

Introduction : Rethinking History from Perspectives on Recording Media, Practice, and Construction

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journal or publication title	Senri Ethnological Studies
volume	110
page range	1-8
year	2022-03-18
URL	http://doi.org/10.15021/00009924

Introduction: Rethinking History from Perspectives on Recording Media, Practice, and Construction

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The purpose of this book is to identify differences and commonalities in the frameworks for recording and constructing social history through an examination of the forms, media of recording history, and the processes of historical practice.

The editors attempt to rethink the place of history in anthropology, promote dialogue and interaction between anthropology and history, and tries to discover some historical characteristics of Eurasian societies.

The quest for a bridge between anthropology and history is nothing new. Anthropology has long entailed a study of society without history in the Western academic system. However, a paradigm shift, called the ‘crisis of representation,’ occurred during the 1980s. This shift was perhaps set into motion by the various earlier studies on the relationship between anthropology and history. In fact, anthropology is very concerned with historical issues. In his 1949 paper, Claude Lévi-Strauss argued that the commonality between history and anthropology is that they both attempt to accurately reconstruct what happened and what is happening in the society they are studying. He stated that there were no fundamental differences between their subjects, goals, and methods. For the study of modern society, he advocated cooperation between the two, arguing that nothing could be done without incorporating historical and ethnological perspectives (Lévi-Strauss 1972). In a 1950 treatise, Evans-Pritchard similarly criticised the attitude of functionalists to avoid history, arguing that there is no fundamental difference between anthropology and history in terms of their purpose and methods (Evans-Pritchard 1970).

In recent years, many books on the dialogue between anthropology and history have been published in Japan. For instance, Mori has actively insisted on a dialogue between anthropology and other disciplines from the humanities. According to her, the question of history in anthropology does not arise from a singular system. The question of history arises from the deficiencies of the systems of each field, so the search for history in anthropology is probably being conducted in various ways. How does anthropology seek to uncover past events, or simply, determine history? What kind of problem awareness do anthropologists employ to approach and objectify history? For the time being, it will be helpful to keep these questions in mind. Anthropologists indeed have an interest in

'history,' but this interest is not unified within anthropology. Given these pressing questions, dialogue between anthropology and other humanities disciplines is in progress. This dialogue opens up the possibility of being read from various aspects (Mori 2002: 21–22). A practical perspective and a narrative rhetorical strategic approach have been found to be common in anthropology and history. This has the potential to expand into the humanities in future (Mori 2002: 26).

Hokari suggests that we know, by definition, that history comes from the past. But how does history come to us? How do we experience the past? History always realises itself in the present, because without human efforts to realise the events and experiences of the past, the past never becomes history. In other words, then, history is explored, crafted, expressed, and maintained constantly by people all around the world within the sphere of present (Hokari 2011: 89).

Saito's book takes writings and documents as the foundation of human knowledge from the perspectives of anthropology and historical linguistics. It reviews the origin of texts and their transmission and distribution, in addition to the functions and changes that texts have brought about to people's feelings, lifestyles, social systems, and ways of thinking. Here, a 'text' is defined as an artificial object that has fixed visual symbols such as letters, numbers, and figures, and is viewed as a tool that assists the intellectual activities of recording, thinking, expression, and communication (Saito 2009: 9).

As early as 2005, Fujikawa introduced two strains of history commonly used in Australia: academic history and public history. The former aims to systematise knowledge centred on universities, while the latter focuses on the representation of history to the general public who are not specialists (Fujikawa 2005: 5). Later, Suga published the *Handbook of Public History in Japan* (Suga and Hojo 2019). In the preface, he argued that public history is 'present history' that brings the past back to the present as something related to the present, and further extends it to the future, to help people through a never-ending dialogue between the past and the present (Suga and Hojo 2019: 3–4).

Beyond Japan, the question of history in anthropology has also emerged as an important theme in China. In 2012, anthropologists and historians from Japan, South Korea, Vietnam, Britain, the United States, Mainland China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong gathered at Sun Yat-sen University for a conference called Anthropology and History. They discussed the relationship between anthropology and history, specifically, whether there is a history of anthropology, what is the history of anthropology, and other issues (Suenari, Liu, and Ma 2014).

