

INTRODUCTION

“Nature” in Anthropological Theories

“Nature” as a concept is extremely elusive, yet it is commonly taken for granted by those who live in postindustrial societies that “pristine nature” is “out there.” Using Japanese culture, I demonstrate how we often think of “representations of nature” as “pristine nature objectively out there,” and I explore the factors that naturalized this view, challenging the positivist view, beginning with Plato, that “real nature” is “out there.” I compare Japanese culture with other societies, including hunting-gathering and agricultural societies, on the one hand, and some western European societies, on the other.

With an understanding of culture as historical processes, this phenomenological study over a long period of Japanese culture proves that the cosmological scheme, such as the basic spatial division of the above with a positive valence and the below with a negative, does not constitute separate mental activities at higher levels but is intimately involved in the daily lives of people.

My discussion is in dialogue with debates in anthropological studies about “nature,” social evolutionary theory, symbolic structure and the quotidian, representations, mimesis, and practical religion.

Anthropological Studies on Nature/Environment

The foundational work in the anthropological effort to understand the “nature” of various peoples is *Primitive Classification* by Durkheim and Mauss ([1901–2] 1963), written at the time anthropology was born in France as comparative sociology. They and many subsequent anthropologists have used the term “nature” to refer to the environment when describing peoples who themselves had/have neither a term nor a concept for “nature.” Nonetheless, these anthropologists have left invaluable descriptions of these peoples’ views of their environment.

Representations of “Japanese Nature”

A Historical Overview

Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney

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Lévi-Strauss is the major figure whose Mythology series and in fact entire oeuvre is about the relationship between nature and culture, or "cooking" as the basic mode of culturalizing nature ([1949] 1969).

Approaches by anthropologists are quite diverse, leading to a very apt phrase, "Nature Wars," by Roy Ellen (2020). "Environment," also a diverse concept, complicates the question of what is "nature." Ellen ([2006] 2008: 190) opposes those who consider "nature" intrinsically "cultural." Tim Ingold (1993: 152) similarly opposes "the sterile opposition" between the "naturalistic view" of the landscape and the "culturalistic view."

While recognizing the importance of the question, I focus on representations of nature as untouched nature. People interact with their environment in reference to those beings who inhabit "nature," which is seldom perceived as an abstract space. Using examples of indigenous Australians, the Zuni, the Sioux, and the Chinese, Durkheim and Mauss describe how they perceive and conceptualize their environment. For example, among the people in the Mount Gambier area of Australia, the "crow quite naturally, by virtue of its colour, covers the rain and consequently winter, clouds, and—through these—lightning and thunder" ([1901–02] 1963: 20–21).

"Who" are allowed to be members of the universe and the stratification among them are crucial questions to ask for an understanding of a people's "nature." As detailed in chapter 1, the Japanese universe is predominantly inhabited by plants, which occupy the highest throne. Southeast Asians portray their universe in art primarily with plants, including flowers. The self-designation of both the People's Republic of China and the Republic of China starts with two characters for "The Central Flower of the Universe." In contrast, the African universe is inhabited primarily by animals. Like for the Ainu, it is *without* flowers, as Goody (1993: 1–27) points out in his first chapter, "No Flowers in Africa," in *The Culture of Flowers*.

In every culture, a large number of inhabitants, both plants and animals, are excluded from the mental stock of "nature." Many plants are written off as weeds, even though some may be a delicacy for some other peoples, as in the case of Japanese *nori*, referred to as seaweed in the West. The Japanese also associate dandelions with childhood memories of being in a field blowing the seeds to disperse them, as do Americans. As the lawn took pride of place in some societies, the plant became the most annoying enemy for those who treasure their lawn, i.e., culturally created nature, and for farmers since it may delay hay production because of its high water content. There are innumerable examples of undesirable fauna and flora excluded from "our nature."

My first anthropological work was a study of the Sakhalin Ainu, for whom, as for the Achuar of the Ecuadorian Amazon (Descola [2005] 2014), there is no separate concept or word for nature. They have an exhaustive

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knowledge of the beings of their environment, but their language does not have words for overall domains, such as “plants,” “animals,” and “nature.” They select a certain number of fauna and flora to be the inhabitants of their universe. During my first fieldwork in 1965, on a fine spring day after a long winter in Hokkaido, Japan, Husko, my Ainu friend, and I stepped out of our house to collect plants in the field just outside, now full of vegetation. I immediately realized that the promontories in her mental picture of the grass field and those in mine were entirely different. My vision of the field was only flowers, nothing else catching my eyes. In contrast, Husko spotted every edible and medicinal plant whose useful parts were well developed, even those at some distance. There is no name for the whole plant in the Ainu language; rather, a distinct lexeme is given to each part of the plant—leaves and roots—that is useful. Flowers do not receive lexemes and did not have a place in Husko’s mental image of the field (Ohnuki-Tierney 1974, 2021). Like the Achuar, the Ainu consider nonhuman animals similar to humans. When they meet humans, they don fur to offer the fur and the meat as their gifts to convey good wishes to humans.

