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Introduction to the Special Issue

Daniel J. Paracka

Kennesaw State University, dparacka@kennesaw.edu

Masako Racel

Kennesaw State University, mracel@kennesaw.edu

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Introduction to the Special Issue

Dan Paracka and Masako Racel
Kennesaw State University

“Japan has long been famous for its ability to take on new foreign elements, reshaping and reinterpreting them to its particular cultural needs.” (Smyers, 1999, p. 102)

Marking the 30th anniversary of Kennesaw State University’s (KSU) award winning “Year of” Study Program, the 2013-2014 academic year focused on Japan. Notably, Japan was also the focus of the inaugural series in 1984. The program represents the cornerstone of KSU’s campus internationalization efforts resulting in new courses and curriculum, research projects, education abroad programs, and global partnerships. The highlight of this year’s programming was the Year of Japan international conference titled “Humanitarian Responses to Crisis,” which examined the work being done to heal the Tohoku region, lessons learned from the triple disaster, and how Japan’s extensive experience dealing with disasters can be applied to other contexts around the world. Special thanks is due to all of our partners who helped make the year so successful including: the Japan Foundation, the Japan-America Society of Georgia, the Japanese Consulate of Atlanta, Japan External Trade Organization, Soka University, Soka Gakkai, UNITAR Green Legacy Hiroshima Project, the Japan International Cooperation Agency, and the Association of Medical Doctors in Asia. Soka University in particular has been an active partner of KSU, and KSU and Soka University have regularly exchanged students for several years. During the Year of Japan, Soka University sent a total of four of their leading faculty members to teach courses at KSU as part of the program.

The first article in this volume analyzes the historical origins of the ninja as a well-known phenomenon in Japanese martial culture, and how, though secret warfare was practiced throughout Japan, the ninja fantasy of today goes far beyond its practical traditional applications. The second article looks at Zen Buddhism’s use of humor as an important mechanism for moving beyond conventional understanding in the face of human suffering. The third describes the development of a new Asian Studies course at KSU focused on the films of Akira Kurosawa and Hayao Miyazaki. It analyzes the broad appeal of Japanese aesthetics to both domestic and international audiences as portrayed by these celebrated auteurs. The course also challenged students to connect traditional and modern Japanese cultural notions and phenomenon.

The next two articles delve into Japan’s ever-changing role in the global economy. By providing a comprehensive overview of Japan’s economic path since World War II, its remarkable and sustained growth, subsequent periods of speculative boom and bust, and its current on-going malaise, the first of these articles allows the reader to better appreciate Japan’s economic trajectory, its successes and failures, and how such an understanding is

crucial to responding effectively and appropriately to future challenges. The second essay analyzes Japan's food dependency within the context of global population growth, climate change, and rising competition for the world's limited resources. In particular, it looks at a collaborative partnership between Japan, Brazil, and Mozambique and how this development project positions Japan in relation to its powerful neighbor, China, who is also aggressively pursuing access to African resources.

The final paper explores the needs of people and communities hit hardest by Japan's 3.11 triple disaster. It discusses the efforts of local area residents to process and commemorates the sudden loss of loved ones and livelihoods. It compares area narratives of the disaster by those who directly experienced it, with national narratives of it as Japan's disaster. Japan's resiliency exemplified in its desire to make the most out of life is contrasted with the debilitating and deep sorrow felt by those still suffering. It asserts that the most meaningful voices in need of actionable response are local ones.

In order to provide readers unfamiliar with Japan a contextual basis for situating the diverse interdisciplinary approaches to Japanese society and culture offered in this volume, the editors have outlined important aspects in the following introductory essay. This essay was also shared with students at the beginning of the Year of Japan to assist them in preparation for the many lectures delivered on campus.

