My Own Self

I left Japan when I was twenty-eight, an age at which I had become irreversibly Japanese. And yet, a typical expatriate, I was thoroughly alienated from my home country—perhaps, I now realize, in overreaction to a still-lingering ambivalence. It was years before I regained a reasonable balance. Furthermore, as I began to grapple with the American way of life I was entrenched in my doctoral training in sociology, which emphasized a universalistic theory centering on the ideas of Talcott Parsons. What turned me back to Japan was the job market and the realization that my Japanese background was the sole resource I could offer to American academia. Accepting a position teaching cultural anthropology at the University of Hawai‘i, I entered a fascinating world in which the particularities of lived human experience are held up against a universal mirror. Thus I reconnected with my country of origin, to which I have returned every year as a researcher.

This brief tale reveals the multiple marginality of my identity. I am marginal to both Japan and the United States. Perhaps more important, I am marginal to anthropology, not only because my degree was in sociology but also because anthropology has traditionally insisted on studying a society other than one’s own. I am a native anthropologist, even though my “nativity” is not fully legitimate. As a native, I was unable to replicate a non-native’s “awakening” experience in my fieldwork. Instead, I have endured tough self-training, perhaps as tough as a non-native’s fieldwork itself, by teaching American students and writing for English-language readers. The American classroom has been my field site.

This multiple marginality has led to an ongoing conversation between the different parts of myself. The “Japanese” part reacts emo-
tionally and naively as Japan rises and falls in the international hierarchy of power and reputation. When G-Seven (later Eight) world leaders stood in line for a photo session, I was just as anxious as most Japanese to see where “our” prime minister would stand: would he be at the end, isolated from the group, or chat comfortably with the other leaders near the center? My ego is boosted each time a Japanese citizen wins a Nobel Prize, and I am gladdened by the success of Japanese baseball players playing in American stadiums. Conversely, whenever Japan exposes its ineptitude, misjudgment, or large-scale corruption in global headlines, I shrink with shame and anger.

Nonetheless, I am “nationalistic” in a very inconsistent way. When Japanese criticize Americans for weak reasons, I feel upset. In the Japanese national sport of sumo, the only athlete I care about is a local wrestler from Hawai‘i. Like many first-generation immigrants to the United States, I gratefully acknowledge my host country as a land of generosity and opportunity for newcomers. More generally, I appreciate American pluralism, even as I am aware of the huge price it extracts.

This consciousness of my marginal identity accounts for my enduring interest in self—an interest that, however, goes beyond personal involvement, as the present volume, with its broadly socio-cultural implications, will make clear.

**Why Self Now?**

Lately there has been a resurgence of interest in the notion of self, for a number of reasons, from academic to popular, from culture-free to culture-bound. On the academic side, interest in the self reflects the current trend of challenging the alleged misrepresentation of the non-Western “Other” by the Western “Self.” The former “native Other,” thus, is being refigured into Self, while the Western “observer Self” is being recast as Other. This is a major issue for contemporary Western anthropologists, who have been studying “native Others” as a matter of disciplinary mandate. This crisis has led not only to deep self-reflection on the part of Western academics, but also—and as a consequence—to a new focus on the “non-Western native self” in Western academic work (as evidenced by this book).

This controversial Western Self is further complicated by the political, ethical, and methodological self-consciousness of ethnographers, who inflict an inevitable “intrusion of their own selves” on the lives of the people they study (Cohen 1994, 5). Reflexive anthropology now advises ethnographers to be aware not only of how they project
themselves onto the native other, but also of how they are themselves monitored by the native people living in their field site. The anthropological Golden Rule of “participant observation” is no longer a given, because the self’s participation inevitably disrupts and influences the native others’ way of life, which then feeds back into the observing task. We are aware, further, that field “data” do not emerge without constant negotiations between “observer” and “observed.” Yet despite these qualifications, I do not intend to join in the chorus criticizing Western anthropologists, nor do I wish to reinforce Said’s (1978) denunciation of “Orientalism” (a term I further refer to below).

