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著者(英)	Narifumi Maeda Tachimoto
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Postscript: Japanese Anthropological Scholarship on Malaysia

Narifumi Maeda TACHIMOTO
Kyoto University

IN RETROSPECT

After the destruction of World War II, the American discipline of anthropology, rather than the German ethnology, which had been the dominant scholarly tradition in Japan before the war, was gradually introduced into Japanese academic circles. However, it was still unimaginable that Japanese anthropologists should conduct field work outside Japan, mainly because of the lack of foreign currency available for overseas expenditure. Thus, in its early days, anthropology in Japan lacked the core of the discipline, that is, fieldwork, although some Japanese sociologists engaged in Japanese rural community studies with funding from American foundations.

It was only in 1957 that two research expeditions were dispatched to continental Southeast Asia by the Japanese Society of Ethnology and Osaka City University. Unfortunately, neither of them visited Malaysia. The situation began to change slowly in the 1960s, especially in the latter half. After the above expeditions returned, Kyoto University launched a systematic endeavour to promote the scientific study of Southeast Asian societies and nature. The University officially established the Center for Southeast Asian Studies (CSEAS) in 1965, two years after its activities in Malaysia had begun using much-disputed funds donated by the Ford Foundation. The Center aimed at an integrated area studies program which included the natural sciences as well as the social sciences.

The first Malaysian project was organized by the late Dr. Joji Tanase, in which several researchers participated. It included not only anthropologists but also sociologists, historians, Sinologists, Islamicists, and psychologists. They were later joined by agronomists, a soil scientist, an agricultural engineer, and a medical doctor. Dr. Tanase was an ethnologist trained in the field of religion. He was much influenced by the German schools, but he combined this with a command of anthropological knowledge from the UK and the USA. His dissertation, based on a survey of the literature, was posthumously published by the Center as its first monograph, entitled *Primitive Forms of the Idea of the Other World in Greater Oceania* (CSEAS, Kyoto University, 1966, in Japanese with an English summary of 10 pages). Inspired by his teacher Enku Uno's book, *Religious Rites and Ceremonies concerning Rice-Planting and Eating in Malaysia* (Toyo Bunko, 1940,

in Japanese with an English summary of 23 pages), Dr. Tanase collected vast amounts of ethnographic case material on death rituals and beliefs in Southeast Asia and the Pacific, including the Malay peninsula. He unfortunately passed away in Japan just after his return from Malaysia, where he had conducted several months of field research together with his students in 1964. Among these were Masuo Kuchiba, Yoshihiro Tsubouchi and Narifumi Maeda, all of whom were from the Department of Sociology of the Kyoto University Graduate School. At that time, there was no anthropology department in Japan. Kuchiba had just completed the master's course in anthropology at Cornell University. Maeda was studying Malay studies at the University of Malaya.

The three students continued their research on Dr. Tanase's project, and it culminated in the publication of *Three Malay Villages: A Sociology of Paddy Growers in West Malaysia* (University of Hawaii Press, 1979) edited by Kuchiba, Tsubouchi and Maeda. The book mainly consists of three community studies based on more than a year's fieldwork by each member of the team in Kedah, Kelantan and Melaka, respectively. Other contributions are on soil, irrigation, rice cultivation, and hygiene. Thus the book appears to be more a socio-economic analysis of rice cultivation than an ethnographic monograph, although it claims to have been based on comprehensive research on rice-growing communities (see also Kuchiba 1978; Kuchiba and Tsubouchi 1967; N. Maeda 1974, 1975a, 1975b, 1978; Tsubouchi 1975, 1976).

Apart from the projects from Kyoto University, many researchers conducted various studies in Malaysia in the 1970s. Their results were mostly published in the early 1980s, mainly in Japanese-language bulletins and journals.

In the wake of the *Three Malay Villages* followed two excellent socio-economic studies on Malay rural communities, although they are not by anthropologists. Kenzo Horii conducted repeated community studies mainly in Kedah from the end of the 1960s, focusing on land tenure for both rice and rubber cultivation. Part of his findings are published as *Land Tenure and Rice Economy in West Malaysia: A Comparative Study of Eight Villages* (Institute of Developing Economies, 1981). He died in 1995 with some work still to be published.