One of the oldest evidences of pottery making can be found in Japan beginning roughly around 10,000 B.C.E. (Varley, 2000, p. 2), though the communities did not rely on agriculture, a subsistence style typically associated with pottery making. Wet rice cultivation was introduced to Japan from China around 300-400 B.C.E. and has remained one of Japan's staple crops ever since. The indigenous religious belief system of Japan is known as Shinto, where spirits or *kami* inhabit nature and look after families and villages. Shinto shrines can be found throughout Japan. Buddhism came to Japan from Korea in about the middle of the sixth century. Confucianism also strongly influenced Japan's philosophical ideas and social structures. Many Chinese ideas were adapted to fit Japan's unique cultural perspectives and environmental conditions. Similar to China where the emperor ruled through the mandate of heaven based upon the maintenance of virtues, in Japan this notion was given further authority under beliefs associated with *Amaterasu*, the mythological Sun Goddess, who bestowed upon the imperial family as her descendants the sacred right to rule eternally. Since its introduction in the sixth century, Buddhism became an integral part of Japanese life, and today the oldest wooden buildings in the world are found at the Hōryūji Temple complex (constructed in 607 and rebuilt after a fire in 670) in Nara prefecture. As Japanese state was beginning to be formed in the Asuka (538-710) and Nara (710-785) eras, Japan eventually adopted the name *Nihon* or *Nippon* or the Land of the Rising Sun. The *torii* gate marks the entrance to Shinto shrines and has along with the image of the rising sun been incorporated into the Year of Japan logo, which was designed by KSU students and is featured on the cover of this volume.

A mixture of Chinese characters and *kana* (*hiragana* and *katakana*), Japanese is the most complex written language in the world (Varley, 2000, p. 36). The Japanese have a great appreciation of poetry and incorporate it into many aspects of literature including novels, diaries, and love letters. It is said to have the power to soothe the hearts of fierce warriors (Kimbrough, 2008, p. 52) and capable of even causing grasses and trees to attain Buddhahood (Kimbrough, 2008, p. 325). A unique feature of the Japanese poetry is its use of pivot words that have double or even triple meanings (Varley, 2000, p. 44). Another

defining characteristic of Japanese poetry is its focus on nature and the changing of the seasons. As Paul Varley has noted, “the Japanese seek beauty in nature not in what is enduring or permanent, but in the fragile, the fleeting, and the perishable” (2000, p. 46). This is a great example of a synthesis of Japanese love of poetry, appreciation of nature coming from Shinto, and the theme of impermanence emphasized in Buddhism. Divine nature is imbued with emotional energy.

One of the most enduring periods of Japanese history is known as the Heian period (794-1185), the era known for its super sophisticated culture of nobility centered around its capital city, Heian-kyō or today’s Kyoto, a place renowned for its beautiful gardens. Poetry especially flourished during the Heian period. The famous novel, *The Tale of Genji*, was written by Murasaki Shikibu, a lady-in-waiting in the Heian imperial court, and includes extensive use of *tanka* poetry. The story provides intricate details about life at court, especially the heart-rending intrigues of the amorous adventures and misadventures of Prince Genji. It also highlights nature by comparing the changes of the seasons with human emotions and the life cycle. It has long been considered an exquisite expression of Japanese high culture and the search for human happiness (Addis, 1996, pp. 55-57). Another famous work known for its aestheticism, *The Pillow Book*, is also written by a woman author, Sei Shōnagon, and in a tone that is at times surprisingly critical of male privilege common to the era (Kimbrough, 2008). Though women by no means enjoyed equality to men, Heian aristocratic women’s works of literature have been prized for their aesthetic sensibilities.

Powerful family clans have exerted great influence over Japan throughout its history. In the Heian period most notable was the aristocratic Fujiwara clan, followed by the bitter rivalry between the Taira and Minamoto warrior clans during the late Heian Period, resulting in the defeat of the Taira and establishment of the shogunate under Minamoto in the Kamakura period (1185-1333). Power struggles between clans gave rise to the Samurai warrior culture, described at length in war stories such as *The Tale of Heike*, later formed the basis of the dramatic and supernatural *nō* and *kabuki* theatres.