Current interest in the self extends well beyond the small academic circle, of course. It also reflects present-day opportunities to transcend cultural borders at home and abroad and encounter cultural others. Globalization disperses political, economic, and cultural resources, as well as the people who supply or demand them, across national borders. Although this fluidity would seem to displace the culture concept, in fact cultural identity is reinforced as two opposite pressures—globalization and localization—stimulate each other; it is, James Rosenau (2003, 69) says, “as if every increment of globalization gives rise to an increment of localization, and vice versa.” This double process of “glocalization” or “fragmegration” (local fragmentation plus global integration) may involve conflict, but not necessarily. Tourism, for example, succeeds only to the degree to which the local, native product is made to appeal to foreign visitors through what I regard as the “glocal” process of “collusion.”

Tourism and international exposure through the media also prompt the individual to ask, “Who am I?” Contact with foreign people and information stimulates the quest for self-knowledge, particularly in the context of cultural and national identity. Nostalgic interest in an old Japan among contemporary Japanese may have much to do with ongoing globalization. (See epilogue for more on this.)

A very potent arena for analysis of the self can be found in the material and consumer culture, which in Japan grew plentiful and exuberant as the country enjoyed an unprecedented affluence from the mid-1960s into the 1990s. Luxury consumption now transcended the three basic conditions of subsistence—clothing, food, and shelter—as people swarmed to buy “designer brand” apparel and accessories, avail themselves of cosmetic surgery, indulge their taste buds in foreign cuisine or “authentic” Japanese food eaten at fashionable restaurants, and build lavish architect-designed homes in chic Tokyo suburbs. Consumption, possession, or display of these material goods now serves at the very least to enhance, if not outright constitute, the individual’s self-worth.
Economic resources for survival have thus been increasingly transformed into symbolic capital used to enhance, enrich, refine, decorate, and exhibit one’s self. The very fact that contemporary popular culture is essentially an entertainment culture (captured by such coinages as “infotainment” and “edutainment”) further subverts the old Japanese ideal of self-discipline.

The visual media enter strongly into this cultural shift, causing ordinary folks to be increasingly conscious of their presentational and performative selves as they take part in a “display culture.” The most visible aspect of this trend involves one’s body appearance and facial features. In contemporary Japan, not just women, but men too, engage in cosmetic beautification. Men patronize male beauty salons and follow such formerly female trends as keeping the body hairless (not only leg and armpit hair, but arm and chest hair as well) as a means of promoting sex appeal (Miller 2003). For Japanese, this emphasis on outward appearance—as opposed to the “heart”—has undermined the old norm whereby people were advised to be “modest,” “unobtrusive,” and “reserved” as manifestations of personal integrity.

As individuals shape their selves in accordance with media-imposed standards of life style, appearance, speech, and knowledge, the main “public” that monitors and controls self-presentation is increasingly constituted by these media viewers. Success is now associated with a discovered tarento (talent), as displayed on the screen. In the resulting hierarchy of publicity, celebrities form the elite, while a large mass of media commoners—the “fans”—occupy the bottom rungs. Many adolescent boys and girls now dream not of educational or occupational success, but of “making it” as a media star. And yet the media culture is defined by caprice, with the overnight rise and fall of stars commonplace.

This situation leads to a tendency to attract media attention through conspicuous anomaly, from applying graffiti in eye-catching public places to hijacking airplanes to committing horrific massacres. The most media-attracting incidents in Japan today are conspicuous, and almost predictable, disruptions of public events—ceremonies for the national adulthood day, high school graduations, community festivals—by violent gangs. Japan’s Hells Angels, for instance, apparently anticipating media exposure, choreograph midnight subversions of order in confrontations with armed police.

