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JANE M. BACHNIK

TIME, SPACE AND PERSON IN JAPANESE RELATIONSHIPS

Introduction

THE Japanese are often characterized by great sensitivity to relationships. As Lebra writes, 'The overwhelming impression from the literature, as well as from my personal observations, is that the Japanese are extremely sensitive to and concerned about social interaction and relationships' (1976: 2). 'For the Japanese *ningensei* ("humanity", or "human-beingness") takes precedence over everything else' (ibid.: 6).

Such sensitivity is not directed primarily towards marital or family relationships, but towards '. . .other relationships, *even at the expense of the former*' (ibid.; emphasis added). This means that relationships are primarily identified with the broad spectrum of social life *outside* the primary group, or family. It has been well documented that ties are central to many arenas of Japanese social life, including enterprise productivity, which is increasingly related to a 'fundamental humaneness about the mode of organizing people' (Cole 1979: 252). In addition, government ministries, Diet representatives, political parties

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and large-enterprise families are linked in extensive networks (Yanaga 1968; Hamabata 1983); and large-scale enterprises have extensive sub-contracting ties. Both religion and morality are also based on human ties: ethics on '*the relationship between man and man*' (Watsuji, cited in Lebra 1976:12), and Confucianism, as Smith puts it (1983: 103), on 'the centerpiece of the Cosmos [which] is human society and its manifold relationships'.

Yet major difficulties remain in the conceptualization of relationships. For example, there is considerable agreement among scholars of Japan that relationships are constituted by practice (meaning performance), and exist *in* space and time (Kumon 1982; Lebra 1976; Maraini 1975; Nakane 1970; Nakamura 1968). Words for 'relationship', such as *tsukiai*, or *tsukiai kankei*, have strong connotations of doing. Furthermore, human beings are consistently described as 'always. . .existing in a network of human relationships' (ibid.: 192), '. . .invariably identified as acting in some kind of human relationship, never autonomously' (Smith 1983: 49). Even the word for human being conveys this sense. *Ningen* (人間) is made up of two terms: *nin* (人) meaning 'person' or 'people' (also read *hito*), and *gen* (間) meaning 'space', 'space between', 'space of time', 'an interval' (also read *kan*, *ma*, or *aida*). *Ningen* is often used with the word *kankei* (relation), which implies both 'connectedness' and 'participation'.

The strong implications from these translations are that Japanese relations are constituted by practice and exist *in* space and time. The analytical difficulty stemming from such characterizations is that of objectification and the relation of objectified models to performance in space and time. In his extensive (and excellent) discussion of this question, Bourdieu (1977) has pointed out that objectification omits time, and that time is essential to the practice of social life. For example, in gift-giving reversible patterns of reciprocity are experienced by the participants as *irreversible*, because of the interval between gift and counter-gift (ibid.: 6–7). The abstracted patterns do illuminate one aspect of social life (reciprocity), but they omit the equally crucial aspect of how reciprocity works in time.[1]

Like gift-giving, relationships are experienced in time, and time constitutes them as a dialogue with the 'other' which is constructed as it goes along. As Lebra puts this (1976: 7), 'The Japanese Ego acts upon or toward Alter with the awareness or anticipation of Alter's response, and Alter in turn. . .influences Ego's further action. . . . Activation of the chain cannot be attributed to either Ego or Alter exclusively but to both or to the relationship between the two.'

Smith also notes that both self and other can be expressed only in relational terms. 'There are no fixed points, either [for] "self" or "other". . . .' (1983: 77) The implication is that the self is constituted in interaction with others, and both Plath (1976, 1980) and Smith (1983) have called for an interactionist approach to the Japanese self.

1. '[E]ven if reversibility is the objective truth of the discrete acts which. . .are called gift exchanges, it is not the whole truth of a practice which could not exist if it were consciously perceived in accordance with the model' (Bourdieu 1977: 6).

Figures 1 and 2: Self/Other Relationships
(Adapted from Nakane 1972: 138)

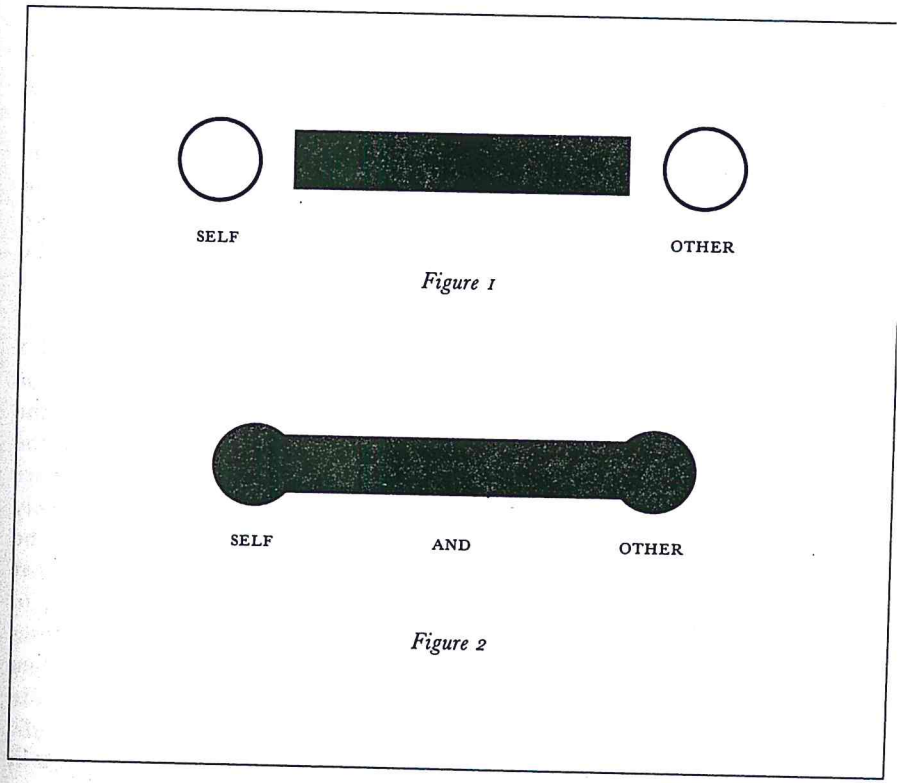


Figure 1

Figure 2

Nakane has also noted this aspect of relationship in a set of figures which she presents on 'self' and 'other'. In Figure 1 self and other are separate entities, who must create a connection between them (the Western view). In Figure 2 self and other are interconnected by a tie (the Japanese view). Nakane comments that the focus in Figure 1 is on the '*poles*' of self/other, in Figure 2 on the '*and*' between the two (1972: 138).

Nakane's Figures capture in a nutshell virtually all of the problems involved with the idea of relationship. Relationship as a connective 'and' between self and other cannot be extracted from the context in which it exists (between self and other). Relationship is not substantive, but dynamic. It has to do with the creation of self and other.

Because of this, Nakane's diagram is paradoxical. The very point Nakane is trying to communicate (that relationships are *in* time and practice) is negated by the way in which the relationships have been removed from time and practice in

this representation. Only in time and space can *ningen* be defined in a field of ties (*ma*), or a social nexus (*aidagara*). Nakane is not the only one caught in this paradox. Lebra's definition of a 'Japanese ethos', whose chief characteristics of social interaction and relationships are depicted in the term 'social relativism', is also paradoxical—since the interactional context which is necessary to give 'social relativism' its meaning has had to be abstracted to arrive at the label.

