

TRANSFORMATION OF THE PUBLIC IMAGE OF ANTHROPOLOGY: THE CASE OF JAPAN

Junji Koizumi¹

My paper first outlines the five stage of development of anthropology in Japan, and then it gives a brief sketch of the public image of anthropology formed in the latter half of the twentieth century. The reality of Japanese anthropology is amorphous and hard to grasp, but the public image is stereotypical one of centrifugal, useless, romantic and exotic science. The paper finally describes what I call a “practical turn” due to social and institutional changes which started a few years ago, and it concludes with my own experience of transforming the image of anthropology by building a center. My discussion is intended to be a presentation of a comparative material.

History and Five Stages of Japanese Anthropology

It will be safe to say that anthropology in Japan started as a new obscure discipline around the middle of the last century. An anthropology department started in the University of Tokyo in the 1950s, and a few more somewhat later. It is usually said that Japanese anthropology has a history of some sixty years.

But it has a very long prehistory beginning in the nineteenth century. Shinji Yamashita, writing about the history of Japanese Anthropology, divides it into five “developmental” stages: (1) 1884-1913, (2) 1913-1934, (3) 1934-1945, (4) 1945-1964, and (5) from 1964 to the present.

Yamashita follows Kazuo Terada’s view that “anthropology in Japan started in 1884 when a group of young scholars formed a workshop called “Friends of Anthropology” stimulated by a biology professor at the University of Tokyo, Edward Morse. This group was interested in the investigation of the origin of the Japanese people. The search for the origin is always nationalistic,

1 School of Human Sciences, Osaka University.

and thus the first stage of Japanese anthropology was a product of nascent nationalist consciousness.

The second stage begins in 1913, when Ryuzo Torii argued for the separation of ethnology from anthropology. This means a shift of interests from the origin to the ethnic groups surrounding Japan. Torii carried out field investigations in China, Taiwan, Korea, Eastern Siberia, Manchuria, Mongolia and so on, that is, in the region where the Japanese Empire was about to expand. His work was "Oriental ethnology" and it was "the study of the Oriental race." It was a pursuit of "neighboring colonial Others" (Yamashita) who were to be found in the process of the Imperialistic expansion.

The third stage was initiated in 1934 when Nihon Minzokugakkai, or the Japanese Society of Ethnology was established for the Western sort of comparative study of the origin and the diffusion of cultures. In this period Japanese anthropology was divided into two general orientations: ethnology and folklore. This was mainly due to the establishment of Minkandensho no kai, or "Folklore Workshop" of Kunio Yanagita in 1935. Yanagita is the figure in the Japanese folklore, who had a career as a bureaucrat and traveled extensively to remote rural areas of Japan in order to find traditional rural cultures. He collected tremendous amount of folkloric information and wrote a long series of essays and analytic articles with a very conspicuous prosing. He single-handedly created Yanagita Minzokugaku, meaning "Yanagita's folklore," and became a decisive factor in drawing a sharp line between folklore and ethnology in Japan. Folklore is inward looking and strongly associated with Japan and its culture, while folkloric studies concerning other countries were put almost entirely in the realm of "ethnology." In short, folklore is nationalist and ethnology is internationalist. It has been pointed out that this internationalist ethnology was associated with political purpose of the period. Toward the end of this third stage, Minozoku Kenkyusho (the National Institute of Ethnic Research) was established and worked for the research of minority groups in the dominated regions of the Japanese Empire.

Yamashita's fourth stage begins in 1945, the year Japan was defeated. The post-war period is again marked with a strong concern with the Japanese nation. Ruth Benedict's *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword* was published and brought about intellectual sensation, for it was amazing to know, it was said, that a non-Japanese knows Japanese better than themselves. The book sold well, and it still is as a classic on the Japanese culture and society.

Social scientists debated widely on Benedict's founding, and *Haji no Bunka*, or the culture of shame, became a stock phrase among the ordinary people. But it was not known that it was a piece of work in anthropology. Hardly it is.

