

MISUNDERSTANDING JAPAN:
LANGUAGE, EDUCATION, AND CULTURAL IDENTITY

by

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Abstract

The purpose of this work is to explore the roles of education and language in the creation of Japanese cultural identity. Education means first “schooling,” but it also expands to include all cultural learning. In the attempt to unravel the inter-relationships of abstract concepts such as education, culture, identity, language and Japan, our understandings are necessarily influenced by our own education. Attempts by the educated elite of one culture to understand other cultures constitutes an intellectual conflict of interest that questions academic conventions, such as objectivity.

In this work, I interweave expository and narrative chapters in an attempt to create a new “methodology” or “approach” to the study of culture, which I call cultural hermeneutics. The autobiographical chapters present an ongoing self-reflection upon my developing understanding of Japan. I have studied and taught in Japan for many years, and my increasing familiarity with things Japanese has gradually moved me beyond the boundaries of previous identities, and into spaces that once separated me from Japanese culture, involving me in the formation of new hybrid cultural identities.

After an introductory chapter, the dissertation is split into three parts. The first part deals with the challenges of cultural hermeneutics as a methodology. The second part examines how the languages of Japan and foreign language education in Japan influence the formation of Japanese cultural identities. The third part explores how ideological debates, such as those about education, nationalism and internationalization, play a role in forming cultural identities.

I conclude that identities are constantly contested by voices from both within and without the “imagined communities” of cultures. This contest is in progress even before we come to study “Culture.” Because change is inherent to living cultures, and

because lived experience is so abundant and complex, the knowledge we inherit about cultures is always incomplete, and full of prejudice and misunderstandings. We can never arrive at final understandings of cultures, not even our own. Nevertheless, it is important to continue conversations about cultures because they can lead us to form deepened understandings, and because these conversations ultimately contribute to greater self-understanding.

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A Note about the Romanization of Japanese Words

The Japanese language is usually written using Chinese characters called *kanji*, and two syllabaries called *kana*. There are several systems for romanizing written Japanese (i.e. converting words to the alphabet). In the body of the text, I rely upon a standard method of romanization, but I have adapted it for readers who are not mainly interested in the study of Japanese by not indicating long vowels in Japanese words. Indicating long vowels could confuse unnecessarily attempts to pronounce unfamiliar words. I take as a precedent for this omission the fact that in Japanese place names written in English, such as Kyoto and Tokyo, it is customary to not indicate long vowels (i.e. we do not write Kyouto or Toukyou). In the case of Japanese names, I indicate a long vowel only if it is clearly the custom of the individual in question to do so (i.e. some people write their name as "Itoh" rather than "Ito"). However, in the Bibliography, I have distinguished between long and short vowels. All Japanese words used in the texts are italicized except where noted otherwise.

The Japanese custom of placing family names first is sometimes confusing to non-Japanese, and this is complicated by the fact that the names of many Japanese-Canadians (i.e. Joy Kogawa), and even some well-known Japanese writers (i.e. Yukio Mishima) are commonly seen family name last. Therefore, in the case of most Japanese names, I put family names last. However, the names of well-known Japanese writers (i.e. Yasuoka Shotaro), I write as they are commonly recognized in Japan, family name (i.e. Yasuoka) first.

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Chapter One

Introduction

From it seeming to me--or to everyone--to be so, it does not follow that it is so. What we can ask is whether it can make sense to doubt it.

Ludwig Wittgenstein (cited in McGrane 1989, p. 126)

Just over twenty years have passed since I found that small help-wanted advertisement seeking English language instructors for a group of Japanese students studying in Vancouver. I had little interest in Japan, and had never spoken to a Japanese, but I was twenty-seven-years old, with a new MA in English, and unemployed. I thought the job could hold me over financially until I found a position teaching literature, but when I got that job, it changed my life. Before long, I was obsessed by things Japanese. I was studying the language, and reading anything I could find about the culture. I have since learned to speak, read and write Japanese, married a Japanese and had two sons with her, lived more than twelve years in various Japanese cities, worked and studied at Japanese schools and colleges, and become a tenured professor at a Japanese university. That small advertisement marked the beginning of my journey of discovery of Japan, a journey that has taken me through profound changes in my understandings of culture and of self. Early in my odyssey, I discovered that my experience of the Japanese often contradicted what I “knew” about them. This “knowledge” had not only been acquired through my “formal” education, or schooling, but it had also been absorbed through the “popular” education of my culture, including advertisements, jokes, books, comics, television, and movies. I saw that I shared with the “informed” community of my

culture many misconceptions of the Japanese. I set about to try to identify and correct some of these misunderstandings, and this dissertation is one product of that quest.

In this work, I attempt to unravel the relationships between the dominant concepts of Japanese identity and the systems of Japanese education, especially language education. My judgments about Japan are, of course, largely determined by my own background and education in Canada. My beliefs about education and what educational institutions are supposed to accomplish have their roots in my early educational experience. Nevertheless, despite and even because of the deep differences between Japanese culture and my own, I am expected, as a scholar, to observe and judge Japanese culture objectively.

When I first began to write about Japan, I felt comfortable that this "detached" approach was the normal way of researching another culture. As I became more closely involved in the actual practise of education in Japan, however, my allegiance to my preconceptions was repeatedly tested. Persistent reflection upon discrepancies in values and practises in my education, and extensive reading of curriculum theorists influenced by phenomenological thought (for example, Aoki, 1993, 1992, 1988, 1983; Pinar & Reynolds 1992a; Van Manen 1990; Grumet 1988; Pinar 1988) led me to question the conventions of my own research. I realized how tightly my analysis of Japan was bound up with an equally complex relationship between my own identity and the wider educational community of my culture. I was then faced with the daunting project of defining and unravelling the relationships between not two, but four abstract concepts: Japanese identity, Japanese education, my identity and my education.

Such a project stretches the parameters of conventional academic research, and tests established interpretations of concepts. I am fully aware that there are hundreds of definitions of culture, that language may include slang, body language, and, in Japan,

even *haragei* [belly talk], that education involves more than formal schooling, and that acknowledging and defining all the possible identities of any one individual could easily provide the material for a whole book. At various places in this work, I discuss debates over definitions of terms, but since much understanding can be gained from exploring the ambiguities of their meanings, I prefer not to impose a too narrow framework upon words. Instead, I often pluralize terms as a reminder of their inherent multiplicity of meanings.

Convinced of the necessity of accepting misunderstandings as starting points to the better understanding of cultures, I give attention to how these concepts are entwined with my own cultural identity. My writing is increasingly concerned with the methodological challenge of keeping two different worlds of culture and identity in mind at the same time. Thus, this dissertation has been driven by its own internal contradictions down a new methodological path. The result is a work I acknowledge to be unconventional and experimental. It does not conform to established patterns of objectivity, unity or rational organization. In fact, part of my purpose is to question these very conventions. This work follows a new "methodology," which I have named "cultural hermeneutics."

I. Language Teaching and Cultural Subversion

In this work, I focus on the role of higher education and language programmes in the formation of Japanese identities for three reasons. One reason is that scholars at Japanese universities have since Tokugawa times[1600-1868] played an important role in defining "Japaneseness" (see Cutts 1997; Tanaka 1993; Amano 1990; Horio 1988; Fukuzawa 1985; Mitchel 1983; Passin 1982; Hartootunian 1970; Dore 1968). The second reason is that I have spent more than twenty years either teaching at Japanese universities or teaching Japanese students in Canada, and so it is my most familiar experience of Japanese education. The third reason is that within the last decade or so

the number of non-Japanese professors, instructors and students at Japanese universities has increased dramatically (see Duff & Uchida 1997; Wadden 1993; Sekiguchi 1993; Yamashiro 1987). These “foreigners in residence” influence and challenge Japanese identity. At the same time, their experiences in Japan can lead them to question their own identities (see Olvia 1999; Hansen and Liu 1997; Davidson 1993).

In other areas of Japanese society and education as well, direct foreign influence has dramatically increased since the late 1970s. The sources of this influence are many and varied. For example, more and more non-Japanese are living and working in Japan, and sending their children to local or private schools. Likewise, young Japanese who have gone abroad with their parents and who have studied in foreign schools are returning to Japan and re-entering the Japanese system (see Willis & Onoda 1989; Dhomoto 1987; Hani 1983). Moreover, the Japanese government and private schools are hiring thousands of foreign language instructors for schools and “prep schools” or *juku* (Court 1998). For over a hundred years after the Meiji Restoration in 1868, Japanese education borrowed selectively from foreign educational systems at arms length, either by sending representatives abroad to study or by bringing to Japan a few foreign experts at great expense (see Gluck 1985; Passin 1982; Pyle 1978; Najita 1976; Nagai 1971). In other words, two hundred and fifty years of strict isolation during the Tokugawa Period was followed by another one hundred years of semi-isolation. Then, in the late 1970s Japan found its economic feet, and with new communications technologies, successful industrial and business management systems, and the sudden accumulation of national wealth, the world poured into Japan. The Japanese, like people in other Western industrialized countries, found themselves part of a Global Village, and began to define identities to suit

new international roles and relationships (see Smith 1997b; Bremner 1997; Morris-Suzuki 1995, 1994; Bostwick 1995; Najita 1989; Chikushi 1986).

Not all Japanese people embrace an ideal of participating equally in an international community (see McCormack 1996; Kamei 1989; Dhomoto 1987; Campbell 1987; Tsuruta 1988; Takagi 1988; Hani 1983). Nevertheless, we see evidence of the reaching out to such a community in the huge numbers of Japanese who travel abroad each year, and in the fact that so many Japanese spend years studying foreign languages, usually English. Almost all Japanese students study English for six years in high school, and many begin their formal study of English in elementary or even preschool (Kanou 1996; Watanabe 1996; Bostwick 1995; Goldberg 1989). Most of them will study it for another year or two in university. Some study it at *juku* and language schools, while others go abroad for weeks or years to study English or other languages (Kawanari 1993). Adults study English in company classes, private tutorials or "culture classes." It is estimated that one in ten Japanese is studying English (Duff & Uchida 1997, p. 457). Language education is a huge industry in Japan, and its overflow has benefited the economies of other countries as well, including my own country, Canada.

Despite the apparent eagerness of many Japanese to involve themselves in an international community, and all the effort and energy they spend on the study of English and other foreign languages, their actual participation in the wider world is fraught with frictions. Japanese are condemned for their trade policies, for their past militarism or their present constitutional passivism, for their callous treatment of "comfort women," for "censoring" school textbooks, for their "sex tours" to Asia, for their whaling and fishing practices and other abuses of the natural environment. Of course, criticism and accusation are common among nations, but some Japanese are especially sensitive to

“Japan bashing.” They interpret criticisms of their country’s economic, political, social and environmental policies as attacks on Japanese culture, and believe that their nation has long been a victim in its international relations (see Goto 1996; Yoshino 1992; Ohtake 1989; Kamei 1989; Kimura 1988; Oda 1987; Suzuki 1987 a & b, 1983; Buruma 1984). This response is partly due to the fact that Japanese national identity has since the end of the Second World War become centered upon an idea of a homogeneous, group-centred [*shudanshugi*] culture that has been propagated by various educationalists, business leaders and intellectuals both in Japan and abroad (see Anderson 1993; Mouer & Sugimoto 1990; Yoshino 1992; Peak 1989; van Wolferen 1989; Reischauer 1988; Yoneyama 1986).

Overt nationalism, because of its association with pre-war militarism, is generally in disrepute in Japan (see Yoshino 1992; Oda 1987; Koschmann 1985; Ienaga 1978). The vacuum left by “national pride” has been filled with “cultural pride” (Nishikawa 1996; Yoshino 1992). From the earliest stages of their education, Japanese are taught to value the distinctiveness of their culture. Sponsoring an exaggerated consciousness of culture, Japanese education, in a sense, works against itself, at least in regards to language education. On the one hand, it mobilizes a national effort to teach English. On the other hand, it instills in children a powerful consciousness of cultural identity that resists foreign influence. Superficially, this cultural identity is symbolized by “traditional things,” such as the tea ceremony or Buddhist temples. Underlying these visible symbols of culture are certain assumed “Asian values,” such as self-sacrifice for family and deference to authority (Chie 1970; Fukuyama 1992). Some Japanese define their cultural identity in terms of its “difference” from Western culture, and based upon a belief that Japan is a “unique” culture that is victimized by Western nations (see Tanaka 1993; Yoshino 1992; Kamei

1989; Suzuki 1973; Nozaka 1977) . Similar stereotypes in descriptions of Japanese culture are found in works by many foreign scholars, journalists and novelists (see Feiler 1991; Pico 1991; Reischauer 1988; Christopher 1983; Rudofsky 1982; Seward 1981). The result of this stress on "cultural difference" is that many Japanese have a paradoxical relationship with the English language. On the one hand, English offers them a path by which to move out to participate in the international world. On the other hand, English is a path by which foreign influences can undermine Japanese cultural distinctiveness (see McCormack 1996; Kamei 1989; Matsumoto 1987; Suzuki 1987b; Miller 1986, 1982).

Cultural identities are complex. Norton (1997) uses the term identity "to refer to how people understand their relationships to the world, how that relationship is constructed across time and space, and how people understand their possibilities for the future" (p. 410). Paraphrasing Tajfel's definition of social identity, Hansen and Liu describe cultural identity as "that part of an individual's self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group [in our case, *cultural* group] (or groups) together with the emotional significance attached to that membership" (1997, p. 567-568). Cultural identities involve more than traditional arts and customs, and sometimes they incorporate fundamental contradictions in values and beliefs.

The language classroom is inherently involved with the formation of cultural identities. It can be both a place to display cultural identities and a place to challenge them (Pennycook 1998; Bostwick 1995; Campbell 1987). Language is so inherently a part of culture that it may be impossible to separate the two. Learning a new language transforms cultural identity, and this may provoke insecurity and fear. By and large, the Japanese eagerly study languages, but this does not mean that they feel no cultural anxiety. While part of a Japanese student's identity may encourage reaching out through

foreign languages to the world, something else in that same identity may make that student want to withdraw to a more predictable environment cut off from outside influences and threats. Japanese teachers may share and reinforce this contradiction. Non-Japanese, or so-called "native-speaker" instructors have cultural agendas and identity contradictions of their own, as researchers into language education are discovering (Liu 1998; Susser 1998). It can be argued that the foreign teachers of English serve the forces of a global cultural imperialism (Pennycook 1998, 1994), but certainly few of us want to see ourselves in this negative light. Many native-speaker instructors are initially drawn to Japan by an appreciation of Japanese culture. Yet, when they enter a Japanese English classroom, they can see themselves as "liberators" come to free Japanese students from the "too narrow" and "irrational" cultural strictures of Japan (see the case of "Danny" in Duff & Uchida 1997). Likewise, some Japanese students find learning English an "empowering experience" despite ambivalent feelings about "the role of English in perpetuating Western culture" (Norton 1997, p. 426). Nevertheless, when Japanese students and foreign language instructors meet in the Japanese language classroom, there is often a subtle (and sometime not-so-subtle) clash of cultural values (Nozaki 1993). In this work, I try to understand these conflicts and contradictions in relation to the struggle among educationalists and other thinking elites to control the formation of modern Japanese identities. Such an understanding may help us recognize similar contradictions within other cultural identities, including our own.

A work like this, then, cannot be just about Japanese identity. It is also inevitably about the cultural identity of people who claim the English language as their own. In the language classroom there are always at least two cultures present: that of the learner, and that of those English-speaking cultures that are the source for idioms, usages, readings and other materials that make up the language program. These different cultures

may or may not abide harmoniously together in the classroom. When a classroom of Japanese students is taught by a foreign instructor, two cultural worlds come together over the teaching and learning of language. This experience can be exciting, but it is not without danger. Misunderstandings abound, and it is not unusual for instructors and students to leave the classroom feeling frustrated and even insulted. Moreover, in an institution which has both Japanese and native-speaker instructors of English, competition between cultural cliques is common (Kelly & Adachi 1993). Disputes about policy and methodology that are common to any university are in Japan sometimes interpreted as cultural conflicts (Bailey 1998, 1997b; Kimura 1988). Japan has invested a lot in the teaching of English on a massive scale. English is meant to be a door through which Japan can enter the international scene. Unfortunately, narrow concepts of cultural identity can serve to keep the door locked (Clark 1987; Miller 1986, 1982).

This work starts from my belief that it is incumbent upon educators to understand their classrooms as places where cultural identities are negotiated. As Kramsch (1993) says, "language teachers are so much teachers of culture that culture has often become invisible to them" (p. 48). One of the goals of cultural hermeneutics is to make instructors more conscious of the role of the language classroom in the negotiation of cultural identities, and of how this negotiation can seriously undermine the pre-established cultural identities of students and instructors. Cultural hermeneutics also treats a related problem: that many foreign instructors are too confident of their understanding of Japanese culture, and fail to reflect upon the reliability of the sources of their understanding. As Kincheloe and McLaren (1997) point out, in the high tech global village of today, "we increasingly make sense of the social world and judge other cultures through conventional and culture-bound television genres" (p. 143). Duff and Uchida (1997) also warn against "trivializing and stereotyping others in the process of socio-cultural identity construction" (p. 454).

Without reflection, instructors and researchers inadvertently reinforce cultural stereotypes and perpetuate conventional misunderstandings of culture.

Educators must reflect upon the cultural perspectives of students, but they must also reflect upon the construction of their own identities. Even language instructors cannot presume to be culturally neutral. As Pennycook insists, "the English language teaching industry is not culturally, politically, socially, or economically neutral; rather in the international (EFL) sphere it plays a powerful role in the construction of roles, relations, and identities among teachers and students" (cited in Duff and Uchida 1997, p. 452).

Educators have a responsibility to understand their involvement in the formation of identities. In addition, they should be prepared to help students understand the complex relationships between education (in the widest sense of the word) and the formation of identities, including their own. Moreover, this understanding must be imparted in ways that are not threatening or confusing to students. Cultural hermeneutics aims to provide patterns for questioning cultural identities through conversations that explore the interests and contradictions that compose the history of a "nation," and that are expressed in the lived experience of the myriad individuals who are "its people."

Everything that happens in the classroom, from the materials that are chosen, to the teaching methods used, and to the responses students give, will be determined by the negotiation of cultural perspectives. As Duff and Uchida (1997) write, "Whether they are aware of it or not, language teachers are very much involved in the transmission of culture, and each selection of videos, newspaper clippings, seating plans, activities and so on has social, cultural, and educational significance" (p.476). Differences in perspective are not limited to those defined by national cultures. There are also the perspectives of minority and regional cultures. Perspectives will also reflect other differences such as gender, socio-economic class, and age. In fact, since every individual is unique, no two people

can ever see things from exactly the same perspective (Gadamer 1994). We can talk about these differing perspectives using various terminologies. Kuhn (1970) gave us the idea of "paradigms" that determine shifts in the ways cultures understand their world. Foucault (1984) calls our attention to the fact that knowledge represents "regimes of truth." Gadamer (1994) focuses on individual understandings and describes them as "horizons." These varying terminologies are not unrelated in turn to theories that attempt to describe differing perspectives of whole civilizations determined by literacy and orality (Thomas 1992; Ong 1982; Derrida 1980; Goody 1968; McLuhan 1964, 1962; Havelock 1963). Despite distinctive terminologies, one idea common to all these theories is that people do not necessarily see the same things in the same way, and thus arise many misunderstandings. We educators should be prepared for these misunderstandings and tolerate them if we are not going to let them defeat our pedagogical purposes. Although this may seem like a simple enough proposition, in practice it is not always easy.

Early in 1998, in the General Office of my faculty at the Japanese university where I teach, I met a visiting professor from a university in the United States. He was completing his first semester of teaching in Japan. He was exasperated by his students and disdainful of the educational environment of the Japanese university: the reluctance of students to do homework; their lack of attention and participation in class; their inability after years of study to use English, and so on. I am used to hearing these complaints from Americans or Europeans who have come to Japan to teach, and who often have little familiarity with any culture other than Japanese culture and their own. In contrast, this "international scholar" spoke several languages fluently, including English, French, Korean and Japanese. He was, in addition, an authority on certain areas of Japanese business. Born and raised in Korea, he was connected to that wider "Asian" culture within which many Japanese prefer to locate themselves, especially when they feel misunderstood or

abused by “Westerners” (Goto 1996; Tanaka 1993; Ohtake 1989; *Ajja* 1988). I would have thought him to command the facts necessary to alleviate his “culture shock.” However, “facts” alone could not help him come to terms with Japan. If anything, it was the “facts,” as he understood them, that were getting in the way of his understanding.

The problem with facts about cultures, especially national cultures that include millions of people inhabiting vast areas and covering a variety of climatic and geographical regions, is that they are notoriously “unfact-like.” Compared to, say, mathematical facts, cultural facts are constantly changing as they are influenced by factors such as education, race, religion, economy, dialect, generations, socio-economic class and gender relations. “Facts” about the educational experience of a girl in college in Nara twenty years ago will not necessarily help us understand a boy in kindergarten in a coastal village in Kyushu today. As Duff and Uchida (1997) say, “complexity is inherent . . . to exploring the interrelationships among language, culture, and teaching--all the more so when people’s cultural and social identities are being reflected upon” (pp. 471-472).

Time and again, people are caught up in situations of cultural stress because they think they know some fact about the other culture. I first noted an example of this kind of blunder twenty years ago when a group of Japanese girls studying in Vancouver were invited to the home of their program coordinator. It was a rainy evening, and the girls, all wearing boots, came stomping into the house, tracking mud all over a new, white carpet. The students had learned that although Japanese took their shoes off in the house, foreigners never did. So they didn’t. Admittedly, this is an example of the simplest kind. Yet recently I witnessed the horror of a Japanese hostess when she saw a foreigner blithely gliding over her new *tatami* floor in bathroom slippers. He had committed the double crime of wearing slippers on *tatami*, and wearing bathroom slippers out of the

bathroom. The foreigner thought he had completed his “footwear duty” when he took his shoes off in the *genkan* [entry]. The *tatami* were not ruined, but I’m sure it was a long time before the hostess could overlook the lasting “invisible” stains. Even such simple misunderstandings based upon inexact cultural knowledge can result in lasting resentment.

It might be assumed that the kind of “faux pas” represented by the above examples can be overcome with a little study and experience. However, other misunderstandings actually develop over time, even as cultural “knowledge” accumulates. When, after years of living in Japan, I got my first full-time position in a Japanese university, I was determined to do things right as a member of a Japanese faculty. Coming back from a holiday, I brought small *omiyage* [souvenirs] for my colleagues. I knew from reading and observing that this was the way things were done to knit human relationships in the “Japanese company.” Soon, however, the Department Head took me aside and explained that this was not the way things were done at universities, and that I should refrain from embarrassing my colleagues with any more presents. I had, in short, been betrayed by my “knowledge” of Japanese culture.

The problem for the “international scholar” was not that he didn’t know enough about Japan. He knew a lot, but some of his knowledge was incomplete, dated, misinterpreted or otherwise unreliable. Operating on unreliable knowledge is a common predicament for people living in foreign countries. Nevertheless, Western education trains us to act correctly based upon a rational understanding of the facts. Like other “national cultures” though, Japan is a complex, extensive and fast-changing society, and nobody, not even a Japanese, ever has all the cultural information, let alone has it all correct. Thus, misunderstanding is a normal condition of inter-cultural relations.

Facts alone do not necessarily assuage the frustrations of cultural misunderstanding. For example, some native-speaker teachers complain that Japanese students seldom do class preparation or homework (Wadden & McGovern 1993; Robb 1993). However, unlike in North America where a full load of courses in any semester might be five or fewer courses, most Japanese students take fourteen or more courses a semester. The reality of fourteen ninety-minute classes a week, each with a different professor and textbook, makes a Japanese student's university experience very different from that of a North American student. In addition, many students are taught that merely by successfully entering a university they have earned the right to put leisure and part-time jobs before study. Club obligations are also generally felt to be as important, or even more important than study. His awareness of these different characteristics of Japan's educational culture only served to reinforce the international scholar's disdain for Japanese university. His experience showed him that Japanese university education was a sham, an evaluation consistent with the judgment of some other authorities on Japanese university education (for example, Cutts 1997; Reischauer 1988; Anderson 1993; Clark 1987; Nagai 1971). The paradox is that despite apparently poor educational standards, Japanese graduates succeed, and the economy is powerful. In other words, his short experience of teaching in a Japanese university contradicted his beliefs about the role of education in society; it challenged his educational identity.

Putting a student or scholar into a foreign university is a little like putting a salt water fish into fresh water: the environments may look the same, but they are not, and anyone who insists that "water is water" does so at the risk of the fish. There is a big difference, as we will later see, between the meaning of *kyoiku* [education] in Japan, and of "education" in America, or for that matter any other country. Educational environments

are complex, and even within Japan there are significant regional differences, for example between Nagoya and Kyoto, or even among districts of the same city. Often even visible commonalities among educational cultures may mask deeper differences. We must be wary of the illusions of difference and similarity.

After years of study and experience of Japan, we scholars and teachers may believe we have achieved an understanding of the culture and its education. Then some unexpected incident makes us doubt our "knowledge." We have an idea of what education is supposed to be, but Japanese education does not always match expectations. Yet within the Japanese community, educational success is fostered, and students learn and then go on to work in society. We examine statistics and read authorities and reports, but they leave our understanding incomplete. We can become almost angry that institutions so familiar from the outside can be so frustratingly different once we get inside. This experience may not be representative of all foreign educators in Japan, but I think many will find it familiar. Some Japanese professors, too, have confessed to me that they feel confused and disoriented when doing research or studying abroad. From the bleachers, the "education" games look the same, but once one starts to play, the rules, and even the objectives, are often contrary or unexpectedly different.

Our learning establishes preconceptions and prejudices that distort our observations of things. We tend to see what we are taught to look for. For example, as we will discuss in detail later, the heavy emphasis in much literature about Japanese culture on the "groupishness" of Japanese in contrast to the "individualism" of Americans prepares visitors to Japan to recognize instances of groupishness and overlook instances of individuality among the Japanese. One of the purposes of this work is to argue that we must approach cultural knowledge warily, balancing facts and figures with careful observation of the lived world and an appropriate measure of doubt. We should doubt

what the "authorities" have told us, doubt the ready interpretations, and doubt even what we think we see. One guarantor of this healthy doubt is to embrace misunderstanding as a necessary condition of knowledge, and to recognize that cultural relationships such as those among education, language and identity are necessarily unstable and contradictory.

When educators come to understand the educational system of another culture, we immediately get caught up in a paradox. We have, so to speak, an intellectual "conflict of interests": our experts, the best products of our educational system, are supposed to objectively examine and evaluate another educational culture. However, the fundamental educational interests of our Western educational "regime of truth" (for example, rationalism, scientific research, democratic goals, objectivity, even language) may not conform to those of other cultures. As a result, it is exceedingly difficult for a highly educated person to get from the outside an objective view of an educational system that in any way approximates the inside view of a native of that culture. This means misunderstandings and the frustrations that go with them are a normal condition for scholars, teachers and students involved in cross-cultural educational experiences.

When I began teaching in Japan twenty years ago, few "Westerners" were studying or teaching in Japan, and few Japanese could yet afford to study or teach abroad. In more recent years, many thousands of Japanese students are studying abroad, and many thousand more foreign students are flocking to Japanese schools and universities (Dhomoto 1987; Yamashiro 1987; Hani 1983). Moreover, an increasing number of foreign professors are hired by Japanese universities, and thousands of young foreigners teach as language assistants in Japanese high schools (Court 1998). As many as 15,000 foreigners were teaching in Japan in 1991 (Duff & Uchida 1997, p. 457). This is a cultural exchange of the highly educated. We trust in education to provide us with inter-cultural understanding, and yet where the educational interests and values of different cultures

meet, disputes and misunderstandings occur. Just bringing people together in educational environments is not enough to promote inter-cultural understanding. In some instances, it actually aggravates cultural misunderstanding.

There is a need for different ways of understanding cultures, including educational cultures and the curricula they entail (see contributions to Lincoln and Denizen 1994; Pinar and Reynolds 1992; Clifford and Marcus 1986). A young teacher going fresh to Japan may prepare by reading about Japanese education and culture. There are a lot of valuable books about modern Japanese education, and many of them will be cited regularly in this work (for example, Cutts 1997, Benjamin 1997; Rohlen 1996, 1983; Thomas 1993; Amano 1990; Shields 1989; White 1987; Cummings 1980). But most of the books, even the best books, either focus on one aspect, time or level of Japanese education, or else give a generalized and, therefore, unavoidably simplistic picture of the system. Thus, most of the literature on Japan suffers from the same kind of compartmentalization that characterizes an individual's experience of Japanese education. The very nature of our normal research methodology generally requires a researcher to limit the focus of investigation to a few subjects in one or two institutions or in one locality at a time. If we read enough such studies, we can expect to gather a broader picture. But it takes a lot of time to do research, and then write and publish a book. By the time a teacher can read enough to get "the broad picture," the cultural environment may have changed considerably. Research and statistics limited by narrow methodologies may even leave that teacher worse off in practical terms because it gives her the false confidence that she *knows* "Japanese education."

Most language teachers are poorly prepared by their training to deal with cultural frictions and often have only superficial ideas about culture. Duff and Uchida (1997) urge

that "the cultural politics of English teaching, of popular and professional media, and of various teaching methods, assessments procedures, and government policies needs to be explored more critically in teacher education programs and by teachers in the field" (p. 477). They call for "a combination of biographical and contextual practice oriented reflection in ESL/EFL teacher education" (p. 477). Hansen and Liu (1997) also suggest that greater study of social structures be incorporated into a theory of SLA (p. 570). They conclude that "studying our own histories can help us better understand the history of others" (p. 574). Taking a cue from these suggestions and those of other critics such as Louis Smith (1994b), I freely include biographical anecdotes and a significant autobiographical component in the present work. This unconventional focus on the life world is intended to stimulate critical methodology of self-reflection in the study of education, language and identity.

Important anthologies (such as, Clifford & Marcus 1996; Denizen and Lincoln 1994) question established methodologies in the study of culture. A similar methodological questioning is happening in the area of curriculum studies (for example, Aoki 1993, 1988; Feinberg 1993; Pinar and Reynolds 1992 a & b; Lather 1991; Van Manen 1990; Grumet 1988; Willis 1977). In the area of "Japanology," too, new perspectives are challenging established methodologies (see Morris-Suzuki 1998; Smith 1997b; Amino 1996, 1992; Ohnuki-Tierney 1993; Tanaka 1993; Mouer and Sugimoto 1990; Kondo 1990; Miyoshi and Hartootunian 1989; Barthes 1982). Much of this diverse discourse shares a focus on the problems of understanding identity. Hansen and Liu (1997) believe that "although many social identity researchers consider social identity to be dynamic, the very methods some have employed--questionnaires, observations, interviews, and so forth--do not allow for dynamism, as they are typically one time occurrences" (p. 572). My work, too, attempts to unite a diverse questioning of cultural and educational situations by continually returning to

problems in understanding identity. To the end of restoring a sense of dynamism and avoiding some of the pitfalls of concentrating upon one time occurrences, I have purposely "fractured" this work in order to broaden its spatial and temporal perspectives. I have used my own experience of Japan, retraced after the fact through letters, diaries and memories, as a key ethnographic source. I include a variety of styles of writing, from formal academic to narrative, and even to the poetic. I have broken many rules of unity and objectivity. I have crossed the boundaries of "fields" such as history and literature. I have done these things self-consciously. I hope that this unconventional "methodology" will be a step towards creating models for a more thorough going cultural hermeneutics that will be useful in the training of language teachers, and will also have practical relevance for research, and in the every-day living community of the classroom.

II. Change and diversity in Japanese education

Rather than relying on the impression of sameness throughout Japan as promoted by holistic theories of Japanese culture that emphasize homogeneity and groupism, this work is especially sensitive to change in Japan and the differences change implies. Cultural changes cannot always be readily distinguished in absolute ways. However, in this work, I will emphasize four kinds of change by exploring: 1) differences across time, 2) differences among regions, 3) differences among local communities, and 4) differences among institutions. Let me briefly outline these kinds of differences in regard to Japan.

First, as concerning differences across time, even in the twenty years I have been teaching and studying in Japan, considerable and sometimes rapid change has taken place in Japanese educational culture. For example, changes have occurred in the styles of school uniforms (McGill 1988), the contents of textbooks (Smith 1994a), the problem of

bullying (Desmond 1997; Hishimura & Ogi 1996), the methods of instruction (Kristof 1995; Sekiguchi 1993; Anderson 1993), the roles and extent of foreign exchange programs (Yamashiro 1987), and the numbers of foreign instructors (Duff & Uchida 1997). People coming into the Japanese educational system need to understand their experience within an historical context, both long and short term. They need a sense of the impulse for change and the debates that motivate it. Some change is sudden and conspicuous. If a high school phases out its uniform, people will notice the change immediately. Some long term shifts in values and beliefs "invisibly reflect" (to coin an oxymoron) changing identities. If citizens are losing confidence in the bureaucrats of the Ministry of Education, or if students are becoming impatient with outdated language instruction methods, a foreign observer new to Japan may not recognize these phenomena as changes

A second kind of difference is among geographical regions (see Smith 1997b; Morris-Suzuki 1996; Suzuki & Oiwa 1996; Pearson 1996; Shibata 1995). Most foreign instructors and students come to one institution in one area for a limited period of time, and are often unaware of the geographical, economic, demographic and historical distinctiveness of Japan's regions. Especially when visitors are convinced that Japan is a homogeneous culture, they assume that any region will offer a "typical" experience of Japanese society and education. Nevertheless, Japanese schools remain marked by regional differences and characteristics. In conservative Nagoya, even some elementary schools have uniforms, a fact that people in Kagoshima find hard to believe (there, uniforms are introduced only from junior high school). In Tsukuba, north of Tokyo, our local elementary school students wore green jogging suits as a uniform (to the disgust of many parents who had moved in from urban Tokyo). Uniforms are only one visible symbol of regional characters. In some regions of Japan the rejection of such symbols is extreme. In the deep south, in Okinawa, some citizens, distrust any semblance of "militarism"; they

reject uniforms, refuse to sing the "national anthem," and some have gone to far as to tear down the "national flag" (Pearson 1996; Kohei 1996; Suzuki & Oiwa 1996). In fact, opposition to such symbols remains so fierce that neither the anthem nor the flag has yet gained official recognition from the Japanese Diet. Differences in regional characters are also reflected in less visible symbols, such as the number of incidents of bullying, the strictness of school rules, and the levels of attendance at *jukus*.

A third area of change, and one related to the differences among regions, are the differences among local communities. Despite the often-perceived illusion of equality and sameness in Japan, the natures of certain communities are distinguished by socio-economic class or the presence of minority groups, such as Koreans or Hisabetsu Burakumin. Within the same city there will be schools with good or bad reputations. Even at the elementary level, where almost all schools are public and have access to similar budgets and resources, the differences between any two schools can be quite marked. When my wife and I put our children into an elementary school in Kyoto, a number of our Kyoto friends congratulated us on placing them in a "good" school. They said the school just north of ours was *chotto gara ga warui* [a bit rough]. In fact, it was merely by chance that we moved into the area with a "good" school. Japanese are less likely to leave school choice to chance. Some of them will move the whole family or have a "work-away father" [*tanshinfunin*] in order that their children might attend a "good" school.

At the junior high school level, the differences among local communities become even more apparent. Certain junior high schools have bad reputations for bullying [*ijime*], violence, strict rules, and poor educational standards ("Japan's schools" 1990; Kristof 1995). There are three junior high schools within a short walk from where I lived in Kyoto. One is a prestigious Christian private school: all boys, brown uniforms, lots of foreign

teachers, large playing ground and excellent sports programs. Entry is highly competitive, but almost all of the students proceed to the same institution's high school, and then to one of the two best universities in Japan, *Todai* [Tokyo National University] or *Kyodai* [Kyoto National University]. The second school is a public school on a hillside surrounded by trees and the houses of the wealthy. The grounds are large, but the buildings are old, cold and dirty. Students wear blue blazers and grey slacks. The standards are not particularly high, but with some attendance at *juku*, students can expect to get into good high schools. The third school is also a public school, but it faces a busy, noisy street. The grounds are cramped. The uniform is similar to the second school, but they are worn quite differently: girls wear baggy socks and shorten their skirts; boys wear oversized trousers, leave their shirts undone, and slip earrings on outside the gate. Although this school has a "bad reputation," it is still better thought of than other schools only a short train ride away, where students still wear stiff black Prussian uniforms, dye their hair neon colours, and wear make up and ear rings in school. In the worst schools, violence is a normal part of school life, teachers feel threatened, and their concerns about poor standards are overwhelmed by more immediate worries--like physical survival (see "*Kodomo*" 1998).

The fourth area of change, the differences among institutions, becomes most noticeable beginning from the level of senior high school. Compulsory education lasts until the end of junior high school. As a result, unlike junior high schools, which must accept students from their districts, senior high schools are no longer tied to communities. At the senior high school level, even "public" schools select students based on competitive examinations. As a result, students may have to commute for considerable distances or move closer to a school to which they are accepted even though there are perfectly good

high schools in their own neighborhood. All senior high schools fit into a hierarchy (Thomas 1993; Shields 1989; Rholen 1983). Some schools, private and public, have distinctive programs and policies. For example, some are "internationalized" and have special entrance exams for *kikokushijo* [student returnees] or students with foreign language or other abilities. Other schools boast many foreign instructors or programs to travel and study abroad. There are also conservative schools that aim only to guide students through the difficult regime of study necessary for successful entry into an elite university. Despite, or perhaps because of their clear-cut rankings, high schools are not as likely to be as strife ridden as are some junior high schools. Students at the top and middle levels of senior high school know they have a chance to enter a good university, and so they settle down to the drudgery necessary to do so. Students at the bottom levels know they are removed from the competition to enter good universities, and so they can enjoy their clubs and friends while picking up job skills (Rholen 1983).

The differences among institutions reflected in the hierarchy characteristic of senior high schools is even more significant at the university level (Cutts 1997; Thomas 1993; Reischauer 1988; Nagai 1971). The institutional variety among universities is quite remarkable. There are public and private universities, women's universities, men's universities, coed universities, junior colleges, sports universities, art universities, language universities, agricultural universities; city, suburban and *inaka* [countryside] universities; Christian, Buddhist, Tenrikyo, Ainu and American universities, and more. This list does not include the *senmon gakko* [the hundreds of computer, language and business schools that are not recognized as colleges or universities by the Ministry of Education]. The top universities are national, like Tokyo and Kyoto University. The top private universities are Keio and Waseda. However, most large cities will have at least one good national

university. Some will have famous private universities as well, such as Ritsumeikan and Doshisha in Kyoto. Some universities compete for students by offering innovative programs. Particularly popular are programs relating to foreign languages, technology, internationalization, and the environment. Other universities compete by building attractive campuses with lounges, coffee shops and fountains or by hiring movie stars, artists and comedians as professors. Most students only ever attend one university, and professors seldom change universities in their careers. As a result, even the people most directly involved in Japanese university education, the students and professors, seldom appreciate the diversity of institutions of higher learning in Japan.

One weakness common to much of the literature on Japanese culture, and especially on Japanese education, is the tendency to ignore these facts of change and diversity in Japan. Occasionally, a book like Thomas Rholes's (1983) Japan's High Schools will describe the variety of institutions at a particular level of education. Other works, like Stevenson and Stigler's (1992) The Education Gap, while looking at a number of different schools, choose all the schools from one region of Japan. Other books, such as Gail Benjamin's (1997a) Japanese Lessons and Anne and Andy Conduit's (1996) Educating Andy, deal with the experience of only one institution, resulting in narrow and often misleading pictures of "Japanese education." Each of the above books makes a valuable contribution to our understanding of Japanese education, but few books, I think, capture much of the dynamic of Japanese education. Most of the debate, discrepancy, inconsistency and protest concerning Japanese education are lost in static pictures of generalized values and representative institutions.

In a paper about qualitative methods in the social sciences, Vidich and McLyman (1994) discuss Thorstein Veblen's writings on higher education in America, and point out that he drew largely on his own experience at three American universities. They claim that

works like Veblen's are "in effect, examples of qualitative research based on data acquired over the course of rich and varied life experiences. In these studies it is impossible to disentangle the method of study from either the theory employed or the person employing it" (p. 34). In this work, too, I draw on all my knowledge and experience of Japan and Japanese people to try to create a broad view of the complex relationships among culture, education and identity. I endeavor to give my view a combination of scholastic depth and practical usefulness in the living world of the classroom. I attempt to express something of the complexity of Japanese educational experiences, with all its changes, differences and contradictions.

In my more than twenty years of teaching in Japan, I have taught at one national prep school [*yobiko*], one private high school, several language schools, two junior colleges, and five universities. Moreover, I have studied at a language school, and two Japanese universities. I have also taught hundreds of Japanese high school and college students in Canada. The Japanese educational institutions where I have taught include some of the best, and some of the worst. Moreover, they are, as I mentioned earlier, located in widely separate regions. Through my family's experience of Japanese education, I have gained more knowledge of other Japanese schools. My wife has gone through the school system in Kyushu and graduated from a college in Nara. My two children have experienced kindergarten [*yochien*] in Nagoya, and elementary and junior high school in Kyoto. These educational experiences in Japan have been balanced by our educational experience in Canada from Montessori preschool to university.

The sum total of this experience puts me in a good position to describe change and diversity in Japanese educational experience. Needless to say, this description is closely connected to my personal perspective. The view I present of Japanese culture and

education arises from a combination of academic research and autobiographical self-reflection. This creates special methodological challenges. Paul Valery has said that "there is no theory that is not a fragment, carefully prepared, of some autobiography" (cited in Smith 1994b, p. 243). Valery's claim undermines confidence in any strictly objective stance. Gradually, qualitative methods are gaining acceptance in the academy, and recent works incorporating narrative (see Neilsen 1998) are having some impact in the North American academic community. Still, a lingering suspicion of narrative means that "a large area of knowledge is systematically suppressed as "non-scientific" by the limitations of prevailing research methodologies" (Clarke, cited in Smith 1994b, p. 85). On the surface, personal accounts and anecdotes can appear trivial and unscientific, but I agree with Smith who writes that autobiography, by blurring the borders of fiction and non-fiction, "is a sharp critique of positivistic social science. In short, from my perspective, autobiography in its changing forms is at the core of late twentieth-century paradigmatic shifts in the structures of thought" (1994b, p. 288). I, too, though willing to acknowledge my debt to positivistic research methodologies, in this work seek to go beyond the measure of positivism.

III. On the Methodological Challenge of Cultural Hermeneutics

By analysing interactions of influences among identity, language and education, I hope to show something of the diversity and complexity of Japanese culture. My approach may be rather broad and circuitous, but then what I am seeking is a view broad enough to encompass the appreciation of diversity that might demolish stereotypes of Japanese. An attempt to encompass such a broad view presents certain methodological difficulties. My work is neither strictly qualitative or quantitative. It does not conform to accepted

procedures of "ethnographic" fieldwork. Mine is, in short, an attempt to find another way to understand culture. It is a "re-search" in the sense that it searches again the established authorities and theories, and then tests their findings against my own experience. In this way, I eke out from among ossified concepts, prejudices and misunderstandings a new, freer understanding of education and identity--both Japanese and my own. I call this methodology "cultural hermeneutics."

Cultural hermeneutics is based upon the philosophical tradition of hermeneutic phenomenology. The chief aim of cultural hermeneutics is to deconstruct knowledge and to recombine in a meaningful way the fractured segments of knowledge that remain from our compartmentalized scientific investigations in the human sciences; at the same time it constantly questions cultural stereotypes. Broadly speaking, hermeneutics occupies that place in the human sciences where "specializations" and "fields of knowledge" tend to impede rather than facilitate our understanding. I do not reject quantitative or ethnographic research. Instead, I try to incorporate them, along with other paths to understanding, into a wider and more diverse understanding of culture. I want to achieve a "reunification" or "re-membering" of experience and theory by giving primacy to the play of language, especially the written language.

Cultural hermeneutics self-consciously incorporates the "imaginative" treatment of a wider variety of evidence, including novels, poems, personal anecdotes and narratives, in order to achieve a deeper understanding of culture and identity. Envisioning educational situations, empathizing with the situations of people of another culture, or even remembering our own perplexity within a foreign culture requires, as Degnehart and McKay (1988) say, an "ability to hold present to the mind abundant details (of circumstance, belief, motive, previous experience, and so on)" (p. 244). Such acts of imagination go beyond the requirements of normal academic research that emphasize

experiment, measurement and objectivity. Of course, if scholars really adhered to a strict program of scientific objectivity, "the result would be very inadequate descriptions of people's conduct or their culture" (p. 243). Therefore, while cultural hermeneutics takes full advantage of informed and disciplined evidence, it also engages the culture directly in a "conversation." Through this conversation, I intend to expose patterns and imperfections in our understanding of Japanese culture, and especially in our understanding of the relationship between education and identity.

In the more specific "arena" of the language classroom, cultural hermeneutics involves reflecting upon and talking about cultural identities and their relationship with language. For the student, this means knowing that learning a second language alters identity. The student must see the risks and advantages of learning language. At the same time, because a student seriously intent upon learning a new language must shed a previously accepted identity, a new identity must be prepared. For the instructor, cultural hermeneutics means accepting the "unavoidable" role of accomplice in deconstructing students' pre-given cultural identities to replace them with less exclusive identities. This is never a disinterested activity. Moreover, to some extent it is reciprocal. That is to say, the instructor cannot come out of the encounter of language teaching without some alteration in identity. Whether admitted or not, the instructor enters the language classroom with some kind of "identity agenda" (see Liu 1998; Amin 1997; Norton 1997; Duff & Uchida 1997; Courchène 1997; Pennycook 1994). An instructor directs students' changing identities along certain ways, even if the intended directions are as simple as making students less "shy to speak" or more "environmentally aware." Therefore, it is especially important that the instructor reflect upon culture. The instructor must respect the evolving cultural identities of students and not just criticize randomly. This means, too, that the instructor must reflect upon his or her own cultural identity and how it was learned. By

practising cultural hermeneutics, students and instructors may achieve a deeper understanding of the formation of their cultural identities, and establish in the classroom an environment of tolerance and trust within which language can be more confidently learned.

In Part One of this work, I expand upon this methodological “approach.” Here, I will briefly summarize six “attitudes” in the approach of cultural hermeneutics:

1) “Back to the things themselves.” We are indebted to Husserl for this slogan. Especially in regard to cultural hermeneutics, it can be taken as a warning. Our views of cultures are obscured by prejudice and stereotypes. The very education that helps us understand the world, also teaches us to see the world according to our own culture’s interests. This bias is exposed by Edward Said (1979) in Orientalism. The tradition of Orientalism in Western science is particularly pertinent to our study of Japanese culture. Other scholars show us that such a perspective can work both ways (MacKenzie 1995), or that Japanese “orientalizes” other nations (Tanaka 1993). We must each go back to the beginning, and, adopting a questioning attitude, re-interpret Japan for ourselves.

2) “The hermeneutic circle.” Where traditional social science often tries to isolate a custom or aspect of culture for objective investigation, hermeneutic phenomenology and other postmodern schools say that this is not possible. The part can only be understood in the context of the whole, and the whole is only understood in relation to its parts. The individual cannot be understood without reference to the culture, and the culture cannot be understood without an appreciation of the variety and complexity of its individuals. What is researched is determined by the researcher, and in turn transforms the researcher. We picture this interconnection of the parts with the whole, the “case study” with the “big picture” as a circle. Within this circle we must constantly move, connecting the part with the whole, the individual with the culture, the researcher with the researched. For cultural hermeneutics, this means that we must always be in motion, always shifting attention

between the specific and general. This is a “conversational” approach that values the unusual, the exceptional and the unexpected.

3. “The contingency of truth.” This idea I borrow mainly from Richard Rorty (1989, 1979) although it is implicit in most postmodern thought. Heidegger (1975) and Kuhn (1970) teach that even the sure mathematical sciences are at their essence products of human belief. Derrida (1980) has used this understanding to deconstruct pretensions to truth based upon ethnocentric evaluations of script. Rorty takes a typically pragmatic step, and founds his social truths upon a chosen “rock” of solidarity: a solidarity that aims to reduce the amount of cruelty and suffering in the world. Gadamer (1994, 1976) leaves truth open, not seeing it as a solid rock, but as a shifting, floating form that is constantly being re-negotiated by human beings. The “contingency of truth” means that we must constantly question our received “truths” about language, culture and identity, and ask who “created” these truths, and to what end.

4. “All understanding is new understanding.” Thus, Gadamer summarizes the changing nature of lived experience. Understanding is always running to catch up to life events. Every individual has a unique perspective on life, and no two people can see exactly the same thing from exactly the same perspective at exactly the same time. T. S. Eliot claimed that any new literature necessarily changed all the literature that came before it. Likewise, any new book or theory about a culture changes everything and everyone connected to that culture, even in the past. On the one hand, this is a humbling proposition. It means that even as we write about and analyze a culture, the culture has already changed, and our descriptions are already out of date. It also means that all our understanding is founded upon error, prejudice and misunderstanding. On the other hand, this is a liberating proposition in that no matter how accurate were the books or theories of

those who went before us, changing events, people and thought always make room for new and necessary interpretation.

5. "Understanding is always self-understanding." On the surface, Gadamer's statement is naive. Certainly, understanding is a route to power: knowledge is power. When we "know" another culture, when we can "name" and "define" it, we exercise power over it. But "power," too, offers lessons in self-understanding. Recognizing the dangers of power relationships should make us more cautious in our claims to "objectivity." When we study others, our study is "motivated." Our motives may be predatory or they may be altruistic, but they are never disinterested. Change is the inevitable result of research. The researched changes, and the researcher changes. The changes are not always unintended, accidental or coincidental. They are directly connected to the original motivations of the research, and those motivations are largely found in the past, and in the experience and education of the researcher. This means the researcher is obliged to "re-search" his or her own self in relationship to the research. Thus, the experience of the researcher is validated, and so is the use of narrative and anecdote in research. The researcher's cultural investigations become self-consciously autobiographical.

6. "The priority of language." Derrida (1980) goes so far as to place the origin of the written language before that of the spoken language. Van Manen (1990) stresses the importance of the performance of writing in research. Aoki (1993, 1992, 1988), Pinar (1992), and Grumet (1988) emphasize the value of narrative in curriculum research. Aoki and Deluze (1987) see exchanges of understanding, even of academic knowledge, as conversations. Ricouer (1991) reunites fiction and empirical knowledge. Gadamer traces the roots of this postmodern emphasis on language back to the tradition of hermeneutic phenomenology, which has given language priority in contemporary critical thought. Research returns to fiction. History, sociology, anthropology and other human sciences

are fictional endeavors: stories of humanity, told and revised and rewritten from generation to generation; stories not of absolute, but of approximate truth. For Anderson (1991) and Hobsbawm (1992) the "nation" is an "imaginary community." For Barzun (1965) and Suzuki (1989) "race" is "superstition." The basic concepts of our understandings are based on words, Shakespeare's "airy nothings." Academic truths and cultural identities are created, fictional. Seen in this light, research becomes ambiguous, but it benefits from a vast widening of scope. Novels, fiction, poetry, folk tales, song, and other ingredients of the carnival of life, become (along with authorities, surveys and statistics) legitimate materials for academic research and debate. The practise of academic writing may result in a scholarly article, a narrative or a poem.

IV. An Outline of the Present Work

The present work is fractured in construction, and diverse in form and focus. Rather than one narrowly defined thesis, it offers a combination of related theses. Its main purpose is to unravel the relationships among language, education and culture in Japan. While some chapters are quite conventional in terms of form and methodology, other chapters are experimental, and their inclusion here is justified by the circuitous approach of cultural hermeneutics. These diverse chapters are divided into three parts. Part One examines the methodological paradoxes of cultural hermeneutics: "a methodology that rejects methodology" in appreciation of the randomness of experience. Part Two deals with language in relation to the creation of Japanese cultural identities. Part Three deals with education and national ideologies, particularly those relating to race, nationalism and internationalization. This menagerie of parts and diverse chapters is interspersed with narrative chapters or "autobiographical interludes" that alternate with the "academic

chapters.” This biographical content is my attempt to juxtapose the lessons of scholarship with those of the life-world in ways that provoke intellectual instability. The narrative chapters reconstitute the beginning points of my doubts about our “cultural knowledge” of Japan.

Part One begins with Chapter Two. This is a rather conventional chapter on methodology. In Chapter Two, I try to situate cultural hermeneutics within the broader tradition of phenomenology, and also try to relate it to educational cultures. Part One continues with Chapter Three, which presents an unconventional “counter-methodology” or “non-methodology”; it develops an extended metaphor on rocks, mixing fact, fiction, poetry and anecdote as alternate models of understanding. I hope that readers can find in the chapter’s loose, fragmented style, spaces through which to glimpse the living-world of Japanese education that will create for them new “impressions” of Japan. Between the Scylla and Charybdis of the two alternative conceptions of methodology presented in Chapters Two and Three, I will attempt to navigate the course of my dissertation. Part One ends with Chapter Four, sub-titled “Situating the Scholar in the Work.” This is primarily an autobiographical narrative emphasizing my own evolving sense of cultural identity, especially as it relates to my education in Canada and to my “discovery” of Japan.

No doubt Chapter Four will strike some readers as out of place in a work about Japanese identity; however, I think it is important for three reasons. First, it presents my understandings of culture and identity as I acquired them even before I met Japan. Because I want to open up our understanding of culture, and especially Japanese culture, I present my own early sense of the contingent and evolving nature of cultural identity. This can be contrasted with more absolute and static concepts of culture I discuss later. My second reason for including this autobiographical chapter is that it exposes the failure of my Canadian education to prepare me for an understanding of the variety and

complexity of Asian cultures. Although my focus in this work is Japanese education, the lack of understanding between Occident and Orient is, I believe, a symptom of more universal educational failings. My third reason for the inclusion of this chapter is the phenomenological priority given to reflection upon individual lived-experience. Chapter Four thus establishes a starting point for the series of autobiographical narrative chapters.

Stories and anecdotes remind us that what we present as objective scientific inquiry is always related in its sources to life experience. Anecdotes serve the useful purpose of tying abstract theories to the concrete events. They suggest directions towards understanding. My own experience in Japan is one legitimate source of ethnographic material (Vidich & Lyman 1994; Smith 1994b). The intention of my narratives and anecdotes is not statistical or representative, but rather imaginary and creative. Where expository arguments and narrative accounts meet, cracks and crannies allow readers other views of Japan. By alternating longer expository chapters with shorter narrative chapters, I hope to balance the particular with the general, and the concrete with the theoretical. How well this experiment succeeds will depend partly upon the willingness of the reader to participate in the "writing" of this work. I leave it largely to the reader to make connections between my opinions as presented in the expository chapters and my experience as described in the narrative chapters. Should the reader lack patience for this approach, it is possible to skip over the narrative chapters and read only the expository chapters, perhaps to go back later to read the narrative chapters as a set. However, I hope the instability caused by the alternation of narrative and the expository chapters can take the discussion beyond a merely theoretical or stereotypical Japan.

Part Two begins with the first of a series of five major expository essays that pursue a "close reading" of the evolution of Japanese identity through education. Two of these chapters, Chapters Five and Seven, are in Part Two, the remaining chapters are in

Part Three. In Chapters Five and Seven, I investigate the relationship between language and Japanese identity. This emphasis on language follows from the central role that cultural hermeneutics gives to language in understanding culture.

In Chapter Five, I deal with the Japanese language, particularly the written language. I examine the history of written Japanese, and its effect upon Japanese cultural identity. To this end, I rely heavily on theories about "orality and literacy" in Western culture (Thomas 1992; Ong 1982; Derrida 1980; Goody 1968; Gough 1968; McLuhan 1964, 1962; Havelock 1963). In particular, I try to show how Japanese education is largely determined by the particular nature and difficulty of its written language. I also argue that the nature of the written language causes, or at least reinforces, certain negative stereotypes of the Japanese.

In Chapter Seven, I deal with the English language and its relationship with Japanese identity. The English language classroom in Japan is a place where cultures meet and sometimes clash. Japanese universities, despite visible similarities with Western universities, have their distinct traditions. When teachers and students do not recognize these traditional differences, it can lead to stress and conflict in the classroom. English language education puts demands upon Japanese students for which they are not always well prepared by their culture. Moreover, foreign instructors come to the classroom with expectations and values that cannot always be easily met by Japanese students. In this chapter, I try to explain some of these differing values and expectations.

In Part Three, I explore the relationships among ideology, education and the struggle to define Japanese identity. In Chapter Nine, I discuss how intellectuals and politicians manipulate cross-cultural comparisons in order to promote various educational agenda. Feinberg (1993) shows how Americans use their understanding of Japanese educational excellence to encourage a redefinition of American identity. Many American

scholars (for example, Benjamin 1997; White 1993, 1987; Stevenson & Stigler 1992; Hirsch 1987; Woronoff 1982) also argue for a reform of American cultural identity based on a sense of economic and educational competition with Japan. What many North Americans overlook is that such comparisons work both ways. Japanese scholars (see Sekiguchi 1993; Kimura 1988; Fukuzawa 1985; Nagai 1971) have urged or resisted educational reforms that could alter Japanese cultural identity. In this chapter, I compare and contrast educational debates in the Canadian press (especially Dwyer 1994) and the Japanese press (especially Hishimura & Ogi 1996). One observation that reverberates throughout this chapter is that the Japanese concepts contained by the word *kyoiku* [education], do not correspond exactly to the concepts of North Americans using the word "education." In such discrepancies in the meanings of words, cultural misunderstandings can arise.

In Chapter Eleven, I examine the evolution of the construction of various Japanese racial identities. I follow the historical development of the concept of race in Japan, especially as it has been influenced by Western theories of race. I show how concepts of the "Japanese racial type" have changed over time, in accordance with historical and political factors. Japanese racial perceptions are often quite different from those of Western peoples, and these perceptions are fostered by education. Despite careful arguments to the contrary (Herrnstein & Murray 1994), race is, like nationality, at best an imagined community (Hobsbawm 1992; Anderson 1991), and at worst a dangerous superstition open to social and political manipulation (Gould 1994; Suzuki 1989; Barzun 1965). Nevertheless, in Japan today, the concept of a "Japanese race," and the struggle to define just what that *is* remains a conspicuous part of debates about Japanese identity.

In Chapter Thirteen, I examine the contest in Japan to define the nature of a new "internationalized" Japanese identity. Some Japanese intellectuals burdened by a sense that Japan is always victim in international relationships believe that "internationalized" Japanese should promote Japanese language and culture abroad while trying to preserve the "purity" of traditional culture at home (Kamei 1989; Suzuki 1987 a & b, 1973). Other intellectuals (Yoshino 1992; Oda 1987) believe it is time for Japanese to move beyond their fear of victimization, and to accept and incorporate foreign people and values into their communities. They wish to involve themselves in the world on the basis of new "universal values" that are only in the process of being negotiated.

In Chapter Fourteen, the concluding chapter, I explore evidence of recent changes in the evolving cultural identities of young Japanese and then go on to review the methodological paradoxes that motivate the dissertation. Offering fresh evidence gleaned from current events, I restate my overall thesis that cultural identity in Japan is contingent and evolving, and that language instructors and students are crucial players in this constant re-negotiation of identity through a process of education that ties us to the mistakes of the past. I reaffirm the belief that we learn about others in order to learn about ourselves, and accept that our learning is founded upon prejudice and misunderstanding. By studying the intertwining relationships of Japanese language, education and culture, I hope to broaden our understanding of self and culture.

Part One: Finding a Way

Chapter Two

The "Methodology" of Cultural Hermeneutics

In natural science, I have understood, there is nothing petty to the mind that has a large vision of relations and to which every single object suggests a vast sum of conditions. It is surely the same with the observation of human life.
George Eliot, The Mill on the Floss. (1994, p. 277)

When it comes to trying to understand Japanese culture, I believe that what is important is not so much discovering new facts or truths about Japan, but rather discovering the preconceptions and misunderstandings upon which our already established "truths" have been created. In our high-tech, post-modern global culture, we are constantly bombarded through myriad media and institutions by out-dated and unreliable information. From birth we are subjected to an ongoing cultural education. As a result, we come to the study of any culture already "knowing" it. We have, all of us, absorbed a vast amount of knowledge about Japan and Japanese culture, even though we may not be aware of where this knowledge came from. As Ernest Becker (1973) has said, "the man of knowledge in our time is bowed under a burden he never imagined he would ever have: the overproduction of truth that cannot be consumed" (p. x). Yet, despite this vast quantity of "truth," we scholars continue to try to fill the cup of knowledge, adding more even as the cup runs over.

In this work I try to unravel the network of facts and truths that our culture has established about Japanese culture and identity. I do this in order to make way for new understanding. This approach poses a methodological challenge. Modern educational institutions lend their weight in support of "scientific" methods of social research. For a

scholar whose purpose is to identify misunderstandings about culture only to replace them with doubt, conventional scientific methodology can be inadequate. Various postmodern methodologies are presently in the making under labels such as “qualitative studies,” “ethnographical studies” and “constructionist methodologies,” but as yet there is no one clearly established postmodern methodology to follow. Therefore, I must formulate my own methodology. I call this methodology “cultural hermeneutics.”

Cultural hermeneutics as an approach to the study of culture is grounded in the philosophical traditions of hermeneutic phenomenology. The scope of the term “hermeneutic phenomenology” expands beyond the edges of normal understanding, threatening at times to fall off into the void of the absurd. The term can seem uselessly all-encompassing. Yet, much of what we loosely call “postmodernism” has evolved from the traditions of hermeneutic phenomenology. As Pauline Marie Rosenau (1992) says, phenomenology encourages “a reconsideration of personal knowledge, a rejection of logocentric world views, and a suspicion of lessons that come to us from the past, from history (Husserl 1960); post-modernism takes up these themes” (p. 13). I situate my methodology within this hermeneutic phenomenological tradition of thought.