Because the contradictions involved in 'relationship' seem basic to Japanese society, I think it is imperative to acknowledge the existence of these paradoxes, rather than to gloss over them. But what is really at issue here? The issue of self and other which Nakane attempts to represent in such diagrams is not simply the relationship of a particular self and other, as Nakane indicates. It is also related to a more general set of issues regarding self and other, that of the relation of the individual to a more general other—that of society. In this sense we can read the Figures on two levels: as representing two perspectives toward self and other, and also as representing two perspectives for approaching the self and society.

This opens up the perspective of 'relationships' to include much more complex issues. Instead of viewing relationships as objective data on the social horizon, the issue of approach itself must be consciously examined, as the relation of the researcher to that social horizon. This relation, in turn, must be included in the ultimate depiction of the social order. Objectification is of critical interest here because it permeates social science approaches so thoroughly that it goes largely unrecognized. By objectification I mean not only the objective stance of the observer, but a stance toward *social life* itself as observed and objectified so that '. . .in taking up a point of view on the action, withdrawing from it in order to observe it from above and from a distance, [the anthropologist]. . .constitutes practical activity as an *object of observation and analysis, a representation*' (Bourdieu 1977: 2). This is illustrated by both of the polar dichotomies of self/other in Figure 1.

I am proposing that objectifying relationships has obscured important issues in Japanese social life. As 'things' (data) which are perceived on the social horizon, relationships are problematic, as I hope to demonstrate. But even more problematic is that as 'things', they are passive rather than active, and the productive part they play in the construction of social life is obscured. In this sense I believe relationships to be crucial in understanding Japanese social organization since, by viewing relationships as constructed in practice, we can also view social life as constructed in practice. This changes the perspective of the inquiry—from an investigation of what relationships are, to an investigation of how they work; from how relationships are organized to how they organize.

Relationships will be approached here, not as the lowest-level 'building blocks' of society, which must be integrated into higher levels, but as organizing factors themselves. The very term 'relationship' means a linkage, a connecting, and it is perfectly reasonable that relationship is a connective in a higher-level sense—relating self not only to other but to the social order (in the sense of what are usually considered as rules, structures and patterns).

In order to demonstrate that issues of approach such as those raised above have practical consequences, I will now explore a set of problems currently being raised about the portrayal of self and other in Japanese society.

There are two issues that have been focal points regarding the definition of self and other in Japan, and both of these revolve around the organization of 'person'. The first is the problem of variation in defining person, both in the Japanese language and in the psychology of the self. The second is the excessively holistic and unified representation of Japanese society via the group, or 'group model' (commented on by Sugimoto and Mouer [1980] and Befu [1980]); it virtually leaves the 'individual' out of the account.

Let me first briefly elaborate on both these matters. The problem of variation in Japanese person terms is well known and commonly cited in cross-cultural descriptions on Japan (for example, Befu and Norbeck 1958; Fischer 1964; Neustupný 1978; Suzuki 1973, 1976, 1978; Wolff 1980). To illustrate the point: Fischer (1964) reports ten terms used for reference and address in one three-member family; Smith (1983) notes a minimum of fourteen terms used by boys and girls for reference and address. The terms also vary from family to family and person to person. Thus, where 'I' and 'you' would be used in English, multiple terms are required in Japanese, and these include names, age-status terms, kin terms, place-names and zero terms. In addition, the self is defined as 'open-ended' (Suzuki 1973, 1976, 1978), 'relational' or 'variable' (Araki 1973).

However, the perspectives on person and self which define the self as variable are those of the *pole* of self (Figure 1), rather than the relationship between the poles; this difficulty has been noted by Plath (1980) and Smith (1983).[2] It is the focus on the pole of self (and the expectation of consistency at the pole) that defines either self or person in interaction as variable.

On the other hand, the pole of the other as abstract collective has most often been approached in terms of the human collective, or group, which has thus been considered as *the* unit of Japanese social organization. The second set of criticisms has focused on the group as a model, which depicts the human group as too rigidly organized, too uniform, and too devoid of personal self. The complete submergence of the self in the group, and the characterization of the group by consensus, harmony, paternalism, loyalty, dependency, hierarchy and holism have also been brought into question.[3]

2. Smith puts this strongly (1983: 74): 'It is not mere idle speculation to suggest that our understanding of these matters would be very different today if over the past thirty-five years research had been conducted in the framework of the interactionist social psychology of figures like George Herbert Mead and Henry Stack Sullivan. . . . Had the intellectual influences been different, we should long since have had an eminently plausible picture of the Japanese conception of the self.' Plath's *Long Engagaments* (1980) is an intriguing experiment toward an interactional portrayal of the life-cycle.

3. These criticisms are extensive, and include three conferences on alternative models: at Shaker Town, Kentucky, in August 1978 (organized by Harumi Befu); in Yamanashi prefecture, Japan, in

These criticisms are both astute and relevant. Yet I notice an [illegible] relationship in the way these two problems of self and other are defined. They are like two sides of the same coin. While the self is characterized by enormous variation, the group and its members are depicted by virtual uniformity. The extreme situational flexibility of the self can also be contrasted with rigid obedience to the minutely defined rules of the group.

Moreover, the change of logical type from 'group' to 'group *model*' is important, since the latter is a meta-level statement. The unacknowledged slippage from 'group' to 'group *model*' leaves an important question unresolved: is the *model* or is the *human group* too rigidly organized, uniform, and devoid of personal self? Do holism, consensus, harmony, etc. reflect characteristics of the *model* (as the social-order pole of Figure 1), or characteristics of the human *group*? Confusion over the logical level of these characteristics leads to constant slippage from human practice (which may be varying and inconsistent in social context) to analytical constructs which cannot be human, in this sense. The connection between analysis and practice is re-established by making the characteristics *prescriptive*, applicable to *all* group interaction. The construction of the model then eliminates conflicts, dissent and tension from Japanese groups. It is precisely this situation which has led to severe criticisms of the inability of the group model to deal with conflicts, dissent and tension (by Befu [1980] and Sugimoto and Mouer [1980]).[4] Befu rightly points to the relationship between group harmony and *tatemae* (the presentation of group life to outsiders) as representing only one aspect of group social life—its public version, or *kireigoto* (1980: 36, 39). *Tatemae* is simply one facet of the group's portrayal of itself, rather than a blueprint for its organization. But here again it should be stressed that *tatemae* (as self-defined ideology) and the group model (defined from the researcher's perspective) reflect different logical levels of analysis.

I think it is significant that not only the self but also the group has been repeatedly described both by Japanese and others as located in experience, time and space. Kumon translates group as *sō* (1982: 23–4)—'our' company, 'this' household, 'us'—which specifies the group as 'placed', or located in experience. A number of basic concepts for Japanese society all relate to the experiential context of the group: for example, *bun*, *mibun* (position, place) (Lebra 1976); *shozoku* (belonging) (ibid.); 'identity' (Kumon 1982); *ba*, or group 'frame' (defining 'this' group)—in contrast to 'attribute', which transcends the group (Nakane 1970). Kumon also relates the group to *ma* (field of ties) and *aidagara* (social nexus), both of which are connected with *ningen* as 'human relationship' (1982: 12).

July 1979 (organized by Befu and Nakano Takashi); and in Canberra, Australia, in May 1980 (organized by Sugimoto and Mouer). The latter produced a special issue of *Social Analysis* (in December 1980), as well as a newsletter (*Dialogue*) and a series of research projects aimed at focusing on the individual, instead of the group.