Another factor in this fourth stage is *Kiba Minzoku Setsu*, or "the horse riding people" theory. This is a thesis of Namio Egami, who proposed that the Japanese Imperial family has its origin among the horse riding nomads of the northern Asia who later migrated to Japan and conquered it. The hypothesis is bold and appealing, and it still is a stock theory of the origin of the Japanese nation despite of its deficiencies. Anyway the focus is upon the problem of the Japanese nation. Japanese identity was at the center of the intellectual scene, and it still is. I would argue that the most conspicuous feature of Japanese culture is the fact that it is strongly concerned with the problem of what the Japanese culture is. Once again, the general public was not aware that the horse-riding-people theory was a crude form of anthropology, if it is closer to the discipline of history.

The fifth, and last, stage of the history of Japanese anthropology, according to Yamashita, begins in 1964. This is the year marking generally the end of the post-war period. The Tokyo Olympic Games were celebrated, and with this Japanese economy started to expand to overseas. Restrictions on foreign travel were lifted, and "Japanese anthropology once again focused on other cultures outside Japan." (Yamashita) In this fifth stage Japanese anthropology started to expand regardless of, and beyond, the former colony of the Empire. For some reason anthropology in Japan developed well in the late twentieth century, and JASCA, the Japanese Society of Cultural Anthropology, with its over two thousand members, is one of the largest anthropological associations of the world, second only to the AAA. Anthropologists from this country have been carrying out fieldwork all over, including the most remote regions of the modern world, and have accumulated a tremendous amount of ethnographic data. They and their products have been almost invisible from outside mainly due to the language barrier, but efforts have been made to change the situation.

The hybrid nature of Japanese anthropology

Thus anthropology in Japan seems to have certain relations with ethnic policies of the war period, and some anthropologists write on the political implications of its involvement. But the argument

is confined in the professional circles and the public opinion seems to be indifferent.

This means that the history before the mid twentieth century does not contribute much to the formation of the public image of anthropology; the development in the latter half of the century does. Beginning in the 1950s, anthropology in Japan has gathered and formed various images. I first describe the reality of anthropology in this period and then the images associated with it.

Anthropology in Japan is a product of confluence. It is a hybrid product and its theoretical framework is mainly, though not always, imported. The word *bunkajinruigaku* (cultural anthropology) with an American tint and the word *minzokugaku* (ethnology) with an European tint are used almost interchangeably, and the word *shakajinruigaku* (social anthropology) with a British tint is also used to indicate one's inclination towards British social anthropology. Old German historical sort of approach can also be traced.

Chie Nakane, for instance, the best known among Japanese anthropologists, is identified with British social anthropology (she was close to Edmund Leach) and her famous analysis of Japanese society as "vertical society" (Nakane, 1970) is based on the British theory of "social structure." Another well-known anthropologist, Taryo Obayashi (e.g., Obayashi, 1984) was trained in Vienna and possessed a clear diffusionist tendency. Junzo Kawada, another well-known who has been working in Africa (e.g., Kawada, 2001), is not exactly a structuralist but is responsible for the introduction of Levi-Strauss. But functionalism, diffusionism and structuralism are rather outdated fragments, and post-modernism and post-colonialism have strongly affected the field. I myself am heavily influenced by the interpretive approach of Clifford Geertz and Michelle Rosaldo, and the writings of James Clifford and Arjun Appadurai are very popular among younger generations.

This mixed feature of Japanese anthropology should be appreciated if one examines *JRCA, the Japanese Review of Cultural Anthropology*. This is an official English journal of JASCA and it was initiated several years ago with a specific purpose of propagating information about anthropological activities in Japan. It is a collection of review articles, a la *Annual Reviews* style, written mainly by Japanese anthropologists on the works of Japanese anthropologists. To date six volumes have been published, and review articles on anthropological studies of China and Korea, as well as Mainland and Insular Southeast Asia, Siberia and Russian Far East, Southern Africa and native North America,

have become available in English. Mesoamerican archaeology and Andean prehistory have also been covered.

