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# THE POSTWAR DEVELOPMENTS OF JAPANESE STUDIES IN THE UNITED STATES

EDITED BY

HELEN HARDACRE



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## TAKING JAPANESE STUDIES SERIOUSLY

ANDREW GORDON

In the spring of 1996 the Joint Committee on Japanese Studies (JCJS) of the American Council of Learned Societies and the Social Science Research Council was “decommissioned.” For nearly 30 years this committee had been a central actor in the effort to promote Japanese studies in North America, part of the two Councils’ larger postwar effort to support the enterprise called “area studies.” It is no surprise that the decision to dissolve the JCJS along with 11 other joint area committees occasioned impassioned protest, although the sensational journalistic coverage of shouting and tears in the hallways of these venerable institutions was unusual.<sup>1</sup> Defenders of the area studies project convened emergency meetings, while supporters of the new turn at the SSRC and ACLS assured all who cared to listen of their ongoing commitment to what they now called “local knowledge.”<sup>2</sup>

One of the most striking features of this latest round of what the *Chronicle of Higher Education* called a “clash over [the] value of area studies” is what Yogi Berra would have called *déjà vu* all over again.<sup>3</sup> Some buzz words were new—globalization instead of modernization, for example—and the context was the post-Cold War era and not the Cold War itself. But the issue was framed in familiar ways.

In this essay, keeping the focus on Japanese studies but aware that the issues are more general, I try to clarify the common ground on which both defenders and detractors of area studies stand, suggest a different way to assess the value of the enterprise, and examine some works that indeed make a case for taking Japanese studies seriously.

As a first step, consider how the historian John W. Hall justified the founding of the Japan Committee thirty years ago.

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<sup>1</sup> Jacob Heilbrunn (1996).

<sup>2</sup> For example, a meeting of the National Council of Area Studies Associations (NCASA) in Washington, D.C., September 18, 1996. A report is published in the *Asian Studies Newsletter* (1991): 12.

<sup>3</sup> Christopher Shea (1997).

Having passed beyond the state of strategic concern—of knowing the enemy—or even of area studies—knowing the foreigner—the leaders of Japanese studies in the United States have begun to look upon their work as much more an integral part of disciplinary studies in general. As Japan is accepted as part of the “modern world”, as Japanese scholars mix freely with ours, Japan-based data and findings become increasingly relevant to even the most theoretical work in the social sciences. This deep but subtle change in the role and importance of Japanese studies in the realm of social science research has not been sufficiently explained to those outside of the field... *A CJS [Committee on Japanese Studies] would contribute greatly to this process of reuniting area studies with the main stream of methodological and theoretical advance in the social sciences and of enriching that stream with an element of cultural sophistication and understanding that it now so frequently and so conspicuously lacks.*<sup>4</sup>

Compare this to a memo sent by the staff of SSRC to “Friends of the Council interested in Japan” in 1996, describing the new, post-JCJS order.

We are excited to announce the receipt of a major grant from the Ford Foundation in support of the core activities of our joint international programs. The grant is intended to further the Councils’ efforts to redesign and strengthen their jointly sponsored program of international, interdisciplinary research and training in the social sciences and humanities. The new program architecture is designed to build on the previous system by bringing local knowledge to bear on global and comparative issues and by renewing our commitment to link the world of scholarship with debates and practical efforts that take place outside the academy. *Intellectually, our aim is to integrate discipline-based scholarship with the often unique perspectives provided by local—or area-based—knowledge.* Practically, the task is to provide insights and theories to those struggling to cope with global forces that threaten to generate new inequalities, inequities and injustices. Organizationally, the objective is to create a truly international community of scholars focused on issues of common concern around the globe.

If we consider the heart of these two statements as they address the intellectual case for area studies, we see that Hall’s call for enriching the social sciences with “cultural sophistication” has dropped out of the later pronouncement, and “area knowledge” has been re-labeled “local knowledge,” a slip that increases a nega-

<sup>4</sup> Letter from John Whitney Hall to Joseph Slater of the Ford Foundation, October 3, 1967. I am indebted to Dr. Rudolf Janssen for bringing this document to my attention. Italics added in this and the next quote.

tive connotation of narrowness. But the fundamental positioning of area-based research is the same. In 1967 the call was made to “reunite area studies” with “methodological and theoretical advance in the social sciences.” In 1996 the order was reversed but the order of the day was the same: to “integrate discipline-based scholarship”—another way of referring to theory framed by a coherent method—with the “often unique perspectives provided by local—or area-based—knowledge.”

