

## Introduction

### New Insights into Japanese Society

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The present issue of the journal *Asian Studies* brings us a substantial number of selected contributions focusing on Japan, which aim to uncover different aspects of Japanese society and culture. As the articles are written by experts in Japanese studies from different parts of the world, we can find research perspectives from varied traditions, which bring us diverse, comprehensive, developing, and systematic assemblage of theories and approaches to various topics.

Among a variety of topics discussed in this volume, we first look into the world of art and popular culture in Japan. Art and especially popular culture in Japan are two of the most vibrant and rapidly changing fields of Japanese cultural activities. And especially, popular culture has a large audience among the students of Japanese society. In this section, a set of four papers is designed to bring the readers various aspects of creative art forms portraying the human world from the past and then to the future.

With the first article, we go into the darkness of the night and get to know the scary creatures wandering around our world. Raluca Nicolae in her article introduces us the *yōkai*, the numinous creatures inhabiting the other world and sometimes entering our world as well. These creatures are manifestations of people's feeling of fear and thus are portrayed in text and image. The author presents the specific type of *emaki*, called *hyakki yagyō*, where a large variety of *yōkai* and *oni* come together and wander around in the night. With the second article, we move into the contemporary world of images, *anime*, which is also one of the most creative forms of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Tamae Prindle with her article on Nakamura Ryūtarō's anime provides us an interesting study of so called "expository anime", which explains the diachronic story out of a synchronic aspect of a certain field of science. *Anime Serial Experiments, Lain* unfolds the rationales, potentials, and effects of two types of communication systems using the

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perceptions of the major character, a thirteen-year old girl, Rein, as well as other supporting characters. The science in it does not just punctuate a diachronic narrative; rather, it sets the major and minor plots in motion. *Experiments* is essentially a synchronic exposé of the digital mechanism and its impact on humans.

With the next two articles we move into the sphere of the body and its transformation and self-cultivation in the Japanese society. The first article by Violetta Brazhnikova Tsybizova explains the process of impersonating feminine roles by masculine performers, and therefore creating the masculine femininity transmitting the spirit and the state of mind in place of ordinary copies of external femininity signs. This is the basis of the actor's interpretation in the Noh theatre, similar in the case of both male and female roles. Japanese martial arts or *budō*, discussed by Stephen Robert Nagy in the next contribution, are very popular icons found in films, comics, video games and books. In the article, the author deals with the way of teaching Japanese *budō* at university level and thus questions himself about the approach to this topic. From the personal experience of teaching in a university level course about *budō* tradition, he tries to answer many challenges he faces during the process of teaching.

The second section brings forth some insights of philosophical and religious researchers in Japan, which are under research topics in Slovenia. Thus these articles are of great value, especially for the readers of *Asian Studies* in Slovenia.

First two articles deal with the philosophical discourses of ethics and phenomenon of life and death. Hashi Hisaki's article about the former topic is a discussion about principles of essential being from a comparative perspective and explores the views of two philosophers, Dōgen of Japan and Martin Heidegger of Germany. Both deal with the existence of human beings and thus the goal of this comparison is to fundamentally grasp the essentiality of being, life, and recognition (*jikaku* 自覚), bound to embodied cognition in our globalized world. The second article from this part discusses the problems Japan is facing in contemporary world. Kristýna Vojtíšková focuses on a phenomenon that some may consider as a crisis of values. However, the article does not deal with the value system nor search for causes for the contemporaneous crisis of values in Japanese society. Rather she works on the assumption that the value crisis is present in the contemporary Japanese society and focuses on an ethical aspect of this crisis, which is the relationship between the individual and the society, the

major pillar of Watsuji Tetsurō's thought, which the author considers particularly topical here.

The last article in this section by Iva Lakić Parać deals with the phenomenon of shamanism in Japan with an emphasis on the female role. From the historical perspective and the notion that the women have dealt with shamanistic practices in Japan since ancient times, she tries to answer two questions. First, was the shamanism a tool that women used in order to have a small part of their authority and power acknowledged? And second, have women managed to influence their marginal position in society and in what way? Thus this study brings us a research of the shamanism from a female perspective that shows the position of the women in the rigid patriarchal social milieu.

