1   Anthropology, policy and the study of Japan

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While most people probably associate the study of social policy with disciplines such as economics, politics and sociology, it is in fact an area with which anthropology has been involved, if not always happily, for almost a hundred years. Cambridge University in 1906 used the term 'practical anthropology' in describing a programme it ran for training colonial administrators and, in 1929, Bronislaw Malinowski (1929: 36) called for a 'practical anthropology' which would be 'an anthropology of the changing Native' and 'would obviously be of the highest importance to the practical man in the colonies.' While, according to Ferguson (1996: 156), Malinowski used this claim mainly as a means of raising research funding, in general, anthropologists maintained what can only be described as an uneasy cooperation with colonial authorities in many parts of the world.

Anthropology and policy: a long yet uneasy relationship

Although the effect on policy of the work of the anthropologists varied greatly from region to region (see the papers in Asad 1973), most subsequent commentators, such as Said (1978) and Foucault (1972), have not perceived the role of anthropologists in the colonial context favourably. Ben-Ari (1999: 387) summarises succinctly this view of the relationship when he writes that: 'Even if there was no direct correspondence between anthropological theories and systems of colonial government, anthropology did, it could be argued, participate in producing the assumptions upon which colonialism was based'. On the other hand, as Goody (1995), Kuper (1997, Chapter 4) and various of the authors in van Bremen and Shimizu (1999) point out, many pre-war and war-time anthropologists (in the UK, Holland and Japan) were actively involved in anti-colonial activities and were sometimes vocal advocates for the rights of the peoples they were studying.

In the immediate post-war period, however, the relationship between administrative authorities and anthropologists, especially in the United States, became officially much closer. This in part came about through

the development of policy for the new regimes that were being estab-
lished in the nations that had lost the war: Japan and Germany. Ruth
Benedict's (1946) classic, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword*, for
example, was originally an anthropological analysis of Japanese society
that was commissioned by the US government as background to how the
country might be most efficiently occupied and democratised (see Hendry
1996). The main energies of those in applied anthropology, though, were
in the third world where they worked alongside development agencies.
Here, as indeed in Germany and Japan, the anthropologists set out to
deal with issues of cultural interpretation and the generation of a more
positive relationship between the 'undeveloped' and the 'developers.'

As in the pre-war period, so in the post-war era, the work of applied (as
they largely became known) anthropologists often became mired in
controversy. While they tried to stick to the principles of ethnographic
description without becoming involved either in what they described or
in the implementation of policy, this turned out to be far from an easy
position to maintain and, on several widely publicised occasions, applied
anthropologists found themselves dragged into a political fracas. In one
case, the well-known Vicos project in Peru undertaken from Cornell
University in the 1950s, the anthropologists actually ended up in the role
of 'patron' on a large estate and helped to implement a reform plan that
meant devolution of power to the producers (see Holmberg 1960).
British functionalist anthropologists also, as Grillo (1985) points out,
bought into this American-led obsession with modernisation and
convergence theory (with its many similarities to Victorian evolutionism)
and increasingly worked on colonial modernisation projects, particularly
in Africa. The study of Japan was not immune to these trends as could be
seen in the 1960s Princeton series entitled 'The Modernization of Japan,'
even if some of the chapters in some of these volumes, such as Ronald
Dore's work on Tokugawa education (1965), actually did much to under-
mine the view of Feudal Japan having been a 'backward' society.

As a consequence, in the following decades, and particularly by the
new brand of neo-Marxist anthropologists of the 1970s, applied anthro-
pologists were severely attacked for reinforcing (or at least not critiquing)
the political and social inequalities that already existed between the more
and the less developed nations (see Robertson 1984). In the infamous
Project Camelot case, anthropologists were actually accused of under-
taking research which was used to gauge the level of anti-Communist
feeling in Chile in the 1970s and similar accusations were thrown at
anthropologists who worked on Thai and Cambodian societies during
the Vietnam war, at which point the status of applied anthropology hit an
all-time low.

Such 'scandals,' combined with a continuing, perhaps growing, distance between the academic world and the practical one, led to the virtual cessation of relations between the academic and applied anthropologists: few applied anthropologists were invited to lecture in universities, and few academic anthropologists worked on applied projects. In general, the practising anthropologists were considered marginal to the anthropology taught in universities and the academic anthropologists too high in their ivory towers to be of any use in a practical situation. The enormous gulf between the two extremes could perhaps best be seen by comparing articles in the journals that represented some of their most influential work in the 1970s: *Human Organization* (put out by the Society of Applied Anthropology in the United States), on the one hand, and the new Marxist-inspired journal, *Critique of Anthropology*, on the other.