Another collection of reviews of anthropological works in Japan is a monumental book named *The Dictionary of Anthropological Literature* (*bunkajinrui-gaku bunken-jiten*), which was written in Japanese and published at the end of 2004. It is an encyclopedic collection of brief papers on eighteen hundred anthropological books reviewed by four hundred and forty-six Japanese anthropologists. (The Dictionary also collects dozens of papers on important debates in anthropology – Mead/Freedman, Anti anti-relativism, Rigoberta Menchu/David Stoll, etc.) About half of the reviewed books are by Japanese authors. The dictionary is complete with a chronology of all the publications taken up in the volume. It begins in 1682: Mary White Rowlandson and James Everett Seaver's *The sovereignty & goodness of God, together, with the faithfulness of His promises displayed; being a narrative of the captivity and restauration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson*; the chronology ends with four books published in 2004: Masahisa Segawa's *Anthropology of Chinese Society: Perspectives from Kinship and Family*, Yasuko Takezawa's *Questioning the Universality of the Concept of Race*, Keiji Maekawa's *Anthropology of Glocalization: International Culture, Development and Migration*, and Osamu Murai's *Arguing Against Shinobu Orikuchi* [a charismatic Japanese folklorist].

By looking at these reviews of anthropology, one can only feel some huge and complicated mixtures of so many elements and traces of omnivorous activities perhaps without clear orientations in sight. In this situation, it is readily expected that the “public image of anthropology” is difficult to come.

Public Image of Japanese Anthropology

Yet it is possible, and it has taken simplistic terms in contrast to the complicated nature of reality. One of the images is that anthropology has a strong centrifugal tendency. This is not only an image but also is a fact, as I recently pointed out in a short article in *Anthropology News* (Koizumi).

Due partly to that separation between outgoing ethnology and inward-looking folklore, Japanese anthropologists have tended to work outside their native country and they have shown a strong centrifugal orientation. This orientation — and their concern with the distant and the marginal — is certainly a hallmark of anthropology in the West from the beginning, but when it is contrasted with the centripetal one of, say, Japanese economists who usually

place their own country at the center of their research, the notion of “uselessness” tends to appear. The tendency is also contrasted with centripetal one of anthropologies in other countries of the contemporary world. As far as my knowledge goes, all the anthropologies in Latin American countries are centripetal, carrying out investigations on their domestic problems and social reforms. The same is true for East Asian and Southeast Asian countries -- anthropologists in China, the Philippines or Indonesia study their own societies and cultures.

Japanese anthropology has left the study of Japan to folklore, economics, sociology, political science and history, and I think that this led to the formation of its second image: “uselessness” or *Yakuni tatanai koto*. In the 1960s, when something that could be called “the public image” started to be formed, it was, if any, tenuous indeed. (I entered University of Tokyo in the late 1960s in order to study law, but soon I switched to anthropology. My father, a businessman who wanted me to be a lawyer, was puzzled and tried hard to find out what anthropology is -- with no avail.) Probably the notion of anthropology (*bunka jinruigaku*) itself has just started to be circulated then, and little was known about it. Not only my father but anthropologists themselves claimed that it is of no use. Particularly Masao Yamaguchi, a former President of the Japanese Society of Ethnology who was very influential and productive in symbolic studies of myths, rituals, tricksters and Japanese Imperial system, often claimed so.

Such a notion of uselessness is not necessarily derogatory. It is an antonym of practical, mundane economic activities of everyday life. While the majority of the Japanese citizens work diligently in various organizations for daily earnings, engaging in an “academic” pursuit with no practical consideration in sight had the image of something pure, unique and valuable. “Going abroad trying to find something extremely remote” seemed to have created an intelligible framework.

Third of the images associated with anthropology is a “romantic” one. Again it is a common image of anthropology; a famous American anthropologist once explained me that he entered anthropology and studied among Amazonian tribes due to his “romantic” passion of the youth. The romantic image tends to come from “primitive” lives and “ancient” civilizations, but I suspect that a successful archaeological project has something to do with the fortification of such an image in Japan.

Shortly after the first anthropology department in Japan was established at the University of Tokyo in 1954, Seiichi Izumi and

his colleagues started ambitious archaeological projects “in search of the origin of human civilizations both in the old world and the new.” Izumi was in charge of the new world and he started his expeditions to the Andes in 1958. The project turned out to be enormously successful and it was succeeded by Kazuo Terada and then by Yoshio Onuki. After half a century, the Andes Project is still going strong under the leadership of Yasutake Kato, the former president of the Japanese Society of Cultural Anthropology (JASCA). The project greatly contributed to clarify the origin of the civilizations in South America, particularly in the Peruvian prehistory before the Inca period. Formative archaeological sites were excavated in the north highlands of Peru, and Kotosh and Kuntur Wasi came to occupy established places in the Andean history. Now a special room is dedicated to the memory of Seiichi Izumi in the national museum of Peru.

