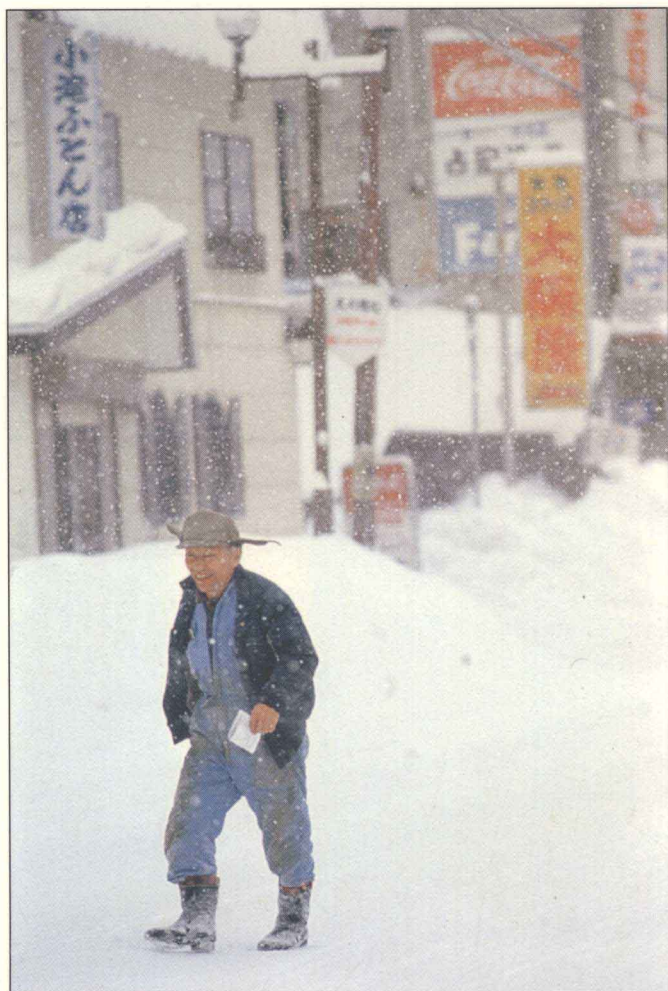


COMPARING CULTURES

Readings
on
Contemporary
Japan
for
American
Writers

MERRY I.
WHITE
&
SYLVAN
BARNET



Comparing Cultures

Readings on Contemporary Japan for American Writers

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Preface for Instructors

CASSIUS: *Tell me, good Brutus, can you see your face?*

BRUTUS: *No, Cassius, for the eye sees not itself
But by reflection, by some other things.*

—William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*

*A knowledge of one other culture should sharpen our ability to
scrutinize more steadily, to appreciate more lovingly, our own.*

—Margaret Mead, *Coming of Age in Samoa*

The Aim of the Book

Comparing Cultures is designed for composition courses—that is, for courses in which students write essays, instructors (and often other students) read the essays, and instructors and students discuss them. It contains multidisciplinary readings about a contemporary culture—modern Japan—in eleven chapters. The organization of the chapters and the editorial apparatus seek to promote thoughtful, nuanced comparisons with America.

This last point needs to be explained a bit, although the quotations from Mead and Shakespeare tip our hand. We use a single culture, Japan, as an aid or foil to enable students to think and write about America with a fresh perspective. Japan—like us in being democratic, patriarchal, and capitalistic but emphatically *not* Western—is an ideal cultural mirror for the United States. By reading intensively about Japanese culture and by testing their new knowledge of Japan against their existing knowledge of American culture, students learn to think critically (which is chiefly to say that they learn to examine their assumptions and to evaluate evidence) about what may be distinctively American in their own disparate experiences and subcultures.

These fifty-six readings (ranging from academic analyses to popular journalism, from entries in reference works to personal accounts, from fiction to song lyrics) are offered, then, not in order to assist students to become experts on Japan, but in order to assist them to examine thoughtfully their own experiences as Americans. By providing students with the chance to

read one culture against another, these readings about a contrasting culture help students to think about what Americans have in common as well as how they differ. (This is not to say that students will not learn a great deal about Japan—they will, as will their instructors, who we hope will welcome the challenge and the opportunity to learn along with their students.)

The Two-Part Organization

Part One, with eight readings in two chapters on cross-cultural analysis and on critical reading and writing practices, introduces students to comparative thinking and writing. In these chapters we try to adapt some of the insights of anthropologists and social scientists in a way that will be useful in a composition course where students are thinking and writing about culture.