Akimi Fujimoto, of Tokyo University of Agriculture, carried out his fieldwork in Kelantan in the 1970s. His *Income Sharing among Malay Peasants: A Study of Land Tenure and Rice Cultivation* was published by Singapore University Press in 1983 (see also Fujimoto 1974, 1976a, 1976b, 1977, 1983a, 1991, 1994a, 1994b, 1995).

Western Borneo is a mine of traditional ethnological studies, but Japanese research was delayed in this area. In Sarawak, short surveys were conducted by Keiji Iwata, Yasumasa Sekine, and others in the 1970s (see Committee for Southeast Asian Studies 1977). It was only during the period 1975-77 that Motomitsu Uchibori, now at Hitotsubashi University, conducted a full-scale anthropological research project on the Iban in true anthropological style. He received his Ph.D. from Australian National University in 1978, with a dissertation

entitled *The Leaving of This Transient World: A Study of Iban Eschatology and Mortuary Practices* (see also Uchibori 1983, 1984a, 1984b, 1986). In Sabah, Yutaka Shimomoto wrote a book on the Rungus in 1984, based on several field trips in the 1970s.

Focusing on the peninsula again, there have been several anthropological studies concerning ethnic groups other than the Malays. There have been two research projects on the Orang Asli in peninsular Malaysia. In the mid-1960s, Maeda conducted fieldwork for eight months among the Orang Hulu. Although his master's thesis, *The Structural Analysis of Cognatic Society: The Orang Hulu Case* (Kyoto University, 1967), has not been published as such, he published several papers in Japanese and two in English on the topic (see N. Maeda 1971, 1976). Yukio Kuchikura, now at Gifu University, studied the Semaq Beri from the viewpoint of ecological anthropology. He published several papers in English (Kuchikura 1987, 1988a, 1988b, 1993, 1996) and a major monograph *Subsistence Ecology among Semaq Beri Hunter-Gatherers of Peninsular Malaysia* (Department of Behavioral Science, Hokkaido University, 1987).

Many Japanese Sinologists and Indologists have also been interested in the Chinese and Indian communities in Malaysia and conducted short-term surveys in the 1970s. One of these pioneering studies was by Kiyoshige Maeda, who participated in Professor Tanase's previously mentioned Malaysia Project, sponsored by CSEAS (see K. Maeda 1967). Special mention must be made also of the work by Kokan Sasaki on Singaporean Chinese rituals and the studies by Shinji Shigematsu on Indian plantation workers in Pahang.

It is impossible to make an exhaustive list of the researchers who have visited Malaysia since the 1970s. Even if the list is confined to anthropologists and ethnologists, it is still rather difficult because many of them did not publish major works unless they conducted long-term field research, which was rather rare at that time. In the 1980s, however, a regiment of anthropologists emerged to carry out what could be termed proper anthropological fieldwork.

In the early 1980s Hisao Tomisawa, now at the University of Shizuoka, and Yuzo Kawasaki of Teikyo University, made intensive studies of Malay kingship in Negeri Sembilan and on the Teochiu fishing communities in Selangor, respectively. A generation of younger scholars followed: Masaki Nakazawa (1992) (Kedah), Akemi Itagaki (Kedah), Ryoko Nishii (Southern Thailand), Keiko Kuroda (Southern Thailand and Kedah), Makoto Tsugami (Sarawak), and the contributors in this volume, Tomiyuki Uesugi (1988, 1995) (Sabah), Suelo Kuwahara (1995) (Negeri Sembilan), Hiroshi Tawada (Kelantan), and Noboru Ishikawa (Sarawak). Most of them conducted intensive fieldwork after having been trained in anthropology departments in Japan and overseas.

Geographers and anthropologists and even historians sometimes blur their disciplinary boundaries, especially when they are engaged in fieldwork. In the early days Yoshihiko Yabuuchi, a geographer, surveyed the Orang Laut for a short period. Recently Masayuki Tawa of Kwansai Gakuin University, conducted

fieldwork among Chinese fishermen in Johor (see Tawa 1996). Tsukasa Mizushima, a south Indian historian at Tokyo University of Foreign Studies (now at Tokyo University), and the late Yoshimi Komoguchi, a geographer of Bangladesh at Komazawa University, launched a project entitled 'A Comparative Study on the Modes of Inter-Action in Multi-Ethnic Societies', involving Junji Nagata of Tokyo University, a geographer, and Koji Miyazaki of Tokyo University of Foreign Studies, an anthropologist specializing in the Javanese. Many of them carried out fieldwork in Johor. The project, which is ongoing, has produced English reports such as *Local Societies in Malaysia* Vol. 1 and Vol. 2 (ILCAA, Tokyo University of Foreign Studies, 1992) and *Human Ecology in Rural Malaysia* (Komazawa University, 1995).