Only the means to this end are said to be changing. The single acronym of the JCJS will be replaced by an alphabet soup of Collaborative Research Networks (CRN), Regional Advisory Panels (RAP) and a Human Capital Committee (HCC), together with a rump Japan Advisory Board (JAB). For scholars of Japan, the new order promises a seat at several tables, including perhaps multiple CRNs, and an East Asia RAP. Clearly, as the SSRC and the ACLS transformed their area programs in general, including the Japan program, these two organizations continued to believe that “local knowledge” mattered. At the same time, by eliminating the JCJS and all the other standing area committees they repudiated the idea that a consistent and explicit effort to organize and focus intellectual energies on the study of an entity called Japan, or any other specific place, is the best way to integrate local knowledge into broader systems of knowledge.

#### *Beyond False Dichotomies*

At the heart of this complicated affirmation and challenge to area and Japanese studies, and indeed also at the heart of John Hall’s initial call for a Japan Committee, are two deeply entrenched, related dichotomies. One sets area studies against theory and science, and another sets area against disciplines, in both cases to the explicit disadvantage of area. The political scientist Robert Bates echoed these perspectives in 1996 with a blunt and provocative statement that has served as a lightning rod for contentious debate despite his stated goal of reconciliation. He wrote that “within the academy, the consensus has formed that area studies has failed to generate scientific knowledge.” In most political science departments, he continued, area specialists “constitute a center of resistance to new trends in the discipline. They tend to lag behind

others in terms of their knowledge of statistics [and] their commitment to theory."<sup>5</sup>

John Hall in 1967 had accepted this dichotomy between "Japan-based data" and the "most theoretical work in the social sciences" but he was optimistic about the potential for a Committee on Japanese Studies to bridge the dichotomy by "reuniting" area studies and social sciences. Critiques such as Bates's and the fact that the SSRC in 1996 restated Hall's view of the problem, and its solution, show either a failure of work in Japanese and area studies to fulfill this potential or a failure to communicate its achievements.

I believe the failure is more one of communication (or reception) than of execution. But it is very important not simply to rebut this charge on its own terms, answering that the consensus is wrong and that Japanese studies or area studies *has* generated theory and scientific knowledge, or to assert that we could "reunite" the two given proper organization and funding. First one must take on the premise of all the critics, that something called "scientific knowledge," or theory, or social sciences, or the disciplines, stands outside and above area knowledge.

A dichotomized understanding of area studies and social science always leads to models of intellectual activity in which practitioners classed as area studies people are the fetchers and carriers of the academy. A separate category of scholars, the "theorists," this thinking has it, need them to prepare the ground so they can do the really important intellectual work of abstracting. Thus, Bates in fact *defends* area studies as "a necessary complement to the social sciences. Social scientists will be weaker, the weaker our colleagues in area studies." The value of area studies scholars—"ethnographers, historians, students of culture"—in this view is as a source of "data" which will then be analyzed by properly trained theorists.<sup>6</sup> Disciplines here are the sites or providers of theoretical method and rigor, area students the diligent fact finders. Meta-

<sup>5</sup> Robert Bates (1996): 1. Also quoted in Christopher Shea (1997), p. A13. Bates slightly distances himself from this consensus, calling for a "mutual infusion" of area studies and theoretical work. He has earlier argued that area studies has contributed to social science, as co-editor, with V. Y. Mudimbe and Jean O'Barr (1993). This book is dedicated to showing how study of Africa is central to the work of many academic disciplines.

<sup>6</sup> Bates, *ibid.*, 1-2.

phorically speaking, area studies is considered an artisanal craft akin to brickmaking, and theorizing is a grander pursuit akin to architecture. With defenders like this, one scarcely needs detractors.