Hermeneutic phenomenology is so extremely amorphous that it is not at all a “normal” scientific methodology. Nevertheless, hermeneutic phenomenologists insist on the “usefulness” of viewing the world in its uncontained heterogeneity (Brown 1992, p. 49). Hermeneutic phenomenology is not so much a school or a rigorous method, as it is a quality of thought: a questioning attitude. This attitude transgresses the boundaries separating academic disciplines and even those between truth and fiction (Smith 1994b; Ricouer 1991). Questioning what we think we already know, we open “empty” spaces for exploration. Hermeneutic phenomenology returns science to literature and reads the life-world as a text. This text calls forth a multiplicity of voices from various cultures, sub-

cultures and academic fields into a common conversation. The social sciences, or as Hans-Georg Gadamer (1976) and Richard Rorty (1979) call them, the “human sciences,” broaden their horizons by blending their separate traditions in a proliferation of hermeneutic cultural “conversations.”

Cultural hermeneutics seeks, by questioning the most familiar facts of our lives, to arrive at an understanding of the sources of identity. When I, “a Canadian English teacher” and member of a faculty of a Japanese university, explore with my students issues in “Japanese education/*kyoiku*,” I wonder if I share with them the common conceptual ground necessary for understanding. I ask myself questions like, “What are the boundaries of Japanese education/*kyoiku*?”; “Can we truly talk of *national* educational styles?”; “What does *Japanese* mean here?”; “Who has decided such meanings and how?”; “How does education/*kyoiku* determine the “Japaneseness” by which it defines itself?” For me, these questions will always lead back to a problem of self-understanding, and an effort to locate my own identity within an alien context. Questioning begins with language, immediately extends to culture, and, thence, to identity. This is a movement through particular words, to abstract concepts, and then back to particular identities. The circular movement of cultural hermeneutics that begins with my questioning of education/*kyoiku* eventually leads me to new understandings of culture, education and myself.

My questioning of Japanese education/*kyoiku* is only a part of a much wider questioning of fundamental terminology in the human sciences. In the field of Japanology, for example, we can point to Amino Yoshihiko’s (1992) questioning of the meaning of “Japan,” of Morris-Suzuki (1994) and Shumpei Ueyama’s (1990) questioning of “culture and civilisation,” or Stephen Tanaka’s (1993) questioning of “Orient.” We are, it seems,

involved in a kind of deconstructive testing of the validity of basic cultural terminology. This questioning takes place within what G. B. Madison (1988) describes as that "always interrupted and always begun conversation that we call Culture" (p. 71). The questions are not meant to denigrate academic terminology, but rather to expose the cultural assumptions, and the presumptions about the meaning of "culture" that underlie accepted jargon. In addition, the questions aim to breach the artificial boundaries that divide "fields of knowledge" in the human sciences. Hermeneutic questioning intends to draw thinkers from various academic fields onto a common ground for conversations about what it means to "know" or to "understand."

Hermeneutic questioning takes strength from its community context. This is not a questioning by detached and "objective" specialists, but a questioning among a community of literate individuals. This social event of questioning together is likened to a "conversation," and this conversation is primarily based on and conducted through texts. Therefore, the conversation is not restricted by time, space, language, or culture. "Conversation" is a central metaphor of cultural hermeneutics. Hermeneutic phenomenology concerns itself with the interpretation of our being within the life-world, and presumes that "what we most truly are in our most inner self is a conversation" (Madison 1988, p. 169). Within the "hermeneutic circle," the individual and the universal are seen to be in a relationship of mutual creation. This creative vacillation between the general and the specific mitigates against the compartmentalisation of knowledge and the departmentalisation of institutions of learning so characteristic of our modern societies.

The hermeneutic phenomenological questioning of words and identity intends to assuage the violent reductionism of investigatory procedure in human science research. A broader range of texts and experiences are accepted as having scientific validity. The subjectivity of the investigator is admitted, and personal experience no longer defers to the

authority of objective investigation. Moreover, as all texts have significance for understanding, none are given priority simply by virtue of their supposed "rigorous scientific method." Human science research can interpret essays, biographies, novels, poems, histories, newspaper articles, editorials, even movies (Eco 1988, pp. 445-455). This promiscuous interpretation of a multiplicity of texts and of personal experiences read as texts is an inter-disciplinary conversation.

This hermeneutic conversation cannot be departmentalised or divided according to types determined by the authority of "experts in the field." Rather, it is an egalitarian discourse that "liberates us from the authoritarian claims of those-who-are-in-the-know, who believe they have somehow transcended the merely human 'realm of opinion'" (Madison 1988, p. 52). Interpretation is acknowledged as initially self-centred, even narcissistic, but this is no embarrassment. All understanding is, as Gadamer (1994) says, essentially self-understanding (p. 260). When we know that understanding is not something we have, but rather what we are, then we need no longer blush in the presence of our own subjective experiences and opinions. Although it may not be "precise," this egalitarian conversation is less violent than an oppressive objectivity that seeks to reduce the living world to objects that can be isolated, measured, generalised, and predictably controlled.

Gadamer (1976) says that "the real power of hermeneutical consciousness is our ability to see what is questionable" (p. 13). Thus, questioning terms like education/*kyoiku* can serve to initiate inter-disciplinary conversations about culture and identity. Questioning terminology elicits further and less transparent questioning. Assumptions implicit in the questions also come to the fore. For example, implicit in the question "What is Japanese education/*kyoiku*?" is the expectation of answers that offer up units of knowledge that can

be packaged, fixed in time, and handed down from a superior giver, “the authority who knows” [the professor], to an inferior receiver, “the incomplete being who is yet to know” [the student]. In other words, the very question suggests the static, hierarchical and authoritarian patterns of learning and teaching in our universities. In so far as a question is aimed at “an answer,” it creates a closure, and inhibits the free inquiry that is usually assumed to be a privilege of academic life.

If we reflect upon how we use a term like “Japanese” in the sense of a national style--i.e. *nihonteki* or “Japanese-style”-- we will see that it tends to suggest an isolated and static condition in Japanese culture. Mouer and Sugimoto (1990) see the word *nihonteki* as part of a world view that tends to “classify reality as being either *nihonteki* (ethically, racially or culturally Japanese) or non-Japanese. It is an all or nothing perspective which leaves little room for accommodation or international mixtures” (p. 378). The term *nihonteki* limits what it means to be Japanese. The term emphasises “difference” and thus becomes involved in what Stephen Hall (1992) calls that “play of identity and difference which constructs racism” (p. 257). The term *nihonteki* constitutes an interrupted approach to understanding culture. A culture is not something that can be first defined in order to be contained, then mastered in order to be explained, and finally stored as “fact” to be passed on complete at another time. Even as we observe aspects of a culture, they are changing before our eyes. Even as we describe them, they are not what they were. Any effort to contain a culture is an act of violence. Aspects of culture cannot have life if utterly confined. Moreover, the subject who learns such knowledge, trusts it, and believes it to be a living truth is deceived.

Hermeneutic phenomenology teaches us three important aspects about our observation of things. First, we see only that part of the thing that faces us, and much else

is always hidden from us. Secondly, we can only focus our attention on bits at a time, and so there will always be a surplus of meaning remaining to be accommodated. Thirdly, all that we see is a reflection of what we are: understanding arises from our individual and particular perspectives of the things we investigate. The self is located both physically in a body and historically in certain cultural traditions. We cannot escape the situation of this "self" that sees. Each of us looks out from a unique location in the world, and projects a particular self upon the world.

The fact that our understanding is a reflection of what we are does not mean that there can be no common understanding. It does, however, make us realise an important paradox about what it means to understand. Understanding is at the same time both cultural and individual. On the one hand, understanding is a community event in that all understanding takes place within, and is determined by a tradition. We are thrown into Being. What we come to understand was always already there before us. What we learn is, therefore, always an "old understanding." On the other hand, because learning is always tied to an individual human perspective, all understanding is "new understanding." Common understanding is possible in the spaces that open between old social traditions and new individual perspectives.

If our understanding both begins and ends with our selves in a kind of "hermeneutic circle," then it is significant that what we are mostly is language. We speak and write our world with words like "individualism/*kojinshugi*," "*shudanshugi*/groupism," "*kokkashugi*/nationalism," "economy/*keizai*," "*shakai*/society" or "education/*kyoiku*," but such words are at best *ideas* or "signs of signs" by which we attempt to impose order upon the chaos of existence. At worst, they are the cast off remnants of certain worn-out habits of thought. The words that we use arise from our shared traditions; they pass through us

to determine and shape *our apprehension* of reality. The words we use to try to grasp the world in our understanding are already with us in the vastness of the world.

We create meaning through language. That is to say, knowledge in the human sciences is a cultural fabrication. The meanings of words evolve within the traditions of cultures. Let us observe by way of example the evolution of a term that has come to determine perceptions of Japan at the end of the twentieth century: *nihonteki keiei* or “Japanese business management.” Gordon Andrew (1998) and Kosaku Yoshino (1992) have shown that business terminology provides the favoured metaphors to describe modern Japanese culture. Through vast numbers of books, articles, lectures and interviews, academics compete to influence the meaning of the term *nihonteki keiei*. Between 1968 and 1995 the Japanese National Library records over 120 books with *nihonteki keiei* in the title (*kokun-tsukokkai-toshokan* 1969-1995). Since the first recorded title (Miyamoto & Okumoto 1968), the number of publications with *nihonteki keiei* in the title has increased every year with 22 published in the three years between January 1992 and March 1995. More books with *nihonteki keiei* in the title are still coming out. This quantity is probably a healthy sign for it suggests that the meaning of *nihonteki keiei* in Japan is still fluid. It is constantly being re-examined or redefined. Thus, it is saved from being a “technical term.” When a concept’s meaning gets too narrow and predictable, it becomes a technical term. Gadamer (1994) stresses that “a certain range of variation is essential-- a technical term is a word that has become ossified. Using a word as a technical term is an act of violence against language” (p. 415). Still, we cannot escape this struggle to control the meaning of important concepts like *nihonteki keiei*. As Merleau-Ponty (1962) says, “we are condemned to meaning” (p. xix). Only by accepting the inherent contingency of the meaning of concepts may we broaden the ground for “academic”

conversation. What sanctions this broadened conversation is our common involvement in culture.

If we sincerely engage a culture to understand it, we must be willing to let it wash over and engulf us. This is equally true of a national culture, a class culture, an ethnic culture, a business culture or an educational culture. We must begin by acknowledging our immersion in a sea of culture. Any effort to stand apart in order to observe and explain the manifestations of that sea is an artificial distancing that distorts our apprehension of the "essence" of culture. We talk, for example, of our "cultural roots." If we must use this root metaphor, we should think of roots not as single tubers, but, rather, as rhizomes, myriad and multifarious (Deleuze & Guattari 1987). Cultural essence should not be conceived of as rock-hard, like Democritus's atoms, but rather as insubstantial or diffuse, like a flavour, or an aroma. We will be best served by metaphors of culture that suggest the amorphous, the ambiguous and the unseen. The essence in culture is the powerful, shifting presence of a distinctive emptiness.

Just as we *cannot be* "objective" when we engage culture, we cannot reproduce the experience of culture. Any attempt to represent or reproduce the experience of another person or another culture is a futile gesture to an outmoded objectivity. We cannot take facts, figures and other data, and then say on the basis of this knowledge that we know what it is like to be in another person's shoes--or *geta*. As Merleau-Ponty (1962) says,

...the behaviour of another, and even his words, are not that other. The grief and the anger of another have never quite the same significance for him as they have for me. For him these situations are lived through, for me they are displayed. (p. 356)

It would be an absurd pretension to suppose that we could fully represent the lived experience of another person even in our own culture, let alone in another. We can only

interpret words and behaviour. We cannot stand within another person as he is, but we can, through the creative power of imagination, stand beside him as ourselves, and look out at his world. In so doing, we do not truly perceive his horizon, but neither do we merely repeat our own. We create for ourselves, through our imaginative interpretations, a new horizon called "understanding."

Scientific methods that attempt to objectively understand culture are prescribed in their success, and if they overreach themselves they are inevitably thwarted by the very multiplicity and inexhaustibility of individual and cultural identities. To paraphrase Merleau-Ponty, we don't have cultures, cultures have us. We are thrown into a Being that already precedes us. We are given to ourselves to understand. We can only reach that understanding by our relationship with the world and the things of the world. Our experience of the world involves, as Hegel says, the discovery that what we thought was true is not necessarily the case (cited in Schmidt 1994, p. 7). Because we are situated in the world, and prejudiced by our particular place in time and culture, our understanding is always new, but also always partial.

The cultural hermeneutic approach to understanding culture starts by accepting our immersion in tradition and history. We begin by accepting that we are prejudiced observers. Prejudice is an inescapable condition of Being. We passively inherit prejudices as we learn to be part of our culture (Schmidt 1995, p. 5). Therefore, understanding is condemned to move out from misunderstanding. If we try to understand a culture, we already start with our prejudices and misunderstandings in tact. Unless we open ourselves to change, our attempts to objectify and control the other culture result not in understanding, but in delusions of knowledge.

In Orientalism, Edward Said (1979) has exposed the concepts of Orient and Occident as such a delusion. The faith in the categories of East and West, and the belief

that the Orient can be a legitimate "object" of study prevent our understanding from moving beyond the narrow horizon of a fixed cultural perspective. The belief in East and West reinforces an allegiance to cultural preconceptions and prejudices. Yet such terms are so essential to our vocabulary that any discussion of Japan can hardly avoid using them. Therefore, any interpretation of Japanese things that suggests the human condition is split between East and West, Occident and Orient should be bracketed off for a more careful interrogation. We must resist the belief in *distinct* cultural traditions, lest we be seduced into "taking sides." Attempting to define a culture, we collude in an effort to dominate and control people.

Some foreign teachers in Japan seem to believe that by transferring their allegiance to Japanese culture they have overcome something of their own inherent cultural contradictions and prejudices. Even the phenomenon of "going native," exemplified in the lives of people like T. E. Lawrence, Lafcadio Hearn, Grey Owl and Mori Arinori, does not necessarily guarantee a disinterested understanding. "Simply 'going native,'" say Mouer and Sugimoto (1990), "does not provide perspective, for it too can be a form of myopic parochialism" (p. xxvi). "Going native" can be an extreme manifestation of the attempt to reduce another culture to controllable stereotypes. By actually living out stereotypes, we reify them in life. The "going native" that poses as a homage to another culture may instead be a gesture of dominance and mockery.

Cultural hermeneutics begins by acknowledging that we are already dissolved in culture. All we can really do is try to pour ourselves into a foreign culture, knowing that we still take with us something of our own culture. There can be no pretence at preserving the integrity of the "objective subject observing." Nor is there any hope of becoming the pure other in a gesture of self-obliteration or cultural denial. Instead, intermingling self and

other, self's culture and others' culture, we give rise to new metaphors of culture. Homi Bhabha (1994) sees the modern world involved in the constant creation of a multiplicity of new hybrid cultures. Studying culture is not, then, a representative act, but a creative one. When we study another culture, we are "*participating in the event of a tradition, an educational process of transmission in which past and present are constantly mediated*" (Gadamer 1990, p. 290). The culture we study will not survive unchanged our study of it. Our understanding of a culture creates it anew. "Understanding" is what we *do with* culture.

The attempt to understand another culture is inherently subversive. What we subvert most are our own cultural fabrications--the prejudices, cultural canons, and dead metaphors we habitually associate with culture. The understood culture and the understanding self and its culture are changed. Our understanding incorporates and transforms all previous understandings. Even when we study a culture we may never have heard of before, we do not start from a blank slate. The very fact that we can recognise something as "culture" shows that it was already present in our preconceptions and prejudices about cultures. Because we can name it, it has already been with us.

Thus, coming to the study of Japanese education/*kyoiku* and its relation to identity, we cannot escape the tradition of academic debate that backgrounds it. Even if we have never read a book about Japanese education, we are already prepared to understand it through our own education. "Education," in this case, means not just "schooling," but all the cultural learning we are immersed in from infancy. It includes everything from the stories our grandparents told us as children, and the music we listened to as teenagers to the movies and T.V. we watch, and the books, magazines and newspapers we read today. What we learn in school is only a small part of our education.

As fish live in water, we live in a sea of learning. By the time we are adults, we approach nothing with an unprejudiced view, not even things as "exotic" as *nihonteki* or *kyoiku*.

We do not come to a culture fresh and open. We come to it already prepared to know it, already prepared to identify it, categorise it, judge it and dominate it. As "researchers," we know already what we are supposed to look for in a culture, where its significances may be hidden. We distinguish the pieces, and fit them into an unacknowledged preconceived pattern according to conventional methodologies. Somehow each piece serves to reconfirm our emerging picture of "Cultures." Yet, the groundwork for "mastering" another culture has already been laid in the myths and stories, the fears and suspicions of our childhood. The procedures for recognising cultures were learned even before we spoke the word "culture." This is apparent in even a term as seemingly benign as education/*kyoiku*.

Modern students of Japanese culture cannot avoid considering the meanings and development of terms like *kyoiku* or *nihonteki*. For better or worse, the growth of the Japanese economy since the 1960s has led to Japanese culture being interpreted based on metaphors of business and industry, and the education system that sustains them. Ross Mouer and Yoshio Sugimoto (1990) explain that the field of "Japanology" divides into two main theories. The first is a "holistic theory" that emphasises "group consciousness" [*shudanshugi*]. The second is a "conflict theory," espoused mainly by Marxists. More recently, this conflict theory has been championed by postmodernists such as Morris-Suzuki (1998), Vlastos (1998), and Miyoshi and Harootunian (1989). This conflict theory stresses diversity and social struggle.

The two theories, holistic and conflict, are in turn intersected by two main language traditions: one Japanese, the other English. The English language tradition

has, since the Second World War, been dominated by Americans who have supported the "holistic theory." This is the mainstream American tradition, and one that Smith (1997b) refers to as the "Chrysanthemum Club." Until recently, only a few North American or British writers, such as the Canadian E. H. Norman (1975) and the English Marxist Jon Halliday (1975), espoused the "conflict theory." More recently, an increasing number of Americans have also joined the ranks of the "conflict" scholars, including Koschmann (1989, 1985) and Smith (1997b). In the Japanese language tradition, the two theories are more evenly represented, but the "holistic theory" remains dominant. Mouer and Sugimoto (1990) and Yoshino (1990) stress the connection between the "holistic theory" and business. Mouer and Sugimoto write,

those inclined towards the group model of Japanese society have argued that the firm is the key organisational unit in Japanese society. In particular, literature on labour-management relations tends to stress the commitment of the Japanese employee to his company and the existence of some kind of symbiotic relationship between the union and management. The company union, lifetime employment and the seniority wage system are seen as being the key concepts. (p. 287)

But this group model is seen to perpetuate itself through an education system that institutionalises and depersonalises students in preparation for their future role as "salary men" (Sakaiya 1988; Thomas 1993). Most of the most influential post-war descriptions of Japanese culture (such as Nakane 1979; Doi 1973; Reischauer 1988 and Vogel 1979), contribute to this image of Japanese as dependent, unindividuated and groupish.

In recent years, the English tradition is showing increasing suspicion of the group image of Japanese society. Francis Fukuyama (1992) tentatively places Japan in the "Western" liberal democratic tradition, precariously detached from the groupishness of "Asian Values" he finds epitomised in Singapore. Ueno Chizuko (1996) shows that the "tradition" of the importance of the role the Japanese *ie* [family] in Japanese culture is an

“invention of the Meiji government.” Connecting Nakane Chie (who defines modern Japanese culture in terms of this tradition of *ie*) with pre-war nationalist scholars, Stephen Tanaka (1993) tries to expose the ideological roots of her holistic image of Japan. Mouer and Sugimoto (1990) try to show that the group image rests on little reliable “empirical” evidence and debunk the group model with a convincing “individualistic” counter-model of Japanese society. Nevertheless, their review of the traditions of Japanology leads them to a methodological dead-end.

Having debunked the holistic theory, Mouer and Sugimoto (1990) remain unwilling to join forces with the conflict theorists. Faced with the problem of locating their own methodology, they avoid “taking sides” by seeking refuge in the “neutral” empirical research. They propose a scientific methodology for Japanese studies based on a “stratification framework.” This framework is a mathematical construct composed of figures, rates, surveys, graphs and statistics. A representative sentence goes like this: “the correlation of the size differential is calculated using Pearson’s *r* for each of the 6 subgroup pairings, as shown in Figure 13.2, cross-sectional data for 46 prefectures, 9 major industrial categories and 20 manufacturing sectors” (p. 351), and so on. Despite this “precision,” their attempts to interpret this research often ends with a warning about “the need for more empirical research” (p. 356), a caution that “one should be careful not to rely too heavily on these preliminary results” (p. 369), or the disclaimer that “firm conclusions cannot be drawn” (p. 367).

The methodological weaknesses of this “scientific” approach to cultural studies are not lost on Mouer and Sugimoto. The last part of their book is devoted to a sensitive analysis of the methodological problems in the social sciences. Several times (pp. 394, 397 & 401), they note the limitations of conventional methodologies. They admit that

“massive amounts of quantitative data or factual information on foreign societies . . . have not necessarily produced an understanding of the societies studied” (p. 401). They have serious “doubts about the efficacy of social science itself as a method which can enlighten us about social phenomena” (p. 416). Those of us in language education have heard the same kinds of doubts about research in language acquisition (Ellis 1994). Our vast quantities of research seem to lead us nowhere. Where do we turn then?

While retaining faith in the value of “empirical research,” Mouer and Sugimoto admit that “much more than scientific method is required if the study of society is to be a fruitful or liberating endeavour” (p. 413). In the end, they confess that they have no answers to the methodological dilemma (p. 414). Still, they offer important suggestions for the further consideration of methodology. One is that possibly “research is largely of personal rather than of social relevance” (p. 425). Another is that academic research should involve itself in “active dialogue with the people studied” (p. 429). Both of these points suggest the need for “phenomenological” inquiry. Twice in their book Mouer and Sugimoto refer to the importance of phenomenological observation (p. 73; p. 413). However, they never develop these suggestions. Perhaps this is because they are so intent to reject “arbitrariness” in the use of concepts (p. 413). From the postmodern perspective, it is just this arbitrariness in concepts such as *kyoiku* or *nihonteki* that offers opportunity for exploration and change. Jacques Derrida suggests we take advantage of “the infinite regress and arbitrariness of interpretation, not for the sake of epistemological or ethical relativism, but in the interests of setting the reader free, of setting the text free” (cited in Pinar 1992, p. 6). Phenomenology brackets arbitrariness, not to deny it, but to find freedom in the play of heterogeneous spaces.

Hermeneutic phenomenology lends itself particularly well to the questioning of the

methodology that dominates research in our institutions of higher education. In contrast to the accuracy, precision, consistency, coherence, adequacy, and narrow focus demanded in normal social science methodology, cultural hermeneutics is aimless and meandering. It pays little respect to distinct fields or academic disciplines. Moreover, it accepts the possibility that our true research goals are personal. For Gadamer (1994), at least, not only is all understanding new understanding, but also all understanding is self-understanding (p. 260). The irony of the phenomenological adventure is that we come to understand ourselves only through trying to understand others.

Heidegger (1977) diverts the phenomenological movement away from Husserl's original search for a "rigorous science." In turn, Gadamer (1976) asserts the moral scope of the tradition. He believes that its real roots have always been moralist, and have included "themes of pragmatism" in which we can hear echoes of Nietzsche and Dostoevski (p. 140). These pragmatic themes connect hermeneutics with the thought of William James, John Dewey and Richard Rorty. Rorty (1979), too, stands committed to a "moral faith" (p. 383). He admires a group of thinkers (including Goethe, Kierkegaard, Santayana, William James, Dewey, Wittgenstein, and Heidegger) who without quite forming a "tradition," are all "dubious about progress" or claims to rational truths by "such and such a discipline," and who recognise that "this century's 'superstition' was last century's triumph of reason" (p. 367). Following this advocacy of moral faith, hermeneutic phenomenology transgresses academic boundaries to create a broader community of thinkers. By referring always "to the things themselves," they resist explanatory theoretical constructions and the "reduction of all higher psychic acts, such as sympathy and love, to an original utilitarianism or hedonism" (Gadamer 1976, p. 145). Thus, this community defends moral faith in defiance of contemporary positivism and the methods associated with the natural sciences.

Hermeneutic phenomenology is not co-opted by rationalism because it understands that "validation is nothing other than the harmonious unfolding and reciprocal confirmation of successive experiences (interpretations). This is to say that knowledge is not so different from faith" (Madison 1988, p. 15). The ultimate foundation of all knowledge is not fact, but faith. Faith is not a property we possess; it is an act that we perform, an event of the world of lived experience. As a result, one path newly opened for the social scientists exploration of lived experience is literature. Literature, therefore, has "abnormal scientific" validity that is different, but no less true than that of normal science.

Doubting the relevancy of quantitative methodology to the human sciences, phenomenology finds its ally in hermeneutics, the interpretation of texts. Phenomenology accepts the scientific validity of the incidents of texts, even when they correspond to nothing in reality. As a result, the whole world of literature is opened up as data for scientific research. Within phenomenology separate fields of study merge into an unbounded human science that gives imagination and thought room to move. The "things" of literature become significant phenomena worthy of hermeneutic scientific attention. This validation of literary experience is reinforced by Husserl's and Heidegger's questioning of a scientific reality where, in the absolute sense, the real "is nothing at all" (Gadamer 1976, p. 150). Perhaps this is something of what Milan Kundera (1984) means by "the incredible lightness of being." The nothingness of fictional experience, the nothingness of real experience, and the nothingness of scientific reality float together and intermingle in a Zen-like *mu*--a significant emptiness.

Acknowledging the contingency of truth allows us to erase the line between human science and fiction. My own introduction to *nihonteki keiei*, for example, came in a course in Japanese literature at Tsukuba University, where I was assigned to read Odaka

Kunio's (1984) *Nihonteki keiei: sono shinwa to genjitsu*. At the time, I was surprised that a book on "business management" could find its way into a course on "literature." Yet, as I learned to criticise Odaka's book, I gained a new awareness that my university studies in Canada had been a kind of ideological indoctrination. The "field" of "Japanese Literature," like the field of "Japanese Business Management," was premised on the assumption of a monolithic Japanese culture. Things Japanese were everywhere defined by a commitment to "groupism." Studying Odaka's book was, in my own education, an important interdisciplinary event. Literature, cultural anthropology, business management/*nihonteki keiei* and education/*kyoiku* overlapped briefly to reveal the wider ideological environment, or what I later learned to call "regime of truth," of North American university education. The catalyst in this brew was, of course, the study of language.

"Phenomenology first gave language the central place it holds in the current situation of philosophy," claims Gadamer (1976, p. 172). This in turn allows literature a more expansive role in the human sciences. "Fiction" is no longer an illusion of reality. On the contrary, it is "the privileged path for the redescription of reality" (Ricouer 1991, p. 56). Forging ahead upon this path of literature, our understanding need no longer follow reality by the trail of the crumbs of fact and figures left behind as history. Literature allows us to keep pace with and even anticipate the becoming of reality. Whereas figures and facts focus our attention on what is left behind, fiction allows us to interpret "the type of being-in-the-world unfolded *in front* of the text," and through it "new possibilities of being-in-the-world are opened up within everyday reality" (Ricouer 1991, p. 86). Fiction, therefore, can bring us closer to our everyday reality than can the objective facts of science. For example, the life-world of characters in a novel by Ikko Shimizu may tell us as much about the life reality of *nihonteki keiei* as can statistics and tables ("Japan" 1996, p.13).

Ricouer claims that "there is no self-understanding which is not *mediated* by signs, symbols and texts" (cited in Madison 1988, p. 92). The text, especially the literary text, becomes a common field for the exploration of self-understanding, and thereby of all understanding. Literature, because of the power and truth of its perceptions, moves out in modern thought to encompass first "the historical text" (Madison 1988, p. 88), and eventually "the philosophical text" (p. xiv). A work like Roland Barthes' Empire of Signs (1982) inquires into Japanese culture, expands into an historical and philosophical meditation, transposes into a work of literature, and in the end tells us little about the "real" Japan, but much about *our apprehension* of Japan.

Interpreting literary texts, we create and come to understand our own identities, whether individual, sexual, national, or cultural. As Madison writes,

we recognise ourselves in the stories we tell about ourselves. It makes little difference whether those stories are true or false, fiction as well as verifiable history provides us with identity. (Madison 1988, p. 95)

The stories we tell in university about education/*kyoiku* or Japanese-style/*nihonteki* may in the same way be understood as interpretations of cultural texts, and as such, as fictional events. This is not to deny their validity. Rorty (1989) says that literature "gives us the details about what sort of cruelty we are capable of, and thereby lets us redescribe ourselves" (p. xvi). (Rorty's insistence on recognising the latent cruelty in ourselves echoes Oda Makoto's insistence that Japanese obsessed with Japan's victimisation had better recognise themselves as potential victimisers--but more of Oda in later chapters). Rorty stresses the need for intellectuals to move thought away from method and theory and towards fiction and narration. He says that this "turn against theory and towards narrative . . . would be emblematic of our having given up the attempt to hold all sides of our life in a single vision, to describe them with a single vocabulary" (1989, p. xvi). The

single vision of Japanese as “groupish,” common to cultural, historical and economic interpretations of Japan can be refracted by literature. A novel can teach us that for understanding cultures the exception can be as important as the rule. The moral complexities of lives reflected in literature make us sensitive to the moral dimension even in terms like education/*kyoiku* and Japanese-style/*nihonteki*.

Gadamer (1976) says, “to understand a text is to come to understand oneself in a kind of dialogue” (p. 57). Literature is a conversation mediated through texts. An author creates a text through an inner conversation with it by writing it and rewriting it from nothing. Then the reader, too, enters into a conversation with the text. In the act of interpretation, we find ourselves

in the middle of a conversation that has already begun and in which we try to orient ourselves in order to be able to try to contribute to it But the key hypothesis of hermeneutic philosophy is that interpretation is an open process that no single vision can conclude. (Ricouer 1991, p. 33)

The metaphorical field of the text is the location for the play of interpretation in the act of conversation. The conversation of literature offers a “real” sense of being-in-the-world eminently suited to interpretation permeated with understanding.

Anyone literate in a language can enter the life-world of literature. Textual conversation can penetrate barriers of space, time and culture. In fact, according to Ricouer (1991), “one of the aims of all hermeneutics is to struggle against cultural distance. . . thus genuinely making one’s *own* what was initially *alien*” (p. 119). This is done not by appropriating the place of the alien through objective understanding, but by putting oneself into conversation with that other, either through life-world experience or through the interpretation of texts. We come to understanding through “a fusion of horizons,” in which imagination places us near the other to look out from that near, yet separate place, causing a tension between what is one’s own and what is alien, between

the near and the far; hence, the play of differences is indeed a convergence (Gadamer 1976, p. 93). In other words, we come to an understanding of Japanese identity only by incorporating into ourselves something of that identity--by becoming Japanese.

In the event of being written, a text is freed from the original locus of conception in the point of view of its author and that author's culture. Over the decades, critics from various cultures have contributed to the ongoing conversation about education/*kyoiku*--Passin, Amano, Reischauer, Cummings, Warnoff, White, Rohlen, Vogel, Dore, Najita, Feinberg, to name just a few. If nothing else, this conversation has been valuable because it has revealed a multiplicity of inter-"national," inter-"disciplinary," and inter-"ideological" perspectives available for understanding education/*kyoiku*. Education/*kyoiku* is "meaningful" in the sense of "full of meaning," and no matter how rigorous our methodology, the term will always possess a surplus of meaning that lies outside consideration. No matter how careful we are at any one time, our conversation can only treat a part of the meaning of a term like education/*kyoiku*.

At the same time that this conversation spans cultural divides, it also frees the human sciences from the domination of authoritarianism and manipulative rationalism that Ralston Saul (1992) sees as so entrenched in our society and its institutions, not the least of which is the university. The academic environment encourages professors to compete for dominance by wielding facts, condensed and hardened into blunt objects of aggression. In its most cynical and manipulativeness extremes, this violent tendency of rationalism mocks the broader humanistic and spiritual aspects of university life suggested by a concept like "liberal education." Fortunately, such cynical objectivity is rare, and I think most scholars can agree with Michael Polanyi who says, "Any attempt to rigorously eliminate our human perspective from our picture of the world must lead to absurdity"

(cited in Madison 1988, p. 18). With our cultural hermeneutics, we aim to examine the cultural conversation we call education/*kyoiku* in full appreciation of the depth and the complexity of the human condition.

In place of a rationalistic monologue eulogising objectivity, cultural hermeneutics seeks to institute a liberating dialogue unburdened by demands for strict consistency and systematic order. Moreover, the phenomenological term, "life-world" takes much of its meaning from its contrast with a "world of science" that finds an ideal in mathematical precision. Mathematical science aims to master reality by reducing it to essential quantities and generalisations. In contrast, the phenomenological life-world respects the being of things. It encourages an appreciation of the multiplicity and particularity of life that inspires humility in scientific enquiry. Science is freed from a too strict adherence to the laws of mathematics and logic. Truth is found, too, in the subjective and poetic apprehension of life.

When the poet Rainer Maria Rilke found he could not write, his mentor, the sculptor Rodin, sent him to study animals in the Paris zoo (Bly 1981). For weeks, he studied the panther, and learned from it, until he could write a poem that expressed the essence of the nature of the panther. Rilke sought his understanding in the living world of the thing itself. The careful observation of even the individuality of a thing can lead to an understanding of nature and the universe different but no less scientifically valid than that provided by mathematics.

The mathematical and statistical approach to research in the social sciences is not in itself a complete methodology. Some things are always left out. For example, *nihonteki keiei* tells us little about poverty or marginality in Japan. Statistics tell us that as many as 90% of Japanese consider themselves "middle class" (Mouer & Sugimoto 1990,

p. 76), and my own initial experiences of Japan confirmed this picture. However, one day I lost my way on the train and found myself in a part of Osaka seldom visited by foreigners or prosperous Japanese. There I saw a poverty and human degradation not represented in our stereotypical images of Japan. Poverty in Japan inhabits a private, secretive world that is suspicious of academics and bureaucrats. Studying Japan's poor, Akiyama Kenjiro says, "the unfortunate of mankind close up tight when confronted by surveys from the outside" (cited in Mouer & Sugimoto 1990, p. 77). Franz Fanon (1965) long ago and more recently Paulo Freire (1970) have shown that the "wretched of the earth" scorn and distrust the privileged, including the well-intended teacher or researcher. The dispossessed have little to gain by co-operating with teachers or researchers who treat their condition as a manifestation of disease or filth in society, something to be gradually eliminated, in effect denying them whatever crumbs of cultural self-respect they have salvaged from their existence. Society turns its back on the wretched and they become invisible. Few of the many marginal life-worlds of Japan are included in the proud figures that establish the triumph of *nihonteki keiei*. Likewise, the debate about the relative merits of Japanese the education/*kyoiku* also tend to overlook the identities of the marginal, the abnormal, and the minorities that inevitably interplay with a dominant Japanese identity.

Cultural hermeneutics tends to undermine our confidence in "normal" science, and leads us by way of paradox to doubt. This doubt, however, "already presupposes the universal experiential basis of belief in the world" (Gadamer 1976, p. 155). In his theory of "normal" and "abnormal" discourses, Rorty (1979, 1982, 1992), too, explains that the "abnormal" is that which we cannot understand through normal scientific discourse. Abnormal discourse concerns mysteries like love, death, time, faith, meaning, identity and belief. Rorty is willing to respect the contributions to human thought and welfare made by

normal scientific discourse, but, as do Mouer and Sugimoto, he feels that alone, it leaves truth lacking.

Rorty (1979), however, does not recommend another method of inquiry, but rather an “inchoate questioning out of which inquiries--new normal discourses--may (or may not) emerge” (p. 384). He distinguishes two types of philosophy: a “systematic” philosophy, and an “edifying” philosophy. Edifying philosophy fends off the demand for objectivity, and tries

to prevent education from being reduced to instruction in the results of normal inquiry. More broadly it is the attempt to prevent abnormal inquiry from being viewed as suspicious solely because of its abnormality. (1979, p. 363)

Another philosopher struggling to open cultural conversation to the possibilities of abnormal inquiry is Wittgenstein, who offers this insight:

The aspect of things that are most important for us are hidden because of their simplicity and familiarity. (One is unable to notice something because it is always before one's eyes.) The real foundations of his inquiry do not strike a man at all. (cited in Gadamer 1976, p. 176)

Here Wittgenstein echoes William James's admonition that in the interest of truth we must learn to look at unfamiliar things as if they were familiar and familiar things as if they were unfamiliar (cited in Barzun 1964, p. 199). What these insights demand of the researcher is intense self-reflection. They also validate the kind of autobiographical methodology I include in this work. In order to “re-”perceive the very familiar, we must take the phenomenological step “back to the things themselves,” and this includes examining our own interests and motivations. All around us, truth arises in events that occur in the spaces opened by the tension between concealment and disclosure. Before we attempt to disclose more information and facts, we must reflect upon the prejudices and interests that lay concealed in our motives. We are humbled in our quest for truth by the simple knowledge that we can never see more than the aspect of things turned toward us.

Moreover, even among those things available for us to see, there is only so much that we are willing to see or able to recognise. Always something is hidden, both in the “object” of research and the “subject” of the researcher. What is concealed in the “object” along with what is concealed in the “subject” always guarantees a surplus of meaning. Inherent within whatever meaning we do disclose will always remain misunderstanding.

Chapter Three

Approaching Japan through Cultural Hermeneutics

I. I am a Rock; I am an Island

We are hammers and chisels in the hands of would-be sculptors, battering the spirit of the sleeping mountain. We are the chips and sand, the fragments of fragments that fly like arrows from the heart of the rock. We are the silences that speak from the stones.

Joy Kogawa. *Obasan*. (1981, p. 132)

Virginia Woolf says biography is about the truthful transmission of personality, and Louis Smith (1994b) explains Woolf's statement like this: "The truth is like 'granite,' and personality, at least in the selection of which truths to present, is like a 'rainbow.'" In Woolf's view, truth and personality make one of the biographer's perennial dilemmas" (p. 292). Smith goes on to qualify her statement by noting that "present-day scholars often see truth as less than granite" (p. 292). Granite, a rock, a rock-like truth-- these are metaphors through which cultural hermeneutics can approach new understandings of Japanese culture. This approach may suffice as a balance against hardening dependency upon methodologies.

Any serious work on a culture is a kind of extended "biography," and so the dilemma of the need to choose between a "granite-like truth" and the "rainbow-like personality" extends into the human sciences. Some writers on curriculum (for example, Grumet 1988; Willis 1977) try to reveal the personality of an educational system through

narratives of individual experience. In the scholarship on Japanese culture, too, there are both writers who seek to provide a rock-like foundational model for our understanding (for example, Nakane's 1970; Doi 1973), and writers who try to reveal the "personality" of Japanese culture (such as Smith 1997b; Kerr 1996; Kondo 1990). Even scholars who prefer a more positivistic approach can mistrust granite-like truths and are capable of giving us something of personality of Japanese culture (as do Morris-Suzuki 1998; White 1993; Reischauer 1988).

Nevertheless, when we hear people talk about Japan or read books on Japan, we still find those who offer truths about culture as if they were things that were "hard and fast." For example, Cutts (1997) says this about the Japanese:

Foreigners are often told how group-centric the identities of Japanese people are. It is hard for them, however, to grasp how important this is to the individual's whole sense of himself, how it invests his "being Japanese" with an extra dimension of social awareness--and how much it automatically ingrains a nationalist purpose into his life.

Here is where the university, and the whole educational system that fans out beneath it, play a pivotal and highly mendacious role. They introduce the individual to the group, carefully socialize him to it, and then convince him that subordination to group values is his own natural inclination. It is a way of controlling the values of each individual by brutally forcing his or her own cooperation in internalizing them. (p. 42)

Needless to say, this is an extremely negative picture of the Japanese and Japanese higher education, and this picture is developed throughout Cutts' book. For someone like me who has spent a career working in several Japanese universities, it is hard to recognize the locations of my experience in Cutts' description. For me, the university is one area of Japanese society where "group-centric identities" often break down, and where individuals enjoy some freedom. Cutts brings many "facts" to bear to support his ethnocentric picture of Japanese higher education.

Despite his many facts, Cutts' overlooks the complexity and multiplicity of Japan's educational "personality." He has tried to impose one monolithic personality on all of

Japan's people, education and culture. This single personality is group-centric. In the above passage, he uses the word "individual" three times, but in his work one seldom gets a sense of living individuals inhabiting Japanese universities. Rather, there are artificial beings "automatically ingrained with a nationalist purpose." For Cutts these beings are cheated by a pseudo-education and a fake democracy. Where did Cutts get his dark vision of Japan? What in his own life--what insults or disappointments--drives him to portray Japan in such a negative light? He gives us no clues: he keeps his self to himself. We can, however, detect behind Cutts' diatribe an implicit comparison with an ideal image of America where young people develop true personalities by virtue of getting a truly democratic education that encourages their inherent individuality. This image is a kind of self-stereotyping, and it has nothing to do with the "educational reality" criticized by American educational theorists as diverse as Grumet (1988), Apple (1988), Hirsch (1987), Bloom (1987) or Dewey (1944). Cutts ignores the personalities of the living world of education.

My Japanese students, for whatever their faults and weaknesses, tend to be full of personality. I am constantly fascinated by the variety of their manners, opinions, fashions and tastes. Some students definitely enjoy group life; others are quite solitary. Each university I have worked at, too, has had a personality that distinguishes it from other colleges and universities. I admit there are times when I, also, suspect something "mendacious" in the environments of Japanese education, or in Japanese politics (just as I suspect mendacity in Canadian education and politics), but these suspicions must be balanced with a recognition of the diversity of personality among Japanese educational institutions and people. Any Japanese reading Cutts is likely to feel insulted "as a Japanese," and, thus, be driven back on to just that "group consciousness" that Cutts claims to want to save them from. In the Japanese academy, there are nationalistic

scholars who would take advantage of the damage done by critics like Cutts in order to reinforce the solidity of the national group identity. Responsible scholarship should aim to balance all the little rocks of truth with the wide rainbow of personality. In my attempts to understand Japan, I remind myself to consider the diversity and abundance of Japanese personalities.

II. Roots among Rocks

These good souls, for that's what they are, are borne up by an ancient shelf of limestone, gleaming whitely just inches beneath the floorboards, yet each of them at this moment feels unanchored, rattling loose in the world between the clout of death and the squirming foolishness of birth.

Carol Shields. The Stone Diaries. (1993, p. 48)

For almost two decades now, I have been talking and writing about the Japanese. I do not know by what right I have done so. Yet, through my reading, I found that I was not alone in this. The Japanese pose problems of identity that provide endless fascination to intellectuals (perhaps especially to we Canadians with our own on-going identity crisis). On the one hand, the Japanese have, since Meiji, challenged the complacency of the Western sense of cultural superiority: they have undermined militarily and economically the confidence of a world-dominating European culture. On the other hand, the Japanese have been a mirror to the West, reflecting back to the observing Europeans familiar social and cultural institutions, but of different patterns of colours. These novel patterns offer Westerners new possibilities for identity. The Japanese offer a wondrous variety of living metaphors for exploring culture. Much of our fascination with Japan stems from our fascination with our own identities. As we come to know them, we come to better

understand ourselves, for as Hans-Georg Gadamer (1994) says, "All understanding is self-understanding" (p. 260). We use what we learn in our study of the Japanese to recreate an image of ourselves, and to rebuild the shaky foundations of our own identities.

Sometimes, it is as if we are not really looking at the Japanese at all, but through them to a new forming image of ourselves.

As we continue observing the Japanese, we may at some point come to the startling awareness that we, too, are being watched. For generations, the Japanese have been looking to the West for knowledge and understanding. From time to time, they have shifted their national gaze from Holland to England, to Germany, to America, but the fascination with the West never ceases. From behind a deceptively solid-looking facade, uncertain eyes peer out at the Western "other," trying to find materials for forging new Japanese identities relevant to a broader world order.

I have, as I said, played a part in this game. Caught up in the fascination of the back and forth movement of the play, I have come to recognize it as a game of metaphors. In this game we, in the interest of theories and opinions, reduce others, and even ourselves, to metaphors. We participate in this reductionism willingly, perhaps inevitably.

With the awareness that ours is a game of metaphors, there comes a temptation to cynicism, an impulse to turn our backs on the game completely as something false and unreal. But we are fated to work out all our understandings through metaphor for the very languages we use are shifting patterns of metaphor. In our quest to form solid pebbles of knowledge, we start with the "airy nothing" of the word. Nietzsche once suggested that all language, and therefore all truth and error, is metaphoric in origin (cited in Van Manen 1990, p. 49). Metaphor, too, is the stuff that *nations* are made of. We live and die in "imagined communities" substantiated by little more than belief in the underlying truth of

metaphors (Anderson 1991; Hobsbawm 1992). In the shift and flow of patterns of metaphor arise possibilities for growth in understanding. Homi Bhabha (1990) explains that "metaphor produces hybrid realities by yoking together unlikely traditions of thought." Patterns of metaphor need not necessarily fall into the closure of stereotype, though often it is their fate to become dead, rock-like things. To avoid such fossilization, cultural hermeneutics initiates a questioning conversation that takes as its topic our lived experience of culture. We look again at the unfolding growth. We prune away the dead truths so that the fresh and probing patterns of metaphor (upon which we base our cultural identities) can sprout forth from among the boulders to find new-forming life.

III. Ideals and Agony

Heaven's winged hound, polluting from thy lips
 His beak in poison not his own, tears up
 My heart; and shapeless sighs come wandering by,
 The ghostly people of the realm of dream,
 Mocking me: and the Earthquake-fiends are charged
 To wrench the rivets from my quivering wounds
 When the rocks spit and close again behind.
 Percy Bysshe Shelly. "Prometheus Unbound." (1979)

Those of us who teach languages in Japanese universities inevitably teach about culture. For some of us, this is a cause for professional misgivings because we are not trained specialists in culture: we are neither anthropologists nor sociologists, yet we are often called upon to teach about our own cultures or Western impressions of Japanese culture. Were we to have the audacity to lecture on these topics in North American classrooms, we might expect to be challenged. What do we know of kinship groups or of

matriarchal and patriarchal societies? What ethnographic field work have we completed? What right have we, who have not mastered the accepted methodologies of the field, to presume to teach about culture? Perhaps we had better stick to talking about adverbs and adjectives.

In Japanese universities, nobody questions the right of a language teacher to lecture or write about cultural topics despite an unconventional methodological background. Instead, teachers are encouraged by students and colleagues to say more, even at the expense of time that could otherwise be devoted to instruction about adverbial phrases or restrictive clauses. Methodological failings are tolerated, and opinions about culture are generally respected. This tolerance reflects fundamental differences between Japanese and North American universities. Understanding these differences may challenge preconceived notions of what universities are.

In the West, the university has, since the time of Plato, been in service to rationalism. Rationalism is the foundation of the Western academic community; its values are objectivity, measurement, experiment, and proof. Some critics feel this stress on rationalism is excessive. Especially in North America, the university has become a veritable temple to rationalism (Saul 1995, 1992; Lasch 1995; Herrnstein & Murray 1994). In such an environment, language learning hugs the periphery of academic life. Indeed, many North American universities do not require students to study foreign languages.

In Japan, foreign language study has always been central to academic life. The roots of the Japanese university lie not in reason, but in translation--the translation of foreign (first Chinese, later Western) morality, literature, and technology into Japanese cultural terms. In the light of this tradition, we can understand the importance of languages in contemporary Japanese universities. In most Japanese universities languages are required courses. Nevertheless, many of these courses seem loose and ill-

directed to the critical eye trained in the highly rationalized language programmes of North American universities. In response to assumed faults, some Japanese universities have embarked upon reforms that adopt North American methodologies (Sekiguchi 1993).

Language teaching is being rationalized, systematized, and standardized. As curricula are tightened, teachers have less room to express individual interpretations of culture.

In this move towards rationalization of the language classroom, something is, I fear, being overlooked. Even with more classroom hours, smaller class sizes and so on, students do not necessarily exhibit more or better language use. Even in shiny new institutions with all the technological frills and modern methodological fashions, classrooms can be oppressively silent. When I question those of my students who can actually use a foreign language, few credit their ability to university instruction. They learned the language largely elsewhere: from friends, travel, private classes, study-abroad, radio, TV, movies, videos, music, foreign friends, language schools, lovers, pen-pals and homestay families, books, comics, the Internet, and a variety of hobbies and interests. The Japanese university classroom, it seems, is almost irrelevant to successful foreign language learning.

IV. Statues, Towers and other Rock Structures

Above the town, on the hill brow, the stone angel used to stand....She was doubly blind, not only stone but unendowed with even the pretense of sight. Whoever carved her had left the eyeballs blank.

Margaret Laurence. The Stone Angel. (1964, p. 1)

Most professors and administrators in Japan agree about the need for language teaching reform. Unfortunately, debate reflects a cultural split among faculty, especially between "native-speaker" instructors and "Japanese" instructors. Common within Japanese universities are two thinly veiled prejudices about teaching faculty. One is that native-speaker instructors cannot teach the languages they speak. The other is that Japanese language instructors cannot speak the languages they teach. Until this cultural split among language teachers at the university is bridged, all other language reforms are likely to be rendered futile.

This split among teachers is only one symptom of the clash of cultures in the university language classroom. Recognizing this clash could help native-speaker and Japanese foreign language teachers discover that, in at least one important respect, they share a common ground. Yet, this space that they share is the sometimes uncomfortable space between the differing methodologies and educational expectations of two cultures. In the university, language learning is often subsumed in the process of working out cultural frictions. What goes on in the language classroom inevitably challenges assumptions about culture. The classroom, too, is a "sub-culture," and it is often the first place where students' idealized images of foreign culture are tested against experience. In this confrontation of different traditions of learning, the language instructor is a cultural

interpreter.

Even if we wanted to avoid teaching about culture, we could not. Language and culture are bound together in a kind of hermeneutic circle: language is part of culture, and culture is an expression of language. Richard Rorty (1979) goes so far as to suggest that all learning is really cultural learning, and that in place of our many disciplines "cultural anthropology (in the large sense which includes intellectual history) is all we need" (p. 381). Cultural hermeneutics is a questioning conversation that provokes doubt about preconceived ideas of culture. In the give and take of dialogue, we become aware of spaces in our stereotypes that remain undefined. These are spaces for freedom and growth. Likewise, in the "in-between space" that is the language classroom, cultural hermeneutics negotiates among the "ologies" of rationalism, and the intuitive insights of art, literature and the daily lived experience of a culture.

Our universities, whether Eastern or Western, are much like the "stone angel" that watches over Margaret Laurence's little prairie town. The university is a closed world. It lives by what Michel Foucault calls a "regime of truth" that is sustained by wider cultural prejudices. Hans-Georg Gadamer (1994) teaches that all understanding begins from prejudice. The academic mind, often blind to the world of lived experience, can be surprisingly conventional and xenophobic. Academic truth is often as hard as rock, and as blind as a stone statue. In this academic environment, the language class is a space that opens up between cultures. The language instructor is caught, so to speak, "between a rock and a hard place."

V. Writ(h)ing under the Rock

In the very first it was rock'n roll
 Set me free in body and soul
 But this weight is just bringing me down
 It's never satisfied every time I go to town
 You know I'm talking about this weight.
 Van Morrison. "This Weight." (1997)

Milan Kundera (1986), in The Art of the Novel, describes a protagonist called Shatov in a work by Dostoyevsky. The first time Shatov appears in the work, he is "characterized quite cruelly":

He was one of those Russian idealists who, suddenly struck by some immense idea, are left dazzled by it, often forever. They never manage to take control of the idea, they believe with a passion, and their whole existence from then on is nothing but an agony writhing under the rock that has nearly crushed them.
 (p. 79)

Heavy rocks, really nothing more than metaphors, oppress and torment him.

Among our most monolithic ideas are those that have to do with race, nation and culture. One does not have to be a Russian idealist to writhe under their weight. Once pinned to earth, it is a hard struggle to get free. Take, for example, those people caught under a stereotype of Japanese identity. Particularly, those whose vision of Japan's "internationalization," *kokusaika*, rests on the belief that Japan is a victim in the international sphere.

They, too, find metaphors in rocks. Takeo Suzuki (1973), in his popular book Kotoba to Bunka [Language and Culture], explores the idiom "A rolling stone gathers no moss," and finds that the English and the Americans have contradictory interpretations.

For the English, it means that constant movement prevents accumulation of moss (i.e. wealth); while for the Americans, it means that movement keeps us shiny and new. The interpretation of the same words is quite contrary, revealing fissures in an apparently monolithic English-speaking world. But then the rock falls. Suzuki digresses to explain a trait of American character:

Many Americans have no liking for the time worn or antique looking. . . . Just after the war, when many Japanese homes were forcibly requisitioned by the American army, one often heard stories of their completely painting over the darkened (unvarnished) pillars. For me, who knew of examples of their scrubbing down moss covered stone lanterns with a wire brush until they were pure white, it is clear that for Americans moss was something dirty and disgusting, like rust on metal, and that their sense of values was different than that of people of the Old World.

(p. 24. My translation)

Suzuki, as we will see later, is haunted by his childhood experience of war and defeat. He is writhing under the weight of perceived injustices, perpetrated by Americans against Japanese. Because of his pain, even as he seeks to expand our knowledge of cultures, he precipitates a closure of understanding. Insisting upon the essentially negative quality in American culture, he reduces both Americans and Japanese to stereotypes. All Japanese are endowed with Old World sensibility (including, I suppose, even those who have cemented over Japan's rivers and coastline, or built the new Kyoto Station). All Americans are boorish and insensitive. Americans who champion Japanese culture, like Earnest Fenollosa (1936) and Edwin O. Reischauer (1988), are ignored. All middle ground is lost. Shifting differences *within* cultures are denied. Only essential differences *between* cultures survive to harden into self-perpetuating stereotypes.

VI. A Questioning Meditation

The pathway to salvation is lined with slogans and stones.
 Joy Kogawa. *Itsuka*. (1992, p. 50)

All this talk of race, nation, culture--it should frighten us. How can we talk glibly of things that have been the excuse for suffering and slaughter? There is something shocking in the audacity of intellectuals who presume to guide the understanding of others along such dangerous pathways, already soaked in blood. Certainly, Foucault is right to warn that "everything is dangerous." Danger is especially near where people are being molded to fit grand national dreams. Samuel P. Huntington (1996) says, "For peoples seeking identity and reinventing ethnicity, enemies are essential, and the potentially most dangerous enmities occur across the fault lines between the world's major civilizations" (p. 20). Looking out over the placid university campus, I sense, just below the surface, intellectual land mines ready to explode and ruin lives. Like the young Sikh bomb expert, Kip, in Michael Ondaatje's (1992) *The English Patient*, cultural hermeneutics sets out to uncover and diffuse these mines one by one. But we may not be so expert as he, and in our tampering we may cause a blast that cripples. The world is only now beginning to weigh the profit and loss of land mines. Metaphorical land mines, hard and dangerous concepts of identity, will be with us longer yet.

At universities, civilizations meet and identities are formed. We are not even safe in the language classroom, for language is at the core of identity. In the contemporary world, "Language is realigned and reconstructed to accord with the identities and contours of civilizations" (Huntington 1996, p. 64). In Walter Benjamin's (1968) image of the angel of history, "his face is turned towards the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he

sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet" (p. 257). The good intentions of teachers are no guarantee that our words will not add to this nightmare. Always I remind myself to be careful, to question, to doubt, even to doubt my own words, and then to try to move forward carefully in my understanding of Japanese culture.

Reading Joy Kogawa's (1992) *Itsuka*, I am reminded of the fragility of tolerance and how suddenly the structures supporting social harmony can collapse. Individuals are crushed under the shifting continental plates of race, nation, culture and civilization. But the push and pull of people struggling against the weight of these totalitarian ideologies opens fractures for freedom. Through these crevices, individuals find room to sprout up, surface, and break free like dandelions: "those powerful plants with their green dragon wings leafing themselves wherever they can, in hostile lawns or through cracks in the sidewalks" (p. 98). Like dandelions, individuals find room to thrive even in the narrowest spaces. This "crevicing" process confirms Julia Kristeva's confidence in "the individual as the site of subversion and ethical possibility" (cited in Clark 1990, p. 154). It also reflects the pragmatic confidence of John Dewey that education matters, and that democratic education is a lever that can shift the weight of megalithic "totalities." Even in the language classroom we can make room for multiplicities. Ted Aoki (1988) questions rationalist methodologies of language teaching; he says that they

are being severely criticized for their overly instrumental orientation, ignoring, as some are arguing, the meaning of second languages at the root level. Even the popular immersion program is being questioned for its monolingual/monocultural orientation. Some are advancing bilingual second language programs that are oriented toward a dialectic between the mother tongue and the second language. I foresee a paradigm shift of some consequence. (1988, p. 414)

Ironically, just as some Canadian educators are rejecting these rationalistic methodologies,

some Japanese universities are “reforming” their language programmes by adopting the same questionable North American pedagogies and their “instrumental orientation.”

VII. Victims of Culture

... Sulla knew this man belonged to Marius. So he tried to secure Cinna's loyalty to the new constitution by making him swear a sacred oath to uphold it--an oath Cinna nullified as he swore it by holding a stone in his hand.

Colleen McCullough. Fortune's Favorite. (1994, p. 23)

We find our own identities in response to the identities projected by others. This may or may not be an antagonistic relationship. Essentialist identities need essential enemies. Homi Bhabha (1994) urges us to focus our attention away from the essentialist idea of culture: “Terms of cultural engagement, whether antagonistic or affiliative, are produced performatively. The representation of difference must not be hastily read as the reflection of *pre-given* ethnic or cultural traits set in the fixed tablet of tradition” (p. 2). Cultural identity is not “written in stone.” Any cultural identity is a translation of the experiences that arise in conversation with other cultural identities. These conversations frequently take the form of literary discourse, including not only poetry and novels, but also the fictions of the newspaper and the evening news. Through an act of the imagination, we “translate” ourselves into the situations of others. Gadamer (1994) cautions that we can never stand in the place of others, but we may, by imagination, stand by them and look out upon their horizon.

Cultural identity is a product of the imagination. We evolve within the context of a constant negotiation of cultural identity. This negotiation is largely out of our individual control, and proceeds despite our personal intentions towards others. Our own identities become inextricably linked to our understandings of other identities. New feelings and meanings constantly arise from our interpretations of the cultures of others. This hermeneutics informs new "hybrid" identities that we must then situate and justify within a tradition. We move across and through our communications with others into ever-new understandings of ourselves.

An impasse is met when any two cultures lay exclusive claim to the same virtue, as when two cultures in conflict both see themselves as "victim." All movement towards mutual understanding becomes blocked because sustaining faith in the *pre-given* trait (victim) requires the denial of the claim of the other to that same trait. Bhabha (1994) talks of the incommensurable articulations when different cultural identities meet:

This must not be confused with some form of autonomous individualistic pluralism (and the corresponding notion of cultural diversity); what is at issue is a historical moment in which these multiple identities do actually articulate in challenging ways, either positively or negatively, either in progressive or regressive ways, often conflictually, sometimes even *incommensurably*--not some flowering of individual talents and capacities. (p. 208)

Oda Makoto (1985) attempts to break the impasse of this incommensurability by making the imaginary leap into that shared space on the borders of cultures where he can stand as an individual and look back upon his own culture as both victim and victimizer. Julia Kristeva (1993) distinguishes between the individual as a self-centred ego (which both Bhabha and Oda reject), and the individual as one of a multiplicity of identities in solidarity with others (which is what Rorty advocates). In the process of ever-widening the borders of this solidarity, openings occur for peace. This widening circle is not an exercise in

cultural assimilation, or of the power to define others. Bhabha (1990) says, "It is only by losing sovereignty of the self that you can gain the freedom of a politics that is open to the non-assimilationist claims of cultural difference" (p. 213). The translation of the self is not within the control of the self; the self does not form itself, but offers itself up to be transformed.

VIII. A Cautionary Tale

Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking.
Walt Whitman. "Leaves of Grass." (1967)

When I walk into my classroom, I find that I have little to add to my students' ideas of cultural identity. Paul Reys (no date) begins his collection of Zen tales with this tale:

Nan-in, a Japanese master during the Meiji era (1868-1912), received a university professor who came to inquire about Zen.

Nan-in served tea. He poured his visitor's cup full, and then kept on pouring.

The professor watched the overflow until he no longer could restrain himself. "It is overfull. No more will go in!"

Like this cup," Nan-in said, "you are full of your own opinions and speculations. How can I show you Zen unless you first empty your cup?" (p. 20)

Similarly, one of my tasks as a teacher is to empty my students' cups. They are full of opinion and speculation about what it means to be Japanese, American or whatever. They have randomly culled a mass of images, stereotypes and impressions from the host of sources that make up their actual education: TV, comics, movies, magazines, books, travel posters, propaganda, conversation, radio, rock music, the world of fashion and so on. The problem for cultural hermeneutics is not that people do not know enough about

culture, but rather that they “know” too much. Their cups are already over-full.

We who teach culture in the language classroom are caught on the rocks of methodology. Our efforts begin from prejudice. Taught to be objective and scientific, we find that in the realm of culture, objectivity and rationalism are often mere facades for rationalizations. Coming to drink of another culture, we find that our cup is already full. We had not even noticed who filled it.

Cultural hermeneutics need not fall silent before the necessity of prejudice.

Gadamer (1994) notes:

Thus there is undoubtedly no understanding that is free of all prejudices, however much the will or our knowledge must be directed towards escaping their thrall. . . . [T]he certainty achieved by using scientific methods does not suffice to guarantee truth. This especially applies to the human sciences, but it does not mean that they are less scientific; on the contrary, it justifies the claim to special humane significance that they have always made. The fact that in such knowledge the knowers own being comes into play certainly shows the limits of method, but not of science. Rather, what the tool of method does not achieve must--and really can--be achieved by a discipline of questioning and inquiring, a discipline that guarantees truth. (pp. 490-491)

Opinions and speculations about the nature of Japanese culture are plentiful. A whole tradition, *nihonjinron*, is dedicated to this purpose (see Morris-Suzuki 1995; Yoshino 1992; Mouer & Sugimoto 1990; Edwards 1989; Miller 1982). Why should I involve myself in it? Why should I engage students in a cultural hermeneutics? My only justification is that mine is a questioning approach to the idea of culture based upon experience--defined by Hegel as “scepticism in action” (cited in Gadamer 1994, p. 353). I would empty tepid cups before adding a fresh brew. Were I to leave them empty, what service have I done? Always there will be someone ready to pour out opinions and speculations. Perhaps the tea they offer is less carefully steeped than mine.

