

**PEDAGOGY AND EXPERIENCE:
BRINGING JAPAN INTO THE CLASSROOM**

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“Purpose and Goals,” “Perceptions of the Other,”
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“Connection and Identity”

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Introduction

The Faculty and Curriculum Development Seminar on Japan – the Japan Seminar for short – is a year-long program designed to help interdisciplinary teams of faculty members acquire the capacity to teach about Japan and create units, courses, and course sequences that infuse Japan-related content into undergraduate curricula. The ultimate goal of the Japan Seminar is to foster American undergraduates’ appreciation of Japan by arranging for them to encounter Japan as a part of their regular coursework, no matter what their major. Since its inception in 1998, the Japan Seminar has helped bring greater attention to Japan at almost 50 U.S.

colleges and universities and has trained more than 100 faculty members from the humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences.

Arranged in three distinct yet related phases, the Japan Seminar first involves participants in a rigorous five-month (January through May) study of Japan with weekly discussions conducted both on campus and on-line. In July, directors G. Cameron Hurst and Jane R. Spalding lead participants on an intensively programmed study-tour of Japan, which is followed during the fall by a semester of guided curriculum development work. Through this 12-month project model, the Japan Seminar enables faculty members, who come as novices to the study of Japan, to teach about Japan within the context of their disciplines.

The Japan Seminar is a project of the University of Pennsylvania's Center for East Asian Studies and has, over the years, received funding from the Japan-U.S. Friendship Commission, the U.S. Department of Education's Center for International Education, the Japan Foundation's Center for Global Partnership, and the Freeman Foundation. All accredited U.S. institutions awarding baccalaureate degrees in the arts and sciences are eligible to participate.

Purpose and Goals

The study-tour of Japan during late July and early August of 2002 captured our imaginations and motivated us to seriously consider how we might integrate key experiences into our teaching about Japan. During the three week journey we often talked about how our Japan Seminar readings and experiences would shape and change courses that we would develop and teach in coming years. We represent five distinct academic disciplines, so it seemed appropriate to write separate essays, each one describing meaningful experiences that would be compelling and instructive regarding a careful examination of Japanese culture and society. We also provide examples of how we will engage students and enhance our teaching, while drawing on our scholarly knowledge/understanding of Japan. Our interdisciplinary efforts have implications for the development of collective and individual identity in a variety of cultural and pedagogical contexts (see *Interdisciplinary Connections*).

Searching for Memory

Gradually things around me came into focus. There were the shadowy forms of people, some of whom looked like walking ghosts. Others moved as though in pain, like scarecrows, their arms held out from their bodies with forearms and hands dangling... An old woman lay near me with an expression of suffering on her face; but she made no sound. Indeed, one thing was common to everyone I saw – complete silence.¹

Complete silence was also the only reaction that seemed acceptable that July morning as I stood looking at the watch that had stopped at 8:15, charred lunch boxes, melted bottles, students' burned summer uniforms, and human shadows in stone. 8:15 is a perfectly normal time for getting up and starting a new day, for having breakfast, for going to work – not for the destruction of an entire city, the death of 140,000 people, the beginning of a new era holding a new fear, and the rewriting of Japan's history.²

At the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum, one can also see a replica of "Little Boy," that new technological wonder which was to guarantee peace when it exploded at 8:15, 580 meters above Hiroshima. One can hear the voices of the pilots in the planes which escorted the B-29 bomber carrying the deadly weapon, pilots excited about the success of the mission – and one can see the pictures of the devastation, of which only the A-Bomb Dome remains.

John Locke, in his famous *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, says that personal identity is based on consciousness, the consciousness of past events, our memory.³ So, it is the fact that I carry with

¹ Michihiko Hachiya, *Hiroshima Diary: The Journal of a Japanese Physician, August 6 - September 30, 1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1955), p. 4.

