

**Sonja Ganseforth and Hanno Jentsch, eds.**

***Rethinking Locality in Japan***

London: Routledge, 2022. 288 pages, 27 figures, 7 tables. Hardcover, \$176.00; paperback, \$48.95; ebook, \$36.71. ISBN: 9780367900823 (hardcover), 9780367469481 (paperback), 9781003032137 (ebook).

“Locality in Japan,” as evoked in the title of this edited volume, has been a staple of Japanese studies for many decades, from the early ethnographies of rural villages (Embree 1937; Dore 1978) to more recent studies (Ivy 1995; Robertson 1991; Klien 2020). Locality and its many layers of meaning impact greatly everyday lives and high-end administrative choices. Accordingly, this volume focuses on the historical process of the constitution of locality, the actors involved, and the site-specific characteristics of local-ness in Japan. Originating from the 2018 German Institute for Japanese Studies symposium “What Is ‘the Local’ in Japan?,” this edited volume is comprised of sixteen essays over four sections: “(Re)lating Localities as Lived Spaces in Japan,” “Local Social World at Risk,” “Localities Under Contestation,” and “Local-National Dynamics.”

In the introduction, the editors present the volume’s core concepts as derived from the so-called “spatial turn” in the social sciences and humanities, according to which space is to be thought of “not as an objectifiable, homogeneous, and measurable container”

but rather “a contingent product of social, political, and cultural relations” (4). In the Japanese case, such relations take the shape of matters such as welfare, volunteering, depopulation, rural revitalization, brand invention, municipal administration, and other specific themes dealt with in the essays.

The first section, “(Re)lating Localities as Lived Spaces in Japan,” focuses on the discrepancies emerging between the lived spaces of informal everyday life and the formal space of administrative policing. Themes include individual well-being (Holthus and Manzenreiter), urban-rural dynamics in face of the ongoing aging and depopulation processes (Kelly), and neoliberalism (Klien). The second section, “Local Social Worlds at Risk,” examines the constitution as well as the threat of disintegration of *locales* (Giddens 1984) in relation to social, economic, and environmental changes, presenting studies on coping about nuclear risk (Katramiz), welfare, precarity, and neighborhood informality (Jentzsch; Gagné).

The third section, “Localities Under Contestation,” focuses on municipality mergers and their consequences in the course the twentieth century and includes discussions of how local identities persevere under political and socioeconomic pressures to merge (Kramer); how transport services can preserve town borders and protect artificial unification from “above” (Thelen and Oguma); how coastal fishery cooperatives as composed by municipal and administrative boundaries but also as historical, informal, and cooperative places are reproduced (Gasenforth); and brand construction in winemaking terroir and rural revitalization in the countryside (Kingsbury).

The fourth and final section, “Local-National Dynamics,” presents reflections about the interaction between *locales* and macroscopic national administrative processes of transformation and (re)definition, with case studies focused on special forms of taxation and the moral connection with local areas. Rausch and Koji, for example, explore the formation of a moral space through the relation between locality and the idea of a “good” life. Hijino, however, focuses on local political representation or the lack thereof, as the autonomy of Japanese local governments is notoriously poor, leading to a weak citizens’ participation in local politics.

In the concluding chapter Peter Matanle produces a broad, reflective perspective on climate change and the threats it implies for humanity at large. The return to a more local and collective lifestyle (“decenter and decelerate,” 273), as advocated by several climate scientists and activist movements (see Dixon-Declève et al. 2022), appears to be a viable strategy to mitigate the damages we are quickly moving toward.

Considered synthetically, *Rethinking Locality in Japan* brings us a thorough and up-to-date mapping of the contemporary academic concerns about the subject, consolidated by vivid ethnographic testimonies as well as promising theoretical developments. It certainly represents a significant addition to the researcher’s and lecturer’s library, containing a precious reconnaissance of “hot” academic themes from a prestigious group of well-known researchers. Readers lacking preparation in the historical, sociological, and anthropological literature about Japanese locality, however, are likely to find the content excessively focused and difficult to grasp. If the lean form of the five-thousand-word contributions drives, perhaps excessively, the authors’ scopes, it does without doubt leave the reader avid for their upcoming, in-depth monographic publications.

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