Interestingly, it was during the Kamakura period that Japanese Zen Buddhism developed, known in part for its belief in *satori* or sudden enlightenment sometimes brought on by the literary technique of Zen *kōan*, a short form of questions and answers exchanged by master and disciple. It was, in part, the strict adherence to self-discipline, control, and the master/disciple relationship that Zen Buddhism is so well known for which also characterized samurai culture and continues to influence the martial arts today. *Bushidō*, or the way of the warrior, emphasizes character development through “compassionate steadfastness, complete moral honesty, inability to compromise, and action through belief” (Richie, 1998, p. 242). No action should be wasted and all actions should be sincere. Such values are also expressed in Japanese admonishments to avoid imprudent talk. In this way, actions are valued more than words (Smyers, 1999, p. 192). And while “the majority of medieval samurai were rough unlettered men engaged in a brutal profession,” the high level warriors or warlords were mostly learned and accomplished men who emphasized honor, respect, and loyalty to their teachers (Varley, 2000, p. 104).

Very powerful samurai, or *daimyō*, in the 16th century included Oda Nobunaga (1543-82), Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1536-98), and Tokugawa Ieyasu (1542-1616). Nobunaga and Hideyoshi’s often ruthless campaigns served to expand and unify their holdings which was

then followed by 250 years of “Great Peace” under Tokugawa rule (1600-1867) and saw the Shogun’s capital moved to Edo (Tokyo) while the Emperor remained in Kyoto until 1869. Edo, along with Osaka, quickly became the cultural and artistic center of the country known especially for its woodblock prints, ukiyo-e or floating world art, kabuki theatre, bunraku puppetry, and haiku poetry. The woodblock prints of Kitagawa Utamaro, Katsushika Hokusai, and Andō Hiroshige influenced and inspired Western artists such as Claude Monet and Vincent van Gogh (Addis, 1996, p. 95). It was also during this period that the first Europeans arrived in Japan, as the European societies went through the age of exploration. The Portuguese came in the 16th century and introduced Catholicism. The Dutch came in the 17th century and became the only Europeans allowed to trade with Japan (and only on the artificial island of Dejima in the port of Nagasaki) as they promised not to engage in missionary activities. The “seclusion policy” served the Tokugawa shogunate as both a way to limit Christianity’s influence and the power of the daimyo by preventing them from engaging freely in foreign trade or import weaponry. An important development to the success of the Tokugawa period was the implementation of “alternate attendance” where the daimyo (who became more like provincial governors) were required to spend every other year living in Edo. They were also required to leave their wives and children in Edo when they returned to the provinces. Alternate attendance system also contributed to the economic development by encouraging regional products to create revenue needed to support the expense of travelling, as well as creating the merchant class who catered to the needs of the Daimyo and their retinue.

By the early 1800s as Russian, British, and American ships increasingly entered Japanese waters, and it was apparent that Japan would have a hard time keeping foreign powers at bay. Following China’s defeat by Great Britain in the Opium War (1839-1842), Japan’s “seclusion policy” faced serious threat. The response from some Japanese scholars was a call for “Eastern morals and Western technology,” or a merging of the perceived strengths of the different cultures (Varley, 2000, p. 234). In 1853, Commodore Perry steamed into Edo Bay and in 1854 succeeded in signing a “Treaty of Friendship” that opened some ports and included the most-favored-nation clause. It paved a way for the 1858 Harris “unequal” commercial treaty, which included extraterritoriality and deprived Japan from imposing tariffs as it saw fit. The Tokugawa period ended with younger, activist samurai rallying around the Emperor Meiji. The Meiji Restoration (1868) embarked on an aggressive path towards modernization with the primary purpose of “strengthening the military and enriching the nation.” As part of the modernization efforts, universal military conscription was instituted in 1873, a sure sign of the samurai’s demise. Still, some traditional aspects of Japanese society retained their strength and a very nationalistic Japan organized itself on a hierarchical structure with the emperor at the head of a very “obedient Confucian family” (Varley, 2000, p. 248). With the Meiji Restoration and through the large *zaibatsu* business consortiums, Japan rapidly transformed itself from a feudal society to an industrial society.