² See Naomi Shono's explanation of the effects of the bomb as well as figures of casualties in Gaynor Sekimori, trans., *Hibakusha: Survivors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki* (Tokyo: Kosei Publishing Co., 1986), p. 24.

³ John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (New York: Prometheus Books, 1994), Book II, Chapter XXVII, Section 9. Locke states, "For, since consciousness always accompanies thinking, and it is that

me memories of earlier times that guarantees my personal identity, my being the same person over time. As I walked the halls of the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum I thought about identity, not personal identity, but the identity of a City, the identity of a Nation, and I thought about so many painful, horrific, silent memories now part of Hiroshima and its people and of Japan. To know one's memories is to know one's history and to know one's history is to know oneself. Both the East building of the museum, with its "Panorama of the Atomic Bombed City Area," and the West building, with its model of the A-bomb, provide us with an insight into the history of Hiroshima and of Japan. One wants to cry or shout, and yet remain silent and one wants to understand – the road to Modernity, Reformation, Transformation, Imperialism, and Defeat – and bring this knowledge to others, friends, students, to all who need to understand.

The Cenotaph for the A-bomb victims (Memorial Monument for Hiroshima), located at the center of Peace Memorial Park, honors the victims of the bombing. It is reminiscent of clay sculptures found in ancient burial mounds of the Kofun period. In a stone chamber under it are the names of the victims; more names are added every August 6. It would do us good to remember what is inscribed on this stone chamber holding the memories of many, "Let all the souls here rest in peace for we shall not repeat the evil if we want to avoid more painful silences."

Teaching is a way of remembering, of keeping in mind painful episodes of history. In my course, Japan and Modernity, I ask students to read narratives of *hibakusha*⁴ and to think about the significance of the relationship between personal narrative and memory, memory and history, and ultimately, to ask the question: How do we understand Modernity in light of what we learned about Hiroshima's painful memories? This is a difficult question, but one that nevertheless must be asked. Lisa Yoneyama's insightful book, *Hiroshima Traces*, informs our discussion and

which makes every one to be what he calls self, and thereby distinguishes himself from all other thinking things, in this alone consists personal identity, i.e., the sameness of a rational being; and as far as this consciousness can be extended backwards to any past action or thought, so far reaches the identity of that person; it is the same self now it was then; and it is by the same self with this present one that now reflects on it, that that action was done."

⁴ Sekimori, trans., *Hibakusha*.

helps us understand the complexities connected to particular acts of remembrance, understanding of the past, and a thrust towards the future.⁵ My aim is to carry out an exercise in remembering the experience of others, not only to learn more about the lives of particular Japanese involved in a momentous event, but also our own history.

Connection and Identity

On a hot, humid late July afternoon in 2002, my friend and I ascended a steep hill to the Hiroshima City Museum of Contemporary Art. Walking up, we witnessed the trees of Hijiyama Park give way to a splendid structure, designed by the renowned architect Kisho Kurokawa and opened in May 1989. We saw a circular entrance connected by two long columns. Once inside the cool, shaded structure, we paused at the souvenir shop to regain our composure. Looking at an aerial photograph of the museum, I could see that Kurokawa had combined Western and Eastern features into the structure, a Western-style colonnade and an Eastern-style storehouse. (The Japanese storehouse is, in my view, similar to the Greek marketplace or *agora*, a place of assembly). This architectural combination of West and East complements the museum's holdings, giving the museum a universal appeal.

