Japanese Culture and Society
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Introduction

Japanese Culture and Society is a diverse and deeply interesting field of study. This FreeBook is a collection of chapters from key titles from our Japanese Studies collection, all written by experts in their field on a variety of topics ranging from cuisine to religion. The chapters here are as varied as the field they cover, and address a range of topic of interest in Japanese Culture and Society. To see our full range of Japanese Culture and Society titles, please visit the website now.

Chapter 1 - Cuisine and identity in Contemporary Japan taken from 'Routledge Handbook of Japanese Culture and Society'.

This chapter, taken from the Routledge Handbook of Japanese Culture and Society, examines the vital role that cuisine plays in Japanese society. The Handbook provides a broad and comprehensive coverage of significant phenomena, institutions, and directions in Japan today, on issues ranging from gender and family, the environment, race and ethnicity, and urban life, to popular culture and electronic media. As such, the Handbook will be an invaluable reference tool for anyone interested in all things Japanese.

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Chapter 2 - Women and Work in Modern Japan taken from 'Career Women in Contemporary Japan'.

This chapter, which appears as chapter 2 in Career Women in Contemporary Japan, introduces the reader to the identities of working women in Japan and the shaping of white-collar career trajectories. The book examines what motivates Japanese women to pursue professional careers in the contemporary neoliberal economy, and how they reconfigure notions of selfhood while doing so.

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Chapter 3 - What is the Rashomon effect? taken from 'Rashomon Effects'.

This chapter, which appears as chapter 7 in Rashomon Effects, tries to pinpoint exactly what is the Rashomon effect? The book addresses issues beyond the realm of Rashomon within film studies, and the Rashomon effect, which itself has become a widely recognized English term referring to significantly different perspectives of different eyewitnesses to the same dramatic event. The book addresses both the
continuing and vibrant influence of Rashomon effects into the twenty-first century, as well as the director’s manifold legacies to cinema, its global audiences and beyond, and will be welcomed by those interested in Japanese studies, film studies and world cinema.

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Chapter 4 - Religion as Moral Infrastructure: The Practice of Neo-Shintoism in Japan taken from 'Digital Culture and Religion in Asia'.

This chapter, which appears as chapter 2 in Digital Culture and Religion in Asia, examines the role of Shintoism in contemporary Japan. The book critically analyses the connections between religion and digital media in a range of East Asian countries, including Japan in this instance. It discusses both how religious organisations make use of new technologies, and also explores how new technologies are reshaping religion in novel and interesting ways.

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Chapter 5 - Towards a New Literary Trend: Contemporary Japanese Society Mirrored in Literature taken from 'Visions of Precarity in Japanese Popular Culture and Literature'.

This chapter, written by Yasuko Claremont and appearing as chapter 9 in Visions of Precarity in Japanese Popular Culture and Literature, examines the new literary trend created by a new generation of writers in Japan where the predicaments of the modern working life are vividly portrayed throughout the vacillating precarious socio-economic conditions in contemporary urban Japanese society. The book closely examines how Japan’s new paradigm of precarious existence is expressed through a variety of pop-cultural and literary media.

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Chapter 6 - Making Sense of the Lost Decades: Workplaces and Schools, Men and Women, Young and Old, Rich and Poor taken from 'Examining Japan’s Lost Decades.'

This chapter, written by Andrew Gordon and appearing as chapter 5 in Examining Japan’s Lost Decades, argues that despite common belief that Japan failed to keep up with the pace of globalization, great change has occurred over the “lost decades” in Japan, in terms of public mood, socio-economic practice and state policy. This chapter focuses on socio-economic issues with reference to workplace, gender and social inequality, but the book as a whole looks at five features of Japan’s “lost decades”, gives a comprehensive overview of Japan’s recent 20 years of crisis, and reveals that this issue is not necessarily exclusive to Japan and that it does in fact have global relevance.

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Cuisine and Identity in Contemporary Japan
Food is all around us, yet remarkably elusive for something seemingly so concrete and mundane. People grow it, buy it, prepare it, eat it, savor it (or not) every day, everywhere, often without much thought about food’s significance in any larger social, cultural, or historical schemes. But food is profoundly embedded in these frameworks, and food culture (shoku bunka) is a key concept for understanding the day-to-day foodways of Japanese society, as well as the larger contexts of identity that food and foodways reflect and create, some of them not much remarked upon, some of them quite prominently on display in everyday life.

Today in Japan, foodstuffs (as material) and cuisine (as concept, one that is self-aware of larger frameworks of structure, meaning, and tradition) attract constant attention on a very broad scale. Culinary choices and their connections to lifestyles and identities are trumpeted in advertising, in the mass media, and in restaurants and supermarkets across the country. The range of stylistic possibilities is endless: hole-in-the-wall bars serve Japanese regional specialties; exclusive French bistros compete for Michelin stars; supermarkets hold special sales of seasonal foodstuffs connected to particular Japanese holidays; food halls of department stores feature the earliest shipments of Beaujolais nouveau; television programs teach Italian cooking; popular magazines carry tips on becoming a connoisseur of sushi on a budget; proponents of Japanese “research whaling” consume whale meat to defy foreign critics; members of Slow Food convivia promote principles of LOHAS (“lifestyles of health and sustainability”).

Culinary choices, lifestyles, and what Pierre Bourdieu (1984) calls “distinction” – the linkages between aesthetic taste and economic class standing, between social power and cultural prestige – are tightly packaged in contemporary Japan. The dynamic interplay of food, cuisine, and class is complex, cast against larger backdrops of identity and the “authenticity” of both domestic and cosmopolitan choices, and carried out at the level of the individual as well as in terms of regions, generations, and gender. And Japan’s modern relationship with itself and the world – the juxtaposition of Japan’s self-essentialized cultural uniqueness and its simultaneous, almost constant incorporation and innovation of things foreign – is clearly visible through food and foodways.

Arjun Appadurai (1986) writes about concerns over “culinary authenticity” as a reflection of a society’s uncertain sense of identity as it is going through – or reflecting upon – periods of great change or upheaval. Certainly, in the case of Japan since the
mid-nineteenth century, deep cultural introspection on the nature and integrity of
Japanese identity, surrounding both Japan vis-à-vis “the West” and Japan’s often-hostile
relationships with other East Asian nations, has been a recurring motif. It is not
surprising, therefore, that the cultural meanings or identities associated with food (in
the sense of particular foodstuffs or ingredients) and cuisine (as distinct methods of
preparation, flavorings, dishes, or combinations of dishes into meals and menus) have
been objects of scrutiny for well over a century and a half, often couched in terms of
national cultural identity.

Although the foreign provenance of ingredients and dishes consumed is commonly
acknowledged, Japanese cuisine is regarded by many Japanese as quite distinct from
that of its neighbors. It is viewed in a larger tripartite cultural scheme that roughly
distinguishes culinary categories as Japanese, Chinese, or Western – a division of flavor
seen in cookbooks, restaurant guides, and culinary entertainment, including the wildly
popular television series Iron Chef (in which Western cuisine is regularly represented by
French, and occasionally Italian, cooking). These cultural categories are “washoku”
(combining “wa,” a traditional designation for Japan, and “shoku,” for food or cooking),
“yōshoku” (“Western cooking”), and “chu ūa” for Chinese. In “washoku” and in other terms
like wagashi (distinctively Japanese sweets) and wagyu (“Japanese beef, also known as
Kobe beef), “wa” designates a specifically Japanese cultural sphere.

Yōshoku is by now a rather old-fashioned and relatively limited culinary category,
which calls to mind the heavier, meat-laden dishes that were localized and adapted to
the Japanese palate in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. (For some, the
term may bring to mind knives, forks, and spoons (rather than chopsticks) or a choice
between bread and “raisu” (rice, served on a flat plate, not in a Japanese style bowl, nor
called by the respectful Japanese term “gohan”.) Some dishes made their first
appearances at elite tables during the Meiji era (1868–1912), and others were
introduced to the broad national table by the Japanese military, which adapted Western
dishes for their nutritional value and ease of cooking on a mass scale (Cwiertka 2007).
Many of these are now firmly embedded in everyday vernacular cooking, almost as
comfort food, for example: tonkatsu (breaded pork cutlets), korokke (meat and potato
croquettes), omuraisu (rice omelet), hanba “go sute ki (Salisbury or hamburger steak),
and, perhaps surprisingly, kare “raisu (curry rice, which is more or less an import from
Great Britain, not directly from the Indian subcontinent). These dishes are familiar to
eyery Japanese, and they are not really foreign (or Western) foods; they are the
domesticated products of the first century or so of Japan’s modern internationalization.
The point is not so much the purportedly “Western” origins of particular dishes, but
their location in a different culinary galaxy, in concept if not in daily consumption.

In Japan today, the solidity of “the West,” at least as represented in culinary terms by yō-
shoku, has dissolved into appreciation for specific national cuisines – French, Italian, and a very few other high-status foreign cultures. A Japanese term, ryo おり, which can be glossed as “logic of ingredients,” is generally translated as “cuisine,” in the sense of distinguishing national cuisines: Japanese from French, Italian, or Indian. Ryo 調 (in this sense of logic) implicitly emphasizes particular foodstuffs, dishes, combinations of flavors and textures, and the composition of meals and menus as the basis for distinguishing foodways along canonical lines. Ryo 調 also describes particularly cohesive and distinct culinary traditions within Japanese foodways, mentioned above: osechi おせち for the New Year’s holidays; or kaiseki かいせき (tea ceremony cuisine) and shōjin しょうじん (Buddhist vegetarian cuisine), both of which are regarded as characteristic of Kyō 京 (Kyoto cuisine).

Imagining Japanese cuisine

Cuisine is a product of cultural imagination. Ideas about food and foodways are combined – by insiders and outsiders alike – to create relatively coherent and integrated images of culinary principles and practices. Of course there are delightful surprises and delicious detours that keep a cuisine a lively canon to explore, but, by and large, cuisine is regarded as stable, with predictable pathways, rooted in tradition and the past (often the premodern past). And cuisines are conventionally thought to include the range of practices and preferences that are presumably shared broadly across a society, by farmers, fishers, millers, brewers, tofu makers, grocers, fish mongers, shoppers, cooks, chefs, homemakers, eaters, cookbook authors, and so on, as they prepare and partake of food. This culinary imagination reflects, therefore, a loose agreement on a common and sustained template of cuisine as something definable and distinctive, something with more or less known qualities and boundaries.

In the case of Japan, this self-defined (or self-appreciated) template includes a key element: fresh or raw ingredients.

For the Japanese raw or uncooked food is food, while in other cultures food usually means cooked food. The raw in Japanese culture thus represents culturalized nature: like a rock garden in which traces of human hands that transformed nature into culturalized nature have been carefully erased, the raw food of the Japanese represents a highly crafted cultural artifact presented as natural food.

(Ohnuki-Tierney 1990: 206, emphasis added)

Most cultures frame their ideas about food culture around concepts such as the bounty of the land and the changing seasons, the natural world. But, as Ohnuki-Tierney points out, food is nature transformed by culture, and culture is a powerful force with which to
fasten symbolism and meaning to the mundane facts of life, such as cooking and eating. In the following sections, I sketch some of the most significant aspects of cultural symbolism, ideas about tradition, and other aspects of Japanese food culture, belief, and food lore seen – as they so often are – as stable and relatively unchanging.

Rice

One of the most central of culinary things in Japan, in both practical and symbolic terms, is rice (Ohnuki-Tierney 1994). Rice cultivation is a hallmark of East and Southeast Asian agriculture, where seasonal monsoons provide the water necessary for elaborate irrigation systems. Japanese civilization developed around rice cultivation, made indigenous through the myths and rituals of Shinto religion that are closely tied to rice (as well as to the gods who gave mythological rise to the Japanese imperial line). Many Shinto rituals are linked to the calendar of rice production, and even the present-day emperor annually transplants rice seedlings in a paddy inside the Imperial Palace at the center of Tokyo. Shinto itself celebrates not only rice, but the entire agricultural cycle; offerings on Shinto altars typically include rice stalks, rice cakes (mochi), sake, water, salt, fish, dried seaweed, fruits, and vegetables; the offerings are variously interpreted as providing a meal to the gods (kami) or as a reflection of thanksgiving for what the gods have provided.

In other, secular contexts, rice also carries great cultural significance. The close communal coexistence of village life is often nostalgically remembered as revolving around the patterns of consensus and cooperation that irrigated rice cultivation requires, and in folk theories of Japanese identity (Nihonjinron), rice is seen as central to the Japanese spirit. Throughout Japanese history, the northern frontiers of Japanese culture were the northern limits of rice cultivation, and as agricultural technologies and crop strains advanced, Japanese moved further northward. (It is worth noting, however, that, contrary to popular imagery of rice as an essential component of every meal, until the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries rice was often beyond the reach of large segments of the population, except perhaps on special occasions – it was elite rather than commoner food.) Nevertheless, the symbolic and practical importance of rice is manifested in countless historical and contemporary practices: wealth (and taxes) in the Tokugawa period were measured in bales of rice; the passage of domestic authority from mother-in-law to daughter-in-law in the not so distant past was customarily marked by the transfer of the household’s rice paddle (shamoji); bales of rice (along with substantial cash payments) are presented to the winners of sumo tournaments. And, today, rice as a symbol of national identity is promoted or maintained by policies of agricultural protectionism that limit imports of rice from outside Japan and celebrate a proliferation of expensive domestic rice
varieties as contributing to the preservation of culinary authenticity.

Religion, ritual, and food

Two other religious and philosophical traditions, in addition to Shinto – Buddhism and Taoism – have also had major and long-lasting influences on Japanese food and foodways.

After the introduction of Buddhism from Korea and China (538 ce), the killing of animals and the consumption of meat were banned because of Buddhism’s dictates against the taking of life. Such prohibitions were unevenly applied and certainly unevenly accepted; the frequency with which prohibitions were repeated over the centuries suggests they were not zealously observed in all quarters. Throughout Japanese culinary history, meat eating has not been uncommon, sometimes masked by euphemistic terms for various kinds of meat – wild boar as “mountain whale” (yama kujira) or peony (botan), and rabbits referred to by terms for fowl. Official prohibitions against meat consumption were lifted during the early years of the Meiji period (1868–1912).

During the Nara and Heian periods (710–94 and 794–1185) Buddhism was central to elite life; certainly in religious communities vegetarian cuisine was the norm. Foodways that developed during this period, and which were further elaborated in subsequent periods (for example, with the introduction of Zen Buddhism from China in the twelfth century), established the fundamentals of what is now considered classical Japanese cuisine, largely but not exclusively vegetarian. Monastic communities developed a style of vegetarian cuisine (including an extensive repertoire of dishes using tofu in an astounding array of forms, flavors, and dishes) that is known as sho~jin ry~ri (“priestly cuisine”). This in turn influenced the development of the cuisine served in the tea ceremony (chanoyu), which flourished as an accompaniment to Zen practices; this style of cuisine, known as kaiseki ry~ri, became a defining aspect of elite life in Kyoto and gave shape to the traditional haute cuisine of contemporary Japan. Today, whether the presentations are more lavish (in elite restaurants) or more restrained (in tea rituals or establishments that embrace chanoyu’s more austere aesthetic), kaiseki cuisine typically includes a large number of very small dishes selected to harmonize and juxtapose with each other in terms of textures, flavors, colors, and methods of preparation, with an emphasis on seasonal products. A kaiseki meal today may include nine or more courses (always an odd number, never an even) – typically including a custard dish, sashimi, grilled fish, something simmered, a soup, and several others – each course served in turn, or presented to each guest on a carefully arranged tray (or succession of trays).
Simultaneous to the arrival of Buddhism, Japan was introduced to Chinese philosophical systems (based on Taoist beliefs) regarding the fundamental harmonies among human bodies, environmental contexts, and the ingestion of foods/medicines. These principles remain an essential aspect of Japanese attitudes toward diet and health (Lock 1984). In the Taoist tradition, human health is achieved and maintained through a balance of dietary items, which create equilibria among bodily organs. The best-known example is the complementary duality and balance expressed as yin and yang (in and yô in Japanese). Some foodstuffs are considered cooling (yin), others warming (yang), and some cooking techniques result in more yin or more yang; an appropriate diet needs an array of dishes that maintain human health through the equilibrium of cooling and warming characteristics. In addition, the five fundamental elements (fire, water, wood, metal, and earth) are associated with many things such as flavors (bitter, salty, sour, spicy, sweet), specific organs of the body (heart, kidneys, liver, lungs, spleen), emotions, seasons, and many other aspects of health, illness, physiology, and the properties of foods and medicines. And so an ideal diet (or a therapeutic regime) should take these interrelated properties into account in selecting and combining ingredients. The holistic principles of East Asian medical practice, including acupuncture and various herbal therapies (known in Japanese as kampo ôyaku, or “Chinese medicine”), are very closely attuned to the relationship between bodily conditions and the substances – nutritional and medicinal – that are consumed (ibid.).

This philosophical (and nutritional) system, somewhat like the humoral systems of Greek medicine, influenced the development of Japanese cuisine for over a thousand years, providing principles still common in Japanese attitudes toward food, diet, nutrition, and health, although today rarely identified as Taoist in origin. Japanese foodways also pay extensive attention to traditional concerns – inspired by Shinto – about purity and pollution as symbolic concepts related not only to biological hygiene but also to spiritual and social balance (Ohnuki-Tierney 1984).

**Culinary calendars**

Cuisine is constructed across calendars that reflect many dimensions, including concepts of seasonality. Even in a globalized food system, which delivers products from around the world without much regard for month of the year, Japanese food culture places great emphasis on seasons. The term shun (which calendrically indicates a unit of roughly 10 days) is used to refer to foodstuffs that are “in season.” Of course, particular foods are available for much longer periods of time than that, but the term implies a great awareness of the rapidly changing culinary landscape, and the multiple possibilities for combinations of ingredients to reflect the micro-seasons, each of which offers its own unique flavors and qualities.
Seasonality defines varieties of seafood, for example, not just by availability and quality but also by their essential characteristics. That is, fish of the same species may be known by different names depending on the time of year they are caught, their size, their maturity, or the location where they are taken (all of which, naturally, may be closely interrelated). A juvenile tuna (meji) and a mature tuna (maguro) are distinct in culinary terms, each with its own unique seasons, characteristic flavors and textures, and best methods for preparation and consumption. Guides to connoisseurship go into great detail about the seasonality of ingredients; specialized books about sushi can easily list a hundred or more different toppings, with notes on the desired seasons and seasonal accompaniments for each.

This degree of concern over hyper-seasonality is, not surprisingly, most pronounced in top-end restaurants, and among professional chefs, food critics, and travel writers. Culinary seasonality is complemented by many other traditional contexts of Japanese culture which mark divisions of the year through such things as well-known poetic allusions, customary greetings, or color combinations and patterns (of kimono, for example) that are appropriate to and emblematic of the rapidly passing seasons. As noted below (p. 279), cuisine and travel are intimately linked in contemporary Japan, and the seasonality of particular regional cuisines is emphasized as a central element of the enjoyment of travel.

Closely related to notions of seasons are so-called "first things" (hatsumono), the first products of a season: the first bonito; the first apples from Aomori; the first tuna of the year to be auctioned at Tsukiji (Bestor 2004). The arrival of the "first" is trumpeted as a harbinger of the season in stores, on restaurant menus, and in the mass media. For the true connoisseurs of Japanese cuisine, the first products (of whatever kind) may be awaited with as much excitement as wine-lovers (in Tokyo as much as in Paris) must for the arrival of the year's Beaujolais nouveau; for those with less exacting palettes, the publicity surrounding arrivals of "first products" nonetheless punctuates the rhythms of the changing year.

Culinary calendars also mark events, holidays, and festivities that occasion particular kinds of foods. The celebration of the New Year has many food associations, ranging from the simple act of eating especially long noodles on New Year’s Eve to ensure long life and prosperity, to the extremely elaborate banquets for the holiday itself. The New Year’s feasts feature osechi cuisine: typical elements of the banquet include sea bream (tai), herring roe (kazunoko), dried kelp (konbu), fish paté (kamaboko), pounded rice cakes (mochi) served in soup (oz òni). Many of these foods have auspicious meanings based on color combinations (lobsters and crabs, for example, combine celebratory red and white) or double meanings (the word "tai," for sea bream, also has the meaning "congratulations"). Ozo ni is often a standard-bearer for regional food culture, with
many locally distinct ingredients and styles of preparation; it and other special local dishes are highlights of the New Year’s feast. Osechi is served in elaborate sets of stacking and nesting lacquered boxes and trays, and the food is prepared ahead of time, the folklore being that housewives should be spared from cooking during the holiday; in the past cooking fires were supposed to be extinguished during the first days of the New Year.

Other times of the year also have food associations. In mid to late summer, for example, food lore instructs one to eat broiled eel (unagi) to fortify the body against the heat, on very specific dates determined by traditional almanacs. There are two seasons each year marked by extensive gift-giving, one in July (ochu-ten), the other in December (oseibo), and gifts of food are very common at these times; today these are extremely commercialized periods of gift exchange, in which department stores, supermarkets, and other retailers strenuously promote food products as gifts. The festivities of setsubun, a holiday in early February, involve dried beans – thrown to drive goblins and ill fortune out of the home – and in the past decade or so a formerly regional custom of eating huge rice rolls (supposedly resembling cudgels with which to pummel goblins) has become commercialized nationally by fast-food outlets.

Some celebratory dishes are not tied to specific holidays or seasons, but are consumed throughout the year, such as the auspiciously red-and-white combination of red beans and sticky rice (sekihan), common at festivals, family celebrations, weddings, and other occasions.

Regional cuisines

Contemporary Japan celebrates its regional cuisines on an almost minute scale. Japan’s geographic fragmentation and the diversity of micro-environments up and down a mountainous archipelago with only small coastal pockets of tillable land along a jagged and rocky coastline, combined with the difficulties of transportation in the premodern period, have left a legacy of micro-regional sensitivities to highly localized cultures and foodways. Towns and villages throughout the country are able to point with pride to distinctive ingredients, idiosyncratic styles of preparation, and regional calendars of seasonalities and festivities marked by specific local foodstuffs.

Regions have dishes to call their own – trout sushi from Toyama, okonomiyaki (something like a frittata) from Osaka, Hakata-style ramen from Fukuoka – and they have specialty food products that are equally well known: apples from Aomori, beef from Kobe, Koshihikari rice from Niigata. Japanese food labeling laws require quite precise information about the places where food products originate, and consumers pay a great deal of attention to regional provenance. Locavore principles are increasingly
popular, and there has been a resurgence of heritage crops that can trace their roots to specific locations, most notably in the Kyoto area, where so-called “Kyō-ya-sai” (Kyoto vegetables) have received government recognition as well as popular consumer acclaim (Rath forthcoming). Some examples of these regional specialties are nationally known and appreciated, but regional cuisine also celebrates the exotic and perversely unattractive, by focusing on dishes that those from other regions purportedly find distasteful. One foodstuff that marks regional affiliation is a sticky fermented soy bean dish (nattō) which is predominantly consumed in northeastern Japan (Tohoku); it is a dish that people either love or hate, and people from Tohoku often take glee in holding up as an example of their special regional cuisine that only "insiders" can appreciate.

As mentioned previously, regional cuisines play a very significant role in tourism, and Japanese guidebooks (and travel advertising) emphasize the culinary delights and specialties of particular regions, towns, and villages as essential pleasures of travel. Local "famous products" (meisan or meibutsu) are today hyper-developed categories of things, often foodstuffs, which almost justify a trip on their own. A traveler is advised on what the culinary "famous products" of a particular place are, how to appreciate the historical, or cultural, or environmental particularities that mark these local specialties, and how best to savor them. Farmers’ markets and locally famous food shops or workshops that prepare local specialties are popular tourist destinations, as are food museums. (Foodstuffs are also sometimes spectacles in their own right: the village of Inakadate in northern Japan has made itself nationally famous for using rice plants of different varieties and colors to create entire fields planted to grow into reproductions of woodblock prints, historical portraits, and other art works (views of the fields are easily found on the Internet).)

Wherever the traveler ends up, preparing to depart they should stock up on the appropriate souvenir packages (omiyage) of local culinary products to take back home. In a nod to the fast pace of modern travel, Tokyo station has an extensive selection of local products from the provinces on sale, so a traveler returning to Tokyo can pick up the iconic food product upon arrival back in the metropolis. Closely related to the idea of local famous products are box lunches, obentō, in this case known as ekiben (station box lunches), that are sold on railway platforms; train schedules and travel magazines put a spotlight on the particular local specialties of this or that station’s offerings (Noguchi 1994); here again, someone traveling light can pick up the requisite souvenir box lunch at Tokyo station along with other regional omiyage.

In addition to the self-conscious food traditions of different regions of Japan, there are also underlying differences in food preferences that divide the culinary landscape. For example, the varieties of soy sauce preferred in the Kansai region (around Osaka, Kobe,
and Kyoto) are saltier and heavier than those favored in the Kanto region (around Tokyo and Yokohama); seafood in the Kansai and further west leans toward white flesh and lighter shades of red flesh (such as in tuna), whereas from Tokyo to the north the favorites are red over white flesh, and the redder the tuna the better.

Taken together, the many aspects of tradition, religion, seasonality, and region sketched above combine to form a cultural imagination of what many Japanese would consider to be the fundamental elements of traditional and authentic Japanese cuisine. That is, “Japanese” cuisine is differentiated from other cuisines as an essential element of cultural definition and identity. Despite the fact that the food habits of most if not all contemporary Japanese do not closely observe these culinary traditions in actual daily food choices, and honor them more abstractly as sources of heritage and identification, the cultural distinction of a national cuisine remains important both domestically and internationally.

**Domesticating foreign cuisines**

The culinary imagination of a unified and stable Japanese cuisine does not exist in a vacuum – it is formed in contrast to the many things Japanese eat that are not considered “Japanese.” Of course, much of the traditional diet of the country fundamentally resembles that of environmentally similar regions of Asia that were part of the extended zone of Chinese civilization. Many of the central foodstuffs of Japanese cuisine (e.g. rice, soybeans, tea, sesame oil), methods of cultivation or preparation (irrigating rice paddies, fermenting soy beans into soy sauce, making tofu or noodles, etc.), and styles of utensils, cooking techniques, and flavorings come from the Asian mainland and mark significant parallels with the various national cuisines of East and Southeast Asia.

The identification of dishes as part of a distinctive “traditional” Japanese cuisine does not imply historical stasis. Like all other aspects of “tradition,” food culture constantly evolves. The exposure of Japanese foodways to foreign, and in particular Western, influences that fundamentally changed the Japanese diet took place in several distinct historical periods since the medieval period. In the sixteenth century, Japan was first in contact with Western sea powers, primarily the Portuguese and the Dutch. Drawing distinctions between Japanese cuisine and other food-ways undoubtedly accelerated as Western contact brought exposure not only to Europe but also to the many other regions of the world already enmeshed in European trading empires, including South and Southeast Asia (with an abundance of spices unfamiliar to Japan).

The so-called “Columbian Exchange” – the transfers of peoples, plants, animals, and diseases in both directions between the Old and New Worlds, following the voyages of
Columbus in 1492 – affected East Asia rapidly. Foodstuffs from the New World that made their way to Japan during the sixteenth century included sweet potatoes, potatoes, and capsicum (red) peppers (and a non-food item: tobacco). Japanese foodways were also affected by the cooking of the European explorers, missionaries, and traders following the 1549 arrival of the Jesuit priest Francis Xavier in Nagasaki. Tempura is generally regarded as a culinary innovation stimulated by Portuguese influence in Kyu-shu, and many new foodstuffs arrived, either directly from European contact or indirectly from other Southeast and East Asian countries. European words (or adaptations of them) entered the Japanese language as well: ko-hi (coffee), tempura (from a Portuguese term), piripiri (hot, spicy, from a Swahili term for red peppers brought from the New World to Iberia, then to East Africa and on to East Asia by Portuguese traders), kasutera (an Iberian pound cake), and pan (bread, from Portuguese). (Another phrase, reflective of different tastes in cuisine and in standards of personal hygiene, came into use as a derogatory term for foreigners and foreign ways: batakusai (stinking of butter).)

From the seventeenth through the nineteenth centuries, Japan maintained self-imposed isolation, and the culinary influences occasioned by sixteenth-century contacts with the Portuguese and the Dutch were largely confined to the new crops (including New World crops) that took root in Japan; the level of actual trade between Japan and the rest of the world was miniscule, and foodstuffs played little part in it.

During the two and a half centuries of Tokugawa rule, Japan was at peace. Despite periodic massive famines, agriculture was generally productive, and many innovations expanded the range of rice cultivation. Despite the political unification of the country, Tokugawa policy restricted travel in many ways, and since contacts among different regions were limited, local foodways and specialties were strongly maintained. Official travel to and from Edo (as Tokyo was known until the 1870s), however, was mandatory for local lords and higher-ranking samurai from each of the fiefs, so Edo became something of a melting pot, in which metropolitan tastes and flavors – in literature, fashion, art, politics, cuisine – were created and disseminated to the provinces with the coming and going of the elite. Guidebooks provide detailed descriptions (and rankings) of the culinary delights of the capital, and famous restaurants were often depicted in woodblock prints (the souvenir postcard of the day).

The peace and prosperity of the period also enabled the development of regional food processing industries that had extended geographic reach. Sake brewers, the producers of soy sauce (produced through fermentation), and the manufacturers of rice vinegar, for example, in some cases became regional rather than merely local. A number of prominent food companies active today can trace their origins to the proto-industrial production of the Tokugawa period; Kikkoman, the soy sauce company, dates to several
families active in the trade near Edo in the mid-seventeenth century; Mizkan, the producer of rice vinegar, began in 1804 in a port city near Nagoya, astride the trade routes linking Edo and Osaka. And the dietary needs of large cities like Edo and Osaka were met by local agricultural production as well as large-scale inter-regional trade in basic foodstuffs: the Osaka to Edo rice trade being one example, the Hokkaido- to Osaka fish trade being another.

Following the “opening” of Japan by the American naval officer Commodore Matthew Perry in 1853–54, Japan experienced an accelerating flood of foreign influences across every aspect of life, including the culinary. The Meiji period (1868–1912) saw a flood of imported products, and the upper middle classes especially experimented with new tastes and menus, both at home and in restaurants. In the 1870s, there was a boom in consumption of beef, emulating European tastes for red meat (officially, long forbidden by Buddhist proscriptions), in the form of a traditional kind of dish simmered with soy sauce: a dish now internationally known as sukiyaki. Particularly in Tokyo and the treaty ports where Westerners were allowed to settle (such as Yokohama and Kobe), restaurants provided introductions to European cuisines for urban sophisticates. Wax models of food were first displayed then to visually explain foreign dishes to diners unfamiliar with them; such models (in plastic) are today ubiquitous in Japanese restaurants.

