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Edited by Gavan McCormack and Yoshio Sugimoto

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## Introduction: modernization and beyond

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### JAPAN AND MODERNIZATION THEORY

Historians, sociologists, and political scientists continue to debate the fine points of what it means for a society to ‘modernize’, even as they agree that the so-called advanced countries have now completed the process and begun to move into the even more unknown territory ‘beyond modernization’. Western social science theory for long understood ‘modernization’ as a basically unilinear process of transformation of the world which stretched from the cultural and intellectual world of seventeenth-century Europe to the post-1945 United States; the Japanese experience was never easily incorporated within such a model, and the emergence of Japan as an economic superpower calls the whole theory in question. Likewise the theoretical extension of the ‘modern’ trajectory into the ‘post-modern’ will remain unsatisfactory so long as such theorization remains exclusively Euro-American oriented.

As the first society outside the Western cultural tradition to achieve a high level of industrialization Japan was, and still is, the crucial case for the debate over whether industrialized societies have a tendency to become increasingly alike in structure and values – the so-called convergence debate.<sup>1</sup> In the context of Japanese studies, there are two further interrelated problems. Is modernity to be defined by Western, Japanese or universal (and somehow culturally neutral) standards? And however the concept is defined, does Japan qualify as ‘modern’?

As Japan develops into an economic superpower, whose trade performance appears to threaten other industrialized societies, it has become common to suggest that it is the country which others must emulate. In other words, Japan has come to be seen as the most modern society on earth, and as a beacon lighting the path which others are destined to follow. In a remarkable paradigm shift the scholarly consensus has moved from seeing Japan as backward, semi-feudal and undemocratic to seeing it

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as post-industrial, super-efficient and ‘more Western than the West’. The present volume is an attempt to evaluate these claims by examining Japanese cultural and political life – historical as well as contemporary – both at national and local levels.

This brief introduction is designed to provide a sketch of the modernization debate in the context of Japanese studies and consider chapters of the volume in the light of that debate. The essays collected here are reflections on different aspects of our theme. They are designed to introduce and comment on complex problems, rather than assay any formal proposal on how such problems should be resolved.

### JAPANESE STUDIES AND MODERNIZATION THEORY

#### The western model

The extent to which Japan is perceived to be modern has been conditioned primarily by the political context of the U.S.-Japan relationship. Immediately after World War Two, Japan was depicted as a society where almost everything was unmodern, the government autocratic, social relations hierarchical and unequal, and the national mentality (in the words of General Douglas MacArthur) that of a ‘twelve-years old’. The Western approach was essentially anthropological: Japan was analyzed as a compact, homogeneous and exotic unit, qualitatively different from and fundamentally inferior to Euro-American industrial societies. The Japanese scholarly view at the time was dominated by the indictment of ‘feudalistic elements’ of Japanese society, abhorrence of the ‘dwarfishness’ of the Japanese pre-war and wartime character, and the necessity of ‘democratization’, which most assumed would be patterned after the American model.

In this context, the notion of ‘citizen’ was inseparably related to that of modernization: ideally, modern society was defined in terms of self-sufficient, autonomous and independent individuals committed to universalistic, rational, libertarian and egalitarian values. In the democratization debate which took place immediately after World War Two among Japanese intellectuals, the majority took the view that despite rapid industrialization Japanese society had so far failed to produce modern citizens,<sup>2</sup> although this view was rejected by a wide range of intellectuals who contended that the concept of ‘modern citizen’ was the product of Western experience, and that Japanese reality should not be interpreted by using such a culturally biased concept; whether or not particular Western attributes were discernible in Japan was of no particular significance, they argued.<sup>3</sup>

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The extent to which modernizing Japan produced democratic citizens was debated again as historical studies accumulated to show the activities of individuals who appeared to conform to such a pattern. Most notably, research on Meiji Japan unearthed popular drafts for a national constitution drawn up in the latter half of the nineteenth century, articulating ideas of popular sovereignty, human rights and egalitarian values; the ideal type of the 'citizen' would therefore seem to have been present in early Meiji Japan.<sup>4</sup>

Furthermore, since the 1960s, Japan has witnessed the rise of citizens' movements which do not rely on the established political parties and labour union movements. The citizens' movements range from anti-war, anti-nuclear, peace movements through pollution-conscious environmental movements to community-based resident movements; they tend to cut across company and party lines. This suggests that modern citizens may have emerged as significant political actors on a large scale in post-war Japan. It remains a moot point, however, whether the tradition and the recent upsurge of citizens' movements represent mainstream or anti-mainstream currents of life in Japan.