IX. The Not-Supposed-to-Be

"Stones are foundations.
Breathe into them
and they will roll way,
reveal to you secrets
hitherto unknown."

Sally Ito. "Frogs in the Rain Barrel." (1995, p.59)

We have at our house in Canada a rock from Japan that sits by the bathtub. When my children were young, they played with it in the bath, delighted by the fact that it floats. A rock as big as a fist that floats is easily explained with an understanding of air and lava. Still, every time I see it, I pause to remember my own wonder that first time I visited a beach in Kagoshima where I saw the shore assaulted by a flotilla of bobbing rocks. The sight was such as to make me think, to paraphrase a line from a song by Joni Mitchell, that perhaps "I really don't know rocks at all." So much of the rock-solidness of rocks rests in their weight and "unfloatability." For adults, a floating rock may be an oxymoron, or at least a useful metaphor. For children, it is just a wonderful "not-supposed-to-be."

There is in our knowledge of rocks a closure that is shattered, if only temporarily, by the not-supposed-to-be of floating rocks. Spaces are opened up in our knowledge of rocks. For a moment, in wonder, we, too, float.

Some people think of cultural essences as hard atoms--solid to the core. Some think of essences as foundational, like the essential I-ness of Descartes. Perhaps we can learn to think of essences in another way. We can choose other kinds of metaphors that value growth, fluidity, and empty spaces. We can learn to value the exceptional and the unpredictable. The evolving essence of a culture may not lie in the ninety-nine of a

hundred in a culture that sink, but in the one that floats. Our hermeneutics of culture must understand such contrariness as also essential to culture. Let us make for cultural hermeneutics a parable of floating rocks: the fool clings even to the not-supposed-to-be of a floating rock, and lives, but the wise man, knowing that the rock will not save him, refuses to reach out to it, and so he drowns.

X. And Then to Doubt Doubt

In the last stages he simply lost all power of identity. A mild-natured, obliging man, he slipped towards death with a stony, empty expression on his face, speechless and unhearing, not recognizing his own wife or his own daughter and having no idea, so far as you could tell, who he was himself.

Graham Swift. Ever After. (1996, p. 113)

Another Zen tale takes us to the opposite extreme from the certainty of the Nan-in. In this second tale, Dokuon teaches us to doubt skepticism. Let me paraphrase the tale:

A young monk, desiring to show his attainment, told his master, "the monk, Buddha, and sentient beings, after all, do not exist. The true nature of phenomenon is emptiness." His master, Dokuon, puffed on his bamboo pipe for a while and then suddenly whacked the lad with it. The boy's face flushed with anger. "If nothing exists," inquired Dokuon, "where did this anger come from." (Reps, no date, p. 69-70)

Anderson (1991), Hobsbawm (1992), Tanaka (1993) and others have shown us that nations are imaginary, and yet wars between nations persist. Barzun (1964) and others have argued that race is little more than a superstition, and yet the world is swept by the agony of racial and ethnic persecution, segregation, "cleansing," and genocide.

Regardless of our rationalistic skill in arguing that nations or races are imaginary,

Benjamin's angel of history continues to gaze upon atrocities piling up in the wake of the coming and going of phantasmal communities. An infatuation with the nothingness of such communities carries its own risks. Even a rock would be preferable to a cultural hermeneutics that threatens to evaporate all we believe in, and to disperse us into oblivion.

My students are generally comfortable in their received identities, but still eager to talk about what they are and what I am. Hopefully, we all leave the classroom less comfortable and less certain about what our cultures are, but not in despair of culture. Cultures may be imaginary, but they serve our needs. Cultural hermeneutics should aim not to destroy, but to open cultures up, and to give them room to grow.

One huge boulder weighing on the Japanese stereotype is "groupishness." Many people believe this trait distinguishes Japanese from people in the "individualistic" West. How did this trait come to dominate the Japanese identity? Cultural hermeneutics demands that we return to the "things themselves" and look at them from different angles. We can critique this trait from two different angles. First, we can see the newness of the trait. Secondly, we can see the otherness, the American-ness, of the trait's origin.

Japanese groupishness is a relatively new idea. It was not an idea common in the Meiji era. Nitobe Inazo (1981) wanted to show Americans that Japanese were spirited individualists exhibiting great "originality of character" (p. 21). Early European visitors to Japan agreed. One visitor described the Japanese as a people with "original thinking minds; with a dash of Asiatic fierceness, they are generous joyous and sympathetic" (cited in Yokoyama 1987, p. 1). The stereotype of the groupish Japanese came later.

During the Second World War, Western propaganda dehumanized the Japanese. Ruth Benedict (1946) maintained that Japanese had no individual conscience, no "guilt," but rather functioned on group conscience, or "shame." But why would Benedict want to emphasise this distinction between guilt and shame? Perhaps she was disturbed by a

shift away from guilt to shame in her own society. In his discussion of the relationship between modernity and self-identity, Anthony Giddens (1991) points to "the increasing prominence of shame in relation to self-identity, as compared to guilt" (p. 153). Sensing the waning of guilt as a force in American society, scholars like Benedict may be especially sensitive to the dangers of "shame culture" that they see epitomized in Japanese groupishness. American academics, from Reischauer (1988) to Fukuyama (1992), have perpetuated this stereotype of Japanese groupishness. The Canadian diplomat and scholar Herbert E. Norman did not share the American view of Japanese (Bowen 1984). He had been raised among rugged people living in the mountains of Nagano. He knew Japanese to be independent and individualistic. In the Cold War era, Norman was driven to suicide by McCarthyite zealots, and his view of Japan was discredited (Ferns 1968).

Since the end of the Second World War, it has by and large been American scholars who have told the story of Japan. This story is also much about America. The American myth is of a land of rugged individualists. Within this regime of truth, it is necessary that once-enemies exhibit opposite traits. If Americans are individualistic, Japanese, Germans, and Vietnamese must be groupish. This is what is looked for, and this is what is found. Believing is seeing.

Since Americans tell the story, they get to choose the themes. The urgency of America's story of Japan is intensified by an anxiety within contemporary America. Americans look around their society and see groups of religious and political fanatics wreak havoc; they see Madison Avenue manipulate the Silent Majority; they see cities controlled by gangs or corrupt police, they sense the influence of the CIA, the FBI, the Mafia, pressure groups and lobby groups. The American myth of individualism inexorably gives way to machinations of groups: corporatism, conspiracies and conformity wax triumphant.

Conformity reaches even into American universities. Ralston Saul (1995, 1992) complains of the increasingly "corporatist" nature of North American universities. Herrnstein and Murray (1994) argue that Harvard students are becoming socially and intellectually homogeneous. Academic debate is stifled under the weight of political correctness. The innate conventionality of universities is amplified by a new groupism in American society.

In such an intellectual environment, we can almost feel the sigh of relief when Americans read about the Japanese, a people even more conformist and groupish than themselves. The Japanese trait of groupishness that surfaces in this story of culture serves to assuage American anxiety. The more they doubt themselves, the more important to them is Japanese groupishness. This is not to say that Japanese are not at all groupish. It is only to say that the story of Japan that we accept today is a story serving American concerns.

Some Americans recognize incongruities in their myth. Walter Feinberg (1993) shows Americans realigning educational priorities according to definitions of Japan. Merry White (1993), another expert about Japanese education, suggests that "it may be the Japanese, not the American youth, who is the greater individualist" (pp. 208-209). The stereotypical trait of Japanese groupishness "is not written in stone." It is merely a prejudice. Moreover, it may tell us nothing about Japanese culture. If we are to achieve a more honest understanding of Japanese culture, we must re-examine the "life-world" of Japanese society. Japanese groupishness is open for re-negotiation.

XI. The Safety of Rocks

The rain came down, the floods rose, the winds blew and beat upon that house; but it did not fall, because its foundations were on rock.

Matthew 7: 25

The eighteenth-century dilettante and biographer, James Boswell (1965), after visiting church with Dr. Johnson, opened a conversation about “Bishop Berkeley’s ingenious sophistry to prove the non-existence of matter, and that everything in the universe is merely ideal”:

I observed, that though we are satisfied his doctrine is not true, it is impossible to refute it. I shall never forget the alacrity with which Johnson answered, striking his foot with a mighty force against a large stone, till he rebounded from it, ‘I refute it *thus*.’ (p. 128)

Dr. Johnson, a man of vast knowledge, balanced practical skepticism with desperate faith. He was a pragmatist before Rorty or Dewey. Standing on the cusp of the nothingness of being, he kicked a rock.

The pragmatist philosopher, William James is prepared to accept intellectual constructs because without them all would be “a boomin’ buzzin’ confusion” (cited in Huntington 1996, p. 29). But methodologies are interim constructs on the way to a broader understanding. Until we can swim in the swirling confusion that is life, we hang on to a rock. Dewey (1944) clings to the rock of democratic values in education. Rorty’s (1989) rock is his commitment to reducing the amount of cruelty in the world. In the chaos of existence, rocks protrude as foci of contingent truth. The only justification of such rocks is that they are “chosen.” This is the realm of faith rising to the surface of doubt, the realm

of the floating rock. My chosen rock is the cultural hermeneutics of an idea called Japan, a thing I am barely convinced exists.

What has all this “non-sense” about metaphor, hybridity and floating rocks to do with teaching language and culture? Perhaps even less than we might find in a haiku, like this one by Issa: “A wayside sermon / All nonsense to me, but see / How serene he is!” (cited in Buchanan 1973). Cultural hermeneutics offers a little brightness and life into the so often stodgy, stony world of the university language classroom. If nothing else, it locates the teacher struggling among the rocks of methodology. The university language teacher is caught between a job and ideals, between constructing and deconstructing concepts, between service to society and to the intellectual appetites of individual students, between building glass houses and throwing stones. For those of us teaching languages at Japanese universities who feel caught between a rock and a hard place, there can be comfort in the knowledge of floating rocks.

Chapter Four

Where East is West: Situating the Writer in the Research

"You never spoke. You never smiled. You were so 'majime.'
What a serious baby--fed on milk and Momotaro."

"Milk and Momotaro?" I asked. "Culture clash?"

"Not at all," she said. "Momotaro is a Canadian story.
We're Canadian, aren't we? Everything a Canadian does is
Canadian."

Joy Kogawa, *Obasan*. (1981, p. 68)

The role of narratives, biographies and autobiographies in human science research remains controversial (Hansen and Liu 1997; Smith 1994b; Clandinin & Connelly 1994; Manning & Cullum-Swan 1994; Aoki 1992; Rosenau 1992; Pinar 1988b). By choosing to include autobiographical materials in this work, I am inevitably involving myself in what Clandinin & Connelly call "the politics of method" (1994, p. 415). I take this risk not out of any innate perversity, but because I have been convinced on a number of levels of the validity and value of biographical and narrative methods. As I said in Chapter Two, on a philosophical level I agree with Gadamer that all our understanding is really self-understanding. In that chapter, I also noted Madison's (1988) contention that whether the stories we tell about ourselves are true or not, they provide us with our identity (p. 95), and mine is a work about identity. On a more pragmatic level, I believe with Dewey (1944) that experience is so essential to education that we can hardly separate one from the other, and mine is also a work about education. There is also an ethical level. That is to say, I have for over forty years been involved in education in Canada and Japan either as a student or a teacher. I make my living through education. It would be less than honest of me to pretend that I am a disinterested observer. My whole life is entwined with my

experience of education and all of this is bound up with my writings. I cannot for the sake of methodological orthodoxy assume an objective pose about a field of practise that is so important a part of my identity and my life. Finally, there is the less exalted level of utility. In my own studies of culture and education, for example, I have so often been impressed by the immediacy and clarity of works on curriculum that contain biographical and autobiographical materials, such as Van Manen's (1990) Lived Experience: Human Science for an Action Sensitive Pedagogy, Madeleine Grumet's (1988) Bitter Milk: Women and Teaching, Ted Aoki's (1983) "Experiencing Ethnicity as a Japanese Canadian Teacher," and Paul Willis' (1977) Learning to Labour: How Working Class Kids Get Working Class Jobs. Despite all the uncertainties of the truths of narrative and biographical methods (but are not all our "truths" subject to uncertainties?), such works have enlightened my understanding of the educational experiences of others, and in turn they have helped me to perceive my own educational and cultural experiences in new ways.

In the English-speaking tradition of works on Japanese culture and education, there is a conspicuous lack of autobiographical candour. I say this because the works of critics like Cutts (1997), Buruma (1996), and Clark (1987) are full of clear and emotionally charged biases and prejudices, but these writers seldom admit details of their personal involvement with the culture or the education they criticize. Both Benjamin (1997a) and the Conduits (1996) have written refreshing autobiographical ethnographies relating to Japanese elementary schools, and Alex Kerr (1996) has written a wonderfully personal critique of social and ecological conditions in contemporary Japan, but for the most part the literature avoids grappling with the issues of authorial identity, and this may be one of the reasons the literature so often fails to reveal an appreciation of the abundance and variety of Japanese "personalities."

In this work, I will commit "myself" to the effort to understand Japanese culture and education by embracing "personalities," those of various Japanese, and of some foreign critics, and of myself. Autobiography will not be the main body of this work, but it will be a large portion. Against this autobiographical portion, the reader may test some of the evidence or the hypotheses in the rest of the work. This double perspective may provide the reader clues to my reliability. On the other hand, the reader may find these chapters narcissistic and boring. In this case, he or she is invited to leave them unread.

In the final analysis, the deciding reason for my inclusion of these autobiographical chapters is that I want to talk about my experience of Japan. I know I am not alone in this. Like the international scholar I introduced in Chapter One, many people who experience Japanese culture want to talk about that experience. Talking about it is one way of bringing it to understanding. I suspect that a large number of scholarly or journalistic books on Japan are little more than disguised autobiographies, and that their occasional diatribes are directly motivated by personal experiences in Japan (particularly Seward 1981 and Suzuki 1973). One of the benefits of the post-modern movement has been to validate personal experience. Louis Smith (1994b) affirms the relationship between individual personalities and the study of national cultures:

The sequence of events as an individual passes through a culture during the course of a life is one view of that culture. And the resulting kind of person and his or her outlook on life are related additional ways of viewing a culture. These views play off against ecological, social structural, and historical perspectives. Culture can be written through lives. (p. 296)

In this chapter, and in the other short chapters called "autobiographical interludes" interspersed throughout this text, I attempt to describe my passage through Japanese culture, especially events in my experience of education. This will provide the reader with a secondary view point of Japanese education and culture, the view point of a Canadian teacher experiencing twenty years in various Japanese educational environments. This

secondary view point can be “played off” against the “primary” chapters in the text that attempt to present certain issues in Japanese education and identity. The primary chapters are more conventional, but, as we have seen, such conventionality is, at least to some critics, autobiography disguised. If Smith (1994b) is right, my view of Japanese culture is written in the events of my life. When I reflect upon those events and their relationship with my own developing identity, I discover that the reverse is also true, and that my life is constantly being re-written through my experience of Japan.

In contrast to people in my own country, Canada, people in Japan seem confident about who they are. If I ask my Japanese students about Japanese culture, they promptly respond by explaining about kimono, ikebana, tea ceremony or Buddhism. If we Canadians are asked about our culture, a long pause often follows. Most of us lack ready replies. For us, cultural identity is paradoxical—it is insubstantial but powerful, and always changing. Metaphors to express this sense of our identity might differ according to region—perhaps wind on the prairie (Mitchell 1947), or snow in Quebec (“*Mon pays c’est la neige*”). On the West Coast, we could borrow the metaphor of a mist: “The mist is, is not, is a mist—a smoky curtain continuously rising” (Kogawa 1981, p. 34). Whatever metaphor we use, it will likely be something that transforms itself constantly. This mutable image of identity makes us distrust questions about culture that demand simple replies.

Doubts about the solidity of cultural identity colour not only our view of our own culture, but also of other cultures. In contrast to American scholars, from Edwin O. Reischauer (1988) to Francis Fukuyama (1992), who tend to see Japanese as homogeneous and groupish (perhaps reflecting their own strong American identity), some notable Canadians look at Japanese from a more vulnerable standpoint. Reischauer’s contemporary, the Canadian diplomat, E. Herbert Norman (1975; also see Bowen 1984;

Fern 1968), seeks out examples of Japanese individualism and independence. Likewise, the Canadian environmentalist David Suzuki (Suzuki & Oiwa 1996) sees Japanese as a complex mosaic of individuals and cultures that includes Koreans, Ainu, Uilta, and Okinawans. I find myself instinctively agreeing with Norman and Suzuki in refusing to objectify Japanese culture as "monolithic, homogeneous and conformist," and I think this refusal has to do with something in the development of our Canadian identities.

Canadians, or at least we three, tend to see cultural identity not as facts written in stone, but as shifting, growing things that are as alive and diverse as plants in a garden.

Plants have roots, and Americans and Japanese, too, talk about their cultural roots, but roots are of different kinds. For some, their roots are long and thick, and planted deep in the soil of history. Canadian roots are more like the roots of grass, a multitude of shallow filaments, all tangled up together. Perhaps, in Canada's harsh environment, this shallower net of roots helps us to quickly establish ourselves as we are transplanted throughout the country.

Ted Aoki (1988), a Canadian pioneer of a new attitude in educational scholarship growing out of hermeneutic phenomenology, encourages the use of autobiography in the human sciences. The philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer (1994) teaches that although we can never stand in other people's shoes, we can stand beside them, and look out on their horizons. Following such precepts, I will, in this chapter, describe some events in the evolution of my sense of cultural identity. Even if we could identify such a creature as a typical Canadian, I could not present myself as one. I'm not. If I were typical, I probably wouldn't be living in Japan. Here in Japan, people find it easy to accept that I am Canadian because I am Caucasian and English-speaking. This stereotype is, of course, misleading, and stands in the face of Canadian efforts to create a multicultural society. For many Canadians, identity begins with differences. Identity is more likely to lay in the

spaces that open among our visible differences. Where I am Canadian, it is not in my race or language, but in the evolving nature of my cultural identity. Certainly some Canadians--such as United Empire Loyalists in Ontario, or *pure laine* Quebecois--may avow a more solid sense of national identity, but I believe most Canadians experience national identity not as something fixed and given, but rather as something constantly coming into being.

We Canadians are a hyphenated people. This may especially be true for those of us in the younger West, a region that stretches from Manitoba to Vancouver Island. Canada is such a vast country that even our hyphenated identities are fractured by location: Eastern- and Western-, French- and English-, Maritime- and Arctic-Canadian, and so on. Like David Suzuki, other Western-Canadian writers, such as Wayson Choy (1985), Sky Lee (1994), and Sally Ito (1995), derive inspiration from this multiplicity of hyphenated identity. The parents of the narrator in Choy's "The Jade Peony" (1985) resent being "hyphenated" Canadians. For them the hyphen indicates an incomplete assimilation, and leaves them feeling like second-class citizens. But for the younger generation, hyphens can act as bridges among cultures. Identities fracture and multiply, and at the same time recombine in hyphenated form. These movements among cultures are accompanied by much anxiety and soul-searching, and some writers like Neil Bissoondath (1994) warn that if we fail to question cultures and our understandings of them, superficial multiculturalism can perpetuate racial stereotypes. Nevertheless, Canadians continue to move across hyphens to broaden their cultural identities.

Some Canadians who lack a visible hyphen, express a need for one. In a short story called "The Leper's Squint" (1980) by the Vancouver Island writer Jack Hodgins, a character visits his ancestral home in Ireland partly out of "jealousy" of hyphenated Canadians. He says, "Everyone else he knew seemed to have inherited an 'old country,'

an accent, a religion, a set of customs, from his parents. His family fled the potato famine in 1849 and had five generations in which to fade out into Canadians” (p. 384). Perhaps, like that character, I have been one of the “faded-out” Canadians, a little jealous of those around me with more colourful identities. Perhaps, that is one reason I have worked over the years to make myself a kind of hyphenated Canadian by immersing myself in Japanese culture and language.

“Who Do You Think You Are?” (1980) is the title of a short story by Alice Munro who lived many years in Victoria in south-western British Columbia. Her intentions in that story are at once more personal and more universal, but in portraying the changes in a small Canadian town over several decades, she invokes the central question of Canadian identity. We are a people constantly upbraiding ourselves, “Who do we think we are?”

I was born in south-western British Columbia, and lived my earliest years near the Fraser River. Like the Japanese who had once shared that community, my family and their friends logged, farmed and fished salmon. My grandfather had a strawberry farm. As a child, picking berries on warm summer mornings, I had no inkling that those fields might have been cleared and planted by Japanese immigrants. Or, standing on the slippery deck of an uncle’s fish boat amid the muddy waters of the Fraser River, it never occurred to me that Japanese had once fished there, too. In the mid-1950s, the only Japanese I saw were in the war movies on television; they were “the enemy.”

I remember as a child one day looking through a tin cookie box in which my mother kept her old photographs. I came across a photograph of “an oriental” girl sitting stiffly in a sailor suit, smiling shyly, long black braids snaking down her shoulders. I thought it odd that my mother had a picture of “a foreigner” among her most personal possessions, so I asked her about it. She said the picture was of a friend from her school days. Her friend was Japanese. My mother told me the girl’s name, and something about

the internment, but I soon forgot it all. Her tale lacked the glamour I expected of war stories. But the photograph itself remains imprinted on my mind. That photograph is for me a part of my mother's story left unread, and then lost in time. Were my mother alive today, how I would like to ask her again about her friend.

In my childhood, Canadians were part of the British Empire. We didn't have our red maple leaf flag then; that symbol came much later. The flag then was the "Red Ensign," a swath of crimson with a Union Jack in one corner and a simple crest in the middle. In school, we sat in rows of wooden desks, dipping red straight-pens into inkwells, writing and blotting and memorising, and occasionally looking up at the photograph of our young Queen on the wall above the blackboard. The huge map of the world in our classroom revealed to us the pink pattern of an empire upon which the sun never set. We marvelled to think that we were part of all that! We sang "God Save the Queen." Of course, Britain was already less important in a world threatened by another "red" Empire, the Soviet Union. But, we were too young to know such things. My childhood world seemed comfortingly homogeneous: everyone was white, English-speaking, and loyal to the crown.

My introduction to the inequalities of race as a child had to do not with Japanese-Canadians, but rather with Native People. My family lived in close proximity with Native People. We shared the same work--fishing and logging. We faced similar threats--unemployment and alcoholism. But somehow we "white people" felt in a position to condescend. This seemed natural.

When I was older, I learned to doubt these "facts of life." I remember an incident one day when out with my cousin. In those days, the only places to drink were beer parlours at hotels, like "the Royal" and "the Empress," or at the "Royal Canadian Legion." Even when we drank, we were reminded of our colonial status. That day, as we sat over

our beer, a fight broke out at the next table. One man threw a punch at another, knocked over the table and all the glasses, and then lay sprawled upon the floor. For a moment, the whole beer parlour went quiet.

In that moment, my cousin leaned to me and said, "Look around. Do you know what everyone's thinking? They're thinking, 'drunk *Indians!*'" I got his point: a white man in a drunken brawl is just a "drunk!" When it is a Native Person, we add, "Indian." This was my earliest lesson about racism: people notice what reinforces their prejudices. When it comes to race, "believing is seeing." As Aunt Emily says of her community in *Obasan*, "None of us . . . escaped the naming. We were defined by the way we were seen" (p. 139). This holds true for Native People in Canada, and in different ways for me here in Japan. Race is a superficial label, but one, I learned, that clings tenaciously.

In Canada, some people label me an Anglo-Canadian. The term means little to me. At the simplest level of national roots, I am not English. Only my father's father was English. He used to tell me stories of his childhood in Manchester. What a dark and foreign world that was to me! His stories were the closest link I had to England. But he also described the shock of immigrating to Canada after the first war. He had built a house out of blocks of sod cut from the raw prairie. He told me how the horse died in the barn one winter and froze solid. I can still picture him chipping away at it with an axe, little slivers of frozen "horse-cicle" flying into his face.

On the prairie, my grandfather's working-class Englishness offered few of the privileges we might assume were enjoyed by the English in Canada. Many Albertans still see themselves as the "Texans of the North," and in that Americanised prairie, my grandfather was a "bloody limey," and unwelcome. Until his dying day, he was labelled "a Brit," not a Canadian. Yet, he had left England behind him. After living in England's

slums, and fighting in England's wars, he had no wish for his children and grandchildren to be "little Englishmen."

Both of my parents had been born in Canada, but through my grandparents and great-grandparents my roots split off into American, Irish, Scottish, Welsh and Norwegian rootlets. There are so many hyphens in my background that they lose their meaning. Mine seems a pretty "WASP-ish" pedigree, but that is largely a modern impression. In Canadian novels like Susanna Moodie's (1852) Roughing it the Bush or Margaret Atwood's (1996) Alias Grace, for example, we can read of early Irish immigrants, who included some of my ancestors, and of the contempt and prejudice they suffered from Canadians.

It is a North American pattern: one generation immigrates from a certain part of the world, and endures hardship and prejudice; eventually their descendants become established, and in turn look down on more recent groups of immigrants. As the Irish became accepted in Canada, contempt transferred to immigrants with even less connection to British civilisation. In Margaret Laurence's (1966) A Jest of God, for example, a young woman is attracted to a man whose Ukrainian roots make him a hopelessly unsuitable marriage prospect for a good Presbyterian girl. After reading this novel, I wondered how my mother's Scottish-Canadian father dared to marry a Norwegian girl. Even in my childhood, Norwegians were the butt of cruel jokes. My family has grown tangled roots, and in their intertwinings I read victories of love over discretion in a world where ethnic contempt was once as bitter as the racial prejudices we confront today.

Japanese can often trace their family roots in one town or profession back hundreds of years. Canadian roots generally begin when ancestors arrived in Canada. Margaret Laurence (1987) says, "My long-ago families came from Scotland and Ireland, but in a sense that no longer mattered so much. My true roots were here" (p. 84). It is a

rare Canadian who can trace roots back more than a few generations, especially in the West. I have a fairly clear picture of where my family comes from back as far as my grandparents. After that, all is lost in the mist. Sometimes, I feel guilty about that loss, and would like to retrieve a family history for my children. Morag, in The Diviners (1974), remembers her parents only as faded images in a few sepia photographs, and yet her mind is pulled back to them. She says, "Perhaps I only want their forgiveness for having forgotten them" (p. 19). Many Canadians, I think, share a similar sense of guilt towards their ancestors. We were too busy surviving to concern ourselves with the past. But once we establish a place, we put the icy wilderness behind us, and look back to where our parents or our grandparents came from, and wonder why we are not still there, and how we came to be in this place called Canada that others sacrificed so much to get us to.

As I grew older, the British influence in Canadian life was weakening, leaving a vacuum that was largely filled by the United States. At the border with the United States, just south of Vancouver, is an international park and a large white monument called the Peace Arch. On the arch is engraved the phrase: "Children of a Common Mother." The common mother is Britain, and the children are Canada and the United States. If one doesn't think about it too deeply, this seems a rather nice sentiment, but it has problems for Canadians. First, the origins of the Canadian social contract intended to unite the children of *two* different mothers, England and France. Secondly, although Canada and the United States may be siblings, we are not twins. The United States, as a nation, is twice as old, ten times as populous, and staggeringly more powerful economically and militarily than is Canada. Ours is not an equal relationship. Pierre Trudeau once likened that relationship to a mouse sleeping with an elephant: the elephant hardly notices the mouse, but the mouse is sensitive to the elephant's every twitch and sneeze--for the

mouse this sensitivity is a matter of survival. Without it, he would soon be crushed.

Canada's history--the confederation uniting English and French-speaking colonies, our long attachment to Britain, the building of the railway to the Pacific, and the creation of institutions like the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation--is largely a struggle to distinguish and defend itself from the United States.

As I entered my teenage years, most popular culture in Canada--our movies, comics, television shows, and sports--was coming from the United States. All we had that was ours was hockey and Canadian football. Where in the past Canadians suffered from a "colonial mentality" in relation to England, we were now threatened by an inferiority complex in relation to the United States, and we were inclined to define ourselves by that relationship: we were not sure what we were, but we were sure what we were not--we were "not Americans." As a result, every chance to thumb our noses at that big bully made us feel significant. When the Americans put a trade embargo on Cuba, Canada continued on good relations with that communist country. When the United States went to war in Vietnam, Canada welcomed American draft dodgers. When America overthrew the Allende regime in Chile, Canada took in the left-wing refugees. I do not want to oversimplify the complex political and cultural reasons that led the Canadian government to take a stance against the United States in these events. Nevertheless, I do not think it too much to claim that many ordinary Canadians took satisfaction from the belief that Canada was acting in the interest of a "justice" that rose above real politics, and, moreover, that we found pleasure in spiting our big brother to the south. Like the character in Atwood's (1972) Surfacing who casually condemns all Americans as "Bloody fascist pig Yanks" (p. 9), many Canadians develop a kind of "knee-jerk" anti-Americanism. Though nothing to be proud of, this anti-Americanism remains an active part of Canadian identity still (see "Where Anti-Americanism Comes From," 1999, p. D7), and it is, at least in part, the

product of a deep fear of being obliterated by the American elephant.

When I was about thirteen, my family moved to a small town called Yarrow, a Mennonite community in the Fraser Valley. Yarrow was a German town, and there I had my first experience of being in a minority: I and my family were more or less outsiders in a German Mennonite world. My first impression of these mostly blonde, German-speaking people was that they were homogeneous. Living among them for years, however, I came to understand that the community was fractured: it *mattered* which Mennonite church in town one attended, or whether one spoke High or Low German. I found, too, that many of these "German" families had not come to Canada from Germany, but from places as widespread as Russia and Peru. Living in Yarrow among the German Mennonites, I first learned to distrust the idea of cultural homogeneity.

When I moved to Yarrow, I had yet to meet "an Oriental." Only one Oriental lived in Yarrow then. We just called him "the Chinaman." He could be seen walking along the railway tracks with a gunnysack on his shoulder and a hoe in his hand. Occasionally, we came across his little crops of cabbages or peas, cultivated in clearings by the river or beside the tracks. Some boys assumed that finding these gardens gave them the right to tear them up, as if it were some cruel game of "search and destroy." I don't know anyone who ever talked to "the Chinaman" or even if he spoke English. He was incredibly poor, and lived in a little hut not much bigger than an outhouse at the back of a Mennonite farm. Whether he had suffered some personal tragedy or was a cast off remnant of some national dream, his story was forever lost when he disappeared from among us.

In high school, we were all bussed to a larger town near an army base, where I found myself in the majority again. There were not a lot of visible minorities in our school. Unlike today, there were very few Asians in that part of the Fraser Valley. The only "Asian"

in our class was a girl called Cindy McCarthy. Cindy's mother was Japanese, her father, a Canadian soldier. She had never been abroad, couldn't speak Japanese, and acted just like the rest of us, but she remained for us "the Japanese girl." Race clung to her, and wouldn't let go.

By that time, the Mennonite community of Yarrow was declining. The younger generations were assimilating or moving to better jobs. The older folk retired or died, and their raspberry farms were sold. The people who bought the farms were often of a new immigrant group. They came from India and Pakistan. On our streets appeared turbaned men with bushy beards, women wrapped in colourful saris, and young boys with their hair in cloth buns--"like girls." They became the next favourite target for the contempt of those who thought themselves more Canadian.

When I visit that part of the Fraser Valley now, two decades after I left, I realize that the cultural tension remains. Though some immigrants assimilate, others maintain distinct cultural communities. The local culture, too, is variously influenced by the "imported cultures." Such "cultural engagement," whether harmonious or not, involves the working out of new hybrid cultural identities (Bhabha 1994, p. 2). Three decades ago, Miriam Waddington (1969) made this observation about Canadian identity:

Confederation was only the beginning of a far-reaching process. It furnished the structure and the frame for nationhood. But the fragments of various cultures and interests still move blindly and chaotically within it. There is no mysterious force, no possible dialectic which guarantees that the collisions between opposites will be constructive and energizing. Such collisions, as we have seen, may as easily result in hatred and destruction as in unity and growth.

But the lack of guaranteed outcome in the matter of national identity is no reason to lose hope. (p. 637)

Today, in south-western B.C., movement continues in the spaces among cultures.

Understanding is slowly, often painfully, happening. But all understanding is new

understanding (Gadamer 1994). In so far as culture *is* communication, a performance of understandings, any living culture is always becoming anew.

I left Yarrow in my early twenties and moved to Vancouver to complete my university education. At Simon Fraser University in the early 1970s, I first heard the term, "colonial mentality." Like some Japanese, we Canadians worry about the derivative nature of our culture. Everything we have that is any good seems to be from somewhere else. In "Stones," a story by Timothy Findley (1988), a young boy describes the royal parade in Toronto in 1939:

...with its Mounties in scarlet and its Black Watch Band and the King and Queen, all blue and white and smiling, sitting in an open buick called a *McLaughlin*--built according to Cy, *right here in Canada!* For one brief moment ... all these symbols of who we were went marching past... . (pp. 198-199)

This is the way it had been for us. The most valued symbols of our identity came to us from afar, and when we found we had produced anything of quality, even a car, we were surprised at ourselves, even a little embarrassed. This in a nutshell is the colonial mentality from which we strove to escape. At SFU, I found myself part of a generation consciously trying to find an identity that could surface from its squeeze between Britain and America.

Then, suddenly, we woke in the 1970s to find that in many fields Canadians had achieved international reputations. In international politics, Lester Pearson, won the 1957 Nobel Peace Prize, and later, as Prime Minister, set an independent Canadian foreign policy. In literary criticism, Northrop Frye blazed new paths in his exploration of archetypes. In philosophy, Marshall McLuhan became the first "guru" of media studies, terming phrases like "global village," and the "media is the message." In economics, John Kenneth Galbraith was re-evaluating capitalism. In music, our indisputable genius, Glenn

Gould, thrilled people world-over with piano virtuosity. In popular culture, too, for example in folk music, we saw Canadian performers--Joni Mitchel, Neil Young, Gordon Lightfoot, Stan Rogers--gain international reputations. Canadians of my generation were a bit startled to find internationally recognized thinkers and artists among us. After all, we were the colonials. We were the child or younger sibling of older, more powerful nations. We had always accepted that others would do our thinking for us. Now, some of us were thinking for the world.

While at SFU, I studied under Professor Gordon Elliot. In Japanese universities today, it seems natural that almost all professors are Japanese. In Canadian universities in those days, most professors came from foreign countries, especially England and the United States. For me, Elliot stood out among my professors as a born and raised Canadian. He taught Canadian literature--something most of us doubted could exist, let alone be good. Good literature came from England. Even American literature was a pale shadow of England's literary grandeur. Fortunately, his task was made easier by the popularity of new Canadian novelists like Margaret Laurence, Robertson Davies, and Margaret Atwood, and Canadian poets like Earle Birney, Miriam Waddington and Leonard Cohen. In the 1970s, Canadian poets may have been writing "the best poetry of the time in the English-speaking world" (Stephens 1996).

Even as our literature reached new heights of success, it suffered the insults accorded a "second-rate nation." I remember that when Margaret Laurence's (1966) A Jest of God was made into a successful Hollywood movie, "Rachel Rachel," the young woman became an American living in an American town. Canadians have grown used to such insults. Even today, movies and T.V. shows, like "Speed," and "The X-Files," are filmed in Canada, but are supposed to be somewhere else. Occasionally a movie, like the

recent Oscar-winner, The English Patient, from a novel by Michael Ondaatje (1992) (another hyphenated Canadian), lets Canadian characters remain Canadian. For the most part though, successful Canadian talent and imagination are still packaged as American products.

I had begun university in the late 60s with the idea that English literature was really the only literature. Later, I discovered that Canada had good literature of its own. Although I was proud that Laurence, Davies, Atwood, Cohen and others were Canadian, when I read their books, something in me remained unsatisfied, but I didn't know what it was. Then I read a Canadian novel that spoke of my immediate world. Swamp Angel (1954), a novel by Ethel Wilson, is a story of a woman's journey to the interior of British Columbia in the 1950s. What a surprise it was to me--a novel set in places I knew! I recognised names like the Similkameen River and Kamloops. For the first time in my life, I could read a description of a place and know it truly because I had been there. I was familiar with the characters, too--the fishing lodge owner, the Chinese shop keeper's son--because I met people like them everyday. It was exciting to see places as I remembered them from my childhood. It gave me a sense that where I lived, too, had a history. I realised reading Wilson's novel that what literature lacked for me was something people in Toronto, London, Tokyo, or Moscow could take for granted: they could read books set in familiar environments. For us Western Canadians, literature was about other people in other places. Until I read Wilson, I hadn't even realised that it could be otherwise.

After I graduated from SFU, I sewed a Canadian flag on my backpack and set out to tour Europe and North Africa. Through travel, I learned more about myself as a Canadian. In Morocco, I travelled in deserts, among men on donkeys, and women in veils, and had my first experience living in a different civilisation. In Europe, I came to regret my

failure to study French and Spanish seriously, and became convinced that a second language is essential to understanding even our own culture. In England, I learned that, although a very pretty place, England was not my home. And everywhere I went, I generally found other young Canadians the easiest travellers to talk to: we shared a "silent language" of common values, shared interests, and familiar manners of communication (Hall, 1981).

I came home to Canada in the late 1970s to face unemployment, and still wondering, "Who do I think I am?" Then one day, I applied for a job as an English teacher to Japanese students studying in Vancouver, and, to my surprise, was hired. Nowadays, over 10,000 Japanese students study English in Vancouver every year, but in the 1970s Japanese students were still rare. The group I was to teach was one of the first of its kind in Vancouver. By chance, I had become a pioneer in a whole new educational movement. I didn't realise that at the time. I was just glad to have a job.

When I began teaching, I suffered a shock. These students came in all different shapes, sizes, attitudes, interests and abilities. They were not boring. They had interesting ideas. They were not all alike. They were fun, fascinating people. In short, they didn't fit my preconceptions of Japanese. My all too obvious ignorance of them disconcerted me. What is more, I saw that my ignorance was only a tiny part of a colossal ignorance in Canada about Asia. For me, this ignorance was summed up in a question of my Canadian barber: when she heard that I had visited Japan, she asked me if I had seen "the Great Wall?" Like me, she considered herself educated. However, direct contact with Japanese showed me that my knowledge was based on assumptions and prejudices entrenched in our cultural "education." I realise now that "no understanding . . . is free of all prejudice" (Gadamer 1994, p. 490), but at the time, my discovery of this profound ignorance determined me to try to correct the mistakes of my education and to better

understand Japan.

Through my interest in Japan, a whole new world opened up to me. I mean by this, that I began to see the world and my place in it differently. Until then, like most Canadians, my outward view was focused either eastward, to England and Europe, or southward, to the United States. According to Farley Mowat (1987), Canadians go north only "to make a quick buck and then flee as if the very hounds of hell were on their heels" (p. 259). To the west, the world ended with us on the Pacific Coast, except for a few semi-mythical places beyond, like Hawaii. In a way then, I lived on the very edge of my known world. "Go west, young man," my ancestors had been told, and they did, in stages, until they got to the final destination, the Pacific Shore. I lived in the Occident, better known as "the West." In that West, my country, was yet west of Europe, and where I lived in Canada is called "out west." So, I lived in the west of the west of the West. Now, when I turned west and looked beyond the Pacific, I saw yet another west, called, "the East." For me, this was a bit like discovering that the world was round. Japan became my own West, my own "land of opportunity."

As should be clear from this short autobiographical sketch that leads up to my first "contact" with Japanese, my enduring obsession with Japan is, in part, an obsession with my own identity. One thing I find interesting about the Japanese is that they find Canada interesting. They ask about my culture, and I have to think about Canada and myself. Japanese come to Canada for specific reasons: for the safety, for the nature, for the convenience of its Asian communities, and for Anne of Green Gables (1908). I am surprised at how many Japanese have read Akage no An. Although recently a popular CBC television series has made Anne of Green Gables palatable to Canadians, when I was in university, none of my intellectual friends took Montgomery's works seriously (it is a

trait of the colonial mentality that when our culture produces anything really good, we assume it must be a mistake). In general, Japanese have a positive image of Canada, and they are willing to let that image grow.

In order to learn more about Japan, I began to read Japanese novels. First, Tanizaki, Kawabata, and Soseki; later, Inoue, Oe and Banana Yoshimoto. Reading Japanese literature helped me make sense of Japanese society, but it also helped me understand my own culture better. In a novel by Arishima Takeo (1919), A Certain Woman, a Japanese woman, passing by on a ship, glimpses the coast of Vancouver Island--that's all--just a glimpse. But it was the first time for me to see familiar shores taken seriously in foreign literature. Towards the end of Under the Volcano (1947), Malcolm Lowry had described life on the "Sunshine Coast" of British Columbia, but he had lived there, and had become one of us despite his Englishness. Arishima took note of my world for no other reason that it was there, and it was worth describing. Somewhere beyond that coastline, though Arishima didn't know it or care, were my ancestors, surviving.

At least one Japanese writer, Yasuoka Shotaro, has directly influenced my understanding of Canadian identity. Professor Kinuya Tsuruta recommended I read Yasuoka after reading a story I wrote in Japanese; he said he noticed an affinity. Many of Yasuoka's stories are about growing up in poverty in the countryside. I first read "Prized Possessions" (1977), a story about his father's inept attempt to make money raising rabbits after the war. Yasuoka's satire struck a cord in me, and in his stories, I recognised something like my own memories (my father, too, had considered the potential profits of rabbit raising). It was as if Yasuoka were writing about my life, but set in Japan. From Yasuoka Shotaro I learned that my identity could reach out beyond my country's borders, beyond culture, and beyond race.

I have now enjoyed a twenty-year relationship with Japan. My interest in Japan stimulated my awareness of the Japanese-Canadian community in Vancouver. When I returned to Canada, I attended a Japanese church. There I met people who had been interned during the war. It was partly to better understand these people that I first read *Obasan* (1981). But, reading that novel gave me more than I had bargained for. It was, for me, a revolutionary experience.

Joy Kogawa called me home again. *Obasan* is the first novel I ever read both by a writer born in my region of Canada, and about events there, events involving the kinds of people I know there. In it I found, saved and preserved for myself and my children, a part of the history of our people that had almost been lost. By "our people," I mean specifically Canadians from British Columbia, and especially from Vancouver and the surrounding logging, farming and fishing communities, where I spent my childhood. This is the world I share with Kogawa. Her stories make real again the world of my parent's youth, the world of my beginnings. At the same time, they show me that the memory of a people is a fragile thing, and that official histories may have dubious intent. From the events of that local environment, Kogawa fashions literature that is good, and has universal appeal. Through it, she helps Canadians to question our identities, and then encourages us to redefine them in more generous ways.

Canadian identity, says George Woodcock (1987), is "the product of living in time within a specific environment" (p. 21). He says "Canada can only be understood, in regional terms. We are not a unitary nation" (p. 43). It took me a long time to realise this truth. When I was a child, I was taught an allegiance to an empire and a far away queen. Later, in university, I wanted a strong *national* identity as a defence against America. After graduating, distracted by my pursuit of things Japanese, I missed much of what was

happening "back home." I feared I was betraying my roots, "losing touch." Margaret Laurence (1992) dealt with a similar anxiety. She describes her relationship with the small-town prairie world of her childhood:

This is where my world begins. A world which includes the ancestors--both my own and other people's ancestors who become mine. A world which formed me, and continues to do so (p. 84)

Similarly, the novels, stories and poems from my childhood home provoke in me memories and half-memories. They lend me ancestors, and they make me realise that I still, and always will, carry within me that place of my beginnings. Now, living in Kyoto, I reach out to explore and understand Japan confident that I do so as a Canadian--a Canadian from the Fraser Valley in south-western British Columbia. My experience of Japan deepens my understanding of myself and my beginnings because "all understanding is self-understanding" (Gadamer 1994). I still sometimes ask myself, "Who do I think I am?", but I no longer feel an urgent need for a conclusive answer. The value of the question lies in the asking, not in the finality of any answer. My identity as a Canadian continues to evolve, and in its changings, strengthens and matures.

This chapter has been something of a confession, and it was not easy for me to write. I am well aware that it involves vast simplifications about, and a certain mythification of Canadian culture. These deserved to be questioned and contradicted. There is, too, something narcissistic about any autobiography, and for this I can only hope to be forgiven by the reader. Finally, as with any other public confession based largely upon one individual's impressions and memories, let *caveat emptor* be your guide. Having said this, and fully recognizing the weaknesses of this embarkation upon an autobiographical methodology, I believe that the importance of this effort should also be acknowledged. The reader should be able to gather something of the whys and wherefores behind the

motivation of this study of Japanese language, education and cultural identity. There need be no illusion that this is a "purely" disinterested and objective study. It is, rather, intensely "interested." Against my interests, I invite the readers to compare their own interests. Out of the infinity of what is "Japan," I have chosen certain events, incidents and issues to explore. My choice was not random. Neither was my choice guided by a methodology disinfected of personality. My choices are direct results of my experience and prejudices. They are an attempt to rise above the failures of my own education and the past constrictions of my own cultural identity. I trust that, for having read this chapter, the reader will be able to better judge the success or failure of my efforts, and to more confidently evaluate the reliability of my presentation of things Japanese.

Part Two: Language and Japanese Identity

Chapter Five

Literacy and Orality, and Japanese Stereotypes

What meets the eye in Japan is often all there is. Japan is, after all, as Roland Barthes observed, the empire of signs, the land of the empty gesture, the symbol, the detail that stands for the whole. The fetishist ikon is so powerful that the real thing becomes superfluous.

Ian Buruma. A Japanese Mirror. (1984, p. 111)

As I begin writing this chapter, my eight-year old son sits at the table nearby practicing his kanji*. Over and over again, he writes some of the about two hundred kanji prescribed in the curriculum for grade two. As he writes, he complains in Japanese, "*kanji wa omoshirokunai, na* [Kanji is a bore]." And I believe for him it is. When I ask him why it is not interesting, he says, "it's a pain to write, and it's easy to make mistakes." However, he will have to continue practicing kanji in this way, writing them over and over, each complicated stroke in the correct order, and memorizing the multiple readings for each character for many more years to come. My older son entered the Japanese education system at the grade five level. He could already speak Japanese fluently, and write hiragana and romaji, but, even at that, writing Japanese was his biggest obstacle to smoothly fitting into the Japanese elementary school system. Three years later, nearing the end of his first year in junior high school, he is only just catching up to the other students in his writing ability. It was a hard struggle for him. I fear that had he come to

* Note: for convenience the Japanese words for scripts--kanji, katakana, hiragana and romaji--will not be italicized in this chapter.

Japan even one year later, it would have been impossible for him to fit successfully into the Japanese educational system. We would have had to enroll him at an international school or a school with special programmes for student returnees [*kikokushijo*]. Still, many people, including foreigners--scholars like Hendry (1993), Bailey (1992) and Barthes (1982), collectors of calligraphy like Alex Kerr (1996), and poets like Ezra Pound (Fenollosa 1936)--find kanji attractive. We are fascinated by the grace of the characters, their intricacy and variety. Depending on how you look at it, kanji can be a burden or a blessing. Whichever way you choose to look at it, there is no doubt that the written "Chinese character" is a most significant force not only in Japanese education, but also in the creation of Japanese cultural identity.

The profound impact on European perceptions and life patterns that have resulted from the introduction of the phonetic alphabet into Greek culture have been described by scholars such as Eric Havelock (1963), Walter Ong (1982) and Rosalind Thomas (1992). These scholars suggest that the alphabet defines the nature of modern Western civilization. The Canadian philosopher, Marshall McLuhan (1964; 1962) pioneered a new study of media that showed how writing technologies transformed Western culture and thought. Since the lectures of Ferdinand de Saussure (1915), the development of the science of linguistics has further deepened our appreciation of the relationship between language, thought and culture. Language, asserts Hans Georg Gadamer (1976; 1992), now takes the central place in modern philosophical discussion. However, some philosophers, notably Jacques Derrida(1980) and Roland Barthes (1982), caution against the ethnocentricity of a narrow focus on the alphabet that ignores other writing systems such as that of Chinese ideographs. Earnest Fenollosa and Ezra Pound (1936) long ago examined the influence of Chinese ideographs in poetry. Nevertheless, with a few

exceptions (Gough 1968), Western scholars have failed to explore how Chinese writing might affect wider areas of Asian life and culture.

Japan is one of many countries that have adapted the Chinese writing system to its language and culture. In this chapter, I describe the evolution of the Chinese writing system in Japan and, in the light of contemporary Western discourse on literacy and orality, consider the ramifications of this writing system on Japanese education and identity, especially as they relate to certain negative cultural stereotypes of the Japanese. These cultural stereotypes are common in much of the popular literature in English on Japan and can be detected in much of the serious scholarship as well. These stereotypes emphasize supposed national traits that contrast with those of people in Western countries, especially contemporary America. In these stereotypical images, the Japanese inherently possesses three negative cultural qualities: xenophobia, elitism and sexism.

The Japanese writing system is so complex that it has been called the "devil's tongue" (McGrath 1983). The system includes a combination of different scripts. The main script, Chinese ideographs, or in Japanese, "kanji," were adopted about the fifth century AD. Later, in the ninth century, the Japanese developed two indigenous "kana" syllabaries, "hiragana" and "katakana" derived from kanji, but used to represent sounds rather than ideas. More recently, the roman alphabet, called "romaji" has also found a place in the Japanese writing system. A single sentence in Japanese may well include kanji, katakana, hiragana and even romaji. In contrast to the mere 26 letters necessary to write anything in English, a knowledge of thousands of characters is needed to read or write Japanese well.

Chinese characters became established in Japan in the fifth century, introduced initially by Buddhist scholar monks. During Nara Period [eighth century], kanji was already being used by aristocrats and court bureaucrats for both literary and administrative

purposes. An essential requisite for learning to write “Japanese” during this early stage of adaptation was a competent knowledge of Chinese. According to Robert Borgen (1994):

The Japanese learned to use Chinese characters to record their native language and in a remarkably short time were writing polished verse in Japanese. However, the compilation of the *Man'yōshū* around 759 was followed by roughly a century in which literature in Chinese was preeminent. This period was often referred to as “dark age of native literature” for nearly all the extant writings from it are in classical Chinese. (p. 41)

An intimate relationship developed between Japanese and Chinese through the sharing of the same complex and difficult script, and eventually a large body of vocabulary as well.

Roy Andrew Miller (1967) suggests that “the net result was a circular process of borrowing and mutual enrichment which is perhaps unique in linguistic history” (p. 113). For the educated male elite of monks, bureaucrats and scholars in early Japan, writing was “a highly valued technical skill” (Borgen, p. 40). With the invention and refinement of simplified kana beginning in the tenth century, the bureaucratic-religious male monopoly on writing broke down somewhat. The kana were fewer, simpler to write, and more suited to the pronunciation of native Japanese words common to daily speech (as opposed, for example, to bureaucratic and scholastic jargon). The development of these new writing scripts coincided with a long period of relative peace and prosperity known as the Heian period [literally, the period of “peace” and “security”].

The Heian period saw a cultural flowering in Japan to which aristocratic women made significant contributions. During this period, some of the greatest works of Japanese poetry and prose were written by Japanese court ladies. These works include The Pillow Book of Lady Shonagon, and possibly the world’s first novel, The Tale of Genji by Lady Murasaki Shikibu. Written in kana, these works gained a wide and lasting popularity (Rowley 1997). Partly because of the popular literary successes of these women and the general adoption of kana by literate women, kana became stigmatized by

the male writing elite as “womanish.” In fact, it was called *onnade*, “woman’s hand,” or *onna moji*, “women’s letters” (Miller 1967, p. 121). With the introduction of kana, many women gained access to education by acquiring a literacy in their own language. Nevertheless, for centuries a gender bias remained towards these different Japanese writing scripts: kanji was the authoritative script of “serious” men of power and learning; kana was a toy suitable to the childlike enjoyment of women.

The Heian period was followed by long centuries of civil war that were unkind to popular education, the arts of leisure, and the social status of women. Japanese culture came to be dominated by martial values. It was not until the establishment of the Tokugawa era at the beginning of the seventeenth century that Japanese society again enjoyed a long period of stability, but this time under a military dictatorship that kept a heavy hand on individual freedoms. During this two-hundred-and-fifty-year *bakufu*, the country was almost completely cut off from foreign contact. The samurai class, which maintained a monopoly on bureaucratic positions, saw its authority shift gradually from the sword to the pen, and the class became widely literate. With a long continued era of peace, education spread out to reach both men and women even of the lower classes. Eventually, under irresistible foreign pressure to open the country, the feudal government collapsed, and the Tokugawa era gave way to the Meiji. The Meiji Restoration in 1868 marks the beginning of “modern” Japan. Since then, the nation has rushed to catch up with the West in science and technology.

This passion for “modernization” that began in the Meiji Period has inspired a popular enthusiasm for Western languages, especially English, that continues today. A huge number of words for new customs, technologies and concepts have been adopted into Japanese from European languages. The katakana script has taken on new

importance as a marker for these imported words. At the same time, the written structure of the language has come to conform largely to Western styles with modifications to everything from punctuation to the use of metaphors. The changes in the writing system, coming upon all the drastic social changes of the past century, have rapidly distanced modern Japanese from the culture of their near ancestors. Without special training, young Japanese cannot clearly understand the written language of even their near ancestors. The gap between the modern Japanese language and the language of the mid-1800s is as wide as the gap between modern American English and the English of Chaucer.

This brief description of the evolution of Japanese writing should give the reader clues to why many scholars and intellectuals are convinced of the “uniqueness” of the Japanese language (see Oe 1996; Suzuki 1975; Miller 1986, 1982, 1967; McGrath 1983). For some scholars, it might seem obvious that if the Japanese language is unique, it is unique primarily in its borrowings (see Miller 1982). However, one tradition of discourse in Japan called *nihonjinron*, or “debate on the Japanese,” established in the Tokugawa Period by teachers like Motori Norinaga, tries to trace a “uniqueness” of Japanese “spirit” to the myths and poetry in ancient Japanese histories and later Heian classics like The Tale of Genji (see Yoshino 1992; Mouer and Sugimoto 1990; Edwards 1989). In slightly altered form, the attempt continues today. Witness the dispute between Eto Jun, who ties the “uniqueness” of the Japanese spirit directly to the “uniqueness” of kanji, and Roy Andrew Miller (1982) who thinks it absurd to trace a *Japanese* “uniqueness” to *Chinese* writing.

Nihonjinron is primarily a (sometimes comic) debate on the question: “Are modern Japanese *essentially* different from foreigners?” (Note that often *gaikokujin* [foreigner] is understood by Japanese to mean white Americans). This question is entangled with

stereotypes and prejudices prevalent on both sides of the cultural divide between Japanese and others. Although much of what makes up *nihonjinron* has more to do with sentimentality and nationalism than with academic research, the belief in “uniqueness” cannot be dismissed out-of-hand. Of course, it is a truism that every culture is by definition “unique”; that is why we believe we can distinguish one culture from another. This truism in no way justifies, however, the extremist vision of Japanese “spiritual uniqueness” that sustained pre-war nationalism and has left its traces in the *nihonjinron* of today.

My concern in this debate about “uniqueness” is not whether Japanese stand unique among world cultures, but rather whether they perceive the world differently from people in Euro-american cultures with whom they have come into ever closer relationship. The common urge among some foreign scholars to debunk the *nihonjinron* tradition (Edwards 1989; Miller 1986, 1982) must be moderated by an awareness of the effects of literacy upon Japanese culture. We must recognize three factors: first, writing systems are technologies that effect the development of cultures; second, the writing system of Japan is distinguishable by its complexity and difficulty; third, the Japanese system is obviously different from the various alphabets shared in “the West.” We might well be forgiven for wondering what the effects are upon education and identity of a “literacy” so radically different from that common to Europe and America?

If, as Walter Ong (1982) asserts, “logic itself emerges from the technology of writing” (p. 172), then another kind of writing may result in a different kind of “logic.” Japan certainly has a “different” writing system. As we have seen, Japanese writing is a hybrid of four different scripts, one of which, kanji, consists of almost 50,000 characters (Miller 1967). Most kanji have at least two readings, one Chinese [*onyomi*] and one Japanese [*kunyomi*], while certain kanji, especially those used in people’s names, have several

additional readings. Although the Japanese government, through the Ministry of Education, tries to control the number of kanji and their readings by designating about 1,850 kanji as the basis of literacy to be taught in a tightly controlled curriculum in the first nine years of school, an educated adult is still expected to master several thousand kanji. But that is not the end to the difficulty. Certain kanji move in or out of popular use, while others are abbreviated or otherwise altered from the original Chinese character. Some combinations of kanji require unique readings; others are technical jargon or shortened forms of terms used mainly in newspapers. The overall system is described by Edwin O. Reischauer (1988) as "probably the most complex and difficult of any in common use anywhere in the world" (p. 391). Another complicating factor is that the main scripts (kanji, hiragana and katakana) usually indicate the origin of a word as being either Chinese, Japanese or Western.

A common negative stereotype of the Japanese suggests that they are fundamentally chauvinistic and anti-foreign (see Cutts 1997; March 1996; Van Wolferen 1989; Tasker 1987; Buruma 1984; Rudofsky 1982; Seward 1981). That the various scripts serve to signal the Chineseness or Japaneseness or Westernness of words suggest to some critics that the writing system is an accomplice to an innate Japanese "xenophobia." They assume this despite the fact that writing was initially adapted as a means for importing Chinese culture, and has always been associated with things foreign. The *kan* of kanji means "Chinese," and *ji* means letters, so *kanji* means literally "Chinese letters." In contrast to the "foreign" kanji, hiragana are usually used either to write "Japanese words" or in conjunction with kanji to make "Chinese words" fit Japanese syntax. Likewise, katakana has come to be used to write the huge number of mostly English "foreign words" [*gairaigo*] present in modern day Japanese. Thus, through such a writing system,

Japanese are continually made aware of distinctions between foreign and native culture. Whether or not it is fair to label such an “awareness” *xenophobic* is a question we will take up later in this chapter.

Another negative stereotype of Japanese is that they are elitist, and that Japanese culture is inherently hierarchical (see Cutts 1997; Thomas 1993; Van Wolferen 1989; Nakane 1970). Kanji (along with other characteristics of the language, such as the use of *keigo*, a highly status-reflecting polite language) is implicated with the conservatism and deference commonly associated with this elitism. The Japanese education system, with its formalism, competitiveness and hierarchy of schools and universities, is accused of perpetuating established elites (see Cutts 1997; Thomas 1993; Shields 1989). Much of the early years of schooling is devoted to mastering the writing system. Of course, the mere quantity of kanji necessitates strategies of memory, discipline, regime, accuracy and routine that are generally associated with traditional learning methods and values. The fact that this learning requires so much time has meant that in the past only “leisured classes” could afford the time to learn to write. Moreover, because of the initial monopoly of writing by religious and bureaucratic elites, kanji has long been associated with institutions of power. Based on similar historical observations, scholars attribute “political natures” to scripts. On the one hand, Goody and Watt (1968) claim that the alphabet is essentially a “democratic” script (p. 39). On the other hand, Ong (1982) says that Chinese writing is fundamentally “elitist” (p. 87). But even if Ong were right, Chinese writing is only one of four Japanese scripts. Later in this chapter, we will question the idea that Japanese writing has an “elitist nature.”

A third negative stereotype of the Japanese is that they are “essentially” sexist, and that Japan is essentially a “man’s world” (see Buruma 1996; Reischauer 1988 Christopher

1983). Foreign critics of Japan are inclined to make much of the female oppression that they can read into superficial cultural rituals, like young office ladies [OL] serving tea to their male colleagues. What I question in this chapter is not whether Japanese history and society are characterized by the oppression and exploitation of women. Certainly, Japanese women have been the victims of patriarchy (see Garon 1997; Bernstein 1991; Lebra 1984). Nevertheless, some complacent foreign critics exaggerate this exploitation of women in contrast to that in the West, and they portray Japanese women as stunted characters lacking intellectual maturity (as does the male teacher in Duff and Uchida 1997).

Ironically, when the famous prewar educator Nitobe Inazo wrote of this deference in *Bushido* (1981), he tried to do so in terms of the Western cultural tradition. Rather than indicating "subservience," he claimed that the manners of Japanese women were the product of a culture that valued "service" (a value he felt "Christian America" would appreciate). His explanation was more or less lost on pre-war America, and certainly it is unlikely to convince many feminists today. The point is, however, that the stereotype of the meek and deferent Japanese woman, based upon the assumption that they have been left "backward" in contrast to foreign women by the "uniqueness" of their historical oppression is a highly ethnocentric view. It certainly does nothing to help modern Japanese women to improve their situation in society or their image in the world. Moreover, this extreme view is not necessarily justified by a consideration of the historical conditions of Japanese women.

Whether we prefer to label Japanese women by the stereotype of "subservient" or side with Nitobe's counter-stereotype that they are "altruistic," we cannot deny that Chinese writing has historically been a tool to subjugate women in the interest of Japanese

male privilege. Since it was first introduced into Japan, kanji has been a tool for communication among men. It was only with the development of kana in the ninth century that significant numbers of women became literate. As a result, a “gender bias” developed toward scripts: kanji was primarily a male script; hiragana, primarily a female script. Nevertheless, the idea that Japanese women are, and always have been subservient and helplessly downtrodden is dangerously ethnocentric. Studies of the history of Japanese women by Gail Bernstein (1991), and more recently Sheldon Garon (1997) suggest that feminism in Japan has its own traditions and goals. Our Western stereotypes of Japanese women tend to lack historical and social scope. Thus, they underestimate the dignity afforded certain ranks or classes of Japanese women, their historically high level of education compared to women in many European nations, and their long tradition of contributing to the economy, the community and the arts of Japan. However, just because we bracket off our stereotypes of Japanese women until we better understand their cultural identity does not require us to ignore the possibility that Japanese writing is part of a system of male dominance, and we will consider this “third stereotype” in more detail later in this chapter.

Does the Japanese writing system determine the nature of Japanese culture? Based upon the above summary of three negative stereotypes of the Japanese, we can break this question down into three sub-questions. One, does the writing system contribute to the authority of power elites in Japanese society? Two, does the writing system affect Japanese attitudes to foreign peoples and cultures? Three, does the writing system help determine gender role and status? In the remainder of this chapter, we will consider each of these questions carefully in order to see if we can trace the ways the Japanese writing system influences Japanese identity.