4. For further discussion on logical types see Bateson (1955; reprinted in 1972: 177–93). Confusion over logical levels in 'group model' and 'group' results (in Bateson's words) in a mistake of the order of eating the menu instead of the food.

[illegible] difficulties with self and other again bring us back to the paradox Figure 2. The problems of consistency in the self and of lack of variation in th group can be related directly to the polar perspectives of the self/oth dichotomy. I am proposing that these are not empirical problems, but rath problems of definition. But the question at issue, rather than the definition of more consistent self or a less uniform group, can now be posed as a problem on different level: as the relation of self and social order; the relation of consistenc and variation; and of multiplicity and unity in Japanese social life.

It is now useful to examine Figures 1 and 2 more carefully, to ascertain bette the relationships of self and social order which they express. Here, Figure 1 represents the dominant approaches to social thought in the history of the West as being located at the poles of the individual and the social order. The two poles represent two perspectives which are prominent in philosophical and social-science terminology. Thus the pole of the individual is also concrete, empirical and real; while the pole of the social order is abstract and ideal (and viewed as form, pattern, structure, rule or norm). The pole of the social order is also at a different level of abstraction from the pole of the individual, for it is generalized, while the latter represents the particular, the case.[5]

The larger issues which each of the pair of polar perspectives addresses is the relation of multiplicity (or multiple different individuals) to unity (or one social order). Each of the polar perspectives is valid, as Stark points out (1962), because each addresses a facet of the relation of self to society. The difficulty stems from the multiplicity of perspectives on social life which must exist: the visible manifestation of society is the individual, yet individuals share traditions which they do not originate (including those which produced and defined the individual as individual). The shared traditions, patterns and institutions (which make up the social order) are not empirically visible, but must be abstracted from the instances of individual situations.

In addition to the poles of the individual and the social order, a third perspective is possible, as Stark points out: that of the *relation* of self to the social order, of multiplicity to unity. Although this perspective is relatively rare in the history of Western social theory, I would argue that it dominates the Japanese approach to self and social order. The perspective is present in the Japanese interpretation of Confucianism, as well as Shinto. But this should not confuse the issue that the perspective of self *and* social order is expressed primarily in practice—i.e. in terms of everyday interaction in Japan—in contrast with the academic discourse of philosophers and social scientists in the West:

> Western pragmatism appears historically on the scene of thought as a reaction to idealism. . . . [It is] academic, it originally took birth, as a theory, in the heads of philosophers. . . . Japanese pragmatism has its roots in the life, work, beliefs of the people, it is something born in the thought processes of farmers, fishermen, potters, carpenters, and their like (Maraini 1975: 70).

5. I do not wish to imply that the polar representations are consistent; Evens (1977) discusses the contradictions, paradoxes and confusions surrounding these terms. Stark (1962) uses them as the basis for a history of social thought.

Thus the problem of defining 'relationship' in Japanese society emerges as a set of complex and important issues. These include the relation of self to other in time and space, versus relations-as-objectified; the relation of self to the social order, versus polar views of self *or* social order; the relation of concrete to abstract, multiplicity to unity, versus the dichotomies of concrete *or* abstract, multiplicity *or* unity. The ethnographic issue of Japanese relationships emerges as a double discourse, in the broad sense of this term—both at the level of ongoing social life and at the meta-level of significant issues in Western philosophy and the social sciences. The subject thus has the potential to be illuminating on both of these levels.

Time, Space and Person in Japanese Discourse

I will now turn to the question of time, space and person in Japanese society, toward developing a perspective which approaches self *and* other in time and space. There are three parts to this perspective. First, I will discuss an approach to relationship which is more compatible with the Japanese perspective. I will then relate this approach to a specific ethnographic context, that of the *ie* (translated as 'household'). Finally, I will discuss more broadly the implications of this perspective *vis-à-vis* Japanese society.

In developing a perspective for relationship which can move between the polar dichotomies I have delineated, I will proceed by discussing language, and specifically differentiate between referential versus indexical perspectives toward meaning. I will focus on indexing, and indexical meaning, as relevant for approaching Japanese social life. My focus is not only on language, however, but on social life, and I wish to show how these perspectives on language are also perspectives on social life.

The very problem with defining person in Japanese may be a by-product of the expectation of a consistent set of terms for self and other (Bachnik 1982). Most linguists agree that no class of pronouns exists in Japanese, and that names, age-status terms, kin terms, place-names, and zero terms are all used where pronouns would be used in Indo-European languages. Thus not only do person terms vary, but also the circle of terms is considerably expanded in Japanese. Yet 'person' (and pronouns) in other Asian languages—such as Vietnamese (Luong 1984), Kawi (Becker and Oka 1974), Indonesian (Geertz 1960, 1973), Korean, Burmese, Cambodian, Thai (Head 1978)—are also characterized by wide variation in terms used, and this is increasingly linked to a definition of person in discourse situations. Here it is extremely significant that person terms in Japanese are usually omitted in discourse, meaning that person is defined in discourse situations without reference to terminology.

Thus one says '*Ikimasu*', to mean 'I am going'. *Ikimasu* literally specifies 'going' (from the verb stem *iku*, 'to go'), as well as formality (from the formal suffix *masu*). But person (here 'I') is unspecified and must be understood from the context.

Furthermore, one can also say 'I am going' in a variety of other ways—for example, '*Iku*' (using the verb stem without the *masu* suffix), which communicates informality, as well as 'going'.

Although Japanese often communicate without using person terms, it is impossible to speak without using register. *Keigo*, or 'register' (also known as honorifics, speech levels, or polite language) is unavoidable in Japanese. As Jorden notes, 'Almost without exception even single utterances are marked for politeness and formality, and certainly anything longer than a two-item exchange will be so marked' (1978: 144). Register communicates a message about the relation of the speaker to the addressee (and/or the referent), and this message communicates varying degrees of social distance as well as deference or respect in Japanese (as well as in other Asian languages, such as Burmese, Cambodian, Korean and Javanese; see Head 1978: 187).

Thus a close relationship exists between register usage and the definition of person. In addition to reference, or naming (and often in lieu of it), the Japanese speaker is defining a continuum between self and other which is signified by the use of register. Nor is this distance continuum peculiar to person in Japanese, or in other Asian languages. Linguists acknowledge that reference is not the only function, even for Indo-European pronouns. 'I' is defined *in relation to 'you'* (see Forchheimer 1953). Becker and Oka (1974: 229) refer to this relation between 'I' and 'you' as a distance cline which is central,

> . . .perhaps *the* central thread in the semantic structure of all languages. . . . Between the subjective, pointed specific pronominal 'I' and the objective, generic common noun, between these poles *the words of all languages* are ordered and categorized according to their distance—spatial, temporal, biological, and metaphorical—from the first person, the speaker. (Emphasis added)

Edmund Leach has also discussed a self/other distance cline (1964) and argued that distance to or from the speaker defines the choice of animal terms used in verbal abuse. (We say 'You pig', 'dog', 'goat', 'swine', or 'ass', but not 'you ant-eater', 'son of a hippopotamus', or 'koala bear'.) Leach also spells out other clines—kinship and locational space—and relates closeness on one cline with closeness on others. (We neither eat our pets nor marry our sisters and brothers.)

