In-depth interviews are well suited to explore people's experiences and perceptions of the world. For example, what does it mean for a woman to remain single in her thirties? By interviewing (say) forty unmarried Japanese women in that age group, an anthropologist can gain a complex, situated account. Unlike survey results from a large, nationally representative sample, the researcher cannot use the results of in-depth interviews with a relatively small sample to make generalizations about single women in Japan. Nonetheless, qualitative interviews offer rich, nuanced data that large-scale surveys cannot easily provide. By using observational and interview data, the contributors to this volume thus convey concrete, rich examples of people's real-life engagements and struggles.

Notes for Instructors

This book contains thirteen chapters, divided into five sections. Chapters that address certain similar themes are grouped together, although except for chapters 1 and 2, which shed light on long-term changes, it is not necessary to assign the chapters sequentially. To facilitate the adoption of this volume for the teaching of Japan-related classes, the following provides the key themes covered in each chapter.

Chapter 1 (Roberts): economic change, family, work conditions and opportunities, blue-collar employees, marriage, cultural capital, class reproduction, parent-child relations

Chapter 2 (Mathews): marital satisfaction, marital ideals, men’s experiences, aging, retirement, divorce, religion, disability, child rearing

Chapter 3 (Kurotani): the bubble generation, female corporate workers, the EEOL, career women, gender and work, habitus

Chapter 4 (Rosenberger): organic farming, women farmers, alternative lifestyles, resistance, identity, food safety, environment

Chapter 5 (Whitelaw): work culture, moral economy, convenience stores, small-scale business owners and retail systems, consumerism, loss and waste, prepared foods, urban lifestyles

Chapter 6 (Nakano): single women, employment opportunities and strategies, marriage opportunities and choices, meanings of singlehood, values, life courses
Chapter 7 (Long): grandparents, grandchildren, generational relations, aging, longevity, the frail elderly, elder care

Chapter 8 (Nakamura): sexuality, sexual services, people with disabilities, prostitution, men with physical disabilities, welfare organizations, volunteering

Chapter 9 (Kawano): child-rearing support, young mothers, preschoolers, metropolitan communities, social networks, non-profit organizations, female volunteers

Chapter 10 (Miller): divination, the occult, young women and girls, social bonding, entertainment, consumption, technology, communication

Chapter 11 (Cave): education, elementary schools, middle schools, high schools, private tutorial and test preparation programs, academics, moral values, socialization, pedagogy, curriculum changes, educational reforms

Chapter 12 (Roth): car culture, K-cars, gendered driving manners, driving metaphors, femininity, masculinity, structuralism

Chapter 13 (Kawano): mortuary rites; ancestors; ash-scattering ceremonies; dependence and late adulthood; the elderly living alone; attitudes toward death, family ties, and burial; attitudes toward religion; afterlives

We intend this volume to be read by students in tandem with recently published handbooks, ethnographies, and collections on aspects of life in contemporary Japan. Chapters from this book could be assigned to complement these other books in order to give students a feel for the people behind the sociological narratives. In recent years several handbooks on contemporary Japan have been published, systematically explicating various facets of social life today (for instance, Bestor et al., Routledge Handbook of Japanese Culture and Society, and Robertson, A Companion to the Anthropology of Japan). There are also several multi-author volumes that deal with various issues facing Japanese society today, such as Mathews and White, Japan's Changing Generations; Matanle and Lunsing, Perspectives on Work, Employment and Society in Japan; Hashimoto and Traphagan, Imagined Families, Lived Families; Ishida and Slater, Social Class in Contemporary Japan; and Ronald and Alexy, Home and Family in Japan. In Capturing Contemporary Japan, social transformation during a time of increasing globalization and challenging economic circumstances is the plumb line, while the topics covered vary depending on the
ethnographic research of each author. The volume strives to provide a slide show of people in diverse positions during the first decade of the twenty-first century, but it does not attempt to cover all the major themes or topics important to contemporary Japan. For instance, in recent years, Japan has seen an increase in international marriages, as well as in its resident foreign population. While accounts of these groups are certainly important, we ask readers to visit other works, such as Willis and Murphy-Shigematsu, *Transcultural Japan*, in order to understand these populations. In a way *Capturing Contemporary Japan* is reminiscent of Imamura’s *Re-imaging Japanese Women* as it attempts to highlight the diverse experiences of Japanese people during the 2000s, although there are a number of differences in scope and approach. Gender is not the primary focus of this volume, although many chapters attempt to provide gendered accounts as well as age- and class-sensitive accounts of people’s experiences. None of the chapters in the volume are reprints; all are newly crafted to feature ethnographic data collected during the 2000s.

Notes

1. Osawa (2011) points out that no more than 20 percent of Japanese employees benefited from lifetime employment, but the large firms that offered it became icons of the economic stability and success of the country.

2. The postwar period in Japan often refers to the period from the end of World War II to 1989.

3. Formerly, as discussed above, women exited the world of work to marry, and a woman’s status was measured to some extent by the socioeconomic position of her husband. Therefore her educational capital was less directly tied to her status.

References Cited