In Britain, at least, the gap between applied and academic anthropologists did not begin to close until the early 1980s when, under Margaret Thatcher, university posts were frozen – and a whole generation of anthropologists were driven to work in the non-academic world – and, simultaneously, universities were required to demonstrate their relevance to the outside world. GAPP, the Group for Anthropology in Policy and Practice, was formed in 1981 to bridge the gulf between anthropologists inside and outside academia, as well as to act as a network to help anthropologists use their skills in policy and practice and to train students in the additional skills they needed to make them attractive to employers.

If I can be forgiven a personal note, which perhaps in part explains my interest in the topics covered in this volume, I was a participant on a week-long GAPP residential workshop that was held in 1985. Another participant was Jean La Fontaine, who had recently taken early retirement from being Professor of Anthropology at the London School of Economics. La Fontaine (1988; 1990) was soon commissioned to undertake research into issues of child protection and child abuse, which in the mid-1980s were the source of a major moral panic in the UK, and in the early 1990s, she was asked by the Secretary of State for Health to undertake an investigation into the evidence for the existence of ritualised satanic child abuse. La Fontaine (1998) concluded, in part by drawing on parallels with witchcraft in the classic literature of anthropology, that there was no evidence for satanic abuse, rather that society found the whole concept and practice of child abuse so abhorrent that it could only deal with it by labelling it 'satanic'. La Fontaine's conclusion, while it was not, from an anthropological perspective, particularly radical, was widely greeted as a major contribution to the debate about child sexual abuse. It is curious, therefore, as Peter Riviere (1985) has suggested in his discussion of the Warnock Committee's work on reproductive technologies, how minor a

role anthropologists have played in domestic policy and ethical debates in the UK (and it seems also the USA) when the insights that they have gleaned from studying other societies can often help to clarify what other-wise appear to be incomprehensible social phenomena or insoluble problems in their own. It is even more curious in the light of the fact that, due to budget cuts that have made overseas fieldwork more difficult, in many western countries over the past 20 years more anthropologists have turned their attention to studying sections of their own society (see Jackson 1987).

The public status of anthropologists in Japan has been rather more impressive. Anthropologists and ethnologists have enjoyed considerable political influence in Japanese society since Yanagida Kunio's ethnographic search for the 'indigenous features' of Japanese life attempted to establish a moral foundation for Japanese society in the Meiji period (see Kawada 1993). In the colonial period also, anthropologists played a much more important role in the development of colonial policy than their counter-parts in Europe (Shimizu 1999). Today also, anthropologists are often invited, under the catch-all title of *hyōronka* (social critics), to join govern-ment committees which lead to policy initiatives. The names of Hamaguchi Eshun, Nakane Chie, Umesao Tadao and Umehara Takeshi are all well known in Japanese society not only for their academic work but also for the roles they have played on various government commissions, such as that played by Umehara Takeshi in the debate in Japan about brain death (see Mulvey 1996; Feldman 2000: 85, 101 and 105).

What anthropology can bring to the policy arena

The papers in this volume are based on the belief that anthropology can bring a perception on policy issues that differentiates it from other dis-ciplines. One of the great strengths of anthropology, for example, lies in its ability to unpack the taken-for-granted assumptions that lie behind the production of policy. Most people think that they know what is meant by basic social categories such as 'child,' 'parent,' 'teacher,' or basic social institutions such as 'school,' 'hospital,' 'welfare home,' or basic social experiences such as 'birth,' 'marriage' and 'death.' Yet the moment that we attempt to translate any of these terms into another language (particu-larly a language as different from English as Japanese), we realise that these terms are social constructions, with meanings that are to a high degree culturally and historically contingent. To take just one example, the word *'sensei'* carries in a contemporary Japanese context a very different mean-ing to the word 'teacher' in a British one. *'Sensei'* in a Japanese school is still 'one who goes before' and who is charged with shaping the moral world of the children in his or her care and ensuring that they have learnt

the facts that will give them the best chance of examination success; a 'teacher' in a British school is one who, in combination with parents, helps children develop their own strengths (see Cummings 1999, for more on the significance of the social and historical context of educational terms).