The topic of next section is Japanese literature and it is especially dedicated to the poet, essayist and writer Takahashi Mutsuo (born in 1937, Fukuoka, Japan). He represents the world of contemporary Japanese poetry and has published more than a hundred books so far, including his anthology of poems *Bara no ki, nise no koibitotachi* (薔薇の木・にせの恋人たち, *Rose Tree, False Lovers*) which drew the national attention in 1964. He is a rare literary person who creates by transcending the boundaries of literary genres—i.e. new poetry, *tanka*, *haiku*, essay, and even opera and *nō* play. Takahashi also has a profound knowledge of literature in all times and lands. His wide and original perspective provides us a fresh view different from those researchers or critics of literature. He has received a number of important literary prizes in Japan and his poems and other works have been translated into many languages. He frequently gives reading recitals around the world.

The section begins with Takahashi Mutsuo's lecture that was performed at March 27, 2014 on the Faculty of Arts, organised by the Department of Asian Studies. Our colleague Moritoki Škof Nagisa, who also helped editing this section, offers a prologue on his lecture to the poems created after the great earthquake in Tohoku of 2011, which open up new topics such as ecological catastrophes caused by nuclear energy, loss of the meaning of words in the contemporary era in which information is exchanged at a lightning speed.

The following article by Yamasaki Kayoko gives us a deeper view in the world of previously mentioned poet Takahashi Mustuo. The author particularly focuses on analysing the tree motif in his poems, from the early stages to the present day. The collection of poetry inspired by the poet's childhood, full of

tragic events such as his father's premature death and his mother's abandonment of him, is interwoven by autobiographical and mythological elements in a ringlike structure. However, after the year 2000 a new creative phase in his work ensues: the poet deals with the problems facing our world such as ecological issues, disintegration of the family, terrorism, etc.

Fukuma Kenji, the author of the next contribution on Japanese literature, deals the so called *dankai* generation, a generation born during Japan's post-war baby boom. As consumers of culture in a society which was becoming richer, they experienced a "hot season" around 1970. Sato Yasushi's *Jazzmen in Street Fighting* and Sasaki Mikiro's *Whip of the Dead* are two pioneer works born in an undulation of political movement in the late 60s. At a certain point in the 1970s the whole scene changed. People entered a state of strange happiness with problems unsolved.

In the section "Asian Studies in Slovenia" we have three articles written in Slovene by three young Slovene researches. The section begins with Luka Culiberg's research about the Japanese national language and the modern structural linguistic's approach to understanding the language in the social contexts. He focuses on the ideological overview of linguistic deliberations of Tokieda Motoki (時枝誠記 1900–1967), who attempted to justify the colonial language policy of Japanese Empire in Taiwan and Korea. The second article by Klemen Senica exposes one of the most controversial issues in Japan's foreign relations with its neighbouring countries, particularly China and South Korea. The topic discussed is the Yasukuni Shrine and the practice of politicians, especially prime ministers, going to the shrine and paying respect to the soldiers who died for the "Japanese cause". The author looks into this topic in a broader context of imperialist nostalgia, the wave of which has been coming over Japan since the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The third article in this section is written by Saša Istenič, a Taiwan specialist, who analyzes Slovene media coverage of the dispute between Japan, China and Taiwan over the sovereignty of the Diaoyu/Diaoyutai/Senkaku islands, one of the most serious maritime territorial disputes in East Asia. The news stories on the dispute are researched by applying a combined quantitative and qualitative content analysis.

Though the authors of the present collection often hold very divergent views regarding many aspects of Japanese culture, they all share a complex intellectual culture which enables them to explore the Japanese society, bringing some new

insights into research. We hope that the collection before you will contribute to a deeper understanding of old and new, traditional and contemporary issues related to Japan. It is our hope that this collection would induce future investigations, point to new aspects and questions, and open new horizons for the appreciation of diversity and variety of Japanese society.

I wish all readers an enjoyable reading.

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