In addition to stimulating somewhat superficial expressions of self, this barrier-free media culture also inspires deeper questions about self-identity. Sexual orientation, for example, is no longer bound by the rigid binary of gender identity; new and wider options
are seen to be possible. Self-liberation from stereotypic sexual and social roles may stimulate many individuals, including otherwise quite conventional people, to experiment in carving out more expansive alternative selves. Further, media exposure is bound to expand individuals' perspectives beyond their local culture and toward globalization.

Finally, there is the ongoing revolution in information technology, which is strongly—and irreversibly—impacting human life, including our notions of self, as it brings unlimited numbers and types of invisible others into electronic contact. The constantly upgraded mobile phone, with its multiplying functions, has become an indispensable possession for most Japanese. Whereas our predigital idea of communication is “embodied”—that is, dependent on interaction through seeing, hearing, talking, touching, posturing, and gesturing—the new modes of communication allow unprecedented contact between disembodied selves. The coexistence of this invisible, inaudible exchange with the audiovisual culture of the media results in a constant widening of “the digital divide.”

**Embodied and Disembodied, Real and Virtual, Yesterday and Today**

The bulk of the present volume is grounded in embodied humanity and will reveal the importance of bodily and even “silent” communication style; I refer to the “cyber self” occasionally only where it furthers my discussion. Nonetheless, we cannot ignore the exponentially expanding cyberspace in which we live. How do the two trends—embodied and disembodied—and the two resulting selves—real and virtual—relate to each other? I propose three modes of linking the virtual to the solid world of experience: oppositional, complementary, and replicative.

In the *oppositional* mode, the virtual universe flourishes only at the expense of embodied reality. The expansion of cyberspace is claimed to undercut the embodied interpersonal space, thereby producing socially withdrawn, isolated individuals, as best illustrated by the phenomenon of *otaku* (Japanese nerds). More horrific examples can be found in the phenomenon of cyber-dating, where several “dates” have ended up in murder. How might these negative traits be countered? One strategy would be to discourage virtual communication and to encourage a revival of solidarity groups or communities based on face-to-face, body-to-body interaction.

The *complementary* mode draws attention to the inadequacy of
precyber communication as a precise result of its body attachment. Here, cyber communication is seen to make up for the defective, limited nature of embodied communication by transcending all kinds of boundaries—geographical, political, cultural, economic, bodily. This extended capacity is likened to an “electronic prosthesis” in its ability to free one from such limitations. This mode also addresses the culturally conditioned resistance to direct person-to-person communication under certain circumstances (see especially chapter 4)—one basis for the fantastic optimism about cyber culture as “savior.”

The virtual self is thus enriching the sensory self. Virtual communities are even being created to reinforce or recreate the old, real communities or to strengthen interpersonal and communal ties. According to a television report in 2001, for instance, one isolated, depopulated mountain village in Japan was revitalized when each household, equipped with a computer, became connected on-line to the world through the Internet. So powerful was this innovation that young people who had fled for bigger things soon began to return to their home village.

While the first two modes presume the two worlds of embodied and disembodied to be different or contrastive, the third, replicative mode assumes the possibility of overlap, of replication of one by the other. Similarly, in this mode the two types of communication—digital and analog—prove less different than they at first appear; rather, cyber communication may be seen not to supplant and disempower embodied communication, but rather to imitate and reinforce it. I came to this unlikely proposition from a paper by Katsuno and Yano (2002) on kaomoji (emoticons; literally, “facelike symbols”), invented and elaborated by Japanese Internet correspondents by combining diacritical marks—commas, quotation marks, slashes, parentheses, etc.—to make little faces that display emotions difficult to convey textually. One might call this a new vocabulary of “body language,” being “spoken” in disembodied “chat rooms” or by use of the kaomoji-equipped Japanese cell phone, a new vocabulary that accommodates the cultural need to convey personal feelings without words.

