



Nora Kottmann | Cornelia Reiher [eds.]

Studying Japan

Handbook of Research Designs,
Fieldwork and Methods

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Fieldwork and Methods



Nomos

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Foreword

‘Anything goes, as long as it is relevant and convincing.’ This guidance by my supervisor sounded like an invitation to confidently rely on my curiosity and creativity when doing research for my PhD back in the late 1980s. But I soon learned to translate the statement into ‘Anything goes, as long as it complies with the rules.’ The rules set by the academic community defined what was relevant and convincing. Methods form an integral part of this. They are the tools and rules of the trade of scholars: as tools they enhance our abilities to explore, test and verify, as rules they constrain what is acceptable.

German Japanese Studies mostly differs from the more traditional Japanology with regard to its focus on subjects beyond culture, literature and language. When the new academic community started to establish itself at German-speaking universities in the 1980s, it had no genuine methodology. Instead it borrowed from the so-called *Methodenfächer* (method subjects) like Sociology, Political Science or Economics. But how could methods developed by disciplines that favour theories which are abstract from time and space be usefully applied to academic enquiry interested in phenomena that are defined by specific time-space constellations, like the family in post-war Japan or Japanese firms in the 1990s?

Anthropology provides a solution as it offers a methodology which explicitly honours time-space contingencies, and some of the best research on Japan, like Ronald Dore’s classic *British factory—Japanese factory* (1973), has been achieved by applying anthropological methods. However, not all issues in the realm of management, the economy, politics and society lend themselves to anthropological methods. So, scholars in the field of Japanese Studies continue to be confronted with the tension between research interests about phenomena specific to Japan and research methods not primarily concerned with specifics.

The handbook *Studying Japan* does not resolve this tension, but it does provide a pragmatic way of coping with it. And it does so in a comprehensive and systematic manner. By making the various methods of the Social Sciences accessible and by offering guidance on how to apply these tools and rules during the different stages of a research project, this handbook will prove highly valuable for those who study, teach and do research on Japan. Given its pluralistic approach, the handbook does not proclaim that there is only one right way to conduct research. It has no intention of being the *Bible of Japanese Studies*, but it certainly has the potential to become *The book of recipes* on how to make one’s research both relevant and convincing.

The editors deserve both thanks and respect for taking up the challenge of embarking on this project as well as for what they already accomplished with the conference in 2019 and now with the timely publication of this handbook. The German Institute for Japanese Studies (DIJ) in Tokyo is very happy and proud to have been part of this endeavour.

Franz Waldenberger
Director, German Institute for Japanese Studies
Tokyo, July 2020

Intercultural research, methodology and the emerging space of transnational knowledge

When people from other corners of the world do qualitative research on Japanese contexts, they engage in an intercultural enterprise. I am not speaking of closed national cultures in terms of methodological nationalism. In this globalising world, the mass media, personal travel and capitalism have contributed to opening up and interlinking cultures: people in many places watch anime on the Internet, eat sushi of diverse quality and wear trousers produced by low-paid female workers from the Global South. But this has not resulted in a globalised, flattened world culture. Rather, cultures have been and are thriving as contradictory complex configurations of meaning and practices, and they blend elements from what is seen as home or far away.

In this sense, those not socialised in the Japanese context and language start on an intercultural tour when they decide to do research on social or cultural issues focusing on Japan. This approach of intercultural interaction, communication and interpretation can bring new perspectives to the study of Japan, which of course is already comprehensively covered by Japanese researchers. This book is a detailed, diverse and extremely useful travel guide and companion on the road to reflexive and successful intercultural research in and on Japan. I want to congratulate the editors for this constructive and timely collection. They belong to the middle generation of researchers and thus show rich expertise in identifying and handling the various challenges of qualitative research on Japan. Like other pioneers in Germany, I had to find my way through the confusion, traps and thickets on this road mainly on my own with some support from advisors in Japan and elsewhere, when researching gender in industrialisation and later in industrial computerisation in Japan from the 1970s. Therefore, I find it extremely gratifying that younger generations can refer to this compendium on the why, how and where of doing research in Japan.

Let me go on with the why, how and where: intercultural and transcultural research is an urgent issue for Cultural and Social Sciences in globalisation (Gerharz 2021; Rosenthal 2018). However, it is charged with tensions which are also present in the national context but less visible. Let me touch on some basic issues while drawing on the rich suggestions from the articles in this volume.

The first is the relationship between the researcher and the researched subjects: the main aim of qualitative research is to bring to light and to interpret how *actors as subjects* see and construct sociocultural contexts and themselves (Rosenthal 2018). As researchers often used to see themselves as the main subjects of their projects, this creates tensions which have been debated as the representation problem or crisis in intercultural research (Gerharz 2021). Researchers and actors enter interactions in qualitative research as a *process of cocreation* (see Bruman, Ch. 7.1). As many contributors highlight in this handbook, (self-)reflexivity is an indispensable compass or everyday eyeglasses for researchers on the intercultural research road. They need to reflect on their own interest in the research issue and on the interaction, including its ethical and power dimensions. How am I 'pre-formed' and pre-informed by my social position ac-

ording to class, gender, minority/majority status or world region? Researching about gender in education, will I ask only women or also men or queer people? And will I interview migrant men and women as well as ‘ethnic Japanese’? So researchers have to reflect on whom they include or exclude through their concepts (e.g. of gender) and selection of interview partners. This also applies to interpretation: Will I accept the fact that mothers make lunchboxes (*bentō*) for school children as something natural (as some interviewed mothers might say) or will I look for contradictions and ambivalences in the interview texts? Researchers do not have to belong to the group they do research on; the contributions in this volume rather suggest that crossing borders of age, gender or nationality may add value to both the interviewer and the interviewed. But they will have to reflect on their own position, experiences and potential power.

The second issue are the hermeneutic dynamics in qualitative cocreated research or how to create and interpret meanings in an intercultural process. The first obvious barrier is the Japanese language, which in my view can be only overcome by using it. Expert interviews with international actors may be done in English or German. But for interpretative qualitative research this may not work. Having tried it at the request of my interview partners, I found that at least the semantics are different in the end and thus qualitative substance may suffer. Also, many Japanese appreciate the outside researcher taking the trouble to learn their language, with the result that the interview situation becomes more like an everyday interaction.

But reflexivity is also needed in intercultural qualitative research as a continuous exchange process of meaning between cultures or intercultural hermeneutical dialectics. In which ways can researchers craft their theoretical and empirical framework so that it does not follow Eurocentric (or ‘Nipponcentric’) codes and is open to articulation and interpretation by the actors? Asking why mothers make a *bentō*-box for schoolchildren makes sense in Japan but not so much in Germany, and may also involve new stereotyping. Doing research on *otaku*, would one translate the term and look for English equivalents or start from the fact that it is now an international term explained in various national Wikipedias? Referring to these examples, I want to argue that intercultural hermeneutical dialectics are not simply a matter of translation but rather of reflecting the ongoing cocreation of meanings between researchers and actors/research subjects. Doing intercultural qualitative research in Japan implies that the actors articulate their meanings and constructions and have an open space for this. The researchers will have to understand these meanings and then go beyond them in their own interpretation, while keeping the trust of their interview partners.

Intercultural qualitative research in this sense is evolving in many world regions. Thus, new spaces of transnational knowledge creation are emerging (Gerharz 2021) and Area Studies like Japanese Studies can play a key role in this. Let me raise some questions to conclude: Will these spaces still be centred on Japanese Studies outside Japan and research inside Japan? Or will mainstream Cultural or Social Sciences in the ‘West’ overcome their tendency towards exoticising or singularising Japan and (finally) join in creating these spaces, thus opening themselves up to comparative and reflexive universal research (Lenz 2013)? With more intercultural research covering shared problems, will the circulation of knowledge still be a one-way road

between ‘the West’ and Japan or become a truly transnational exchange (see, for example, Ochiai 2012–)? And how will the emerging transnational academic spaces recognise and negotiate the deep inequalities in the postcolonial world of academia?

Ilse Lenz
Professor Emerita of Sociology, Ruhr-Universität Bochum
Berlin, July 2020

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After the conference, we were tasked with writing our own chapters, collecting the contributions, editing and formatting manuscripts. For their invaluable help during this process, we cannot thank Marie Ulrich and Isabel Schreiber enough. We are extremely happy and grateful that they both agreed to keep on working with us after their internships to finish the project

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Nora Kottmann and Cornelia Reiher
Berlin and Tokyo, August 2020

Introduction: Studying Japan

Nora Kottmann and Cornelia Reiher

1. Introduction

The handbook *Studying Japan* emerged—just like any good research project does—from a puzzle. In 2016, we were both teaching in Japanese Studies programmes at German universities where methodological training is often squeezed into the curricula here and there, but generally not taught in a systematic manner. In our courses, we were often confronted with questions from students such as ‘How do I start my research?’, ‘Which methods suit which research questions and designs?’, ‘How should I conduct my research?’ or ‘What should I do with my data?’ This made us wonder how we could teach Social Science research methods to students who want to conduct research in or on Japan in a more systematic way. Lacking a comprehensive handbook on the methods of Social Science research on Japan that we or our students could use in class, we started to think about what such a handbook could and should look like and eventually decided to create one ourselves. Now, more than four years later and after countless discussions, millions of Skype calls, two conferences and numerous encounters with our authors, we are very proud to write this introduction to just such a handbook.