While the unpacking of otherwise-unquestioned assumptions might not immediately help the construction of social policy – indeed it might prove to be a hindrance – it will certainly do much to illuminate it since a great deal of the power of social policy emanates from the fact that many of the terms used are so essentialised. As McKechnie and Kohn (1999:1) point out, for example, it is difficult to argue against bland policy statements that call for 'better care,' since the word 'caring' is 'at least on the surface, fairly unambiguously associated with things positive.' The chapters in their edited volume demonstrate that the meaning of the word 'care' is actually highly contested and is highly resistant to clarification because of, as McKechnie and Kohn put it, the 'taken-for-granted, practical and yet highly emotionally charged nature of the caring practice.' Part of the power of anthropology, therefore, lies in its potential for showing other ways of doing and thinking that demonstrate the basically arbitrary way in which different societies organise their social, political, economic, religious and other institutions and systems.

To say that certain concepts need to be put in their correct cultural and historical context in order to be understood is not, however, the same thing as saying that they are untranslatable. This is an important point to stress because the view that some Japanese concepts are so unique that people from other societies cannot understand them is the basis of the *Nihonjinron* literature that has been associated by some with the growth of national chauvinism in Japan, particularly during the height of the economic bubble of the 1980s (see Dale 1986). While the construction and dissemination of *Nihonjinron* beliefs have sometimes been erroneously associated with the discipline of social anthropology (see, for example, Mouer and Sugimoto 1986), anthropologists have generally always been of the belief that not only can concepts be 'culturally translated,' but once a subjective meaning has been ascertained, such terms and ideas can be compared across radically different societies.

Most of the comparisons in the papers in this volume, however, are implicit rather than explicit. It is important to point out, therefore, that there is a burgeoning literature looking at Japanese social policy comparatively. At the broadest level, this has involved attempts to situate Japanese social policy in a global context. These attempts have included Esping-Andersen's (1990) system of 'decommodification' scores (which measure the extent to which services are obtained by 'right' and citizens can live without relying on the market) by which Japan is grouped with countries such as Italy, France and Germany; Korpi and Palme's (1994, cited in

Hill 1996) division between 'encompassing,' 'basic security,' 'targeted' and 'corporatist' systems, in which Japan falls into the last – sometimes also called 'Bismarckian' – category, which is based on social insurance programmes basically aimed towards the economically most active; Siaroff's (1994) analysis in terms of the input of 'female' care in the welfare system, which characterises Japan as one of the 'late female mobilisation welfare states' along with countries such as Greece, Ireland, Italy, Portugal and Spain; Therborn's (1986) analysis of welfare policies in terms of employment policies, which groups Japan with Norway and Sweden as countries where the policy of full employment has been a central plank of the welfare system; and Jones' (1993) analysis in terms of concerns about producing equality, in which she describes Japan, along with Taiwan and Korea and some of the other 'Little Dragons,' as constituting a discrete set of 'Confucian welfare states.' (For a succinct summary of all of these and other macro-comparative approaches, see Hill 1996.)

The problem with all of these approaches, as Gordon White, Huck-Ju Kwon and I (Goodman, White and Kwon 1998) have pointed out elsewhere in our comparative analysis of East Asian welfare states, is that they do not take into account the historical dimension of welfare state development. No welfare state is ever static and its current manifestation often reflects on-going political battles over the best way to provide welfare. This has certainly been the case for Japan, which developed very different welfare rhetoric in each of the last four decades. In some ways, more useful analysis is presented by detailed comparison of either individual welfare states (such as Gould's 1993 comparison of Japan with Sweden and the US, or Izuhara's, forthcoming, with just the UK) or of specific policies, such as policies for the aged (see, for example, Hashimoto 1996; Long, ed. 2000) or education (for an overview of which, see Beauchamp and Rubinger 1989).

The anthropology of policy has historically concentrated on the study of the production of policy, in particular colonial policy (Hann and Dunn 1996). In the case of Japan, the experience of colonialism, of course, was short-lived – limited to seven years of American occupation immediately after the Second World War. There is, however, as many historians have pointed out, a sense in which colonialism in Japan has, since the 1870s, been internally rather than externally imposed by the development of a strong state. To a considerable degree, therefore, the anthropology of policy in Japan has become the anthropology of the Japanese state and how the state imposes its policies on sections of its population (see Garon 1997; McVeigh 1998).

It would be a mistake, however – and perhaps particularly so in the case of Japan, which has one of the world's most educated populations –

to suggest that the state can impose its social policy on a passive populace. Indeed, to a large extent, state policy is determined by the demands of the population – demands that are often conveyed through intermediary institutions such as the mass media. It is the role of these intermediary institutions which explains how it is that a society can suddenly become fixated on a certain issue when that issue is in fact long-standing in nature and only one among many.