The food purveyor Meidiya, established in 1885 (named for the Meiji era, retaining an archaic English transliteration), is an example of the companies that developed to import Western foodstuffs. Such business as well as restaurants helped to promote the boom in Western-style consumption for Meiji-era elites and led the way for other foreign and domestic specialty stores. (Meidiya remains a high-end importer, with its own food labels and a national chain of luxury supermarkets in major cities.) The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries also saw the development of department stores as centerpieces of urban modernity. By the 1920s, in large urban centers, department stores had assumed premier roles in defining middle and upper middle class consumption along modern lines, including foodstuffs. Department stores developed food floors (generally the basement) that featured the finest products, both domestic and foreign. Such department store food halls continue to be arbiters of high-level cuisine.

In the late nineteenth or early twentieth centuries, however, such food innovations would have only gradually reached the general population of consumers. A diary kept by a housewife in Kyoto in 1910 (Nakano 1995) gives a sense of utter novelty of the culinary encounters of the times, as new foodstuffs – chocolate, bananas, beer, and canned fruits – were slowly becoming a part, even if only a minor part, of urban middle-class life. But early twentieth-century changes nonetheless built on one
another. Urban population growth created larger markets for restaurants, cafés, and the important cultural spaces of kissaten, or coffee shops (White forthcoming), all of which reflected new forms of public social life and encouraged food innovations: department stores shaped elite food consumption; the rapid expansion of industrial food processing and manufacturing brought ever wider kinds of food products into shops and kitchens across the country, facilitated as well by the creation of a nationwide railroad system.

In the twentieth century, Japan’s extensive colonial empire throughout East and Southeast Asia also influenced the development of Japanese domestic food life; dishes and tastes from elsewhere in Asia became standard components of Japanese consumption (e.g. the popularity of Chinese restaurants, the introduction of spicy kimchi from Korea, or the wide popularity of ramen (noodle soups) from North China).

An extremely important aspect of culinary transformation was the impact of the Japanese military on dietary norms (Cwiertka 2007). From the creation of a mass conscript army in 1873 through Japan’s defeat in 1945, the Japanese military was one of the major institutions shaping national life. With a huge conscript base, the military faced the challenge of creating a nutritionally solid military diet that had to be relatively easy to prepare in standardized ways for large numbers of people. Since the promotion of national unity was also of great importance, aspects of Japanese cuisine that traditionally reflected sharp regional or class differences needed to be avoided. Perhaps surprisingly, military nutritionists adopted many dishes from non-Japanese sources to become standards in the military diet, including curry rice, pasta dishes, soups and stews (many of the mainstays of yōshoku, discussed on p. 274).

After Japan’s defeat, the Allied (primarily American) Occupation of Japan launched another wave of culinary innovation and adaptation. Some Japanese foods were adapted to the tastes of the occupiers (large amounts of meat cooked on a steel griddle became the now-standard dish teppanyaki). American forces brought with them a diet rich in dairy products, meat, and animal fats of all kinds; this had a major impact on changing Japanese food consumption and tastes during the postwar period.

The war and its immediate aftermath brought near-starvation to millions, and permanently severed Japan from its previous colonial sources of food supply. The postwar economic recovery of the 1950s and 1960s, the so-called economic miracle, focused primarily on the development of heavy industry and export industries, but also created entirely new lifestyles for many Japanese. From the 1950s onward the urban population exploded, and rural areas (and their foodways) declined; smaller nuclear families became the norm, and shopping, cooking, and eating habits changed; large-scale food manufacturers took over production in many segments of the food industry, and local or regional producers suffered. Increasing proportions of the food
consumed in Japan were imports, and Western foodstuffs (whether thought of as yōshoku or simply as ordinary daily fare) became commonplace in many urban diets – toasted bread with mixed green salad and coffee for breakfast, curry rice for lunch, perhaps spaghetti for dinner.

In the 1970s, Japan emerged from its high-speed growth years as a full-fledged economic powerhouse and a prosperous urban middle class that looked to Europe and the US for models of consumption. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s (in hindsight known as the “bubble years” for the hyper-consumption of the times), Western-inflected food fads flourished both at the high end of fine European imports and on the mass level (the first McDonald’s in Japan opened in the Ginza district of Tokyo in 1970; it was an instant success). The last quarter of the twentieth century and the first decade of the twenty-first have seen a commercial transformation of the world of food in many ways. Japanese imports of food from overseas have continued to soar. Vast empires of fast-food chains saturate most urban areas. Home dining and food preparation account for a smaller proportion of food-related expenditures. Supermarkets and convenience stores (konbini) have driven out of business many of the small specialized local food stores that previously dotted the urban landscape, and the stock in trade of konbini are highly processed prepared foods that are themselves transforming the nutritional standards of the Japanese diet (Bestor 2006; Whitelaw 2006).

At the same time, the level of interest in food at the high end continues to sustain a gourmet boom focused on the finest ingredients and styles of preparation, whether domestic or foreign. On the domestic front, what I have called the “gentrification of taste” has resulted in a revival of regional dishes, local producers, or styles of preparation that had been fading away as old-fashioned; they are now touted for their authenticity, and often lauded for sustainability, local roots, and other “Slow Food” characteristics.

One can look at changes in the Japanese diet since the nineteenth century as incremental innovations and stylistic shifts along a chronological sequence. Another perspective is to think about Japanese consumers’ access to a vast array of both domestic and cosmopolitan foods as a consequence of the transformations in the Japanese diet brought about by what Jack Goody refers to as “the industrialization of food” (Goody 1982). As part of the new global food system (Mintz 1997), this entails a macroscopic and multifaceted set of transformations in which the entire character of a society’s sustenance – selections of food resources; methods of production and processing; techniques of distribution, sales, and advertising; daily rhythms of eating; the nutritional content of the daily diet; the re-engineering of familiar foods for mass distribution; and the creation of entirely new foodstuffs as well – is adapted to and shaped by industrial, capital-intensive production.
Clearly, from the late nineteenth century onward (and in some cases from much earlier),
Japanese foodways have been increasingly industrialized in Goody's sense of the term.
The nineteenth- and twentieth-century transformation of Japanese foodstuffs reflected
a variety of aspects of industrialization and globalization: the introduction of new
foodstuffs from the West and its colonial empires (including things that could be grown
in Japan as well as things that continued as imports); new ways to prepare foods (both
foods that were already familiar in Japan and those that were new); and new
techniques and technologies for processing food, and for cooking and preparing food at
home (or in restaurants). The industrialization of food production promoted both the
standardization of foodstuffs and the mass marketing of products such as canned fish
and meat products, vegetables, and fruits, which became common commodities in the
early decades of the twentieth century.

An interesting example of industrial food engineering is the isolation of monosodium
 glutamate (MSG) by the Japanese chemist Ikeda Kikunae in the first decade of the
 twentieth century (Sand 2005). Ikeda explored the chemical basis of flavors in seaweed,
which he believed stimulated a taste sensation outside the orthodox classifications of
sour–salty–bitter–sweet. From konbu, a kind of seaweed, he isolated MSG, which
produced a flavor he named umami (“delicious”), now widely accepted as an additional
taste sensation. MSG was patented and commercially produced by the Ajinomoto
Corporation (Ajinomoto means “the source of flavor”), and rapidly became a major
product marketed throughout Japan, East Asia, and now worldwide.

But the industrialization of food can also define or redefine what is traditional. Many
dishes and delicacies now widely regarded as hallmarks of Japanese cuisine are of
relatively recent introduction or invention. For example, even the basic form of
nigiri-zushi, a thin slice of fish atop a compact oblong block of vinegared rice – the style
characteristic of Tokyo's cuisine and now the world’s de facto sushi standard – was an
innovation of the mid-nineteenth century, and many of its contemporary features,
including exquisitely fresh fish (rather than various kinds of pickled or salted seafood),
only became possible in the twentieth century with the advent of mechanical
refrigeration and ice manufacturing.

Typically, industrialization of food changes the repertory of goods available to
consumers, increasingly substituting highly standardized, processed, and manufactured
foodstuffs for widely varied, locally produced, raw, and semi-processed ones. This
affects consumers, of course, but the transformations are fundamentally propelled by
changes in the economic, political, and social institutions that produce, process, and
distribute foodstuffs.
Branding Japanese cuisine

Clearly, twentieth- and twenty-first-century technologies of the food industry – including aquaculture, food additives, freeze-drying, high-speed transportation (on a global scale), and mechanical devices to replace hand-processing – have expanded dramatically the ability to invent and produce “new food.” At the same time, new techniques of food processing develop together with new channels of distribution, new kinds of retailers, and new forms of marketing. Proprietary brand names become attached both to newly developed products and to products that previously had been simply generic items from the culinary public domain, and consumers, especially in Japan, come to expect “branded” merchandise.

The array of carefully delineated culinary categories above are testament to the abundant range of culinary options available to many Japanese today, and, at least among more affluent consumers, food choices are an important aspect of defining lifestyle identities and social distinction. In Japan, as in many other prosperous middle-class societies, there is considerable cachet attached to being relatively omnivorous (across culinary cultures) and also to being attuned to connoisseurship. To discern and savor many styles of Japanese cuisine as well as to appreciate the finer points of at least high-status foreign foods is to secure a claim as a sophisticated Japanese and a cosmopolitan “citizen of the globe.” This juxtaposition of the local and the global, the domestic and the transnational, has been an important aspect of larger Japanese identity politics since the high-speed economic growth era of the 1960s.

The culinary dimensions of social distinction are also, importantly, products of the vast media attention paid to food in all its forms, which has exploded over the past generation. Commentators on cultural production often use the term “culture industry” as shorthand to refer to the complex influences and connections that in industrial capitalist societies link: the creators of cultural artifacts; the content or meanings of those goods or services; and the tastes and preferences of those who receive or consume them (creation and production, content and distribution, reception and consumption). Many argue that industry is the prime mover; others argue that the linkages are more fluid and multidirectional, and that consumer tastes and preferences (and many social and cultural trends external to industry) shape industry as much as vice versa. Typically, those who write about culture industries focus on mass popular culture and its many media – music, film, television, magazines, comics, digital games, and fashion – but it is not far-fetched to think of food culture in similar terms, as an extremely complex system of culinary production, a vast marketing and distribution system, selling items that take shape in many symbolic and social ways, promoted by celebrity chefs, supported by extensive advertising and the doting coverage of mass communications outlets devoted to culinary matters, and presented to consumers
whose choices are shaped both by media coverage and by individual impulses for self-fulfillment and social standing – distinction – expressed in culinary fashion. Of course, some of this “food culture industry” is quite specifically media-based – the entertainment value of food as expressed in movies like Itami Ju- zo’s noodle farce Tampopo (1985), in the televised fantasy food competitions of Iron Chef (first aired in 1992), or in the manga series Oishinbo (1983 to the present) by Kariya Tetsu and Hanasaki Akira, about an investigative reporter engaged in a never-ending quest for culinary authenticity and connoisseurship.

And in broader terms, Japanese foodways have become a focus of contemporary discussions – among journalists, business leaders, diplomats, and other government officials – about “Cool Japan” or “Japan’s Gross National Cool,” a term coined by the American journalist Douglas McGran (2002). “Cool Japan” is the product of Japan’s so-called “content industries” – anime, manga, video games, fashion, music, Hello Kitty, and, yes, cuisine – that have generated highly popular (and highly profitable) markets for things Japanese outside of Japan, all the more noteworthy during the past couple of decades in which the Japanese economy as a whole has only stuttered along. The “content industries” (or culture industries) are the beacons of Cool Japan, and are officially promoted as such by Japan’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Domestically, Japanese cuisine is very well branded as a cultural product, an icon of national cultural identity. Internationally, for both foreign observers and food tourists, Japanese cuisine is part of the enticement of Japan’s “soft power” (the ability to project attractive cultural influence, without international coercion). And so it is entirely worth noting that a 2008 Japanese government survey revealed that the leading reason foreign tourists gave for visiting Japan (64.5 percent) was “to eat Japanese cuisine.”

Further reading


Women and Work in Modern Japan
Identity and the shaping of white-collar career trajectories

The economies of East Asia are currently at the center of world economic growth, while the pace of globalization is accelerating in the region. Globalization offers new job opportunities; indeed, the number of women in managerial positions is steadily increasing, as are their educational achievements (Kimoto 2003; Lam 1992; Roberts 2011). Inoguchi (2007) suggests that introducing particular targets could potentially accelerate the process of narrowing gender gaps in both geopolitical and socioeconomic terms. Moreover, several initiatives have supported the efforts of women to reconcile work with their family and community life, such as part-time employment, flexible hours, and working from home.

However, such opportunities are not equitable across employment sectors. The financial and government sectors are predominantly male and are the least conducive to allowing women to combine work and family. In contrast, the public service industry is much friendlier for female careers regarding promotional opportunities, maternity leave, and childcare. As sociologist Shirahase Sawako notes:

in Japan, only 22 percent of women with preschool-aged children are employed, compared to 60 percent in the United States, 56 percent in the United Kingdom, and 42 percent in Taiwan. Japanese mothers of adolescents are more likely to be employed (52 percent) than those with young children, a figure similar to that of the United States (59 percent) and the United Kingdom (70 percent).

(Holloway 2010: 171)

The academic environment is a special case, as it allows more flexibility for women. As historian Fujita Fumiko explains, women can take maternity leave for 14 weeks in compliance with the Labor Standard Law in Japan. When combined with other types of leave, this allows women to take fully paid leave for one semester. Moreover, women can extend this leave at a reduced salary until the child is one year old (2006: 179). Regardless of these advantages, there are still very few female professors in Japan. According to surveys conducted by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology, “in 1990 women accounted for 5.3 percent of professors, 8.7 percent of associate professors, and 13.3 percent of tenured lecturers in four-year colleges and universities. They respectively increased to 11.2 percent, 17 percent, and 24.1 percent by 2005” (Fujita 2006: 178).

In light of Japan’s recessionary economy, double-income couples would be of great benefit. In order to achieve that goal, companies have to create the incentive and the necessity for both to work. Under current circumstances, however, there is still a firm
division of labor, as wages are low, thus justifying the continued gender division of labor (Rindfuss et al. 2005). Even though some women are highly educated, their main goal for the future is to get married and settle down (Yamada 2010). Most of my subjects in the 20 through 40 age groups complained about the difficulty of finding a partner because they believed that men felt intimidated by their financial independence. They lamented that Japanese society still expects women to follow a standard track and that society will blame them if they deviate from the norm. Most young women want to have a career as well as a family, but society does not allow them to have both. Needless to say, there is a difference if one was born during the *ushinawareta ju-nen* or was entering the job market during that time. Timing is important, as it shapes life course experience in significant ways. For instance, what kind of hardship – social, financial or structural – did a woman go through while growing up? The decisions these women made ten years ago were different from the decisions they would make now, because the social norms have significantly changed.

**Japan as a neoliberal economy – critical perspectives on knowledge, power, and practice**

In Japan, the neoliberal economy broke the old framework and some women took this as an opportunity to develop their careers. What does it mean to identify the present day Japanese economy as neoliberal? How did neoliberalism penetrate understandings of Japanese everyday life? Is neoliberalism gender free? As the Japanese economy changes, new demands are being made of its citizens, which shape education, school-to-work transitions, and the definition of what constitutes valuable human capital. This section will highlight the major characteristics of the Japanese economy and discuss how the former hierarchies of work, such as the *salaryman*, the corporation, and the glass ceiling, are breaking apart, while neoliberal economic priorities are chiefly based on recognizing talent. In this environment women are given chances they never had before, and these global priorities are allowing them to increasingly assert their agency. This chapter will analyze how the global economy has changed and how Japan positions itself in that new economy.

David Harvey argues that

neoliberalism is in the first instance a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade.

(2005: 2)
Thus, Harvey is talking about global economic change since the 1970s, its implications for deregulated free capital and its implications for individuals. The dynamic drive of capitalism naturalizes the dominance of capital flows within a neoliberal framework, and international financial institutions – such as the World Bank – telecommunications, and media conglomerates are responsible for spreading international capitalism. Neoliberalism is cast as an entity, a unified state apparatus dedicated completely to the interests of unregulated markets. Harvey presents “the neoliberal state” as an ideal-type, equating the state to a monolithic entity. This concept is particularly flawed when applied to East Asia with its rapidly changing economy (Ong 2006: 12). This chapter will disregard Harvey’s conceptualization of a neoliberal state and follow instead Aihwa Ong’s concept of neoliberalism, which resonates with the geopolitical and socioeconomic structures of East Asian countries.

Neoliberalism is conceived not as a set of predetermined outcomes, but as an ideology with different impacts in particular sociopolitical contexts. Ong’s articulation of neoliberalism identifies the relationships among citizens, national governments, and market forces that establish new territories of capitalist growth, political spaces, and denationalized and deterriorialized forms of citizenry, which characterize the world’s contemporary globalization. This neoliberal ethos transforms citizens into “self-enterprising individuals,” whose human capital becomes a license for realizing individual freedom in different transnational realms (2006: 14).

Neoliberalism is a governing technology employed by individuals to gain self-capitalizing knowledge and develop competitive market practices. It is also utilized by national sovereignties to determine hierarchies of citizenship, identify investors, and to transfer business production, technology, and knowledge capital to new areas of rapid development. Ong makes a distinction between neoliberalism as exception and exceptions to neoliberalism: the former “articulates a constellation of mutually constitutive relationships that are not reducible to one or the other. Rather, ethnographic exploration reveals novel interactions between market-driven mechanisms and situated practices in space-time interrelationships through which problems are resolved” (2006: 9). But the latter – exceptions to neoliberalism – “can be modes for protecting social safety nets or for stripping away all forms of political protection” (2006: 4). The following discussion will show that in Japan, “exceptions to neoliberalism” is the most applicable distinction.

This double nature of neoliberalism as an ethos allows it to function on several levels – from state policies that affect NGOs to the injection of workers into the labor market as “self-enterprising individuals.” Ong’s emphasis on how neoliberalism is situated differently in various socio-cultural milieus is important, but how does neoliberalism organize other sites of power, such as race and gender? Neoliberalism establishes itself
as the exception in newly developing Asian economies, where capitalist market strategies create new exceptions for citizenship and national territory beyond the geographical boundaries of the nation-state.¹

After the end of the Cold War, economic regimes in East and Southeast Asia stood in the way of neoliberal ideals and came under increased scrutiny. Neoliberalism in Asia is often seen as a period of enhanced economic inter-connectedness that began in the late 1980s (Ong 2006: 1; Hadiz 2006). The 1997 Asian financial crisis generated attacks on Asian capitalism, the developmental state, and authoritarian regimes. The crisis intensified the pressure being placed on economic and political regimes, triggering the introduction of new conflicts to the processes of neoliberal globalization. Neoliberal policies are all about readjusting the capacity of groups to the dynamism of global markets (Obstfeld and Taylor 2004). In Asia, neoliberal practices are introduced as exceptions to political business as usual, bringing about a reconfiguration of political paradigms, logic, and new concepts. Although many consider neoliberalism, in broad terms, as global markets overwhelming countries, neoliberalism is fundamentally about novel forms of populations (Hadiz 2006; Obstfeld and Taylor 2004).

In Asia, the common goal is to raise an enterprising spirit in individuals, improving their capacity to make rational choices in the competitive global economy. Asian neoliberal ideologies are less concerned with adopting norms of efficiency and more concerned with supporting self-enterprising subjects: “The assumption that individual freedoms are guaranteed by freedom of the market and of trade is a cardinal feature of neoliberal thinking, and it has long dominated the US stance toward the rest of the world” (Harvey 2005: 7). Over the past decade, many Asian countries – especially China and India – have focused on higher education, primarily the natural and social sciences, law, and medicine (Ong 2006: 149–156). The promotion of highly educated citizens triggers a global job migration and makes “labor arbitrage” an increasingly common practice, that is, highly qualified citizens move elsewhere for jobs. The “neoliberal exceptions” and “exceptions to neoliberalism” produce different solutions that both divide and recombine spaces and populations in contrasting ways (Ong 2006: 3–4). While workers around the world are caught up in the exceptions of neoliberalism, the global elite find productive exceptions in this same neoliberalism. Thus, a myriad of disarticulations and rearticulations ocasioned by the logic of the exception transform the concept of citizenship to values that are increasingly eclectic, fragmented, and contingent.

Neoliberalism has had a special impact on East Asian women, for whom an explosion of professional opportunities has conflicted with restrictive gender conventions. Yoda Tomiko explains that neoliberals “generally perceive Japan Inc. as an endogenous product of modernization in Japan, combining native sociocultural characteristics and systems developed under the demands of the ‘catch-up’ economy during the postwar
recovery and expansion” (2006: 29–30). The current global job market is embedded in a neoliberal economy that influences the demands of work on these women, while economic globalization transforms them into self-governing subjects and legitimizes their pursuit of individual freedoms. The global economy is at an unusual moment of steep worldwide decline, and the financial crisis is seriously impacting female career trajectories in Japan.

The global financial crisis has defied all predictions in its depth and breadth. Thanks to the interconnectedness of financial institutions and markets, the collapse of the housing market in the United States triggered global deleveraging across worldwide markets. On the one hand, Asian economies were not particularly alarmed, because they were only tangentially affected and hoped that a solid economic base – along with a relatively robust banking system – would protect them to some degree from the financial turmoil. On the other hand, Japan has been involved in a long-term recessionary cycle and profound demographic change since the economic bubble burst in the late 1980s. Despite the prolonged recession and demographic change, the region has enjoyed a significant expansion of its industrial production base since 2007 (Asian Development Outlook 2007: 24). However, after the collapse of financial services firm Lehman Brothers in September 2008, the near collapse of Merrill Lynch, and the near bankruptcy and bailout of Bear Stearns, global investors reduced their exposure to the North American market (Ho 2009: 301).

It is a mistake to assume that Asian economies are shielded from the global financial turmoil, because the Lehman Brothers shock also resulted in declines in the Asian stock markets. The global financial crisis spread quickly throughout Asia, particularly to Japan, casting doubt on the credibility of the Asian market. When faced with the global financial crisis, many Japanese financial institutions had only limited experience with subprime-related instruments; nonetheless, the increased participation of Asian financial markets in international markets did transfer the global financial turmoil to Japan (Kato 2009). Ho explains that given the rise of neoliberal policies and globalizing markets, many scholars resort back to assumptions in which investment banks act as omnipotent global markets (2009: 33; Obstfeld and Taylor 2004). Furthermore, the US subprime mortgage crisis triggered a worldwide financial crisis, causing home foreclosures and a tragic restoration of distinctions based on race, class, gender, and age, with high consumer prices, severe job losses, and the potential collapse of Wall Street itself (Ho 2009: 298).

In terms of Japan, its economic vigor during the 1980s made it one of the East Asian Tigers. The dramatic growth in the 1980s was not dependent on neoliberalization except that greater openness in global trade and markets created an environment in which export oriented countries like Japan and West Germany could develop
undisturbed in the midst of ever-increasing international competition. Towards the end of the 1980s the countries that had decided to follow a more radical form of neoliberalism were struggling economically. Japan and West Germany soon became role models of sorts to other European and Asian countries. In Asia, the Japanese model was emulated by South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore (the “Gang of Four”) and then by Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, and the Philippines (Harvey 2005: 89; Kingston 2004, 2011).

The downside of a neoliberal economy is that it does not allow for the restoration of class power, as was the case in Japan. In response to the brief economic slowdown during the early 1970s, the Japanese government began cutting back on social assistance and public care services, promoting the political agenda of Yasuhiro Nakasone. The Japanese state promoted particular traditions, like the extended family (three generations) in maintaining social balance. State welfare and social services were drastically reduced, but the government encouraged a structure in which companies could offer a family wage to most employees, while middle-class women were highly encouraged to work as full-time homemakers.

From the 1960s until the late 1980s, Japan was a guided capitalist society and after the bubble burst, in the early 1990s, Japan entered the period of late-capitalism/post-industrialism. From this perspective, neoliberalism is an extreme form of late-capitalism or post-industrialism. Neoliberalism as an industrial order moved beyond its conventional features – that is, service industries and financial sectors become more and more relevant – as agents of the economy seek themselves as consumers more than workers. Furthermore, the state of the economy causes greater deregulation. Thus, social class in Japan operates in concert with other social formations, including gender and ethnicity. These three features apply to the five different work sectors: finance, industry, government, academia, and entrepreneurship. As sociologist Ishida Hiroshi and anthropologist David Slater point out, “[a]fter the experience of economic recession in Japan, social identity is emerging not as a function of institutional membership, but as a function of the sets of linkages that individuals patch together among those institutions” (2010b: 11–12). For instance, the identity of women in financial services is not shaped from a single institution, but a set of linkages patched together from different institutions. Individuals now pursue degrees in order to create a sense of belonging to a particular social class rather than pursuing a lifetime affiliation to one institution (Muraki 2007; Roberts 2005).

Instead of managing people in a top-down manner, the Koizumi Jun’ichirō administration, between 2001 and 2006, used neoliberal measures, leaving it up to the private sector to increase the birthrate. In order to increase the birthrate, the population needed to be managed economically as well as efficiently. Former Japanese
Prime Minister Koizumi noted that the idea behind this policy was that through adopting these “self-help and independence” methods, the social security system would be restored, at a time when Japan was facing a rapidly declining birthrate and aging population (Konishi 2009: 5–6). Japan is a traditional welfare state in the age of globalization, which creates conflict between striving to be a “competition state” and maintaining an extensive welfare regime (Goodman et al. 1998). However, in comparison to the European welfare state, Japan and the United States stand in stark contrast to other industrialized capitalist nations, as they do not subscribe to a welfare-state model of social support. Japanese politicians emphasized their qualms about the European-style welfare state. Instead they recommended “a mutual fellowship among the people” where families and communities would support each other through “a sense of moral duty,” as Sheldon Garon notes (Borovoy 2010a: 60).

After the economy began to slow down in the 1970s, following the dramatic growth period in the 1950s and 1960s, the Japanese government resorted to previous wells of social welfare.

Unlike the United States and the UK, Japan took a different approach to dealing with the global push toward neoliberal policies. Instead of leaving social outcomes purely to market forces, the Japanese strengthened the conventional institutions of company and family. It was also during that time (the 1970s) that the government emphasized the importance of wives and mothers staying at home, and they were actively discouraged from working outside the house. Over time, when the neoliberal policies from the United States began to have an impact on the world, through the accelerated flows of globalization, Japan was also affected. This process started in the 1980s, and the “Japanese system, which never fully embraced the agenda of free market and self-determination through ‘merit,’ now confront[ed] the demands of global capitalism and neoliberal reform” (Borovoy 2010a: 62). For example, in Japan’s neoliberal economy, manufacturing is disappearing while jobs are moving offshore. In other words, jobs are in flux and therefore social class becomes less prevalent as an analytical tool in understanding social organization. This process, however, is not yet well developed in Japan in comparison to the United States. Neoliberalism offers a more extensive range of lifestyle choices and rewards those with individual ambition. This increase in lifestyle possibilities as well as freedom comes at the expense of stability and security, cornerstones of the Japanese economic miracle. Japan’s debates surrounding neoliberalism offer an important mirror on neoliberalism more broadly: that personal freedom and decision making can produce fair outcomes in the absence of a welfare state and the vigorous management of social life, gender subjectivity, as well as social values.

Several profiles of Japanese professional women illustrate how the neoliberal agenda had an impact on their career development. The women working and entering the job
market in the 1980s and onwards were especially affected by the neoliberal environment. These women's decision to embark on a career was fraught with uncertainty, as both external and internal factors pull back the “self.” The process of the identity formation of a professional woman is dependent on her agency, which is contingent on socioeconomic and political structure.

Changing social inequality

We will now discuss inequality, free-floating individuals, and the way in which social class still matters for gender issues in Japan. Japan's twenty-year recession is seen as a manifestation of the neoliberal economy, and social class discourse provides an analytical framework to understand the social anxieties of current Japanese society (Ishida and Slater 2010a; Roberts 2005). Popular media, as well as academics, have portrayed several social issues as consequences of stratification in Japanese society (Genda 2011; Kingston 2004; Leheny 2006; Sato-2011; Shirahase 2011a; Yamada 2004; Yamada and Ito- 2007; Yamada et al. 2009). These issues include the increase in part-time workers (fur-ita-), NEET (not in education, employment or training), parasite singles, hikikomori (social withdrawal), and school non-attendance (futo- ko-), all of which characterizes them as the consequences of the stratification of Japanese society (kakusa shakai). Ever since the postwar period Japan has been considered a largely middle-class society (Kelly 2002; Upham 1987; Vogel 1963), but with the spread of neoliberalism, and the reconstruction of the old welfare system, the aforementioned social ills are symptoms of deeper problems, such as the restructuring of the economy, increased unemployment rates, and a shift away from lifetime employment to part-time and short-term work (Ishida and Slater 2010b: 7). Because of this largely middle-class consciousness, social class was never seen as a parameter of social scientific analysis in the past. However, with the class gap growing larger and dividing society into winners (kachi-gumi) and losers (make-gumi), social class becomes prevalent again in the study of Japan (Hashimoto 2003; Ishida and Slater 2010a; Roberts 2005; Sato- 2000, 2011; Shirahase 2011a, 2011b; Yamada 2004; Yamada and Ito- 2007; Yamada et al. 2009).

As Ishida and Slater point out, neoliberalism and social class analysis might harbor a seemingly inherent contradiction: on the one hand, in a neoliberal economy, the possibility of production as the basis for social status and identity vanishes, and the marker for class-based identity becomes erased, while on the other hand, consumption and other forms of leisure activities become the main expression of social position. Identity is formed according to social reference points such as gender, ethnicity or other groups of elective affiliation. In that sense, labor politics is substituted for identity politics, and with this profound change, class analysis becomes obsolete in the face of a
split social order and the different ways of establishing one's identity (2010b: 7). In other words, neoliberalism and social class analysis seem to avoid comparison, but this is a misleading contradiction. In a neoliberal environment, individuals tend to have an atomistic existence, acting as "self-entrepreneurs" and standing on their own, while social classes would attempt to lock them into a category that is too linear, and functionalist in a way, to define their social standing. Gender and ethnicity are seemingly more nuanced markers, although social class can still be considered an adequate analytical tool in understanding people's social role in a society.

We need to rethink social class in a more nuanced way but not discard the concept altogether. To understand class in Japan, it must be emphasized that it does not work like gender or race. For instance, educational credentials or a job position are not the same as class, even if they are determining factors of class position. Social class is a complex process and, through globalization fluxes and neoliberal reform, it becomes increasingly complex to disentangle the intricate factors that determine its formation. This is particularly the case in contemporary Japan, as many markers of social order and identity are disappearing (Ishida and Slater 2010b: 12). Thus, the analytical category of "Japanese professional woman" can no longer be examined without relating it to the particular class position these women are in, as

[w]omen's work, consumption, marriage and child-rearing practices today do not form a uniform pattern (if they ever did), and the 'place' of women solely within the context of the male-dominated family increasingly leaves out important parts of gender and family structure, practice and politics.

(Ishida and Slater 2010b: 11)

As the following case studies will show, choices about education, work, and relationships are determined by class structure and gender, as well as the neoliberal economy.