For us, this handbook is a milestone that began with (still ongoing) discussions on methodology in Japan(ese) Studies over the course of sharing our experiences teaching research methods to Japanese Studies students at Freie Universität Berlin and Heinrich Heine University Düsseldorf. From these conversations emerged a joint teaching project of (method) courses focusing on Japanese foodscapes in Berlin and Düsseldorf, which resulted in a conference in Berlin in 2017 where students from both universities presented their projects and discussed method education with scholars from Berlin, Düsseldorf and Japan (Reiher 2018a). Around that time, we first talked about the idea of creating a method handbook for a Japanese Studies audience, and in early 2018 we wrote a book proposal and began to recruit authors. From the very start we were (and still are) overwhelmed by the positive feedback from colleagues and everybody else we talked to about this project. We soon realised that there was so much material to discuss with regard to methodological challenges and the method handbook that we decided to invite the authors of each chapter to Berlin for a conference in the summer of 2019. Discussions with the authors substantially shaped some of the common threads that run through almost all chapters of this book: 1. What is specific to research on and in Japan? 2. How do transnational entanglements change the study of Japan? 3. How do technological innovations enable and challenge research on Japan? and 4. What are the ethical implications when studying Japan? This handbook is a collaborative effort, and we are grateful to everyone who supported it.

2. Why this handbook and why now?

Why is a handbook of qualitative Social Science research methods for the study of Japan necessary at all, and particularly at this point in time? There are wonderful books on Social Science methods, fieldwork and research designs on the market and for Japan(ese) Studies, the volume *Doing fieldwork in Japan*, edited by Theodore Bestor, Patricia Steinhoff and Victoria Lyon-Bestor (2003), is certainly the most influential.¹ It is widely used by those who plan to or are already conducting fieldwork in Japan. Some other edited volumes or special journal issues have addressed issues related to fieldwork and to ethnography, in particular, in Japan such as reflexivity, responsibility and fieldwork ethics (Alexy/Cook 2019; Furukawa 2007; Hendry/Wong 2009; Linhart et al. 1994; Reiher 2018b; Robertson 2007). Very few discuss data analysis (Kobayashi 2010; Shimada 2008). Several individual contributions primarily address fieldwork, fieldwork ethics and ethnography in Japan (Aldrich 2009; Gill 2014; Hendry 2015; McLaughlin 2010; Numazaki 2012; Yamashita 2012). Yet, despite the valuable publications this handbook builds on and is indebted to, there is, at least to our knowledge, no comprehensive and coherent handbook on the study of Japan that addresses the whole research process from the first idea to the publication of findings, explains and discusses the most common methods in Social Science research in and on Japan in a ‘how-to’ manner and can be used by students, researchers and teachers alike. Therefore, one motivation for putting this handbook together is to offer a starting point for learning and teaching methods as well as research designs in a Japanese Studies context and beyond.

In addition to this relatively pragmatic reason, there are, however, three more reasons why we consider this handbook necessary and timely. First, there is an increasing demand for systematic and transparent research practices in Japanese and Area Studies communities against the backdrop of the increasing marginalisation of Area Studies in academia, particularly in Europe (Basedau/Köllner 2007; Ben-Ari 2020).² Secondly, the transnationalisation of Japanese Studies as a research field, of Japan as its research subject and of research teams requires researchers to rethink traditional national and disciplinary boundaries. Thirdly, technological innovations provide new and exciting opportunities for research, yet also pose various challenges, including in regard to ethical questions. This handbook is our attempt to address and discuss these and further developments with scholars around the world and contribute to respective methodological discussions. We believe that it is important to strengthen international and interdisciplinary exchange and discussion about how students and scholars of Japan can best conduct research in a transparent and ethical way and produce reliable, comparable and comprehensive research results that scholars from Area Studies and Social Science disciplines alike can relate to.

1 There are many Social Science method books focusing on a range of topics. Thus, in this handbook’s individual chapters, the authors give recommendations and introduce handbooks on the respective topics. Of course, there is also a great variety of method books in Japanese (see, for example, Kishi et al. 2016). We would also like to mention two edited volumes that explicitly address teaching in/for Japan(ese) Studies in a Japanese and a global context, namely Gaitanidis et al. (2020) and Shamooin/McMorran (2016).

2 For an ongoing, interactive discussion on the topic, see Curtis (2020). For an early contribution on the positioning of Japanology in the Social Sciences in a German context, see Lenz (1996) and Seifert (1994).

3. What this handbook is about

Studying Japan mainly targets (PhD) students and researchers who plan to draw on qualitative Social Science methods to conduct research on Japan. It also offers a handy tool for colleagues who teach courses on fieldwork, research designs and methods or want to address specific methodological issues in class in order to prepare their students to conduct their own research projects and write theses. This handbook is about qualitative Social Science research on Japan, focusing on the entire research process that begins with a vague interest in a research topic, which is then developed into a research question and eventually leads to findings presented in a thesis, an article or a book. Since the study of Japan is an interdisciplinary field, research focusing on Japan's society, politics, culture, economy and history draws on a wide variety of theories and methods from various disciplines. Therefore, throughout this handbook the authors present insights from Sociology, Political Science, Anthropology and History, but also address several recurring themes and challenges.

One challenge for both Japanese Studies and Area Studies scholars has been the translation of methods developed in other disciplines (mostly in the West) to specific (often non-Western) field sites and research subjects. One could argue that these translation processes are part of every research project, where methods have to be adjusted to a specific field site or a researcher's skills or resources. However, there are some issues that are particular to the study of Japan in and outside the country. The most obvious is language. Translation of Japanese sources and data as well as cultural norms is the task of every Japan researcher, regardless of their nationality. Therefore, it is important to be reflexive regarding one's own positionality, the reciprocity of trust-relations (Takeda 2013), the ways sensitive issues are handled or conventions for encounters in the field.

At the same time, an increasing focus on transnational entanglements, mobilities and processes (not only) in Japan-related research challenges traditional national and disciplinary boundaries (Soysal 2016). This implies that research on Japan is not only carried out in Japan anymore (Adachi 2006; Aoyama 2015; Kottmann 2020). It also means that it is important to contextualise findings on Japan in a global context, no matter if a researcher studies Japan's transnational entanglements or compares Japan with other countries.³ In addition, an increasing focus on the transnationalisation of cultural, social and political phenomena in and beyond Japan involves several methodological challenges. For example, researchers may need to visit multiple sites or be able to conduct multilingual case studies within Japan (Arrington 2016; Avenell 2015; Farrer 2015). Furthermore, the research enterprise itself has become more transnational. In addition to cooperation across the boundaries of individual Area Studies (Middell 2018), research teams are increasingly international and interdisciplinary. This provides new opportunities, but also poses questions with regard to languages, institutional differences or divergent ethical requirements.

Transnational collaboration is often enabled through recent technological innovations ranging from online communication tools to software for data analysis or data repositories. Technological innovations provide new tools for getting in touch with informants via social media,

3 For an ongoing discussion on comparisons in Japan(ese) Studies and Area Studies, see Sidaway/Waldenberger (2020).

accessing data online, making large sets of data available for other researchers or a public audience or coordinating an international research team. In fact, this very handbook would not have been possible without tools for online communication and for storing data online! But these new technologies also pose challenges to researchers studying Japan and require them to develop new strategies for research. They create new types of reciprocity and demand attention is paid to the impact of social media in the whole research process online and offline (Baker 2013; Danley 2018; Gerster 2018; Postill/Pink 2012).

Not only do translation processes have (new) ethical implications, but so does the transnationalisation of Japan research and technological innovations. In fact, ethical issues are of high relevance during the whole research process, ranging from the originality of research questions to ensuring fairness in publishing. While these issues pop up in almost all chapters, we devote a separate chapter to the topic to stress the importance of good research practices, academic integrity and research ethics, such as properly quoting sources, ensuring fairness and respect to research participants and colleagues, and protecting the privacy of interviewees.

4. Editorial decisions

This handbook offers a large number of contributions on a variety of topics, but we are aware that we cannot cover everything there is to say about methods and methodology in the study of Japan. Thus, we had to make a number of decisions to limit this handbook's scope, including the level of detail in the chapters, author selection and the format of the handbook. One choice we made was to focus on qualitative methods because these are the methods we are most familiar with and which our students are most likely to use. Another was to only write short overviews for each topic in the main chapters, although much more could have been said about each of them. To account for this, we provide further reading for those who would like to know more about the specific topics as well as to connect the literature on research design, fieldwork and methods from the Social Science disciplines with the study of Japan.

Selecting contributing authors for the handbook was a more difficult process. We planned the handbook as an international collaborative project and sought to balance contributions with regard to disciplines, nationality, gender and career level, but because of our own academic background and the context from which this handbook emerged, many of the handbook's authors are food, family and gender scholars, and a significant number were educated and/or work in Germany. Nonetheless, we offer interdisciplinary perspectives on each topic, and the handbook unites contributions by anthropologists, political scientists, sociologists and (fewer) historians. In short, the more than 70 selected authors whose contributions are featured in this handbook do not represent the full spectrum of Social Science research on Japan, but rather this selection reflects our own positionality in the field. We are, of course, aware that there are many more wonderful Japan scholars in the world!

Finally, and despite a variety of technological innovations, we decided to publish this handbook as a physical, and therefore static, book that might be quickly partly outdated, especially the information on social media, websites and technological tools. Why did we choose a static format like a printed book? The short answer is: we love books and we are sure that at least

some information will remain pertinent. We imagine students and researchers carrying this handbook to Japan and back and having it at hand when they need it, even when there is no internet connection available. Despite these parochial and romanticised ideas about books, we are planning to enhance the printed version of the handbook with a website that features more information on methods and will be updated on a regular basis.⁴

5. How to use this handbook

This handbook offers a starting point for learning, teaching and applying methods in a Japan(ese) Studies context and beyond. It is structured in such a way that it can be used for (self-)studying and teaching alike. The handbook could be utilised for comprehensive reading in order to gain an overview of qualitative methods in Social Science research on Japan as well as to structure one-term method courses. Yet, the handbook's seventeen chapters can also be read individually; they can be used to learn about a specific method of data collection or analysis, expand one's knowledge, familiarise oneself with a certain topic or just look up specific information. In addition, the individual chapters can be applied to courses as and when required.