As my friend and I entered the various rooms housing the museum's permanent collection, we marveled at the contemporary art of both Japanese and Western artists. Yanagi Yukinori in *Akitsushima 50* (2000) and Yamaguchi Makio in *Square Stones and Round Stones* (1988) depict images of war and destruction, a pervasive theme in Hiroshima art. Tadanori Yokō in *Funeral Procession II* (1969-1985) powerfully captures this theme by depicting five Western people in the foreground, three young women and two young men, their faces irradiated by an atomic bomb blast, a disturbing reminder of the U.S. A-bombing of Hiroshima. On the other hand, Fernand Botero in *Little Bird* (1988) and Henry Moore in *The Arch* (1971) depict images of passing through air or space to new beginnings, perhaps. After a while, these Japanese and Western artworks began to fuse in my imagination, suggesting both the human history of destruction and the human need for renewal, for newness. As such, the Eastern and Western

⁵ Lisa Yoneyama, *Hiroshima Traces: Time, Space, and the Dialectics of Memory* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

artists in the collection offer tentative forms of communication with one another.

My visit to this museum was the singular experience of my journey to Japan because it undermined the central assertions of both Alex Kerr in *Lost Japan* and Patrick Smith in *Japan: A Reinterpretation* – i.e., the Japanese are unwilling to reveal who they are not only to strangers (*gaijin*) but also to themselves.⁶ According to Kerr, “[t]here is a vast chasm between the simplicity arriving foreigners often find in Japan and the furtive, unrevealed complexity that lies within. In this space the Japanese still make their hidden history – the record of their endeavor to achieve public, unmasked individuality.”⁷

I now realize that the Japanese do “achieve public, unmasked individuality” through their artwork. The singular vision and clarity conveyed by the mixed media of Japanese artists, architects, sculptors, fashion designers, etc., reveal a candid and at times intimate personality, one appealing to viewers who choose to read its unique message. While in Japan, as a participant in the 2002 Japan Seminar, I visited many art museums. From those experiences, I learned that the intimacy we prize so dearly in the West can also be discovered in the everyday artistic images that await Western visitors to Japan. The visit to the Hiroshima City Museum of Contemporary Art clarified this impression, yielding an unexpected epiphany, a personal revelation that I recount here: As my friend and I wandered outside the museum and began contemplating Magdalena Abakanowicz’s movie theatre-like *Seats in Rock Garden* (1992-1993), we took photos of one another. I now realize that, like the images we witnessed, we were engaged in the postmodern condition of holding hands, of being momentarily connected.

One way to teach the mixed media of Japanese art is to study the interrelations among specific artistic forms. Take, for example, the work of two important twentieth-century artists Uemura Shoen (1875-1949) and Paul Jacoulet (1896-1960). Both artists have made significant contributions to *ukiyo-e* woodblock prints. Uemura experiments with traditional *ukiyo-e* depicting kimono-clad women, evoking the Edo tradition of *bijin-ga* (pictures of beautiful women). In *Beautiful Women in Snow* (1911), Uemura

⁶ Alex Kerr, *Lost Japan* (Oakland: Lonely Planet Books, 2001); and Patrick Smith, *Japan: A Reinterpretation* (New York: Vintage Books, 1998).

⁷ Kerr, *Lost Japan*, p. 39.

reveals a Western influence by capturing the movement of two women's garments in bold, flowing ink lines.⁸ She seems to evoke the *bijin-ga* traditions only to make it modern. Like Uemura, Jacoulet – Parisian born but who lived most of his life in Japan – also contributes to traditional *ukiyo-e* woodblock prints by depicting exotic settings, mainly influenced by his numerous visits to Micronesia from 1929-1937. To capture the exoticism of Micronesian women and the beauty of Micronesia itself, Jacoulet increased the number of blocks – on which artists layer colors – from 20 to 30 to as many as 200 blocks. As a consequence, he produced a modest number of woodblock prints. Further, he depicted women from East Asia, including Koreans, Ainu people, Chinese *bijin*, and even Western residents of Japan. His *Tattooed Women of Falalap, East Carolines* (1935) shows his mastery of the *bijin-ga* form while revealing his modernity in a kind of homage to Paul Gauguin.⁹ So his contribution to *ukiyo-e* woodblock printing was to internationalize this form. For me, Uemura and Jacoulet reveal their “unmasked individuality”; the teacher simply needs to understand the tradition and how Japanese artists continue to renew it.