This new neoliberal environment has repercussions on many different levels, one being the development of an "education market," a growing market for certificate qualifications, which creates new opportunities and freedoms for many, such as the possibility for young, talented, and ambitious employees who are promoted according to performance instead of dedication (Borovoy 2010a: 69). The era of lifetime careers, loyalty to one company, and the permanent marriage have passed. With this increased freedom in one's life choices comes a heightened level of anxiety and fear of loneliness, inadequacy, unemployment, and the constant struggle to remain employable (Borovoy 2010b; Alexy and Gershon 2011; Hendry 1981; Muraki 2007; Wallulis 1998).

The shift in American social life in the 1970s also took place in Japan, only a decade later, in the 1980s (Wallulis 1998). These pervasive changes in Japan affected all layers
of Japanese society, as well as both genders, but we will focus on the impact that the new neoliberal environment had on professional women. In this new globalized and neoliberal environment young Japanese women are trying to understand what they need in order to survive in a new environment. These women were eager to collect as many educational qualifications as possible. Many mentioned a phenomenon of double-schooling (daburu suku-ru) to prepare for the requirements of the new market. Those women who are now in their forties and early fifties were affected by this changed environment and recalled it as a time of competing with one another: who had accumulated the most certificates? Those in their twenties and thirties were also affected by this ideology of “ability-ism” (Borovoy 2010b: 174). The women in their forties were affected differently by these sudden changes in requirements, as they were the first generation to experience a new environment while making the transition from school to work (Okano 1993).

This system clearly favors merit over seniority, and this is exactly the shift we can observe in Japanese companies. The seniority system has been slowly but steadily giving way to meritocracy to account for the new requirements of a neoliberal environment. The impact of the Japanese seniority and meritocratic systems on women’s careers is quite significant, as the system that rewards performance is more likely to recognize women’s contributions than one that rewards loyalty (Allison 1994; Ho 2012). Despite the fact that the meritocratic system is conducive to developing the female career track, women continue to face difficulties in establishing lifelong careers, as other corporate frameworks are not in place. The meritocratic system opens the door for women, yet it also punishes them once they have established themselves in the field. It gives the illusion of a more female-friendly work environment but once women gain access the career track is not laid out like the equivalent track for men.

Establishing a career in Japan is still a labyrinth for women to navigate through. The obstacles that Japanese women are faced with are particularly daunting (Sakuragi 2006). Thus, neoliberal ideology expands educational and employment opportunities for women, while undermining stability and permanency. Women are both empowered and endangered: they can finally be recognized as individuals despite the fact that the same stability that men enjoy does not exist for women in the changing environment of neoliberalism. In other words, in a neoliberal environment, everything becomes fluid while the permanence that men enjoy is denied to women.

Neoliberal restructuring has had a variable impact on different sectors of the economy; the financial and industrial sectors have been most affected, but it is also reshaping universities. Needless to say, the impermanence of the neoliberal environment also affects temporary workers (haken shain), part-time workers, and laid-off workers. How do these professional women negotiate new gender norms at a social nexus that blurs the boundaries between male and female gender expectations? We will examine the
flexibility and individuality required to form self-identity in light of the high value placed on relational ties in Japanese society.

For women working in financial services – more so than in any other career – the pressure to integrate work and life is linked to the high turnover and the impermanence of the work environment. Ho describes the lives of Wall Street investment bankers as "liquid" (2009: 249), and the hectic lifestyles of these women are reminiscent of a *bricolage*, reflecting this condition as they struggle to reconcile work and family obligations. The anthropologist Miyazaki Hirokazu writes about Japanese proprietary traders’ sense of

‘being behind’ the global changes spurred by financial markets (Miyazaki 2003, 256, 261). To unpack this ‘lagging’ temporality, ... [he] analyzes their engagement with the market in multiple registers: their particular trading strategies, individual life trajectories, Japanese corporate culture, and a national temporal location and identity of needing to 'catch up' with the United States.

(Ho 2009: 250)

Similarly, the Japanese professional women working in financial services constantly feel they are running behind. As opposed to their North American investment banker counterparts, they are not the market but behind the market (Ho 2009: 250). Financial services in the United States is a particularly difficult place to work. In Japan this sector is equally tough to navigate and it is especially challenging for women to develop a career.

Compared to the financial sector, industry, entrepreneurship, government, and academia are less fast-paced and erratic for job promotion and relocation, usually following a more conventional career pattern (Marcus 1983; Moeran 2005). However, regardless of the sector, these professional women attempt to fashion a well-rounded life that can provide them with a fulfilling career without having to sacrifice everything else. The "illusory" nature of neoliberalism – akin to the paradox of Max Weber’s "iron cage" – can be understood as a form of chimera. The very system that made these women believe they had endless possibilities and freedoms ensnared them with false promises (Alexy and Gershon 2011). In other words, actors construct the system yet they are themselves controlled by it, at the same time feeling alienated from their creation:

[it]it has been part of the genius of neoliberal theory to provide a benevolent mask full of wonderful-sounding words like freedom, liberty, choice, and rights, to hide the grim realities of the restoration or reconstruction of naked class power, locally as well as transnationally, but most particularly in the main financial centres of global capitalism.

(Harvey 2005: 119)
The recent focus on the developmental drive of China and other booming countries, such as Brazil, Russia, and India, has shifted much of the social science research away from Japan. Ensnared in two decades of economic stagnation, Japan no longer seems to threaten the preeminence of the United States. The devastation caused by the March 2011 Tohoku earthquake and tsunami is likely to delay the economic and moral recovery even further. As Ishida and Slater discuss in their edited volume, social class was never given much attention in Japanese studies research, although it might become prevalent as the advanced industrial society of Japan struggles with the consequences of economic downturn. The chapters in Ishida and Slater’s book discuss the topic of social class from different angles using the historian Ira Katznelson's four levels of class: "capitalist economic development,” “social organization of society,” "lived experience,” and "collective action based on shared motivation” (Ishida and Slater 2010b: 15). The common belief is that postwar Japan was an almost exclusively middle-class society, based on a rigorous educational system of meritocracy, regardless of socioeconomic background. Japanese scholars rejected social class as a parameter to analyze Japanese society because it introduces Marxism to interpret a non-Western social system. As Japan continues to struggle economically its society is drifting apart dividing the middle-class into two camps: (kachi-gumi) and (make-gumi) (Sato 2000, 2011; Shirahase 2011a, 2011b). The social panic this could cause might be most pertinent to the middle, upper-middle and upper classes when their children cannot find the kinds of jobs their parents thought were meaningful to pursue, such as lifetime employment at a large company.

This book focuses on neoliberalism’s contradictory effects on the lives of professional women. As I have shown, neoliberalism in Japan has repercussions at many different levels. Together with the “four class dynamics,” as Ishida and Slater explain, “class structure, selection, socialization and strategies” (2010b: 27) allow us to better understand the complex dynamics between them. In my research sample of 120 women, ranging in age from 23 to 94, we can clearly see how these women's careers proceeded from a largely middle-class society in the postwar period of the Second World War to a neoliberal economy in the 1990s. Accordingly, the trajectories of these women's careers reflect the transition from a largely middle-class society based on the welfare system of the company and family to a society that is torn by neoliberal ideology (Ueno 1982, 2009). These women were establishing careers in the financial, industrial, entrepreneurial, government, and academic sectors during vastly different time periods; this analysis will show how both the changing structure of social inequality and neoliberal ideology have an impact on these women's lives.
Constrained agency and agentive constraints

Social class and ethnic background, as well as gender, are some of the structural forces that guide these Japanese women in their choice of education, work, and family (Fukuzawa and LeTendre 2001; Okano 2009). The majority of women in the research sample, regardless of their age, had permanent full-time jobs or were already retired. To contextualize these women’s socioeconomic backgrounds and understand their choices of education and career tracks one must analyze how economic, social, cultural and symbolic capital are manifest in their lives. Bourdieu’s concepts of habitus and capital help unpack the processes of meaning creation and give us insight into the cultural workings of these women’s lives. His nuanced methodology of analyzing classes and class fractions aims to unpack the multi-layered relational ties between class and classification. Moreover, his discussion of economic capital and cultural capital plays a crucial role in illustrating how the educational capital varies. Bourdieu proposes that social change starts with the state, for the state reproduces orthodoxy. He also questions the limits of the state, arguing that economic realignment shapes cultural practice.

In his work on Distinction, Bourdieu (1984) argues that the choice of lifestyles is based on tastes and that tastes are the primary markers of social status. Differences in taste are related to particular positions in the social class structure. He draws the rather deterministic conclusion that social classes reproduce themselves and discusses the misrecognition – not false consciousness – that lies at the center of this dynamic. His configurations and re-configurations of power structures are limitless, and he does not deny the possibility that there is room for deviation from the standard as there is both intra- and inter-mobility among the social classes.

Habitus is a dynamic “system of structured, structuring dispositions” (Bourdieu 1980: 52), converting the dichotomy of social positions into antithetical structuring and perception (Bourdieu 1984: 172). Thus, habitus forms systems of disposition shared by individuals in the same social position, dictating the conversion of objectively definable differences in the social space – that is, the characteristic signs of distinction in everyday life. Integrated into the dispositional system of habitus is taste, the feature that both classifies and is classified. Bourdieu explains that the social sphere is defined by a three-dimensional space: the “volume of capital,” the “composition of capital,” and the “change in these two properties over time” (Bourdieu 1984: 114). Uniting the objective and subjective elements, habitus transforms social imperatives into schemes of cognition, thought, and action. These schemes build a system of dispositions that limit the actions of every social actor. Thus, the habitus predetermines the social frame within which every individual can act, yet a limitless number of combinations within it are possible. However, regardless of these limitations, habitus cannot be dismissed as a
deterministic concept. Habitus is also transferable to other social situations. The newly acquired behavioral pattern is always subsumed into a systematic scheme that applies to all other social codes of practice. The systematic configuration that arises is the expression of differences that constitute the basis of all lifestyles: “each class condition is defined, simultaneously, by its intrinsic properties and by the relational properties which it derives from its position in the system of class conditions” and “by everything which distinguishes it from what it is not and especially from everything it is opposed to; social identity is defined and asserted through difference” (Bourdieu 1984: 170–172).

This book borrows Bourdieu’s concept of habitus and capital to create an analytical framework to develop trends relating to the life choices made by these Japanese white-collar professional women and to analyze the conversion of economic, social, and cultural capital. I examine the structure and formation of these career women’s habitus – how they have developed a white-collar professional ethos and set of experiences that frame and empower them. In other words, habitus and capital is determined and determines the work sector and timing of their career. In advanced societies, such as Japan, the social sphere is subdivided into particular fields that comprise their own norms and regulations. Bourdieu identifies four types of capital: cultural, economic, social, and symbolic. Cultural capital unites knowledge, skills, and other cultural acquisitions, serving as a “society’s symbolic resources in religion, philosophy, art, and science” (Bourdieu 1977: 187). Economic capital includes both financial and material resources, while social capital describes accumulated resources through affiliation in a particular group. Finally, symbolic capital, “which in the form of the prestige and renown attached to a family and a name is readily convertible back into economic capital” (Bourdieu 1977: 179). Symbolic capital is

a transformed and thereby disguised form of physical ‘economic’ capital, produces its proper effect inasmuch, and only inasmuch, as it conceals the fact that it originates in ‘material’ forms of capital which are also, in the last analysis, the source of its effects.

(Bourdieu 1977: 183)

In short, symbolic capital is the unconscious expression of cultural, economic, and social capital without people being aware of it.

The social sphere is marked by constant struggles played out within, not between, social classes. Within a social sphere, vertical movements – “upwards or downwards” – relocate resources from the cultural to the economic capital and vice versa. However, these relocations do not necessarily have to occur in horizontal movements (i.e. on the same level of capital) (Bourdieu 1984: 131). According to Bourdieu, the strongest
catalyst for change within the social sphere is the educational system. The social actors
win their designated affiliation with a social class not simply by holding a certain
combination of economic and cultural capital. Instead, Bourdieu combines the
economic and cultural capital model with different forms of lifestyle, defined by
distinctive behavioral patterns and tastes. Having certain combinations of economic
and cultural capital and leading a particular kind of lifestyle are characteristic of a
particular social class.

Social positions are related to particular preferences and practices, as

the dominant class constitutes a relatively autonomous space whose structure is
defined by the distribution of economic and cultural capital among its members,
each class fraction being characterized by a certain configuration of this
distribution to which there corresponds a certain life-style, through mediation of
the habitus.

(Bourdieu 1984: 260)

Thus, *habitus* is the connecting link between social space and lifestyle space as
individuals internalize their social structures. Although social markers provide objective
capital, *habitus* is incorporated capital; in other words,

the dialectic of conditions and habitus is the basis of an alchemy which transforms
the distribution of capital, the balance-sheet of a power relation, into a system of
perceived differences, distinctive properties, that is, a distribution of symbolic
capital, legitimate capital, whose objective truth is misrecognized.

(Bourdieu 1984: 172)

Bourdieu divides society into social spaces, using the term *class* in a specific way to
demonstrate how the distinction between a person's economic and cultural capital
manifests in his or her life, such as choice of occupation and lifestyle. Social class is
defined as one's position within the social structure and one's trajectory within that
structure, regardless of whether one is rising or falling. For example, members in the
same occupation and income group represent different patterns of taste according to
their academic backgrounds. Bourdieu's suggestion that “class habitus ... [is] the system
of dispositions (partially) common to all products of the same structures” (Bourdieu
1977: 85) implies that everyone has the same experiences, yet members of the same
class are more likely to have had similar experiences. Within a particular social class,
people strive to differentiate themselves from each other; however, their options for
combining and recombining patterns of *habitus* are limited by the boundaries of their
own social class.

Drawing from Bourdieu's work *Distinction*, we will discuss how the women's education,
income, and residence influence differentiation between cultural and economic capital. First we will discuss what counts as economic, social, and cultural capital in Japan and then evaluate how gender and education influence these three types of capital. Before the mid-1980s, when most Japanese women were not yet focused on pursuing professional careers, economic capital was primarily linked to income differences and was mainly male oriented, while cultural capital was predominantly female. The lifetime employment system guaranteed men a steady development of economic capital, while women had the time to pursue activities – both before and after their marriage – thus developing their cultural capital, such as ikebana (flower arrangement), shodo- (calligraphy) or sado- (tea ceremony).

Anthropologist Brian McVeigh also uses Bourdieu to explain the ethnomorality of etiquette at a Japanese women’s junior college:

In Japan, attention to details of dress, bearing, and manners form part of an ethnomorality of etiquette. The central role of etiquette can be better appreciated if the seken is appreciated ... [w]hat one wears, does, and says – and how one does these things, are carefully monitored by observing others.

(1995: 36)

However, men and women did not exclusively rely on each of these forms of capital; women were also accumulating economic capital and men were developing cultural capital, although to a lesser extent. For instance, when women were forced to quit work after giving birth and subsequently returned to the workforce in a part-time job, they were accumulating economic capital – albeit to a much smaller extent than contemporary women who are on a professional career track.

Moreover, we will also evaluate how the neoliberal ideology has impacted Bourdieu’s concept of habitus and capital. In a neoliberal environment, the structuring structures of habitus are no longer rigid, and the concept of taste – which helps mark social classes and is necessary to maintain distinction – is no longer fixed. It is more difficult to read habitus. This book analyzes what counts as capital and habitus in a neoliberal environment and how they manifest in the lives of the career women. Depending on the sector in which these women are working, the concepts of capital and habitus change accordingly; this book shows how to interpret the old paradigms in a neoliberal environment. For instance, to what extent does the neoliberal ideology blur the lines between economic, social, and cultural capital? Are these different types of capital largely interdependent yet at the same time independent, depending on the analytical perspective? Or do capital and habitus essentially remain the same and only their manifestations appear different in a neoliberal environment?

With the collapse of the lifetime employment system in Japan and with more and more
women pursuing careers, women are increasingly building economic capital (Shinotsuka 2004). They have less free time to pursue cultural activities, meaning their cultural capital is likely going to decrease, compared to previous generations. However, thanks to higher levels of education, their cultural capital might also be relatively high, as they most likely engaged in many cultural activities during college, professional or graduate school. Such cultural capital can serve as a catalyst for their economic capital, because, for example, it could improve their chances of getting a promotion. For instance, practicing the tea ceremony or social dancing becomes part of these women’s habitus; such skills might indirectly manifest in their working environment, such as body posture and an overall demeanor, becoming a self-enforcing mechanism as their cultural capital helps improve their economic capital (Chiba 2011). As Ho explains in her ethnography about North American investment bankers,

Bourdieu’s models are prescient: these everyday practices of anxious deal-making and performance of smartness and market immediacy serve as the link between habitus and field, between the cultural structures and habits, anchored in individual’s and group’s bodies and minds, and the larger ‘fields’ of social relations in the world.

(2009: 12; see also Moenan 2005)

Therefore, we will analyze the way in which the interplay between habitus and capital shapes the professional and private lives of these white-collar Japanese executives. To better understand these dynamics, we will examine how capital volume, the amount of resources available, capital composition, and the combination of cultural and economic assets are changing because women are pursuing lifelong professional careers. Large-scale corporate restructurings in contemporary Japan are not only brought about by internal machinations of company policies but also by the very habitus of its employees, both male and female. Specifically, the habitus of white-collar professional women is helping to lead companies and other institutions, such as universities, to restructure accommodation for the increase in female employees aspiring for lifelong careers. Lastly, we will discuss the possible shortcomings of applying Bourdieu’s concept of habitus and capital to a neoliberal environment, as the neoliberal ideology influences the manifestations of economic and cultural capital.

Notes

1 Ong’s strongest point is the state–economy relationship, although her concept of citizenship is more relevant for the Chinese Diaspora. Therefore, in contrast to Harvey, Ong is talking more about political citizenship than economic neoliberalism. She has made a number of pertinent points, the thrust of her analysis being the notion of citizenship, which is not so relevant for my analysis.
2 "Parasite singles" and "gap-widening society" were terms coined by sociologist Yamada Masahiro.

3 It is also important to note that changes in the social class structure in postwar Japan are much larger than in the United States or Germany, explains Ishida (2010b: 41). Nakane Chie, as Ishida and Slater point out, "argued against the development of any horizontal segmentation of society, such as class, and instead for a society based on the vertical integration of institutional order" (2010b: 5).

4 He discusses a broad range of topics, including aesthetic choices and disposition, the changing of cultural patterns, and the formation of taste in French society during the 1960s.

5 Bourdieu's concepts of habitus and capital lend a comprehensive insight into the specificities of French societal structures, but the theoretical framework of his work can also be applied to other societies, such as that of Japan.

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What is the Rashomon Effect?
Chapter 3. What is the Rashomon Effect?

Robert Anderson

At the conclusion of Rashomon people commonly say that the film is about the differences in perspective found in diverse accounts of a single event. They then call this the Rashomon effect. This chapter examines the common difference-in-perspective version of the Rashomon effect, a version that occurs in cognition, epistemology, anthropology, psychology, sociology, communication and other social sciences, and in legal studies. Because so many viewers miss other key ingredients that contribute equally to the Rashomon effect (arising from the film), I concluded that the effect needs a clearer analysis, one that emerges from the film itself. My purpose here is to remind us of the intellectual complexity which Kurosawa, inspired by Akutagawa, has set before us. Can we see freshly those very ingredients in the film that many of us forget to acknowledge? Can we go beyond popular readings of Rashomon which seem curiously incomplete? And finally, what precisely is the Rashomon effect? This essay addresses these important questions in order to better establish its full power as an intellectual concept.

Over the past ten years I have asked roughly four hundred students (in a university in western Canada) about their reaction to seeing Rashomon for the first time, and in speech and writing most of them zoom in on one crucial dimension of the film thus overlooking others. The Rashomon effect, most say when asked immediately after viewing it, is the differences in perspective concerning a single event or process.¹ A few others proposed that the Rashomon effect appears where the facts are not known, and consequently varying (typically called unfactual) versions of events are put into circulation by participants or witnesses. Some of these viewers go so far as to claim that these differences in perspective (and the Rashomon effect) undermine the world of facts. Finally, a considerable number of student viewers’ interpretations involve the idea that one of the four main narratives is the truth and the others are therefore lies, and that although one character is not lying, the others are. This prompts a curious search for the most plausible account of the incident. Though not entirely wrongheaded, these common interpretations of Rashomon diminish the power of both the film and the Rashomon effect. Moreover, these kinds of response mislead viewers of the film who then forget to acknowledge its most important insight. If we examine some of the film’s ingredients that are overlooked, because only when taken together do all these ingredients constitute the effect named after Rashomon and allow us to see its most powerful expression, it will thus become clear how the concept of a Rashomon effect entered our language.
At the outset, however, it is crucial to say that there really are at least two Rashomon effects arising in and from the film. The first Rashomon effect, usually forgotten by scholars, is the one experienced by first-time viewers of the film: surrounded by the relentless Bolero music, the sound of heavy rain around the gate, the bright sparkling sunlight and shade in the forest, the sudden and subtle switches in the stories, the power of the superb acting. This is a story grounded in twelfth-century Japan and then filmed and edited for screening in 1950, which is a long way back for twenty-first century viewers. Yet, in terms of technique and engagement, few experiences lasting eighty-eight minutes are as memorable. No amount of post-film theorizing about epistemology diminishes the effect of seeing Rashomon for the first time. That is an effect I have seen over and over again in susceptible and attentive audiences. We should try to recall the effect when it was first shown in 1950 in Japan and 1951 in Venice, an aesthetic appreciation which arises again and again more than sixty-five years later.2

The second and subsequent Rashomon effect is the one I am focusing on here; it is the naming of an epistemological framework – or ways of thinking, knowing and remembering – required for understanding complex and ambiguous situations on the small and large scale, in both the routines of everyday life and in its extraordinary moments. The second Rashomon effect is probably universal in our experience, and that adds to the globalizing and proliferating tendencies of the term. Of course here I speak of the two effects together because they arise together, but one should remember their distinctiveness. I shall also point out a distinction between a strong version of the effect and a weak version of the effect, thus salvaging some parts of the popular level of the film’s reception.

It is intriguing to speculate where the term Rashomon effect originates, though it may be impossible to settle this question to everyone’s satisfaction, beyond disagreement. In 1988 anthropologist Karl Heider wrote about a Pacific Islands discussion group called the Rashomon Sessions which he coordinated from 1980 to 1984 at the meetings of the Association for Social Anthropology in Oceania. He refers to a lineage of remarks there about Rashomon, some of which had been made in passing by others in 1978 and 1979; those earlier remarks showed him, he said, that there was sufficient interest in inviting people to sessions at anthropological meetings in the following four years. Heider concluded that the Rashomon effect, in that period around 1980, was ‘a phrase whose anthropological time has come’ (1988: 73). Journalist Valeria Alia reports that she used the phrase in the late 1970s and that it was then incorporated in her 1996 book on journalism ethics and truth telling (Wikipedia 2014). D.P. Martinez seems to have been thinking about the idea while an anthropology student at the University of Chicago in 1982 (2009: xi). My own understanding of its origins arises much earlier, upon hearing my respected teacher, Nur Yalman, say to us in a class in early 1966 at the
University of Chicago that ‘anthropology’s main problem is to deal with the Rashomon effect’. Unlike some graduate students in that room in Chicago, I had seen the film in 1961 or 1962, so this remark crystallized something that had been lurking for five years in my memory, but was still unformed and unnamed: that something was the realization of just how complex my experience of the film’s unfolding had been, without me being clear minded about it. I suspect the Rashomon effect has shown up in many historic intellectual undertakings that deal with contested interpretations of events or with disagreements and evidence for them, or with subjectivity/objectivity, memory and perception. A pertinent example is the long poem called The Ring and the Book by Robert Browning (published in 1868–9, which he based upon a published copy of official written court testimonies in an Italian murder trial from the seventeenth century); the narrator describes from multiple angles the 1698 murder of an Italian countess and her whole family, and there are other versions of these events from different voices. I recall Browning to demonstrate that the Rashomon effect is not a modernist conceit and is, in this particular case, over one hundred and forty-five years old.

**What is Rashomon all about?**

The first ingredient of the film is that there is a fact, namely the body of a man in the forest. This is not just any fact, but a compelling fact. Societies expect answers to the question posed by this kind of fact, if not immediately then certainly in due time. There is pressure for an answer, pressure for closure. In Rashomon the fact of the body is so compelling that a witness and all principal participants are brought before a judge, over whose shoulder Kurosawa’s camera is watching. This is not just any body, but a noble samurai’s body. However, the descriptions of the fact and interpretations of it differ both subtly and systematically. The second ingredient is that these interpretative differences are wrapped in long narratives, each carefully cultivated by the teller to give us his or her version of truth. Each of these four narratives communicates the interests of the teller. But they don’t offer us a position from which to negotiate agreement or disagreement with them. Kurosawa and cameraman Kazuo Miyagawa are too economical with the evidence and do not enable the viewer to take any such superior position.

Kurosawa’s film oscillates between dialogue about the incident in the forest, and negotiation among the three actors present at the scene. The dialogue in the rain under the half-destroyed gate among the monk, the woodcutter and the commoner is constructed for three voices: the voice of idealism (high Buddhist culture of compassion, the monk’s tale), the voice of an eyewitness (the humble woodcutter’s two slightly different tales) and the voice of a skeptical realist (a commoner who also ducks
in to escape the rain) who, while he interrupts the others with his questions, keeps himself warm by breaking off parts of the gate and lighting a small fire.³ The conversation between them is intense but still somewhat detached. This could be an allegorical dialogue that could be taken by audiences to be about issues such as the Japanese decision to go to war with the United States in 1941, the dropping of the Allied atomic bombs on Japan in 1945, the rightness of US-imposed reforms in 1946–9 in Japan, or even the removal of clothing from an abandoned baby. But on the surface the film is a dialogue about the probable cause and implications of a twelfth-century nobleman’s death. It is, after all, a historic period film based on Akutagawa’s stories, in turn based on twelfth-century stories from the famous Konjaku anthology. The 1950 Japanese audience would have understood these meta-level allegories, and twenty-first century viewers will supply their own references even if they are unaware of the 1950s context.

On the other hand, the negotiation in the forest is more concrete and not at all detached – ‘kill him’ the lady urges the bandit in one version, pointing to her husband, then ‘kill me’ the lady urges the bandit in another. Both the negotiation to pretend to fight and the decision to end the play fight with a duel to the death are reached without words. The power of the film is to show how both dialogue and negotiation work in a dialectic process, and lead the innocent viewer to apprehend the Rashomon effect in the very complexity that the actors/characters themselves experienced it. It is their apprehension that is translated into numerous other (non-film) situations, and that is why the film provides a name for the complex effect which has long been known, but not named until recently.

Each account of the samurai’s death is both coherent and plausible; the effect lies in that the death of the nobleman is the responsibility of a different person in each narrative and each account appears equally plausible. Remember that no warning is given to the innocent viewer; nothing is suggested during the woodcutter’s first story that there will be other stories, or that there will be reasons to later doubt the woodcutter. Then suddenly, twenty-two minutes later, the viewer is thrust into another version of the same incident. It is important for someone who has seen the film many times to remember that the innocent viewer sees Rashomon for the first time only once, and that after that one viewing of the film a naïve reading is no longer available. It is remarkable how much engagement and intrigue are experienced by second- and third-time viewers who have nevertheless lost forever the element of surprise and disturbance that is essential in the first screening.⁴

Though coherent and plausible, each account is different in a crucial sense – the mode of the death. The bandit confesses he finally killed the samurai after a lengthy sword duel. The wife thinks she may have fallen upon her husband’s roped body when she
fainted in remorse arising from their dishonor. She says to the judge: ‘I killed my own husband. I was violated by the robber … Neither conscious nor unconscious … I stabbed the small sword through the lilac-colored kimono into his breast.’ The dead man, channeled through a spirit medium, described how he took his own life in dignity, using his wife’s jeweled dagger which she dropped, after seeing what he thinks is the infidelity of his very beautiful wife. And the woodcutter describes the bandit suddenly and impulsively killing the nobleman after a playful sword skirmish in front of the woman. Having stabbed the nobleman, the bandit runs after the woman but does not catch her.

Read another way, each tale revolves around the samurai’s wife, given that the original first causal move, for the entire set of stories, was how the bandit was awakened in the glade by the play of bright sunlight on his eyes, thus breaking his nap under a tree. As the samurai guided his wife’s horse through the forest, a gentle breeze raised the clothing covering her ankles, and the bandit glimpsed a hint of her sensual body and fell under her spell. Everything else followed from that powerful intersection of sunlight, charm and desire. Her disadvantage and vulnerability are the starting premise of each narrative, but evolve differently from there. She is not portrayed as helpless, even though she acts out that condition skillfully. As Martinez suggests, ‘the beautiful wife is not silent (a great virtue for Japanese women), and she is possibly not virtuous either’ (2009, 39). This is how fact and interpretation are inextricably linked in *Rashomon*.

There is one other fact presented, and that is the bandit’s sexual advance to the woman (who is married to the nobleman), but this fact is more equivocal. Most viewers conclude that the sexuality of the two, however interpreted, resonates with the death of the man. This sexual episode, whatever it is called, leads the viewer ineluctably to the body of the dead samurai. What gets frequent attention is the embrace and kiss leading to an advance, an assault or a rape occurring between the lady and the bandit. This set of different scenes is not essential to the Rashomon effect but, if anything, is an example of it. The popular memory of seeing *Rashomon*, constructed mostly by male critics, tends to focus more on the death of the samurai than on the experience of the woman. Viewers see this scene variously as the lady’s calculated and brave strategy to prevail over the bandit and limit the risk to her person and/or her husband; as the lady’s authentic, personal and spontaneous sexual response to the bandit’s advances; as the lady’s reluctant submission to the bandit’s desire leading to her inability to fight off his assault; or finally as the bandit’s forceful assault or rape of the resistant noblewoman. The firmness with which many viewers report that an assault or rape occurred is quite striking, when in fact different versions and interpretations of this encounter are carefully presented by Kurosawa. We do not know enough to say this sexual contact would constitute, in modern terms, second-degree rape or some other
type – modern legal rape classification systems hinge on degrees of force used, physical injury experienced, confinement, etc. Kurosawa offers no evidence other than her shame in one or two of the narratives. Feminist legal scholar Orit Kamir wrote about her students who had seen Rashomon, and also about her friends ‘who resisted the film’s invitation ... to see an unconventional gender narrative of excluded voices .... [which appears] when we read the film against itself.5 In this book we have Janice Matsumura’s observation that very soft sanctions against rape were common in Japan in 1950, noting that it was socially significant only when it exposed and embarrassed the very men who were supposed to prevent it from occurring. Other men, and many women in Japan, appear to have understood sexual assault as a mild aberration of normal female-male relations.

