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Introduction

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Today's world is facing rapid changes, opening borders, exchanging ideas of economy and politics. In addition to the various problems ensuing from the recent situation, we have to recognise that we are entering a new age of lifestyles in which, in everyday life, we are exposed to new social situations with more diversity, ranging from foods and lifestyle to arts and information. The transitions between different historical periods and social regulations can be complicated and often frustrating.

These phenomena may be viewed in the context of Japan's globalisation, internal and external, which began as soon as Japan opened its ports and began its modernization project since the Meiji Period (1886–1912). Many economic, political and cultural changes that Japan has gone through since then resulted in great changes in lives of the Japanese. Externally, modern Japan's globalization began, when Japan began to establish itself as Asia's imperial power by acquiring control of neighbouring countries. The internal globalisation is shown in the changes of society within itself with the influx of foreigners since the Meiji period. Turning to more recent times, from the end of the twentieth century through the early twenty-first century, Japan has been going through a series of convulsive transformations. The economic changes came with the newly evolved corporate culture that places profit over workers welfare. (Befu 2008, xxii) Economic prosperity has encouraged a middle-class orientation, and the increasing interest for higher education resulted in the higher number of college students and the shortage of high-school graduates who could fill the unskilled labour market. The

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family system has also been going through various transformations. The marriage age is going up for both males and females, and the number of single persons has increased, too. Reasons for this may be found in accelerated urbanisation, resulting in new behaviour patterns in all segments of the changing society. Inevitably, Japan is also dealing with the problems of the decreasing birth rate. Numerous government interventions have been ineffectual in reversing the trend.

Nevertheless, in the contemporary world influenced by the process of globalization, the idea of homogenous and egalitarian society is in contrast to the reality, characterized by diversity, heterogeneity and multiculturalism. The complicated process of globalization leads to hybridization which results in the mixture of socio-cultural, political and economic powers. Japan is consequently in the stage of metamorphosis. The transformation started at cultural boundaries and is currently spreading across the country. When new forms of social relationship are interpreted, multiculturalism, transculturalism and intercultural dialogue come to the fore. They are becoming more important also in international dialogues and politics, as well as in methodological research in humanities and social science. (see Befu 2008; Sugimoto 2009) Lately, these ideas have been emphasized and revisited and have shed more light on the internal variations and stratification in the Japanese society. A very rich subculture has been emerging, not only from various ethnic groups and regions, but also in dimensions of gender, generation, education, and so on. The subcultures resulting from lifestyles of certain layers of population illustrate the wealth and diversity of the Japanese society that often seems difficult to pinpoint for foreign observers.

In order to illuminate certain aspects of globalisation in the last hundred years and more, the present volume explores a wide range of transformations happening in the Japanese society. It deals with the pluralisation and diversity of lifestyles in Japan and social changes related to other shifts and trends, such as demographic changes, urbanization and socio-economic developments. This interdisciplinary edition will appeal to anyone interested in Japan and its contemporary social issues. With articles from sociology, literature, political science, and philosophy, the edition provides an overview on Japan from different perspectives. The value is particularly apparent in case of complex, multifaceted socioeconomic issues, where the juxtaposition of multiple theoretical and empirical perspectives can provide a deeper understanding on the society in transition. The same transition can be found also in literature with several distinctive features, related to the role of literature in Japanese culture as a whole. In every era, the Japanese have

expressed their thoughts in concrete literary works, where they could show their social background, their view of life, death, religion and philosophy.

The first part of this edition is focused on the transitions in society, which can be reflected on many levels of society. Housing is certainly such a phenomenon that has fundamental impacts on issues as diverse as family life and gender roles, social justice and distribution of wealth, community dynamics, social cohesion, public health and patterns of daily life. The opening article by Tomoko Kubo and Yoshimichi Yui well portrays the transformation of the housing market in Tokyo. The authors try to point out the correlation between the transformation of the Japanese housing market and the increasing number of single-person households of condominiums, which appeared in Japan since the late 1990s. They also examine the diversification of the Japanese household structure reflecting also the consumption-based lifestyle. Beata M. Kowalczyk in her research offers a very interesting approach to the study of social change and spatial expression within the context of modernization and globalization in Japan. In analysing and observing the urban space such as Tokyo Station City, she shows the main direction of changes in the “society in transition”.