The explicit application of modernization theories to Japan followed the rise of structural-functional theories in sociology, especially the Parsonian theory of social evolution. As publications on Japan based on this model flourished in the late 1950s and the 1960s, it became evident that the modernization framework was being applied to the Japanese case with the conscious aim of providing an alternative paradigm to that developed by Marxists in their historical and sociological analysis of Japan. To a considerable extent, this trend reflected changes in U.S.-Japan relations as the United States establishment increasingly found it profitable to show Japan to the world as the successful case of industrialization without discernible social disruption, an example of modernization based on smooth evolution rather than abrupt revolution.<sup>5</sup> Since such a claim could not be made of any other country Japan was assigned a central role in modernization theory.

The dominant (American academic) paradigm for understanding Japan at this time was avowedly 'productionist', that is to say it saw modernization exclusively in terms of indices of production. In a striking passage, one scholar especially active in representing Japan as a model of non-Communist success wrote:

the important thing is *that* people read, not *what* they read, *that* they participate in the generalized functions of a mass society, not whether they do so as free individuals, *that* machines operate, and not for whose benefit, and *that* things are produced, not *what* is produced. It is quite as modern to make guns as automobiles, and to organize concentration camps as to organize schools which teach freedom.<sup>6</sup>

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This is perhaps the classic statement of ‘modernization equals rationalization’; the attribution of modernization value to *means* without consideration of social or human ends amounts to a representation of modernization/rationalization as an end-in-itself. Fascism, imperialism and war were reduced to neutral referant points on the graph of steadily rising levels of modernization.

### The Japanese pattern

As Japan astonished the world with its phenomenal economic growth in the 1960s and 1970s, theories of Japanese modernization were given another twist: where the Japanese tradition had till then been seen as an obstacle in the path of rationalization/modernization, to be gradually transcended as Westernization advanced, now the Japanese tradition was redeemed and proclaimed a uniquely suited vessel for modernization by a new school that developed around the ‘unique Japan’ hypothesis. In recent years, at least five variants are identifiable within this school.

The first of these is the so-called ‘post-modern society’ thesis, in which Japan is portrayed as leading the process of surpassing the modern, and is seen as outperforming Western societies. This argument tends to be intertwined with the long-standing theme of *kindai no chōkoku* (transcendence of modernity), which can be traced back to slogans generated in the 1940s to justify Japan’s war activities against the Allied Powers. In the 1980s, Japan is depicted as becoming post-modern as it gets rid of ‘modern’ elements originating in the West, and places renewed emphasis on the traditional, indigenous and ‘pre-modern’ ingredients of Japanese culture. The literature which takes this line of argument has been produced by Japanese writers who tend to rely on Western theorists such as Michael Foucault, Gilles Deleuze, Jacques Derrida and Felix Guattari who are critical of aspects of Western civilization. Self-criticism by Western scholars reflecting on the crisis of Euro-American culture is twisted by Japanese critics into justification for seeing Japanese society as *beyond* criticism.<sup>7</sup>

The second variant is the *ie* society theory formulated by Murakami, Kumon and Sato.<sup>8</sup> They characterize Japanese society as being governed by an emphasis on *aidagara* (the interpersonal) rather than the Western notion of an autonomous self, and they stress the trans-temporal principle of group formation based upon kinship lineage. Against the background of Japan’s phenomenal economic expansion these writers argue that patterns of *ie* society are compatible with modernization and industrialization; in fact they argue that such patterns are most conspicuous in company organizations. While organization of Japanese corporations

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along family lines was viewed as a tool of control and manipulation immediately after World War Two, the *ie* theorists have now redefined those principles as conducive to Japanese-style corporate democracy. Significantly, they also believe that parliamentary democracy is essentially incompatible with the consensual Japanese character in so far as it is based on competition between opposed political parties. To the extent that this argument disfavours political pluralism as being incongruent with the *ie* society tradition, the theory is open to justifiable concerns that it may be consistent with a soft form of neo-fascism.