The camera angles, the length of shots, the movement of hands and heads all enable us to draw quite different inferences about this sexual episode in the four narratives. In his ‘Film Style and Narration in Rashomon’, Nick Redfern uses time series and multiple correspondence analyses to prove that the four retellings differ not only in content but in form as well. According to Redfern, shifts in pacing and cinematographic technique between retellings indicate each narrator’s relative narrative agency, positioning them as either active or passive participants in the sequence. While he concedes that his analysis ‘does not solve the epistemological problem at the core of the film’, Redfern’s analysis provides new insight into its formal construction, revealing that the film’s narrative ambiguities owe much to Kurosawa’s nuanced approach to each narrative (n.d.: 12).6 The Rashomon effect directs an audiences’ attention to these subtle differences. In the lady’s and woodcutter’s versions there is no embrace or kiss. In the husband’s version the lady goes off with the bandit willingly, but with no embrace or kiss, but bearing a look of beauty, which greatly disturbed the husband nonetheless. In the bandit’s version the kiss is most important. This is an example of the Rashomon effect.

**The Rashomon narratives and doubt**

Kurosawa’s great skill is that he offers no evidence at all by which the viewer may disqualify any of the narratives. Even the eyewitness, usually a privileged narrator in most societies, is found to be only as plausible as the others. Importantly, a doubt about the woodcutter’s story is deliberately introduced, so that this eyewitness version cannot be found superior to the others. And the bandit has proudly confessed to killing the nobleman after a sexual encounter with his wife, mentioning at the same time his numerous other previous crimes.

While there is much else that is important, these are the elements of the film that
belong in the usual differences of perspective account of it. Because differences in perspective are ubiquitous, and the Rashomon effect is not, it cannot be these differences alone which establish the Rashomon effect. In contrast, I suggest that it is the conjunction of these elements, plus their strong interaction, that make up the Rashomon effect. That means the Rashomon effect is a combination of a difference of perspective and equally plausible accounts, with the absence of evidence to elevate one above others, with the inability to disqualify any particular version of the truth, all surrounded by the social pressure for closure on the question. This convergence is presented to us through Kurosawa’s stark minimalism in the different accounts of the events in the forest glade. It is not simply the viewer’s conclusion about this minimalism; it has to be each participant’s conclusion too. Although the power of the Rashomon effect is said to hit the observer and bystander strongly, experience of it is not restricted to them. Indeed, it affects the participants in this incident too, revealing itself to them sooner or later, often with great inconvenience to them. This uncertainty is inextricably woven into the certainty of the fact (the man’s body, in this case) around which the Rashomon effect usually takes shape.

The conclusion reached by a viewer, if any, must be inconclusive. Except for the persistent fact of the nobleman’s body, lying in the forest, punctured by a blade – coupled with the expectation that there will eventually be closure around it – there is nothing more to rely on. The camera sitting over the judge’s shoulder reminds us of that. The Rashomon effect draws listeners in, participants and observers alike, and they all slowly discover themselves in it. The absence of forensic evidence to help us assign cause is poignant, as it is in the case of many compelling situations. Although the judgment reached may not be logically satisfactory, it must be socially and legally satisfactory. It must be decisive even if it is not beyond reasonable doubt. Although the bandit’s and woodcutter’s stories implicate the bandit, the other two accounts do not. The judge must judge among these accounts, even if only to acquit the bandit. But when involved in the murder of a nobleman, a bandit seldom fares well – so there will be a judgment.

All this shows that significant differences occur in the narratives, and that many viewers of the film do not remember these differences when the film is over. This narrowing of focus and forgetting of key ingredients, pointed out by numerous studies of memory by psychologists, are curious in the context of a film that so powerfully opposes narrowing, selective forgetting, and early closure. This common reaction reminds us that those who really experience the Rashomon effect are not necessarily comfortable with its implications. Indeed, as is common in most legal process, they might prefer a method by which to undermine one or more of the accounts, privilege another, and arrive at a more satisfactory conclusion than the one they think the film offered them.
Is there any use waiting for some new evidence to come along to satisfy us and permit satisfactory closure? While it is true we often do wait or should wait for this evidence, in the presence of the Rashomon effect such waiting would be futile, because no more evidence is forthcoming, at least not during this period of pressure for closure. This is why the Rashomon effect enters our ordinary daily lives. We are all faced with puzzling situations where a difference of perspective arises yet the absence of forensic and decisive evidence thwarts a satisfactory conclusion. Something else then emerges, something much less satisfactory. The emergence of differences of perspective alone would not endow the Rashomon effect with such power; after all, aren’t differences in perspective quite commonplace? No, it is its conjunction with other ingredients mentioned above, such as pressure for closure, etc., that makes it so powerful. This is one reason that judges say they see the Rashomon effect all the time, namely that the evidence is variable, even when provided by otherwise reliable observers/truth-tellers. They too see the effect without always remembering that they are part of the pressure for closure.?

But what is compelling about the facts in Rashomon? Ask yourself whether this story would have become legendary if the body in the forest had been the bandit’s body? Cinematically this might have been quite effective, but would either of the other two principals (the samurai or his wife) have claimed responsibility for killing him? Would the dead man’s spirit accept responsibility for his own death, as the nobleman does speaking through the spirit medium? Socially we know that the judge listens carefully to the testimonies because this nobleman’s body is more important than a bandit’s. Of course, the bandit’s body would have been important to his competitors, and to his loved ones or relatives (he says he is not married), and more probably to his former victims. But socially – in the twelfth century as in the mid-twentieth century when Kurosawa made the film – most bandits commanded more fear than respect. What if the body had been the lady’s body? How compelling would that be?

I raise these hypothetical questions to remind us that the Rashomon effect does not occur just anywhere. It is not simply the absence of facts that brings it into being, nor simply the appearance of different versions of the truth. Moreover the absence of facts does not itself produce different versions of the truth. The Rashomon effect occurs where interests, culture and power converge to fix our attention on closure, to propel us to ask for explanations, and to expect to get them, and soon. When elements of authority are involved, such as judges representing the state, these expectations are more tangible. That is what I mean here by compelling. Yet the other ingredients of the effect have to be present, in a strongly interacting relationship.

The appearance of a film’s name for a cognitive and cultural phenomenon (the Rashomon effect), known in many cultures for a very long time, is therefore a good
measure of the reception and acceptance of Kurosawa's work. Subjects so widely separated as groups in conflict with the state over the consequences of toxic waste buried in a canal in northern New York State and the evolution of Israeli fiction writing have come within the analytic and viewing framework of *Rashomon* (these and other examples are shown in the accompanying Appendix I The Rashomon effect in the social sciences). Kurosawa and his producers, admirers and critics could not have imagined such an influence out of all proportion with the film's original intention, and nor could I.

**How is the Rashomon effect experienced?**

In November 2000 I sat in the Supreme Court of British Columbia listening to a case of alleged assault and wrongful dismissal in the workplace. The assault turned out to be mostly pushing and shoving, accompanied by harsh language. The judge, having heard the evidence, asked the prosecutor to sum up the accounts of the two principals (employee and employer). The lawyer for the defence nodded concurrence with this summing up when it was concluded. My notes are verbatim:

> So there are two versions Mr. Watson? Yes My Lady, two versions, only two. And nothing to allow us to confirm either one of them, Mr. Watson? Nothing, apparently, My Lady. Thank you counsel. [Judge shakes her head, and then says, muttering the first sentence in a lower voice.] Just like *Rashomon*. I must rule an acquittal. The case is dismissed.⁸

Notwithstanding this remark, and the presence of Kurosawa's camera looking over the judge-prosecutor's shoulder in the Japanese magistrate's compound, we must avoid the impression that the Rashomon effect appears only in judicial form. As one person, now an accountant, said to me, years after seeing the film for the first time, 'it is everywhere, I just hadn’t understood it so clearly.' It may be that many judges also think that their references to *Rashomon* are mainly in memory of the difference-in-perspective interpretation of the film, and that they, too (being closer to it), do not acknowledge the other key ingredients in the evidence before them. This case of wrongful dismissal mentioned above was hardly as pressing as a murder. I mention this to stress that we expect to find the Rashomon effect in many spheres of life, not just juridical, and not just those concerning heavy facts such as a body in a forest. Processes or incidents which arouse little interest other than among immediate participants are nevertheless the sites of the Rashomon effect.

Finally, the Rashomon effect induces doubt, in the first step doubt about one's own judgment. This first step necessarily leads to and hinges on the second step, namely doubt about others. This doubt is not a solipsism arrived at in solitude, but is
established socially. That means we think about an incident more or less privately but usually come to terms with it together, through a sociable mixture of dialogue and negotiation. Only recently would people have seen the film alone; in the twentieth century, most of them would have seen it socially, as part of an audience. The Rashomon effect is thus a communicative condition above all; it is about the explanations of an incident offered by three (or more) qualified people, explanations which we find unsatisfactory or unsettling, whether we are parties to this incident or not. So, experiencing the Rashomon effect is a very social process, a very communicative process. Its complexity is produced by the presence of the hearers and/or observers who provide some of the social pressure for closure around the question. The dialogue among these hearers/observers is laced with authority, and conclusions (if not judgments) are expected whether or not there is a judge present. Opinions are formed and minds are made up through this process, only to run up against the inherently ambiguous nature of the situation.

This sociability has consequences, arising from the possibility of getting it wrong, and the Rashomon effect draws us there too, eventually. In a subset of cases there are serious consequences to the social nature of these judgments, where responsibility is assigned in error, as in cases of murder or other major crimes. In all cases we prefer not to be wrong, which is why most of us work hard to convince ourselves that we are right. We usually have an interest in not being out of step with those who seem more clearly to be right. This preference is compounded by the social pressure that drives everyone toward closure. Wrongful conviction is thus not arrived at by mistaken solitary solipsism about an error, but by a very collective social process, a mutual appraisal of interests, all deeply influenced by authoritative opinion, usually addressing a set of facts framed by authorities. Another social process that occurs, at least in North America, is the voluntary (and fictitious or false) confessions of guilt, numbering dozens of such improbable and irrelevant confessions made by uninvolved persons, often in widely publicized cases. But in Rashomon Kurosawa does not lead us to think these are voluntary, spurious or fictitious confessions; he shows us real pressure and real conviction about placing and accepting responsibility for the death of the nobleman, but embeds all that in different varieties of the truth.

So cultures and societies seem to move back and forth between the experiences of the Rashomon effect in the wild, in real life, and the depiction of the effect at work in their theatrical and fictitious creations (and re-creations). I want to redirect the idea that this effect is a peculiarly judicial phenomenon, although it is hardly surprising that we dwell there, because the process of calling witnesses and pressure for closure in courts is so crucial. It is not restricted to judicial situations at all; it is far more general and widespread in our experience across what are usually called the humanities and social sciences.
The Rashomon effect in the 1941 Bohr-Heisenberg conversations in Copenhagen

One particularly effective re-creation in the Rashomon mode concerns a famous conversation grounded in the 1941 experience of two physicists who knew each other well, and for whom (and for the wife of one of them) that famous conversation reverberated for years. A closer analysis of this two-day incident, and the theatrical play based on it, will demonstrate the interplay between the experience of the Rashomon effect in the wild and its dramatic reconstruction and re-creation on the live stage. The fact is that physicists Niels Bohr and Werner Heisenberg, although separated in age by sixteen years, had a long friendship. However, in 1941 something occurred between them that ruptured their relationship in such a way that efforts to restore it were painfully unresolved until their deaths. Frayn's play presents the ambiguity of the fact of that two-day visit, with three different interpretations (Niels Bohr's, Werner Heisenberg's and Margrethe Bohr's), and its implications, which could not be resolved, even until the end of time. 9

Bohr and Heisenberg's friendship was born out of the admiration of each for the extraordinary capabilities of the other in physics, reinforced by the universal perception among other scientists that they were indeed two superstars in physics. Years earlier, in late 1926 and early 1927, they jointly talked about a Copenhagen Interpretation which was one of the stable formulations of quantum mechanics at the time, particularly Bohr's idea of complementarity, as linked to causality and wave theory. The work of one depended on the work of the other; they co-evolved as scientists and private men, during which time they led the field of quantum mechanics. The privacy of their family friendship is contrasted with the expansive open communication expected among stars of nuclear physics. Frayn's play examines two personalities, each with its concealments, and a friendship that was not simply a professional camaraderie but one that engaged their private lives, their wives and children for seventeen years before Bohr and Heisenberg were divided by war in 1939. But then the war brought German troops into Denmark to occupy the country in April 1940; Heisenberg had moved quickly to the senior position in the German nuclear program, and Bohr (still directing his Danish institute) began to fear for his half-Jewish status once the German authorities decided to enforce the Nazi anti-Jewish laws. Tipped off about his impending arrest, Bohr escaped by small boat to Sweden in 1943, and then went through the United Kingdom to work on the Manhattan Project in the United States.

In this context, in 1941, Heisenberg came to Copenhagen to meet Bohr to talk with him about the uranium, plutonium, reactor and bomb projects of the Germans and the Allies. To the complexity of their long and intimate friendship, and rivalrous professional
physicist relations, was added the new gravitational effect of the war, the German occupation of Denmark, and the distinct possibility of an atomic bomb.

In Frayn’s play, these men presented three faces to each other: the face of the physicist engaged in open scientific communication, the face of the friend of the family for almost twenty years, and the face of the custodian of (opposed) state nuclear secrets. The Rashomon effect appeared as they adopted and adapted their new roles as custodians of state secrets. In their interaction they were offering something and withholding something else, and each knew it. In these famous 1941 conversations, mediated by Bohr’s observant wife Margrethe, the three faces of each man take the stage. In the play the conversation lasts about two real hours; in history the conversations occurred over two days. None of these three faces could be set aside or subordinated for long. Frayn shows us how they tumbled forth, each face overcoming the others in contrapuntal succession. Like Kurosawa the film director, Frayn the playwright compressed time and constructed an ever-opening space for this kind of struggle with high uncertainty.

Which of these three faces would prevail in certain moments of the conversation? Frayn’s play skillfully weaves the uncertainty about which face would prevail in the conversation (remember the uncertainty principle of which Heisenberg too was an author). Each stage in the conversation succeeded only in revealing further uncertainty, not in diminishing it. Bohr’s wife is shown as a privileged and astute observer, but one also severely challenged to interpret what is going on since she was not a physicist. She queries Heisenberg’s objective and motive. In her husband’s later struggle to comprehend what took place in 1941, and to express himself in writing to Heisenberg, she played a very significant historic role. Margrethe does not simply take her husband’s side in all of this, but provides a third and independent voice. She presses Bohr to consider whether Heisenberg had come to try to uncover what Bohr knew about the progress in the UK-US-Canadian-French bomb project but Bohr does not immediately adopt her skeptical position.

Different versions of that conversation attract different moral interpretations: Frayn reminds us, almost as a warning, that after his study of all the versions of the conversation, including a careful reading of numerous drafts of un-posted and rewritten letters that Bohr wrote to Heisenberg until his death in 1962, no definitive judgment is possible about Heisenberg’s motivation or intent to come to meet Bohr in 1941. These questions still remain: Did Heisenberg choose to reveal to Albert Speer (minister in charge of his atomic project) the probability that a nuclear reactor could produce plutonium for a bomb, or not? Did his conversation with Bohr build Heisenberg’s confidence that a reactor could achieve that end? Did Heisenberg’s nuclear team deliberately miscalculate the critical mass of U235 needed to sustain an effective chain
reaction in such a reactor, or not? The evidence available does not put beyond doubt what Bohr thought Heisenberg was doing in Copenhagen in 1941, and shows that Bohr had continuing questions and doubt about what Heisenberg’s purpose was in coming, and what he actually did after he returned to Germany after 1941. Did he skillfully delay the official German project even marginally, or significantly?

In the un-posted cumulative letter of 1947 to Heisenberg, Bohr wrote, ‘Despite our personal friendship we had to be regarded as representatives of two sides engaged in mortal combat’.11 We only know for certain that Heisenberg intended to send messages through Bohr to other physicists whom they both knew well, including the enemy state agencies he knew to be in touch with Bohr. We also know that Bohr was evasive, being uncertain of the effects of transmitting such messages. Both later felt the 1941 conversations in Copenhagen ruined their friendship, and both deeply regretted this fact throughout their lives, struggling to reopen the relationship. Two facts converge: first the strategic uncertainty surrounding the outcomes of the conversation at the time, second that this conversation was agreed to have been the cause of a rift in an important friendship. Frayn implies that Heisenberg worked harder at this repair work than Bohr (trying to see and meet Bohr), but considering how often Bohr sat down to draft his ultimate statement about the 1941 conversation, the loss was evidently and undeniably reciprocal. Although there is social, political and intellectual pressure to settle the question concerning the 1941 Bohr-Heisenberg conversation, different and equally plausible interpretations have been made. This is a classic illustration of the Rashomon effect, in which it is not possible to settle satisfactorily the key question, despite pressure to do so and to reach closure. This example powerfully illustrates the ripple of the effect of the real life Bohr-Heisenberg conversation to its re-creation fifty-seven years later in Michael Frayn’s 1998 hit play.

**An example of the Rashomon effect in the Dziekanski Affair, Vancouver, 2007–15**

If the Rashomon effect appears on the level of very private conversations (as in the film), it also appears on more public stages. In the same Supreme Court of British Columbia mentioned above, trials began in 2013 of four police officers from Canada’s national police force, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP). In October 2007 these RCMP officers had hurriedly arrived, confronted and then caused the sudden death of Robert Dziekanski, a Polish immigrant in the airport at Vancouver. His accidental enclosure in the secure international area of the airport, which lasted from the afternoon into the middle of the night, led to the death of this unnoticed forty-year-old adult man who spoke no English. He was coming to visit his mother, and perhaps stay in Canada to work, passing through the airport like thousands of similar
immigrants every year. His sense of being neglected, and being unable to exit, probably led to his agitated movements, occasional shouts in Polish (by that time all the interpreters had gone home), and dramatic and erratic gestures, augmented probably by his inability to smoke, and perhaps dehydration or lack of sleep, or all three. He picked up and brandished a chair; he picked up and waved a stapler. But we shall never know what he was thinking. He died a few minutes later.\(^\text{12}\)

This unintended death led to a trail of official police notes, reports and statements, which show inconsistencies and changes over time, ultimately revealing a form of the Rashomon effect. All of this recorded detail and oral communication emerged in a 2008 Commission of Enquiry into this incident, because the death occurred in police custody and was partially caused by use of a conducted electrical weapon, known as a Taser. Those changes and inconsistencies in their narrative accounts were the reason that the Attorney General initiated a series of trials six years after that night, trials based on the charge that these four men had cooperated (colluded) with one another to construct a common narrative which was intended to mislead official enquiries, particularly while they were testifying under oath. If they had done so, the court would decide that they had committed perjury, lying under oath – a serious offence. This enquiring and explaining gave rise to a rippling outward of differing versions of the truth about this brief episode, first on the night of Dziekanski’s death and the morning after, second in the routine required investigations and official reports in the following days, third after viewing a short video filmed by a witness on the spot (but released to the public only thirty days afterward), fourth in the stages of an official enquiry into Tasers, fifth in the perjury trials that began in 2013 and continued through 2015. This complexity can be better understood through the frame of the Rashomon effect.

Cut to the Vancouver airport in October 2007; suddenly four policemen arrived and interpreted Dziekanski’s movements quickly, in a few seconds, and they said (under oath soon afterwards) that Dziekanski’s gestures and intentions when he saw them were menacing or aggressive or combative. Acting as a team, one of them fired an electronic conducted energy weapon, commonly called a stun gun or Taser. Falling to the ground with this shot, Dziekanski struggled while receiving three or four more shots of the Taser; the policemen then wrestled with him and put their weight on him, one using his knee on the back of his neck. Later they all described this as the take-down moment, and a heavy baton was also used as a tool to subdue him. This attack lasted thirty-one seconds, and he was handcuffed and writhing on the floor immediately afterwards, slowly dying. Though they called for paramedics, curiously no CPR was administered by the officers on the spot.

As in *Rashomon*, the body of a man lay dead on the ground. There was pressure for closure because police were directly involved, even though this body was not a
high-status body, not like the noble samurai in Rashomon. This incident produced great pressure on the RCMP concerning its reputation, and they thus wanted (and yet also did not really want) an investigation which would lead to closure. There was also strong pressure for investigation from the Polish government, and for closure from Canadians of Polish origin. There were testimonies from each of the four policemen and statements from nine witnesses, contributing to the complexity of the Rashomon effect. And then – entering the twenty-first century – an 8.5 minute video appeared, taken through the huge glass walls enclosing Dziekanski and the policemen – all filmed on his mobile phone by another passenger. The eyewitnesses too, like the woodcutter in Rashomon, were not high status – limousine drivers, security guards, airport night staff, etc. There were variations in the police testimony and witness reports, but no disagreement about the fact that the death occurred rapidly in police custody. In contrast to Rashomon where each tale implicated the teller, the frame surrounding Dziekanski was that no one accepted responsibility, and each of the four police officers avoided personal liability. Even the Commissioner of the Public Complaints Against the RCMP (a government agency), who is a senior lawyer without police experience, observed in his February 2011 report that ‘I do not accept as accurate any of the versions of events presented by the involved members [officers] because I find considerable and significant discrepancies in the depth and accuracy of the recollection of the members when compared against the otherwise uncontroverted video evidence’. But in the perjury trials, which started in 2013, each man once again gradually revealed differences in their perspectives, all under the pressure to explain their role around this unnecessary and futile death.

As if in a Rashomon sequence, these four policemen’s tales were told and re-told in different hearings. Some witnesses had been hurriedly interviewed just after the death, before they could see the (confiscated) video, which, it was feared by policemen, would influence the witnesses and taint their evidence – thus reducing its value in court. The short yet notorious video was soon seen and re-seen millions of times by people around the world. Gradually, a debate over police conduct and inconsistent police explanations appeared in the public sphere, usually linked to the video. Four months later, in February 2008, a Commission of Enquiry was instructed to start work and summon the policemen and all witnesses. It became difficult to think about the Dziekanski affair without referring to the video. One judge warned the court in 2013, ‘the video must be viewed with caution … casting doubt upon the proposition that if something cannot be seen in the video it didn’t happen’. Note how that statement contrasts with the Judge Commissioner’s 2011 report doubting the policemen’s narratives in contrast with the video.

Importantly for our study of Rashomon effects, these four police officers were brought back again to court in a series of four separate trials, commencing in June 2013 and
continuing through 2015. The charge in each case was that each policeman cooperated and conspired, or ‘colluded’, to construct a single line of reasoning about this brief event. This collusion enabled them to adopt a common defence during investigations of their conduct, for which their first line of explanation has always been ‘self-defence’, thus justifying their use of force, including five rapid shots from the Taser. This charge meant that they had lied about the case in court under oath. The separation of the four trials served to enhance the Rashomon effect because separation increased the disassociation of the narratives: They were being tried separately for conspiring together and colluding. In the first 2013 trial one policeman was found not guilty of perjury, in the second and third trials both were found guilty, and the fourth trial in 2015 concluded with a ‘not guilty’ judgment. In all trials in 2013–15, there was prolonged questioning about whether and how well these men followed standard police practices (note books, reports, the duty to account, reports to superiors, critical incident debriefings, etc.). This inevitably revealed how this procedural apparatus was inadequate to deal with the Rashomon effect. Perhaps more precisely, standard police practices and record-keeping seem to have served to establish, conserve and even uphold the Rashomon effect, enabling observers to compare and contrast over many years the ambiguous and subtly different versions of the same policemen’s testimony about the same brief event.

In one of the trials, the former policeman Kwesi Millington described Dziekanski holding a stapler high in the air as if it might or could become a weapon, or surrendering but not holding his hands ‘up high’. Having listened to the disagreement about whether or not Dziekanski complied with instructions (in a language Dziekanski could not understand), the Supreme Court Justice said in early 2015 ‘This isn’t Alice in Wonderland ... I’m suggesting all of us are experts in the English language’. In front of four separate judges, asking different questions about the same charge, the result has been that two policemen were found guilty and two were found not guilty. The inconsistency is profound: One can see that in the Dziekanski affair the Rashomon effect does not fade away, even with the passage of almost eight years.

In the Dziekanski affair there is a kind of reverse Rashomon effect. The four policemen each expressed a very similar narrative in hearings and enquiries, saying that they apprehended violence from him, and thus they countered resistance with force. The systems of police administration and judiciary have truth constructed and applied a ‘difference-in-perspective’ model, expecting implicitly that these four people would not and could not achieve a singular account of the incident. These current trials proceeded on the premise that the policemen did not tell the truth in their earlier testimony. The trials were not about the fact that they unnecessarily killed a man in less than a minute, but were instead about their versions of the truth. A separate and consistent perspective is provided by the mobile phone and its video record; observers, some
judges and witnesses seem to think that the risk of Dziekanski’s menacing resistance was misrepresented and exaggerated.

There was (and remains) an emerging consensus that there should be a singular definition of the truth about this incident, but there were reasonable disagreements as to what that truth is. We should recall a remark by Martinez, that 'It [Rashomon] is about the conflicting desires of the human condition; we want a single reality, while holding fast to our subjective interpretations.'\(^1\)

**Conclusion**

The Rashomon effect is not just about differences of perspective. It occurs particularly where such differences arise in combination with the absence of evidence to elevate or disqualify any version of the truth, plus the social pressure for closure on the question. The convergence of these three ingredients is sufficient in all cases, but there are stronger and weaker cases of the effect – distinguished by the intensity of the interaction of the three ingredients. It is the conjunction of these elements and their intense interaction that make up the strong cases. Through Kurosawa’s starkly minimal treatment of the different narratives of the events in the forest glade, audiences experience the power of the Rashomon effect. This fascinating combination of elements, played through the viewers’ increasing doubt, gives the film its philosophical and social force. But there is probably a spectrum at work here from stronger cases to weaker. Put another way, with respect to one discipline, Heider said:

> there is a shared reality but differing truths may indeed be said about it. [However,] the value of thinking about the Rashomon effect goes far beyond the relatively few cases of ethnographic disagreement that we shall be able to turn up. The sorts of influences, biases, or predilections we can examine here are at work in all ethnography, even when it is unchallenged.

(1988: 74)

For greater clarity, we can now say there is a strong Rashomon effect, for example in the Bohr-Heisenberg case mentioned above; it had all the necessary elements in the film just described and also involved three narratives or accounts. But to acknowledge the way this old film has been creeping into common thought and speech (remember the judges quoted above), there is also a weak Rashomon effect, for example in the wrongful dismissal case mentioned above; it had the other necessary elements yet unfolded with only two narratives, two accounts, two plausible and unreconciled explanations.

We can conclude that the Rashomon effect provides us with an epistemology that
applies to a special set of situations, tracks how we come to terms with the complex properties of these situations, and suggests how we understand or misunderstand them, depending on our insight. From this epistemology we can see precisely how we know what we think we know, and what we say, about this set of situations. In this limited sense, we can say that people engaged in this process arising out of this set of situations all form a kind of epistemic community of uncertainty. Although it may be transitory, that epistemic community is moving toward a deeper understanding of the very situations in which the Rashomon effect arises. The necessary presence of bystanders, witnesses and official listeners or even judges adds to the uncertainty and complexity of the Rashomon effect. I hope I have persuaded you that though not entirely wrongheaded, many popular interpretations of Rashomon limit and diminish the power of both the film and the Rashomon effect. As anyone can see easily through Google, there are now hundreds of references to the Rashomon effect. The Rashomon ripples which flow across this book are moving steadily through space and time. This essay is intended partly to give it better shape as it moves on that journey.

The Rashomon effect shows up in many intellectual undertakings that deal with contested interpretations of events or with disagreements and evidence for them, or with subjectivity/objectivity, memory and perception. But Rashomon may have found its most fertile ground earlier – first in anthropology and later in sociology, social psychology and communication studies. Eventually it arrived in the conceptual world of jurisprudence, and is now found in the study of epistemology; there we see a debate on how we know what we say we know, how we explain how we know that, how we justify our confidence in our knowledge.

We come to terms with these complex situations through dialogue and negotiation, through communication. The film’s greatness arises not just in showing how the effect occurs, though that is a great achievement, but also in asking if we can come to terms with it, particularly without much help from its creator, Mister Kurosawa himself.

Notes

1 These students lived in western Canada, and were asked to speak and write about Rashomon in a class taught by me since 2003. They were generally between the ages of twenty and thirty (though about ten percent were older), and more than half were women. Although about half of them came from households where a language other than English was also spoken, very few students understood Japanese. Remarkably, fewer than five percent had seen the film before. Each person was required to discuss and write about the Rashomon effect, and how their work in negotiation and dialogue was related to it.

2 There is obviously a variant of this first kind of effect, and that is the experience of seeing Rashomon year after year; thanks to my colleague Terry Neiman for his insightful reading of a draft of this chapter.

3 Donald Richie often said that only the commoner under the gate had no story, so had no version to tell (1972: 73).
4 When analyzing *Rashomon*, a few students recalled seeing Tom Tykwer's *Run Lola, Run* (1999), which they recognized as an equally precise treatment of alternate narratives and alternative outcomes. The logic of one film stirs their memory of the logic of the other. But we observe important differences between the two films. *Lola* is not, like *Rashomon*, about distinct versions of the same incident, but three sequences with different outcomes, each achieved by small alterations in probability and contingency, repeated over a fast, breathless twenty minutes. Releasing the film, Tykwer talked about

the way time gets manipulated ... The dramatic principle of creating time is, I feel, one of the most interesting aspects of film-making. You can relate what happens in twenty minutes or in twenty years ... the biggest challenge was to make the leaps ahead in time not appear like breaks in the action, but to make all the transitions flow into each other so that the viewers would move from scene to scene with their emotional commitment unimpaired. The space-time continuum gets taken right off its hinges without anyone really noticing ...

(Tykwer 1999: n.p.)

5 An example of an insightful analysis, Orit Kamir's interpretation is best summed up in the following statement

let me restate this point. The legal discourse tends to engage itself with specifics and details; the compatibility of witnesses' testimony and the determination of the facts occupy significant portions of the legal world's time, effort and energy. As my reading of *Rashomon* demonstrates, such preoccupation is far from being neutral, objective, or purely professional. It distracts from issues such as underlying social stereotypes, screening mechanisms that preclude illegitimate stories, and the unconscious construction of the judging community as a community of men. It thus acts as a conservative force, discouraging reflection, awareness, and willingness to change ... *Rashomon* is a story of men's weakness, selfishness, and greediness and a woman's courageous resistance and survival against all odds.

(2000: 86 – 7)

Later Kamir wrote that the film leads viewers 'to arrive at the "legal" conclusion marked and predetermined by the film' (2005: 269). But she seems to refrain from saying what that conclusion is. Kamir later collected these ideas in *Framed: Women in Law and Film* (2006) (Kamir 2000, 2005, 2006).