Gender and Culture in Japan: Through the Prism of Politics and Economics

My pedagogical discussions in the classroom of Japan and its women allow students to discover sharp contrasts that straddle the time periods of Meiji, Taisho, Showa, and Heisei. Nowhere is this contrast felt so acutely as with the reading of anarchist women in the Meiji period – such as Kanno Suga, Ito Noe, and Kaneko Fumiko who questioned the dominant patriarchal paradigms and even espoused political violence as a relevant strategy for the re-creation of a new Japanese system – with that of the most recent one, Heisei, from 1989 onwards (described below).¹⁰ An article on

⁸ Jeff Hammond, “Bygone Beauties in the Modern Age,” *The Japan Times* (10/08/03).

⁹ Tai Kawabata, “Paul Jacoulet: The First Western Master of Woodblock,” *The Japan Times* (05/21/03).

¹⁰ Hélène Bowen Raddeker, “Resistance to Difference: Sexual Equality and its Law-ful and Out-law (Anarchist) Advocates in Imperial Japan,” *Intersections: Gender History and Culture in the Asian Context* 7 (2002) (<http://www.she.murdoch.edu.au/intersections/issue7/raddeker.html>).

these anarchist women by Hélène Raddeker stands in opposition to some of the personal observations I amassed during my trip to Japan.

The words of our Program Director, Dr. Cameron Hurst, expounding on the theme of gender in an email missive, were ringing in our ears as our journey through Japan unraveled its own curiosities.

There is still a greater division of roles between male and female along public and private lines...the old role of ‘good wife, wise mother’ is less acceptable to young women today...[However], *wait until you see the widespread proliferation of pornography*, and then let me know what you feel about the progress of women.¹¹ [Emphasis mine]

“Irasshaimase...” was the welcome greeting that erupted almost every time I stepped into a department store (or a pharmacy, shoe store, or restaurant for that matter). I would turn around startled, trying to locate the group of children from whom such a cacophonous salutation emerged. To my shock, I noted that the childish voices belonged to the young women assistants whose ages usually ranged from 16 to 30 years – like Italian operatic castrati, the saleswomen had preserved their infantile vocals to be appealing to their clients (and society).

Back in my hotel room (be it in Tokyo or Kyoto, Himeji or Kurashiki), the recurring theme of “capturing the infant in the woman” was evidenced in the glossy pamphlets surrounding the omnipresent television. The pamphlets advertised pay-per-view TV channels that would allow the (male) guest to consume child-like Japanese showgirls on screen for a moderate fee. In the majority of these pictures, the obsession with girls in school uniform or a “schoolgirl look” was obvious and it captured my attention – morality and cultural relativism notwithstanding. My program director’s email message: “*wait until you see the widespread proliferation of pornography*” echoed in my ears.

I pushed the glossies aside and in the search for some TV news, clicked my way through Japanese soaps, MTV, and films. My attention centered on the TV advertisements. Once again, infantile female voices screeched from the screen – selling laundry detergents, washing machines, cookies, and colas – and assailed my senses, reminding me of Mary

¹¹ Email from Dr. Cameron Hurst, Wednesday, May 8, 2002.

Wollstonecraft's words: "Kind instructors! What were we created for? To remain, it may be said, innocent; they mean in a state of childhood. We might as well never have been born..."¹² Eighteenth century statements by Wollstonecraft, a diatribe against those such as Rousseau who had described women as "graceful creatures in perpetual childhood," did not appear irrelevant in the context of Japanese women and the media.¹³ The television, as a mirror of contemporary culture, was preserving the child-ness in the voices of adult women even while they were courted as marketing and consuming agents of capitalist society. And where were the women in the same boardroom? Wollstonecraft's warning words rang in my ears, "She [woman] was created to be the toy of man, his rattle, and it must jingle in his ears whenever, dismissing reason, he chooses to be amused."¹⁴ The television images were stereotypically reinforcing women's place in the home, with female models ardently monopolizing the marketing of washing machines and baby items, while men sold electronics and computer games. One wondered, who in the advertising media business could possibly be persisting in producing commercials that trapped women in their childhood? A trip to a Tokyo-based advertising firm – ranked as one of the largest in the Asia Pacific region (that will remain unnamed in this article) – provided a possible response to this question.