The handbook covers the entire research process in seventeen chapters from the outset to the completion of a thesis, paper or book. While this structure and the 'how-to' style might suggest that the research process consists of neatly separated steps, in reality, this is not the case. We are aware that the research process is often circular and dynamic and that the individual steps are often not carried out one after another in a linear manner, but sometimes even in reverse order. The blurred boundaries between the different tasks and steps in the research process are also addressed in the individual chapters. Yet due to the limitations of a book, which only allows for linear narration, as well as for reasons of clarity, this handbook is structured to follow the steps of the research process as they are most commonly organised.

The seventeen chapters are all structured in a similar and easy-to-access format: a chapter introduction ('main chapter') and three short essays with further reading and a joint reference list. The main chapters feature an introduction to key ideas, concepts and practices, point out key terms, address the most important problems and the strategies that can be employed to solve them, present selected case studies and offer further up-to-date reading. While the main chapters address the respective topics in a relatively general way, they always refer to the specific challenges and opportunities encountered when doing research on and/or in Japan. Three short essays written by senior and junior researchers in Japan(ese) Studies from around the world follow the main chapters. There are a total of 51 essays, each offering insights into how

⁴ A number of smaller decisions were made related to gender-sensitive language, the order of Japanese names, the order of authors and the transcription of Japanese terms. With regard to gender, we decided to use 'she' or 'her' for female, male and other genders when the gender of the subjects is unclear. This is not meant to be exclusive, but rather to challenge old ways of thinking that took the use of masculine forms to refer to both genders for granted in academia. Japanese names are written in the following—and in Japan unusual—order of first name first and last name second. This is due to criticism from some of our Japanese authors, who did not want to be treated differently from the other authors. Therefore, we decided to deviate from the way of writing Japanese names normally practised in Japan(ese) Studies. In the case of more than one author, names are mentioned in alphabetical order. Japanese terms are romanised based on the modified Hepburn system.

individual scholars actually deal with their respective method in practice. The authors share their experiences, offer concrete advice on and precise insights into their fields of interest, and elaborate on their perspective(s) and individual way(s) of studying Japan both in and outside the country. Yet, the essays are not only illustrations of research experiences but also give insights into a wide range of topics in the study of Japan, including nuclear power plants, single women, families, food safety, Japan-China relations, condom use, social inequality, host clubs, party politics and agriculture. In so doing, the essays celebrate the diversity and plurality of scholarship on Japan. Furthermore, the essays show that there is no ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ way of doing Japan research, but that research always reflects the researchers’ positionality and that it is necessary to make thoughtful decisions and explain them well.

6. Structure and content of this handbook

The first four chapters set the context for Japan research and address fundamental steps that often take place at the beginning of the research process. In chapter 1, Roger Goodman provides an introduction to the diversity of Japanese Studies and to research on Japan in the Social Sciences. Against this backdrop, Goodman provides advice on finding a research topic and explains how a researcher’s biography and theoretical (pre-)assumptions affect this choice. The importance of research questions as well as the actual process of finding and asking questions is the focus of chapter 2 by Gabriele Vogt. In chapter 3, Kaori Okano addresses (case study) research designs and touches upon the discussion of theory building and testing as well as inductive and deductive processes. Urs Matthias Zachmann discusses the importance of reviewing scholarly literature and the need to identify and position oneself in relevant debates in chapter 4. He also explains the challenge of balancing debates from Area Studies, the Social Sciences as well as debates from Japan.⁵

The subsequent chapters focus on data collection. Chapter 5 by Akiko Yoshida starts with an overview of the most common qualitative data collection methods used in Social Science research. Yoshida explains different types of methods and comparatively discusses their respective characteristics, which is followed by chapters that each introduce and discuss one specific method in more detail. Levi McLaughlin addresses fieldwork—physical and virtual as well as in and outside of Japan—in chapter 6, Nora Kottmann and Cornelia Reiher introduce and discuss the world of qualitative interviews in chapter 7 and Christian Tagsold and Katrin Ullmann elaborate on observational research with a focus on participant observation in chapter 8. Finally, in chapter 9, Theresia Berenike Peucker, Katja Schmidtpott and Cosima Wagner deal with the collection of written and visual sources in archives, libraries and Japanese online databases.⁶

5 The essays in these chapters are written by Verena Blechinger-Talcott (Ch. 1.1), Daniel P. Aldrich (Ch. 1.2), Joy Hendry (Ch. 1.3), Nicolas Sternsdorff-Cisterna (Ch. 2.1), Kenneth Mori McElwain (Ch. 2.2), David Chiavacci (Ch. 2.3), Lynne Nakano (Ch. 3.1), Jamie Coates (Ch. 3.2), Kay Shimizu (Ch. 3.3), Patricia Maclachlan (Ch. 4.1), Sonja Ganseforth (Ch. 4.2) and Gracia Liu-Farrer (Ch. 4.3).

6 The essays in these chapters are written by Emma E. Cook (Ch. 5.1), Karen Shire (Ch. 5.2), Barbara Holthus and Wolfram Manzenreiter (Ch. 5.3), Nana Okura Gagné (Ch. 6.1), James Farrer (Ch. 6.2), Hanno Jentsch (Ch. 6.3), Christoph Brumann (Ch. 7.1), Tomiko Yamaguchi (Ch. 7.2), Allison Alexy (Ch. 7.3), Susanne Klien (Ch.

Chapter 10, by Carola Hommerich and Nora Kottmann, focuses on mixed methods research, and it connects the chapters on data collection and data analysis. It serves a somewhat special role, as it provides a basic introduction to key terms and concepts of *quantitative methods*. The chapters that follow are devoted to data analysis, which may occur during and/or after the data collection process. In chapter 11, David Chiavacci addresses the importance of data analysis for the whole research process, introduces the main analytical approaches and discusses the use of computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software. The subsequent chapters each address specific analytical methods. In chapter 12, Caitlin Meagher focuses on (modified) grounded theory designs, the process of coding, the development of concepts and, ultimately, theory. Following this, in chapter 13, Celeste Arrington introduces content and frame analysis, and discusses their similarities and differences as well as each method's strengths and weaknesses. In chapter 14, Andreas Eder-Ramsauer and Cornelia Reiher discuss various forms of discourse analysis, define basic concepts and explain individual steps in analysis.⁷

Finally, the last three chapters of the handbook deal with finishing one's research projects and address basic cross-cutting issues like ethics and writing. In chapter 15, Chris McMorran writes about the importance of successfully completing one's research project(s) despite the various obstacles in researchers' private and professional life. Furthermore, he encourages researchers to demystify the writing process. In chapter 16, Cornelia Reiher and Cosima Wagner address the importance of following good and fair research practices throughout the whole research process and introduce new trends, such as open scholarship. In the final chapter 17, James Farrer and Gracia Liu-Farrer introduce various oral and written forms of presenting one's findings for both an academic and a wider audience. In this context, the authors stress the importance of carefully thinking about the audience one wants to reach.⁸

Throughout the handbook, all the authors write as concretely as possible and in an easy-to-access manner. They summarise key points, highlight key issues, define key terms, include visual models, offer lists of important journals, provide links to important webpages and introduce helpful tools (digital and analogue). While all the authors write from their respective perspective—as novice or established researchers; as Japanese, European, Australian or American citizens; as sociologists, political scientists, anthropologists, human geographers or economists; as people of a specific gender and age—they provide information that is helpful and applicable for students, researchers and colleagues from different national contexts and academic cultures.

8.1), Akiko Takeyama (Ch. 8.2), Swee-Lin Ho (Ch. 8.3), Katja Schmidtrott and Tino Schölz (Ch. 9.1), Sheldon Garon (Ch. 9.2) as well as Shinichi Aizawa and Daisuke Watanabe (Ch. 9.3).

7 The essays in these chapters are written by Robert J. Pekkanen and Saadia M. Pekkanen (Ch. 10.1), Laura Dales (Ch. 10.2), Jun Imai (Ch. 10.3), Katharina Hülsmann (Ch. 11.1), Genaro Castro-Vázquez (Ch. 11.2), Markus Heckel (Ch. 11.3), Nancy Rosenberger (Ch. 12.1), Celia Spoden (Ch. 12.2), Julia Gerster (Ch. 12.3), Anna Wiemann (Ch. 13.1), Emi Kinoshita (Ch. 13.2), Kai Schulze (Ch. 13.3), Annette Schad-Seifert (Ch. 14.1), Daniel White (Ch. 14.2) and Steffen Heinrich (Ch. 14.3).

8 The essays in these chapters are written by Aya H. Kimura (Ch. 15.1), Christian Tagsold (Ch. 15.2), Richard J. Samuels (Ch. 15.3), Isaac Gagné (Ch. 16.1), David H. Slater, Robin O'Day, Flavia Fulco and Noor Albazerbashi (Ch. 16.2), Christopher Gerteis (Ch. 16.3), Scott North (Ch. 17.1), Isabelle Prochaska-Meyer (Ch. 17.2) and Brigitte Steger (Ch. 17.3).

7. Summary and future perspectives

In a nutshell, the handbook *Studying Japan* provides an overview of and hands-on advice for the individual steps in the research process and discusses methodological opportunities and challenges brought about by the transnationalisation of research subjects, research practices and research groups as well as by technological innovations and the digital revolution, while paying attention to good research practice and ethics. It enables students and teachers to study, teach and apply methods and to develop research designs and strategies for fieldwork in Japan. The challenge of producing both an area-sensitive yet academically sound study is a problem not only for scholars and students of Japanese Studies but also for researchers from all Area Studies. Thus, this handbook is a valuable tool for both the international Japan(ese) Studies community as well as for all Area Studies scholars who take the local characteristics and languages of ‘their’ areas seriously. At the same time, scholars from the Social Sciences who plan to study Japan in more depth can use this book to engage with Japan more deeply.