From the above brief review, it is evident that academics have been probing both the dialogue between anthropology and history and the question of history in anthropology for some time now. This book is an attempt to continue this exploration. While the perspectives highlighted above have informed the premise of this book, the texts considered by previous studies seem to be limited to letters (Saito 2009). This book, meanwhile, considers an extensive range of recording media for history, including texts such as genealogies, travelogues, letters, and other media such as museum exhibits, photos, folk music, performances, costumes, colours, and plants.

This book addresses three themes that are deemed to be problematic in the ‘history’ of anthropology. Ten anthropologists discuss these themes from their respective regions and disciplines. The three themes are ‘Media of Recording History,’ ‘Historical Practice,’ and ‘Historical Construction.’ The research areas range from East Asia at the eastern end of the Eurasian continent to Mongolia, India, Palestine, Romania, Serbia, and Italy.

In the first part, which deals with the ‘Media of Recording History’ there are three papers. The first is by Matthews, an anthropologist and ecologist, who explicates the significance of plants and derived artefacts as a record of recent human history through an overview of the ethnological collection and botanical garden materials, including specimens from the National Museum of Ethnology. His contribution to this book and revelation is that people can learn about the human past from the plants that we use, carry, plant, and cultivate.

The second paper by Han, for the first time, details a comparative study of family genealogies from Vietnam, Japan, the Korean Peninsula, and China, using genealogical collections from the National Museum of Ethnology in Japan. She provides a detailed introduction and analysis of the 102 titles and highlights the commonalities and differences of East Asian genealogies by comparing the names of genealogies and editing functions. With the advent of the Internet, the number of genealogical collections in museums that are readily accessible has vastly increased. Archival records of history in museums can be used not only by researchers, but also by the general public for their learning and communication. Archival records of history and their use are also mentioned in the papers of Matthews and Udagawa in this book.

Using travelogues and photographs by Western foreigners visiting Mongolia in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Konagaya analyses the image of the relationship between dogs and humans in Mongolia from the perspective of Westerners. Photographic features can be used to reconstruct historical prejudice because they are a kind of narrative by the photographer. Through theoretical work on capturing photographic narratives in the context of Mongolian society, Konagaya explains another logic about dogs which is useful in the circulation of the eco-cycle between humans and nature, and her work contributes to anthropological photographic analysis.

In the second part, we discuss the process of connecting the ‘past’ and ‘present’ through places and people’s practices.¹⁾ Here, the term historical practice draws on and refers to the definition by Japanese anthropologist Hokari: ‘Historical practice is a bodily work. It is a lived experience’ (Hokari 2011: 94). ‘Without human efforts to perform the events and experiences of the past, the past never becomes a history’ (Hokari 2011: 89). That is to say, by doing something with the human body, the past can be established as history.

Niwa takes up *Ouendan*, the cheering squads of Japanese universities, and highlights how the physical education organisations of the early Meiji era eventually morphed into modern day cheering squads. They were officially recognised in the 1930s, and most of them were established after the Second World War. Niwa found that the traces of history embodied in them have been inherited from the past, far beyond the formal founding year. Even the newly established ones still tend to reproduce images of the past through

their outfits, dance, songs, and typical behaviours. As pointed out by Hokari (2011), 'history happens in-between body and place,' and *Ouendan* members themselves are clearly aware that they are re-enacting their continuity with the past.

Sugase provides a report on the historical practice of a man, Nassar, called the Father of Palestinian Nationalism, in the early 20th century. As a Christian Arab, he treated Muslims and Christians fairly throughout his life. Sugase takes up concrete historical practices such as his proposals, essays, books, newspapers (the first Arabic newspaper in Palestine he founded), agricultural development, and analyses in detail his personal idealism and the ideological background of the times, inherent in his practices. He was the one planted the seeds of Arab nationalism in the early 20th century, but his contributions to the same have been poorly studied. Given this gap, it is valuable to understand the conditions that contributed to Palestinian nationalism in the early 20th century and the role played by religious Christian elites.