This metaphor posits a division of labor that is misleading as well as invidious. Granted, the acts of theorizing and gathering and sifting evidence can be spoken of separately as a heuristic device. But in the best scholarly work in humanities as well as social science disciplines from literary studies, anthropology, and history to political science (and even economics once upon a time), these pursuits are inseparable. A different way to model this intellectual enterprise might think of theory and discipline as lens and camera, the scholar as a photographer, filmer (or painter), and the area (or human experience in a specific time and space) as the object or subject being imagined. The investigator's goal, in this rendering, is to create a study, or a picture, of human experience. We all must use lenses or tools. A pure theoretician is akin to a lens maker. Some area specialists simply take their theoretical lenses off the shelf, without much thought to the choice. They may not give much thought to the fact that their particular lens has an impact on the picture that results. Others get involved in both analyzing, selecting, and improving the lenses as well as taking the pictures. And of course many lens makers take pictures, too. Usually the best photographers pay attention to their lenses, and the top lens makers know something about taking fine pictures.

Put this way, the researcher is engaged in an integrated process of creative activity. Such an understanding of academic inquiry assigns a higher value to the study of experience through the use of tools of analysis than the brickmaking and architecture rendition allows for. Analytically speaking, a dichotomy between generating abstractions and understanding experience remains, but it has been refigured in a way that is closer to the integrated practice of the best scholars.

Characterizing area studies in this way is just a first step toward taking them seriously. The next step could be to argue that the pictures themselves are the ultimate objects of value, the lenses incidental tools. One should take Japanese studies seriously because it has produced pictures worth having, even by those outside the field. This may be the line of argument many people who see themselves as humanists of a certain old school would be in-

clined to take. They would emphasize that the finest works on Japanese subjects are worth reading in and of themselves, for what they say about their topics and about human experience that speaks to readers broadly. Indeed, I think such works are numerous. But to justify the area studies project in these terms goes to an opposite extreme from the proud claims of pure theorists. It enters a silly contest about which is more important, taking pictures or designing lenses.

A more promising second step would be to focus attention on the indivisibility of picture taking and lens making and stress that most scholars do both, if with different degrees of emphasis. Neither activity is possible or meaningful without the other. Japanese studies has most value when it does two things at once: makes good pictures and improves lens design. Put in negative terms, if the study of a place—say Japan—never does more than use throw-away cameras, never contributes to better lens design, there may be grounds for criticism even in terms of this refigured metaphor. Can Japanese studies, that is, be dismissed as a selfish or narrow enterprise that takes from but does not give back to the guilds of lenscrafters? A brief survey of some important works in fields close to my own research interests, together with an unsystematic and not comprehensive look at some others that have happened to catch my attention, should make it clear that it cannot.

#### *Japanese Studies as Lens Redesign*

One of the pioneers and most accomplished historians of Japan over the postwar era has been Thomas C. Smith. He is best known for his series of books and articles on the agrarian origins of modern Japan.<sup>7</sup> In this work Smith offered brilliant evidence of the extent and contours of economic development in Tokugawa Japan, and he argued that the Tokugawa economy provided an important legacy to Meiji and twentieth-century Japan.

In addition, in the 1980s Smith returned to an old fascination with the history of labor in Japan and wrote two important essays.

<sup>7</sup> In addition to his 1955 and 1959 publications, many of his most important works are collected in the book *Native Sources of Japanese Industrialization, 1750-1920* (1988).

In one (1988 [1986]) he offers a fine example of the historian as picture taker and lens designer both. He begins with E. P. Thompson's famous work on the time consciousness of workers in England in the transition from an agrarian to an industrial capitalist society, "Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism." Thompson himself drew on the analyses of scholars looking at non-Western societies, including Edward Evans-Pritchard and Pierre Bourdieu, to make a distinction between the task orientation of pre-industrial, agricultural labor, and the time-orientation of factory labor. These writers might then be considered "area specialists" of an earlier generation, although Bourdieu especially has since emerged as a much-quoted cultural theorist. His place as a supplier of empirical evidence to Thompson, thence Smith, is a nice example of the difficulty of separating out camps of "theorists" and "area specialists."