Multisensory Perception of the Environment

The means of perception and understanding of the environment vary among peoples. Among European peoples, what Jay calls *ocularcentrism* ([1993] 1994: 40–41) began in the Renaissance as opposition to the interference of textuality preventing an unmediated vision of the divine, and it spread to nonreligious fields, leading to the celebration of Cartesian physics and turning nature into “a ventriloquist’s dummy, of which man could make himself, as it were the lord and master” (Descola [2005] 2014: 61).

The Sakhalin Ainu use multiple senses, but vision is of least importance. Their perception of the environment and its inhabitants is uncannily reflected in their classification of headaches and boils. The terrestrial beings, such as bears, musk deer, dogs, and woodpeckers, are perceived auditorily (Ohnuki-Tierney 1977). For example, the bear headache is perceived by the sound that simulates the bear’s heavy footsteps in the head, as opposed to the musk deer headache with the sound of lighter footsteps. The aquatic beings are perceived through thermal and tactile senses. The octopus headache simulates the tactile feeling of the suction cups of an octopus, accompanied by the chill, as opposed to the lamprey headache, which has the tactile sensation of sharp pain at one locus and accompanied by chills (for details, see Ohnuki-Tierney 1977).

Billington ([1966] 1970: 32–33) points out that at the fringe of “European civilization” in the Russian north, new church murals were becoming musical illustrations in the fourteenth century, and that the interdependence

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of sight, sound, and smell had been important in the liturgy of the Eastern Church. Although not about nature, this example shows the way multiple senses are used simultaneously.

Nature had been captured and represented by other means, such as music, as seen in Beethoven’s Symphony no. 6 (*Pastoral*), in Flight of the Bumblebee by Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov, or in “Song of the Flea” by Modest Mussorgsky—the list is long.

The affective dimension of nature varies widely. The Sakhalin Ainu consider its inhabitants as *pirika*, meaning “sacred and therefore beautiful.” Thus, the bear is *pirika* because it is the supreme deity (Ohnuki-Tierney 1974). In Western scholarship, the discussion of nature often involves concepts of aesthetics: the “beautiful” and “sublime.” The discussion of sublimity often begins with Longinus, a scholar of perhaps the first century CE, who defined it as “a kind of height and conspicuous excellence” and said its presence in speeches and writings drives people “not to persuasion, but to ecstasy” (1985: 8–9). That is, he emphasized that sublimity is not a conceptual understanding but an emotive response. Often referred to is Kant’s distinction: “The Beautiful in nature is connected with the form of the object, which consists in having [definite] boundaries. The Sublime . . . is to be found in a formless object, so far as in it or by occasion of it *boundlessness* is represented, and yet its totality is also present to thought” ([1790] 2000: 101–2; [1793] 2001: 306–8). He adds: “Sublimity, therefore, does not reside in anything of nature, but *only in our mind*” ([1790] 2000: 129; my emphasis). Elsewhere, he explicitly states that it is incorrect to call any object of nature sublime, but it is correct to call many objects of nature beautiful (103). “The *beautiful* is that which pleases universally without [requiring] a concept” (67), and therefore, “*Beautiful Art is an art in so far as it seems like nature*” (187).

Some Basic Themes

There are some themes in reference to “nature” that are quite common across cultures, if not universal. Let me describe a few of them.¹

No “Nature” as a Distinct Category

For people in small-scale societies, primarily hunting and foraging peoples, there is no “nature” as a category of their environment. Descola ([2005] 2014) points out that “nature” as a separate category does not exist among the Achuar as well as among many other groups. He describes the Achuar view of hunting: “Woolly monkeys, toucans, howler monkeys . . .

are . . . the ‘complete persons,’ . . . we kill them for food, but they are still relatives.” The hunters establish “the bond of friendship” with particular members of these species (15). His book, *Beyond Nature and Culture*, starts with a quotation from Aristotle, who warns that “any attempt to demonstrate that nature exists would be absurd” but defines nature as “the sum total of beings” (1, 65).

The Sakhalin Ainu do not have nature as a separate category. Their “hunting” was a supreme religious activity, and less an economic value, as in the case of their treatment of the bear, the supreme deity. The deity, the bear, offers its flesh and fur as gifts to the Ainu, who, during the elaborate bear ceremony, offer their treasures as their return gift and send its soul back to the mountains, the home of the bear (Ohnuki-Tierney 1974: 16–31, 90–97; 1999).

Wild Nature to Be Conquered

In some of the large nation-states built on an agrarian economy, “wild nature” is constructed to be conquered by the king or some elite males. Pointing out how the strong symbolic connection between kingship and the hunting of oxen/bull developed and persisted, Bertelli ([1990] 2001: 114–26) tells us that Gilgamesh, the Sumerian ruler who is said to have reigned between 2900 and 2700 BCE, was called “the mighty wild bull.” In Mycenaean Greece (c. 1600–1100 BCE), hunting was the source of political and military power (Hamilakis 2003).