The advertising firm, housed in an edifice that seemed to epitomize post-modern architecture in its neo-gothic appearance, only seemed to counter the not-so-modern status of women *in* the corporate world of the media business. The nine of us (2 program directors and the faculty), sat around a large polished table in an aesthetic boardroom to listen to three male executives who briefed us about the minutiae of the media business.

¹² Mary Wollstonecraft, "Observations on the State of Degradation to Which Woman Is Reduced by Various Causes" [Chapter IV], in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, ed. Carol H. Poston (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1988).

¹³ Mary Wollstonecraft points out, "Rousseau declares that a woman should never for a moment feel herself independent, that she should be governed by fear to exercise her natural cunning, and made a coquettish slave in order to render her a more alluring object of desire, a sweeter companion to man, whenever he chooses to relax himself." Wollstonecraft, *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, Chapter IV.

¹⁴ Wollstonecraft, *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, Chapter IV.

One of them (in carefully casual “Parisian” clothes) presented a suave slide show on the successful message of cross-cultural values (including race and gender issues) relayed by their advertisements and the products that they sold – what an irony! And where were the women?

The two women who were present in the room, distributed handouts, served drinks, and helped set up the show. They sat against the wall (not around the table with the rest of their colleagues and us), unobtrusive, and responded only when spoken to – thus confirming my premeditated opinion about the inconspicuous status of women in the (advertising) workplace.

Back in my class on Modern Japan at Lynchburg College, I had to present the place of Japan in the modern world and the complexity of gender relations that challenge simplistic and reductionist perspectives. Without glossing over my foregoing narrative, I resumed my lecture/discussion by stating that the face of peace in post-war Japan is female. I narrated to my students my astonishment at seeing the gargantuan “tribute to the unknown soldier of World War II” which was the imposing Kannon, the Buddhist goddess of compassion (a re-embodiment of the Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara) located in Kyoto – an 80 ft. piece of concrete weighing 500 tons. I further noted that the first of the Japanese contingent of UN peacekeeping force involving the Japanese Self-Defense Forces, sent to East Timor in 2002, had seven women in its Engineering Unit.

I do not fail to inform my students that Japan, in the paradox of its everyday gender relations, also had Kawaguchi Yoriko, a woman Foreign Minister in Prime Minister Koizumi’s cabinet (the second of the two women he has nominated for the post)¹⁵ – this is not very different from the only two women in the United States, Madeleine Albright and Condoleezza Rice, who have enjoyed such positions in the upper echelons of the foreign policy circle as Secretary of State.

Before undertaking the unforgettable trip, all seven participants in the Seminar were immersed in listserv discussions of readings, one of which was based on the declarations of a Harvard-educated feminist, Sumiko Iwao, who underscored the point that it is narrow-minded to view Japanese women as merely powerless victims with no agency and control in

¹⁵ The previous woman foreign minister was Tanaka Makiko who served in the position from 2001-2002.

society.¹⁶ Indeed, she claimed, the career-oriented husband that a Japanese woman selects provides her with the money, time, and the climate that is conducive for her to pursue the “empowering vocations” [my words] of shopping and other cultural activities! Thus, while Japan and the average Japanese woman struggles between traditional roles juxtaposed with modern predicaments, at the political level some minimal steps have been taken to show the world that Japan has put its past behind it, but not necessarily to remedy the status quo regarding the gender dynamic in the public sphere.