Let us first consider whether or not there is evidence that the writing system contributes to the authority of power elites in Japanese society. Some Western scholars have made rather extravagant generalizations in this regard. They have described the alphabet as a "democratic" script, as opposed to the "theocratic" script of Egypt (Goody and Watt 1968), or the "fundamentally elitist" script of China and Japan (Ong 1982). Of course, Japan does not have a long history of democracy, and its first modern democratic institutions developed only after the Meiji Restoration. Still, compared to other modern nations, especially outside Europe, Japan is one of the older democratic countries (Hobsbawm 1992). Despite the venerable age of Japan's democratic institutions, Ong and others (Miller 1982) argue that Japan's writing system serves an elitist force within Japanese society. There are two explanations for this elitist nature: one is that the difficulty of the language is such that it can only be mastered by leisured elites (Reischauer 1988; McGrath 1983). Another explanation is that, as Goody and Watt (1968) put it: "pictographic and logographic systems are alike in their tendency to reify the objects of the natural and social order; by doing so they register, record, make permanent the existing social and ideological picture" (p. 37). According to this second explanation, any writing system necessarily acts as a conservative force. Be that as it may, even some among the Chinese Communists have complained that "if you want to abolish Confucianism you must first abolish the Chinese script" (Goody 1968, p. 23). Whether or not it has an essentially "elitist nature," in Japan, as in China, kanji has long been associated with the Confucian values of powerful and prestigious bureaucratic elites.

In the West, the "power of the word" is most often associated with the *sound* of the spoken word. The Greeks and Romans built a culture upon rhetoric. Even the Bible, a

foundation stone of European culture, is a book derived from oral traditions and the rhythms of spoken language. Northrop Frye tells us that

Most of the prose of the Bible is oratorical prose, and oratory is the aspect of prose that is closest to the metaphorical, magical approach to words, because the intention in oratory is to act on an audience and affect them by the power of words. (cited in Ayre 1989, p. 369)

In the West, the spoken word has magical power, and the written word is a vessel for that power. Kanji, too, is connected to magic. Among the earliest kanji found in China were those written upon bones used in religious and magical rites. In contrast to the development of writing in Europe, however, the magic of the Chinese written character was more immediate, and lay in its visual form. Even today, a kanji is a symbol with a charm-like power, and this power may be independent of the spoken word (often people cannot "speak" the characters they "read"). From its beginnings, kanji has asserted the priority of its visual presence in its mystical associations with power.

When kanji was introduced to Japan, it was connected to Buddhist mysteries and rituals. Even today, in many Japanese homes and institutions, calligraphy, sometimes consisting of only one or two characters, is displayed like talismans on walls or in the *tokonoma*. Often the calligraphy can only be deciphered by experts, and one of the pleasures of possession is the right to "interpret" the text. Calligraphy is a highly ritualized craft, involving an assemblage of utensils: decorated ink blocks, carved stone inkwells, and a variety of brushes, blotters and hand-made paper. Each character is carefully composed in a strict sequence of strokes. Mysticism even surrounds the signing of one's name: rather than writing signatures, most Japanese use seals (*hanko*), some of which, when specially "blessed," can cost a small fortune.

Kanji retains, therefore, an aura of magical power, but it also has a close relationship to more worldly sources of power, especially those that can be achieved

through education. In Japan, the main pathway to bureaucratic power is through the entrance exams to an elite university. The history of these exams can be traced to the ancient Chinese *keju*, the world's oldest examination system (Andersen 1998). Amano Ikuo (1990) explains that in Europe the first examinations took place in medieval times, and like those at the faculty of law at the University of Bologna were oral:

But in contrast to the *keju*, Bologna gave an oral examination. Nakayama Shigeru, observing this difference between testing based on written and oral responses, developed his theory of the characteristics of Eastern and Western learning (Nakayama 1974). A written examination was conducted at a European university for the first time in 1702 (Teng 1943). (1990, p. 21)

The Japanese set up their first university, headed by a Korean scholar during the Nara period, probably around 670 AD, and they soon copied the *keju* system. The first civil service examinations were instituted with the Taiho Codes of 701 AD, which also stipulated expansion of the education system (Borgen 1994, p. 71). Of course, the curriculum was based on the Chinese classics.

Although modern Japanese universities are modeled on European universities, the entrance examinations are a direct link to the ancient *keju*. Except for a very few recent and limited exceptions, the exams have always been entirely written. They are made purposely hard, and demand prodigious memory. One modern innovation has been the inclusion of a section on Japanese language [*kokugo*]. As a result of these examinations, successful candidates, from whose ranks bureaucrats will be selected, are not only masters of knowledge trivia, but also know myriad kanji, and are more or less familiar with a canon of literature that includes many of the texts promoted by the *nihonjinron* schools. In other words, the present system still perpetuates the ancient Chinese concept of "literature as a bulwark of the state" (Borgen 1994, p. 63).

Whereas university graduates entering the bureaucracies of other countries acquire a variety of verbal skills either directly through studying rhetoric, and logic, or indirectly by joining debating clubs or simply by constantly having to contribute to seminar discussions, the future Japanese bureaucrats receive little preparation for “eloquence” (see Namba 1995; Andersen 1993; Koreo 1988). What they do get is a wide knowledge of written language and literature, and the proof of this literacy is in a strong command of kanji. The words of a Chinese philosopher remain largely true in Japan today: “The world is of the opinion that those who know ideographs are wise and worthy, whereas those who do not know ideographs are simple and stupid” (cited in Goody 1968, p. 24). A famous Tokugawa bureaucrat and scholar, Arai Hakuseki, laid great stress on the assiduity and alacrity with which he, as a youth, accumulated vast quantities of kanji, staying up late into the night to practice writing, and having icy water poured over his head when he got drowsy (Ackroyd 1979). Writing, and especially writing kanji has long been associated with the power and prestige of at least one section of the Japanese power elite--the bureaucracy.

The bureaucracy is not the only faction in the power elite, and in Japanese history power has often shifted among the bureaucracy, military, aristocracy, priesthood, and more recently businessmen and politicians. The Tokugawa samurai elite included both scholarly bureaucrats, like Arai Hakuseki, and revolutionary men of “direct action,” like Sakumoto Ryoma. Since World War Two, the bureaucracy has been filling a power vacuum left by the discredited military, aristocracy and *zaibatsu*. It may well be that the resulting excessive power of the bureaucracy has hobbled Japan’s democratic institutions (Najita 1976). Modern politicians, too, take advantage of the halo of literacy they derive from graduating from elite educational institutions like Tokyo University to gain power

(Cutts 1997; "Takeo" 1995). Literacy may count for something in politics, but for the most part money, family and business connections have always counted for more. Presently in Japan, politicians are half-heartedly moving to assert the authority of democratic parties over bureaucracies that have been discredited by scandals and economic floundering. The failure of the "planned economy" after the bursting of the bubble economy in the late 1980s has shattered the credibility of the bureaucrat "planners." This in turn has encouraged politicians to be bolder in their demands for *kaikaku*, reform of the system. In the near future, a concerted move against the bureaucracy by politicians and businessmen may well bring an end to the reign of the literacy elite--Japan's almighty bureaucracy.

Japan is strengthening its democratic institutions even without the advantage of an alphabet. As Kathleen Gough (1968) says, even if the "democratic nature" of the alphabet could facilitate democracy, it has never been a guarantee of democracy. In the same way, she says that even if kanji is associated with literacy elites, this is largely an accident of history, and not due to any essentially "elitist nature" in Chinese writing. Kanji may be difficult to learn, but as early as 145 BC at least some peasants were learning to write using ideographs in schools in China (p. 71). Likewise, in Japan during the Tokugawa Period, a well established system of temple schools, *terakoya*, educated a large number of common people (see Pyle 1978; Passin 1982; Dore 1968). Literacy may have been almost as widespread in some periods of Chinese history as it was in classical Greece. Gough warns us against overestimating the difficulty of the Chinese writing system (p. 69), and to some extent this holds true as well even for the more complex Japanese adaptation of Chinese writing. After all, Japan's literacy rate is among the highest in the world. While recognizing that writing itself may have been an important instrument of democracy in modern nation states, she insists that nothing makes the alphabet more or less

“democratic” than kanji (p. 20). If anything, the history of the alphabet shows that it has served undemocratic as well as democratic states. In the same way, we can say that although in Japanese history bureaucratic elites have jealously guarded the privileges gained by a knowledge of kanji, and that they have, where possible, taken full advantage of the natural formalism and conservatism inherent to writing systems as a whole; nevertheless, the Chinese writing system itself possesses no ideological sympathies. Independent of other historical, social and cultural realities, the Japanese writing system has no political mind, and no “elitist nature.”

This brings us to our second question about the role of writing in Japanese culture: does the writing system effect Japanese attitudes to foreign peoples and cultures? This question is particularly relevant in this age of Japanese *kokusaika* [internationalization]. In the wake of the initial enthusiasm for *kokusaika* in the late 1980s, we now read warnings of a resurgent Japanese nationalism characterized by xenophobia (“Japan” 1995). Japan is often described as a country that moves between two unhealthy extremes in its attitudes to the foreign: during some periods of its history (as in the Meiji and Taisho Periods), it admires and copies anything it can from the outside; then (as after the Showa Restoration) it shifts to the opposite extreme and despises all foreign values and influences. Kinya Tsuruta (1988) believes that throughout modern Japanese literature, foreigners are portrayed as either beautiful god-like creatures, or as ugly monsters, and only rarely as real human beings. He sees these split extremes as manifestations of a Japanese inferiority complex that is not only unhealthy, but also dangerous. To what extent might this sensitivity to the foreign be inculcated by the writing system?

Historically, various languages and dialects have existed in Japan (Shibata 1995; Shibatani 1990). However, at least since the opening of the country to the West in the

middle of the nineteenth century, language has been a central issue in the struggle for Japanese national survival in the modern world. From the late Tokugawa Period, the Japanese consciously embarked upon a "modernization" programme that for many was synonymous with Westernization (Jansen 1982). Even in the feudal period, before the country was officially opened up to foreign contact, the Satsuma daimyo, Shimazu Hisamitsu, who is sometimes described as conservative and anti-foreign, smuggled a secret representative, Godai Tomoatsu, to Europe. One thing that particularly impressed Godai was the efficiency of Western script, and he speculated that unless Chinese loan words were eradicated, the entire Japanese language might have been discarded (Jansen 1994, p. 255). After the Meiji Restoration, politicians like Mori Arinori, and even writers like Shiga Naoya and Tanizaki Junichiro believed that the Japanese language was archaic and unsuitable for a modern nation (Hall 1973). Some Japanese went so far as to suggest that Japan replace its native language with a European one (Miller 1968). For others, the answer was to create a new language, perhaps a kind of "Japan-glish," and similar suggestions are still heard from time to time today (Nagai 1983, p. 172). All these cases suggest that some Japanese feel a deep anxiety, about their native language and its future.

Another factor in this language anxiety is the fact that the impact of English and other foreign languages upon the Japanese language over the past hundred or so years has been tremendous. First, a whole new vocabulary was necessary for imported European concepts and technologies. New words had to be created for everything from "bookkeeping" to "democracy." John Haley (1991), for example, points out that

the language of law was almost completely rewritten. Japanese translators either invented new compounds of Chinese characters [*jukugo*] or adopted older ones for the terminology of Western law. In definition hardly a single term of Japanese legal language survived the transformation. An entirely new vocabulary was created, with new categories, new concepts. (p. 69)

Changes were not just limited to introducing new vocabulary and concepts. Punctuation and sentence patterns were either introduced or changed to conform to European models. Writers picked up new habits, such as making metaphors along the pattern of "A was like a B," hitherto uncommon in Japanese literature (Miller 1982). In the Meiji period, new kanji terms were created for imported European concepts, but in recent years, an avalanche of foreign words, mostly English, have simply been transcribed into katakana and adopted wholesale into Japanese. Perhaps as much as a quarter of the basic vocabulary of common Japanese speech is now English. Some Japanese understandably fear that their language is being buried under foreign influences.

In addition to the pressure of this foreign language influx, political factors have also lessened the stature of kanji in Japan. After World War Two, kanji came under attack, first by American occupiers, and then by Japanese themselves. The early post-war US Education Mission recommended that kanji be abolished in favour of romaji (Takahashi 1987). Later, the Japanese government moved to simplify and reduce the number of kanji in common use. Although kanji has survived, its role in Japanese writing has weakened, and the use of kanji has changed considerably since prewar times. Today's young people have a new relationship to kanji. In a popular movie, *Otoko wa tsurai yo*, I saw a "typical" high school boy satirized as being unable to write even a simple letter in kanji. Many older Japanese seem to fear that, in general, the postwar generation of Japanese has an inferior fund and command of kanji.

The rapid and profound changes in their language since Meiji have understandably left some Japanese feeling a little confused and vulnerable. With computerization, more profound changes can be expected (Takahashi 1987). Is it any wonder that some have responded by calling for the defense and preservation of the Japanese language, or even

a purge foreign words (which, if it were to include Chinese vocabulary would, unfortunately, not leave much language left)? Suzuki Takao has taken an even more aggressive approach: he calls for greater promotion of the Japanese language abroad. Certainly, many Japanese universities are taking an aggressive approach to the teaching of Japanese (Campbell 1987). Suzuki insists that "throughout history, strong nations have always insisted on using their own languages within their spheres of influence" (Suzuki 1987a & b). However, China is rapidly advancing to economic dominance in Asia, and is flexing its own "linguistic" muscle ("Lessons" 1996). Just whose "sphere of influence" Asia will be, and what language will dominate remains to be seen. Meanwhile, most ordinary Japanese seem content to speak their own language. Many others eagerly study a variety of foreign languages. They seem unworried by the influx of foreign language; in fact, they seem to enjoy the cosmopolitan feel of foreign words in their language. The inflow of foreign words and influences is likely, for a while yet, to continue.

For their part, more and more foreigners see the Japanese language as healthy and profitable, and they are eager to learn it (Johnson 1991). Robert Cutts (1997), among others (Clancy 1997; Brannen 1989), claims that it is not really the difficult language it is made out to be, and more and more foreigners are now heard speaking it. Foreign students increasingly flock to Japan, especially from Asia (Yamashiro 1987). For many of these students, kanji provides an easy entry point to Japanese society. Chinese students can often understand the gist of written Japanese even without being able to speak any Japanese. Likewise, a Japanese traveler in China, even one who cannot understand spoken Chinese, may still be able to "read" and understand Chinese signs, instructions or newspaper articles. I have seen, for example, a Japanese and Chinese businessman, sitting side by side on a long flight, "chat" entirely in written notes in their respective languages. In contrast, an English traveler in France would have to "sound out" the words

in a note or a newspaper and either guess aural correspondences to English or else look up the words in a dictionary. Looking up words in a kanji dictionary, however, is a sometimes frustrating exercise involving the counting of minuscule strokes and the recognition of over two hundred radicals (Nelson 1962). The international face of the alphabet is different than that of kanji: the alphabet is all ears for sound; kanji is all eyes for meaning.

The shared use of kanji makes Japan welcoming to people of other languages which use Chinese writing. Unfortunately, kanji also seems like a barrier against people of languages using alphabets. Frustrated by the “wasted” effort needed to learn kanji when kana syllabaries seem so much easier, some Western critics urge that kanji be abandoned (Reishcauer 1988, p. 391). But Japan is a place where two great world civilizations meet in relative harmony, and to a large extent the internal flexibility of the language has allowed for this coexistence. Rejecting kanji would cut Japan off from its long relationship with Chinese civilization, and much of its own past as well. This is not a price Japanese are likely to be willing to pay for further “Westernization.” The language has already accommodated itself to Western influences, and in doing so, it has achieved a remarkable balance between two great world traditions that have jointly contributed to the creation of modern Japanese culture and identity.

Although it is now used to incorporate mostly English words into Japanese, some people still see in katakana something like a “xenophobic nature.” However, that katakana is used to “isolate” foreign words is largely an accident of history. Nevertheless, some people suspect that the script is a kind of “quarantine area” for foreign words. One could just as easily claim that katakana is a kind of pedestal upon which foreign words are set to be admired. Katakana is a means for Japanese to “flaunt” English words in their writing,

much as many British writers and socialites once spiced their writing with French *bons mots*. Practically speaking, katakana is a technical device to make reading easier by identifying unfamiliar words as foreign (perhaps saving a reader a futile search through a Japanese dictionary), and by giving an approximate pronunciation. As foreign words enter katakana, they become the property of Japanese and often cease to be accessible to the foreigner. In katakana, "building," "beer" and "bill" are all written more or less the same, as are "berry," "belly" and "very." This causes no end of confusion to English speakers learning Japanese, but it seems to serve Japanese needs quite adequately. Through katakana, foreign words are engulfed in Japanese pronunciation, and made integral parts of the Japanese language.

Is the Japanese written language a barrier set up to "protect" Japanese identity? Because of its supposed difficulty, relatively few speakers of Western languages bother to try to learn it. The majority of foreign people who write Japanese are Korean or Chinese. Many of these "foreigners" were born in Japan. Based upon such observations, we could claim that Japanese writing is the instrument of a "xenophobic" nature. But looked at from another perspective, we could claim that the multiple scripts, the specialized uses of kana, and the persistent reliance upon *Chinese* characters all show the "international nature" of the language. As a cultural tool, a language is manipulated and interpreted according to the social exigencies of the historical moment of the people who speak and write it, or across a gulf of time and space, in the act of reading or listening with it. Any xenophobia we detect in Japanese writing is only a reflection of Japan's ever-changing historical and social situation--or of our own.

This brings us to our third question concerning the Japanese writing system: does it help determine gender role and status in Japan? We have mentioned that during the

Heian period, kana facilitated an expansion of literacy in Japan, especially among women so that kana came to be called *onna moji*, or "women's writing." In contrast, we have examined the way in which kanji served as an instrument of power in the historical development of male bureaucratic elites. It seems clear that there has been a gender bias towards certain scripts in the Japanese writing system, and it may well be that something of this bias still persists in the contemporary culture.

The cultural divide between men and women in Japanese society is in some ways so wide that it is not unnatural to speak of separate male and female subcultures. This divide is clearly reflected in the language. Not only do women generally use a more polite version of Japanese, but they also tend to use a substantially different vocabulary. Modern adults seldom hesitate to complain that young people, both girls and boys are unable to carry a meaningful conversation in their native language (Nagashima 1989). In fact, research shows that young women tend to have more verbal ability than do young men (Caudill and Weinsten 1975). A glance at contemporary Japanese society suggests that in formal situations, it is men who are expected to speak: though seen less often in recent years, the classic TV interview in Japan involves a wise older *sensei* pontificating to a pretty young announcer that nods and smiles and prods him on with benign questions. However, watching Japanese couples in relaxed environments (in the home or coffee shop), we notice that it is women who sustain many conversations. Peter Tasker (1987), who focusses his studies on Japanese (male) business culture, declares Japanese culture verbally disadvantaged and inherently suspicious of eloquence. Nonetheless, one need only hear the brilliant flow of words from the "godmother" of Japanese television, Kuroyanagi Tetsuko, to suspect that such a view is too narrow, and misses subtle distinctions between Japanese male and female cultures.

Before we continue further in our discussion of Japanese women and writing, it is probably wise to note that the very term "Japanese woman" is one of many vast generalizations we manipulate confidently, seldom questioning meaningful application to reality. The fact is that Japanese women have played different roles in various ways and depending upon factors like region and class, they have their own dialects, religions, and traditions (Suzuki & Oiwa 1996; Bernstein 1991). Among most Japanese, it is accepted that there are distinctive regional personalities for women as well as men. In particular, local laws and customs regarding things like dowries or inheritance rights have varied greatly throughout the islands of Japan. For one thing, this has meant varying degrees of freedom for women. Such differences were more pronounced in the Tokugawa period when, as a result of fief rivalries, regional identities were accentuated as a matter of feudal policy. Traces of these regional identities persist as regional female stereotypes. For example, there are stereotypes affirming the sophisticated and elegant ladies of Kyoto, the proud but pleasing wives of Kagoshima, and the resilient, resourceful peasant women of Tohoku (this Tohoku-type was exemplified in the once enormously popular TV drama series "*Oshin*"). The oft touted "homogeneity" of the Japanese people is a rather modern fabrication (Smith 1997; Bailey 1989 a & b). Even the term *shufu* [housewife], referring to the "traditional" Japanese "good wife and mother," only came into common use during the 1910s and 1920s (Garon 1997, p. 127). It is only for very recent decades of Japanese history that the generalization "Japanese woman" makes any sense at all.

Despite the persistence in the West of one dominant stereotype of Japanese women (meek, deferent and oppressed), we must acknowledge that compared to women in many countries, Japanese women benefit from considerable social freedom, public safety and economic power. The amount of freedom a Japanese woman enjoys has

fluctuated throughout history, and besides regional differences, it depends as well on factors like age, marital status and social class. For example, many young Japanese women today are self-consciously liberated "sexually." But we know, too, from The Tale of Genji, that Heian court ladies enjoyed considerable sexual freedom; anthropologists tell us that peasant women, especially older generations, had as well (Hane 1982). In the late Tokugawa period, the women of the inns and pleasure haunts of Japan were actively taking part in the radical events of the day, and leading lives that "made them fitting subjects for later chroniclers of screen and fiction" (Jansen 1994, p. 224). One such woman, Oryo, is famous for saving the life of one of Japan's most dashing Restoration heroes, Sakamoto Ryoma. "I must say, she has more strength than I do," he confessed, and so he married her (p. 225). Evidently, there is more to Japan's "weaker sex" than timidity and deference, and sexual freedom for women has long been a factor of Japan's cultural traditions.

Education for women in Japan also has a long tradition. When Sakamoto Ryomo sent a letter to his sister asking for things for Oryo, high on his list were books (Jansen 1994, p. 225). At least since Heian times, Japanese women have enjoyed access to literacy. By the Tokugawa era, even women of the lower classes often had some education. Female literacy was made possible in part by the introduction of *kana*, which took less time to learn and fitted itself more directly to the spoken language (Passin 1982). For many male scholars, female literacy was something to be condoned, but not necessarily promoted; one Tokugawa scholar stated bluntly: "women should be unlettered. To cultivate women's skills would be harmful. They have no need of learning. It is enough if they can read books in *kana*" (Passin 1982, p. 46). Herein lies a curiously Japanese understanding about writing and education: true learning means reading and

writing kanji; reading and writing kana is little more than a higher level of "illiteracy."

Ironically, this condescending attitude permitted women a backdoor access to education.

By the late Tokugawa period [mid nineteenth century], at least in the metropolitan areas,

girls in the local temple schools may have outnumbered boys (Passin 1982). During this

period, among commoners, women may well have been as widely literate as men. Later,

by the end of the Meiji period [late nineteenth century], 99 percent of Japanese girls

attended at least elementary school (Garon 1997, p. 122). Nevertheless, although women

have achieved literary reputations since Heian times, they were still excluded from

government, scholarship and most professions until after the Meiji Restoration. Still,

textbooks like *Onna Daigaku* (*Women's University*), by Kaibara Ekiko (1930-1714),

provided a popular, if conservative, foundation of education for women (Bellah 1957, p.

97). In the Meiji period, educators like Tsuda Umeko, one of the first Japanese sent to

visit and study in the United States, began to establish colleges for women. Garon (1997)

points out that during that period "women advanced as physicians in greater numbers in

Japan than in contemporary American" (p. 122). More recently, young women are making

up for the social setbacks their mothers and grandmothers suffered during and after the

war, and they are once again taking advantage of their access to higher education in order

to enter and make regular and significant contributions to most professions.

Walter Ong (1982) believes that because in Europe women were given a vernacular education that did not bother with rhetorical finery, they tended to write in a

style "distinctively less formally oral" than did boys, and that the consequences "must

certainly be massive" (p. 160). In contrast to European women, Japanese women may

have a relationship to writing that has a more solidly "oral" foundation than that of

Japanese men.

Japan has no strong tradition of rhetoric like the one the Europeans inherited from the Greco-Roman culture and from "oratorical" Biblical prose. With the exception of an almost "mute" Shinto tradition, the Japanese have borrowed most of their religious traditions from China. Religion has entered Japan through the visual ideograph. Later, scholarly prestige was derived first by mastering these visual kanji, and then by memorizing difficult Chinese texts. In Europe, the foundations of learning are oral, but in Japan, they are visual. The visual bias of learning in Japan also makes itself felt in literature. Although the early poems of the *Manyō'shu* were oral in focus, later scholar-poets, like Sugawara no Michizane (see Borgen 1984) and Arai Hakuseki (see Ackroyd 1979), came to favour *kanbun*. A *kanbun* poem, written only in kanji, reads to the uninitiated like a telegram. The appreciation of its highly conventional beauties was a prerogative of learned men. It was, we are led to believe, more or less lost on "uneducated" women.

Free of the knowledge of obtuse Chinese classics or stiff kanji-based poetry, women learned to read in kana, a script that was more in harmony with everyday life and language. Compared to most writing, common everyday speech tends to use more "native" Japanese words. In literature, most women wrote and read prose and short lyrical poems in kana. Theirs was a language that more naturally expressed the rhythms and nuances of spoken Japanese. Thus, the female writing tradition was from its beginnings more "oral." As in the West, the consequences of female literacy in Japan, too, must be "massive," but little research has yet been done in this area. The greatest prose writer of the Heian period, Murasaki Shikibu, was a woman. With the significant exception of the writers of the egocentric post-Restoration "I novels," significant modern Japanese novelists

usually either have been women or, like Tanizaki and Kawabata, have mainly written about women. One might say that the Japanese novel is essentially a feminine genre.

The role of women in contemporary Japanese society is changing rapidly. In particular, more women than ever before are attending four-year colleges and going on to work in important companies. Many are determined to make careers outside the home. In university, however, women still prefer to enter departments of language and literature rather than law, engineering or science. One explanation for this tendency is Japan's career environment: men still take most of the senior positions in companies and government; women usually become office ladies or teachers. However, another reason may simply be that Japanese women have a different relationship with language than do Japanese men. Women may be more oral, more vernacular, and more able to appreciate the natural rhythms of poetry and prose, whether it be in Japanese or a foreign language. Of course, this tendency may also reflect social prejudices against young ladies of good family studying physics or finance; but historically these same prejudices may be linked to the language strengths of Japanese women and indicate more than a mere "finishing school" mentality among female students.

Not only do significant numbers of Japanese women study literature, but huge numbers also study foreign languages. They are also more likely than men to take advantage of opportunities to study languages abroad or to join foreign homestay programs. In general, young Japanese women have more success in learning to speak foreign languages well. One simple explanation of this aptitude for languages is that young women in university are under less pressure to follow standard male career paths; therefore, they have more freedom and leisure to pursue language study. They are also more free to experiment with learning methods other than the traditional ones of rote learning and translation. But less apparent cultural explanations are worth considering.

Perhaps their historical relationship to the sound system of kana makes women more receptive to the oral qualities of the alphabet. In contrast, young men who successfully cram for entrance exams become increasingly absorbed into a silent world of reading and memory that is dominated by kanji. Many of these men go on to make up the male bureaucratic elite, a kind of ineloquent mnemonic monolith, that has come to represent Japanese culture in the minds of most foreign people. This symbolic male elite is a far too limited symbol of Japan. It completely excludes the vast array of women and along with them "less successful" men who are also involved in the everyday life-world of Japan, and whose alternate or marginal learning experiences afford a diversity of talents and understanding that may yet burst forth into novel and eloquent forms of Japanese language and culture.

Our negative stereotypes of the Japanese are innately prejudicial. However, Hans Georg Gadamer (1994) sees our prejudices as our jumping off point for understanding. In other words, prejudice is where real knowledge begins. In this chapter, we have examined some of the ways in which Japanese educational institutions have through control of the Japanese writing system contributed the formation of Japanese identities. In addition, we have seen how foreign misunderstanding or ignorance of those processes reinforce our own cultural prejudices towards the Japanese as manifested in certain cultural stereotypes. Japanese is, in a sense, a language divided against itself. For example, in ways not yet clearly understood, the contrary tendencies of kanji and kana cancel each other out, and leave the Japanese written language "gender neutral." The complex Japanese writing system has in the past been used as a prop for male privilege, but at the same time it has been a tool for the education and liberation of women. Since the earliest times when Chinese writing began to be used to communicate the Japanese spoken language, tensions have existed between the oral and written language.

The evolutionary process of grafting Chinese script onto oral Japanese has become entwined with developing tensions and contradictions that have contributed to the formation of present day Japanese culture. Interpretations of Japanese culture that assume that the writing system has a fixed "nature" offer an unnecessarily narrow perspective on Japan's total cultural horizon. Rather than accepting ready condemnations of the Japanese writing system or related negative stereotypes of the Japanese as elitist, xenophobic, or sexist, it is wise to approach Japan again through a cultural hermeneutics that pays heed to a variety of perspectives, and that gives due attention to divergent cultural trends or phenomena, especially to those that appear exceptional, discrepant, or incongruous. In this way can we come to understand the prejudices upon which our present image of Japan is founded, and from where our understanding must set forth anew.

Chapter Six

Autobiographical Interlude: Learning to See Japan [Early Years, 1978-1984]

To such, however, as do not choose to go so far back into these things, I can give no better advice, than that they skip over the remaining part of this chapter, for I declare beforehand, 'tis wrote only for the curious and inquisitive."

Laurence Sterne, Tristram Shandy: Gentleman. (1967, p. 38)

The first time I went to a movie theatre in Japan was a notable experience for more reasons than that I had to sit through a whole movie without popcorn, which was not sold in movie theatres at that time (though fortunately Japan has since "caught up" with North American culture in this respect). What I remember was being troubled at being "out of sync" with the rest of the audience. Let me explain. The movie was an American comedy with sub-titles in Japanese. At the first few gags, I and the audience burst into laughter together. But then something disconcerting happened. Something on the screen struck me as quite funny, and I let out a guffaw. I was the only one who laughed. The rest of the audience of several hundred people missed the joke. I swallowed my embarrassment, and put it down to an omission in the sub-titles. Later, I found myself laughing again (though somewhat more cautiously) with the audience. Then, in the midst of a rather dull dialogue between two minor characters, the whole audience burst into a great roar of laughter. I was the only one left silent. I was unsettled. What had I missed? Had the others all imagined something funny that really wasn't? Was it another trick of the subtitles? Thus, the movie progressed: sometimes I was laughing with the others in the audience, sometimes I had to stifle a laugh in a silent theatre, and sometimes I was left looking around me a several hundred people laughing "at nothing." In a way, this visit to the

theatre is representative of my early experience of Japan. More generally, it is the experience of anyone living in any foreign culture: some things you see, some you don't, and sometimes it seems you see things that for others are just not there.

The experience of such discrepancies in cross-cultural perceptions, I believe, strengthens one's awareness of the ambiguities of identity. For the sake of this awareness, I value my misperceptions despite the discomfort and embarrassment they have caused me. At the same time that such misperceptions are a common experience familiar to anyone involved in inter-cultural relationships, they remain intensely personal and particular. The cumulative effect of such events over many years is impossible to measure, but it is undoubtedly significant in forming our understandings of other cultures. I cannot separate my understanding of Japan and Japanese education from my experience of it. My experience informs my research, and anyone who reads this dissertation will, I humbly offer, be in some way "in-formed" by it in turn. The origins of our understandings are always remote and elusive, but if our ultimate goal is self-understanding, as postulated by cultural hermeneutics, then we cannot neglect the "remembering" of the original perceptions and misperceptions that form the basis of our understandings. Trying to recall those first moments of understanding can lead us, like it did Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*, to an infinite regression into an amorphous pre-understanding. We need not go so far--nor need we proceed so linearly. What is important is to take the time to reflect upon the progression and expansion of our understanding as it grows out from among the prejudices and misperceptions of our pre-given cultural identity.

To some readers, my reflections may seem irrelevant, but I think they are not. If nothing else, they provide some proof of the "concrete" building stones that sustain this "academic" and "theoretic" account of Japanese culture as revealed in relationships

among language, education, and identity. I hope, too, that if my narrative accounts are vivid enough, they will create for the reader a kind of "fictive experience" that will contribute to the variety of "stand-points" from which they can see Japan.

The reader may be relieved to know that I do not attempt to offer a complete and detailed account of all my experiences in Japanese education over the past twenty years. Nor will I enter into in-depth interpretations of each event. Rather, I offer only a "bricolage." Although this is a familiar postmodern conceit, I actually take it from John Dos Passos, who, in his great novel USA incorporated short chapters called "Newsreel" to serve as "factual" and concrete glimpses into the era in which he set his fiction. My own memories are broken into glimpses like the segments of a mobile: distinct events form little immediate relationship to incidents closest to them, but nevertheless contribute to a shifting, abstract, pattern. I try to order these experiences loosely in two ways. First, the narrative proceeds in a generally chronological order. Secondly, I more or less limit my account to events that contributed to my understanding of the interrelationships of Japanese language, education and identity. A random narrative of events might be more honest, but a modicum of organization will at least make the accounts more readable.

This narrative is based primarily upon my memory of events, supplemented by diaries and letters. Needless to say, memory is a fallible source. Therefore, *caveat emptor*--let the buyer beware. Moreover, since the places and people are real, I sometimes change names (as indicated by an asterisk when I introduce a personal name or abridge an institutional name, such as "N" College). I sometimes alter incidents in order to respect privacy. Despite all this uncertainty and disguise, I believe these accounts communicate an apprehension of "my reality" at the time the events happened around me. Their truth does not rest on their factual accuracy, but on the cultural experience they

evoke. As Madison (1988) says, "it makes little difference whether those stories are true or false"; the important point is that "we recognize ourselves in the stories we tell about ourselves" (p. 85). In the narrations that follow, I recognize myself and the people who participated with me in these events.

Tankidaigaku [Women's Junior College], 1978-1981

I began my relationship with Japan teaching at a private, two-year women's college in Nara ["N" College"]. Actually, I first taught the students of "N" College in Vancouver, and I was only later invited by the college president to teach in Japan. For three years, I spent half the year in Japan preparing groups of first-year students to come to Canada, and then I taught them the other half of the year in Japan. I was twenty-eight years old when I started. The experience has shaped the course of my life since then.

The college was at the peak of its popularity at the time, headed by a president who was iconoclastic and visionary. He was intent on making the school a home of the arts. He invited famous singers, dancers and artists to teach. He was also eager to create an international atmosphere, and for him that meant teaching "real" English. As a result, he wanted to have foreign teachers and students on campus, and he was eager to form institutional connections with the West, especially in Vancouver, where he had once studied, and a place he clearly loved. I was the first Canadian he invited to teach at his college, but after me, several young Canadian teachers came to his college every year. So novel was this arrangement that Japanese bureaucracies lacked precedents to deal with us. The first few of us came without proper visas, and we were paid under the table because the college lacked "official positions" for us. The president used his power to make sure that authorities turned a blind eye to any irregularities. He impressed me not

only for his cunning, but also for his readiness to display wit in his self-professed “broken English.”

The president was not necessarily as popular among Japanese professors as he was among his foreign covey. One of his first acts as president had been to enforce a retirement age. In those days, this was a radical step for a private college. The professors of national universities retired at sixty-five or earlier, but most went on to teach at private universities and colleges like “N” College. The private institutions value these septuagenarians because the reputation of a private school can be enhanced by having *ex-Todai* [Tokyo University] or *ex-Kyodai* [Kyoto University] professors on campus. At “N” college, the removal of the elderly professors was well advanced by the time I arrived on the scene. I met only a few of those white eye-browed, fragile old scholars deep in their seventies. I appreciated their gentility. Unfortunately, they were remnants of another time, and reminders of an “old Japan” that leaders of the president’s generation were eager to put behind them. This was in the late 1970s, and the beginning of new things in Japanese education.

The first programme I worked on consisted of a group of just over forty *ichinenesei* [first-year students] and about ten *kenkyusei* [graduate students] sent to study in Vancouver for five months. (Most of the *kenkyusei* eventually stayed on for at least a year). This kind of programme is nothing exceptional today, but it was a daring innovation in its day. Remember that many of these girls were “*hako-iri musume*” [daughters protected in boxes] and “*ojosan*” [young “ladies”], the yet unmarried daughters of wealthy and respected families. It took a great deal of courage and trust on the part of parents to send their darlings to live in a foreign world for five months. A pleasant time can be had by anyone who visits a country and lives in hotels for a few days or weeks, but most parents

and teachers realize that five-months with homestay families is another matter. It often means trouble. The program survived through a tremendous quantity of good faith, and a belief that all the difficulties, conflicts and scandals were worth it.

This parental faith was sometimes contradicted by the advice the first students got from their mothers. One girl told me her mother warned her not to bring back a "blue-eyed" husband. (Perhaps she took it as a challenge: years later, she married a rather shiftless Canadian). Another girl said her mother warned her not to learn English "too" well. In those days, "a little English" was an advantageous credential for a prospective bride, but "too much English" would taint a girl, make her *bata kusai* [stinking of butter or "the West"], and thus it would be a demerit in the marriage market. Fortunately, the particular girl in question was in no danger of disappointing her mother. Another bit of strange advice came from a senior English professor, a fellow with an inexhaustible supply of English idioms, often used with comic inappropriateness, but more usually lost behind impervious pronunciation. He warned his student not to speak English while in Canada. His theory was that if once you got one sentence out right, people would believe that you really knew the language and expect you to keep on talking--so, better not to start.

In Canada, the students were aware of their own conspicuousness. They were told that in Canada they would be "ambassadors" for Japan. But as the only student group of Japanese traipsing around Vancouver at the time, they laughingly labeled themselves the "Japanese army." The metaphor might make more sense today, when as many as ten thousand Japanese students "invade" Vancouver every year, but now, twenty years further separated from the Pacific War, I doubt that young Japanese would appreciate the irony of the metaphor.

Despite their elders' warnings against getting involved with foreigners and against really speaking English (advice some girls had no choice but to obey, lacking as they did any grasp of the English language), most of the students threw themselves into Vancouver life. Before long, they had found the best restaurants, coffee houses, and discos. They soon knew more about my city than I did. Some successfully sought out boyfriends. They were, literally, out of control, and loving it, and learning from it. Some girls would disappear for days at a time. One got on a bus and chased a boyfriend to Kamloops in the dead of winter, and survived to tell her friends the tale.

There were scandals and misunderstandings. There was a lot of trouble in keeping the students in homestays for long. Used to having their own way, they wanted to move at the least inconvenience. Having a homestay that wasn't "white" generally constituted such an inconvenience; too many cucumber sandwiches for lunch was another. One girl decided to move herself out, and when the homestay refused to give up her belongings, she solicited the help of her friends, and they stormed in at night, taking what belonged to her by force. Such aggressive conduct did not conform to the stereotype of Japanese womanhood I had absorbed from movies (such as James Bond's "You Only Live Twice" and "Teahouse of the August Moon") and my other main "educational source," television.

Among the various scandals of the programme, the biggest was caused partly by a misunderstanding about fashion. At the time in Japan, the popular fashion for young women was a mini-skirt, mesh stockings and high boots. Our most innocent students explored Vancouver's night life in this costume. But in Canada at the time, this was the stereotypical uniform of prostitutes. Needless to say, these young women got a certain amount of unwanted attention, especially when they wandered into downtown discos in the early hours of the morning. Each in her own way, the girls learned to deal with such culture shocks. Notwithstanding, someone, perhaps a disgruntled teacher, wrote an article

for a Japanese scandal magazine, in which the girls were portrayed as nymphomaniacs disgracing Japan with their conduct abroad. Japanese are familiar with controversy about "sex-tours" that pack Japanese men off to the brothels of Southeast Asia. The "N" College programme was portrayed as a kind of sex-tour for young Japanese women. Of course, not all the students were zealous to preserve their chastity, but the article certainly exaggerated their conduct in Canada. The programme survived the publication of that article only because parents trusted the college and its teachers.

Each year, I went to Japan for the first semester (beginning in April), and taught girls planning to go to Canada in the second semester (late September). The low levels of English ability demonstrated by most of these students coming directly from six years of high school English study were daunting. My own experience as a language instructor was likewise "bottom of the barrel." My classes were like "pulling teeth," painful for both students and instructor. Fortunately, most of my students showed little concern about actually learning to speak English (though a few were clearly eager to learn), so we got by with various "entertainments."

One of these beginner students stands out in my memory because of the incongruity between her actual English ability and her classroom "performance." In class, Mima* was a rather unexceptional student. She never got a sentence of English out without a great deal of giggling and consultation with the students sitting beside her. Even then, she usually got it wrong. Then, one day, towards the middle of the first semester Mima came to talk to me in my office. Once in my office with the door shut, she transformed. She became "American," speaking perfect American high school slang with all the "right mistakes." Her pronunciation was flawless, and the words poured out in an uninhibited flow. Mima had spent ten years living in the United States, and going to

* Note: hereafter this mark * indicates a pseudonym

American schools. When she returned to high school in Japan, she quickly discovered that her English ability offended her peers. "The nail that sticks out will be hammered down" goes the Japanese saying, and this is especially true in schools (see Anderson 1993). Mima was not eager to get hammered. She studied how to speak English like the other students. Her "American" identity became a secret shared by just one friend, and later by me. I honoured her deception. In the classroom, she remained just as "hopeless" as the most average student, but occasionally she came to my office, shut the door, and "let it all out" in English. Meeting her made me better understand the impact of *ijime* [bullying], and the plight of *kikokushijo* [returnee students] on Japanese education and identity formation.

For most of the students in these first groups, learning English, meeting a foreign instructor, and flying off to Canada for five months were the symbols of a new freedom for Japanese women. They were experiences that could only be dreams for most of their mothers (although long ago, before the Edo period, it was not uncommon for Japanese women to make long journeys alone). This new atmosphere of liberation and discovery formed the environment of my introduction to "the real Japan." Until that time, I had known little about Japan, and cared less. Once before, I had been offered a job teaching in Japan, but I was put off by an image in my mind of a Canadian lost and wandering amidst a maze of narrow streets among the faceless crowds of an industrial wasteland. Now, for the first time in my life, I was actually meeting Japanese. To my surprise, I found them attractive people full of imagination and curiosity.

I was also pleased by their interest in me and my country, and soon I made close and lasting friendships. I began to study Japanese. I enjoyed showing Japanese people around my country, and when I visited Japan, they willingly reciprocated. The most

important impression that remains of my initial experience of Japan was my deep shock at my own and most other Canadians' ignorance about Japan, a country so close to Western Canada on the map, and yet so far from our consciousness. I recognize in this ignorance a failure in my education, which rightly or wrongly, I have spent the last twenty years trying to correct.

Chapter Seven

Culture Clash in the University English Language Classroom

"Young people control culture, while old people rule society."
Maruyama Masao (cited in Chikushi 1986, p. 292)

One evening in Japan, a television show caught my eye. A young *idoru* [pop star] was set in a classroom of foreign students pretending to be a teacher of Japanese. She did not know that the students were also actors. During the class, one of the foreign students fell asleep. When he began to snore, the "teacher" tried to wake him up, but it took a long while for the sleepy-head to open his eyes. The television audience enjoyed the confusion of the teacher trying in her poor English to wake this foreigner. What I noticed as a language teacher was a cultural discrepancy. In the culture of the foreign classroom, falling asleep, especially in a small language class, is not only difficult (because of the required participation), but also generally recognized to be insulting to the teacher. In the television classroom, the teacher woke the student up only when his snoring disturbed the class.

At Japanese universities, where it is considered natural that many students keep late hours, either having fun, studying, or working at part-time jobs, students commonly sleep in class. Japanese teachers might complain about students sleeping in class (or doing other homework, reading comics, chatting with friends or even answering telephone calls), but they seldom interpret it as a personal affront. In contrast, it is common for foreign teachers to be irritated by the "inappropriate conduct" of students (see Nozaki 1993; Robb 1993). I saw one Japanese teacher deal with students laying their heads on

their desks or chatting by simply talking louder. The teacher was undaunted by the general inattention of many of his students. Attention was obviously not one of his preeminent classroom values.

When my son entered a Japanese junior high school, we requested that he be exempted from the required beginner's English-language courses on the grounds that he was a native-speaker of English. This request was rejected by the vice-principal. All students had to take the class together, and no exceptions could be made for native-speakers of English. We pointed out that it would be extremely boring for him to sit through English classes, and that it would be a waste of his time that might better be spent studying Japanese or reading in the library. However, the vice-principal insisted that the Ministry of Education required my son's physical attendance. Apparently, his attention was optional.

The above television skit made me realize the extent to which we often overlook subtle differences in educational cultures. Lack of attention is such a normal inconvenience in some Japanese classrooms that the television classroom for foreigners was simply made to conform to the pattern. Years ago, I used to get angry in class when students slept or did not give me their full attention, and I was often disconcerted by their surprised reaction. In a similar situation in Canada, I could expect support from responsible students in the class. In Japan, I was on my own, and I became a furnace of irrational anger in a sea of perplexity. The students do not see sleeping as any kind of insult. At most sleeping students are minor irritants. Students who want to pay attention move to the front of the classroom.

The classroom culture of Japan is in many ways different from what we are used to in North America. Moreover, what goes on in, say, a Japanese junior high school may be different from Japanese senior high school. Yet all levels of Japanese education fit

together as parts of a greater pattern of educational culture. Thus, the culture of the university classroom has been largely determined by the pre-university educational experience of students. Unaware of what their Japanese students have experienced, foreign instructors can misjudge them. Classroom practice that most foreign teachers take for granted (doing homework, participating, paying attention, being on time) may not be equally valued in Japanese university custom (Kelly 1993; Robb 1993). "Misconduct" that the foreign teacher judges to be the individual faults of students, and therefore, "correctable," may in fact be warranted by the wider cultural context, and ingrained by a lifetime of educational experience.

In their turn, students may misinterpret the reactions of foreign instructors. The instructor who gets angry when students sleep or come to class late may be an ogre in the eyes of students for not conforming to the culturally determined scholarly detachment expected of a university instructor in Japan. Japanese students learning English and their foreign instructors are often operating according to different cultural norms and educational identities. In North America, for example, teachers often appear casual in their relationships with students, but they, nevertheless, "demand respect." In Japan, teachers often appear formal, but they do not necessarily "expect respect." Japanese teachers, in general, are weak "authority figures," at least when compared to administrators and bureaucrats (see Lewis 1996; Nozaki 1993; Peak 1989; Koschmann 1985; Cummings 1980; Najita 1976).

University professors have an ambiguous identity in Japanese society. One saying goes, "if you've been a professor, a monk, or a beggar for three days you can never quit" (in other words, it is a lazy man's game). I once shocked a graduate of Kyoto University by suggesting he become a professor. He said he would rather do more meaningful work, like banking. In Japan, regional differences also partly determine the respect shown to

teachers. When I taught for a *yobiko* in both Nagoya and Kyoto, I found that the Nagoya students related with me on a very casual basis, calling me by name, and using casual Japanese, whereas my students in Kyoto "showed me respect," referring to me as *sensei* and using *keigo* [polite Japanese]. Age is also a factor. For example, many students prefer not to call teachers they respect *sensei*. They explain that older people use *sensei* to refer to anybody from a tea ceremony instructor to a corrupt politician, and they see the term as tainted by hypocrisy and cynicism. In short, "respect" and "authority" are culturally defined terms.

Misunderstandings also arise among foreign and Japanese professors (Kelly & Curtis 1993). Sometimes seemingly insignificant incidents escalate to become serious problems. A Canadian instructor at a university in Nagoya once put up a few travel posters in his language classroom in order to brighten the "dingy" classroom environment, and to motivate the students to appreciate the freedom to travel that goes with mastering languages. A Japanese professor who used the same classroom once a week protested. For him, the posters were "childish" and distracting, and unsuitable to the seriousness of a university classroom. Soon the entire department was split over the issue with all the foreign instructors supporting the Canadian, and most of the Japanese professors supporting the Japanese professor. Heated debates aggravated personal animosities. For some Japanese professors, the posters became a kind of a symbol of foreign educational hegemony. For some foreign professors, the problem was Japanese "irrationality" or lack of sound teaching methodologies. Eventually, the posters came down, and drab order was reestablished, but bitterness among faculty remained.

The incident was considered by many of us at the time a "conflict of personalities," but I now see it was at least partly a clash of cultural values (as is shown by the way the

instructors soon split along cultural lines: foreigner vs. Japanese). North Americans value a cheerful classroom. They want interaction with their students. They generally agree that a comfortable environment and an enjoyable curriculum motivate learning. These "facts" are "common sense" to North Americans. Nevertheless, this is not necessarily "the way things are done" in Japan. Thomas Rohlen (1996) points out that for many Japanese "hardship" is a positive educational value in itself, and it is not necessarily something "to be overcome by better facilities or improved methods of instruction" (p. 72). Similarly, Rebecca Fukuzawa (1996) says that beginning at the middle school level, "academic classes do not need to be made relevant, entertaining or even intellectually stimulating. At this level study is a sober business" (p. 318). Posters in a classroom disturb the sober environment many Japanese, including many students, expect of a university. The most prestigious universities in Japan, *Todai* and *Kyodai*, are also two of the most drab, characterized by shabby, old and uncomfortable buildings.

George Oshiro (1985) explains that even that great Japanese educator Nitobe Inazo, when principal of a prestigious public school, had to give into the protests of students when he tried to impose "American" order and efficiency on campus life. Traditionally in Japan, students, especially *ronin* [students preparing to retake entrance exams] and university students, are portrayed as living an "attractive" poverty. Their lives may be uncomfortable, but there is a liberty in their "shoddiness." We can appreciate this "freedom" in the school-day stories of Yasuoka Shotaro or the novels of Natsume Soseki. We can compare this type of "bohemian" Japanese student to North Americans who dream of the freedom of a dingy apartment in Greenwich Village or a garret on the Left Bank in Paris. Of course, this represents only one kind of Japanese student. There are other student "archetypes" in Japan. But the point is that the cultural factors that

determine the educational environment of Japan are not necessarily what foreign instructors are used to. Rohlen (1996) reminds us that:

Our formal theories of learning and teaching derive largely from the Anglo-American tradition of educational psychology. We are finding that the often reified Western theories that have dominated our perceptions and research seriously hinder our ability to perceive the numerous uncoded worlds of teaching and learning that abound in each society. (p. 1)

The education that relates to Anglo-American cultural identity is different from that which relates to Japanese identity. Where these two different "educational" identities meet, as they do in Japanese English-language classrooms, cultural friction occurs. Noticing and trying to understand these cultural differences is of obvious importance in easing this friction. However, since most foreign language instructors can only experience one narrow segment of the educational process, it is easy for them to misinterpret the culture of education in Japan, and be unable to place their small segment into the wider educational picture.

Learning and teaching are defined differently at different stages of the Japanese educational process, and so, according to Rohlen (1996), "we need to keep this complexity in mind when judging the Japanese system, for to fail to see its stages as part of a larger whole is to distort what is clearly a 12 year process" (p. 8). For those of us who teach Japanese students at the university level, the educational process we must bear in mind is even longer. In this chapter, I explore some of the ways the development of Japanese educational identity up until the university level may affect and be affected by English language instruction. Putting the university English-learning experience back into the wider cultural and educational context, I explain how much of the frustration experienced in university English classrooms has cultural roots that spread throughout the process of Japanese education and socialization. Moreover, I show that the students are not

necessarily to blame for their apparent inability to pick up spoken English with any kind of ease.

So often do we hear Japanese sadly say, "We Japanese are just no good at learning foreign languages." The immediate reaction of many foreign teachers is to scoff at such a statement. We are trained to be highly critical of such generalizations. On the one hand, they seem unnecessarily defeatist: lame excuses for lack of real effort and method in education. On the other hand, they smack of racial thinking: just another aspect of tedious arguments about Japanese uniqueness. Unfortunately, if we do not give a fair hearing to the complaint that Japanese are disadvantaged in their efforts to learn English, then if our students fail to make progress, we are tempted to blame them for being overly shy, perverse, lazy or just plain stupid. It is a sad irony that when well-meaning foreign instructors impose their methods and standards on Japanese students, they often end up alienating their most serious students.

The difficulties I have met with when teaching English in Japan are not necessarily representative of those of all foreign teachers, but over the years my approach has changed and my criticisms of my students have softened. I have come to sympathize with students in their struggle to learn to speak out boldly and freely in English when so much in their education shows them that speaking out boldly in any language, even their own, is improper and unwise. In learning to speak English, Japanese students not only face reproach from their friends, parents and even teachers, but they must also overcome much of their previous education from infancy.

Researchers from both Japan and the United States have found evidence that from the earliest weeks of life Japanese infants show differences in patterns of vocalization when compared to American infants (see Caudill and Weinstein 1975). The research is limited to comparing Japanese and American infants, and so we can not say that either

pattern is "normal." The important points for our discussion are three. First, American and Japanese infants develop language ability differently. Second, these differences are not genetic in origin, but have more to do with different customs and methods of maternal care. Third, these customs can vary not only among cultures, but also within a culture, depending upon, for example, the kind of work in which the family engage (Caudill and Weinstein 1975, p. 264). These three points are pertinent to our understanding of Japanese university education because it is in university that most Japanese get their first regular contact with foreign English teachers. In these university classes, almost all the students are Japanese, and almost all the foreign English teachers are "Anglo-American." Because of their upbringing, Japanese students come to the university English classroom with attitudes about the nature of conversation or the propriety of stating opinions or even the proper purposes of language that may not conform to the attitudes of their "American" teachers brought up in a different cultural reality. Myriad possibilities exist for misunderstanding and friction.

For example, in their study of groups of Japanese and American infants, William Caudill and Helen Weinstein (1975) find clear differences in developing patterns of infant vocalization, and attribute the differences to "mothering." Japanese mothers tend to soothe and pacify their infants; American mothers tend to chat with and physically stimulate theirs. The result is that soon

The American baby appears to be more physically active and happily vocal, and more involved in the exploration of his body and of his environment than is the Japanese baby, who, in contrast, seems more subdued in all these respects. . . . The Japanese infant, on the other hand, is only greater in unhappy vocalization. (p. 247)

As Takeo Doi (1973) and others (see video "The Children," no date) point out, Japanese mothers are almost always with their infants, asleep or awake, and catering to their least wants. As a result, babies remain satisfied and passive. They have little need to

“demand” care or attention. Furthermore, Arai, Ishikawa and Toshima (cited in Caudill and Weinstein 1975) found after investigating 776 infants in the Tohoku region of Japan that when compared to American norms there were no differences in the first 16 weeks of development, but that from 4 to 36 months the norms widened, especially in regards to language, and that for Japanese infants with a developmental quotient between 90-119, “language aptitude (the weakest behavior) is 66.0 percent” (p. 263). Marilyn Goldberg (1989) even attributes a recent increase in autistic Japanese male babies to methods of maternal care:

Cultural factors such as the fact that babies are carried on mother’s backs thereby limiting face to face communication are being explored as one of the possible causes. Also the propensity for not displaying feelings, particularly by verbalization, is thought to be another possible causative factor. (p. 181)

If these customs do contribute to autism, then they may also result in less serious but more widespread and deeply rooted emotional problems for other Japanese young people.

Within the last ten years the practise of carrying babies on the back has almost completely died out, at least in urban Japan. Still, other practices of maternal care have deep roots within a culture. The nuclear “salaryman” family that has become so representative of modern Japan is actually a relatively recent phenomenon. In extreme cases, the “salaryman” husband is away from home most of the time (there is even a term for such absent fathers: *tanshinfunin*). In such cases, mother and children are left isolated in a tiny apartment with little outside human contact. With the recent increase in the number of working mothers, it is no longer unusual in Japan to see young children coming home from elementary school (in some cases, pre-school) to an empty apartment. In a recent tragedy, two preschool children were burned to death in Japan when their house caught on fire. The mother had gone to her part time job, and had locked them in

the house. In Japan baby-sitting is not an accepted custom and so it is not uncommon for Japanese mothers to lock small children in the house when they have to go out.

Foreign teachers often remark on the almost pathological intensity of the shyness of many Japanese students, who seem to fear "face to face communication," and often become stiff and mute when asked to speak in class. Some foreign teachers call this "shyness"; other less generous teachers call it "stubbornness." In fact, this tendency to inhibition may in some cases be a symptom of much deeper personal trauma. It may even be evidence of more widespread problems in socialization that are arising in modern Japanese society. Whatever its causes, this shyness is something that foreign teachers should approach carefully, and deal with in a professionally responsible manner.

William E. Cummings (1980) warns against assuming that studies of infant development can be used to predict later educational development because:

First, . . . there is enough variation in all of these practices to dispose young Japanese along a great variety of routes of personality development. Second, although there are different opinions on this issue, experiences that occur in the family are no more likely to determine personality than those that occur in other settings. (1980, p. 95)

Cummings is right to be skeptical about reading too much into the findings of research on maternal care. Nevertheless, where mother-child relationships are not balanced by sufficient "other settings," some children are likely to suffer poorly developed socialization. In this chapter though, I will not try to prove that Japanese *generally* internalize an inhibition to vocalization, but only to show that the possibility of such an inhibition may exist for significant numbers of our students. Perhaps the most I dare claim is that certain common stereotypes about Japanese character, such as that Japanese are poor at foreign languages, are shy to speak out, are not embarrassed by silences in conversation

or are suspicious of eloquence (Tasker 1987, p. 215), are consistent with these patterns of passivity, stemming from a lack of happy vocalization in infancy.

One other finding by Caudill and Weinstein that is relevant to this discussion is that whereas "occupational style of life" does not make a difference in the data in American culture (in this sense, American culture is more "homogeneous"), it does in Japanese culture: "In the Japanese independent business families the infant is awake more, and the caretaker is present more, and talks to, lulls, carries, and rocks the infant more than in the salaried families" (p. 264). In contrast, the mother in a modern salaried family seems "to have subtracted from traditional ways of care-taking rather than to have added anything new. If anything, the independent business mother in Japan is closer to the American mother in the extent of her direct involvement with her infant" (p. 264). Other observers note different work-determined environments of Japanese families (see Bremner, Gaskell & Galuszka 1997; Nishikawa 1996; Kondo 1990; Reischauer 1988 and Vogel 1975). An infant raised in a Japanese business family interacts with many people in an active and stimulating environment; an infant raised in a salaried family may be isolated in an apartment, relating, mostly passively, only with a silent mother. A variety of pathologies relate this too-close relationship of mother and children cut off from social interactions and confined small apartments. One phenomenon is the mother who turns against her eldest child, finding him or her *kawaikunai* [impossible to love], and pours all her love and attention on younger children. Japanese psychologists are still at a loss to fully understand this recently identified problem.

This cultural split along occupational styles is part of a deep cultural divide within Japan that may well extend its influence as far as the university level. It has often been observed that Japan really has two quite distinct economies with different structures and

interests (Bremner, Gasgell & Galuszka 1997; Wornoff 1982). The Japanese economy is sustained on the one hand by huge corporations, such as Toyota, Sony, Hitachi, that employ vast armies of commuting "salarymen." On the other hand, there is an extensive alternate economy of small family businesses in which the whole family live above or near the actual workplace. Universities are often split along the same "economy-line." Certain famous private universities and colleges (Doshisha, Keio, Waseda, Tezukayama) are the traditional destinations of business families, while salaried families can afford only the lower tuition of public institutions.

There may be a kernel of truth in the generalization that Japanese are not good at languages, as I discussed in Chapter Five, but this must be balanced against the fact that many Japanese do very well indeed at foreign languages. For example, Mouer and Sugimoto (1990) point out that there are over 10,000 Japanese businessmen in the United States with a working knowledge of English (p. 232). Nevertheless, customs of maternal care and family occupational backgrounds may handicap certain students' language ability. If there is such a handicap, it is neither impossible to overcome, nor does it necessarily affect all Japanese equally. But if as Ezra Vogel (1975) says, "The [Japanese] educational system is dominated by the spirit of the salaryman" (p. 267), then it may be dominated by those students who, from infancy, are the least likely to succeed at learning to speak a foreign language.

More than any "educational handicap" resulting from customs of maternal care, it is the educational culture of the salaryman that interferes with Japanese ability to learn to speak a foreign language. The effects of "salaryman culture" reach down even to pre-school institutions. In Japan, most children enter the educational system at about the age of three or four for several years of preschool. The preschools are quite varied when compared to institutions at the middle levels of the school system: some are academic

and have strict entrance exams; some emphasize play; some require uniforms; some make students go barefoot, or only in shorts, even in winter. However, even at this early stage of education, schools are strictly ranked and linked into the chain that leads to university. A recently popular television series was based on the educational adventures of a group of mothers intent on having their toddlers pass the entrance examination into an elementary school that was on the track to entrance into Keio University. Preschools, *yochien* [private] and *hoikuen* [public], can be seen as extensions of the elementary school system and directly involved in the competition by examination that characterizes upper-middle levels of Japanese education.

Already at the pre-school level, some schools are experimenting with teaching English (Bostwick 1995), and many children attend English conversation classes after school. But in most preschools and elementary schools English is not taught. Right now, debate continues about *Mombusho's* [the Ministry of Education] plans to introduce English education into the elementary school curriculum. It is generally believed by experts in language acquisition that young children remain more open to hearing and speaking a foreign language, and so it is best to begin instruction at an early age (Ellis 1994). In Japan, there is yet another reason arguing for English instruction to begin in elementary school. Preschool and elementary education appear to be a happy time for most Japanese children (Conduit 1996; Benjamin 1997; Stevenson & Stigler 1992). Generally, children are under little stress, and they have considerable freedom. Children are not burdened by a lot of rules. Their relationships with teachers are relatively warm, and attitudes to learning are eager. Classes are active, even noisy. It stands to reason that children would have a better chance to learn to speak English if the study were introduced

in this cheerful and open environment. Unfortunately, English is not introduced until the dark, troubled days of junior high school.

The fact that English is not usually part of preschool and elementary curricula does not mean that these levels of education have no influence on later foreign language learning success. Most scholars recognize that these early years are important in the socialization of children. Of particular interest are the means of social control that seem rooted in the preschool and elementary school experience (see Benjamin 1997; Conduit 1996, Lee 1996; Lewis 1996,1989; Peak 1989; Sano 1989; Shields 1989; Rohlen 1989). At least two habits that begin to be established in preschool may have negative consequences for later English studies. The first is the emphasis on routine. The second is the use of peer pressure as a means of controlling student behavior. Routine is itself a means of fostering peer pressure.

