their topics. There are occasional lapses in accuracy and style, but on the whole the book constitutes a useful addition to the growing list of studies on a topic that has until recently been little explored in English. Those who read it through will not understand all there is to understand about humor in Japan, but they will be able to view it from a number of perspectives they had probably not considered before—and yes, it does contain some pretty good jokes and poems, as well as some useful illustrations and a helpful bibliography.


Reviewed by
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As a Japan studies specialist currently studying Makaton (a simplified version of Auslan for people with intellectual disabilities), I was eager to read Karen Nakamura’s book _Deaf in Japan: Signing and the Politics of Identity_. Nakamura’s methodology combines the field techniques of anthropology, archival research, and the political analysis of social movements to gather information on deaf movements in Japan in the postwar era, with the goal of understanding what it means to subscribe to “deaf identity” in Japan. She frequently includes cross-cultural perspectives from international deaf movements and language systems to contextualize the Japanese case, as well as poses thoughtful and provocative questions about personal and communal identities by comparing the Japanese deaf community to other minority groups in Japan. Disability studies is well established in the fields of medical anthropology, early childhood education, and other more clinical areas of research, but little research has been conducted in the Japanese context. My book _On the Margins of Japanese Society: Volunteers and the Welfare of the Urban Underclass_ (Routledge, 1997) and Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney’s _Illness and Culture in Contemporary Japan: An Anthropological View_ (Cambridge University Press, 1984) deal with disability in specific contexts (the former with reference to poverty and welfare, the latter with reference to Asian medical models), so Nakamura’s monograph is extremely important because it explores disability in a wider context—as deafness cuts across all class, ethnic, and gender lines—and explores disability as a social construct for identity formation.

Nakamura explores deaf identity in Japan in two ways: communally (through the analysis of deaf activism) and individually (through life histo-
She first describes the ideological differences between two prominent deaf movements in Japan: the Japanese Federation of the Deaf (JFD, established in 1947) and D-Pro (established in 1993). JFD has taken a leading role in the deaf movement in Japan, working for the most part in collaboration with the government to facilitate the community’s access to benefits. Nakamura describes this group as embracing a position of “inclusive and assimilationist politics” (pp. 5–6). JFD is also more inclusive in its definition of deafness (partial versus total) as a basis for identity construction (p. 66). On the other hand, D-Pro espouses a more separatist philosophy: its “Declaration of Deaf Culture” states that “deaf people are a linguistic minority who converse using Japanese Sign Language, a language that is distinct from the Japanese language” (pp. 8–9). Influenced by the American deaf movement, D-Pro’s stand is that deafness is not a medical condition but a cultural attribute. “Speakers” of Japanese Sign Language (JSL) constitute a minority group in Japan, with equivalent status to any other ethnic group, such as the resident Koreans, the burakumin, and the Ainu. Even though deafness is always defined as a disability, this book’s argument is juxtaposed against studies of ethnic minorities in Japan: Sonia Ryang’s work on resident Koreans, Takeyuki Tsuda’s work on Japanese Brazilian migrants, Richard Siddle’s work on the Ainu, and a variety of works on the burakumin, for example.

The “deafness as ethnic minority” debate informs much of the ethnographic data presented in the book. The middle chapters are devoted to description and analysis of experiences of deaf people in contemporary Japan. Nakamura identifies three stages of deaf cultural identity in postwar Japan, as indicated by historical, socioeconomic, and political developments in each period, and charts how the politics of deafness has transformed over this time frame. The future of this community, though, is under threat: falling birth rates, improved public health, advances in hearing technology, and a tendency to mainstream in education all mean the Japanese deaf community is gradually splintering and assimilating into wider Japanese society (p. 115). This helps us, perhaps, to understand the radical stance of other movements; if the deaf community is entirely normalized, those who become deaf much later in life will suffer without the support of an existing deaf community.