All the cultural and physical factors alluded to above influence our lives at an ever increasing pace, intensifying our self-awareness, insecurity, and alertness in response to the perceived fluidity and uncertainty of the world. The media specialize in bringing to the public view what is novel today, outdating what was new yesterday. This constant updating of what is current threatens adults, to be sure; but think of the typical Japanese high school girl, who feels defeated by a one-year-younger schoolmate in staying up with what’s “in” today. Restlessness among youths is widespread. In 1970 Margaret Mead, in *Culture and Commitment: A Study of the Generation Gap*, wrote on the
generational reversal of teacher and pupil. She was looking at the
campus unrest and violence of the 1960s, describing that counterculture as a sort of “social bulldozing” (1970, 85). Today’s intergenerational reversal has nothing to do with counterculture or the “bulldozing” witnessed by Mead; rather, it is marked by a “digital divide,” which nonetheless seems to be having a far more serious impact on the way self and other are perceived across the generations.

Nevertheless, a very real—and horrendous—“bulldozing” is affecting today’s world. The worst is the threat of terrorism, which destroys human lives and cultures at unforeseeable moments and sites. The largest-scale manifestation of this threat to date was the September 11, 2001, attack on U.S. landmarks. Vivid media-transmitted images of the instantaneous collapse of the World Trade Center buildings were imprinted on all TV viewers, to a degree annihilating their confidence in the familiar order of the world.

The “9/11” disaster has been called a turning point in both U.S. and world history; the American media continue to mourn the victims, to review and analyze what happened and what could have been done to prevent the attack, to warn about more attacks on an even larger scale, to endorse radical upgrades of the security system, and so forth. And yet only one thing is truly certain in all of this, and that is the uncertainty of the next threat: we cannot foresee when, where, against what or whom, or by what means the next attack will be. Although patriotism is being looked to throughout the United States to enhance the collective morale, that is not enough. The utter unpredictability of terrorism demands an overhaul of old notions of individual security and the creation of a new self that is psychologically equipped to adapt to this global uncertainty.

Even overlooking the universal threat of terrorism, Japan, after decades of recognition as an economic superpower, is facing its own crisis—economic, political, governmental, diplomatic, social, educational. No longer confident of an existing order to follow, including a Western model to emulate, many Japanese are in a depressive mood, feeling that their country is “collapsing.” To cope with national and global crises, individuals are pressed to rediscover or reinvent themselves, to draw new maps for navigating their life courses, maps that steer them away from familiar, collectively shared tracks. As I see it, the big question here is whether and how culture facilitates or blocks, guides or misleads, this quest for self. I hope the present volume will contribute to relocating our selves—Japanese as well as non-Japanese—in a cultural context. Whatever radical change, such as the ongoing expansion of cyber space, is taking place, and wherever it takes us, I believe that although things new are different from things old, they are not unrelated.
Reflexivity of Self and Other: “I” and “Me”

Relativization of the concept of self is mirrored in the changing labels applied to the anthropological subfield in which the present study most closely fits, from “culture and personality,” to “psychological anthropology,” to “the anthropology of personhood or self.” This change suggests a self-conscious move by Western scholars away from the allegedly Western-centered conceptual apparatus. Dombeck (1994) gives cogent definitions of _self_—which she characterizes as “reflexive”—and _person_—“referential”—and suggests that the dialectic between the two, including what is concealed from the self, provides valuable information. In place of the mirror as metaphor, Dombeck proposes the prism, which “allows us to describe inconstant, inconsistent, and fragmented experiences of the self,” the assumption being “that there are constant and precise principles (analogous to the principles of optics) that make the whole thing work” (1994, 441–442). Noting, moreover, that “the self comprises the whole spectrum of nuances of meaning,” she warns that “persons who selectively ignore the interruptions of their reflexivity become dangerously dehumanized by seeing themselves only in reference to a fixed personhood. Conversely, humans can become depersonalized through the denial of the sanctioned capacities of personhood” (1994, 455).

