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Theodore C. Bestor, Patricia G. Steinhoff and Victoria Lyon Bestor (eds), *Doing Fieldwork in Japan*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2003. 414 pp. incl. bibliography, list of contributors and index. ISBN 0-8248-2734-1.

This book contains twenty essays by foreign scholars of Japanese Studies working in various fields of anthropology (cultural, economic, legal, rural, etc.), history, media studies, political science, popular culture, religious studies and sociology, together with an introduction by all three editors and an appendix on digital resources by Victoria Lyon Bestor. Given that the contributors also range in age from a very senior scholar (Robert J. Smith) to young hopefuls who have only recently completed their dissertation fieldwork, the book may be seen to represent an extremely wide range of – almost entirely American – fieldwork experiences in Japan.

As someone who is not American and who has, over the years, watched the increasingly inward focus taken by those Japan specialists and anthropologists living and working in the United States, I have to wonder at the editors' decision to pay so little heed to the activities of European (including Israeli) scholars of Japanese Studies. The two contributors from outside the US, Joy Hendry and Ian Reader, have both written excellent chapters – suggesting that others this side of 'the Pond' might usefully have been invited to participate in this publication. The fact that the editors did not do so unfortunately contributes at an academic level to the overall impression of American arrogance currently displayed on the political front.

Although almost all of the essays have something intrinsically interesting about them, few can be classed as exceptional. Perhaps this should be expected in a market-driven education system that requires quantity, rather than quality, of publications (as noted by one of the contributors, Ellis Krauss), but it immediately raises an issue that has plagued ethnography (that is, the *writing* of fieldwork data and experiences) in general: how much personal detail should the writer include, and what purposes should such detail serve, when writing up their research material? Some anthropologists, true to the meaning of the word that describes their discipline, opt to tell the stories that their informants tell them and, in the process, weave a tale that is itself close to being a literary form in structure and content. Others make use of their involvement in a particular incident, or series of incidents, to outline a more general theoretical position. Yet others describe ongoing problems in their everyday lives as a means of showing how their discipline can never be the kind of objective social scientific practice that some anthropologists once made out it was. And some seem to revel in a confessional style merely to situate themselves politically *vis-à-vis* their academic peers.

Under such circumstances, and given the sheer variety of essays and experiences included in the book under review, an extremely strong editorial hand is required. Alas! This is missing. The Introduction by Steinhoff and the two Bestors does not grapple in a sustained manner with the issues raised by fieldwork, but instead – like many books currently published within the field of the anthropology of Japan – meanders along from one point to another (and occasionally back again). For instance, early on, the editors express the hope that 'those who actually conduct fieldwork will gain a better understanding of some successful, concrete strategies for such research' (p. 2). And some of the essays do indeed contain helpful hints on fieldwork strategies – like John Creighton Campbell's suggestions regarding interviewing; Ian Reader's advice to retain total flexibility and so to be ready to seize any opportunity that comes one's way; and Ted Bestor's comments on how to read the variety of 'labels' assailing the passer-by, from doorway signs to store logos, by way of bulletin boards, inscriptions and decorative plaques. But none of this is summarized in the Introduction which, apart from a few general comments on language skills, gaining access to a fieldwork site, navigating bureaucratic institutions, and building and maintaining networks, leaves the reader to grope his or her own way through the ensuing mass of ethnographic detail. This is a pity because a serious comparative essay on fieldwork in Japan is sorely needed.

This leads me to my final criticism. Neither in the Introduction nor in the following chapters is anybody apparently prepared to address general theoretical issues raised by those writing about fieldwork in other parts of the world and in other disciplines (for example, organization studies). Nor does anyone consider the *writing* of fieldwork, even though this has been *the* problematic in the discipline of anthropology since the mid-1980s (Clifford and Marcus 1986; Geertz 1988) and even though each of the book's contributions is a written piece about various kinds of social and material interaction. Here the work of not just the anthropology 'gurus' mentioned above, but of scholars such as John Van Maanen (1988) might usefully have been discussed – if only because the anthropology of Japan has, over the decades, been blessed with some extremely clear and incisive writing whose easy style has avoided the excesses of the postmodern turn. How come nobody, but *nobody*, in this book mentions the greatest Japan scholar of the past half century – one who has done fieldwork on virtually everything from rural community to large-scale corporations, by way of land reform and the education system and who has, surely, made the greatest contribution to general social science scholarship? Probably because Ronald Dore is not American.