I remind my students that empowerment may be a state of mind, nonetheless, the state of the woman’s body and how it is perceived, the status of her work as an equal in society and as an active agent in the public sphere, are worthier goals to aspire to in any society – be it in Japan or in the U.S. – than the mere status of a childish, naïve, and therefore desirable woman.

A Land of Contradictions

Serenity, ancient temples of worship, quiet landscaped gardens, all intermingled with modern structures of high finance and advanced technological achievement are the “Madison Avenue-like” trademarks that delineate the great Asian nation of Japan. Packed and ready to go, I would finally behold firsthand what had been vicarious knowledge most of my life.

I was elated to have been chosen as one of the participants in the 2002 Japan Seminar. After completing the recommended books and articles as well as participating in discussions pertaining to Japanese studies, my anticipation of the impending trip was at a fever pitch. As a social work educator, it is critical that I convey to my students the ability to ascertain knowledge relating to diversity, oppression, discrimination, and the drive for social justice as they impact subjugated populations. The trip to Japan could only be a once in a lifetime experience that aptly addressed the issues at hand.

Arriving in Japan, I found it hot and humid like Oklahoma City when a visitor has forgotten to wear a big hat for protection from the intense sun. Despite the heat, the visit to the Hiroshima City Museum of Modern

¹⁶Sumiko Iwao, *Japanese Woman: Traditional Image and Changing Reality* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994).

Art exemplified the artistry and majesty of Japanese culture in both structural splendors, as well as in the artifacts on display. The meticulously landscaped gardens and trees that had been tended with minute detail were mesmerizing. The Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park illustrated Japanese creativity, while echoing the anguish of the tens of thousands who had been incinerated in the atomic blasts at Hiroshima and Nagasaki. But through all the recognition of the artistry, majesty, craftsmanship, and attention to detail, my social work lenses easily spotted the modern-day scourges of discrimination and homelessness that often plague the great metropolises around the globe.

Imagine being caught up in the euphoria of the splendor and grandeur of the Tokyo Contemporary Art Museum, while simultaneously witnessing a massive park, filled with the homeless, their blue canvas tents forming a surrealist landscape. Here people wash their clothes in a beautiful pond, while the rest of humanity quickly criss-crosses their meager existence. Some of the museum patrons acted like they did not care, while others were probably glad that poverty was not their plight.

Lectures during our visit were very informative. Even though Japan is basically a monolithic society, it is experiencing problems usually attributed to pluralistic societies. Spousal abuse was on the rise in 2002 coupled with divorce rates soaring to an all-time high.¹⁷ Japan does not promote a barrier-free environment for its citizenry. As a result, many of the physically challenged are absent from the day-to-day routines of living.

The Japanese experience monumental struggles with the acceptance and assimilation of foreigners. For years, Koreans were forced to immigrate to the Japanese islands, only to experience extreme discrimination. Even today, Koreans make fifty percent less than their Japanese counterparts in positions of similar employment.¹⁸ They, like most foreigners, are only allowed limited participation in many activities afforded to the rest of the citizenry. Add gender discrimination, and a social worker could easily work around the clock correcting an array of social

¹⁷ Kumiko Fujimura-Fanselow, "Women in Japan." Japan Seminar Lecture: Tokyo (August 1, 2002).

¹⁸ Chegal Tok, "Koreans in Japan." Japan Seminar Lecture: Hiroshima (July 20, 2002).

injustices. Majesty, artistry, beauty, technology, discrimination and social injustice – that’s Japan.¹⁹

My social work students seek to develop an accurate picture of our diverse world. The greater their exposure to similarities and differences, the more they respect and celebrate diversity. Students reflect on ideas and values different from their own, explore other cultures, and recognize their own cultural biases and differences. They experience diverse ideas, worldviews, and peoples as a means of enhancing their learning and preparation for work and membership in a diverse society/world. I have developed two assignments that not only challenge students to understand Japan, but to gain an awareness of our modern global society.