The Greeks had various forms of hunting, with different significations for social status. Hunting with hunting dogs, called *cynegia* (dog driving), had the highest status. In Plato’s utopia, young ruling-class males practiced only *cynegia* (Cartmill 1993: 31–32). Beginning in 80 CE, gladiatorial contests between Roman “hunters” and exotic animals vividly portrayed the Roman elites’ attitude and activities related to hunting, an utmost show of the *conquest of wild nature* and a demonstration of masculinity. The medieval “royal hunt” starts with *the creation of wild nature*, a large royal forest near every chateau, like Château de Fontainebleau, which Francis I redeveloped starting in 1528, or Château de Versailles, where Louis XIII built a hunting lodge in 1623. In these artificially created forests, kings and other elite males hunted animals to demonstrate their power by conquering wild nature. Hunting was their supreme political activity. In Eurasia, including the Middle East, India, central Asia, and China, the royal hunt was also extremely important and continued well into later periods (Allesen 2013; Bates 2013; Cartmill 1993).

In European societies, hunting remained a privilege restricted to nobility; commoners were not allowed to be in these royal forests. Therefore, it

was far from a subsistence economic activity providing a source of food, as clearly supported by the fact that people's riots took place *always* at times of grain shortage, as exemplified by the Flour War during the reign of Louis XV (Kaplan 1976a: xxvii–xxxix; 1976b: 446–47).

Countryside/Farmland as "Nature"

A universal phenomenon following urbanization, the construction of the rural-cum-natural took place in many of these societies. When cities are born, the rural is born, and urbanites often long for a connection or re-connection to "pristine nature." For them, nature is/was "there" among peoples engaged in foraging, pastoralism, and agriculture, when in fact nature does not exist either as a concept or word among these peoples. Farmland, created by a thorough destruction of nature, by clearing all the trees and other plants, becomes nature in the view of urbanites, giving birth to the symbolic opposition of nature and culture. In many post-agrarian societies, the two became antithetical concepts, each assigned with positive and negative values. The city represents culture with human achievements and, alternatively, the decadent human-altered space, while the rural represents the unspoiled pristine space or the wild or uncivilized nowhere. This development started early, reaching back to classical times (Williams 1973: 46–54). The cultural construction of the "English countryside" is well articulated by Newby (1979), Williams (1973), and others.

To most inhabitants of urban England . . . the countryside supports a serene, idyllic existence, enjoyed by blameless Arcadians happy in their communion with Nature; or alternatively it is a backward and isolated world where boredom vies with boorishness, inducing melancholia and a suspicion of incest. (Newby 1979: 13)

In the 1970s, "in contrast to the apparently unending gloomy news about conflict-ridden, strikeprone, double-digit inflation, urban, industrial England," a *real* English countryside thrived in the minds of the people, especially middle-class English mostly ignorant of agriculture, and on calendar illustrations and chocolate-box lids (Newby 1979: 14–18).

In France, Marie Antoinette built a little farm in Versailles where she could play at raising sheep. Painters both major and minor chose rural France as their motif. The "grain stack" series by Claude Monet (1840–1926) and paintings of farmers (*L'Angélu*, *Des glaneuses*, etc.) by Jean-François Millet (1814–75) are the most celebrated examples.

In Japan, there already was "the rural" for the urban courtiers in Kyoto during the eighth century (chapter 3). However, the discussion of the rural/urban gained force during the late early modern period in reference to modernization. The Japanese nativist scholars supported the moderniza-

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tion and industrialization of Japan while at the same time lamenting the decay of the quality of life in Edo (Tokyo) (Gluck 1985: 179–85). Yanagita Kunio's *Tales of Tōno* (*Tōno Monogatari*), published in 1910 (Yanagita [1968] 1981), is often cited as representative of the nostalgia for the rural at the time when Japan was rapidly industrializing. Yanagita collected the oral tradition of Tōno in present-day Iwate Prefecture during the last of the Meiji period (1868–1912). Harootunian (1988: 416,) is critical of Yanagita Kunio “re-presented” the voiceless narrative of the folk as opposed to civilization and rationality, and Orikuchi Shinobu equated orality with village simplicity.

Today, against incredibly tall skyscrapers mushrooming in Tokyo, NHK, the national television network, has a number of series featuring individual farmers informing viewers about their meaningful lives.

Pastoralism is also idealized as “a simplified life in the country” (Frye [1957] 1990: 143) and even reinforced by Christian teachings, as in a series of metaphors such as Christ the lamb, ministers as pastors, and believers as the flock. ([1957] 1990). Yet, in some European cultures, pastoralism, which required grazing land, was seen as in competition with agriculture, as noted by Braudel ([1967] 1973: 68; my emphasis), who unabashedly favored animal husbandry and meat eating, and lamented that “fields were cultivated *at the expense* of hunting-ground and extensive stock-raising. . . . [A] larger and larger number of people were *reduced to* eating vegetable foods . . . *often insipid and always monotonous.*” Japan never had a pastoral economy until it was introduced on a small scale to a few places, like Hokkaido, during the Meiji period.

