

It has been a pleasure to work as Guest Editor for *New Voices in Japanese Studies*, Volume 8. We have several wonderful and fascinating articles from excellent emerging researchers who combine their scholarship in Japanese Studies with other disciplines, including legal studies, linguistics, cultural, media and gender studies. In a time when Japan, as part of a world economy, is undergoing significant transformations, the articles collected in this volume share informed perspectives on several issues specific to Japanese society that also have international relevance.

The work of these scholars demonstrates the importance and necessity of the broader movement in the humanities and social sciences to continue to complicate fixed binaries and challenge familiar assumptions so as to more accurately reflect, respond to and ultimately re-make realities being lived in late-capitalist society in Japan, and elsewhere. Rather than cushioning education with safety and reassurance in settled and bounded terms of reference, knowledge derives from the capacity to engage empathetically with unsettling realities while seeking deeper truths. From the university to the public sphere, scholars should be permitted and encouraged to exercise their skills in questioning received wisdom and perform their civic responsibility to address issues of violence, oppression and injustice and the conditions that produce them. Not to do so is to abrogate the validity of social values and rights that are crucial to the formation of independent-minded citizens who have a stake in the direction of their society. The collection of scholarly articles in this volume show promise in this direction.

**Geraldine Carney** examines international parental child abduction cases to and from Japan, with a focus on cases of abduction to Japan. She investigates the present situation of custody laws in Japan and argues that, given that the law has not adapted to the increase in families of mixed nationalities, conditions are such that parents are turning to social media in attempts to improve their situations. Citing a number of parental child abduction case studies in which social media has been used by concerned parties, Carney provides detail on the state of Japanese custody laws vis-à-vis the needs and expectations of parents and children both within and outside Japan. In particular, she argues, in cases where left-behind parents whose custodial and visitation arrangements with their child are restricted due to legal preference for sole custody under Japanese family law, social media provides opportunities to document and publicise their cases and to form horizontal community networks with disparate and concerned

others in similar situations. Where there is little legal incentive for custodial parents to encourage or facilitate contact with the non-resident parent, Carney finds that social media is a viable channel through which left-behind parents can perform advocacy, seek support and exert social pressure to improve these conditions. The implications of the article are compelling regarding changing conceptions of the family due to increasing internationalisation, including in Japanese society.

**Gian Marco Farese** provides a cultural semantic analysis of the Japanese words ‘*haji*’ and ‘*hazukashii*’ to demonstrate the potential of the Natural Semantic Metalanguage (NSM), the system of cross-translatable words which forms the methodological basis of the article. In order to avoid privileging the linguacultural meanings embedded in their English correlates, he explores the terms ‘*haji*’ and ‘*hazukashii*’ as distinct emotion terms which are linguistically and culturally specific to the Japanese context. In showing how their English translations are typically used in examples from a Japanese dictionary and modern and contemporary Japanese literature, Farese argues that their typical translation as ‘shame’ or ‘embarrassment’ is insufficient and not culturally neutral. After identifying the differences in cultural salience of ‘*haji*’ and ‘*hazukashii*’ in the Japanese context, Farese’s challenge is to describe these terms in words which are recognisable as indigenous by native speakers of Japanese and also understandable to cultural outsiders. He demonstrates the suitability of NSM for elucidating these differences in simple and cross-translatable words. Farese’s study contributes to a less-homogeneous understanding of emotions themselves as part of a broader study of the relationship between language and culture.

**Anne Lee** examines two manga by est em (*esu to emu*), *Hatarake, kentauros!* and *equus*, which focus on male centaurs in homosocial settings, positioning them within both *shōjo* manga and Boys’ Love (BL) manga traditions. est em’s focus on the figure of the centaur in realistic, everyday settings in contemporary Japanese society evokes homoerotic subtexts and intertextual parody for the enjoyment of mostly female readers. Unlike the chaotic and hypersexualised qualities of centaurs in Greek mythology, Lee maintains that est em uses this as a device to subvert and unsettle mainstream constructs of sexuality and masculinity found in typical salaryman culture. Rather than directly protesting patriarchal and heterosexist oppression, the centaur is a humorous device to playfully undermine restrictive heteronormative roles engendered in popular culture. At the same time, Lee’s analysis considers these manga as also incorporating criticism of the way in which otherness and/or femininity, as embodied by the centaur, is marginalised in the closed homosocial world of the Japanese workplace. By way of example, Lee contrasts Kintarō, a model of a brash, hyper-masculine corporate worker in *Sarariiman Kintarō*, with Kentarō, the impeccably mannered centaur in est em’s *Hatarake, kentauros!*, to demonstrate how Kentarō’s difference excludes him from the hegemonic ideal. She also explores how est em’s human-centaur friendships are either *nioi-kei*, with a hint of homoeroticism, or are more direct male-male centaur romances of mutual consensual pleasure, as in *equus*, for a BL readership. Producing homoerotic centaurs for readers’ delectation

---

while challenging dominant constructs of heterosexuality and hegemonic masculinity appears to Lee to be an appealing way to provide temporary relief in late-capitalist Japanese society.