As the sociologists Spector and Kitsuse (1977: 12) have pointed out, social problems do not just emerge from a vacuum but are the result of 'the activities of specific and identifiable individuals (not "society") who are engaged in defining conditions in particular terms with specific (recorded) purposes in mind.' The process starts when a group or groups 'assert the existence of some condition, define it as offensive, harmful or otherwise undesirable, publicise these assertions, stimulate controversy, and create a public or political issue over the matter (1977: 142).' Social panics, to use the terminology of Stanley Cohen (1971), in recent years, seem to have followed an unusually predictable two-year sequence in Japan and have mostly been connected with the perceived 'problem of youth.' Starting from the mid-1980s, the sequence of panics has gone roughly as follows: *kateinai bōryoku* (violence by children against their parents); *kōnai bōryoku* (violence by children against teachers); *ijime* (bullying by children of other children); *tōkōkyohi* (school refusal syndrome); and, most recently, as described in my own paper later in this volume, the issue of *jidō gyakutai* (abuse of children by adults). In each case, the phenomenon has been 'discovered' and defined, normally by professionals who have been motivated to a certain extent by self-interest – although few would go as far as Ivan Illich (1977) did in the 1970s in suggesting that self-interest is almost the only reason professionals bring such issues to public notice. In some cases, groups of victims who have suddenly obtained access to the media, often because they are of a class background with sufficient economic and political power, have also been involved in defining the issue. Once the phenomenon has been discovered and defined, it can be 'measured,' and such measurements have appeared to show that it is rapidly on the increase. Pressure is then put on the state to develop a policy to deal with the issue and to provide financial backing. The policy is implemented, and the problem is 'measurably' brought under control until media interest begins to wane and a new problem 'emerges.' The current social panic about child abuse in Japan is a good example of this pattern. First officially defined, for reasons explained in my paper, by the Ministry of Health and Welfare only in 1990, the exponential growth in the figures (from 1,100 reported cases in 1991 to almost 25,000 in 2001) has led to pressure that has forced the state to develop policy and to invest money for 'dealing' with the issue.

Further, in the case of all moral panics in Japan involving the country's youth over the past two decades, it has been interesting to see the similarity of the explanations for their 'sudden' appearance. These centre on the breakdown of: the extended family, public morality, respect for seniors, the education system and the concept of community in general. As we shall see, the explanations that were given for the emergence of child abuse in Japan, for example, tied in with broad-ranging debates that were going on in Japan at the end of the twentieth century, including discussions of individual rights and the changing family structure. Fujimoto (1994: 35) provided a good example of some of these arguments:

Child abuse has never been a big social problem on a national level in Japan … However with an infiltration of European and American life style in social, economic and cultural levels, the social problem such as child abuse which occurred in Europe and America affected Japan seriously.

As Cohen (1971) pointed out in his ethnography of the moral panics about mods and rockers in 1960s Britain, the analysis of such problems tells us as much about society's wider anxieties as it does about the individuals directly involved.

Much of the anthropology of policy involves the examination of official documents and the terms and the language in which policy is presented. As Foucault (1972, 1977) has argued since the 1970s, the power of the state has often lain in its ability to use apparently objective language – what he called 'political technology' – to hide the basic social assumptions of what it is really trying to change. The power of such policy is difficult to attack when it purports only to be presenting what is 'natural' and 'rational' and even more so when the language it uses is 'scientific,' technical and often, to the layperson, confusing. As Shore and Wright (1997: 7) point out, policies should be seen as Maussian 'total social phenomena' which are 'inherently and unequivocally *anthropological* phenomena (which) can be read by anthropologists in a number of ways: as cultural texts, as classificatory devices with various meanings, as narratives that serve to justify or condemn the present, or as rhetorical devices and discursive formations that function to empower some people and to silence others' (emphasis in the original).

The power of policy documents is perhaps nowhere more clearly expressed than in their use of statistics and it is here perhaps that anthropology can make its greatest contribution to the unpacking of social policy. Statistics are often called upon to legitimate and justify policy decisions – such as the system Eyal Ben-Ari describes in his chapter in this volume by which a child's development is defined as 'normal' or 'abnormal.' Yet it is seldom acknowledged that such statistics are, to some

extent, reflections of the preconceptions of those who collect, collate and use them.