6 I am grateful to Jef Burnham for this reference.

7 An example of witness variability is given by anthropologist Alan Macfarlane, in the experience of a Cambridge judge trying a case of a daylight armed robbery of a post office in Cambridge, UK. In this trial real-time eye witnesses differed on key issues:

The uncertainty of people's experience and memory is particularly evident where we would expect it least, that is in the study of legal process. My wife was a magistrate (lay judge), trying an armed robbery case in Cambridge in 2001. There were many witnesses to the daylight raid on the post office. She heard their testimonies and was amazed by the discrepancies. People who were standing only a few yards from the scene described the robbers in totally contrary ways. For some they were tall, dark, bearded, driving a red car; for others they were small, fair, clean-shaven, driving a blue car. And so on. Unlike *Rashomon*, there was no possible reason for these witnesses to lie. All thought they were telling the truth. It was simply that, as cognitive psychologists could no doubt explain, we see what we expect to see. Yet even hardened judges and prosecutors, let alone the general public, forget about this expectation – and the Rashomon effect is a powerful reminder.

(Macfarlane 2004)
8 Also judges in less compelling situations are more and more recognizing and referring to the Rashomon effect, as Justice Finkelstein in the High Court of Queensland, Australia, found in August 2008; unable to decide on the evidence in a dispute between an administrator and a litigious citizen who was using the case as a form of discovery, he charged them both with their costs. His judgment referred explicitly to Rashomon (2008).


10 A face is like a mask, in Erving Goffman's sense of the presentation of self in everyday life, a thing constructed and sustained by the person behind it to whom it belongs. Each face in a network has a valence, meaning its combining power, its capacity to bond with others, as is meant in physical chemistry. That transition is what we call face work. These multiple faces are not limited to famous physicists, and we all know that this increases the intensity of the Rashomon effect.

11 Un-posted letter quoted by Frayn in the epilogue to the film version (2002) of his play directed by Howard Davies. The whole text released by the Niels Bohr Institute can be seen on its website at www.nbi.ku.dk. Note that Bohr also met Joseph Stalin's and Lavretii Beria's delegate from Moscow in November 1945, but there is less doubt about what occurred in that conversation (Bethe, Gottfried and Sagdeev 1995: 85–90). There are four thoughtful essays on Frayn's treatment of the Bohr-Heisenberg conversation (published in Forum on Physics and Society, October 2002, pp.36–42). The Bohr family believed this evidence to be so important that they overturned an agreement with their father and published all these letters in 2002.

12 The Dziekanski affair can be understood through Internet-based documents provided by the 'Commission for Public Complaints Against the RCMP' (December 2007 and 10 February 2011); 'Braidwood Commission of Enquiry' for the Government of British Columbia (hearings in February–March 2010, decision in June 2010); Supreme Court of British Columbia R. v. Bill Bentley (hearings and decision in June–July 2013); also R. v. Millington, R. v. Rundel, R. v. Robinson (2013–15); also pertinent but unavailable are 'RCMP Integrated Homicide Investigation Team Reports' of 2007–8.

13 Commissioner for Public Complaints Against the RCMP, Chair's Final Report [re: Dziekanski], 11 February 2011.

14 Supreme Court of British Columbia 2013: 45.


17 Martinez 2009: 40.

18 This work began by recording all evidence regarding Rashomon in the social sciences, and further into epistemology. But the volume of citations grew too large. See the list of examples of applications of the Rashomon effect in many fields in the accompanying appendices.

Akira Kurosawa describing how the rain effects were created at the gate set during the filming of Rashomon:

Because the gate set was so huge, the job of creating rainfall on it was a major operation. We borrowed fire engines and turned on the studio's fire hoses to full capacity. But when the camera was aimed upward at the cloudy sky over the gate, the sprinkle of the rain couldn't be seen against it, so we made rainfall with black ink in it.

(Kurosawa 1983: 137)
Religion as Moral Infrastructure
Chapter 4. Religion as Moral Infrastructure

The practice of neo-Shintoism in Japan

Introduction

Japan holds a unique place among the societies in Asia with regard to religion. There is, rightly or wrongly, a strong secular reputation. An episode of Encounter, a radio program from the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, which aired in 2008 was even titled “No religion please, we’re Japanese.” As Ian Reader, one of the guests on the show, who also happens to be one of the leading scholars of religion in Japan, states, “Most Japanese take part in all sorts of activities connected with Buddhist temples and Shinto shrines, but many people just see that not as religion but as something to do with social customs and traditions and so on.” Another guest, a Reverend Watanabe, who immediately follows Reader, describes the attitude toward religion in Japan as “supermarket-type.” “If [you] need this one [thing] and then you use this religion.” The Reverend goes on to suggest that this may be a quality innate to “Japanese tradition,” as he calls it, of “accepting everything equally.”

To illustrate this point, the segment producer interviews a Japanese-Australian’s experience with church. When she was younger, she says, she would go to Sunday school at a nearby Christian church. She went, largely, because there were cookies, specifically biscuits from Europe, as well as English language classes. She states that she was not interested, then and now, in “what would happen when we die.” Yet, she goes to her ancestor’s graves and also visits Shinto shrines. In spite of this, she claims not to be interested in matters of religion. Reader, the professor, explains it in the following manner:

I think particularly in Japan it’s very hard to separate out the old historical religious traditions of Shinto and Buddhism which were very much embedded in people’s everyday lives, and I think to some extent they still are. So people can have a Buddhist altar to their ancestors in their house and they can pray at it every day, and then they might still say but we’re “not religious” because they don’t see themselves as being formally committed to one particular religious tradition.

However, recent developments in Asian geopolitics counter Reader’s claims about Japanese people seeing themselves as not necessarily tied to a singular religious tradition. Since the tenure of Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi, the word “Yasukuni” has become increasingly important to know. The Yasukuni shrine is a Shinto shrine dedicated to the war dead. This includes, of course, those soldiers who died “on the wrong side” according to many in the region who were occupied by the Japanese.
Imperial Army. The visit to the shrine by the standing prime minister was, until Koizumi’s tenure, provocative. In fact, Emperor Hirohito had not visited the shrine until his death because certain war criminals’ names had been enshrined there. Koizumi visited the shrine several times during his tenure as prime minister, which incidentally was the longest of any Japanese prime minister in history. Expectedly, this was met with outrage in Taiwan, China and both Koreas, with people demonstrating in front of Japanese embassies across the region.

The response to Koizumi’s visits cannot be seen in isolation. His visits, for those who took offense, were part of a long line of insensitive—and perhaps even unjust—actions on the part of Japan regarding its imperial past. In addition to the shrine controversy, there have also been other instances of perceived tone deafness on the part of Japan. Among these, the two that have received the most attention are the issue of the acknowledgement of sexual slavery during the occupation of China and Korea in the period before and during World War II, and the coinciding less-than-forthcoming reconstruction of those events in Japanese textbooks. While Japan, for reasons that are not without merit, views itself to be secular, and without religion, there is, without a doubt, some evidence to suggest that religion is very much a part of Japanese life. It just depends on what we mean by religion. It is this very issue of “finding” or “locating” religion in Japanese culture that will operate as the driving problematic behind this chapter.

To understand the fraught nature of the study of religion in Japan, we do not have to look further than the phrase itself: “religion in Japan.” As Jun’ichi Isomae points out, it is difficult to ascertain, when thinking about “Japanese religion,” whether we are talking about “religions particular to Japan as well as religion in Japan.” While the difference seem semantic, there are some rather important conceptual distinctions in using one phrase over the other. The former connotes a religion that is unique to Japan, as an “ahistorical, unified facet of ‘Japaneseness’” (Isomae 2005, 236). The latter paints the religious landscape of Japan as a “hybrid space, where religions have both emerged and been introduced, and have then influenced one another” (ibid., 236).

As is consistent throughout this book, the perspective that we prefer is most certainly the latter. However, a hybrid space does not necessarily mean an equal one. Not all religions have the same contributory power in this space. This is most certainly the case for Japan, where clearly there is some sort of argument to be made for the “indigeneity” of Shinto. However, Shinto itself is not unified. This then reasserts the second meaning of “Japanese religion” to which Isomae refers.

It is this quandary that leads Timothy Fitzgerald to reject religion as a category of analysis, especially in the case of Japan. Instead, he offers “ritual” as an alternative. Influenced by the work of Talal Asad among others, he argues that “religion” fails
because of its undue "ideological weight" in the configuration of "modern Western"—to wit, secular—values. The basis of the modern concepts such as politics, economics and law "presuppose," as Fitzgerald states, a secular sphere. Thus, religion becomes the logical opposite of the secular, locked into an interdependent, yet oppositional, relationship. This "important piece of western ideology misleadingly appears as a piece of neutral analytical equipment, or even more problematically as though 'it' is somehow objectively there in the society or culture" (Fitzgerald 2003, 9).

Ritual presents a useful alternative because it takes away the power of "belief" in the conceptualization of "religion." In an overtly Protestant understanding of religion, ritual is "merely symbolic." Put simply, it is seen as representation. "Protestant rituals," Fitzgerald writes, "do not actually perform any mystical transformations, as in the Catholic mass; they merely act out symbolically the primary intellectual beliefs. The ritual performances are explained by the beliefs" (Fitzgerald 2003, 9, emphasis added).

For Catholics, as well as Orthodox, the ritual actually entails the transformation of one kind of substance—bread and wine—into the actual flesh and blood of Christ at the moment of consumption. However, between the first and the second view, there is a third. There are some who participate in the ritual without necessarily holding to the belief that explains it. In fact, Fitzgerald suggests that ritual is both logically and chronologically prior to belief (ibid., 10). Ritual may, in fact, "function quite happily without intellectualist representations at all." As Althusser's famed evocation of Pascal in his theory of "interpellation" reads: "kneel down, move your lips in prayer, and you will believe."

Detaching religion from belief allows for a true appreciation of the popular Japanese religious consciousness. The Japanese, when thinking about religiosity, do not feel the pressure to adhere to a singular, unified body of text and/or practices that we commonly associate with religion. Hence, the conception of "religion" is different from that of the West, where individual and exclusive commitment is assumed. The contrast is especially clear in Japan as the religious landscape is characterized by multiple commitments, not exclusive ones. Thus, Fitzgerald forgoes a definition for religion that caters to Japan specifically, settling instead on "a family of overlapping ritual performances that share ideas about reciprocity, self-sacrifice and dependency" (Fitzgerald 2003, 36).

This rather loose description of Japanese religion provided by Fitzgerald will serve as the foundation for this chapter. Over the course, it will become clear why this open-ended definition of religion in Japan is appropriate for understanding digital culture and religion in Japan. We begin with an abbreviated history of religion in Japan. It is neither comprehensive nor thorough. It is not meant to be. The history is purely introductory in order to provide context for those who would find the themes and
concepts explored in this chapter interesting but are not experts in the field of Japanese religious history. We then move on to specific examples of the intersection of digital culture and religion in Japan, to suggest that religiosity can be found in everyday forms of entertainment such as manga and TV talk shows.

The religions of Japan

The religious history of modern Japan can be marked by three important dates: 1868, 1945 and 1995. For many who are interested in the history of Japan, the significance of these dates is clear. 1868 is the beginning of the Meiji Restoration, when Japan, rather exceptionally vis-à-vis the rest of East Asia, began modernizing in the Western sense. Industrialization and military technology are usually what Japan watchers refer to when discussing the long-term effects of the Meiji Period, but with regard to religion, the Meiji Period bears notability for a reason having to do with the basis of the sovereignty of the emperor.

Engrained in the Western (read: American) imagination of imperial Japan is the reductive figure of the kamikaze, a soldier who willingly would give his life in the service of his emperor, a divine being. The kamikaze, while vilified, also retains some modicum of, if not respect, a sentiment close to it. The American idiom “hard-core” may be the closest approximation. Popular understandings of the kamikaze’s “commitment” state that while the emperor is indeed technically a divine being, it was only after the Meiji Restoration that he was believed to be so. Prior to the Meiji Period, the emperor was not a major player in domestic political affairs. In fact, the “restoration” was so named because it restored the emperor’s sovereignty based on the fact that he was descended from divine beings, or kami.

Prior to this period, the Japanese “religious” landscape (we hesitate to use this word for reasons discussed below) was syncretic. Shinto was more of a catch-all term for “religiosity.” It means something like “the way of the spirits (or gods).” Shinto was thus not exclusively made up of the folk beliefs and practices native to Japan. Part of the “popular Japanese religious consciousness” was not only Shinto but also Buddhism, which came to Japan in the 6th century via Korea, and shortly became the religion of the ruling class, thus having a very large impact on Japanese political and intellectual life.

Buddhism was far more institutionally inclined than Shinto. As with most shamanisms, Shinto did not have a centralized belief system. Nor did it have much of an intellectual (or priestly) class that developed ideas and theology. Therefore, there were not many points of justification for the State to draw from in the service of customs and laws. However, during the Meiji Restoration, there was a concerted effort to base the
"renewal" that Meiji represented on Shinto and not Buddhism. Shinto, at this time, became a state religion in the true sense, with state funds being used to construct shrines. There was also a significant theological shift: the rise of Amaterasu, who shot up from being simply a part of the pantheon of Shinto deities from whom the emperor is descended. Amaterasu, appropriately for Japan, is the sun goddess. It is during this time that Shinto took on mythological, imperial and nationalist proportions and became equated to "Japaneseness."

After the surrender by Hirohito in 1945, the new Japanese constitution repudiated Shinto as state religion in the name of religious freedom, taking with it the divine status of the emperor. This turn in the history of religious life in Japan, however, did not do much in terms of disembedding Shinto's status as culturo-moral infrastructure. Aspects of everyday life in Japan were always already infused with Shinto ideas.

As mentioned earlier, Shinto's boundaries were hardly airtight. In addition to the influence of Buddhism, Confucian ideas penetrated Shinto ideology and customs, especially in the realm of ancestor worship and the maintenance of ie, the Japanese notion of familial kinship. Hence, in spite of the de-officialization of Shinto as state religion, Shinto remained as influential as ever as it was able to adapt to different spiritual realities of the nation.

It is interesting to remark on the persistence of Shinto and Buddhism in Japan with the backdrop of discussions of the "religious economy" pioneered by sociologists Rodney Stark and Roger Finke. The theory is sometimes called the "supply-side" theory of religion as it is rooted in similar principles as supply-side economics, which, roughly speaking, is grounded in the notion of a marketplace consisting of suppliers and consumers. This view holds that the ability of certain religious groups to respond to the demands of consumers dictates which religions, to put it rather crudely, win out—that is, achieve market dominance. Within this theory, as with free markets (the existence of which in this world is most certainly debatable), state actors are not to play a role. They are, in the true liberal sense, guides of the market. This has not been a reality since—and we may be overgeneralizing—mercantilism was the dominant economic ideology in Europe. At any rate, the situation for the religious economy, like that of a non-metaphorical one, is hardly ever populated with just two. While it does take two to tango, for economies there are usually unexpected interrupters, one of them oftentimes being the State. In the case of Japan, the State, as mentioned above, utilized Buddhism and Shinto in order to pursue political ends, even blending the two to construct what amounts to a Japanese civil religion.

This poses a rather interesting question for the theory of religious economies. On the one hand, this case of Japan does support the idea that the religion that best captures demands of the consumer wins out. Shinto, apparently, would be the winner in this
instance. Its ability to be woven into the daily life of people ends up allowing for it to remain, even after its detachment as state religion. Yet, on the other hand, there is an argument that can be made suggesting the limits of the "religious economies" perspective's applicability in the case of Japan, and even generally. For starters, it is a rather difficult case to make that Shinto can be considered a "religion." Unlike the Abrahamic religions, which are tellingly referred to often as the Religions of the Book, Shinto does not contain a central text or set of texts. This of course means far less regulation and centralization than Christianity, Islam or Judaism, which, in addition to being bound by the same monotheistic God, also share a significant amount of writing and theological structure. Shinto, being somewhat non-Axial, is a generalized orientation, a religious habitus.

This lays bare the limitations of the "religious economies" approach in at least two ways. First, and most obviously, it does not take into consideration that there are hardly ever situations where there is a pure religious economy. Even in places where there are weak states, the political, as a social space, remains and wields power. The inability of the religious economies perspective to take this into account cannot simply be attributed to its non-existent theory of the market but also speaks, according to many critics of this particular brand of the sociology of religion, to the faulty foundation of supply-side thinking generally: rational choice theory. Consumer choice, not to mention decisions regarding religion, is not always based on calculations of cost and benefit. In other words, supply-side theories overestimate the power and virtue of "rationality." Faith, or "religiosity," manifests, as Kierkegaard once described, as a "leap" (Kierkegaard 1992).

March 20, 1995 is infamous in Japanese history, known as the day of the Aum Affair. On that day, members of a group called Aum Shinrikyo released sarin gas in three Tokyo subway lines—the Marunouchi Line, Chiyoda Line and Hibiya Line. Bringing the gas into the subway lines at the height of the morning rush hour in plastic bags, the Aum members punctured the bags with the end of their umbrellas, releasing it in the cars but also in Kodemmacho Station.

The Aum Affair quickly became a moment of reckoning for the nation. As Erica Baffelli calls it, the Aum Affair was a "turning point" (Baffelli 2008). These new religious movements, which had been drawing great attention for some time, and had been on the rise—were they now dangerous? What did it mean for Japan, a country supposedly without religion, that a religious group would organize such an attack? Moreover, how did this group organize such an event? How did they have the personnel with expertise? This must mean that they had scientists and engineers among their ranks. A very grave prospect.

However, the rise of Aum and its subsequent attack also introduced larger questions
about the uptick of new religious movements across Japan. One of the problems is that there are so many of them. There are those, like Aum, that would be considered cults. While there is great diversity among them, they do have a few characteristics in common: apocalypticism, mixed theology drawing from Shinto, Buddhism, Christianity and others, as well as a charismatic leader or guru. There are others that are simply neo-Shinto and neo-Buddhist organizations which have operated in Japan as “renewal movements” since the Meiji period.

As Nobutaka Inoue notes, there are several generations of “new religions” in Japan. Since the 1950s, there have been “new religions” that were actually spinoffs of Shinto and Buddhism, the more established religions. Known as shin shukyo, many of these were sectarian Shinto groups, which were even registered. This generation of new religions, including Tenrikyo, Soka Gakkai, among others, did not yield the kind of distaste that newer religions, or “new new-religions” as they are called, have elicited especially since 1995. These older new religions were, and still are, rather diverse. Yet, they do share a feature also found in Korean religiosity—the doctrine of “this-worldly benefits.” Sectarian Shinto and neo-Buddhist movements tend to agree on the importance of the applicability of their ideas to everyday life. New new-religions, while falling within the spectrum of new religious movements in Japan, are distinct in their orientation towards “psychic phenomena and spiritualistic elements” (Inoue 1999, 6).

Interest in the occult and magicality is most certainly not new in the Japanese religious context. However, as Norman Havens writes, in the concept of kami itself, the most commonly associated term with “the supernatural” in Japan, connotes onto-cosmological immanence, not the transcendence of a term such as “deity,” which sits above. Deity or “divinity” is largely Western, and smacks of Abrahamic ideas such as omniscience, omnipotence, immutability and unity. It is decidedly monotheistic, in other words. However, as Havens rightly points out, kami is characterized by none of these characteristics.

One misstep in the understanding of kami is that scholars often consider it as the name of an entity, hence the notion that it is synonymous with “god.” In actual fact, kami is both a noun and an adjective. It is both “kami-nature” and “kami-ish.” This is because the Japanese cosmos is rather different from the bifurcated cosmos of monotheism, which necessitates a transcendent God that sits above creation. This division can be seen as the basis for others at the heart of Western metaphysics, e.g. between the nature and supernature, body and soul, etc. However, the Japanese cosmos is “unitary” and “metaphysically undivided.” Kami are not “metaphysically distinct” from humans. This, in fact, according to Havens, is what the concept of kami “militates against” (Havens 2000, 4). Hence, there is no absolute Being in the form of a supreme deity. In the onto-cosmological schema of Shinto, “all beings ... are less than absolute, and exist
within a unitary, relativized world, then no absolute God can exist as an object of prayerful petition, or as the ultimate source of transcendental legitimation for social action” (ibid., 8). Kami, ultimately, is the “immanent agency and ‘becomingness’ of all existing things, an agency, which manifests itself in phenomena of non-everyday, awe-inspiring power” (ibid., 10).

Religion beyond religion

Digital religion in Japan operates somewhat differently from in the United States or other parts of the West. For one, while Japan boasts one of the most wired populations in the world, there are not many looking to the Internet for religious content or information—a mere 2.5 percent of Internet users according to a recent study. However, within the same study, 13.6 percent responded that they did access fortune-telling sites. (More on fortune telling as digital religion later.) This shows us that even in the digital space, what kind of activity counts as “religion” is highly debatable. However, what this nugget of information indicates is not only rather important in understanding recent developments in digital religion in a Japanese context on the Internet, but also in other parts of the media-technological complex such as television and print.

As mentioned above, contemporary Japanese religiosity retains a unique onto-cosmological base. Kami are seen as not above humans but in the same spectrum of existence. This means that what we see as religiosity has a lot to do with making a connection to the everyday lives of people. It is this intention that some instances of digital religion in Japan have manifested, especially in the realm of counseling, fortune telling or, to strike a more magical tone, divination. This takes on two different forms—over the Internet and also on cable television.

For instance, in Konkokyo, a Shinto sect that was established in a village in Okayama in the 19th century, there is the rite called “Toritsugi-mediation.” “Toritsugi” in Japanese “implies the act in which someone’s requests, orders or matters are made known to another person or persons.” The founder was on the verge of death due to illness when he prayed and received divine messages or “oshirase” from Konjin, a kami that was associated with evil. However, for the founder, these messages and his accordance with them resulted in not only his recovery but also his ability to heal. Every attempt at Toritsugi-mediation, it is believed, is an instantiation of the founder’s initial capacity as mediator between people and the will of the deity Tenchi Kane No Kami, the god of heaven and earth. The mediation is “the process of conveying the will of God to people who are struggling with various sufferings. This gives them the strength they need to live in keeping with the will of God as it is revealed to them. It not only helps people, but also God, insofar as it provides a means by which God can play his role of guiding
human beings” (Kawabata and Tamura 2007, 10).

The mediation works like this:

Facing Kami, the Toritsugi-sha or Toritsugi-Mediator, one who practices Toritsugi-Mediation, hears and accepts a person’s request asking for freedom from his or her difficulties, and offers it to Kami. During this process, the Mediator accepts the seeker’s suffering as his or her own agony, and prays wholeheartedly for the seeker’s salvation to Kami-Sama. The Toritsugi-Mediator also apologizes to Kami for irreverences [sic], knowingly or unknowingly [sic] committed by [the] seeker.

(Konko Churches of America 2013a)

In 1999, a mediator created a website for his Konkokyo and began to offer mediation through email. Inspired by the mental health sections of online message boards, in this case on Yahoo! Japan, he sought to create “a place where people suffering hardships and difficulties could gather” (Kawabata and Tamura 2007, 10). As Kawabata and Tamura lay out, the case of email Toritsugi-mediation is unique for several reasons. First, the ritual itself is based on exchange between two people. To remediate the mediation in the form of email is not such a great leap. However, there was some doctrinal wrangling that needed to occur as mediation in church was viewed as the basis of the religion. Moreover, the mediation also held significance as it was seen as the replication of its founding. In 1998, Konkokyo de-emphasized the mediation and placed it on the same plane of importance as other rituals.

Konkokyo is not the only religious group that has taken to counseling via the Internet. Tenrikyo, one of the older shinshukyo (“new religions”), has offered a “counseling room” since 1999. It targets both members and non-members alike. Tenrikyo has always been a proselytizing religion. It has gone door to door, leaving brochures much in the style of Jehovah’s Witnesses. Within Tenrikyo, it is called nioigake or “sprinkling the fragrance of the teachings” (Kawabata and Tamura 2007, 12). As more and more Japanese began to respond to the fragrance negatively, leaving signs instructing people not to leave materials at their homes, the Internet became a place to continue to proselytize. Each day the Tenrikyo counseling website responds to anywhere between five and ten inquiries. The subject matter of these inquiries runs the gamut from questions about unemployment to illness. These are archived on the website and indexed.

This particularly pastoral aspect of the logic of digital religion in Japan extends not only to the Internet but also to the digital space of cable television programming. There are, currently, a slew of TV programs like that of Hosoki Kazuko. Her TV show, “Zubari iu wa yo!” translates to “I’m going to give it to you straight!” Those outside Japan would recognize her from her many appearances as a guest judge on Iron Chef. In
her own program, she acts as a clairvoyant. With dozens of publications and TV appearances, she has created a media empire not unlike Martha Stewart and Oprah Winfrey, although not on that scale. They all dispense a commodity called "common sense." Admittedly, the brand of common sense peddled by Winfrey and Stewart has more to do with ways to exercise more and homemade lemonade recipes, but as Benjamin Dorman notes, Hosoki has become the major personality she is—she has even had Jon Bon Jovi on her program—due to the fact that she reminds the audience of the "kind of shared knowledge that 'we Japanese' should know" (Dorman 2007, 33). She is "an all-purpose lifestyle guru whose opinions are sought on many subjects, including debates about education," but also "marriage, death and finances" (ibid., 33). Like Stewart, Hosoki has endorsement deals for a variety of products and services.

Hosoki’s popularity, Dorman argues, has to do with her ability to draw on images and tropes from what he calls the “popular Japanese religious consciousness”—specifically ancestor worship. *Rokusei senjutsu* (six-star astrology) is a system based on the Chinese system that believes people’s lives to be in a cycle of 12 years. Using one’s birth date, she is able to see which “destiny star” a person falls under. This determines whether one’s fortune is fading, strengthening, or somewhere in between. She incorporates these forms of Chinese astrology with ancestor worship. The positioning of grave-stones or Buddhist and Shinto shrines to showing gratitude, not shaming one’s family (more specifically, not having children out of wedlock or getting a divorce—all these become relevant in the shaping of one’s fortune in the context of these cycles).

Crucially, she makes these claims without any invocation or evocation of “religion,” instead choosing to rely on the discourse of “cultural nationalism.” Yet, the very stuff of Japanese culture, as constructed by Hosoki, can be seen as “religious.” Her work is chock full of references to kami, hotoke and ancestor memorialization. This amounts to a strategy where religion becomes culture through media.

To understand the complexity of what Hosoki has woven together, one must have a bit of context. Picking up around the mid-1970s, the divination industry boasts not only media personalities such as Hosoki but also divination computer games as well as fortune tellers who make home visits, and divination halls. Fortune tellers, much like magicians in the West, are also privately contracted in order to make corporate appearances. For Dorman, the key to Hosoki is what he calls “shared meanings” (Dorman 2007, 35). This requires a delicate balance of media use and also culturo-religious semiotics. On the one hand, Hosoki denies that what she does and offers as advice is connected to religion. On the other hand, she “draws on shared meanings about concepts widely believed to have religious significance in Japan” (ibid., 34).
Dorman summarizes the religious logic of Hosoki’s media presence in the following manner. First, her non-religious claim relies fundamentally on the widespread nature of religious concepts, while suggesting that society has forgotten much of it. In other words, her particular brand of religiosity relies on a popular Japanese religious consciousness—or perhaps a better term would be “Japanese religious savoir”—but also claims to be reintroducing to the Japanese public that very same savoir. Second, Hosoki relies on the extant allergy to identifying as “religious” in Japan, which was already discussed above. In couching ancestor worship and her divination methods in such a discourse, she is able to claim that she is talking about shared Japanese culture, not religion. Further, as she is unaffiliated with a specific religious organization, new or old, she can double down on that stance.

As previous studies of media and religion have already noted, when religion and new media meet, there is undoubtedly a circulatory effect (Hoover 2006). Indeed, while certainly not new, it is especially pertinent in this case because of the way in which the interaction between religion and digital media achieves the “shared meaning” that Dorman talks about. What media (e.g. numerous cable television programs) are able to do for Hosoki is to bring together the signifiers from Shinto, Buddhism and also the *rokusei senjutsu* into a resonant complex that overlaps crucially with the extant popular Japanese religious imagination. Digital media allow for the remediation of “religiosity” into Japanese culture—what we have thus far been calling “culturo-moral infrastructure.” Technology in this instance becomes a means of making religion recede into a cultural background. Technology launders religion into culture.

*Pop culture as religion*

Another form of media that has become the stage where shared meanings have been circulated is manga. Manga, unlike comics in the West, is read by a larger segment of the population, regardless of age. What is important about manga is that it too is multi-platform. Starting off as something akin to comic books, they have now taken on various forms such as animated series (“anime”) to graphic novels. They are also serialized online. Manga has been one of the key markers of Japanese popular culture since their rise in the 1950s. It is perhaps one of the key cultural exports of Japan.

Many “new religions” have leveraged manga in a variety of ways. As Pfeiffer notes, “manga ... are widely used to recruit and deliver information to members” (Pfeiffer 2000, 156). These groups, he continues, are marked by their lasting orientation towards psychic phenomena and spiritualism. However, there is, as Jolyon Thomas notes, a deeper connection with manga, one that is far more productive for the study of religion and media in Japan—entertainment. In using a new theoretical analytic that he dubs “shukyo asobi,” a portmanteau of “shukyo” (religion) and “asobi” (play/entertainment),
Pfeiffer argues that contemporary religiosity in Japan has been increasingly “outsourced” (Thomas 2007, 75) to areas previously untrammeled by traditional religious institutions. This is a symptom of greater changes in religion in Japan. It suggests a “movement away from traditional structures, where religious affiliation and practice were determined by family and community” towards informality (Thomas 2007, 75). Religion therefore is no longer a stable entity but rather a momentary state, a concretization of certain conditions, moods, ideas and environs that emerges in certain instances. In the case of Japan, Thomas argues, religiosity manifests itself in “practices centered primarily on the acquisition of worldly benefits (genze riyaku), in fascination with the occult and the supernatural, and in various divination practices” (ibid., 75). Indeed, this is consistent with the arguments laid out above. What Thomas adds to this list is the entertainment factor, whereby the “religious material” is presented “in an environment where participants see themselves as audience members and consumers more than as believers or adherents” (ibid., 76). New religious movements “can be seen as playing with the stuff of religion” (ibid., 76, emphasis added).

Thomas argues that the films of the most famous of Japanese animators, Miyazaki Hayao, can be viewed as “religious texts,” wherein the “efficacy of gods, saviors and spirits” is promulgated (Thomas 2007, 80). For instance, in many of Miyazaki’s films, there is an ecological emphasis. This “environmental ethic,” as Thomas calls it, is rooted in a religious or spiritual idea that there is an “immanent life-force that binds organisms together” but that there is now, as opposed to the past, a loss of respect and appreciation for this force (ibid., 82). Thomas effectively makes his case, citing examples from many of his best-known films, including the wildly popular My Neighbor Totoro, wherein the eponymous totoro are clearly a friendly and cuddly version of kami (ibid., 83).

As Tanabe rightly notes:

Religion and entertainment, shukyo and asobi, share the ability of enabling audiences to escape familiar territory and enter into fantasies which can be mundane in the creation of an idealized (or even real) past, or extraordinary in constructing an entirely imaginary world. The power to transport operates at many levels, and can induce new experiences that are temporary or lasting, titillating or transformative.