We hope this handbook inspires further reflection on the conducting and teaching of research in and beyond Japan. We think that the discussion of the methodological and ethical challenges arising, in particular, from transnationalisation and technological innovations in Social Science research in and on Japan should be continued. We are looking forward to future discussions, possibly an interdisciplinary handbook on quantitative methods in the study of Japan and to enhancing this book through a website that could serve as a means to connect researchers internationally who would like to share their experiences of using and teaching methodology in a Japan(ese) Studies context. Meanwhile, we hope that you find this book useful in facilitating your research or teaching. It might help to keep in mind this advice: while there is no single ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ way of studying Japan, work as precisely and reliably as possible, be critical and pragmatic and, most importantly, have fun, follow your curiosity and don’t lose your fascination with your research.

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Chapter 1

How to begin research: The diversity of Japanese Studies

Roger Goodman

1. Introduction

The single most important decision for any research project is where to start: what question to examine and how to address it. This chapter sets out some of the key processes that researchers should consciously and conscientiously go through in making these decisions and attempts to turn them into a set of explicit and transparent steps to help those who are about to begin their own research projects. These principles apply at any level, from an undergraduate dissertation through to a major new project by a senior professor. They are built around the very simple premise that, in all research projects, the researcher is the main research tool. Just as any workman needs to know their tools, the researcher of Japan needs to know themselves. This chapter, therefore, looks at the importance of interrogating the personal biography and theoretical assumptions that all researchers bring to their work *before* they decide upon a research topic and research puzzle. In doing so, it also provides a guide to reading research which has already been undertaken by others in any field of Japanese Studies, from Natural and Medical Sciences through to the Social Sciences and Humanities.¹

2. The importance of personal biography

As the accounts by Daniel Aldrich, Verena Blechinger-Talcott and Joy Hendry in the essays following this chapter show, every research project starts with the researcher. We study—or we should study—things that we know about and things that interest us. We tend, however, to be very bad at acknowledging this fact. Until the 1970s, indeed, most social scientists failed to acknowledge in more than the most superficial way their own role in their studies. They felt that to do so was in some way not scientific. They presented themselves as objective researchers who collected data in a value free manner through robust methodologies which they then analysed using the latest theoretical models available.

¹ The ideas in this paper were first explored when the author was looking for a topic for his doctoral thesis (Goodman 1984) and were developed in articles which reflected on the relationship between how that project and a number of subsequent projects were designed and the conclusions which were drawn from them (Goodman 1990a; 2000a; 2006).

From the late 1970s these assumptions of ‘scientism’ began to be challenged by what some called the ‘reflexive turn’ (O’Reilly 2009, pp. 187–93). Increasingly, not just social scientists but even medical and physical scientists began to realise that, consciously or unconsciously, they brought with them a personal perspective on an issue which might influence not only why but also how they asked a particular question and how this might indeed affect what they saw and concluded.²

By the mid-1980s, as ‘reflexivity’ increasingly became intertwined with various debates about ‘post-modernism’ in Social Science, some researchers began to question whether it was possible to examine anything objectively and whether every research project was nothing more than a reflection of the cultural and political prejudices of the individual researcher. To some extent, this denial of objective truth was linked to and pushed by those whose beliefs in the ‘certainties’ of Marxism had been crushed by the crumbling of the former Soviet Union. One response to this collapse in faith in the scientific method was to turn the researchers’ microscope on to the researchers themselves. What did they discover about themselves as a result of looking at the other? Examples of this in the case of Japanese Studies can be seen in the works of Brian Moeran (1985), Matthews M. Hamabata (1990) and Dorinne Kondo (1990).³

Most researchers in the 1980s took a less extreme position which took into account three elements of any research project: the researcher, the research and the reader (Okely/Callaway 1992). They argued that it was sufficient to give the reader ample autobiographical information and a detailed account of how a project was set up to allow them to judge the research they produced against their background knowledge of the researcher.

What was some of the personal information which researchers felt was important to share in the case of research on Japan? **Gender** (as exemplified in Hendry’s account, see this chapter, Ch. 1.3) was one. Women had a very different experience of Japan from men (Roberts 2003). Indeed, the fact that there are such strong gender divisions in Japan often leads to different forms of study, for example, with a tendency for men to study the public sphere and women the private sphere.

Sexuality was another variable which was increasingly made explicit in studies of Japan in the 1980s, as indeed it was elsewhere as the study of identity politics and gender more generally became a global focus for research. This was most clearly expressed by Western authors who felt that the public expression of their sexuality was important since they did not want to separate their sense of self (which included their sexual orientation) from their role (as a researcher). An explicit example of this is the autobiographical account by John W. Treat (1999), but the importance of sexuality in giving access to certain worlds in Japan is also acknowledged in the work of Mark J. McLelland (2000) and Wim Lunsing (2001), who were among the first scholars to provide deep ethnographic accounts of the experience and world-views of homosexuals in Japan.

2 Different disciplines have their own key figures in the ‘reflexive turn’ movement, but history will probably suggest that the single most influential figure was Pierre Bourdieu and the single most influential book was his *Outline of a theory of practice* (1977) with its notion that all researchers need to ‘objectify their own objectifications.’ Other important figures in these debates were Mikhail Bakhtin, Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault.

3 Ostensibly, Moeran’s ethnography is on a rural community in Kyushu, Hamabata on family businesses and Kondo on small manufacturing firms in Tokyo. In practice, each of them is also an account of what they discovered about themselves through their encounters with Japan.

A variable which could be inferred from these personal accounts, though not always stated explicitly, is **age** (Smith 2003). This, of course, affects the researcher's ability to empathise with and access different generations of Japanese. Age, gender and sexuality, of course, all interact. If one accepts that Japan is still a very patriarchal and gerontocratic society (and the make-up of the Diet and company boards would suggest that it is), then there is an argument that young women make the best researchers since they are the most likely to have the basic categories of how Japanese society operates 'explained' ('mansplained?') to them. Older, more experienced male researchers may be expected to 'know' these things. The ideal scenario for a social scientist is to be 'patronised' since that is when people reveal what they think are the basic underlying assumptions of their worldview. This is one reason (along with, ironically, the fact that their Japanese is too good) why it is often more difficult for native anthropologists to undertake research on their own society than it is for foreigners (see Yamaguchi, Ch. 7.2).

At the end of the 1980s, Harumi Befu and Josef Kreiner (1992) carried out an interesting project which explored the impact of national background on the way that overseas researchers approached the study of Japan. They argued that researchers with different nationalities and different ethnic backgrounds bring with them '**cultural baggage**' which impacts (generally unconsciously) on the type of questions they ask about Japan. North American scholars have a cultural predisposition when they look at Japanese society to focus on 'race', Koreans and Chinese on blood ties, Indians on minority and outcaste status, the Soviets (at the time) on collectivism, Germans on social democracy and the English on social class since these are the 'key' social variables in their own societies.⁴

Another issue which is rarely discussed in the personal introductions to accounts of Japan is **politics**, either personal or national. As Sheila Johnson (1975) has shown, the U.S. view of Japan between the 1940s and 1970s was largely determined by U.S. relations with China. That is almost certainly still the situation today. Further, within societies, right-wing commentators have generally had a more sympathetic view of Japan in the postwar period—because of its economic success and high levels of social stability—than left-wing commentators, who have been concerned about the lack of national unions to protect and fight for workers' rights.

3. Interrogating the relationship between the person and society

The above are all personal biographical details which may be pertinent to understanding the position which a researcher brings to their study of Japan. There are two other sets of assumptions which are actually much more significant, but which are rarely, if ever, discussed explicitly, although they can be gleaned by an astute reader simply by looking at the bibliography and acknowledgments of any academic book on Japan. These two sets of assumptions 1. about the relationship between the person and society (see sections 3 and 4) and 2. about the distinction between Japanology and Japanese Studies (see section 5) overlap to a considerable degree. Moreover, they are essentially independent from any of the other variables that have been ex-

⁴ It was during their workshop that I realised for the first time that the way I was looking at the issue of returnee children (*kikoku shijo*) in Japan was so strongly driven by my interest in the class effects of education as a result of my own experience of the highly class-divided English education system.

amined previously; they have no relation to gender, ethnicity sexuality and educational background and, since the collapse of Communism in 1989, there is no reason why they should have a connection with nationality, age or class.

The first of these sets of assumptions relates to the very nature of what constitutes academic research in the Social Sciences and Humanities. Put at its most simple, the Social Sciences and the Humanities can be defined as the study of the relationship between the person and society, depending on how ‘person’ and ‘society’ are defined in a particular place or time. This simple formulation is what disciplines as apparently varied as Archaeology and Psychology, Law and Economics, History and Literature, Linguistics and Business, and Education and Sociology all share, even as they invent their own special language for describing these key variables.

In Anthropology, what is termed the study of the person or personhood lies at the very core of the study of any society, but an understanding of personhood is key in other disciplines too. While every society makes a distinction between self (*ego*) and role (*persona*), the relationship between the two varies over time and space. In Western societies, post-Enlightenment ideologies have seen the conflation of the two as leading to healthy ‘individuals’—and their separation as problematic. Western ideas of Freudian and Jungian psychoanalysis, for example, seek to find out how the role that a person is forced to perform (mother, worker, student) constrains their sense of self and how the self can be allowed to express itself fully again. In most societies, however, it is the ability to separate the two which is seen as essential to a healthy lifestyle. In Japan, when the self and role become overly conflated, the person may be perceived, or perceive themselves, as ‘selfish’. Distinction (*kejime*) is the skill that all small children develop that enables them to separate their sense of self from any role they need to perform and anyone who is unable to do so may be perceived as immature. Naikan and Morita therapies (Reynolds 1989) are focused on meditating on how one’s sense of self has got in the way of good role performance.

In Social Science disciplines, the study of society can most simply be described as the examination of how rituals and symbols have been used, and by whom, to construct a sense of community. As Cohen (1985) shows, this can be either internally or externally generated; people can construct their own sense of who they are or they can be defined by others. Who does the constructing is a question of political and economic power—domestic or extra-domestic—in both cases.

