to re-enter the workplace, and then expects they will leave again to take care of aging parents and in-laws. That women lament the loss of even such jobs as these is evidence of the frustrations in their alternative, motherhood.

Motherhood usually comes to Japanese women at the point when their husbands are subject to the greatest time demands of their own working lives. Even if fathers wanted to participate in the rearing of their children or the daily life of their household, and there is little evidence that they do, this is the period when family welfare requires long working hours on the part of the father. The dismal career prospects for women only reinforce this decision.

Japanese women who find themselves the mothers of young children are faced with a truly daunting job description, drawn partly from tradition, but even more from the advice and admonitions of childrearing experts. Their recommendations start with a rigorous prenatal regime for enhancing the health and intelligence of the fetus through proper diet and activities, including singing to the child, talking to it, up to and including speaking to the fetus in foreign languages to give it a head start in English or French.

After birth, the suggested daily regime means that mothers spend every waking and sleeping moment with the child, nursing it, preparing special food, being so attentive to its needs that the child never feels frustrated or deprived enough to cry. Perhaps most extreme, from an outsider's point of view, is the strident tone of the rhetoric condemning the use of disposable diapers, said by these experts to be more uncomfortable than cloth diapers, so that using them undermines a child's confidence in its mother's love and care, encouraging the child to become inert, rebellious, naughty, and even having adverse impacts on the timing of toilet training and the development of IQ.

Jolivet also discusses the role of abortion in modern Japan, and its connection with the onerous nature of motherhood. Because of the commitment to small family size, and the use of the most unreliable methods of birth control, many married Japanese women find themselves having abortions. In spite of their commonness, abortions are stressful for the mothers and families involved; they are conceived of as the necessary murder of a living soul. Jolivet discusses the development of Buddhist rituals which both soothe and exploit the women who have abortions in modern Japan.

The author does a good job of vividly presenting the dilemma confronting young Japanese women as they try to formulate a life encompassing motherhood, self-fulfillment and social usefulness, as Japanese people perceive it. It does less well at placing Japanese women's behavior in any comparative framework. The low Japanese birth rates are not the lowest in the world, surpassing those of Italy and Germany, for instance. Nor do all Japanese mothers buy into the intense ideal prescribed by the experts, nor do they all fail to find social contacts and family support through what has, since Westerners started observing Japanese society, been considered the hardest period of a woman's life. Are infants harder to live with than mothers-in-law? ▯

Gail Benjamin

GAIL R. BENJAMIN is an Anthropologist teaching at the University of Pittsburgh. She has done fieldwork in Japan on sociolinguistics and education, including mothers' roles.

Understanding Japanese Society

BY JOY HENDRY
SECOND EDITION, NEW YORK: ROUTLEDGE, 1995

"Scintillating" is not a word one would use to describe Joy Hendry's *Understanding Japanese Society*. Nonetheless, this attempt at a general overview of Japanese culture can be a serviceable supplementary text in courses on postwar Japanese culture or a useful reference for nonspecialists who would like to include Japan-related material in more general classes. Hendry claims that her book is designed to "open a door" into Japanese life primarily through the examination of the findings of anthropological studies of Japan. Having read *Understanding Japanese Society*, students will be, she says, "armed with background information" that will make it "possible to achieve a deeper understanding of specialist books in other areas" (3–4). I think her claims are largely true.

Hendry's book is organized rather traditionally, with a beginning chapter tracing Japanese history from the beginning of time to the postwar era followed by a series of chapters that break Japanese society down into unsurprising categories such as "The House and Family System" and "The Education System." Each chapter is followed by a well-rounded list of references and suggestions for further exploration, some of which include films and novels as well as scholarly books and articles that relate to the chapter topic. Hendry moves along systematically, acquainting the reader with the findings of the most well known works on Japanese culture and detailing some of the differences between research done in different time periods and in different locations in Japan. In both good and bad ways, Hendry's chapters read most like literature reviews.

Hendry's readers will receive a broad orientation to the work available on many different topics. Given the conscientiousness with which Hendry points out differences between specialists' various perspectives, one is likely to take away a fairly realistic impression of the difficulty of making all-encompassing general statements about Japanese society. Students will get a summary explanation of theoretical approaches that have made an important mark on the Japanese studies field; they will also be cautioned about the limitations of those approaches. For example, in her chapter "Status and Stratification in the Wider World," Hendry offers a detailed and cogent description of Nakane Chie's famous "vertical principle" explanation of Japanese social structure (86–89). However, Hendry also points out that "Nakane's model has been criticized for being too all-embracing," and Hendry describes ways in which social behavior among housewives, for instance, may not conform to Nakane's analytical framework (89–90).

Hendry's even-handedness is sometimes her downfall. The book moves smoothly from topic to topic but seldom digs deeply enough into a single one to be truly fascinating. Furthermore, although, she is careful to avoid shaping her interpretation of Japan according to one simplistic perspective, the matter-of-course tone with which she moves through topics as diverse as toilet training and geisha training

produces the ironic effect of privileging her overall authority. She admits to disagreement between scholars about how to classify Japanese experience. She does not admit that some parts of it might resist clear classifications or that the social science categories into which she has organized the book are, though common tools of her discipline, nonetheless makeshift in their own way.

Because of this fact, Hendry sometimes undercuts her own purposes. For example, she is very careful to point out that a Japanese person's experience would vary greatly depending on where she is raised, and that Japanese customs are constantly undergoing change. Yet, by beginning her book with the "everything before the postwar" history chapter, Hendry seems to reinforce a rigid binary distinction between the traditional and modern in Japanese life. While she describes contemporary urban life as in contrast to rural and past practices, at least half of the book's pictures depict "traditional" Japanese items such as shrines which, from my own research experiences, I would argue have only a small place in the lives of Japan's largely urban population. "Religion" is a common anthropological category. "Train station culture" is not, and thus gets slighted even though that is where many Japanese spend several hours of each day. Students of *Understanding Japanese Society* will not be encouraged to think critically or comparatively about how we come to know what we think we know about another culture, and in that way, the book is limited to a relatively introductory role in the classroom.

Despite these misgivings, however, I think *Understanding Japanese Society* could be profitably included in the required reading of courses on postwar Japanese society. The book would be especially helpful in courses where the students either do not have a uniformly strong educational background or are entirely unfamiliar with Japan. Many of us teach precisely such courses. If I were to use Hendry's book, I would combine it with other, more focused works—matching Hendry's chapter on careers with a book such as Dorinne Kondo's *Crafting Selves* or Hendry's chapter on community with Theodore Bestor's *Neighborhood Tokyo*, for example.[1] Since Hendry consistently provides very accessible introductions to other readings that a student might do, her book could also be a first stop for students doing research papers and wondering how to phrase their topic or where to begin in their approach to the library. Few of us would deny the value of such a resource. n

NOTE

1. Theodore C. Bestor, *Neighborhood Tokyo* (Stanford: Stanford University Press,1989); Dorinne Kondo, *Crafting Selves: Power, Gender, and Discourse of Identity in a Japanese Workplace* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990).

Robin LeBlanc

ROBIN LEBLANC is an Assistant Professor of Politics at Washington and Lee University. Her book, *Bicycle Citizens: The Political World of the Japanese Housewife,* will be coming out later this year from the University of California Press.