(Tanabe 2007, 98)

Mundane here must be understood in both senses. On the one hand, there is the sense of the quotidian, the everyday. On the other hand, there is the mundane, meaning this-worldly. Religion in Japan seems to exhibit both of these characteristics. Crucially,
technology is that which facilitates the everyday, the mundane. Japan is already known for its cyberculture. While it certainly borders pathology at times, especially in the Western blogosphere as well as in science fiction novels, there is sufficient evidence to show that Japan, culturally and otherwise, has a penchant for the technological. Technology, rightly or wrongly, has become almost synonymous with Japanese popular culture. The banality, however, is not simply that technology exists and is widely used but rather that there is a readiness of sorts rooted in the Japanese religio-moral infrastructure that easily allows for the banality of religious digital culture.

The immaterial and the popular

As mentioned in the introduction, in recent years, social-scientific perspectives of religion have honed in on the importance of the everyday. One could argue that this came in the wake of the failures of secularization theory. Secularization theory argues that religion is “waning” due to the metaprocess of modernity. However, as many scholars have pointed out, this conclusion is arrived at through a strict adherence to institutional religion. Hence, when church attendance declines, or when the number of respondents in a religious affiliation goes down in a national survey, it is only a specific idea of religion that is being affected negatively by modernity.

What many of the critics of secularization theory have pointed out is that religion can no longer be studied from the perspective of orthodoxy, of doctrine, of clerics. Instead, as Nancy Ammerman has recently proposed, religion could be studied from the perspective of the non-expert. This would mean studying not so much religion but rather religiosities, as mentioned earlier. The study of religiosities assumes that what should be under scrutiny are not the structures of religion but the “wide range of mental, physical, emotional and social realities that can fall within the realm of ‘religious’ experience” (Ammerman 2007, 6).

As mentioned previously, the analytic of “religiosity” over “religion” allows for the appreciation and fuller consideration of religion as practiced with the logic of hybridity or bricolage (Ammerman 2007, 8). The locus of everyday religion can be found in unexpected places. It comes from “multiple religious sources.”

From royal funerals to funerals for aborted fetuses, we are curious about who participates and why. From home altars to televised liturgies, we are curious about the power and impulse to create something that is sacred. From “faith-based” organizations to Internet chat rooms, we are curious about where religion happens and how it mingles with other aspects of social life.

(Ammerman 2007, 9)
Everyday religion, as Ammerman notes, beckons us to deal with two possibilities for the conceptualizing of religion itself. First, we must be open to the prospect of the “health” of religiousness, or “religious energy,” relying on “flexibility” as much as we do on “apparently unchanging truths” (Ammerman 2007, 12). Second, the very definition of religion must be reconsidered. Beyond the ideational one, which focuses on beliefs and doctrines, religiosity may lie in the construction of a sacred in everyday life.

The media play an important part in what we call “everyday life” in at least one way: they serve as an implicit resource in the articulation of culture, as Lynn Schofield Clark (2007, 73) suggests. According to Clark, the media allow for a particular form of contact with what she calls “tacit” religiosity. Specifically referring to television shows that have a supernatural backdrop such as Charmed, which revolves around a group of sisters who also happen to be witches, and Touched by an Angel, these shows represent a supernatural and fantasy world which, according to Clark, has “long been popular with those at a particular developmental stage in which they desire more power than they feel they will ever have” (ibid., 73). Based on interviews, she argues that “not-so-religious teens” are not exactly “true secularists.” As her data suggest, many teens who consume the supernatural narratives of contemporary entertainment media are open to stories that exceed the scientific perspective of the Enlightenment. The world of spirit and fantasy are familiar to them. These beliefs cannot be identified as “religious” outright; hence, Clark settles on the word “tacit” to describe them, or, alternatively but perhaps even more accurately, as “religion, twice removed.”

The theory of the media’s religiosity that we can gather from Clark’s work has many overlaps with some of the main empirical points detailed above regarding religion in Japan specifically. The media, according to Clark, are a means of exposure to a culture that is laden with religiosity that defies the prior categories of identification. To put it differently, religion is infused with culture whereby the distinction between the two becomes increasingly difficult.

It is due to this infusion that the term “popular religion” becomes useful for us. Popular religion, as with popular culture, has something of a “bifurcation” problem. As Stephen Turner makes note, is “popular” that which is hegemonic? In the case of China, the religion of the nobility was at times imposed upon the masses. Would this qualify as popular religion, as there would have been many adherents, albeit some of them involuntary?

This beckons the larger concern about defining religion as institutional or something else altogether, as Ammerman earlier raised. In large part, contemporary popular religion no longer faces a problem of sanctioned religion, as even some religious theocracies tolerate religious minorities. As Cristián Parker G. has written, popular religion today is part of the current of globalization. Contemporary popular religion,
and popular piety, actually operates in the domain of culture, specifically cultural identity and cultural models (Parker G. 1998, 197). Part of this is considering what "calling" religion has for human beings. For Parker G., religion fulfills a "community niche" (ibid., 203). As globalization unravels prior ties, religion, as a mark of identity and cultural roots, emerges as a counteracting force of "deterioralization" (ibid., 202). Thus, religion becomes something of a "counterculture" against "the 'modernity' of a dominant culture of globalized capitalism" (ibid., 203).

One aspect of this contemporary form of popular religion, Parker G. writes, that puts it in relief to the dominant culture, consists of "the transcendent;"

[which] enable[s] people to express feelings in sensible, corporeal fashion, pouring out the mighty charge of feelings, accumulated by the popular mystical experience during the year, and expressing it on the precise date of the patronal feast. Its effectiveness is due to the capacity of the icon to catalyse feelings and desires in a precise time/space (through the element of marvel in fiesta and ritual), together with its mediatary capacity as efficacious symbol of a transcendent action upon living persons.

(Parker G. 1998, 204)

This is related to what Parker G. calls "the vitalistic." By this, he is referring to that which is "beyond human beings' rationalistic grasps." This, in turn, includes that which cannot be understood by "Cartesian and positivistic scientism" (Parker G. 1998, 204), such as kami.

Parker G. argues that this is due to the influence of popular culture, which, like popular religion, is "more symbolic, dramatic and sapiential than the enlightened, intellectual, educated and scientific dominant culture." It "produces and reproduces faith, rituals and religious expressions in its own symbolic framework" (Parker G. 1998, 205). In fact, this explains, as Parker G. says, the "coexistence of magical and modern scientific rationalities observed in modern popular religion" (ibid., 206). This sort of onto-cosmology, as noted above, distinguishes Japanese religious consciousness. Therefore, what makes the case of the intersection of "popular culture" and "popular religion" uniquely Japanese is the mixed reality of kami and humans.

**Conclusion**

Digital religiosities in Japan provides an important case in the study of religion and digital culture in Asia because of its unique quasi-secular status. However, we maintain that deeper investigation suggests that its self-professed secularity covers up a very rich and pluralistic spiritual landscape. This landscape, which we call a "religio-moral
infrastructure," draws upon various religious traditions, making use of symbols, rituals and deities from not only native Shinto but also from Buddhism as well as Christianity. Not only that, but pop culture also becomes integrated into the large symbolic pantry from which Japanese religiosity draws to make its unique blend. One could argue that this dynamic was already present in Japanese spirituality. However, we would argue that the impact of digital culture on Japanese culture at large indicates a movement away from traditional structures of religion toward mundane or everyday religiosity. In the case of Japan, the boundaries of religiosity and entertainment have eroded, resulting in a popular religiosity (as opposed to popular religion), the elements of which can be found in varied areas of culture, ranging from manga to talk shows.
Towards a New Literary Trend
Chapter 5. Towards a New Literary Trend

Contemporary Japanese society mirrored in literature

Yasuko Claremont

Introduction

This paper examines the auguries of a new literary trend created by a new generation of writers in Japan that arose out of the precarious social conditions in contemporary Japan. In their works the predicaments in which people now find themselves in their working life are vividly portrayed through the vacillating socio-economic conditions of contemporary urban Japan.

Even though the popularity of sociopolitically focused themes is comparable to that of proletarian literature in Japan in the late 1920s and the early 1930s, they lack the united commitment shown then to the prevailing communist ideology. What is common, however, is the hardship endured by labourers at the work front. Dealing indirectly with contemporary social issues such as karōshi (death by overworking), hikikomori (self-imposed isolation), homeless people, freeters, NEET (not in education, employment, or training) and the working poor, these polarised literary topics have, by virtue of the range of predicaments depicted, the potential to become a source of activism for promoting social change, as their predecessors did, though not bound together this time by a political ideology.

Moreover, the narrative style of these authors, for example, Nishimura Kenta (b. 1967) and Shirai Katsumi (b. 1961), is confessional; using the first-person narrative reminds us of Japan’s I-novel tradition, but again contemporary narration lacks the deep psychological terrain that the archetypal I-novels contained. Instead, their works illustrate latent anxieties, anger and apathy against modern societies where inequality flourishes (kakusa-shakai) and in which they find themselves trapped. I-novels are often criticised for their concentration on the psychology and reactions of the protagonist and, consequently, their lack of social content. Thus, in a strict sense, these new writers are neither proletarian writers nor I-novelists. They have extended existing literary styles into a new form. Their works confront the propensity in Japanese society to conform. Characteristically, the writers discussed below have made it clear that their attitudes are based upon being ‘unable to unite’ and ‘not forcing people’. To this extent, Nishimura and Shirai, for example, chose to remain as outsiders, and their bitter personal experiences form the basis of their literature. In this paper I discuss first the economic forces leading to the creation of an underclass, and second, past and
contemporary works of literature dealing with this theme.

**Economic forces in society**

Neoliberalism is a contemporary form of economic liberalism that emphasises the efficiency of private enterprise, liberalised trade and relatively open markets to promote globalisation. Neoliberals therefore seek to maximise the role of the private sector in determining political and economic priorities. Privatisation has occurred globally, neglecting responsibility for social welfare and environmental issues. As a response, anti-globalisation movements have taken root in the world since the 1990s. On 16 April 2012, *Time Magazine* featured an article by Michael Schuman in which the youth unemployment statistics quoted were 50 per cent in Spain and 8.5 per cent in Japan.²

Sustaining a precarious way of life by working casually, part-time, or on a temporary contract appear to have become perilously commonplace in the contemporary labour markets of the industrialised world.³ The Australian Broadcasting Commission (ABC), for example, reported in December 2011 that 40 per cent of workers in Australia are now either on casual employment or under independent contract. Sophia Seung-yoon Lee's study shows that ‘the non-standard employment rate rose from 27 per cent (2001) to 36 per cent (2007) in Korea and from 20 per cent (1994) to 34 per cent (2007) in Japan (OECD/Korea 2008); and around 2 million people in the UK were ‘trapped in a continual round of low-paid and insecure work’.⁴ Their precarious existence has increasingly created personal and social problems due to insecurity and lack of a stable income.

Needless to say, media innovation and technology today is unprecedented and we are daily inundated by news of job cuts, and financial downturns. As a world-wide trend we see crowds protesting against political and economic exploitation, resulting in large-scale unemployment. For example, Schuman's abovementioned report in *Time* contained devastating statistics from the Pew Research Centre that suggested:

 between 2010–2011 the share of Americans aged 18 to 24 who are in employment is only 54%, the lowest on record. Also, the International Labor Organization (ILO) figures show that 75 million people aged 15 to 24 were unemployed globally, that is, 2 out of every 5 jobless – and there is little hope of significant improvement.⁵

History has shown that social unrest at these levels often erupts into outbreaks of protest and violence, as was illustrated, for example, in contemporary Greece. The point here is that social unease is related not just to the isolated issues of special discontented groups, but more importantly to global issues that transgress national borders agitated by the fear of insecurity through sensationalised media reports. For instance, the effect of the downfall of the European economy has spread worldwide,
affecting international investments, and leading to the possibility of a world recession that could be comparable to the 1930s Great Depression. Today, localised issues and their effects are no longer isolated in one geographic region but permeate every corner of the world.

While Japan has experienced lingering stagflation since the economic downturn in the early 1990s, more recently President Obama has defined contemporary youth as belonging to yet another ‘lost generation’ that missed out on the opportunity to get involved in the fabric of society as an integrated part. The assumptions of the lifetime employment system in Japan as the model responsible for Japanese economic success have now been debunked. In parallel, the difference of income between full-time and part-time payment widens, splitting societies into the haves and have-nots, which in Japan has led to the creation of what is known as the kakusa-shakai (unequal society). Moreover, those in full-time permanent positions are not safe, as they are made to work excessive hours, leading in some cases to what is called karōshi (death by overworking). Despite the fact that Japanese society has become increasingly competitive over the past two decades, Japan's economy-based social problems, such as the insecurity still attaching to full-time jobs, the low income of freeters (casual workers), as well as the plight of homeless people and the hikikomori, have multiplied and extended into every corner of social life. The disasters of the 3/11 Great East Japan Earthquake and the Fukushima nuclear power plant meltdown have added an extra dimension of unease to the already prevailing sense of social precarity. In this sense, Japan is at a crucial socio-economic turning point.

The youth unemployment rate in Japan is high, due particularly to the changes that have taken place in socio-economic structures in industries in the last two decades. It has been politically induced through privatisation, restructuring and casualisation in the name of a new liberalism that has pursued efficiency and profit making through technological advance. Japan's unemployment rate is currently 4.2 per cent, but we know that statistics are subject to interpretation. For example, the increasing numbers of despatch workers (haken) now find themselves in the category of Services and not of Employment, with its related benefits. The government-led economic strategies, for instance, the temporary housing scheme and job retraining, have turned out to be unsuccessful, creating serious shortages in job opportunities and proper employment for future development.

According to the critic Yoshimoto Takaaki, the difficulty facing the labouring class is ‘a problem of weakening spiritual power that resists adversity’. Yoshimoto grew up in wartime Japan, and knew starvation at a time when Japan had unconditionally surrendered and there was not enough food for everyone. Miserable though their lives
are, poverty-stricken young adults today have not experienced the extreme degrees of poverty of earlier times. However, as comparative background, the Guardian has reported that around 10 million Japanese people now earn less than 2 million yen (US$20,000) a year. And according to the OECD (2008) report entitled ‘Growing Unequal?: Income Distribution of Poverty in OECD Countries’, the average income of the poorest 10 per cent of Japanese people is around US$6,000 in purchasing power parity – below the OECD average of $7,000.11

Casual workers threatened by instability in their employment are often referred to as purekariâto, a Japanese neologism that combines ‘precarious’ with ‘prole- tariat’ in an attempt to highlight their precarious social status. By 2011, as Jeff Kingston has noted, ‘more than one-third of workers in Japan were employed on the disadvantageous terms common to non-regular employment featuring low wages and limited job security’.12 This sense of precarity exists globally as workers become the victims of social reforms and the restructure of industries such as privatisation of public assets and the globalisation of liberal trade that took place from the 1990s onwards. As yet another dire consequence, those reaching working age during these periods lost connection with the people of previous working generations.

In the 1980s in Japan the popular phrase dokushin kizoku (single–unmarried youth) indicated the indulgent and carefree lifestyle of adolescents, such as going on overseas holidays as they had the money to do so. Formerly, freeters also had the same notion of the carefree lifestyle of youth moving from one casual job to another without commitment or loyalty towards their employers and work. But since the bubble burst in the 1990s they have faced a different scenario, with less availability of full-time jobs, which has led to greater competition, no work-related benefits in terms of skills to learn, and no insurance or a pension. The never-ending recession in Japan does not bode well for the life of casual workers in the competitive Japanese labour market. These predicaments have become so prevalent that they are now part of the mainstream of employment in developed countries such as Ireland, Portugal, Italy, Greece and Spain, all experiencing high levels of unemployment and needing Euro loans to continue financial viability.

In 1995 Nihon keizai dantai rengōkai (Japan business organisations) proposed three categories of employees in a statement entitled shin-jidai no Nihonteki keiei (Japanese-style management for the new age), that challenges the new direction and its practical strategy:13

1 long-term employment;
2 skilled professional employment on contract;
3 flexible employment.
The third category includes no wage increase and no benefits. Literally, it refers to a labour category that can readily be disposed of. This is a forcible departure from the principle of dōitsu chingin, dōitsu rōdō (equal wages for equal labour). Irie Kimiyasu pointed out that in Japan the commodification of labour without protection of labour laws and unions is a key problem.14

In Japan today, full-time employment emphasises managerial work, where full-time employees are expected to survey, control, evaluate and rank non-full-time workers to maximise profits. Japan has often been described as susceptible to this form of stratification due to the general uniformity of its education system. This alleged national culture of conformity combines with the dissemination of social stereotypes such as Japan’s homogeneity myth and the Nihonjinron discourse as one of the contributing factors in shaping Japan’s stratification of labour. As far as the linkage between education and the economy is concerned Guy Standing states:

The education system is being globalised. It is brashly depicted as an indus-try, as a source of profits and export earnings, a zone of competitiveness, with countries, universities and schools ranked by performance indicators. It is hard to parody what is happening. Administrators have taken over schools and universities, imposing a ‘business model’ geared to the market.15

Education, particularly at school, should not be regarded as a profit-making entity. Instead of emphasising the value of a liberal education, the rationale of universities today is to prepare students for entrance into the labour market, so they must be trained to be competitive. The shortcomings of this exclusive focus became apparent when Japan’s political corruption and stagflation caused the business market to collapse in the 1990s, resulting in fewer employment opportunities. Unfortunately, the ensuing labour restructure measures introduced by Prime Minister Koizumi failed to invigorate the economy, leaving a large number of youths poor, in a precarious state and with no future.16

Mary Brinton defines the ‘lost generation’ as Japanese school leavers who tried to obtain employment during the recession of the 1990s only to become squeezed out of full-time work later on in their lives, particularly as new graduates from school, college and university.17 The stable labour supply market consisting of a large number of graduates used to be the norm, and may well restart if the Japanese economy recovers. But the tragedy remains that those belonging to the lost generation will miss out on such an opportunity. Thus, opportunities for social mobility within disadvantaged social groups such as the hikikomori, freeters and NEET will experience a heightened sense of precarity, which may also lead to a group consciousness of disenfranchisement.

Today, Japan faces several social and economic challenges. People in the labour market compete with each other by selling their labour cheaply. Even people in permanent
jobs are not safe. Because of their employment status they are expected to work and contribute excess time unpaid. The shrinking of tax payers in the population will no doubt create problems for the government. Japan is an ageing country\textsuperscript{18} and its declining birth rate has been a critical issue that impacts heavily on the national labour market and employment situation.\textsuperscript{19} When we consider the fact that the government receives less tax from the part-time sector and no tax at all from other groups, such as elderly and disabled people, the resulting financial imbalance may lead to further reductions in social welfare. An article titled ‘Precarious Work in Japan’ succinctly outlines how economic insecurity leads young people to avoid marriage and family. Social insurance benefits, in particular, are only for regular workers:

It appears that declining income and uncertain employment are contributing to this rising rate of non-marriage. This is a critical factor in Japan’s low birth rate. It has also contributed to growing concerns about the viability of pension and medical care in the future, as the dependency ratio (retirees per worker) is rising sharply. This fiscal situation is aggravated by the large percentage of the workforce in non-regular employment that does not pay social insurance premiums.\textsuperscript{20}

Echoing Karl Marx’s famous definition of ‘the creation of man through human labour’, Hannah Arendt wrote:

The modern age has carried with it a theoretical glorification of labor and has resulted in a factual transformation of the whole of society into a laboring society ... Within this society, which is egalitarian because this is labor’s way of making men live together, there is no class left, no aristocracy of either a political or spiritual nature from which a restoration of the other capacities of man could start anew. Even presidents, kings, and prime ministers think of their offices in terms of a job necessary for the life of society, and among the intellectuals, only solitary individuals are left who consider what they are doing in terms of work and not in terms of making a living. What we are confronted with is the prospect of a society of laborers without labor, that is, without the only activity left to them. Surely, nothing could be worse.\textsuperscript{21}

Arendt’s insistence here is that human beings must go beyond simply ‘making a living’. She has stressed in this seminal book that she is proposing ‘nothing more than to think what we are doing’. Her lamentation is still most apposite today and the commodification of labour was already a norm in nineteenth-century work conditions where workers were treated like automated robots, and today human beings are actually being replaced with robots performing labour.
Past and contemporary literature

Given that the government’s social policies shape a labour market that affects all the people at work, the literary portrayals of contemporary work conditions by nominal Japanese writers, particularly of casual labourers and despatch workers, are indicative of a prevailing sense of precarity and suggest stereotypical norms, such as long hours, no security and lack of promotion. In terms of exploitation by the directions taken by labour market values and measures, the new literary trend seems at first glance to be an extension of proletarian writing of the 1930s. There is a major difference, however. The working conditions in the 1930s were deplorable, as seen in Kobayashi Takiji’s Kanikōsen (The Cannery Boat, 1929) and Japan’s proletarian literature in the 1930s promoted the communist ideology that was disseminated regularly among the workers. Moreover, proletarian literature was part of several cultural movements.22

The scale of Japan’s economic downturn for the past two decades has produced writing that distinctly addresses the hardships that have arisen in the wage-earning class. Unlike the 1920s and 30s when there was communist penetration into the working force, at this present time in history the labour supply in Japan has been lawfully organised, runs efficiently and is paid accordingly. In short, despite the fact that nothing illegal appears to take place in contemporary society, this appears to be a much more sinister method of exploitation than the violent confrontation between managers and labourers in the 1930s. In Amamiya Karin’s book Ikisasero! Nanminka suru wakamono tachū23 [Make us live: the displacement of young people!] the activist suggests that young freebers and casual workers do not understand what drove them into such a desperate situation and thus they often blame themselves for being non-competitive in a market that is based on promoting high efficiency and profit within the framework of a democracy.24 Due to her commitment and dedication to social issues in Japan, Amamiya has become a public figure representing different kinds of disenfranchised communities.

It is not surprising how consciously the new writers incorporate the contemporary work environment and its impact on people into the textuality of their work. Such eye-catching book titles as Akagi Tomohiro’s non-fictional Wakamono o migoroshi ni suru kuni [The nation abandoning its youth, 2011] and Shirai Katsumi’s Zetsubō otoko [Man in despair, 2008] and the fictitious I-novel style of Kueki ressha (Hereafter: Labour train, 2011) all echo the misery that the authors have found in themselves and the necessity for social reform. These works profile contemporary youth whose social status has become that of casual labourer without the prospect of a career.

Depicting their monotonous working life with no future, these writers have succeeded in making a realistic impact on their readers. In Amamiya’s case, through media and electronic technology, such as Facebook, YouTube and Twitter, she has taken an activist
role in arguing that the social condition of malaise is not altogether of their own making, but has been caused by a politically engineered economic structure. Thus the writing coming from this marginalised group is gaining at least some awareness in Japanese society as a whole.

Below I discuss two prominent examples of the genre of disparity in Nishimura Kenta and Okazaki Yoshihisa, who successfully depicted the life of the precariat in Japan. In order to place these two in a literary historical perspective that is related to labour themes, I will juxtapose their work with two former novelists, Kobayashi Takiji, who was writing in the 1920s and 30s, and Nakagami Kenji, whose work came much later, in the 1980s. These four Japanese writers all reacted to the economic pressures emerging in their times, leading directly to job insecurity, inequality and isolation. In discussing the particular way in which socially focused literature can have an impact on society itself, David Inglis has pointed out that most twentieth-century thinkers in the Marxist tradition regard artworks not as containing direct expressions of the ‘economic base’ of a society or of ‘dominant ideologies’, but instead as expressing indirect and mediated relations between ‘material’, ‘ideological’ and ‘artistic’ factors. And indeed, in their writing Nishimura and Okazaki do not advocate social reform through anti-government or anti-globalisation protests, but rather their literary output relates to the predicament of the young who are alienated in society by poverty and lack of human relationships.

Kobayashi Takiji (1903–1933)

Hirokazu Toeda has analysed the reasons for the boom in sales from 2008 onwards of Kanikōsen by Kobayashi Takiji. Toeda saw the reason for the novel’s immediate popularity as lying in media reviews and publishers’ advertisements, where catch phrases caught the public’s attention, for example ‘a masterpiece depicting the harsh labour environment born again in the “gap-widening society” of the Heisei period!’ and ‘Kanikōsen – Sad reminder, lamenting disparity, young people’s empathy’. The Guardian reported that half a million copies of Kanikōsen were sold in 2008. The huge sale of this classic novel of proletarian literature nearly seventy years after it was first published indicates that Japan’s modern-day working poor feel that they are part of the same kind of exploitation that the fishing crew in the story experienced.

Kanikōsen is a statement of how harshly workers were exploited and the corruption of those in authority, including army and government officials. The well-known opening sentence is ‘We’re on our way to hell, mate!’ and the workers’ space in the ship is called ‘a shit pot’, where they were treated like animals. The workers were a mixed group of seasonal labourers, young boys from the slums, ‘farmer fishermen’ and ex-students. In the story Takiji included their previous work experience, such as at mining pits and
factories, in order to stress other areas of employment where mistreatment took place.

On the ship the workers were made to compete in productivity output between the crew, the fishermen and cannery hands. The superintendent offered prizes to the winning side, and at the same time he posted a notice for the least productive member, saying that a red-hot poker would be applied to that man’s body. The workers rebelled in the end, but their strike ended in defeat. When the imperial destroyer approached the ship, ironically the workers first thought that it came to rescue them. Instead, it came to subdue them. They were betrayed; the power of the state had overwhelmed them:

You know, it's just dawned on me – we've got no allies but ourselves. 'An imperial warship.' Sounds good, doesn't it? But it was nothing but a pawn of the rich. An ally of the people? Don't make me laugh. That's a lot of bunk!28

The navy arrested their nine representatives. Those who remained were worked almost to death. Nonetheless, in the final scene they planned to rise up again with a new strategy where all joined together to make a united demand. This time the workers were successful and the cruel supervisor was arrested and jailed. In a critical article ('Takiji and the security system of the time'), Ogino Fujio asserted that the situation then is still relevant and applicable to this day.29 He referred to Takiji's saying – 'war is an invasion of violence externally and at the same time it inevitably creates internally a reactionary horror government'.30 Kanikösen presents a microcosmic power relationship between those with authority and those exploited. It goes beyond taking class conflicts as a theme, hinting further at the existence of fascism in Japan.

Precarity today is obviously not treated in the same way as the crew were in the story, but the social impasse that we find ourselves in is similar. In contrast to the boat workers in Takiji's story, the disenfranchised labourers blame themselves for not being able to be in the mainstream of the work force due to their own inability and inadequacy.

Placed in its literary historical context, Kanikösen served the aim of promul- gating communism among the factory workers, by means of promoting socialism in an art form at the labour front, such as in factories. Under the guise of art movements, the communists could avoid being arrested by police. At the same time they could deeply involve themselves in re-educating the workers. Although proletarian literature was short-lived, it produced good writers whose narrative technique consisted of actions unfolding one after another, thereby holding the reader's interest until the end of the story. Kanikösen also contains the following detailed descriptions of how violent the sea could be:

'The "rabbits" are going to jump! The "rabbits"!' Someone was running along the
starboard side, shouting. His words were whipped away by the violent wind, reduced to an unintelligible shout. The entire surface of the ocean was now peaked with flying whitecaps, leaping like rabbits in a vast prairie. This was the harbinger of a Kamchatka squall.\(^\text{31}\)

This type of narrative depicting the violence of nature as a background to labourers on board is artistic and far more than prosaic reportage. Embedded in the artistic themes of *Kanikōsen* is an activist’s conviction for the need for social reform. Takiji presents modernity in Japanese literature by describing workers’ plights in the social context of the time.

**Nishimura Kenta (b. 1967)**

Nishimura Kenta was awarded the 2011 Akutagawa Prize for his narrative *Labour train*. Born in 1967, he came of age at the height of the bubble economy. He left school early and entered the work force in the early eighties, a reality reflected in the era of his story. He openly admits that *Labour train* is autobiographical, dealing with the time of his youth when he was a day labourer at a warehouse. Among this new group of writers he deliberately set himself apart by following the I-novel tradition as his personal style. He praised the works of a few novelists who succeeded in writing about their own ‘shame’ as if it were somebody else’s, particularly Fujisawa Seizō’s works. Fujisawa (1889–1932) spent his life as a labourer and was found dead in Shiba Park due to his mental illness. Seizō was encouraged at times by Tokuda Shūsei and Mikami Otokichi to gain a job and publish his works, for example *Nezugongen ura* [At the back of the Nezu shrine, 1922], in which his friend’s miserable death was featured. His works depict with sympathy the suffering of poor people, similar to the empathy in Dostoevsky’s works. The protagonist in Nishimura’s *Labour train* has a strong self-consciousness. He admits and embraces his shameful actions as they happen without blaming society and people around him. This is similar to Okazaki’s protagonist in *Byōsoku 10 senchi no ettō* [Wintering at the speed of 10 centimetres per second, 1997], which is discussed below. Both authors subscribe to the *jiko-sekinin* mythos and portray the painful debilitating force of self-doubt in their fiction.\(^\text{32}\) This stands in contrast to activist writers such as Amamiya, who recognise the sociopolitical dimension hidden behind the veil of *jiko-sekinin* rhetoric. Indeed, it was Prime Minister Koizumi who promoted the idea of self-responsibility as a way of shifting the government’s accountability for workers’ safety and security to individuals and families themselves, in order to stimulate Japan’s economy in the early twenty-first century.\(^\text{33}\)

*Labour train* itself is the portrait of a young man with no future. The protagonist,
Kanta, a nineteen-year-old day labourer, is based on the author's self-image, which is destructive, foolish and isolated. Kanta is fully aware of his uncontrollable nature and dismayed about it. Yet, as in the author's comments about himself, the protagonist, too, desires to write an I-novel. This is the only positive aspect in the story, which still has a strong note of desolation at the end:

Kanta is still a labourer without a future or purpose, but he always keeps a copy of Fujisawa Seizō's work in his hip pocket. He does not contact anyone, and no one contacts him.34

The protagonist's sad and disastrous background – his father was gaol for having committed a sex crime; his family was broken apart; he left home at the age of fifteen and his education level was low; in the end he turned into an alcoholic. All these semi-autobiographical factors made the author's prestigious winning of the prize even more popular. Nishimura's honest and reflective observation of himself exists between the lines, for example, how Kanta admitted that he took a false step in life by taking the easy path of being a day labourer at the beginning. Obviously, there was no future in just shifting 30 kilogram packages of frozen food one by one on to a pallet, but Kanta also admitted that he was too lazy to change his attitude. The protagonist's full awareness of his precarious lifestyle shocks the reader through uncompromising realism. The author projects the protagonist's self-torture and envy, but refrains from self-pity. Kanta felt that other people belong to a common and fortunate group of human beings who can steadily walk on the royal road of life, whereas he had no other way than to earn 5,500 yen a day to keep himself alive:

When he thinks that his life will run to the end as a labourer, while being eaten away by a demeaning envy that stemmed from an oversized inferiority complex, he could not but feel his life was filled with nothing but toil that was in itself wretched and suffocating.35

While Nishimura attempted to write in the archetypal I-novel tradition engulfed by highly stylised genre conventions, he also wrote about the real and depressing gap between the wealthy and the working poor in Japan, which is nowadays contextualised by the hackneyed phrase *kakusa shakai* (inequality in society). However, the protagonist's desperately lonely lifestyle is in fact of his own making. There was an opportunity for Kanta to get out of such a situation by getting a forklift-driving licence, but he lacked motivation, whereas his friend Kusakabe succeeded in his aims, finding much better work in the postal services. The author reveals all of Kanta's negative sides such as anger, envy and laziness without reservation as if dissecting Kanta's psychology, which also reflects the influence of the traditional I-novel style of narration espoused by his mentor, Fujisawa Seizō.
In modern times the idea of employment opportunities carries with it more than monetary gain. It also contains aspirations for personal development and the ability to contribute to society. Without his commitment to creative writing, Nishimura would have remained a labourer, but in reality he rebuilt himself and became a promising writer.