Thompson argues that with the rise of industrial capitalism in England came a sharp break with the past, as working people were forced to internalize a new sense of time discipline. Thompson's work drew on and enriched local knowledge of England, and was itself a form of area studies, although not so named. At the same time, he offered a generalized model or theory of the social transformations that accompany capitalism in any society.

Smith turned to Japan and asked if Thompson's model applied to the experience of agrarian society in the Tokugawa era and the subsequent industrial transformation. He examined a rich body of evidence such as manuals written by and for farmers, and he concluded these farmers were not possessed of a casual time sense or a "task orientation" akin to Thompson's presentation of the English, Evans-Pritchard's of the Nuer, or Bourdieu's of the Algerian peasant. He argued that to the contrary, Tokugawa peasants strictly monitored the use of time. They had a keen awareness of its economic and social value. At the end of his exploration of the Tokugawa and Meiji era evidence, Smith comes back to the larger notion of "pre-industrial" time discipline itself, and he questions it with subtlety and force. He writes:

Tokugawa peasants seem so far removed from the attitudes attributed to pre-industrial English working people by Thompson that I cannot help wondering if he has not exaggerated the strength and prevalence of task-orientation in eighteenth-century England.... Thompson quotes the complaint of a writer in an agricultural maga-

zine in 1800 that "When a labourer becomes possessed of more land than he and his family can cultivate in the evenings...the farmer can no longer depend on him for constant work." This sounds like a wish for independence on the worker's part rather than necessarily a casual attitude towards time....Perhaps the conflict over time between employers and workers in eighteenth-century England was not over the value of time, but over who owned it and on what terms....

Then, turning to the United States, Smith continues:

The Boston carpenters, masons and stonecutters in 1835 proclaimed that the "God of the Universe has given us time, health and strength. We utterly deny the right of any man to dictate to us how much of it we shall sell." Many English working people in the late 18th century would have understood and sympathized with this statement. No Japanese in 1835 could possibly have understood the statement or taken a favorable view of it if they did....The source of the divergence would seem to have less to do with time-sense (as Thompson uses the term) than with different conceptions of the individual in society.

Here, in a brilliant analysis that deserves wide reading, Thomas Smith ends up not only saying something important about time and money in Japan, but in England and the United States. He presents a strong case that the connections between time and money have been differently understood in different times and places. This is a historian's work, and historians rarely proceed by constructing formal models in the manner of game theorists. But only an obtuse reader could fail to read Smith's work as profoundly theoretical. He challenges a *discontinuous* theory of change in which a pre-industrial time sense gives way to an industrial one. He offers instead a theory of *continuity* in the transition to capitalism or industrial society. He posits and shows that in these three societies, at least, differing culturally constructed time senses crossed the divide of the industrial revolution partly intact. This essay stands as a fine example of a work of Japanese studies that both offers a picture of Japan and contributes to the redesign of the lenses used to make sense of modern history more generally.

A more recent and quite different sort of historical study offers another example of an important dual contribution. Takashi Fujitani's book (1996) both helps us make sense of Meiji Japan and suggests ways to rethink aspects of a Foucauldian approach to modern history. Fujitani analyzes the way the elites of the time deployed the Meiji emperor to achieve their end of building a

powerful nation-state. He uses Foucault's concepts (the lens metaphor would be particularly apt in this case) of the "society of surveillance" and the "disciplinary society" to make sense of the political uses of the emperor in Meiji times. But he also shows us that an unamended Foucauldian model fails to capture an essential feature of the Japanese story. For Foucault, the modern "disciplinary society" with its dispersed, omnipresent systems of power emerged in the West upon the ruins of monarchic power. Foucault understands monarchic power as a polar opposite to modern forms of disciplinary power. But in Japan, a society that was arguably in every respect the model of a "disciplinary society" was created by bolstering, indeed newly inventing, monarchic power in a process that included the very sophisticated manipulation of the imperial gaze.<sup>8</sup> This book forces those who heed its message to modify an important aspect of a Foucauldian approach that posits two theoretically and experientially distinct forms of power. Again, a work of Japanese studies contributes on a variety of levels.