As Figure 1.1 shows, there are two ways that the relation between the person and society can be examined. **Structuralist approaches** look at how society constrains the actions of the person. **Interpretative or social action approaches** look at how the person constructs society.⁵ Structuralist approaches in turn can be broken down into two traditions: those which assume that society is essentially based on consensus and those which assume it is based on conflict. The former used to be described as **functionalist** and the latter as **Marxist**. Both terms have increasingly come to be used in a derogatory fashion (functionalist for being too ‘conserva-

5 Karl Marx, Max Weber and Émile Durkheim, generally credited as the ‘founders’ of these three approaches in the Social Sciences, are today often dismissed as ‘dead white men’, but it can be argued that virtually all current Social Science theory is either derived from, or developed in opposition to, their seminal work.

tive', Marxist for being too 'socialist'), but in purely analytical terms they remain the most useful way to think of work which looks at how society constrains the person.

Figure 1.1: Heuristic overview of sociological theory

Sociological theory		
Structuralist ↓		Interpretative/agency ↓
Society based on consensus ↓	Society based on conflict ↓	Society based on competition ↓
Functionalism ↓	Marxism ↓	Social Action ↓
Emile Durkheim 1858–1917	Karl Marx 1818–1883	Max Weber 1864–1920

Functionalist and Marxist approaches have very different underlying assumptions. This can be seen very easily in work on education systems.⁶ Both functionalists and Marxists see education as effectively a black box in to which are fed the raw material of pre-school children. It is the outcome of the educational experience over which they disagree. Functionalists *describe* relations between the educational system and other institutions; Marxists explain *why* these relations exist and change over time. Functionalists see the socialisation process as a common *value* which holds society together; Marxists examine *interests* underlying those values and how socialisation differs systematically by social class. Functionalists see the education system as offering opportunities for *mobility*; Marxists see the role of education as maintaining *structured social inequality* (reproducing social class through reproducing social capital).⁷

In opposition to the structuralist theories of the Marxists and functionalists who see education as a black box, **interpretative or social action theorists** are more interested in what happens *inside* the black box of education. They want to know how the participants—the teachers, parents, policymakers and children among others—*construct* the society that makes up the school. Unlike structuralist theories, which assume these participants are passive in the face of societal rules and norms, the assumption in social action theory is that the participants have a level of agency, even if they cannot all express it equally. Students can conform to the goals and the methods for achieving those goals that the school has set, but they can also rebel, retreat, ritualise, colonise or innovate, to use some of the categories identified in the classic work of Robert K. Merton (1938). As Peter Woods (1979) has shown, teachers can also take a number of different roles and positions in relation to the curriculum and school rules. It is reported, for example, that left-wing teachers in Japan have sometimes supported adopting right-wing history textbooks as exemplars for their students of the dangers of the state getting involved in controlling the messages of history (Goodman 2020).

⁶ For an overview of these theories, see Sever 2012.

⁷ For probably the best-known analysis of the difference between functionalist and Marxist interpretations of Japanese society, see Ross Mouer and Yoshio Sugimoto (1986, chapters 2 and 3). A classic functionalist account is the work of Chie Nakane (1970); a classic Marxist account can be found in the work of Rob Steven (1982).

Figure 1.2 suggests that the choice that a researcher makes between a structuralist or a social action approach to studying a particular problem can also influence the methodologies that they need to use. While it is not always the case, very often structuralist theories require quantitative research methods since they set out to *measure* the extent to which society constrains the activity of the person. Interpretative theories, on the other hand, often require qualitative research methods since they set out to examine *how* persons construct the world around them.

Figure 1.2: *Heuristic model of the relationship between structuralist and interpretative theories and the methods they use*

<p>Structuralist theories e.g. functionalist (Durkheimian), conflict (Marxist) theories</p> <p style="text-align: center;">↓</p>	<p>Interpretative theories e.g. social action (Weberian) theories</p> <p style="text-align: center;">↓</p>
<p>measure the extent to which society constrains the activity of the person and tend to use</p> <p style="text-align: center;">↓</p>	<p>examine how persons construct the world around them and tend to use</p> <p style="text-align: center;">↓</p>
<p>quantitative methods e.g. questionnaires, structured interviews, big data sets.</p>	<p>qualitative methods e.g. participant observation, unstructured interviews.</p>

The best research should take into account both structuralist (functionalist and Marxist) and interpretative social action theories. They should also draw on both quantitative and qualitative research methods—in what is sometimes called ‘mixed methods’—since the difference between structuralist and interpretative theories can not only push researchers towards different methodologies (see Hommerich/Kottmann, Ch. 10). This difference can also explain why they may end up with very different conclusions when looking at apparently the same phenomenon, as the following example suggests.

4. Example of the impact of theoretical assumptions on research on contemporary Japan

During the 1990s, Joshua Roth (2002) and Takeyuki Tsuda (2003) undertook detailed anthropological fieldwork among the *nikkeijin* (Latin Americans of Japanese descent) community who were invited, in large numbers, to come and work in Japan in the late 1980s which was then facing severe labour shortages in the country as the economy boomed (see Gagné, Ch. 6.1). Roth and Tsuda’s subsequent ethnographies agreed on almost all points in their account of this community. In particular they agreed on the fact that the *nikkeijin*, who had been so

proud of their Japanese ancestry when in Latin America, were disappointed on the reception they received in Japan and, in the process, ‘rediscovered’ their ‘Latin Americanness’.

Where Roth and Tsuda differed was in the conclusions they reached for the future of *nikkeijin* in Japan. While Roth believed Japan would be able to contain within it minority groups, like the *nikkeijin*, as ideas of ‘Japaneseness’ became more broadly defined, Tsuda believed the *nikkeijin* identity would disappear inside the boundaries of an increasingly tight definition of ‘Japaneseness’. The reason for their different conclusions lay not so much in their views of the *nikkeijin* community as in their views of Japanese society and in particular their underlying assumptions of the relationship between the person and society.

Tsuda (2003) saw Japan in very functionalist terms. He believed that the intrinsic nature of Japanese culture meant that anything coming from outside was perceived as potentially contaminating and, hence, in need of either rejection or purification before it could be accepted into society. Such an approach saw society functioning like a self-contained, biological organism with clearly defined boundaries and mechanisms for dealing with anything polluting from outside. Roth (2002), conversely, saw Brazilian Japanese ethnic identity coming from interaction with the political and economic structures within which the *nikkeijin* were forced to operate in Japan. It was not Japanese culture as such that was responsible for the rejection of the *nikkeijin*, but interest groups within Japan—such as employers, politicians, journalists and, particularly, labour brokers (hence the word ‘brokered’ in the title of his book). These groups, he said, used the language of culture and history to legitimise the marginalisation of the *nikkeijin* group for their own economic (cheap labour) and political (reinforcement of Japanese ethnic identity) ends. It was in opposition to this marginalisation that the *nikkeijin* had been constructing their own cultural forms (drawing on ideas of ‘Brazilianness’). As their class position strengthened in Japanese society, so the Brazilian *nikkeijin* would be able to exert economic and political pressure that would lead to their cultural lifestyles being accepted as part of the definition of ‘Japaneseness’.

Compared to Tsuda, Roth’s view of society was much more flexible in terms of the power (‘agency’) that it gave to the different actors, even though he recognised that these same actors were themselves constrained by the political and economic realities of the contexts in which they moved. It was his (what might be termed ‘social action’) assumptions about the way societies operated that explained the very different conclusions he reached from Tsuda’s functionalist approach.

Twenty years later, what can we now say about the situation of the *nikkeijin* in Japan? To a certain extent, we can say that neither Tsuda nor Roth was correct in identifying the future for the *nikkeijin*. The bursting of the economic bubble in the early 1990s meant that many of the *nikkeijin* were forced to return to Latin America and those who did stay often ended up as distinct but marginalised communities who operated as a peripheral and insecure workforce for sections of Japanese industry. In short, the functionalist and social action theories of Tsuda and Roth needed to be complemented with insights from Marxist thinking.

5. Japanology versus Japanese Studies

The former section on the importance of the structure/agency dichotomy, with its references to some of the major intellectual traditions in Social Science, might have appeared rather abstract for a chapter on starting research on Japan, even if it has been spiced with some examples from the study of Japanese society. This has been on purpose because it is easy to lose sight of some of these big questions in the excitement of commencing a new project. Not taking them into account can have major ramifications for the project. The advice to look at such issues from the very beginning applies to anyone undertaking any project on any topic in the Social Sciences, but perhaps it is particularly important in the case of those in Area Studies. This is because, as Verena Blechinger-Talcott (see this chapter, Ch. 1.1) points out, Area Studies researchers can suffer from being considered ‘less rigorous or theoretically sophisticated’ than their disciplinary colleagues.

There is a second set of assumptions which also needs to be taken into account at the very beginning of a research project which relate specifically to those doing research in Area Studies. These might be characterised broadly as ‘Area-ology’ versus ‘Area-Studies’ approaches or, in the case of Japan, ‘Japanology’ versus ‘Japanese Studies’. While the former long predates the latter, these two approaches have existed alongside each other in almost all Area Studies communities since the 1950s. In many parts of the world, however, they inhabit virtually parallel universes, publishing in different journals, attending different conferences and, sometimes, even being placed in different departments within the same institution.

Figure 1.3 sets out, very simply, some of the key differences between these two communities. The core intellectual difference between them is whether a society is best studied in its own terms (an emic approach) or through a comparative lens (an etic approach). The former sees History as the key discipline and Philology as the key tool; the latter sees Sociology (in the broadest sense) as the key discipline and the use of universally applicable theory as the key tool. The former focuses on, and looks, for continuities; the latter discontinuities. The former assumes a society can only be studied in its own right; the latter that it should be judged by universal normative values. In general, the former has a view of society as essentially based on consensus; the latter sees society as more conflict-ridden. Even more broadly, the former is often associated with the Humanities; the latter with the Social Sciences.