Japan went to war with China in 1894-95 and with Russia in 1904-05 and triumphed in both. Japan’s military successes increasingly paved a way for more nationalistic perspectives, and by the time of World War I, Japan had become an emerging empire exerting strong influence over Manchuria and directly controlling Korea (annexed in 1910). Following the so-called Manchurian incident in 1931, the puppet state of

Manchukuo was established in 1932. Japan withdrew from the League of Nations in 1933, and began the second Sino-Japanese War in 1937.

Japan's surprise attack on Americans at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941 coincided with attacks on Guam, the Philippines, Singapore, and on the British in Hong Kong the same day (December 8 due to the dateline time difference). Japan's claims of wanting to create a "Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere" was used as justification for aggression which led to a brutal war in the Asia-Pacific region (1941-45), and ultimately to the catastrophic atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945. The war claimed the lives of more than 7 million Japanese and 15 million of its Asian neighbors. The Japanese were responsible for extensive war crimes especially against the Chinese and Koreans. After the war, the American occupation of Japan has been generally viewed as quite successful as Japan began de-militarizing and rebuilding its economy. The relatively rapid transformation from hostile rivalry to friendly alliance was remarkable.

Following the devastation of war, Japan focused its full attention on rebuilding its infrastructure and economy. Few would have predicted its miraculous success. An important boost to Japan's economy came in the way of military spending by the United States for the war in Korea. Indeed, the Cold War significantly shaped U.S. policy towards Japan resulting in support for the more centralized power of the *keiretsu* (business conglomerates) (Kingston, 2011, p. 13). Japan's success has mostly been attributed to the close relationship between business and government under the dominance of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), which ruled Japan from 1955-2009 with a brief interruption in 1993-94. The Democratic Party of Japan came to power in 2009 by promising to focus its attention on developing greater transparency and accountability in government. In December of 2012, the LDP returned to power.

In the 1950s and 60s, the LDP oversaw a period of rapid economic growth with a relatively equal distribution of benefits. The government was extremely successful at picking winners especially supporting the consumer electronics and automobile industries, which were also rapidly becoming champions of innovation. The government kept interest rates low which favored capital borrowing. At the same time, Japanese families tended to save money providing banks with plenty of capital to loan out. Growth slowed in the 1970s primarily due to rising oil prices but rebounded in the 1980s with wildly popular video and gaming technology — think Donkey Kong and Super Mario Brothers. Gradually, inflation and rising home prices took their toll especially after the bubble economy of the late 1980s burst and a decade-long recession hit in the 1990s. In response, the recession was tackled through government privatization and deregulation efforts but gains have been limited and the recovery sluggish.

Throughout history, the Japanese have had a reputation for fine craftsmanship and product innovation, and in the modern era especially, for manufacturing precision instruments that are compact and efficient. Japan was the first "Asian Tiger" providing high quality consumer goods at relatively low prices. With Japan's rapid industrialization also came severe stress on the environment which eventually led to a higher level of environmental awareness. Today, Japan has some of the highest standards in the world for food quality. It is also interesting to note that as Japan has expanded its export markets, and it now produces more cars and consumer electronics for outside Japan than it does for inside Japan.

The close relationship that has developed between Japan and the United States is nuanced. Japan's constitution forbids the nation to wage war, yet the United States under the controversial ANPO treaty has had a large military presence in Japan especially in Okinawa since World War II. Since in 1978, Japan also has paid for hosting U.S. troops. Japan's own Self-Defense Force has one of the largest defense budgets in the world, even though it accounts for just 1% of the GNP. Because of Japan's close military and economic relationship with the United States, Japan tends to follow the U.S. foreign policy agenda. For example, Japan provided \$13 billion in financial support to the 1990-1991 Gulf War, though there are notable exceptions, including Japan's opposition to the International Monetary Fund's recommendations during the 1997 Asian currency crisis (Kingston, 2011, pp. 52-53). Beyond the military and economic relationships, one of the best examples of the close cultural ties between the two countries is the shared love of baseball. In addition, Japanese toys, games, animation, and movies have had an enormous impact on youth culture that resonates with an entire generation of young Americans who have grown up with new concepts and a positive outlook on both Japan and Asia as a result these cultural media exports.