Also in the realm of cultural studies, this time psychological, consider a work that brings a seemingly esoteric bit of Japanica into the gaze of "gaze theorists" and psychoanalytic theory. Anne Allison writes about Japanese comics (*manga*), and in the process she takes on Western, Freudian-derived theories of how pictures of women, whether in pornography or art, are presented through a power-laden "male gaze." She looks at the way the gaze of the presumed male reader and characters focuses on women's naked bodies in *manga*, and finds that it doesn't fit the Freudian paradigms of "power-gazing." In particular, she sees a continuity from the gazing of children to that of adults, one that contradicts Freudian assumptions about a "development of subjectivity away from mothers assumed to start at puberty."<sup>9</sup>

While Freud-bashing is old hat, the gaze theorists here addressed are recent, and they have been much noticed. Allison, like Thomas Smith, has demonstrated a culturally bounded character to theories, psychological ones in this case. One thus has a valuable picture of Japanese society as well as ideas for redesigning the analytic lens.

<sup>8</sup> Takashi Fujitani (1996), 141-45.

<sup>9</sup> Anne Allison (1993), 34.

*Japanese Studies and "New" Models*

One could perhaps say, at the risk of belaboring the metaphor, that the examples so far are all too "Japanese." That is, they fall into the realm of improvement engineering of lenses. They take an existing model first produced in study of elsewhere (usually the West), and they modify or improve it in study of Japan. Improvement engineering is not an unworthy activity, as anyone who has traded up from a Ford to a Toyota can tell you, but neither is it a high status achievement.

One might ask: are there no examples where one must take Japanese studies seriously because a work has devised a new model from the ground up? That is probably an unreasonable question. Is there any important idea that has not been prefigured somewhere by someone? Arguably, any "new" theoretical approach owes a debt to earlier thinking. A more realistic approach may be to look not for pure originality but for major innovations that take on a life of their own, that come to be seen as fresh and productive of interesting thinking by a larger community of scholars. In addition to the works introduced above, I believe one can point to a number of analytic approaches that were generated in important ways first or at an early stage from studies of Japan by Japanese scholars as well as others.

Professor Doi Takeo, for example, first articulated his concept of psychological dependence, or *amae*, as a tool to better understand the behavior and psychodynamics of Japanese people (1971). In the wrong hands, the notion of *amae* as a particular trait of Japanese culture can produce simplistic essentializing of the peculiarities of "the Japanese." But most powerful tools are dangerous ones as well, and Doi's analysis, which originated as he thought about Japanese society, has also been of good use as a lens to examine other cases.<sup>10</sup> This was recognized from the start by many readers. As Doi's English translator noted:

But to explain the Japanese is only half of the author's aim. Just as *amae* in the Japanese [people] is of course tempered by various other characteristics superficially associated with the West, such as personal freedom, objectivity, and so on, so *amae* is an essential part of the

humanity of Western man also. Just as the value attached to *amae* has accounted for both the virtues and the failings of Japanese society, so its suppression, or diversion into different channels, explains much of what is most admirable and detestable in the Western tradition.<sup>11</sup>

Doi himself made this point clear in a chapter written for a later edition of his book: "while my whole argument depends on the assertion that *amae* is a peculiarly Japanese emotion, I also assert that it has universal relevance." Thus, he continues, "even in Western societies where there is no convenient word corresponding to *amae* and feelings of *amae* would seem not to exist, a surprising amount of a similar kind of feeling can be observed if one looks at the phenomenon with Japanese eyes."<sup>12</sup>

Closer to my own area of interest, the modern history of economy, society, and polity in Japan, one can identify at least two important, related cases of conceptual innovation emerging from studies focused on Japan. First, there is a long tradition of scholarship that articulates some concept of the timing of development, especially "late development." These authors theorize on global time. They argue that the same processes unfolding at different times in global history are not, in fact, the same processes. The dynamics of industrialization in a latecomer, or of a later capitalist revolution, reflect their relative timing.