**Hei-Lei Cheng** analyses how cinematic representations of rape and rape recovery can challenge the notable paucity of public debate surrounding the issue of sexual violence and its representations in popular media in Japanese society. Through a textual analysis of two contemporary fictional Japanese films, *DV: Domestic Violence* and *The Ravine of Goodbye*, Cheng examines the ways in which narrative and cinematographic techniques are used to construct rape and domestic violence scenes that encourage critical reflection rather than reinforce dominant stereotypical assumptions about rape and rape victims. Based on the idea that knowledge formation is embedded in a dynamic process of mutual feedback between the individual and society in flux, she perceives mass media as important institutions for shaping public consciousness as they reflect, repeat and normalise values, beliefs and attitudes entrenched within a nation's cultural and social history. As production and consumption increases in the mediated social sphere, viewers can access alternative viewpoints that challenge hegemonic perceptions. Citing feminist media critics in Japan and the United States, Cheng argues that gendered stories of rape and rape victims that deny gratuitous pleasure and destabilise exploitative portrayals of sexual violence in popular culture have the potential to transform the collective imagination. She observes how these filmmakers discursively engage, and create space for, viewers to consider some of the realities of working through painful and traumatic experiences of sexual abuse. Through uncomfortable glimpses of the nature of trauma and its overcoming from the victims' perspectives, Cheng maintains that these otherwise silenced experiences are at least brought into public consciousness where viewers can decide to shift their received perceptions on sexual violence and to become advocates against sexual violence against women. While urging for widespread ethical reflection and collective activism on these issues in Japanese society, this also implies the need for critical awareness of the fictional devices utilised by media makers in the process of knowledge formation.

**Rie Kido** shares her findings from action research and participant observations in a Self Help Group for young people in Osaka who experience angst exacerbated by precarious socio-economic conditions. Employing Karin Amamiya's term '*ikizurasa*' to describe youth angst amid the neoliberal economic climate in Japanese society, Kido proposes that a narrative method and the non-judgmental space used in the Self Help Group allows affected youth to share their feelings and experiences without the direct pressure of having to find a job. While complementary to a variety of existing supports such as psychiatric treatment and government activation programs for chronically underemployed people, Kido argues that this Self Help Group narrative method is useful for helping youth who are less equipped to be resilient in times of stress to avoid alienation, build motivation and develop relationships in a trusting environment. As a form of self-reinvention, Shimizu maintains that these focused narrative sessions assist the individual

---

to clarify their needs, rebuild their confidence and self-respect, and develop a sense of connection with others who share similar experiences to practically and positively envisage their lives and careers anew. Instead of considering unemployment as a temporary situation, Shimizu contends that it should be accepted as a chronic reality to live with. At the same time, she acknowledges that this focus on reinventing personal narratives and identity should not be used to ignore the need for change in labour conditions so as to properly address the underlying causes of social marginalisation that affects a significant portion of the population. Ultimately, the self-help narrative approach helps to augment existing programs in adapting to the diverse needs and expectations of a range of young people and to help them find a place in society that is more suitable to them.

**Alison Luke** addresses the life of Chikage Ōgi to examine how one of the most successful female politicians in Japan negotiated the structural constraints to women's participation in the political sphere. Ōgi's career began in the entertainment industry with a five-year stint as a *musumeyaku* in the Takarazuka Revue, followed by a role as host of a popular television program. Luke contends that this, along with her familial socialisation, equipped her with the performative skills to enact gender-role expectations while realising her ambitions over her life course. In response to persistent gender inequality in Japan's male-dominated conservative political sphere in which women's presence has been regarded as unusual and unnatural, Luke finds that Ōgi was able to deploy her creative and practical skills to turn cultural expectations about women's primary roles as housewives and mothers to her advantage in political campaigns and forums by appealing to conservative values of authenticity, trustworthiness and suitability. While capitalising on an idealised feminine image and significant male patronage enabled Ōgi to ascend to leadership roles and ensured her political longevity, this came with the cost of actively reproducing these normative constructs in a non-threatening manner within the masculine culture of the Liberal Democratic Party. Nevertheless, Luke argues that Ōgi's displays of individual autonomy and deft manipulation of her networks belies her performances of acculturated femininity and undermines the assumption that she represents nothing more than a political asset. Instead, Luke finds that Ōgi's political career owes much to her not confronting but embracing gender expectations among other things in order to achieve her political goals.

I am grateful to Elicia O'Reilly, Series Editor and Ayusa Koshi, Manager at The Japan Foundation, Sydney for this stimulating and rewarding experience. There were several who did not make it into this volume but we encourage them and others to submit their work to *New Voices in Japanese Studies*, Volume 9. Many thanks again to the dedicated work of Elicia O'Reilly with whom it has been an absolute pleasure to work on these fine research articles.

Dr Adam Broinowski  
Australian National University