The perspectives on language of both Leach and Becker are worth attention here. They both regard language not only as classifying 'things' in the environment, but also as defining the location of things-in-the-world in relation to us. To take this one step further, the 'world' of 'things' is not simply that of nature, which we learn by naming. *It is our relationship to the world which allows us to name things in the first place.*

This is an important point. At issue are two different approaches to language (and the world outside ourselves): through reference (naming), and through the distance cline the speaker signals between self and other. The second approach relates more closely to Charles Franklin Peirce's system of signs than it does to that of Ferdinand de Saussure. Peirce's approach to signs is defined in terms of relationships, and breaks down into tripartite sets of relationships between symbol, icon and index. The index, considered by Peirce to be the most

important of the three kinds of signs, communicates a relationship between the entity signalled and the signalling entity (smoke is an index of fire; a rap on the door is an index of someone seeking entry; see Hartshorne and Weiss 1931; Buchler 1940).

More pertinent to this discourse, a pointing finger is also an index, which 'is based upon the idea of identification, or drawing attention to, by pointing' (Lyons 1977: 637). For example, 'this' and 'that', 'here' and 'there', 'now' and 'then'—all these are pointers, and each is defined in relation to a set of coordinates, gauged from the speaker's perspective. The speaker, as 'I', *anchors* the discourse as the zero-point from which spatio-temporal distance is gauged; the relationship between speaker and addressee (and/or referent), which indexing communicates, is also spatio-temporal. My use here of the term 'index' corresponds to the meaning of the term 'deixis'.[6]

Indexes are thus performative, rather than purely referential. 'I' does more than simply 'name' the speaker—'I' is also in space and time, the very 'I' who is uttering this statement *here* and *now* (Lyons 1977: 645). To put this even more strongly, 'I' is what allows 'here' and 'now' to be understood in the first place. Seen in this way, pronouns are pointers; and one of the major functions which 'I' performs is that of 'locating', 'anchoring' the discourse (ibid.; Benveniste 1971: 226).

These two perspectives on language—reference and indexing—can be related to the two perspectives on self and other, as objectified and in practice, which have already been discussed above. Thus the objectified poles of self/other can be related to reference—and a focus on *what* the participants say. The continuum between self and other can be related to index—and a focus on *how* the participants anchor and index the 'world' both of reference and of social ties (the other) in relation to themselves. Yet in approaching language, as well as social life, we in the West have focused predominantly on the poles rather than the continuum; on reference rather than index; and on *what* rather than *how*.[7]

One of the unfortunate consequences of this focus has been the lack of application of indexing and deixis to the investigation of social life (Silverstein 1976). Yet indexicality, with its close connection to performative discourse, as well as to time and space, is unavoidably social, just as discourse is social. Moreover, it is also ontological, for the speaker who anchors time and space is *in* time and space. The implications of this are extremely important: the indexical perspective, to make an unavoidable inference, is one of being *in* the world. This means it can be linked both to practice and to phenomenological perspectives, such as those of Heidegger (1962), Ortega (1957), Merleau-Ponty (1962) and Erwin Straus (1967).

6. On indexicality and deixis see, for example, Benveniste 1971, Fillmore 1975, Jakobson 1957, Levinson 1983, Lyons 1977, or Silverstein 1976.

7. As Silverstein puts this (1976: 15), 'All of our analytic techniques and formal descriptive machinery have been designed for referential signs, which contribute to referential utterances in referential speech events.' Index has been approached through reference, as 'riding on' reference, and for this reason has been largely the province of linguists (as well as philosophers).

For all of these, the basic starting-point for social life is that of being *in* the world. 'It is not the case that man "is" and then has, by way of an extra, a relationship-of-Being towards the "world"—a world which he provides himself occasionally' (Heidegger 1962). Rather, being *in* the world is crucial for our orientation both to self and the world: 'We don't live in a homogeneous, isometric, isotropic space—or a geometric space—*but a space in which we orient ourselves. . . .*' (Straus 1967: 117; emphasis added).

This orientation is accomplished by a set of spatio-temporal coordinates for the cardinal directions, defined by Straus (1967: 118) as above and below, in front and behind, left and right. All of these coordinates require the existence of a zero-point (my body), in relation to which they must be defined (also Merleau-Ponty 1962). Ortega puts the point clearly:

> [This orientation]. . .does not allow me to be ubiquitous. At every moment it fixes me to one spot like a nail and exiles me from everything else. . . . I can change my place, but whatever place it may be, it will be my 'here'. Apparently, here and I, I and here, are inseparable for life. And since the world, with all the things in it, must be for me from 'here,' it automatically becomes a perspective—that is, its things are near to or far from *here*, to right or left of *here*, above or below *here*. And this perspective is a perspective *in time* as well—the *here* is a *now* (1957: 74).

Thus the indexical relationship between 'here' and 'there', 'now' and 'then', 'I' and 'you', of time and space in discourse, can also be related to the directional coordinates of vertical and horizontal, front and back, left and right, which orient the self toward the 'world', both physical and social. We locate ourselves constantly in time and space by a set of coordinates which tell us 'where things are'. We also locate ourselves socially (for example by introductions and genealogies), and by our perception of our relationships *vis-à-vis* others (which we then objectify as 'status' and 'role'). The process is similar to reading the spatial coordinates of a map, using the little red dot which says 'You are here'. Without this dot one is unable to read a map; while without locating or 'reading' the social distance between self and other, one is unable to perform adequately in social life.

Yet our spatio-temporal orientation through the use of these coordinates is more than simply a means by which we locate *our* relation to the world. The world is located by orienting it *in relation to ourselves*, just as a camera requires constant adjustment of the lens in focusing the picture. While we have generally assumed the *world* to be 'given', and such spatio-temporal orientation to be riding on the 'given-ness' of the world, the evidence suggests that it is rather the other way round—that spatio-temporal orientations are crucial in organizing our perceptive frame of reference which emerges as 'the world'.

In order to illustrate the point that indexing is essential to our comprehension of the 'objective' world of reference, it is necessary to consider examples of situations where reference fails because indexing fails. I will use two sets of cases: the first, documented by a surgeon, Marius von Senden, who in 1932 investigated the spatial conceptions of congenitally blind patients after successful cataract surgery. The second case refers to the record of two neurosurgeons concerning the aphasic victim of a car accident (Yamadori and Albert 1973).

Von Senden documented the differences between tactile and visual senses of

space:

> Before the operation a doctor would give a patient a cube and a sphere; the patient would tongue it or feel it with hands and name it correctly. After the operation the doctor would show the patients the same objects without letting them touch them; now they had no clue as to what they were seeing (Dillard 1974: 27).

The lack of spatio-temporal orientation, normally derived from sight, drastically affected these patients' orientation to the world. When asked how large his mother was, one patient put his thumb and index finger about an inch apart to show the size (von Senden 1960: 52). 'A house that is a mile away is thought of as nearby, but requiring the taking of a lot of steps. . . .' (Ibid.: 41) One patient took off one of his boots, threw it some way off in front of him, attempted to gauge the distance, took another few steps and tried to grasp it, then moved on again and groped for the boot until he finally got hold of it (Dillard 1974: 28). When asked what he could see when he first opened his eyes, the patient

> . . .saw an extensive field of light, in which everything appeared dull, confused, and in motion. He could not distinguish objects. . . . Soon after his operation a patient generally bumps into one of these colour-patches and observes them to be substantial. . . . In walking about it also strikes him. . .that he is continually passing in between the colours he sees, that he can go past a visual object, that a part of it. . .disappears from view. . . . Thus he gradually comes to realize that there is also a space behind him, which he does not see (ibid.: 27–8).

Von Senden's cases document what cognitive psychologists have already told us—that the world is not passively 'seen' but actively constructed. 'Seeing' is learned through experience, and understood from spatio-temporal coordinates in relation to the self. This is such a basic skill that we are largely unaware that we are doing it. Yet it was so difficult for an adult to learn that many of the patients investigated by von Senden preferred to close their eyes and affect blindness.