One pioneer, perhaps the first, who made the point that "a precipitate move out of medievalism into the modern system of industry and science" gave both Germany and especially Japan a great although transient "opportunity" to challenge the advanced powers was Thorstein Veblen (1943). Another important scholar who focused more systematically on the dynamics of late development, although looking solely at Europe, was Alexander Gerschenkron. His provocative analysis (1966) had obvious implications for Japan, which he recognized. But perhaps the first extended work to develop this argument in depth for Japan was Ronald Dore's now classic study (1973), in which Dore identifies and articulates "a general late capitalist development syndrome." He defines a late developing nation or society as a place that, to choose selectively from his list of defining features:

<sup>10</sup> For example, Doi in a 1981 addition to his original book notes Joseph de Rivera (1977), 127.

<sup>11</sup> John Bester (1981 [1973]), 10.

<sup>12</sup> Doi Takeo (1981 edition), 169.

- 1) is “less likely to be dominated by a laissez-faire philosophy” and more likely to see a “predominant” state role;
- 2) experiences no slow buildup of rural proto-industry that can evolve gradually from peasant to capitalist agriculture before industrialization;
- 3) develops mass education concurrent with or prior to building large manufacturing industries;
- 4) faces a larger technological leap from traditional skills to those of imported new technologies than an early developer;
- 5) faces a larger organizational leap, as well, so that industry is likely from the outset to be marked by “rationalized bureaucratic forms”;
- 6) is likely from the outset to incorporate labor management practices and rules that are already in place in “advanced” cases;
- 7) is dominated by more secure large firms and plan-oriented management;
- 8) has a sharper dualism of large versus small firms, with workers in the former sector relatively privileged.<sup>13</sup>

This book has had major impact. While historians might challenge some of the particulars of Dore’s catalogue of the distinguishing marks of late developers in general or Japan in particular, the essence of this work stands up to scrutiny twenty-five years after publication. Dore also adds an important final twist to the logic of his late developer theory in what is arguably the most provocative aspect of the book. He suggests that Britain, once the proud first industrial “developer,” now finds itself in the late twentieth century to be a latecomer forced to scramble to catch up to and “converge” toward the organization-oriented practices found in Japan.<sup>14</sup>

Twenty-five years later, the notion that Japan as late developer is now a world leader to whom former hegemony look for models is so widely accepted as to be a cliché. And the state of clichéhood is perhaps the greatest sign that a theory or model designed for a particular topic has taken on a wide-ranging life of its own. Dore has recently provoked new controversy by arguing that now it is the German system of industrial relations that is pressed to converge toward a version of the Japanese model.<sup>15</sup> Here, then,

<sup>13</sup> Ronald Dore (1973), 408-15.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 338-71, chapter titled “Britain Catching Up?”

<sup>15</sup> Ronald Dore (1966).

is a fine example of the importance of taking Japanese studies seriously, both for the picture it offers of Japan and as a source of ideas for wider application.<sup>16</sup>

Clearly and intimately related to the theory of late development is the model of the “developmental state.” This concept, first articulated with rigor and depth by Chalmers Johnson (1982), has proven of value not only to picture-takers of Japan, but to lens-makers and photographers all around the world. For Johnson, the developmental state is a political formation growing out of “the situational nationalism of the late industrializers.”<sup>17</sup> He writes that “in states that were late to industrialize, the state itself led the industrialization drive, that is, it took on *developmental* functions.”<sup>18</sup> The state was not simply active in regulating society, setting forth rules and a framework for economic behavior. The state also set substantive social and economic goals—what industries should exist? which should be phased out?—and it intervened directly to help private actors achieve these. Focusing particularly on the institutional history of the Ministry of Commerce and Industry and the trials of depression, war, and recovery that led it to become the Ministry of International Trade and Industry (MITI), Johnson traces the course from the 1920s through the 1970s of one critical project of Japan’s developmental state, industrial policy.

Not all of his colleagues are convinced that the Japanese state achieved its goals to the extent Johnson suggests. Many object that the state’s tools were neither so well honed nor so effective as he claims. But the most vociferous critics, especially economists, are in fact missing the point when they criticize the developmental state for being inefficient compared to the market. This may or may not be true, in some or in many cases. But Johnson makes an important distinction between “efficiency” and “effectiveness” early in the book, and for him the crucial point is that the state in Japan has been effective, that is to say, consequential, in its meso- and micro-level interventions.<sup>19</sup> To challenge the efficiency of the state does not deny its “effectiveness” in achieving essentially political goals. Indeed the chorus of calls in the mid-1990s, in Japan and outside it, for the deregulation of the Japanese economy (*kisei*

<sup>16</sup> I should note that the title of this chapter is a take-off on that of another book by Dore (1987).

