

Editorial

An unacknowledged paradigm shift appears to be underway in contemporary Japanese culture [...] At the beginning of the 21st century, the nation has observed a dramatic shift in its characterisation from a unique and homogeneous society to one of domestic diversity, class differentiation and other multidimensional forms.

Sugimoto Yoshio (2009: 1)

Numerous experts have pointed out the rapid changes that Japanese society has been undergoing in the past few decades (see, among others, Coulmas 2007; Kingston 2011; Sugimoto 2009; Yamada 2004). While all societies change, “the pace and scope of change in Japan has been staggering and deeply unsettling in many ways for its citizens” (Kingston 2011: 20). Many of these changes are reflected in both the transformation of individual lifestyles and in Japan’s changing social reality.

For Volume 23 of *Contemporary Japan* we therefore invited papers that covered diverse facets of a pluralization of lifestyles witnessed in Japan in recent years. In addition to dramatic socio-economic changes, Japan is undergoing a shift from “solid” to “liquid” modernity (Bauman 2007) in which frames of reference for life planning and individual action have become blurred and multiplied. This development raises a number of questions:

What does this pluralization of lifestyles mean for Japanese society, for its economy and politics? What are the principal causes of this process and what are the consequences? What role does the media play in shaping and influencing lifestyles in Japan? Which lifestyles can be identified and how do companies address the needs emerging from them? What are the implications of these developments for consumption, employment and retirement? How does this social change relate to other shifts and trends, such as demographic change, urbanization and socio-economic developments?

Of course, these questions are too numerous, broad and multifaceted to be all addressed in one or even two issues of an academic journal. However, they have served as guidelines for both the issue editors and the authors in selecting topics and contents, as well as in framing them.

Contemporary Japan, Volume 23 consists of two issues related to the topic of lifestyles in transition. The themes covered in Issue 1 indicate the scope of the subject matter and the multiplicity of areas where these transitions can be witnessed. The five papers, nevertheless, share a common analytical frame relating to struggles in identity formation and life design solidification in times of change and liquidization.

Maria Grăjdian, “*Kiyoku, tadashiku, utsukushiku: Takarazuka Revue and the project of identity (re-)solidification*”, investigates how socio-demographic changes are reflected in the identity construction undertaken by the famous all-female musical theatre, Takarazuka Revue. Analysing its development in the post-war period by looking at the different and changing functions of the androgynously charismatic *otokoyaku* figures (i.e., female interpreters of male roles in the Takarazuka Revue) and the apparently conformist and submissive *musumeyaku* figures (i.e., female interpreters of female roles in the Takarazuka Revue), Maria Grăjdian underlines some of Takarazuka Revue’s strategies for constructing, developing and propagating a worldview by means of a new form of cultural imperialism. Here, love is identified as the ideological base and aesthetic superstructure of late-modern identity. Grăjdian proposes that the form of cultural awareness, which can be witnessed in both the Takarazuka Revue and Japan’s social reality, is based on tenderness as an existential attitude.

Similarly relating to processes of identity formation, but very different in the thematic area touched upon, is the paper by Alexandra Hambleton, “Reinforcing identities? Non-Japanese residents, television and cultural nationalism in Japan”. As the foreign population of Japan increased over the last decade, so did the number of television programs featuring non-Japanese. Hambleton proposes that non-Japanese residents of Japan on variety television programs are used to reinforce ideas of Japanese cultural identity. Although advertised as opportunities to look at issues from an international perspective, they instead highlight perceived differences which exist between Japan and the outside world. Her research examines how media mechanisms create an image of the foreign “other”, which is then used to create, perpetuate and strengthen the idea of a unique Japanese cultural identity.

In “Eating disorders and self-harm in Japanese culture and cultural expressions”, Gitte Hansen analyses expressions of female lifestyles which she finds to be motivated by cultural and historical constructions of femininity and a fear of social disintegration. Indeed, they express the paradox of women attempting to over-perform and escape the obligation of navigating normative femininity at the same time. Investigating reasons for the rise of eating disorders and self-harm among Japanese women since the 1980s, Gitte Hansen suggests that these be-

haviours are rooted in Japanese culture, and today have become contemporary lifestyles. Drawing on examples from literature, manga, films and popular music, she shows how eating disorders and self-harm are explicitly thematized in Japanese cultural expressions. Employing a set of socio-psychological markers, she investigates how the topics of eating disorders and self-harm are present beneath the surface of even cultural expressions that do not explicitly thematize them.

A quest for renewed stability and a sense of empowerment through the participation in “moralizing institutions” is analysed by Isaac Gagné, “Spiritual safety nets and networked faith: The ‘liquidity’ of family and work under late modernity”. Through ethnographic fieldwork with an international religious organization and a domestic ethics organization, he examines the diverse ways in which individuals try to re-establish a sense of stability and direction by reengaging with idealized life patterns and family orientations that have become more elusive under Japan’s increasingly uncertain socio-economic conditions. A specific focus of his research lies on members of such organizations who have experienced unemployment and late-career layoffs – changes that had drastic repercussions on their life planning and family relations. Isaac Gagne suggests that as human networks built from resilient networked faith, these “moralizing institutions” provide a different kind of logic of “liquidity” and “flexibility” which allows members to realize their idealized life plans and navigate towards the solid ground of a stable work and family life even in times of uncertainty.

In the last paper of Issue 1, Wolfgang Jagodzinski, “Autonomy, religiosity and national identification as determinants of life satisfaction: A theoretical and empirical model and its application to Japan”, investigates the significance of autonomy for happiness, taking assumptions of modernization theories as a starting point. These suggest that in modern societies, happiness can be reached only if the autonomous citizen can successfully realize his or her goals. As theories of individualism and collectivism typically regard independence and autonomy as values of the individualistic cultural frame, they should be lower in those societies where collectivism is still prevalent, as for example in Japan. Jagodzinski first shows that the key variable of these theories (i.e., the sense of autonomy) is not only logically distinct from independence and individualism but also empirically uncorrelated with indicators of the latter concepts. And although his analysis suggests that autonomy and modernization are only weakly correlated, it confirms that autonomy is a strong predictor of life satisfaction. The positive influence of religion and national identification on happiness, by contrast, is relatively weak. The study suggests that such a low sense of

autonomy can provide a fairly good explanation for the relatively low level of life satisfaction in Japan.

Contemporary Japan, Vol. 23, Issue 2, which will be published in autumn 2011, will extend our discussion of the implications of a transition from “solid” to “liquid” modernity by examining changing lifestyles in relation to work and employment.

Tokyo, January 2011

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