Nature in Foundational Myths and Religious Canons

In Greek mythology, Hercules is “Man the Hunter,” and Deianira is “Woman the Tiller.” In the Old Testament, God’s preference is for Abel, a keeper of sheep, rather than Cain, a tiller of the ground. This differential treatment of animals and plants continued in history (Smith [1889] 1972: 269; Braudel [1967] 1973: 68; Ohnuki-Tierney 1993: 119–20).

As detailed in chapter 2, wet-rice agriculture was introduced to Japan toward the end of the ninth century BCE, giving the economic foundation for the development of a large complex society. With the establishment of the emperor system, the imperial myth-history explained how the grandson of the Sun Goddess was sent down from heaven (Takamagahara) to transform the Japanese archipelago from wilderness to a land of succulent ears of rice. The soul of rice grain was placed at the apex of the hierarchy of soul-bearing inhabitants. The emperor was endowed with the exclusive right to officiate all the rituals pertaining to rice and its growth—the role persisted throughout history up to today. The role of the emperor as the

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custodian of rice was not preceded by a hunting tradition. This led to the emperor being in charge of temporality. Miyata (1992) emphasizes that this role is indeed at the very foundation of the emperor's power.

In some agrarian societies, the grains are considered deities, as in the case of corn and maize, and in others they are symbols of deities. In Christianity, wheat is not God but the abode for God, as further discussed in chapter 1.

"Nature" as Representations: Theoretical Overview

By "nature," I refer to the space in people's view of their universe that humans do not occupy. My interest is how that space is represented. It is an attempt to show how representations of nature become "nature," with Japan as an example. The Japanese have been like a poster child of "people who love and live in nature." *Nihon no shizen*—Japanese nature—has become so naturalized that hardly anyone questions it—like the word nature itself. Yet, the Japanese have engaged in extensive representations of nature through literature, music, architecture, and other visual and performing arts.

In Western scholarship, Plato, an early fifth-century Athenian scholar (429?–347 BCE), first articulated the notion of *representation*—art as a false representation, *mimesis*—of "nature." In the well-known allegory, he introduces "men dwelling in a sort of subterranean cavern," who are allowed to see only the shadows on the wall of what passes outside. In this situation, they "would deem reality to be nothing else than the shadows of the artificial objects." When one is freed from his fetters and "compelled to stand up and lift his eyes to the light, he realizes that what he was seeing was "a cheat and an illusion" (Plato [1935] 2000: book 7, 119–23). Using the painter as an example of an artist, Plato calls him the imitator who produces "an imitation of a phantasm or of the truth," and declares that "mimetic art is far removed from the truth," presenting a minor part while claiming to reproduce the whole. For Plato, art is a failed attempt to produce truth/nature (429–33). Ever since, "nature" has been at the center of much of academic discourse, especially in philosophy, art, and anthropology.

In his very short but enormously influential article, Benjamin ([1966] 1986: 333) points out that nature creates similarities, but it is humans who possess the highest capacity for producing similarities. This capacity, according to him, is "a rudiment of the powerful compulsion in former times to become and behave like something else."

Like Plato, Benjamin uses examples from nature for his theory of *mimesis*. As a concrete example, Benjamin ([1982] 2002: 33) points to the introduction of arcades and the construction of panoramas as "the scenes

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of perfect imitation of nature,” which was an “attempt to produce deceptively life-like changes in the represented nature,” and which prepared the way not only for photography but for [silent] film and sound film.” The arcades built during the latter half of the nineteenth century symbolized the watershed of a dramatic transformation of Western society from a culture of production to that of consumption (Benjamin [1982] 2002).

Benjamin’s theory of mimesis is a significant part of his theory of modernity, in which “the decay” comes from a transformation of the mimetic faculty ([1966] 1986: 332–33). Taussig (1993: 20) considers that mass culture today “both stimulates and is predicated upon mimetic modes of perception.” As this book, especially chapters 7 and 8, will show, the mimetic faculty continues to function or, in an even more intensive way, to convert the representations of nature into “true nature.”²

Further developing Marx’s proposition of the “fetishism of the commodity form,” Lukács ([1923] 1971) proposed a highly influential analytical concept of *reification*—how the commodity form becomes the dominant form of objectivity in capitalistic societies. We will see in Chapters 7 and 8 the particular role Japanese religions, including “rice as pure money,” have played in the passage to the naturalization of the commodity as the dominant form of objectivity.

For anthropological inquiry, the “real” or the “truth” in the sense used by Plato, the positivist, is not the concern of this book, since its starting point is how nature is culturally construed and defined, and how the culturally defined nature is represented and transmitted as real. If not regarding it as “a cheat and an illusion,” we all too often assume that we know “the real” inhabitants of “the real nature,” when in fact much of our knowledge comes from representations—culturally constructed images and meanings.

The realization that there is *no* “nature objectively out there” was forcefully presented by Latour ([1991] 1993: 90; 2010: 97), who wrote, “Real as Nature, narrated as Discourse, collective as Society, existential as Being; such are the quasi-objects that the moderns have caused to proliferate.” According to him, this is what we, who pretend to be moderns, subscribe to. Although his argument is based heavily on the biblical tradition of the West, Rich (2021) likewise argues that “nature” has always been what humans make, although his emphasis is more on what he calls the “post-natural world.”