Brian Moeran
Professor in Culture and Communication,
Copenhagen Business School

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Barbara Sato, *The New Japanese Woman. Modernity, Media and Women in Interwar Japan*. Duke University Press: Durham and London, 2003. xiii, 242 pp. ISBN 0-8223-3044.

This interesting account of the 'new Japanese woman' of the 1920s takes its point of departure in the interwar period of urbanization, technological growth and industrial expansion. During this period an explosion of new images of women came to challenge the myth of a fixed femininity. Traditional feminine stereotypes at the time placed women within a family setting and laid emphasis upon their gentleness and meekness. It was this particularly docile and family-oriented quality that came to identify the quintessential 'Japanese' woman.

The 1920s representations of independent working women and decadent outspoken types introduced a radical new challenge to confront this myth. Two kinds of female narratives became dominant, one was the sexual and socially decadent woman typified by the hostess, the prostitute and the unfaithful wife. The other was the professional working woman.

But why did the new images of the feminine and a new subjectivity of women emerge in the wake of World War I? Barbara Sato answers this question through a description of three types of girls who characterize the time, the short-skirted modern girl (*modan garu*) the self-motivated housewife (*shufu*) and the rational working woman (*shokugyou fujin*). All three types of women came to the fore in the 1920s against the backdrop of consumerism, referred to by intellectuals as modernism. Barbara Sato describes how the changes in the commodification of everyday life acted as a progressive force in the self-identification of middle-class women. First, female high-school graduates began to fill the jobs that were opening up for women. Second, the development of a communications industry became a component of this expanding consumerism. Women's magazines, movies, radio programmes, popular music and jazz gradually began to change perceptions. Not surprisingly, according to Barbara Sato, the three figures of the modern woman struck fear into the hearts of most male intellectuals, government officials and the public at large.

For the better or worse, the new woman reflected a departure from state-imposed values. Her new feminine subjectivity went against the 'good wife and wise mother' morality that served as the ideological legitimization of the legal status of married women that had been institutionalized in the Meiji Civil Code (1898), which determined women's legal and social status and place in the family.

The new female identity that emerged with the new images of a consumer society did so although *mass* products were not yet available in the 1920s. In fact while the advent of electricity to homes in America introduced washing machines, refrigerators and vacuum cleaners, these goods were introduced in Japan only in the 1960s, so the liberating effect of these household appliances from household drudgery impacted on the average Japanese woman's lifestyle considerably later. Also, many Japanese women could not afford the actual commodities displayed in the department stores. However, urban and to a lesser extent rural woman were redefining their identity through *fantasies* – hopes and dreams of a future life full of new opportunities.

The only mass product in Japan in the 1920s was women's magazines. These magazines had a great impact on the creation of the image of the modern girl. While commercial journalism provided the possibility for women to learn about upper-class homes and families across Japan, confessional articles written by women provided an emotional outlet for both housewives and working women. A social fluidity between classes was enabled through these women's magazine and although not everyone could afford the goods on display at the department stores, the women's magazines provided the forum for debate and to explore alternative lifestyles.

The Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen's famous 'fanfare for feminism', *The Doll's House*, a play about the intricacies of marriage, was performed with great success in Tokyo in 1911. Numerous references are made to international advocators for women's equal rights which inspired Japanese intellectuals. Among these, the Swedish feminist Ellen Key influenced members of the Japanese feminist group, the Blue-stockings, who wrote about their own experiences of free love and marrying for love – which was extreme at a time when the Japanese majority was still devoted to the concept of arranged marriage.

