

Introduction

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This volume traces its beginnings to a workshop held at the International Research Center for Japanese Studies (Nichibunken) in Kyoto in January 2002. The gathering brought together historians and anthropologists of Japan with the aim of seeing what effect the methodological and epistemological differences between the disciplines had on the study of common themes in Japan's past. Our hope was that dialogue between disciplines in Japanese studies would enrich the field by offering all scholars new ways to consider problems of sources and evidence.

As one of the organizers, I proposed this theme for the workshop because I was struck by the differences revealed in historians' and anthropologists' studies of violence in early Meiji Japan, which is the topic of my own contribution to the volume. In the wake of the Meiji Restoration of 1868, rumors spread throughout the countryside that the government was selling the blood and fat of its own subjects to sate the depraved appetites of the Westerners who had so recently established themselves in the country. Red wine appeared to be blood drunk straight up, while the iron beds of the first Western-style infirmaries looked like grills to broil off the fat of helpless cholera patients. Participants in the wave of antigovernment protests and violence in the early 1870s invoked these rumors to justify their actions, and the government took the rumors seriously enough to issue repeated denials of their veracity. When reading the secondary literature on these incidents, I was struck by the way historians duly noted the rumors but hastened to look past them for rational economic and political causes of disorder, while, in contrast, the authors of ethnological studies plumbed folk culture for the bases of the rumors yet devoted little attention to the violence of early Meiji itself. The two literatures complemented each other nicely in this instance, but I was left uncertain of the implications of this disparity for historical studies more broadly. In particular, I wondered if an ethnological reading of early modern peasant contention (*hyakushō ikki* 百姓一揆) might undermine historians' image of Tokugawa peasants as rational actors and, in contrast, why the folk in folklore studies seemed to be so thoroughly apolitical. Although the workshop did not provide specific answers to these questions, it did help to explain the differences between disciplines.

Once we gathered it quickly became evident that instead of a dialogue between two clearly defined disciplines, we were in fact dealing with at least three or four basic approaches—and, of course, as many individual styles of scholarship as there were participants. Perhaps the most striking contrast was that between ethnology and folklore studies. In Japanese the distinction between the two is blurred by an accident of homonymy: both disciplines are known as *minzokugaku*, but different characters are used to write the words. Ethnology is 民族学, the study of ethnic groups, whereas folklore is 民俗学, the study of people's customs.

Generally speaking, practitioners of *minzokugaku*-as-ethnology study foreign cultures, while practitioners of *minzokugaku*-as-folklore study Japan. The two *minzokugaku* scholars presenting papers at the workshop, Komatsu Kazuhiko and Kawamura Kunimitsu, write principally as folklorists. In contrast, the work of the one North American anthropologist present, Thomas Looser, shows the strong influence of critical theory.

The Japanese and North American historians at the workshop were not divided by formal disciplinary distinctions, but their work did reflect certain pervasive differences in style characteristic of historical writing in Japanese and English. Japanese scholars tend to write in a rigorously empirical style, firmly and thoroughly grounded in the sources, but with the broader implications of their work often left implicit. North American historians of Japan, on the other hand, almost necessarily aspire to write for a readership beyond the small community of specialists. The North American historians at the workshop—Susan Burns, Gerald Figal, David Howell, and Thomas Keirstead—started with an issue or problem and wrote outward, while the Japanese participants—Takahashi Satoshi and Sonoda Hidehiro (a sociologist by training but writing in a historical mode)—burrowed as deeply as possible into their topics. Each style has its strengths, and in practice the dialogue between the two proved as lively as it was fruitful.

Regardless of discipline and approach, every participant perforce had to consider the broader context of his or her work. In general, like participants in internalist discourses everywhere, scholars working in Japanese have the luxury of assuming the significance and interest of their work: after all, within Japan as a geographically, institutionally, and linguistically bounded space, any scholarship that contributes to a greater understanding of the nation is by definition worthwhile. The drawback of this style of writing is that it exempts its practitioners from looking beyond the debates within their fields to ask how their work contributes to scholarship outside the realm of Japanese studies. Sure enough, the Japan-based participants in the workshop seemed to be caught off guard by occasional challenges to look at Japanese studies in a global context.