The second case, documented by the two neurosurgeons Yamadori and Albert (1973), concerns a 54-year-old man who suffered a skull fracture, and severe motor and speech disturbances, as the result of a car accident. He recovered completely, except for certain difficulties, including an inability to name the basic categories of his body and ordinary objects in his room:

> When asked to point to a chair the patient stood up, looked around the room, then sat down, spelling to himself C-H-A-I-R; C-H-A-I-R. . . . He finally said, 'I have to double check that word later. I don't know.' (ibid.: 114).

The patient kept a notebook in which he made word-lists and diagrams. In it he drew a picture of the relation of ceiling, wall and floor. On this he had marked: 'Wall—from bottom to top; used from floor to ceiling. . . . Floor—walk on this area'. Another diagram portrayed the relation of his thigh, knee, leg, foot and toes. He drew in arrows to point out 'foot': 'below leg then knee and last thigh'. He demonstrated remarkable difficulty in naming the first day of the month and year, drawing maps, and drawing clock settings (ibid.: 116–19).

In this case, what the patient lacked in being unable to name his own parts of the body, or a chair, wall or floor, was not the names themselves, but a zero-point by which he could relate himself to his surroundings. His problem was thus most acute (because most visible) in his inability to identify those aspects of his surroundings (including his own body) which were closest to him. This case demonstrates that even objects in the environment—chairs, walls, tables, floors etc.—are not wholly objectified, but rather are understood by us in relation to a zero-point (ourselves).

I have developed these issues at some length because they bear directly on problems in approaching Japanese social life. Two basic perspectives exist for viewing self and other: the polar views of self (individual) and other (social order), and the relationship between these poles. Although they are in a figure/ground relationship, such that if either the self/other poles or the continuum between the poles is regarded as 'figure', the other perspective becomes 'ground'. Although both the polar perspectives and the continuum cannot be brought into simultaneous focus, it is significant that both perspectives do exist in all cultures, and both are necessary for understanding social life. Yet Japan and the West have each focused on the opposite perspective as 'figure' for viewing social life. The West has focused on the poles (and this has resulted in the development of concepts of structure and the individual, as well as objectification and referential meaning). The Japanese have developed to a fine art the relationships *between* the poles, *between* self and social order. This has resulted in a focus on social life in practice, and on being in time and space.

Because each of the two self/other perspectives involves an approach to social life, they are incompatible, in the sense that each must define the other. The issue is whether to start with 'names', the world of reference, and use this to define time, space and distance (in the path of Newton)—or whether to start with a zero-point (for example, the 'I' of Indo-European discourse), a distance cline *between* self and other, and thus to work from the other direction, using distance to define reference.

I believe that the zero-point and distance cline are much more appropriate than referential meaning as a starting-point for approaching Japanese social life. This means that index (rather than symbol), distance *between* (rather than figure or name), and pointing—'this'/'that', 'here'/'there'—(rather than reference) should be used as starting-points in the study of Japanese social life.

The spatio-temporal (deictic) coordinates between self and other are acknowledged as organizational parameters for discourse. Deixis is also acknowledged to be universal (Lyons 1977: 646). As organizing parameters, index (or deixis) is in no way unique to Japan. What I am proposing, however, is that the Japanese have utilized the deictic parameters which organize discourse for social organization as well—hence the emphasis on 'place' or 'field' (*ba*, *tachiba* [Nakane 1970: 1]), 'share', 'fraction' (*bun*, *mibun* [Lebra 1976: 67]), 'position' (Embree 1939; Norbeck 1954; Cornell 1956; Beardsley *et al.* 1959; Plath 1964; Nakane 1967; Kitaoji 1971; Bachnik 1983), and the extensive use of distance and directional coordinates in linguistic register. These coordinates are spatio-temporal—but they are not abstract. They are located in the here and now by human beings interacting in space and time; they are used to relate self to

other, and self to the environmental universe.

It should be obvious that the study of Japanese social life in this way will require a reorientation of approach. For example, it will require a situation (and an anchor-point). It must depict the process of social life (such as dialogue); and it must be *in* time. The researcher must also be *in* the situation and *in* time. These reorientations relate to many of the issues being raised about ethnography at present—such as social life as dialogue (Clifford 1983; Marcus 1980; Marcus and Cushman 1982; Gumperz 1982; Bakhtin 1981), the relation of time to social life (Bourdieu 1977), and the relation of the researcher to the ethnographic text.[8] Note that it is inappropriate to raise 'objectivity' as a problem of method in this case, since objectification is the very issue which I bring into question (and therefore is the *subject* of the inquiry).

Time and Space: Two Scenes

It is impossible to carry out the entire programme defined above in the space which is available here.[9] Instead, I will briefly sketch a context of two small scenes, which are not meant as any kind of empirical 'proof' for the theoretical position I am outlining.[10] The scenes are necessary to deal with the paradox I have pointed out in the portrayal of Japanese social life—that being anchored in time and space is omitted in objectified social-science models. This makes portrayal of a social context necessary. I am aware that this cannot be the actual context, but only a report of it.

The scenes took place in an *ie* (household), which I shall call the Kato house, where I lived and undertook research during a series of visits totalling five years over a sixteen-year period, from 1967 to 1984; the scenes I shall be describing took place when I had known the members of the Kato household for about five years (the word *ie* is variously translated as 'family' or 'household' since it has components both of kinship and enterprise; neither translation is fully adequate). The Katos are a farm household in Nagano prefecture.

Scene 1

The setting: a large farmhouse fronting onto a garden which is blooming profusely on a mild September day. The house is opened up all along the front

8. The literature on this subject (including ethnographies) is too extensive to cite. Excellent discussions include Marcus 1980, Marcus and Cushman 1982 and Clifford 1983.

9. A book which attempts this is forthcoming from Stanford University Press.

10. Such a 'proof' is incompatible with the focus of this paper, which assumes (and investigates) the relationship between subject and object, between 'data' and their construction by the researcher, and between the poles of empirical and abstract reality, discussed above.

(south) side, and four guests are making their way along the stepping-stones through the garden. Beckoned onward by those inside the house, they walk up a stone stairway, remove their shoes, step up to the *tatami* mats and kneel, bowing so their heads touch the floor, as they meet those in the house. They present gifts to those in the house, who bow just as low in return. The guests return the bow of the hosts, and then rise, as they are invited over to sit at a low table on *zabuton* (cushions).

The guests are the bride-to-be, who will soon marry the eldest son (and successor of the household), her father, mother, and father's sister. The hosts are the wife (*okāsan*) and her husband's sister (*obasan*). I am also there, greeting the guests. The *okāsan* and *obasan* bring tea for the guests, and we all sit, quietly sipping the tea, and enjoying the view of the garden. The hosts leave, and I am left to talk with the guests. The room is open to the garden on two sides, and this openness makes it seem as if we are almost in the garden. Flies buzz in and out, and the sun shines into the room. At the far end of the room from the garden is an alcove which has a flower arrangement—made from flowers in the garden—and several scrolls, mounted on silk, hanging on the walls.

Eventually, the two women return with the first course of an elaborate meal which is tastefully arranged on hand-painted porcelain and lacquerware dishes. Although it is now nearly three o'clock, the guests are reserved as they approach the food. They sample a few pieces from each dish, eating delicately, remarking on the freshness of the farm vegetables, but they do not finish all the food.

