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Theodore C. Bestor, Patricia G. Steinhoff, Victoria Lyon Bestor, eds. *Doing Fieldwork in Japan.* Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2003. ix + 414 pp. $55.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8248-2525-6; $28.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8248-2734-2.

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Out in Japanese Fields

Researchers across generations commonly complain that fieldwork, particularly the first time, is fraught with unnecessary mistakes and prolonged anxiety. Although some problems are certainly unavoidable, a typical refrain blames a lack of methodological training. Because research methods are rarely given as much curricular attention as theory, for example, the first experience of fieldwork can easily be understood as a solitary effort at trial-and-error and reinventing wheels. Such a lack of training is coupled with few incentives or forums for scholars to share methodological and fieldwork experiences. Not only are students expected, on some level, to be able to figure out how to do fieldwork on their own, but senior scholars are rarely expected to formally share their own experiences and problems.

This system begs a series of questions: how can research methods be taught successfully? Can research methodologies only be learned through practice? Does the responsibility rest with students to cull wisdom from available sources, or with professors, departments, area studies, or disciplines to create institutionalized programs for teaching methodology? If it is the later, how should methodologies be organized?

By producing this volume, the editors of and contributors to "Doing Fieldwork in Japan" suggest three points in answer to these questions. First, they distribute responsibility equally between experienced researchers and neophytes to recognize patterns of fieldwork experiences. By narrating such patterns, the contributors suggest that good fieldwork methods come from a mix of received knowledge and personal experience. Second, the volume subverts the traditional disciplinary organization of fieldwork methodology. What elsewhere is divided by discipline–including anthropology, sociology, political science, religious studies, and history–here is defined as a common project: "fieldwork." Going to a foreign country to do research about some aspect of that country produces, in the authors' view, a common set of experiences regardless if the research is participant observation, statistical analysis, or collecting oral histories. Third, there is something unique about doing research in Japan, and contributors consider "how disciplinary research problems and techniques are inevitably situated in specific cultural, historical and social contexts" (p. 6).

Edited by Theodore Bestor, Patricia Steinhoff, and Victoria Lyon Bestor, this book includes 21 social scientists' reflections on their years of research in and on Japan. The contributors are scholars from six disciplines, including: anthropology (Theodore Bestor, Samuel Coleman, Joy Hendry, David L. McConnell, Glenda Roberts, Joshua Roth, Robert Smith, Merry Issacs White, Christine Yano), history (Andrew Gordon), library resources (Victoria Lyon Bestor), political science (David Arase, John Creighton Campbell, Ellis Krauss, Shelia A. Smith), religious studies (Helen Hardacre, Ian Reader), and sociology (Mary Brinton, Suzanne Culter, David T. Johnson, Patricia G. Steinhoff). As shown in the partial bibliographies included at the end of each chapter, these scholars have produced an impressive list of influential publications about Japan, many of which readers will recognize. By describing the research behind published texts, these pithy chapters enable readers to get a sense of the research *process*. Perhaps as a reaction to recent work on representations of fieldworkers, each chapter includes a photograph of the researcher in mid-fieldwork. The pictures–many of which attest to alcohol's presence in research in Japan–are captivating and, like the chapters, simultaneously humanize the researchers, represent the work of research, and add subtleties to texts that are already familiar and valuable.

The book is organized in roughly the chronological order of a single project's development, beginning with a description of "Starting Out," before moving to groups of essays about "Navigating Bureaucratic Mazes" and "Ask-

ing: Surveys, Interviews, Access." The final section, "Outsiders in Insiders' Networks," includes essays by five anthropologists addressing the eternal anthropological tension between being both inside and outside a group of informants. Many of the individual chapters mimic the book's chronology, narrating the development of single projects–finding a site, making contacts, getting permission to research, completing research, and transitioning from the field to writing up and publishing. Throughout this process, the *Japaneseness* of fieldwork in Japan remains a contested question.