Another trend, reflected in the above project, is the shift in area of interest by established anthropologists. One example is the study on Sabah Filipinos by Masaru Miyamoto of Chuo University, whose book on conflict resolution among the Hanunoo-Mangyan is highly evaluated. Also, Indonesia specialists have moved to Malaysia, like Miyazaki mentioned above. Another Javanologist, Teruo Sekimoto of Tokyo University, carried out research on the Javanese in Selangor (see Sekimoto 1994). Tsuyoshi Kato of Kyoto University, a Minangkabau specialist, has been repeatedly conducting research in Negeri Sembilan (see Kato 1988, 1991, 1994a, 1994b). Narifumi Maeda, who shifted his field to Sulawesi in the 1970s and 1980s, returned to Malaysia to conduct fieldwork among the Bugis immigrants in Johor (see N. Maeda 1988; Tachimoto 1994). The research of Sekimoto, Kato and Maeda is part of the coordinated research project with Malaysian counterparts headed by Professor Shamsul A.B. The results have been reported in English in special issues of *Southeast Asian Studies* (CSEAS, Kyoto University, vol. 26 no. 2, 1989 and vol. 32 no. 2, 1995).

Some Japanese anthropologists have conducted fieldwork spanning long periods of time, repeatedly visiting the same community. A good example of this is Tsubouchi's Kelantan study spanning twenty years. He recently published a book in Japanese entitled *Twenty Years of a Malay Village* (Kyoto University Press, 1996). Unfortunately this has still to be translated (see Tsubouchi 1995; also N. Maeda 1986). Also, it should be noted that comparative studies of communities within Southeast Asia are popular in Japan, and this relates to the trend, mentioned above, among major scholars to shift their field of interest. Among others who have shifted from Malaysia to other areas, Kuchiba of Ryukoku University moved to Northeast Thailand to obtain data comparable with his Kedah study. He also headed an international project comparing padi-growing communities in Southeast Asia and Japan (see Kuchiba and Bauzon 1979; Mizuno 1977). Maeda moved to Sulawesi, Riau and Madagascar (see Tachimoto 1995), Uchibori also to Madagascar, Sekimoto to Surinam, Fujimoto to Java and so on. These shifts also included comparative studies of Malay or Indonesian communities outside Southeast Asia.

There are other researchers and other topics which I could mention but their

publications are intended for the Japanese audience only. Often they write articles in English for Japanese academic journals to fulfill obligations to the funding agencies but the circulation of these journals is quite limited even in Japan, not reaching the English-speaking audience. For non-Japanese scholars, the situation in the social sciences in Japan is regrettable in terms of the limited availability of results in English. They may ignore the existence of accumulated academic knowledge in Japan, simply because they do not know the Japanese language or because they surmise that the Japanese scholarship is not worth referring to. It would be difficult for me to generate widespread respect for Japanese scholarship with this short note. But it does have a contribution to make which is different from that of western or Malaysian scholarship. At present, those who are really interested in the work of Japanese scholars have to acquire a knowledge of the Japanese language in order to obtain first-hand information concerning their research activities on Malaysia.

One more marginal comment: it is quite amusing to note that the four papers in this volume barely refer to Japanese scholarship on Malaysia. The only exception is Kuwahara's paper, which cites Kato's paper on Indonesia. In order to rectify any incorrect impressions of the state of anthropology in Japan which readers may derive from these four papers, I present a bibliography of anthropological publications in English by Japanese scholars, which, though not exhaustive, I hope will help non-Japanese speakers.