The third variant is to be found in the renewed upsurge of *bunmei-ron*,<sup>9</sup> or civilizations theory. This arises in part out of a desire to correct the culturological biases built into the *bunka-ron* theories. Civilization theorists, including Umesao and Ito, attribute primary importance to technology and institutions, which they see as 'hardware'. Their models specify not only the geographical and ecological distribution of civilizations but also their developmental rank-ordering. While this approach uses a geographical zone larger than a nation state (Islamic civilization, Christian civilization), as the unit of analysis, 'Japanese civilization' is the single and exceptional case where a national boundary is equated with a boundary of civilization. That civilization is then portrayed as both unique and superior on the basis of a model in which material culture is crucial.

The fourth variant is a Confucianism model. With the economic rise of (South) Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore, the concept of a Confucian zone has been injected into the modernization debate.<sup>10</sup> Together with these countries, it has been argued, Japan shares the Confucian ethic emphasizing the virtues of austerity, hard work and submission to authority, all of which contribute to rapid economic growth. Ironically Confucianism, which was perceived in the 1950s and sixties as an obstacle to modernization, is in the 1980s given the status of its facilitator. The extent to which the Confucian zone theory may be used as an ideological tool to justify an authoritarian political system remains to be seen.

The fifth variant, a 'cultural physiology' model, has racist implications. It enjoys rather extensive support in Japan, such that it was little surprise when in 1986 Mr Yasuhiro Nakasone, reputed to be the most internationally minded Prime Minister in post-war Japan, made public remarks which implied the racial superiority of the Japanese. According to one widely publicized theory, the Japanese brain is qualitatively different from the Western brain and more susceptible to subtleties in nature and in emotional feelings.<sup>11</sup> Others claim that the Japanese who are traditionally herbivorous therefore think and behave differently from westerners who

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are mostly meat-eaters.<sup>12</sup> Such writings mesh nicely with the xenophobic elements in folk belief, still prevalent in Japan, to reinforce the popular notion that the Japanese are not only unique but superior to other nationalities. The Nakasone remarks were the tiny tip of a substantial chauvinist iceberg.

Presented in the context of the emergence of Japan as an economic superpower, these arguments are not really free from the undertone of various types of ethnocentrism, provincialism and even bigotry. Their ideological and political functions must be closely scrutinized. On the other hand, it must be noted that major proponents of the 'unique Japan' hypothesis, including Nakane and Doi,<sup>13</sup> contributed to the modernization debate by articulating some key concepts endemic to Japanese culture and language. They brought to the analysis Japanese words such as *tate* and *amae* (terms referring to the supposed 'vertical' structure of Japanese society and the psychology of 'dependence' which is said to characterize it) without which, they argued, Japanese society and psychology could not be understood. In proposing conceptual tools particular to Japanese culture, they took a position of cultural relativism and, by implication, brought into relief the ethnocentric bias of modernization theories based almost exclusively on a Western conceptual vocabulary.

Using the dichotomy between *emic* (culture-specific) and *etic* (trans-cultural) concepts,<sup>14</sup> cultural relativists such as Nakane and Doi maintain that the *etic* concepts used in Western modernization theories are, in fact, derived from Western *emic* experiences. Clearly they are correct. The most *etic* categories, therefore, are Western *emic* concepts which happened to prevail as trans-cultural, universal notions simply because Western societies were politically stronger than others.

The literature which set the stage for the 'learn from Japan' campaign in the late 1970s and the early 1980s went so far as to claim, directly or indirectly, that what earlier theorists had regarded as uniquely Japanese social characteristics were in fact patterns of modernity which other societies, especially Western industrial societies, would in due course reproduce. Symbolically, Vogel put Japan at the top rung of the modernization ladder by entitling his book *Japan as Number One*.<sup>15</sup> A similar point was put by Dore, in more technical language, in his 'reverse convergence hypothesis'.<sup>16</sup> Modernization was in the process of being freed of the bias implicit in the assumption of convergence on a Western pattern; instead the West, in particular the U.S., would have to 'Japanise'. The message has been taken up in many ways and at different levels of sophistication since then as officials, politicians, businessmen and academics in one after another Western country urge adoption of the

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Japanese way of management, labour organization, education, or bureaucracy.