In contrast, scholars writing in languages other than Japanese must at least take the rhetorical stance that their work—if not each individual scholarly effort, then the scholarship of the community of specialists—somehow incorporates Japan into broader debates within and across disciplines. As a practical matter, this meant that the workshop's North American participants' interventions into the general discussion tended to move quickly—perhaps too quickly at times—from the relatively specific to the relatively abstract.

The differences in scholarly style notwithstanding, there were intriguing overlaps among the papers. The best example is the role of the folklorist Yanagita Kunio (1875-1962) as the source and inspiration of much of the work presented at the workshop. Yanagita was the author of the foundational texts of Japanese folklore studies; in addition, many Western scholars of Japanese intellectual history write in dialogue with him. Only one of the papers (Kunimura's, which unfortunately is not included in this volume) dealt directly with Yanagita and his oeuvre, but his role in constructing an intellectual basis for the imagining of the Japanese nation was a touchstone for much of the discussion that occurred at the workshop. The discussion in this case boiled down to a series of questions about the "folk" in particularist and universalist discourses: Is the Japanese "folk" essentially different from any other "folk"?

Can there be an ethnography of the “folk” that is divorced from time? Do folklore studies as practiced in Japan provide a workable template for the study of the common people in Japanese history?

Although, once again, the workshop discussion did not provide definitive answers to these vexing questions, the dialogue proved very fruitful. I came away with a better appreciation of the value of carefully deployed particularism. Within the context of Japanese discourse, taking the “folk” out of history serves the useful purpose endowing the common people with a clear identity across place and time. That identity, ahistorical and thus artificial as it is, serves as a place of resistance for the “folk” against the grim history too often imposed on them from above by political leaders. Work influenced by folklore studies has transformed Japanese historiography over the past several decades, both in the form of “people’s history” (*minshūshi* 民衆史), which became influential in the 1960s and 1970s, and Amino Yoshihiko’s prolific work on medieval Japan. Japan’s particular version of social history was thus born out of a dialogue between history and folklore studies.

Seven papers are collected here. Komatsu Kazuhiko considers the practice of deifying historical figures in Japan. The topic is particularly relevant today in light of the ongoing debates over the status of Yasukuni Shrine, where Japan’s war dead—including Tōjō Hideki and thirteen other Class A war criminals—are enshrined as Shinto deities. Komatsu finds that although the custom of deification has a long history in Japan, its aims have tended to change over time. That is, he sees a general trend away from deification designed to placate vengeful spirits—as was the case, for example, at Kyoto’s Kitano Tenmangū Shrine, dedicated in the tenth century to the courtier Sugawara no Michizane—and toward deification designed to memorialize or commemorate the life of a notable person, as in the case of Tōshōgū, established in 1636 to memorialize the hegemon Tokugawa Ieyasu. Without taking a stand one way or the other on the Yasukuni controversy, Komatsu finds that there is in fact plenty of precedent for people taking it on themselves to enshrine others, with scant regard for the feelings of the person being enshrined or those of his or her descendants: “*anyone* can deify a human spirit”—even the Japanese state, which has unilaterally done so repeatedly since the beginning of the Meiji period.

Mori Ōgai’s (1862-1922) historical fiction is the point of departure for Thomas Keirstead’s methodological inquiry into the relationship between history and historical fiction. He argues that, for Ōgai, the crucial difference between fiction and history lay in the excessive neatness of fiction—the quality, that is, that allows an author to tie all the loose ends together into a clear narrative with a clear conclusion. Ōgai’s history, in contrast, is a messy, jumbled affair, presented not by an omniscient narrator but rather by an amateur scholar whose method is to have no method—a “posture of posturelessness” (*mutaido no taido* 無態度の態度)—and who gains pleasure from his sources rather than the stories they have to tell. In other words, Ōgai embraced antiquarianism and rejected the conventions of historical fiction as practiced by Takizawa Bakin (1767-1848) (and, for that matter, Walter Scott), who saw fiction as a more complete form of history insofar as it gave him the freedom to bring the past to life more vividly than conventional chronicles could.