**Nakagami Kenji (1946–1992)**

The relationship between labour and creativity is taken up in a highly individual way in Nakagami Kenji's writing. In early life the author worked as a forklift driver at Haneda Airport handling cargo, so he too knew the hardship of menial labour. In his novels and essays Nakagami turned his experience of labour into a fusion of body and mind:

> The object, the cargo, exists here in front of me. I touch it, lift it up and move it. What we call the archetype of labour may be described as a rapport or communication between people and objects. It becomes a physical ecstasy. We exist in front of the object, and we realise that we ourselves exist as an object likewise.

This unusual perception of fusion is echoed in Nakagami's fiction *Karekinada* [Sea of Withered Trees, 1977], where the protagonist Akiyuki felt that while he was working as a labourer the sun-soaked landscape was like music. In Eve Zimmerman's words, 'Nakagami breaks through Akiyuki's tortured deliberations about himself, in which he attempts to read himself through the tangled, meta-phoric relations that exist in his family. Instead, his work suspends him in a realm of pure sensation.' By way of comparison, Nishimura's depictions of Kantaro's labour have no such realisation of unity in work, but rather indulge in a sense of I-novelistic shame throughout.

**Okazaki Yoshihisa (b. 1968)**

Okazaki Yoshihisa is a contemporary of Nishimura Kenta. Unlike Nishimura, Okazaki is a Waseda University graduate who majored in literature. In 1997 he received the fortieth Gunzô New Talent Literature Award for his book *Byōsoku 10 senchi no ettō*. One of the selection members, Ri Kaisei, commented:

> the author was narrating the life of a 'defeated' protagonist and his 'rela-tionships' with others, using a plain style without pretence. He succeeded in freshly depicting a kind of youth that is present today, and the book is written with touches of satire and resistance.

Ri emphasises the word 'defeated' and 'relationships' to imply the author's social criticism written with both detachment and satire. Also commenting on this book, the
critic Karatani Kōjin took a different perspective, seeing it as a story depicting the life of a labouring freer on the edge of becoming homeless while maintaining a carefree nonchalance.40

In Okazaki's novel, the protagonist, Tanaka Shōichi, worked for six months in winter standing along a conveyor belt to put books in order into a box every ten seconds for eight to thirteen hours, six days a week with a short break for lunch and tea. There is, however, one moment for the potential development of human relationships when the protagonist sees a girl working under the same conditions. Almost predictably, their relationship quickly dies away: 'the unfruitful love was sealed up tightly.' He does, however, follow her advice that he should attempt to apply for an Arts School scholarship. It was indeed his dream of studying painting that would help him to endure his severe social conditions. In the end Tanaka succeeds in getting a scholarship, and manages to leave his exploitative job. When he receives the scholarship he blesses his good fortune, which brought with it a sign that he had triumphed over the grind and misery of his past life: 'I will step out into new days with your farewell gift of disappointment that you were unable to beat me.'41

The protagonist's defiant and realistic attitude is clearly seen in the opening passage, in which he acknowledges without any self-pity that he is a loser and will never be victorious in life. He simply walked out of the building where he worked without a formal resignation letter. He only remarks that 'I am no good at processing work'. Ironically, after numerous applications for a new job he ended up again with the work that he hated most, 'processing work'. His wages are paid weekly and he acknowledges to himself that he has fallen into the category of a labourer. Under such wretched conditions Tanaka is overwhelmed at being trapped in such a way that he became totally conditioned towards a precarious unstable lifestyle amidst the working class, reaching a point where whenever he heard the supervisor's voice say 'lunch' he was immediately reminded of Ivan Pavlov's 'conditioned reflex' demonstrated by a dog associating the ringing of a bell with food.

We can now draw together some common features to be found in the writings of Okazaki and Nishimura. First, while caught in their dispiriting labour and seemingly with no possibility of escape, both protagonists still kept personal aims, such as 'going to art school' or 'reading a book of Fujiwara', no matter how dreary their lives were. This aspect highlights a certain escapist 'optimism' that was similar to the delineation of the vision of a better future through communist revolution evident in the 1930s proletariat literature. Labour ideology today espouses freedom to choose and express oneself. Similarly, Nakagami Kenji drew for his subject matter on his days of labour at Haneda Airport as a cargo handler. While recognising that in this monotonous work he felt himself becoming mono, an object,42 this idea of objects in work, of which he
himself was one, led him psychologically to feelings of unity in the rhythm of the work. In comparison, Okazaki’s short story ‘Kodoku no michikake’ (The waxing and waning of loneliness) is another example of the precariat’s life style. The protagonist, only known as ‘I’, is thirty years old, and he feels neither old nor young. He works alone as a warehouse keeper, keeping a record of goods and dispensing them on request.

The office people all work on the floor above. He likes such menial work partly because he has the freedom to be on his own and the company he works for has a policy of only working in office hours. He has compromised himself in this situation even though the pay is very small. The daily routine of his life is aimless:

In those days I occasionally felt that I had become a kind of taxi driver. I did all things unmistakably, such as choosing the line, watching the signals, paying attention to pedestrians, turning the handle according to the curve, but I couldn’t feel that I was heading anywhere. I felt that I was simply driving forward on the orders of someone sitting in the back seat. Above all, I didn’t know the destination or where it was.43

He claimed that he didn’t give up on himself, although that was the impression he gave from the way he behaved. He also felt that society resembled the numerous pieces of a jigsaw puzzle. One could not call him hopeful or ambitious, but at least he volunteered to analyse what consists of loneliness while he idled away his office time:

1 A lone person wanting to be with someone, whoever it is.
2 A lone person enjoying remaining aloof from others.
3 Feeling isolated among the people who don’t understand him.
<4 Feeling scared of being alone.44

From this list he was able to arrive at his own definition, which was that loneliness can be hell when one wants to be associated with others, and a utopia when one wants to be isolated from others. The narrator’s non-committed feelings are the most conspicuous aspect of his personality. One day he met a school friend who invited him to participate in a new work project. Both men were excited by the prospects that it might have, but the project failed to go ahead. After that, and without noticing, the narrator ‘I’ gradually became further and further distant from his work, although he managed it to perfection. He rejected the managing director’s kind offer to improve his work prospects, including a pay rise, and instead decided on the spot that he would walk out.

The portrait of this young man presents his complex and apathetic personality filled with an overpowering sense of resignation. This kind of aimlessness in the protagonists’ lives succinctly depicts the psychological repercussion of today’s social
ills. Okazaki has succeeded in creating a devastating image of young workers losing all vision in their lives. Yet, both he and Nishimura have taken up paths within the existing social framework instead of being alienated from it.

**In conclusion**

It is still too early to say whether the narratives of disenfranchisement and precarity discussed in this chapter by arguably a new generation of fiction writers who deal with the contradictions of self-responsibility versus activism may ever come together to form a coherent literary trend. What is clear is that the common theme of their writings depicts the hopelessness and malaise that has invaded the lives of people who have the misfortune to experience the zeitgeist of precarity as the dominant status quo in contemporary Japan. In the novels the polyphony of day labourers, a casualised work force and temporary employees unite with the increasingly prevalent notion of a global precariat that includes an eclectic group of workers of all ages. Instantaneously they may become redundant when a company moves offshore or engages in a wholesale reduction of jobs as an efficiency measure. For those working on contracts, the threat of redundancy is ever-present. It is this general unease that has found its way into novels such as *Labour train* and *Wintering at the speed of 10 centimetres per second*, making them socially significant.

The existing literature on this topic displays different perspectives. For instance, the tone in Nakagami Kenji’s work is creative and positive, so that social advocacy for the emancipation of *buraku* people is caught up in the wider spectrum of his art. Takiji’s *Kanikōsen* is of a similar kind. In contrast, the activist stance of Karin Amamiya focuses directly on social criticism aiming at social reform. Separate again is Nishimura’s insistence on using Japan’s I-novel tradition, indicating that it is only this form that allows him to express the truth of his feelings, an amalgam of anger, shame, aspiration and defeat.

In both fiction and non-fiction these authors are concerned with the human condition in society. This can be measured by Hannah Arendt’s thesis of ‘labor and work’ whereby workers become units in a never-ending cycle of production and consumption. Arendt acknowledges that artists are not part of this automatic cycle, but are driven by their own creative visions. In this vein Nakagami’s legacy continues to influence the cultural activities at Kumano University in Japan, which he founded in 1990, as well as at Otaru University of Commerce where Takiji graduated. The Takiji University library is active not only for providing information but also for sponsoring publications, international symposia and film making of *The Cannery Ship* (released in 2005) – a testimony to Hippocrates’ dictum, *ars longa, vita brevis*. 
Notes

1 Danketsu dekinu, oshitsukenu (unable to unite, not forcing people). Cited in 'Purekariáto bungaku "zetsubó otoko" o shuppan', Asahi shinbun.

2 Michael Schuman, 'The jobless generation', 18–23.

3 Considering the global financial crisis of 2007–08, the state of precarity appears surprisingly common and some have claimed that paradigm shifts institutionalised by, for instance, Fordism are mere exceptions and precarity the rule. For details, see, for example, Brett Neilson and Ned Rossiter, 'Precarity as a political concept'.


6 Obama's famous enunciation resulted from a secretly taped Mitt Romney talk that controversially claimed that 47 per cent of Americans do not pay income tax.

7 See, for example, Ross Mouer and Hirosuke Kawanishi, A Sociology of Work in Japan, xv.

8 Labour Force Survey (Basic Tabulation) November 2012.

9 Yoshimoto Takaaki, Hinkon to shisë, 11.


11 For details, see The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development 'OECD work on income distribution and poverty'.

12 Jeff Kingston, Contemporary Japan, 77.

13 Discussed in a report published by members of the Japanese Business Federation (Nihon keiei shadan tairenmei) entitled Shin-jidai 'Nihonteki keiei': chōsen subeki hōkō to sono gutaisoku.


15 Guy Standing, Precariat: The New Dangerous Class, 68.

16 'Basic policies for economic and fiscal management and structural reform 2004 (Summary)', in which thorough implementation of the principles 'From public sector to private sector' and 'From the state to the regions' were staged, e.g. the privatization of postal services. Online at: www.kantei.go.jp/foreign/policy/2004/0604kettei_e_.html. Also see Koizumi policy in Amamiya's interview of Irie Kimiyasu, 258.


18 See for example the 'Declining birth rate and aging population' statistics at Statistical Handbook of Japan 2013, which records that in 2012 the aged population (65 years and over) 30.79 million, constituting 24.1 percent of the total population and marking a record high. This percentage of elderly in the population is the highest in the world. Online at: www.stat.go.jp/english/data/handbook/c02cont.htm (accessed 7 June 2014).
19 For instance Jonathan Head of BBC News reports that 'the Japanese government says urgent policy changes are needed to persuade women to have more children'; and suggests that the population in Japan is expected to shrink more than 20 per cent by the middle of this century. For details, see Jonathan Head 'Japan sounds alarm on birth rate'.

2- Machiko Osawa, Myoung Jung Kim and Jeff Kingston, 'Precarious work in Japan', 331–332.

21 Hannah Arendt, The Human Condition, 4.

22 For details see Mats Karlsson's article 'United front from below', 2.

23 Amamiya Karin, Ikisaser! Nanminka suru wakamono tachi. Amamiya expresses her determination as 'a declaration of war on Japanese society' and continues her activities of interviewing and writing on this theme until society changes for the better. Because of her commitment and dedication to this issue she has become a public figure on media.

24 This is similar to the workers back in the 1930s but with the difference that contemporary discourse suggests the existence of a Japanese sense of jiko-sekinin or self-responsibility as a powerful deflection of state accountability. For detailed examples of the jiko-sekinin debate, see, for example, Miriam Silverberg, 'War responsibility revisited: Auschwitz in Japan.'


26 Hirokazu Toeda, 'The 'Kanikosen' boom: Reflecting present day suffocation'.

27 See Justin McCurry, 'Japan: Marxist book turns bestseller 79 years on'.

28 Frank Motofuji, The Factory Ship and the Absentee Landlord, 80.


30 Ibid.

31 Kobayashi Takiji, The Cannery Boat (Kanikāsen), 58.

32 Jeff Kingston, Contemporary Japan, 84.

33 Ibid., 83–84.

34 Nishimura, 'Kueki reessa', 493.

35 Ibid., 490.

36 Nakagami Kenji (1946–1992) was born in Shingū, Wakayama Prefecture, in 1946. He was a descendant of burakumin, a stigmatised social class in Japan that was discriminated against. His novels feature stories of burakumin, e.g. The Cape, which won the Akutagawa Prize in 1975.

37 Nakagami Kenji, 'Sakka to nikutai', 200.

38 Eve Zimmerman, 'In the trap of words', 130–152.


40 Ibid.

41 Yoshihisa Okazaki, Byōsoku 10 senchi no ettō, 164.

42 Nakagami Kenji, 'Sakka to nikutai', 200.
43 Yoshihisa Okazaki, ‘Kodoku no michikake’, 85. 44 Ibid., 88–89.
45 Norma Field, ‘Commercial Appetite and Human Need’.

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Ri Kaisei's commendation for Okazaki's winning of the Gunzô Shinjin Bungakushô (Gunzô New Talent Prize), June 1997.


CHAPTER 6

Making Sense of the Lost Decades
Chapter 6. Making Sense of the Lost Decades

Workplaces and schools, men and women, young and old, rich and poor

Andrey Gordon

Prologue: Talking about lost decades

Since the 1990s, an extraordinary change has taken place in the way Japan is understood and discussed both domestically and around the world. A country spoken of in the 1980s with awe or with fear, as model or as menace, came to be described as having a "soured" system, beset by profound problems in society, economy, and politics. These were said to affect the young and old, both men and women, in families, schools, and workplaces. Toward the end of the 1990s, the appellation that won the day (and still prevails) is that of the "lost decade(s)." The term replaced an earlier discourse of "Japan as Number One," which had its heyday for a bit more than a decade, from the late 1970s through the start of the 1990s. This positive earlier take was never unanimous or unchallenged. But the discourse of decline has been both more enduring and more confused – pregnant with contradictory assessments of what has been lost and where the problems lie. Any appraisal of Japan's experience of the past twenty years must begin by sorting through these diverse and divergent perspectives.

One of the most prominent views of Japan in this era is that the nation failed to change in ways that our globalized times demand. I argue in this chapter to the contrary: tremendous change has occurred over the lost decades, in public mood, socioeconomic practice, and state policy. In part, these changes reflect some of the issues that Machidori Satoshi analyzes in Chapter 8 (of the featured title) on Japanese domestic politics and that Peter Drysdale and Shiro Armstrong point to in their discussion of Japan's foreign trade and investment in Chapter 10 (of the featured title). But however profound they have been, the changes have not been unidirectional: for some they are negative and need to be reversed, for others they are positive but insufficient. The combination of opposing directions and opposing assessments produces an overall impression of stasis or insufficiency. Nevertheless, the changes have been substantial.

A second argument of this chapter is that change – even as it has been extensive – has unfolded in the context of existing and relatively enduring norms and structures. This truism was most memorably described by Marx as people making their history in a context where "the tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living." It bears repeating as a reminder that tossing long-established
norms and systems overboard is never simple and not always wise (even if Marx
certainly hoped that his readers would repudiate their inherited past). Toward the end
of this chapter, I will develop the concept of a multidimensional “moral economy” as
one way to characterize these enduring structures of the past.

A third argument is that any account of the lost decades and any prescriptions for the
future must keep politics in focus. The views and actions not only of those at the center
and top of society, but also of those in civil society standing in places “outside” or
“below” or on the margins, are important. And the discourse of stagnation is always a
value-laden claim with political valence. To put forward a view of Japan as lost is
inevitably to call for some sort of action, whether for reform, moral regeneration, or a
return to a better past.⁴ Escape from the condition of “lostness” is not a technocratic
matter of discovering the current global best practice and following it: it is a
profoundly political challenge.

The discourse of “decline”

The discourse of socioeconomic deadlock and decline ranges across several related
topics: employment systems and corporate management; the situation of youth in
education and the transition to their working lives; the situation of women in the labor
force and in families; the decline in birth rates, the ageing of society, and the plight
of the elderly; and a rise in economic or social inequality. Policymakers, business and labor
leaders, and scholars have long understood that issues of employment are intimately
linked to questions of education, gender and social equality, and well-being.

Given their interconnected nature, one might start with any one of these topics. In this
chapter, we begin with the workplace and move on to address matters of gender and
social equality, with only brief mention of education and demography, topics addressed
more fully by Seike Atsushi in Chapter 1 on demography and Kariya Takehiko in Chapter
6 on the Japanese education system (of the featured title). Toward the end of the era of
“Japan as Number One,” truly grand claims were being made about the brilliance of
Japanese-style management. Itami Hiroyuki, a well-known professor of management at
Hitotsubashi University, proclaimed in the mid-1980s his belief in the superiority of
Japan’s “human-centered corporate system.” He argued that, “when we think of Japan’s
long prosperity, at risk of exaggeration perhaps, can we not say that we have arrived at
a time to consider the self-conscious export of our civilization?”⁵ In more muted tones,
in 1991 Koike Kazuo proclaimed Japan’s “skill formation and industrial relations” to be
“a step ahead of world trends.”⁶

The bursting of the 1980s financial bubble and the onset of the lost decades
dramatically changed the context and generated a new flow of views on the defects of
the Japanese workplace. Most prominent has been the neoliberal critique. As early as 1993, flagship carriers of this view such as the Economist were deploiting the rigidity of long-term job security or seniority-based wages. In contrast to Anglo-American-style “shareholder-first” capitalism, Japanese firms were criticized for adherence to a “stakeholder” capitalism that considered the interests of employees and managers to be as important as those of investors. At home, also from the mid-1990s, the business federation focused on employment issues, Nikkeiren, began to call for more flexible deployment of labor. A leading domestic supporter of this position, the Nihon Keizai Shimbun (Nikkei), ran a series in January 2003 on what it called the “Japanese disease” (a play on criticisms from the 1960s of a “British disease” of economic stagnation and entrenched labor power). The newspaper condemned Japanese business leaders for failing to implement much needed reforms in managing their companies. Similar views had been put forth during the 1970s' recession and oil crises. But the recent round of criticism of Japanese workplace practice has been far more enduring and has focused not just on what employers should do differently, but on reforms that the government needs to initiate. Reformers have called for deregulation of labor markets to allow companies more freedom to dismiss workers and close unproductive facilities, greater reliance on outsourcing both to save on costs and to allow easier future adjustments, and increased use of “nonregular” workers on fixed-term contracts, for similar reasons.

The distinction here between “regular” and nonregular” labor has a particular legal and social meaning in Japan. A “regular” employee is someone hired with an indefinite time commitment rather than a time-defined contract. Decades of legal precedents, as well as agreements between unions and companies, established fairly strong protections for these workers, who were most often men. In legal battles over dismissals, courts ruled that before shedding regular workers, employers had to meet four standards of “reasonableness”: business conditions had to necessitate retrenchment; the need for cutting back via outright dismissal as opposed to transfers or furloughs had to be clear; the selection of those persons marked for dismissal had to be fair and rational; and the procedure, including discussion with the union if present, had to be reasonable. In contrast, “nonregular” employees, typically hired on a fixed contract and often in part-time status, were only protected from dismissal during the contract period. They had no protection when it ended. At the same time, labor laws from the 1950s placed some significant restrictions on the industries and contexts in which workers could be hired on time-limited contract, in particular when hired through third-party labor brokers. Regular status has in fact never been as protected in practice as it appeared to be through legal decisions. Beginning in the 1960s, companies devised an array of methods to cut back employment and ease out regular workers, and smaller companies in particular have been able to cut back with little fear that employees would go to
court to protest. Nonetheless, the neoliberal critique from the 1990s took aim at the purported rigidity of Japanese employment law and practice.

But even as significant changes in employment did indeed take place (discussed in greater detail later), other voices emerged to lament the new situation equally as one of discouragement and decline. Reflecting the enduring force of the male breadwinner model as a dominant gender ideology in Japan, concern focused in particular on the ripple effect of the increase in nonregular employment for young men. Deregulated labor markets were said to have increased the numbers of poorly paid young men with insecure jobs and weak prospects for advancement.

These youths were seen to lack the means or the confidence to spend money and generate domestic demand, reinforcing an enduring negative cycle of deflation and economic stagnation. Their growing need for unemployment insurance, as well as corporate claims to state subsidies to sustain employment, put pressure on the national budget. Their situation was prominently connected in the public and bureaucratic mind to declining marriage and birth rates. Nonregular workers were understood to lack the confidence not only to buy things, but also to marry and have children. And a smaller working population would experience increased trouble supporting an ageing society.

The discourse of decline included a more generalized concern with youth and education beyond the confines of the workplace, although it was often related to employment and economic issues. The sense of crisis in education ran from elementary through advanced levels, and it is discussed in depth in Kariya's chapter. Of most relevant to this chapter is Kariya's depiction of a sense of crisis in secondary education, focused mostly on nonelite students. This must be set against a backdrop where, through the 1980s, the efficient placement of young male high school graduates into secure jobs with long-term prospect for advance in pay and skills had been a point of pride in Japan and among outside observers. By the late 1990s and into the 2000s, school guidance counselors were uniformly lamenting the unraveling of this system due mainly to a sharp decrease in desirable job placements in manufacturing. Available opportunities for those without university degrees seemed increasingly limited to poorly paid and insecure service sector jobs.

In higher education, the pessimistic trend discussed most widely not only in Japan but in universities elsewhere was the dramatic drop-off in the number of Japanese youths who studied abroad. It is important to set this decline in context; it followed a dramatic increase in overall study abroad from the mid-1980s through the early 2000s, and numbers going abroad in 2012 were still significantly higher than the numbers in the 1970s and 1980s. Fueling anxiety behind this decline was the pronounced decrease in Japanese students going to the United States in particular, especially when compared to the sharply increased numbers going to America from China or India. As the Kariya
chapter argues, this new comparative context is the critical element in producing a sense of crisis in the production of global talent in Japan. Explanations for the decline have abounded, ranging from the unwillingness of companies or government offices to sponsor young employees for study abroad, to the allegedly inward-looking mindset of risk-averse youths, to the (perceived) need of college students to stay in Japan to begin job-hunting even in their sophomore or junior year. For government officials and some business leaders, the lack of global experience and ambition was part of the explanation for the failure of Japanese companies. Their reports and statements, which proliferated from about 2009 onward, lamented that younger workers did not seek a global stage for their careers, and that Japan trailed much of the world in English proficiency. They also said that the problem ran two ways: Japanese students and workers were failing to look to the world, while Japan was failing to attract students and workers from the world. In this sense, such reports echo some of the Drysdale/Armstrong criticism in Chapter 10 (of the featured title) concerning Japan’s lack of ability to allow in foreign investment and to import global talent.

The gloomy discourse on youth was a gendered one, with roughly equal-opportunity lamentation about both women and men. Beginning in the late 1990s, observers in Japan began to write critically about “parasite singles,” defined as young people who lived rent-free at home, with little ambition beyond shopping and enjoyment of leisure. The term first gained prominence with the 1999 book by the sociologist Yamada Masahiro, The Age of Parasite Singles. Yamada argued for a rough equivalence in the numbers of male and female young parasites, but the mass media tended to see this as a female phenomenon, with the additional criticism of these women as “selfish” for neither forming families nor seeking serious careers. These labels gained currency around the world, helped by a feature article in the New York Times Sunday Magazine in July 2001. Several years later, a male-centered term for failed youth came to prominence: the “herbivore.” Coined in 2006, this label spread so widely that by 2010 government surveys were asking young men if they self-identified as “herbivores” (in one survey, 36 percent of teenage boys did so). The term typically conjured images of feminized young men interested above all in personal grooming and lacking both sexual drive and the career ambition of earlier generations.

While such pejorative buzzwords tended to lay the blame on young people themselves, other commentators found fault with the socioeconomic or political systems for failing to provide opportunity or empowerment to youths. The economist Genda Yuji argued with harsh passion in the early 2000s that “contrary to the belief that parasite singles enjoy the vested right to live at their parents’ expense, the real parasites are the parents, the generation of middle-aged and older workers on whom society has conferred vested rights and who make their livelihood at the expense of young people.” An important related argument was made in some quarters to the effect that
Japanese employers, mainly men, were failing to offer sufficient opportunities to young women and indeed to all women to use their talent and energy in productive ways. Many people saw this not just as a matter of justice or equity, but as one of national economic interest. A 2010 report by the Tokyo office of Goldman Sachs on what it called “Womenomics,” argued that “if Japan could close its gender employment gap, we estimate that Japan’s workforce could expand by 8.2 million and the level of Japan’s GDP [gross domestic product] could increase by as much as fifteen percent.” In addition, it noted, “against a backdrop of anemic consumption, female spending trends have been relatively resilient.”

Genda’s claim that middle-aged and older employees, mainly men, were protecting their privilege at the expense of the young in some measure echoed the spirit of the neoliberal prescription for a corporate free hand in cutting back on expensive long-term commitments to employees. But his opinions sat uneasily with equally downbeat arguments, also made frequently and with passion, to the effect that the older generation (especially men) was being squeezed and cast aside in violation of the implicit understanding that long and dedicated service would be rewarded.

The *Asahi Newspaper* from November 8, 1997, began with a provocative headline: “Sayonara, Mainstream Consciousness!” The reporter argued that the prolonged recession and corporate restructuring had made once-secure jobs unreliable, while crashing land and stock prices and microscopic interest rates had eroded the assets of the middle-class population. The article related the nightmare of the forty-nine-year-old Mr. A, employed at a company that sold electronic equipment. He had been transferred to the “market development section,” a posting widely understood by coworkers to be a dead-end dumping ground for those targeted by the company for “voluntary retirement.” Explicitly told by his boss that he should volunteer for early retirement, Mr. A was discouraged, angry, and humiliated. He had worked for this company for thirteen years and had just taken out a loan to pay for a new four-bedroom home that he would be paying off until age seventy. He and his wife, who worked part time in a real estate office, were saddled with college preparation and tuition costs for three teenage children. Mr. A had not yet had the courage to tell his wife honestly of the extent to which he was under pressure to resign. The article quoted him as asking “Can my ever-so-average lifestyle be so easily snatched away from me?” Angry at the company’s “insincerity” and determined to fight to keep his job, he had recently joined the Tokyo Manager’s Union but his future on his job was uncertain.

More dramatically, there were increasingly depressing reports of high numbers of suicides among middle-aged Japanese, men in particular. Typically attributing these acts to despair at personal economic and employment circumstances, government and
media attention focused with keen intensity on a spike in suicides among men from precisely the moment when the story of Mr. A was published in 1997. Suicides by men in Japan jumped from 16,416 in that year, a level typical of the previous two decades, to 23,013 in 1998, an extraordinary increase of nearly 50 percent. Suicides have remained at this level ever since.¹⁹

The discourse of decline as it intensified over the course of the lost decades focused on one further important loss. A high degree of social and economic equality had been widely trumpeted as a key strength of Japanese society across the decades of rising postwar affluence. In the late 1990s, as the economy floundered, authors of best-selling books started to argue that equality was vanishing. Japan’s middle class was fast dissolving into groups of winners and losers in the competition for income and wealth. The winners were epitomized by a handful of self-made billionaire entrepreneurs who were seen as heralds of a new freewheeling economic order. The losers ranged from younger adults, men in the typical retelling, unable to gain a post-graduate foothold of stable employment, to more senior employees, such as Mr. A, eased out of their mainstream positions by corporate downsizing. In the mid-2000s, the dominant buzzword in discussions about this rising inequality was “stratified society.” Then, sparked by a powerful two-hour NHK television documentary on the topic, broadcast in December 2007 before the global financial crisis (known in Japan as the “Lehman shock”), the appellation “working poor” came to public attention. The program focused on the growing numbers of conscientious, hard-working, well-intentioned men and women employed in low-wage, insecure jobs, unable to earn enough to meet their most basic needs for shelter, food, clothing, or even health care.

On the one hand, this downbeat catalog of decline is obviously full of apparently connected and reinforcing trends. A rigid employment system that protects jobs of veteran workers can be blamed not only for inhibiting nimble corporate strategy, but also for clogging or breaking down the school-to-work pipeline for youths when companies are not growing. And lack of job opportunities can discourage young men, perhaps indeed making them “herbivores.” It can also discourage young women, leading them to become stay-at-home parasite singles. And these trends can discourage both young men and women from marriage and parenthood. The logic behind such connections is clear, but we should not assume there is always a strong causal relationship: in particular, Japan’s demographic shift to a rapidly ageing society with a declining birth rate long predates the 1990s and the emergence of the key attributes ascribed to the lost decades.

On the other hand, the discourse of “lost Japan” is equally filled with contradictory and mutually exclusive perspectives. One observer’s solution is another’s problem. For some, the demographic shift is a crisis because there are not enough young people available
to work and to generate the revenues to support their elders. For others, there are too many young people, unable to get their careers and their lives on track. For some, greater corporate flexibility in hiring and dismissing employees is crucial to allow businesses to compete in the global economy. For others, the resulting increase in nonregular labor inhibits domestic demand and drags down the economy. In the eyes of some, women are selfish parasites who need to get serious. To others, women are a valuable resource who are poorly treated and not given opportunities to enrich their own lives and that of the nation. Some condemn parasite singles, whether women or men, for spending irresponsibly. But others complain that nonregular workers – and by definition the great majority of parasite singles falls into this group – are underconsuming because of their low pay and uncertain future prospects.

Finally, although the specific configuration of these problems varies from place to place, at a general but by no means an empty level of abstraction, these ills are globally shared. Significant and rising inequality, a crisis in education in which youth are not taught the skills and knowledge that would put them on a path toward productive futures, a declining birth rate and worry about supporting an ageing society financially and socially, anemic job growth and job creation centered on part-time and insecure positions – this catalog certainly applies to many places in the advanced capitalist world.