The following two articles in a second part to a certain extent touch upon the transition in the field of literature in the period of postwar Japan. In many ways, post-1945 Japanese literature differed dramatically from that of the pre-war with the defeat in the Second World War and the Allied Occupation. Huge literary issues were hotly debated. The young writers of the 1980s and 1990s rejected the problems of national identity in favour of anything “trans-”: transnational, transhistorical, transgender, transsexual. The present-day writers are reshaping Japanese literature once again. Speaking for their own generation, their fictional worlds are inundated with mixed ethnicities, high-tech, paranoia and alienation, violence, information overload, economic globalisation and depression, radical shifts in time and space and upheavals in “normative” sex and gender performances. (Cornyetz 2009, 287–290)

Tamae K. Prindle thus metaphorically traces the transition of Japanese culture since World War II. Through the analysis of Yūji Usui’s novel *A Grass-Carp on a Tree* (1993) and its film adaptation (1997) by Atsushi Ishikawa, she deals with sensitive issues in sex/gender change, which in itself is a metaphor of a larger transition of Japanese culture. Theoretically, the approach is corroborated with the use of Zoltán Kövecses’ study of metaphor and Michel Foucault’s similar but

more sociocultural metaphysics of “interior,” “outside,” and “diagramming.” The next author dealing with the transition in literature is Rodica Frentiu, who elucidates some very interesting point about the contemporary Japanese literature in its transition to the new postmodern humanism. With the study of a bestselling author, Murakami Haruki’s work that invented quirky, trans-temporal dreamscapes in dispassionate narrative style, she tries to review and complete the inventory of the postmodern characteristics in Murakami’s works.

The inspirations for the creations of present habitus come also from the past. However, Japan as every other country has many past experiences that are rather concealed than to be discussed in public. Especially, unsettled issues of the wartime era marked Japan’s postwar, postcolonial relationship with the governments and people of other Asian nations. The most complex postcolonial relationship was that with Korea. Facing oppositions from many different sides, governments could not negotiate the Treaty on Basic Relations until 1965. This agreement was finally recognized by the Republic of Korea (South Korea) as the sole legitimate Korean government. (Gordon 2009, 293–294) But serious tensions persist up to today as discussed in the paper of Jeff Kingston where he examines the 2010 commemoration of the centennial of Japanese colonialism in Korea. Prime Minister Kan Naoto’s apology generated controversy, exposing the longstanding domestic divide within Japan over the imperial past. The politicization of history, apologies and acts of contrition impedes reconciliation between Japan and its Asian neighbours. It remains difficult for the Japanese government and people to erase the distrust held by many Asians. Despite fence-mending efforts with neighbouring countries, apologies and acts of contrition may not be sufficient to advance reconciliation, but remain essential elements of process of reconciliation.

On the other hand, present exploration of the contemporary society in this volume is focusing on the lifestyles of youth subcultures in Japan. Lifestyle or *seikatsu* generally means livelihood, everyday life or a wide range of life activities (Sugimoto 2008, 8). Maya Keliyan’s article looks into the lifestyle of two significant groups of youth subcultures *kogyaru* and *otaku* and she presents them as examples of postmodern changes in the dissemination and perception of fashion trends, hobby activities, and innovative products. The causes of their emergence and growth are related to the general problems facing postmodern Japan: its economy, educational institutions, family, and value system. The subcultures represent a trend of counter publics in 20th-century Japan through which young

people are able to articulate and create their own notions of community and desired lifestyles though they occupy a marginal position between generations and genders.

Sensuality is further discussed in the last article of this edition, where Fusako Innami investigates the Japanese concept of *ma/aida*, the space in-between from the Roland Barthes' point of view on the space in-between as the Neutral, not signifying the medium of the opposite poles but the bare existence. The article first analyses how the discourse of contiguous relationships and the space between others have functioned in modern and postwar Japan, and further employs the works of the Japanese female writer Matsuura Rieko as counterexamples, with particular emphasis on the space between the sensual and the sexual. It provides a fresh view toward conceptions of space and indirectness between and within the body through the analysis of several philosophers.

In spite of modern technology and less communication barriers, and the demand for cooperation and alliances, people seem to be less united and in disagreement, seeking their identity, heritage, uniqueness and symbols. All this resulted in some fuzzy areas that call for a new order in the twentyfirst century, the legitimate place in the world and not exclusion from the society. In a broader sense this calls for a new definition of "Japan" where hybrid areas are accepted as legitimate, where marginalised groups become part of society without the sense of exclusion. We may quickly come to the conclusion, that the survival in the twentyfirst century demands the invention of the new way of life often referred to as *kyōsei* (symbiosis). It also calls for the radical modification of homogeneity habitus. This can be said for all countries in the world. According to the fact that Japan has been most skilful in merging the foreign and domestic elements, the problems mentioned should not be too difficult to solve in the future.

The images of Japan have been changing through time within and outside the country under the influence of various intellectual contexts. The portrait of Japan with its economy and international status kept swinging between acceptance and rejection. The theoretical frame of analyzing Japan moved between two extremes, on the one hand being particularly labelled and on the other universally generalized, so these new insights show us that there can be also another way of studying Japan. Bringing together a number of perspectives on the transformation of the society in Japan since the end of the 19th century to the contemporary Japan this volume provides a comprehensive, challenging and theoretically developed

account of the processes of transition during a period of unprecedented social and economic change in one of the enigmatic social, political, and economic systems of the modern world.

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