This long tradition, and the public display, of prehistoric research in the Andes seems to have boosted an image of anthropology and give at least one of the reasons why Japanese anthropology is often understood in terms of ancient civilizations. (Just because I am a Latin Americanist, many take it for granted that I do excavations there.)

Another factor giving a strong influence in the formation of the public image is the existence of the National Museum of Ethnology (Kokuritsu Minzokugaku Hakubutsukan, or Minpaku). This is a museum located in Osaka, next to our university, and perhaps it is the biggest anthropology museum in the world. The monumental building of the museum is a piece of art by the famous architect Kisho Kurokawa. It is a colossal and quite extensive four-story building, and the total floor space reaches 51,235 square meters, about 13 acres or 5 hectares, including exhibition halls, research facilities, storage rooms and so on. The museum is run by the budget of 3.6 billion yens, or about 30 million dollars a year. Over 60 researchers -- professors, associate professors and assistant professors -- carry out research on the ethnic cultures of the world together with many more associates and visiting scholars from all over the world.

The Museum was conceived in the 1970s and the building was completed in 1977, although it has been proliferating after its first completion. The one who turned the original idea into reality was Tadao Umesao, a famous and charismatic ethnologist who wrote extensively on Central Asian nomads, the civilization neither Occidental nor Oriental, the methods for organization of information and intellectual production, and so forth. He gave

a tremendous impact upon the general intellectual life of Japan and he was particularly popular not only among the academics but also among bureaucrats, businessmen and mass media. He was a typical public intellectual, and he was ornamented with the Order of Cultural Merit (Bunka Kunsho) in 1994 and became one of the best known anthropologists in this country.

The museum is strongly research oriented and has yielded a tremendous amount of valuable academic products, and no doubt it has promoted a relativistic sense of the variability of world cultures among those who are interested in the museum and its exhibits. But it is also true that it has filled the appetite for exoticism among the popular mass. These interests in exotic customs and extraordinary beliefs may perhaps be an antonym of the supposedly uniform and centripetal nature of Japanese culture. Anyway the museum should have contributed to the creation of a very visual and tangible image of what ethnology and anthropology is.

Centrifugal, useless, romantic and exotic. Even if the reality is composite and ambiguous, the image given in the public sphere tends to be stereotypic and schematic. The public image of anything prefers simpler framework, and it was what was imposed upon a rather amorphous entity called anthropology.

Practical Turn

But the scheme is changing now. Or it must be changed by the action on our part. The image of anthropology can be transformed easily and rapidly, because the reality of the anthropology is rather formless from the beginning: it is not so “hard” as the case of British anthropology.

The change seems to have started in the beginning of the 21st century, and the forces behind it seem to have been largely institutional. For all the academics in our country, particularly for those who are employed in national universities, the foundation of the working environments was totally shaken by what is called *hojinka*, or *kokuritsu daigaku hojinka*, “the non-nationalization of national universities.” In April of 2004, all of close to one hundred former national universities became non-national independent agencies (although they continued to be called “national universities.”). The budget is still supplied mainly by the Ministry of Education and this is a big difference with private universities. Osaka University, for example, receives a half of its annual revenue of one billion dollars as regular governmental subsidies.

But the way the money is distributed and personnel is allocated is totally changing both among national universities and within each university. Distribution is made on a lot more competitive basis than before -- neoliberalism. Cost performance became important in any scientific discipline, and yielding immediate results is now strongly emphasized. Audit culture was of course imported from the United Kingdom, and setting strategic targets and making regular evaluations became part of the routine work of the academics. The audit culture became "obsessive," as one visitor put it, in Japan, and the word *hyoka zukare*, or "worn out of evaluations" is often heard. Competitions among both national and private universities are beginning to bring about university mergers and absorptions just among business corporations. The notions of productivity of research, reform in educational system and contribution to society at large came to the center of all activities and became the source of legitimization of the existence of the university system itself.

