as co-organisers]. These efforts are made for a variety of motives. In the past decade an increasingly important one has been revenue raising through the promotion of stamps as a part of the material culture of Japan and indeed of the rest of the world. Stamp collecting is crucial to the success of this aim and Japanese stamp designs increasingly reflect this commercial objective [This is perceived to have become the case by virtually all the Japanese and British stamp collectors interviewed]. The introduction of regular, annual stamp issues by the Provincial authorities, which are intended to promote tourism in their areas by illustrating their scenic and craft attractions [the *Furusato* series] has underlined this commercial use [Sakura Catalog, 2002].

### Conclusions

Thus far this research has revealed that there has been an evolution in Japanese postage stamps which has resulted in their playing more than one role in Japanese society. From being utilitarian material objects they first became also a part of the Government propaganda machine and then a part of material culture. Meanwhile their users have shown little awareness of this progression. Either they have simply used them in their basic role of being receipts or they have collected them; either to use or to satisfy their collecting instinct. In both these latter cases the stamps have been more important to their collectors as definers of their own identities than of anything else. No real evidence has been found that the social / political messages which post-World War 2 Japanese governments appear to have included in their designs have been received, except by some foreigners, and as a result they have not created any “communities” which share common perceptions of Japan. However it has become evident that the aspects of these stamps which are familiar to stamp collectors *qua* collectors has had social effects and that these are transnational. This has become one focus of this continuing research.

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### Appendix

#### Research Methods

The research methods being used in this stage of my study are a combination of participant observation with questionnaires and interviews based on random sampling.

The questionnaires have been used to elicit opinions in an open-ended manner. The forms have been kept brief, fitting onto one side of A4 paper including space for answers. They open by asking a few questions to define the respondent [leaving optional the giving of names & addresses] and their stamp collecting. In the case of British respondents there are also a few questions to determine the extent of their familiarity with Japan. There follow 4 key questions regarding their opinion on the social significance of Japanese stamp designs in issues made since 1947. The wording of these questions was as follows for the Japanese collectors:



- What characteristics of Japan as a nation do you think they show?
- How do they describe Japanese people?
- Do you personally think the pictures of Japan and the Japanese people which these stamp issues give are accurate? And if not what are the reasons for your disagreement?
- Do you think that the Japanese stamp issues of the last ten years or so have become more “international” in appearance? Perhaps more concerned with appealing to youngsters to collect them?

The wording was varied slightly for the British collectors and instead of Question 3 they were asked if they thought that the designs of those Japanese stamps most used on foreign mail from Japan suggested any different images of Japan and the Japanese people from the general run of issues.

Respondents were encouraged to offer narrative answers and to use the back of the form if they required extra space, which some did. Although asked to identify specific stamps which had influenced their answers not many did.

Each questionnaire was accompanied by an explanation of my research aims. The one to British collectors in UK which was sent to the members of the British Society for Japanese Philately [BSJP] was supported by an article in their journal [*Kiku Shimibun*] which was issued in advance of my questionnaire. In the case of Japan my questionnaire was given two distributions. It was circulated [in English] with an issue of the English language journal [Philately in Japan] of the Japan Philatelic Society Foundation in which my explanatory article was published. This journal is sent to their Japanese collector members who request it and to a few foreigners. The questionnaire was also sent [again in English] to all the Japanese members of the International Society for Japanese Philately [ISJP] who are resident in Japan. This questionnaire was accompanied by an explanatory letter based on my articles. As most Japanese collectors of Japanese stamps belong to both the JPSF and the ISJP they were advised to answer [English preferred but Japanese accepted] only one of the two questionnaires, which were both returnable to the same address in Japan. There was no duplication and there was only one response in Japanese.

The response rate from the British collectors was quite high at nearly 50% but it was very low from the Japanese collectors, perhaps 10%. Whilst the total number of British collectors contacted is known, the number of Japanese collectors is known to be at least as large, but is uncertain in total because of overlap in the two distributions made there. Cluster analysis is now being applied to the British responses but would not be appropriate to the Japanese responses because of the small number.