### Political considerations

As the 1980s began to wane, some of the problems that had earlier been set aside were reopened, in particular the relationship between economic and political aspects of modernization. Japan was undoubtedly highly industrialized, but if democracy was also a mark of modernization, where did Japan stand in the ranking order of democracy? The distinction between modernization as industrialization and modernization as democratization came to be highlighted; there was no doubt that Japan had been modernized in terms of industrialization, but democratization was a different matter altogether. The same consensus system of Japanese society which the 'Japan as Number One' theorists praised might be seen instead as a sophisticated mechanism of control, through which the masses of the people were regulated in concrete, specific and situational contexts.<sup>17</sup> From this perspective, group-oriented behaviour, which an overwhelming majority of Japan specialists regarded as indicating 'consensus from below', might be seen as showing 'control from above'. Specifically, according to the control theorists, the *ringi* system, the total quality control circles, the company excursion practices and so forth – which the groupism theorists interpreted as part of a voluntary democratic participatory process – could be seen as part of an elaborate and intricate structure of manipulative control.<sup>18</sup>

In a separate book which the editors of the present volume compiled,<sup>19</sup> scholars in Australia, Japan and Canada explored these issues in some detail with particular attention to the state, society, education, labour, citizens' movements, women, human rights and science. The present volume reflects the same problem consciousness though its focus is both broader and deeper. In emphasizing the democratization dimension of modernization we are in effect calling for a reopening of the democratization debate of the late 1940s and the 1950s. The sweeping bird's eye view of indices of economic productivity, technological innovation and bureaucratic efficiency reveals very little about the state of human rights, freedom of expression, equality among people, and the general quality of Japanese life. To examine the life conditions and lifestyles of ordinary men and women with respect to these areas, it is necessary to develop a 'worm's-eye' perspective. Japan has to be observed not only 'from above' but 'from below' as well. It is in this spirit that the Japanese Studies Association of Australia chose 'Japan from Down Under' as the theme of its fourth national conference. This volume is based on the revised



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versions of papers delivered at this conference which was held at La Trobe University, Melbourne, from 22nd to 25th May 1985 and attended by about one hundred scholars, including six leading intellectuals from Japan.

## ISSUES IN JAPAN'S MODERNIZATION

The contributions to this volume are built around explorations of four main sets of questions. They are (1) the extent to which political manipulation may be present under the guise of popular culture in Japan; (2) the extent to which Japanese *emic* or culture-specific categories are useful in the analysis of the Japanese way of life; (3) the extent to which the process of modernization in Japan has been accompanied by conflict and social disorganization; and (4) the extent to which traditional Japanese social structure and values may contribute to the country's post-modernization.

*1 Politics in the name of culture.* A crucial issue in interpreting the level of democratic modernization (as distinguished from industrial modernization) is the degree to which apparently voluntarily shared culture actually manifests patterned political control. Defining Japan as a 'manipulated society', Kogawa is explicit about the politically managed nature of Japanese popular culture. He stresses the power of mass media, especially electronic media, in shaping mass consciousness and creating and disseminating a mass culture that is as homogenous and pervasive as the traditional *tennō* (emperor) system. Kogawa's assessment is pessimistic: the prevailing 'simulated reality', where weekly magazines, television gossip programmes and comic strips mould popular perceptions of the world, has stripped the media-soaked masses of the sense of human rights, spontaneous communication and the capacity to understand and respond to fundamental problems. Post-industrial Japan, dominated by the large-scale information industry, (according to Kogawa) may show a 'friendly' and non-repressive face but nevertheless controls the mass psyche in a manipulative way by inducing mass political apathy.

On the other hand, Kogawa sees some hope in the development of 'free communion' among youth who have found ways to make use of electronic devices for the formation of counter-culture. He interprets the 'Mini FM' networks spreading across Japan in the mid-1980s as a community-based and spontaneous grass-roots cultural phenomenon, a symbol (however apparently insignificant) of a post-modern reality that is not homogenized, packaged and controlled.