Conversation in the meal is punctuated by quiet pauses. We finish with tea, which seems to accentuate the quiet calm of the afternoon, and the laziness of the feeling of sunshine coming in from the garden. There is a feeling of calm, making us feel removed from the hustle and bustle of daily life.

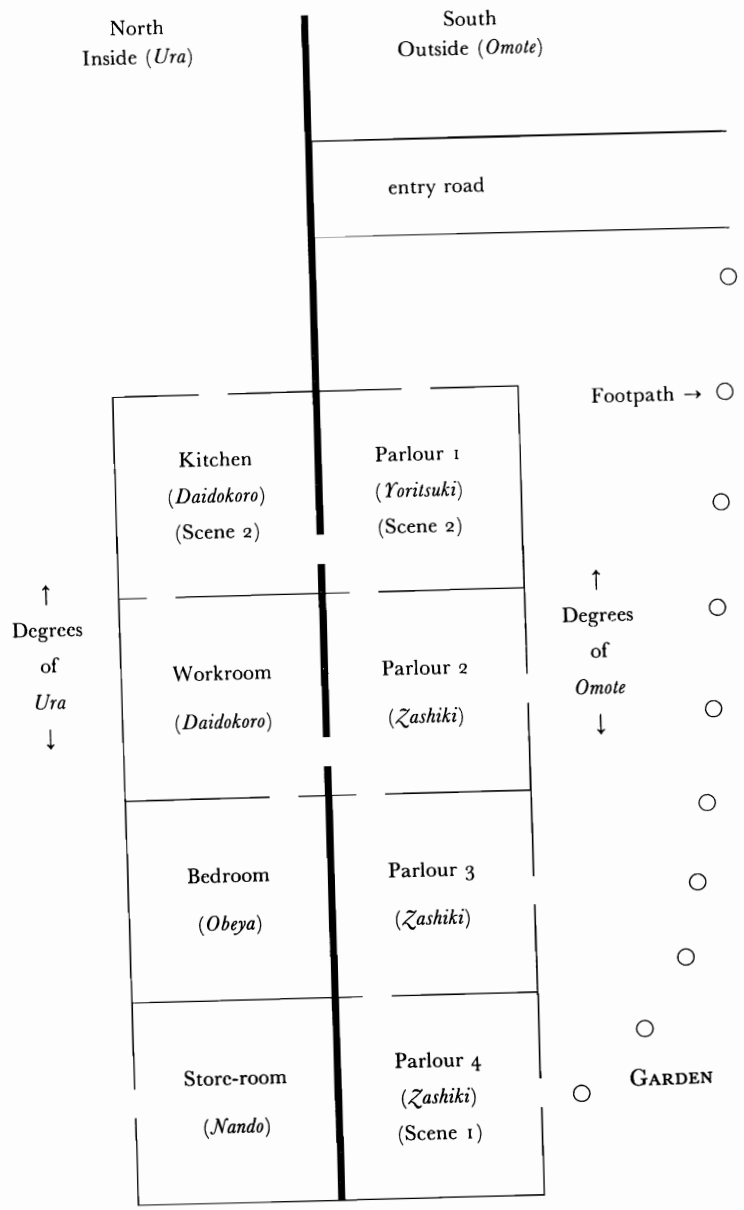
Scene 2

The setting: several hours before Scene 1, in a different room of the same farmhouse. Three women are sitting at the *kotatsu* (a table with a hole cut into the floor beneath it, used as a place to sit at and for warming oneself in winter). This room also fronts onto the garden, but does not have a good view. The room is cluttered and looks lived in; holes have been poked in the paper-covered doors (*shoji*), and magazines and children's schoolbooks are lying about. A TV is in the corner. The *tatami* mats are old and worn, and there are cracks in the fittings of the doors and windows.

The three women at the *kotatsu* are the *okāsan*, the *obasan*, who has come on a visit for the day, and myself. The two women are talking about goings-on in their households (the husband's sister has married into another house), gossiping, and drinking tea. Conversational register is very informal and the talk is punctuated by howls of laughter and slaps on the back, performed with great gusto by the *okāsan*. Suddenly the telephone rings in the next room, and the *okāsan* goes to answer it. We hear a loud shriek through the walls—then a pause.

The *okāsan* comes back into the room and begins talking in an even more

Figure 3: House Plan of the Kato Household



animated fashion than before. '*Ah komaru. TaiHEN komaru!*' I gather from what she is saying that the eldest son, who is about to be married, has just arrived at the railway station in the next town with the bride-to-be and her relatives—seven hours early. Nothing is ready; the preparations have not even been started—and yet they will be here within half an hour.

The *okāsan* is still recounting the conversation, and moaning about what she can do, when the *obasan* gets up and begins climbing out of the *kotatsu*, unwrapping a bundle which she has beside her: 'Don't worry about a thing! I've brought my work clothes [*mompei*], and I'm all set to help. We'll have things ready in no time.'

The *okāsan* protests—rather weakly—that the *obasan* is a guest and certainly cannot be expected to help. The *obasan* responds by pulling on her *mompei*, saying as she does so, 'Can't work in a kimono. Slows you down something terrible.'

The *okāsan* protests—even more weakly—while they move off in the direction of the kitchen, and then, quickly, they get down to business, and I am delegated to go to the shop. The two women work furiously and manage to have a complete meal ready within a couple of hours, while I am again delegated to occupy the guests after they arrive.

As empirical manifestations of social life, both scenes are different—in almost every way. At the same time each is connected to the other, for each produced the other (the kitchen scene was produced by the telephone call, and the kitchen scene in turn produced the meal which was central to Scene 1).

Each of these scenes is characterized by communication in a number of different modes: for example, the greetings, bowing, the giving and receiving of gifts and food, spatial communication, speech register, kind of dress worn, and communication content. There are two kinds of messages (following Bateson 1972): 1) information messages ('They're seven hours early!'), communicating *what* people say (content); and 2) relational meta-messages (like that of distance in register usage), communicating *how* far away people define themselves *vis-à-vis* each other (form).

The expression of self and other which took place in Scene 1 in Parlour 4 (see Figure 3) was characterized by formality of dress and speech register, by the giving of expensive and aesthetically pleasing gifts (by the guests), and by the giving of a specially prepared and artfully arranged meal (by the Katos). In this scene relatively few informational (content) messages and a great number of relational (form) messages were communicated.

The messages 'say' that the two groups of people (the Katos and the house of the bride-to-be) are *distant*, and the message is similar in each mode. Distance is communicated in both cases by formality, which can also be viewed as *difference* from everyday life. Aesthetics is important in communicating this difference, so that the sparse furnishings, indeed 'emptiness' of Parlour 4, the arrangement of the garden *vis-à-vis* the room, the art objects in the room, the tasteful arrangement of the food presented by the Katos, and the gifts and dress of the guests—all these give much attention to aesthetic form, and at the same time

communicate little *content*.[11]

The communication of self and other which took place in Scene 2, in contrast, was characterized by *informality* of dress and use of speech register, by the giving of much more ordinary gifts (cakes for the house ancestors), and by the receiving of tea and crackers (*senbei*) by the guest. The relational messages in Scene 2 were both informal and close; this scene was striking in the lack of aesthetics exhibited. For example, the number of household artefacts in the room, its degree of clutter, the lack of a good view of the garden, the cracks in the doors and windows, the informal dress, the informal speech register and the howls of laughter and slaps on the back, and the informal gifts and mode of tea-drinking—all these contrast with the formality in Scene 1.