The following section analyzes in more detail the social or economic trends that underlay these diverse negative perspectives. This presentation of the "facts" will, however, neither resolve dubious causal connections nor clarify which of the contradictory perspectives are true. I rather turn to look at the evidence that buttresses these perspectives to gain a better understanding of the three points made at the start: The lost decades have seen significant change. These changes, and the processes by which they have unfolded, have been embedded in longer historical contexts. And the ways in which the facts and the changes are construed are inevitably political.

**Japan’s “social-industrial complex” of problems**

The Japanese employment system changed greatly in the 1990s and 2000s with new configurations of regular and nonregular employees, both men and women. Most significantly, across the entire society the rise in both numbers and proportion of nonregular workers was quite dramatic. But change in the treatment of regular workers has been far-reaching as well, in some ways leading to a convergence in the two types of employment.

Job security in major firms became notably weaker over the 1990s and 2000s. The practice of soliciting "voluntary retirements," already part of the tool box of corporate
Japan since the era of the recession and oil crisis of the 1970s, became ever more common and occurred at earlier ages in a typical career. Likewise, interviews with personnel managers at major firms in 2010 suggest that employees were more likely than in the past to find their division in a large enterprise spun off as an independent company. Such moves would likely narrow their later options. Those who remained faced increased workloads, especially as a company's fortunes improved and new hiring was pursued cautiously. In recent years, one extreme manifestation of this change in employees' status has been the emergence of so-called “black enterprises.” There are at present no government surveys or official definition of such firms, but discussion in the media tends to focus on two sorts of brutally harsh corporate behavior: Such corporations seek to rid themselves of senior employees with a variety of tactics to bully them into leaving “voluntarily.” And they exploit young workers by hiring them in regular status while treating them as disposable resources. Enterprises hire far more new employees than they plan to keep, impose impossible work norms, demand long hours of unpaid overtime, and squeeze out their labor until they quit, often in exhaustion or with damaged health. Young people sign on for such jobs drawn by promises of regular employment status in a difficult job market.

In matters of compensation, the idea of “seniority-based pay,” even for regular employees in large firms, has been transformed through a series of incremental changes that over time have produced a qualitatively different system. Building on policies since the 1960s, which introduced merit assessment into annual raises, many companies in the early 2000s introduced or expanded a “result-based” element in wage setting. This component was usually tied to an assessment of an individual’s achievements; in this regard it did extend the long-established calculation of wages to reflect traits of the person more than traits of the job. But the spread among individual incomes at a given age or seniority nonetheless increased. This was all the more pronounced when bonuses were taken into account. Companies brought much greater managerial discretion into aggregate calculation of bonuses to reflect corporate revenue and profit, and they greatly increased managerial authority to allocate bonuses to individuals to reflect their performance. In aggregate terms, bonuses at one leading steelmaker in recent years (and steelmakers are often presented as among the more traditionally minded employers) have varied by nearly 100 percent from year to year (average bonuses in 2009 were 2.2 million yen; in 2010 they averaged 1.2 million yen). And at one of the major electronic firms, the bonus payment given to a strong performer over the course of a given year by 2010 stood at ten months’ additional pay compared to four months’ pay for a poorly rated person. Since the base monthly income itself was sure to be higher for the more highly rated worker due to better merit increases over time, the spread in bonuses between such individuals would be considerably greater than a 10-to-4 ratio.
Thus, even in the purportedly rigid world of regular workers in major firms, employees can no longer assume either that their jobs are secure over the long term or that their pay will reliably and steadily increase. Managers have a wide range of tools at hand with which to allocate labor and control personnel costs. More than ever, employees have come to face greater variability in earning power and a greater likelihood of reassignment to a subsidiary or a call to retire voluntarily. As described above, the particular mechanisms by which companies have come more strictly to control wage costs, adjust workplace numbers, and allocate human resources have developed within a framework of long-established practices that are in some measure distinctive to Japan. But the changes in these practices are nonetheless profound.

Equally profound has been the shift in the proportion of employees in the category of regular and nonregular workers. The latter include part-time and full-time employees on fixed-term, renewable (and easily nonrenewable) contracts made directly with an employer, as well as workers dispatched to a job from a third-party employment agency. Defining and measuring such nonregular employment is not a straightforward project, but the direction and scope of change is clear. Counting dispatch workers is difficult because the same person can be dispatched more than once in a given year, and government statistics count each dispatch as an additional worker. When the entire workforce is included, the proportion and numbers of self-employed and family labor declined sharply, the proportion defined as “regular employee” declined modestly from 58 percent (38 million) in 1992 to 52 percent (34 million) in 2007, and, most notably, the proportion and absolute number in the various nonregular categories nearly doubled, from 14.4 percent (9.5 million) in 1992 to 27 percent (18 million) in 2007. These numbers and proportions have been relatively unchanged since 2007. In the “Labor Force Survey” of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, which excludes the self-employed and family labor from the denominator, the proportion of nonregular workers in relation to all employees is even higher – it reached 33.7 percent by 2009 and 35.2 percent in 2012 (see Figure 5.1).

This expansion of contingent employment was accelerated by legal changes in the labor field, promoted and implemented from the late 1990s into the early 2000s, most aggressively under the Koizumi administration. A 2003 revision of the Labor Standards Law, while it ironically reaffirmed the four “reasonable” standards that had to be met to dismiss a regular worker, made it easier to hire workers on fixed-term contracts. A Dispatch Worker Law of the same year made it possible for labor brokers to enlist and dispatch workers in virtually any industry (until then this sort of employment had been limited to a handful of industries). These reforms were certainly of some consequence, but it is important to note that even in the 1970s and 1980s, large manufacturing firms outsourced significant elements in their operations to subcontractors, and those employees had weaker protections. The expansion of nonregular employment gained
Figure 5.1  Shifts in regular and nonregular employees

headway from the late 1980s, well before these legal reforms.

One important indication that employment in Japan has become more flexible (or insecure, depending on one’s perspective) for both regular and non-regular employment is found in evidence that losses and gains in employment have become significantly more responsive to the performance of the overall economy. The economist Arthur Alexander found some years ago that from the 1950s through the 1970s, for a given change in GDP, employment in Japan fell or rose only one-fifth as much as in the United States. That is, Japan’s elasticity of employment with respect to GDP was only 0.2 (or 20 percent), whereas the elasticity in the United States (in both cases measured over a two-year period following a given shift in GDP) was 1 (or 100 percent). This was a striking difference, a clear macroeconomic statistical indication that jobs in Japan during the high growth era were significantly more secure when compared to the United States. But beginning in the 1980s, and especially in the past two decades, the gap has closed significantly. By 2009, employment elasticity in Japan as measured by Alexander had reached the realm of 0.7 to 0.85, still lower than in the United States by 15 to 30 percent, but much narrower than in the past.24 It is hard to doubt that the combination of greater flexibility (or insecurity) in the jobs of regular workers, combined with increased hiring of workers in nonregular, contingent jobs, were the factors producing this tighter link between employment and economic performance. This is an important change. It makes the Japanese scene much more like that of the United States (and less like Europe). It casts doubt on oft-repeated claims that a rigid employment system is the root cause of lagging corporate performance.

A key critique of changing employment patterns is that increased flexibility to hire contingent labor has various negative effects, most notably weaker consumer demand and declining rates of marriage and reproduction. Commonly cited is a sharp rise in nonregular employment among men, and in particular among young adult men. The number of male nonregular employees nearly tripled from 1995 to 2013 (from 1.9 million to 5.4 million), and the number of nonregular male employees aged twenty-five to forty-four rose nearly fivefold (from 360,000 to 1.69 million) (see Figure 5.2).

As a proportion of all male workers, nonregular employment rose from 7.4 percent in 1985 to 19.7 percent by 2012.25 The younger men in this status are the very people who in the past would have been starting and building careers as regular employees in medium- to large-scale corporations, with some realistic hope of building a long-term career in their organization. For commentators in the mass media and for the general public, educators, and labor bureaucrats, the fact that so many young men, the expected breadwinners and household heads of the nation, have been unable to enter the mainstream of regular employment constitutes a change with far-reaching social and economic consequences. Their concern is bolstered by good evidence that nonregular
Figure 5.2 Increase in young (male) nonregular employees

Source: Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications “Labor Force Survey (Special Survey)” and “Labor Force Survey (Detailed Tabulation).”
male workers in their twenties and thirties were only half as likely to be married as regular male employees of the same age (see Figure 5.3).

These changes have been considerable and are important. But they are neither the only nor necessarily the most important element in the story of rising numbers of nonregular workers. Over these same years, from 1985 through 2012, the proportion of women in contingent employment, mainly in the category of part-time workers, rose even more dramatically; it almost doubled, from 32 to 54.5 percent of all women workers. And the absolute number of part-time women workers far more than doubled, from 4.9 million nonregular women workers in 1985 to 12.8 million in 2012.26

The long-accepted understanding and justification for this preponderance of women in the part-time labor force was that the great majority of them were married and raising children. They were seen to take up part-time work voluntarily to supplement a family income earned mainly by their husbands. But with an increase in single-mother families as a result of a rising divorce rate, the growing numbers of working women in various types of nonregular employment no longer fit the model of the supplementary wage-earning wife and mother, even as the growing numbers of men also did not fit the model of primary wage earner. By 2012, among the 7.8 million women engaged in part-time work, nearly 1.2 million (15 percent) were either the head of the household or were supporting themselves on their own. And one-fifth (20 percent) of the 2.75

![Graph](https://via.placeholder.com/150)

**Figure 5.3** Comparison of the percentage of married young males based on employment status

million women in the categories of dispatch labor or contract employee were household heads or self-supporting. Taking a slightly different perspective, data provided by the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare also shows that in 2010 only four million (about one-third) of all nonregular women workers fit what we might call the “pure” case of a part-time female employee of prime working age (fifteen to fifty-five) married to a full-time working husband.27

In sum, the twin trends of rising nonregular employment for men and women, coupled with changes in the social and economic responsibilities of working women, have rendered the male breadwinner model significantly out of alignment with the life situation of people in Japan. Increasing numbers of nonregular male and female workers are employed in this category because regular work is not available, although many would prefer full-time “regular” jobs. A government survey in early 2013 found that as many as one in three nonregular male employees and one in six nonregular female employees were working in this status against their wishes.28 This proportion among women nicely matches the percentage of women in part-time work who are either household heads or self-supporting.

In addition, an important government survey of 130 companies across all industries and of all sizes, covering over 42,000 applicants for regular employment in the “comprehensive” career track in 2010–11, implies that there is in Japan not only a glass ceiling to promotion, but also a closed glass doorway for women even entering such jobs. Looking at the entire applicant pool and all applications to these companies, whereas 5.8 percent of men who applied for these positions were hired, only 1.6 percent of women applicants were. Looking at the breakdown by gender once companies had filled these posts, women accounted for only 11.6 percent of all new hires. If female applicants had been hired at the same ratio as the men, they would have constituted nearly one-third (32 percent) of all new employees.29 It is hard to imagine that the merits of the female applicants were so much weaker as to justify these results. One cannot help suspecting that employers, for other reasons, prefer to hire men. The consensus among government officials, and the staff of employer and union organizations queried about this in 2013, was that a key factor leading to lower rates of hiring for women was a concern among employers that women would be unwilling to accept transfers to distant offices.

Changes in the security offered regular workers and in the numbers and proportion of nonregular workers have thus been quite extensive over the past two decades or more. These changes have been framed by modifications, though not abrupt ruptures, in law. They have been accompanied by important shifts in customary treatment of regular employees. The ongoing historical context for these changes includes persisting norms of a gendered division of labor, with women continuing to dominate the ranks of
contingent labor. At the same time, changing social patterns have made this division particularly out of sync with the life situation of women and young men. This story of change embedded in shifting structures and norms of the past brings us to our third theme – politics. How have contending parties sought to use a discourse of the lost decades to push for a particular sort of change or defended elements of the status quo within a changing world?

For men, the key political divide has centered on what can be called Japan’s “moral economy” of employment. By moral economy, I refer to a set of ideas that define a concept of a just or moral regulation of economic life, in this case the regulation of employment. I juxtapose such a concept to a neoliberal belief that unfettered markets – in this case job markets – produce the best and indeed the fairest or most just outcomes for all concerned. The moral economy of labor in Japan is a cultural configuration. It is not “cultural” in the simplistic and static sense of a centuries-long inheritance carried forward from some imagined “traditional Japan.” It is a dynamic cultural configuration produced in the modernizing course of the twentieth century and always subject to change. Concern with status and respect was expressed in disputes of railway engineers in the 1890s; in the insistence that bosses respect the “character” of workers as humans in the 1910s; in the calls for improved treatment such as regular pay raises, bonuses, or secure jobs in the 1920s; and again in early postwar demands for the elimination of status discrimination between blue collar and white collar staff, or disputes of the high growth era both between unions and companies over decisions to eliminate jobs and dismiss workers.

Over time, the outcome of such struggles, reinforced by legal decisions in lawsuits brought by individual workers in defense of their jobs, was to define a moral economy as one in which male workers had a right to keep their jobs and employers were obligated even in the face of hostile market conditions to make all possible efforts to preserve these jobs. This value remains alive, if under greater pressure and more qualifications than in the past, not only among many working people but also among employers, politicians, and state bureaucrats. It is only against this background that we can understand the powerful impact of the setting up of a Dispatch Workers’ Village over the New Year’s holiday of 2008–09, when the Lehman shock led hundreds of Japanese companies to lay off thousands of their nonregular dispatch workers. An effective coalition of nonprofit organisations (NPOs), lawyers, community unions, and media on very short notice set up a tent village in Hibiya Park for 500 of the laid-off workers. The village gained extraordinary attention, with much sympathy for the workers and strong criticism of the companies and the government policies that made these workers so vulnerable.

In some cases the contract workers had been ousted from company housing in
violation of the law or work rules, and in some cases contracts had been abrogated illegally. However, it seems fair to say – and to me, this is the key point – that even if all these layoffs had been implemented in accord with the letter of the law, the very fact of these mass dismissals would have gathered huge attention and been seen as a violation of Japan's moral economy of labor. One pithy example of this sense of violation came in a letter to the Asahi Newspaper from a junior high school student from Kyushu: “I am upset at the recent news that dispatch workers are being fired by companies. Until now, they had worked hard to support the company, yet they are so easily fired. . . . Don't the companies have some responsibility?”

This episode led some major companies to reduce their reliance on dispatch workers and resulted in a modest shift toward greater legal regulation in a revised Dispatch Workers Law in March 2012, passed with bipartisan support. Although a retreat from early drafts under the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) administration, the law prohibited short-term dispatches, required the dispatch agencies to make public their revenue margin above the amount paid to the workers they supplied, and included provisions that would encourage firms to convert dispatch employees to regular workers. The question of how far to go, and in what ways, toward systems of more flexible deployment of labor remains deeply contested within an enduring framework of social values.

For women, the employment issue in its wider context plays out on a different sort of moral landscape, because – with some notable dissent from feminist scholars and activists – the moral economy of labor in Japan as it evolved in the twentieth century accepted a secondary role for women as not just legitimate but desirable. The widely accepted view of the best way to balance women’s commitments in the spheres of reproductive and productive labor had historical roots in the cultural configuration of the idea of the "good wife and wise mother." To be sure, from as early as the 1890s, when a widespread consensus emerged (mainly among men) that women must give priority to these twin roles, productive labor for wages was not necessarily seen as a violation of these commitments. But to the extent that work was validated, it was for the sake of the family and the nation or for women's ability to support themselves just in case they had the misfortune (from war or disease or a dissolute mate) to find themselves without a breadwinner husband.

As with the issue of a moral economy of regular employment, one finds no consensus on the issue of women's proper or desirable role in economy and society. In recent years, the balance of opinion (if not necessarily of behavior) appears to have shifted considerably in favor of encouraging women to work outside the home. This is not unambiguously a new formulation of the moral economy of labor. Those who take this position make claims not only or even mainly on grounds of justice or equity (the moral
side), although such values do seem to sit just beneath the surface and motivate the argument. They also advocate increased participation for women as a plus for economic productivity and growth (the economy side).

The 2010 Goldman Sachs analysis of Womenomics mentioned earlier argued that increased employment opportunities for women would boost Japan's GDP and consumption in general. It further introduced strong evidence that around the world increased labor force participation for women correlates to increased rates of childbirth. The report specifically identified forty-four companies whose stock prices were likely to rise as women played stronger economic roles, and it claimed that a similar list compiled in 2005 had indeed outperformed other investments. This sort of Japan-focused analysis is reinforced more generally by recent macroeconomic research focused on the American economy. Work by Peter Klenow and colleagues argues that the opening of career opportunities to women and to African Americans in the United States over the half-century since 1960, in essence a more efficient allocation of talent in the economy, may explain 15 to 20 percent of growth in aggregate output per worker. And Klenow's work concludes that further removing what the paper calls "frictions" in job allocation offers potential for additional "substantial gains" in productivity.

The policy and political case for gender equality in the workforce also posits such an outcome as a solution to the nation's demographic dilemma. It is well known in Japanese policy circles and in public debate that across the advanced capitalist world, high rates of employment for women correlate strongly with high birth rates (mainly in nations of northern Europe plus Australia and North America). Conversely, countries with the lowest rates of female labor force participation (Korea, Italy, Spain, and Japan) are also the places with by far the lowest birth rates. An intriguing eight-year longitudinal survey of 2009, carried out by the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare, offered suggestive evidence that if Japan's employment practices moved in a "northern European" direction, so might its demography. The study found that compared to what we might call a traditional "modern" couple where the husband held a regular post and the wife worked part-time (or in otherwise nonregular employment), married couples where both partners held regular positions not only desired slightly larger families but did in fact have more children.

But despite such evidence and supportive rhetoric from those in authority, including the Abe administration in 2013, which is in favor of bringing women more fully into economic life outside the home, the mainstream of corporate, political, and bureaucratic elites seems ambivalent about pulling vigorously in this direction. Calls for women to act as "good wives" by earning money or contributing to the economy are repeatedly met by admonitions for them to be responsible and dutiful by staying home and having
children. Although its wording was vague enough to be understood as gender blind if one were so inclined, the Liberal Democratic Party’s 2012 draft of a revised constitution included an article (24) on the family which, in its statement that the “members of a family are obligated to help each other,” could be read as an implicit moralistic call by the state for women to bear the primary burden at home at the expense of their wider social participation. More specific tension over such a view of women’s roles emerged in sharp relief in the spring of 2013 when the Abe administration proposed circulating a “Handbook on Life and Women” to teenage schoolgirls nationwide. The handbook would have contained information about pregnancy and childbirth with the aim of encouraging women to bear children sooner rather than later, arguing against the tendency of women to delay marriage and childbirth. The proposal was to distribute the handbook only to schoolgirls, not boys, a clear reflection of a view that men were exempt from reproductive responsibilities. This plan was roundly criticized by a wide range of women’s and labor organizations, who called instead for economic and social policies to make it easier for families to afford to raise children and find childcare, and in short order the proposal was abandoned.38

Inequality

A purported rise in economic and social inequality is another aspect of the social-industrial complex of lost-decade problems that merits consideration. Like insecurity of employment, socioeconomic inequality cannot be measured easily. On the one hand, according to data collected and analyzed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in 2004 and at several earlier points in time, the income of Japan’s wealthiest 20 percent was only 2.3 times that of the poorest 20 percent, and the ratio was little changed over the previous decade. This compared to an eight- to tenfold multiple for the United States and a twelvefold multiple for China, and in these societies inequality had increased sharply in the previous decade.39 By this measure, Japan’s inequality was not increasing, and it boasted the smallest income differential in the world.

On the other hand, according to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)’s calculation of this ratio, which compared disposable (after-tax) income in 2003, 2006, and 2009 – essentially contemporaneous with the IMF data of 2004 – the United States only beat Japan by a moderate amount in the inequality Olympics. The OECD reported that Japan’s top quintile earned about six times more than the bottom fifth, while the American top fifth earned about 7.8 times the bottom. And inequality was similarly rising in both societies. The Japanese top/bottom ratio was fivefold in 1985; in 1984 the U.S. ratio had been a multiple of 6.4 times.40 In addition, recent OECD statistics for another measure of inequality, the so-called poverty index – which measures the proportion of people whose income is less than half the national
average – found that in the year 2006 Japan’s poverty index stood at 15.7 percent, a fairly significant increase from a 12 percent rate in 1995. In this inglorious race to the bottom, the United States and Japan are similarly unequal; Japan’s poverty index ranked second worst among the advanced economies, beaten only by the United States where 16.8 percent of the population had incomes far below the average in 2006. These divergent results are based on different data. If one gives credence to the IMF data, one can reconcile the discrepancy between its top/bottom ratio and the OECD poverty index as follows: indeed more people than before are on the bottom rungs of Japan’s economic ladder, and this is a change one must take seriously; but the ladder from rich to poor itself is shorter than in the United States or elsewhere. But a second and perhaps safer conclusion is that cross-national comparisons of inequality are unreliable. Some scholars in Japan believe that the Japanese data used by OECD, while accurate for Japan, exaggerates inequality compared to elsewhere because the Japanese data collection does a better job than other nations in tracking income among the poor.

In this murky statistical situation, we might best focus our attention on changes over time in Japan rather than on comparative inquiry. After all, unlike comparatively inclined social scientists, most people in any society compare their situation not to other societies or nations but to their own society’s past and their own personal past. And while comparative data is problematic due to different methods of data collection and different efficiencies in the process from place to place, we can be fairly confident that temporal data within Japan over this span was calculated consistently.

It seems safe to conclude that postwar Japan circa the 1960s through 1990s was far more egalitarian than it is today – even if, of course, never completely equal and certainly not inclusive or equal across gender lines. The inclination to view the complex data on inequality in this pessimistic way seems both empirically justified and culturally rooted in a roughly fifty-year history of pride concerning equality of both opportunity and to some measure of result. Against this background, recent changes have produced a profound sense of loss.

If the lost decades have been a time of significant change in the level of equality, the politics of the pursuit of equality are no less challenging or complex than the politics of employment or gender roles. Japanese society today, like many societies elsewhere, faces a perplexing dilemma in continuing to value equality of both opportunity and of result, when people inhabit a world of increased and increasingly unequal competition. Given that the higher proportion of nonregular jobs raises the proportion of low-wage earners, neoliberal prescriptions to unleash the market with further deregulation of employment markets would seem likely to generate more inequality, at least in the near-term. Is that a pill that people – whether among policymakers or the general
public – are willing to swallow?

The answer is uncertain, but it is notable and not well recognized that Japanese income policies across the lost decades have in fact ameliorated what would have been a far more dramatic rise in economic inequality.43 In 1985, the Japanese poverty rate as calculated by the OECD was essentially the same for pretax and after-tax income (12.5 and 12 percent). By 1995, a notable gap had opened (19 percent versus 13.7 percent). And by 2009, the pretax poverty rate stood at an astounding 32 percent. That is, one third of the population had pretax incomes that stood 50 percent below the median. The after-tax, disposable income poverty rate was “only” 16 percent. The quintile comparisons were no less stark. In 2006, pretax income earned by the top fifth stood at about ten times that of the bottom fifth; the after-tax multiple was “only” sixfold.44

The intuitive explanation for this shift in pretax to after-tax income would of course be income taxes themselves, which are assessed in progressive fashion in Japan as elsewhere. A second explanation might be the payment of direct welfare benefits to the poor. But economist Oshio Takashi reveals that neither taxes nor welfare benefits are a significant factor. The heart of the matter is an intergenerational transfer of income through the national social security system. It is well known that over the past several decades the elderly have increased substantially as a proportion of Japan’s population. Those who are retired have virtually no pretax income, so pretax data places many of the increased numbers of the elderly into the poverty zone. Social security payments, which are calculated as after-tax income, then lift many of these elders above the poverty line and thus substantially reduce, both in appearance and in fact, the nation’s poverty rate.45

It is important to note that the social security system that has buffered rising inequality both predates and has persisted across the lost decades. It is not a direct policy response to rising inequality. This is an incomes policy in result more than intent.46 It is an open question as to whether the current Japanese government will take additional proactive steps to address rising inequality. The push underway in 2013 to revise the Livelihood Protection Law would be a step backward from an active incomes policy.

**Future possibilities**

Japan's state policies and corporate programs to address the web of social and economic problems surveyed in this chapter remain ambivalent. The center of gravity in the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), the corporate world, and the bureaucracy appears to be a view that unleashing markets offers the best way forward. But over the course of the lost decades, a considerable body of opinion has also persisted that values
community and solidarity and fears the decline of those things if markets are allowed to function without significant constraints. As one example, the leader of one of the nation’s major business federations in the early 2000s spoke of the “moral hazard” of deregulation in discussions of revisions to labor law. In the end, these revisions affirmed some degree of protection for regular workers as a trade-off for allowing wider use of nonregular employees.47 Voices from civil society outside the political, bureaucratic, or business elites are similarly ambivalent, and muted. Japan’s mainstream labor unions affiliated with the Rengo federation have been losing members and especially under the new LDP administration are on the defensive. Rengo unions in the best of circumstances face a dilemma in pursuing both protections for regular workers, who constitute the majority of their members, and at the same time reaching out to nonregular workers for new members. It is logical to pursue the latter, whose numbers in the workforce are growing and who need protection. Indeed, the only area of membership growth in both Rengo-affiliated and nonaffiliated unions is among nonregular employees, mainly in the service sector. But squaring the circle of protecting the former without imposing some costs on the latter is difficult, when corporate managers argue with apparent success to leading unions that without the flexibility afforded by a significant (and growing) buffer of contingent employees, the fortunate regular workers in these unions cannot be protected.

This fundamental and long-standing dilemma is not simply an ideological clash between supporters of a Japanese version of a regulated market economy undergirded by a moral economy of employment and a neoliberal vision of political economy where regulation is in principle counterproductive to the greater good. That friction is part of the story, but a second clash of views is also in play. The moral economy of employment as it took root in postwar Japan (and before) always accepted the exclusion of some – mainly but not only women – as fair. Confronting this view are calls for a society and economy grounded in what some call Womenomics, a society that gives to all its members the opportunity for secure and productive career paths on both economic and moral grounds. Reinforcing such calls is the fact that the acceptance of a subordinate role for women has lost much (but not all) of its legitimacy as a social norm in Japan today, making it all the more necessary in both moral and economic terms to find a way to a future where the old exclusions are broken down.

But those who pursue this new sort of equality continue to face the question of whether the goal should simply be the opportunity or the right of women to “lean in” and to work as long and as hard as men.48 Perhaps such a goal is both socially and economically desirable. The survey data showing that married couples with two regular jobs have more children than “traditional” modern couples where the wife works part-time might support such a view. But can – and should – this trend be expanded and sustained when regular jobs so often demand long hours of overtime and
acceptance of transfers? Is there any alternative?

In recent years, the opening up of a third way between insecure nonregular employment and the unlimited demands of “regular” careers has been much discussed as a possible solution. This category of employment is sometimes called “regularized nonregular” or “limited regular” employment.49 Supporters characterize this as a form of employment that would offer possibilities for career development and increased responsibility and pay, with the understanding that the employee would not be asked to accept distant transfers but would also not have the job security that access to wide-ranging assignments might offer. Critics fear that rather than raise the prospects for formerly nonregular employees (mostly women) to be upgraded to such posts, this middle way might weaken the prospects for regular employees, men and women, whose posts would be downgraded and less secure. It is too soon to offer a confident judgment as to which outcome is more likely, although without strong advocacy by, or on behalf of, those moving into such posts, it is hard to be optimistic. But at a time when a return to a “golden era” of middle-class equality and stable long-term jobs for men – buttressed by limiting the opportunities outside the home for women – is neither economically practical nor politically or culturally attractive, efforts in this direction seem worth pursuing.

Notes

1 The first published use of this term in English appears to have been a Newsweek story in 1998; in Japanese, it was probably the same week, in a newspaper column that attributed the expression to foreign investors. Bill Powell, “The Lost Decade,” Newsweek (July 27, 1998), p. 28. Takita Yōichi, “Kokufu: Ushinawareta 10-nen no kyōkan,” Nihon keizai shimbun (July 21, 1998, evening edition), p. 3. Since magazines date their issues to the week after actual publication, the Newsweek story would have appeared one day before the Japanese newspaper article.

2 In English, the most famous challenge was probably that of Karel van Wolferen, in his The Enigma of Japanese Power (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1989).


7 Economist, January 16, 1993, p. 66.

9 For example, Ezra Vogel, *Japan as Number One* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979), pp. 177–78.


19 For this data, see “*Keisatsucho seikatsu anzen kyoku seikatsu anzen kikaku ka*; *Heisei 21 nen chū ni okeru jisatsu no gaiyō shiryō*” (May, 2010), p. 4.

20 Author interviews with managers at Toshiba, IHI International, and JFE Steel, December 2009 and January 2010.

21 For one definition, see “”*Burakku kigyō tte donna kaisha*” Asahi Shim bun (May 23, 2013), p. 2.

22 Nitta Michio, “*Koyō portfolio system kaikaku no shiten*; *Gendai no riron*” (Summer 2009), p. 3. See also Nitta Yoshio, “*Koyō no ryōteki kanni*” in Nitta Yoshio and Hisa-moto Norio, eds., *Nihonteki koyō shisutemū* (Kyoto: Nakanishiya Shuppan, 2008).

23 Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, Japan Annual Labor Surveys (”Rōdōryoku chōsa”).


26 Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, Japan Annual Labor Force Surveys (”Rōdōryoku chōsa”).
37 Special calculation by the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare, Labor Policy Advisory Bureau based on the Ministry’s “Longitudinal Survey of 21st Century Adults” (2010). The couples with two regular jobs had on average 1.9 children, compared to 1.79 where the husband had a regular post and the wife a nonregular job. The survey also found only 1.09 children born to couples with a husband holding a nonregular post and a regular-employee wife, and 1.36 children where both husband and wife held nonregular jobs. However, the sample sizes in these two cases were only eleven and twenty-eight respectively.
40 OECD statistics are located at http://stats.oecd.org/. For poverty rates and quintile ratios, search under “social protection and well-being,” sub-category “income distribution and poverty by country.”
42 Personal communication from Moriguchi Chiaki, economist at Hitotsubashi University, October 28, 2013. Moriguchi has done extensive research on economic inequality in Japan.
43 For an example of nonrecognition of this trend, see the otherwise interesting paper by Marco Mira d’Ercole, “Income Inequality and Poverty in OECD Countries: How Does Japan Compare?” in Japanese Journal of Social Security Policy 5, no. 1 (June 2006). The author makes a persuasive case that Japanese income transfers are low in comparison to European nations in particular. But the clear increase in the impact of those transfers over the last decades remains significant and worthy of analysis.


48 For many years, Kumazawa Makoto, among others, has been exploring this issue. See, in English, his Portraits of the Japanese Workplace (Denver: Westview Press, 1996), chap. 7.

49 For extensive discussion of this issue, see the July 2013 special issue of Nihon rōdō kenkyū zasshi, “Hiseiki rōdō to ‘tayō na seishain.’”