The objective of my “Human Needs” paper is an accurate analysis of economic and social welfare developments from a global perspective. Students focus on Japan and the U.S. by comparing and contrasting the needs of people (e.g., housing, social services, employment, and medicine). I label another assignment: “Ethnic Group Raising Your Child.” Groups of students play the role of Japanese parents raising Japanese infants (male and female) to age 21. The objective is to identify one’s own values relating to diverse groups and describe how these values influence thinking and behavior that are relevant to the profession of Social Work. These assignments have successfully exposed my students to a critical and needed understanding of diverse human activities and the contradictions of modern societies.

Perceptions of the Other

For months we had been reading about a very ancient and complicated society. But would we be able to provide an authentic picture for our students after the 2002 Japan Seminar (JS) ended? This question led me to wonder how the Japanese view America. We share a common history, but does this mutuality assure accurate perceptions? Americans like to think they “know” Japan. Do the Japanese really “understand” America?

¹⁹ A number of scholarly publications examine modern social conditions in Japan. Two relevant books relating to family and immigration experiences in Japan are Edwin Reischauer and Marius Jansen, *The Japanese Today: Change and Continuity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995); and Yoshio Sugimoto, *An Introduction to Japanese Society* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

How do individuals in these cultures encounter the Other? What are the educational implications of this social engagement?²⁰ I find that my students better understand Japan when they know how the Japanese view aspects of American society.²¹

These questions and concerns formed the basis of my JS project. The task certainly could not be completed after just one visit to Japan, but I needed to start somewhere. Professor Kazuyuki Matsuo (Sophia University in Tokyo), who had lived in the United States while completing his Ph.D. at Georgetown University, graciously invited me to attend his class, “United States Social History.” Twelve students would present preliminary Senior Thesis findings addressing various aspects of American society and culture. This seemed like an excellent opportunity to experience how the Japanese view America, “the Other.”

Professor Matsuo asked me to meet him in front of the Sophia Library at 2 p.m. on July 15, just one day after we arrived in Japan. My body said it was 11 p.m. back home in Ann Arbor, but the stifling heat and humidity did not prevent me from arriving early to enjoy the commotion of finals week. At the appointed time, walking through a sea of students, Professor Matsuo greeted me and suggested we take a crowded elevator to the Institute of American and Canadian Studies, seven stories above Tokyo.

²⁰ George Herbert Mead, a well known twentieth century sociologist, recognized the importance of individuals successfully engaged with and understanding “significant” and “generalized” Other. This knowledge/interaction contributes to successful socialization and a healthy formation of self. Tolerance of the Other and unknown can have positive and desirable social/pedagogical outcomes. See Mead, *Mind, Self and Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1934, rpt. 1971).

²¹ Toward this end, I ask my students to read at least one book or article written by a Japanese citizen about the United States. For example, if a class is taught on gender or religion in Japan, my students benefit greatly from knowing how the Japanese view gender/religion in America. This experience helps to reduce a smug cultural superiority and enables U.S. students to gain a fresher and more objective view of Japan. The exercise also encourages tolerance and a productive understanding of the “Other.” A very useful journal providing a scholarly/Japanese view of North America, *The Journal of American and Canadian Studies*, is published by Sophia University through the Institute of American and Canadian Studies.

As students filed into the Institute, they also greeted me and found seats at the seminar table. When Professor Matsuo started class by identifying how we would proceed, many of the students seemed nervous. Each person would make a short ten-minute presentation, and I would have an opportunity to ask questions.