IN PERSPECTIVE

Japanese anthropology has not been confined to studies in Malaysia or even in Southeast Asia. Many Japanese anthropologists are engaged in studies in Africa, Latin America, the Middle East, South Asia, Oceania and other areas. You can refer to *Japanese Ethnology 1964-1983* (edited by the Japanese Society of Ethnology, Kobundo, 1986, in Japanese) for a bibliography of their work. Again, the number of non-Japanese articles is quite limited. The number of Southeast Asianists has increased since the 1970s and is still increasing, but it still does not include a large number of anthropologists. Among all the Southeast Asian countries, Indonesia and Thailand have attracted the most attention from anthropologists, followed by the Philippines. If we omit Burma (Myanmar) and Indochina because of the difficulty in obtaining research permits, Malaysia is the country attracting the fewest anthropologists in Southeast Asia. Perhaps Malaysia, like Singapore, is perceived as being too developed.

The four papers in this volume, which do not necessarily represent Japanese anthropological research in general, nevertheless call to mind several polemic themes often observed in anthropological endeavours in Japan. These relate to the problems of (1) the nature of ethnography; (2) description and theory; and (3) indigenouness and triadic or 'triangular' three-way perspectives.

These four papers represent a part of their authors' major ethnographic

studies, whose future publication we eagerly await. However, the papers here focus on particular aspects of the societies studied: matriliney and capitalism, local Islam, colonial agro-economic policies, and myth-reconstruction. Yet this tendency towards meticulous analysis, usually without mention of wider theoretical implications, is characteristic of Japanese scholarship. Another characteristic of Japanese studies of Malaysia is that they are more sociology-oriented or socio-economic in focus, like most of the monographs mentioned above. The papers by Kuwahara and Ishikawa are typical of this genre.

Another feature of Japanese anthropology or, in more general terms, of the social sciences in Japan is that, in spite of its large accumulation of research findings, it has had little theoretical impact in the world academic arena. It is regrettable that the Japanese social sciences are theoretically ignored in sociology and anthropology in Western countries. One reason could be the problem of language: only a few translations are available in non-Japanese languages. Moreover, Japanese scholars are not eager for their work to be translated because the Japanese market is sufficient. A more serious issue is that, even if translated, their work is not appreciated very much by English speaking audiences. Is this because of the difference in styles of expression, attributable to the different cultural contexts or is it because of the quality of the work?

The papers by Uesugi and Tawada raise questions of methodology, especially that of the anthropologist's perspective in relation to indigenes. Indigenous or native or inside perspectives are quite tricky in the sense that one must decide which kind of boundaries are at issue: at the level of individuals, groups, communities, ethnic identities, states, or even whole cultures. I do not think that Malaysian scholars are more able to understand peasant society than non-Malaysian scholars just because they belong to the same nation-state as Malaysian peasants. Of course, in terms of language competence or understanding the general cultural background, Malaysian scholars have an advantage, yet they themselves may not be necessarily be indigenous members of the group they are studying.

I am thinking in terms of comparison with Japanese scholars' attitudes towards foreigner scholars' studies of Japan. Somehow they have a low opinion of foreigner scholars' works due to the belief that Japanese culture is unique and cannot be fully understood by foreigners. However, once foreigner scholars have a command of the Japanese language, they can take advantage of cultural differences which sharpen their perception when doing fieldwork, thus reversing their handicapped situation.

This is the question raised by Uesugi in his focus on anthropological field methodology. Following his suggestion, I would like to emphasise here the triadic perspective, not a bipolar comparison between Malaysia and anthropology, that is, a Western perspective, but a three-way comparison between Malaysia, Japan and the West. The discipline of anthropology originates within Western intellectual culture. We can use its concepts and methods as our tools to depict the facts and to

interpret them in some way. We can objectify things Japanese or Malaysian using foreign cultural products, i.e., anthropological tools. By doing so, we can relativize Western concepts more easily. The key question is 'who is the researcher?' A triangulation perspective helps to make clear the situation when a Japanese scholar studies Malaysian culture and society with Western traditions (i.e. anthropological methodology), consciously cutting across indigenism from Malaysian, Japanese and Western angles. The results of this perspective as here demonstrated also stimulate us to encourage more cooperative research between Malaysians and Japanese in the future.

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*Editors' note: the author of this review presents only the English-language publications by Japanese authors; for a larger bibliography that includes Japanese-language publications, see Uesugi, pp. 129-161, this volume.

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