

THE JAPANESE VIEWPOINT

by Takao Sofue

I have known many of the foreign scholars who have come to Japan for field work and, fortunately, have been able to do some anthropological observation of them. Most are from the United States, but some are from France, Austria, and West Germany. Unfortunately, I have not seen any British colleagues except Mr. Dore. Since he seems to be an exceptional case, a cosmopolitan with a British passport, I think I had better omit British data from my field work. The several Frenchmen whom I know are all sociologists or social psychologists, and, as I know from personal observation, most of them do not speak Japanese or try to learn the language. They communicate with the Japanese either in French or English and always use interpreters. They do not eat Japanese food and want to behave as Frenchmen. As a result, they collect many figures, percentages of "yes" and "no" answers to questions, populations statistics, and so on. But they seem to be rather isolated from the Japanese society and cannot get to the deeper part of Japanese culture. Austrians are quite different. Presently, I know four graduate students from the University of Vienna, three ethnologists interested in the social organization or religious life of Japanese and Okinawan villages, and one sociologist interested in recent changes in Japanese rural society. All speak Japanese fluently and can read writings in Japanese on anthropology and sociology surprisingly fast, as fast as ordinary Japanese students. They have a good command even of *hentaigana* and can read classic writings very well, which ordinary Japanese students cannot do. The Austrian students can write letters in Japanese and can communicate with farmers directly in Japanese.

American colleagues are also well-adjusted to Japanese society and, because their oral Japanese is very good, their relationships with Japanese subjects seem to be excellent. However, their skill in written Japanese is generally less than that of the Austrian students.

Quite a number of Japanese scholars and many Japanese musicians have visited Austria since the 1920's, particularly Vienna, and Viennese interest in Japanese culture has a fairly long history. The Institut für Japanologie was established at the University of Vienna in 1938 by Dr. Masao Oka, and is now directed by an ethnologist, Dr. Alexander Slawik.

The major trend of ethnology, or cultural anthropology in the American sense, in Austria and Germany has been ethno-historical studies, as exemplified by the *kulturkreis* school, organized by Fritz Graebner and Wilhelm Schmidt. For this reason, the emphasis of the Institute for a long time has been the study of Japanese literature and history from library works. But *kulturkreis* theory was criticized and modified by young scholars and gradually the importance of empirical field study was recognized. As a result, beginning around 1962, young graduate students came to Japan for field work. We expect that in the near future the number of such graduate students will increase. The primary emphasis of their education seems to be firstly the reading of works by Japanese scholars and secondly the theoretical framework of social and cultural anthropology in general. Their training in theory is thus somewhat weaker than that of American colleagues; for instance, they don't know much about British social anthropology or psycho-cultural traditions in the United States. They seem, however, to have closer communication and relationships with Japanese scholars. This is simply because they can read Japanese books freely. For most of the conservative, dignified Japanese professors—in other words, non-internationally oriented professors who don't speak English—giving guidance to foreign scholars who can read Japanese books is an easy task. It is necessary merely to provide a list of publications written in Japanese and say, "Just read these." Such a foreign scholar doesn't have to worry about English translations or finding a good translator as an assistant.

Some time ago, Dr. Richard K. Beardsley published a small book entitled *Field Guide to Japan* (Beardsley 1959) in which he recommended that American anthropologists in Japan hire Japanese graduate students in anthropology to translate Japanese books; he also said that most Japanese students are willing to help American scholars and that the expense of hiring them would not be very high. Some Japanese students, however, are overly confident of their ability in the English language, and this is sometimes a problem. I would agree with Beardsley's recommendation, but, unfortunately, his book was widely read by Japanese graduate students. Presently the circumstances are not very favorable, especially because of student revolts in Japan, and I am afraid that in the near future finding Japanese students to serve as translators or assistants might be more difficult than before. For this reason, a knowledge of written Japanese would be very important, especially for subjects studied by Japanese scholars which have not yet been studied by foreigners. At the same time, I fully agree with Dr. Caudill who urges in his paper that the Japanese must improve their English if they want to establish mutual scholarly relationships with Americans. The Japanese must learn not to withdraw too far behind the barriers of an overly self-conscious people. Caudill nicely describes the

Japanese reaction as negative-passive, in other words, a pure avoidance reaction. This is indeed the usual reaction of the Japanese scholar. I fully agree also with Chie Nakane, who states that as long as Japanese anthropologists continue to write their papers in Japanese their backwardness in the scientific study of anthropology will continue. Nakane also states accurately that scholars rarely discuss or criticize works of non-Japanese in the same way as they do the works of Japanese colleagues. Still another problem which I have recently discussed elsewhere (Sofue 1969) is that some Japanese scholars tend to use terminology which is not internationally applicable.