Shirane (2012), who meticulously examined “the Japanese four seasons” during the premodern period using textual, performative, visual, and other materials, uses the term “secondary nature (*nijiteki shizen*)” to refer to the represented nature which became “a substitute for a more primary nature that was often remote from or rarely seen by the aristocrats” who lived in the city (Kyoto) (4).

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My own personal experience took place when I began writing an article (Ohnuki-Tierney 1981). I drew a "real catfish," which my colleague Norman Whitten, then editor in chief of *American Ethnologist*, pointed out really did not look like a catfish. I then realized that I had never seen a "real" catfish, which the Japanese "marginalize" and hence is not sold or seen in fish stores. Yet many Japanese are familiar with visual representations of the fish and meanings assigned to it in their folklore, which include its role as the causal agent of the 1855 earthquake that destroyed a wicked society by punishing the rich and bringing a new world (Ouweland 1964).

The importance of representations as the source of people's conception of "nature" is of paramount importance in societies where literary, visual, and auditory representations are highly developed. At times, there is a subtle "tug of war" between nature and its representation. For example, cherry blossoms are of paramount importance in all forms of representation of spring, the most cherished season. On the other hand, in ancient Japan there were only mountain cherry blossoms. Today, television follows the degree of blooming, starting from northern Okinawa, the southernmost region, as it goes up to Hokkaido in the north. It was humans and the successive governments who made Japan into the land of cherry blossoms by planting the trees all over Japan's riverbanks, school yards, military bases, and so forth. By far the most common type of cherry tree is a *someiyoshino*—a *hybrid*—that is, a type culturally altered by humans, created during the Edo period.

The above discussion of representation is only one side of the whole process, in my view. In other words, the basic question is: are these representations really "mimesis" of what is supposedly out there objectively? It is the issue of "form" versus "matter," debated by Plato and Aristotle (Rogers 1935; Shields 2020), as well the Japanese philosopher Nishida Kitarō. It is the question of whether there is some "matter" out there, which an artist or people give a "form."³ Let me return to this topic in later chapters and the conclusion, using the examples of the rock garden, netsuke, and bonsai, which raise the possibility that in fact these representations are *not* mimesis of "objective nature" out there.

Culture as Historical Process

Since I have taken the most difficult path for research by choosing the entire prehistory and history of Japan for this project, let me explain by briefly discussing the need for a study over a long period of time.

Jan Vansina (1970: 165; 1985) has been the most prominent champion for the necessity to abolish "the zero-time fiction," emphasizing oral tradi-

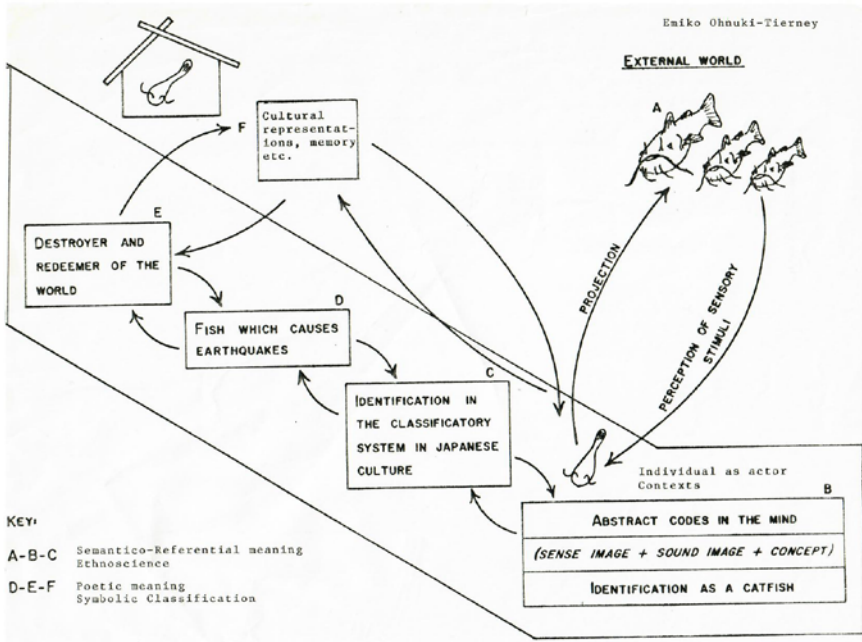


Figure 0.1. Catfish in “nature.” Chart by the author.

tion as history. As I explained in my previous work, there are a number of approaches for studying culture as historical processes (Ohnuki-Tierney 1990a; 2001; 2002a; see also Hunt 1989). One major issue is the length of time chosen, depending on the problem under research. Sally Moore (1986) chose one hundred years for her study of the Chagga of Tanzania, and for his study of Western colonialism and capitalism, Sidney Mintz (1985) examined the entire modern period, during which sugar was transformed from a rare foreign luxury into a necessity for working-class British.