The usual preschool class consists of as many as forty students and one young, female teacher. The teacher is motherly in the Japanese sense that she seldom exercises authority. The teacher seldom threatens or punishes children, even when the children are violent or abusive. The teacher is ready with affection, but does not always supervise her children, some of whom may go off to play out of her view. Japanese preschools sometimes seem rather wild places, but they are not anarchic. The teachers institute subtle means of control, and this control usually begins with establishing routines. Rohlen (1989) calls routine "a crucial tool" applied by teachers to manage their students:

Order is shaped gradually by repeated practice of selected daily tasks (such as putting away shoes or cleaning the room) that socialize the children to high degrees of neatness and uniformity. (p. 21)

Beginning in preschool, neatness and uniformity become over-riding values of normal school life, and throughout elementary school "more and more of the day is under the jurisdiction of what can only be termed an intensively routinized order" (p. 21). More

importantly for our discussion, routines, once established, are maintained not by teacher authority, but by peer-group pressure.

The teachers encourage the children to control each other. Lois Peak (1989), Toshiyuki Sano (1989) and Catherine C. Lewis (1989, 1996) and Shin-ying Lee et. al. (1996) stress that peer pressure is an important means of social control even in preschools and daycares. For example, if a child neglects to put away her shoes, this breach of routine may be discussed by the whole group. A student that is criticized by other students for not following a routine can expect no consolation from the teacher. The teacher may well "punish" the child by removing her from the group for a while (see "The Children of the Tribe"). Gradually, first in preschool, then increasing in elementary school, peer pressure is used to control students, and to establish values of neatness and uniformity through "fixed patterns of daily order" (Rohlen 1989, p. 25).

Neatness and uniformity are essential in the competitive world of industry and trade. Neatness and uniformity are core values of Japan's salaried middle-class. These values contribute largely to the country's economic success. University graduates, long made accustomed to routine, and habituated to neatness and uniformity fit smoothly into the work-force. A former MITI official, Taichi Sakaiya (1988), claims that fostering "uniformity" has always been an important part of government educational policy:

Uniform levels of knowledge and skills would ensure efficiency in the mass production factory, while a uniform product culture would make for an excellent consumer market for the output of such factories. (p. 18)

The valuing of a uniform neatness engendered by educational practices may contribute to making Japan the "world's optimal industrial society," but it may not be a positive trait for students trying to learn something as unpredictable as a spoken language.

The routines of early education establish habits of neatness and uniformity that are policed by the student group, and so students become extremely self-conscious among

their peers. They are always concerned about how they look in the eyes of other students. Of course, young people everywhere are concerned about how they look in the eyes of their peers, but in Japan this sensitivity is sanctioned by adult cultural mores. Should students be criticized by the group because they dared to do something differently, they can expect no support from the authority of a teacher. Students who stand out in any way risk becoming ostracized or worse, victims of *ijime*, a brutal form of peer persecution. This system of control is compatible with an examination oriented education system, in which the competition is directed beyond the classroom groups. Compared to North American students, Japanese students spend much more of their life "in class" (Horvath 1986, p. 282), and once they begin attending *jukus*, they are almost full-time in various study "groups." In these learning groups *not standing out* is essential for harmonizing with other students. Study in Japanese schools is at the same time public and intensely private: that is to say that although it generally takes place in large groups, there is little study interaction among students--what they do is done silently in notebooks and on tests, away from sight of the other students. This encasement of the "private" study of individual students within a larger uniform group regulated by routine and rote is disastrous for anything as dramatic and immediate as learning a foreign language.

The success of Japanese students on international math tests is well known. When Patricia Horvath (1986) studied Japanese math classes, she was impressed by a number of things. One, as we noted earlier in this chapter, was a certain pride in a rather Spartan and "uncomfortable" classroom environment (p. 282). Another was the large class sizes of 45 students on average. Another was the fact that students spend so much of their time in class that "for them, life *is* school" (p. 282). She admires the students for their "study habits," and for their "discipline." She praises the "strong national curriculum" for

negating the effects of "different teachers" on class success (p. 283). In other words, she admires a disciplined, ordered and depersonalized classroom environment that seems to provide good results in mathematics. One thing that worries her, however, is that "Japanese teachers tend to be lecturers in class whether they are in math, English, or social science" (p. 284). She notes her belief that "good teaching involves good questions," and adds that "the number of questions from the teachers I watched were few." Instead, teachers "adhere religiously to the text and eliminate questions in favor of more topic coverage." She finds these "few absences to be regrettable." Some Japanese find these "few absences" a significant product of an education that aims solely at rote mastery of facts and formula needed for passing examinations (Hisama 1994). For the human sciences and especially language studies, in which "questioning" must be central, these "absences" are a catastrophe. Regrettably, much of Japanese education is characterized by just these absences.

Mathematics, English grammar, even history if limited to names and dates can be learned by lecture, practiced on paper, and tested with expectations of some uniformity in results. Students can achieve good results on tests without being thrown into visible competition with other members of the class. As they progress through the system, Japanese students get sorted into "levels of ability." Classrooms become more and more homogeneous according to the results of written tests. Real differences in ability become less visible as students progress through the system. Students "lose sight" of their individual differences in competency even as their lives are increasingly directed by an "invisible competition" for educational advantage. In such an environment, demonstrating an ability to speak English considerably better than other students would threaten to disrupt the harmony of the class group.

Conversational English is hardly predictable and not at all neat. The most routine greeting can evoke a number of replies. In a grade seven [first year of junior high] English test, my son answered wrongly the question, "Do you want to go to a movie?" He wrote, "Sure." The textbook answer, the only one acceptable, was "Yes, I do." No allowance is made in the curriculum for variety of response. Moreover, as most of us realize, spoken English often ignores rules of grammar. Incomplete sentences often suffice for native speakers. Three words written sound like one when spoken. When asked, "Would you like tea or coffee?", students invariably answer yes because they cannot recognize "tea or" as two words; they think the sentence is "Would you like (?) coffee?" On top of it all, intonation and context alter the meaning of words, and so does verbal irony. A spoken language is messy. It demands flexibility and a certain tolerance for chaos. These are not attributes promoted in Japanese schooling. In a system based on "the spirit of the salaryman," there is no place for the messy process of English conversation.

Besides being messy, speaking English allows students no privacy. It is a public exercise. Under the threatening scrutiny of peers, the student called upon to say something in English class faces a dilemma: a mistake may expose a weakness that will be ridiculed; while a correct response could provoke resentment or jealousy in other students. Either way, the student risks the disapproval of peers. Therefore, many students opt for the intentional error. I especially notice this technique applied to pronunciation. Students may intentionally distort a sentence to sound like Japanese-English ("I donto riku kohi," rather than "I don't like coffee") even though they are perfectly capable of correct pronunciation. They just feel more comfortable saying it incorrectly. In the closed and regulated world of Japanese middle schools, being too correct can be risky business.

When Japanese students begin to get foreign teachers, a clash of cultures occurs (see Liu 1998; Susser 1998; Court 1998; Duff & Uchida 1997; McCormack 1996; Nozaki 1993; Robb 1993; "Japan's schools" 1990; Kimura 1988; Campbell 1987). Foreign teachers tend to find routine shallow. When entering an English conversation class, a foreign teacher may encourage activity, variety, spontaneity, and unusual and interesting approaches. The teacher may, without realizing it, be alienating those students whose whole educational history has been based on predictable patterns. This approach also challenges the common Japanese belief that in the student-teacher relationship, the student is expected to assume a passive role, characterized by a respectful silence.

A Japanese mother who had lived in Canada and sent her son to a Canadian elementary school told me of her shock when her child said he needed to take something to school for "show and tell." To her, having a child take some personal object from home to talk about in school was educationally irresponsible for two reasons: one is that it violated the privacy of the home; the other is that having children talk in class is a waste of valuable educational time. Now, back in Japan, she suffers from a reverse culture shock. She feels that the general passivity of Japanese students denies them opportunities to express themselves. Some Japanese schools are experimenting with programmes that allow for class discussion, but these are still rare. Elementary schools allow children chances for discussion, but throughout high school, students have few opportunities to discuss issues or opinions in class. Their oral participation in class is not generally encouraged other than for short answers to specific questions. For the most part, this lack of student participation is the norm for university classes as well. Given that students have spent six or more years sitting silently in almost all their high school and university classes, is it any wonder that they feel confused and threatened when a foreign language teacher

suddenly expects them to give opinions and express ideas in class, and to do so in a foreign language?

The image of Japanese junior high school is dark. Over eighty percent of all instances of *ijime* [bullying] occur in junior high school (Shields 1989, p. 101). Instances of junior high related murder, mutilation and suicide constantly surface in the news. In a period of a few weeks early in 1998, one junior high school student in Osaka murdered his father, and another murdered his mother in study related arguments. In junior high school, the golden days of childhood come to an abrupt end, and adolescents clash, often brutally, with the expectations of society.

Japanese students must look forward to two great examination hurdles: first for high school and later for university entrance. The university entrance exams are more famous, but the high school exams are no less important because high schools are strictly ranked, and entrance to a good high school is a necessary step in preparing for the university entrance exams. Failure to enter an "academic" high school (as compared, say, to an "agricultural" high school) more or less puts one out of the running for a good university. The pressure of the entrance exams hits student hardest in the second year of junior high school. Those who cannot keep up must accept "second rate" status for the rest of their lives. Those who wish to succeed have no choice but to dive headlong into "Examination Hell."

Preparation for exams resembles military maneuvers. Until recently almost all junior high school boys could be seen wearing the black and shapeless uniforms adopted from the nineteenth-century Prussian army. In high school, the routines characteristic of elementary school are supplemented with countless, often picayune rules of dress and conduct (McGill 1988). Not only do some schools force boys to wear their hair cut shorter

than one centimetre, but some schools restrict the length of girl's socks, the use of hairpins and even the colour of underwear. Some girls with naturally brown hair have been forced to dye their hair black because the rules prohibit the dyeing of hair: a strange twist of reasoning has it that since it is generally believed that all Japanese have black hair, a girl with naturally brown hair *will be thought to have dyed it*, and, thus, be flouting the rule. Even dress and conduct after school hours is regulated by some schools.

Students on the academic track have very few out of school hours anyway. They go to school six days most weeks. Some attend special classes before regular classes begin. Almost all students will stay after school a few days a week for compulsory club activities. Most students go to *jukus* in the evening. Still others also take a variety of non-academic lessons, such as piano, abacus, and swimming (although these activities are often quit after elementary school so the student can concentrate on exam preparation). Many *juku* classes continue or are expanded to fill the "idle time" of holiday seasons. Life after entering junior high school becomes totally involved with school, and school increasingly focuses on examinations. Not all students are caught up in this study "hell," only the clever ones, the ones that one might ordinarily think had the ability to learn a foreign language. These are the students we are most likely to find in our university classes.

When I talk to Japanese about this period of their life, their overall memories are remarkably similar. First, if they enjoyed anything about school at all it was their clubs and friends. Their studies, they learned to accept as a bore. Secondly, they remember that they had no chance for discussion or debate, and regret this deprivation. Thirdly, they remember being tired; they became accustomed to being sleepy in class. (One popular dictum is that "more than four hours sleep a night means failure in the entrance exams.")

At this point in their lives, when besides the normal emotional and physical stresses of adolescence the students have to deal with the shock of entering junior high school, with all its rules, uniforms, violence and exam pressures, students begin their study of English. English is from the start associated with examinations. English, Mathematics and Japanese are the main subjects covered on exams. From the beginning, English is not something to be enjoyed and explored as a means of communicating with people of other cultures. English is rather a complex system of rules and symbols that must be memorized and manipulated according to strict pre-given patterns for the sake of passing written examinations. High school teachers have all gone through and survived the same regime of examinations. They have graduated from good universities, and "mastered" English grammar. Only a few, however, are able to speak English well, and seldom do they risk speaking English in front of their students. English is relegated to textbooks, blackboards and exam papers.

The high school teachers in Japan deserve both admiration and sympathy. For the most part, they are accomplished and dedicated professionals with the best interests of their students at heart. They recognize that for their students English for exams has more practical importance than English for communication. Nevertheless, the "high school English teacher who cannot speak English" is a kind of satirical stock character in Japan. My son's grade seven English teacher, for example, could speak English and demonstrated good pronunciation. He was, nevertheless, an object of humour among his students, who automatically assumed his English ability was poor even though they had no reliable way of judging. Some young high school teachers, especially those who have spent some time abroad, speak excellent English, but the curriculum allows them little leeway to make use of their verbal skills. Other instructors do not deserve blame for their inability to speak English. They have suffered the same teaching methods that they are

expected to perpetuate. Most of them recognize their own language limitations, and make the best of what they have to offer. A few of the oldest teachers learned English when it was still the language of "the enemy." Many younger teachers learned English before videos were easily available, and when there were as yet few "native speakers" in Japan to serve as models. Their focus on writing rather than speaking was dictated by the realities of the society of early post-war Japan. Therefore, even without the pressure of exams, high school English would probably still be grammar and translation oriented simply because there have never been enough teachers in Japan fluent at Western languages. Any Japanese with real skill at speaking a foreign language could find more lucrative positions in business or government. This is not to say that high school teachers are second rate. They are often first rate at what they are expected to do: prepare students to pass crucial examinations. If a high school teacher happens to be fluent in English, as some are, that is fine, but as far as high school English goes, it is irrelevant. The methods of teaching English at high school are governed by the logic of the written examination.

"Lip service" is paid to English for oral communication, especially with the recent concern for "internationalization." Many people complain that even after six years of high school English (and often another two to four at university), students still cannot speak the language. They tend to blame teachers, but the main obstacle is the examination system. For the teachers, who have been educated in that system, teaching for exams "is the only 'teaching method' they know" (Brannen 1989). Rather than undertake fundamental reform, the government is looking for a "quick fix." One solution is to "import" native speakers for the high schools.

The Ministry of Education presently hires over five thousand foreigners, mostly from the United States, Canada and the United Kingdom, to serve for up to three years as

teaching assistants in the Japan Exchange and Teaching Program (JET). They circulate among schools to give students international exposure and a chance to hear "real" English. Typically, these foreigners have little training or experience in teaching English. In the classroom, their role is often reduced to that of an objects of curiosity. It is a little like taking the "zoo" to the children. These assistants are seldom given the time necessary to build a relationship with the students. (The one at my son's school visited once or twice a semester). Moreover, their presence can be an embarrassment to Japanese teachers who feel inadequate in their own spoken English, or who are not quite sure what to do with these foreign novelties. Many of these young foreigners learn to dislike Japanese students, and some Japanese teachers come to resent these often outspoken and "undisciplined" foreign youths (Court 1997). For many involved in it, this programme is a negative cross-cultural experience, and one that contributes little or nothing to students' English ability. Despite many good intentions on both sides, at its best the system is merely an expensive entertainment that briefly relieves the pressure of the real purpose of high school English: passing examinations.

The Ministry continues to import these teaching assistants and the system has improved over the years. In the meantime, the large number of Japanese student returnees, *kikokushijo*, are also internationalizing schools with their presence. Each year over 10,000 students return to Japanese schools after living in foreign countries. Many of them can speak English or another foreign language fluently. Unfortunately, the education system is too rigid to make much use of this pool of Japanese "native speakers" of foreign languages (see Bailey 1991, 1989a; Edwards 1989; Clark 1987; Dhomoto 1987; Hani 1983). One bureaucratic reaction has been to segregate these students into special schools or programmes. Other returnees are pounded back into a more uniform Japanese

mold by their peers and by their teachers. Many of them become victims of *ijime*.

Sometimes the other students call this "stripping off America" (Dhomoto 1987, p. 35).

Rather than feel guilt, at least some students who indulge in this persecution think they are doing the returnees a favour by forcing them to return to "proper" Japanese patterns of behavior. There may be a perverse truth in this, for as Buruma (1984) asserts, in Japan "not conforming to the expected pattern means essentially that one does not exist at all" (p. 100). Stripping off this "false" America may be an attempt to restore the returnees to a "true" Japanese identity.

However, there are other ways of understanding this discomfort with returnees. First, not only students, but also many adults feel that it is unnatural for a Japanese to speak a foreign language well, and so they are uncomfortable in the presence of those who do. Secondly, students are well aware that they are in competition to enter university. One of the core exam subjects is English. A returnee seems to have acquired an unfair advantage in this contest. Thirdly, and less obvious, the returnee threatens to shatter high school fantasies. Many high school students escape the pressures of their competitive society by creating a fantasized American world complete with their own Japanized English vocabulary. Popular songs invariably include English lyrics. Youth sub-cultures have been built around images of American greasers, James Dean, bobby-sockers, surfers, skate-boarders or break dancers. Patrick Smith (1997b) believes these sub-cultures represent "the abandonment of identity: Let us celebrate the figures and icons of our postwar instructors, let us even pretend to a nostalgia for them, for our own have been discredited" (p. 296). In a novel about life in Kyoto, Pico Iyer (1991) describes a similar predicament for his heroine:

Returning to her small hometown, moreover, Sumi had found herself shunned by all her high school friends, not only because she had made it to the land of which they only dreamed, but also--and especially--because she presented it

back to them now as some thing more complex than a beach poster. They could not forgive her, so it seemed, for importing some reality. (p. 331)

Many young Japanese seem to long for New York or California. Theirs is a shared fantasy world in which young Japanese imitate ideal images of American youth. How embarrassing it must be for them to see their fantasies mocked by the "real thing": a Japanese who speaks English, and who has "made-in-America" attitudes, manners and fashions.

Japanese students are sorted first into high schools, then into universities as mechanically as eggs are sorted into small, medium and large. To some extent private schools offer alternative choices in education, but for most young Japanese, high school is a place where they learn to conform to rules, to accept uniformity, and to spend long hours passively listening to instructions, reading textbooks, memorizing facts, and solving problems. Personality is directly related to success. Students who are active, eager, outspoken, inquisitive, imaginative and unreserved are at a definite disadvantage. Although class discussion occurs in elementary schools, it is almost completely absent from high schools. Listening becomes more important than speaking, sitting passively more important than participating. Translating is more important than conversing. In this environment, according to one high school English teacher (Nakajima 1989), not only does the ability to speak English suffer, but so does the ability to speak Japanese:

Before we can teach student to speak exactly, we must face the fact that among young people today, especially boys, there are those who are unable to carry on a simple conversation. (my translation)

This teacher finds that boys, especially, have trouble conversing, and he complains that the conversation of high school girls consists primarily of the constant repetition of three interjections: "you're kidding [*uso*]," "really [*honto*]," and "yuk [*yada*]." While it is granted that not only in Japan do adults criticize the limited conversational ability of youth, that

does not lessen the significance of Nakajima's opinions. Other Japanese have noticed a huge generation gap opening in Japan of which only one aspect is language (Chikushi 1986). Nakajima's observations allow us to ask: How can young people learn to speak a foreign language when they cannot speak their own? How can students participate in English conversations when their concept of conversation is incomplete? Buruma (1984) believes that "while in the West a person is supposed to have opinions, which he or she voices in public, in Japan, opinions, if held at all, are kept to oneself or carefully blended with those held by others" (p. 221). If ideas and opinions are not discussed in high schools, or in most other places in Japanese society, how can we expect them to be easily discussed in English conversation classes at university?

The boys have more trouble conversing than the girls. In university, fewer boys study English and do well at it than do girls. Patrick Smith (1997b) remarks that in Heian times "women were innovators, men prisoners of the orthodoxy." He goes on to suggest that

There is a parallel today. Women travel abroad more than men. They experiment in their careers more frequently. They are more curious and seem psychologically freer than men--more agile in their lives, more flexible, imaginative, and adventurous. (p. 162)

Is it not possible that these facts have something to do with the greater pressure Japan's highly competitive educational system puts on boys? The boys may well be more "socially" damaged by their education. This personality gender gap can only narrow if women move in from the margins of economic life. It will not bode well for the future of Japan if the boys, "who can never remove their masks" (Smith 1997b, p. 163), are left with all the responsibility for making Japanese society international and for communicating with the world, and remain the majority of tomorrow's English teachers and professors.

The six years of high school English devoted to memorizing rules and

vocabulary is hardly good preparation for internationalization or inter-cultural communication. Criticizing American methods of teaching French, E. T. Hall (1981a) says,

people who depend on rules and authorities in order to act are slow to experience the reality of another system. Projecting what they have been told in the past, they fit the world into their own model. (p. 130)

For many years, I was involved with Japanese students studying English in Canada.

Behind many of the cultural conflicts I witnessed was a common cause: the reality of a student's experience in Canada did not match the ideal they arrived here with, and so they felt cheated. Because Canada is not what they expected, Canada must be wrong. We sometimes see a similar reaction when students take their first class with a foreign instructor: "that is not how we did it in high school, and so this cannot be a good teacher." The dependence on rules, routines and authorities and the habit of silence that is acquired in high school makes it difficult for student to participate fully in university English classes. They are often discouraged to find that all they learned in six years of high school English has no apparent relationship with the spoken language.

High school may be worse than useless for learning to speak English. Students accustomed only to seeing English on paper try to "visualize" the sounds they hear, but they cannot match them with words and phrases they have learned because they are, in effect, "listening with their eyes." Also, because they are used to translating one word at a time, they focus their attention only on isolated parts of what is said, shutting out the speaker and neglecting the overall context. The "good" student is especially frustrated because what worked in high school fails when faced with a native-speaker instructor. The student finds himself back in square one. Gregory Clark (1987) says of the way English is taught in high school,

It has a negative value. For the most part it guarantees that its victims will never be able to speak or listen to English naturally. It would be much better of (sic) most Japanese students did not learn a word of English in school rather

than be subjected to the mental damage that the present system creates. (p. 4)

Japanese students who would learn to speak foreign languages are disadvantaged by a high school methodology that stresses memorizing vocabulary and grammar rules for the purpose of written translation and tests.

As if the damage done by high school language teaching methodology were not bad enough, Mouer and Sugimoto (1990) point out that the understanding of "culture" as it is taught in many schools also serves to render speaking foreign languages more difficult. Some people still believe that the cultural divide between "the East" and "the West" is so wide that the only way to learn English is to learn "to think like an American." This accounts for an awkward "casualness" and "aggressiveness" among some eager English learners who are in fact acting out a stereotypical version of American conduct in the hopes that it will make their English seem more natural. So confident are these students that "this is the way to do it," that they never realize how "off-putting" and offensive their parody is to native-speakers. Mouer and Sugimoto (1990) go so far as to speculate:

It would be interesting to study whether language ability upon leaving Japan is a predictor of the success which Japanese foreign students and businessmen have in integrating into societies overseas. In fact, for the Japanese whose study of English was linked to the cultural content approach, it may be that the reverse is the case. Their ability to communicate in English may sometimes be offset by the belief that they are so different that anything more than the most formal interaction would be impossible. In other words, the most capable communicators may be those who go abroad with little else than an open mind ready to appreciate both similarities and differences. (p. 400)

I tend to agree with them, and offer as an example the case of a Japanese professor who came to Canada for six months, and brought his wife for her first trip abroad. He was a graduate of *Todai*, and while in Canada he gave a formal lecture on differences between Japanese and Western philosophical thought in which he discussed the works of Jacques Derrida, which he had read in English. Outside of the lecture hall, however, he was stiff

and helpless; he could not carry a conversation in English. In contrast, his wife, who had only graduated from a *tankidaigaku* [Junior College], soon made friends with her Canadian neighbours, and chatted with everybody in a serviceable if imperfect English. When they went shopping, he could not even ask a clerk where the razor blades were; she had to ask for him. Surely his education deserves much of the blame and the credit for his "English ability." As for his wife--well, to borrow lyrics from Paul Simon, "it seems her education hasn't hurt her none." I fear that the education of many Japanese students has hurt their ability to learn English a great deal indeed. Before freshmen English students can really start to learn to speak English, they first have to unlearn the attitudes and habits to language and culture that they acquired in high school. This task is not an easy one.

Foreign teachers of English in Japanese universities often express frustration at the poor progress their students make in learning to speak English. Some place the blame on the system of university education that they believe robs both teachers and students of motivation to study seriously (see Cutts 1997; Kawanari 1993; Anderson 1993; Kelly 1993; Kimura 1988; Armstrong 1987). However, after looking at the educational background of our students, we can see that the problem goes much deeper. Many of our students really want to learn English, but they do not know where to begin. They have supposedly been studying the language for six years, and when they enter university some find it difficult even to say "Good morning." Students sometimes blame themselves or their high school teachers. They feel inadequate before the task of language learning. At the same time, they can be confused by their foreign teachers. They are not used to foreign methods, and do not always understand the purpose of classroom activities, which can strike them as "silly." They are uneasy with the constant probing of their feeling and opinions. They look for recognizable routines, but find themselves lost in a muddy swamp of sound. The

teacher often affects an easy manner, but can suddenly become very “demanding” and visibly irritated. Both the casual manners and the show of emotion can prove shocking to students. These students may retreat deeper into their “private” space. Other students who want to speak English do not know what to talk about. They lack the tradition of conversation that in the West goes back to Dr. Johnson or even Socrates. If they do find something to say, they may be wary of speaking in front of their peers. They may feel vulnerable when singled out to answer in class. Fearing ridicule, they want to discuss and verify each word with classmates before uttering a simple sentence in English. Even then their response may be calculated to walk that narrow line between the glaringly mistaken and the too smoothly correct, either of which extreme could attract unwanted attention.

By the time many Japanese students enter university, their ability to learn to speak English has been impaired. If university English teachers examine their students’ language problems within the wider cultural context, and consider how high school, elementary and preschool education contribute to these problems, they may discover effective solutions. After all, many Japanese do learn to speak English well. Improving the general effectiveness of university English-language education will not be simple. It is not just a matter of more class hours, better equipment, more homework, and better textbooks. In fact, to be of more help, teachers may have to change some of their own culturally prescribed educational values and teaching methodologies. Recently, there is more awareness of the need for teachers to change themselves, and to resist the tendency to “other” their students by judging them by North American cultural standards (Susser 1998), and even to recognize the cultural hegemony implied in their often ethnocentric teaching methodologies (Liu 1998).

As teachers of English, one of our main tasks is to gain the trust of our students. Until we do, we may have to sacrifice gains in the “spoken” part of our English

Conversation classes while we take time to show students what *we mean* by “conversation” and “learning.” Students must overcome an identity that has been imposed upon them by their formal education. This identity perceives the spoken language as a serious embarrassment. Until they are no longer shocked by the sound of their own voices in the classroom, until they gain confidence in class, they should be allowed some small routines and familiar patterns of study. Only after establishing a trusting relationship with our students should we make strict demands upon them to “speak out” in English. Then we must do more than teach English. We must help students to rethink their concepts of language study and to remold their attitudes to speech. In other words, we foreign language teachers can assist our Japanese students in their creation of new educational identities. In turn, we may find our own identities transforming as well.

Chapter Eight

Autobiographical Interlude: Intimations of Diversity

Things are because we see them, and what we see, and how we see it, depends on the Arts that have influenced us. To look at a thing is very different from seeing a thing.

Oscar Wilde, "The Decay of Lying." (1980, p. 47)

When I returned to Nara after six months absence for my second visit, I came by way of Tokyo where I stopped over for three days. In Tokyo, I was shocked at how much Japan had changed. The fashions were darker, the people "cooler," the subways gloomier, and the pace of life faster but stiffer. Then I took the Shinkansen to Kansai. As soon as I got off the train in Kyoto, I felt a difference. People were laughing. Fashions were flamboyant: young women wore soft pastels or bright colours, and a few indulged in an outlandish "char women" fashion; young men with red wavy hair wore baggy purple pants and little pink slippers. The whole atmosphere of Kansai was just as sprightly and colourful as I remembered it. Tokyo did not represent "Japan" after all. This was my first insight into the depth of different regional cultures in Japan.

The rivalry between Kansai [the area around Osaka, including Nara, Kyoto and Kobe] and Kanto [around Tokyo] is hundreds of years old. Ancient cultural differences have been aggravated by a political competition (symbolically, for several hundred years until the modern era [Meiji] the Emperor lived in Kansai and the Shogun lived in Kanto). The result has been a self-conscious divergence of identities. These identities are reflected in differences in dialect, fashion, manners, diet and even the way people spend their time and money. It is generally believed that Kyoto people spend extravagantly on fashions, and Osaka people splurge on good food, while Tokyo people are more likely to

be reserved in their spending. I later learned to identify other regional cultural types: Nigata people are said to be paler complexioned, perhaps due to the closeness to Russia; the "mountain" people of Nagano are especially self-reliant (see Bowen 1984); Nagoya people, caught between the power of Kansai and the cultural hegemony of Kanto, are egalitarian but conservative (almost all of the cars there are white, "for resale value"). Nagoya people can also be sometimes *hade* [showy], spending lavishly on weddings; and Kagoshima people, isolated as enemies of the Tokugawa shogunate for centuries, are independent and innovative. Regional rivalries can be severe. I knew a woman from Kagoshima who refused to utter a word in public when she toured Aizu Wakamatsu because she feared her accent would "give her away." The soldiers from Kagoshima had invaded Aizu with bloody force in the civil war leading up to the Meiji Restoration over a hundred years earlier. As far as she was concerned, Aizu Wakamatsu was still "enemy territory."

Kyoto people have a firmly entrenched regional identity. People from other regions of Japan complain about how "private" people are in Kyoto. Even Kyoto people will agree. A Kyoto man told me that he had just visited his best friend's house. This was, for him, a noteworthy event because he had known his friend for over twenty years, and this was the first visit to his home. A Japanese lady who had spent a long time in Canada had trouble making friends when she moved to Kyoto, and complained that her neighbours were punishing [*ijimerarete iru*] her for her long experience abroad and her ability to speak English. A student from Tokyo complained, "These Kansai people say we Tokyo people are "cold," but I've lived here for two years, and I have not even made one friend." One of the first things students who come to Kyoto from other regions do is learn to imitate the distinctive Kyoto dialect, saying, for example, *wakarahen* [I don't know] rather than the

standard *wakarimasen*. The people of Kyoto are proud of their differences from other Japanese, especially those “upstarts” in Kanto. Kyoto people have their own *kosei* [individual character]: they consider themselves artistic, intensely private and stubborn, as demonstrated by a long history of disdain for Tokyo’s bureaucratic and military authority (see Berry 1994). The above stereotypes of Kyoto people are familiar, I think, to most Japanese.

At “N” College, my students were for the most part from wealthy families. Their parents could afford to send them to an expensive private college, and then for a five-months study-trip to Canada. At first, my students seemed to me culturally, socially and racially homogeneous, but over time I came to see this as a carefully fostered illusion. In the years I worked at “N” College, I found many clues to the “invisible” diversity of Japan. There was the girl who hugged her passport shyly as we passed over the border into the United States from Canada because she did not want the other students to see that she was “Korean.” (Later, I found that she was one of the “lucky ones”: some “North Koreans” could not get passports, and so could not travel outside Japan). Another girl confided to me that she was taking “Japanese lessons” because she spoke a northern dialect that made her an object of ridicule in the Kansai region. A young woman from Kyoto had a Chinese grandmother and this made her “Chinese” in the eyes of many of her school friends. The importance of some of these clues I only understood years later. When an unpopular foreign instructor married a Japanese girl, I was told confidentially by one of his enemies that his wife’s family, though wealthy, were “in the meat packing business.” I did not understand at the time that this implied that she was probably a *hisabetsu burakumin* [outcast], and that the unpopular foreigner was “getting what he deserved.”

As my experience of Japan broadened, I noted more and more examples of disguised difference. For example, Naoko* never took her right hand out of her pocket. She loved rock music and was one of the most fashionable girls among her group in Canada--always smartly attired in a suit, or a dress. She preferred something with a jacket, but whatever she wore had to have a pocket for her hand. I taught her and went on field-trips and tours with her for five months. I never once saw her with her right hand out of her pocket. I believe she hid some deformity with a remarkable forbearance.

In Japan, after her face, a woman's hands are perhaps the most public part of her body, and any deformity, visible or invisible, can ruin her chances of a good marriage. Another student always wrote and ate with her right hand, but golfed and batted baseballs left-handed. She explained that she was really left-handed, but that such a "difference" was not acceptable in a young woman, or at least people of her mother's generation thought so. From early childhood, her mother had forced her to use her right hand to eat, and her teachers had cooperated by encouraging her to use her right hand to write. In this way, they saved her from a conspicuousness that might embarrass her future husband.

Some mysteries remain from my associations with those young ladies. Fumiko* was a most beautiful girl, and also very intelligent. Rich, beautiful, and intelligent--"perfect," I thought. One day I found her crying, and being consoled by her friends. I asked her why, and she said, "I will never be able to marry." She would explain no further. Twenty years ago, reasons for a young lady being unlikely to marry well in Japan could still vary greatly, from being an outcast or suffering some deformity to being born in an "unlucky year."

Even minor scars can be a heavy liability in a woman's life. When my son fell down as an infant and split open his brow, it took six stitches to heal the wound. It left a not very salient scar. For months afterwards, Japanese friends were telling us, almost joyfully,

“how lucky he isn’t a girl.” In terms of Japanese society, they were right. After all, one can’t keep her head in a pocket. In Japan, deformity is a kind of pollution best left in dark places. Physical flaws are especially problematic for unmarried women.

Later, I found that young men hid differences as well. One kind of difference was racial. Several students I have known were “set apart” because they had at least one parent who was “Korean” or “Chinese.” One young fellow “stood out” because his mother was black. She was not a black American, but a black Japanese: she spoke no word of English, and knew no other home but Japan. Another of my male students got into trouble for getting a tattoo on his arm. The Japanese authorities of the school could not tolerate this tattoo because in Japan tattoos are immediately associated with criminal gangs, *yakuza*. They insisted that he have it removed or leave the school. In the midst of a rather heated debate on this ultimatum in the principals office, the young man did something I thought rather “un-Japanese.” He took off his shirt to display his white chest and tattoo defiantly. He declared, “I know what you’re doing. I’m used to this kind of persecution. It is because my grandfather is Russian that you want me out.” Until then, I had never realized his “difference,” but clearly it was something that had caused him difficulties in the past.

Once a Canadian friend brought up in small-town Ontario told me that until about fourteen he had never really “taken notice” of the fact that his parents were of different races. Even then, the “discovery” was only accidental: when he noticed another inter-racial couple, he found himself taking a second look. Until then, no one had made him feel different because his mother was of a racial minority. Such a situation is inconceivable in Japan. Japanese children of inter-racial families must learn to deal with their “differences” from early childhood, and generally hide them if they can.

Not all of the clues to difference came from my own students. Behind Ninnaji Temple in northwestern Kyoto is a school for the deaf. I used to go jogging that unfrequented way when I lived in Omuro. The school has a newish building with wide grounds. I often saw groups of students walking home from school "signing." But the school is discreetly hidden away behind the temple walls at the foot of Kinugasa mountain. Perhaps I read too much into this isolated location, but until very recently in Japan, handicaps of any kind have generally been treated as shameful, and hidden away. Recently, a home for senior citizens was destroyed in a mud slide. It, too, had been built in a remote area at the foot of the mountain, despite warnings that the location was unsafe. In Japan's rapidly greying society, the aged, too, are hidden away.

Dowa mondai: Discovering Invisible Minorities in Japan

During my first months in Japan, a student from "N" College offered to show me around her hometown of Kyoto. I remember walking down a back street on a sunny afternoon, looking for the way to Yasaka Shrine. My guide laughed and chatted carelessly until we came to a certain street. There she stopped short and looked puzzled. The way to Yasaka Shrine lay just beyond a block of buildings across the road, but we could not go that way. When I asked her why, she was embarrassed for a reply, and simply insisted that it was impossible to go that way. As there seemed no obstacle to me (the other side of the street seemed just like the side we were on) I pressed the point. My guide showed only the slightest trace of anger, or perhaps confusion. She explained that her grandmother had always warned her never to cross that street or enter that district of buildings. Why? She could not (or would not) explain. So we took the long way around.

Only years later did I learn that that street marked the entry to a *hisabetsu burakumin* district, a district of "racial outcasts," one of the invisible races of Japan.

Japanese are rift by "invisible" differences (see Morris-Suzuki 1998, 1996; Suzuki & Oiwa 1996; Kohei 1996; Pearson 1996; Denoon 1996; Kayano 1994; Tanaka 1993; Seidensticker 1983; Mitchel 1983; Hane 1982). It takes time and attention to become aware of these differences. Some foreigners never do. Neither do some Japanese.

Many Japanese are hiding "shameful" differences. As we saw above, some have physical or mental handicaps. Some have families "deformed" by death or divorce (Yamashita 1986). Still others are *inaka no mono* [country bumpkins] and speak humiliating dialects (Shibata 1995). Moreover, as I explain in Chapter Eleven, peculiar Japanese concepts of "race" mean that Japan hosts a variety of invisible racial minorities, not only "alien" groups like "Chinese or Korean" Japanese, but also indigenous groups such as Okinawan, Ainu and Burakumin.

Every year in Kyoto, my son's elementary school PTA offered an educational lecture for parents. Often the talks dealt with "discrimination." Since most parents were inclined to stay away, one of the responsibilities of the PTA officials was to coerce enough parents to come to make an audience of at least a half a dozen listeners. The parents complained secretly that they were tired of hearing about *dowa mondai* (*dowa* is the term for *hisabetsu burakumin* most often used in Kyoto). One informant confided that he "hated" Koreans and *burakumin*. For him, this wasn't prejudice; it was just common sense. One woman told me a story about her sister's car being crushed in an accident with a garbage truck. (Garbage collecting is one of the "dirty" jobs usually done by *hisabetsu burakumin*). The sister spent six months in the hospital, but the driver of the truck never

once visited her to offer an apology (a serious affront by Japanese standards). The woman told me,

But that's the way *they* are; they're different. They are so spoiled. The government is always giving them money. Then they just drink it away--no sense of responsibility. My sister never got any money out of that guy because he just disappeared. Nobody would tell us where he was. They stick together that way. They said they didn't know where he was. Can you believe that?

I found these words eerily familiar. I had often heard similar complaints about Native Peoples or other minorities in Canada. It was a shock to hear Japanese talking about other Japanese in this discriminatory way. Japanese were apparently bitterly conscious of differences among themselves that I could not see. The *hisabetsu burakumin* garbage truck driver, briefly discernible in conflict with a "normal Japanese," vanished back into the shadows of society. From nothing back to nothing. In this woman's story, I heard the voice of racism everywhere. "No," some Japanese insist, "we are not prejudiced--but those people are, well, *different*."

During my first visit to Japan, I got lost in Osaka. I decided to explore anyway, operating on my belief that "you never really know a town until you've been lost in it." Until then, I had only seen the "normal" Osaka of the shopping districts of Umeda or Namba, and the polite communities of my rather well-off students. Getting lost that day, I came to know "another" Osaka. I could hardly recognize that area as "Japan." In a park, men lay drunk on benches or sitting and arguing under trees surrounded by empty sake bottles. They were poor and ragged. Their hair was often long and matted. They were unshaven. The streets surrounding the park were likewise dirty and littered. There were bars and porno movie houses, and slatternly women squatting in doorways. The atmosphere was charged: I heard people argue, I saw blows, I saw people running in the streets.

What shocked me more was my own sudden visibility. I had become used to being purposely ignored, or merely glanced at furtively by curious passersby. In "Japan," people pretend not to notice me. In this place, I found no such pretense. Among the truly invisible, I lost my artificial invisibility. I was openly stared at. This was not Japan! When I returned to the station to flee this "under-world," I was accosted by a grizzled drunk who stood on his toes to look me in the eye. He spit out a tirade in a dialect that I did not understand. And yet I *did* understand. It wasn't just the constant repetition of "Hiroshima" that let me know that I was hated, and that I was blamed somehow for his pain and all the pain that lay so open in that district.

Experience taught me that there are in Japan various marginal communities: *hisabetsu burakumin* communities, Korean communities, communities of day-labourers or of the "night workers" of entertainment districts. Study has taught me that in Japan many other such minority communities face discrimination. I have never been taken to see any of these communities. They remain more or less invisible, not just to most foreigners but even to many "normal" Japanese. These are areas of darkness. Like the empty spaces Joseph Conrad (1988) leaves on Marlow's map of Africa, they are a heart of darkness in Japan that many Japanese would prefer to remain unseen.

Part Three:

Japanese Education and Cultural Ideologies

Chapter Nine

Educational Myth and the Contest for National Identity

Learning is for the cultivation of one's own self; it is not for the good of others.

Fukuzawa Yukichi, "Nakatsu School Announcement." (1985, p. 58)

The universities have become to a great extent the handmaidens of the corporatist system.

John Ralston Saul, The Unconscious Civilization. (1995, p. 67)

Many academics who write about the problems of North American education can not resist the temptation to make comparisons with Japan (for example, Lasch 1995; Feinberg 1993; Stevenson & Stigler 1992; Hirsch 1987; White 1987; Duke 1986). Likewise in Japan, critics of Japanese education compare their institutions with those of America (for example, Hisama 1994; Abe 1992; Horio 1988; Kimura 1988; Yamaguchi 1984; Nagai 1971). We are, it seems, ready to find what we lack in another country's educational system. Needless to say, views from afar often overlook the true complexity of another nation's system of mass education. They also tend to assume that "education" means the same thing in quite different national cultures. Is what Americans mean by "education" really what Japanese mean by "*kyoiku*"? Aside from the obvious fact that the two words are in different languages, the concepts have different histories, traditions, and social functions. Each word takes the bulk of its meaning from the context of its own national culture. But even within the national culture, "education/*kyoiku*" is significantly diverse. This is why we pay regards to "educational backgrounds" or curriculum vitae.

Moreover, "education/*kyoiku*" varies according to institution. That is to say, education does not mean the same thing at preschool that it does at graduate school. Like so much else that goes on in culture, in education what people seem to be doing, or even believe they are doing, may not explain the full meaning or motives of the doing. Efforts to create equal opportunity may in fact be laying the foundations for new elites. In the fight against racism, new concepts of "race" evolve. Reforms to promote internationalization may in fact reflect new aggressive forms of nationalism. Educational movements are often difficult enough to understand in one's own country. Certainly, we should be cautious when trying to understand the educational culture of another country. North Americans and Japanese are looking at each other's educational systems. Some admire what they see, others fear it. All are advocating reforms in their own systems based upon this admiration or fear. However, any educational reform based upon comparisons with another country's institutions must give due attention to the complexity and diversity of education in a national context.

Talking about any kind of culture is often a process of reifying preconceptions and stereotypes. This is particularly true when we are talking about national cultures like Japan, Canada or the United States. In the case of Japan, this tendency is amplified by the general assumption that the culture is uniquely homogeneous and group-centred (Fukuyama 1992; Reischauer 1988; Nakane 1970). Discussion of Japanese education often begins with the assumption that there is one standard educational pattern true for the entire nation. Always the focus of attention is on the general rule. To some extent, this cannot be helped, for as Morris-Suzuki (1998) points out, "In order to say anything at all it is necessary to generalize" (p. 3). Nevertheless, when it comes to the comparison of educational systems, seldom is effort made to understand the small foreshadowing

exceptions or the subtle nuances of non-conforming motions in the constant shift and flow of influences between culture and education. The more we talk about Japanese or American culture, the more we tend to reinforce established definitions and boundaries. In so doing, our desire to understand leads us further and further away from the fluid reality of the everyday life-world.

If we start with the idea that there is something fundamentally misleading in cultural stereotypes, whether they be of Japan, America, Canada or any other country, we are immediately handicapped in any discussion of that culture. For example, as soon as we mention the word "Japan," we acknowledge the existence of the "thing." But as Benedict Andersen (1991) and E. J. Hobsbawm (1992) have shown, any national "thing" is at best "an imagined community." At worst, "the nation" is a fossilized ideal that has little connection with any living human communities, not even with those of the people who claim belonging. Yet such is the power of this imagined thing, that the mere mention of the word "Japan" immediately conjures up in the minds of most of us a vast array of facts, beliefs, stereotypes and assumptions. On the basis of this "knowledge," we discuss Japanese culture, confident that it is a definable thing. Our minds are already full of a Japan that we have culled from a variety of sources and filtered through our own cultural lenses. The fact that so many of us share the same or similar image reinforces our confidence in its validity. If for some reason we discover that an aspect of this image is wrong, we simply remove it and replace it with a "correct version," without losing confidence in the overall validity of our total image of Japan. We replace certain bricks, but the overall structure of our image remains the same, awaiting, perhaps, future additions.

Be that as it may, national cultures need not be thought of as nouns that are fixed and essential things. We might do better to think of them as verbs--that is, as waves and

movements in the process of perpetual becoming. The becoming of "Japan" is a historical process of multitudinous efforts to define, criticize, deconstruct, recreate and redefine an imagined community, and this is a process participated in by people within and without the proposed boundaries of that community (see Morris-Suzuki 1998; Vlastos 1998a; Garon 1997; Bernstein 1997; Smith; 1997). This process is an educational activity. As Ikuo Amano (1990) says of modern Japan, "It is no exaggeration to say that the social structure of the country following the Meiji Restoration was molded by the education system" (p. xv). Examining the concepts that bind social institutions within our national identities helps us to understand cultures as motions through time--floating, shifting clouds of belief that engulf and permeate us. We come to see culture as something both inherent to us, and yet separate from us. This split vision, perhaps something akin to what literary critic Northrop Frye (1991) calls a "double vision," challenges our belief in the substantiality of national identity. We see that Canadian or Japanese or American is not so much something we are as it is something we do, either willingly or through coercion. We belong to our culture more or less in the degree that we conform to prescribed beliefs, values and codes of behavior learned through family, literature, myth and schooling. In other words, cultural belonging is a process of trying to make the raw reality of individual experience conform to a shared, idealized fiction. Facilitating this culture-conforming process is one of the responsibilities of education.

In any country, national authorities create and take advantage of culture and cultural myths in an effort to direct education. In Japan, too, bureaucrats are placed well to manipulate the curriculum that determines the doing of Japanese culture. The fact that the bureaucrats have such influence should not lead us to assume, as does John Ralston Saul (1995), that Japan is the "perfect corporative state" (p. 90). Tetsuo Najita (1976), Michio Nagai (1983), Teruhisa Horio (1988) and others (Mitchel 1983; Koschmann 1978)

have well documented the tradition of anti-bureaucratic resistance in Japan. Nevertheless, to be Japanese means to be educated into Japaneseness. Schools are not the only institutions involved in this effort. The media, the military, boy scouts, prisons, unions, business enterprises all have intentional and unintentional educational functions. Most social institutions do. But schools have, along with the family, the most direct role in teaching children into a culture. Schools and cultures are caught in a hermeneutic circle of reciprocal creations: schools make cultures; cultures make schools.

Not only do we try to make our schools serve our individual understandings or our own national culture, but often we advocate reforms based upon our understanding of foreign cultures. Walter Feinberg (1993) shows how Americans hold up Japan as either a model for or a challenge to the American educational system. Feinberg opposes "cultural conservatives" like Allan Bloom (1987) and E. D. Hirsch, Jr. (1987) who argue for a disciplined national curriculum based on a canon of shared knowledge essential to an "American" identity. Feinberg promotes instead a "progressive" system that encourages diversity and self-fulfillment. In this North American debate between conservatives and progressives, stereotypical ideas of Japanese education are used in two ways. On the one hand, conservatives point to superior test results of Japanese in math, science and reading, and claim that if Americans do not learn to compete in education, they will lose out in the worldwide economic struggle. On the other hand, progressives claim that young Japanese are victims of regimentation and rote learning that rob them of imagination and make them into factory fodder. One side sees Japan's education as an efficient engine of economic domination; the other sees it as a kind of tribal initiation ritual (see NFB video Children of the Tribe) that inculcates "Asian values" incompatible with liberal democratic values (Fukuyama 1993).

To get some idea about how this debate is presented in the modern media, we can look at a special issue of MacLean's magazine (1994) that examines the crisis in education in North America, and particularly in Canada. In this extensive article, conservative reformers point out that "Asian students outperform their North American counterparts, at least in math and reading" (p. 53), while progressive reformers counter that schools should instill "a broad set of civic virtues" and that even a country like Yugoslavia with a "messed up democracy," can turn out top-notch mathematicians (p. 53). Moreover, the "progressives" claim that Canadians do not do well on tests because, in contrast to Asians, their educational philosophy is "anti-testing" (p. 46). Unlike Asians, they say, North Americans are trying to move away from "a production-line approach to education" (p. 47), and towards processing "vast amounts of information that no student could ever hope to memorize" (p. 47). A half-page photograph of well-groomed Japanese elementary students sitting straight in rows and pouring over math textbooks has the caption: "Tokyo students: 'Confucian beliefs about the role of effort'" (p. 52). In this magazine article, North Americans on both sides of the debate show that they share without questioning a common image of Japanese education: an image of a homogeneous, highly efficient machine, driven by rote learning and number crunching, that molds young Japanese into the tribal group.

Strangely enough, we see a related self-stereotyping in the Japanese media. In a debate in the Asahi Shimbun (1996) on the problems of bullying [*ijime*], one critic begins by contrasting bullying in Japan to similar problems in England, America and New Zealand. Noting that these countries have bullying problems, he dismisses the possibility of any common ground for learning from their experiences. Japan's problems are "peculiar" [*koyu*] because Japanese students are subjected to "examination stress" [*juken*]

sutoresu] and “groupism” [*shudanshugi*]. He ignores the facts that young people everywhere are under stress to succeed in school, and that youth culture tends to impose peer values. This critic instead assumes that Japan is alienated from some kind of “international norm.” Although accepting that bullying may be the same in the slums of Manchester and the suburbs of Mason City, he believes it is different in groupish Japan. A second critic then suggests that Japan’s “classroom style,” in which a teacher is “at the blackboard with his back to students who are all using the same textbooks,” must be made more “gentle” [*odayaka*], and schools must learn to “value each child’s individuality” [*kosei o taisetsu ni shi*]. These suggestions for a progressive solution rest on a negative generalization of the “Japanese classroom style.” He makes no effort to distinguish the situations in elementary or high schools, urban or rural schools, private or public schools, or schools in rich and poor neighbourhoods, nor does he admit effective differences are made by individual teachers or principals. Instead, like the Americans and Canadians, these Japanese critics and most of their readers accept a stereotypical image of Japan’s schools as rigid, groupish, and homogeneous.

The shared assumption that Japanese education is a homogeneous social machine is misleading. Despite the efforts of bureaucrats to impose uniformity, diversity persists at all levels. Even regional sub-cultures have established characteristic schooling environments. In Kyoto, I see children run laughing in colorful clothes to school; in Nagoya, where some public schools have uniforms from Grade One, I see them trudge along in glum order. School has different meanings for these pupils, and those meanings are expressed in their very movements. If we read three different descriptions of elementary schools in different regions of Japan (Conduits 1996 [Kyoto]; Benjamin 1997a [Saitama]; Stevenson & Stigler 1992 [Sendai]), we get quite different impressions of what

is going on in Japanese elementary education. But how can we judge even Kyoto schools? The Conduits (1996) describe a Kyoto public school that promotes a socialization process "almost entirely organized around the group" (p. 84). Since we are taught to see the Japanese as groupish, this description is predictable, but it in no way describes the elementary school my children attend in Kyoto. Our local public school clearly and purposefully fosters a creative and socially responsible individualism. This progressive approach has historical roots in the Kyoto area. The Kyoto public school system predates even the national system, and in the first years of the Meiji era, Fukuzawa Yukichi (1985) admired Kyoto schools for their efforts to "develop a spirit of independence and self-reliance" (p. 77). Regional and individual diversity in educational philosophy persist in Japan, and so despite their best efforts, bureaucrats remain ineffectual at fitting all children into a standard "Japanese" mold.

From about the second year of high school, the educational atmosphere becomes more competitive, at least for those who are still in the academic running (Rholen 1983). It is no coincidence that *ijime* and other behavioral problems are worst in junior high schools. Uniforms are standard at most high schools, and rules are prevalent (McGill 1988). However, even high schools offer considerable diversity. One proof of this is the extent to which some families will go in order to have their children enter a certain high school or avoid another, including having them attend *jukus* from elementary school and expensive private schools, or even illegally changing addresses or not moving with father when he is posted away. Beneath superficial similarity lays significant divergence. Where there are rules, some schools enforce them more or less strictly. While some schools are easing away from uniforms, others are making even teachers wear them. Perhaps it is in the high schools that the ideological struggle for control of education is most intense. The struggle

pits the bureaucrats and their allies against the leftist teacher's union. William Cummings (1980) argues that this is a struggle for and against "a view of the Japanese people, unified in harmony, loving their country, respecting their emperor, and sacrificing through hard work for the realization of greater prosperity" (p. 58). In short, Japanese schools, like North American schools, are battlegrounds for the right to define national identity.

Incongruities in our understanding of Japanese education help foster the myth of cultural homogeneity. The exhausting program of school and after-school study leading up to the Japanese entrance examinations, and the nature of the examinations themselves, which stresses rote memorization of facts, figures and formulas, have been the focus of North American criticism of Japanese education. Within Japan, pressure to reform this system is intense. This pressure comes mainly from school teachers and parents, and is resisted mainly by university and Ministry of Education bureaucrats. In daily life, teachers (after the students themselves, who are more or less powerless in the debate) bear the brunt of the system, and have to deliver a curriculum many find pedagogically unsound. Parents, seeing their children wasting their youth in exhausting and endless (and expensive) routines of study and memorization, often suffer guilt. On the other hand, a great many of the academics and bureaucrats in positions of real power are graduates of the elite universities like Tokyo University (Thomas 1993, p. 38). Naturally, these policy makers are less inclined to see faults in a system that so obviously benefits their own careers.

In this social battle to define the culture, two broad ideals are offered to the Japanese. One is that described by Cummings, and it involves hierarchy, group identity and hard work. The other is that preferred by Japanese liberal educators like Nitobe Inazo (see Oshima 1985; Nitobe 1981), Fukuzawa Yukichi (1985) and the principal of our local elementary school in Kyoto (whom I interviewed). This ideal involves promoting equality,

creative individualism and social responsibility. In general, the "equality" model prevails in elementary schools (Cummings 1980), and the "group" model takes precedence in junior high school (see "Japan's Schools" 1990). The most obvious reason for this shift in the balance of power is the proximity of the university entrance exams. These exams, upon which all future advancement hinges, require above all the regurgitation of facts. The main personal qualities needed for success in the exams are a passive and "visual" intelligence, and the patience and discipline to sit and read, sit and listen, and sit and memorize, memorize, memorize. Taichi Sakaiya (1988) points out that such qualities are just what the corporate world is looking for in employees. E. D. Hirsch (1988) also attributes "Japan's industrial efficiency" to its educational system (p. 1). Christopher Lasch (1995) points to Japan as a model of educational efficiency, noting that "superior education is widely cited as the reason for the economic success" of Japan (p.180). However, this tendency for modern education to bend itself in service to corporatism is hardly limited to Japan. John Ralston Saul (1995) takes special aim at North American universities, accusing them of "aligning themselves with market forces," and contributing to the "crisis of conformity brought on by our corporatist structures" (p. 70). In our willingness to see education as a servant of economic efficiency and national economic competitiveness, Japanese and North Americans may be more similar than we generally care to believe.

The importance of educators in Japan is written in money. Each of the three men pictured on Japanese paper money, Fukuzawa Yukichi, Nitobe Inazo, and Natsume Soseki, was a scholar, as was Sugawara no Michizane, who used to be on a 5 yen note (Borgen 1994), and Shotoku Taishi, who was recently displaced on the 10,000 yen note by Fukuzawa. The currency of Japan is stamped with educational myth. Sugawara no Michizane, a Heian scholar who rose from relative obscurity to a position of national

power, is described by Ivan Morris (1982) as one of the great tragic heroes of Japan. The lives of these heroes reveals how in Japan “education” interplays with values like self-discipline, moral conviction, independence of thought, dedication to the welfare of others, support for the “underdog”, and resistance of bureaucratic injustice--in other words, with “traditional American values” that are seldom thought to contribute to a Japanese national character.

Like most fictional traditions, education has roots in cultural myth. Our national educational heroes provide clues to the meanings of “education/*kyoiku*.” George Oshiro (1985) notes in his biography of Nitobe Inazo that Nitobe hung a portrait of Abraham Lincoln in the entrance to his school. What was it in his reading of the American myth of Lincoln’s “self-education” that appealed to a samurai educator? Nitobe (1981) tried hard to convince Americans that, like them, the Japanese had the “individuality” and “originality of character” that Americans saw as “the sign of superior races” (p. 21). A World War and an economic miracle or two later, Americans remain unconvinced. Most Japanese do not believe Nitobe either. Instead, as we saw in the *Asahi Shimbun* article, they listen to those who tell them that Japanese are “homogeneous,” “conformist,” and “groupish.”

Nonetheless, in front of most Japanese elementary schools is the statue of a boy reading a book and carrying a heavy load of wood on his back. This boy, Ninomiya Sontoku, “the impoverished but dedicated scholar” (White 1993), echoes the same individual dedication to learning under hardship that Nitobe appreciated in the log-cabin roots of President Lincoln. The mythical struggles of other Japanese “education heroes,” like Fukuzawa, or the farmer-poet Miyazawa Kenji, also point us away from the established stereotype of Japanese groupism.

American scholars are particularly impressed by “groupism” in Japanese society. In contrast, the Canadian scholar and diplomat, E. H. Norman (Norman 1973; Ferns 1968), much like his contemporary Nitobe, preferred to emphasize the individuality and native independence of the Japanese. But the American view, reinforced by the hierarchical theories of Japanese conservatives (Tanaka 1993), has prevailed. In keeping with their own cultural myths, Americans want to see themselves as free, individualistic and independent. The reality of modern American mass consumer corporate society is quite obviously different. Saul (1995, 1992), a Canadian, doesn’t mind telling them so, but many Americans have come to the same conclusion. Lasch (1995) notes the cultural shift, and cites the sociologist Lawrence Frank, who says that in modern society, the individual “instead of seeking his own personal salvation and security, must recognize his almost complete dependence upon the group” (p. 218). Rather than romanticize individualism, Lasch argues that the supposed alternative “individual/group” is “profoundly misleading since group life presupposes the trust that can prevail only when individuals are held accountable for their actions” (pp. 218-219). In this, he may have arrived where many Japanese have long been: beyond the “group/individual” split. Feinberg (1993) argues that in corporate America “individualism” is really “an instrument for collective conformity” (p. 23). Merry White (1993) also fears that young Americans are drifting away from the ideal of independence. She notes that they tend to choose heroes who are “affluent and establishment figures,” while young Japanese, in contrast, “more often choose loners.” White goes so far as to suggest that “it may be that it is the *Japanese*, not the American youth, who is the greater individualist” (pp. 208-209). Perhaps the American obsession with Japanese “groupism” is a reflection of a nostalgia for their own lost “rugged

individualism": Americans can still feel "relatively" individualistic compared to an extreme image of Japanese groupism.

If, as we hear claimed, the curricula of Japanese high schools and American universities serve to supply the corporate world with pliant workers, where does the Japanese university fit into the picture? If Japanese elementary schools serve "individualism," and Japanese high schools serve "groupism," then what do Japanese universities serve? At first glance, the American critical eye sees the Japanese university as an instrument for social stratification (Cutts 1997; Kelly 1993). Students come in by way of the "examination hell," a mock meritocracy that institutes a kind of academic "game of 'Trivial Pursuit' writ large" ("Japan's Schools" 1990). Students are sorted by these tests into various levels in the hierarchy of universities. Then, after "a four year vacation" (McGrath 1983, p. 64), they are distributed to appropriate bureaucracies or corporations for life. This picture contrasts sharply with the images of American universities as sanctuaries of intellectual endeavour, although critics will debate whether in fact they are too rational (Saul 1995, 1992) or not rational enough (Bloom 1987). These stereotypical images are not only ethnocentric, but also based upon a misleading comparison. So different are the histories of these institutions that, culturally speaking, comparing American universities and Japanese universities is like comparing "apples and oranges." Moreover, both university systems are evolving such that what they were is far different from what they are becoming.

Although universities made an important page of American democratic myth in the nation's youth, in its maturity, they are serving the creation of a more elitist America. Richard J. Herrnstein and Charles Murray (1994) note that American universities now tend to divide the population into cognitive categories, with a cognitive elite attending a few of the best institutions. Until the 1950s access to Harvard was relatively easy for anyone with

moderate resources and intelligence. Herrnstein and Murray point out that in the 1990s, Harvard and Yale alone, enrolling just 2,900 freshmen--roughly 1 out of every 400 freshmen in the USA--accounted for 10 percent of the yearly freshmen who scored in the 700's on the SAT-Verbal, and that the top ten schools soaked up 31 percent (p. 42). Herrnstein and Murray fear that the intensifying competition to enter the few "best" universities results in a narrowing of outlook among the nation's elite. They warn that

when people live in encapsulated worlds, it becomes difficult for them, even with the best of intentions, to grasp the realities of worlds with which they have little experience but over which they also have great influence, both public and private. Many of those promising undergraduates are never going to live in a community where they will be disabused of their misperceptions, for after education comes another sorting mechanism, occupations, and many of the holes that are still left in the cognitive partitions begin to get sealed. (p. 50)

Herrnstein and Murray speculate that when the graduates of these elite universities reap the financial benefits of their education, and marry other elite graduates, their children will have the intellectual and financial advantages necessary to establish a "genetic elite," a new "breed" of Americans. This vision hardly matches the democratic and egalitarian ideal many Americans have for their universities.

Herrnstein, Murray, Lasch, Ralston and White all describe a similar tendency in American higher education towards corporatist or elitist values--that is, towards something very much like the commonly accepted image of Japanese universities. The Japanese Ministry of Education has unabashedly created a system of higher education that creams off the "most intelligent" students for a handful of the best public universities. J. E. Thomas (1993) claims that "the Japanese education system is uncompromisingly elitist, and the pinnacle of achievement and recognition in that system is the University of Tokyo, called Todai..." (p. 38). Students who do not make it into Todai are distributed, by virtue of entrance examinations, to appropriate "levels" in a hierarchy of universities that reaches

from the second ranking public university, Kyoto University (*Kyodai*) down to the lowliest *tankidaigaku* [women's private two-year college]. This distribution is supposedly based upon intelligence, but "most intelligent" in the Japanese context does not necessarily include the same personal qualities that "cognitive elite" does in the American context described by Herrnstein and Murray. At a Japanese college (that I will not identify) where the "level" of students is rising rapidly with each new intake of students, teachers complain that classes are becoming less lively and stimulating. Apparently, "a high level" indicates a student with a diligent and persevering personality suitable for preparing for examinations rather than an individual with a lively and creative intelligence. Japan's severe examinations select for success students who master visual and passive learning skills. This makes them contrast sharply with successful American students who are rewarded for being vocal and extroverted. Professors in American universities who teach Japanese students "are often heard to lament that their Japanese students, though more industrious, are less fun to teach, less able to argue a point, less able to come up with good ideas than Americans" ("Japan's Schools" 1990: 22). This observation exposes the differing cultural connotations of concepts like "intelligence," "level," or "cognitive elite." One nation's "whiz kids" are another nation's "nerds." Questioning the commonly accepted meanings of concepts like "intelligence" can reveal cultural misconceptions that contribute to confusion in educational reform.