Bolitho looks at the evolution of Sumō wrestling. The popularity of



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Sumō, a quintessential component of Japanese popular culture for over 300 years, was purchased only at a price. First, it could not have been obtained without explicit submission to state control. This involved externally imposed regulation, the imposition of an organizational hierarchy, and the express recognition of approved codes of morality and forms of religiosity. Secondly, it could not have been achieved without the economic intervention of professional organizers, and the patronage of the feudal lords. In origins and character, the sport of Sumō contrasts sharply with Western pugilism, and its evolution as described by Bolitho constitutes a nice study of gentrification, professionalization and aesthetic refinement – in short, of modernization – to which Western contact seems peripheral. From Bolitho's account, it would seem that Sumō might lay claim to be the world's first fully professional spectator sport.

2 *Utility of emic concepts.* Since the process of concept formation is crucial in modernization theory, it is necessary to consider who it is in Japan that defines what is modern. In this volume, several scholars have emphasized regional variation in the classification scheme – progress, evolution and development. In contrast to Kogawa who evaluates the current situation mainly from the vantage point of Tokyo, Tada focusses on the religious, festive and dietary tradition of Osaka mass culture, which is qualitatively different from that of Tokyo, thus reminding us of the complexity of categories used in the assessment of modernity, especially its culture elements. As an 'emicist', Tada implies that local culture is often counter-culture *vis-à-vis* the culture of the centre which masquerades as national culture, and suggests that the classificatory categories of Tokyo culture may not be adequate for the analysis of Osaka culture. In Tada's analysis of Osaka vaudeville culture, both notions imported from overseas and vocabulary used in Tokyo are given meanings different from their original usage; theories based on Tokyo categories may therefore be seen as a form of Tokyo-based cultural imperialism.

*Emic* concepts in studying Japan are especially prevalent in Japanese literature. Aoyama's investigation into contemporary women writers unravels a Japanese classificatory vocabulary for the aesthetic analysis of male homosexuality. She traces a perspective on Japanese values and culture that, while intrinsically 'Japanese', is yet doubly removed from the dominant conventions of the culture – from the male and heterosexual.

It remains to be seen if and how these and other Japanese *emic* concepts can be used in the reconstruction of modernization theories. If the Osaka-type 'low-level' universalism based on the philosophy of one measure of modernity is characterized by the prevalence of the Pure Land Buddhist belief that 'in the long run people are all the same', what

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implications would this have for the ranking of various nations? Should the type of communication present in Osaka *manzai* be an index of modernity, then where would Western societies be located in terms of this indicator? Regional diversity of *emic* practices in a nation sensitizes us to difficulties in using national averages as the guidepost for the evaluation of the levels of modernization of different countries.

Following a similar tack, Arnason attempts to situate the Japanese modernization phenomenon within a theoretical framework which allows for distinctive versions of and autonomous roads to modernity. After an introductory overview of the Japanese trajectory and consideration of ways of comparing it with the West, he discusses some salient features of the process of state formation in Japan and their relationship to the peculiar structure of Japanese feudalism. He argues that a comparative analysis should focus on three main contrasts: a different structure of the feudal principle, different relations to non-feudal components of society, and different transformations of the feudal elite.

*3 Level of social cohesion.* Modernization theories suggest that the process of modernization tends to be accompanied by social dislocation, cultural lag and political disruption. In the field of Japanese studies, however, most scholars have argued that Japan is exceptional in that little large-scale disorganization took place despite the rapid tempo of modernization. Inkster in his chapter argues that the early phase of modernization in Meiji Japan was carried out without creating serious non-elite disturbance because it was legitimized in terms of traditional, late Tokugawa values. Japan first adapted pre-modern East Asian values and attitudes to the modernization process; in later years the 'Four Little Tigers' of East Asia followed suit. Protestant Europe had no monopoly on the work ethic.

Matsuzawa reconsiders the thesis of successful conflict management in Japan by scrutinizing street labour markets and the struggle of day labourers. According to him, Sanya in Tokyo, Kamagasaki in Osaka, and other *yoseba* markets where day labourers, cut off from their families, are concentrated and work in the construction, civil engineering, transport and stevedoring industries, represent the bottom line of modernization; outright exploitation and overt repression are rampant in the *yoseba*, and mass grievances run deep. Matsuzawa argues that these realities are either hidden or played down in discussion of the nature of Japanese society, although the lower strata of Japanese society to which these workers belong constitutes as much as 10 percent of the Japanese population.

Taking a similar tack, Tanaka also examines another 'dark shadow' of Japan's 'high-tech development': the so-called nuclear power plant