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AESTHETIC JOURNEYS AND MEDIA  
PILGRIMAGES IN THE CONTEXTS OF POP  
CULTURE AND THE CREATIVE INDUSTRIES  
FROM AND TO EAST ASIA

MUTUAL IMAGES

ISSUE 10 – 2021

# MUTUAL IMAGES

## A TRANSCULTURAL RESEARCH JOURNAL

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AURORE YAMAGATA-MONTOYA, MAXIME DANESIN & MARCO PELLITTERI

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AESTHETIC JOURNEYS AND MEDIA  
PILGRIMAGES IN THE CONTEXTS OF POP  
CULTURE AND THE CREATIVE INDUSTRIES  
FROM AND TO EAST ASIA

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# MUTUAL IMAGES

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## ***An Affair with a Village* – Joy HENDRY**

Stirling: Extremis Publishing, 2021, 154 p.

Review by Aurore YAMAGATA-MONTOYA | Independent Researcher, MIRA, France

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Joy Hendry is today a leading Japanese studies scholar and anthropologist, recompensed with the Order of the Rising Sun, who founded and presided over several major research associations over the past decades. However, at the time this story starts (as it is a story Hendry is writing in this book), she is a young woman starting her fieldwork for a doctorate. She had mastered the Japanese language already, but many aspects of Japanese daily life, especially in a retired rural area such as the small village of Kurotsuchi (Kyushu), elude her – as it did for most foreign academics in the 1970s.

Written during lockdown due to the pandemic, Hendry narrates her memories of life and work in Japan. This book is not an academic work, but the pendant to her earlier research. She writes with nostalgia and personal engagement about her encounter and love affair – its ups and downs – with the village she lived in for one year to do her fieldwork and which she visited regularly for over forty years. If you want to read the academic version, you should open *Marriage in Changing Japan: Community and Society* or her textbook *Understanding Japanese Society*. *An Affair with a Village* will introduce you to the real people, those she met and those she brought with her – Dennis, her husband who stayed with her in Kurotsuchi for several months during the fieldwork for her doctorate, and her own children who visited several times both during their childhood and as adults. It has been a lifelong love affair. She has seen children grow and become parents themselves; she has buried many acquaintances of the older generations, those who told her about the past life of the village. Hendry grew old alongside the villagers. She witnessed their changes as much as they did hers and her own family's growth.

For those who, by any chance, have never read Hendry's work – there must not be that many around – do not worry. *An Affair with a Village* can be read alone, without being

familiar with her published research findings. However, an interesting reading strategy might be to read them in parallel, thus allowing you a peek behind the curtain. Hendry follows a tradition of personal narrations of anthropologists' fieldwork that emerged in the 1960s. This book goes beyond the factual, beyond the anthropological analysis and focuses on the emotions and personal souvenirs. In this autobiographical narration, Hendry recalls chronologically over forty years of relationships with the village.

Chapter 1 introduces the reader to the village with a description of the place, that Hendry "did not think [...] beautiful at first" (p. 1) and introducing what would be the places of interest for an anthropologist in a rural area: the places of social life, the religious places and the fields.

Chapter 2, titled "Introductions", is both an introduction to the main figures of authority (her academic tutor, a member of parliament, the village head, the policeman) and how they introduced her to the village and each in his (as all were men) own way helped her be accepted in the community. Hendry also presents the first steps of her fieldwork with the formal meeting of all the families, the police records and the genealogical tree of the village she made.

In Chapter 3, Hendry explains how she "wooed" the families, how the first formal meetings turned into less formal encounters, how she exchanged gifts with them, and also got to know their ancestors.

Chapter 4 lists how she was able to build relationships with different groups of people: the shopkeepers who are always around, at events she was invited to, by being allowed into their homes, by tagging along specific groups such as the youth group. She finishes the chapter by developing two specific events she witnessed: a baby presentation at the shrine and the rebuilding of a house.

Chapter 5 introduces the concept of the Japanese family registry and why and how she gained access to them and presents the mourning rituals she encountered for the first time.