Part Two contains forty-eight readings arranged into nine categories that social scientists consider most germane to the study of modern industrialized societies. Because these categories include social institutions as well as stages of life, personal experiences as well as ethnographic description, the readings include such matters as material culture, growing up, work, leisure, crime, and notions of nation.

The Editorial Apparatus

Because this is a text for courses in composition, we have included apparatus designed not only to enable students to think rigorously and to read thoughtfully, but also to write effectively. The apparatus continuously connects the readings with the aims of the composition course.

- **Chapter assignments**, called “Explorations,” reinforce the cultural and comparative lessons of Part One and, in Part Two, prompt students to examine their own cultural assumptions.
- **Chapter introductions** in Part Two present overviews of the topics.
- **Two sets of discussion and writing assignments after each selection**, called “Thinking About the Text” and “Thinking About Culture,” prompt students to examine the content and rhetoric of the selection, and also to explore larger cultural connections between the readings (and other readings) and their own experiences. The overall aim is to encourage students to produce writing that draws on both personal experience and on critical thinking.
- **Footnotes** for each selection provide biographical and background information and gloss Japanese and cross-cultural terms and concepts.
- The **appendix**, “Doing Research,” equips students to perform library

and field research as they write and document research papers in the MLA style.

- Our **instructor's manual**, titled *Editors' Notes to Accompany COMPARING CULTURES*, provides commentary on and teaching suggestions for every chapter and selection, as well as an annotated bibliography of works on cultural analysis and on Japan.

Acknowledgments

"The last thing one discovers composing a work," Blaise Pascal said three hundred years ago, "is what to put first." Still true. We could not have written this preface before we finished the rest of the manuscript. But the first thing we discovered, almost as soon as we met with our publisher to talk about the project, was what we are putting last in the preface, our massive debt to those who helped us.

First, we must name three people at Bedford Books: publisher Charles H. Christensen, general manager and associate publisher Joan E. Feinberg, and development editor Stephen A. Scipione. These three shapers of many first-rate textbooks assumed (not entirely accurately) that we wanted frank criticism, rather as if we shared Emily Dickinson's request (in a letter to T. W. Higginson) for an honest appraisal: "Will you tell me my faults frankly as to yourself, for I had rather wince, than die. Men do not call the surgeon to commend the bone, but to set it, Sir." When they did not play the role of surgeon, cutting into our manuscript and setting its bones, they played the role of chiropractor, straightening out the kinks and putting in a few good twists of their own. Much of what we think is good in the book is because Chuck, Joan, and Steve always found time to follow our progress and to suggest sensible improvements. They were, so to speak, just what the doctor ordered.

In the later stages of working on the book, we became deeply indebted to yet another group at Bedford Books: managing editor Elizabeth Schaaf, production editor Lori Chong, copyeditor Cynthia Benn, and production associate Heidi Hood made many valuable suggestions. And between the beginning—with the searching and shaping lunch talks with Chuck, Joan, and Steve—and the end—with the detailed critical appraisals of Elizabeth, Lori, Cynthia, and Heidi—as we worked on this book *on culture for* writers, we were indebted to colleagues who read drafts and shared their experience and ideas about using our material in composition courses. We are glad, then, to be able to thank Glenn Blalock, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill; George Bozzini, George Washington University; Kathy Hutnick, Indiana University; Sonia Maasik, University of California, Los Angeles; David Porter, Southern University of Baton Rouge; Barbara Sloan, Santa Fe Community College; and Irwin Weiser, Purdue University.

A Note on Names and Pronunciation

Japanese Names

In Japan, the family name is given first, but to avoid any confusion, we use the Western style, personal name first, throughout this book. An exception to this is made for historical figures such as the tenth-century diarist Sei Shonagon, who is always referred to in this manner.

Pronouncing Japanese Words

Japanese words are pronounced approximately as they are written in English, which is more than you can say about English words. (Consider *rough*, *bough*, and *through*, for instance; or *you* and *ewe*, which are pronounced identically even though they do not share a single letter. It has been aptly said of English spelling that the consonants count for very little, and the vowels for nothing at all.)

When Japanese words are written in a romanized script, the vowels are pronounced more or less as in English or Italian, thus:

a as in “father”

e as in “get”

i as in “marine”

o as in “no”

u as in “rule”

The consonants are pronounced as is usual in English, but note that *g* is always hard as in “get,” never soft as in “gem.” The *f* (as in *Fuji*) is pronounced somewhere between *f* and *h*—that is, the sound is somewhat like what is produced when one blows out a match—but the English *f* will do.

All the letters are pronounced. Thus, Professor Chie Nakane’s given name has two syllables (Chi-e), and her family name has three (Na-ka-ne).

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Part One

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