A tripartite scheme for historical research was proposed by Fernand Braudel, Marc Bloch, Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, and others of the *Annales* school. Braudel defined the “structure of the long run,” or *longue durée*, in contrast to two shorter spans: the *conjuncture*, which covers a decade or up to a century, and the *event*, a short period of time when “surface oscillations” are most conspicuous (Braudel [1969] 1980; Furet 1972: 54–55; Le Goff 1972). Their choice is the *longue durée*, with apparent skepticism about the other two, as succinctly characterized by Paul Ricoeur (1980: 11), who forcefully stated, “History characterized by short, rapid, nervous oscillations” is “richest in humanity” although “the most dangerous.” The

basic assumption is that the structure remains intact for a long period of time and therefore it is worthy of study.

Culture always consists of more than one paradigm. By "paradigm" I mean the basic model or pattern of culture. Revolutions—be it French, Bolshevik, or Mao's—are all the result of an alternative paradigm coming to the fore. There was no revolution, but medieval Japan epitomizes the presence of two paradigms, with the one below trying to usurp the existing paradigm (chapter 4).

In addition to the synchronic presence of more than one paradigm, historical flow involves the rise of a new paradigm. In the literary field, Charles Baudelaire (1821–67), in his well-known essay "Peintre de la vie moderne" ("The Painter of Modern Life"), clearly defined the term *moderne* (modernity) for the first time: "By 'modernity' I mean the ephemeral, the fugitive, the contingent, the half of art whose other half is the eternal and the immutable" ([1855] 2001: 12). Baudelaire's modernity was a new paradigm that emerged at the time and assumed dominance along with another that was stable and noncontingent.

According to Marc Augé ([1992] 1995: 79), with *surmodernité* (supermodernity) we witness the emergence of "non-place" (*non-lieux*)—impersonal space—without the complete erasing of "place," with its personal connections to the individual's space. He argues that the two constitute "palimpsests." When a new paradigm emerges, it interacts with the previous ones and may eventually become dominant. Culture as historical processes is always in motion (Moore 1986)—becoming and reproducing itself even when disintegrating. It transforms itself at the core in a constant ebb and flow, with local-transnational interactions as the engine of historical change.

Studying Japanese culture and society over a long period of time enabled me to examine the relationship between the quotidian and the "lofty" cosmological scheme. My research proved that cosmology/ontology and the like are not separate mental activities at higher levels but are intimately involved in the daily lives of the people. It is not a solid structure over which surface oscillations occur. Instead, the basic symbolic axis of the above and the below has persisted, upholding the everyday behaviors of the people, *and* *verse versa*, while both undergo historical transformations.

In reference to the topic of nature, my research enabled me to see that nature recedes as a series of representations take over and become "nature." Along the way, I was able to explore the complexity of historical change, in which no single individual exercises power; rather, historical change takes place, in the main, while those "in power" as well as those "without power" are more or less unaware of the process—those who created representations of nature did not tell others to copy their representa-

tions, but the latter willingly accepted the representation as true “nature.” With the development of capitalism, nature became commodified and reified as “nature objectively” out there. Even this process does not involve coercive pressure; people are willing participants without knowing the process involved.

While we witness the development of capitalism all over the world, Japan’s case offers an example of how its penetration of societies is not uniform. From ancient times, rice was “pure money” and naturalized the financial payments to religious practitioners as legitimate. In addition, the Japanese emphasis on reward during one’s lifetime, rather than after death, has become the enduring practice, “endorsing,” as it were, consumerism. Both of these factors have operated for a long time, giving consumerism a long and successful history in Japan, with people being willing participants without being aware of the factors involved in the process.

About This Book

Part 1 offers the basic information about Japan, its prehistory and early history, and its cosmology. Chapter 1 describes the nascent “Japan,” when the political economy based on the wet-rice agriculture introduced by Koreans was established, when the imperial court constructed the cosmogony that deified rice grains, and when rice paddies became “Japanese nature.” It also established the spatial division of the above and the below, with the former assigned a positive value and the latter defined as defiled. The book describes how this symbolic structure governing cosmological space as well as daily behavior continued to be upheld through time and remains even today.

Chapter 2 examines the inhabitants of the universe and their interrelations. The relationship between deities, humans, and some nonhumans is highly complex due to the border crossings by nonhuman animals, as well as humans who can be deities. Each of them, animate or inanimate, is endowed with a soul. Most importantly, the soul remains dormant until it leaves the physical body, upon which time, if not treated properly, it inflicts punishment on the individual, who may not always be the offender, leading to the collective responsibility among members of a social group. I consider animism to be the most important belief in Japanese religiosity, in the past and today.

There is a distinct hierarchy among all beings. The Japanese universe is dominated by plants, with rice at the apex. Next are trees. The hierarchy among trees depends on whether a divine soul uses it as a temporary abode. The normative classification of nonhuman animals follows the

basic cosmo-spatial principle, degrading the “four-legged” animals as the most defiled and hence taboo to eat. It is not because of the physical property of four legs but because the number of legs maximizes their contact with the ground. Yet, the same four-legged animals, such as monkeys and foxes, are the messengers to the deities. Furthermore, important religious cults developed, such as the Fuji Shinkō during the Edo period, in which the monkey played the important role as messenger for Mount Fuji. Another is the Inari Myōjin, the deity of rice grains, with the fox as the messenger with enduring strength even today.