In Chapter 6, after mentioning the difficult line between her need to fit in the community and her own family's privacy, she focuses on her friendlier relationship with one family and the sudden death of their head of the household, a middle-aged father of three. Here, we see clearly both sides of Hendry's reaction: her own emotional response to this death and her professional reading of how it affects the household (*ie*) and the whole village.

In the next chapter, Hendry explores the more intimate aspect of life within the home and the evening and night routines. Once her husband returns to the UK for his work, she

is inundated with invitations to stay over, and uses the occasion to stay with as many families as possible to discover the sleeping arrangements and the questions of privacy within each household. Thanks to that closeness to the private life of the villagers, she manages to attend more meetings and get a better understanding of the village life.

In chapter 8, the author details how her house being broken into by an unknown man who she caught wearing her clothes scared her into staying over at her neighbor's house for the rest of her fieldwork. She describes her dealing with the police and the four hours she spent being interrogated. Staying at with Kumagais helped her understanding of Japanese social and family life, in addition to building a lifelong friendship.

When Hendry was not informed about an important festival in the village, as she recalls in Chapter 9, she felt betrayed – with this feeling becoming the title of the chapter. It became the occasion that led her to question her position in the village, the gap between what was said to her and what was actually thought or felt, about how she might be imposing on the villagers; lives. However, their curiosity towards her lowered her concerns about her own curiosity. The second half of the chapter focuses on the presence of a stray dog she adopted – rather, it adopted her – and the issues it created with some of the villagers.

Chapter 10 narrates the final weeks before she finishes her field study and leaves the village. It matches the end-of-year season and is packed with parties, speeches and even a radio interview. Hendry recalls the departing gifts she received and the send-off party that accompanied her to the train station.

The “glorious return” that composes Chapter 11 takes place three years later. By then, her thesis had been published and she had given birth to her first son. Her second stay lasted one month and she was to accompany a BBC film crew to the village. There were still few foreign visitors at the time and the film crew were treated as guests by the villagers. Although it went smoothly, the BBC crew being used to working abroad and complying with expectations, an issue arose when Hendry and the crew were given the wrong time to assist with some field preparatory work. But all bad feelings were left behind at the farewell party the villagers threw for the crew.

Chapter 12 highlights the author's difficulties with keeping up with the correspondence of the villagers and the difficult reception of her work and the BBC's film. Indeed, the eleven hours of film turned into a fifty-minute documentary and some people's sensibilities were hurt at being excluded from the final product. The same happened with her published thesis. It included some photographs of the villagers but not all. Moreover, none of the

villagers could read English. The head of the village offered to have it translated but Hendry refused, as a bad translation could cause more damage than no translation at all. Nevertheless, during the three-weeks stay, everybody warmed up again to her, thanks to her – by then – two young children, the oldest of which could speak Japanese from having attended a Japanese kindergarten for several months while Hendry was conducting new research on childrearing methods. Her new research project also helped her get close to the mothers in the village and learn about rural methods of childrearing.

Over the next chapter, Hendry recalls the many visits she paid to Kurotsuchi both for personal (to keep in touch) and professional (to update her understanding of changing rural Japan) reasons. She recalls that the visits around that time were sad as the economic bubble burst had affected the chrysanthemum sales, the crafts, and small businesses. She notes the many changes on the social life of the village: a lowered population and only one child in primary school age (in 2002), many one-person households, difficulties finding a wife for sons who agreed to carry on the family business, the increase of outside care for elders, neighbours no longer involved in housebuilding. While the village emptied out, its younger members started travelling internationally, and Hendry welcomed several villagers during their visits to Oxford. With the contribution of a carpenter from the village, she planned the – difficult – construction of a Japanese room at Oxford Brookes University.