Together with this came the reform of SCJ, the Science Council of Japan (*Nihon gakujutsu kaigi*), perhaps the most important academic organization in Japan. SCJ is called the "parliament of the scientists" and composed of about two hundred members and two thousand associate members from every discipline in human and natural sciences. It is influential in Japanese policy making, particularly in the sphere of scientific policy making.

The reform was put into effect in October 2005, and the number of the committee representing each academic discipline was reduced to only thirty. These thirty includes medicine, biology, technology, sociology, physics, mathematics, history chemistry, philosophy, information science and so on, and of course anthropology, whose name had marginally appeared before, lost its seat. Anthropology was put under the rubric of, somewhat strangely, "area studies." We have just managed to secure an anthropology *sub*committee made up of sixteen anthropologists, but clearly we will need to work hard to be recognized in the new environments.

Due to this sort of tectonic movements, we now see something I call a "practical turn" in Japanese anthropology.

The reaction from anthropologists was swift. Some members of JASCA, Japanese Society of Cultural Anthropology, formed a new group for the promotion of "practical anthropology" (*jissen jinruigaku renkeijigyo kento iinkai*). This group started to explore the possibilities for the application of anthropological knowledge into practical fields, including development, education, public

health and so forth. Applied kind of anthropology has been weak and no collective effort was made before this move.

All this has been connected to the new emphasis on practical activities by the National Museum of Ethnology. The Museum was also turned into non-national agency in April 2004, and it was incorporated into a newly created umbrella organization called the National Institute for the Humanities (*ningen bunka kenkyuu kiko*). The Museum lost its previous independence and freedom and started to be partially controlled by the Institute. It is clear that the museum entered into a transitional period, and it started to explore the use of anthropology and ethnology in practical fields as one of the four principal projects of the museum.

The image of anthropology can be changed through this kind of action, in addition to the discourse addressed to the public by anthropologists. But it can also be strongly affected by the reform of the educational system, particularly on the level of high school. This is particularly the case in Japan because all the textbooks used in all high schools must be examined and approved by the Ministry of Education, or MEXT. This examination is based on the Official Guideline (*Gakusbu Shido Yoryo*) proposed by the central advisory board invited to the MEXT, and most of the board members are university professors. This system of the examination of textbooks by the guideline is not a censorship but a local way of seeking consensus and agreement for developing a unifying momentum and it is found as cultural phenomenon everywhere. In any case, working on this guideline can change the textbooks and thus the high school education itself. After all, there is at present no mention of the word “anthropology” there. Anthropological contents are not completely absent and some anthro-fan teachers can give extra curricular classes on anthropological issues, but anthropology is not officially taught in schools.

My own “strategy” is to build an institution for research and education, putting anthropology at the center and organizing other related fields around it. This is a new center called the Global Collaboration Center of Osaka University, and it will be inaugurated in April 2007. This is a product of reorganization of our university due to the merger with Osaka University of Foreign Studies. The latter university is oriented toward international studies and language trainings, and I became in charge of the creation of a new center based on the resources of two universities. (This project was also helped by the fact that we had been selected one of the twenty COEs, the Centers of Excellence,

in Humanities.) We envision a unique center for international cooperation made up of four sections: research, education, practice and evaluation. The aim is global collaboration, particularly for developing countries, and we are trying to combine the research efforts in anthropology, development studies, political science, public health, disease research, environmental studies and so forth for a common cause. We plan to work together with the National Museum of Ethnology. We also plan to work with JICA, the Japanese International Cooperation Agency. JICA is closely associated with MOFA, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (*gaimusho*) and it is the organization which handles Japanese ODA. JICA was also affected by the wave of non-nationalization and audit culture, and it is going to be merged with JBIC, the Japanese Bank for International Cooperation, in April 2007. In these flow of events and ongoing restructuring, they are in need of more effective ways of international cooperation, and we plan to collaborate in finding such ways based on the intellectual assets of the university.

By these movements, the public image of anthropology in Japan has not been affected yet, because they have just begun, but I believe it will. In making such efforts, we do not need to limit collaboration only to anthropology; we may be able to collaborate with any other related fields. We do not need to limit it to academics either; we can work with practitioners, NGOs and national and local governments. After all, the point is not to protect the name of anthropology; it is to strengthen and propagate anthropology's teaching.