Part 2 focuses on how “Japanese nature” was defined and represented in different periods of history. Chapter 3 starts with the poetic praises of rice plants in the *Manyōshū* during the late Nara period (710–94), which saw the initial development of the “four seasons” based on the original seasons used by the Chinese and reformulated by the Japanese. With the move of the capitol from Nara to Kyoto (Heian period), there was an efflorescence of the imperial culture, in which the imperial version of “the four seasons” became detached from the environment but was well established as “the Japanese four seasons,” that is, “Japanese nature.” The “imperial nature” reflected the opulence of the lives of courtiers at the palace, symbolized by butterflies, which fly above the ground, and by flowers without roots—neither touching the ground. Developing highly sophisticated aesthetics, the courtiers placed the beings of the imperial nature at center stage in their *waka* poems, such as *Kokin Wakashū*, and literary pieces, such as *The Tale of Genji*, which became important classics.

Humans too began systematic avoidance of the ground. The most important expression of this was the permission one must receive from the emperor to “go up” to the main building of the Imperial Palace for an audience, which was granted only to individuals of the highest rank. Others, called “people on the ground” (*jigenin*), including warriors, had to stay outside, kneeling with one knee on the bare ground.

The invention of footwear was the first attempt to enable people not to directly touch the ground when walking. Footwear then became the culprit and has not been allowed inside ever since, leading to the ubiquitous presence of signs declaring, “NO FOOTGEAR INSIDE.” Carriages followed this development. For the emperor a special type of carriage exclusively for the emperor, called *hōren*, was used throughout history until the introduction of an automobile during the Meiji period. The ox-drawn carriage, called *gissha*, was for the courtiers who used ever more elaborate *gissha* to show off their status and wealth.

Chapter 4 discusses a most dynamic period in Japanese history, when the paradigmatic plurality came to the fore. The “lower conquering the upper (*gekokujiō*)” reigned in Japanese society, as both the mentalité and

the governing principle of the social structure. The most dramatic example showing the power of historical agents is Toyotomi Hideyoshi, who was born the son of a farmer of no distinction and orphaned at a young age, and who ascended to the apex of the Japanese political system as the most fearsome of the warlords. While trying to prove he too was “cultured,” he became the grand patron of the tea ceremony.

At this time, the warrior class rose to the top of the social hierarchy, pushing the emperors to the background. The emperors ceased to have power over the military, which became the exclusive domain of the warriors. Cultural affairs, such as composition of *waka* and *renga* poetry and events celebrating and appreciating “nature,” became the courtiers’ role and preoccupation. During this period, the representation of “Japanese nature” was completed, as it were. The year came to consist of twelve months, each defined by a plant (flower or tree), a bird, and a particular activity. Even if a particular flower might not bloom during the month to which it was assigned, the constructed “nature” governed.

Meanwhile, the most fearsome and brutal of warriors had to prove that they too were cultured (*bun*), rather than simply excelling in military skills (*bu*). The development of rock gardens and tea ceremony was the result of their efforts. The ground is not to be seen—all covered with rocks and pebbles. The rock garden became the quintessential “Japanese nature.” Unlike the Western landscape, the Japanese *tei'en* (landscape) is said to represent “nature.” Yet, the rock gardens show how the “representations” are not mimesis of “nature”—far from it. It is neither a mimesis nor a fractal minimalism.

Part 3 focuses on uses of “Japanese nature” as the symbol of the collective self of the Japanese as they became increasingly aware of Japan as a country in the world and their sense of *cultural* nationalism developed. Chapter 5 describes the ironic outcome of the prevailing peace within the country under the shogunate—the warrior class’s loss of a *raison d’être* and consequently their economic and political powers. The highly urbanized new capital of Edo saw the rapid rise of capitalism. Since both the courtiers and warriors were legally prohibited from engaging in commercial affairs, the merchants seized economic power and developed their plebeian culture. Through a number of venues in art and literature, they celebrated “Japan as the land of rice paddies, cherry blossoms, and Mount Fuji”—creating the enduring symbols of “Japanese nature.”

Another important development during the Edo period is the efflorescence of the plebeian culture of the merchant class, which further refined the non-minimalist tradition of poems of *haikai* and *haiku*—the literary tradition with the use of 5-7-5 words—and small-scale arts of *bonsai* (“garden in a pot”) and *netsuke* (toggles).

Chapter 6 points out that with the rise of *political* nationalism, "Japanese nature" became a favorite tool used by the government for various purposes, not only to strengthen nationalism but also for economic development by luring both domestic and foreign tourism. Already in 1912, the Japan Travel Bureau was established, and in 1931 the national parks were designated for the promotion of tourism, at times when devastating changes to the "natural" environment were allowed to take place in Akan in Hokkaido, Oze near Tokyo, and elsewhere. At the height of Japanese militarism, cherry trees, which had represented Japan or Japanese nature since the Heian period (794–1185), were planted in the colonies to mark that they belonged to Japan, against the wish of the South Koreans, who are now planning to replace them with their own "king cherry" (Rubin 2014). This was also the time when the military government attempted to aestheticize the murder of its own soldiers by using the metaphor of cherry blossoms, which fall after a beautiful but short time.