Vučinić presents a study undertaken in former Yugoslavia at the time of its dissolution (1990–1992) and demonstrates the myriad ways in which history can play a role in anthropological research. Her study, undertaken in the territory of present-day Croatia, one of the constituent republics, deals with the revival of traditional religious festivities devoted to the saint protector of the city of Dubrovnik by portraying how the local elite and Catholic Church constructed their history for the occasion of the municipal festivity at a time when Croatia was leaving one polity and creating a new one. She demonstrates that the revival of certain religious traditions was going on simultaneously with the changes in interethnic relations, which were strongly influenced by political events at the global, national, and local levels.

The third part deals with historical construction in the contexts of national historical narratives about Romania, birth control movements in India, food movements of the Italian local community, and visual representation of Chinese Red.

Shinmen's paper discusses aspects of Romanian nationalism as the outcome of a mixture of history and folklore. In Romania, the quest for an orthodox historical past was frustrated by the lack of literary material from the Middle Ages and the inability to identify a lasting unified group, and intellectuals complained that 'the lack of history' was lamentable. History and ethnology (folklore) contributed to the awakening of Romanian national consciousness and the formation of nationalism. The contribution of history refers to the 'discovery' of Romanian origins by early 18th century Greek Catholic priests studying in Rome. Meanwhile, intellectuals found 'national character' of Romania through the study of the folk epic *Miorița*, which they incorporated into the nationalist movement. Here, the discussion about the relationship between religion and nationalism is a common concern for both Sugase (Palestine) and Vučinić (former Yugoslavia), and it is also consistent with the problem awareness that we envisioned when planning the international symposium. The subjects that memorize history are diversifying, and the medium is also evolving. In addition, as the times change, the history of each region, ethnic group, etc. is being reconstructed or forgotten in various ways, such as the unity of nation-states, the building of group identities, and the acquisition of rights. According to Narita, when Japanese nationalism was formed,

national historical narratives began to be compiled around 1890, and Japanese nationalism was born in this period. The canon of historical materials is designated, the storytelling method was finalized and rhetorical devices were selected, but the bearers were academia historians (Narita 2002: 170).

Matsuo's paper focuses on the birth control movement in India in the 1920s which was driven by educated, higher class, upper caste male social reformers. Focusing on Karve, the first birth control activist, Matsuo describes the birth control clinic Karve opened, his dialogue with clients, the magazine he published, and the letters he exchanged with readers. Through his practice, we can see that Karve's idea of birth control was based on attention to the individual body, and his goal was to combine sexuality and reproduction and to abolish restrictions and taboos on sexuality in India. On the other hand, some of the other Hindu nationalists in the same period were proponents of eugenics and wanted to prevent unfit people (lower class or caste, and Muslim) from leaving any descendants, while encouraging fit and useful citizens (higher class, caste) to have more children. Matsuo portrayed a process in which the concept of birth control was recreated through various practices of activists, with political and social implications.

Udagawa deals with the local food movement in present-day Italy. Since the history of local food is the foundation for demonstrating and authenticating the locality of food, most movements are interested in discovering the history of local food. Museums are actively focusing on things that have not typically been historical sources, such as the memories of residents and the natural environment and are turning these into history. Halbwachs argued that the past does not regenerate in the unconscious, and what extant research seems to suggest is that the past is reconstructed from the foundation of the present (Halbwachs 1992). On the other hand, the history of local food is also a vehicle for conflict among stakeholders with varied interests. Udagawa argues that history provides a space where the intentions of various agents are revealed and negotiated, based on grassroots movements' creative uses of history.