Statistics seem to be particular widely used in official documents in Japan, perhaps because of the high general level of numeracy in the population and the general respect for 'facts' over interpretation that is emphasised in the school system. Indeed, it is unusual to be able to think of a statistic in Japan that might exist but that has not been collected, and when such a situation does occur – for example, there are virtually no statistics on what happens to young people who have been in children's homes after they leave the care of the state, and very few official statistics on people from most of Japan's minority groups – then this is normally for significant political reasons. A further example can be seen in the large number of research projects that were undertaken in the late 1970s and early 1980s on the perceived plight of Japan's *kikokushijo* population (children who had returned from living overseas). Virtually none of these projects examined whether such children actually had problems in returning to the Japanese education system: they simply took it for granted that they did, set out to measure the extent of those problems and to propose ways in which they might be tackled (see Goodman 1993). As Stephen Jay Gould (1984), in his wonderful debunking of the statistical method, *The Mismeasure of Man*, points out, it cannot be assumed that factors which correlate are necessarily caused by each other. Interestingly, therefore, the one large-scale project (Takahagi et al. 1982) that did use a control test of children who had not been overseas and that suggested that the 'problems' of *kikokushijo* were not noticeably worse than those of other Japanese children was either ignored completely in official docu-ments (despite the fact that it was funded by the Ministry of Education) or else criticised by other researchers for not making any constructive suggestions on how to alleviate those problems that *kikokushijo* were shown to have (Goodman 1993: 166–7). For an anthropologist, therefore, the study of official statistics in any society is also the study of the people who collect those statistics, the questions they use to collect them, the labels they put on the tables to present them, and the conclusions they draw from them; these questions, labels and conclusions often provide a fascinating insight into the assumptions that the researchers bring to their projects, which in themselves are often a reflection of wider views about the issue under study.[1]

Anthropologists, particularly in the field of semantic anthropology or discourse analysis (Bloch 1975; Bourdieu 1991; Parkin 1978, 1984), have also examined how even the most essentialised of symbols are not immune from challenge and change. While the most powerful groups in society, especially the 'state,' may try to maintain their own definitions and explanations of symbols and slogans, other groups will also attempt

to have them redefined to suit their own interpretations. Symbols, as Victor Turner (1967) put it, are 'multivocal' and in few areas is this as clear as in the politics of social policy. Family policy is especially susceptible to national histories and sensitivities, as can be seen if one compares recent policies on the family in France, Germany, UK and Japan. Each country has tried to introduce social policies to reverse its rapidly declining fertility rate, which is far below the replacement level of 2.1 children that women on average need to produce. The French and German popula-tions seem to be fairly relaxed about state intervention in such a sensitive – and some might argue private – arena, though their approach has been quite different: in France, policies have been determinedly pro-natalist, even to the extent of encouraging the birth of children outside wedlock; while in Germany the emphasis has been on strengthening the family unit, in the hope that this will lead to a more secure basis for the develop-ment of larger families (Pringle 1998: 57). In the UK, however, attempts by the state to get involved in such personal family affairs as reproduction have been met with general hostility, in particular against the rally of the previous Conservative Government to go 'back to basics,' in which the 'back to' element involved a return to childbirth in marriage, in face of the fact that over 35 percent of children were, by the early 1990s, being born outside of wedlock (including some to the mistresses of Conservative Members of Parliament). In fact, in over 70 percent of cases where children were born to unmarried mothers, both parents were registered on the birth certificate as living at the same address. The Conservative Government was making what Robin Fox (1967) long ago described as the classic anthropological error of confusing reproduction with marriage in its attack on unmarried mothers being a drain on society.

In Japan, there has also been considerable ambivalence to state inter-vention in pro-natalist policies: in part, because of reminders of such policies in the 1930s when more men were needed to staff the army; in part, because of women's new-found freedom outside marriage. The mixed messages that the Japanese government has been sending out about its pro-natalist policies were well encapsulated in mid-1999 by the question directed at Posts and Telecommunications Minister, Noda Seiko – the only woman in the Cabinet – by Nonaka Hiromu, head of the gov-ernment's Office of Gender Equality, during a meeting on measures to tackle the declining birth-rate: 'Why don't you set an example?' (*Japan Times International* 1–15 June 1999). Japan's collapsing fertility rate is a topic to which I shall return later in this introduction, since it is an underlying theme that links all of the chapters.

If the anthropology of social policy is the study of *meaning*, particularly the different meanings that are ascribed to slogans and symbols, it is also the study of practice – to use a classic anthropological distinction, *function*