In a manner approaching Dombeck’s notion of “reflexivity,” I use _self_ when some sense of subjectivity is involved in relation to the objective world. The external “observer” of self cannot remain outside the subject but must enter the inner, subjective domain of self, as much as self enters other (throughout, “other” refers to other person[s] in relation to self). Self and other thus require each other for full definition. This emphasis on subject-object reflexivity is reminiscent of George H. Mead’s (1934) assertion that self emerges only through the internalization of others’ perspectives and expectations. Mead struggled to link two sides of self: self as subject—“I”—and self as object—“me”—or the unique, individual self and the social self, susceptible to others.

Mead’s self as “I” and “me” carries a temporal duality: “I” as spontaneous, unpredictable, in the “present” moment, a self that is released blindly at the moment of action; and “me” as a memory of “I,” produced only after “I”’s action.

I talk to myself, and I remember what I said and perhaps the emotional content that went with it. The “I” of this moment is present in the “me” of the next moment. There again I cannot turn around quick enough to catch myself. I become a “me” in so far as I remember what
I said... It is because of the “I” that we say that we are never fully aware of what we are, that we surprise ourselves by our own action. ... It is in memory that the “I” is constantly present in experience. ... As given, it is a “me,” but it is a “me” which was the “I” at the earlier time. (G. H. Mead 1934, 174)

Lonnie Athens (1994) reworks Mead, elaborating on “the self as a soliloquy.” In the process of soliloquizing, Athens suggests, one converses at once with another person, that is, a disembodied other, and with oneself. I find the idea of soliloquy useful for the characterization of Japanese self.

This temporal duality of the self throws light on the culture concept. Culture may be characterized as a gigantic storehouse of memories, collectively carried and temporally enduring but not independent of individual selves. Culture can thus be visualized as a set of memories internalized in collective “me”s, yet acted out by a host of “I”s. This perspective helps account for the spontaneous, creative, improvising, generative, instantiating aspect of culture, which is “I”-based, as well as the enduring, conformative, patterned, reflexive side of culture, internalized in the “me.” Since both sides of culture must be taken into consideration, it seems unreasonable to discard the culture concept, as anticulture critics suggest. Mead’s “I-and-Me” model comes closest to what I perceive as the Japanese self, though it does not totally overlap the Japanese case of selfhood, as this volume will make clear.

Allied closely to self is person, a somewhat more “objective” (or in Dombeck’s terminology, “referential”) construct, amenable to external observation. Person in this sense comes close to individual, though there is a difference: an individual, by my definition, is an uncontextualized, abstract, universal construct, often used in contrast to a collectivity, whereas a person is concrete, loaded with cultural meaning, and contextualized in social setting.1

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1 Andrew Strathern and Pamela J. Stewart (1998) provide an overview of the anthropological literature on these three interrelated concepts of self, person, and individual, with definitions ranging from clearly distinguished constructs to interesting fusions. From literary sources Amelie Rorty comes up with related words, including character, figure, soul, and mind. In her view, however, it is individuality that is central and most advanced, associated with such attributes as conscience, integrity, autonomy, inalienable rights, and inwardness (Rorty 1976, 315–317). My definition does not carry the moral values implied in these attributes.
Strategies in Writing

Far from being a solid field-based ethnography, this book is an outcome of my talking to myself over the years, a lonely luxury of living a retired life. As such, it is a culmination of obsessive speculations. In presenting self-generated ideas, however, I try to discipline myself by adhering to certain strategies. First, I realize that my subjective ideas will be transformed into “information” only insofar as they are accepted by my readers as plausible. To gain support from my readers, therefore, I have tried to objectify my basically subjective thoughts. Instructive in this regard is Melford Spiro’s (1996) provocative statement that there is a “mind-independent external reality,” which leads to the theory of correspondence between statements and the external objects to which those statements refer. For me, correspondence obtains between my statement and my reader’s response based on his (or her) knowledge and experience.