Thus in the first scene all the modes of communication expressed formality, emptiness of content, and difference from ordinary everyday life—in other words, what people did and said expressed their relationship as 'far' (or as 'outside-ness'). Communication in the second scene expressed informality, everydayness, and a high degree of *content*—what people did and said expressed their relationship as 'close' (or as 'inside-ness').

Two concepts which express these clusters of relationships are *ura* ('inside-ness', content, informality, everydayness) and *omote* ('outside-ness', form, formality, difference from everydayness); both are major concepts in Japan. The communication in Scene 1 is obviously characterized by *omote*, and this word is also used to describe the section of the Kato house which makes up the four parlours. The communication in Scene 2 is characterized by *ura*, the word used to describe the section of the house which consists of the four back rooms. *Omote* and *ura* are much used in everyday discourse, in expressions such as *omote no hanashii* (literally, 'appearance talk', viz. 'what they do in order to impress others whose presence puts them on guard') and *ura no hanashii* (literally, 'inside' or 'inner talk', viz. 'their secrets which they will disclose only to those who are closest to them') (Doi 1973a: 259).

None of these glosses is adequate as a definition, for my point here is that *omote* and *ura* are indexes, rather than referential terms—that they define a distance cline, *between* self and other, rather than naming or describing any characteristic of either. Index thus hinges on context, on the perceived relationships between the Kato household and the two different sets of guests. The basis of defining the bride-to-be and her relatives as distant is that the marriage has not yet taken place; and this is the initial meeting of the people in Scene 1. The basis of defining the *okāsan*'s husband's sister as close is that she is the only sibling of the household head.

Most important of all, *omote/ura* (and these two scenes) do not represent dichotomies. Rather than specifying some 'thing', *omote* and *ura* index *degrees of distance* between self and other. Moreover distance in turn also functions as an index—pointing out *degrees of difference* between self and other. Rather than

11. 'Emptiness' in Japanese aesthetics may even be related to the emptiness in *content* of formal (*omote*) communication in such contexts.

formality versus informality, or 'ordinariness' versus 'non-ordinariness', *omote* and *ura* indicate the *degree of formality* (from formal to informal, along a continuum).

Yet, this is not all. I have already defined two levels of communication—that of the message (information), and that of the meta-message (relationship message). If we think of the information message as *content* and the relational message as *form*, then *omote/ura* have a double-*level* relationship as well, since *ura* has to do with content (as well as *lack of form*), while *omote* has to do with form (as well as *lack of content*). Scene 2 was also characterized by much more content, which was most obvious at the point of the telephone message when the *okāsan* let the *obasan* in on the crisis which had just arisen for the Kato house. This conversation produced a change in distance communication between the two women so that the guest (the *obasan*) left the *kotatsu*, changed into work clothes, and changed rooms (moving to the kitchen) in order to help the *okāsan* deal with the crisis created by the imminent arrival of the other guests. All of these changes virtually erased the little remaining distance between the *okāsan* and *obasan*, and the latter became (temporarily) like a household member herself.

Thus *omote* and *ura* are related to one another in a manner similar to that in which the sand in one side of an hour-glass is related to the emptiness (or lack of sand) in the other. This is an inverted continuum—in the sense that the degree of existence of one term means the lack of existence of its counterpart, to the same degree. To give an example, the greater the formality that is expressed, the less the informality that can be expressed in the same situation, and vice versa. Thus the frantic scene taking place in the kitchen (and the crisis brought about by the telephone call) are not communicated to the guests in Parlour 1. Nor are the aesthetics of Parlour 4 communicated in Scene 2, which takes place in a setting which is both ordinary and unaesthetic. Yet both parts of the continuum are necessary for social life, and the Japanese are well aware of this. Guests in Parlour 4 know that the *ura* is being modified, just as guests in Parlour 1 know that the *omote* is not present. The *omote* is necessary for dealing with outsiders, and the *ura* is essential in creating the *omote*—so the scene in the kitchen is clearly necessary for the scene in Parlour 4 to take place at all.

A number of other sets of terms also express the relationship of an inverted distance continuum. For example, *tatemae*—'the surface reality' (Hamabata 1983: 7), 'a. . .formal principle. . .palatable to everybody concerned so that the harmony of a group is maintained' (Doi 1973a: 259)—and *honne*, 'the world of inner feelings' (Hamabata 1983: 8). Doi and Hamabata (as well as Barthes [1982] and numerous other writers) make it clear that *honne* (as inner reality) is no more 'real' than *tatemae* (as surface or appearance) for the Japanese. Both *tatemae* and *honne* are considered equally 'real', as are all expressions of *omote* and *ura*. In addition *giri* (social obligation) and *ninjō*, 'the world of personal feelings' (Hamabata 1983: 22), are also an interrelated set of terms; as Doi puts it, 'it is possible to consider *giri* as the vessel. . .and *ninjō* as the content' (1973b: 34). Other sets of terms are *yoso*, or *soto* (outside), and *uchi*, or *naka* (inside); *hare* (sacred, extraordinary, formal) and *ke* (profane, ordinary, informal); *oyake-goto* (public) and *watakushi-goto* (private). The meanings of many of these sets of terms

overlap (Doi 1973a: 259). This makes sense if the terms are indexical, and if they all index a continuum which is similar as between self and other, or self and the social order.

Implications

The differences in these scenes are familiar enough to members of a Western society, for we too use different degrees of formality in language use, in dress and in gift-giving. There are occasions when we act formally, and occasions when we act informally. We also are able to shift from scene to scene, and we can understand distance clines.

The difference between ourselves and the Japanese lies in our perspective, which is oriented toward reference, not index; toward objectifying the world, not relating it on a continuum *vis-à-vis* ourselves; and toward perceiving both self and other as dichotomous. The difference in perspective has important consequences in the way social life is approached and defined in Japan. In other words, both the distance cline and the poles exist in both societies, for ordinary people in everyday life; but the Japanese focus on the distance cline (or indexing) and arrive at the poles (reference) through indexing. We, on the other hand, start with the poles and move in the opposite direction. The result is a difference in focus: on self (the individual), and on society as structure, norms, or patterns. For the Japanese, however, the focus is on the relation of self to society, both of which are closely connected to time and space.

This means that relationship in Japanese social life is not an issue of empirical data, nor are relationships adequately viewed as 'objects' or 'things' on the social horizon. Instead, relationship is a way of *defining* that social horizon, and is therefore crucial for an understanding of the process of Japanese social life.

Relationships can be seen as both ontological (in time and space) and indexical (relating time and space to self and other). They are like gauges according to which people define degrees of difference between self and other and index their communication (both in content and form) according to *the degree of distance defined*. Social life should therefore be approached as continuing discourse, consisting of both words and action.

A major difference in perspective follows from the focus of social life on index (and distance) as distinguished from perspectives focused at either of the poles of individual or social order. This is evident from the way in which Doi defines social maturity in Japan as 'the ease with which one shifts from *omote* to *ura* and back again without much strain' (ibid.). Rather than mastering either the performance or rules of a particular situation, the goal of maturity here is that of being able to define the difference between situations, in ways which are culturally agreed upon. Doi further elaborates (ibid.) that a person's integrity is not damaged by taking '. . .recourse to *omote* or *ura* depending upon the particular situation he finds himself in. Rather his integrity rests upon the complete mastery

of *omote* and *ura*.' 'Integrity' here is not defined by recourse to the 'inner' self (as *ura*), but as the ability to shift appropriately *between omote* and *ura*. The focus on shifting means that mastery (or knowledge) of *omote/ura* is not encompassed in any particular expression of *omote/ura*, because the differentiation necessary for shifting appropriately between scenes requires knowledge of the whole range of possibilities.