In their descriptive reflections and prescriptive suggestions, contributors begin with how they decided on their research topic and where they should locate themselves to best complete the project. Some, like Theodore Bestor, who has completed projects on a specific neighborhood in Tokyo and the Tsukiji fish market, seemingly had fewer decisions to make about location. Yet, as Bestor describes, the process of finding a "typical" Tokyo neighborhood to research was more complicated than he expected. Finally, on the advice of a fellow graduate student, he decided to find a "network not a neighborhood," and place himself where he had contacts and friends (p. 315). Although not articulated as explicitly, other researchers followed similar patterns and chose their location based on where they could find interesting and willing informants. Shelia Smith faced a different problem when considering where best to research how the Japanese military is organized in light of the post-war constitution. Although Tokyo was where most policy was being made, and therefore where she started her research, Smith realized the significance of venturing further a field. As she says: "My trip away from the center of policy power gave me a glimpse of Japan's military at work. While I had expected to see the attitudes of Roppongi [Tokyo] reflected more strongly on bases around the country, I found the opposite" (p. 169). Although Smith was interested in how policy was being made, moving around Japan gave her very different perspectives on how policies were being implemented and understood. Her experience is a larger reminder that Tokyo is not Japan and that acknowledging regional difference inevitably pays off.

Deciding on a geographic location is further complicated by options about hierarchical locations–is it better to enter an organization or group from the top or from the bottom? David T. Johnson, in his ethnography of Japanese prosecutors in Kobe, found that the only way into an office was with permission and an introduction from the very top. With a letter of introduction from a professor at Kobe University to the chief (*kenjisei*) of the Kobe District Prosecutors Office, Johnson was eventually able to get permission to do research in the office, although with a number of conditions. Yet, he knew, from his project's conception, that success would depend on "official permission" from the supreme authority"[1].

Similarly, while planning his research about the JET English-teaching program, David McConnell realized that he was dependant on "permission from Japanese officials at the very top" (p. 128). Glenda Robert's research on working-class women employees in a lingerie factory was shaped by a parallel entrance into the field. Because she wanted to work with her informants "on the line," Roberts needed official permission to join the company as a worker. She was eventually granted this access through introductions to the management of a firm and in a meeting with her academic advisor and the company president. Although she first got into her fieldsite from the "top," Roberts soon realized that she had to distance herself from the management if she wanted to be trusted by the employees. She says: "I decided to be a less frequent visitor at the corporations' main office, where I had been offered a desk to study in the afternoons. I came to recognize that these frequent parlays into corporate headquarters only distanced me from factory workers, who certainly lacked such direct access to the power center" (p. 302). Joshua Roth, who also worked alongside his informants in a factory, narrates a similarly complicated switch between entering at the "top" but identifying with the "bottom." Like Roberts, Roth was dependent on permission to work granted from above. Yet, the high incidence of workplace accidents and injuries led Roth to feel that it was his responsibility to advocate on behalf of his informants, eventually alienating himself from city bureaucrats who had helped him (p. 350).

Through these discussions of fieldwork experiences, Japan-specific questions are repeatedly raised. One of the most frequent comments concerns *honne* (real motive, intention) and *tatemae* (public position or attitude). Although researchers in all cultural contexts must wonder how much "truth" they are getting from their informants, researchers in Japan can employ this handy binary to describe the dilemmas of performance, belief, truth, and trust. Many contributors here include tricks to peal back *tatemae* to reveal the (implicitly more interesting) *honne*. Yet none of the methods convince me that they lead more directly to "truth," or that the binary is particularly useful. David Johnson suggests that alcohol is one quick way to *honne*, describing the difference between two conversations he had with the same prosecutor: "One day Suzuki and I had an awkward conversation about how much control managing prosecutors ex-

ercise over their subordinates–Suzuki [cited] the official *tatemae*–[That evening] after the bottles were uncorked, Suzuki charged into my conversational circle, glass in hand, and declared his wish to work in America because then he would be free from the 'petty' controls he encounters in Japan's procuracy. Though I cannot be certain Suzuki's comment was *honne* (the next day he would neither confirm nor deny it), his pronouncement did reveal a layer of prosecutor reality I would not have seen but for the facilitative effects of fermented rice" (pp. 152-3).

Christine Yano offers a more responsible methodology that balances flexibility and spontaneity with a directed research plan. Discussing the idea of "playing situations–even frustrating ones–to your advantage," she says: "serendipity does not just happen, but is partly bestowed, partly earned, and partly exploited. It is really only in the combination of all three aspects that fieldwork in Japan can proceed" (p. 292).