<sup>17</sup> Chalmers Johnson (1982), 24.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 19. Emphasis in the original.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

*kanwa*) in the interests of economic “efficiency” fundamentally affirms that the existing bureaucratic state is effective. If it were not, there would be no need to deregulate.

Others who have described the political economy in recent years have argued persuasively that Japan is home to a more negotiated set of relationships between state and society than Chalmers Johnson admits.<sup>20</sup> But most of these critics end with some modified formulation of a political economy where the state is surely present and vigorous in ways that place Japan toward one end of a spectrum of “capitalisms.” The important point is not whether every claim on behalf of the developmental state is sustained. The notion of multiple capitalisms, with an idealized “developmental state” as one (and any model must be idealized to be usable outside its original context) has been productive and provocative to other researchers. It has helped them take better pictures, which is one important standard for theoretical “significance.”

None of these achievements, it is important to note, would have been possible without in-depth study of Japanese society and history, knowledge of the language and attention to its nuance, careful examination of institutions past and present, as well as attention to larger issues of the various ways of knowing and framing that we call method and theory. The scholars who produced these works were both brickmakers and architects, both lensmakers and careful picture takers, one and the same.

#### *Embedding the “Rational” Individual*

This case for area studies asserts that Japanese studies requires both creative picture taking and innovative tool design. At base, I believe this case rests on what will be for some a subversive or counter-intuitive idea, especially for swimmers in the recently surging stream of the academic river known as rational choice theory. It is worth pausing to develop this point.

Rational choice begins with the assumption that all individuals are consistent seekers of maximum utility, whose preferences are internally consistent and predictable in a given context. The premise for this sort of social science is unapologetically reductive and

<sup>20</sup> For example, Richard Samuels (1987) and Daniel Okimoto (1989).

proudly universalistic.<sup>21</sup> Contra rational choice, I would argue that knowledge in the social sciences and humanities is in some fundamental ways in fact *not* about universal political or social behavior. It is about the particular. It is less a search for regularities across the globe than an effort to understand socially embedded contingencies of place and of time. Taking rational choice seriously in the long run is unlikely to leave us much wiser in our understanding of the diversity of human experience. A more enduring and measured theorizing would assume that something about experience in and around a certain place at a certain moment has a particularity not found elsewhere. This particularity will require special tools of analysis or will lead to the design of such, for example the concept of late development or the developmental state (neither of these, after all, could have emerged from study of American or British evidence alone). These tools should then, despite their particular origins, prove of use in comparative, international, or other investigations.

To argue that knowledge is particular certainly does not mean that Japan or any place should be understood as particular to the extreme of being uniquely unique. Such claims are the property of narrow-minded advocates of so-called “theories of the Japanese” (*nihonjinron*). Work in the field of Japanese studies must take these theories of the Japanese seriously by examining and relativizing them, trying to understand where they come from and why they are so powerful in contemporary or past culture, without falling victim to their seductive claims.<sup>22</sup> But in our enthusiasm to repudiate the crude culturalism of the Japanese (or any other) essentialists, our work must not reject a nuanced understanding of contextualized human behavior.

To be sure, some rational choice analysts of Japan are deeply familiar with Japanese language, laws, institutions, even customs. But the fundamental premises of their undertaking deny that the study of a particular place has intrinsic meaning. Theoretically correct work in the rational choice tradition sees no particular substance to the human subject. He or she (and gender differences, too, would evaporate as insubstantial reflections of the “rules

<sup>21</sup> A valuable discussion of rational choice and the study of Japanese politics and history is by Joseph P. Gownder and Robert Pekkanen (1996).