Zhang's paper explains a historical process in which the red colour, a set of cultural cognition, and universal psychological identification has been constructed as Chinese Red by European, and was selected by Chinese referring communist revolution and was developed into a national colour. The red colour in China is one of the five major traditional colours. Chinese Red, as a special term, was coined by Europeans as a commercial symbol and artistic style in the early 20th century, referring particularly to the vermilion materials in China and the substitutes of red porcelain. On the other hand, the red colour began to be seen as symbolic of the 'revolution,' which can be traced back to the French Revolution, and with the influence of communism and Russian Revolution, the concept of red as being symbolic of revolution was gradually accepted by the public. With the establishment of a socialism in China, red was selected as the national colour from the five traditional colours. Questions raised by Zhang surrounding the motivation behind the selection of a national colour in China are similar to questions raised by Shinmen regarding the selection of folk songs and their influence on Romanian nationalism. They also share thematic similarities with Narita's work, who argued that

when Japanese nationalism was formed, canonical historical materials were designated, the narrative strategy was finalised, and rhetorical devices were selected to best fit the project of building a national consciousness (Narita 2002: 170).

This book explores the media of recording history, historical practice, and historical construction. It is a continuation of long-standing attempts by anthropologists to initiate dialogue with disciplines from the humanities, such as history and folklore. To that end, the book contributes in the following manner.

First, we found that there are various kinds of media that are passed down and they play a considerable role in the construction of history and memory. These media can be divided into text and non-text media. The former includes written records such as genealogies (Han), letters, essays, newspapers, books (Sugase, Matsuo), and travelogues (Konagaya), while the latter captures oral traditions (Shinmen), photography (Konagaya), plants (Matthews), religious ceremonies (Vučinić), dance, costumes (Niwa), and colours (Zhang). Since all these kinds of media may be used as tools or resources for the inheritance and construction of history, we consider both text (Saito 2009: 9) and non-text media to be the foundations of human knowledge.

Second, we find that when a nation state is formed or a political system undergoes a split, it is usually the elites who play a critical role in reshaping history and shaping the future (Vučinić, Shinmen, Sugase, Matsuo). In addition, the East Asian tradition of compiling genealogies was mainly continued with the participation of elites with knowledge of Confucianism. On the other hand, historical practice is bodily work. It is a lived experience (Hokari 2011). Ordinary people also participate in historical practice through their performances, local food movements, and religious activities (Niwa, Udagawa).

Third, history is a structure based on interpretations or experiences of the past, which arises in a situation wherein various actors are involved. Moreover, not all events that occurred in the past have become history. History, therefore, is a collection of knowledge about the past that has a narrative character (Shinmen) and is organised by selection based on specific interests and value judgments (Konagaya, Zhang). As Halbwachs pointed out, the past does not regenerate in the unconscious. It is reconstructed from the foundation of the present (Halbwachs 1992). History is selectively interpreted by various people according to the needs of the times, thereby producing a sense of continuity with reality (Han, Niwa, Udagawa, Sugase). In social movements, history is even used as a space where the intentions of various agents are revealed and negotiated (Udagawa). In other words, 'the past is constructed by narratives. And memories are not merely record, but have been selected from the perspective of the present, and is reminiscent of narratives as a material for spinning the story' (Katagiri 2003: 181).

From the ten cases above, we can see that history has is constructed, utilised, and selected in myriad ways, depending on the context. As anthropologists, we do not need to judge or argue whether historical records are correct. What we should do is observe what kind of history people record, by what means they record it, and how and why they make use of it. This is the exact task of anthropology. At the same time, we should also

reflect on the information we collect and the records we have made, and try to initiate dialogue with other humanities disciplines. We also need to initiate dialogue with people outside the academic field through the sharing of archival records and ideas by private individuals, institutes, universities, and museums, for a public history (Fujikawa 2005; Suga and Hojo 2019).

We know that this collection of papers is not perfect, and some topics presented here need to be discussed in depth. However, we hope that our efforts will provide some new insights into and case studies for historical research in anthropology, and some possibilities for generating new perspectives and frameworks in approaches to human history as well.

Note

- 1) On the international symposium ‘The Logic and Conception of History: Cross-field approaches from around the world’ held on 1 March 2019 in Osaka, Ota Shimpei gave a report about the multifaceted nature and the discontinuous history of the Minjung Church in South Korea. He traced a history of a Korean church, established in 1948, by focusing on practices of their members. He will finish the paper and publish it elsewhere in the future.

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