Although Yano here makes a suggestion that I think would be valuable for research in almost any context–have a plan but be flexible–she carefully notes that this is for "fieldwork *in Japan*" (emphasis added). In thought-provoking disagreement, the cultural specificity of research methodologies remains an open question throughout the book. Describing his earlier research on birth control practices in Japan and later on the social organization of laboratory scientists, Samuel Coleman concludes with a powerful statement about the universality of methods: "If by now it looks as if there is nothing particularly unique about Japan in the dynamics I have discussed–minus the language issue–then my argument has succeeded" (p. 120). Andrew Gordon suggests more gradation, in which: "certain issues of access and discovery of archival material strike [him] as to some extent specific to Japan, if certainly not uniquely unique" (p. 262).

Other contributors list more pragmatic suggestions about Japan-specific research techniques. Most describe the importance of being introduced to informants and into institutions and then continually acknowledging these networks of debt and obligation. Helen Hardacre, who conducted research within new religious groups, concludes that "maintaining good relations in the long term is one of the obligations of fieldwork" (p. 85). Further, she goes on to stress the importance of gift giving in Japan, suggesting researchers should include a gift budget in their financial plans. Gordon is even more prescriptive, saying "never come to an interview empty-handed" (p. 269). Because business cards (*meishi*) provide a quick social identity, many contributors stress always carrying them, and narrate their experiences trying to get a Japanese affiliation to print on the cards. Shelia Smith suggests that, for political scientists, an academic affiliation is the most "neutral" option, but that an affiliation with "government-related think tanks was crucial to gaining access to policy debates on security issues" (p. 159). Coleman says that, for a brief period when he was unaffiliated, he felt he had to apologize for a card that "looked like a CIA agent's" (p. 122). Contrary to his expectation, though, he found that his lack of affiliation didn't alienate him from research contacts.

On a less pragmatic level, both Mary Brinton and Andrew Gordon describe research practices and styles of data organization specific to Japan. Brinton explains the paucity of "individual-level data [or] raw data–which to carry out statistical analyses" in Japan (p. 195). Because "none of the major government ministries–routinely makes individual-level data publicly available" and it is in the best interest of privately-funded projects to keep their data private, considerable challenges exist for researchers who want to use statistical data (p. 200). In her dissertation research, Brinton created an original large-scale survey and, although she narrates the experience so that others could emulate it, she recommends this only as the last option. Andrew Gordon presents a paradoxical paucity of historical data, saying: "On the one hand, there may well be no other place in the world where organizations so assiduously–indeed obsessively–write their own histories. On the other hand, despite a plethora of organization histories, archives in Japan are in relatively poor repair, and access to them is difficult" (p. 262). Gordon then offers various suggestions to milk quality research from this paradox.

Doing Fieldwork in Japan ends with two chapters valuable for the plethora of information they impart in very different ways. First, Robert Smith's reflection on the *long duree* of his research in Japan narrates his lifetime of work. Conducting research on Japan since 1944, when he joined the U.S. Army Japanese Area and Language Program, Smith briefly reconsiders his lifetime of experiences, providing a unique perspective on social shifts, Japanese lifecourses, and how he has changed throughout his career. Following Robert Smith's retrospective description, Victoria Lyon Bestor has created a valuable list of digital resources for research on and in Japan into the future. Although many of these digital texts are sure to change, this appendix provides multiple threads that interested readers can follow.

Indeed, this volume as a whole is best described as

a resource packed with personal reflections and experiences, perspectives on disciplinary trends, ruminations on the theories and practices of fieldwork, and multifaceted descriptions of Japan. Ultimately, it will be up to readers to mine this book for experiences and suggestions they find useful. It is to the contributors' credit that it includes so much potential and will certainly become a cross-disciplinary resource.

Note

[1]. Walter L. Ames, *Police and Community in Japan*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), p. xi; cited by David T. Johnson, "Getting in and Getting along in the Prosecutors Office," in *Doing Fieldwork in Japan*, eds. Theodore C. Bestor, Patricia G. Steinhoff and Victoria Lyon Bestor (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2003), p. 140.

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