In her essay, Susan Burns examines a number of legal cases from the period following the Meiji Restoration, all involving abortion or infanticide. The 1870s was a transitional decade in Japanese legal history, a brief period of Chinese influence before Western-style legal institutions were introduced in the 1880s. Burns looks specifically at cases heard on appeal by the Daishin'in, Japan's highest court. She finds that, in keeping with the Confucian tenor of the legal codes of the time, considerations of family relations and ethics figured heavily into the court's assessment of responsibility and assignment of punishments. Thus, a family that committed infanticide was likely to receive relatively lenient treatment if driven to the act by desperate poverty, but not if the house's reputation was the only thing at stake; likewise, a man who arranged an abortion for his girlfriend in an attempt to keep their relationship secret could count on receiving no sympathy from the court. Burns's most intriguing finding is that even amidst extensive testimony from relatives, doctors, and other witnesses, the mothers of the fetuses and infants remain silent and nearly invisible in the case records. Indeed, in none of the infanticide cases was the mother charged with a crime; rather, the courts assumed that the woman was completely passive as her parents and other relatives decided what to do with the newborn child.

My contribution to the volume focuses on violence against former outcastes in the early Meiji period. The Mimasaka Blood-Tax Rebellion of 1873 was the product of a confluence of anxieties wrought by the dawning of a new era. Its immediate cause was fear that the blood tax (*ketsuzei*)—an ill-chosen euphemism for conscription—was meant to be taken literally: rumors spread around the countryside that a mysterious figure in white was draining the blood out of the bodies of able-bodied young men for sale to foreigners. Fear of the new was compounded by anxiety over the regime's dissolution of the Tokugawa social-status system, and particularly its abolition of outcaste status in 1871. The essay tries to capture the uncertainty and violence of a particular historical moment, after the rules of engagement of Tokugawa-period peasant contention had been discredited, but before the Meiji state had gotten firm control over rural society.

Thomas Looser's essay considers some of the possibilities that lie with the notion of the folk in Japan, particularly in connection to the evolution of new media in the twentieth century. As Yanagita Kunio's coinage of the term *jōmin*, "the abiding folk," suggests, the idea of the folk is in many respects a modern invention, an imaginary counterpoint to modernity, situated in the countryside and presumed to transcend history. At about the same time in the early twentieth century that the folk were being invented, people in Japan and elsewhere began to consider the possibilities of cinema as a means to transform society and social relations. Looser thus suggests that the relationship between the folk and the modern is itself "cinematic," a point he makes through an examination of "The Traveler with the Pasted Rag Picture," a short story that Edogawa Ranpo (1894-1965) wrote in 1928. In contrast to the "analog" modernity of the early twentieth century, we now live in a digital age, yet Looser argues for the continued relevance of the past. Although "it may be that the countryside is no longer populated with the traditional agrarian peoples who might once have offered some possibility of thinking an essentialized identity . . . the place of the folk as a term of temporal and economic value continues to serve as a reference point for the contemporary world. . . . The 'folk,' in other words, is also a good example of the ways in which received institutional

and conceptual structures continue not only to subsist within, but also to hierarchize, new and supposedly emancipatory forms of identity and everyday life.”

Kume Kunitake's (1839-1931) account of his journey to Britain as part of the Iwakura Mission of 1871-73 is at the center of Sonoda Hidehiro's contribution to the volume. Kume, who wrote the official account of the mission and later went on to become a prominent academic historian, was deeply impressed by the technological achievements of Britain, particularly the development of steam power in the form of railroads and steamships. Sonoda argues that Kume saw Japan as being about forty years behind Britain: that is, by considering the state of British development at three points in its recent history—1800, 1830, and 1870—Kume realized that forty years earlier Britain had just barely begun its take-off into modern industrialization, and that it owed much of its recent development to the power of the steam engine. Although a gap of four decades might seem to be cause for despair, in fact, Kume saw it as evidence that Japan was separated from the West by differences of mere technology, and that, given the opportunity to catch up, Japan could become as advanced as Britain in due course.