In part 4, chapter 7 focuses on the role of consumerism, which gained velocity in contemporary Japan, playing a powerful role in the domestication of "Japanese nature." Contemporary consumerism also takes advantage of the cosmo-spatial principle and its valences in a number of everyday practices, including purification of cars, which accumulate dirt from the defiled ground on their tires, and the promotion of pet carts so that the feet of the pets do not get soiled when they "take a walk." This mutual reinforcement between capitalism and Japanese cosmological beliefs is so naturalized that most people do not realize the real nature of current consumerism. Likewise, the government and tourist industries promote tourism by the Japanese and foreigners to appreciate "Japanese nature" when tourists are not fully cognizant of the economic motive of their promotions.

Chapter 8 is an attempt to understand contemporary Japan, described in chapter 7, where consumerism has almost a free hand, domesticating the inhabitants of "nature." Meanwhile, magic and magical thinking flourish and animism legitimizes the business prosperity of temples and shrines. At the same time, the symbolic principle of above and below with respective valences also bolsters consumerism, promoting the need to supply footwear and other commodities to facilitate and reinforce the symbolic valences. Furthermore, this principle remains the cardinal rule for the everyday life of the contemporary Japanese—from the requirements for everyday behavior, such as taking off one's shoes, to architectural structures, such as the mandatory entrance area (*genkan*).

Through a critical assessment of social evolutionary theory, which sees a unilinear path of history from primitivism, characterized by magic and irrationality, toward modernity, marked by celebrating rationality as the

ultimate, I suggest that we abandon this yardstick—one based primarily on the historical experiences of Western European societies. Instead, we should look into the paramount role that “magical practices” play in *soci-ality* for the Japanese, who are known for an extensive practice of gift exchange. These magical practices play the role of “gifts,” expressing one’s concerns to a particular individual.

The ease with which temples and shrines have “cooperated” with consumerism requires some explanation. Money is equivocal in most societies and its nature—pure or impure—is determined in practice, that is, in how it is used. In the case of Japan, rice—the dominant symbol of “Japanese nature”—has been “pure money” almost throughout history. It was what the Japanese offered to the deities. Therefore, offering money to Shinto priests and Buddhist monks, for example, for the purification of cars, is not a departure for the Japanese, who have been used to offer rice and currency for religious purposes.

After a summary of major points raised in the book, the conclusion focuses on “the representation of zero”—are art and other human products always a mimesis of “matter” and other phenomena that are presumably to be copied? Or should we interpret, for example, the rock garden as human products without reference to “matter,” and netsuke and bonsai *not* as miniatures but human products based on, for example, people’s imagination of what a tiger, never seen by the artist, is about? To put it in reference to the Aristotle-Plato debate, should *form* without *matter* be another way to think about the problem of “representations”?

Notes

1. I use the term/concept “culture,” which is more inclusive than cosmology and ontology, although the recent “ontological turn” ushered in intensive debates over these related concepts. “Ontology” has a long history in philosophy (e.g., Deleuze [1988] 1993, [1990] 1995) and has been used differently by various scholars under such terms as “differential ontology,” “perspectivist ontology,” “cosmological deixis,” etc. Descola (2014: 271; [2005] 2014: 57–88) prefers “worlding” to differentiate his approach from ontologies, and offers a comprehensive history of “The Great Divide,” including nature versus culture, in the Western scholarly tradition. Descola ([2005] 2014: 3–9, 13–17) considers that the similarity of interiorities justifies the extension of “culture” to non-humans, including “intersubjectivity to a mastery of techniques, ritualized conduct and deference to conventions” (129–30). He states: “[A]ll this does not suffice to blur the major differences that exist between the cultures presented here as examples” (31).

Viveiros de Castro (1998: 470, 479) proposes multinaturalism—the same culture, different natures. “Ontology Is Just Another Word for Culture” is an

edited volume (Venkatesan 2010), whereas Graeber (2015) entitles his article "Radical Alterity Is Just Another Way of Saying 'Reality.'" For further discussions, see Candea (2010), Geschiere (2013: 170, 256–57), Kelly (2014), Latour (2005), Ramos (2012), and Turner ([2009] 2017: 205–43).

2. For further discussion on the topic of representation and mimesis by Erich Auerbach, Walter Benjamin, and Michael Taussig, see Ohnuki-Tierney 2015: 14–15, 210.
3. Kant ([1781] 1966: 34) identified space and time as the two forms of sensibility. Some scholars have focused on the temporal element. Handelman (2020: 291) emphasizes that all forms are moving with time, as does Deleuze ([1990] 1995: 14, 47), who discards notions such as structure, the symbolic, or the signifier.