Second, I make note of another epistemological stand, taken by many anthropologists today, which amounts not to “reality,” but to political correctness, moral righteousness, ideological commitment, and ends up ruling out the possibility of objective knowledge. It should be obvious from my first point that I am opposed to such politicization or “moralization” of knowledge. Roy D’Andrade (1995a,b), in a discussion of “the current moral model in anthropology,” puts it like this: “Objectivity turns out to be a mask for domination.... The moral thing to do [according to this model] is to denounce those who maintain this mystification and transform anthropology from an objective natural science, which is just a charade and a means of continuing oppression, into a critical anthropology which will help change the world.” The moral model, he points out, “tends toward black and white... [and] is almost entirely negative in character: it creates a climate of denunciation and rage” (1995b, 400–407).

Like D’Andrade, I am interested in accumulating “objective” knowledge, which in turn depends, pragmatically, on degrees of agreement or disagreement among researchers as well as general readers regarding the subjects I investigate. When I single out morally implicative cases such as corruption and scandalous incidents, therefore, I am committed to explanation rather than accusation. I wish to contribute to the production of knowledge, not to denounce or glorify something or someone.

My third strategy in this book is to pay attention to the complexity of events, situations, and experiences, instead of subscribing to simple reductionism. It is for this reason that I contextualize self in culture, rather than in power, economics, or the techno-environment,
which would lead to more simplistic analyses. Because culture embraces all these variables, power-generated political scandals, for example, which run rampant in today’s Japan, will inevitably enter my culture-centered self-analysis.

I consider self and culture as analytically distinct “categories” on two contrastive accounts. On the one hand, self emanates from and resides in an individual person, while culture is based on a selected aggregate of people participating therein; on the other hand, self is likely, if defined in terms of human psychology, to cover universal humanity in general, whereas culture is embedded in a particular population (even though “universal culture” is also conceivable). Inevitably I will shift my attention between universals and particulars, between individual persons and groups. My aim throughout, however, will be to target the areas where culture and self intersect.

Culture, a notoriously fuzzy concept, has given rise to a multitude of definitions, as illustrated perhaps best by Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1952). We cannot eliminate fuzziness from any definition entirely, and I do not necessarily believe fuzziness to be all bad. But I try to reduce the fuzziness of culture by proposing models of cultural logic that provide some coherence for my presentations and arguments.

In a substantive sense, I connect culture with people as its carriers and, perhaps as a consequence, characterize it in comparative terms. Thus I refer to “Japanese culture” in contrast with “American,” “North American,” “Euro-American,” or generally, “Western.” In what follows, I attempt to rationalize this approach, in anticipation of critics who spurn such labels as “over- (or under-)generalizations.” Nevertheless, it is important to take note of these criticisms as they apply to anthropology in general and to Japanese studies in particular. The so-called Nihonjinron (discourse on the Japanese people) is often mentioned in this regard, such that almost every student of Japan tries to avoid being branded with this label.

Although I believe we need to confront rather than evade the Nihonjinron issue, and know it would be appropriate to do so right here, I have chosen to postpone that discussion until the end of this volume, for two reasons: first, a satisfactory analysis would take too much space here; and second, my argument on this issue presupposes the logical models that will be introduced in chapter 1. The epilogue allows more room both for analysis and for reasoned response to prevailing criticisms; it also provides me with an opportunity to advocate the revitalization of Japanese studies in a cultural context.

Fourth, despite my attention to complexity, I am ultimately committed to drawing generalizations—at the risk of sacrificing details, which in any event are infinitely endless and variable, incapable of yielding a conclusion. Along with details, consider how everything is
always changing, from day to day and even moment to moment; this manner of change is beyond description, let alone generalization. Nevertheless, I hope to elucidate the ways in which change in human society is often driven or pushed by higher-order cultural channels. As a consequence, you will encounter some discussion of change in every chapter, but especially in chapter 3, which looks not only at deviations from established, familiar patterns but also, and more importantly, at culturally recognizable, patterned cycles of change.