Figure 1.3: Some heuristic dichotomies for thinking about research in Area Studies

	(Area)-ology	(Area)-Studies
Approach	Emic	Etic
Reference point	Internal comparison	External comparison
Key disciplines	History	Sociology
Key tools	Philology	Theoretical terms
Assumptions	Continuities	Discontinuities
Moral universe	Relativistic	Universalistic

Human behaviour	Society based on harmony (functionalist)	Society based on conflict (social action theories, Marxism)
University departments	Humanities	Social Sciences

As with the relationship between the person and society described above, the significance of taking a Japanological or Japanese Studies approach to a project is rarely explicitly addressed even if its impact is potentially considerable. To give just one example, whether we believe it is the past ('history') which determines the present (the Japanological approach) or the present which writes the past (the Japanese Studies approach) leads to a very different view of how we should think about contemporary Japan.

Since they are social scientists, the three contributors of case studies to accompany this chapter all work in the Japanese Studies rather than Japanological tradition. All of their work is explicitly or implicitly comparative; they are interested in how the examples they look at in Japan shed light on the experience of similar phenomena in other countries—particularly their own (U.S., U.K. and Germany)—and vice versa. In order to do this, they all draw on theoretical ideas from their disciplines, which have a common currency, at least in the English-language Social Science literature on Japan. While they all place their studies in a historical context (Hendry's study of marriage in rural Japan in the 1970s has a detailed analysis of historical antecedents, see this chapter, Ch. 1.3), they are sceptical about narratives which suggest Japan is somehow unique because of its distinctive history or topography. Where they do come across narratives of uniqueness—such as Japan being a society based on 'natural' consensus-seeking harmony and group-mindedness—they question the source of such narratives and ask whose interests they serve—as in Blechinger-Talcott's analysis of political corruption in Japan (see this chapter, Ch. 1.1). They all encourage the use of multiple theoretical perspectives and mixed methods in order, as Daniel Aldrich neatly puts it, 'to convince skeptics that our findings are not an artefact of the way that we approached the problem' (see this chapter, Ch. 1.2). Blechinger-Talcott most clearly picks out the distinction between Japanological and Japanese Studies approaches in her essay (see this chapter, Ch. 1.1). This is not surprising, since the philologically-based Japanological approach to Japan is still strong in continental Europe and the Social Science community tended until relatively recently to see the study of Japan as somehow 'exotic'. The Japanese Studies community has had to fight hard in the past two decades to create a distinctive voice in Continental European institutions but, having done so, it possibly now enjoys a better, more mutually respectful, relationship with its Japanological colleagues than almost anywhere else.

6. Practical steps for beginning graduate research on Japan

It is because so few researchers begin with analysing their intellectual assumptions that the majority of this essay has emphasised that element when beginning research. Most researchers do, however, start with themselves when they look for a topic to study in that they generally

understand that they need to build a project around their own skills, ideally around a topic that they are in a position to study better than anyone else. Ironically, by identifying their so-called ‘unique selling points’ and designing a project around them, most researchers then discover that this is what they really do want to research because it is a topic they already know something about.

Finding a topic is relatively easy compared to nailing down a puzzle within that topic which is going to keep the researcher engaged for months (in the cases of master’s students) and years (in the case of doctoral students). Put simply, research projects need a ‘research itch’. A research itch is a puzzle to which the researcher genuinely does not know the answer but the search for which will keep them intellectually challenged for the length of the project. The importance of the ‘research puzzle’ is that—even if the researcher never actually finds an exact ‘answer’ to the puzzle—it becomes the researcher’s ‘elevator pitch’ and sets the boundaries to the project and gives it an overall shape (see Vogt, Ch. 2).

Most research puzzles are centred on specified data sets which appear to be counterintuitive or social institutions which cannot be explained in one’s own cultural terms. Examples of research puzzles which have guided my own research (and the publications which then appeared) over the past three decades include:

- Why is Japan the only country in the world where the government has established special institutions for children who have returned from living overseas (Goodman 1990b)?
- Why was there such anxiety among the heads of children’s homes in Japan in the early 1990s around the *reduction* in the number of children needing to be taken into care (Goodman 2000b)?
- Why, when it was widely predicted in the mid-2000s that the number of private universities would fall over the following decade by between 15–30%, did the actual number increase by 15% (Breaden/Goodman 2020)?

Having found a research puzzle to which they genuinely do not know the answer and to which they cannot find an obvious answer in the research literature, the researcher needs next to undertake the hypothetical exercise of how a Marxist, Durkheimian and a Weberian scholar would approach this topic and what the implications of each of these approaches are for their methodology.⁸ The researcher also needs to run the project through the heuristic Japanological–Japanese Studies dichotomy since it is likely that much of the literature that they use (especially the literature in Japanese) will also be divided along these lines.

Finally, the whole project is turned on its head, so that what is presented is not only an important puzzle which needs to be solved, but also one which the researcher is particularly well placed to tackle. Classically, therefore, the best research proposals—and certainly the ones most likely to win research funding—generally looks something like the following:

- This is the ‘research puzzle’ (written to catch the attention of the reader; the first two sentences are the most crucial of any research funding application).

⁸ All new graduate students in the Oxford School of Global and Area Studies are required to undertake such a hypothetical exercise as part of their first-year methods training course. The assignment that they are set is: ‘Take a research topic to do with contemporary Japanese, Chinese, Indian or any other society and describe and analyse what would be the different assumptions that a Marxist, Weberian and Durkheimian researcher would bring to such a topic—and how those assumptions might affect both their research questions and their research methodologies. The word limit for this exercise is 1000 words.’

- This is what has been done in this general area before (preferably not too much but also not nothing).
- This is why the research is so important (these are the theoretical, methodological, applied, ethnographic, data gaps it seeks to fill).
- This is how I am going to tackle it (an account of theory and methodology—where; how long; how).
- *Just by chance*: I happen to be particularly well qualified to address this puzzle because of my background, networks, language, research skills.

7. Summary

This chapter on ‘how to begin research’ has focused more on the researcher than what they study since, as stated earlier, the researcher in the Social Sciences and the Humanities is the main research tool. Every researcher brings with them a bag of skills and strengths as well as biases and weaknesses which will, necessarily, affect the way that any research project is approached. These all need to be acknowledged before the project can even begin. If they are fully accommodated, then the project will be able to take an intellectual puzzle, examine it from all angles and make a serious contribution to our understanding of Japan. Indeed, the skill of the researcher to incorporate multiple theoretical positions and research methodologies in addressing important questions about Japan is what will distinguish them as an academic scholar.

1.1 Positioning one's own research in Japanese Studies: Between Area Studies and discipline

Verena Blechinger-Talcott

In Social Science research on Japan, and especially in the field of Japanese politics, identifying a good research topic often presents itself as a major challenge for young scholars. While Political Science usually expects scholars to develop research projects based on theoretical considerations, for example the relationship between two variables, and to identify cases for study according to features relevant to theory and related hypotheses, most students in Japanese Social Science research are genuinely interested in studying empirical phenomena in Japan. Scholars from the discipline might thus consider Area Studies (and Japanese Studies) less rigorous or theoretically sophisticated, more interested in thick description than in 'relevant' contributions to the field of Political Science. Traditional Japanologists, on the other hand, may challenge social scientists working on Japan for over-theorising or oversimplifying and over-reducing actual complexities in the interest of theoretical models. While there is no one-size-fits-all recipe with which to overcome these challenges, in my experience, it is helpful to base one's own research on genuine empirical research based on phenomena in Japanese politics and/or society, while at the same time placing Japan in a broader comparative context. An active search for interdisciplinary debate is important, as is a true passion for one's topic.

My first research project on corruption in Japanese politics started out with a keen interest in institutions in Japanese law, politics and society (Blechinger 1998). I had just finished my MA in Japanese Studies with a thesis on the relationship between social practices and changing legal norms after 1945, looking at ways in which family law and new legal norms such as gender equality and individual freedom affected family relationships. I wanted to understand how normative change affected social behaviour, and how actual social practices affected the ways in which norms were shaped and implemented. For my MA, I had studied Civil Law, Political Science and Japanese Studies. Realising that I had acquired knowledge about Japan and the Japanese language, but was lacking the analytical and methodological tools to answer my questions, I enrolled in a PhD programme in Political Science, where I focused on institutions and the relations between politics and law. By the time I had completed my course work, debates in German and Japanese politics centred on issues of political finance and corruption, and I was puzzled by the differences in both debates. While the German debate about illegal party donations to the Christian Democratic Party (CDU) under the then chancellor Helmut Kohl was strongly shaped by arguments about personal misconduct and individual misconduct, arguments about systemic corruption and deeply entrenched practices of bribery were shaping debates in Japan. German newspaper reports about corruption in Japan also pointed to aspects of Japanese culture, such as gift-giving relations, to explain the assumed intrinsic nature of corruption in Japan. I was not only puzzled, but had also found my research topic: How could we explain the prevalence of corruption in political systems, and in which ways could legal reform, for example in the electoral system, affect corrupt phenomena? What

makes corruption systemic? What are the incentives for politicians and bureaucrats, but also for private sector actors, to engage in corrupt behaviour even in the face of highly negative sanctions?

As corruption is a phenomenon that takes place in secrecy and usually only comes to light when it is exposed in a scandal, I had to spread my research further in order to find answers to my questions. In the following years, I analysed how politicians in Japan were financed, where they received funds for their work and how they defined the boundaries between legitimate behaviour and corruption. I also looked at the legal norms and related discourses in Japanese politics and its bureaucracy to prevent or at least reduce corruption. I interviewed politicians and spoke with political secretaries who administered politicians' accounts and were involved in fundraising. I spoke to business representatives about their experience with political contributions, and I spent many hours studying records of parliamentary debates about political and campaign financing reform. I also participated in regular study groups on campaign financing in Tokyo and discussed the state of political financing with Japanese journalists who had followed campaigns and exposed (or decided not to expose) corruption scandals. I also followed politicians on the campaign trail to learn how they spent their funds and where they felt the pressure that might have made them inclined to take the risk of engaging in corrupt behaviour. The research led to my dissertation and my first book.