A second problem has been discussed by some of the participants, especially Nakane and Caudill, and was also discussed by Dr. Passin this afternoon. Caudill states (p. 48). "I hope we can avoid concentrating on comparisons of Japan with the United States and come more to include comparisons with other countries in the world, such as those in Southeast Asia and Europe." Nakane has said the same thing. I do fully appreciate this proposal and guess that most American scholars will agree, too. But I wonder if there might not be a tendency among Americans to regard any deviation from American patterns as a deviation from the standard. This view never appears explicitly in formal presentations by American scholars, but may be implicit in their informal discussions. Any patterns or elements of culture that are both Japanese and American are simply accepted as "normal" and do not seem to attract much attention. For instance, in the United States 40% of the youngsters attend college and in Japan 15% do so. If only these two countries are compared in this respect, the 25% difference may seem conspicuous. If one looks at an European nation—9.6% in France, 9.3% in Britain, 6.8% in West Germany, and so on—something else is evident. Both the United States and Japan differ considerably from the European countries. The reasons may be firstly that the Japanese educational system was strongly influenced by the United States after World War II. Other influencing factors may be that ideals and goals of achievement are quite similar in the United States and Japan, and the idea that upward social movement must be achieved through higher education exists in both countries. In European nations, especially Great Britain, higher education is still thought to be only for a very restricted number of people from specially defined classes. These circumstances do not seem to have been fully discussed by American colleagues. Other analogous similarities may also exist between Japan and the United States and European countries. For instance, sleeping arrangements in Japan are somewhat similar to those of lower middle-class Italian families.

A third problem is closely related to the second. Since the comparison of Japan, the United States, and European countries should be very important, I hope that in the near future there will be greater communication

and cooperation between American and European colleagues who specialize in Japan. The European and American viewpoints should also be compared more carefully.

Recently, I told Austrian students now in Tokyo about this conference, in which they expressed much interest. They hope to hold as soon as possible a similar conference of Europeans specializing in Japan. I very much hope that in the near future an international conference on Japan will be held to which Europeans as well as Japanese will be invited. I hope that Russians will be included since I have heard that some young Russian scholars are interested in Japanese studies, although most Russian scholars of Asia are now more interested in the ethnological study of China and Korea. Ruth Benedict's *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword* and John Bennett's summary of Japanese reaction to this book have been popular among these young scholars.

Finally, I wish to say that I think some aspects of Japanese culture, society, and personality should be analyzed more deeply by a multidisciplinary approach. One example is the nature of logical thinking, which Dr. Fisher discusses in his paper. I should like to point out that the Japanese are very strong at mathematics, a matter which is discussed to some extent by Dr. Singleton, and they are traditionally very weak in logic. The reasons for this seeming contradiction have been discussed by some Japanese scholars but no explanation has been offered. I suggest that in order to gain an understanding we must first classify logical thinking into types or categories with the aid of psychologists, philosophers, and scholars in other fields of study. I think we will then probably find that the Japanese are strong in some kinds of logical thinking but weak in others. The Japanese appear to be very strong in logical thinking within given theoretical frameworks but very weak in formulating new frameworks. In his study of American boys, the psychologist David Levy found that over-protected subjects are good in verbal work at school, good readers, but are notably poor in mathematics. These circumstances obviously do not apply to Japanese children, who are very strong in mathematics although much over-protected. I have selected this topic of logical thinking, which certainly needs further study, as an illustration. I am sure that many other subjects of investigation exist that similarly require multidisciplinary cooperation in order to be understood.

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