In 2007, Japan ranked 54 out of 93 nations on the United Nations gender empowerment index and has one of the lowest rates of working women among the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development nations. Moreover, on average women in Japan only earn 60% as much as men and only 10% of managers are women (Kingston, 2011, p. 64). Government legislation has tried to improve opportunities and conditions for women at work and to achieve work/life balance but change has been slow. Traditionally, women have had extensive family responsibilities including caring for aging parents. The aging of Japanese society is also one of the most critical social issues facing Japan. Twenty-one percent of Japan's population is over the age of 65. Life expectancy is 84, one of the highest in the world, and there are more than 40,000 Japanese over the age of 100. The aging of Japan is also in part due to low birth rates (1.39 per woman) well below replacement rate and one of the lowest in the world. Japan has generally not promoted immigration as a strategy to deal with growing labor shortages.

Traditionally in Japan, the relationship between employer and employee is extremely valued and carefully managed. Seniority, experience, and age are critical factors governing such relationships. Mentoring and guiding junior staff is an important responsibility that also results in a strong sense of loyalty and obligation. Within the vertical hierarchy of Japanese organizations both managers and workers are bound by duties and responsibilities to each other, therefore, they tend to work in an atmosphere of "maximum consultation," especially within smaller work units or groups (Nakane, 1970, p. 144). Japanese companies and management systems are well-known for the emphasis placed on teamwork and quality control. In such organizations, everyone looks out for each other. Generally speaking in Japanese businesses, "decision-making is diffused and responsibility is concentrated." Management guru Edward Demming's Quality Control Circles stemmed from his work in Japan where problem solving tends to be done in teams at the most immediate and applied levels (Hall & Hall, 1987, p. 71). According to communication specialists Edward Hall and Mildred Hall (1978), among the Japanese, "leadership means an individual's ability to listen carefully to others and to work to achieve group consensus and harmony" (p. 78). Although group consensus and harmony are emphasized in Japan, individuality is also recognized. Karen Smyers (1999) in her detailed analysis of *Inari* worship notes that it is

highly personalized - recognizing that the personal in Japan is private and carefully protected (p. 206). More importantly, individual effort and achievement in schools and business is considered critical for success.

Japan has endured 20% of the world's earthquakes. Japan is keenly aware of the sudden and unpredictable wrath of nature and the need for disaster prevention, preparation, and response measures. The nation's dependence on nuclear energy has come under serious scrutiny and all reactors were taken off-line following the Fukushima disaster for safety reasons. Due to the country's susceptibility to earthquakes, Japan is a world leader in researching and developing preventive measures as well as responding to natural disasters often being the first nation to come to the aid of others in need. Designated the site of the Third World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction in 2015, Japan endorses human security as a pillar of its foreign policy. The country has lent its expertise in the aftermath of the Haiti earthquake in 2010, the East Africa draught crisis in 2011, and the Sahel food crisis in 2012. It participated in these efforts even as the country mobilized and coordinated global response to its own national crises. There is much to learn from Japan's experience and leadership in confronting human security threats brought on by natural disasters, economic crisis, environmental degradation, and climate change.

Japan, a diverse archipelago of 6,852 islands in the Pacific Ocean, has the world's 10th largest population — more than 127 million people. Tokyo area comprises the world's largest metropolitan area with more than 30 million residents. Its technology-driven economy remains the world's third largest. Japanese are among the best-educated in the world with an illiteracy rate of less than 1%. It is also one of the safest countries in the world. Japan has a strong civil society with an active press. It is a nation steeped in traditional values and actively engaged in the world. Thus begins this journey into better understanding Japan, a land of innovation with the proven ability to transform tragedy into success. We hope this volume, like the year-long series of lectures and cultural events on our campus, will enrich your appreciation for Japan, its people, and its unique role in the family of nations.

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