Chapter 14 points at a change in attitude towards rural Japan. Both academics and city dwellers show an interest in rural areas and, thanks to wireless Internet, it is the start of country retreats. Hendry witnesses more changes, such as the new phenomenon of the “hands-on father” (*ikumen*), but also questions the “disastrous drop in the birth-rate” (p. 107) when she has “plenty of evidence of new generations being born” (p. 107). Before closing the chapter, she narrates how she was given an unworn wedding kimono – another sign of the changing times, as the daughter bought her own kimono and refused her mother’s handmade one. She donated the garment to the Japanese room at Oxford Brookes University, and avoided paying heavy duty in the UK thanks to the kindness of a Japanese port employee. This chapter closes with a short visit that coincided with the festival of the sacred tree (*gorogorosan*) that she missed during her field stay forty years ago.

The next chapter, titled “Forty years and counting”, summarises the changes she has witnessed during that timeframe and how she has been recording it in the five successive editions of her textbook *Understanding Japanese Society*. The change is not only in the village, but in her gaze. The village that had first appeared to her as “untidy” is now full of

charm. However, the village has lost all its shops and the public bath; only a drinks machine remains. People now drive around and, as a consequence, informal chats have subsided. The overall population lowered from 54 houses to 45 and there has been a decrease in the number of farmers and horticulturalists, although the chrysanthemums and tea fields are now prosperous and unfortunately are the cause of pollution in the area. The different crafts that Hendry witnessed in the village, such as lantern-making, paper-making, or *Kurume gasuri*, are now only practised in the Craft Centre next to the Tourist Information Centre in the nearby town Yame. Hendry specifies that all changes are not bad: some less well-off households have grown, the formerly plastic covered greenhouses are now properly finished glasshouses, all the houses look well maintained, new occupations have emerged: health care, a plastic bags factory and several small businesses. If a family's continuity is not the norm anymore, some new forms of continuity emerge, such as building new houses on the same plot to allow the older and younger generations to work together but live separately.

The last chapter recalls Hendry's last two visits to Kurotsuchi. During her penultimate trip, Hendry could not find her notebook (from her first stay) with the information about each family and was unable to remember all their faces well, especially those of the departed. As a result, for the first time, she could not visit the Buddhist altar of the people who died since her last visit, not knowing in which house they had lived. From this mishap emerged the idea of a farewell to the community. She informed her editor that it would be the last update of the textbook mentioned above. She also handed over all the photographs to the Pitt Rivers Museum (Oxford). In 2017, she offered to give to the village some documents she thought could be of interest to the villagers, mostly village-wide family trees and charts about outsiders' provenances. In 2019, a formal handover was organised. Accompanied by her son James and his girlfriend Nadine Kreter who filmed her last visit,<sup>1</sup> she took copies of the documents to the individual households and nostalgically reminisced about the past while looking at photographs.

Actually, the whole book is about nostalgia. It reads like a goodbye to the village and her lifetime love affair. A goodbye to academics, even. It is fully understandable as Hendry's age places her in the "retired" category. However, do we ever retire from

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<sup>1</sup> The film *Understanding Japanese Culture* (2019) is available here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x7qptoXqnhE>

Academia? Can we ever stop being researchers? Hendry has demonstrated that she is among the researchers who – despite other interests – go back to the same subject over and over again, who deepen their understanding of their subject and follow its evolution. I believe that if Hendry were to return to the village, she would not be able to prevent herself from analysing the most recent changes, and her resolution to not update her textbook anymore might be somewhat difficult to keep. Hendry has invested so much, professionally, in this village, that it might be hard to resist the temptation and it might be easier to just walk away as she announced she will do. But the book I am reviewing is also, if not mainly, about Hendry’s personal involvement with the village. Hendry had to juggle everyday the balance between fitting in and being an outsider. Not only a foreigner, but an academic, an anthropologist. She had built not only a relationship with her study subject, but many interpersonal relationships. As she said: “It is not easy to be sure of one’s relationship with a village. With families perhaps, with individuals more surely, but with a village – it is quite difficult!” (p. 83). She managed to keep her relationships alive for over forty years, within and outside the village. She has been fully invested in her research: her sons visited with her, helped lower tensions at times, filmed her with the villagers; she welcomed villagers into her home in the UK; she kept correspondence with many of the housewives. She asked the villagers to open up to her, but, in a reciprocal movement, she also opened up to them. Would her research have been as good if she had not invested herself and her family? I believe not. And neither does Hendry, as she had previously written about “the advantages of the personal involvement of a fieldworker in gaining understanding of a society” (1999, p. 155).