In the same way, what people say or do (for example, in gift-giving, or greetings) has different implications depending on whether this is defined referentially or indexically by the observer (or on whether reference defines index or index reference). If reference is primary the message is important (i.e. the *gift*). If indexing is primary, however, the referential message is nested in the relational context (which includes the relation between giver and receiver, and the expression of the gift as a particular point on the continuum of self/other or *giri/ninjō*). Thus each scene carries an indexical message—of *who* communicated the scene and their relationships with each other; and moreover it is these relationships that literally *produce* the scene. The two scenes used above illustrate this, by the degree to which the expression of content and form in the scenes was indexed by the relationships perceived between the participants.

I am proposing that a continuum is the paradigm for this type of study of Japanese social life—but this is a specific kind of continuum. It is defined by indexing, performed in the communication of self and other in a number of simultaneous modes of social expression. It is neither real nor ideal; it does not exist *in* time and space. It is potential—consisting of possibilities which can be expressed in time and space.

These possibilities are ranged along the entire continuum which is defined by degrees of closeness to or distance from the self, including everything in-between. Each of the perspectives indexes a different expression of social discourse (through the whole range of possibilities of content and form relationships), although only one of these possibilities can be expressed in a given social situation. Another way of putting this is that rather than there being a single social reality, a number of possible perspectives of both self and social life are acknowledged. Interaction in Japanese society then focuses on the definition of the appropriate choice, out of all of the various possibilities. This means that what one says and does will be different in different situations, depending on how one defines one's particular perspective versus the social other.

In a society where social life is defined via interaction along a distance continuum, priority would be placed, not on defining 'the' world or 'the' self, but on understanding the relationship between the different possible perspectives which can define both self and the world. The meta-level nature of indexicality is important here. Rather than a focus on congruency in the communication of messages (such as gift-giving or the treatment of guests), the focus is on the relationship between different messages, at different times and in different situations. The perspective is in fact on *difference*, and on all the possible degrees of difference between the ways of expressing a message, in all combinations of content/form ranging from extreme *omote* to extreme *ura*.

It is now possible to see that indexing is a means for relating social life *between*

scenes; but this is done by difference, rather than similarity. Thus the degrees of difference between points on a distance cline index the interactions *within* Scenes 1 and 2. But they also relate the different interactions *between* the two scenes. This means that if slices of scenes are extracted and compared without taking indexing between scenes into account, the result will be unexplained variation, just as a comparison between Scenes 1 and 2 of gift-giving, greeting interactions, behaviour toward guests, eating, or tea-drinking would produce variation in each kind of behaviour. The indexing between scenes is defined, of course, by the different relationships of the participants—which are omitted from objectified accounts of social life.

The relationships of the Katos may be located along the entire range of the distance continuum, and the house plan indicates the entire range as well. The relationship between difference is expressed in the sliding scale of formality of each of the four 'guest' rooms, which locate points along that continuum. In this sense, Benedict's characterization of the Japanese as 'the most fantastic series of "but also's" ever used on earth' (1946: 1) should not be explained away. The question which Benedict has raised is not of collapsing the 'but also's', but of explaining the relationships between them.

Indexing also provides a means for dealing with the problems of rigidity and inflexibility in definitions of norm and rule. To return to the problem of minutely defined rules, in Scenes 1 and 2 the indexing of distance (in the use of register, definition of space and placement of seating at tables) defined the giving of gifts and food, the choice of room and seating at the table, the speech register used and the amount of content (or lack of it) which was communicated. The question here is whether minutely defined should refer to the redundancy of communication in *indexing*, or to rule-governed behaviour. I think that these scenes *can* be characterized by minutely defined rules and rigidity, but only if they are viewed retrospectively, like a strip of film run backwards, so that virtually all of the behaviour is seen as rule-governed. Since the interaction is generated by the parameters of the scenes themselves, the argument is circular. The fluidity of choices, the ambiguity of more than one correct possibility for indexing distance and the flexibility of response in interaction (which is evident in the reaction of the *obasan* to the crisis) are all omitted from this perspective. The entire significance of the communication of self and other and the mutual generation of the scene between them is missed, if situations are viewed as virtually prescribed.

The question of whether such rules are really indexical commentaries on *interactions* is important because if approached objectively indexes (like 'here', 'there', 'now' and 'it') are empty. Many of the rule statements about Japanese society focus on interaction and/or relationships, and there is a high degree of emptiness in their definitions (also noted by Sugimoto and Mouer 1980: 11). For example, terms such as 'situational ethic', 'social relativism' and 'interactional relativism' are very commonly used to describe Japanese society. These terms specify merely that situations are crucial in defining interaction, ethics and social organization. But since they require the very situation which they are supposed to explain, in order to explain it, they are not only empty but also circular.

A large number of statements about structure and rules in Japanese society also concern interaction, and the question is whether these statements refer to indexing of distance or principles of rule. For example, 'horizontal' and 'vertical' are both commonly used to define relationships. But do they refer to abstract principles of 'horizontalness' or verticality? Or to interaction and the distance cline between self and other?

These questions may be asked as well of virtually all of the terms used to define the group model: dependency, harmony, paternalism, consensus, loyalty and hierarchy. The translation of virtually all of these terms is problematic, as Rohlen (1974), Smith (1983) and Doi (1973b), among others, have pointed out. Thus *wa* (harmony) is not, according to Rohlen, a metaphor, nor is it merely an element in a system of abstract distinctions. Rather it is relational, referring to 'the cooperation, trust, sharing, warmth, morale and hard work of efficient, pleasant, and purposeful fellowship' (1974: 47). 'Hierarchy' is also an important term because it has been so often used to describe Japanese society. As Smith points out (1983: 48), 'most scholars who deal with Japanese society place at the center of their scheme of Japanese values something usually called a sense of hierarchy. Less thoroughly analyzed is this sense of *hierarchy in action*' (emphasis added). Each of the group-model terms refers to a complex *way* of interaction between self and other, which the translation does not adequately convey; and all of them raise questions about whether they should be indexically defined.

Thus 'relationship' is not an empirical issue (i.e. the investigation of relationships), but instead involves the relationship *between* self and social order, part and whole, one and many—issues which are as complex (and at least as important theoretically) as any issues stemming from the polar dichotomies themselves. To those who say that Japan has not contributed in an important way to the theoretical development of the social sciences, I would respond that if this is so, it must be due to the basic level of the issues which confront the Western researcher in Japan, rather than to any real lack of potential contribution. The researcher must confront such basic matters as the relation of self to society, of space and time to social practice, of self to the empirical world, of the empirical to the abstract, particular to general, and subject to object. The basic nature of these issues also means that one ignores them at the risk of prejudicing one's research, or, to put this another way, that consciousness of one's approach to research in Japan is a necessary part of attention to the 'data', because each defines the other. I do not mean to imply that this is not also true elsewhere, but simply that all of these relationships are central to the everyday working of Japanese culture. Therefore the relationship between theoretical and practical becomes central, as well.

In conclusion, it should be greatly significant to us that the Japanese perspective on social life focuses on the relationship *between* what we in the West have most often perceived as dichotomies. But this significance will be lost if we try to perceive the Japanese through dichotomous lenses. Instead, the importance of Japanese society for us should lie in the possibility of reaching new perspectives on issues which have long perplexed us, including the relation between the individual and the social order; variation and rule; flexibility and constraint; time and continuity; and particularity and general unity.

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