Roughly speaking, Nakamura maps three generations of deaf culture: the prewar generation, the postwar generation, and the current generation. After presenting a brief history of deafness and disability in the Japanese context, Nakamura launches into their life histories and their contextualizations. Her first interviewee, Nakano Shizuyo (a pseudonym), speaks to her from a deaf nursing home and tells of unspeakable hardships as a child. Nakano’s inability to communicate reduces her early existence to one of mere packhorse for her family. We learn that in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries there was very little in the way of a deaf community, because deaf people in rural areas were integrated into manual labor for the agricultural and manufacturing industries. This resulted in no opportunity
for deaf individuals to learn sign language from each other. Yet Nakano is a truly resilient figure whose lack of education did not keep her from working independently until she entered a home for the elderly in 1991.

“The Middle Generation” includes individuals born after World War II and before the mid-1960s; it corresponds to Japan’s “baby boomer” generation. During this period, schools for the deaf began to incorporate signing (rather than banning it from the curricula). Signing and notions of equality and human rights in the context of disability began to gain momentum. For example, from 1958 to 1973, members of the Japanese deaf movement successfully campaigned for a lifting of the ban on deaf people applying for drivers' licenses (p. 78). This generation of deaf people was more diverse with various ages of onset for deafness. Unjudicious use of the antibiotic streptomycin in the early postwar years created a generation of deafened children, but because these children were not deafened in utero, they were more integrated in hearing communities. This suggests that this group’s signing corresponded more closely to the mainstream languages and, consequently, they could be more seamlessly integrated into the Japanese ethnic mainstream identity. It was this generation that constituted the bulk of the leadership of the JDF in recent years and accounts for its assimilationist outlook.

In the 1950s and 1960s, we see an improvement in living, working, and educational conditions for deaf people and a concomitant rise in the level of their activism: why would a group whose situation is improving become increasingly vocal? Nakamura hypothesizes that this is most likely to be due to the overall political atmosphere in postoccupation Japan, spurred on by a “resurgence” in activism (p. 99). Postwar JDF activism is contextualized against the activities of the Buraku Liberation League and the Zengakuren student movement, which set the overall social climate at this time. This, combined with the talents of its “postlingually late deafened” (p. 102) and articulate leaders, allowed the JDF to enter a new era of increasing social and political prominence, resulting in a sign language “boom” in the 1990s. I too remember, in the steamy summer months, watching the trendy 1995 television drama “Ai shite iru to itte kure” (Tell me you love me) and admiring the handsome deaf protagonist, played by Toyokawa Etsushi. Deafness as well as blindness, as expressed in these 1990s dramas, was a “weakness,” but it was also portrayed as a “purifying” factor that distinguished the affected individual from increasingly materialistic and selfish trends in youth culture at that time.

In the final generation, Nakamura profiles Yamashita Mayumi (a pseudonym), a woman born in 1980 in Hokkaido. She says that she did not experience much discrimination as a child but tells of many awkward moments when her inability to understand was mistakenly interpreted by others as standoffish (pp. 152–53). Still, she “never thought once of going back to the school for the deaf” (p. 156); Yamashita is more comfortable navigating the communication maze in the hearing world than negotiating the strict rules
of the deaf school she attended as a young child. In the end, she chooses a college for deaf students to learn about her own community; she learns to sign as a young adult and is unaware of the existence of D-Pro (p. 157). Nakamura’s characterization of the younger generation is one of liminality. Due to her successful coping strategies in the hearing world, Mayumi is only coming to terms with her deaf identity as an adult; yet, because she is reluctant to give up her oral skills, so hard won through mainstream education, she is not considered “truly” deaf by activists in D-Pro—no wonder Mayumi is distanced from them.

From the five detailed life histories given, it is interesting that Nakamura chooses to profile only women—gender status does intersect with disability status in all of these women’s lives (whether they choose to or are allowed to marry, and whether they have children, for example) but there is not much explanation as to why deaf men are featured at a much more peripheral level. This begs the question: would the deaf identity of profiled individuals have differed if Nakamura had featured a close interview with a male informant as well, demonstrating the juxtaposition of gender identity with disability identity?