One result of ranking students by examinations is that many universities and colleges can be identified by a "type" of student, and that these types can then be channeled into appropriate types of careers. In Japan, where this "typing," or shall we say, "textualizing," of student bodies is already well established, students can be "read" according to university and faculty. The basis of meaning for this reading is the

examination. Most Japanese spend several years of their life studying the university hierarchy, the intricate routes to universities (that weaves through select high schools down even through special kindergartens), and the various styles of entrance exams. In this national drama called "examination hell," the players (students) and the stage settings (universities) have metaphorical and symbolic significances for Japanese that are lost on most foreign observers. North Americans notice all the effort Japanese put into finding a way into university, and then are shocked to see that, once inside, Japanese students apparently give up all academic striving. They assume that the same strenuous program of high school study should naturally continue through university. Perplexed, they come to disdain Japanese universities as intellectual vacuums where little is taught or learned. University life is a "time for indulging in the success which has followed the monumental effort to get there," says Thomas (1993, p.15). Reischauer (1988) thinks "university life is disappointing," and that it has "insufficient intellectual stimulation" (p. 197). He adds that "some students show little interest in their studies, devoting themselves instead to outside activities, such as sports, hobbies and radical politics" (p. 199). In short, Japanese higher education is not conforming to Western standards and expectations. But still, when no less an international figure than an ex-US ambassador to Japan and Harvard professor so roundly condemns Japanese higher education, and Japanese academics (Nagai 1983) nod in agreement, one cannot help but wonder why Japanese are not more urgent about reform. Perhaps something is overlooked in this evaluation of the "crisis."

The fact that higher education does not match the rigours of the American system upon which it is patterned should not be surprising--neither does any other level of Japanese education any longer match its post-war American model. Elementary education appears to be more free and egalitarian than the American model (Cummings 1980), while the high schools are more hierarchical, and have a range of "levels" designed

to meet various Japanese social needs (Rohlen 1983). The modern Japanese educational system, originally laid down by American Occupation forces, and based on American models, has, since the 1950s, evolved to conform to Japanese needs and expectations. In particular, Japanese universities are out of tune with those American universities they pretend to emulate. Perhaps this is because the patterning upon American universities is in fact quite superficial.

The history of Japanese universities goes back long before the European discovery of America. The oldest Japanese university was probably established around 670 AD, and the system was expanded under the Taiho Codes of 701 AD. Later, during the Heian period, the Fujiwara clan, a powerful elite, supported their own university, while the Sugawara family founded a rival university as a power base (Borgen 1994). Much later, when the Tokugawa bakufu was coming to its end, the Confucian academy at Mito (itself a Tokugawa institution) was providing the ideological justification for its overthrow (Harootunian 1970; 1988). Tokyo University, the dominant institution since the Meiji period, grew out of the old Tokugawa institution responsible for translating barbarian books. Since the Meiji Restoration, the system of national universities has expanded, but so has a parallel system of private universities. Some of these private universities have forged distinct identities in striving to provide ideological alternatives to the national universities.

From its beginnings in the Meiji period, the modern Japanese government intended public schooling and higher education to play quite different roles in the social system (Horio 1988; Hall 1973). The first Meiji Minister of Education, Mori Arinori, a young Satsuma samurai who had already spent several years in Europe and America, determined that public school should provide *kyoiku* [education]. By *kyoiku* he meant the

training, skills, and moral indoctrination necessary for obedient and productive subjects of the Emperor. Mori saw, however, that if the state were to have leaders capable of creative and independent thought, universities would have to provide free and intellectually stimulating environments for “scholarship” [*gakumon*]. The result of Mori’s policy has been a kind of government sponsored academic freedom in the national universities.

Nevertheless, Fukuzawa (1985) described scholars of those institutions as “mostly cowards” with not “much mettle to be counted on” despite “their ability to decipher difficult texts” (p. 93). The efforts of Meiji leaders to provide Japan with universities that fostered *gakumon*, and thus independence of thought, failed to win over Fukuzawa. He wrote,

At times some spirited scholars did speak out against the despotism of the government. But when the very root of it all is studied, we realize that the seed was first sown by the scholars themselves and that they were themselves being bound by the “vines” which grew out of it. Who, in the first place, taught the doctrine of despotism to the government? (p. 109)

His answer was that it was the Confucian scholars who dominated the national universities. Today, scholars are still “entwined” with Japanese government and policy, especially through their connections with the bureaucracy, the highest levels of which are filled almost exclusively by graduates of a few elite national universities.

Whereas Mori distinguished two kinds of education [*kyoiku/gakumon*] appropriate to different social levels, Fukuzawa distinguished two kinds of learning: “real learning” [*jitsugaku*] and “false learning” [*kyogaku*]. Real learning was that which promoted “independence.” Kazuyoshi Nakayama (1985) describes Fukuzawa’s concepts:

Real learning was the kind that helped people to attain their freedom and independence. The Western type of learning belonged to this category. False learning was the kind that taught knowledge and skills but molded people into disciplined subjects or vassals, useful to the state or lord. Confucian learning belonged to this latter category. Fukuzawa regarded it more as training (*kunren*) than education (*kyoiku*) in its true sense. (p. ix)

In other words, what Mori called education was for Fukuzawa merely training and not really education at all. This controversy about the meaning of education still characterizes the educational debates in Japan today, and in North America. Fukuzawa, like Feinberg now, was struggling against the "cultural conservatives" of his day.

These days in Japan, discussions of elementary or high school reform remain heated, but few people seem seriously bothered by the unhappy state of the universities. Some who speak out for university reform, like Michio Nagai, are motivated by feelings of inferiority vis-à-vis the West (Nagai 1971). Fukuzawa, too, understood that Japanese universities would be measured by Western standards, and he argued that achieving those standards was the best way to save Japan from humiliation by foreigners. Nevertheless, if the choice were between high standards of "false learning" or lower standards with "independence," Fukuzawa, like some Japanese today (see Kimura 1988), would probably choose independence. This might explain the lack of urgency to reform higher education. Despite some failings, the university provides a freedom for the growth of independence rarely matched elsewhere in Japanese society.

Whatever a Japanese university student lacks, it is clearly not a background of study, for it has been estimated that by high school graduation an eighteen year-old Japanese student has already spent as many hours in class as the average twenty-two year-old American university graduate (White 1987). Moreover, by the time students enter university, they have already been more or less sorted out for the job market. Their future career routes are largely determined, and they know it. What will it profit a student to vigorously pursue a course in linguistics when she knows she is almost certain to become a clerk for life at a city office? Possibly another student wanted to study in a different department of another university, but couldn't pass the exam, and so this university was

her *suberidome* [literally, “slip-stop”]: a university of last resort after writing several examinations. One can hardly expect the conduct of university life to be determined by a dedication to the values of the university as an institution. Students pay tuition, the institution smoothes a path to employment, and for both that is a “fair” deal. Therefore, what happens (or does not happen) at a Japanese university has much to do with the standing of the university in the overall hierarchy, and how well the curriculum reflects the needs of a particular “level” of student. Although this may seem a mercenary approach to higher education, it makes as much sense as the American system predicated upon the assumption that every university freshman is a potential research scholar.

Nevertheless, to say that Japanese universities have “insufficient intellectual stimulation” is a hasty over-generalization. Even if Japanese universities lack that pretentious play-at-intellectual environment of many American universities, students still find stimulation in the unaccustomed freedom of an open university life that is so different from the restricted routines of the high schools they have left, or the companies they will soon enter. Even without the usual American coercive devices of serious examinations or term papers, students show up for lectures.

Both foreign and Japanese professors often accuse students for “not wanting to study” (Cutts 1997; Robb 1993; Reischauer 1988; Nagai 1971). Such professors do not ask why students who have spent twelve years honing the habit of serious study, and who have finally entered a university, after paying huge tuition and entrance fees, suddenly and willfully turn into intellectual wastrels. In my experience, Japanese freshmen students come into their first university classes as bright-eyed and eager to learn as any North American students. Only after a few months do some start to sour and slacken in their efforts. Instructors and curriculum designers must share some responsibility for this

waning enthusiasm. Definitely, there is room for curriculum and teaching reform. At the same time, we should explore possibilities of deeper, cultural explanations for Japanese university students' lack of "industrious spirit."

The general permissiveness, or shall we call it "slackness" of Japanese university has cultural, historical and even economic roots. This slackness does not have the negative Western connotation of carelessness, but rather it indicates the "slackness" [*yuru*] (a word that seems etymologically related to concepts like "generosity" [*yuruyaka*] and "forgiveness" [*yurushi*]) associated in Japanese minds with maternal *amae* (see Bailey 1997d). In many ways Japanese culture is far more permissive than American culture. Perhaps one reason Fukuzawa was intent upon fostering independence through education is that the opposing force of "maternal dependence" [*amae*] has such a powerful influence in Japanese culture (Doi 1973). In contrast, some "progressive" American educators like John Dewey and Madeline Grumet would like to move their culture away from paternalism, and encourage greater dependence in American education. Dewey (1944) says,

From a social standpoint dependence denotes a power rather than a weakness; it involves interdependence. There is always the danger that increased personal independence will decrease the social capacity of an individual. In making him more self-reliant, it may make him more self-sufficient; it may lead to aloofness and indifference. (p. 44)

Grumet (1988), too, believes American "individuation" can lead to a dangerous "isolation" (p.166). Moreover, she is suspicious of an anti-social independence that promotes paternalistic values in American culture and that disqualifies "the mother/child relation as a model for society at the very moment it valorizes it as our ideal" (p. 169). At the same time that Americans champion "mom and apple pie," they adopt educational practices that counter the social and community values of the family. As Doi's theory of *amae* shows,

Japanese still accept "the mother/child relation" as one model for their culture. This does not mean Japanese institutions are not paternalistic; certainly, the high schools and bureaucracies appear so. It only means that Japanese institutions are not self-conscious about reflecting maternalistic values, an audacity impossible in America, where the paternalistic values of individuality, independence and self-sufficiency are almost sacred. Japanese society somehow balances the paternalistic discipline and authority of its high schools with the maternalistic slackness of its universities.

The academic slackness of the university is just as representative of Japanese culture as is the rigorous high school curricula so admired by some American critics. Thus, slackness does not necessarily mean that universities have failed in their duty to Japanese society. It does not even mean that students are not learning enough. The young lady carefully doing her nails in the fifteenth row may still be paying attention to the lecture, enjoying it, and learning something from it. There is nothing much in the American custom of busily scribbling notes to paper that makes it clearly more studious than just listening while doing your nails--which may tell us something about North American cultural preconceptions. The slackness of the university may well be much of its value to Japanese society. Young Japanese are promised a taste of freedom once they enter university, and why should one of the conditions of the offering be that nobody should accept fully. Perhaps the more significant reality is that even with this real freedom, that includes the freedom to do nothing without failure, many Japanese university students do still independently pursue a variety of academic, social, political and other serious interests while at university.

Historically speaking, too, the mission of Japanese higher education differs significantly from that of universities in the West. Saul (1992) describes the modern Western university since the Enlightenment as coming increasing under the domination of

reason at the expense of almost all other human qualities and values to the extent that universities are veritable temples of reason. Japan was not part of Europe's Enlightenment. Japan developed institutions of higher learning derived from Chinese and Korean models. Japan's early tradition of university learning had little to do with reason, and knew nothing of Plato or Voltaire. Yet so deeply ingrained is the Western assumption that university learning and reason are almost synonymous that the idea of a "non-rational university" strikes most Americans as a ludicrous oxymoron.

When, after the Meiji Restoration, Mori Arinori set about restructuring traditional educational institutions based upon European models, he made an effort to preserve an ill-defined "Japanese spirit," especially at the highest levels of education from which he expected to draw the governing elite. An exceptional range of freedom was allowed university students--in striking contrast to the severe strictures governing most other aspects of prewar Japanese society (Mitchel 1983). As a result, universities became havens for radical intellectuals on both the right and the left, as well as for eccentrics, religious enthusiasts, social rebels, artists, writers and other assorted misfits in "homogeneous" Japanese society. In a sense, Mori succeeded in bringing the cultural margins back into the very centre of Japanese society. This required a "hands-off" policy on the part of government in regards to university intellectual life. In return, the governing establishment received from conservative academics the very ideological justifications of nationalistic policy and power (Tanaka 1993). Moreover, the government could select for bureaucratic posts brilliant graduates who had already been exposed to, and had weathered, the influence of Western ideas, even of the most "dangerous" kind.

Not every university student, of course, goes into the bureaucracy, or even bothers to graduate. Especially in literature and the arts, Japan has a long tradition of young people entering university, spending a few lax and lazy years, perhaps even dropping out,

and then going on to fame as writers, poets, artists or religious leaders. Not a great deal of stigma is attached to this apparent waste of opportunity. Instead, Japanese accept this idle time as part of a natural process that must be indulged if young people are to develop into artists. Slackness does not necessarily mean students will be lazy. Some students use this idle time for exceptional endeavour or social activity. For example, after his second year of university, one young man of my acquaintance enrolled as well at a two-year art college, and two years later graduated from both full-time programs. Whether they choose the idle or the busy path, students recognize the freedom to be idle as their right. When Nitobe Inazo tried to enforce a more American rigour at the First Higher School, he met such violent student protest that he eventually had to loosen up again (Oshiro 1985). One look at a Kyodai dormitory, a wasteland of debris, graffiti and derelict cars in the heart of well-kept Kyoto, convinced me of the pride with which elite students still preserve this "bohemian" tradition of a studied idleness.

All this may seem odd to industrious North Americans, especially since idleness is loaded with negative connotations in our culture. However, it might do to remember the famous dictum of that great hard-worker Samuel Johnson that "Every man is, or would be, an idler." If we change terminology and call "idleness" instead "leisure time," we can see the Japanese situation in a different light. In a society as busy as Japan's, and especially for students who have successfully survived the examination hell, a period of leisure time is needed to digest information and turn it to thought. Japanese freshmen have the facts, but they have not had much chance to think with them. In North America, freshmen are still scrambling for facts, not to mention basic skills like reading and writing. Perhaps North Americans should reconsider the self-complacent pride they take in the great busyness/business of university life, and its enormous pressure to read and write in quantity.

Reading and writing have different roles in Japanese higher education, as well. In North American universities, the essay, based on rhetorical patterns of reasoning, is central to university success. Students in Japan do not generally write long expository essays as do students in North America. Since Japanese students take so many courses concurrently (usually fourteen or more), there just is not time to write long, polished essays. Grades are usually based on examinations, or, in more advanced courses, on "reports" that are often accumulations of regurgitations of texts that seldom shy from plagiarism. Foreign instructors who teach Japanese students English Writing often remark that their students have no idea how to write a properly organized paragraph let alone a full-length expository essay (apparently mindless of the fact that doing any writing at all in foreign language is a considerable achievement). In Japan, universities have always been closely tied to foreign language learning, whether Chinese in the Heian period, Dutch in Tokugawa times, or English since the Meiji era. But in foreign language learning as elsewhere, reading has always taken precedence over writing.

In high school, students preparing for entrance examinations read their textbooks several times over, but once in university, the pressure to read textbooks eases, and students need read only what truly interests them. Students are seen unashamedly reading fat comic books and glossy fashion magazines almost everywhere, even in class. On the other hand, Japanese students are seldom seen toting bundles of heavy textbooks about campus. Some Japanese universities even advise instructors to use inexpensive (and thin) textbooks (after all, the student may have to buy fourteen or more of them). Many Japanese students never buy textbooks anyway because it is easier and cheaper to buy notes for lectures sold at local shops just before final examinations. This apparent disinclination to do studious reading contrasts with the fact that Japanese students clearly like to read: many young Japanese even go to browse in bookstores on dates. In fact,

Merry White (1993) notes that young Japanese read more than young Americans both in and out of school, and that they "buy large amounts of print and other media output" (p. 113). Whereas in North America reading often involves a smug, almost Puritanical seriousness, in Japan, reading is less pretentious: everybody does it. People are not embarrassed to be seen reading "junk," and neither do they gain a lot of prestige from, in their strolls about campus, bearing under their arms the burden of five to ten pounds of abstract ideas in print.

The relatively different importance given to reading and writing in North American and Japanese university cultures has deep significance for cultural understanding. As we noted in Chapter Five, theories of orality and literacy explain the "rational nature" of Western culture (Ong 1982; Thomas 1992). These theories explain that a great shift in thought and perception was imposed upon the West by the introduction of the alphabet around the time of Plato, and that this shift accelerated with the introduction of the printing press in the fifteenth century (McLuhan 1962). With the coming of the alphabet, the eye took precedence over the ear in learning, and books displaced memory. No longer a link in the chain of communal memory, the individual took on separate importance from the group. The alphabet, with its oral base, provided this new individual with a perfect tool for the expansion of rhetorical reasoning. This rhetorical tradition, based upon the alphabet and fostered by the universities, became a cornerstone of modern Western liberal democracy.

Japan has a different tradition of reading. With thousands of intricate characters, literacy is hard to achieve, and it requires a disciplined memory--exactly what the alphabet displaced in the West. Moreover, when the sign is itself a pictogram, the divide between the oral values of abstraction, and the visual values of concrete imagery is partially bridged. Ernest Fenollosa (Pound 1936) notes the visual quality of the Chinese ideogram.

One result of the different nature of literacy in Japan is that the university tradition lacks the prejudice against the "visual" that is characteristic of the European "oral" university tradition (Amano 1983, p. 21). This helps explain the popularity of comics and fashion magazines even among an adult educated elite (not to mention things like the visual attractiveness of Japanese food and kimonos, or the Japanese mastery of graphic design). It also helps us understand the importance of memory and rote learning. The examination system is a direct link to the ancient Chinese system of bureaucratic examinations, the *keju*, that relied almost entirely upon memorization of classical texts (Andersen 1998; Amano 1983, p. xxi). Shigeru Nakajima (1974) says that Western universities are part of an "oral" (alphabet based) tradition that is rhetorical and "disputative" [*ronsotekigakumon*], and that Japanese universities are part of a "visual" (ideogram based) tradition that is mnemonic and "documentary" [*kirokutekigakumon*] (*Kiroku*, literally, "recording" shares the first character of *kioku*, "memory"). The gist of all this is that those American professors who complain that Japanese students cannot readily "argue a point" or that they plagiarize and repeat what they have learned word by word are judging them by standards of "intelligence" that are fundamentally ethnocentric.

Many critics (for example, Cutts 1997; Kelly 1993; Reischauer 1988; Nagai 1971) severely criticize Japanese higher education without taking into consideration the history and traditions of the Japanese university. A less prejudiced appreciation of the culture and curriculum of Japanese universities might break up educational stereotypes. What is more, a better understanding of the Japanese university might help us perceive contradictions and biases inherent in North American educational culture, even in regards to something as basic as understanding of the meaning of "education." We could avoid the simplistic assumption that education in North American culture necessarily means the

same as *kyoiku* in Japanese culture. Rather than seeing education in terms of monolithic institutions imposed upon societies by nation states, we can see it as a multiplicity of cultural tendencies moving among institutional settings with sometimes conflicting goals. North Americans who criticize Japanese education have a responsibility to be especially careful. As Feinberg (1993) says, "because the first step in such understanding involves viewing one's own activity and behavior as a cultural product, understanding is usually more difficult for members of the dominant culture, who learn to take their own behavior as modeling a cultural norm" (p. 173).

America is the dominant culture in the world today, and not only are many Americans defining Japan in relation to models that take America to be the norm, but Japanese, too, tend to judge their own social systems by American standards. The problem for understanding Japanese education is, as Teruhisa Horio (1988) points out, that "American observers have overlooked the real problems and controversies surrounding educational democratization in Japan, and have only seen its schools in terms of America's own educational problems, which are in many important but unnoticed respects actually quite different" (p. xvi). Of course, all understanding, as the philosopher Hans Georg Gadamer (1994) reminds us, is really self-understanding. Most foreign observers who try to understand Japan and its institutions do so because they want to better understand their own systems and, ultimately, themselves. Those who champion educational reform naturally look to other cultures for contrasting models, both for better and worse. To discover our failings in the mirror of another culture is a method as old as Tacitus (1970), and to attempt reforms based on our judgments of other systems is a perfectly reasonable approach. But we must recognize a preliminary step in this process. That step is to realize that we are always already "prejudiced" in our observations

(Gadamer 1994). When we come to study Japan, or when Japanese come to study America, we come already "educated," already with a point-of-view, already prepared to notice certain aspects. This is why Feinberg (1993) asks, "What is it about the nature of our own self-understanding that leads us to see Japanese performance in the way we do?" (p. 4). Before we can adequately answer this question, it is incumbent upon us to first make the effort to look at Japan from various perspectives, and to see that there are, and always have been, many Japans in the making.

Chapter Ten

Autobiographical Interlude: Down and Out in Kyoto [1982-1984]

I gave him a short account of some particulars, and made my story as plausible and consistent as I could; but I thought it necessary to disguise my country and call myself a Hollander; because my intentions were for Japan. . .

Jonathan Swift, Gulliver's Travels, 1726 (cited in Oliva 1999, p. 333)

In 1981 my Canadian college broke its connection with "N" College and the programme I was working on came to an abrupt end. I had to return to Canada indefinitely. It was not easy to leave Japan, but I did not have enough money to survive there long without an income. In Canada I had a job. So I went home, worked, and saved my money like any other would-be adventurer. The next Spring, I went on a hitch-hiking trip to Mexico. When I found myself following Japanese tours around Mexican ruins, I knew it was time to go back to Japan. I took a leave of absence from my job, took out my meager savings, and made my way back to Kyoto.

This time in Japan I was unconnected to any college or institution. Fortunately, I had Japanese friends. Some of these friends had been *kenkyusei* at "N" College. When I arrived in Kyoto, they helped me get established. They found me a decrepit house in Omuro, a suburb in north-western Kyoto. It had no heat, no flush toilet, but a resident ghost, and plenty of spiders and cockroaches for company. My friends provided me with a *kotatsu* [heated table] and *futon* [quilts], and a few basic household goods. For employment, they found me two private students. Rent was cheap, and with my tutoring fees, and what I earned baking carrot cakes for a local restaurant, I managed to eke out

my savings until I found more remunerable employment. It was a great beginning to my new Japanese adventure.

No longer living at a College-owned *mansion* [condominium] or under the protective wing of any institution, I had a fresh experience of Japan. I met different kinds of people. One morning, a neighbour lady, thinking I was a new Japanese neighbour, came carrying a plant as a gift. When I opened the door, she almost dropped it. She could not speak English, and my Japanese was awful, but almost two decades later, we are still close friends. A few days later, a monk from a local temple came begging rice. He, too, was startled by me, but he held out his bowl for a offering anyway. Later, I met an American monk, now a potter living near Kameoka, and he, too, is still a friend.

I met new inconveniences, too. One morning, I woke to find myself retching from the awful stench of the "honey truck" that was pumping out my toilet. When the rains started, I met my first *mukade* [an eight-inch long poisonous centipede] sleeping in my *yukata* on the floor. I could not kill it with a slipper so for the first time I brought a shoe into the house. A few months later, when I got ill and couldn't leave my bed, neighbour ladies kindly brought food to my sickbed. I was really "getting into" Japanese life.

Without any institutional support, I had no choice but to speak Japanese. I made mistakes. Once a waitress asked me if I wanted the free cup of coffee that went with my meal and I replied, "*ii desu*," meaning "that's good"; I found out then that it also meant "no thank you." I used to make little *kanji* cards and study them on the trains. People beside me pretended not to notice, but I saw them writing *kanji* on their knees to see if I had it right. One gentleman even had the courage to point out a mistake, for which I was grateful.

I took classes at a Japanese language school, where I had a chance to meet more people. One young English-speaking lady I met looked Japanese, but she was from Alberta. She was having a harder time of it than I was. Everyone expected her to *be* Japanese, and that meant speaking and acting like a Japanese. She actually had strangers yell at her for her language mistakes. This kind of aggression I never experienced. Perhaps I benefited from the *gyaku sabetsu* [reverse discrimination] that favours *hakujin* [white people]. Most Japanese were surprised that I could speak any Japanese at all. Once getting lost in Kyoto with a Chinese-Canadian instructor and stopping in at a gas station for directions. I asked the attendant questions, but he answered to the oriental-looking lady. Since she spoke not a word of Japanese, I then translated. It took a while to get the directions straight, and the attendant never looked at me during the whole time. I felt invisible.

I have heard similar stories from other “white” people, and the explanation they invariably give is that Japanese “just *cannot believe* that a *hakujin* can speak Japanese” even when their ears tell them otherwise. On the other hand, at least in those days, “Japanese-looking” people were expected to speak Japanese. In recent years, the increase in the number of visible foreigners who speak Japanese and of students and guest-workers from Asia who do not speak Japanese has resulted in more ordinary Japanese people developing a kind of “willing suspension of disbelief” in a previously taken-for-granted “link” between race and language. Today, Japanese are not generally so disconcerted by hearing Japanese words issuing from a white face, and they no longer expect every “oriental” to speak fluent Japanese.

Hoping to learn to read and write Japanese, I enrolled as a *Chokosei* [auditing student] at one of Kyoto’s best private universities. An old colleague of mine had a *kone*

[connection]: a professor who kindly allowed me into his class on the novelist Arishima Takeo. When I visited the professor, he showed me his work in process. He was making an index and counting all the words in the works of Somerset Maugham. His class on Arishima was in keeping with his research on Maugham. In the first lecture, he wrote on the blackboard all the publication dates of all Arishima's novels and their various editions. Then he listed the names and significant biographical dates for all the members of Arishima's literary group, the *Shirakaba Ha* [the White Birch Group]. In the following classes, the professor was seldom present. Instead, groups of students gave "reports," most of which I could not understand, but which also involved a lot of numbers and dates being written on the blackboard. This was a severe sort of scholarship, and I was not prepared for it. I wanted to know what the novels were about, and what they could tell me about Japan and life. Eventually, I gave up on the classes, and stayed home to read Arishima. Although I attended no classes for the last third of the semester, shortly after final exams, the professor sent me a note asking me to write "anything" so that he could pass me. Students were supposed to pass. Instead, I read Arishima on my own, but it was hard. Finally, I went to my friends for help in understanding certain passages and was surprised that they could not understand Meiji Japanese (late nineteenth century) either. I realized, then, that if I wanted to study Japanese literature, I would have to return to university in Canada.

An Osaka Women's High School [1983]

In order to support myself in Kyoto, I took a number of part-time teaching jobs. The most frightening job was teaching at a women's high school in Osaka. The lady who interviewed me for this position, Mrs. Katamichi*, was the kind of stereotypical "teacher"

that one might expect to be painted by a Japanese Norman Rockwell: she was a dry stick, empty of humour. She took me to formally meet the school president, a frail and ancient scholar. He showed little interest in me, but spent a long time examining my documents until he found an incorrectly written Chinese character [*kanji*]. Mrs. Katamichi then waxed ecstatic over his command of “difficult kanji.” He smiled smugly at us, and the interview was over. I had the job. I learned that if you want to flatter a Japanese scholar, praise his ability with kanji.

All Katamichi-san told me was that I had two classes: one was an introductory junior high school “conversation” course; and the other was a “special” communications course for senior high *kikokushijo* [students who had returned to Japan after living abroad]. This was a Christian high school connected with a famous *tankidaigaku*. I soon discovered that attending chapel every morning did not render these young ladies meek. The really scary students were the ones in the junior high school.

There were forty girls in the junior high-school class. The first day, I walked into the class to find forty half-dressed girls glaring at me. I turned around and left. It seems that my class followed a gym class, and that the students had to change in the classroom as the school had no change rooms or showers. Nobody had seen fit to warn me. After that, I always started class ten minutes late because the students refused to understand that I wanted them to change more quickly. I suspect this was a matter of “selective non-understanding.” At the time, I thought students changed in the classroom only in women’s private schools, but later when my son attended a public junior high school, he said that he and his classmates changed in classrooms: the girls in one, boys in another (no curtains--no privacy). Modesty clearly was not an issue. Perhaps that is why, years later, I could believe a student who told me that in her high school teachers would stop girls in the

hallways and make them lift their skirts to prove they were wearing regulation white underwear. Anyway, to delay the start of class, my students may have taken advantage of my respect for their modesty.

At times, the students seemed intent on making my life in class a misery. They were aided in this effort by two factors: first, they could not speak English; second, I could not speak Japanese (or at least they pretended not to understand what I thought I could speak). Needless to say, what with the delay at the beginning of class, and the constant confusion thereafter, we got little done. I fell back on familiar classroom routines. Everyone knew how to recite, and how to stand and read, even if they did not understand what they were saying. We did a lot of "now repeat after me," and "now, Michiko please start reading from the beginning" kind of exercises. Since this is what they were used to anyway, I gained a reputation as a pretty good teacher.

I still dreaded going to class, though. Even as a few chanted and read out loud for me, other students chatted, did other homework or read fashion magazines. I, the teacher, seemed largely irrelevant to the progress of the class. The students pretty well did what they wanted, and at their own pace. Perhaps this was as it should have been. After all, the classroom was student territory. Most of the time it was occupied by the same group of students, who were only visited periodically by an assortment of harassed teachers. The classroom was definitely "student territory."

Unfortunately, I was not the only one whose life in class was full of misery. For me, the most disturbing event of the class was when I asked Akiko* to stand to read. As soon as I said her name, the whole class burst out into wild laughter. Akiko just stood, looked down, and read, seemingly oblivious to the hilarity around her. She stuttered. She stuttered, and the whole class laughed. Not one refrained. Akiko was a shy, clever girl, and perhaps the best English student in the class, but her stutter made her a target of

ijime [bullying]. At the time, I had no idea that *ijime* was a serious problem in Japanese schools. None of the Japanese teachers I went to for help showed any interest in my problem. I could not communicate with my class enough even to explain that I thought their conduct wrong. I resorted to scolding them in English. This brought about short, bemused silences. But I was helpless to end the tormenting of Akiko. Still, Akiko always took her turn reading despite the teasing. The rest of the time she sat silent with her eyes down, seeming to be in her own world, like in a little bubble.

It was rare in those days for a foreigner to teach a whole course in a Japanese junior high school. Even now with the JET Program, most foreign teachers work under the guidance of a Japanese teacher, and they only teach any particular group of students a few times a year. In this sense, my course was experimental, and a somewhat radical departure from accepted policy. From what I was told, the class was judged to be a success. I was told that the students said they liked it. I remain skeptical.

Teaching the high school *kikokushijo* [1983]

The other class, the high school “returnees” class, was the “experimental” one I had really been hired to teach (the junior high school class was a kind of bonus to make my commute worthwhile). The course was under the supervision of *Mombusho* [The Ministry of Education], who were then concerned about the many problems surrounding “student returnees.” We even published a detailed course description, something not common at Japanese high schools and universities. The group was only about a dozen students. They seemed far more mature and thoughtful than my junior high school students. Some of them had spent a large part of their life outside of Japan. One student had lived in New York for over ten years and was a native-speaker of English. Another young lady, who had

returned from five years in Sao Paulo, could speak fluent Portuguese but not much English. Three girls at the lowest end of the international-experience-scale had visited American cities like Mason City, Iowa on one-year exchange programmes. These three tended to keep to themselves, and, like the students in junior high school, they giggled when called upon to speak English; however, after a little commotion, they usually did. All the students in this "special class" were hungry to speak English. No matter how boring the readings or how inept the exercises, the students fully involved themselves.

They told me they were bored with high school life. They didn't fit in. At about this time, unbeknown to me, Ian Buruma (1984) was writing that in Japan "not conforming to the expected pattern means essentially that one does not exist at all" (p. 100). These students had, until this course was provided them, been invisible within the school, and, as a result, they were lonely. Though we met only once a week, we became like a little "foreign" family. I spent a lot of time just listening to their frustrations with Japan (much like the frustrations of the "American scholar" in the Introduction to this work). They were caught in a space in between (see Willis & Onoda 1989; Edwards 1989; Dhomoto 1987; Hani 1983). They were denied the right to identify with the nations they had left, and yet they were not permitted to find a place within "Japanese identity." Or rather, a place had not yet been opened to include them.

Although I much enjoyed teaching these *kikokushijo*, I was exhausted by my experience teaching the junior high school class. It was one of those painful experiences from which we can claim to have learned much about others and ourselves. Some of my failings as a teacher had been made uncomfortably obvious. In the beginning, I had happily accepted this job because I knew how difficult it was in Japan for someone

“institutionally unaffiliated” to get a formal position at any school. When asked to come back to teach there again the following year, however, I declined the offer.

Back to Where I Came From.

I learned quickly that there were three important obstacles to developing a teaching career in Japan: race, gender, and affiliation. At the time I was living on my own in Kyoto, I had two of them against me: I had the right gender for getting a teaching job, but I remained an unaffiliated “foreigner.” Maybe because of the discrimination I felt then, I became more aware of the plight of career-minded Japanese women teachers. For Japanese women, building a career outside the home is difficult (see Sand 1998; Silverberg 1998; Smith 1997; Ueno 1996; Bernstein 1991; Kondo 1990; Lebra 1984). Anything that suggests an atypically independent education can make the situation more difficult.

For example, one of my earliest students, Chika*, a young woman of remarkable independence and intelligence, applied for a job at an “international” library in Kyoto. The job required someone with good English ability. She had probably the best English ability of anyone I had yet met in Japan. I was surprised when the position was filled by applicant with rather feeble English skills (to the inconvenience of many of the foreigners like me who used the library). I had an opportunity to inquire into why Chika did not get the position. The explanation I received was this: Chika’s English was good, and she was well qualified for the job, but the library preferred to hire someone who had learned English inside Japan. Chika had spent a year in Canada, and, at the time, that made her an undesirable employee.

I have since seen other examples of institutional discrimination. Several years later in Nagoya, I was particularly upset by an instance at my university's Department of International Culture. The Department was requested by a large company to recommend a student for a scholarship. The scholarship would almost certainly lead to a good position at the company upon graduation. A committee selected three candidates for consideration. The top candidate was a young woman. After a little discussion, the committee (all male, as were all tenured professors of the Faculty), moved the woman down the list. The reason given was that she had lived alone in an apartment while studying at the university. When I questioned this reason, my Japanese colleagues explained that the issue was not gender discrimination. After all, had she lived at home or in a dormitory, she would have been perfectly acceptable. The committee felt that the university had a responsibility to the company, and that a young woman who had lived alone in an apartment was clearly of questionable character. The scholarship went to the second-ranking candidate, a young man. No one questioned where he lived.

In Canada, I had seldom faced problems of discrimination. In Japan, I was a foreigner, and I was "unaffiliated," and so I was discriminated against in the job market. Especially in the teaching profession, racial discrimination was even then recognized social problems in Japan. The ethnic group most seriously effected are "Korean-Japanese," who still are legally denied many government jobs for "reasons of national security." Foreigners, even if born, raised and educated in Japan find it almost impossible to become teachers in public schools or universities. There have been a number of disputes about the tenure of foreign professors at Japanese national universities. Some progress has been made to improve this situation, but progress is slow and resistance is subtle, but stubborn. In the early 1980s someone like me, a white foreigner with modest credentials, and a smattering of Japanese, had no trouble finding work. Lots of people,

companies, and schools wanted part-time "English conversation" teachers. Getting a permanent, full-time position, however, was almost impossible.

In Japanese universities well-paying and moderately secure positions usually require some kind of "institutional affiliation." Private language companies will hire unaffiliated foreigners, but they usually require them to teach long hours for relatively little pay. Colleges offer better pay to foreigners, but even most part-time instructors are hired through connections at other colleges and universities. The few full-time contracts available to foreign instructors at Japanese universities are usually by applicants from another Japanese university or from outside of Japan, recruited directly from foreign universities. In the early 1980s, there were not as many foreign teachers at Japanese universities and colleges as there are today. Even at "N" College, my position had initially been "unofficial." Had I still been working at "N" College, I might have had a chance to find a part-time position at a university. But I was on my own.

I planned to get married, and I needed a "real" job. Raising a family in Japan is an especially expensive undertaking. I could not contemplate trying to live on the small income I made at my various "teaching jobs." I realized that the best way to get a teaching job at a Japanese university would be to return to Canada to continue my education. It also seemed the only way I was going to improve my ability to read and write Japanese. Moreover, I still had a job waiting for me back in Vancouver. So, in the spring of 1984, newly married, I again left Japan, thinking this time it might be for good.

Chapter Eleven

Race, Education, and "Japanese" Identity

I should like to consider the importance of the colour of our skin. From ancient times we have considered white skin more elegant, more beautiful than dark skin, and yet somehow this whiteness of ours differs from that of the white races. . . . When I lived on the Bluff in Yokohama I spent a good deal of my leisure in the company of foreign residents, at their banquets and balls. At close range I was not particularly struck by their whiteness, but from a distance I could distinguish them quite clearly from the Japanese. . . . For the Japanese complexion, no matter how white, is tinged by a slight cloudiness. These women were in no way reticent about powdering themselves. . . . Still they could not efface the darkness that lay below their skin. It was plainly visible as dirt at the bottom of a pool of pure water. . . . Thus it is that when one of us goes among a group of Westerners it is like a grimy stain on a sheet of white paper. The sight offends even our own eyes and leaves none too pleasant a feeling.

Junichiro Tanizaki, In Praise of Shadows. (1977, pp. 31-32)

While I was living in Kyoto, a Japanese friend living in Canada asked my wife and I to buy a doll with "Japanese features" for her young daughter. She felt it would be good for her daughter to have a doll she could identify with in some physical sense, at the very least a doll with brown eyes and black hair. My wife and I set out to find such a doll in Kyoto. There were none. Later, we checked stores in Osaka, but still we found none. Only after a long search did we find a doll with Japanese features, and then only in a "craft shop" that catered to foreign tourists. Meanwhile, we were being told in the mass media that the ever-popular "Barbie" doll was being reshaped with smaller hips and busts to better represent the modern woman. Barbie's "hour glass" figure has never interfered with her sales in Japan, where she continues to be immensely popular. The fact that in this market the consumers, who are mostly black-haired, brown-eyed young girls, buy and

spend their play time with only blond, blue-eyed dolls is an incongruity seldom noticed in Japan. When I mentioned this observation to Kyoto mothers, they were bemused.

Perhaps such a phenomenon is only a "problem" in the eyes of a foreign observer used to a multi-racial society like Canada or the United States.

In her ethnography of Japanese elementary school life, Gail Benjamin (1997) notices a similar phenomenon in elementary text-books:

In those textbooks illustrated with drawings rather than photographs, the children and adults depicted do not look physically Japanese. This occurs not just once in a while but very consistently. Most noticeably, the coloring of their hair does not match the range of black and near-black hues found in Japan. Instead, most people, both adults and children, are shown with brown, light brown, and even almost blond hair. Eyes are drawn in a way to de-emphasize the epicanthic fold, which is nearly universal in Japan.
(p. 125)

For Benjamin this phenomenon represents a conundrum because she doesn't think "the Japanese suffer from an unhealthy desire to be physically different than they are, but this style of portrayal is too widespread to be accidental or to be ignored" (p. 126). Although she isolates this "style of portrayal" as important for understanding the Japanese, she never arrives at or even attempts an explanation of it other than noting that the Ministry of Education is responsible for selecting these textbooks, that there is no opposition to such portrayals, and that just maybe it is some kind of attempt to make Japanese textbooks more "international." In the end, she offers no solution to the conundrum, and as a result falls back on questioning her own identity: "Perhaps as an American observer . . . , I am overly sensitive to the anomaly of textbooks that systematically portray Asians as though they were Caucasians" (p. 125). Yet, she never thinks to question the validity of this distinction between "Asian" and "Caucasian" or even to doubt the definitions underlying her apprehension of such human categories. In this chapter, I pick up this discussion where Benjamin leaves off, and explore the relationship between education, race and identity in

Japan, and how it relates to the racial identities of foreign, particularly North American, observers.

It is true that in Japan most people look favorably upon "internationalization," and it may constitute a reason for a varied portrayal of human types in textbooks. But it is also true that many Japanese are concerned about maintaining a strong racial and cultural identity. Japanese want to internationalize, but they want to remain distinctly Japanese. There is nothing especially unusual in this dichotomous desire; it can be found in many countries. It is what results when the human need to identify with a familiar and definable group clashes with the need to trade and communicate in a wider world. We cling to racial identities, mythicize them, politicize them. Upon close examination, however, much of what we take for granted about race turns out to be little more than deeply ingrained superstition (see Omoto 1997; Yoshino 1992; Suzuki 1989; Barzun 1965). We live in a racial environment conditioned by ideas about race that have evolved out of centuries of imperialism and colonial war.

Japan was thrown suddenly into a modern industrial world dominated by European science and thought during late Tokugawa Era [mid-nineteenth century]. Since the beginning of the Meiji Era [late nineteenth century] Japan has been striving to "catch up to the West." The accepted "international" ideologies of the West at that time rested mainly on concepts like imperialism, colonialism, and Darwinism that involved belief in a hierarchy of distinct "human types." This belief still permeates our cultural thought.

Moving beyond belief in these dangerous, out-dated concepts requires that people transcend an awareness of culture that limits us to membership in narrow and exclusive cultural or racial groups. This involves coming to new understandings of cultural identities. As Edward Hall (1981) says, "self-awareness and cultural awareness are inseparable, which means that transcending unconscious culture cannot be accomplished without some

degree of self-awareness" (p. 212). Of course, this self-awareness presupposes a well developed sense of self, and whether Japanese have an adequately developed sense of self is a question that scholars have been debating for decades (see, for example, Vlastos 1998a; Morris Suzuki 1997; Smith 1997; Rosenberger 1992; Bernstein 1991; Miyoshi 1979; Nakane 1970; Benedict 1946). I doubt that modern Japanese have a less sophisticated sense of self than do people in Western countries. Nevertheless, the Japanese could, as could most people in both "the East" and "the West," benefit from the expansion of their sense of self by more carefully studying their own and others cultures, for as Peter Winch (cited in Howard 1982) says, "seriously to study another way of life is necessarily to seek to extend our own" (p. 84).

Our modern world is mired in a heritage of race-thinking, and few have so deeply pondered this quagmire as has the novelist V. S. Naipaul. After living many years in England, he returned to his native Trinidad to find it on the "brink of racial war." The natives, he believes, had learned the prejudices of their former imperial masters. He writes, "The Negro has a deep contempt . . . for all that is not white; his values are the values of white imperialism at its most bigoted. The Indian despises the Negro for not being Indian; he has, in addition, taken over all the white prejudices against the Negro and with the convert's zeal regards as Negro everyone who has any tincture of Negro blood . . ." (Naipaul 1962, p. 86). This situation of racial conflict in which Negro and Indian despise each other "by reference to the whites" is for Naipaul especially ironic because it has "reached its peak today, when white prejudices have ceased to matter" (p. 86). To a large extent Japanese, too, have learned the racial "values of white imperialism." At most we might claim that the race-thinking common to most contemporary Japanese may be somewhat "out-of-date" relative to that of people in North America. Throughout the world, prejudice spreads or wanes according to changes in social factors, such as ideology,

demography, economics, technology. In this ebb and flow, individuals and even nations may find themselves "out of sync" with the racial "beliefs" generally accepted by others.

Few of us bother to seriously examine our own beliefs about race. Rather than question them, we tend to clothe them in platitudes. For that reason, when Benjamin questions her "American reaction" to Japanese racial portrayals as possibly "over sensitive," we may detect one of those healthy openings for growth that is stimulated by self-doubt. One paradox in the fight against racism is that we are condemned to contend using many of the same terms and concepts that have served to perpetuate racism. As Jacques Barzun (1965) points out, in most racial discourse:

The idea of race itself was seldom called into question by the opponents or the victims of the persecutions. On the contrary, racial pride was often stiffened by the onslaught, and related needs of group consciousness played into the hands of racists everywhere. (p. 184)

As I have shown in earlier chapters, many scholars are ready to identify the Japanese by the extremities of their "group consciousness." If this were true, one could claim that Japanese were especially susceptible to racial thinking that in turn leads to extremes of racism. Certainly, during the Second World War Japanese committed atrocities, the most notorious being the Rape of Nanking, that were clearly racist. In many countries of the world, Japan, as a nation, has yet to fully dispel this stigma of racism. But, I doubt that Japanese can be defined by their "group consciousness," and the Japanese are not the only nation to have committed racial atrocities in war.

We have all inherited a great deal of superstitious thought about race, and much of this thought is perpetuated through education, and is directly related to projects of "nation building." Yoshino (1992) has pointed out that "race" is very much like the "imagined community" of "nation" as described by Benedict Anderson (1991). Modern education tends to dress certain racial beliefs in scientific garb and enshrine them as facts

(Gould 1994). But they are not really facts. Our concepts of race are generalizations based upon vast amounts of often contradictory information. Since this "information" is integral to our cultural "regime of truth," we hear the same generalizations repeated so often that we come to assume that they are indisputable.

The racial thinking of Japanese is conditioned in part (but not entirely) by their relationship with the West and particularly the United States. Many of my Japanese students, for example, associate "racial prejudice" almost exclusively with the United States. Many times I have tried to open a conversation with my students about racial prejudice in Japan only to met by puzzled faces. These students associate "prejudice" with Americans, and see race literally in terms of "black" and "white." For many of them, "prejudice" has little to do with the "yellow" races except in so far as they are sometimes victims of it. This response no doubt partially reflects the influence of American media upon Japan.

One reaction of many of my Japanese students when I question them about racial prejudice in Japan is to wonder what I'm talking about: "How can there be a serious problem of racial prejudice in Japan when there are so few black or white people here?" In contrast, many Westerners I meet living in Japan are acutely aware of Japanese discrimination against Korean, Ainu and *buraku* communities. This difference of perspective is important to recognize. When Japanese and Americans talk about problems of race, they are often talking at cross purposes: some Americans are inclined to see Japanese as racist for the atrocities they committed in the Second World War, and in their persecution of their own minorities; some Japanese are inclined to see Americans as racist for dropping atomic bombs on them and for white American persecution of Asians and blacks. Cultural hermeneutics will remind us that Japanese and Westerners may

"see" race differently because they look at it from different, culturally-determined perspectives. Socially constructed definitions of race and related patterns of values may overlap among countries, but seldom do they match entirely, and from the discrepancies in this conceptual fit, cultural misunderstanding can arise.

For example, one Japanese intellectual, Oda Makoto (1987), observes a tendency among Japanese to believe that they have always been victims of foreigners, which makes it impossible for them to recognize themselves in the role of victimizer (pp. 165-169). Other observers like Ian Buruma (1984) and Morris-Suzuki (1997) have also noticed in Japan a "popular myth" of Japanese as "victim." What happens, then, when Japanese carry this "victim" identity into dealings with Americans who interpret their own actions in terms of self-sacrifice and generosity? Both parties are likely to be disappointed by the others "irrationality." Their resulting frustration is bound to impede cultural understanding. Some Westerners have already given up on the possibility of ever understanding the Japanese. For example, Jack Seward (1981) writes, "Our cultures are so antithetical that we as individuals, no matter how strong the emotional bond, the sexual impulse, or the force of shared experience, simply cannot live together in harmony for long periods of time" (p. 151). Even Edward T. Hall (1981) says, "Any Westerner who was raised outside the Far East and claims he understands and can communicate with either the Chinese or the Japanese is deluding himself" (p. 2). A similar frustration is displayed by many Japanese I have met who, after living or studying abroad, return to Japan with a distrust of foreigners.

Needless to say, I believe that Seward and Hall are mistaken, even though their skepticism about the possibility of understanding is shared by many on both sides of the Pacific. Instead, I share the view of the Canadian historian and diplomat E. H. Norman (1984), who writes:

It has become fashionable to say that foreigners can only come to understand them [Japanese] intuitively by long years of experience. Yet I believe they can be described as culturally predictable and as following patterns of behavior which can be understood to the extent that people will take the trouble to study their history and institutions. (p. 144)

But if Norman is right and the Japanese can be understood, why are Hall and Seward, both "reasonable men," so pessimistic about understanding the Japanese despite their obvious knowledge of Japan?

Much knowledge about other cultures and direct contact with people of other cultures are not in themselves guarantees of cultural understanding. Without a questioning attitude and self-reflection, knowledge and experience will not necessarily improve our understanding of other cultures. One of the bitter ironies of internationalization is that the people gaining international experience, including the scholars and teachers we rely upon for knowledge about foreign cultures, are often subject to inter-cultural stresses and disillusionment that can make them skeptical about the possibilities for cultural understanding. Some of these people then take the next step, and attribute their inability to understand to inherent and unbridgeable divisions of race.

In human relations of any kind, there is always danger of misunderstanding: conflicts of interest, jealousies, suspicions, and so on. When dealing with people of other cultures and languages the chances for misunderstanding and friction are multiplied. In order to prevent this friction from reaching destructive levels, cultural hermeneutics reminds us that prejudice and misunderstanding are the necessary first steps to understanding. Rather than insist upon the validity of our received "knowledge" or on the reliability of our gatherings of scattered "facts" about others, we should re-examine and question the sources of our own values and perceptions. Not only must we tolerate the mistakes of others, we must accept the humiliations of being tolerated in our turn. Finally, we must be self-forgiving of our own inevitable blunders and misunderstandings. I will try

to maintain such a self-questioning attitude as I continue this re-examination of the relationship between Japanese education and race.

The roots of Japanese racial identity lie not in its nativist traditions, but in nineteenth-century Western ideologies (Morris-Suzuki 1998; Yoshino 1992). Traditionally, Japanese had found the uniqueness of their common "national" bond in "things unseen" (Harootunian 1988). During the Tokugawa Era, nationalist scholars tended to emphasize a unseen "spirit" [*Yamato damashi*] or "national-family" bond [*kokutai*], and some of this thought still exerts a cultural influence in Japan today. However, beginning in the Meiji Era, Western "scientific" ideas of race were eagerly incorporated into the national myth. In the West, beginning from the late eighteenth century, "race" developed as primarily a visual construct. People came to trust in the idea of race because they could see its evidence in things like skin colour and bodily structure. Just as in the past people believed the world was flat and that the sun moved over it because their eyes told them this was "true," many people trust the "racial fact" because they can perceive selected patterns of visible difference among the vast and unlimited range of human difference. The Western rational imperative encouraged nineteenth and twentieth century scholars to categorize, interpret and give meaning to these perceived salient differences of race.

But "significant" differences, like all fashions, are subject to change. What is generally accepted to be a racial difference at one time or place may seem irrelevant elsewhere. Naipaul tells us that in the West Indies people are very sensitive to minor variations in skin colour, so that a person with coffee-coloured skin is considered racially different from a person with a tan or an ebony-coloured skin. In contrast, in Japan though one person is tall, with a milk-white complexion, fine reddish-brown hair and an arched

nose, and another person is short, dark complexioned, with coarse black hair, and a small flat nose, both are considered part of the same homogeneous race.

It is not that Japanese are not aware of such differences. As Benjamin noticed in elementary textbooks, if anything, Japanese exaggerate their differences in discourse among themselves. But unlike the American Benjamin, Japanese do not automatically interpret such differences as "racial." Japanese tend to perceive much more variation among themselves, visible and invisible, than do foreign observers with an "untrained" eye. For example, almost all Japanese know their own blood type, and can discuss tirelessly the effects blood-type differences have on personal character (Yoshino 1992). Most Westerners cannot play this game. They often do not know their own blood type, and most will not accept that blood type influences character; in other words, they just do not "see" the significances that to Japanese seem "obvious." Among themselves, Japanese seem to share two opposing tendencies in their perceptions of identity: on the one hand, they are attuned to fine physical differences among individuals which they value and do not hesitate to exaggerate, but on the other hand, there are whole groups of "internal others" who are rendered invisible within the homogenous culture. *Hisabetsu burakumin*, who are genetically identical to Japanese, are lost within what Wolf (1983) claims to be a Japanese "conspiracy of silence" (p. 282). Even Japanese Koreans and Japanese Chinese can be more or less indistinguishable from the Japanese they live among. The Ainu are invisible for another reason: they are so few and live in geographically remote areas. Nevertheless, the prejudice against these "invisible" minorities is "racial." Only when faced with a threatening outside world do Japanese assert their homogeneity at home, and declare a "visible" racial solidarity. Therefore, in order to better understand Japanese concepts of race, it will be useful to keep in mind Morris-Suzuki's claim that

"discrimination . . . produces difference just as much as difference produces discrimination" (1998, p.84).

The widespread Japanese belief in their racial homogeneity derives from European racial beliefs, and, as a result, Japanese tend to define themselves as a racial group in contrast to their understanding of "a European racial type." In other words, the Japanese perceive themselves as a race *despite* the great range of individual or regional physical differences they recognize among themselves. To the average Westerner, the Japanese constitute a race because they all have black hair, dark skin and brown eyes; that is to say, "they all look alike." In contrast, Japanese are often amazed when a European can, at a glance, identify another European as French, German or Italian. I remember my own shock when a Japanese student studying in Canada confided to me that "everybody here looks the same to me." Many of the clues to racial distinctions among Canadians that I took for granted were lost on her eye. She and I were operating by different criteria of distinctions.

Even where we share the same terminology of race such as "white" [*hakujin*] or "Oriental" [*toyojin*], our culturally determined boundaries for these terms may be quite different. This is not only true when comparing Canadians and Japanese. I recall reading a reference to a "British" writer as a "black," and read later that he was of "Indian" descent. In Vancouver, I have never heard an Indo-Canadian referred to as "black." In our North American regime of truth, "black" means "African." In England, an "Arab" is classed as an "Oriental," but in Western Canada, Oriental is a label more or less limited to East Asians, and does not usually include people from the Middle East, India, or even the Philippines. Racial terminology is notoriously loose, but it also "trains" the eye to identify "significant racial" distinctions.

The superstition of race has a long history in the West, but probably not as long as most people assume. The ancient Greeks grouped and distinguished people according to local identities based on city-states, religion, art and especially language (for example, we owe to Greek prejudices our word "barbarian"). Many other cultures simply divide the world into two groups: their own group and everybody else. An example are the Canadian Inuit and the Japanese Ainu. In their respective tongues, both "Ainu" and "Inuit" roughly translate as "the people." The Roman writer Tacitus probably wrote the first major book based upon a broad concept of race. In Germania (1970), he explores the virtues and vices of the German race in contrast to the Latins, which he feared were becoming degenerate. He uses the idea of racial threat to spur the Roman people to social reform. This is an ideological strategy still common in the West, and one which the Meiji reformers quickly adopted. Race is a social construct that becomes a tool of social control that is particularly useful in garnering support for war.

The first European text to use the word "race" in its modern "scientific" sense was probably by the scholar Georges Louis Comte de Buffon in 1749 (Morris-Suzuki 1998, p. 79). After that, race-thinking was an important tool of European imperialism and colonialism, and became legitimized by such slogans as "the white man's burden." As an instrument of imperial propaganda, pseudo-scientific race-thinking enjoyed official favour. It also proved useful in inter-European rivalries. The vogue for eugenics encouraged the carving of Europe into distinct racial types, dividing even the population of a single city into Germanic, Gallic, Latin or other "racial types." Later, "Social Darwinism," and the concept of the "survival of the fittest" was used to justify racist oppression and even genocide. Eugenics fell into disfavour in the West only after the Second World War, and theories about superior or inferior characteristics of certain races became taboo in polite "educated

circles.” Recently, controversial books by Herrnstein and Murray (1994), and Gould (1994) have revived “scientific” racial debate in North America.

Nevertheless, studies of human genes and alleles still suggest that the “biological” concept of race rests upon only flimsy genetic evidence (see Omoto 1997; Yoshino 1992 Bailey 1989a; Suzuki 1989). A pamphlet published by a British teacher’s union points out that “well over 94 percent of all the differences are found *within* a given ‘race’ rather than *between* ‘races,’” and so genetically speaking a “white” man is likely to be as different from another “white” man as he is from a “black” man. Moreover, differences in the distribution of particular alleles may occur between regions (e.g. Western Honshu and Southern Shikoku) or even neighbouring villages although the differences would not normally be classed as “racial” (National Union of Teachers 1978). In short, the concept of race is more or less unrelated to modern biological science (Suzuki 1989).

Despite the lack of scientific foundation for the concept of race, racial vocabulary persists in modern discourse: Asiatic, Nordic, Aryan, Semitic, Indian, Oriental, Caucasian are words that are used uncritically to categorize human groups. Often such terms carry negative connotations. Edward Said (1979) has shown how a term like Oriental serves a Euro-centric regime of truth. “Oriental” conjures up exotic images of mysterious cults, immoral practices, oppressive tyrants, and treacherous inscrutability. As early as the eighteenth-century, novelists like Samuel Johnson in Rasselas or William Beckford in Vathek were taking advantage of these exotic stereotypes in their “Oriental Tales.”

While we on the Pacific Rim tend to see Oriental as referring mainly to East Asian people, during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, even German’s were considered Oriental by the English and French. A French writer, Edmond Demolins, after the Franco-Prussian War, declared that “Prussians are a half-Oriental people” (cited in

Barzun 1965, p. 167). The English agreed, and during the First World War, they labeled the Germans "Huns," after the Mongolian hordes that swept into central Europe during the Roman Empire to destroy Western civilization. Later, Hitler declared the Germans to instead be "Aryan," descendants of a people originally migrating out of India. Hitler said, "At all times, social philosophies have conditioned not only the trends of politics, but also the aspects of cultural life" (cited in Barzun 1965, p. 183). Clearly, Hitler was on to the idea of "regimes of truth," and knew that no matter how insubstantial were his categories of race, if he could only make enough people believe in them, they would become "real." Most people today still stereotype Germans as blond-haired and blue-eyed, despite the fact that only a few generations ago the English pictured them as dark-haired and brown-eyed (like Hitler) "Huns." This German stereotype is a legacy of Hitler's racial propaganda, his "de-orientalization" of Germans. A brief survey of the changing ways Europeans have perceived the Japanese and how these perceptions influenced the Japanese self-perceptions may help us appreciate the "orientalization" of the Japanese "race."

In the eyes of the sixteenth-century Spanish and Portuguese missionaries and traders in Japan, the Japanese were not "yellow." Rather, Japanese were "white." One early visitor, Joao Rodrigues, wrote, "the Japanese are white, although not excessively pale as the northern nations but just moderately so" (cited in Cooper 1980, p. 37). Somewhat later, Bernardino de Avila Giron allowed only that "the women are white" (cited in Cooper 1980, p. 39). Later, in the seventeenth century, the Japanese drove out these "red" (not "white") European barbarians, and kept them out for 250 years. When the country reopened to the West in the late nineteenth century, some of the first visitors were British, who took a keen interest in this island nation that seemed so much like their own: civilized, aristocratic and "white." Yokoyama (1987) has given us an interesting picture of the evolving Victorian perceptions of the Japanese race. For example, it became popular

to trace the Japanese to the same "Semitic origins" as the "English race." One Englishman wrote, "It was impossible not to recognize in their colour, features, dress and customs, the Semitic stock whence they must have sprung" (p. 52). One theory among Victorians was that the Japanese race was of the same origins as the European, and that they were perhaps descended from the Babylonians or the lost tribe of Israel (p. 51). When an Englishman met a Japanese, he saw not an Oriental, not another "fattened-up Chinese, or greasy Brahmin" (p. 25), but, instead, he saw a member of perhaps "the finest race on earth," (p. 26), with a skin "clear and white as that of a Circassian" (p. 57). Even the Americans were at first careful to distinguish Japanese from the "racially inferior" Chinese with which they were more familiar (Miyoshi 1979, p. 67). But especially for the British, the Japanese were like a magic mirror that reflected an unspoiled and exotic image of themselves.

During the 1860s national frictions made the Japanese look less benign, and therefore, less "white" to the British. Political tensions led to armed conflict. A British subject was cut down by a samurai. In retaliation, a British fleet bombarded Kagoshima. To Europeans, the Japanese were showing their true and treacherous "Oriental face." Sir Rutherford Alcock declared,

The Japanese, notwithstanding their advanced state and unquestionable superiority in many respects over every other Oriental nation, still remain true to the original type, to the traditions and the instincts of their race. (Yokoyama 1987, p. 83)

Although Alcock did not define these "instincts," most English readers were familiar with them from their education and their reading of "Oriental Tales." From this period on, many British would describe Japanese in terms of a negative stereotype: brutal, obsequious and sexually amoral. Nevertheless, the fairy-tale, "Mikado" image of an exotic and beautiful Japan also persisted. This split in perceptions of Japanese continues today.

Perplexed by the Japanese, the British came to refer to them as “singular.” This label has contributed to the persistent belief in Japanese uniqueness. In fact, rather than “singularity,” Japan presented a “duality” to the Victorian mind. This duality is seen in two opposing stereotypes. One is negative: dark, grotesque, rude, immoral, untrustworthy, “a civilization without any originality” (Yokoyama 1987, p. 175). The other is positive: graceful “white” ladies in beautiful kimonos; men with “original and thinking minds; with a dash of Asiatic fierceness, they are generous, joyous, sympathetic” (p. 1). As often happens with racial stereotypes, once a certain vocabulary is established, it assumes a life of its own and proliferates.

In England and America these two opposing stereotypes became tools for social reformers who could either contrast the coarseness and brutality of Industrial England with the grace and gentility of nature-loving Japan, or arouse British pride and Christian militancy by excoriating Japanese debauchery and cruelty. When Mori Arinori, later the first Minister of Education in the Meiji government, slipped away as a youth to England, he was introduced by Laurence Oliphant to the Christian mystic, Thomas Lake Harris. Harris came to hope for a “Global regeneration” that would begin in Asia, and he turned “to Japan--or rather an idealized image of Japan--for reaffirmation and encouragement in his struggle to reform the degenerate nineteenth-century West” (Hall 1982, p. 101). We can contrast Mori’s early enthusiastic reception in England with that of a later generation of Japanese students, which included Natsume Soseki, who were less eagerly patronized, and were described in British periodicals as “uncontrolled and immature,” or corrupt and conceited (Yokoyama 1987, p. 140). This divided response to Japanese students persists today as a new generation of Japanese study and travel abroad.