For the next two hours Japanese students described American society. My subjective state merged with their objective analyses, and I recognized myself in the words they spoke. I became the “Other.” Some students were interested in elements of African-American music, including rap and hip-hop, reflecting how African culture had shaped American culture. Another focused on how minstrel shows of the early 20th century helped to reinforce racial stereotypes, while contrasting this “entertainment” with Spike Lee’s critical portrayal of American race relations. There was a general concern with the changing nature of the American family, including how homosexual couples have trouble adopting children. One student asked whether the growing number of street children in the U.S. reflected a form of resistance to the pressures of the nuclear/isolated family and a highly individualistic culture. Still another explored the introduction of Zen Buddhism to America, how Zen had subsequently changed, and was then reintroduced back to Japan in “purer form.” One student who recently returned from New York was fascinated with how an evolving American coffee culture (e.g., Starbucks) influences Japan, especially as a direct challenge to the Japanese tea ceremony. Finally, students wondered how and why the Internet emerged in the U.S.

The insight of these Sophia students was impressive. They understood aspects of American culture better than many of my own students. By exploring how features of social structure and culture are constructed over time, they had developed a more complete picture of America. By seeing the “Other,” they also appreciated themselves. When students, whether in Japan or the U.S., study different societies, they not only move outside their own history, but also develop tolerance of difference. As we teach our students about Japan, they too can see how American culture constrains and constructs. By taking the role of the “Other,” we appreciate the beauty and complexity of worlds beyond direct experience. These efforts, on both sides of the Pacific Ocean, create an invaluable recognition of our common humanity.

Interdisciplinary Connections

These essays not only provide glimpses of experience in Japan, but also relate examples of how we approach our teaching about Japan and other social settings. One theme that emerges in our analyses elaborates (directly and indirectly) on how identity is perplexingly achieved within complicated cultural contexts. We explore, in part, how societies and individuals share this common quest and dilemma. By examining a diverse understanding of our Japan Seminar experiences, we are better able to show our students how identities inevitably emerge in all social contexts.

Ortega suggests that knowing the past and its complexities is to understand how one's identity emerges and flows into the future. An authentic balance between the past and present provides a reasonable and more productive vision of the future. Manian considers unequal gender relations and the tension between women as active agents in the public sphere and traditional marriage partners with childish characteristics. The experience of gender identity in public and private realms is a dilemma of modernity in Japan, as well as other countries experiencing rapid change. Losey explores how the Japanese are unwilling to reveal who/what they are to others and even to themselves. Art unmask this public display and reveals a candid and intimate identity – authenticity. Individual and collective identity can be and is revealed through art. Scott examines how Japanese identity is expressed through the artistry, technology, and progress easily experienced and observed. A more troubling aspect of this collective identity emerges as we see manifestations of discrimination allowed to persist within social contexts. Individuals and groups are left to resolve the resulting and inevitable contradictions. Finally, Lang posits that when studying and encountering other cultures, we experience the possibility and uneasiness of knowing the other and by extension better knowing ourselves. This common and tentative experience, regardless of cultural context, can shape identity, as individuals come to encounter, tolerate, understand, and celebrate difference. Efforts to effectively use these interdisciplinary connections have numerous applications in the classroom.

Conclusion

From the outset, participants in the Japan Seminar have embraced the opportunity the Seminar offers them to become serious students of Japan. The quality of their engagement with the topic is evident in their contributions to the project listserv, the scope of their individual research projects, as well as the new courses they have created. By their own

evaluations, those of their institutions and the project directors, they have progressed rapidly in their general understanding of Japan.

Although each Japan Seminar officially lasts only one year, participation by some institutions has had a pronounced “ripple effect,” in terms of their engagement with Japan. Several colleges that prior to participation had not taught Japanese language now do so. Newly developed courses incorporating content on Japan have created student demand for these language courses. In addition, several Japan Seminar institutions have gone on to develop partner institution relationships with universities in Japan and are now sending and receiving exchange students. The momentum that the Japan Seminar has helped faculty create on campuses extends well beyond the initial year of participation.

In conclusion, the Japan Seminar has always served a variety of campus constituencies – the individual faculty who participate, the institutions that expand their capacity to offer Japan-related coursework, and, perhaps most important of all, the students whose lives are changed through a new engagement with Japan.