Gerald Figal's essay examines the postwar reinvention of Okinawa around the three themes of World War II, the tropics, and the Ryukyu kingdom. In the immediate aftermath of the war there was little sense that Okinawa could ever offer anything to tourists except perhaps the opportunity to visit sites associated with the horrific Battle of Okinawa, which devastated the island in 1945. Eventually, however, with a push from consultants, an effort was made to market Okinawa as a tropical resort—Japan's Hawaii. The island's landscape needed a makeover with non-native plants—a few palm trees here, some hibiscus blossoms there—to make the new image convincing, but developers and the local government (both during the U.S. occupation and after reversion to Japan in 1972) managed to pull off the rebranding effort. Making Okinawa into an exotic yet unthreatening tropical paradise led eventually to a rediscovery of the island's history before 1879 as the centerpiece of the Ryukyu kingdom. Symbolizing Okinawa's Ryukyuan past was the rebuilding of the old royal palace at Shuri, beginning with the Shurei gate in 1958 and culminating in the reconstruction of the entire complex in 1992. Figal argues that the rebuilding of Shuri Castle has special significance because its utter destruction during World War II was due to the Japanese military's decision to locate its headquarters in a series of tunnels dug under the castle grounds. War, tourism, and history come together at the site.

In addition to the seven papers collected here, the workshop included presentations by Takahashi Satoshi on popular responses to the outbreak of Japan's first cholera epidemic in 1858¹ and Kawamura Kunimitsu on Yanagita Kunio's activities during World War II.²

As the foregoing summarizes reveal, the papers included here reflect a diversity of topics and approaches, but all of them engage to at least some extent with interdisciplinary scholarship. Two contributions—Keirstead's and Looser's—are particularly noteworthy in this regard, for they are explicitly methodological. Both test the disciplinary boundaries of history and anthropology (and folklore studies), and both make a strong case for the utility of literary sources and the insights of literary scholars in historical and anthropological inquiry.

Indeed, in very different ways, each makes an eloquent case for scholarship that is interdisciplinary to the point of transcending the parochial dictates of discipline.

The other papers fit more neatly into conventional categories, but are nonetheless interdisciplinary in orientation. Thus, Komatsu takes an ethnological problem—the deification of humans—and looks at its evolution in historical terms. Burns and I examine the conflict between longstanding folk practices and beliefs—concerning reproduction in Burns’s case, and social order in mine—and the policies of an impatient and rapidly modernizing state. Interestingly, a sociologist, Sonoda, authored the most conventional historical narrative in the collection. Figal’s work fits easily into a number of disciplinary frameworks, from history or anthropology to newly emerging fields like tourism studies.

In the end, the workshop did not produce a coherent new paradigm to consider the relationship between history and folklore studies in Japan, but it did provide us with an opportunity to interact across disciplinary lines, with results that were in many ways more satisfying than a simple focus on disciplinary binaries—history versus anthropology, *minzokugaku*-as-ethnology versus *minzokugaku*-as-folklore studies, and so on—would have been. Needless to say, we all benefited as well from the opportunity to interact with colleagues who work in different linguistic and institutional environments.

Finally, on behalf of all the participants in the workshop, I would like to acknowledge with gratitude the Program in East Asian Studies at Princeton University for underwriting a preparatory meeting for the North American participants and the International Research Center for Japanese Studies for sponsoring the workshop in Kyoto. Thanks go as well to Ishii Shirō, professor emeritus of the IRCJS, for proposing the series of workshops of which this meeting was a part, and to Professor Komatsu Kazuhiko of the IRCJS for serving as the main organizer on the Japanese side. Finally, I would like to offer my deepest gratitude and appreciation to Professor James Baxter of the IRCJS, who was involved in the planning of this meeting from the beginning and took an active part in all our sessions, and who has been patient and encouraging during the long process of bringing this volume to press.

NOTES

¹ Subsequently published in the twentieth anniversary issue of the Bulletin of the National Museum of Japanese History: Takahashi Satoshi 高橋敏, “Bakumatsu minshū no kyōfu to mōsō: Suruga no kuni Ōmiya-machi no korera sōdō” 幕末民衆の恐怖と妄想—駿河国大宮町のコレラ騒動—, *Kokuritsu rekishi minzoku hakubutsukan kenkyū hōkoku* 国立歴史民俗博物館研究報告 108 (March 2003).

² Kawamura later expanded on his workshop presentation in a related essay: Kawamura Kunimitsu 川村邦光, “Sensō to minzokugaku: Yanagita Kunio to Nakayama Tarō no jissen o megutte” 戦争と民俗学—柳田国男と中山太郎の実践をめぐって, *Hikaku Nihon bunka kenkyū* 比較日本文化研究 7 (2004), pp. 7–35.