Already in 1999, Hendry wrote a “highly personal” – as her publisher states – account of another fieldwork in *An Anthropologist in Japan*; that book is nonetheless turned towards Academia in a way that *An Affair with a Village* is not. The former is published by Routledge, who qualifies it as “reflexive anthropology in action” in the abstract; the prologue presents the method of research and states that its overall goals are to “provide interesting and revealing glimpses of Japanese life” and “to make a contribution to the wider aim that I believe is made especially possible by the subject of social anthropology, namely to overcome the dreadful propensity of people to misunderstand one another” (1999, xiv). The back cover clearly states the book is aimed at academics, more precisely anthropologists and Japanese studies scholars.



As I was reading *An Affair with a Village*, I kept wondering who it was written for? Was it for future anthropologists to learn about a predecessor's failures and successes? Was it for the faithful reader who for years has been reading Hendry's latest studies? Was it for the layman with an interest in Japan or in rural life? I think in the prologue Hendry actually gives us a hint. This book is about nostalgia and it was written mostly for herself. It is a trip down memory lane. That the subject makes it of interest for fellow scholars, is just a plus. Hendry opts for a more informal style than her 1999's publication and has no other goal than to reminisce. There are thoughts about her role within the community as an anthropologist, but they remain brief inclusions to the main narrations. The publishing house, Extremis Publishing, is neither aimed at an academic audience nor a Japan-focused one. Her book is published alongside a variety of other memoirs, local historical accounts, travel books and nonfiction on media and culture.

I cannot in good faith complete this review without mentioning a few more critical points. Although I understand that Extremis Publishing is a young independent publishing house (started in 2015), the printing quality of the book is overall low. Many photographs have been included (those donated to the Pitt Rivers Museum), to our great pleasure. The choice was made to display the photographs alongside the text. I personally find it nice to be able to look at the images while reading about the event or people in the photograph, rather than having to flick back and forth. However, this choice forces all pages to be printed in colour (as testified by a Bordeaux header), but all in a lower quality, for financial reasons, I assume.

I also have to admit a slight irritation at Hendry's writing style, especially in the first chapters. She seems to have forced her narration into a chronological line – although almost never providing indications of the date, not even just the decade. In theory, there is nothing wrong with that approach for an autobiographical text. However, she keeps jumping ahead of the events in a somewhat inelegant style: "I am jumping ahead again [...] it will be revealed in due course" (p. 23), "as we shall see in due course" (p. 28), "and will reappear in a later chapter (read on, dear reader!)" (p. 38).

Do not expect *An Affair with a Village* to be Hendry's latest update on her early research. It is not. As long as you read it for what it is – a memoir, a nostalgic account of a life in Japan in the 1970s and the subsequent changes she witnessed, a goodbye from a renowned anthropologist who has deepened our understanding of rural Japan relentlessly since then – you should enjoy this peek behind the curtains.

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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**Aurore YAMAGATA-MONTOYA** obtained her PhD on the representation of Japanese children and the construction of national identity in photography from the University of the West of England (UK). Her research interests are at the junction of photography, childhood and family studies, Japanese and cultural studies. Her current research focuses on two different but related themes: the childhood of the feminist Tsuda Umeko, especially her experience of life in America in the 1870s; and the representation of the Iwakura Mission in the Press both in Japan and abroad. She is a co-founder and the president of Mutual Images Research Association. Her latest publications include “Dressing the Mizuko Jizō: Materialising the Aborted Fetus in Japan” in *Representing Abortion*, edited by Rachel Alpha Johnston Hurst (London and New York: Routledge).