Fifth, I have chosen to draw on a variety of information on various subjects, all culled from or sparked by my past fieldwork. Thus, in a somewhat retrospective view, I have revised some portions of my earlier publications and reinterpreted other parts within a new frame of reference. Shizumi, my field site of thirty years, appears throughout, joined by other places, primarily in and around Tokyo, where I conducted more recent interviews, especially regarding the aristocracy and career women. Casual conversations with friends and colleagues supply intriguing pieces of information as well.

I have tried to keep information updated by drawing abundantly on the media, including newspaper reports (primarily the Asahi newspaper), columns and letters to the editor of various publications, televised news, and other programs from Japan, including popular drama series. I quote today’s news not because it is the latest knowledge, destined to be trashed tomorrow, but because it often throws light on a general cultural theme or illuminates a relatively predictable logical scheme. For the same reasons, locally available American media (the Honolulu Advertiser) and Internet sources are also consulted. One caveat: I have been working on this manuscript for so long that when I qualify statements with “at this writing,” “today,” or “nowadays,” I could be referring to anytime between the mid-1990s and 2003, unless specifically dated.

Individual illustrations are typically brief, though occasionally they are interrupted by discussions commanding several pages either continuously within a single context or intermittently across different contexts. The topics discussed include styles of conversation, silence, gender, motherhood, domestic violence, suicide, hierarchy, power, classmate abuse, corruption, hospitality (settai), self-other surrogacy, Alzheimer’s patients, eldercare, and “home-help” programs. In addition, two fictional accounts are analyzed at some length: the televised home drama series Wataru seken wa oni bakari (“Making It Through” in the Hawai’i version) and a double-suicide drama by the playwright Chikamatsu Monzaemon (1653–1724).

Chapter 1 presents two models of cultural logic—“opposition logic” and “contingency logic”—which are useful as guides for examining concepts of self, Japanese and otherwise. The following four
chapters utilize these logical models to delve into three layers of Japanese self: the social layer (chapters 2 and 3), as located in four “zones” —omote (front), uchi (interior), ura (back), and soto (exterior); the inner layer (chapter 4); and the cosmological layer (chapter 5). The social layer, with its zonal concepts (familiar to students of Japan), is further elucidated by discussion of the dimension of “civility.” The inner self, in contrast, involves a reflexivity in which self communicates with self. Viewed another way, if the social self engages in conversation with other in dialogue or trialogue, the inner self communicates through monologue or soliloquy. The cosmological layer of self, meanwhile, centers on transcendental beliefs and fantasies, supplemented by aesthetics. It will be noted that as one progresses from the social to the inner to the cosmological layer, cultural distinctiveness magnifies. Finally, we have the epilogue, an analysis of critiques of Japanese studies (Nihonjinron) that is propelled by my humble wish to reinforce the relevancy of Japanese studies.

I am convinced that the self-concept serves as a universally available, effective, and indispensable filter that helps us make sense of the chaotic flow of information in this manifold world today. The following inquiry into the Japanese self will, I hope, inform our understanding of humanity in general.

One final note. Regarding third-person singular pronouns, we seem still to be struggling with how to designate gender, particularly when multiple instances of “he or she” or “his or her” appear in a single sentence or paragraph. To avoid tedious repetition, some authors have opted to mention “she,” dropping “he,” a device I would follow if this alternative did not somewhat trivialize the gender issue. Another alternative, “s/he,” could be adopted only if one did not have to use other cases (her/is? him/er?). My non-solution solution is to designate “he or she” as “he (or she)” in its first appearance, and drop “(or she)” afterward in the same discussion.

In contexts where yen amounts are discussed, given the tremendous fluctuation of the dollar-yen rates over the years (during the period 1989–2001 the average was ¥120 to the dollar, varying from a high of ¥150 in 1990 to a low of ¥93 in 1995; Nihon Tōkei Kyōkai 2003, 430), I have simplified so that ¥100 = $1. Although inaccurate, it gives a general sense of monetary amount, which is sufficient for my purposes.