Throughout that time, I worked in academic contexts on Japanese politics both in Japan and elsewhere, but I also formed a network with scholars working on corruption elsewhere. The comparative perspective, and also the questions asked by non-Japan specialists shaped my work and stimulated further research. At the same time, through exchange with 'general' political scientists and non-Japan area specialists, I learned how to position Japan as a case in a broader comparative context—which also was useful for countering arguments that focused on culture and gift-giving as the main cause of corruption in Japan.

Through the work on my first project, I developed a keen interest in the relationships between business and politics as well as the state and the market, which has since shaped my academic work. Having studied the relationship between politics and money, I started to become interested in the role of companies as political actors, both at the domestic and the international level. In later projects, I looked into patterns and strategies used by Japanese (and international) firms to affect political decision-making processes. In my current research project, I am interested in the role of politics in globalised markets and especially in the governance of global value chains.

When I started my dissertation, the field of Japanese Studies in Germany was just changing from scholars using a predominantly historical and philological approach to a more diverse field including Social Science approaches. At the same time, Political Science in Germany was very strongly focused on Germany, Europe and the U.S., and non-Western cases were not common. In Germany, my dissertation research was thus considered 'exotic' both for my colleagues in Japanese Studies and those in Political Science. I benefitted greatly from cooperation with scholars and colleagues in Japan, especially at the Institute of Social Science at the University of Tokyo, where I was able to learn from highly empirical political scientists with a strong comparative focus. I also encountered international graduate students working on Japanese politics. The study groups at the Institute of Social Science (and later at the German Institute for Japanese Studies, where I initiated the Social Science Study Group) and also the Japan Politics Colloquium at the University of Oxford, led by Arthur Stockwin at that time,

provided a network of like-minded social scientists working on Japan and a forum for constructive criticism and exchange.

Moreover, working together with doctoral students from Japanese universities who were interested in similar issues helped me to reflect on my basic assumptions and expectations in a double way—on the one hand, these discussions often challenged my somewhat German perspective on the ways of politics and, on the other hand, they allowed me to revisit my theoretical literature based on the empirical evidence from Japan. In two cases, we also did joint interviews. My presence as a German researcher allowed me to ask questions that would have been more difficult for my Japanese research colleague to ask. Afterwards, we compared notes about linguistic aspects of the interview.

In summary, researchers studying Japan often face the challenge of balancing disciplinary and Area Studies' demands. This will affect researchers' choices of research topics as well as the ways in which they conduct and present research to appeal to different audiences. In order to perform this balancing act successfully, I suggest that young researchers start out with empirical research on Japan, but put their empirical findings in a broader comparative context and reach out to interdisciplinary debates—theoretical ones and debates that discuss Japan as a case among others. Academic debates often vary in different national contexts, as was the case with my research on corruption. These differences can pose puzzles and thereby motivate research projects. In this sense, researchers should always keep their eyes open for contradictions and differences in public and scholarly debates within and across national borders. Forming networks with scholars outside one's discipline or national academic context as well as with those studying the same phenomenon in a different setting is another piece of advice I can offer to young scholars. This will help researchers to position their research in broader comparative contexts (see Kimura, Ch. 15.1). Collaboration with colleagues from both other disciplines and Area Studies, and particularly with colleagues from Japan, will provide researchers with inspiration and networks they can draw on in the future—both intellectually and professionally. In particular, I recommend that researchers make themselves familiar with academic debates on Japan in the Anglo-American community and reach out to colleagues from the U.S. and the U.K. This will help to produce research that the global community researching Japan will perceive and to which scholars from Area Studies and Social Science disciplines alike can relate to.

1.2 Let the field be your guide

Daniel P. Aldrich

There is no single way to begin research, nor is there any sure-fire strategy to ensure that topics evolve into successful publications. Nevertheless, I am a big fan of several approaches, including building up interesting puzzles from real world empirical examples, being flexible when in the field, avoiding using culture as a catch-all explanation and writing about your interests and passions.

Puzzles from the real world

Almost all of my research projects began as puzzles that I observed in the real world while spending time in the field, whether Japan or North America, and not from reading peer-reviewed articles, books or political theory. My first book project grew out of the failure of another, more standard Political Science project that I began while a graduate student at Harvard University. The abandoned project focused on the electoral strategies used by a Liberal Democratic Party (Jiyūminshutō, LDP) politician who was running for office. I hoped to follow in the footsteps of past social scientists like Gerald Curtis at Columbia University and Richard Fenno of the University of Rochester, both of whom ‘soaked and poked’ in the lifestyles of their subjects. Rather than writing articles and books from the comfort of a library carrel, these political scientists shadowed politicians, watching them on the campaign trail and talking with them after a day of glad-handing and baby kissing. My own dreams of success evaporated after several weeks of shadowing and ringing ears from the ‘nightingales’ (female announcers who used microphones to speak to crowds as their buses passed by) when my candidate abruptly lost the election and told me to get lost.

Stuck in Japan for several more months without a viable project, I remembered a question that had come to me when thinking about Japan’s scientific progress following World War II: How did the only country in the world that experienced the horrors of nuclear weapons end up developing one of the most advanced commercial nuclear power programmes in the world? I wondered what the Japanese government had done to assist private utilities as they sought to promote atomic energy after going through the shock of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings. With time on my hands, I wangled an interview with Tokyo Electric Power Company (Tōkyō Denryoku kabushiki-gaisha, TEPCO) executives at TEPCO HQ in Tokyo through some cold-calling to the phone number listed on their website. After I had pestered them a number of times, they invited me in, and I began to ask them about how they sited their nuclear power plants. Engineers and bureaucrats at that firm spoke of the ways that they sought to induce compliance through a variety of side payments and benefits.

Then I began speaking with anti-nuclear activists at local organisations such as the Citizens’ Nuclear Information Center (Genshiryoku Shiryō Jōhōshitsu, CNIC). After some soaking and

poking, I discovered a whole system of benefits and incentives offered to host communities in rural, coastal communities that were willing to have a nuclear facility in their backyard. The Japanese government had been far more than a passive umpire in the field of energy as some might envision. Instead, it took a side early—supporting the growth of the field in the late 1940s—and sought to support private energy firms throughout the nuclear power plant. This initial foray grew into several articles and the book *Site fights: Divisive facilities and civil society in Japan and the West* (Aldrich 2008).

From personal experience to a research project

Where my first project sprang from the collapse of my intended research, my next major research project came from going through an actual disaster. As I was finishing up my dissertation on controversial facilities like nuclear power plants and turning it into a book, my family and I moved to New Orleans, Louisiana. There we settled into a short-lived but comfortable existence in the neighbourhood known as Lakeview, just south of Lake Pontchartrain. Within seven weeks of our arrival that name became all too real with the arrival of Hurricane Katrina and the collapse of the levees that held back Lake Pontchartrain and the Mississippi River. Lake water flooded our neighbourhood, with twelve feet of water destroying everything in our home, including my hard drive, all of our clothes, toys, books, records and material possessions.

We got out alive, but evacuating and then trying to rebuild showed me how misconceived my vision of recovery was. My vision of disaster response involved U.S. government agencies like the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) swooping in to support survivors in a government-led process. Alternatively, the private market, such as homeowners' insurance, was able to help rebuild. But rather than the government (through FEMA) or the market (through insurance), all of the aid, assistance, offers of places to stay and schools for our children came through friends, friends of friends and our social network. Instead of such aid coming from the market or the state, social capital and social ties proved to be the engine of resilience. I wondered if my own experiences might be similar to those of survivors from other major catastrophes around the world. With the support of the Abe fellowship, I spent time poking and soaking in disaster-affected communities around the world. This research grew into a comparative research project on disaster recovery in India, North America and Japan called *Building resilience: Social capital in post-disaster recovery* (Aldrich 2012).

My most recent project came from watching Japan experience the triple disasters of March 11, 2011—the 9.0-magnitude earthquake, tsunami and nuclear power plant meltdowns (sadly enough at the Fukushima reactor near the town of Futaba, where I had done fieldwork for my first book). While many observers argued that cultural factors (Japanese stoicism, etc.) could account for the initial signs of recovery, and others claimed that it was going to be a function of damage (e.g. how high the tsunami was when it came ashore to each village), it was immediately obvious that certain locations were bouncing back faster than others. Some cities, towns and villages had higher levels of mortality, while others were decimated; and in the years since the events, some have rebuilt and increased in population, while others have only brought back the elderly. After I had spoken to several mayors, local administrators and NGOs, it was obvious that some had built strong and broad networks of assistance, while oth-

ers had far more limited ties. During the two years I spent in the field between 2011 and 2018 through a series of short, medium and longer stays (one funded by a Fulbright fellowship), this investigation became my newest book *Black wave: How networks and governance shaped Japan's 3/11 disasters* (Aldrich 2019).

The challenge of Japan's presumed uniqueness

But studying Japan also comes with some difficulties. One of the regular challenges about using cases from Japan has been the belief in the uniqueness of Japan. If, as many Japanese and non-Japanese observers like to claim, Japan is indeed unique, then it is very hard to apply lessons and best practices from Japan to other settings. For example, if Japanese citizens are indeed the only ones in the world who say one thing and do another (*tatemae* and *honne*), or if there are esoteric aspects of the Japanese aesthetic that cannot be easily captured (*wabi sabi*), then there are few conversations we can have with scholars and observers of other nations and systems. It would be hard for a scholar of American or African politics, for example, to have a useful exchange of ideas with those of us studying Japan (see Kimura, Ch. 15.2; McElwain, Ch. 2.2).

However, if Japan has institutions, incentives and policy arenas like other countries—and I've enjoyed scholarship from Hayden Lesbirel (1998), Steven Vogel (1996) and Richard Samuels (2003) that exactly builds on this approach—then we should be able to learn something from its experiences. One of the reasons I have followed the work of these scholars is because they begin by recognising explanations for empirical outcomes that stretch beyond those built on a belief in a nativist or unique culture. Instead, organisations and rules can in turn change behaviour and create new outcomes and norms. In this sense, we have seen more 'mainstreaming' of work on Japan, especially Japanese political outcomes, from various scholars (Catalinac 2016; Ono/Yamada 2018; Pekkanen et al. 2006; Rosenbluth/Thies 2010; Saito/Horiuchi 2003) who use a variety of tools to demonstrate the broader lessons from events in Japan to events and phenomena far outside it.