I am following up these questionnaires with personal meetings as far as possible with both British and Japanese collectors. In the case of Japan I recently spent two weeks in Tokyo and attended the Japan World Stamp Exhibition which is held every ten years and lasts a whole week. This gave me opportunity to arrange substantial discussions with a number of Japanese collectors, some of whom had felt unable to complete my questionnaire. In the case of the British collectors I am using meetings of the BSJP to arrange individual discussions.

Participant observation has proved a most significant and illuminating aspect of this research. As a collector of Japanese stamps [albeit I concentrate mainly on forgeries of the earliest issues] I am accepted as an ordinary member of the three stamp collectors' societies mentioned above although I have made known and explained my active research interests to both the British and the Japanese societies. For the past eighteen months I have attended the majority of the meetings of the BSJP and have recently been invited to help represent the Society in an exhibition for the UK Japan Society in



London. It is agreed that I will use this opportunity to display the results of my research and to invite discussion.

In addition I have attended as reported already the Japan World Stamp Exhibition and major annual exhibitions in the UK which are not solely devoted to Japanese stamps. At all these exhibitions I have access to the stall of a professional dealer in Japanese stamps which allows me to observe collectors' interests in the displays and their discussions with the dealer regarding buying for their collections. In the case of the World Stamp Exhibition in Tokyo I had also access to the JPSF's Members' Lounge which enabled me to make informal contacts with Japanese collectors. The stamp exhibits themselves also give an insight into what interests collectors and how they look at their stamps.

The other sources of information on collectors' interests are the periodical literature of the stamp societies and the stamp catalogues in which stamps are classified and valued. Each of the three stamp societies concerned with Japanese stamp collecting to which I have already referred publishes a journal for its members. I have mentioned two of them. The third is that of the ISJP [Japanese Philately] which is the oldest and has been published continuously since 1947. It is in English and is edited in the USA. I have examined all the back issues of this journal as well as the past three years' issues of the other two, which are less substantial. There are two stamp dealing catalogues of Japanese stamps which are pre-eminent in the English speaking world: Stanley Gibbons [UK] and Scott's [USA]. In Japan the JPSF publishes both a standard [Sakura] and a specialised [JSCA] catalogue of Japanese stamps.

All these catalogues are updated annually and follow much the same classification systems for the stamps, differing mainly in the degree to which they go into detail about variations and in the values that they give. But it is noticeable that the latter are coming close together as stamp trading, especially via the internet, becomes ever more global.

For non-collectors the main source of information is that of personal discussions with individuals. I have aimed at a small random sample of Japanese people only, reasoning that British non-collectors outside Japan would see too few Japanese stamps to have any informed views on their designs. This Japanese sample was obtained during my visit to Japan this year and was varied in terms of age, education, occupation and sex. I am now supplementing it with a further random sample of Japanese people visiting and resident in UK. My discussions are based on asking them what feelings they have about the Japanese stamps they both buy and receive and are relaxed and informal/ unstructured.

One further source of information on public perceptions of Japanese stamp designs is the Japanese press. This source has not been used as yet.

## Notes

- 1 I am using "social agency" here in a general sense and not in the more restricted sense that Alfred Gell gave this term in his writings on the anthropology of art [Gell, 1998].
- 2 For example, D.M. Reid, "The Symbolism of Postage Stamps" in *Journal of Contemporary History*, 1984, No. 19, pages 223-2, is a classic reference piece for historians. More recent examples are: O'Sullivan, C.J. "Impressions of Irish and South African National Identity on Government Issued Postage Stamps", *Eire-Ireland journal*, 1988, Vol. 23, No. 2, pages 104-115; Zei, V, "Stamps and the Politics of National Representation", *Javnost*, 1997, Vol. iv, No.1, pages 65-84; Pierce, T. "Philatelic Propaganda: Stamps in Territorial Disputes", *Boundary and Security Bulletin*, 1996, Vol. 4, No. 2, pages 62-64; and Nuessel, Frank "Territorial and Boundary Disputes Depicted on Postage Stamps", *Studies in Latin American Popular Culture*, 1992, Vol. 11, pages 123-141.