The negative stereotype of the Japanese became dominant abroad in the propaganda of the Second World War. Even I (still only in my forties) can remember

watching Popeye cartoons on TV, in which Japanese were depicted as grotesque and dwarfish buffoons. But even before the end of the war the American authorities were reviving the positive stereotype. Sheila Johnson (1988) notes a 1941 Time Magazine article entitled "How to Tell Your Friends from the Japs" that explains, "Some aristocratic Japanese have thin, aquiline noses, narrow faces and, except for their eyes, look like Caucasians" (p. 9). In other words, just like the illustrators of Benjamin's Japanese elementary school textbooks, some American experts were willing to "draw" Japanese with "Caucasian" features. The war gave Americans two contrasting stereotypes of the Japanese. I saw this contrast portrayed in a war-time military poster depicting side by side photographs of two Japanese "types": the first was short, dark, squinting, buck-toothed, pug-nosed and pig-shaved; the second was a tall, straight, dignified, almond-eyed gentleman with a high arched nose and white complexion. The second portrayal has yet to fix itself in the American imagination, possibly due to later American wars against other "Orientals."

To this point, my brief and no doubt inadequate survey of the history of perceptions of the Japanese race has been made from the "white" European point of view. If we look back over the same period from the Japanese point of view, we will again find the development of two quite opposite stereotypes of Western races. These stereotypes present a kind of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde "white man": the beautiful and the ugly *hakujin*.

The Japanese word that is closest in meaning to the English word race is *jinshu*. Another word, *minzoku*, can also carry the idea of race. *Minzoku* includes connotations like "a people" or "folk" but during the war it became valorized as a "racially specific folk" (Hartootunian 1989, p. 77). Today, *jinshu* more specifically denotes those vast divisions, such as "white," "black" or "yellow" races. But *jinshu* only took on this denotation during

the Meiji Era. Until the late nineteenth century, the word *jinshu* [*jin* = human; *shu* = type] was used to mean something like “human kind,” as distinct from animals. Beginning in the Meiji Era, the Japanese vocabulary changed and grew in order to adapt concepts and values imported from the West (Miyoshi 1979, p. 169). New words for new ideas--*shakai* [society]; *kanojo* [her]; *kenpo* [constitution]--came into use after the 1880s. Even concepts so taken for granted in Western societies as “home” had no equivalent in Japan, and so a new word had to be invented, *katei* (Sand 1998). Similarly, an old word, *jinshu*, was adapted to take on new meanings that were incorporated in the concept of “race” as it had already evolved in the West.

Until Japan opened to the West in the Meiji Era, Japan had limited contact with foreigners, and thus little “need” for a concept of race. Instead, Japan was rife with internal divisions and distinctions. Japan was divided into dozens of warring fiefdoms. Culture was fragmented and reflected clear regional and class distinctions. Even the language because of the prevalence of often mutually incomprehensible dialects served to divide the Japanese. It is said the lord of Satsuma claimed that he feared no spy because the Satsuma dialect was unintelligible to outside Japanese, and it was impossible for other Japanese to imitate it. Such dialect differences, along with severe restrictions in trade and travel, were encouraged by *daimyo* [lords] as a matter of political and military policy. Until the Meiji Restoration, “national” identity in Japan tended to be centered on the fief rather than the entire country. In fact, the regional fiefs were, and often still are, referred to as *kuni*, the same word used to mean “country.” The differences among some fiefs took on “national,” perhaps even “racial” degrees in the eyes of Japanese of the day. During the Paris International Exposition of 1867, Satsuma exhibited as an independent state (Jansen 1994, p. 319). As a result of over two hundred years of a stagnant military truce,

fief loyalties became entrenched resulting in a fracturing of national identity. In this political environment, visible differences among regional populations were valorized. In Japan before the Meiji Restoration, there was not much call for concepts stressing the inherent racial unity of all Japanese.

It took the Meiji Restoration, the adoption of Western science and concepts of the state, and a concerted educational effort to establish race-thinking in Japan. This adoption was stimulated by the threat of European imperialism. By the early twentieth century, the ideologue Kita Ikki had accepted the social Darwinist view that "competition between peoples and nations . . . has taken place throughout the entire history of mankind." He moved towards building an "racial group" broad enough to counter the force of European imperialism by identifying with his "seven hundred million brothers in China and India. . ." (cited in De Bary 1964, p. 269). Nevertheless, nationalists like Ikki were essentially idealists, and more interested in "Japanese spirit" than "Japanese race." The most sophisticated race-thinking was not done by these nationalists, but by Christian intellectuals familiar with Western thought. In The Earth and Man, Uchimura Kanzo argues that the mountainous terrain of Japan gives it characteristics similar to Europe and as a result Japanese people are racially equal to Europeans and possess the traits necessary for world leadership (cited in Howes [unpublished], p. 232). Nitobe Inazo (1981), in Bushido: The Soul of Japan, a book he wrote in English, tries to convince a Western readership that "now, individuality is the sign of superior races and of civilizations already developed" (p. 21). For Nitobe, the idea of "superior races" came quite naturally after his many years studying in the United States. Nitobe and Kanzo both looked to the West and wanted the Japanese to be perceived as racially equal to the "Anglo-Saxons." At the same time, Nitobe argues that the Japanese are superior to other Asians: "while in

India and even China men seem to differ in degree of energy or intelligence, in Japan they differ by originality of character as well" (p. 21). For Nitobe, Chinese and Indians possess that unfortunate Oriental vice of sameness, whereas Japanese, like Anglo-Saxons, possess the individuality that Kanzo saw as the mark of superior races fit to lead the march of world civilization.

It is easy to underestimate the social and cultural influence of Japanese Christians in Japan because of their small numbers. Also, certain notorious incidents, such as Uchimura Kanzo's arrest for refusing to bow to the Imperial Rescript on Education, have given the impression that Japanese Christians, especially Protestants, were in opposition to the aims and policies of the central authorities (Pyle 1978). However, as Sheldon Garon (1997) points out, many politicians and bureaucrats were either Christian or sympathized with Christianity, and many more supported Christian demands for social reforms. He explains that "Composing less than one half of one percent of the population, Protestants nonetheless enjoyed considerable influence. They were well organized, active in social reform, and possessed international ties through missionaries from the United States and Great Britain" (p. 98). Of course, this aggressive Christian minority was responsible for importing many Western values and concepts to Japan. Some of these new values and concepts benefited the Japanese people greatly. Others, such as those regarding race, had a more questionable influence.

Nitobe's effort to distinguish the Japanese race from the inferior Chinese is a small part of a more sophisticated attempt to create a new "Orient" for Japan. Stephen Tanaka, in Japan's Orient: Rendering Pasts into History, has documented the efforts of pre-war Japanese scholars to draw the same kind of distinctions of superiority and inferiority between Japan and China [or *Shina*] that Europeans were drawing between the Occident

and the Orient (see Said 1979). A key turning point in this racial realignment was the Russo-Japanese War of 1905, in which for the first time Japan defeated a “white” nation in war. From this war, the Japanese gained a new “international” perspective. But Daikichi Irokawa (1985) argues that “this internationalism was soon reduced to the single point of racial prejudice against the Chinese” (p. 309). The Great Pacific War, Japan’s invasion of China, and her later defeat by the “Anglo-Saxons” have complicated racial discourse in Japan, but they in no way ended it. A confusion about racial identity continues today: some Japanese look to the east and see Japan as part of an “Asian” race; other Japanese look to the west and aspire to an equality with “Anglo-Saxons” that has no relation to Asia. As some look east, and others look west, another group of Japanese are, it seems, trying to look both ways at once.

A few years ago, I came across a cartoon story in an educational magazine (English Journal 1989) that dealt with the difficulties of a Japanese girl studying in an American school. It illustrates how these two different racial identities exist in the same Japanese mind at the same time. In one scene [see Chapter Appendix, p. 268], three girls are walking together: a round-eyed Ayako in a blouse and skirt; a blond American in sports shirt and cut-offs; and a Chinese student with slanted eyes, high cheek-bones, and a high-collar dress with a slit up the side, like a bar waitress. The Japanese girl’s facial features are much the same as the “white” girls, just as Benjamin sees them portrayed in elementary textbooks. The Chinese girl, in contrast, is a walking stereotype of the “Oriental.” I have shown this picture to many Canadians, and only a fraction of them could identify Ayako as “Japanese,” but they all could identify the other girl as Chinese. In contrast, Japanese have no trouble recognizing Ayako as “Japanese,” and naturally distinct from the Chinese. I was less surprised by this because I am familiar with the Japanese habit of pulling the corners of their eyes up to mimic Chinese. The point that

Benjamin misses, and that this cartoon illustrates, is that Japanese actually do “see” themselves as physically varied (not to mention quite different from other Orientals), even though in the eyes of many North Americans “they all look alike.”

But there is more to this cartoon than just this observation about the portrayal of Japanese and Chinese features. There is also a deep irony because the story emphasizes the “solidarity” of the Japanese girl and the Chinese girl in the face of American persecution. The Japanese girl is being teased by the American for her poor English. The Chinese girl comforts her saying, “Don’t give up, Ayako. I’m behind you. We are both Oriental [*toyojin*]” (my translation--see page 225). The irony of the contrast between the visual portrayal of these girls and the racial sentiment is unintended, but nevertheless significant. The perception of race apparent in this story in a popular educational magazine reveals that at least some Japanese entertain a “dual” or split racial identity.

Some Japanese feel divided racial loyalties. They express a kind of guilt about “deserting” the Orient. One high school student wrote a letter to the editor of the *Asahi shimbun* to make an argument for Oriental racial solidarity:

The other day, my teacher went to Taiwan, and when he mentioned that he was “Asian,” the Chinese taxi driver said, “Asians call Japanese ‘bananas.’” Although we look like the same “yellow race,” we act in all ways like “white people.”

My teacher responded that, “Japanese are really boiled eggs.” Even though we live like Western people, in our hearts we are the same Asian people. (see “*Ajia e*” 1988)

Observing racial attitudes in Trinidad, Naipaul (1962) noticed a “sentimental camaraderie of skin,” which provides blacks in the West Indies with “the cheep thrill of being ‘African’”(p. 91). It would seem that a similar “yellow race” camaraderie is felt by the teacher in the above letter. The irony is that when the student writing this letter enters this “race-game,”

he does so according to the rules developed by "white" European imperialists over many generations. According to the game, "white," a symbol of purity, is the highest quality, "black" a symbol of darkness and ignorance, is the lowest. If a Japanese chooses to be "yellow," he chooses to be inferior to "whites," but yet he cannot really choose to be "white." The novelist Junichiro Tanizaki (1977), in In Praise of Shadows, insists, as did the early European visitors to Japan, that the Japanese are "white," but then he qualifies this declaration, saying that "when one of us goes among a group of Westerners it is like a grimy stain on a sheet of white paper" (pp. 32-33). There is white, and then there is "white." Where the concept of race is determined by skin colour, Japanese are caught in a no-win situation: they recognize Europeans as "white," and so since they have traditionally valued a white complexion as superior to a dark complexion, (especially in women, as is symbolized by the heavy white make up of Geisha and Maiko performers), they can never match the superior whiteness of the "whites."

When Japanese look to the West, to the "white" race, they are at the same time attracted and repelled. Kinya Tsuruta (1987) finds a split in portrayals of *hakujin* running throughout modern Japanese culture. He traces two stereotypes--one beautiful, the other ugly--back to the Meiji Era, and especially to Soseki's novel, Sanshiro. Tsuruta believes that these two stereotypes dominate the images of foreigners in Japanese literature to the present day. Tsuruta suspects that these portrayals of "white" people reflect anxieties arising from an ambivalence to modernization. This ambivalence results, on the one hand, in the perception of foreigners as grotesque, and "other-than-human":

What is most striking is these writers' inability to create *hakujin* characters that seem lifelike; they are often so hideously exaggerated in one aspect or another that they fail to come alive as human beings with normal feelings. (1987, p. 394)

The Second World War, of course, only intensified Japanese anxiety about race. In some post-war stories, such as Nozaka Akiyuki's "American *Hijiki*" (1977), occupying American troops are pictured as repulsive and bestial. Since the war, Japanese have enjoyed great economic success, but an inability to see "white" or "black" people as human persists, and Tsuruta believes that "beneath the reflection of affluence and poise lies a pool of self-doubt and *Angst* ready to boil up at any time" (p. 394).

Tsuruta's observation that Japanese tend to "hideously exaggerate" portrayals of *hakujin* is evidence that the cartoons in elementary textbooks are not, as Benjamin suspected, Caucasian—at least not in the minds of most Japanese. Most Japanese I questioned had no trouble in identifying Ayako as Japanese even though few Canadians could, and instead mistook her for a Caucasian. Just as the Chinese girl was stereotyped clearly by her slanted eyes, high-cheekbones (seldom a part of Japanese self-portrayal) and slit dress, characters meant to be "Western" are conventionally depicted with certain exaggerated racial traits such as hairiness, blue eyes, excessively large noses, and rosy red complexions. Despite their brown hair and round eyes, (or partly because of them if we contrast with portrayals of Chinese), Japanese characters can be identified as Japanese because they represent an "un-grotesque" humanity.

A Japanese ambivalence towards modernization, and towards *hakujin* may contribute to their fascination with tradition and *nohonjinron* [theories on the Japanese], including the belief in Japanese racial homogeneity. For those who insist on creating a strong concept of Japanese racial identity, they may be submerging their *angst* more deeply, and the pressure of their anxiety may increase to the point that it will erupt violently. Barzun (1965) has explained events in Germany that led to the Second World War in this way:

Race in Germany was a means to give back to the German people a

feeling of self-respect after the national humiliation at Versailles and since. Inevitably, giving self-respect meant giving a sense of superiority, as well as the chance for live persecution. (pp. 182-183)

Some foreign observers see Japanese society as fundamentally racist. They see this in Japanese sex tours abroad, the finger-printing of Koreans, the denial of the Ainu and *hisabetsu burakumin*, the popularity a decade ago of "Sambo" dolls, and the difficulties of foreign students to find housing. Japanese tend to think these issues are exaggerated by foreigners as an exercise in a fundamentally racist "Japan bashing." As we have seen, for many Japanese the term "racist" relates only to problems of "black" and "white" or situations in which Japanese are the "victim." In the midst of all this acrimony, it is important to point out that those foreigners who label Japanese "racist" are as misguided as those Japanese who deny racism in Japan. To label any other race as "racist" is itself a racist act, just as intolerant as calling a race "dirty." In fact, it is this ever-repeated originary event of "accusation" that makes all other racist acts possible.

In Japan, educational policy is one of the chief culprits in the perpetuation of race-thinking. As we have seen, it was primarily scholars like Nitobe and Fukuzawa who popularized in Japan Western concepts of race. That great Meiji popularizer of Western *bunmei* [civilization] and founder of Keio University, Fukuzawa Yukichi wrote one of the first Japanese textbooks to explain that the globe was racially sorted and colour-coded: Europe = white; Africa = black; Asian = "slightly yellow" and so forth (see Morris-Suzuki 1998, p. 85). Scholars of Tokyo and Kyoto universities developed various theories of race, giving central attention to debates on the origins and "quality" of the Japanese race, and whether the Japanese were a "pure" or "hybrid" race. The Ministry of Education disseminated certain of these theories through its textbooks. The theories were not necessarily simplistic, even during the difficult period before the War when government

policy was becoming increasingly right-wing. Giving the example of the textbook *Kokutai no honji* [Principle of the National Entity], Morris-Suzuki (1998) explains that "In fact, the more one looks at the literature of the 1930s and 1940s, the harder it becomes to sustain simple equations in which belief in racial purity are equated with militarism and imperialism and belief in hybridity with tolerance of difference" (p. 94). Morris-Suzuki observes that seldom in this literature is Japanese "superiority" explained "in terms of biological race." Rather, the literature stresses that Japan is "uniquely qualified to lead the East Asian region" by virtue of its "'unselfish' ability to assimilate foreign influences" (p. 95) or its "long tradition of respect for racial equality and harmony" (p. 101). Morris-Suzuki goes so far as to suggest that the pre-war Japanese theories of race [*jinshu*] and ethnicity [*minshu* or *minzoku*] and their relationship to nation [*kokutai*] were remarkably similar to theories current in academia today, such as those of Benedict Anderson, Eric Hobsbawm or Louis Althusser (p. 98).

Since the war, Japanese scholars have generally shied away from exploring issues of race, and Japanese textbooks remain relatively quiet on the subject. Racial stereotypes are nevertheless promoted in Japanese education through "silent" means: for example, language textbooks in which native-speakers of English are almost always white, or JET teachers who are almost all from "Anglo-Saxon" countries. The accusations that the Ministry of Education "censors" modern Japanese history textbooks is well known (Smith 1994a; Ienaga 1978). History textbooks generally avoid mention of Japanese wartime racial atrocities. Recently, Ministry of Education "censorship" has broadened to include home economics textbooks that dare to portray other than the "normal" patterns of the nuclear family (working father, at-home mom, two healthy children studying hard). Less discussed by critics, however, is the fact that textbooks hardly ever deal with current racial

problems in Japan so that students are not made sensitive to manifestations of racial discrimination in their daily lives. The result is that for most students race is a "foreign" problem, and one that seems hardly relevant in a "homogeneous" Japan. In other words, one of the main problems with textbooks are their omissions. These omissions reflect an absence of meaningful "racial" discourse in schools at all levels. Perhaps we could go so far as to say that *Mombusho's* busy curricula are like a typhoon: a great deal of wind swirling around an empty centre.

When Prime Minister Nakasone made his notorious comments about the success of Japanese education resting on the "fact" of Japanese homogeneity, which he contrasted with multi-racial America, many Westerner critics were appalled that the statement seemed to deny the existence of Ainu, Koreans, *hisabetsu burakumin*, Okinawans, and other minorities in Japan. Some American eagerly pointed out this "fact" of Japanese racial diversity. Yet in the past many American scholars have overlooked inter-Japanese racial differences. For example, Reischauer (1988) dismisses the Ainu as "an early type of man" insignificant because of their number (p. 33). But Nakasone's argument is based upon a long tradition of belief in the Japanese as a *tan'itsu minzoku*. [*tan'itsu* means "one" or "uni," and *minzoku* is an ambiguous term meaning "race/ethnic community/nation" (Yoshino 1992, p. 25)]. The ambiguity of the concept *tan'itsu minzoku* means that foreign protests against it make little sense to most Japanese. Moreover, since race, as it has developed in the West, is a concept of belief based on little fact, making a "factual" case against Nakasone is more or less futile.

The real weakness with Nakasone's educational judgment is that he "puts the cart before the horse." He says educational success is the product of racial homogeneity, when this "racial homogeneity" is really a product of a successful educational policy. Merry

White (1987) notes that in Japan "education is a force for reducing cultural variety" (p. 15).

Roy Andrew Miller (1982) argues that even "foreign language learning--the one academic exercise that might otherwise be expected to lead society in the direction of internationalism and racial pluralism--has instead become one of the major factors perpetuating the essentially racist nature of contemporary Japanese society" (p. 239).

William K. Cummings (1980) agrees that the homogenization of the Japanese is a deliberate educational objective of *Mombusho*, but he also notes a strong resistance to this policy in Japan:

One reason conservatives object to the propagandistic activities of leftist teachers was they also wished to advance their world view of the Japanese people, unified in harmony, loving their country, respecting their emperor, and sacrificing through hard work for the realization of greater prosperity. (p. 58)

Conservative forces manipulate Japan's curriculum in order to impose their own definition of what it means to be Japanese, and to this end they have institutionalized race-thinking in such a way that Japanese are taught to habitually relate to foreign people in terms of "us against them": "us" being the *tan'itsu minzoku* Japanese, and "them" being just about everyone outside of Japan. In the meantime, apart from a few slogans and ritual apologies for *dowa mondai* [the problem of discrimination against *hisabetsu burakumin*], Japanese education manages to leave unmentioned the internal differences among the Japanese "race."

The differences that underlie the veneer of Japanese homogeneity are complex. For example, there are not only the differences between "normal" Japanese and the "internal others" (the racial minorities, the physically and mentally handicapped, the deaf and so on), but also there are vast numbers of people in the spaces that open up among these differences. Minority groups in Japan are not always clearly distinct from each

other. For example, there are only between 20,000 and 50,000 Ainu in Japan (different experts give different numbers, showing the difficulty of "measuring" racial distinctions), but many thousands more have Ainu ancestors and hide (or are ignorant of) the fact. There are close to a million Koreans in Japan, but many thousands of Japanese have a mother, or grandfather or other blood relative who is Korean, but they make no attempt to identify with their "Korean selves." Homi Bhabha (1984) demands that we consider and value the realm of "hybridity." Stuart Hall (1992) explains the need to "retheorize the concept of difference." He says,

... we [in Britain] are beginning to see constructions of just such a new conception of ethnicity: a new cultural politics which engages rather than suppresses *difference* and which depends, in part on the cultural construction of new ethnic identities. Difference, like representation, is also a slippery, and therefore, contested concept. There is the `difference` which makes a radical and unbridgeable separation: and there is a `difference` which is positional, conditional and conjunctural, closer to Derrida's *differance*, though if we are concerned to maintain a politics it cannot be defined exclusively in terms of an infinite sliding of the signifier. We still have a great deal of work to do to *decouple* ethnicity, as it functions in the dominant discourse, from its equivalence with nationalism, imperialism, racism and the state, which are the points of attachment around which a distinctive British or, more accurately, English ethnicity have been constructed. (p. 257)

But if the British have a long way to go, then the Japanese have a much longer way to go because they are still generally at a stage of denial of difference. This is a stage at which the educational system resists entering into conversations with internal others. It is a stage of silence.

Difference is often perceived as a threat in Japan, and where it is found it can become the focus of *ijime* [bullying] and of shame. A great emptiness in the school curriculum moves out and fills society with a vacuum of identity. What fills the vacuum is shame. The rules that seal this shame are uncompromising. If "auntie" is Chinese, keep it a secret. If cousin is mentally handicapped, don't talk about it. If mom is divorced, suffer

in silence. If the family "used to be" Korean or *burakumin*, hope nobody finds out about it. If a son or daughter is in a wheel chair, keep her out of sight. This is the great Japanese *gaman*: enduring in silence. This desire to hide difference may be one reason Ruth Benedict (1946) senses Japan to be a culture of "shame." Benedict is wrong not to recognize Japan as a culture of "guilt" as well. But guilt, too, is hidden.

In Japan today, ethnicities are starting to "come out," and to redefine themselves. Koreans are using their Koreans names. An Ainu university has been established. People who were once "Japanese" admit to being *hisabetsu burakumin* or Ainu, and even write books to recover their lost identities (Kayano 1994). Recent books in English (Morris-Suzuki 1998; David Suzuki & Keibo Oiwa 1997; Patrick Smith 1997; Denoon et. al. 1996) rediscover ethnic and racial identities among Japanese. Within Japan as well, there are scholars, such as Amino (1996, 1992) and Shibata (1995) who promote the theories of difference and diversity in Japan. Despite this movement towards "redefining difference," the educational system remains fossilized. On the topic of invisible others, it maintains a stony silence. In the interest of success in the competition for educational achievement, the Japanese curriculum leaves students with no *yoyu* [space] for conversations through which they could discover and explore the differences that unite them. One Japanese who "came out" to live her life no longer as one of the homogeneous Japanese, but as a *hisabetsu burakumin*, says,

"The problem begins and ends with education. The power of self-expression, the ability to realize yourself, to act in the world--these things come from education. But they are not encouraged in Japan. It is the biggest problem of all." (cited in Smith 1997, p. 281)

Thus, she summarizes the failure of the education system to alleviate discrimination in Japan.

For the foreign observer, and especially for the many North American educators (like Bernstein) in Japan, it is important to try to understand that the Japanese "understandings" of issues of race, or even about what constitutes race, are complex. Moreover, they are not necessarily the same as in North America, even if the terminology and structure of thought share similarities. It is wrong to dismiss Japanese racial attitudes as racist simply because, for example, a few politicians try to manipulate concepts of Japanese homogeneity or uniqueness in order to achieve political advantage. The construction of racial concepts in Japan's modern history have been as complex as anywhere in Europe or America. Gaining a little knowledge about war-time atrocities, the persecution of Japanese Koreans, or the *dowa mondai* does not give us the right to bring our thinking about Japan to an end in order to make blanket condemnations of Japanese attitudes to race. As Morris-Suzuki (1998) correctly says, "the exploration of diverse prehistoric origins and the deconstruction of scientific racism, however valuable in themselves, do not take us all that far down the road to understanding the complexities of inclusion and exclusion, prejudice, and discrimination in modern society" (p. 108). On the other hand, a cultural relativism that forgives or justifies any and all racial attitudes does not take us any closer to real understanding either. Cultural relativism is a popular defensive stance in a number of controversial issues in Japan. We have seen it used recently when a Japanese consul arrested in Vancouver for beating his wife tried to justify his abuse as an aspect of Japanese custom Canadians cannot understand (see "Josei e" 1999). Similar arguments can be heard to explain away racial discrimination in Japan, and, as Yoshino (1992) points out, "although cultural relativism developed as a reaction against racism, it had the ironic effect of promoting other types of racial thinking" (p. 181). The development of race thinking is directly related to nation building, and it reflects ideas

about what kind of nation people ultimately want to create. In this sense, race thinking is directly connected to a people's national identity through their educational experience. To better understand the racial attitudes among people in another culture like Japan requires a careful examination of the history and creation of concepts of race in that nation. At the same time, it requires serious reflection upon our own racial attitudes, and upon their place in our own cultures and systems of power.

Chapter Appendix

From: 画: 大竹孝志, 「綾子のプレップ・スクール」

高校留学 89 "The English Journal 51," pp. 205-212.



Chapter Twelve

Autobiographical Interlude: In the Japanese Wilderness [1985-1990]

The man who says, "I've got a wife and kids" is far from home; at home he speaks of Japan. But he does not know--how could he?--that the scenes changing in the train window from Victoria Station to Tokyo Central are nothing compared to the change in himself; and travel writing, which cannot but be droll at the outset, moves from journalism to fiction, arriving as promptly as the Kodama Echo at autobiography. From there any further travel makes a beeline to confession, the embarrassed monologue in a desert bazaar.

Paul Theroux, The Great Railway Bazaar. (1975, p. 332)

Tsukuba Science City, and a National University [1985-1986]

So much in life depends upon chance. After less than a year in Canada and the birth of my first son, I wanted nothing more than to return to Japan, but financially I had no room to move. I applied for scholarships, and waited for some opportunity. Meanwhile, I pursued my study of Japanese language and literature at UBC. Still, I was restless, and so during Spring Break I set out on a two-week driving tour of the northern-west United States with my family. But the baby cried all the way to Oregon, and the weather was terrible: rain, and wind blowing our volkswagon "bug" all over the freeway. After only two nights away, we were back in our apartment in Vancouver. A letter was waiting for me. I had been awarded a full *Mombusho* graduate scholarship. The deadline for accepting was in a matter of days. Had we been away for the full two weeks, my chance to return to Japan would have been lost.

Tsukuba University is one of the most prestigious national universities in Japan. A famous "education" university had been moved out of Tokyo to Tsukuba Science City as part of Prime Minister Kakue Tanaka's effort to decentralize the Japanese archipelago.

Tsukuba Science City gained international attention when a World's Fair was held there in 1984. Otherwise, I knew little about the place. My only experience of living in Japan had been in Kansai, and so I was glad for a chance to live in Kanto. I did not think it could be much different from Kansai. I soon learned not to underestimate the regional differences of Japan. An architect, Arata Isozaki (1989) once described Tsukuba Science City as "a vacant lot." He said that when he first visited there he saw a "desolate modern city designed and built by the textbook," and he knew "it was not the kind of place where [he] would want to live" (p. 50). Fortunately for me, I arrived at night.

I spent that first night alone at the university guest house, and in the morning, I found myself in an architectural wonderland of modern buildings and fountains. But it was like a ghost-town, empty of people. I could not even find a coffee shop open for breakfast. As long as I studied there, the university always seemed half deserted.

Tsukuba City remains largely undeveloped, and so there is no "university town" environment to attract students. Since it is close to Tokyo by train, most students and professors prefer to commute from the much more lively capital. Commuting from Tokyo is made easier by the fact that it is quite possible to succeed at a Japanese university by only occasionally visiting campus. Many professors make it a regular habit to *kyuko* [cancel classes]. Travelling to the university from my house in the countryside was often a waste of time because many classes were canceled, or extremely boring. Eventually, I, too, gave up attending classes regularly.

When I complained about the lack of intellectual challenge at Tsukuba to a professor in Canada, he gave me good advice: "Don't worry about the empty university; make the best of your opportunity by reading, studying Japanese, and getting to know the area and the people." So that is what I did. Once I changed my attitude, I relaxed and

enjoyed life in *Sakuramura* (Cherry Blossom Village--the largest *mura* [village], I am told, in Japan). I read, jogged, enjoyed time with my wife and child, made good friends with our neighbours, joined a local tennis club, and explored north-central Japan. Despite the university, I enjoyed a valuable educational experience.

The people living in *Sakuramura*, the area surrounding Tsukuba, can be divided into two distinct groups. The first group are the farm families who have lived there for generations, and who have a distinctive culture and dialect. To me, they even appeared physically different from people in the other group. They seemed shorter relative to other Japanese, and tended more to the extremes of "skinny" or "chubby." The second group are the scientists, professors, students, and seekers of cheap housing who have recently moved in, mostly from Tokyo. This second group can again be sub-divided economically: outsiders connected to the university were usually wealthy, stylish, highly-educated, and cosmopolitan; outsiders who came for the cheap housing were usually poor, and often socially isolated.

People from Tokyo speak a monotonous sounding "standard Japanese," but the locals speak a lilting dialect, ending their sentences with a distinctive "*da-pe*." The outsiders live in sub-divisions or in the huge apartment complexes that stood out among the empty lots like giant rocks on mars. The locals live in farmhouses characterized by a spacious courtyard entered by huge *mon* [gate houses]. The farmhouses are huddled among woods, surrounded by fields of rice. There are many deserted farmhouses: dark and ghostly in the shadow of tall bamboo groves. In *Sakuramura* I could relax as a foreigner because the locals looked upon me as no more an "outsider" than most of my Japanese neighbours.

I and my family became friends with our next-door neighbours. Three generations lived together, including a daughter about the same age as our son. The grandfather and his son were electricians. This son, just a few years younger than I, loved motorcycles, rally races and shopping. We often took our families for drives in the county or to visit some of the many parks of Tsukuba. They were very interested in Canada, and since then, they have sent both of their children to Canada for their senior high-school education. These neighbours helped breakdown my image of working-class Japanese as faceless and fun-less economic animals. They did not fit that mold at all. They were relaxed, curious, fun-loving, unpretentious people.

Learning about Japan through Television

My neighbours invited me to talk to a local mother's group about education. With my new relaxed attitude towards my university studies, I had lots of time to watch day-time TV with my son. So I gave a talk on cultural differences in the use of television as an educational tool for preschool children. Having just come from Canada, where my son spent time watching "Mr. Dress Up," "The Friendly Giant," "Fred Penner's Farm," "Captain Kangaroo," and, of course, "Sesame Street," I couldn't help notice differences with Japanese children's television like "*Ponkeiki*," [The name of a stuffed doll] and "*Okaasan to isho*" ("Together with Mother"). The most significant differences I noticed concerned "gender role-models," and the ways the adult hosts talked to children.

The Canadian children's shows often centered around an adult male, usually a grandfatherly fellow. The Japanese shows usually centered around a young woman in a mini-skirt. Whereas the man in Canadian shows generally talked to his young audience as if they were adults, the woman in Japanese shows talked as if she, too, were a child,

pouting and using “baby talk.” In more recent years, Japanese television has been changing. “Sesame Street” has become popular, and families can choose to watch it in English or Japanese. Japanese producers are adapting much from “Sesame Street.” One recent and very popular show, “*Eigo to asobo*” [Let’s Play in English], aims to introduce pre-school children to English. The Japanese girl in a mini-skirt is paired with a quiet-speaking silver-haired foreign gentleman, offering, I suppose, something of both worlds.

I learned a lot about changing gender roles by watching Japanese television. When I first came to Japan, the typical news broadcast paired a male announcer with a young female assistant. The man did most of the talking; the woman nodded and looked impressed. Now things are different. Kuroyanagi Tetsuko is probably the most famous “talker” in Japan, and she has a number of shows, some light, some serious. The most popular news/discussion show on Japanese TV is now “News Station,” and its female announcers give opinions and are “seen to think.” The hostess of a popular NHK documentary programme called “Close Up” is a beautiful, bilingual, middle-aged woman of obvious intelligence, who tackles hard issues in considerable detail with great finesse and poise. The show is hers, and the only men are among her guests.

***Watakushi no habatsu* [My Academic Clique]**

Much of scholarly life in Japan is dictated by the *habatsu* [clique]. Most university *habatsu* (there are also *habatsu* in politics and other fields) grow up around a distinguished professor at a national university or a famous private university like Keio. Almost by accident, I found myself attached to a *habatsu*. The professor I had originally come to study under at Tsukuba turned out to be a “right-winger”; he had been a friend of the novelist, Yukio Mishima (see “The man,” 1995). This did not deter me, but at the time

most right-wing professors were consciously turning away from “America” and towards “Asia.” As a result, the professor had little interest in me, and left me on my own. In this vacuum, I met another Tsukuba professor through an acquaintance at UBC. This Professor Yamanaka* was “a liberal” in the tradition of Fukuzawa and Nitobe. He came from a respected Christian family, graduated from *Todai*, and had spent his long academic career building and cementing relationships between Japan and North America. He took me into his *habatsu*.

Yamanaka was a forthright gentleman. In our first interview, he explained to me the system. He said, “I may not look it to you, but I am a very important person in Japan.” Later, I found this to be true: he was a famous and influential scholar. When he accepted me into his *habatsu*, he told me that it meant doing what I was told. Since I was adrift at the time, I did not mind. At Tsukuba, I spent considerable time with Yamanaka, and soon found him eager to place me in a teaching position.

Yamanaka “placed me” in a large private university near Nagoya (I’ll call it “A” university). He was setting up a “Department of International Culture,” and already had a few *habatsu* members there. I moved to Nagoya with my family, eager to contribute to this new Department. Before I left Tsukuba, Yamanaka identified the members of our *habatsu*, and warned me against associating with any professors outside this group. This last instruction was impossible to carry out since there were initially only ten professors in the Department, and we all had to work together closely. Nevertheless, when I arrived in Nagoya, I immediately moved under the protection of my *habatsu* colleagues. I could not follow the unfolding of the *habatsu* rivalries in my new Department because the real action was happening at higher levels. We, in the Department, were only the “symptoms of cliquism”; the disease raged elsewhere.

I learned about the negative side of the *habatsu* system when I heard news that a senior professor was murdered by one of his young professors, who had long been promised promotions that never came. The young professor eventually ran amok and stabbed the senior professor to death. The *habatsu* system became a focus of national debate, but not much was done to change it.

Some universities are now opening their hiring policies to real "competition." This is the best way to undermine *habatsu*. I came to see the *habatsu* system as a form of corruption, and especially unsuitable in a Department of International Culture. I distanced myself from my *habatsu*. But I was out of favour with our leader anyway. Professor Yamanaka came down every summer to give a week-long series of lectures at our university. I was always away holidaying with my family in Canada, and so I was never on hand to pay him homage. My absence was interpreted as a snub. After the second summer, I received a letter informing me that I was out of the *habatsu*. I was on my own again.

Teaching at a Private Buddhist University in Aichi [1986-1990]

One day, I asked my conversation class at "A" university how they had chosen that university. I then learned a new Japanese word: *suberidome*. *Suberi* means "slip," and *dome* means "stop," and a "slipstop" is a university one applies to as a kind of "last resort." Most high school students apply to several universities. This is expensive because it can cost the equivalent of \$300.00 - \$400.00 to write just one entrance exam. Students usually know what universities are at their *level*, and apply to them, and maybe to one or two slightly higher. Just in case they fail, though, many also apply to a university they are *sure* to get into: this is their *suberidome*. The further down the university hierarchy one

goes, the higher is the percentage of its students who have chosen it as a *suberidome*.

Attending a *suberidome* is the next thing to failure. Rather than enter a *suberidome*, many students prefer to become *ronin* [high school graduates who spend an extra year or two studying for university entrance exams]. Morale can be low in a classroom in which most students are there not because they want to be, but because it is their *suberidome*. I have discovered that many foreign instructors in Japanese universities do not clearly understand this Japanese system of university entrance. I know that after I learned about the great number of *suberidome* students at "A" university, I came to judge students less harshly for their initial apathy. I spent more time building morale and trying to convince them they could get an education even at a *suberidome*.

When later I taught at a high-ranking university, few students were there reluctantly. Those that had tried for other universities had tried for *Todai* or *Kyodai* or some other highly prestigious university, and it is no great shame to fail entrance to such lofty heights. Yet, even at the high-ranking university, some students suffer a "complex" similar to that of *suberidome* students. These were students who could enter the university of their choice, but only by joining a faculty in which they had no interest. For example, entrance to the Faculty of Economics at "X" university may be less competitive than the Faculty of International Studies. A student who really wants to enter the Faculty of International Studies may also write the exam for Economics. If only accepted to Economics, the student may enroll despite having no interest in economics. Therefore, at any university the morale in one Faculty may be very high, while in another Faculty competition is relatively slack, and successful entry is still a kind of "failure." Since many Faculties have their own English Departments, the learning environment of university language classrooms can differ considerably even within one university.

At "A" university, our Department was one of the most popular because it was new, and because the name included the fashionable term *kokusai* [international]. (The least popular Department was Buddhist Studies, where most of the students came because they were destined to inherit the family temple). The university was built beyond the last subway stop out of Nagoya, and so, like Tsukuba, it had something of the atmosphere of a "vacant lot." As a matter of fact, it was famous for having the biggest parking lot of any university in Japan. The parking lot told a lot about the university culture. The cars in the student lot were mostly new European sports and Japanese sports utility vehicles. In the faculty and staff parking lot, cars were of two extremes: on the one hand were the old sedans of the general teaching faculty and lower staff; and on the other hand were the Mercedes and BMWs of the upper echelons of faculty and administration who were mostly Buddhist monks.

From about 10:00 to 3:00 on teaching days, the campus was busy. Before and after that, the place was virtually deserted. In the evenings, when I went jogging at the track, I invariably had the whole playing field to myself. In the beginning, I worked in my office in the evenings, but I found the vacant campus "spooky," and so I set up an office in our already cramped 2LDK [two bedroom] apartment.

Not only did students spend little time on campus, but so did faculty. Younger professors, who were expected to serve on all the committees and be busy with drudge work, usually moved into the area and bought *mansions* [apartments]. Many senior professors, however, had their duties bundled into two or three days a week, and commuted *down* from Tokyo or *up* from Kansai. One professor in our Department commuted from a remote mountain village in Shinshu. The advantage of working at a private university was that contracts were negotiated individually, and terms for senior

professors who had retired from famous national universities were very attractive. Despite good salaries, young professor generally acknowledged “real scholars” usually preferred to move on to teach at a national university, even at much reduced salaries.

Among the ten full-time professors who made up the Department when I arrived, three were foreigners (two Canadians and one Englishman). We were the visible proof of our Department’s *kokusaika* [internationalization]. Unfortunately, behind the *tatemae* [false front] of internationalization was the *honne* [hidden reality]: the foreign professors were not integrated into the academic community.

Japanese professors generally fall into two categories. The higher category is *sennin*: full-time “tenured” instructors who are paid a good salary plus large bonuses, and who are expected to attend many meetings and serve on committees. The lower category is *hijokin*: part-time instructors on one-year contracts who get paid by the number of classes they teach, and have no other duties or benefits. The three foreign professors fit into neither of these categories. The university administration had no experience employing full-time foreign instructors, and did not really know what to do with them. However, they needed some foreign professors if they were going to have a Department of International Culture. So they invented a new status: *gaikokujin kyoshi* [foreign instructors]. Foreigners had “perpetually renewing” two-year contracts. Like *sennin*, they had to attend meetings, but instead of committee duties, they taught more classes than their Japanese colleagues. They got large monthly salaries, and got some assistance with housing, but bonuses and research allowances were small. Since monthly salaries were more or less public knowledge, most people believed foreigners were getting higher total salaries than Japanese professors when, in fact, their yearly income was often hundreds of thousands of yen less. Another difference was that foreign instructors were not given

zemi [the student seminar “families” that continue until graduation] and so they had, like *hijokin*, only brief and superficial contact with individual students.

I had come to the university expecting to be an equal member of the faculty, and was disappointed to find that I had a kind of second-class status. When I protested, I was told that this was only a temporary measure. When I left four years later, I was still *gaikokujin kyoshi*. Almost fourteen years later, one of the foreigners who is still there has finally been made a “full professor.” When I asked if he was also made *sennin*, he said “no”; he was still on a two-year contract as *gaikokujin kyoshi*.

The desolation of the university’s physical environment depressed me, and the apparent hypocrisy of my *mibun* [position] as *gaikokujin kyoshi* rankled me, but the reason I finally left the university was the failure of its language curriculum. Like at many Japanese universities, the foreign language programme is “all bones and no meat.” That is to say, there are courses, and the courses have titles, and some are required and some are elective, and the students get grades, but aside from this skeletal structure there is not much specified curriculum content. During their undergraduate years, students take a dozen or more English courses. These courses usually meet once a week for 90 minutes (although some core courses meet twice a week).

At that time at “A” university, there were no course descriptions to back up the course titles. What students had to do to pass a course was unspecified. What was clear was that they were expected to pass. At the end of my first semester, I was cautioned that I had failed too many students--perhaps 20% of my class. If students failed, the university had to create new courses for them, because it would be unseemly for second-year students to retake the course with first-year students. In a radical step for the time, the Department divided the students into “levels of ability” based upon a placement test.

Unfortunately, nobody bothered to define those levels or to suggest appropriate materials or textbooks. Moreover, no attempt was made to relate first and second year courses. The result was that there was no coordination or continuity in the programme. In classes at the same "level of ability," some teachers used "beginner's texts" and others used "advanced" texts. Even if they had the same course titles, all classes were completely independent of all others.

In this "international" Department, English was a required course for all students (as it is for most students in most Japanese universities). Unfortunately, a lot of students clearly had no interest in English. (The *suberidome* students had little interest in anything to do with the university). In short, the situation was a kind of "controlled chaos." Many students did not want to learn English; many did not want to be at that university; they would pass whether they studied or not; they were confused by having so many unrelated courses (14 to 20 a semester) all with different teachers and textbooks; students and foreign instructors could develop only shallow relationships with students that left little room for developing cultural understanding; the English programme was a "mish mash" of thinly related courses.

I was at "A" university for four years. I had struggled to get the curriculum reformed, but to no avail. At the end of my last year, I went to the graduation party of the students who had entered in my first year. I remembered a few of them as clever young people eager to learn English. After four years of studying in an "international" department with a curriculum that stressed English, they were embarrassed to talk to me at the party because, they said, they "had lost" the little English they had entered with from high school. I decided it was time for me to leave.

Chapter Thirteen

Education and the Negotiation of Japanese "Intern[ation]alization"

People do not live by reason alone. They cannot calculate and act rationally in pursuit of their self-interest until they define their self. Interest politics presupposes identity. In times of rapid social change established identities dissolve, the self must be redefined, and new identities created.

Samuel Huntington, The Clash of Civilizations. (1996, p. 97)

During the last half of the 1980s two intimately related phenomena pervaded Japanese society. The first was the economic bubble that gave the Japanese, or at least the favoured many, new economic power and confidence. The second was an obsession with "internationalization" that swept through society, and especially educational culture, like a *tsunami* [tidal wave]. Now, in the late 1990s the bubble has burst, and many Japanese have moderated their promotion of internationalization. It is almost two decades since the beginning of the *kokusaika* [internationalization] "boom" in Japan. Compared with the impact of other contemporary global changes (the Soviet Empire has dissolved; European unification progresses; NAFTA binds the economies of Canada, the United States and Mexico; NATO goes to war with Yugoslavia), Japanese economic dominance and internationalization may seem of waning importance. Yet the continuing national debate about internationalization has been part of a struggle to define a new Japanese cultural identity in the world. It has accompanied progress in opening up Japan's economy and society. This redefinition of identity is by no means complete, but in many ways internationalization has already been institutionalized in Japanese society. For example,

almost every Japanese university has an international department or programme of some kind (Kawanari 1993). The institutionalization of *kokusaika* means that Japanese cannot return to an insular identity that characterized a defeated Japan after the Second World War. In fact, within the last few decades the thinking of young Japanese has become so removed from that of their elders that some social critics are willing to see them as a "new race" (Chikushi 1986). But among educated Japanese the meaning of *kokusaika* is still in flux. The meaning of *kokusaika* is contested in the media and in *nihonjinron* [theories of the Japanese] (see Yoshino 1992; Mouer & Sugimoto 1990; Edwards 1989; Matsumoto 1987; Suzuki 1987a&b). The internal "interest politics" behind the contest to define *kokusaika* reflect the differing aspirations of educated Japanese in the global community. Looking particularly at the role of education, I will, in this chapter, explore the re-negotiation of "cultural" identity as it evolves, and as it reveals itself in Japan's "internal discourse" on internationalization.

Words for abstract concepts are notorious for the way in which they can have quite different meanings for different people. The word "freedom" may have far different connotations for a refugee, a convict in jail, and American politician, or a German labour leader. The same is true of *kokusaika*, a word as powerful in Japan as a word like "democracy" in the United States. Although most people agree that *kokusaika* has positive value, not everyone will agree on its meaning (Bailey 1988; Luce & Smith 1987; Matsumoto 1987). For a Japanese *kyoiku mama* [education mother], it may mean the need for her son to study English, while for a businessman it may mean more effective penetration of Asian markets, while for some scholars it may mean nothing less than a revolutionary transformation of Japanese society. The term contains a broad spectrum of meanings and it can even serve as jargon for opposing political factions, but so deep is the

significance of this enthusiasm for *kokusaika* that any attempt to define the word soon becomes an effort to define what it means to be Japanese in the modern world.

For a foreign observer, attitudes to internationalization in Japan can often prove confusing. They may be just as confusing to the Japanese. In this chapter, I will examine some differing Japanese concepts of internationalization, in order to better understand the complexity of the issues involved in the definition of *kokusaika*. These issues reflect a contest among educated elites to control “cultural identity” (Yoshino 1992).

Some Japanese intellectuals see internationalization as an opportunity to forge a “hard core” for Japanese identity: an “essence” of uniquely Japanese manners and values that can be traced back along an unbroken “cultural” thread for thousands of years. This “linear” identity, setting Japanese apart from other peoples of the world will, when once adequately “internalized”, serve as a kind of “life-line” for a new generation of Japanese businessmen, educators and diplomats who must venture into the dangers of a wider world that historically victimizes Japan.

Another group of Japanese thinkers, however, would move beyond this myth of victimization. They reject linear and essentialist metaphors for identity. They would instead use Japan’s new influence in the world to begin creating new identities for Japan and engage people of other nations in the negotiation of a new set of “universal values” that could serve as a basis for a non-aggressive international relations.

Since the Meiji Restoration [1868], the pace of development and change in Japanese society and politics have been so fast that contradictions and ambiguities abound in every attempt at cultural interpretation. As Kenzaburo Oe (1996), Japan’s most recent Nobel laureate observes, “ambiguity” pervades Japanese language and identity. The psychological stresses involved in Japan’s rapid transformations have resulted in a

kind of permanent “culture shock,” and especially so for the first post-war generation. Defeat in the Great Pacific War (as the Second World War is known in Japan) and occupation by foreign troops have intensified anxieties about national identity.

In the face of “foreign threat” some proponents of *nihonjinron* stress the insularity and homogeneity of the Japanese cultural identity that goes back thousands of years (Yoshino 1992). In Chapter Eleven I described the “racial” diversity of the Japanese population. However, there is also a great deal of cultural diversity within Japan. Moreover, there are groups on the “borderlands” of Japanese culture, those places where Japanese and foreign cultures overlap in experiences of individuals. For example, the American troops mentioned above are mostly concentrated in Okinawa. The historical particularity of Okinawa within Japan challenges holistic concepts of Japanese cultural identity. The bitter debates over the presence of foreign troops in Okinawa often reveal long suppressed resentments and a deep national *angst*. Like the Okinawans, the indigenous Ainu have been a persecuted minority among the Japanese. Recently, some writers are beginning to re-evaluate Japanese identity in light of their historical victimization of the Ainu and Okinawans (Morris-Suzuki 1998; Friday 1997; Suzuki & Oiwa 1996; Kohei 1996; Pearson 1996; Kayano 1994).

Another source of national self-questioning is the small but steady stream of Japanese returning from abroad with views out of harmony [wa] with “normal” Japanese. One such group are the *zanryukoji* [war orphans: Japanese children deserted in China at the end of the war who were raised as Chinese], who are returning from China to Japan, seeking lost relatives and lost roots. Although these war orphans are “Japanese,” they speak, act and even move like Chinese. Partly because of the apparently incongruous identity they portray, they are unable to find complete acceptance in Japan. These

orphans have become victims twice over: first, when they were abandoned in war; and again, when they are rejected on their return to Japan because they do not conform to narrow concepts of Japanese identity. Many Japanese sympathize with their plight.

Another kind of returnee are the Japanese Brazilians whose ancestors were part of an exodus of over 700,000 Japanese to North and South America in the first half of the twentieth century (Morris-Suzuki 1998, p. 198). Tens of thousand of Japanese *nikei* ["second generation" emigrants] began coming to Japan to fill the labour shortage of the bubble economy. At first, Japanese authorities welcomed this group because they thought that, being "Japanese," they would blend into Japanese society better than other foreign workers. In fact, many can not speak Japanese or, proud of their Brazilian identities, are unwilling to assimilate. Recently, when a boy was murdered in a territorial dispute between a "Brazilian" gang and young "Japanese" thugs, some "normal" Japanese insisted that the "foreigners" should return to Brazil if they cannot fit harmoniously into Japanese society. Apparently, the homegrown delinquents proved preferable to the imported variety. The presence of Japanese Brazilians all over the country stimulates an ongoing public questioning Japanese identity.

In 1997, a group of "Japanese wives" of Koreans returned to Japan from North Korea, the first such visits since the Korean War began over forty years ago. These women had married Korean men in Japan. As a result many were discriminated against by other Japanese, and sometimes even by their own families. To escape "racial persecution," they left Japan to live in North Korea, only to be cut off from almost all contact with Japan by the isolation of North Korea. A small and carefully selected group of these wives were permitted by the Korean government to return to Japan for a brief visit. Some of these wives spoke movingly on TV of the racial intolerance that drove them from

their homeland. The media was full of stories and images of the persecution of Koreans in Japan. Suddenly, the usually "invisible" Korean minority came out into the light of Japan's national consciousness. The silence about the often brutal persecution of Koreans in Japan before and after the war was broken. In the world view portrayed in Japan's educational curricula, Japan is a harmonious and heterogeneous family group that is often victimized by Westerner powers. To see themselves as victimizers, and to realize that living among them are persecuted minorities is a shock for many young Japanese whose education has not informed them of these realities.

Another large but less visible group of "returnees" are the thousands of businessmen and their wives and children, and even of holiday travelers who visit abroad every year. Much of this emigration is directed towards Asia. Today, the economic success of Japan since the Pacific War takes new waves of Japanese businessmen and travelers to flourishing Asian cities over which an earlier generation fought and died. Their reception in these cities is sometimes mixed with suspicion and jealousy. Most Japanese are anxious not to repeat the mistakes of the past, and they recognize that new economic success creates new international responsibilities. These responsibilities in turn stimulate the formation of new Japanese identities (Takagi 1988). At the very least, they will require a stripping away of the negative stereotypes that have constricted Japan's relations with other countries for generations.

Another important group of "returnees" to challenge the narrow post-war Japanese identity is the *kikokushijo* [student returnees], young people who have been educated abroad, usually when their parents were posted to foreign branch plants. When these students, who can speak foreign languages, and who have intimate knowledge of other countries, return to the narrow world of Japanese *juken benkyo* [exam-focused education],

they have trouble fitting in and being accepted (Willis & Onoda 1989; Edwards 1989; Dhomoto 1987). Often they are victims of *ijime*, bullying (Desmond 1994). Japanese are divided as to whether it is best to foster these differences or destroy them: efforts are taking place on the one hand, to “re-Japanize” these student returnees, and on the other hand, to take advantage of their *kokusaika* for the benefit of the nation.

Unfortunately, there are still people who cherish the cultural solidarity symbolized by the early post-war homogeneous Japanese identity and its related stereotypes. Among these people are a new generation of highly educated Japanese who are forging a “new nationalism” based not upon “race” or the “old” concepts of pre-war nationalism, but rather upon “cultural relativism” (see “The new nationalists” 1995; Yoshino 1992; Mouer & Sugimoto 1990; Edwards 1989; Miller 1982). Despite often accepting the complexity, variety and resulting deep divisions in Japan’s “melting pot” society, these people insist that Japanese are “essentially” homogeneous and different from other “races.” They minimize and sometimes ignore the cultural influences of ethnicity (see Denoon 1996), class (see Bremner 1997), or dissent (see Koschmann 1985; Hane 1982) among Japanese. Their exaggerated insistence upon unity and homogeneity is part of a long tradition of Japanese elites exploiting fear of victimization by foreigners (see Smith 1997; Tanaka 1993; Amino 1992; Halliday 1975). These myths of unity and of cultural and racial homogeneity are subtly promoted through the Japanese educational system.

Japan is close enough to the mainland of Asia to make invasion a possibility, but it is isolated enough that before the Meiji Restoration [1868], the military class did not have to devote a great part of its energies to defending the country from foreign armies. Instead, the warrior class concentrated on consolidating its power at home. To this end, the fear of the foreigner was a convenient ideological weapon. The Tokugawa shoguns

were able to manipulate the European threat to their advantage. Beginning in the early seventeenth century they implemented a strict policy of national seclusion. They expelled foreigners, persecuted Christians, and imposed a strict censorship of foreign learning during a 250-year totalitarian dictatorship.

In the middle of the nineteenth century, Japan was forced open by American and European military bullying. From the point of view of many Japanese of that time, this opening of the country, with its foreign settlements, unequal treaties and extra-territoriality, constituted a kind of limited "invasion of Japan" (see Jansen 1994; Pyle 1978). This "invasion" led to the collapse of the *Bakufu* [Tokugawa government]. Though the demands of foreigners may have been catalysts in the overthrow of the Tokugawa regime, the practical agents of its destruction were its enemy fiefs in the south, particularly Satsuma and Choshu. However, the feudal authority of the Tokugawa *bakufu* was also undermined by segments of its own educational elite who were developing ideologies of a new "nativist nationalism" (Harootunian 1970). The Black Ships and the shelling of Kagoshima and Shimonoseki became symbols of the European threat, and this fear of the foreign became a justification for the revolution called the Meiji Restoration [1868]. After that the fear of the foreign continued to be advantageous to Japanese oligarchs in their frantic efforts to modernize the country and unite it behind the Emperor and a strong military (see Tanaka 1993; Gluck 1985; Mitchel 1983; Najita 1976; Norman 1975; Pyle 1978). Later Japanese imperialistic adventures in Asia, which were embarked upon ostensibly to protect the country, finally resulted in the Great Pacific War and what Japanese leaders had most dreaded: defeat in war, the humiliations of invasion, and occupation by foreign armies.

Although some critics emphasize the obstacles to Japanese internationalization (McCormack 1996; Brown 1993; Kawanari 1993; Seward 1981), early modern Japan is already replete with internationalists like Fukuzawa Yukichi, Natsume Soseki, Tsuda Umeko, Uchimura Kanzo and Minobe Tatsukichi. Nitobe Inazo is one outstanding example of Japanese internationalism (Oshiro 1985). He dedicated his life to greater international understanding and to becoming a "bridge across the Pacific." He studied at Johns Hopkins University, married an American, and later represented Japan at the League of Nations. A Christian who never denied his Japanese heritage, he wrote a book (1981) intended to make samurai values understandable to Western peoples. A man of courage, he was, until his death in Victoria, B.C., shortly before the Second World War, a spokesman for peace in a world of increasing war hysteria. One fundamental accomplishment of people like Nitobe is that their recognition of what is unique and valuable in other cultures allowed them to better recognize what is truly unique and valuable in their own. Marshall McLuhan once claimed that terrorists and fanatic nationalists are usually men of weak identity (CBC 1984). Conversely, as the life of Nitobe suggests, a personality firmly grounded in a confident national identity may offer much to peace and international understanding.

The role Japan plays in the world today is far different from the one it played during the lifetime of Nitobe. While an international community may have been a dream for his generation, the young Japanese of today inevitably live in "the global village." The foundations of their economy are global, and their culture is rapidly adapting to economic reality. Their entertainment, art, living styles, eating habits and fashion are conforming to and sometimes shaping international patterns. In every important city of the world, Japanese live, work and study, while the islands of Japan are hosts to increasing numbers of foreign businessmen, students, soldiers, teachers, entertainers, missionaries and

tourists. In the light of this vibrant life-world, we might be forgiven for wondering "why all this fuss about internationalization when it is so evidently an accomplished fact?" The real problem for many Japanese, however, is *not to become* international (that is already accomplished), but *to recognize how* this internationalization can be incorporated into their understanding of Japanese identity.

Some Japanese reject internationalization because they associate it with Westernization or Americanization. Partly, this is a reaction against Japan's historical obsession with modernization (see Koschmann 1989; Jansen 1982) and catching up with the West, and more particularly, the American occupation. American domination of Japan has limited and distorted the range of international influences on Japan since the war. Indeed, the influence of the United States has been so great that for many Japanese "foreign" is almost synonymous with "American." When children encounter any foreigner on the streets, they are as likely to yell out *America-jin* (American) as they are *gaijin* [foreigner]. Equating internationalization with Americanization allows such people to blame American influence for all the negative aspects of modern society.

Education is especially marked by American influence (see Tsuchimochi 1993; Horio 1988). After the war, the Japanese system of education was redesigned upon the American 6-3-3-4 model. Many universities and colleges have close links with American institutions, and of course, many American teachers are in Japan. For example, fully 51.3 percent of all JET instructors are American (Court 1998, p. 13). Many of Japan's best scholars and scientists have studied in American universities, and even the Japanese government sends its promising young bureaucrats to American graduate schools. One result of such closeness is a polarization of the Japanese academic community into pro-American and anti-American factions (Bailey 1998, 1997b). Another tendency growing

from this relationship is for Japanese to judge their educational achievements and institutions against American standards (for example, Hisama 1994; Kimura 1988).

The tendency to see Japan's international role primarily in terms of the Japan-American relationship is not limited to the Japanese. Since the war, not only has the bulk of the Japanese literary works available in English been translated by Americans, but the whole field of Japanese studies (previously led by Europeans) has become dominated by American scholars. Many of the most influential scholarly works in English on Japanese education and identity are written by American scholars (for example, Benjamin 1997a; Cutts 1997; Rholen 1996, 1989, 1983; White 1993, 1987; Kondo 1990; Reischauer 1988, 1986; Cummings 1980). Many of the older generation of American scholars, like the eminent literary scholar Donald Keene, received Japanese language training in the military during the war, and some were involved in formulating or carrying out occupation policy. In the early years of the occupation, Japan was so much a property of the American scholarly elite that the young British scholar Ronald P. Dore (1974) complained about the difficulty he had to gain permission from SCAP even to enter the country (p. 18). A few years later, the "seminal Japan scholar" of the day, the Canadian E. H. Norman, was persecuted and discredited by McCarthy witch-hunters (see Bowen 1984; Ferns 1968). As a result of this domination of Japan as an "academic field," most of the world (at least the English-speaking world) sees modern Japan through American eyes, and especially the eyes of a clique of right-leaning Harvard scholars that Patrick Smith (1997) labels the "Chrysanthemum Club". In short, modern Japan has become a product of an "American regime of truth." In return, Americans so closely identify with their creation of post-war Japan that they sometimes make what Najita Tetsuo (1974) has called the "outlandishly egocentric American remark, 'What have we wrought?'" (p. 1).

Americans bent on recreating Japanese in their own image, and Japanese for whom foreign is synonymous with American hinder open internationalization. The United States has its own history of isolationism, and although it now has global military commitments and economic interests, it is not necessarily the best model for internationalization. Geographic, economic and military strengths shelter Americans from the need to compromise in conflict with other nations. They are able to dictate the terms defining internationalization in ways that protect their own preferred versions of national identity (as we see when Americans appropriate "individualism" as a defining characteristic of their identity, leaving Japanese to be defined as "groupish"). Japan lacks the shelter of a powerfully defended perimeter. Instead, relying on American "protection," Japan is under pressure to conform to and support American "international" policy. For example, the Nakasone administration, under American pressure to militarize, removed its traditional 1%-of-the-national-budget ceiling on defense spending. This move increased tension with China and Korea, and even caused suspicion in the United States. Especially since the Gulf War, the United States is in the ironic position of pressuring Japan to remove from its constitution Article 9, the famous peace clause that Americans initially wrote into it during the Occupation. Bowing to American whims is not always beneficial to Japan's international reputation. Yet many Japanese are unwilling or unable to consider other than American models.

Although a tradition of internationalization in Japan has been strong for over a hundred years, there has been a break and a marked change in its tone since the end of the Pacific War. The distinguished internationalist, Matsumoto Shigeharu (1987) has drawn a distinction between "new liberals" and "old liberals." He believes that the old liberal tradition, which is rooted in the thought of certain Meiji intellectuals, offers a healthy and true internationalism, but that the new liberal tradition is selfish and hedonistic. He

wistfully wonders if, "since this is a time when in France, West Germany, and England there is an increasing appreciation of Japan, could we not once again return to the beauty of Early Meiji [Old Liberalism]?" (p. 4). Unfortunately, this new liberal outlook is a product of the intervening experiences of war and occupation. These experiences have had contradictory effects. While they have meant the general acceptance of certain American ideals and systems, they have also caused much resentment, which often leads to rejection of those same values identified as "American" (see Kamei 1989; Nozaka 1977).