Considering the premise that the Japanese deaf identity constitutes “quasi-ethnic status,” I expected to read more on the worldwide controversy in deaf culture: the cochlear implant. Because hearing parents of deaf children are more likely to have their children fitted with the device than are deaf parents of deaf children, this procedure is often interpreted as a political statement against the proliferation of a nonhearing culture. Yet, the “bionic ear” doesn’t figure largely in the Japanese landscape. Nakamura concludes that the cochlear implant has not created much controversy in Japan, for the following reasons: its relatively late introduction (the first pediatric implant was in 1993); only 30 per cent of implants go into children (p. 144); and the lack of a strong “deaf language culture” as compared to the United States (p. 145).

At the end of her book, Nakamura describes a JFD meeting where the committee met at length to suggest and discuss the implementation of new signs. In entertaining detail, she describes her unexpected contribution to the creation of a new sign for the loanword *dijitaru* (digital) (p. 168) and then launches into a more linguistic rather than sociological analysis of the problems inherent with the coexistence of sign and spoken languages. It is in this chapter that she more robustly describes linguistic aspects of JSL within the context of the gaps between the signed and the spoken language; after reading this, the separatist claims made by the D-Pro activists become clearer.

For some, disability is the “new black”; it is the latest addition to the list of attributes (such as gender, class, and ethnicity) that we use to analyze culture and society. For others, it has been long been on the radar and it is only recently that society can discuss disability as not just a private matter but as having a profound effect on the ways people conduct their lives in public.
Disability studies research has moved away from understanding disability as a condition to be “cured” to a personal attribute that shapes the way an individual experiences social life. Karen Nakamura’s book amply demonstrates this paradigm shift, going beyond the fashion statement to look at an important aspect of Japanese politics and society.

Japan, Sport and Society: Tradition and Change in a Globalizing World.

Reviewed by
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Critical studies of Japan’s sports and body cultures have flourished in recent years, and this volume is especially welcome because its 11 chapters introduce the research of 10 Japanese sports scholars whose work has not been previously available in English. Because it appears in one of the most important series of critical sports studies, Routledge’s “Sport in the Global Society,” and is coedited by a prominent British sociologist of sport, it will gain an audience for a field of scholarship in Japan that is increasingly vibrant and important.

Most of the authors are sport sociologists, and as with their British counterparts, whose work has heavily influenced them, they emphasize historical research as much as contemporary analysis. Most of the chapters here are framed by rather narrow topics (and several condense a series of works by the author), but they are contextualized by the three themes that organize the volume: the emergence of sport in modern Japan, dimensions of contemporary sports participation (economy, environment, fanship, and gender), and Japanese sport in a global sportscape.

Underlying much of the debate about the history of sport in modern Japan has been the understanding that two processes were occurring in tandem in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. On the one hand, certain indigenous practices (especially sumo and martial exercises) were reshaped into rule-governed physical competitions; at the same time, new Western sports introduced during the Meiji period (especially baseball) were spiritualized with newly articulated Japanese values. Sportification and spiritualization went hand in hand. In an important sense, this is merely the sports version of wakon yōsaï, the selective adaptation of Western practices and their ideological domestication with Japanese “spirit.” But lest it be dismissed as yet another instance of Japanese particularism, it is worth remembering that
“Deaf in Japan begins to fill an enormous lacuna in the literature on contemporary Japanese society, namely how the society treats those with any form of physical or mental disability. Those interested in contemporary Japanese society and comparative welfare will learn much in this book about how Japanese social attitudes have changed over the past fifty years.”—Roger Goodman, University of Oxford. “Karen Nakamura combines history, life histories, ethnographic observation, and politico-linguistic analysis of sign language in Japan to open up sensible and much-needed debate on the multiplicity of the Japanese and their culture.”—Sonia Ryang, The Johns Hopkins University. About the Author.