- 3 Hugo Dobson of Sheffield University is researching the politics of Japanese stamp issues and will be publishing a paper titled "Japanese Postage Stamps: Propaganda and Decision-making", in the first issue in 2002 of Japan Forum, in which he makes the point that there should be doubt that there is any unified Government view on the messages to be given by commemorative and other special stamp issues; and that the Minister of MPT has been known to use issues for his own political advantage. However this does not mean that stamp issues have not [also] reflected the conservative social attitudes of the postwar LDP governments and more particularly of the civil servants controlling the Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications.
- 4 For instance the Minister responsible for the Japanese postal services in sending a message to The Japan World Stamp Exhibition 2001 [*Philanippon '01*] wrote in the Catalogue that "stamps provide a concentrated image of the history, natural environment and arts" of their respective countries which clearly leaves out rather a lot.
- 5 Definitive is the term used by stamp collectors and dealers to identify the regular issue which is always on sale in a large range of denominations.
- 6 Special issues are those made to mark regular national occasions such as New Year and the National Athletics Championships. Commemorative issues are made as their name suggests to recognise some event or its anniversary.
- 7 The Director of the Stamps and Correspondence Office of the Postal Bureau of the Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications in Tokyo advised me in a letter dated 3rd June 1999 that Commemorative and Special issues are decided upon at the initiative of the Minister and all stamps are designed within the following guidelines: their designs should:
- record nationally important events which[MPT believe] people should remember;
  - deepen international friendship and understanding;
  - enhance tourism and industry by recording Japan's traditional culture and local activities;
  - honour persons who [MPT believe] have contributed to Japan's culture and academic learning;
  - support campaigns in Japan and internationally which are important [MPT believe];
  - record significant [MPT believe] Japanese historical events;
  - support letter writing and improve interest in and understanding of stamps.
- N.B. the square brackets are my additions. Three types of subject were never to be used:
- religious, political and industry groups;
  - living people;
  - controversial ones.
- This suggests that these Japanese postage stamps essentially reflect the views on Japan and Japanese society of the senior staff of the Postal Bureau and its Minister. See also the following Note.
- 8 This procedure was described to me in the letter referred to in note 7 above. It involves the Postal Bureau in consultations each summer with all the major ministries regarding their proposals for new special and commemorative stamps, with the final selection being made by the head of the Postal Bureau, with the aid of a small, advisory committee of invited experts. It is further explained in my paper to be published in the first issue in 2002 of Japan Forum. The matter of individual politicians using the process to their own advantage is dealt with by Hugo Dobson in his paper in that same publication.
- 9 The International Society for Japanese Philately [ISJP] was founded in Canada in 1948 but has been administered from offices in the United States for many years. It has over 1200 members, of whom 50 are resident in the United Kingdom and 90 are Japanese resident in Japan. The British Society for Japanese Philately, which is affiliated to the ISJP, has a membership of 110 including 50 joint members of the ISJP. The Japan Philatelic Society Foundation has some 2000 members in Japan including the 90 members of ISJP.

- 10 The Japanese response to nature and the question of its possibly unique nature is discussed in my paper to be published in the first edition of Japan Forum in 2002. I have used ideas expressed by Ackerman, 1997, Kalland, 1992, and Morris-Suzuki, 1998.
- 11 Postage Stamp Catalogues of the stamps of all the countries in the world with a world-wide reputation, are issued by stamp dealer related publishers in the United Kingdom, the country in which postage stamp collecting began on an organised basis; the United States, and France. These catalogues all take their basic format for cataloguing stamps from that developed by Stanley Gibbons in the UK. Many other countries, including Japan, have specialised catalogues of their own stamps, and sometimes those of neighbouring countries too. They too take their classification systems from the Stanley Gibbons catalogues. The basic Japanese catalogue is the "Sakura Catalog of Japanese Stamps", new editions of which are published annually by Japan Philatelic Society Foundation, Tokyo, Japan. It illustrates every Japanese stamp in full colour but in slightly reduced scale. They also publish a more specialised catalogue which includes valuations according to type of postmark for used stamps, and variations in the printing and colours of the stamps etc.
- 12 Collecting has acquired a rapidly expanding literature which has tended to concentrate on those areas which relate to museums [museology]. I have used "Collectors: Expressions of Self and Other" edited by Antony Shelton and first published in 2001 by Horniman Museum, London as well as books by Paul Martin [1999]; Elsner and Cardinal, eds. [1994]; and Susan Pearce [1995].

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