In order to better appreciate this conflict, let us look at Japanese cultural identity as described by Suzuki Takao. Suzuki, a professor well-known among Japan's educated elite in government and business, is a leading representative of the "new nationalism." For example, he has led the defense of Japanese whaling on the grounds of "cultural relativism," and condemns foreign criticisms of the industry as unfair and ethnocentric. He published a famous essay in the Japanese journal *Chishiki* that was later translated and published as two articles in *The Japan Times* (1987). I will quote from the English language newspaper articles entitled "The Eternal Melting Pot" (EMP) and "Internationalization and Language" (IL). While Suzuki offers striking insights into the relationship between language and society, his work suffers from two weaknesses: one is a tendency to deal in stereotypes (including self-stereotypes), and the other is a rather loose interpretation of Japanese history. Suzuki's use of history supports Yoshino's (1992) contention that such *nihonjinron* is fundamentally "ahistorical" (p. 128). Beneath a guise of educated "liberalism," the underlying message of much of what Suzuki writes is nationalistic.

Suzuki sees internationalization as necessary to the future of Japan, but at the same time he sees it as a possible threat to the Japanese national identity. While pointing

out that Japan has long been a “cauldron of cultural interaction” and a veritable “melting pot” of races, he still insists that at the same time Japan “has been guided by an inner direction that has remained unchanged throughout the nation’s 2000-year history” (EMP). In an attempt to reconcile these apparently contradictory facts, Suzuki makes the astounding claim that “what sets Japan apart from other nations in this process of continual assimilation is the complete absence of compelled learning” (EMP). We may first wonder why Suzuki feels the need to set Japan apart in this way from other nations, but more importantly we must ask why he insists on “the complete absence of compelled learning.” He does not define exactly how and what it is that other nations have been compelled to learn. Or, on the other hand, he does not explain, for example, how it is that Meiji reforms were not “compelled” by Perry’s ships, the shelling of Kagoshima, and the unequal treaties.

Instead, Suzuki proceeds to emphasize his point by claiming that “except for a brief period after the war, Japan has never experienced the humiliation of physical subjugation. The Japanese have had no cause to worry about survival” (EMP). Not only does this statement trivialize the shock of the atomic bomb and American occupation, it also denies the deep dread of foreign invasion since *bakumatsu* (late-Tokugawa) period, a dread that goes back to the threat posed by Mongol fleets in 1240. Tokugawa leaders were worried enough about national survival to massacre Japanese Christians, drive out all foreigners (except for a small trading presence in Nagasaki), and close off the country for 250 years. Concerns about national survival have been used to justify wars with China, Korea, Russia, and eventually the United States, the soviet Union and the British Empire. Worry about national survival still justifies many political policies such as exorbitant duties on rice

imports. While in the past the geographical isolation has protected Japan to some extent from invasion, in today's high-tech warfare, remoteness offers little protection.

Suzuki stereotypes Japanese as "a people not used to asserting themselves," and says that "self-renunciation . . . is very much a Japanese trait," and that "the Japanese are not trailblazers. They are much more comfortable playing second fiddle." He goes so far as to claim that a "mentality of self-rejection motivates champions of English learning" (IL). Here Suzuki is the moral reformer of his people: chiding them for their weak-willed subservience to America, and scolding them for failing to "protect the essence" of "a culture undergoing continual extrinsic metamorphoses"(EMP).

This non-assertive image of Japanese identity is by extension also "non-aggressive." It is ahistorical in that it completely ignores Japan's military past. The idea of the "co-operative and non-assertive Japanese can be traced to a Japanese anthropological scholarship that locates the "essence" of Japanese culture in family centred life in agrarian villages (see Wigen 1998; Roberston 1998; Hashimoto 1998; Scheiner 1998; Amino 1996, 1992; Tanaka 1993; Hata & Smith 1986; Nakane 1970). Other scholars have linked these "agrarian community values" to the development of *nihonteki keiei* [Japanese-style business Management] (Gordon 1998; Mouer & Sugimoto 1990; Odaka 1984). The idea of the "non-aggressive Japanese" is useful in the real world of modern international business. As one Japanese manager explains, "We are not so assertive as Westerners. Our homogeneous society is less conflict-ridden than Western society. Sensitivity to other people and flexibility in human relations are the virtues of the Japanese" (cited in Yoshino 1992, p. 126). In other words, it will be better for foreign countries to welcome non-assertive Japanese businesses rather than their more "aggressive" Western competitors. The "non-assertiveness" of Japanese managers

becomes a justification for aggressive international business expansion. This means that Japanese business managers in foreign countries can enjoy a sense of moral superiority in knowing that simply by virtue of being Japanese, they are spreading a business culture that protects their foreign workers and customers from Western businessmen hungry only for profits.

The idea of the non-assertive Japanese promoted by Suzuki and other scholars is incorporated into the Japanese education system. Partly, this is accomplished by the Ministry of Education's refusal to allow the depiction of Japan as an "aggressor" in history textbooks, as I have discussed in earlier chapters of this dissertation. However, it is accomplished in other ways as well. Yoshino (1992) gives this example of a dialogue from an English textbook:

Mr. S: Most Japanese tend to avoid doing anything that sets them off from others. They worry about what others think and change their behavior accordingly.

Mr. J: That's probably one of the reasons why people talk about Japanese groupism.

Mr. S: It's a factor. It's also why Japanese are poor at asserting themselves. We tend to speak and act only after considering the other person's feelings and point of view. . . . This is probably connected to our being basically a homogeneous society and our traditional tendency to avoid conflicts. (p. 174)

Yoshino goes on to suggest that such textbook content "can condition the way one expresses one's ideas of Japanese characteristics by providing the language (vocabulary, catch-phrases, etc.) one uses" (p. 174). Michael Apple (1988) confirms the ideological influence of school textbooks. In the image of Japanese cultural identity forged by scholars like Suzuki that we see reflected in textbooks and then reiterated in the attitudes of Japanese businessmen, Japanese are non-aggressive, co-operative and thoughtful of others. They also have another quality that makes them excellent international managers: they are sensitive to the plight of weaker nations facing the aggression of Western business because they too have been victims of this aggression.

In Suzuki's interpretation of history, Japanese are victimized by foreigners. In his famous book *Kotoba to bunka* (1973), he digresses from his discussion to recount an anecdote from his youth. In this story, a foreign woman mistakenly accuses him of being cruel to some stray puppies. He is dumbfounded and unable to defend himself in English. This was just after the war when the War Crimes Trials were belabouring the stereotype of the "cruel Japanese." Suzuki is deemed guilty of cruelty by that woman on the basis of his race and his inability to speak English. In this anecdote, the war trials and the woman's prejudices merge to culminate in his personal humiliation. In the role of "victim," Suzuki's personal and national identities merge.

A number of critics (Morris-Suzuki 1998; Oda 1987; Goto 1996; Buruma 1984) have noticed the prevalence of this sense of "victimization" in the cultural identity of some Japanese. Just as the Japanese school curriculum subtly promotes the image of the non-assertive, homogeneous Japanese, it also spreads this sense of victimization. One of my second year university students entered this passage in her English Journal:

When I was a school child, I thought Japan was a sufferer [on which] was dropped two A-bombs, because my teacher taught that. But it was a mistake, because Japan committed a lot of cruel crimes against a lot of countries. Nobody taught about it. When I read a book written about it for the first time, I couldn't believe it. Japan must not forget it and [must] hand [the truth] down to posterity. . . . I never want to forget about it.

When students become aware of Japan's "aggressive" acts in world history, it is not often thanks to their schooling. However, there are voices of dissent in Japan that insist that the school curriculum must help Japanese recognize their role as victimizers so that they can go on to develop a more sincere internationalization. Among these voices of dissent are certain anti-establishment writers like Ienaga Saburo (1978) and Oda Makoto (1987).

Ienaga (1978) has written books and textbooks that expose atrocities Japanese committed during the war. He has also fought a long court battle against the Ministry of Education for

censoring high school textbooks. Oda is another well-known pacifist, and was at one-time a leader of Japan's Vietnam era anti-war movement.

In one essay, Oda (1978) criticizes an historian for his efforts to "minimize victimizing aspects in his treatment of Japan's hundred years of victimization since the Bakumatsu era" (p. 169). Oda argues that the only way to achieve world peace is for people to recognize that given the right circumstances we are all capable of victimizing other people, especially since "very few of us, as human beings, have cultivated values sufficiently universalistic and compelling to successfully challenge the sanctity of central authority" (p. 165). Rather than turning his back on responsibility for the sufferings of foreign people during the war, Oda accepts Japan's defeat as "a rare, perhaps unprecedented opportunity to overcome this impasse" (p. 165). In other words, Oda believes Japan can become a model for a truly meaningful internationalization, a model that could contribute to world peace.

In Japan's relationship to the United States, Oda sees one obstacle to the maturation of this internationalization. In this he agrees with critics like Smith (1997b) who, looking to Japan's future, says, "A healthy relationship with America will inevitably be a more distant one" (p. 314). Oda, moreover, believes that one reason for Japan's failure in its international relations is the fact that "our universalism was imposed from outside rather than fully developed from within" (1978, p. 166). Oda here refutes Suzuki's claim that Japan has been free of "compelled learning." More importantly, he points to a dilemma. The only "universal" values many Japanese recognize are those "imposed" by the United States. In other words, "universal values" are a property of the United States. But these "American/universal" values are seen by many of these same Japanese as instrumental in the victimization of Japan. Therefore these values cannot be fully accepted without denying their own Japanese identity.

Tetsuo Najita (1974) says that “the search for faith is a profound and often creative current in modern Japan, not just a casual resurfacing tradition” (p. 142). In trying to establish the belief in an unchanging “essence” in Japanese culture as an element of identity, Suzuki is part of a tradition that goes back at least to Motoori Norinaga. Unlike Motoori, however, Suzuki faces the added complication of wanting to preserve a unique Japanese spirit at a time when Japan is intensely involved in world affairs. This international intercourse threatens to pollute the purity of Japan’s language and cultural essence. Therefore, Suzuki wants to define a more “Japanese” internationalization. In the remainder of this chapter, I will examine issues of language and language education particularly in Japanese universities and how they relate to the contest to define a cultural identity.

Language is very much a part of cultural identity, and a topic that Suzuki has written a book about the “isolation” of the Japanese language (1975). We know that where identities are threatened or changing, language may become a political issue, as it has, for example, for Soviet Jews and French Canadians. In Japan, where, since Meiji, language has been at the core of modernization efforts, the promotion of reforms in the native language and of the study of English as an “international language” have sometimes been construed as threats to the national identity. Suzuki is one of those who sees the English language in competition with and a danger to the Japanese language.

We might doubt that the language of this island country with over a hundred and twenty million speakers, one of the highest literacy rates in the world, a thriving literature, and a sophisticated media industry is threatened by English. Nevertheless, Suzuki points to reformers and “extremists” (IL) like the novelist Shiga Naoya who long ago suggested replacing the Japanese language with a European language such as English or French. However, as Roy Andrew Miller (1968) points out (pp. 95-96), Shiga and the many others,

like Tanizaki and Mori Arinori, who advocated replacing the Japanese language with a European language, were speaking from their social roles. Through their various statements about the inadequacies of Japanese, they were actually aiming at reforms that went beyond language to the social order. Tanizaki, for example, wrote an important style manual for written Japanese (noted in Namba 1995, p. 64). Like Bernard Shaw, who fought to free the English language from conventional irrationalities, Tanizaki was interested in restoring vigour to his language. Threats against language are always effective "attention-getters" that can shock people into an awareness of the need for change. Let me note that even as Shiga and Tanizaki were making these radical suggestions, elsewhere in the Japanese Empire Koreans and Taiwanese were being forced to learn and use the Japanese language.

One of the earliest figures to recommend that English be adopted as the official national language of Japan was Mori Arinori, the first Meiji Education Minister. Mori eventually realized the impracticality of his suggestion to jettison Japanese. Instead, he proposed the development of a new language: "Japanese-English" (Nagai 1983, p. 172). Although this is an idea that at first glance may seem absurd, it is an idea that has, to a large extent, been realized in our day.

The Japanese language at the time of the Restoration had certain inadequacies as a medium for conducting business, organizing modern governments or establishing industry. One problem was the lack of vocabulary. When Fukuzawa Yukichi wrote explaining modern accounting techniques, he had to invent a word, *choai*, to mean bookkeeping. The first twenty years of Meiji witnessed the introduction of many words now in common use: *shakai* [society], *jiyu* [free], *kanojo* [her]. Whole new languages were written for certain professions, like law (see Haley 1991, p. 68). Later, between Meiji 30

and 40, the writing system was drastically changed with the development of a system of punctuation and paragraphing. Since the war, the language has ceased to be written from right to left. The correct use of polite Japanese, *keigo*, is nowadays neglected by many young Japanese. The number of Chinese characters, *kanji*, in common use has been reduced by the government and simplified forms have been adopted. There has been a deluge of foreign loan words, known as *gairaigo*. Perhaps one quarter of the basic vocabulary is adopted from English and other European languages, not to mention the names of restaurants, magazines, and the inevitable English chorus in popular songs. The changes in the Japanese language in the past hundred years have been dramatic and profound. Whether this new language should be called "Japanese-English" or "Modern Japanese" requires an exercise in cultural hermeneutics beyond the scope in this chapter. Many of us would consider these changes to be part of the healthy and natural evolution of a vigorous national tongue. For Suzuki, behind any enthusiasm for language change "lurks a mentality that equates internationalization with self-denial" (IL).

Suzuki has no patience for self-denial. He believes that "the best way for Japan to integrate itself with the rest of the world is to pave the way for others to learn Japanese" (IL). He says this does not mean "forcing" the language on other people as was tried in Japan's colonies before the war. Nevertheless, his justification for spreading the use of the Japanese language is global struggles for power. He notes that "throughout history, strong nations have always insisted on using their own language within their spheres of influence" (IL). Exporting the Japanese language will "sustain a leading economic role on the world stage" (IL). To this end, he asserts that "our most pressing task is, therefore, to promote the use of Japanese as an international language" (IL).

Much has been done in the last decade or so to make Japanese such an international language. Japanese language schools have become a booming industry both in Japan and abroad. The teaching of Japanese to increasing numbers of foreign students has become an important function of many Japanese universities (Yamashiro 1987). Even Time Magazine appreciates the increasing importance of Japanese as an international language (Johnson 1991). The problem is not that certain intellectuals promote the greater use of Japanese in the international community, but that the reasons they give for promoting Japanese often disguise an aggressive nationalism (Campbell 1987). The greater use abroad of Japanese is reduced to a kind of "linguistic" imperialism.

Despite increased foreign interest in learning Japanese, the Japanese themselves remain eager students of foreign languages. In fact, the teaching of English to Japanese has become a "world-wide" industry. Suzuki has no patience with those who promote English studies. He says they are motivated by a "mentality of self-rejection" (IL). He argues, rightly I believe, that "the spread of English has accompanied the spread of American might." But it also had a lot to do with the spread of British might--a might that threatens Japan no longer. Despite the obvious connections between economic imperialism and English as an international language (Norton 1997; Pennycook 1994), this connection is not in itself a sufficient explanation for the popularity of English. Even in countries like Sweden which have never been colonized by English speaking countries, English is studied eagerly and successfully. English has become the *lingua franca* of Europe and most of the world, especially among the young: more than one third of Europeans between the ages of 17 and 24 can speak English ("Euro-tongues" 1997). Throughout the world, English is more or less an "established convenience." It is

anachronistic for Japanese to resent English because they think it a reflection of “American” power. International English has taken on a life of its own that is largely independent of the power of specific nations like America or Britain.

Likewise, it would be unfair to attribute the immense new popularity of Japanese as a second language only to Japanese economic might. Half a decade after the “bursting” of Japan’s economic “bubble,” the language remains popular among foreign students, especially Asians. It may well be coincidental that the popularity of Japanese coincided with the coming into its own of the Japanese economy. Economics is a factor, but the popularity of Japanese is also a response to the greater visibility of Japanese artists, pacifists, designers, scientists, musicians, religious leaders and sportsmen.

Already-internationalized Japanese have made foreign people aware of the attractiveness of Japanese art and culture. Whether it be for work, pleasure or study, throughout the world large numbers of Japanese are living, and communicating in English and other foreign languages. Even in Japan and among Japanese speakers, certain professions rely heavily upon the use of English. Shibata (1995) points out that “in the biomedical sciences, for instance, it has been observed that the volume of research, reports and articles published in English in Japan alone accounts for more than the combined amount published in Canada, Australia and New Zealand” (p. 8) We could go so far as to say, if we were inclined to favour such jargon, that English has become an “instrument of Japanese cultural imperialism.” In fact, I prefer to think of it as a means of spreading and mingling Japanese and other cultures throughout an international community.

It may be ironic that Japan is recognizing the benefits of its huge “investment” in English language training just as English is losing strength as an international language. Samuel Huntington (1996) points out that the waning of imperialism and changing

demographics have seen the percentage of the world speaking English decline from around 9.8 percent in 1958 to 7.6 percent in 1992 (p. 61). He says, "language is realigned and reconstructed to accord with the identities and contours of civilization. As power diffuses Babelization spreads" (p. 64). Among the educated elites of the world, however, the power of English endures. Japanese elites, too, study English, but it is especially in Japanese university classrooms that one finds the most ambivalence about language and internationalization.

In one Japanese national university, English classes have as many as 108 students in a class while Japanese classes have as few as 10 students (Campbell 1987). This can be interpreted as a mere outcome of demographics (i.e. there are so few Japanese learners on campus); or can be seen as a grand conspiracy to undermine English education; or it may merely be a matter of poor administration. I suspect that, to some extent all three factors operate in most Japanese universities. Not all English classes are so large, and some universities make the financial sacrifices necessary to get language classes down to twenty or thirty students. Smaller classes are rare. But class size is only one factor contributing to the overall failure of university language education in Japan.

In the Japanese academic community an ambivalence towards language education persists. After hundreds of years of teaching foreign cultures "at arms length," often using textbooks written in foreign languages, Japanese scholars instinctively valorize translation of the written word. Now students are demanding "English conversation." This means that they want to be able to actually talk to foreigners. This presents many language professors with two major questions. First, how can they teach students to speak languages when they themselves can only read them? Second, if students do speak to foreigners, will this not eventually pollute their Japanese identity? However, students,

parents and progressive instructors continue to pressure professors and administrators to provide more effective instruction in English listening and speaking skills.

One solution for the improvement of English instruction at Japanese universities is the wider use of audio-visual equipment and computers. Technology, however, still has a limited role in language education. Another solution is to import "native speaker" instructors. Native speakers, although expensive, are generally popular, and their numbers are increasing. This resulting shift to native-speaker instructors makes some Japanese instructors feel insecure. Moreover, the institutional framework of most Japanese universities has been slow to integrate these foreign instructors. (For example, foreign instructors must pay into pension plans that few are likely to collect). Some universities are reluctant to offer foreigners full-time positions. In fact, at national universities, only Japanese can be full-time professors (as is the case for other public employees), making it impossible for even Japanese-born Koreans to acquire permanent positions.

Along with cultural and institutional frictions in language classrooms, come methodological conflicts. Most foreign instructors frown on the translation methods of language teaching still favoured by many Japanese instructors. For their part, Japanese instructors suspect that nothing more than frolic and chat happens in the classrooms of the foreigners. These prejudices are only aggravated by the fact that "native speakers" usually teach all the listening and speaking classes, while "Japanese" instructors get all the reading courses. Within a Japanese university, Japanese and foreign language teachers often occupy two separate worlds.

The native speakers do not even fit into meetings because usually they cannot speak Japanese. It stands to reason that at least within English departments, English could be used as the language of meetings, but in Japan the use of English at Department

meetings can be a contentious issue for two reasons. The first reason is that many of the professors of a Japanese Department of English are not, or at least feel they are not competent at spoken English. This is particularly true for older, and, therefore, more entrenched professors. The second reason is that in situations where power is being negotiated, Japanese tend to associate English with American hegemony, and this can easily arouse their sense of victimization as we have seen in the case of Suzuki.

In the recent past, "internationalization" was a term popular on Japanese campuses partly because it offered to enlivened the womb-like serenity of the ivory tower. These days, that passion for internationalization has, so to speak, "come home to roost," bringing with it less pleasant international realities, such as inter-cultural friction. This cultural friction can be manipulated in ways that aggravate the division among Japanese and non-Japanese faculty. Let me give an example.

Recently, I attended a meeting of students and professors held to debate certain reforms of the language programmes. (I was the only non-Japanese present). I knew that several of the professors were nervous because they did not understand the reforms very well themselves. Fortunately for them, early in the debate, a student criticized a German "native speaker" instructor. Apparently, the German was short-tempered, overly serious, and given to criticizing Japanese institutions and customs. The professors were relieved to find a common ground with the students. Much of the remaining time of the meeting was spent dealing with "the German problem." The problem could have been an opportunity to explore the prejudices inevitably underlying inter-cultural frictions--or to encourage students to enter into a dialogue with the German instructor about his conduct. However, that was not the result. The solution was to turn the problem over to the senior Japanese professor who undertook to caution the "German" faculty (i.e. the professors would protect the students from the foreigners). The complaint against the foreign

instructor aroused in both the student delegation and the faculty representatives a common sense of victimization. This kind of false solidarity of identity that finds itself in a common sense of victimization by foreigners may contribute to what Campbell (1987) calls "the slide from patriotism to ethnocentrism" (p. 50).

The senior German professor acts as a go-between to protect the Japanese university community and especially its students from the unpredictable foreign instructor. Moreover, he becomes like a scolding parent, and the German instructor is the spoiled child. No doubt this is how many Japanese professors feel about their foreign colleagues. I have heard a Japanese colleague claim that foreign instructors are like over-indulged and spoiled children in Japan, and that they get their positions more for the colour of their eyes than for any academic merit. Fortunately, few of my Japanese colleagues show such candour no matter how discomfiting the presence of native speakers.

Sekiguchi Ichiro (1993), senior Japanese professor of German at Keio university and a colleague of Takeo Suzuki, has institutionalized the desire to "control" foreign instructors within a new German programme. From what I understand, the program consists of only one senior Japanese professor. All other instructors are temporary native-speaker instructors. The curriculum is divided into very tight self-contained one-lesson units. Each day, each instructor is assigned a lesson and a class. The instructor may get a different class every day. Because the instructor must cover all the material in one lesson, there is no need to worry about the instructor choosing "unsuitable" materials or wasting time complaining about Japanese customs and institutions. Because the class changes so often, there is little fear of the instructor become intimate with the students. The native speaker is reduced to a "pre-programmed" voice. The "threat" of any real cultural exchange in the classroom is diminished. Total control of the curriculum remains

in the hands of one Japanese professor. The whole system functions with military-like precision.

When this professor came to promote this programme as an option for my university, he brought a video students had prepared in their German classes. The only thing I found notable in the video was that in ten minutes of fun and games, I heard almost no German. My suspicion is that with their classroom instructors reduced to ineffectual voices without authority, nothing much like language learning happens in the classroom. Despite this deficiency, the programme offers a simple solution to the problems posed by demands for foreign language instructors. It offers "the best of both worlds": Japanese students have their "native speakers," and are having fun in class, and the Japanese professors are still in firm control of what happens in the native speaker's classroom. In this and other ways, the Japanese university can render *kokusaika* harmless by trivializing it (Kawanari 1993; Edwards 1989).

Among Japanese professors are many who, without surrendering their own language or cultural identity, are sincerely seeking to improve English language instruction. Moreover, wider reforms are being made that are opening up the once-closed academic world of Japan, a world controlled by *habatsu* [academic cliques] practising out-dated teaching methods. In the past, I taught at a large university where there was not one foreigner among the hundreds of full-time professors (and as far as I knew, not one woman). At my present university, there are a good many foreign and women *sennin* [tenured] professors. There are several dozens of part-time [*hijokin*] or temporary [*jokinkoshi*] native-speaker instructors as well. Moreover, the various faculties are seriously exploring ways to coordinate and reform language instruction. However, this university is not necessarily typical of Japanese universities. Each university is different,

and at some the new-nationalists, like Suzuki, have more power and institute their own kinds of reform, such as the German program described above.

Nevertheless, not all Japanese professors believe with Suzuki that an open internationalization necessarily means self-renunciation or that it requires the rejection Japanese cultural identity. On the contrary, some see internationalization as an affirmation of their cultural identity. Oda Makoto (1978) offers a positive model for an internationalized Japanese identity:

Insofar as both our experiences as victim and victimizer have resulted from interaction with the state and--more basically--in so far as they have grown out of particular historical and social circumstances, they are national in tone. If universal values are to provide a meaningful framework for those experiences, they must be molded to fit national circumstances, and in the process they inevitably take on national attributes. Only then can individual autonomy emerge as a clear consciousness that individual and state are separate entities. Indeed, an open form of nationalism--nationalism tempered by internationalism--can only be formed out of a union between national experience and universal principle.
(p. 168)

It would be a mistake to engage in any inquiry into the relationship between education and identity assuming that "universal values" are pre-fixed, and synonymous with "American values" or "Western values." In our post-colonial world, that is unacceptable. The world must re-negotiate its "universal values." In the process of this re-negotiation, various conflicting cultural values must be taken into account. The task has hardly begun, but any kind of meaningful internationalism will necessitate recognizing some form of "universal values." Through this negotiation of new universal values, new national identities will also emerge.

Nishikawa Nagao (1996) has noted that "Post-war Japan rebuilt its 'nation' in the name of 'culture.' Japanese intellectuals, right and left wing, cooperated in rebuilding the 'nation' by means of discussing 'culture'" (p. 248). What is more, within this discourse, "even cultural relativism was based on a static cultural model which was exclusive and self-

contained, and a result served to produce cultural frontiers” (p. 247). Japanese education by various means serve a “nationalism” disguised as a unique “cultural” identity. “Culture” has replaced “nation” in discourse on Japanese identity. As a result, some “new nationalists,” like Suzuki, are trying to establish a vision of Japanese identity that is built upon an imagined past: a “disinfected” Japanese history. Others are trying to redefine Japanese identity in more open and flexible ways (see Vlastos 1998a; Morris-Suzuki 1998, 1995; Smith 1997b; Tanaka 1996; Fawcett 1996; Amino 1992; Bernstein 1991).

Generally, the content of most modern Japanese education helps support a cultural identity that is in line with a system of beliefs and values that assumes Japan to have a tightly unified and homogeneous “national culture” that remains “essentially” unchanged through time. Michael Apple (1993) warns us against such simplified visions of “natural harmony” when we try to understand our cultures. He says,

Culture--the way of life of a people, the constant and complex process by which meanings are made and shared--does not grow out of the pre-given unity of a society. Rather, in many ways, it grows out of its divisions. It has to *work* to construct any unity that it has. The idea of culture should not be used to “celebrate an achieved or natural harmony.” Culture is instead “a producer and reproducer of value systems and power relations.” (p. 45)

Through its control of the writing and selection of textbooks and the entrance examination system, the Japanese Ministry of Education enforces a national curriculum based on routine and rote at the expense of creativity and discussion. It celebrates Japanese culture as a “natural harmony” in an attempt to fill the vacuum of understanding about the formation of identity resulting from the absence of discourse on racial discrimination in Japan. Because of this educational strategy, many Japanese internalize a concept of Japaneseness based upon an intense awareness of their “unique” culture. This kind of Japanese identity is at times little different from extreme nationalism. As Gavan McCoramak (1996) explains,

the myth of 'Japaneseness' as the quality of a monocultural, blood-united, pre-ordained people was concocted and evolved till, in the state-building process of the late nineteenth century, it penetrated 'into the very souls of the people.' It was never negated, although the historical reality was very different than the myth. (p. 268)

Detached from Asia, but not feeling an equal member in the West, the Japanese have often suffered "an unease and dissatisfaction" that can be described as "a sense of victimization" (Goto 1996, p. 161). At present, some Japanese are trying to redefine themselves and to create new international identities. As we have seen, these new identities do not always complement each other. One Japanese concept of "internationalism" presupposes the internalization of a strong and static cultural identity based upon a sense of victimization and difference from others. Another Japanese concept of internationalization is more amorphous and cannot be clearly defined, but it involves a willingness to move beyond a sense of "victimization," to refuse to chose between "East" and "West," to enter freely into dialogue with other peoples, and to question the single, linear version of "Japanese identity" that is inculcated through the present Japanese educational system.

Chapter Fourteen

Autobiographical Interlude: Back in Kyoto [1995-1998]

I know that you are fond of Japanese things. Now, do you really imagine that the Japanese people, as they are presented to us in art, have any existence? If you do, you have never understood Japanese art at all. The Japanese people are the deliberate self-conscious creation of certain individual artists. . . . In fact the whole of Japan is a pure invention. There is no such place, there are no such people.

Oscar Wilde, "The Decay of Lying." (1980, pp. 53-54)

At public school in Kyoto

From 1991-1995, I lived in Canada, continuing my Japanese studies at UBC, and teaching to mostly Japanese students at various colleges. Still, by 1994, I was hungering to return to Japan. I had set myself three conditions for a return to teach in Japan. The first condition was that I must return to Kyoto, a city I love. The second condition was that I must return as a *sennin* [tenured professor], so I could be an equal among my colleagues. The third condition was that I must be hired through an open competition; I had had my fill of the *habatsu* system. I was pessimistic that these three conditions could ever be met, but when I heard of an open competition for a *sennin* position at "R" university, a well-known private university in Kyoto, I applied, and, to my surprise, was hired. My wife and two sons, who were comfortable in Canada, made the sacrifice and followed me to Japan again.

My first impression back in Japan was that things seemed to have changed a lot in the five years I had been away. I knew by now that some of this change could be accounted for by my being in a different institution. (Later, I learned that, institutionally speaking, the universities I had taught at in Nagoya, Tsukuba and Nara had changed

comparatively little). Nevertheless, the country had undeniably undergone huge economical and social changes. The economic "bubble" had burst.

Japan's financial collapse and other changes in society were reflected in the daily lives of Japanese, especially the young. Second hand stores had sprouted up in Kyoto, and many *kissaten* [coffee shops] and *snaku* [small bars] had closed for lack of business. Girls were cutting their hair short, and boys were dyeing theirs red and wearing it in pony tails. Young people were less interested in foreign music, and were content with their own thriving music industry. Sumo was dominated by three huge Hawaiians. Young women were choosing to go to university, and the *tanki daigaku* [women's colleges] were feeling the pinch. Moreover, female students talked less of getting married when they graduated, and more of finding good jobs. Foreign travel had become cheaper and easier, but people were getting blasé about it. The travel focus of young people had shifted slightly, away from American and Europe and towards Asia. There had been a huge influx of foreigners into Japan to work and to study, including many people from Third-world countries like Brazil, the Philippines, and Bangladesh. Even eating habits had changed: MacDonald's and Colonel Kentucky were common; even elderly people were enjoying pizza and spaghetti; foreign wine and whiskey were popular and relatively cheap; and the government was worried that Japanese were losing their taste for rice.

Living styles had changed, too. The *kotatsu* [low "heated" table] had become a quaint relic of the past, and most of my students ate sitting at tables. They were also sleeping on beds rather than in *futon*. The *senjo* [public bath houses] were rapidly disappearing. Old-style "Kyoto houses," long, dark structures, drafty in winter and full of strange insects in the summer, were being torn down one by one to be replaced by

"Canadian 2x4 homes." In many ways, Japan was a different place than the one that I remembered.

Not only had Japan changed, but I was different, too. The Japan in my memory was the creation of my early experience. It was formed when I knew nothing about the country or its language. I had been a blank page, eager to be written upon. But by 1995, I was a scholar specializing in things Japanese. I could speak, read and write Japanese. I had published in Japanese. I was "affiliated" with a prestigious university. I had many Japanese friends. My wife was Japanese, and my children had dual citizenship. I was older. In 1995, looking out upon the horizon of Japan after a five-year absence, I realized that the life-world I saw did not fit the nostalgic image of Japan lodged comfortably in my memory. I was faced with learning Japan all over again.

For my wife and me, one of our first concerns was finding a school for our oldest child. (The younger could stay home for a while yet). The Kyoto International school was not prospering, and the one in Osaka was far off and expensive. We decided to try the local public school in the Kinugasa area in north-western Kyoto. When we visited, construction was underway on a new school building to replace the one built shortly after the war. The principal was glad to accept our older son into grade five. She told us there were other foreign children in the school, from places like England, Spain and Brazil, and she assured us that there were no problems of *ijime* [bullying]. We met our son's homeroom teacher, a relaxed young man in jogging pants and a T-shirt. He had studied marine biology, and was curious about Canadian fish. Classes are split in Kyoto when student numbers go over 40, so luckily Kinugasa had two grade five classes with fewer than 30 students each. The principal even arranged for our son to have a private Japanese lesson once a week: he had a lot of *kanji* to catch up on.

There are several excellent books on elementary schools in Japan (for example, Benjamin 1997; Conduit 1996; Stevenson & Stigler 1992; Cummings 1980). Our experience differs from these accounts in only a few ways. For example, the physical facilities of our school were excellent. The new building was soon completed, and the facilities were impressive. They included a huge, well-lit gymnasium. The large stage had a colourful curtain woven by local *Nishijin* [the famous weaving-district of Kyoto] craftsmen. The classrooms had heating and air-conditioning systems (paid for, as was the curtain, by “forced” donations from local residents through the *chonai kai* [community associations]). The school also boasted a music room, a computer room with 25 computers, and an excellent library open to public use. The kitchen for preparing school lunches was well-equipped. An interesting innovation was a small but attractive eating area with a restaurant-like atmosphere that classes took turns using. On the roof of the classroom complex was a swimming pool that got most of its use during summer holidays. The playing ground was large, and was blessed by a huge *kusunoki* [camphor] tree, which was the school's symbol. The huge cement wall that had enclosed the school ground was torn down (as they have been at many Kyoto schools for “safety” reasons), and replaced by a mesh fence, making for more noise, but better visibility and a spacious atmosphere. Moreover, the school had a special relationship with a nearby Catholic school for handicapped children, and inter-school visits were common. Also, the PTA experimented with unusual events, like the overnight camp-out in the school grounds. All in all, I think my children were lucky to attend such a school.

Later, when my older son went on to junior high school, our enthusiasm for Japanese schools dampened. We again opted for a local public school, but our first visit was a shock. The buildings were huge, old and dark. Classrooms were crowded. The

drab uniforms were the monopoly of one company, and their service was atrocious. (Until recently, there had not been a "coat" for the winter uniform, but after parental complaints, one was introduced, but most students found it so unattractive that they refused to purchase it, preferring to shiver on their way to school). A new gymnasium was under construction, but the builders went bankrupt, and so the building sat half-finished. There were no computers, and the murky pool looked like a mosquito farm. Students, as elsewhere in Japan, were responsible for cleaning the school, but it looked dirty, and the washrooms looked particularly unsanitary.

Unlike at the elementary school, there was no visible foreign presence among the students, and the few *kikokushijo* [returnee students] kept a low profile. Most foreign residents either sent their high-school aged children to one of the international schools in Osaka or Kobe or to boarding schools abroad rather than "risk" the Japanese high school system. At that time, the media was full of the news of three stabbings committed by junior high school students: in the first, a boy stabbed a girl because she got in his way when he was going to his desk; in the second, a student stabbed a policeman for his gun; in the third, a "rather ordinary" boy murdered a female teacher with a "butterfly knife" because she had scolded him. These folding "butterfly knives" were apparently "fashionable" at some schools.

Like in any school, some of my son's teachers were popular, some not, but the overall teaching atmosphere at his junior high school was stiff and formal. The administration ruled with an iron hand. The curriculum was inflexible. Although our son was a native speaker of English, he (along with the "invisible" *kikokushijo*) had to attend beginners English classes with the other first-year students. When he broke his arm, he had to go to gym for *kengaku* [observation], anyway. When we visited for "open house,"

all the classes we observed were lecture style; the English class was carried out entirely in Japanese, the board covered with rules written in kanji.

My son was taking first-year high school [grade 7] *shakai gaku* [Social Studies] in Japan, and Canadian grade 8 Social Studies by correspondence at the same time. By coincidence, both courses were about world history. In Japan, even "world history," was heavily Japanese-centered. My son brought home special study booklets, and I noted that on one "the Jomon period" took several pages while "the Roman Empire" was wrapped up in one sentence. The Canadian course emphasized comparisons, such as comparing the characteristics of different empires, and my son regularly had to write paragraphs and create charts. In Japan, he never wrote more than short answers, and tests were mainly multiple choice.

The curriculum of Japanese junior high schools was visibly exam oriented, and teachers had little choice but to conform to its demands. In this atmosphere, parents who did not support the examination system, inevitably found themselves in a kind of adversarial relationship with teachers. We had got on much better with the elementary school teachers. One day, my older son's elementary homeroom teacher had explained a dilemma he was facing. He was approaching forty, and as a male teacher, he was expected to make a career choice: either remain a classroom teacher, or begin training for an administrative position. He liked the idea of becoming a principal some day, but, before he could become an administrator, he had to sign a paper promising to obey and publicly support the decisions of the Ministry of Education. The paper would be kept "secret," and simply locked away somewhere to be brought out only should he break his promise. He disagreed with a number of *Mombusho* policies, so he had trouble bringing himself to sign such a paper.

“Reforms” in a Private University

Kyoto has many universities, and I had become a professor at one of the more prestigious. “R” university had a long history of dissent, and until recently was reputed to be a “communist” institution. When I arrived, there was little evidence of the once prevalent Marxist ideology. Instead, the catchwords were “international education” and “educational reform.” Language education reform is a priority, and *sennin* language instructors spent a lot of time in various committees designing reforms. Certainly there was a lot that needed reforming. Each faculty, for example, had its own English department, and each English department had its own curriculum and policies. Some had placement tests and some did not. Some had conversation classes with a maximum of 70 students, others of 35, and others yet of 25. Within each English department, the curriculum was largely “skeletal,” and so professors had a freehand to teach what and how they liked. Much of the “reform” underway was simply organizational. In an attempt to centralize and coordinate policies, a central “Foreign Language Centre” had been set up. Some faculties, like Economics and Business Administration were merging their English departments. TOEFL testing was being promoted as a way to increase the prestige of language programs in Japan and abroad.

Pressure for change came from “the bottom” and “the top” of the university hierarchy, with professors, caught in the middle, responsible for creating and implementing the reforms. At the bottom, students and their parents, many of whom have studied or travelled abroad, were aware that there were other, perhaps more effective methods of language teaching. At the top, directors and administrators who have “to sell” the university, want programmes that will attract students, and private universities in particular

have to cater to demands for reform, especially "visible" reforms that are "marketable"; hence, the popularity among administrators for TOEFL, and for the hiring of more foreign language instructors.

Unfortunately, many senior professors have, over the years, become comfortable with the system the way it is. For them, reform just means more work and uncertainty. They have benefited greatly by the present system, and for some it is the only system they know. Even if they support the idea of reform, they are often unsure of where and how to start. In the end, the commotion surrounding reform is "mostly smoke and very little fire."

One unfortunate side effect of language teaching reform is a split between Japanese and native-speaker language teachers. The two groups are already divided by suspicion: the Japanese fearing that they are being eased out of the system; the native-speakers feeling that they are being manipulated. A lot of energy for reform is dissipated by friction between these two groups. Some English departments hold certain meetings twice: once for Japanese English instructors in Japanese; once for native-speakers in English.

Sometimes reforms are put into effect in a rush to meet administration deadlines. These are primarily "cosmetic" reforms. Often hurriedly thought out, they are only intended as temporary expedients. It remains for reforms to be implemented that might radically improve the educational environment of Japanese universities, such as changing the entrance examination system, the famous "Examination Hell."

Preparing the *Nyushi* [Entrance Exams]

One of my duties as a full-time professor was to sit on the secret committees that prepare the English entrance examinations. At my university, about twenty English professors from all faculties were divided into subgroups, each responsible for three or four of the 12 or so entrance exams held every year, including different exams for different faculties, and some for special groups like athletes, artists or students changing universities. We met once a week during the spring semester, and everyday at the beginning of summer. The committees were given "false names," and their membership was kept secret. Even the company that published the tests was kept secret.

Changes can be made to the format of the tests, but only in careful stages. One reason I fear for this conservatism is that too many changes would offend the *juku* industry, which must be able to predict the kinds of questions on the test. After all, the tests are big business. One university I know of has almost 100,000 students write entrance exams each year to fill about 5,000 places. Since each student will pay the rough equivalent of \$300.00 to write a test, that means the university gets almost \$30,000,000.00 a year, about 10% of its total budget, from entrance examinations alone. Without a thriving examination season, many university would be hard pressed financially. Universities do not want to offend a main "suppliers" of students: the *jukus*. The entrenchment of *juku*-system in Japan's economy remains one of the chief impediments to reforming Japanese education (see Brasor 1999).

The results of entrance exams are usually posted promptly, and so marking is a challenge in logistics. During the main examination period, many of the university offices are closed, and every spare hand is put in service of the examinations. Most sections of the tests are multiple choice, but some sections require short written answers, and, a few

tests even include a short English "composition" section. At most universities, all full-time faculty and many part-time instructors are mobilized for marking these special sections. Hundreds of professors can be found marking in vast hall, where they are sometimes grouped "ethnically," with the Japanese, the "Anglo-Saxons," and perhaps the Europeans and "others" seated separately.

Completed tests may be published in the newspapers. Often they are published and sold to *jukensei* [students preparing for exams] and to *jukus*. Thus, the tests become visible symbols of a university's prestige. As such, the tests must "look hard." A difficult entrance examination enhances the status and desirability of a university. Maintaining the "appearance of difficulty" becomes a priority among the professors making the test. I have often heard professors preparing the tests joke that they probably could not pass them. In fact, when it comes time to prepare the master marking sheet, some professors can no longer "remember" some of the answers. In other words, high school graduates are expected to answer questions that confuse university English professors.

Few people expect students to answer all the questions correctly. What matters for the university is that all the students who studied for that institution's test (and most of whom will fail it), and all the people who read the test in the newspaper are impressed at its difficulty. The impression given is that the few who *passed* the test must indeed be very good at English.

A Professor Ueyama* told me of one recent test at his university. About 10,000 students wrote the test, from which the university accepted 1,000, or twice their expected intake (allowing for the fact that some will chose another university). The pass score was 35%. (9,000 students got less than 35%). The range of scores for students who passed was between 35 and 100%. The half of accepted students who went on to another

university were probably at the higher end of the range because they were more likely to pass examinations for public universities. Therefore, Ueyama said, some of the 500 students who finally entered had scores near the 35% cut off, which, he stressed, meant little more than a 10% spread between a random score (say, someone who had never studied and knew no English at all) and some of the students who “passed” this test. In other words, a student with little English ability could well enter the university after successfully passing a “visibly difficult” test.

The “illusion of excellence” created by entrance examinations can sometimes contrast rather sharply with the “reality” of the classroom. Instructors and students who legitimately “did well” in the tests are sometimes disillusioned to find how poor many students are in English even at the best universities. A student once complained to me that she had studied very hard and passed with a high mark a “difficult” entrance exam to a private *tanki daigaku*. When she started classes, she found that most of the other students either had entered the college through *suisen* [recommendations by high schools that have special relationships with certain colleges] or had done very poorly on the test, but were accepted anyway. Since all the students had to take the same introductory English courses, she felt cheated, but trapped, because she had already paid a huge college entrance fee, and had no choice but to attend very boring classes.

The entire Japanese educational system from high school on, with its expensive *jukus* and exhausting schedules of study, is based on an “illusion of excellence” and examinations of dubious quality. The examination system may occasionally select “knowledgeable” students, but even then the “knowledge” is generally of a very narrow kind requiring mainly a prodigious memory. For entrance to many Japanese schools and

universities, students might have just as good a chance for success if they forgot about studying altogether, and simply relied upon luck.

It remains unclear whether Japanese universities will be able to implement real reforms in their language curricula. However, as students, their parents and instructors become more "worldly," pressure for reform mounts. Many students are "voting with their feet" so to speak, and going abroad for their education. Some of these students along with increasing numbers of *kikokushijo* reenter the system, and sometimes bring with them high expectation. The great amount of "talk" of language education reform in Japanese universities is at least a sign that professors and administrators are aware of these high expectations. Some educators respond by simply copying programmes or methodologies they see abroad. However, these are seldom suitable for the specific needs of Japanese students and institutions. I believe we may soon see a new era of language education in Japan, an era in which traditional Japanese educational thought is merged with foreign language teaching methodologies and adapted to create innovative techniques more suitable to Japanese educational culture.

Chapter Fifteen

Conclusion: New Horizons

MEPHISTOPHELES

Finished. A silly word. Why finished, I'd like to know. Finished and sheer nothingness all one and the same. What use is this interminable creating, this dragging creation into uncreation again? Finished. What does it point to? It might as well never have been at all. And yet it goes its round as if it was something. Give me eternal emptiness every time.

Goethe, Faust. (1985, p.197)

As I brought my first draft of this work to a close in early 1998, I took pause to look around at the complex and ever-changing life-world that is Japan. The long winter was coming to an end, and the plum blossoms were in full bloom at Kitano shrine, a short walk from my home in north-western Kyoto. As my children went off cheerfully to their respective schools, they did not seem overly burdened by their studies. I sat at home typing at my computer and reading. Occasionally, I visited the university to attend meetings. This was the simple winter pattern of education in my family. Not all students and teachers in Japan, though, were enjoying such a leisurely winter.

Winter is entrance examination season in Japan. The universities are geared up for an influx of *jukensei* [examinees]. On exam days, a steady stream of tense and grim-faced young people filed past my house on the way to the nearby examination halls. That winter also saw the worst epidemic of influenza in Japan in over ten years. A number of children died. Some high schools and elementary schools were temporarily closed. The university entrance examinations proceed regardless of pestilence and disaster. A

few years ago, when the Great Hanshin Earthquake devastated Kobe only weeks before the start of the examinations season, students from Kobe, their homes and lives shattered by the earthquake, still had to get to exam centres or miss their chance at university entrance that year. In 1998, invigilators of entrance examinations escorted students, pale with the flu, to university medical clinics so they could complete their exams under the watchful eye of university medical staff. Students who were just too ill to write the tests forfeited their test fees and waited to try again the next year. Japan's meritocracy is supported by the "brutal fairness" of this entrance examination system. In a few short hours, the futures of students are decided based upon their ability to regurgitate the facts they have been gorged upon since childhood. What are these facts?

From elementary school, children regularly write short tests published by the Ministry of Education. On a grade six test, I noticed a question testing the understanding of graphs. The graph compares the self-sufficiency in grain production of eight "important" countries [*omona kun*]: Canada, America, five of the larger Western European countries, and Japan. The graph indicates that while the other countries produce more than their own grain needs, Japan produces considerably less than half of what it needs. The line representing Japan's level of production stands out clearly from the others. The question concludes: "Compared to world averages, Japan's level is low, isn't it? [*sekai demo ritsu ga hikui no ne*]. This simple graph adds another fact to the already plentiful storehouse in the minds of grade six students.

Few Japanese students have the time to digest these facts. They certainly do not question them. Why was Japan compared to only Western countries? Why was the comparison made only to large "agricultural" countries, and not small, mountainous and densely populated countries more like Japan? Is it really possible to generalize from such

a limited selection of countries that Japan has a low level of self-sufficiency "in the world"? Tests do not encourage students to question graphs. Japanese students are usually taught to trust facts, graphs and surveys. Even as adults, Japanese display a passion for surveys and statistics. The newspapers are always full of them, and popular television shows are based upon them. In Japan education is usually equated with facts, graphs and statistics, not with questioning.

What can trivial facts about grain production have to do with identity? What does it matter that Japan is a short line on a graph? In Japan, "grain" means "rice," and rice plays a key role in Japanese cultural identity. As Ohnuki-Tierney (1993) argues, in Japan, rice is a metaphor for "self" (p. 4). Moreover, she finds it "alarming" that this long unquestioned association of Japanese with rice and rice farming "denies the heterogeneity of Japanese society throughout history" (p. 82). Amino (1996), too, examines the myth of rice in Japan's history and connects it to the emperor system. Nishikawa (1997) points out that until the modern era, very few Japanese could afford to eat white rice, which was a luxury reserved for the ruling classes and for ritual. Nevertheless, this "myth" of Japanese as a "rice-eating people" remains part of the national cultural identity. The Japanese government "heroically" resists foreign pressure to open its rice markets, even though the price of rice is driven up drastically. At school, this test graph vividly shows students an image of "themselves": a "little" Japan standing up against Western giants. The graph evokes not only a sense of insecurity about food supply, but it evokes the sense that Japan is a victim. This apparently benign and "objective" graph supports a concept of Japanese identity based upon fear, especially fear of Western countries. How would students have pictured themselves in the world had the graph instead compared Japan to countries like Chad, Singapore, North Korea or Albania? Facts are neither objective nor disinterested. The facts are selective and can mislead.

Graphs can be deceptive. I went with other parents to observe our children's grade two mathematics class during "open house" at Kinugasa. The class was working on a problem displayed by graphs: if the red ribbon is 60 cm, and the red ribbon is 20 cm shorter than the blue ribbon, then how long is the blue ribbon. The class and the teacher performed well. Then the teacher brought out a comparative "incorrect" graph, and claimed it to be correct. This was not the kind of teaching strategy that we surprised parents expect in Japanese schools. Eventually, some students pointed out that the teacher's chart was wrong. We parents were impressed. There was, after all, room in Japanese education for questioning the authority of the teacher.

On my way out of the school, though, I noticed a very similar "mistaken" chart on the blackboard of the other grade two class. Then, I remembered that my wife had complained that the children had been kept after class everyday for a week to "prepare" for the open house math class. At supper, when we discussed the class, my son confessed, "You know, it's not really like that." The honesty of a child had once again revealed that "the king has no clothes." An eight year-old "informant" made me aware, once again, of the constant need to distinguish between the *tatemae* [false front] and the *honne* [reality] of Japanese education, or of any system of education. The purpose of the "incorrect" graph exercise had been to introduce to parents and students a new ideal of education. This new "questioning" ideal was not yet fully "internalized" either by students or teachers. What we parents saw was a carefully scripted performance. I realize, now, that it had not been a mathematics class after all. It had been an "identity" class.

In Japan, as in North America, the media is full of a national debate about violence in schools. In Japan in 1998, the debate was intensified after a series of stabbings and other criminal attacks involving students. Since the infamous Aum Shinrykyo subway

attack and related crimes which were planned and carried out by graduates of elite national universities, and the grizzly murder in Kobe in 1997, in which a fourteen year-old boy cut off the head of a handicapped boy and left it at a school gate, Japanese have felt that something is seriously wrong with their educational system and perhaps their whole society. The recent knife attacks have only intensified their fear.

In a recent newspaper article, Hasegawa (1998), a *juku* teacher, wants parents to know their children are exhausted by their studies. He admits that at times as many as half of the students in his class are asleep. Most students, he says, do not understand why they have to study so hard just to enter senior high school. In recent years, he observes, more and more students hate to study and find nothing interesting in it. All they understand is that it will somehow be to their future economic advantage. In fact other observers (see Thomas 1993; Shields 1989; Sakaiya 1988; Vogel 1975) suggest that the whole point of Japanese education is the "hard work" and "fatigue" that will prepare them so well for their future roles as Japanese *sarariman* [company employees]. The exhausting routines of the examination hell are inherent to the creation of identities consistent with Japanese business practises, *nihonteki keiei*.

Juku teachers, like Hasegawa, offer no solutions to the problems and pressures of Japanese education; they simply collect the students' fees and let them sleep? This may be partly because the *juku* system, too, is a crucial aspect not only of the contemporary Japanese economy (see Brasor 1999), but also of modern Japanese identity. Despite complaints about *juku* and other extra curricular classes that over-fill the lives of Japanese children, the classes remain in-demand. In Japan, a good child is a studying child, or at least one visibly going through the motions of attending school and

juku. Many children, too, want to go to *juku* simply because their friends attend. In short, going to *juku* is what good Japanese children do.

Many parents and teachers are baffled by the wave of violence that wrecks the carefully nurtured security of Japanese schools, defying the rules and routines imposed by adult society. In a recent survey, over a third of high school teachers admit that they have no idea what their students are thinking ("Kodomo" 1998). The only concrete proposal to deal with violence was the Education Ministry's move to allow teachers to inspect students' school bags--in other words, more rules. Yet, at the same time that they instinctively move to tighten up security and discipline in the education system, Ministry of Education bureaucrats are complaining that "society and teachers" are "the main obstacles to building a more diversified school system" (Smith 1997b).

Perhaps Japanese parents, teachers and bureaucrats could better deal with the problem of school violence if they realized it was a problem they shared with people of other nations. Paul Willis (1977) says of violent incidents in British schools that they offer "permanent possibilities for the alleviation of boredom" (p. 34). Madeleine Grumet (1988) finds fault with "the silence" of American secondary classrooms, which suggests that "nothing is happening" (p. 142). Japanese secondary classrooms are at least as boring and as silent as those of America and Britain. But in Japan the problem is compounded by the *juku* system. Young Japanese are oppressed by a regime of unrelenting boredom from morning to night. They are forced into shells that demand unnatural and sustained passivity. They sit "silently" in school; they sit half asleep later at *juku*; they sit and doze on commuter trains; they sit studying at their desks long into the night. Is it so surprising that in the face of such passivity and boredom some run amok.

The relationship between Japanese education and identity is a tight one, as it is for British, American or Canadian identity. One of the main social functions of the education system of any modern nation state is to instill in young people a sense of a common culture. Madeleine Grumet (1988) says,

What the common culture usually embraces is any culture other than the one lived by the children in that classroom. Because the common culture is always anywhere other than this world, its curriculum rarely speaks to a world children know, a world accessible to their understanding and action. It is a curriculum that controls through mystification, encouraging placid passivity. In Pedagogy of the Oppressed, Paulo Freire shows us how the interests of the oppressor are rationalized and promoted by a curriculum that pretends neutrality while it advances the ways of knowing, the forms of language and relation that enhance the privilege of those with power. Power wears many masks, and if in some countries it appears as the Church or the Party, or even the People, here it is the Common Culture that does the trick. Situating the curriculum in a specific culture provokes the discourse that requires argument, specificity, imagination, and judgment and entails reflection that challenges whatever is parochial and complacent. Because it is labeled as neutral and is packaged and distributed as such, a standard rationale for the common culture is its accessibility. Ironically, it is this very posture of the curriculum's impartiality and neutrality that has contributed to the school's capacity to sort, stratify, categorize, and identify the children of the nation. It has supported the myth of the meritocracy that convinces parents and children that they have warranted the decisions they receive. (p. 172)

What Grumet is here saying about the relationship between American education and culture, also is true for that of Japanese education and culture. If anything, "those with power" in Japan have been even more successful in promoting the illusion of a Common Culture. The Japanese curriculum sorts students efficiently and supports a myth of meritocracy that is "guaranteed" by the examination system. By making "difference" invisible and overlooking Japan's internal minorities, the curriculum avoids uncomfortable discourse. The myth of the homogeneous and group-oriented Common Culture makes students ashamed of their hidden differences, and deprives them of opportunities to talk about the world where their experience is grounded. Denied the authority of their experience, they lack resources for "argument, specificity, imagination, and judgment."

The curriculum renders students silent and bored. It leaves them within the homogeneous Common Culture.

Not all Japanese are willing to accept the imposition of an identity based on the myth of homogeneous culture. Recently, when a new ambassador arrived from South Korea, Japanese bureaucrats were put out that he could not speak Japanese. They have known a generation of South Korean diplomats fluent in Japanese because they received their education when Korea was a colony of Japan. The new ambassador was fluent in English, but spoke no Japanese, and many Japanese were heard to complain about this "inconvenience." But in reaction to this bureaucratic grumbling, a Japanese journalist (Hasaba 1998) points out that no recent Japanese ambassador to Korea could speak Korean. He asks why the bureaucrats, graduates of Japan's best universities who have all spent years studying English, could not work with the ambassador in English. He welcomes the arrival of the new ambassador because it highlights the failure of the educational system to provide Japanese bureaucrats with identities flexible enough to meet the challenges of "internationalization."

Many young Japanese are especially reluctant to accept the myths of groupism and cultural homogeneity promoted by the pre-war values of many of their elders. Following fast upon the examination season of 1998 came the Winter Olympics in Nagano. A twenty-two year old Japanese jumper, Funaki Kazeyoshi, won the gold in the high hill ski jump. When interviewed about his accomplishment, he said,

I don't like this way of thinking that considers me "the first Japanese." It is because of this way of thinking that Japan never sprouts shoots [*me ga denai*] in some sports. "Japan this" and "Japan that" --it's like a shell [*kara*] that confines us. If we cannot get out of that shell, we can never win in the world. ("Funaki" 1998; my translation)

Perhaps Funaki is representative of a new thinking about identity among many young Japanese. This way of thinking rejects the confinement of one hard, confining shell Japanese identity. This is a kind of thinking that does not see Japan as the one short line on a graph. Funaki does not wish his achievement to become reduced to another "cultural fact" (the first Japanese to . . .). Instead, he assumes that Japanese have a right to act in the world as individuals, and upon a basis of equality with people of other nations. He would break out of the homogeneous shell that has been built up to enclose him, and take flight in a new form.

In this work, I have tried to broaden my understanding of relationships among language, education and cultural identity in Japan. To this end, I have proposed cultural hermeneutics as one way to move beyond positivist methodologies of social sciences, and to open up the dialogue on culture to include varied interests and perspectives. In this tentative model of a cultural hermeneutics, I have reflected upon the relationship between my own cultural identity [the knowing subject] and the "object" of my study [Japanese education and cultural identity]. Within the image of Japan that I present, I have tried to incorporate an awareness of difference and change. I accept the limits of this approach, and know that such a "change-full" image will always remain uncompleted, and contradict itself even in its creation.

Education is the conduit through which the knowledge of specialized fields of study flows into our daily lives and into our "national minds." The image of Japanese culture that evolves from the past research of "holistic" critics on Japan, like Reischauer (1988) Vogel (1979, 1975), Doi (1973), Nakane (1970), and Benedict (1946), and that has filtered its way through our educational institutions and media has become the "common knowledge" and even the "common sense" that influences the conduct and strategies of students, businesspeople and bureaucrats today. It makes little difference that these works portray

a “fictional” Japan. What matters is that they carry the authority of academic communities, and that they are widely “believed.” The faith engendered by such works is produced not so much by the reliability of their facts, but by the power of their language and the inclination of a large audience to listen. The holistic theory of Japanese culture as connected to *nihonteki keiei* or the theory of the *ie* (family-based) society is founded upon a powerful literature that has been disseminated globally through education. Our own concepts of education in the “Western tradition” are equally “fictitious,” and are also disseminated through education. Wittgenstein (cited in Gadamer 1976) taught us that

the language games of science remain related to the metalanguage presented in the mother tongue. All the knowledge won by science enters the societal consciousness through school and education, using modern information media, though sometime after a great--too great--delay. In any case, this is the way that new sociolinguistic realities are articulated.
(p. 39)

Education creates the world of human experience: experience creates knowledge, knowledge defines our experience. But our knowledge, as Wittgenstein pointedly warns here, is usually dated. The information passed on in the classroom today, is often based on books that their teachers or curriculum designers read years ago, and these books are based on research done years before their publication, and the research found its motivation in even earlier experience. When it comes to understanding cultures, this “lag” is of critical importance. It means that we are always knowing the past of a culture. Only experience can bring us more up to date, and then, too, we may suffer from the misunderstandings caused by the gap between the image of a culture we have accumulated over years of education, and the experience of that culture’s living world.

Through the circular interplay of education, knowledge and experience, identities are formed. Those who have the “knowledge” that Japanese live by “group consciousness” will experience them in that way. Thus, the theory fulfils itself. But there

are always other theories in play, and experience, too, has its role in forming knowledge. Experience is the promise of new knowledge. As Gadamer (1976) says, "It is the untiring power of *experience*, that in the process of being instructed, man is ceaselessly forming a new preunderstanding" (p. 38). Education, which should be the natural ally of experience, can also tend to control and limit experience. The modern social sciences

increasingly see themselves as marked out for the purpose of scientific ordering and control of society. They have to do with "scientific" and "methodical" planning, direction, organisation, development--in short with an infinity of functions that, so to speak, determine from the outside of the whole of the life of each individual and each group.

(Gadamer 1976, p. 39-40)

In environments where knowledge is alienated from lived experience, only the expert can have a voice. Cultural hermeneutics is in part a reaction against such "specialisation." Rorty (1979) suggests that "we would do well to abandon the notion of certain values ("rationality," disinterestedness") floating free of the educational and institutional patterns of the day" (p. 331). Gadamer (1976) adds that, "It is the function of hermeneutic reflection. . . to preserve us from naive surrender to the experts of social technology" (p. 40). In this work, I have tried to heed these suggestions, not in order to destroy the prejudiced beginnings of academic endeavours, but to move on from them in ways that open up our understanding of the influences of education, and especially language education, on the creation of Japanese cultural identity.

In so far as it is used to promote certain holistic models of identity, the term Japanese education/ *nihon no kyoiku* is a reflection of a wider ideology, or as Foucault (1984) calls it, "a regime of truth." This regime of truth dominates the academic disciplines devoted to the study of Japanese culture both in Japan and North America, and serves special interest groups in Japan and abroad. It emphasizes the centrality of "the homogeneous group" in Japanese identity. It teaches us little about variety and change in

the lived experience of Japanese individuals, and almost nothing about the lives of Japanese in marginal groups. Recognizing the weakness of holistic theories neither weakens their power, nor undermines their value. These theories provide the foundation of prejudice and misunderstanding upon which new understandings of Japan are being constructed.

Scientific methodology alone cannot be relied upon to free us from a too narrow horizon of understanding. We need something more: we need a hermeneutic questioning of the foundational concepts of Japanese culture. Holistic theories have been favoured by the literary talents of influential academics. They offer "interested" people images of Japan that conform to their prejudices or comfort their egos. Facts alone will not shake the power of these theories. The only way to move beyond the exclusivity of the dominant image they create is to write other images of Japanese society. In this task, human science researchers can benefit by acknowledging that what we commonly call "the literature" (research findings, journal articles, etc.) is not really much of a literature at all, while what we call nation, culture, business, science, and education are largely the fictions of a "cultural literature." Accepting literature, narrative and biography along with conventional methods of cultural inquiry, we can instigate conversations that present new views of education/*kyoiku* and of language, culture and identity. Through phenomenological questioning and the interdisciplinary conversation of cultural hermeneutics, I involve myself in the ever-ambiguous and ongoing play of rewriting Japan.

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