<sup>22</sup> Tessa Morris-Suzuki’s (1995) article is an excellent example of such an effort.

of the game”) is a utility-seeking atom. Rational choice theorists recognize that this individual is constrained by political, economic, or even cultural arrangements, but they begin by assuming that a calculating, thinking individual exists prior to and separate from any social or cultural context. As Robert Bates makes clear in a fascinating brief memoir of his experience studying the African coffee trade, the point of departure for his learning “real world lessons about politics and scholarship” is a Hobbesian view of humanity as originating in a “natural condition” in which individuals exist as scattered beings, without society, condemned to lives that are “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short.”<sup>23</sup> As the Japanese political thinker, Katō Hiroyuki, argued in the 1870s, students of the human condition who take concepts such as Hobbes’s or Rousseau’s state of nature or Locke’s social contract as descriptions of the “real world” are replacing analysis of reality with a mythic fiction about the origins and functioning of society.<sup>24</sup>

The problem with taking Hobbes seriously, as it were, is that one throws out the socially embedded baby with the culturalist bathwater. One fails to explore the complicated mutual implication of rules and institutions with human subjectivity and cultural systems. A rational choice advocate might counter that “economic institutions and rules of the game” are simply “the rational choice jargon for culture.”<sup>25</sup> I would reply that a culture is more than a structure of rules and incentives, although it includes these. It also includes a set of received ideas and understandings about how the world works and ought to work and the symbolic representation of these ideas. Such understandings have evolved in any one time and place out of such a long and complicated process, and taken on such a degree of meaning to those who participate in a given community, that they cannot simply be reduced to a reflection of the rules of the game in force at that time. These understandings inhere in the consciousness and behavior of individuals. They constitute the rules and direct their practice in place and time as much as they reflect them.

Think, for example, of the way in which young girls and boys in Japan are educated and then, as adults, enter the world of work.

<sup>23</sup> Robert Bates (1997): 34.

<sup>24</sup> Bob T. Wakabayashi (1984): 485 and *passim*.

<sup>25</sup> Cited from May 4, 1994 E-mail posting by Thomas Roehl.

One way to understand this process is to argue that the “rules of the game” of education and employment make it a rational choice for many women to opt out of struggles for mainstream “male” careers. Instead they choose to become part-time workers who focus primary energy on the raising of the next generation of children in a way that will reinforce future gender-divided choices about careers and life course. Certainly, this analysis makes a lot of sense. But ending the argument here fails to recognize that curriculum and tracking at school and at work constitute a system of “rules” that is tightly bound up with a received but contested structure of ideas about proper gender roles. The ideas account for or generate the system of rules, as much as the reverse. Neither can be seen as residual or prior, and the system is full of tensions. Actors and rules, Hobbes’s individual in “nature” and the collective “society,” can only be separated as acts of analytic convenience. Change does not come first to one or the other, so much as it comes simultaneously to both in their mutual implication in the social lives of people.

### *Conclusion*

Taking Japanese studies seriously, one discovers an impressive stock of achievements. Only some of them have been introduced here. If the problem is not one of execution, why the consensus that area studies does not produce scientific knowledge? The answer is not simply a failure to communicate. Part of the answer lies in the treachery of the question, the way it dichotomizes scientific knowledge and area study to the disadvantage of area. One response must be to argue vigorously against the terms of the question, asserting that the processes of theorizing and studying areas are integrated ones, and then to beat the drums loudly on behalf of work that succeeds in both dimensions, and proceed to produce more in that tradition. Of course, it would be naive to think that louder drum beating itself will carry the day. The dichotomized thinking that gives pride of place to a certain concept of social science over mere “description” of areas is deeply rooted in the political and cultural structure of the academic world and is unlikely to change.

But the stubborn persistence and reproduction of different

cultural and institutional formations around the world offers some reason to carry on. Of course, we are ceaselessly told by the pundits of our day that we live in an era of extraordinary "globalization." This talk needs to be taken seriously insofar as institutions like GATT and NAFTA allow ever-easier flows of goods, capital, and even people, creating a so-called borderless world. One implication is that local areas do not much matter. As the universal rules of the market economy proliferate, local anomalies will disappear. Taking seriously the study of Japan or any other place should make it clear that particular local formations are no more likely to wither away under capitalism than the state is likely to disappear under socialism. The trick is to negotiate the channel between marginalizing the local as the accidental detail of the particular, and romanticizing it as a transcendent cultural essence or a heroic site of resistance.

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