Sato's book provides glimpses and insights into multiple layers of identities that Japanese women were negotiating in the interwar period. At a time when women were categorized as accessories rather than as individuals in their own right (p. 120) and where challenging a man's position was a recipe for disaster, glimpsed possibilities were opening up for a better life ahead for Japanese women, replete with the chance for enjoyment and self-fulfilment.

The book is well written and nicely illustrated. It leaves a strong sense of how woman were shaping and were shaped by the media. Moreover, it provides a solid background for understanding the new millennium

women in Japanese society, who despite all appearances, are still facing challenges in the form of lingering traditional virtues of being a 'good wife and wise mother'.

Lisbeth Clausen
Associate Professor,
Copenhagen Business School

Patricia M. Pelley, *Postcolonial Vietnam. New Histories of the National Past*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2002. 326 pp. Hard cover ISBN 0-8223-2984-0; paperback ISBN 0-8223-2966-2.

Decolonization is a highly complex process. Not only does it imply the establishment of new political institutions and economic structures, but decolonization also means the deconstruction or reconfiguration of colonial forms of knowledge and colonial representations. In this book, Patricia Pelley brings to light such cultural aspects of decolonization by looking at the changes in perceptions of the past that happened in Vietnam from the mid-1950s into the 1970s. She examines the changes Vietnamese nationalists made in order to pave the way for a postcolonial sense of the Vietnamese past and nation. What is of primarily interest for Pelley is 'the process through which historiographical issues were constituted, how problems of interpretation were resolved, and how various elements of the national narrative became fixed and conventionalized' (pp. 14-15).

The remaking of perceptions of the Vietnamese past was already in the making in 1953 as the Indochinese war was still raging. In that year, the newly established Committee for Literary, Historical and Geographical Research came to life, charging historians with the task of writing a general history of Vietnam – a so-called 'new history'. Despite the historians' dedication, it would take them more than thirty years to finish the work. (The first volume appeared in 1971; the second volume in 1985.)

In the first three chapters of her book, Pelley identifies the lengthy and elaborate historical debates that occurred among Vietnamese historians, many of which made it surprisingly difficult to form a postcolonial canonical version of the Vietnamese past. Pelley explores historiographical debates through a meticulous and critical analysis of the Hanoi-based official journals such as *Nghien Cuu Lich su* [Historical Research] and *Tap san Nghien Cuu Van Su Dia* [Literary, Historical, and Geographical Research].

In the first chapter, Pelley focuses on the problem of historical periodization and attempts to place the Vietnamese past within a Marxist five-stage model of history in the search for national origins. In the second chapter, Pelley focuses on disagreements about the very meaning of Vietnam and on how the non-Viet population of Vietnam are made part of the national narrative. In the third chapter, Pelley addresses the problems related to a redefinition of Vietnamese culture in order that it might represent something authentically Vietnamese, untouched by Chinese influence. Finally, in the fourth chapter, Pelley focuses on commemorative practices in Vietnam and the displacement of traditional concepts of time by that of universal, linear time. In this chapter, Pelley also shows how national historiography has tended to place Hanoi at the political, economic and cultural centre of the country – in the past, present and future.

Through her critical investigation of the homogenizing narratives of the Vietnamese past, Pelley clearly goes beyond the abundant narratives of the glorious defeat of foreign invaders. Her book contributes to an understanding of crucial aspects of the cultural history of the North Vietnamese state during the period of decolonization from the French and during the war against American 'neo-colonialism'. In so doing, the book is required reading for anyone interested in Vietnamese history. It will also appeal to people interested in perceptions of the past in Southeast Asia and in he cultural aspects of decolonization. However, the book could have appealed more to those interested in cultural questions had Pelley more closely linked her study to the literature in the fields of decolonization and postcolonialism. For readers with no knowledge of Vietnamese, it is also annoying that titles of books and articles in Vietnamese are not translated into English in the bibliography or in the notes.

Søren Ivarsson
Assistant Professor, Department of History
University of Copenhagen