Be flexible!

I know from experience that it's great to have a clear plan in mind before beginning a research project, whether one in a library carrel in Berlin or in the agricultural areas around Rokkasho. But I have also learned how important it is to be flexible and open to the realities of the field. Too often students may feel trapped by their proposal or by existing theories rather than feeling free to go off list and try out new approaches. I provide a long list of specific advice about beginning research in Japan in my article 'The 800 pound *gaijin* in the room' (Aldrich 2009), including suggestions on going with letters of introduction, business cards, thank-you gifts and an affiliation with a Japanese institution. I also strongly suggest using multiple methods. That is, if you enter graduate school able to carry out a regression analysis using quantitative data, then you should leave with a new skill set, such as the ability to carry out focus groups, interviews and participant observation. If, on the other hand, you're only comfortable using qualitative methods, then you should take courses in social network analysis, regression analysis

and geographic information systems (GIS) analysis to expand your toolkit. Our research should always be driven by a problem, not by our methods. If we can only carry out one type of analysis, we miss the chance to study a phenomenon from other angles and to convince sceptics that our findings are not an artefact of the way that we approached the problem. Having a broader toolkit means that when you tackle a new problem you'll be able to come at it convincingly from multiple angles (see Hommerich/Kottmann, Ch. 10).

In this sense, once you've found an interesting puzzle, I would encourage students to think about the different ways to empirically understand it, running from direct talks with relevant actors to a map of their social network, to a survey of communities in which they operate. One lesson from my own career has been that projects need to develop organically from empirical observation. I would encourage graduate students to keep their eyes open to the real-life puzzles that are constantly emerging around us and to think through ways to study those outcomes methodically and systematically.

1.3 Studying marriage in Japan: A social anthropological approach

Joy Hendry

My choice of marriage as a subject to study in Japan was made rather easily, for I spent six months prior to my formal study sharing a room in a house with five young Japanese girls, for whom the subject was far and away the most discussed. This period was largely for language study, and I was enrolled at the time in an intensive course at a language school in Shibuya/Tokyo. Fortuitously I saw an advert offering accommodation in a house with ten young Japanese who wanted to have a native English speaker in their midst, and we spoke in English every evening over dinner. Otherwise they chatted to each other in Japanese, which not only helped my own language acquisition but gave me a wonderful insight into issues interesting to young people at the time. In the case of my female roommates, this was definitely marriage, especially whether such a thing should be based on love or arranged by their elders. My topic was decided then (Hendry 1981/2011 for the outcome).

Finding a field site

Starting fieldwork in the discipline of Social Anthropology requires planning, of course, but serendipity is also useful for a successful study (see Coates, Ch. 3.2; Gagné, Ch. 6.1; Klien, Ch. 8.1), as we have seen in the way my attention was drawn to the topic. When I did that first fieldwork many years ago now, we were actually given little preparation, but it was usual to expect to spend at least one year in the same place. The idea was to get to know all the people in a chosen area—it could be a geographical area, a community around a common interest or perhaps an enterprise of some sort. Whichever area was chosen, spending a year with people enables several things. First, it sees through a full annual cycle of events—understanding the seasons and attitudes to them and witnessing the enactment of all the annual rituals. A year also gives the researcher time to get to know people well, and indeed, the people to know the researcher and to understand what they are about. In Japan, first questions may elicit answers that the interlocutor thinks the researcher may want to hear; with time, an in-depth response is more likely to be revealed. A year also allows the researcher to become used to the local dialect and linguistic idiosyncrasies. These vary greatly throughout Japan, even more so in Okinawa, for example, and failure to take them into account could result in severe misunderstandings.

With these issues in mind, and my choice of marriage as a topic, I set out to find a suitable location. As it happened, I thought it would be good to work in a village. It was common practice in those days, and I resolved to look at the rituals involved in building a relationship and expectations for the future, as well as the various ways of meeting a suitable partner that my Tokyo friends had been debating. Within one village, I would be able to place the subject

of marriage within a broader social context. It didn't really matter to me where the village would be, or what would be the local economic base; there is quite a bit of Japanese literature on marriage and I was able to compare my findings with those picked up elsewhere. I simply needed to find a place to live for me and my husband, among a manageable number of houses, and I thought it would be good to find a beautiful spot. The most important plan then—a vital plan for an anthropologist or indeed any researcher—is to start out with some good introductions to the people with whom you will work.

When I set out to do my first fieldwork, my supervisors were in Oxford, and at the time there was no one there who had worked in Japan, so I asked a Japanese scholar who had visited my department in Oxford to help. He introduced me to a senior Japanese anthropologist who has helped me all my life, and I realised that it is always a good plan to have a supervisor in Japan wherever a student's university is based. They can provide a great deal of local assistance unavailable at home, and mine was able to tell me about the related fieldwork his colleagues and students were doing. This introduction also gave me a university attachment in Tokyo, which I think inspired more confidence in the people I approached than my Oxford one did. So I have tried hard ever since to procure the same facility for all my PhD students.

We discussed various possibilities for locations, and I spent some time visiting a selection of them. In every case, I would need somewhere to live, so this was an important consideration within a relatively small community. For the first village I tried, I only had a personal connection through a friend, and people seemed suspicious. For the second, I was introduced by an English teacher to the local education office as I had heard that they had houses for teachers. They did indeed and were kind enough to take me out to see some. It was a delightful area in rural Shikoku, and stunningly beautiful, but my project seemed likely to fail because they revealed that, sadly, all the young people were leaving. In the end, the village I found was a thriving community in Kyushu (Hendry 2021), and I found it through a Japanese anthropologist who had worked in the area—a student of my supervisor, as it happened. He not only found me an empty house, but took it upon himself to introduce me to all the important people in the area and to make sure they knew who I was and what I was planning to do. That was wonderful, for the head of the village immediately invited me to his son's wedding, where I met and shared sake with almost all his neighbours, who were happy to help me with my research afterwards. A first stroke of serendipity then, because they asked me (and my husband) all sorts of questions about our marriage, so I assume they then felt some obligation to reciprocate. I also learned that weddings are a great time to discuss details about marriages, and fortunately I was invited to many more (Hendry 2003).

Settling in

My new next-door neighbour explained another Japanese custom, which I would recommend to all those who plan to live in Japan, anthropologists or otherwise. Later, I learned and could identify all the important divisions for sharing community tasks, but for the time being my neighbour took me to the other houses in the immediate vicinity, where I introduced myself and handed over a small gift. 'Not too big,' he said, 'they won't want to be obligated to you.' So I gave them a few postcards from Oxford. My house was actually over the border from the village I had chosen as my focus, so I didn't see those neighbours much over the year, but some

40 years later, when I approached one of them for business purposes, he remembered me, and it was quite helpful. These people were also then able to explain to curious strangers who the ‘funny foreigners’ were—we were rather rare in those days—certainly the only two in our immediate vicinity, possibly the only two in a town of 35,000.

Settled in, I then had to work out a way to approach people, and to start the inquiry. An advantage of having a year to spend is that there is no need to immediately impose a list of questions on people. Of course, it is useful to have an idea of the questions you want answered, but I found that I learned a lot more if I was able to insinuate myself into open situations where people were already talking, and gradually steer the conversation around to my subjects of interest. In the village, my first task was to identify times and places where I would naturally meet people going about their everyday lives. There were three shops, and these were always good locations, the two fish shops attracting two different generations, which helped me to understand in-law issues, and a tobacconist’s, which I later discovered was a favourite place for outsiders to ask about local families (with a view to arranging a marriage). There was also a village hall where meetings took place, but most helpful of all in those days was the village bath house. Almost everyone went there: the older women first, then the younger ones, and finally the housewives, so I could choose my time depending on what I was after, and people were wonderfully talkative soaking in the hot water!

Another good approach to learn about the villagers was through the local policeman. He lived with his family in a nearby police house, and he kept a detailed list of all the occupants of his patch, together with a record of particularly valuable property. Probably because of the appropriate introduction from the Japanese anthropologist, he was willing to share all this with me. It was a perfect introduction because I created a notebook, which I use to this day, in which I entered the names of the residents of each of the 54 houses in the village, and then called on them in turn to verify his record, and to ask about how their marriages were arranged. It sounds pretty cheeky, and I am not sure it would work everywhere, but the people of this village cooperated. I also approached local policemen in later research projects, but in some cases you needed an introduction. My introduction from Kyushu to other far distant places actually worked better than a letter from my own university. In one area, they filled me in on all the yakuza families in the area, and I discovered that the son of one of them had become best friends with one of my sons at school.

Some final thoughts on taking notes

In that village notebook, I eventually collected the names and dates of death of all the ancestors remembered in the Buddhist altars, and I made a detailed diagram of all the families and their relationships. It was very useful to see who was related to whom and how that affected their invitations to weddings, introduction to potential spouses (still common in those days) and other life-cycle events including funerals. I have returned to this village many times over the forty years since I first worked there. The notebook offers me a great opportunity to go around updating it with new births, marriages and deaths, asking to pray at the Buddhist altar to say goodbye to those with whom I had worked when they were alive, and generally keeping in touch. Early on, I also made a detailed map of the houses, which I numbered, and this helped me to find my way around. I recommend that both these tasks are undertaken at the

very start of a research project, though of course the notebook may be a computer file these days, but together they become a superb investment for all subsequent activities (see Kottmann/Reiher, Ch. 7). A general diary is also crucial, for things observed early on are only properly explained much later, and small things may be forgotten if not recorded. I almost never used a tape-recorder, although I know others do, but I found that people would often elaborate on what they first said while I was writing, and things would come out that I had never thought to ask.

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